



Run for your life

PROVIDED PHOTOS
Candace Smith Brown, now able to run on her own, continues her training at Virginia Beach over winter break.



Susan Stephen, left, a physical therapist at Central Vermont Medical Center, and the AlterG Anti-Gravity Treadmill, background, are helping Candace Smith Brown, right, run toward her goal: the 2015 Boston Marathon.



The AlterG Anti-Gravity Treadmill helps people who would otherwise find it difficult to run. The inflatable balloon allows them to run at a lower perceived weight. Physical therapy clinics in Berlin, Bennington and Burlington have the AlterG.

Special treadmill allows heavy or injured people to run at reduced weight

Susan Stephen, physical therapist at Central Vermont Medical Center, speaks enthusiastically about the AlterG Anti-Gravity Treadmill that can be found at only three facilities in Vermont.

One is in Bennington, another in Burlington and a third at CVMC in Berlin. So what is an AlterG, and why should it be good news?

Basically it is "a treadmill that reduces a runner's weight and allows that person to train without beating the pavement," Stephen said.

The concept opens doors to a range of users from elite athletes to the sedentary, from those injured or rehabilitating from surgery to those limited by disease, weight, frailty or age.

The AlterG is a rather curious looking piece of equipment, a bit like a McDonald's bouncy funhouse on a treadmill. The user steps into what looks like a plastic bag, zips up to the waist and inflates it so the running weight is the chosen percentage of actual weight.

With the upper body free and the lower body putting less weight into each step, a participant can walk and run securely and without pain.

People who struggle with an altered gait, such as those with Parkinson's disease, "can be taught to revert to a normal gait," Stephen said, and develop good movement patterns and form that will eventually be the default, as much as is pragmatically possible.

For someone who is obese and struggling to lose weight, the AlterG offers an opportunity to run, a form of exercise that might otherwise be awkward and painful.

Then there are the hard-core exercise enthusiasts, runners and elite athletes who will push through pain to their own disadvantage. The last thing a runner wants to be told is "stop running until this heals."

Working with appropriate rehabilitation guidelines, that athlete may continue to run while healing and, in fact, may heal more quickly.

Another aspect of the AlterG is the role it plays in training and improving athletic performance. Stephen's daughter Liz, a cross-country skier who has competed in two Olympics and multiple U.S. and world championships, trains in the off season, often on an AlterG.

From NASA to Oregon, the AlterG brings space-age technology down to Earth.

Alberto Salazar, director of the Nike Oregon Project, knows about running. Three times a New York City Marathon winner and once the Boston Marathon winner, Salazar tested an AlterG and ordered 20 for training his athletes.

Salazar encourages his runners to add miles to their training, and this can be done safely by adding a weekly workout on the AlterG as cross-training to their outdoor running. Salazar said running on the AlterG helps prevent injury as well as rehabilitate it.

"Where there is no pain, there is no damage," he said.

He points to volume and quality of training as a winning combination.

Perhaps, however, an equally impressive response to training on the AlterG is the confidence that develops over time and use.

Success in the making

On Nov. 8, Susan Stephen assisted at a running clinic at CVMC, in part to help promote the AlterG treadmill.

"The last person I put on this was an unfit-looking woman," Stephen said. "She was in so much pain in her lower legs when she ran, but intently focused on running."

By the end of her time she was amazed, felt great and was smiling.

"Everyone who gets on has an 'aha' moment, a big smile, an 'I can run' awareness," Stephen said.

This particular woman was grossly overweight and diabetic. When Stephen asked her why it was so important for her to run, tears came to her eyes and she shared her touching story.

The woman, Candace Smith Brown, had been married to Walter Brown, who was for many years the starter of the Boston Marathon. As he was dying of cancer, just weeks before, he had asked her to promise to run the Boston Marathon so she could taste his passion for the event.

"All I want to do is finish in the same week," Stephen said Brown told her.

Her journey began, a journey working through grief and getting healthy, a journey that continues.

Brown, who grew up in Plainfield, is retired and the grandmother of four with one on the way. I caught up with her in Virginia Beach, Virginia, where her family had convened for a winter vacation.

Speaking of her quest to run the Boston Marathon, she said: "It's changed my life. My friends are sick of hearing me talk about it."

Brown, her two daughters and her sister plan to meet her goal.

"I told everybody I was going to run on the beach," she said, "and we did it."

Would she have done this before? "Absolutely not," she said.

Over the years, dealing with injury and her husband's illness, she had gained significant weight.

"I was getting very unhealthy," Brown said. "My diet was horrible, I was too uncomfortable to add exercise, and my blood sugar was way out of control. Just changing eating wasn't going to do it for me."

Several things happened to start Brown on her way: Her sister joined a "boot camp" and began to run (and lost 60 pounds along the way); Brown learned of the Jeff Galloway training that combines walking and



Linda FREEMAN
Active Vermont

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LEARNING HOW TO RUN

It is a mistake to think that you can simply open the door and go for a run. The repetitive nature of running strides easily results in fatigue, boredom, disappointment or, worse still, injury.

The smallest misalignment of the foot, knee, hip or back, over time, can cause large problems. The smart runner, whether a newbie with much to learn or an experienced athlete in need of a tune-up, benefits from updated information about his or her technique.

While there are excellent resources online and in bookstores, there's nothing quite as specific and personal as an individual assessment by an expert. Turning to other runners, organized running groups, athletic stores specializing in running, clinics, coaches and physical therapy evaluations all help to insure the success



and pleasure of running.

One opportunity to do just that is offered twice a year at the Central Vermont Medical Center in Montpelier. Its Running/Gait Analysis clinic includes observation and videotaping of each runner, shoe recommendations and an opportunity to try the AlterG — a treadmill that reduces impact on the body.

Kerry McCarthy, physi-

cal therapist, tells me the March 21 clinic is full, but another will be scheduled in October. In the meantime, go to www.cvmc.org to learn more and consider an individual assessment with McCarthy as well as an opportunity to use the AlterG.

Clinics are free, designed for "runners interested in how their body works," McCarthy said. "There's more and more research coming out about gait training. We want to help people improve their form."

Don't just run; learn *how* to run. Then go to it.

Langweil

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same quality of life there. For one thing, he had a long commute.

His commute was particularly long in Seattle. He rode a bus 60 to 90 minutes each way between work and his home in Tacoma, Wash., where he and his wife split the distance between each of their jobs.

"That was two or three hours

of my day spent just riding on a bus," he says.

Now, Langweil lives one mile from work and he can walk or bike there. "I can use that time for exercise or to get to the office earlier," he says.

"The pros outweigh the cons, to me," he says of living in Vermont.

The cons, to him, are fairly minor, such as planning ahead for home renovation projects.

"In New Jersey, you can get everything all the time," he says. "Here, all the lumberyards are

closed on Sunday, and you have to drive to Williston if you need lumber on a Sunday. So you have to plan ahead."

Langweil had never lived in a small town. He learned quickly that here, everyone is connected by one or two degrees of separation. It means professionals have to be careful to build good relationships, and it means residents can be more involved because there are fewer people.

In addition to his full-time

work, Langweil serves as faculty to the Vermont Leadership Institute at the Snelting Center, a program that includes a learning session at the State House that he helps to coordinate.

"One of the things I try to get across to participants is how accessible the state government is," he says. "You can talk to your legislators, and they want to hear from you."

It's different from other places in the nation, he says. Langweil loves working

in the State House because of the energy. If he needs a break from his desk, he takes a walk through the halls or to the cafeteria.

"In 15 minutes, I can go take in the energy and it recharges me," he says.

Langweil clearly loves Vermont, too. Asked if he plans on staying, he says, "Absolutely. Until I die. This is home."

He has clearly found his place.

Sarah Galbraith is a freelance writer living in Marshfield.

Effects of a serious fall can be far-reaching

Although statistics show that most falls occur in the home and that older people, especially those with chronic illnesses or failing senses, are the most frequent victims, there is no shortage of such mishaps on wintry streets for young and old. Especially not this winter, and especially not in places like Atlanta, where experience negotiating ice and slush underfoot is limited.

It is all too easy to be taken unaware, as I discovered on a Sunday in January. The temperature was above freezing, and when my friends and I started our exercise walk at 7 a.m., we were not deterred by light rain.

Suddenly, though, the ground beneath our feet was no longer terra firma but sheets of ice that formed when the rain hit the colder-than-air sidewalk. And suddenly I was on the ground, surrounded by black ice and unable to get up unaided.

I escaped with a bruised hip, but the next day I encountered two men who had broken arms when, unaware of the ice hazard, they ventured out to buy bagels for breakfast.

Even knowing of and being equipped for the risk of losing one's footing on slippery surfaces is no guarantee you will remain upright. I have tried shoes with every kind of sole and finally resorted to a pair of ice cleats to attach to my boots when I trek over snow-covered ice. (A word of warning: Those cleats are treacherously slippery on marble and tile floors.)

But it can be easy to fall even when streets are dry, as my friend Lynda Gould,

of Manhattan, can attest. At 63, she tripped on a subway grate and broke her elbow. Two years later, while rushing to move her car, she caught her rubber-soled shoe on a slight bump in the pavement, fell and broke her hip. And four years after that on a dry day in mid-March, she caught her foot in a tree guard, fell and broke her shoulder.

"It had been a quiet winter weatherwise, and I remarked to the surgeon that business must be slow," she said. "He replied, 'It's never quiet in New York. People are falling all the time.'"

"I tend to drag my feet and catch them on things on the sidewalk, especially when I'm tired. Also when I'm distracted," said Gould, now 71. "In addition, my balance is not good."

She's done some tai chi, which is excellent for improving balance, and has worked on a balance board with a physical therapist. At her doctor's suggestion, she will now take lessons with a Pilates instructor.

And I hope she'll take my advice as well: to stop rushing so much, consciously pick her feet up even when tired, and always watch where she's walking. Friends wonder why I often find money on the street. It's because I keep one eye on the ground in front of me. And after tripping twice on the same broken sidewalk, I've learned not to carry packages that block my vision.

Despite her pain and suffering, Gould, a glass-half-full type of person, sees a bright

side to her many mishaps. "There were always people who stopped to pick me up and get the help I needed. People can be terrific. It renews your faith in humanity."

Of course, young children fall more than those of any other age group, but the consequences are rarely more serious than a skinned knee or smashed ice cream cone and thus are not counted in official tallies. Fall injuries requiring medical attention rise almost linearly from age 18 on, peaking at 115 per 1,000 adults 75 and older.

Statistics among older people are indeed daunting. Dr. Laurence Z. Rubenstein, chairman of geriatrics at the University of Oklahoma College of Medicine, reports that those 65 and older constitute about 13 percent of the population but account for three-fourths of all deaths caused by falls. About 40 percent in this age group fall at least once a year; 1 in 40 of them ends up in the hospital, after which only half are still alive a year later.

Among the factors that account for this grim data are underlying ailments, including osteoporosis; age-related physiological changes like slowed protective reflexes; sensory losses like poor eyesight; medication side effects; a stiffer, less coordinated gait; loss of muscle tone and strength; a drop in blood pressure upon arising; and environmental hazards like icy or uneven sidewalks and loose rugs.

Another factor is fear of falling,

especially common among those who have already suffered a bad fall. Fear can become a self-fulfilling prophecy that, by curbing activity, can lead to a loss of muscle tone, balance and bone density and increase the chance of a disastrous fall.

"In the short run, fear can be protective if it helps you avoid hazardous situations," Rubenstein said. "But by limiting one's activities and exercise, fear can result in weakness that actually increases the risk of falling."

"In the worst-case scenario," he added, "the fear can become a real neurosis where people are afraid to go out of the house and thus become isolated, weaker and ultimately more prone to falls indoors as well as out."

Maintaining muscle strength with advancing years is critical to reducing the risk of falls, Rubenstein said. So is improving balance. "Some age-related loss of balance is inevitable, but some is reversible," he said. He suggested a balance self-test: With someone ready to steady you if needed, stand with feet together and eyes closed. How long before you begin to lose your balance? Can you do it at all?

Or stand on one leg behind a chair without holding on. If you cannot remain stable for 30 seconds, you need help with balance. Now try it with your eyes closed. A normal 25-year-old can do it for about 30 seconds, while a 65-year-old may last only five seconds.

Jane E. Brody is a health columnist for The New York Times.



Jane Brody
On Health

How to help a relative pay for college

When I teach about personal finance at my church or for various other organizations, I often refer to the Old Testament story of Joseph.

He could interpret dreams, and predicted in Egypt seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. During the years of plenty, Joseph saved so much grain that when the famine came, folks from other nations came in search of food. He could share because he had intentionally saved extra.

I use the story to explain that it's not enough to save just for your needs or wants. If you can, I believe you should do what Joseph did and save even more so that your abundance can be used to help others in need.

And that's what Amanda Beery is planning to do. She wants to help a niece go to college.

We are in the season when high school seniors are making college plans. As part of the process, students will receive financial aid award letters. To fill the gap left when they haven't been offered enough scholarships, grants or work-study, many families will turn to borrowing. It's a decision that has pushed student loan debt to \$1.3 trillion.

Beery is finishing her obstetrics and

gynecology residency in New Hampshire. She doesn't want her niece Jillian, who will be attending the University of Alaska in Anchorage in the fall, to have to take out student loans.

Beery is Jillian's Joseph. "She is one of my sister's four children," she wrote. "My sister is a manager at a deli and a single mom. She does not have a lot of resources, but her family is strong on love!"

In the fall, Beery said she will be joining a private practice back home in Anchorage. She will quadruple her current salary. She and her husband have decided to cover tuition for her niece.

"I am the first one in my family to have gone to college," Beery said. "My parents never had the means or the forethought to save for college. They owned a small furniture store in Anchorage, so I was only able to qualify for loans. I now have \$330,000 in loans to repay. Having these loans has been a big burden for my husband and me. We will be OK because I will be making enough money to pay back my loans, and my husband and I have

simple needs and plan to live by simple means. But Jillian has dreams of being a social worker, and I do not want her to have to carry that [debt] burden."

Beery asked about the best way to pay the tuition, which for the upcoming year will be about \$5,500, including student fees.

If the gift is just for tuition and Beery gives it directly to the school, she can avoid gift taxes, according to Mark Kantrowitz, an expert on financial aid and senior vice president and publisher of Edvisors.com.

But she might want to wait before gifting any money to see how much her niece may get in need-based financial aid, he said.

Colleges could treat money as an additional resource and reduce any anticipated awards, he said.

"Giving the money to the student's 529 plan is not a bad way of giving the money with a minimal impact on aid," Kantrowitz said. "Also, gifts to the student's parents aren't reported as income on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Only

gifts to the student are."

Considering all the options, "I'd give the money to the parent," Kantrowitz said.

But if you find you want to help pay someone's college expenses and you aren't sure the money would be used for that purpose and instead squandered, I would send it directly to the university.

Beery says if her niece gets scholarships or grants to pay for tuition and fees, then she and her husband will help her with room and board, books and other expenses.

"We are planning to help her for as long as she needs help," she said. "This will likely be all four years of her undergraduate degree, and maybe more for graduate school if she still wants to get a master's in social work."

Her niece's older brothers, 20 and 24, didn't go to college and are working in construction. Her younger brother is 10.

"Maybe he will want to go to college, and we'll be ready to help him as well," Beery said.

This couple's generosity is worthy of praise. It is an example of giving a hand up by taking extra cash in your time of plenty and helping others.

Michelle Singletary is a financial columnist for The Washington Post.



Michelle Singletary
The Color of Money

Running

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running intervals; and she tried the AlterG.

Perhaps as a leap of faith, Brown joined the Boston Athletic Association, her ticket to the marathon — a new member is given an invitation. She must pay a race fee, but at least she was in.

Walter Brown's funeral was Oct. 15. A friend had passed along a newspaper announcement of a running clinic offered by CVMC beginning in early November. Brown showed up in all new running gear that accommodated her 270-pound body.

The experience confirmed how poorly conditioned she was. Part of the clinic was to film her running and perform a gait analysis, but Brown could barely run the necessary 30 seconds.

"I wanted to get out of there and go cry," she said. "I didn't think I could do one more unsuccessful thing."

It was her turn to try the AlterG. With Stephen's help she experienced running as a 130-pound woman. Nothing hurt. She could do this. She could continue. This is what she will feel like when the pounds gradually melt away.

"Goodbye, pizza and brownies," Brown said. "You get to feel what it would be like."

In the months since, Brown has continued

to pursue her walking and running program, visiting the AlterG twice a week and doing her run/walk at 30 seconds each with a group of friends. She tries to exercise every day, including 60 minutes walking her dogs.

The immediate goal is, of course, the Boston Marathon on April 20.

"I'm not trying to win," she said, "just finish." Having accomplished 20 miles on a recent weekend, finishing is more than a possibility. "It's all about my personal goals and enjoying the company of my fellows."

But Brown can now look to the future. She weighs 60 pounds less but is eating moderately and plans to continue the weight loss, hoping to reverse her Type 2 diabetes as she does so.

To her surprise, she finds running fun. Participation in local fun runs and joining family and friends while training have reawakened a sense of competition as well as goal-setting.

"Finishing last is not my cup of tea," she said.

Brown's story points to many components of success: the courage to assume an almost insurmountable challenge, the determination to honor a promise, the willingness to move forward step by step, and the support of family and friends.

Linda Freeman is an athlete and trainer based in central Vermont. Reach her through her web site, www.lindafreemanfitness.com.



Kerry McCarthy records a runner on a regular treadmill at Central Vermont Medical Center's running clinic recently.

Lange

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bag, my Thanksgiving weekend experience of 68 years ago was still fresh in my mind; I chose my warmest bag, rated to minus 20 and thus almost never used.

As I loaded the truck for the trip, the weather report forecast a Canadian front coming in from the northwest on gusty winds, with subzero temperatures on its heels. Hoo boy!

Mount Ascutney is a pretty interesting piece of rock.

Geomorphically, it's a monadnock. Like the New Hampshire mountain of that name, it stands alone. Geologically, however, it couldn't be much more

different; it's an igneous pluton, a would-be volcano that squirted upward through crustal cracks into rock formations above and formed the typical cone-shaped mountain, but probably never erupted. Eons of erosion and the indignities of scouring by a continental ice sheet have left it only a bit higher than 3,000 feet and scattered bits of its distinctive rocks in a long boulder train all the way into Massachusetts. A look at a topographic map of Ascutney State Park reveals instantly its distinctive conical shape.

Visible for miles up and down the Connecticut Valley, it's long inspired artists, photographers, skiers and hikers.

Our peerless videographer Steve Giordani and I showed

up at the head of the so-called Windsor Trail at 10 in the morning and met Scott Ellis, who'd proposed this particular hike, to an open log shelter about two-thirds of the way up the mountain, as a 2-mile piece of cake. When I looked up at the mountain looming above us and asked the amount of climb to the shelter, I got the vague sort of answer I'd expect from someone selling a used Dodge Omni. But never mind; there was no turning back now. Off we went.

The trail follows an old skid road about a mile, then swings west toward the north shoulder of the mountain. Right about there, Scott's friend Austin Borg, a fellow Appalachian Trail thru-hiker, caught up with us, not a difficult thing to do:

Scott was hauling a loaded pulk, Steve was lugging his tripod and camera, and I'm like molasses in January — which is what the temperature felt like.

The great drawback to lean-to camping, in addition to the darkness of the log walls, is that years of gleaming have left the surrounding forest barren of handy firewood. But Scott and Austin dragged in loads of twigs and chunks of birch trunks (which, because birch bark is waterproof, rot within months). I split the sawed-up chunks as well as I could, and we loaded as much of it as might burn in beside the stove that Scott had stuck into the fireplace.

Outdoors, it grew steadily colder. We pulled a piece of tarp across the hole in the snowbank

that filled the front of the lean-to.

Scott cooked a stew on the Jetboil. We wolfed it down, shot a few minutes of video by candlelight, and began stowing our outer clothes all around us against a reveille 10 hours away. Austin lay down by the stove to keep it going through the night. Following U.S. Army Arctic advice, I downed a Snickers before zipping up that beautiful warm sleeping bag. Yep, it was a cold night.

Willem Lange is a writer, storyteller and retired contractor who lives in East Montpelier. His column appears each week in the Sunday Rutland Herald and Times Argus. He can be reached through his website, willemlange.com.