

Start Your Own Fitness Club

Here's a guide to starting a fitness club with your office mates or friends.

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Starting an exercise club is a fantastic way to shape up. It's like a new hobby: You enjoy getting together, comparing techniques, receiving moral backup and spurring each other on to shed pounds.

"It's like a built-in support system," says Sharon Spalding, MEd, professor of physical and health education at Mary Baldwin College in Staunton, Virginia. "The group motivates each other when someone 'just doesn't feel like working out.' And the encouragement crosses over into other areas."

"It's also a social thing," says fitness guru Edward Jackowski, CEO of Exude Inc. in New York City and author of *FIT TO A TEE*. "Whether it's a cycling or jogging club, it makes you keep up with the others, develop relationships, self-confidence and self-esteem. You get the help of friends and in return make commitments. And your faults are OK, because you're with friends. They won't make fun of you if you don't perform."

Get Your Club Organized

Here are six steps to help make it happen:

1. Recruit.

Reach colleagues through e-mail, post signs in work elevators and bathrooms, or ask other parents at your kids' after-school programs. Then call your new fitness friends to establish a mutually realistic schedule.

2. Find a venue.

At work, ask about booking boardrooms, or exercise outdoors if weather permits. If your

office is multi-story, start a Stair Climbers Club! With friends, nominate a home with an ample garage or yard space, or plan basement workouts.

3. Coordinate schedules.

Follow timetables. Schedule office exercise during lunch or before work (there are more rooms available then). And aim for regular, convenient times: twice weekly when your partner can watch the kids, or during school time.

4. Consider classes.

Adding classes into the mix can help liven up your club's routine. Research organizations in your area — cycling groups that tour your city, water aerobics classes at local pools. And for home and office workouts, simply alternate between you and your friends' favorite videos.

5. Celebrate successes.

Gradually increase your workout intensity and frequency, then celebrate each other's accomplishments, says Spalding. Set milestones, like walking the distance it takes to go across state. Record the miles each buddy clocks, then add them together or plot them on a map to watch your club achieve its goal.

6. Leave room for improvement.

Jackowski suggests setting aside 10 to 20 minutes before each workout to discuss concerns, or nominate a person each week to share how they overcame constraints or reached goals. Then start sweating!

Inspiration in Numbers

Follow the lead of these dieters who've seen success in numbers.

"Four of us go to the gym and serve as 'consciences' for one another. If I don't go, I've got three other people who might call and say, 'You're not going? Why?' Accountability is the key. And **YES**, I've seen the difference. Every pair of pants that I own is now too baggy, which is fun."

Amy, Connecticut