

Bouncing to better health

Take 1,000 jumps, call doc in morning

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The Arizona Republic
Dec. 17, 2005 12:00 AM

When it was time for the doctor to heal himself, Kim Manwaring of Ahwatukee was at a loss.

The well-known pediatric neurosurgeon at Phoenix Children's Hospital was shocked when an extensive physical examination he underwent for his 50th birthday showed he was suffering from a loss of bone density, a malady much more typical in postmenopausal women than men.

The thinning of his bones could put him at risk for osteoporosis, a disease that might cause his bones to fracture easily.

Not wanting to take prescription medication to replenish the loss because of possible undesirable side effects and knowing that weight-bearing exercise is a more natural alternative, Manwaring began investigating his options.

And, after four years of experimentation, the 54-year-old dressed in surgical scrubs recently demonstrated for patients, parents and peers in the main lobby of his Phoenix hospital his top pick for repairing his bones - a pogo stick with an attitude.

Once the toy of children, first gaining popularity in the 1920s, the original pogo stick got its bounce from an internal spring.

But Manwaring's pogo stick comes from a whole new breed of extreme rebounders.

"You may think this is a kid's toy, but actually it's a big-boy toy because it can go up to 7 feet in the air and jump over cars," he told the crowd.

Pogo sticking has become the new sport for extreme enthusiasts who enjoy perfecting stunts and tricks, appearing at national happenings such as the August Pogopalooza II in Chicago, and evaluating the variety of pogo sticks on the market today.

That is not, however, Manwaring's focus, although he acknowledged that his time on a pogo stick is "really fun."

Mostly, he sees it as a serious health maintenance tool.

"I go out on the back porch at night when I get home, and there's the desert air and the moonlight, and I pogo, and it energizes me," said Manwaring.

But that's not all it does for the doctor, who invents and patents his own surgical tools and recently received the Children's Miracle Achievement Award from the Children's Miracle Network.

"I lost 22 pounds, I sleep better, it takes care of things like irregularity, and I just feel excellent all around," he said.

Rebounding regularly on a pogo stick can also, according to Manwaring, lower circulating cholesterol and triglyceride levels, assist in the rehabilitation of a heart problem, promote tissue repair, improve balance, increase capacity for respiration and improve muscle-to-fat ratio.

It's too soon to tell if his bone density has rebounded yet, but said he he has confidence that

it will.

With at least eight different types of pogo sticks on the market, it's taken Manwaring one and a half years to settle on his favorite, although he demonstrated three at the hospital.

One, the Flybar, is a heavy pogo fueled with 12 gigantic rubber bands and sells for \$379.99.

It was an easy pogo to learn on, Manwaring said, because it proved too bulky and noisy.

"The neighbors complained when I used it outside, so my wife made me use it in the garage," he said.

Another was the Motostik, a silent pogo with an internal spring that starts at \$199.95.

But Manwaring's favorite is the newly released Vurtego, a lightweight, quiet stick fired up with compressed air and designed by a California aerospace engineer/pilot/firefighter for his 34-year-old son.



The Vurtego '06 Pro Pogo

"We're taking orders right now," said Bruce Spencer, 61, the designer, who said his sticks come in three sizes, depending on the height, not the weight, of the proposed user.

There are also two different styles; the Vurtego Pro, for \$349, and the Ultra for \$399.

"There's no difference in performance, but the Ultra just has more capacity for air pressure and also for customization," Spencer said.

Manwaring said he fills his Vurtego with air using an air pump he purchased for less than \$15 at a hardware store.

"The more air pressure, the stiffer the pogo stick and the higher you go," he said.

To check the pressure, he uses a digital tire gauge.

His rebounding pogo routine includes doing 1,000 jumps on his Vurtego every day, breaking up the action into four intervals of 250 jumps each.

He said statistics show that many American women who stay at home watch television for 4 hours a day.

"If they would just do this during the ad times, that alone would tone their bodies and get their weight under control," Manwaring said.

Toy stores still carry more simplified pogo sticks that are designed and priced in the double digits for children.

"But anyone using a pogo stick should always wear a helmet," said Manwaring, "along with some sort of athletic footwear."

Spencer even suggests gloves, to prevent blisters.

More serious injuries, he said, have not been a problem.

"Our accident rate is extremely low because unlike things like Rollerblades that you strap on, if you get in trouble on this you can just jump clear and land on your feet," he said.

David Tellez, 50, a critical care specialist at Phoenix Children's Hospital who happened upon Manwaring's demonstration, couldn't resist a shot at the Vurtego.

But Tellez, who is considerably taller than Manwaring, found the stick too short.

"I feel like I'm running a jackhammer," he said as he was forced to lean over the bar as he rebounded in the lobby.

He did, however, acknowledge the positive effects if he had had a pogo that fit.



Dr. Manwaring thrills the nursing staff with his stick handling skills.

"It was fun, and I like the challenge of learning to do something to do," he said. "And it seems like one more thing that helps maintain your core strength and balance."

And make Christmas shopping much easier.

"I'm buying one for both my sons and my son-in-law," said Manwaring, with a devilish grin. "Then after a year we'll have the Manwaring Intramural Pogo Competition."

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