



BY KATE TURGEON

get fit with **FRIENDS**

Locals mix exercise and social time

The results are in. And they're about as pretty as the average push-up.

In a recent study, only one in five American adults engaged in light exercise at least five times a week. Ramp up the question to vigorous physical activity and the statistics look even more dismal with only one in eight participating in serious workouts, according to a National Health Interview Study by the Center for Disease Control (CDC).

Many experts believe the gap between the average adult and a healthier lifestyle can be filled with a solid routine, knowledge and encouragement. For many, that means an exercise partner, trainer or group fitness class. "It's just about having that additional support you need, especially if you're just getting started," explains Shanna Kane of O2 Fitness.

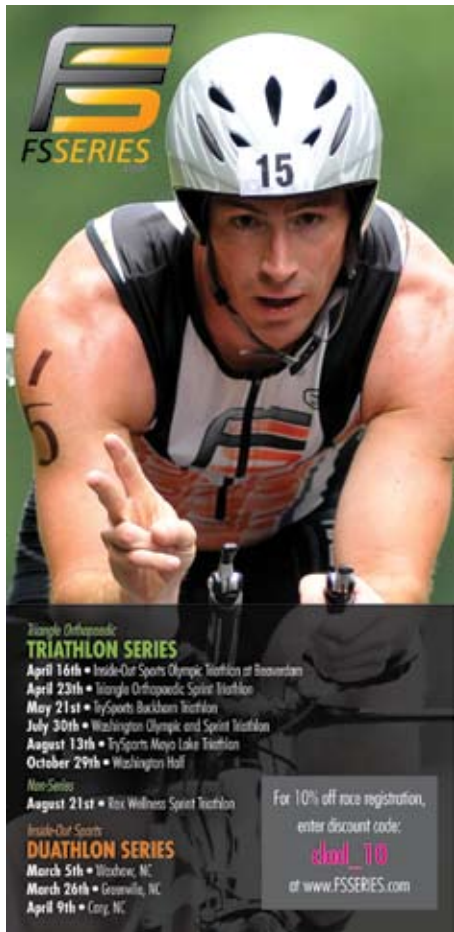
Kane, who jokingly lumps herself in with the New Year's resolution pack, has seen this concept work first hand. She says she'll work out for about 45 minutes when she's alone. But, with a friend, Kane doubles her workout time to 90 minutes.

She has seen the group mentality benefit others at O2, where she has worked for a year. The gym's personal training clinics, she says, are small groups where trainers tailor classes to specific topics. Think fitness for golfers and boot camp style workouts. Group fitness classes such as yoga and Zumba are also popular. "We switch up the moves and music every three months...so, for people who may be intimidated, it's easy because everyone is starting new," says Kane.

Having a common goal to work toward may help fitness efforts also. If you're noticing more 13.1 (half-marathon), 26.2 (marathon) and TRI (triathlon) stickers on cars, you're not alone. Just ask Jason Biggs, co-owner of FS Series, a local event production and timing company. Biggs says that his company has seen a 10 to 30 percent increase in all of its races over the last year. A fair amount of the increase, he says, is from people who aren't necessarily competitive.

"I do agree that more people are doing these for the social aspect," says Biggs. "A half marathon is a very attainable goal." He says it's becoming a common occurrence to hear about friends who trained and participated in a race together.

Cary Living caught up with six locals who mix exercise and social time. While they have different routines, sports of choice, professions and ages, they all agree that finding enough hours in the day to do everything can be a challenge. That's why they say exercising with friends can be the best thing to happen to an all-around healthy lifestyle.



JASON BIGGS – 35
CO-OWNER OF FS SERIES EVENT PRODUCTION COMPANY



Jason Biggs trains for triathlons by swimming with his wife, Debbie Gavaghan, twice a week. He runs at least five times, and manages to bike about three days a week. According to that math, Biggs has days when he's doing more than one activity.

There was a time when Jason Biggs was all about racing his BMX bike. "We'd always ride bikes around the neighborhood... like kids used to do," laughs Biggs, who remembers racing during his elementary and middle school years.

During his teens and early 20s he parked the bike in favor of running, until the urge to pedal eventually caught back up to him. "About six years ago I got tired of running and wanted to get back into biking, so I went and bought a bicycle," says Biggs. It wasn't long after that Biggs got into triathlons.

Today biking is a large part of his exercise routine. And biking with a group is a huge motivator. Most Wednesday afternoons he can be found riding with a group that leaves from Inside-Out Sports in Cary. "It's a pretty fast ride... so it splits up into a couple different groups. One group is really fast and one group is trying to catch the really fast group," laughs Biggs.

The friendly competitiveness of the ride is what keeps Biggs coming back.

"It's all camaraderie," he says. "We're not trying to hurt each other...but you definitely push yourself way more than you would if you were riding by yourself."

In addition to biking about five times a week, Biggs swims and runs with his wife. "She's a way better swimmer than I am," concedes Biggs.

JANESSA CORE – 34
STAY-AT-HOME MOTHER

When Janessa Core moved from Chicago about four years ago, she didn't know anyone in the Cary area. And exercising to kickboxing videos at home while her baby daughter napped just wasn't cutting it.

"I needed to get out of the house," laughs Core, who is now a mother of two. The former college cheerleader joined a local gym with the intent of feeling her best and meeting new friends. While waiting in line for the children's care room to open, she found herself in conversation with other local moms. Before she knew it she was making friends and exercise appointments.

"When I know I'm going to see my friends there and that there's a friendly atmosphere...I know it's time for me to workout," explains Core, who often grabs lunch with friends after exercise classes. "It's nice to do two things at one time."



Janessa Core (second from the right) finds friendship and fitness at her gym.

"I've never been what you would call gregarious, but since getting more involved with classes and running group...I've gotten to know a lot more people. That's added a lot to my enjoyment and motivation."

Matt Donoghue

What's also nice is her clear understanding of all the reasons she works out. "For me, it's because I really like to eat," laughs Core. "If I want to go out and have that dessert, I can."

Core's workouts are about friendship, healthy living and, yes, desserts. (Really, you have to love her honesty!) And she hates to think what life would be like without the workouts. "Oh my gosh, there would be a void...I'd miss it," says Core. "On the days I don't go to the gym, I wish I had gone."

JEN CIPRIANO – 24
HIGH SCHOOL MATH TEACHER



As a high school and college student, Jen Cipriano played soccer and flag football. Today her sport of choice is climbing, which she does with a friend at least once a week.

If Jen Cipriano misses an indoor rock climbing session with her friend, Andrea, she's busy planning a make-up session for the following day. That's just how it is.

"Climbing by yourself is just no fun if you ask me," says Cipriano. "It limits you to bouldering (moving across the wall sideways)." She adds that climbing with a friend is great because it allows her to watch someone else climb the routes. "Sometimes you get a move that you just can't figure out, but watching other people do it is really helpful. It almost becomes a team

effort...we are both trying to solve the problem," she says.

Cipriano, a former soccer player, took up the sport about five years ago. Rock climbing, she says, just sort of happened for her. "The more I started climbing, the more I enjoyed it and wanted to keep going," says Cipriano, who works part time at the rock climbing wall at Lifetime Fitness.

For her, it's a fun exercise that allows her to burn up to 1,000 calories per hour. Her advice to other women contemplating this type of exercise is simple – go for it! "Working out just makes me feel better, no matter what...so anything that helps me to keep that schedule is a good thing," says Cipriano. "Plus, if I've had a long day it usually helps to talk to a friend about it. So I feel better because I've vented, plus I got in a good workout at the same time."



IVAR LONON – 47
SALES ENGINEER, ADVANCED EQUIPMENT COMPANY

There's no such thing as a 40-hour workweek for Ivar Lonon, an independent business owner. Mix in a self-admitted penchant for doing everything himself and Lonon says there's little time for all the things he'd like to pack into a week.

One thing he always makes time for is exercising five times a week. And he does it while working around past injuries to his back, knee and shoulder. (Lonon notes that those injuries weren't related to working out.)

Last year when a personal trainer suggested that he join a running group, Lonon wondered how it would work given his previous injuries. "[He] gave me a running strategy and encouraged me to join the [Cary] YMCA running group, which I did," says Lonon. "I found that running with a group was a lot of fun." And, most importantly, he says the plan for keeping his knee pain-free was working.

Lonon also was pleasantly surprised by the unexpected benefit of making friends in the running club. "When you have a workout partner, you get that extra incentive to show up on those days you might have just stayed at home," says the married father of two.



MATT DONOGHUE – 47
AIRLINE PILOT

Matt Donoghue thought he had hit his peak. For years he worked out alone lifting weights and running on a treadmill. He would sometimes venture outside of the Cary YMCA to run for about 20 or 30 minutes.

"I was satisfied with the intensity of my workout and what I thought was an adequate fitness and weight level," says Donoghue.

All that changed one day as he exited the YMCA to run on a trail and ran into a group of women runners. They invited him to join their group, but he politely

Ivar Lonon (top) and Matt Donoghue (bottom) routinely schedule time for jogging at the Cary Family YMCA. According to their running coach, Romain Marriott, they're enthusiastic about the sport and give their time to help mentor new runners.



declined. "Honestly, I felt very intimidated...deep down I think I was just afraid of being smoked," says the married father of two boys.

It turned out that the group's route and pace were almost identical to his. Being near a running group was a different experience for Donoghue. "I could feel the energy of the group and, I guess, the greater sense of motivation," he says. After that experience, Donoghue decided to join a running group.

That was two years ago. And today he only wishes that he had started sooner. "Running has always been a mental hurdle for me," says Donoghue. The group helped him "jump" that obstacle and erase some of the self-doubt he felt about running longer distances. "Last fall a group of eight of us went out to Umstead Park to do a six-mile trail run...it was an awesome experience," says Donoghue, who is training for a half marathon.

"Just knowing that there is a run tomorrow morning has gotten me excited about going running again," he says. "It's so different from trying to do all of this fitness stuff alone."

JEN KEDROWSKI – 32
OWNER/INSTRUCTOR, STROLLER STRIDES OF RALEIGH



Jen Kedrowski (with her daughter Lily) is a Stroller Strides instructor. She says many women come to a class (left) looking for fitness alone, but find what she calls strength for motherhood.

Jen Kedrowski knows how hard it is for mothers to find time to exercise. "It's extremely challenging," she says. "They are so focused on the needs of their children...newer moms may be sleep deprived and overwhelmed, while more experienced moms may have multiple children's demands to juggle."

But exercise, she insists, helps moms to feel energetic, lose weight, add muscle, increase metabolism and reduce the incidence of some diseases. As a Stroller Strides instructor and registered nurse, Kedrowski understands a mother's need to reach out for advice and friendship, while also breaking a sweat.

"We mix in intervals of power walking or jogging with stations of strength training and intense cardio bursts," says Kedrowski. It's all about maximizing – maximizing a mother's time with her child (moms work out alongside their children, who are in strollers), maximizing time with friends and maximizing calorie burning.

While some mothers attend their first class with a friend, even more come alone to the first class hoping to make friends. "There is something so vital to motherhood, especially early on, in being able to talk," says Kedrowski. "I definitely encourage any new moms to join a group where they can meet and spend time with other moms." 🌱