

Which Is Better: Solo Workouts or Social Ones?

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solo v social workouts

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How social (or anti-social) you should be to get the best fitness results



Most fitness lovers do one of two things: They claim their gym-time as me-time and work out exclusively by themselves (with headphones on, mind you), or they rely on others and stick to packed classes and gym dates with friends.

Both approaches have their strengths and weaknesses. And if you stick with one, you could be missing out on some serious fitness benefits, says personal trainer Mike Donovanik, C.S.C.S., C.P.T.

Here he breaks down the pros and cons of consistently working out solo, with a friend, or in an exercise class:

Solo Exercise

Pros: It not only gives you a much-needed opportunity to quiet down and get in touch with your own body, but it allows you to focus better and personalize your workouts, he says. If you are working towards a specific fitness goal—whether that’s running a 10-K, coming back from a knee injury, or strengthening your stabilizer muscles—being able to hone in on your individual needs is vital.

Cons: It’s easy to get stuck in the same routine, which can stall your results. Plus, no one’s keeping you accountable except, well, you—and you might not be the best self-enforcer.

Buddy Exercise

Pros: If you choose a fit and focused workout buddy, she can help keep you motivated and focused. Plus, together, the two of you will come up with double the exercise ideas, helping to defeat boredom and prevent fitness plateaus, says Donovanik. Research—including a recent study that paired cyclists with virtual partners—shows that exercising with others (who are fitter than you, that is) spurs better performances.

Cons: If your partner isn’t quite as fast or strong as you are, your natural tendency to match your partner’s effort could backfire in a huge way. “It’s very easy to trick yourself and your brain into saying ‘I’m giving it all I got,’ even though you’re capable of much

more,” says Donovanik. Not to mention, if you are trading off exercises (you squat, then I will), you are automatically adding breaks into your workout, which lowers your effort, calorie burn, and cuts down on the time you actually spend working out in the gym, he says.

Group Exercise

Pros: Classes are awesome for motivating people who do best with a consistent schedule, says Donovanik. Even if your workout pal has to miss a gym date, the class will still start right on schedule.

Cons: However, there’s even less room for customization in a workout class than there is with a friend. “Sure, the instructor may correct your form,” says Donovanik, “but that doesn’t mean that workout is fitted to what you personally need for your body.”

The Verdict

With so many pros and cons to each, in the end, mixing up your regimen to include all three can help you get the most benefits out of your gym time, says Donovanik. If you typically work out by yourself, consider asking a similarly fit friend on a fitness date, or try taking a class every now and then. If you haven’t worked out solo since the ThighMaster was rocking the fitness world, some alone time could do you good. All that said, it’s also vital that you actually have fun, says Donovanik—after all, if you dread working out by yourself, you probably aren’t going to do it.