

Healthy benefits of social exercise

Friends and groups create commitment and make exercising more fun

by Michelle Robin, D.C.

Even for the most dedicated and disciplined, sticking to an exercise routine day after day can be difficult. Many of us are overscheduled, which can make it easy to bump exercise off the calendar. However, we are not likely to bump a trainer, friend or group of friends. Whether healthy or not, our commitment to others is often stronger than our commitment to ourselves.

Social exercise is when you plan your exercise routine at the same time as another person or choose activities that involve others. You've heard it before: find a workout buddy. But social exercise provides more than a firm appointment. You've created a support system. Yes, you'll show up because others are expecting you to be there. More importantly, you'll encourage one another, push one another to get to that next level, even compete.

Perhaps you'll try something you didn't think you could do because your friends are with you. You'll acknowledge one another's progress and accomplishments, whether it's losing weight, being able to make it through an entire yoga class without losing your balance or getting to that 8-minute mile.

For example, I regularly workout with a personal trainer. Spring through fall I meet weekly with a group of business women for a Sunday morning bike ride.

Sometimes social exercise can be about

event. Participating in group classes on your own can give you a similar experience because you're not alone and you progress week after week.

In my book, "Wellness on a Shoestring,"

I tell the story of my friend Karen who has been a long-time supporter of the Women's Intersport Network for Kansas City (WIN for KC). One year she was challenged by a friend to participate in the triathlon that WIN for KC sponsors. At first she resisted, proclaiming that she couldn't.

After all, she hadn't done any of that – running, swimming or biking – in years!

Karen was in shape but didn't exercise consistently. Eventually she decided that the triathlon would be a good incentive to start exercising more frequently, and signed up to do it. Once she told everyone she'd do it, she had to follow through.

Getting back into consistent exercise wasn't as easy as she thought it would be. However, Karen had friends who frequently joined her to bike and run. She also knew friends who would be participating in the triathlon with her. The race day came and she finished in the middle of the pack! She continues to exercise with friends and family.

Regardless of your current fitness level or dedication to regular workouts, taking a social exercise approach can add commitment and encouragement, and can push you to that next level. And is just fun. Call your friends and have some fun!



Photo by Dick Ross, seeKCrun.com