

Can Twitter make you fitter?

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On a recent Saturday, Pat Wagner knew she should have been getting ready for boxing class. The 60-year-old Carrollton resident spent the last five years cutting her weight in half, dropping 150 pounds and adopting an entirely new lifestyle. She's no stranger to hard work or hard workouts, but on this day there were just too many distractions.

Errands to run. Laundry to do. A game on TV. She wondered - couldn't she take it easy?

Wagner began scrolling through her Twitter feed. She saw a post from her [personal trainer](#), Steven Williams. He was already in his own boxing class, and the post made Wagner decide to get up and get there, too.

"We all run up these excuses in our mind," Wagner says, "and we might know realistically that there shouldn't be an excuse, but it's amazing what the body can do and what the mind can make up."

Wagner is a living example of how [social media](#) can help you lose weight.

A quick scroll through Pinterest or a Google search for "[motivation](#)" shows that networking sites are brimming with weight-loss inspiration. But there's science behind the idea, too, according to a January study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Informatics Association*.

Participants who self-monitored their weight loss via Twitter had lower

[body mass](#) indexes after six months than those who didn't.

It's also become a useful tool for trainers who want to motivate clients toward their goals, and clients who are looking for an extra push.

"The Twitter nudges do that," Wagner says. "They just reach out and say, 'Hey, get off your butt and go do this. I'm doing it, you need to do it.'"

Getting personal

Williams, Wagner's trainer, says he uses Twitter, Instagram and Facebook to keep his clients motivated during the crucial hours when they're working toward their goals outside the gym.

"It's almost like I'm with them throughout the day as well," Williams says. "They always have a way to get hold of me, so it's almost like I'm with them 24/7."

Williams frequently sends out motivational quotes and reminders or posts pictures of a workout or healthy meal. It's a not-so-subtle message for clients who, like Wagner, might be lacking motivation.

"It's like, they're in here working, why aren't you, basically," Williams says.

Williams' social media sites are also a means for his clients and other visitors to Gold's Gym in Uptown Dallas, where he works, to connect with one another. He's seen them share best practices and lean on one another through particularly tough workouts.

"It's just this endless cycle of mass information exchange," Williams said.

He says his own healthy habits make easy fodder for motivational posts. When he cooks a healthy meal that also looks delicious, he makes sure to snap a picture and post it for his followers; it's just a little check that might help them adjust their own habits.

Gold's Gym general manager Edgar Valdez said social media has become a key, recommended component of the trainer-client relationship. It's almost like free marketing for individual trainers. He encourages both parties to follow each other on social media, and he's seen specific trainers amass a huge following.

"It keeps them engaged and gets them going to the next level, if you will," Valdez says.

When Gold's Gym runs a weight-loss challenge, posting before-and-after pictures is particularly motivating, Valdez says. "They're motivated by results and motivated by people who have actually seen success."

Blog-body connection

That motivation can be just as powerful, and perhaps even more important, for those who seek inspiration outside the gym. Twitter, Instagram and other social media allow online bloggers - who essentially function as free personal trainers for clients across the country - to keep up with followers who turn to them for health and fitness advice.

Cassey Ho, founder of the website Blogilates, says social media helps her followers feel as if they can connect with the California-based personal trainer.

"A lot of times they use that community as if they were like my clients, and so I'm really kind of like their personal trainer," Ho says.

Ho pointed to a recent partnership with the site "DietBet," a social dieting game. Users agree to submit a set amount of money, weigh in and agree to a 4 percent weight-loss goal. Those who meet it at the end of the month split the pot. Ho's followers lost more than 31,000 pounds.

"To get the word out, Twitter and Instagram were really big," Ho says.

Each month, Ho releases a calendar with daily [workouts](#). The calendars have their own hashtags, a symbol used to make topic searches easier on Twitter. Last month's calendar featured the tag #thisisMYJULY, created by Ho to connect community members. She says this allows followers to ask about exercise modifications or answer one another's questions when she's not available.

"Hashtags are big because it creates a sense of community and it's a great way for people to find each other," Ho says.

She also asks for check-ins to promote accountability. They might take the form of a "sweaty pic," a sort of social media self-portrait posted after a challenging routine, or a tweet of text rating the workout's intensity.

Followers often send her their own motivational quotes and pictures - phrases they like, before-and-after photos or pictures of her recipes they've tried at home.

Instagram, Ho says, is particularly good for promoting her "Cheap Clean Eats" recipes or sharing a healthy meal she's found at a restaurant. It also works for "transformation Tuesday" pictures of members who've lost weight or toned up by following her plans.

Ho says that, despite the focus on change, her social media posts aren't all about losing weight.

"A lot of these girls are just looking for inspiration to just live a better life," Ho says, "whatever that might mean for them."

NEED INSPIRATION?

Here are a few sites and feeds worth sampling:

www.blogilates.com

Twitter: @blogilates

Instagram: @blogilates

www.sparkpeople.com

www.toneitup.com

www.muffin-topless.com

sweat-sparkles.tumblr.com/

Gym Inspiration on Twitter:

@goldsgym

@24hourfitness

@equinox

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