



International Health, Racquet & Sportsclub Association

Health Clubs are Essential

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Physical activity saves lives and protects health. Health and wellness have never been more essential to our country as they are at this **very** moment.

As operators of health and fitness facilities, we value above all else the health and wellbeing of our millions of members (and staff) who visit the tens of thousands of gyms, clubs and studios operating across the 50 states.

Why Exercise

Exercise helps improve [immunity](#), and helps combat obesity, a [huge factor](#) in getting and suffering from COVID-19. Exercise also improves our [mental](#) and [physical health](#).

A lifestyle that incorporates exercise improves longevity, stress management, energy, mental focus, mood, and a host of health markers, plus greatly contributes to strengthening the immune system. In addition, muscular strength, bone/structural strength, flexibility, cardiovascular health, and aerobic conditioning are also improved.

For many, a fitness lifestyle is key to health and happiness, and is the first line of defense against sickness and injury. Robert Sallis, M.D. says "[Gyms Can Help Prevent COVID-19 & Lessen Its Impact](#)." Greg Degnan, M.D. says "[Health Clubs Are Valuable, Policymakers Need to Make Changes](#)." Lori Deemer, M.D. says "[Lockdowns Cause Severe Mental & Physical Health Consequences](#)."

Exercise strengthens Immunity

Evidence shows that physically active lifestyles can improve immune system health and diminish the risk of contracting some communicable diseases, including upper respiratory tract infections. Health and fitness clubs, through the promotion of mental and physical health, are an integral part of the solution to returning citizens to a state of good health.

Without a vaccine or proven medication, our own immune system is the best defense we have. Healthier people – even if infected – are less likely to require hospital care, easing pressures on our health care systems.

Health and fitness clubs play a vital role in this by helping members improve their physical and mental wellness and reduce key risk factors.

Several studies link physical activity to improvements in immune markers and immune health. An extensive review published in the Journal of Sport and Health Science outlined how acute bouts of exercise—less than 60 minutes—enhanced the circulation of immunoglobins, natural killer (NK) cells, T cells, and other immune cells that play critical roles in the body’s defense against pathogens, and can help reduce inflammation.

Physical activity can also have a more indirect, positive effect on immune function by mitigating stress. Research out of Carnegie Mellon found that people with higher levels of psychological stress were more susceptible to the common cold.

Moderate exercise has been shown time and again to help immune systems. Data shows that obesity increases the likelihood of hospitalization with a COVID-19 infection six-fold.

Mental and Emotional Health

In addition to the immune system benefit, stress can have an obvious negative effect on mental health and wellbeing. A study published in Frontiers in Physiology showed that regular exercise could create greater emotional resilience to acute, short term stress in healthy people. Respondents to an American Psychological Association “Stress in America” survey reported positive effects of exercise, including: better mood, feeling good about themselves, and feeling less stressed.

The Dangers of Inactivity brought on by Mandated Closures

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has [an entire resource page](#) warning of the "high health and financial costs" that come with not getting enough physical activity.

In the COVID-19 era, physical activity levels have [declined sharply](#), which by itself is alarming, but made even more so by the fact that obesity-related conditions [worsen the effects of COVID-19](#). Data from [world-leading health organizations](#) cites that individuals with obesity, diabetes, hypertension and other conditions are at significantly increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19.

In addition to this, the effects of this lockdown have been disastrous on drug and alcohol abuse, [mental health](#), [stress](#), and [depression](#), all serious afflictions mitigated by regular exercise and the health club community.

Why Health Clubs are Essential

America's health and fitness clubs play a central and essential role in the promotion and maintenance of mental, physical, and social health and well-being. Health clubs are an integral part of the solution to returning America's citizens to a state of good health.

While many consumers can and should get their recommended daily exercise in a variety of ways and places, nothing replaces the neighborhood gym or family health club for millions of exercisers.

Why not exercise outside?

Outdoor exercise does not work for everyone. Outdoor exercise can be a great option for some, but not if extreme weather, dark alleys, wildfires, lack of access to parks or even side walks are at hand.

Outdoor exercise also assumes the exerciser has the knowledge, fitness level and motivation to be able to exercise safely and effectively on their own.

What about at-home workouts, whether equipment-based or streaming options?

At home or streaming options can be great for those who have the space, financial ability, knowledge and motivation to work out at home.

While it might be a promising trend that people are buying more home workout equipment, not everybody can afford a \$2,000 Peloton. Most people, however, can afford to pay \$10 a month to belong to a low-cost club like Planet Fitness. Besides being affordable and accessible, health clubs have proven to help people maintain their exercise regimen and stay healthier. Compare this with the fate of most home equipment, which frequently ends up becoming a laundry stand before becoming a featured item in garage sales.

And now that the world has had to endure 6+ months of only streaming fitness classes as an option, the feedback is that streaming exercise is just about as unproductive as streaming classrooms for elementary school kids - as in not at all.

For many, exercising at home isn't feasible due to location or finances, or [isn't safe](#) without in-person instruction and guidance.

Health clubs offer a qualified staff, and a far greater variety of equipment, programming, and services, which is important for overall physical fitness. It's doubtful an app, bike,

treadmill or mirror with streaming classes, or even the best-equipped home gym can compete with all the choices and variety a club provides.

According to worldwide fitness tracker [data](#), **physical activity has decreased substantially** since the pandemic began – pointing out that the outdoors and streaming options have not and will not fill the disastrous void left by closed (either temporarily or permanently) clubs.

Clubs are More than just a Place to Exercise

The many other services a club provides

The corner gym or family club might also be where you take your kids to learn to swim, where your teenagers goes to improve at their selected sport, or where busy parents can workout for an hour because child care is provided.

Places of Community and Connection

Health clubs are not only places to exercise but places of community and connection. The reasons people visit their club, gym or boutique studio are about so much more than equipment and a good workout. Clubs provide a stimulating and motivating environment. There's the social aspect of a club, whether that club caters to families, millennials or seniors. The camaraderie of being with your tribe (which is why boutiques are the fastest-growing segment of the market) would be hard to replicate via even the best piece of home equipment.

That's why [more than 70 million Americans](#) choose to get their fitness from health clubs and fitness studios. The social support of group exercise and the guidance of professional trainers have proven to be important in keeping people engaged in their exercise habit. [Research](#) backs this up.

Vital Contributors to the Economy

Pre COVID-19, the United States had over 40,000 thriving health and fitness clubs that were generating over \$35 billion in annual revenue. These clubs employed over 3 million people, full and part-time. Health clubs and gyms are critical anchor tenants to shopping centers, large and small. By playing an essential role in the promotion and maintenance of mental and physical wellbeing, health clubs keep U.S. healthcare costs down.