

Baby can be part of mom's workout

By: **CRISSA SHOEMAKER DEBREE** (Sun, Mar/18/2007)

Strollers make great exercise machines, and babies are just the right size for weights.

Just ask the moms enrolled in Tina Yedman's Baby Boot Camp, an exercise class that makes moms fit as they bond with their children.

"It's fun to work out with him and meet new moms," Jane Bonargo of Warrington said as she changed 4-month-old Nicklaus following a strenuous workout that included stroller racing and baby arm lifts.

"He loves it. It's a nice mommy-baby time."

Organizers of mom-and-baby fitness classes said they can't start new classes fast enough. The three main franchises — Baby Boot Camp, Stroller Strides and StrollerFit — are opening about a half-dozen new franchises every month.

Baby Boot Camp founder Kristen Horler said the fitness program fulfills "the need for women to have access to an effective and safe fitness program that also met their logistical needs of having a child who needs to be with their mother.

"Most first-time moms and new moms don't have a baby sitter or feel comfortable leaving their child with someone else," Horler said.

Richard Cotton, an exercise physiologist and spokesman for the American Council on Exercise, said stroller exercise classes are here to stay.

"It's a way for new moms to get together, and instead of sitting around talking about their challenges, they also get to exercise at the same time," he said. "It's a double benefit."

Moms in stroller exercise classes are encouraged to interact with their infants as they exercise, holding them on their stomachs while they do crunches, or laying them on the floor and teasing them as they do push-ups. Even young children are welcome.

One class costs about \$15, but the price goes down if mothers make monthly commitments.

Tricia Perez held her first One Fit Mama stroller exercise class for mothers in her church, Holy Martyrs in Oreland. She now has classes throughout Bucks, Montgomery, Philadelphia and Delaware counties. Bucks classes are held at the

Oxford Valley Mall in Middletown and, weather permitting, Peace Valley Park in New Britain Township.

Perez, who was the athletic trainer for Temple University's women's basketball team, said she wanted to go back to work after her son, Caleb, was born two years ago. But it didn't work out — and neither, she said, did she.

"I was having a hard time getting back to the gym," she said. "I needed to come up with a better plan for my family and my career."

Yedman, a personal trainer from Bristol Township, is the Lower Bucks district coordinator for Baby Boot Camp. She signed on a few years ago, excited about the opportunity to help mothers like herself get healthier.

"They don't want to take their child to a daycare at the gym," said Yedman, whose son Philip is now 7. "And they want to instill healthy habits in their children."

Baby Boot Camp has classes throughout Lower Bucks, including ones at the Neshaminy Mall in Bensalem and My Gym in Middletown. Yedman said classes are so in demand she needs more instructors.

"They're growing by the minute," she said.

Beth Moran of Upper Southampton said she enjoyed meeting other mothers while working out with 6-month-old daughter Emily.

"It's so hard to find something you can do with your baby," she said.

Three-year-old Ray McGrath of Bristol Township loved running around as his mother, Heather, and baby brother Ryan exercised together during a Baby Boot Camp class at the Sports Zone in Upper Southampton.

"I think it's a great idea," Heather McGrath said. "I wouldn't be able to do anything like this with the two kids."

On the Web

- <http://www.onefitmama.com/>

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