Ask most people why they exercise and they’ll tell you it’s to improve their health or lose weight. Some regular exercisers, however, have discovered that working out has another wonderful side effect – increased energy levels.

Suzette McClellan is Director of Health Education at the Wateree Division of South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (SCDHEC) and a spokeswoman for Step Up. Step Out!, a research program that is helping women in Sumter County make exercise a priority. Sponsored by the University of South Carolina’s Prevention Research Center with help from the Sumter County Active Lifestyles Coalition and the Sumter County Recreation and Parks Department, the program encourages women in Sumter County aged 35 – 54 to exercise regularly, on their own.

When Suzette began walking several years ago, her goal was to lower her blood pressure and improve her overall health. “I wanted to be able to move and do the things I love to do,” she says. “After a certain age, you know, weight creeps up on you and slows you down.”

So Suzette began getting up early – at 5 a.m. each morning – to walk. Not only did the consistent exercise lower her blood pressure, she noticed she was feeling better overall and had more energy during the day. “Now that I’ve started exercising, I don’t ever want to stop,” she says.

A self-proclaimed member of the sandwich generation, Suzette says she also realized she needs to stay in good health to be able to care for her children as well as her mother, a diabetic who recently began exercising at her physician’s advice.

“It’s about being able to do the things you love to do,” says Suzette. “Now I’m going to the park and running and playing with the children. I’m able to do that thanks to regular exercise.”

When people start exercising, they report feeling more energetic, often along with a decrease in anxiety and depression. Exercise also helps people get better sleep, and this can increase energy levels during the day. “Exercise will give you the energy you need for life,” she says. “Make it a way of living.”

Follow Suzette’s advice for Step Up. Step Out! participants to energize your exercise routine.

• Get up early. “When you exercise in the morning, you feel better all day. If you’re like me, when you wait until the afternoon, it may not happen.”

• Walk with a friend. “We have a tendency to let ourselves down, but we won’t let another person down – we’ll show up.”

• Schedule it in. “We schedule everything else in our day, why not schedule some physical activity in as well?”

• Stick with it. “It’s important to do at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise at least five days a week, if you want to receive the full health benefits.”

To learn more about participating in Step Up. Step Out!, please call Ericka Burroughs, Project Coordinator at 436-2182.