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We must have patience and perseverance if we want to cultivate a lifelong fitness habit.

**A 74-year-old professional long-distance runner**



A group of retired workers play badminton in the shades along Suzhou Creek.

### Per capita sports space

This project, along with many other similar ones being built across the city, will go a long way toward increasing Shanghai's per capita sports space from 2.35 square meters in 2020 to 2.6 square meters in 2025 — roughly keeping up with the national average level.

According to the city's masterplan (2021-2025) for public fitness, an additional 6 million square meters of public sports space will be created during these five years. As a result, there will be a public sports venue for everyone within a 15-minute walking distance by 2025.

Outdoor sports grounds like the Suzhou Creek esplanade I visited will contribute significantly to the city's future fitness landscape. Such accessible outdoor sports venues are no doubt a boon to public health.

“Outdoor exercise — sometimes called ‘green exercise’ — provides an array of benefits beyond those seen with traditional indoor workouts,” Cedric Bryant, president and chief science officer of the American Council on Exercise, wrote in a recent article for US News & World Report.

He explained that exercising outdoors “increases our exposure to sunlight, enhancing vitamin D production, which has been linked to improving mood, promoting bone health, boosting immune system function and reducing inflammation.”

China launched its first Public Fitness Day on August 8, 2009, after the success of the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing.

To celebrate the 14th Public Fitness



**A tourist wharf is taking shape along Suzhou Creek, paving the way for the launch of cruise services next month.**

Day this year, Shanghai launched a “super” campaign that extended to nine days, beginning from August 6. I didn't attend the opening gala of the event held at the Suzhou Creek esplanade on August 6. I chose to go later so as to see how ordinary people exercise on an everyday basis.

“What better defense can we have against possible illnesses than our health?” said the 60-year-old woman who played badminton. Her words manifested a spirit of persistence in pursuing a regular and healthy lifestyle.

“We must have patience and

perseverance if we want to cultivate a lifelong fitness habit,” said a senior long-distance runner I met as I walked along the creek.

In our casual conversation, I learnt that he was an award-winning professional long-distance runner, who retired at the age of 70 four years ago. He wore a pair of sunglasses and was well tanned. He looked so fit that I couldn't believe he's already 74.

“Many of my fellow runners have quit, but I've kept running all the time,” he said. The pleasure of running, he explained, lies in the running itself.

“We used to exercise at East China Normal University, and moved here in June this year after the riverfront space was renovated and reopened,” he said. Now, he and some old pals run 20km every day along the esplanade.

“When the weather allows, I would first run 6km from my home to the riverfront space and then complete another 20km along Suzhou Creek. If it's too hot, like today, I would get here on a moped,” he revealed.

As we chatted away, some other senior joggers were cooling themselves with underground water siphoned from a roadside hole with a removable lid. Every one of them looked fit and was radiant with joy. They even encouraged me to join them in their regular exercises.

Why not? I will give it a serious thought, I told them.

One advantage of exercising outdoors is you may run into “good Samaritan” sports fans at any time, any place, who may earnestly share their experience with you and help you form a fitness

habit that will benefit your health.

The 74-year-old award-winning runner advised me to buy a pair of thick-bottom sneakers so as to protect my knees in the course of jogging. He suggested I avoid running on hard, stone pavements.

“Learning is always more interesting when we have a community to learn with,” Amaresh Ojha and Subhra Moitra point out in their latest popular book “Fitness Habits: Breaking the Barriers to Fitness.” Both authors work for a leading Indian fitness technology platform.

“Science has proved time and again that any form of physical exercise is the fountain of youth and the best medicine for our brains. If you want to keep your brain healthy, young and vibrant, move your body every day,” they further note in their book.

Indeed, what better place can we have for “moving our body every day” than an outdoor sports ground within walking distance, where experienced exercisers may help you with their expertise and encouragement?

As I walked back and forth along Suzhou Creek on Saturday morning, I saw a tourist wharf taking shape near a riverfront sports ground. The city plans to build eight tourist wharfs along the creek. Cruise services are expected to begin next month when the first four wharfs are built or renovated.

With the much-anticipated cruise services in place, more and more outdoor sports spaces along the creek will be conveniently connected, giving ordinary people more opportunities to engage in communal fitness activities that help everyone to live in harmony with nature and others.