

# Together can be better...exercise classes may be right for you

Moving Grays Harbor  
By Maryann Welch

It has long been my contention that I possess a “fitness personality” best suited to solitary workouts - with the exception of walking with a partner. After testing out the group exercise scene with yoga for a time, I retreated to doing yoga, weights, and treadmill workouts in the solitude of my home. I the past year, however, I’ve decided to take advantage of a variety of classes offered at Monte Fitness Center and am now realizing some of the benefits of group exercise. After some reflection on this change in my “fitness personality”, I’ve identified some specific reasons I now have come to enjoy exercising in a group.

**Accountability and structure.** Scheduled groups or classes demand showing up at a particular time. It can be easy to plan a workout or walk into my day and then find that the day is gone and the workout hasn’t happened. After a time the routine commitment of a class becomes a habit, only to be missed when unavoidable. I now find myself planning my days around my favorite classes.

**Camaraderie and support.** I have gradually come to know my regular fitness classmates. Being in the company of those who have similar health goals makes for an open, friendly environment. Participants have been encouraging and helpful from the start and all wonder what happened when I fail to show. As I write this column I am visiting husband Jim in New York

where he is working temporarily and I know I will get quizzed when I return.

All of the classes I have experienced have participants that represent a full spectrum of fitness levels. Frankly, before joining groups I anticipated being intimidated by super-fit people. However, experience tells me that there is broad support for each person to work at their own level and intensity. It is inspiring to see what others can accomplish regardless of their fitness level.

**Instruction and support.** I know that when I workout in solitude I tend to slip in to bad habits when it comes to form. Instructors have assisted me in fine-tuning my workouts and are constantly reminding everyone how to perform exercises properly, safely, and effectively. It’s also tempting to “slack” when left to my own devices. A group leader can break us out of the doldrums and push us a little more to help get the most out of our workouts.

**Variety.** I have come to realize that my long-time routine of walking and some weight work at home was quite limited. Trying a variety of classes has boosted my overall fitness level by working different body parts throughout the week. Classes invariably start with a warm-up and stretching and end with a cool-down period and more stretching. I have always known these are important components for a complete and safe workout, but just never found the time to fit them in by myself.

While in New York, I have been trying some different offerings at their local Y. After attending just a few classes, many “regulars” have struck up conversations with me and clued me in to other classes that I might enjoy. As I go back and forth between New York and Grays Harbor over the next few months it’s a safe bet that my workouts will get even more diverse.

**Fun and enjoyment.** Upbeat music and a being among a group of motivated people always perk up my

mornings. The sense of well-being after each workout leaves me thinking that each class is my favorite. In one of my regular classes we even have a “class clown” to keep us entertained as we exercise.

Although a walk outdoors with a friend is always an enjoyable way to spend time, I am now a believer in variety. Walking is a great way to get started on the road to fitness and something that I will continue to include in my workout routines, but I have now become hooked on the principle of cross-training! And research is there to support my cause – the more muscles you use and the greater the intensity of your workouts, the more you benefit. Benefits include better balance (fall prevention), improved cardiovascular health, enhanced mental acuity and of course, a higher sense of well-being.

If you haven't participated in a group exercise class recently, I'd really encourage you to give it a try. I know there are a variety of classes to choose from on the Harbor and walking through those doors might be just the insurance policy your body needs – especially in these frustrating times.

*Maryann Welch is the recently retired director of Grays Harbor County's Public Health and Social Services Department.*

*If you have questions about becoming more active or have information about free or low-cost activity in the area, contact the health department at 532-8665 ext. 483, e-mail us at [moving@co.grays-harbor.wa.us](mailto:moving@co.grays-harbor.wa.us) or visit our web site at [www.ghphss.org](http://www.ghphss.org).*