

# FITNESS FRIENDLY:

## How Exercising with Your Neighbors Can be Better than Going to a Gym

by Roger E. Adams, Ph.D., CISSN

*Starting a fitness program can be intimidating! The idea of working out in the presence of complete strangers at a gym, where you're not quite sure what to do or how to do it, can be a large hurdle to overcome. Even group gym classes like spin or yoga can intimidate someone. These are just some of the reasons neighborhood exercise and fitness groups can be more appealing to people looking to begin a healthier fitness routine.*

Neighborhood fitness groups can include yoga, jogging, bootcamp-style training, outdoor weightlifting or aerobics, just to name a few. Some neighborhood fitness programs train together for charity events like a 5K fun run or half marathon. These types of training programs are often more appealing to beginners and those who like a more comfortable atmosphere close to home with friends and neighbors.

### Benefits to Group Fitness Programs

Neighborhood group fitness programs provide a great way to get in shape without the hassle or high cost of going to a gym. Some of the many advantages to neighborhood group fitness programs over traditional gyms are:

- **Convenience:** If it is in your neighborhood, it is nearby!
- **More Enjoyment:** Working out with friends and neighbors can be more fun than with a gym full of strangers.
- **Greater Accountability:** Having a supportive group of close friends can help you stick with your goals.
- **Lower Cost:** Neighborhood fitness classes are generally less expensive than a gym membership fee and meeting up to walk or run is free!
- **Fewer Excuses:** If it has all of the above, you won't have many reasons for missing workouts!



Now that you know the advantages of working out in your own neighborhood, you might wonder, “How can I get started?” First, find out if there is already an exercise class in your area. Check your neighborhood’s community website, Facebook page, and/or Next Door app group. You might also find local churches and support groups organizing neighborhood fitness programs. If you look and can’t find one that suits your needs close by, you can organize a group of your own!

## Tips for Starting Your Own Neighborhood Fitness Group



- **What type of fitness program do you want to start?** It could be a walking program, bootcamp-style class or yoga. Will it be family-oriented or kid-friendly? Identifying these things is an important step as it will help you find like-minded neighbors to work-out with you.



- **How often and when do you want to work-out?** Early mornings may be best for some commuters or a few hours later in the day for stay-at-home parents with school-age children. Evenings may be best for your commuting neighbors that aren’t early risers and don’t want to battle more traffic going to a gym.



- **Is there a common goal to your fitness group?** If you have several friends in the neighborhood interested in running or walking a 5K or doing a charity mud run, create an exercise group centered around training for this common goal.



- **Where is the best location?** Check with your local community board to see what facilities or fields may be available for your use. If there’s nothing available, maybe one of your neighbors has a big yard they’d be willing to share with the fitness group.



- **Do you need any fitness equipment?** Bootcamps and weight lifting may require group members to bring their own dumbbells, kettlebells, exercise mats or other equipment.



- **Who can support you?** Contact local community-based organizations, churches and local businesses to see if they are interested in supporting your group. You may have neighbors with their own businesses who would help you with promoting your group in exchange for advertising and exposure.



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Once you have most of the basic logistics figured out, you may even be able to get a sponsorship from a local business or organization to help with any upfront costs of organizing and running your neighborhood group fitness program. Try promoting your group to family, friends and neighbors. Post fliers at the local community library and ask if your neighborhood’s homeowners’ association will allow you to advertise in its newsletters, website or any other communications they put out. You can create a local Facebook group page dedicated to your program and invite your neighbors to like it and post comments as well as pictures of their workouts and achievements. This can be a great way to motivate others and improve the visibility of your fitness group.

As with any fitness program, the reason people usually quit is due to a lack of goal-setting and clear direction. It doesn’t matter if workouts are done in a gym or in your own backyard; exercising without a goal will quickly lead to burnout and tempt you to end your healthy efforts. A neighborhood fitness program provides an easier way to stay accountable versus a large gym. When neighbors know you are working out to reach a specific goal, they can help motivate you when your own self-motivation is low.

## Maintaining Accountability

There are a number of simple ways to increase accountability in your neighborhood fitness program. Taking attendance or having someone call or text neighbors to remind them of upcoming classes are easy ways to keep everyone accountable. If you have local businesses invest in the success of members by providing incentives, you can use them to increase attendance and help more neighbors get healthy!

If your neighborhood fitness group has a common goal, like running a 5K for example, have everyone sign-up on a certain date for a local 5K.

Most races benefit local charities, so you can all feel good about getting healthy while helping others in need. Having a date in mind will also keep your exercise group focused, and once you achieve the group’s first goal, there are always future goals to look forward to! Consider having t-shirts designed for your group as this may help to increase the community feel of your efforts and advertise your group to everyone local.

## Conclusion

Neighborhood fitness programs are a great way to contribute to a healthier, active and close-knit neighborhood. Having a group of people you work-out with in your own backyard not only gives the neighborhood a feeling of solidarity and cohesion, but also makes the community more vibrant. So take the leap and make your neighborhood a healthier place while you make yourself a healthier YOU!

### **About the Author:**

*Roger E. Adams, PhD, CISSN, is the owner of eatrightfitness, an evidence-based private practice focusing on weight loss and sports performance nutrition, located in Spring, Texas. He has more than 20 years of experience working with clients to achieve better health and wellness. Additionally, Dr. Adams holds group nutrition education sessions and personal training classes. He speaks at business seminars, health fairs, and non-profit organizations about the ever-changing field of nutrition and fitness. Dr. Adams holds a doctorate in nutrition from Texas Woman’s University and is a certified personal fitness trainer by the American Council on Exercise (ACE). He is also a certified sports nutritionist by the International Society of Sports Nutrition (ISSN), as well as an active member in the Obesity Action Coalition; The Obesity Society; the Sports, Cardiovascular, and Wellness Nutrition; Nutrition Entrepreneurs and the Weight Management dietetic practice groups of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. More information about Dr. Adams is available at [EatRightFitness.com](http://EatRightFitness.com).*



# ABOUT THE OBESITY ACTION COALITION (OAC)

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Our core focuses are to elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improve access to obesity care, provide science-based education on obesity and its treatments, and fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination.



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## LEARN, CONNECT, ENGAGE

The OAC knows that the journey with weight can be challenging but we also know that great things happen when we learn, connect and engage. That is why the OAC Community exists. Our Community is designed to provide quality education, ongoing support programs, an opportunity to connect, and a place to take action on important issues.

### Through the OAC Community, you can get access to:

- Weight & Health Education • Community Blogs
  - Community Discussion Forum
  - Ongoing Support • Meaningful Connections
- AND MUCH MORE**



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