

Group exercise improves quality of life, reduces stress far more than individual work outs

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Researchers found working out in a group lowers stress by 26 percent and significantly improves quality of life, while those who exercise individually put in more effort but experienced no significant changes in their stress level and a limited improvement to quality of life, according to a study published in *The Journal of the American Osteopathic Association*.

"The communal benefits of coming together with friends and colleagues, and doing something difficult, while encouraging one another, pays dividends beyond exercising alone," said Dayna Yorks, DO, lead researcher on this study. "The findings support the concept of a mental, physical and emotional approach to health that is necessary for student doctors and physicians."

Dr. Yorks and her fellow researchers at the University of New England College of Osteopathic Medicine recruited 69 medical students—a [group](#) known for high levels of stress and self-reported

low quality of life—and allowed them to self-select into a twelve-week [exercise](#) program, either within a group setting or as individuals. A [control group](#) abstained from exercise other than walking or biking as a means of transportation.

Every four weeks, participants completed a survey asking them to rate their levels of perceived stress and quality of life in three categories: mental, physical and emotional.

Those participating in group exercise spent 30 minutes at least once a week in CXWORX, a core strengthening and functional fitness training program. At the end of the twelve weeks, their mean monthly survey scores showed significant improvements in all three quality of life measures: mental (12.6 percent), physical (24.8 percent) and emotional (26 percent). They also reported a 26.2 percent reduction in perceived stress levels.

By comparison, individual fitness participants were allowed to maintain any exercise regimen they preferred, which could include activities like running and weight lifting, but they had to work out alone or with no more than two partners. On average the solitary exercisers worked out twice as long, and saw no significant changes in any measure, except in mental quality of life (11 percent increase). Similarly, the control group saw no significant changes in [quality of life](#) or perceived stress.

"Medical schools understand their programs are demanding and stressful. Given this data on the positive impact group fitness can have, schools should consider offering group fitness opportunities," said Dr. Yorks. "Giving students an outlet to help them manage [stress](#) and feel better mentally and physically can potentially alleviate some of the burnout and anxiety in the profession."

More information: *The Journal of the American Osteopathic Association*, [DOI: 10.7556/jaoa.2017.140](https://doi.org/10.7556/jaoa.2017.140)

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