

# The low-impact skiing discipline allows aging to keep gliding on

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Martha Kneuer, 69, skiing up a hill, headed toward a Virginia Meissner Sno-park snow shelter one recent bluebird afternoon. If she didn't have places to nordic ski, she might not have been in such a cheerful mood.

"I'd probably go crazy. Cabin fever is a real thing," she said with a laugh. She beats the winter blues and stays in shape with the aerobic activity of nordic skiing.

Kneuer is one of innumerable seniors who enjoy the endless groomed and un-groomed ski trails at area sno-parks.

Meissner Sno-park doesn't track the ages of its estimated 3,000 users, a figure that also includes snowshoers, said Steve Roti, the vice president and treasurer. While nordic skiers' ages range from 3 to early 80s, he said there are two well-represented age groups: teenagers and baby boomers.

"Nordic skiing has many different niches and facets," he said. "People can typically find a niche that fits them. Kids are into racing while baby boomers are more into the health and fitness aspect." He said people in their late 30s, early 40s begin picking up nordic skiing as a way to stave off winter doldrums and stay healthy and outdoors during winter months.

"Nordic skiing is something you can start at any age," said Kneuer.

Chris Glover, a physical therapist at Peak Performance Physical Therapy, agrees that aerobic activity like nordic skiing bundles its health benefits. As with any sustained cardiovascular activity, he said, nordic skiing aids heart health by maintaining healthy blood pressure, healthy lung function and to pump adequate blood flow to and from the heart and through the extremities.

"I think specific to the senior populations, you're not looking at a lot of impact in nordic skiing like you are in things like jogging or even walking for that matter," Glover said. "It's a pretty low-impact activity, and it's a pretty good work out ... which can be helpful for a person at any point in their life."

Chad Brindle, 63, gave up his lifelong love of running when decades spent refereeing youth soccer and basketball tore his meniscus. Nordic skiing, however, even on the coldest days, doesn't trouble his knees in the slightest. Glover ranks the ski discipline alongside water aerobics and cycling in terms of its friendliness to joints.

Zippering along the Paintbrush Trail on his trusty, 30-year-old nordic skis, Brindle doesn't need any persuasion. On this particular day he was the middle of a near 10-mile long loop through the Meissner network that would take him to the Cinder Cone and back. Such jaunts are how he devotes downtime from his part-time job at a local window manufacturer.

"I just (nordic ski) to keep in shape, to keep going," he said, perspiration visible under his stocking cap. "You've got to keep moving — if you don't you'll have health problems."

Brindle said he was recovering from a hernia surgery; he caught the nordic bug when he was in his 30s learning to nordic ski on Paulina Peak.

Roti also has noticed nordic skiing's lasting effect. His enthusiasm for road cycling has waned, however, as many of his cycling peers have been involved in negative interactions and crashes with motorists.

He still runs, but his increasingly tender joints have made him appreciate how much softer nordic skiing is, which he has been enjoying five days per week this season as he splits his ski sessions between Meissner and the Mt. Bachelor Nordic Center. "Many of us have carried nordic skiing into our lives," he said, mentioning how for him the activity has always been a way to enjoy natural beauty.

"I won't be running when I'm in my 80s, but I'll be nordic skiing," Roti said.

There are social aspects to nordic skiing, too.

"It definitely has a psychological boosting effect. Even if you don't know the people around you, everyone is smiling and looking happy, that's an added bonus," Kneuer said. As a native Wisconsinite who moved from the Chicago area this year, Kneuer has three sets of skis that afford her different experiences. Her alpine skis serve her at Mt. Bachelor Ski Area. Skate skis — classic nordic skiing's racier cousin — allow her full range of the Meissner and Mt. Bachelor Nordic Center's groomed corduroy paths. And her classic nordic skis allow her to join her new neighbors on ungroomed trails by their homes.

"We get vitamin D with contact with sun, and if we're not outside, we're not getting that," Glover said. "For a lot of people, they're not going nordic skiing alone."

Brindle said he enjoys nordic skiing with friends, however, and particularly enjoys the well-earned beer afterward.

Kneuer said she can't predict what her body will still be capable of in 10 years.

"I just want to have the attitude that I'm not going to stop being active," she said.

"Nordic skiing just keeps the heart going," Brindle said. "You just want to stay healthy. When you stop moving you don't know what's going to happen."

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Martha Kneuer clicks her boot into one of her skis, just before heading out on a conditioning nordic ski session at Virginia Meissner Sno-park on Jan. 2. (Andy Tullis/Bulletin photo)

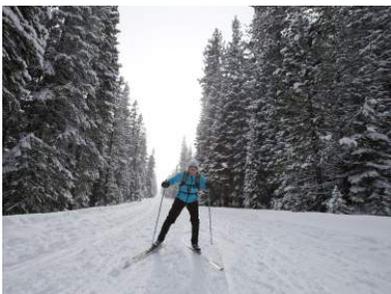
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Martha Kneuer enjoys the beauty of the snow falling through the sunlit trees just before heading out on a nordic ski trip at Virginia Meissner Sno-park this week. (Andy Tullis/Bulletin photo)



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Martha Kneuer zips down a trail while nordic skiing at Virginia Meissner Sno-park on Jan. 2. (Andy Tullis/Bulletin photo)