



## Catherine D'Aoust: Helping Women Age Better

### **M**y mother has osteoporosis.

When I first heard the news, I was 42 years old, working as a personal trainer in my own business and studying Kinesiology at Simon Fraser University.

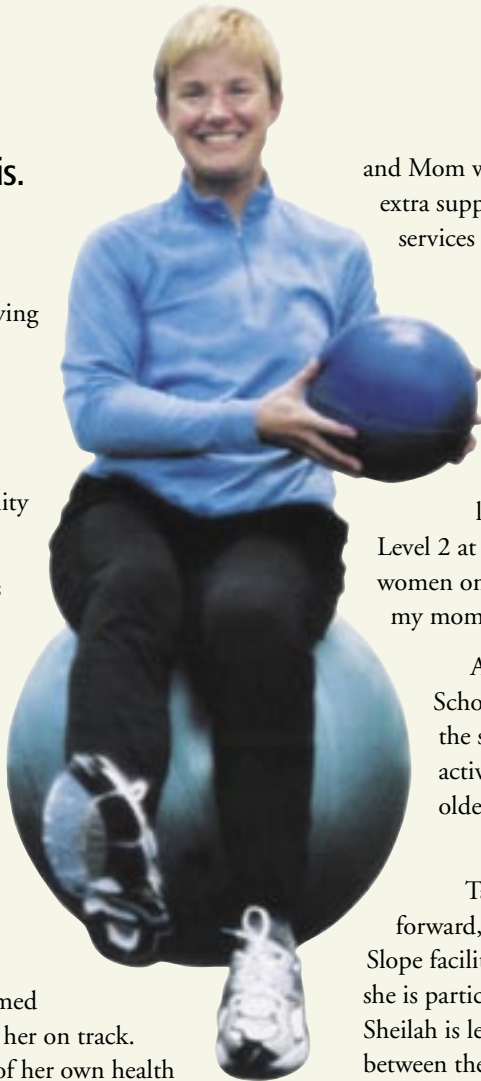
I was scared. I knew this put my 65-year-old mother (her age at that time) at risk of fracture. That meant she had a bone density problem, which could lead to pain and disability as she aged. I became determined to help her.

My mother lives in Ottawa and has always been relatively fit. She swims regularly in our backyard pool and walks, but has never participated in regular strength training or “weight bearing activities.”

I began to research her condition and signed up for Osteofit training. Here in BC, we are leaders in this field: specific exercises that address osteoporosis with minimum risk of injury and that progressively serve to strengthen muscle and bone.

When I next visited my mother, I was armed with exercises and three-pound weights to get her on track. I wanted to coach her on how to take charge of her own health instead of relying on drugs and doctors.

It was a difficult transition for my mother. She was afraid of injuring herself and didn't like the weights very much; she came up with a million and one reasons NOT to exercise. But we persisted—me with phone calls and emails of encouragement



and Mom with her trials and the occasional setback. For extra support, I enlisted the support of my father and the services of a local physiotherapist.

Today at 71, Mom is so much stronger, healthier, and happier that I can scarcely believe it. I am so proud of her and her accomplishments.

To help other women get on track by adding exercise and fitness into their daily lives, I began teaching Osteofit Level 1 and Level 2 at the Kerrisdale Community Centre. I also train women on a one-to-one personal training basis. I know if my mom can do it, so can others.

According to I-Min Lee of Harvard Medical School, “There is no single drug that can give you the same overall benefit to health that physical activity does. Everything that gets worse as we get older gets better with exercise.”



Tapping hesitantly with her cane as she moves forward, Sheilah enters the gym at the YWCA South Slope facility. At age 82 and suffering from osteoarthritis, she is participating in a study that is changing her life. Sheilah is learning to weight train with other women between the ages of 70 and 80 who have all been diagnosed with osteoporosis. She is part of a six-month program called “Bone And Balance Study,” initiated by BC Women's hospital in conjunction with UBC, to study the effects of bone loss, ageing, and the benefits of exercise.

Supported by our dedicated team of Osteofit-qualified fitness instructors and

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trainers, doctors, and physiotherapists, these women are making extraordinary gains in muscular strength and endurance. Not only are they reclaiming their health, they are changing in ways previously unimaginable to any one of them.

In their fifth month of the study, we can already see the changes. They are walking more confidently—eyes blazing with alertness, smiling and talking as they go. Their strength has doubled in some cases and their pain has lessened or has been eased by the sharing with others who care.

- Marie-Therèse, a lean and vibrant woman in her late 70s, tells me she can now lift her grandson.
- Joleane is feeling more energetic and is thinking about giving up smoking.
- Eva is walking more erect and is joining other fitness classes at her local gym.

The women love the care and attention and the contact with others. They blossom under our guidance and respect and relish in the attention.

As a woman nearing middle life, I am struck by their courage and perseverance. In turn, I learn that my life can continually be rich and fulfilling well into my 80s and beyond. ▲

## **Osteoporosis**

Osteoporosis is a potentially crippling disease characterized by low bone mass (density) and the deterioration of bone tissue. It affects about 2.5 million Canadians, 80 percent of them older women. A bone is considered osteoporotic if it has weakened to the point where it may fracture with minimum trauma or if a fracture has already occurred.

### **Other Facts about Osteoporosis**

*from BC Women's Health Centre Osteoporosis Program*

- Bone is living tissue.
- Bone cells are continuously being formed, used, and recycled (resorption).
- The higher the bone density, the less risk of breaking a bone.
- After age 35 to 40, we begin to gradually lose bone density.
- The rate of bone loss increases dramatically after menopause.
- Because of their hormones, men lose bone density but at a slower rate than women.

### **The Benefits of Weight Training**

Discover the joys and benefits of strength training and fitness to improve your balance, stamina, and fitness. Say “no” to pain and to a sagging, tired body. Personal training will change your ageing process to help you embrace a new, healthier you.

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