



HEALTHQUEST

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FOCUSING ON
MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES AND CONCERNS.

GETTING OTHERS INVOLVED IN PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES

Group physical activities can be more than fun. They offer a healthy way for families, friends or co-workers to unwind, and spend time together. They reinforce your own fitness efforts, and provide much needed encouragement to people having difficulty getting started. It takes planning, but the rewards are worth it!

Studies have found that adults who exercise usually have spouses who encourage them. Physically active children and teens team up with friends or family members who are also active.

Admittedly, getting any group of people to commit to an activity can be a challenge! The key is finding the right motivation and choosing activities that appeal.

PROMOTE FUN

When suggesting a group activity, avoid the word exercise; that implies hard work! Instead, promote the idea of having fun being physically active. "You might want to raise the topic when people are already having a good time - such as during a company picnic or a family outing," says Warren Shepell counsellor Anita Teslak.

CONSIDER THE "4 C's": COMPETENCE, CHALLENGE, CHOICE, AND CONTROL

According to University of Alberta fitness researcher Dr. Len Wankel, "this means considering people's differing skills, finding activities suitable to their abilities, offering a variety of activities and social settings, and providing some control over whether or not, when, and where one does the activity."

On the home front, Anita Teslak recommends raising these issues during a family meeting. "I often recommend that families get together once a month to discuss household chores, vacations, and other issues that affect the family as a whole. These meetings provide a good opportunity to discuss shared activities, and to encourage family members to have their say."

DETERMINE GOALS

During a meeting you'll be surprised how activity groups form quite naturally when people discover they have common goals and interests. A father and daughter wanting to get into shape might decide to set aside time for jogging. Two or more co-workers wanting to improve their

tennis serve may decide to take advantage of a nearby court at lunchtime. Some activities are more suitable to specific health or fitness goals than others. Refer to the activities listed later in this piece or consult fitness professionals for detailed information.

KEEP A RECORD AS "POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT"

Once an activity is underway, encourage participants to use a journal or calendar to keep track of their goals and progress. Remember to post the results of group baseball games and other sports. Even if your team loses, you can still write something encouraging, such as "congratulations - everyone went the distance" or "we'll get 'em next time!"

USE REWARDS, PRIZES, AND OTHER INCENTIVES

These won't motivate the truly "unmotivated," but they do help people already involved to persist in meeting their personal goals. Make the rewards relevant: for example, a sports video for a son who realizes his goal of "swimming a kilometre."

Entering walk-a-thon or swim-a-thon to raise money for charity, is a time honoured way of becoming engaged in fitness activities. Check with the charities in your area to learn more.

AVOID COMMON HASSLES

TIMING

Schedule activities to fit comfortably into participants' routines. With co-workers, that's usually at lunchtime or on weeknights.

MONEY

If you're on a tight budget (at home or in the workplace), choose activities that don't require expensive equipment or facilities. Walking and hiking are free. A volleyball game requires a minor investment (a net and a ball), and can take place in any public park or field.

Find out what free or low cost facilities are available through your local or municipal recreation centre, and local "Y." Colleagues or friends may need to chip in for equipment and facility rental, but try to limit your individual expenditures to a maximum of \$10 per session or game.

CONFLICTING SOCIAL NEEDS AND OBLIGATIONS

Even the most motivated participant may eventually drop out if the activity somehow interferes with the individual's other relationships.

Consider letting co-workers significant others in on fitness-related activities. If your peer-pressured teenager wants their friend included in a family outing, "there's no harm in going along with the idea," says Teslak. "It might strengthen your relationship, and at the very least you'll know where your teenager is!"

COMPETITION OF THE "DISCOURAGING" KIND

Naturally, you'll want to avoid pitting sibling against sibling. For example, "Look, your sister plays better than you do" or by poking fun at individual known weaknesses.

On the other hand, a little friendly competition (in the form of a small wager, for example), can liven things up while encouraging competing teams and individuals to improve their skills.

BOREDOM

Establishing a routine for your group activity is helpful, but don't let routine turn into a rut. With team sports, don't always have the same people on the same team. And after a game, have participants take turns deciding where the group will eat.

During aerobics sessions, introduce new music (or videos) from time-to-time. When walking, hiking or bike riding, try different routes or locales.

Encourage participants to be creative. Make some changes, and soon the activity will be fun for everyone again.

WHICH ACTIVITIES SUIT YOUR HEALTH GOALS?*

DISEASE PREVENTION

Any regular activity or sport that requires sustained movement can reduce the risk of heart disease, hypertension, and diabetes. Some examples are:

- ▲ walking
- ▲ low-impact aerobics
- ▲ bicycling
- ▲ volleyball
- ▲ cross-country skiing
- ▲ tennis or badminton

AEROBIC FITNESS

Aerobic (or cardiovascular) fitness is the ability of the heart and lungs to supply the muscles with enough oxygen so you don't get easily tired or "winded" when running for a bus or climbing stairs. The following exercises, done at least 3 times a week, promote aerobic fitness:

- ▲ brisk walking with arms swinging
- ▲ low-impact aerobic dance
- ▲ swimming
- ▲ step aerobics (this involves stepping on and off a low bench while moving your arms, usually in time to music)
- ▲ stair-stepping or cross-country skiing machines

MUSCULAR STRENGTH AND ENDURANCE

Strength training is popular among teenagers, but it is particularly important after age 30 or so, when people often begin to lose muscle.

Some examples are:

- ▲ weight lifting
- ▲ push-ups
- ▲ partial sit-ups
- ▲ aerobic exercise that vigorously works legs

WEIGHT LOSS

Contrary to popular belief, strenuous exercise is not the best way for the average person to lose weight. That's because most people can sustain regular exercise much longer at a moderate pace - and thus burn many more calories overall. Building up to a program of workouts lasting at least 45 minutes to an hour, four to five times a week, is generally the most effective exercise strategy for slimming down. Suitable activities include:

- ▲ bicycling
- ▲ brisk walking
- ▲ energetic dancing (not necessarily aerobic dancing)
- ▲ stair-stepping
- ▲ stationary-cycling and cross-country skiing machines set at a low resistance level

*Adapted from: "Which Exercise is Best For You?" Consumer Reports on Health, April 1994.

Can you say that you really feel that the energy levels of you and the people around you could benefit by the boost of some physical activity? Do you tell people that you would like to embark on an exercise program, but have just been too busy or have too many excuses for why you can't get to this now?

You already know why you want to increase your activity. An EAP counsellor can help you to start on a personal program. If it is a question of how to organize co-workers or your family to participate, we can make suggestions for that too (no matter how stubborn a group, they may be).

If you have any questions about this topic, or if you wish to discuss a personal situation you may be experiencing, we invite you to contact your EAP counsellors to arrange a telephone or in-person counselling session.

All contact between you and your counsellor is completely confidential.

English Service: 1-800-387-4765
French Service: 1-800-361-5676
General Information: 1-888-814-1328