

My favorite time to work out is in the early mornings. I like the idea of starting my day with a good sweat and feeling like I've accomplished something regardless of how the rest of my day unfolds. I especially like Tuesday and Thursday mornings at the Club. On these mornings, I get to sneak-a-peek at the men's Tuesday/Thursday basketball league.

I recognize most of these guys. Some are my neighbors, some are the dads of kids at my children's school, and some are the husbands of my friends. They're the neighborhood guys, up at the crack of dawn to get in a game before work. Most of these guys are very athletic and are in great shape, but it's not their fitness finesse that interests me. (Don't get me wrong, I love watching men in action.) But, what thrills me is how much fun they have! Even though they're sweating like wild animals, and breathing like steam engines, they love every minute of it! Seeing them makes me happy and increases my motivation to work hard too!

Taking part in a sports team or group exercise can be a better physical and mental challenge than working out alone. Our natural competitiveness kicks into gear when we're in groups, and that's a real motivator to push ourselves harder. Team sports and group training hold us accountable to our goals while giving us the opportunity to connect with others who share similar goals. Exercising with friends is not only more fun, but a good way to liven up a familiar exercise routine. Mike Andolina, one of the regular players on the Tuesday/Thursday basketball team, says it's the camaraderie of the players that gets him out of bed on those early mornings. "It's fun playing with different teams and it's a good balance between getting some exercise and getting together with friends." (He also noted that he's unlikely to do any exercising "if there's not a ball involved.")

In addition to the motivation, challenge, and fun, there's more good news about exercising in groups:

new research from Harvard social scientist, Dr. Nicholas Christakis and James Fowler, a political scientist at the University of California, San Diego has indicated that health-related behaviors can be as contagious as microbes. If you are surrounded by friends, neighbors or colleagues who exercise,

the odds are good that you will exercise too.

Their studies also prove the same is true about mental states. Happiness is contagious and can pass among people in the same social networks. For once, you can catch something that is good for you! Surrounding yourself with happier people will make you happier too. In social networks, happiness spreads among people up to three degrees removed from one another. That means, if your friend's friend is happy, then you are 10 percent more likely to feel happy too. Having friends who live close-by increases the likelihood of feeling happy by 25 percent. Happiness is the most infectious when there is an equal fondness shared between two people.

Happiness You Can Catch It!

By Michelle DeCola, L.C.P.C.



So let's get this straight: Exercise makes us happy. Being with happy people makes us happy. And exercising with happy people makes us REALLY happy! This reminds me of the campy Partridge Family 1970 theme song: "Hello world hear the song that we're singin'. C'mon get happy! A whole lot of lovin' is what we'll be bringin'. We'll make you happy!"

Okay, I didn't need to go that far... but, maybe that tune will inspire you to think less about the swine flu, and more about spreading a case of happiness. In the meantime, grab a friend and get sweatin'.



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