



## How to Become a Fitness Diehard

If you've read this column before, it's pretty clear I'm a regular at the Monroe County YMCA. In a different era, my dad was a Y regular, too. As a hard-working, Type A engineer, he used his lunch hour to swim laps, working out while working off stress. I remember each January those stress-relieving swims turning somewhat sour as new members flooded the Y. "All those resolvers, clogging up the lanes," he would complain. But by mid-February, things were nearly back to normal as, one by one, those resolvers disappeared.

I see the same thing happen here every year, though I'm not a swimmer. Those lanes do fill up. The indoor track gets busier, too. The treadmills, elliptical trainers, and stationary bikes are all whirring away. Group exercise classes fill to capacity. Until about mid-February. And then many of the new faces disappear, leaving the regulars—those of us who have been showing up day after day, year after year—to continue on.

I often wonder why so many people start out the new year with such good intentions and then, after just a few weeks, give it all up. But the better question might be what keeps the regulars coming back?

People fail to follow through on their fitness goals for a variety of reasons, both valid and not so valid. But I think that the people who stick with it over the long haul have discovered the key to becoming a fitness diehard: social connection.

Whether that means joining a gym with a friend or family member and making a commitment to work out on a regular basis or joining a group exercise class where you can meet other like-minded folks, those social connections offer reinforcement and accountability. Signing up for sessions with a personal trainer is another way to get that social

connection. It doesn't really matter what you do—plan a walk at lunch with a co-worker, join a running group or a yoga class, head to the nearest CrossFit box and see what's going on. As long as you make that human connection, the chance of success, of becoming one of the regulars, is much higher.

Those who say they aren't into groups shouldn't dismiss the importance of creating social connections, or think they aren't up to making them. My swimmer dad didn't actually talk to many people during his workouts, but even now I hear stories about people he knew from the Y back in the day. Whether he met them in the pool or the locker room or the lobby, they were all there at the same time, every day, and got to know one another in a "we're all in this together" kind of way.

I have some of those same kinds of relationships. There are people I see all the time who I don't actually know, but we smile and nod and say hello while we walk the track or use the cardio machines or rack our weights. But I've also made friends. We take classes together and talk about things we have in common. Some of those relationships have crept out of the gym into more social situations, which is great considering it can be difficult to make new friends as an adult.

The key to becoming a regular? The first step is to show up. And then to keep showing up. Day after day, year after year. Pretty soon, you'll realize that not only are you in the best shape of your life but you have filled that life with positive people who are as committed to health and wellness as you are. And those social connections will keep you coming back for more.

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