

Physical Attraction

Consider a Variety of Nontraditional Workouts To Make Exercising an Exciting New Challenge

By Valerie L. Merahn

The only thing triter than ruining one's diet over the holidays is vowing to work off the resultant pounds in the new year. Which is fine, of course, if the person sticks to the plan. But all too often, by the end of January, crowds at city gyms start leveling off, relieving the regulars who must endure the post-New Year's Day rush to the treadmill.

When motivation is low, the Discovery Channel's National Body Challenge is one way to get things going. There is no fee to participate, and along with a wealth of online fitness resources, participants receive a free eight-week trial membership to Bally Total Fitness (www.ballytotalfitness.com).

Eddie Carrington, a personal trainer and the national spokesman for Bally Total Fitness, says that the program is ideal for beginners who often get frustrated when changes don't happen overnight. He notes that the eight-week challenge provides a real opportunity to begin to see results. He hopes those results will motivate people to make a true lifestyle change. Exercisers in need of a motivation boost can sign up for the fitness challenge online through Jan. 20 at www.health.discovery.com.

Sometimes motivation isn't the problem. For busy New Yorkers, adding

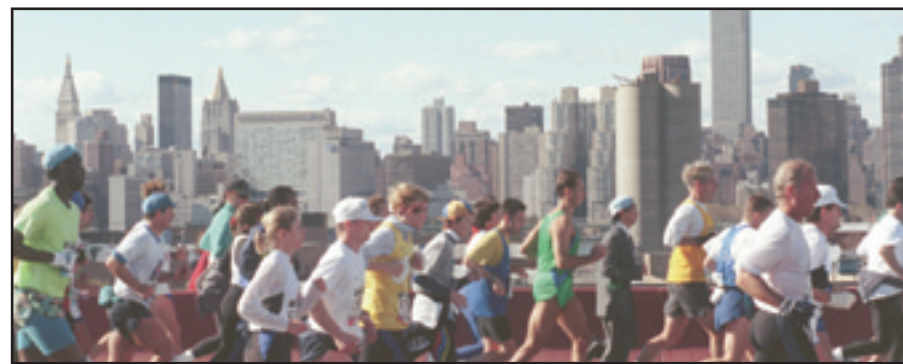


Express Workout: Caters to hectic schedules

workout time to an already hectic schedule can prove to be a daunting challenge in itself. Fortunately, local gyms have found ways to offer members a quick and efficient workout. In 22 minutes or less, members can get a complete full-body strength workout at New York Sports Clubs (www.mysportsclubs.com) with XpressLine, a trainer-supervised, eight-station equipment circuit. Chelsea Piers (www.chelseapiers.com) offers a 30-minute full-body group-cycling

workout. At Equinox Fitness Clubs (www.equinoxfitness.com), Spin Express and Cycling Express classes are also designed to get exercisers in and out of the gym as quickly as possible.

Parents often find it especially difficult to get to the gym, but there is



New York City Marathon: Ultimate accomplishment

no reason why fitness can't be a family affair. On Jan. 17, Kidville, NY (www.kidvillenyc.com) begins tours of its new facility on the Upper East Side, with classes starting on Jan. 31. Newborns through children age 5 can participate in classes that promote a healthy, active lifestyle. While children are in class or horsing around in the indoor playground, new moms can get back into shape with classes such as "Reclaim Your Abs."

Many of the city's mainstream gyms include classes and/or babysitting services. The Manhattan Plaza Health Club (www.mphc.com) offers special hours for children. Swimming classes are available for children 6 months to 13 years, and the whole family can take the exercise plunge with "family swims." According to the American Council on Exercise, parents are responsible for making sure their children remain active when playing outside isn't an option during the winter months.

Velocity Sports Performance (www.velocitysp.com/nyc) recently opened a location in Manhattan that is ideal for athletic families. The gym focuses on sports performance and uses expert coaches to make university- and professional-level programs available to all. In the evenings, classes for athletes ages 12-18 run concurrently with adult classes. Since opening, the facility has run speed camps for five local high schools free of charge as a way to expose coaches and athletes to performance training.

According to Scott Plasky, business director for Velocity Sports Performance, "Our goal in coming to New York City is to really build relationships within the local athletic community and work with every school that sees the benefit of having their athletes

trained in a state-of-the-art facility by the best strength and conditioning coaches around."

More New Yorkers than ever are embracing the concept of training for athletic goals. Mike Monroe, President of HM4 Fitness (www.hm4fitness.com), says that more than 40 percent of his clients completed personal fitness goals for the first time last year, from marathons to sprint triathlons. There are many options outside of traditional health clubs for those looking to begin training. In fact, one of the most popular "gyms" in the city may well be Central Park.

During the year, in all weather conditions, New York Road Runners

(www.nyrr.org) holds classes and races throughout the city's parks. Participating athletes are not afraid of a little cold weather; their next race (Jan. 22) is the NYRR Frostbite 7-mile. For many runners, competing in these races is just a step toward a much bigger goal; NYRR members who complete at least nine qualified NYRR-scored races during the calendar year are automatically eligible to take part in the ultimate challenge — the New York City Marathon.

At this time of year, the harsh winter weather does have the potential to interrupt outdoor workouts. And HM4 Fitness' Monroe, who spent two winters in Norway, knows all about cold weather. Although he runs a program called "Pain in the Park," if the temperature at 7 a.m. is below 32 degrees, he avoids running outside. Monroe maintains that regardless of weather conditions, outdoor functional fitness continues to gain popularity.

Stacy Berman runs Stacy's Boot Camp (www.stacysbootcamp.com) year round in Central Park. She notes that, "in the winter, we do a bit more running because we need to keep the heart rate up to stay warm, but the workout is basically the same." That workout includes "military-style" exercises such as push-ups, pull-ups, squats, abdominal exercises, jogging and jumping jacks.

Even the city's large health-club chains are leaving their facilities to take advantage of the outdoors. Susan Gerson, director of public relations for Town Sports International, parent company of New York Sports Clubs, sees boot camps and outdoor exercise as an expanding trend. New York Sports Clubs holds an Outdoor Team Training Program that features a combination of strength and cardiovascular drills utilizing outdoor props. The next session begins Jan. 24.

Bally Total Fitness also takes advantage of Central Park with classes such as a running camp designed to help prepare one's mind and body for marathons and an in-line skating class.

For those who prefer to stay inside, enhanced mind-body programs combine yoga and Pilates with one another or with strength training. Beth Shaw, founder and president of YogaFit Inc. (www.yogafit.com), believes that hybrids are the way of the future. "Users get the benefits of yoga along with a great upbeat fitness workout," she says.

At Exhale (www.exhalespa.com), a class called "Cold Fusion" mixes Pilates, yoga, core conditioning and orthopedic stretching. The popular program that began in April 2003 now boasts a following of more than 4,000 people.

Crunch Fitness (www.crunch.com) also offers several new yoga classes, including "Rock Yoga," "Midnight Yoga" and the very hot (literally) "Boot Camp Yoga," which is taught in a heated room.

Urban Rebounding (www.urbanrebounding.com), an aerobic workout performed on a mini-trampoline, also offers a fun variation of traditional exercise classes. While the books and videos created by fitness expert JB Berns are popular nationwide and Urban Rebounding classes are available in many of the



Yoga: Benefits both mind and body

largest fitness centers throughout the country, New Yorkers can go straight to Berns for a class at Equinox. This year, Urban Rebounding expands its offerings to cater to youth with special kids' programming at the YMCA and in fitness centers throughout the nation.

New Yorkers have the opportunity to fulfill both fitness resolutions and philanthropic resolutions on Feb. 26 during the Urban Rebounding Marathon. Berns will co-host the event with Meredith Vieira at Bally Total Fitness on Sixth Avenue and 18th Street, and all proceeds will benefit the American Diabetes Association. For more information, visit www.diabetes.org/urbanrebounding.

Regardless of the exercise program, beginners should heed the advice of YogaFit's Shaw: "Be patient, go at your own pace, and realize that everyone at one time or another was a beginner too. Stick with it for 90 days and you'll love it; if you don't after three months, try something else." ■

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