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livingwellnesskc.com  
january | february 2014

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# GLOBAL FITNESS TRENDS in KC

Avoid the New Year's resolution fizzle with these hot, new and fun exercise trends offered throughout Kansas City.

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PHOTOS BY Rob & Jen Photography



As we embark on the New Year, many of us will re-commit to an exercise routine. We will start in January with a new activity, a gym membership and maybe even some personal training sessions. But, sadly, half of us will stop our activities by March. Americans cite lack of time as their number one excuse for abandoning a fitness regime, followed closely by convenience and lack of motivation.

The good news is the fitness industry is listening. The market is expanding to address the public's needs. Fitness professionals and the facilities in which they work are taking aim to help you find the time to exercise in a convenient and motivating environment. Fitness fads and trends are ever-changing, and often come to the Midwest after proving popular on the coasts or even across the world. The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) polls fitness professionals and gym owners in its annual 'Worldwide Survey of Fitness Trends.' Five worth mentioning have recently popped up in Kansas City and with so much diversity, you may find a new way to get and stay fit this year with one of the following trends.

## High intensity interval training (HIIT):

Ideal for those with limited time, HIIT promises fast, lasting results and has become wildly popular at local gyms. Sabrena Merrill, an education consultant with the American Council on Exercise, and CrossFit instructor at CrossFit Memorial Hill near downtown Kansas City,

has noticed a surge in the popularity of shorter duration, high intensity training.

"Overloaded schedules, work and family commitments make long-duration exercise sessions impractical for many people," she said. Daily life demands more from us than ever. In a world of instant gratification, participants are impatient with steady state workouts. "Time spent in the monotony of lengthy workout sessions is a well-documented turn-off for many people who want to get in better shape," Merrill continued.

Observe a typical gym and you may see people performing HIIT training on their own with a trainer or along with an INSANITY or P90X® video. "An example of HIIT on a stationary cycle is to work at an easy workload (i.e., 3 to 5 minutes at a light resistance), and then introduce high resistance and faster revolutions for intense, 30-second bouts. This pattern is repeated (i.e., five reps of 30-second intervals) for a total workout time of about 25 minutes," she said. "Another example of high-intensity, shorter-duration training includes the workout of the day (WOD) offered at most CrossFit gyms, which helps to explain CrossFit's recent surge in popularity." The benefits of HIIT are obvious: less time spent in the gym, fast results and scalable activities for any fitness level. As your fitness level adapts, you can gradually increase the




intensity. This type of training often requires little equipment, making it a convenient workout away from the gym.

## Fitness Professionals

As the fitness market expand, so does the need for qualified professionals. There continues to be exponential growth in educational programs focusing on the fitness profession at colleges and universities, ranging from associates to master's-level education. The U.S. Department of Labor predicts field growth of about 24 percent from 2010

to 2020 (<http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos296.htm>).

The opportunities to work in fitness are vast, with more educational outlets and more clients needing guidance than ever. But, buyers beware – not all trainers are created equal. Before purchasing sessions or signing the auto draft, be sure to research the qualifications of your trainer or instructor. Look for professionals with NCCA accredited certifications like ACSM, ACE, NASM or NSCA. There are currently 17 certifications that are accredited. This marker proves the professional has passed an exam that deems them competent in the standards of the field. Most of the above listed organizations have a directory of fitness professionals on their websites that you can search by zip code. It is also helpful to find professionals who have a degree related to fitness –



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but neither education nor certification will provide the guarantee that they will be a great trainer. As a prospective client, research the trainer's experience and ask for client testimonials or results.

Secondly: try before you buy. Most facilities will allow you to take a class or group session for free and trainers often have new client specials. Beware of marketing gimmicks, which might include limited time offers, the incredibly expensive trainer or the incredibly cheap trainer.

Lastly: understand your trainer's philosophy on fitness. Most professionals work best in a specific niche, so it is helpful to know what that niche is. No need to sign up with a body builder if you want to train for a triathlon. Investing in the help of a qualified fitness professional can provide the accountability, results and education to conquer your fitness goals.

## Group Training

Great for people wanting more bang for their buck, small niche-based fitness studios focusing on the group training experience

have hit the KC market in a big way.

"We started to hear a lot more about small group training in the fitness industry when the economic crisis started," says Jill Stoppel, owner of Excel Wellness Studio in Overland Park. "It's become popular for many reasons, but mainly it has been a way for clientele to continue their frequency of training at a lower cost while providing a way for trainers to increase their hourly income."

Another benefit of group training is the social atmosphere it provides. Small group personal training typically engages three to 10 people in a more intimate setting. This allows the personal trainer to provide individual attention, but still gives the group members the camaraderie of competition. Group members often hold each other accountable, and the social aspect of group work can help make the workout time more fun. They

bond over common goals and challenges. Entire studios are devoted to this type of training and big box gyms have adapted programs to fill this need.

Group training often focuses on total body training and requires the trainer to be able to adapt to multiple fitness levels. "Preparation is key – an experienced trainer should be able to modify anything and keep the flow when there are different fitness levels in the group to provide an appropriate challenge for all," says Stoppel. Group training may also be niche based, allowing you to dabble in other modes of fitness like Pilates, barre work or boxing.

## Yoga

The Kansas City yoga community is growing by leaps and bounds – or more specifically, poses and breaths. There are many styles and forms of yoga found in dozens of studios across the metro.

Yoga appeals to all ages, fitness levels and goals. Lindsey Cullen teaches Baptiste Power Vinyasa at Core Energy Yoga in Leawood. She is also an assistant manager at lululemon athletica in Leawood. She has enjoyed watching the yoga trend grow in our city.

"Yoga is like the cereal aisle. There is something for everyone, and if one style gets old you can mix it and try something new," she said. "Monday might be a restorative raisin bran and Thursday might be ginger almond granola power vinyasa."

## Popular yoga formats include:

**Ashtanga:** a rigorous practice centering on strength and breath sequence, generally focusing on the same sequence of poses.

**Bikram:** a demanding practice complete with a traditional series of 26 poses in a heated environment, building sweaty discipline, strength and stamina.

**Iyengar:** a meticulous style of yoga with utmost attention paid to finding the proper alignment. This is beneficial for those recovering from injury.





Christina Windsor performs aerial splits at Learning2Fly in Mission.

**Restorative:** uses bolsters, blankets and blocks to prop students in passive poses so that the body can experience the benefits of a pose without having to exert any effort. This is perfect for stress relief and physical recovery.

**Vinyasa:** the Sanskrit word for “flow.” Vinyasa classes are known for their fluid, movement-intensive practices. It is a dynamic practice often paired with lively music.

Recently, more mats have unrolled with a new hybrid – heated vinyasa yoga. This style involves practicing dynamic flows in an environment heated to around 95 degrees. Core Energy Yoga in Leawood and Radiant Yoga in Overland Park were some of the first to offer this style in KC.

Cullen started teaching at Core Energy about six months ago. “Participants can expect to find grace and glory in this style of yoga. Yes, the room is 95 degrees. Yes, you will sweat. Yes, you will be challenged. Yes, child’s pose and resting is always an option. Yes, you will feel good.” she said.

With so many options in town, there is a style of yoga for everyone. Cullen reflects, “no matter the style or teacher, you will discover something new about yourself to share with everyone around you.”


## Performing Arts Fitness

One new trend, not listed by the ACSM survey, but starting to pick up momentum in

Kansas City is fitness classes at performing arts schools. Many institutions such as circus arts academies and ballet schools offer conditioning classes to the general public.

Sabrena Merrill notes, “These classes are not just for performance-oriented students. People of all shapes, sizes, and fitness abilities can participate and enjoy great physical benefits at the same time.” Aerial fitness classes have recently received more attention in Kansas City. Participants can fly high suspended in silks, slings, trapeze, lyra (hoop), corde lisse (rope),





cloud swing or hammocks. These classes have gained momentum with the popularity of Cirque du Soleil-type performances.

Karen Marie Achucarro Choun, instructor of aerial fitness at Learning2Fly in Mission, attributes the increase of participants in this type of class to social media and social deal sites. Participants can expect a playful mix of yoga, pilates, dance and acrobatic methods. Benefits of this type of activity include: developing strength, exploring a larger range of motion and experiencing flight. Instructors will help you become secure with using the apparatus and provide cues to ensure safety. Finally, the focus of this type of fitness is fun. You may find yourself in positions you never imagined.

“Once people try aerial fitness, they are hooked. It provides the total body workout in a fun and supportive

environment. It doesn't get boring,” says Choun. Give your performance arts skills a go at the Kansas City Ballet School, Voler Aerial Arts, Quixotic or Learning2Fly, which all offer a range of different classes and levels.

Everywhere you look, the face of fitness is changing in the KC metro. As you enter the New Year, take advantage of the wide variety of fitness facilities in your area. Finding your fitness fit is like finding your personal style. It takes some trial and error to find something that works.

The general trend for the fitness industry is growth. Many more exciting things are on the horizon ranging from medical-based fitness to healthy happy hours and fitness parties. The fitness market will continue to ebb and flow to meet the needs and interests of the public.

To keep up with fitness news and trends as they happen in KC, follow Amber's blog at [LivingWellnessKC.com/blog/Along4fitness](http://LivingWellnessKC.com/blog/Along4fitness). She invites you along for her fitness journey as she explores gyms, studios and fitness professionals in the metro. She will report her experiences and make user recommendations starting in January 2014.

*Before starting any fitness regimen, consult with a physician.*

## TIPS TO MAINTAIN A FITNESS ROUTINE

1. Locate a place or an activity you enjoy and make it a priority.
2. Create a non-negotiable appointment with your gym, your trainer, your instructor and yourself.
3. Find a place that is convenient for you and you feel motivated to visit.

## TOP 10 FITNESS TRENDS FOR 2014

1. High Intensity Interval Training (HIIT)
2. Body Weight Training
3. Educated, Certified and Experienced Fitness Professionals
4. Strength Training
5. Exercise and Weight Loss
6. Personal Training
7. Fitness Programs for Older Adults
8. Functional Fitness
9. Group Personal Training
10. Yoga

*ACSM Worldwide Survey of Fitness Trends  
([acsm.org](http://acsm.org))*