

Types of Group Exercise Classes

Physical Therapy in Kansas City and Leawood for Exercise

Choosing a group exercise class can be quite overwhelming these days, as class formats have developed and evolved tremendously over the years. Class offerings will vary between fitness facilities, but most classes will fall into one of the following four categories: cardiorespiratory, strength, mind/body, or specialty.

Classes can be further described as beginner, intermediate or advanced. Beginner classes will break down the format and introduce a person to the terminology and basic moves of the class. If a class does not designate a level, intermediate is assumed. If you are new to a format, just let the instructor know so that he or she can explain the class for you. Advanced classes are for those who have been long-time participants and are looking for a challenge. Advanced classes are not recommended for beginners. Group exercise classes are designed to be both fun and challenging for the participant, with the added benefits of being taught by a fitness professional and being in a positive social environment. Take a look at some of the available options – and don't be afraid to try something new!

Cardiorespiratory: Classes under this category are most frequently associated with the group exercise format, and focus on getting the heart rate up for the duration of the class. Classes generally begin with a light aerobic warm-up, some stretching, and then moderate- or vigorous-intensity exercise for the majority of the class. This category includes long-time favorites such as step and hi-lo floor aerobics, and some more recent favorites such as kickboxing and indoor cycling.

- **Hi-lo aerobics:** This type of aerobic exercise has been around for many years and is considered the original group exercise format. It combines both high- and low-impact moves where the goal is to get you up and keep you moving. Instructors may incorporate moves from hip-hop, jazz, salsa, and kickboxing, along with classic floor aerobics moves. This format is choreographed, but routines can be broken down and simplified to where the most novice participant feels comfortable.
- **Step aerobics:** Step aerobics is unique with its use of a platform (the step) and risers that can be adjusted for a participant's intensity preference. Step height can be varied from four to 10 inches. These classes have a choreographed routine that utilizes both the step and the floor for a moderate- to vigorous-intensity workout.
- **Kickboxing:** This format is a fusion of boxing moves, a variety of martial arts, and aerobics that combine for a high-intensity cardiorespiratory experience. Some classes involve contact with punching bags, including kicks and jabs.
- **Indoor cycling:** This format involves the use of specially designed bikes that take the participant through a high-intensity workout that utilizes simulated climbs, sprints, flat roads and interval training. Caloric expenditure can be high as long as there is resistance on the bike. It is important to arrive early for the first class to get fitted on the bike to maximize comfort and energy expenditure, and reduce the chance of injury.

Strength: The main goal of this format is to use light dumbbells, barbells, resistance bands, kettle bells or body weight to build muscular strength and endurance. These classes usually involve all the major muscle groups, but can be broken down into formats that focus on just abdominal, upper body or lower body exercises. These classes are considered non-aerobic, but are a great way to incorporate resistance training into a weekly routine without getting out on the weight room floor.

Mind/body: The most recognizable mind/body classes are yoga and Pilates, but these can include stretching or core strength classes. These formats focus on flexibility, core strength and balance with an emphasis on connecting the mind to the physical work of the body. These classes have become more common at mainstream fitness facilities, but can still be found at specialty studios that offer no other formats.

Specialty: The classes in this category tend to be nontraditional and require special training by the instructor. Examples of specialty classes are several forms of dance (hip hop, salsa, belly dancing), self-defense, aerobic striptease, or group personal training. While these classes are becoming more common, they do require a specialized instructor and can often require an additional fee per class or series of classes.

Group exercises classes have become a staple in the fitness industry. While there are four categories, many classes can fall into more than one category, as they can include multiple elements of group exercise classes. It is important to always inquire about a format that is unfamiliar to gauge the difficulty level, if special equipment is required of the participant, or if a fee is involved. Don't be afraid to try something new, as one of the most effective fitness strategies is to participate in a variety of activities. To ensure a wellrounded fitness routine, if you can regularly commit to several types of group fitness classes, you will cover all essential elements of fitness and have a huge dose of fun!