



Get It Together - By Anne Taulane

Couples who work out together stay fit together



What could bring you closer to your partner than getting all hot and sweaty together? Working out with your significant other can boost self-esteem, raise your energy, and improve your relationship. Plus: three great moves to do with a partner.

Making that 6 a.m. spin class may seem like a bad idea when you are snuggled up in bed after your alarm goes off. And it's easy to find an excuse not to work on your arms and shoulders at the end of the day when your husband calls to say he's preparing your favorite dinner. Face it: the biggest obstacle to you reaching your fitness goals might not be yourself, but your significant other.

To combat this fitness hurdle, consider enlisting your better half as your workout buddy—the benefits to your relationship are immeasurable. For starters, says Courtney Shelby, a trainer at the 24 Hour Fitness in Glendale, Colorado, working out together will increase both your motivation and accountability. "If one of you doesn't feel like coming in, the other person will drag them there," she says. And if your husband or wife is already in great shape, they can serve as a stand-in trainer, helping you learn new exercises, set fitness goals, and stay motivated when you hit that wall.

A partner can also ease gym phobia common with newbies who are leery of working out in front of strangers and trying new equipment. "People who are self-conscious don't pay

attention to whether or not people are looking at them if they have a partner," Shelby says. "They feel more confident."

Getting sweaty at the gym with your significant other also adds a little friendly competition to your relationship, which in turn can motivate you to work out a little harder and, ultimately, help you meet and even exceed your fitness goals. "And it's fun," Shelby adds. "Working out together, people can stay focused more. They can make it fun by doing things like circuits and exercises that are timed. Doing it with another person makes it more interactive."

That sense of competition can even help motivate you and your loved one to get off the couch in the first place, especially if your better half is reluctant to hit the gym in the first place. "Sometimes you have to make a deal when your partner does not want to work out," Shelby says. "One partner can promise to do errands or the dishes or pay for the movies. Even buy their partner a pedicure." Or, up the ante by betting who can reach their fitness or weight loss goals first, the winner earning a highly coveted prize like a day at a spa or on the golf course.

The benefits of exercising together can also spread throughout your household when everyone is on board with the program. Shelby says she has seen a number of clients whose relationships have improved once they start exercising together. "Not only is the relationship better, but the household starts eating better," she says. "Maybe one person was eating junk food and the other person was trying to eat healthy, and that caused a conflict in the house. When they start working out together, it changes the whole household. It rubs off on the kids too."

And who knows, your new, toned bodies just might ignite a new spark in your love life.

Howdy, Partner

Here are three moves to get your and your partner's heart moving:

1 Towel curls: Grab a towel, and have one person hold onto both ends of it. The other person will create resistance by pulling/pressing down on the center of the towel while the other person holding the ends tries to perform a bicep curl pulling upward.

2 Lawn mowers: One person should face down in a push-up position on their hands. The other person will hold their feet off the ground. The person in the push-up position should try to walk on their hands. This is an advanced exercise. Each person should be able to hold and manage the other persons feet and weight of their legs while they had walk.

3 Seated Row: Take two medium to high resistance bands with handles and crisscross them. Sit facing each other with knees slightly bent and legs out in front. Have each person hold onto the two handles and row/pull towards their torso. They create the resistance by pulling away from each other.

Source: You 24. Used with permission



Healty Heart Tips for a Bad Economy

Don't let your body pay the price in uncertain times, experts say

The economic news is enough to weaken anyone's heart, and it sometimes does with people feeling stressed, eating poorly and cutting out workouts while trying to make ends meet.

"We've seen an increase in patients complaining about heart palpitations, anxiety and stress over the past months," Karol Watson, an associate professor of cardiology at the David Geffen School of Medicine at University of California, Los Angeles, said in a news release issued by the school. "Much of heart disease can be prevented. That's why it is so important to follow a healthy lifestyle and to control your cardiovascular risk factors." UCLA cardiologists offer these tips for adults and children in these tough economic times:

Eat better; exercise more. Eat a healthy diet, including five servings of fruits and vegetables every day. By cooking simple fresh foods at home, rather than indulging in restaurant fare or fast foods, you can save money and your

health. Maintaining a good diet and exercise program, even if it's just 30 minutes of walking around the neighborhood, helps you prevent obesity, which adds to the risk of heart attacks, heart failure and diabetes.

Don't skimp on health care. Putting off doctor visits, especially when you have symptoms, hurts your health more in the long run, as does skipping medications or splitting pills to cut costs. Maintain regular checkups. Look at pharmaceutical company prescription programs if medication costs are a concern for you.

Stop smoking and avoid secondhand smoke. Smoking is an expensive habit that greatly increases your risk of cardiovascular problems. Quitting smoking quickly reduces the risk to your heart.

Reduce stress. Find a positive outlet, such as exercise, meditation or the company of others, to ease stress and improve your health.

Maintain healthy cholesterol levels. Get your levels checked and talk to your physician about the best plan of action to keep your LDL

("bad") cholesterol levels low and your HDL ("good") cholesterol levels high.

Check your blood pressure. Hypertension is called the "silent killer," because it exhibits few warning signs. Today, several effective treatments are available for high blood pressure. If your blood pressure is normal, maintain it with a healthy lifestyle.

Source: HealthDay News



Keeping Fit Improves Spatial Memory, Increase Size of Brain Structure

When it comes to the hippocampus, a brain structure vital to certain types of memory, size matters. Numerous studies have shown that bigger is usually better. Now researchers have found that elderly adults who are more physically fit tend to have bigger hippocampi and better spatial memory than those who are less fit.

The study, in the journal *Hippocampus*, shows that hippocampus size in physically fit adults accounts for about 40 percent of their advantage in spatial memory.

The hippocampus, a curved structure deep inside the medial temporal lobe of the brain, is essential to memory formation. Remove it - as was done in the well-known case of surgical patient Henry Gustav Molaison - and a person's ability to store most new experiences in memory is destroyed.

The hippocampus also is a key player in spatial navigation and other types of relational memory.

Certain activities are believed to modify hippocampus size in humans. For example, a study of London taxi drivers found that the posterior portion of the hippocampus was larger in experienced taxi drivers than in other subjects. And a study of German medical

students found that the same region of the hippocampus increased in size as they studied for their final exams.

Studies also have found that the hippocampus shrinks with age, a process that coincides with small but significant cognitive declines. The rate at which this occurs, however, differs among individuals.

Earlier studies found that exercise increases hippocampus size and spatial memory in rodents, but the new study is the first to demonstrate that exercise can affect hippocampus size and memory in humans.

The researchers, from the University of Illinois and the University of Pittsburgh, measured the cardiorespiratory fitness of 165 adults (109 of them female) between 59 and 81 years of age. Using magnetic resonance imaging, the researchers conducted a volumetric analysis of the subjects' left and right hippocampi. They also tested the participants' spatial reasoning.

They found a significant association between an individual's fitness and his or her performance on certain spatial memory tests. There was also a strong correlation between fitness and hippocampus size.

"The higher fit people have a bigger hippocampus, and the people that have more tissue in the hippocampus have a better spatial memory," said U. of I. psychology professor Art Kramer, who led the study with Pittsburgh psychology professor Kirk Erickson.

"Even ignoring the hippocampus data, we see there is this significant and substantial relationship between how fit you are and how good your memory is, or at least a certain kind of memory, a certain kind of memory that we need all the time," Kramer said.

"This is really a clinically significant finding because it supports the notion that your lifestyle choices and behaviors may influence brain shrinkage in old age," Erickson said. "Basically, if you stay fit, you retain key regions of your brain involved in learning and memory."

An impairment of spatial memory "is one of a number of reasons why older people end up losing their independence," Kramer said. "Here is yet more evidence that becoming fit has implications for how well you're going to live your life."

Article adapted by Medical News Today from original press release.

To work the core, go beyond the abs.

Most of us have a tendency to focus too much on our abs, leaving behind some key muscle groups. If you're not also strengthening your back, pelvis, and hips, you're not really working your core. Here's how to target the entire area—and the best moves, beyond the plank.



You know by now that endless crunches aren't the best way to sculpt a whittled middle. But focus solely on your abs when you're trying to get that six-pack to pop and you're more likely to ignore the supporting muscles that complete your core, says Rick Baird, trainer at Andre Agassi Super Sport in Las Vegas.

"You have to work all of the core muscles—which include your back, hip flexors, and pelvis—to have a strong middle," says Baird. "I see clients whose abs are incredibly toned, but because they never work their back or hips, they're out of balance. And that leads to injury."

What's more, a strong core also means better results—and not just a wow-worthy body. "Movement doesn't come from your limbs alone—it comes from your center," says Baird. "So whether you're lifting weights or running on the treadmill, a strong core translates into more power, which ultimately means better

performance and efficiency."

If your core is weak, you're also much more likely to hurt yourself doing basic things outside the gym, says Josh Adams, a trainer at Kent Kangley Super Sport 24 Hour Fitness in Kent, Washington. "The stronger all of your core muscles are, the less likely it is that you'll suffer from common injuries, like low back pain and shoulder tension. But the key there is strengthening all of your core."

The Core Truth

Can't name all the muscles that make up your middle? Here's a cheat sheet:

Rectus abdominis. This muscle runs down the front of your abdomen and is typically the most developed core muscle.

Internal and external obliques. These are located on the side and front of the abdomen.

Transverse abdominis. This muscle wraps around the spine, underneath the obliques. It's the weakest muscle in most people, particularly those who sit for hours every day.

Erector spinae. This is a group of three muscles that run along your neck to your lower back and help extend and rotate the spine.

The psoas major. Better known as the hip flexors, these are located in front of the pelvis and upper thigh.

Beyond the Plank

To hit all of these muscles, choose exercises that challenge your balance, build rotational strength, and hold a muscle's contraction for a period of time (called isometric exercises). This is why the plank and the side plank are like the holy grail of core exercises, says Adams, because they do all three. Along with the plank, add these five moves that work the entire core to your routine:

Plank add-ons

- While holding a plank pose, drop your knees so they're 2 inches above the floor, then raise them. Repeat for 30 seconds to a minute.
- While holding a side plank, drop your bottom hip so it's 2 inches above the floor, then raise and repeat for 30 seconds to a minute. Switch sides.

Bosu Ball Stabilizer

Get into a push-up position with your hands balancing on a Bosu ball. Hold a plank pose until your muscles are fatigued (or up to 3 minutes). When this doesn't challenge your balance, replace the Bosu ball with a small-size exercise ball.

Reverse Crunches

Lay flat on your back with your hands under your butt. With your back flat against the floor, pull your knees toward your chest then kick your legs straight out in front of you, keeping your heels about 6 inches from the ground. Repeat for 1 minute or until your muscles are fatigued.

The V-Sit

Sit on the floor and, keeping your hands gently on the ground, lean back so your upper body is at a 45-degree angle from the floor. Keeping your legs straight, raise them until they're also at a 45-degree angle from the floor. Hold for 15 seconds (or longer, up to a minute) and repeat five times.

The Superman

Lay on your stomach, arms and legs spread so you make a "star" shape on the floor. Pull your belly button toward your spine, squeeze your butt, and pinch together your shoulder blades to lift your chest, arms, and legs an inch or 2 off the ground. Hold for 15 seconds and repeat five times.

Source: You 24. Used with permission.

The Big Hurts - By Sarah Lorge

Prevent and recover from common injuries

The three most common injuries—shoulders, lower back, and knees—can keep you from realizing the benefits of all your hard work. Here's your strike-back-fast strategy to get you in the game.

No matter how dedicated and diligent you are to your workout regimen, it's unlikely that you get compliments on your powerful knees, your steely lower back, or your sturdy shoulders. But keeping those three areas strong could be the key to your success everywhere else on

your body.

Nothing undermines your fitness resolve faster than injuries, and sore shoulders, an aching lower back, or balky knees are three of the most common—and pesky—injuries you can face. Here's how you can minimize the damage, shorten your recovery time, and guarantee you come back strong.

The Problem: Sore Shoulders

The Cause

Chances are, you're focusing too much on

bench press and military press, and neglecting the smaller muscle groups, like those that make up your rotator cuff. "A lot of people strengthen only the big muscles you see in the mirror, but never anything else," says Brian Sutton, an educator at the National Academy of Sports Medicine (NASM). Also, cubicle dwellers often experience shoulder pain from hunching over a computer for 8 hours at a time.

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The Fix

Instead of pounding your pecs and lats (toning areas that are probably already tight), stretch them instead. Then, give some attention to your rotator cuff and the muscles between your shoulder blades. Try the seated row machine for your upper back and internal and external rotations with one- or two-pound dumbbells to work your rotator cuff.

"We call Mondays at the gym 'chest day,' because it seems like 90 percent of all men are doing chest to start off the week," says Jack Schenk, a 24 Hour Fitness trainer in Las Vegas. "I would suggest changing your area of focus and doing some back instead, or doing both muscle groups on the same day. As one set of muscles fatigues, the opposing group gets a better workout."

The Problem: Aching Lower Back

The Cause

Trainers say they hear gym-goers complaining about pain in the lower back more than any other area. Usually it's because the back is arched, which compresses the spine. That arch might mean you're lifting too much weight or using improper form when you lift. Or, imbalances—like poor posture, lack of flexibility and weak core strength—could be causing an arched back.

People with lower back pain frequently have what's called an anterior pelvic tilt, says Sutton of NASM. "The pelvis is tilted forward, creating this curvature in their low back and compressing the disks in your lower back." The main culprit? If you sit all day, you're in a hip-flexed position, which will tighten the

muscles in the front of the hip and weaken the glutes and deep abdominals.

The Fix

The goal is to improve your posture and the strength of your abs, while increasing the range of motion in your hip flexors. All those steps will bring your pelvis back to a neutral position and take the stress off your lower back.

Try the standing hip flexor stretch, which is something you can do a few times throughout the day while you're at work. Sets of exercises such as the prone cobra (for back muscles) and planks and floor bridges (for the deep abdominals) will build your core strength and stabilize the area around your spine. Don't expect six-pack abs from these; the results will be more in how you feel than how you look.

The Problem: Balky Knees

The Cause

Knee pain can come from a variety of sources, from that old soccer injury that never properly healed to problems with surrounding joints and muscles that stress the joint.

The Fix

If you know your knee pain is a pre-existing condition, caused by a partially torn ligament or missing cartilage, for instance, your case likely requires the care of an M.D. But if the pain you're feeling has come on gradually after you've been working out for a while, try stretching the muscles surrounding the knee.

Experts like Kari Shardy, a 24 Hour Fitness trainer in Mansfield, Texas, swear by the foam roller. It's a cylindrical piece of foam that you

can use to massage the areas leading into the knee, like your IT band and hamstrings, while improving your flexibility and range of motion.

Take a few days off whatever activity is causing the knee pain, and cross train instead, with low-impact equipment like the elliptical machine or the pool. And do this quick form self-assessment: When you walk or run, make sure your feet and knees are pointing forward. Any outward rotation in your toes or feet will put additional stress on the knee joint.

"A lot of people strengthen only the big muscles you see in the mirror, but never anything else."

Build up immunity

While a few aches and pains are natural as your body shapes up, your workouts should be getting you fitter, not harming you. Here, trainers offer their advice for safe and effective gym time.

Double-check your technique with a certified trainer. Your buddy may seem like he knows everything about the gym, but if he's wrong, you both could end up hurt. Ask an expert to guide you if you're not familiar with a piece of equipment.

Don't lift so much it compromises your form. "A lot of really scary things happen in the gym from that," Shardy says. Straining to lift too much weight can stress your joints big-time. When in doubt, go for less weight and more reps.

Build up gradually, whether you're trying something for the first time or back after a layoff. A little caution at the beginning could save you a lot of recovery time later.

Change your regimen frequently. "At least two-thirds of the people at the gym, I could predict their workouts each day, because I've been seeing them do it for the past 2 years," Schenk says. "Then they get frustrated, because they're not losing weight or getting fitter." Do the same thing for a few months, and your body will adapt. Or the pattern overload can make you more prone to injury. In the gym, change is good.

Take 5 or 10 minutes to stretch and warm up. "So many people are eager to get into their class or hit the weights, they don't bother to do a proper warm-up," Sutton says. The result? Bad postures during a workout.

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