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At 42, first lady Lori Otter continues healthy habits she started long ago

By Colleen LaMay

Lori Otter grew up playing basketball, baseball, volleyball or just about any other team sport you can name.

So it was only natural for her to become a physical education teacher. She was good at it, turning one season's least experienced eighth-graders into a team of good players by the following year.

The 42-year-old still strives to stay in shape, even though, as Idaho's first lady, she no longer coaches or teaches eighth-grade P.E.

Time is the enemy in this decade of life. She has a tight schedule as the wife of Idaho Gov. Butch Otter, and it's easy to let exercise go.

"Life is a little different in high heels vs. tennis shoes," she said.

Some exercises are easier than others to work into a tight schedule. "For one, it's hard to find a group of women to play basketball," she said.

You can take the P.E. teacher out of the gym, but a bookcase of mementos in her office — including a basketball signed by Idaho Stampede players and a photo of a softball team put together by the governor's office for an annual tournament — still says sports hold a place in her heart.

She was a runner for years, completing three marathons, but arthritis and other problems with her back sidelined her. For a while, she walked in 4 1/2 mile chunks but wore a heart-rate monitor to ensure she got a good cardio workout about four times a week.

She is starting to throw in some jogging with her walking and has decided to train for a half marathon with her brother. "You have to train, but it is simply a lot of determination, for the most part."

Even when she ran marathons, she didn't think of herself as a person who runs. "Basically, I just gutted them out," she said.

"I don't by any stretch consider myself 'a runner.' I consider myself a slow jogger."

She doesn't stop there. Now Otter does Pilates two to three times a week and spin classes when she can fit them in. Both are low-impact workouts, which means she can give her heart a workout without jumping around. "If you keep doing the same thing, you wear things out. Your body is not designed for that."

All of that is what Otter calls fitness. Health is more about knowing your genetic history — in Lori's case, bad backs are a family affair — and maintaining your energy levels, a healthy weight and a healthy emotional and social life.

Horses are part of that for her. "It's not really a cardiovascular workout, but I'm a lot nicer person if I get my walks and my rides in," she says with a laugh.



Joe Jaszewski / Idaho Statesman

Lori Otter exercises along the Greenbelt in Julia Davis Park on a sunny afternoon.

Tips to stay active

Advice from a former P.E. teacher, Lori Otter

Turn off the TV and go outside.

"I had a friend who, when she was growing up, had a chart on their refrigerator, and if she wasn't in an organized sport of some sort, she had to mark whether she was going to walk, run, ride her bike or do some type of activity outside."

Know your genetic background. "My family has a lot of cancer in it, a lot of heart disease, a lot of stroke, and that may be the reason I'm so aware of getting the blood work done and keeping track. Diabetes is in my family, so I watch that pretty close. When you teach health, it's kind of hard to just say, 'Do this!' if you're not doing it as a teacher."

Don't let thin people fool you. "There are a lot of people who look very fit that aren't very fit. At some point in your life you start to become aware that you are working out not for what size of jeans you wear,

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Healthy practices don't have enough time to turn into habits unless you start when you are very young, Otter said. "That is what I used to tell my kids," she said about her students. "If you aren't doing it at 14, you're not going to be taking care of it at 40," she said. "Am I taking care of my body? Because I only get one."

Stress relief is being outside, fishing, riding horses. "If I'm outside, I'm usually happy, as far as stress."

She keeps one eye on the future as she exercises. When she retires, she wants to be fit and be able to have fun. Many people work long and hard their whole lives, and at the end they die or are in such poor health they don't get to enjoy it. "You are either working to live or living to work," she said. "I much prefer working to live."

but for your overall lifestyle and how well you cope with everything and keep all the balls in the air."

Do you want to enjoy your later years? If you do, get moving. Now. Don't try to be a superhero. Moderation is good. "You see people all over — they work like dogs their whole lives and then when they retire, they haven't taken care of themselves and then don't get to enjoy their grandkids, they don't get to enjoy their spouse, they don't get to enjoy everything they have worked for."

Be active if you watch TV

1. Work on a craft project
2. Never reveal where you hid the remote.
3. Juggle
4. Resistance train
5. Do curl-ups
6. Do push-ups
7. Stretch muscles
8. Hula hoop
9. Knit or crochet
10. Give yourself a manicure or a pedicure

Source for TV top10 list: Corrine Morgan, P.E. teacher, Koelsch and Amity schools, Boise School District

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