

GET MOVING WITH GROUP FITNESS

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All people should engage in regular physical activity to improve overall health and prevent negative health outcomes. The Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans recommends adults reach at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity each week for health benefits. Getting started with physical activity and staying consistent can be challenging, especially if you have not been active for a while. Group fitness is a great option for those with goals of establishing consistent physical activity routines, exercising safely and effectively, and maintaining motivation for physical activity throughout life.

What is Group Fitness?

Group fitness is an exercise program done with other people that is hosted by a fitness professional such as a Group Fitness Instructor (GFI) or Certified Personal Trainer (CPT). Group fitness is typically held in person at a gym, community center, or outdoor recreation facility. Live, online group fitness classes are also offered via video conferencing applications such as Zoom. Group fitness offers a variety of healthy ways to move your body, with classes ranging from gentle-on-the-joints water aerobics to muscle-building strength training. Other examples of group fitness include yoga, cycling, tai chi, high-intensity interval training (HIIT), Zumba, Pilates, kickboxing, and barre. Group fitness may emphasize weight-bearing activities or incorporate the use of fitness equipment.

How is a Group Fitness Class Structured?

Registration for group fitness is typically required in advance to prepare the instructor. Arrive 5-10 minutes early to sign in and get settled. As you sign in, take the opportunity to introduce yourself to the instructor and tell them about your familiarity with the activity, concerns, health complications, and mobility limitations. Your instructor will begin class by describing the workout and fitness equipment. Next, they will lead you through a warm-up to prepare your body for the activity ahead. The instructor may demonstrate proper form by completing the entire workout with you, or they may talk you through the workout as they walk around. Throughout the activity, they will be available to offer words of encouragement, modifications, and corrections to form. Finally, the activity will conclude with a cool down and stretch to lower your heart rate safely and reduce the risk of injury or soreness.

Who Should Take Group Fitness Classes?

All ages and stages of life can benefit from adding group fitness to their physical activity routine. Group fitness classes provide fun activities in a safe environment for all participants, regardless of fitness level or expertise. For those beginning their physical activity journey, group fitness is a great introduction to exercising consistently with added support from others who share similar health goals. Group fitness classes can also eliminate the added stress of planning a workout for yourself, especially when you may be unsure about logistics such as proper form or pacing. People that have an established physical activity habit can experience benefits from joining group fitness classes, too. Group fitness can add variety and motivation to any exercise routine and introduce you to new workouts you might not be exposed to otherwise.

What are the Benefits of Group Fitness?

Group fitness offers many benefits to your health and happiness. If a benefit from the following list resonates with you, it may be time to try out a group fitness class in your area with help from the *Getting Started with Group Fitness* section below.

- 1. Accountability** – Exercising in a group setting can be a great way to hold yourself accountable. Developing relationships with your favorite instructors and participants can make it feel more difficult to skip class as they are anticipating your presence. The set schedule for group fitness can also help you stay consistent with activity and contribute to the recommended 150 minutes of moderate physical activity each week. Attending group fitness on a daily or weekly basis can assist you in establishing a habit of exercise that feels good for your body. Over time, exercise will feel more like a part of your normal routine than a chore.
Get comfortable speaking with your GFI about your health and fitness goals. Your instructor can be an excellent source of encouragement as they may notice your progress in ways that you do not. Consider asking your instructor for other group fitness recommendations and resources as needed to support you in reaching your physical activity goals. For extra motivation, make plans with a friend to try group fitness together. A study published by the Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology found that the successful completion rate of a weight loss program increased from 76% to 95% when done with friends instead of alone. Ask a friend or family member to join you and push each other to work your hardest.
- 2. Motivation** – Research shows that exercising with others can increase your motivation to work at a greater intensity. Sharing space with others who have similar health goals can encourage you to make the most of your workout. If you perceive your peers to be at a high fitness level, you are more likely to push yourself during group fitness. When you feel tired or consider giving up, rely on your peers and energetic instructor to bring you back on track. The uplifting social support from fellow participants can create a sense of security and reduce any fears of difficulty or failure with the activity.
- 3. Safety** – Certified fitness instructors will guide you through group fitness using proper form to ensure safety and the best results. Group fitness classes always include a warm-up and cool-down section to appropriately prepare your muscles and prevent injury. GFIs also offer modifications throughout the activity that allow you to exercise effectively at your own fitness level. All movements can be adjusted to work for your individual body and fitness goals. You will get the most benefit from your workout when you are working at the right level for you – not the person standing next to you. If you are new to fitness or have concerns about safety, speak with your instructor before the workout begins. This helps your instructor know when to suggest alternative patterns of movement, if necessary, throughout class.
- 4. Fun** – Through group fitness, you can vary your physical activity without having to plan anything on your own. You can also be exposed to new patterns of movement that may help you avoid boredom or burnout with your activity routine. Group fitness provides the ultimate fun atmosphere to shake up your workout with upbeat music, encouraging cues from your instructor, and smiles from your peers. You will get the most benefit from participating in activities that you enjoy as you are more likely to stay consistent with them long-term.



Group fitness classes are designed to be appropriate for all ages, mobility levels, and body sizes.
Ellie Lane, ©2017, Clemson Extension

Getting Started with Group Fitness

A challenging part of any fitness routine is getting started. It can feel intimidating to join group fitness, especially if you have not been very active for a while. Be patient and kind with yourself as you try out new activities and learn what feels best for your body. Group fitness exists for every type of workout, including cycling, dance, yoga, strength, and more. Identify what activities bring you joy and feel good for your body, then do more of these. If you love to dance, try out dance group fitness. Alternatively, if cycling does not feel good for your body, do not force yourself to go to a cycling class.

If group fitness is new to you, start slow. Begin by participating in one group fitness class per week, then add more to your routine as you gain confidence and endurance. Consistency with healthy lifestyle behaviors is always better than intensity. Your body experiences greater health benefits from regular activity that is at an appropriate level for your body than intense bouts of exercise that may burn you out.

Often, the hardest part of getting more active is simply showing up for yourself. Make a commitment to your health and happiness to show up. Tell yourself you will give your best effort during the activity and acknowledge this may look different each day. Trust your instructor to create a safe, fun, and motivating environment for you to work towards your fitness goals.

Ready to Give Group Fitness a Try?

Many gyms and boutique fitness centers offer free trials for classes. If you are just starting and do not have a gym membership, consider taking advantage of these trial periods to find what you like. The MindBody smartphone app is a great resource for booking fitness classes in your area.

Clemson Extension's Rural Health and Nutrition Team offers online, weekly fitness classes with certified fitness professionals to help you reach your physical activity goals. These programs are free and appropriate for all ages and mobility levels. Click the links below to read more about our activity programs and register.

WalkSC: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/walksc-tickets-241972836267>

Practical Strength: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/practical-strength-tickets-604058082987?aff=ebdshpsearchautocomplete>

Yoga for Every Body: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/yoga-for-every-body-tickets-138693376623>

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