

2/13/2009

Survival of the Fittest



Nicola Spadafora (RES) performs an incline dumbbell chest press.

The Fund's Fitness Center gives staff the chance to de-stress and stay healthy... but with increased workloads, many staff have cut back on their use of the facility. Here's how to make more efficient use of less time in the Fitness Center.

The Fund's fitness facility started as a "Staff Exercise and Recreation Room" in 1974. Back then, it was an unsupervised room with very basic equipment, such as stationery exercise bikes. Now, it has grown into a facility which measures over 20,000 square feet, with a wide array of cardiovascular and strength-training equipment, and offering a full-service menu of exercise classes. "Many staff do not realize how large the facility is and are blown away on realizing that it is a full-service facility," says Bob Caldwell, Fitness Center Director. "There are also lockers that staff may rent on a permanent basis. Besides that, signing up is painless."

As noted by Judith McCarthy (HRD), by providing and maintaining this on-site facility, the Fund has continued to demonstrate its support for fitness not only as a recreational outlet, but more importantly as a proactive approach to health and reduction of stress. Making a large amount of space available within HQ1 directly helps staff maintain a work-life balance, given they can get to the Fitness Center easily during the course of a work day, as opposed to having to commute to an offsite location.

Working more, exercising less

With staff departing after the downsizing and intensified crisis-related work, Fund staff have been working longer hours. Fitness Center staff Abby Hedahl and Melinda Moore have noticed a drop in the number of frequent users of the Center. Overall, from January 2008 to January 2009, total membership has decreased from 1,284 to 1,120. Typically 67 percent of the staff who sign up become active users, i.e., those who use the center at least once a month. "Last September, we had about 760 active users, but their numbers steadily fell to 678 by December 2008," says Hedahl. So what is the best way to squeeze in some time in order to reap the benefits of exercising? Hedahl and Moore offered four suggestions:



At the Fitness Center

1. Sign up for personal training. This one-on-one session is structured and also provides guidance on what you can do.
2. Mark and commit the time on your calendar, and treat it as any appointment for a meeting you will normally have at work. It is psychologically important to keep up the schedule.
3. Know your exercise goal. Someone trying to lose weight should focus on cardiovascular strength training, while another person seeking more muscle flexibility could opt for yoga. For someone who needs to de-stress, massage therapy is an efficient use of time.
4. If you only have one-half hour for exercise, it is important to focus on your goal and do the exercise that best fits you. The idea is that it is better to get in the 30-minute workout than not coming in at all!

Moore stresses this final point. A 10-minute walk each morning, afternoon, and evening counts toward the 30-minute suggested cardiovascular exercise needed every day. It is important to be consistent, but the important thing is to get started. Caldwell notes, "You don't have to be a 'gym rat' for the Center to yield positive results in your life-style. And there is also no need to feel that you have to have the right gear or dress in a particular way to come to the facility. It's a relaxed atmosphere."

Just show up!

The Fund's Fitness Center is a convenient elevator ride away for staff, but some staff have difficulties finding the time to make use of the facility, which is open from 6:30 a.m. to 8:45 p.m. For Sanaa Farid (INS), the situation is particularly frustrating. "I can tell you that it is sometimes difficult to make the time to use the fitness center as I usually rush to take my train on time (it takes me almost 3 hours a day to commute) as I live in Fairfax and I start my day at 8:00 a.m."

For others like Sergio Negrete Cardenas (EXR), the facility's convenience cannot be understated even though he does not use really use the equipment. "I love to walk to work, and mostly use the center to have a shower and change. I was already subsidizing others' use of the center as I did not really use the equipment. But since the birth of my second son, walking has fallen to zero, and my wife's belly has returned to her usual flat state, and mine is suffering from double-digit inflation. But if I have not canceled my subscription it is because I hope to soon start an inflation-busting regime, with the fitness center as policy anchor!"



Rekha Turnage (FIN) performs an upright row.

For Ashoka Mody (EUR), an active user, the first benefit of exercising is just getting a break from the day. "I guess it helps release the morning's stresses, builds some new cheer, and helps navigate more productively the rest of the day," he says. Ashoka does not find it difficult to make the time to exercise, and ponders, "I don't understand it when people say they are too busy to come down." For Phil Gerson (SPR), lunchtime workouts are best. "Of course, sometimes things come up that make that impossible. And I confess that sometimes I'll say to myself, 'I'll just finish this one additional task and then go down,' up to the point where it becomes too late to go at all. Often the hardest part of my workout is just getting to the Fitness Center."

For new Fitness Center member Eugene Salazar (TGS), exercising is a great way to reduce stress, balance out his routine, and get healthier in the process. As a cyclist, Salazar uses the Fitness Center as a way to maintain his fitness level, in between riding and especially in the winter months. "After my son was born in September 2008, I felt that it was a good time to start preparing in order to be able to keep up with him in the future," he says.

What's on offer in the Fitness Center?

More than just treadmills and dumbbells, the Fitness Center offers a wide array of cardiovascular and strength training equipment, indoor courts, three studios housing 35 group exercise classes per week, fun tournaments and team events. Massage therapy is also available at reasonable rates and is open to non-members, and Fitness Center staff are always there to help with questions. All this, as well as health promotion screenings and lectures, are included in the monthly \$32 fee.

Walking in is the first step. Taking ten minutes to tour the facility may make you change your mind about exercising and encourage you to sign up. Once you fill out the application form, you have three free visits before finally committing to join the Center.



Shaun Roache (RES) performs a bent-over row.



Fitness Center staff (from left to right): Justin Flinner, Fitness Specialist and Health Promotions Coordinator; LaTina Robinson, Phone Desk Supervisor; Abby Hedahl, Assistant Manager; and Melinda Moore, Group Exercise Coordinator.