



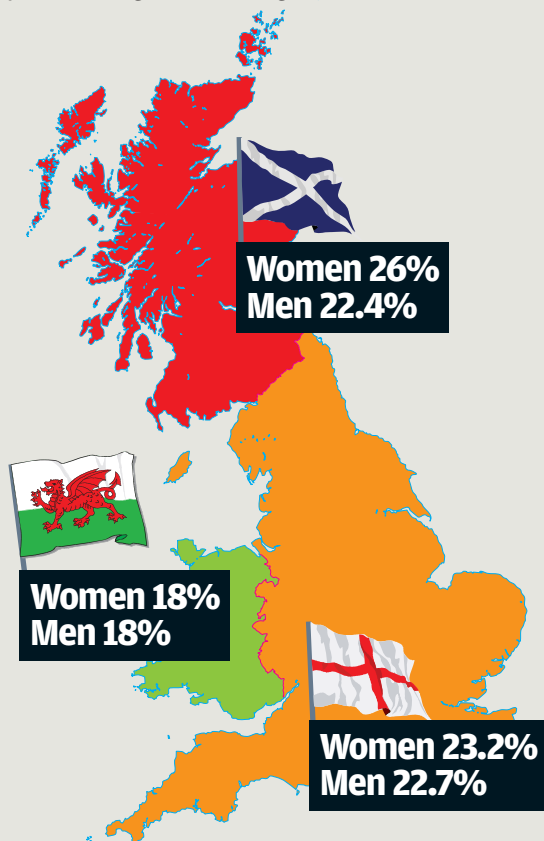
# Make fitness a fact not fiction

Do you promise to shape up every New Year but are putting on the pounds by Valentine's Day? We show you how to exercise easily during your daily routine and what type of gym to choose if you want to go that extra mile



## STATE OF THE NATION

The latest government figures – on the percentages of men and women who are obese – show the problem is significant throughout the UK



People are considered obese if they have a body mass index of 30+ (weight in kilograms divided by the square of their height in metres), or if their waist is at least 40 inches for men or 35 inches for women.

The most recent figures from Northern Ireland date from 1997, so we have not included them here. At that time, 17 per cent of women and 20 of men were classed as obese.

Data for adults aged 16 and over.

**'S**ome of my joints are hurting a bit but that's because I'm doing about three times as much as I would otherwise. If it had been spread out over a longer period of time, it would have been great. But I can now run up a floor without being out of breath.'

David Ainsworth is in his 50s and, before taking up our challenge to get fitter, he was like a third of men – not doing enough exercise to protect himself from heart disease, diabetes and some cancers.

Our ever-increasing sedentary lifestyles mean the nation is getting fatter and sicker, as the map, left, highlights. And it's estimated that by 2010, 33 per cent of men and 28 per cent of women in England will be obese. Even more worryingly, 22 per cent of girls and 19 per cent of boys aged between two and 15 will be obese by then.

## FITNESS CHALLENGE

To see how easy it is to increase fitness, we challenged two typical families to fit more exercise into their busy lives.

David and his wife Jill, as well as Karen and Michael Toth and their two children, agreed to write down the amount of exercise they did every day for a week. We gave their diaries to obesity specialist Dr Ian Campbell and fitness expert Joanna Hall. See how they got on opposite and overleaf.

## EXERCISE DEMISE

Our car may be our best friend, but it's also our worst enemy. It might get us from A to B as fast as possible, but it's contributing to our sedentary lifestyle and the health problems that come with it.

Following his report on physical activity and health for the Chief Medical Officer for England, Professor Sir Liam Donaldson, scientific editor Professor Ken Fox told us: 'We aren't doing less sport and we're actually going to the gym a little more but activity in our every day lives is done for us. In the home, at work and when shopping, everything is energy-reduced.'

He recommends building in 'lifestyle activity' to daily schedules. This might include brisk walking for a total of 30 minutes, which can be broken down into shorter separate spurts.

Our fitness guide (p26) should help you achieve a 30-minute exercise goal. There's also advice on children, who should be active for 60 minutes each day.

Both of our families found their activities challenging at first but are now well on their way to getting fitter.

You may want to join a gym for more intense or extra exercise. Our advice on this is also overleaf.



## THE FITNESS CHALLENGE: MAKING EXERCISE FUN FOR ALL THE FAMILY

**Karen and Michael**

**Toth** 40s, teaching assistant and general store manager

Karen and Michael have two children: Katy, nine, and six-year-old Amy.

Michael walks while at work and plays golf but is inactive at home. Karen runs around after the children and feels like a permanent taxi driver.

Our experts recommended several activities, including walking to school, family bike rides and swimming.

The family was also encouraged to use pedometers – while adults should take 10,000 steps a day, kids need about 15,000. The girls enjoyed trying to beat their parents.

As school is far from home, mum and the children travelled by car part way and walked the rest. Karen says: 'We enjoyed walking part way to school and we'll continue with that. It gave the girls and me a chance to talk. For the first couple of days I was quite out of breath, and even the kids were a bit red in the face, but after a week we weren't out of breath and were springing along.'

But cycling was more difficult, as Amy, who uses stabilisers, felt frustrated about not keeping up. Ian Campbell says: 'Family cycle rides will get easier as Amy progresses away from her stabilisers. There are trail-a-bikes on the

market – which attach a child's bike to an adult one – that may be worth investigating.'

Karen was also concerned about trying swimming, as she is scared of water and Amy cannot swim.

But she tells us: 'It's made me think about learning to swim and getting the younger one to swim. Even if we can't do it now, maybe we can in the future.'

Michael likes to spend his spare time on the golf course. Ian says: 'As the girls get older golf could become a family activity.' Joanna Hall says: 'Perhaps there is a park near the course where the children can play – or possibly go on a nature walk. Going together will help support each other in their actions and perhaps Michael can join in games with his children in the park afterwards.'

Karen was encouraged to take up exercise classes in her spare time. She says: 'I've looked at joining a class but with work and the kids it's not feasible yet – maybe in the future. It has made us think we need to do more, but it's something we need to build up, as the experts said. We will try.'

Joanna says: 'I am pleased with their progress. It is important to raise awareness of what is realistic to do and reassess priorities.'



School is a to get fitter



Dad's exercise routine can involve golf greens



Dance classes are a fun way for kids to get fit.



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We've looked at major gym chains to see what they have to offer

# Keep fit whatever your age, wherever you are

There are many easy ways to exercise at work, at home and during your leisure time

- Always keep moving and reward yourself for achievement (preferably not with chocolate or alcohol).
- Pace the room while you're thinking or on the phone, visit the loo that is furthest away at work and take

- regular breaks from your computer.
- Walk briskly when you can – fast enough to be slightly out of breath but able to talk. As walking is weight bearing, it helps maintain healthy bones and prevent osteoporosis,

- so consider joining a walking club.
- For everyone, including children, active travel is a great way to incorporate activity into daily life, so use your legs instead of taking your car whenever possible.

**0-10** Young kids are naturally active in bursts of play throughout the day – during school breaks, in PE and walking home. Your children should experience a variety of activities to ensure they have healthy hearts, lungs and bones.

**11+** The urge to run around diminishes and adult-like activity patterns begin. Teenagers should be walking to and from school, taking part in sports and doing a paper round, for example. Bones grow until age 21, so it's vital to get lots of high-impact

weight-bearing exercise, from tennis to trampolining.

**20s** It's time to work and play hard before most of us have children. Return to or take up an activity as a way of socialising, such as dance classes, a football club or mountain biking – or get a group together and train for a marathon.

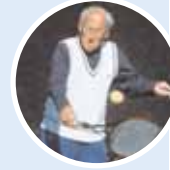
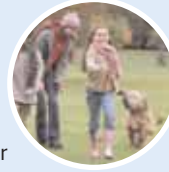
**30s** Small children can take over adult lives. Do what you can when you can – walk the baby in the buggy, get a child seat for your bike, find activities with a crèche or book a babysitter once a week and go out dancing.

**40s** Children can join in. Take the dog for a walk – even if you don't have one, still walk. Go on a family bike ride or a long walk every weekend and consider family swimming trips. Take up a sport, such as tennis, as a group.

**50s** After your kids leave, return to a social life by taking up golf, dance classes or hill walking. Try more vigorous sports like squash, but get a health MOT with a GP as you're not 16 anymore.

**60s** In the prime of life, with a bit more leisure time, you can make over the garden or house, join community gardening groups or discover the countryside through rambling.

**70s** Time to slow down? Not totally. Activity keeps up muscle and bone strength. Twice a week do weight-bearing exercise, such as tennis or walking – nothing should be ruled out if you want to do it, provided you have that MOT regularly.



## Should you plump for the gym?

Exercising at a gym can be convenient – nearly five million of us are signed up to one.

With annual fees ranging from £300 to £1,800, it's important to choose the right facilities for your routine and exercise wishes, and your pocket.

We've looked at the major players to see what they have to offer.

PRIVATE GYM CHAINS				
<b>Number of branches in the UK</b>	59	54	52 (not Northern Ireland)	24 – due to rise to 71 in 2007 (not Northern Ireland)
<b>Type (see 'Checklist', p27)</b>	Premium	Premium	Mid-range	Fewer frills and mid-range
<b>Annual peak membership (range depending on facilities and location)</b>	£480 to £1,200	£540 to £1,788	£913	£290 to £950
<b>Joining fee</b>	£25 to £100	£40	£25	£40
<b>Minimum contract period</b>	3 months	12 months	3 or 12 months	1 month
<b>Cancellation period</b>	3 months	3 months	1 month	Written notice by 17th day of month before cancellation takes effect
<b>Worth knowing</b>	You can use any club after three months. Around three quarters of clubs have indoor tennis courts but you can opt for cheaper membership by excluding tennis	Nineteen racquet clubs specialise in tennis. Although membership lets you use any club, you have to pay an extra half-price day membership for seven branches in the chain	Membership is cheaper for off-peak and single-club use, as well as for those who are over 50	There are plans to incorporate 48 Holmes Place clubs into Virgin Active chain during 2007. Cheaper off-peak and over-55s memberships are available
<b>Contacts</b>	0870 888 3015 www.davidlloydleisure.co.uk	0800 389 1411 www.esporta.com	020 8336 2288 www.cannons.co.uk	0845 130 4747 www.virginactive.co.uk



## THE FITNESS CHALLENGE: FITTING IT ALL IN TO A BUSY WORK SCHEDULE

**David and Jill Ainsworth** 50s, *chemical engineer and special educational needs manager*

David and Jill's activity levels were very low, so we challenged them to measure the steps they were taking each day with a pedometer.

As adults, they should do around 10,000 steps each day – equal to normal activities plus a half-hour brisk walk.

For David, who sits down for most of the working day, reaching 10,000 steps required creative thinking...and our experts' help.

Joanna Hall showed the couple their optimum walking pace for health benefits – as quickly as they can without jogging, but then slowing down slightly. She also told them how their

daily routines could accommodate exercise. So, David explains: 'I work in a very big building. I have taken it upon myself never to visit the nearest coffee machine or toilet. If I'm in a meeting with a client, we'll walk outside for our discussions.'

The Ainsworths also focused on increasing their number of walks. David moved from 3,200 steps to more than 10,000 a day by the end of week two.

While Jill regularly went more than 7,000 steps, she was shocked to read a total of just 320 on a day she attended a course.

'We did enjoy it,' Jill says. 'It made me realise how little I was doing to keep fit.'

'I had stopped doing all the little things I was doing before [the children left home].'

## Checklist

**What to ask before signing up to a gym contract**

■ **What sort of club am I after?** Note that facilities vary, even between branches of the same chain.

**Premium clubs** These offer the widest range of facilities. They're more likely to have tennis and other racquet sports, as well as pools, saunas and spas.

**Fewer frills** We think these are suitable if you want to fit gym visits or classes in with work. Chains offer key facilities at competitive prices and have more city-centre locations.

**Mid-range clubs** These tend to have a good range of facilities but not as many convenient branches.



■ **What facilities do I really need?** Make sure you take a tour around a prospective gym. Think about how and when you'll use it. Don't be persuaded by luxuries such as saunas if really you'll spend most of your time on the running machines or exercise bikes.

■ **Where should I exercise?** Choosing a gym close to work can save money if your employer has special deals with a particular gym chain.

■ **How committed am I going to be?** If you aren't sure, look out for a month-by-month contract or use the gym at your council leisure centre on a pay-per-session basis.

■ **Is that the best price?** Try haggling for a cheaper deal and keep an eye out for special offers. You'll pay less for membership at off-peak times or at a single branch.

■ **What's the small print?** Make sure you read the terms and conditions of a contract carefully. Double check the minimum contract length and whether any penalties apply if you want to cancel earlier – the notice period rules can be strict.

		COUNCIL LEISURE CENTRES	
155, plus 10 Fitness First Express and 12 Fitness First for women	88	<b>Branches</b>	Check out what's in your area. Local authority facilities vary but some offer a wide range
Fewer frills	Fewer frills		
£408 to £612	£396 to £720 (excluding South Kensington branch)	<b>Cost per visit</b>	Typically around £3 to £5 a visit
£30	£25 to £30	<b>Induction fees</b>	Often the same cost as a session but can be higher
3 or 12 months	12 months	<b>Minimum contract period</b>	You can pay per visit, so you can see if a regular gym is for you without getting tied into a contract
1 month subject to contract minimum length	1 month		
There are lots of branches in this chain but more limited facilities available. It's cheaper with a 12-month contract and off-peak or single-club memberships	It doesn't offer tennis, but for a fewer-frills chain a lot of facilities are available. Single-club and off-peak memberships are cheaper	<b>Worth knowing</b>	Many councils have schemes that give discounted rates to local residents, which are greater if you're eligible for concessions. You may have to pay a few pounds to register, but often the discounts apply to swimming, classes and other sports facilities.
0870 898 8080 www.fitnessfirst.co.uk	0870 891 8080 www.lafitness.co.uk		