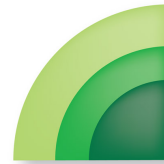




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Singles lycra their chances

A new fitness craze has people working out and hooking up at the same time, writes **Melissa Kent**.

POLE-dancing? Done it. Spin? Check. Cardio strip-tease? So last year. In the fickle world of fitness fads, exercise fanatics have attention spans shorter than their Lycra gym pants.

Forever in search of new and more exotic methods of exercise, a growing number of health devotees are embracing everything from wild and wacky fads to serious workouts that challenge body and mind.

The humble step class has long become a quaint memory as former gym junkies seek constant variety in their exercise regimes and experiment with more adventurous ways of working up a sweat.

If aerobics doesn't prick your interest, why not wield a lethal range of wooden weapons under the command of a Chinese wushu master? Maybe Israeli dancing is more your thing, or the daring art of trapeze in circus-inspired Cirq classes?

For on-trend fitness junkies looking for romance and new exercise challenges, the latest craze about to hit Melbourne could be for them.

Fit2Date is an exercise course that offers the prospect of finding love while getting fit. The concept has already proven a hit in Sydney, where 300 people have signed up since its launch in July, so far resulting in three "live-in" relationships and countless hook-ups.

Founder and matchmaker Erica French, 29, stresses that the focus is on fitness, not on worrying about looking attractive in sweaty Lycra shorts.

"We say at best you'll meet your future partner, at worst you'll improve your fitness," she says. "The great thing is that everyone looks the same, so no one worries about what they look like. Knowing what my male friends say, they hate girls who wear a lot of makeup, so the guys are seeing the real girl."

French says that when she dreamed up the concept, she was tired of hitting the bars to find "the one". "I'd been single for 2½ years and although I was going out, I wasn't really meeting the real person," she says.

"I thought there has to be a better way to meet decent people. I love being fit, so why not get fit with like-minded single people? It seemed like such an obvious idea."

Singles are paired into two teams, who must then compete in fun relays against each other. The losing teams have to answer comedy questions about themselves. At the end, individuals fill in a questionnaire about who they like and why.

Triple M radio announcer Daniel Gawned, 22, is looking for love and, more important, seeking new fitness challenges and to broaden his circle of friends.

The single gym-goer, who moved to Melbourne from Perth less than a year ago, has signed up for the course which starts in Albert Park and Fitzroy Gardens next month.

"I figure I get to kill two birds with one stone," he says. "Meeting new people is my main aim but I'm also looking to break up my gym routine."

French says it is essential that exercise options offer variety and a personal service tailored to each customer.

"We are an over-stimulated society and I think people get bored very quickly these days," she says. "People are looking for a personal connection. They like people to care about them, which I don't think you get from big standard gyms."

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ERICA FRENCH, Fit2Date