

Skating...At My Age? By Maureen Bennie

Skating, either hockey or figure skating, is an activity that many adults participated in as children. Adults often feel the itch to get back into skating as a recreational activity because it's something they've tried before. The burning question is – can you get back into figure skating as an adult even if you are getting on in years? Or is it possible to learn to figure skate for the first time as an adult? The answer is yes!

Figure skating is a great sport to participate in because it has a connection with other things such as yoga, ballet, conditioning, musicality and artistry. Physical aspects are addressed like balance, body control, all the muscle groups are targeted, quick reaction time, posture, and body line. It also improves mental capacity through memorizing programs, moves in the field, and having to think about all the aspects of executing technical details.

As we age, health issues start to emerge. Skating can help with chronic health conditions, improve nutrition, keep weight gain at bay, create body awareness, and motivate. This sport encourages you to come again and improve because the process is a building one – you have to remember what you have learned from the last session and go from there. If you don't come regularly, you'll forget what you've learned.

There is more to skating than just the blade on the ice; there is the off-ice training. Even when there is a health crisis or you can't get to the rink for a skate, you can still have an off-ice program. There is always something you can do! Even someone over 65 with a disabled body can work at this sport. It is liberating when you understand all of the options because you can participate under many different circumstances.

I started skating at the age of 39 through an Adult Learn to Skate program at a local leisure centre. I am a classical musician that has always had an interest in skating because of my fascination with music and movement. I was excited to try and learn a few basic skating skills. When I was a child, I never had the opportunity to take skating lessons. Once I became a mother, both of my children were diagnosed with autism when they were two years old so there was no time to do anything for myself. When both of my children entered school, I seized the opportunity to take to the ice.

One morning a week, I went to the rink for my group lesson and instantly loved it. Moving across the ice was freedom; the world as I knew it slipped away for that hour. Skating was hard work, but it cleared my head and gave me inner strength to face the incredible challenges I had at home, some of which included 4 hours of sleep a night, preparing complex special diets, weekly trips to the Children's Hospital, and hours of therapy.

My confidence grew weekly and so did my social circle. At the end of the second session of the program, the instructor said I seemed more serious about skating than the other students and maybe I should think about finding a private coach. One of the most important things for me was to be able to continue skating in an adult environment. I needed a break from children when I went to skate. I also needed to find a program that could work with my time constraints of working full-time, travelling for business, helping my children, and my lack of skating experience and athleticism.

I can still remember my first day at off-ice training 5 years ago – falling down in my running shoes after trying a jump on the ground and waking up the next morning feeling like I had pulled every muscle in my

body. Despite this, I felt elated and couldn't wait to get back at it again. What was motivating was each day I skated or did off-ice, I could notice some improvement. Maybe I felt a little less tired, could raise my leg a bit higher, or some technical aspect was easier. Those small victories were worth celebrating and increased my self-esteem.

Skating has improved both my physical and mental health - I've lost 25 pounds, sleep an hour less a night, my energy levels have increased, and my stress has decreased. Even with all the challenges of raising two children with autism and running an international company on my own, I feel able to face anything with the physical and mental stamina I have built through figure skating.

The past five years of skating have given me experiences I never dreamed of at this stage in my life: new friends, volunteer opportunities, the chance to share my musical training with other skaters, and competing in other cities and provinces. One of the top highlights has been meeting many interesting people from all walks of life, each with their own story of why they skate and the obstacles they've overcome. Adult skating is a great community – one that is diverse and rich in life experience.

Adults who skated as children and have come back to it in their later years say that the adult skating atmosphere is completely different from the youth one. As an adult, you make your own decisions and with the help of a good coach, you set goals that are right and attainable for you. Everyone has their own story and experience on the ice. What could yours be, I wonder?

For more information about clubs that offer AdultSkate programs, please contact the Section Office