

BODY & MIND



ON YOUR MARKS
Working out with, or against, others can be beneficial

Want to work harder in the gym? Make it competitive

For some people aiming to get fitter, faster, it's no longer just the taking part that counts, writes

Claire Coleman

Were you inspired to shape up by last week's European Championships, in which Great Britain's athletes came second in the medals table? Competing against peers drives rising stars such as Dina Asher-Smith (who broke her British record to win the 100m, and scooped the 200m gold in the fastest time by a woman this year) to push themselves to the limit. Now, thanks to a host of classes and gadgets, you can harness that killer instinct in your own regime. The tandem rise of technology and social media means not only is it easier than ever to log and share workouts, but it's also easier to make solo pursuits

competitive. Apps such as Strava, Nike+ and Runkeeper track your run, cycle or swim as well as the mileage of friends and strangers, allowing you to see if the anonymous NimbleFeet77 has beaten your record for a circuit of the local park, or whether you've topped your sister's 10km time.

Eager to tap into this trend, gyms and fitness studios are incorporating competition into their training, too. UNIT in London has a circuits class called Trooper, where the time you spend on each station is determined by how long it takes the pair on one of the stations to complete a certain number of reps. At the same time, your class is competing with previous classes to do the most rounds in a set time.

This sort of collective responsibility is known by social psychologists as the Köhler effect – the idea that nobody wants to be the weakest link, so if you're working out with people who are fitter than you, you tend to up your game. In fact, a study published in the *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology* found that when individuals were paired up with a more capable partner,

how long they were able to hold a plank increased by 24 per cent.

It's not that much of a surprise that a bit of healthy competition should spur us into working harder. A friend who shares a personal trainer with a colleague tells me that whenever their trainer challenges them to "do the most burpees or sit ups in a minute, it really ups the ante. I've never done so many so quickly in my life".

Now gyms around the country are pitting members against each other. Gym group DW Fitness First's new app Core challenges users to complete as many workouts in a week as possible with a live leaderboard showing who's winning. Spin classes, such as those at



Equinox gym's The Pursuit, see riders' performance stats projected on to a leaderboard at the front of the class, while Meta-Row, a group rowing class at Metabolic London, is competitive.

"There's nothing like a little healthy competition to help you unleash your greatest potential in the gym," says Michelle Morrey, group fitness manager at Equinox Kensington. "Competition is really about coming together to bring out the best in one another. It can inspire you and help you set a goal."

A company called MyZone, which works with a number of national gym chains, including Bannatyne Health Clubs and Speedflex, tracks user heart rate and can show how much effort each person is putting in, meaning any class – from aerobics to Zumba – can

'There's nothing like a little bit of healthy competition to help unleash your potential'

become competitive. It all sounds very positive, and while there's no doubt an element of competition can be useful, if you're only looking at yourself in relation to others, problems can arise.

"The focus on not being the worst can be a powerful motivator in the short term, but it's possible from a long-term perspective it could be demotivating," says Dr Laura Healy, a lecturer in sport coaching at Nottingham Trent University. "There's a lot of research to support the idea that in order to keep exercising in the long term, exercise has to be enjoyable and focus on your own personal improvement."

She points out that while on a one-off basis, competition might inspire you to work harder, constantly ending up as the whipping boy of a class is more likely to lead to you dropping out.

"People don't like doing things where they perceive themselves as not being successful," she says. "It's fine if you're always at the top, or jostling for position at the top, but if you're trying your hardest and still not climbing up the rankings, that's not going to make you feel very good about yourself."

Even those who regularly come out as "winners" should be wary. "You don't want to get hooked on the competition aspect," says Dr Healy. "If you go to a different class where you're not being compared to other people, will you be less engaged? Or feel less positive about the experience?"

Ultimately it's horses for courses. If you feel you work harder in a competitive class, go for it. But if this gets you down, simply concentrate on you – if your time this month is quicker than last month, you know you're heading in the right direction.



HOW NOT TO DIE (YET)

Dr Phil Hammond's guide to living longer
LIE-INS AND LONGEVITY

What's the link between sleep and death? Previous research has hinted at a U-shaped curve (too little or too much is bad) and the adult ideal should be seven to eight hours a night, waking up at the same time every day and coming off the screens 90 minutes before bedtime.

Back in the real world, with 24/7 work demands and the hot weather playing havoc with the hot flushes, weekday sleep is really suffering. So is it worth playing catch-up at the weekends?

In Sweden, 43,880 adults documented their sleep patterns and were followed up over 13 years. The lowest death rates for the under-65s were in those who either slept for six to seven hours regularly every night, or those who slept for five hours or less during the week but managed eight hours or more at weekends or days off.

Those who slept five hours or less every night had a 65 per cent increase in mortality, those who slept eight hours or more every night had a 25 per cent increase in mortality. So lie-ins only work if you're sleep-deprived.

Over-65s need less sleep, children need more. Overall, there are very few symptoms that aren't improved by proper sleep. Wise employers turn off their email servers at weekends and wise parents introduce a screen-free Sabbath.

You can cheat on your sleep in the short term, but not forever. The longer you're awake, the more you need to sleep. If you work up a sleep debt it has to be paid off, by lying-in – or dying.

Dr Phil Hammond is author of *Staying Alive - How to Get the Best from the NHS* (Quercus, £14.99)



ILLUSTRATOR: KERRY SQUIRES

Abbott-Wade Ltd The staircase specialists since 1996
QUALITY ASSURED JOINERY

Transform your staircase in as little as one day

- Award winning family run business
- Contemporary and classic styles
- Timber, glass and wrought iron
- Pre-finished products
- Refurbishments or new flights
- Free, no-obligation design service
- Nationwide service
- 10 year guarantee
- Flexible payment terms available

@StairRenovation
Tel: 01744 634 442
www.abbottwade.co.uk

See us on: Sky 683-Freeview 23-Virgin 748-Freesat 813

FREE DELIVERY worth £2.99

Create & Craft presents

24 Easy-to-Make Luxury 3D Greetings Cards **24 Cards Only** RRP £29.99

£5

Imagine the look on your loved ones faces when you give them one of these unique greeting cards. Then enjoy their surprise when you tell them 'I made it myself'. Your Create and Craft pack has **all you need** to make 24 stunning cards including card mounts, sticky tape and 24 envelopes too. Your kit is packed with stunning designs for every occasion; nature, wildlife, teddy bears, footballs, cars and music - for kids and grown ups. A doddle to make **NO glue, NO scissors, NO mess!** Fun to make and a pleasure to give. 24 truly personal cards for just £5 p&p. That's less than 21p a card. Cards of this quality could cost up to £5 each in the shops. **So Why Pay More. Order today while stocks last.**

Not Available in the Shops. Order Early While Stocks Last!

Create and Craft is the original multi-award winning TV craft channel, on air 24 hours a day LIVE from 8am. Watch now on Sky 683/Freeview 23 / Virgin 748 /Freesat 813 / Apple TV/ Amazon Fire

24 Greetings Cards only (Worth £29.99) **£5**

Easy to Make **NO SCISSORS NO GLUE NO MESS**

75 Piece Card Kit

WOW ~makes 24 truly unique cards for family & friends

- 24 plain & fancy card mounts (ready creased)
- 12 x A4 Print, foil and die cut toppers
- Sticky tape
- 3D foam pads
- Ideas gallery
- 24 envelopes

24 Envelopes included

Easy to follow instructions

STAND OUT 3D Designs

Order Now 0905 648 8488* or www.createandcraft.com/gb/TW Product Code: 453487

Terms and conditions: Orderline open 6am-12.30am daily. Open to UK residents, one per order, per customer, whilst stocks last. For full terms and conditions visit www.createandcraft.com