



# FITNESS TRENDS 2009

BY FRITZ ESKER

## The Ultimate in Health Care Savings

The landscape of any industry changes from year to year and the fitness industry is no different. The good news is that the fitness industry seems to continuously diversify. There's something for everyone – fitness programs catering to people at both ends of the age spectrum, wider varieties of Pilates and yoga classes, as well as other new options for people looking to stay fit and healthy in 2009.

### the economy

As a whole, the country is going through tough times economically. There's a recession, many people are losing their jobs, and the stock market is suffering. What it adds up to is that people will be looking for ways to save money in case things get worse. But will this affect the fitness industry?

Industry professionals have varying opinions as to how the public will respond to the economic

crisis. Group training is an option. Many trainers give discounts for people training together as a group. This way, individuals can get fit together at a discount from the standard one-on-one personal training costs. Even entire families can train as a group to save money and spend quality time together.

Another way people will look to maximize their time will be to take hybrid classes. Hybrid classes involve many different disciplines at once. "Time management will become even more important," said Carla Gray, a personal trainer and owner of the Fitness Connection. "People will be working more jobs and they'll want to get in a lot in a little amount of time."

However, many believe that people will make room in their budget for their one on one sessions with their personal trainers. As one on one training has become more popular in recent years, people have become more attached to the practice.

"Personal training was considered a luxury. Now it's considered a lifestyle," said Samantha Prestenbach, a personal trainer and founder of LIFT Training Studios.

Many people will stick with their training sessions because of the long-term health benefits benefit the pocketbook as well. "It's cost effective to do more preventive activities than to have to go through the health care system," said Tim Bracey, senior director of the West Jefferson Fitness Center. In the end, people save money by preventing illnesses (e.g. heart disease, type 2 diabetes) that would eventually cause costly visits to the doctor.

Individuals will not be the only ones who embrace fitness because of the money it will save in the long run. More and more businesses will offer incentives to employees to join fitness centers. Tavis Piattoly, assistant general manager of Elmwood Fitness Center, says that by

encouraging fitness in their employees, businesses will reduce absenteeism and save millions of dollars in the long run by keeping their employees healthy.

Recent history also indicates that people will find room in their budget for fitness. After the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, many local residents found themselves in unsteady waters economically. Many people had seriously damaged property, others lost their jobs. Despite all of this, people still went to fitness centers. Hudson Ellis, owner of Simply Fit, said, "There was an explosion of people I had not seen before." People like to relieve stress during hard times and regular workouts are a good way to do that.

Ellis added that if any demographic is likely to cut back on their workouts because of the economic uncertainties, it would be young people just out of college. These groups are more likely to take it upon themselves to get fit by going to the park or doing other activities and these groups are also more likely to have lower paying jobs.

At the Jewish Community Center, the numbers indicate that as of right now, people are still sticking with their fitness programs. Katie Kiefer, wellness director at the JCC, says that only 3 clients have quit because of the economy. And that's three clients combined from the 15 trainers at the JCC.

### fitness for an older crowd

Gym memberships and personal training sessions used to primarily be the domain of younger adults. However, trends indicate that more and more older people are seeing the benefits of working out. People have realized that, as they approach middle age, their muscles atrophy and their bones become more brittle. As a result, they become more susceptible to falls. Compounding the problem is the fact that falls become more costly as people get older. A young person can fall and suffer only scratches and/or bruises. When older people fall, the injuries can be much more severe (broken hip, etc.).

Strength training is very beneficial as people get older, as it can stave off osteoporosis as well as improve balance. "Balance is a real issue that we don't take as seriously as we need to," Ellis said.

And these issues are not just limited to senior citizens, either. Prestenbach says that she has seen clients who have suffered a real loss of balance and muscle atrophy in their 30s and 40s.

The good news for aging adults seeking a healthier lifestyle is that many health care programs now cover fitness center costs because insurance companies realize that it's cheaper to pay for preventive measures than for extended hospital

visits. Piattoly says that Elmwood Fitness Center currently has approximately 5000 members over the age of 65. In the next 10-15 years, he expects that number to climb to 10-12,000 members.

### fitness for kids

Obesity continues to be a serious problem among the nation's youth. To curb this disturbing trend, expect fitness centers to create many more programs for kids. Gray said that children are starting to show signs of arteriosclerosis even at the young age of 8. Many programs for children will be education-based. "Parents will begin to realize not only they need to move around, but their kids do as well," Gray said.

"We need to find a focus to get kids more involved with activity," Bracey said. "We need to make it more appealing." To achieve this end, Bracey says that there specific pieces of equipment, like a rock climbing wall, for example, that can be used to get kids fit and keep it fun. There should be a balance between fitness and fun. "The basic adult exercises won't always cut it," Bracey said.

### physician referrals

People often make resolutions to get in shape. Family members often encourage their loved ones to live healthier lifestyles. Often, these motivations fail to work. People start with the best of intentions, but lose interest. However, if a doctor tells a patient to see a trainer or join a gym, then the person might take it more seriously. Physician referrals to licensed personal trainers will become more frequent in the new year. According to Piattoly, 93% of people referred to a personal trainer by a physician will follow through. "People will listen to a physician more than their peers," Piattoly said.

"Up until now, personal trainers have been kind of nomads," Prestenbach said. However, as more qualified personal trainers establish themselves within the community, more doctors will trust these personal trainers and send patients to them.

### pilates

Kerrie Ann Frey says that Pilates will become more popular with more and more groups of people in the upcoming year. First and foremost, athletes are flocking to it. "More and more athletes are recognizing the benefits of Pilates with its focus on stability, core strength, balance, and flexibility," Frey said.

In addition to attracting athletes, Pilates is becoming a popular choice for parents looking to get their children involved in physical activities. Frey says more Pilates DVDs for kids will be

coming out in 2009 and local Pilates classes for kids will become more available, too. "With its physical, mental, and self-confidence boosting benefits, kids of all ages are benefitting from the practice," Frey said. "The concentration and focused breathing helps kids to relax and focus on the task at hand while strengthening key areas of the brain by building brain cells and connections."

On a global level, Frey says people can expect to see more opportunities to add cardio to the Pilates workout, with the proliferation of rebounders, jump boards, and BOSU balls. More Pilates fusion practices, such as Gyrotonics and Kinesis, will also become more popular.

### yoga

Just like Pilates, yoga continues to cross over into the mainstream. "The name's out there and people now know it's not some strange, cultish thing from India," said Jessica Blanchard, owner of Balance Yoga and Wellness.

According to Blanchard, as yoga grows, people are becoming more and more interested in a more holistic approach. While yoga does help with physical things like posture and flexibility, it also helps people mentally through breathing and concentration. "Now that they physical benefits have been established, the mental benefits will be emphasized," Blanchard said.

As life becomes more tense with country in the midst of a recession, Blanchard believes more and more people will flock to yoga for the mental benefits. "People are becoming a lot more stressed and they really value the things that help them deal with stress," Blanchard said.

In addition to this, more yoga classes will make an effort to reach out to newcomers. Katie Kiefer, wellness director of the Jewish Community Center, says that Hatha yoga is a brand of yoga that will likely become more popular because of its friendliness to beginners. The approach to Hatha yoga is more "do what you can." Practitioners won't have to worry about trying to do headstands or any of the more challenging poses of yoga. "The people who normally didn't do yoga are starting to do it now. It's not as intimidating," Kiefer said.

### stay focused

While stressful times are often an excuse for people to lose track of their own health, in reality, staying healthy is never more important than during difficult times. And with all the options out there, there's no excuse to stay at home.