

Re-Introduce Members to Pre-Set Workouts

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The newest cycles and ellipticals are so technologically advanced, they seem to do almost everything for the user except the actual exercise. They monitor heartbeat, hold water bottles, track speed and distance — some even charge users' iPods. But there is another feature that these machines offer that remains under-appreciated: pre-set cardio workouts.

Time-crunched members hop on their favorite cardio equipment and press Quick Start, sweat for 20 minutes then hop off. Unfortunately, they aren't getting the full benefit of the equipment, and often reach plateaus that their current workout regimen just can't break through. Instead of getting frustrated and giving up altogether, why not remind members of the equipment's pre-set workouts? "The pre-programmed workouts offer a variety of routines for any skill level," says Renee Marquis, fitness director at The Fitness Club, Champaign, Ill. "When switching up the programs, it prevents the member from hitting a plateau, and allows them to reach their fitness goals much quicker."

Pre-set programs work ...

Even when faced with a frustrating plateau, separating members from their favorite cardio machine can be difficult. Instead, take the time to explain its pre-set programs to help mix up workouts without throwing their routine out of whack. "[Pre-set programs] can be used to stimulate different energy systems, and continually administer the unaccustomed exercise stimulus needed for change," says Fitness Manager Jake Turner of Idaho Athletic Club – Blackeagle Club, Boise, Idaho. "They can offer a 'no-brainer' interval workout, challenging the body in a new way."

"There are two overall benefits of pre-set programs," adds Brad Wilkins, fitness director of The Cooper Fitness Center, Dallas, Texas. "The first is that they offer the user a variety of workouts with little inconvenience, meaning you just select your desired program and the program does the rest. The other benefit to pre-set programs is that they are goal-oriented by design, meaning the user will accomplish specific goals (e.g., time, heart rate, work levels) related to the program selected."

... So why don't more members use them?

"As with anything new, there is always a learning curve, so to have success with pre-set programs, members need to be persistent by using the machine and its pre-set programs regularly to get through the initial trial and error period," says Wilkins. "Once members get through this initial learning phase, they will then have the ability to release the program's true potential." Still, members' "lack of product knowledge" can, according to Wilkins, lengthen the learning process. "This is evident, as we see members struggle to get through the pre-set programs' step-by-step set-up process."

Wilkins explains: "Once a program is selected, the machine will ask for specific user information, such as weight, age, work level and time. The program asks these questions so that it can execute the program effectively based on the user's profile. A lot of the time, members will try to either bypass some of the questions, or they will enter inaccurate information to proceed through the set-up process faster to get the program started. Another common mistake occurs when members enter in their desired work level segment (speed, resistance level or heart rate zone), because the user typically doesn't know what level they should start with."

Thanks to this trial and error process, and resulting moments of confusion, there are some other common mistakes members make when selecting a pre-defined cardio program.

They work at the wrong intensity. Many times, members using pre-defined cardio programs are working "too hard or not hard enough," says Marquis. "Most people are truly working out at an intensity that is far less than 65 percent of their true maximum heart rate," agrees Turner. This can leave members feeling that the pre-set programs are either too easy or too difficult.

They expect fat-burning miracles. "In the mindset of the manufacturer, every program is true to its name because the manufacturer's intent is to design programs and select names that motivate people to use their product," says Wilkins. "Now, whether or not the program accomplishes the goal its name carries (e.g., Fat Burn, Mountain Climb) can be a different story. [S]o much is dependent on the user's ability to execute the program, along with their overall exercise routine/exercise prescription. What this means is that the equipment is just the vehicle, and that the user is responsible for its performance."

Still, "fat burn" is an alluring setting that, combined with insufficient education, can inspire unrealistic expectations. "It asks for your age and then tells you to hold on to the heart rate handles for dear life while the machine magically steals the fat from your body," says Turner. "What people don't know is that this machine is only using your age, and, therefore, age-predicted maximum heart rate, to keep you at a nice and cozy 60 to 65 percent of this predicted maximum." The combination of working at a low intensity level and expecting fat-loss miracles can frustrate members. It is for this reason, Turner says, "I hesitate to suggest the Fat Burn button to any new member without first knowing more about their goals, and health and exercise history. They can be customized by a fitness professional or experienced exerciser to elicit cardiorespiratory gains."

Help members take control

No matter what pre-set program members select, *they're* in control of their workout, not the machine. Still, many users don't realize that. They feel locked into a particular setting they entered at the beginning of a workout, no matter how they feel halfway through. "Even though the machine sets them up with a program based on their weight, age, sex and level of intensity, it is okay to alter it a little bit as far as the intensity goes," says Marquis. "Some days our bodies feel strong and we want to push ourselves to work hard, and other days we are tired or just not feeling our best and we need to have a lighter workout. Altering the pre-programmed workout can offer just as many benefits."

"We need to help people realize that they are ultimately in control of these options," Turner adds. "[And] that they are nothing more than a different way to challenge our energy systems and keep our bodies from adapting."

Staff solutions

There's no doubt that pre-set programs take practice to master. "There is a learning process that takes place, and it usually takes a member a couple of attempts to get the program set up right," Wilkins says. However, your facility can hasten this process by encouraging staff members to proactively educate members about the pre-set cardio programs. "The first thing to do is to make sure your frontline staff, those individuals who regularly interact with your members, understand how to use the machines," advises Wilkins. All staffers should be able to explain the benefits of each machine, its programs and how to set it up. "To aid in this process, we provide our staff with as much knowledge and information about the equipment in the facility as possible," Wilkins says. "For example, when new equipment for the facility is purchased, we will provide our staff with as much product knowledge and information that we feel is necessary to ensure a high level of competency. This may entail anything from providing them the product manuals to holding a staff meeting/continuing education session prior to installation."

Once your staff is trained, institute a policy of offering individualized orientations. "At our facility, we offer equipment orientations to all our members," says Marquis. "We encourage our new members to have one prior to their first workout." There is a similar program in effect at Cooper Fitness Center. "All of our new members, as part of our facility orientation and training processes, will receive specific instructions from a trainer on how to properly use the equipment," says Wilkins. If your fitness center invests in new equipment, don't assume members can figure out how to use it on their own. "Once new equipment is installed, we will provide extra staff at that location to educate the members on the benefits of the product, and instruct them on how to use it," says Wilkins.

After the initial training, staff members should remain ready to help members choose and run the pre-set programs. "Our staff is trained and encouraged to approach members regularly to develop positive relationships and assist them with their workouts, as needed," says Wilkins. The Fitness Center has "fitness consultants available for questions, and [who are] constantly walking around the cardio and strength areas offering recommendations," adds Marquis.

Pre-set programs are not simply excuses to put more buttons on equipment consoles; there is real value to these features. "Equipment manufacturers put a lot of thought and research into the programs that they select and design for their pieces of equipment," says Wilkins. "And, if you think about the amount of time, effort and money manufacturers spend on designing these programs, and naming them, it should be fairly obvious that they must feel there is intrinsic value that carries over to the consumer/user — because their end goal is to get people to like their product, use their product and buy their product."

Take the time to help members rediscover the simplicity and effectiveness of the pre-defined programs on your facility's cycles and ellipticals. They will get more from their workouts, and realize the full potential of your equipment, and themselves.

Purchasing Guide

Endorphin Corp.

800 940-9844; www.endorphin.net

Endorphin's 370 series of upper- and lower-body aerobic conditioning equipment employs independently operated resistance platforms for user flexibility. Features include upgradable modular technology; a height-adjustable upper module; and a semi-recumbent, 360-degree rotating seat that is removable to allow for wheelchair accessibility.

Espresso Fitness Corp.

888 528-8589; www.expressofitness.com

Interactive Cycling Systems brings virtual reality technology to indoor cycles. Riders select from dozens of road tours, rated basic to extreme. They use handlebars to steer and a shifter to change resistance. Workout data is displayed in real time. New tours, features and music are added automatically via the Internet. Members can compete against one another. With Espresso Services, riders can personalize their experience, gauge their progress and check their fitness results online.

Fitness Master Inc.

866 434-8639; www.fitnexusonline.com

The Aristo CR-1 recumbent cycle by FMI features a patent-pending swing-arm step-through design, providing easy access for users of all sizes. The arm-mounted console can be positioned directly in front of the user, or 45 degrees to the user's right, allowing for an unobstructed forward view. The Aristo CR-1 features seven programs, each with eight resistance levels.

FreeMotion Fitness

877 363-8449; www.freemotionfitness.com

FreeMotion recumbent and upright cycles are designed to enhance the user's workout and offer worry-free operation. The FreeMotion Cardio line features QuickTouch functions to easily change resistance and choose programs, with conveniently located water bottle and accessory holders. Each cycle offers the optional Workout TV console and a 12.1-inch flat panel LCD screen, which is integrated into the console, giving users their own entertainment options.

Keiser800 888-7009; www.keiser.com

The new M3 indoor cycle is made of corrosion-resistant materials. It has dual-placement handles, adjustable Shimano combo pedals, a four-way adjustable seat and gravity-based water bottle holder. Its resistance system doesn't wear and is virtually maintenance free. The optional computer system features RPM (revolutions per minute), power output displays in watts and kilo calories, Polar-compatible heart rate, pedaling time, gear and trip distance. The Keiser M3 has a smooth feel, a quiet ride, and is easy to use.

KHS Bicycles Inc.800 347-7854; www.khsbicycles.com

The newly redesigned Robix 3000B Studio Cycle is the latest upgrade to KHS' indoor cycle. It comes equipped with wide foot bases for stability, a single-unit brake and resistance ratcheting lever, an expandable, handlebar-mounted water bottle cage, and a lower step-through for easier mount and dismount. Additionally, Robix provides a quiet, smooth and comfortable ride with its automotive quality belt drive; a 440mm, 47-pound balanced flywheel; an ergonomic saddle; and tight-fitted handlebar and seatpost adjustments. Additional features include a durable, oversized cartridge bottom bracket with eight-spline spindle, dual-sided pedals and a new seat slider.

Matrix Fitness Systems866 693-4863; www.matrixfitness.com

The H5x Hybrid Cycle from Matrix represents the company's next generation of fitness cycle, featuring a step-through entry and 45-degree seat adjustment. The H5x is backed by Matrix's Customer Advantage Program, which includes a three-year warranty on parts and labor.

Med-Fit Systems Inc.973 593-9000; www.medfitsystems.com

The Lamar Stride Well is a seated, recumbent, quadrilateral elliptical with Easy Glide entry and exit, and an offset monitor mount, to allow easy access by older and rehabilitation patients. It has five-point stabilizing casters and adjustable rubber encapsulated arms and foot pads. The backlit LCD monitor is easy to read and offers numerous programs. The 5-volt transformer preserves exercise parameters so no minimum work output is required. The channel-lock seat features molded foam with built-in lumbar support. The Stride Well has integrated transport wheels, and a 350-pound capacity.

Motus USA866 668-8766; www.motususa.com

Founded in 1993, Motus USA is an ISO9001 specialty manufacturer of fitness equipment, including crosstrainer ellipticals and bikes. With more than 13 years of experience manufacturing commercial-grade equipment, Motus has formed an alliance with the National Sports Institute (NSI) to create a cooperative research and development program affording access to NSI's exercise and design studies. Motus has also partnered with Samsung for LCD screens, Mitsubishi for electric AC motors, and Hyundai for some electronic components.

Multisports Inc.800 877-0588; www.multisportsfitness.com

Multisports has manufactured commercial cardio equipment for nearly 20 years. Products include the Elliptix series of elliptical cross-trainers, as well as cycles. The company also provides a large selection of commercial group cycling bikes, including the Enduro-Cycle, with flywheels ranging in weight from 42 to 66 pounds.

Nautilus Inc.800 Nautilus; www.nautilus.com

The U916 and R916 exercise cycles are the newest addition to the Nautilus family of cardio products. The cordless recumbent R916 features a step-through design, blue-coded adjustment points, integrated water bottle holders and is pre-wired for the Nautilus NV915 15-inch LCD television system. Remote Operation Control (ROC) technology allows users to easily control their workout while in a reclined position, and the new seat slide uses linear bearings for adjustability and stability. The cordless upright U916 combines similar features with a new, ratcheting seat adjustment and ergo handlebars, which allow for multiple rider positions.

Octane Fitness888 OCTANE-4; www.octanefitness.com

The Pro4500 elliptical crosstrainer offers SmartStride interactive ergonomics and electronically adjustable stride length. SmartStride custom fits individuals by monitoring the exerciser's pace and direction, and adjusting stride length accordingly. Users can also change strides from 18 to 23 inches with the touch of a button, as well as take advantage of cross-training workouts and virtual coaching using X-Mode, GluteKicker and ArmBlaster. This unit includes Body-Mapping Ergonomics to replicate natural movement, the patented MultiGrip handlebars for variety and custom fit, and digital contact heart rate monitoring for feedback and motivation.

Quantum Fitness800 937-2282; www.quantumfitness.com

The Quantum Stride 210C elliptical features a compact design with a low step height. It is 44 inches in total length and offers a 21-inch stride length. Its mid-drive technology promotes core stability and balance while maintaining a smooth workout experience. The foot pedals are cushioned to reduce foot fatigue, and the upper-body arms are designed to fit the widest range of users and to reduce stress to the wrists. With more than 30 levels of resistance and a large custom display, the 210C is designed for a light commercial setting.

SportsArt Fitness800 709-1400; www.sportsartfitness.com

The new Xtreme Series recumbent cycles feature step-through access, adjustable seat back, one-touch pedal adjustment, multiple programming and contact heart rate. The 570 model features a tri-color dot matrix console. The 580 has a built-in 10.2-inch LCD screen, multiple source inputs and two headphone jacks. Both feature CardioAdvisor heart rate feedback. The Xtreme Series elliptical cross trainers feature an 18- to 29-inch user-controlled adjustable stride range. Multiple programming options include the new Vari-Stride. Footplates feature a two-stage cushioning system, and console choices include a tri-color dot matrix (E870) or integrated 10.2-inch LCD screen (E880).

Star Trac

800 228-6635; www.startrac.com

The E Series recumbent cycle has a walk-through design and arm rests. As part of a cardio entertainment line with iPod connectivity, the E Series recumbent allows users to watch video content on an integrated 15-inch personal viewing screen. Entertainment options are at users' fingertips in the dedicated media center, and a silver finish complements Star Trac's signature built-in fans and heart rate monitor. The USB port also charges personal media devices, including iPods, BlackBerry devices, MP3 players and cell phones.

Technogym USA

800 804-0952; www.technogymusa.com

The Excite Bike and Recline 700iE are driven by a unique flywheel and single stage poly V driving belt transmission system for a smooth ride that mimics the effect of road cycling. A wide resistance range of 30 to 500 watts accommodates deconditioned and high performance athletes. The Bioseat saddle has frontal support for a racing posture and a wide rear section. The Bioseat on the Recline offers proper spinal and pelvic support. Both the Excite Bike and Recline have dual hand sensors, Fast Track controls, iPod-compatible Wellness TV and six program options, and integrate with all Technogym Excite equipment.