

Virtual workouts for fitness freaks in the time of Covid-19 lockdown



Pilates can be done anywhere, anytime and all you need is a mat and your own body, that is it, says expert Namrata Purohit

The 21-day lockdown isn't a gag order on exercise and you have a plethora of apps and websites out there on which physical trainers offer virtual classes. Instagram is abuzz with workout videos by Bollywood celebrities such as Katrina Kaif, Jacqueline Fernandez and Shilpa Shetty Kundra who say they want to motivate their fans to focus on health while staying at home. Recently PM Narendra Modi also shared his videos performing yoga, "During yesterday's #MannKiBaat, someone asked me about my routine during this time. Hence, thought of sharing these videos," he tweeted.

This is time to make the most of limited resources in the space. "All you need is a mat and you're good to go," says celebrity Pilates expert Namrata Purohit, who has been offering a lot of training sessions online. Pilates can be done anytime, anywhere, especially basic exercises such as hip rolls, ab preps, obliques and side leg raises.

"Pilates can be extremely challenging, as it demands the engagement of your entire body and works on stability, strength, flexibility, balance, and all the deeper muscles of the body as well. But if done properly, it can be very effective," says Purohit.

Zumba is a fitness form that is performed only in groups. Currently, this too has gone virtual. Sucheta Pal, who brought Zumba Fitness LLC to India, talks about an all-new virtual teaching tool that has been launched for licensed instructors. She says, "ZIN Studio is designed to help our instructors easily stream classes, schedule in advance and collect payments so they can keep inspiring, motivating, and leading their students."

For now, instructors are using Zoom, Dacast and Google Meet-up to conduct closed classes priced at about Rs 300-500 per session. "We are seeing a very good response during this time when everyone is holed in and want to simply move," says Sucheta Pal.

Dance-based fitness programmes are a bit tougher to follow virtually than strength and fitness training, as you may end up missing the beat and a few steps here and there, believes South Delhi-based personal trainer Dharmender Singh. He is happy giving personal training to his clients through Zoom. "All of my clients have been associated with me for the past ten years and are aged between 10 and 65 years," he says.

Singh charges Rs 1,000-2,000 per 50-minute session, and saves on commute time too. He is thrilled to have found a tech tool for the long-term and says, "Earlier I'd refrain from travelling as it would disturb my class schedules, as I charge in advance from my clients. However, in future I may be able to travel a lot more easily and take classes online from wherever I am. Likewise, if my clients travel, they can still be regular with classes." On the flipside, Singh says it's stressful to look at the screen all the time. Quite often, he has to shout out aloud so that his clients can hear what he has to say.

Accessibility

Most live classes can be accessed on mobile devices and laptops, and one can also stream the session on desktop and mirror it on the TV screen. All one needs is a good internet connection and a charged phone. In certain apps, you can even get real-time feedback on your workout.

One such is Cult.live, a group fitness class streamed through the app. Says a Cult.live spokesperson: "Our energy meter feature will help track your effort during the workout in real-time with a simple camera access. You can even get a detailed report in terms of total workout duration, your effort report, energy score as well as your rank in class." Currently, the service offers live classes across fitness formats like strength, cardio, HRX, S&C (Strength and Conditioning), dance fitness and on all seven days of the week.

The pitfalls

Not everyone thinks virtual is the best format, though. Delhi-based marathon runner, Sivaleela Yaragorla, says when she runs, she "feels alive". She says though the live sessions have a well-structured schedule in which a 50-minute workout is divided into

13 minutes of warming up, 25 minutes of main workout, five minutes of core exercises and seven minutes of cool down, "the energy of a real class can simply not be replicated". Besides, the instructor cannot rectify your mistakes and it takes a lot of self-discipline and motivation, apart from punctuality to do a virtual workout well.

What's new

In the meantime, many technology-based health fitness companies have been launching a slew of initiatives to help people adopt a healthy lifestyle at home and improve their immunity. HealthifyMe has launched immunity assessment tests, diet consultations and home workouts for free. It hosts daily live fitness sessions by premium coaches within the app, available to all users for free. Says Tushar Vashisht, CEO, HealthifyMe: "It takes 21 days to build a habit. We want people to use the lockdown to build healthier habits and improve their immunity and so we have launched the biggest ever upgrade to our app with several new features centred around balanced diets, exercising at home, sanitising hands and sleeping better." HealthifyMe has trained its AI-coach Ria to answer complex questions based on immunity and viral infections.

There are exercise apps for children as well. According to Sujit Panigrahi, CEO at Sequoia Fitness and Sports Technology Pvt. Ltd and founder of Fitness 365, "There are a few things that we are doing at Fitness365 to engage school students from home using free hand exercises, yoga, weight training, rope skipping." Currently his company is working with Fit India to create modules of virtual workout for students through CBSE which will be streamed once online classes start. He says rather than recommending lounges, push-ups and a very structured conventional work out, kids must actively get involved in chores such as sharpening pencils, folding clothes, polishing shoes- these simple things can be far more effective. Other things could be zig-zag running, obstacle courses, using old bottles for bowling and dining table being used for table tennis.

Food is integral to the fitness plan. Partap Chauhan, Director, Jiva Ayurveda advises choosing Vata-pacifying diets, "A rule of thumb for choosing Vata-pacifying diets is to pick moist, juicy, warm, sweet and sour food items over pungent, bitter or astringent ones. Avoid deep fried, dry or very spicy items," he says. "It is time to ditch your regular tea, and sip on a stress-busting Ayurvedic Teas such as tulsi and ginger."

is no longer a lifestyle fad, it's a necessity. "Fix thirty minutes every morning for Yoga," says Chauhan. "Pick a calm spot in your home, like your balcony, or near an open window, and practice Padmasana to bring your mind to a state of composed calmness in the morning itself."

What virtual workouts would cost you

While there are websites that stream generic exercise videos for free, fitness experts give specific training to individuals or groups, and keep changing the workout according to their clients' fitness level. They charge according to the number of people being trained, their own professional experience, their number of certifications and other factors.