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New Year Brings...

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... new resolve to area fitness-club members.

From left, Annie Plowcha of Homer City, Toy Logan of Indiana and Teresa Binando of Coral are regulars at the YMCA pool. (Gazette photo by Danielle Visnesky)

If the combined effects of holiday feasting and winter inactivity led you to resolve to get physically fit in the new year, you're not alone.

According to Indiana fitness pros, this is boom time for new members at health and fitness clubs.

"I find from previous years that the boom comes the week after New Year's," said Laura Duffy, owner of the Curves for Women fitness center.

"It takes a few days after the holidays and New Year's," Duffy said. "Everybody starts to feel guilty about eating too much during the holidays."

"Yeah, a lot of people are calling and looking at information after New Year's" agreed Sheila Murray at New Life fitness center.

Murray, sister of New Life co-owner Brian Murray, said she'd signed up several new customers in the last few days who told her their time to exercise had come because of New Year's resolutions.

Laura Brougher, working at the front desk of the YMCA of Indiana County, said that although they may not have all been due to resolutions, a lot of new members were signing up after the recent holidays.

"We had a lot of people buying memberships as Christmas gifts," Brougher said. "But we also did have a lot who said it was for a New Year's resolution."

Duffy said another factor in January's fitness center boom comes because at this time of year people are at their lowest level of outdoor activity.

"It's true," said John Cup, owner of JT's Health and Fitness Center. "People tend to use the club more in winter."



Trader Horn

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Although Cup said he didn't see such a big influx due to the new year, he said those who already have memberships just seemed to come in more this time of year.

At the YMCA, one patron working out in the weight room said the winter doldrums were what sent him to the gym.

"Everything slows down in winter," said Chad Vuckovich of Indiana, a student at Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania. "I'm just back home for Christmas break and working out from boredom as much as anything."

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But did his workout have anything to do with a New Year's resolution?

"I suppose you could look at it like that," Vuckovich said.

"Now let's see if I can stick it out."

For those who share Vuckovich's concern, fitness gurus offered several suggestions for staying with a fitness plan once you've started.

First, make sure you're fit to get fit, said program director Kevin Means at the YMCA. He emphasized that the often-cited warning to check with a physician before beginning an exercise routine is not just important so the clubs can protect themselves from liability.

"It's very important to check with your doctor," Means said. "There are probably numerous people who may have a health condition they're not aware of."

"No matter what their age is, it's important for someone beginning a workout program to get a physical" Means stressed, "especially if it's their first time exercising - and if they haven't had a check-up in a long time."

But Means added that people who start a fitness program often do so at a doctor's suggestion. He cited high cholesterol, high blood pressure and heart problems as reasons people had been given a physical fitness prescription.

After the doctor OKs (or suggests) a fitness regime, the challenge is for people to make getting and staying fit part of their regular routine.

"If you can just put the time aside to work out - 40 minutes three times a week - that in itself is a challenge for most people," said Cup at JT's.

He added that whether or not people go to a health club is not as important to staying in shape as it is to find a physical activity they like doing.

"Whether it's working with weights, doing yoga or riding an exercise bike in front of CNN on the television - find something you enjoy," Cup said.

At Curves for Women, Duffy said that though it may be tough to get going, when her clients get the workout habit started, it can be hard to break.

"I let people know up front - there's a lot of discipline that you have to have," Duffy said. "Let's make this a routine, I tell them."

"But once they start exercising their energy level rises "



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...but once they start exercising, their energy level rises," Duffy said. "If they don't work out over a long weekend, they come back saying, 'My God, I feel so awful!'"

"Most of the people that use the club come in because they're committed to it, just like people are committed to brushing their teeth," said Cup. "You've got to have something that motivates you - some type of reward - whether it's psychological or physical."

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