

Finding the right exercise class

If you find it hard to motivate yourself to exercise on your own, taking part in an exercise class can be a great way to get started, maintain variety, boost your fitness levels, meet others – and have fun while doing it, says Chinnor-based personal trainer, Hilary Westall.



Exercise classes take many shapes and forms, and there is a wide variety available to everyone in the Thame area, from local gyms and fitness centres, to village halls and schools. The key is finding the right class or classes to suit your taste and fitness level.

Group exercise has many benefits.

Depending on the class you choose, you can tone up muscles and burn calories to up-beat music that will help keep you motivated and co-ordinated.

Also, working out in a group makes it a more social and lively environment than sweating it out alone on the treadmill, and having others to compete with can keep you going when the going gets tough.

Most gyms and fitness centres offer a range of exercise classes catering for all levels of fitness, although you usually need to be a member to take part. A description of the class should be available, but if you're unsure, try and speak to the instructor personally to assess its suitability for you.

Classes generally fall into the categories below, although names will vary and many will involve a mixture:

Aerobics

Aerobics classes aim to get your heart rate up using a mixture of low and high impact moves. They are a great fun way to burn calories and test your co-ordination skills, and are generally suitable for all abilities as low impact options can always be taken. Many aerobics classes include an element of body conditioning and abdominal work, but check with the instructor about what's involved if you are in any doubt.

Step

These classes involve stepping up and down on a low aerobic 'Step', resulting in greater fat burn, especially around the

bottom and thighs. Classes vary in ability levels and may not be suitable if you have knee and joint problems.

Body conditioning

Toning and conditioning classes are low impact, and are designed to firm up your muscles, usually focusing on the legs, bottom and stomach, but often incorporating upper body and core work.

Dumbbells, bands, free weights and stability balls may be used depending on the class or instructor. Generally suitable for all abilities, these classes can be tougher than they look due to the number of repetitions used and the nature of the exercises, such as lunges and squats, which work the major leg muscles, so if you're not used to them, take it at your own pace and take a break if you need to.

Boxercise and body combat

Combat-style classes are designed to get your heart rate up and your lungs working hard with a range of kicking and punching moves using boxing and karate techniques. A good level of fitness is required so this is not for the faint hearted or new-comers to exercise.

Indoor cycling or Spinning

This is a high intensity exercise class on a stationary bike. Sessions typically involve sprints, hill climbs and intervals, and although they are often described as being suitable for all fitness levels, a basic level of fitness is advisable as you are typically pedalling for 30 to 50 minutes.

These are just a few examples of the types of classes you will come across. Others include yoga and Pilates, which aim to make the body stronger and more flexible through a system of balancing and core exercises; BodyPump®, which is a free-weights class; and circuit training, which involves moving round a

number of exercise stations to target every muscle group and get your heart rate up with a mixture of aerobics, weights, and body conditioning.

Even classes with the same name or description will vary enormously depending on the instructor, so it's worth trying out a few to find which type of class and which instructor suits you best. All instructors should hold a basic Exercise to Music qualification plus specialist qualifications if teaching yoga, Pilates, BodyPump and indoor cycling.

A good instructor should ask at the outset to be made aware of any special conditions such as injury, pregnancy or a known condition such as diabetes. He or she should offer teaching points throughout the class, focusing on correct form and offering alternatives when required. The main disadvantage of group exercise is the lack of individual attention you get, so it's important to watch and listen to what the instructor tells you and to ask at the end if there are any exercises you are not sure about or other concerns you may have.

So if you want to inject some fun and variety into your fitness regime and challenge your body in a different way, or feel that exercise classes are a good way to get started, check out what's available near you and you're sure to find an inspiring class that fits the bill.

Contact Hilary on 07812 097562, email: hilarywestall@googlemail.com or visit www.hilarypersonaltrainer.co.uk. She also runs a body conditioning class in the Reading Room in Chinnor High Street on Friday mornings from 10-11am. Contact her for further details.



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