

Want to get fit? Find a partner to increase exercise effectiveness

It's no surprise that studies indicate people get fit and lose weight more effectively when they partner with a friend or family member.

Think about it. You're more likely to show up for a workout when you know people are expecting and excited to see you. Jazzercise founder Judi Sheppard Missett says exercising with other people is also very motivating as the positive energy spreads from one participant to the next. How many times have you felt like skipping a workout only to discover how great you felt once you got there? An exercise partner can provide that extra incentive to provide that extra incentive to follow through.

Whether it's exercise or dieting, being part of a group is helpful. A study conducted by researchers at Aston University and the Western Human Nutrition Center at the University of California found that organized weight loss groups offered sev-

eral advantages, in particular reduced stress. People who dieted alone had significantly increased stress levels, which were linked to severely impaired task performance.

A Marywood University study of 75 overweight people also found that individuals who worked with others to lose weight were far more successful in shedding pounds and keeping them off a year later than people who dieted alone.

But, as in any partnership, you need to find the right fit. Here are some suggestions for finding the perfect fitness and weight loss partner:

- Have the same goals; it's not a good match if you're looking to dance off a few pounds in an aerobics class and your partner wants to beat his or her best time in a 5K run.

- Don't waste your time on a partner who is late, whiny, or a naysayer, which will only dampen your enthusiasm.

- Pick someone whose companionship you value so you are motivated to be prompt and upbeat.

- Have a set workout schedule and consider friendly penalties for not showing up.

- Get your spouse moving. He/she is conveniently located, easily accessible, and statistically in the same shape as you. Research indicated that women gain an average of 24 pounds over the course of 13 years of marriage, while men gain 19. But research also indicates that couples who begin an exercise program together are more likely to stick with it than single people, according to the Journal of Sports Medicine and Physical Fitness.

In fact, says Judi Sheppard Missett, Jazzercise CEO, having family on your side can be invaluable to your health and fitness program. Having them exercise with you can make your efforts more fun while

spreading the healthy benefits to everyone involved. What greater gift can you give to your family than fitness? There are many games and activities that you and your spouse can do with your children, and many exercises can go undercover as cool games for your kids.

Stability balls are perfect for the whole family and offer numerous options for strength and flexibility exercises. The following back stretch gives you a completely supported backbend that feels great. For children, start by getting them up on the ball and comfortable with the feel of it. You can stand behind them and hold their hands or waist for support if necessary. Just have them bounce around for a while; they'll have a blast while improving their balance and core strength. Now move around in front of them, holding their hands and stabilizing the ball with your feet and legs. Help

them lie back over the ball until it completely supports them from head to tail. Hold the stretch for 10 to 15 seconds before slowly sitting up.

To do this stretch yourself, simply sit on the ball and walk your feet forward, allowing your spine to roll along the ball until it supports your entire back. You can reach your arms to the floor for balance if necessary.

Jazzercise, created by Judi Sheppard Missett, is the world's leading dance-fitness program with more than 6,800 instructors teaching 20,000 classes weekly in the U.S. and around the globe. Since 1969, millions of people of all ages and fitness levels have reaped the benefits of this comprehensive program, designed to enhance cardiovascular endurance, strength, and flexibility. For more information on Jazzercise, go to www.jazzercise.com or call 1-800-FIT-IS-IT.

Columbia County Safe Kids Chapter sets out to help kids ride safe

Children throughout Columbia County are riding safer in motor vehicles thanks to the advocacy of the revitalized Columbia County Safe Kids Chapter. The Columbia County Safe Kids Chapter was re-organized in late 2004 and includes all members of the Columbia County Early Childhood Team. The steering committee for the group includes Joyce Ervin, Hyla Ridenour, Pam Ruddell, Jan Spika-Kenna and Micaela Swanson. The mission of Safe Kids is to prevent accidental childhood injury.

Child safety seat distribution was chosen as the highest priority after completing a needs

assessment. Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of child deaths in our county. The proper use of a child safety seat that meets recommended standards can reduce injuries and fatalities among children. Columbia County Safe Kids is able to purchase seats at a discounted rate thanks to a generous partnership with St. Helens Wal*Mart.

The population with the greatest need for child safety seats and education on proper use in Columbia County is low income families. The Columbia County Safe Kids Chapter has developed a process to distribute seats to families in need and works with several local agencies to determine eligibility, based on WIC criteria. Those agencies include the

Health District, the Self Sufficiency office at Department of Human Services and Family and Child Development programs at Community Action Team. Seats are distributed only by certified child safety seat technicians, who instruct parents and caregivers how to properly install the seats. Currently, there are only three certified child safety seat techni-

cians in Columbia County. One of the goals of the Columbia County Safe Kids Chapter is to increase that number.

The next class for technicians starts January 18, 2007, in Beaverton. Anyone interested in learning more about the program, becoming a technician or making a donation may call the Commission on Children and Families at 503-397-7211.

Here's how to eat healthy even during social events

When people adopt healthier eating habits, they often picture the ideal setting: Just themselves at the table with no distractions, no social pressures, and no diet saboteurs.

Of course life isn't that sim-

ple. When you aim to eat healthy, sometimes you will be pressured in the opposite direction. We don't live in a vacuum. Most often, we eat in the company of others – and their influence isn't always positive.

Fortunately, with the right attitude, you can maintain your healthy eating habits and still enjoy all kinds of social events.

Here are a few guidelines for sticking to your plan:

- Know yourself. You're the

best one to judge what usually throws you off mark. Maybe it's a weekly restaurant meal with friends who urge, "Aw, c'mon, you can forget your diet for just one night." Or maybe it's a certain relative who insists you take a third portion of everything.

- Plan ahead. Rehearse the behavior you'll need, whether it's learning to say no when the appetizer comes around...politely fending off a "food pusher"...or whatever.

- Eat a snack beforehand. You'll be better prepared to make rational choices if you're not ravenous.

Members in TOPS (Take Off Pounds Sensibly) often share hints on the ways they've over

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