Healthy trends: putting the fun back into fitness

For many, the word “exercise” conjures up visions of mindless treadmill-running, endless push-ups or the horrors of high school gym class. This negative image of exercise might be why only 15 per cent of Canadians currently exercise the 30-minutes-a-day, three-times-a-week minimum experts recommend for a healthy lifestyle. The good news is that there are lots of fun, social ways for people of all fitness levels and budgets to get moving. Just make sure you consult your doctor before starting any new fitness regime. Consider trying:



Dance fitness. Dance fitness classes, such as Zumba®, combine high-energy music with different dance styles and aerobic exercises to create a fun, fast-paced workout. Classes are offered for all ages and fitness levels and are a great way to make new friends while getting in shape.

Spinning. With high-energy music and an enthusiastic instructor who guides you through a class of peddling stationary bikes at different positions and resistance levels, classes puts a fresh “spin” on the traditional stationary bicycle. Spinning also provides a great cardio workout in a supportive, social environment.

Boot camps. These classes are a fun interpretation of classic military training and often take place in outdoor park locations. They generally combine creative weightlifting, resistance training and aerobic exercises to help people of all fitness levels achieve their goals. This “militaristic” camaraderie and support can be a very powerful motivator towards a healthier lifestyle.

Boxing fitness. Channel your inner “Muhammad Ali” to duck and weave while punching at various targets for an exhilarating aerobic workout. It’s also a great way to blow off steam after a stressful day at work or an argument with your partner!

Running/walking groups. These groups, which are often centred around a “goal” (i.e. charity run, walk or marathon), meet on a regular basis to run or walk different routes or trails. Groups are usually free to join and it’s easy to find peers at a similar fitness level.

Fitness for Life: Staying Motivated

You’ll probably “hit the ground running” by going to the gym or exercise class every chance you get. But it’s also pretty easy after the initial rush to slip back into old habits, finding excuses to skip workouts or even quitting an exercise program altogether—especially if you become bored or frustrated because you’re not seeing the results you’d hoped for. Stay on track towards your long-term health goals by:

Investing in a trainer. Andrew Walmsley, a certified personal trainer and co-owner of Leslieville Personal Fitness in Toronto says, “The consistency of a regular appointment can help you stay on track. Plus you get expert knowledge—a lot of people come in with postural issues that can cause injuries down the road.” Ask about the trainer’s credentials. While not absolutely essential, someone who has a degree in Physical Education or Kinesiology—in combination with training, like Canadian Personal Training Network certification—is reassurance that you’re working with a skilled professional. “A good trainer will adapt their style to whatever their clientele is looking for,” Walmsley adds. Even if you can’t afford regular sessions, a consultation with a trainer when you lose motivation can help get you on track.

Scheduling your workouts. Try blocking off specific workout times in your calendar each week. Treating your workouts like other important appointments makes it easier to prioritize a healthy lifestyle. Alternatively, you can try joining group classes, which meet at regular times each week to stay on pace.

Being realistic. Attempting a workout marathon on your first day off the couch will only leave you sore, discouraged, and possibly injured. With any exercise program, take the time to learn proper techniques and build up intensity slowly as your body adapts to the new movements.

Changing it up. “Lots of people get stuck in a rut,” notes Walmsley. He says following the same exercise routine week after week can eventually become stale and boring. If your current fitness routine has lost its excitement, change things up by trying new activities, classes or equipment: “Doing classes or a sport you enjoy can really help people keep going and stay motivated,” adds Walmsley.

Tracking your progress. Don’t expect results overnight. Remind yourself that if you stick to a healthy lifestyle, positive changes will show over time. Keep track of your accomplishments—either on paper (i.e. measurements, body fat numbers, etc.) or by taking photos—and review them to help you stay motivated.

Moving to the beat. Nothing inspires instinctive movement more than an upbeat, fast-paced tune. Build a playlist of your favourite workout songs and crank up the music during any fitness activities.

Fitting in fitness. A healthy, active lifestyle goes beyond attending the gym a few times every week. Look for creative ways to get moving during your regular routine. Try parking further from your destination and walking, or turning a slow chore like vacuuming into a high-energy home workout.

Weighing In

- Canadian adults spend an average of 9.5 hours per day sitting - approximately 69 per cent of their waking hours.
- People who are physically inactive are twice as likely to develop coronary heart disease than those who are regularly physically active.
- About 27 per cent of Canadian adults participate in at least one sport.
- If the number of physically inactive Canadians were to decrease by 10 per cent over the next five years, the Canadian economy would save approximately $5 billion in lifetime costs.
- Less than 38 per cent of Canadian adults are at a healthy weight. About 37 percent are considered overweight while 24 per cent are obese.

Looking for additional support? Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) can help.