

GROUP PERSONAL TRAINING

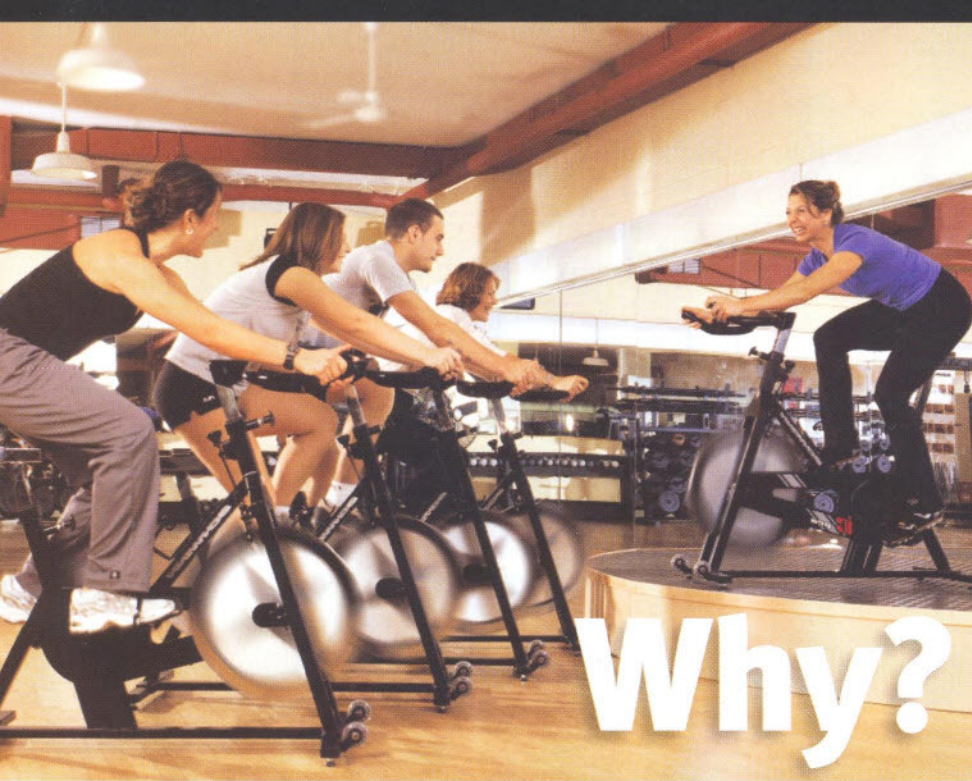
Get the skinny on the next big thing

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It's that time of year again, when we promise ourselves we are going to stick to a plan, set goals and make sure that resolution to get in better shape doesn't fall flat by February. Whether you're new to the gym, or you've been going to the same Spinning class for the last five years, there is one universal truth in fitness: we all need a little push sometimes. And there's something exciting happening in gyms all across the country that will provide you with that push: Group Personal Training.

Group Personal Training - or Group PT - is on the rise in Canada and you can see why: Hands-on attention, challenging workouts, in a supportive and social environment that the average gym member can afford. Maybe you've already caught sight of a session at your gym: a group of sweaty people, struggling to finish their last set of push-ups, skipping rope like middle-weight boxers in training, lifting weights that seem far too heavy for their frames. Look and listen - through the grunts and the groans, and in spite of the fact they are paying for the torture - you can see it in their eyes: they are hooked.



Geoff Bagshaw, Canadian Fitness Presenter of the Year (2005), knows the answer. He has been running packed Group PT sessions for four years, and says there is nothing at the gym that can compare. "It is one of the most challenging things you'll ever do," says Bagshaw, who has seen clients drop clothing sizes in a matter of months. "The participants are very supportive of one another and encourage each other to push themselves. And participants are much more likely to stick with this type of program, as opposed to working out on their own or even in a larger group exercise class, as they become committed and accountable to both the trainer and the other participants."

So what can you expect? Each workout is different, but all will focus on increasing muscular strength and endurance, improving the cardiovascular system, gaining better balance, better coordination and achieving a stronger core to an end goal of a leaner, stronger and fitter body. The ratio of the components in the workout will change each time, but will be designed for maximum caloric expenditure. You will be introduced to new equipment - such as medicine balls, multi-person resistance bands and BOSUs - and learn exercises that target muscles in specialized ways. The Group PT leader scrutinizes the room constantly, correcting posture and tech-

nique; because the session has no more than eight participants you all receive individual attention. A good trainer will always provide variety. "It's important that the program always changes. That way the participants do not become stagnant and cease getting the results they are looking for," says Bagshaw.

In one workout you might focus on cardio: running laps, stair climbing or military style drills such as jumping jacks, followed with strength training for a couple of muscle groups; and the next workout might focus on supersets for the entire body - where you do two or more exercises in a row with no rest in between, thus doubling the impact of the exercise. There are also different types of Group PT appearing in gyms across the country, where you might find an Indoor Cycling/Core Conditioning program designed for cyclists or a Circuit-Style Program that is set up in stations around the gym floor (not for the shy wallflower!). You should look for a session that appeals to your interests and goals, and meet the trainer before you sign up, making sure they have the right stuff to motivate you and provide you with a workout that will break you out of your routine.

Research shows us that varying a fitness program is necessary, for a number of reasons. A study from the University of Florida found that people are more likely

to continue exercising if there is variety in their program. In addition, many of the body's physiological systems - i.e., the muscular system - adapt to an exercise program within approximately six to eight weeks. If you do not modify your exercise routine, you reach a plateau because your body has adapted to the repetitive training you've given it. And if weight loss is your goal, cardio alone will not get the job done - strength training must be part of the program. Even if it does hurt the next day!

Bagshaw knows his sessions aren't easy, but his clients tell him it is the one appointment they won't miss each week. "It is incredibly rewarding to be a Group PT leader," he says. "I've seen incredible changes in my participants - people lose more than 40 pounds in a matter of six months. But it is more than weight loss. People tell me they sleep better, are more productive and they just feel better. It is a big change to see people go from hating exercise to the point where they can't wait for the challenge."

This is one of the most appealing elements of Group Personal Training: rising to the challenge. Participants are often pushed beyond their limits. Sherry Pederson, an urban planner/landscape architect from Toronto, credits Group Personal Training for giving her a new lease on gym life. "The group experience is great. The competitive aspect challenges me to push harder, and I work a lot harder than I thought I could, reaching new thresholds of muscle fatigue. It is hugely rewarding to do something you thought was only achievable by individuals you thought were a lot fitter than yourself."

**So why not try Group PT?
What do you have to lose,
besides that nagging five
pounds that won't go away?**

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