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P.O. Box 1676

Frisco, Texas 75034

Phone: 972.335.1181

Toll Free: 877.781.7067

Fax: 214.722.2313

E-mail: [info@friscostyle.com](mailto:info@friscostyle.com)

Web: [www.friscostyle.com](http://www.friscostyle.com)

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*Christi Tracy and Kelli Davis  
of the Yoga Room of McKinney  
photo by Chris Fritchie*

By Susan Mardele

# UNUSUAL FITNESS

## Take the WORK Out of Working Out

THERE'S NOT MUCH argument today that physical activity is important for well being. Regular exercise can improve mood, help manage weight and combat chronic diseases like osteoporosis, high blood pressure, cholesterol, heart disease and diabetes. But exercise can seem like the task of Sisyphus: rolling a boulder uphill every day, having it roll down in the evening and pushing it back up again the next day.

Fortunately for Frisco families, fitness doesn't have to be a chore. From mild to wild, Frisco offers interesting, exciting and unusual ways to become or stay fit, meet new people and have fun along the way. Fun. Friends. Thrills and chills. These are the things that make exercise not a chore but a way of life and keep us willingly coming back for more.





Tai Chi at the Senior Center

photo by Chris Fritchie

### THE MIND-BODY CONNECTION

Most of us spend our days juggling children, spouse, work, extended family and social obligations. When there is just a little time for exercise, it has to pay off big time. Activities like yoga and tai chi not only offer physical benefits, but can promote relaxation and relieve stress as well.

Joyce Chew is a yoga instructor at 24 Hour Fitness in Frisco. She teaches fitness-based yoga to all ages, combining several styles for maximum benefits. While the yoga is designed with physical fitness in mind, students reap much greater benefits. “The first thing people tell me is that they have a feeling of calm and centeredness,” says Ms. Chew. “Not just internally, but externally as well. You feel physically relaxed because your muscles are stretched and you have been breathing deeply to oxygenate all your muscles and cells.”

Athletes often cross-train with yoga. “A lot of bicycle riders come in because the added flexibility helps them prevent injuries,” says Ms. Chew. “When you’re doing one sport all the time, your muscles tighten and memorize one way of doing something. Yoga helps open up your body so it is strong and more flexible. Our bodies are meant to move in different positions, not just do one thing all the time.”

The added activity of yoga can aid in losing weight by burning more calories, but students notice a sense of awareness that also helps. “You’re sitting in front of the TV and you’re mindlessly munching,” says Ms. Chew. “Yoga teaches you a sense of awareness. Then you can listen to your body and it will tell you, ‘Yeah, I’m kind of full and I don’t need that third or fourth cookie.’ It helps you take a step back. It is a good thing for people to get away from the stress and just be mindful

about what they are doing.”

Tai chi is a series of slow movements, each flowing into the other, that connect the mind and body. It is noncompetitive, self-paced and easy regardless of age or physical ability. Tai chi practice starts out on a physical level as the student learns coordination, posture and alignment, but moves beyond. Regular practice can reduce stress; increase flexibility; improve muscle strength and definition; increase energy; enhance stamina and agility; and heighten feelings of well being.

Chris and Fayne Bouguyon of Simply Aware teach tai chi at the Senior Center at Frisco Square. Mr. Bouguyon says, “I look at tai chi as a choreographed dance between the body, mind and heart. All have to come into play. We talk a lot about smiling energy in class because it is so important to the healing process. Just being in a happy or smiling place increases

circulation, opens up the vascular system and releases hormones that help relax the muscles.”

Many students in the classes the Bouguynons teach in Frisco suffer from degenerative diseases like arthritis, MS, Parkinson’s dementia and Alzheimer’s. They often hold their breath because they are distracted by pain. The movements of tai chi bring awareness of posture, alignment and breath, and the awareness brings the ability to effect change. “Fall prevention is a significant part of our work,” says Mr. Bouguynons. “My oldest student is 97, and I have people who have significant balance challenges. They

use tai chi to move slowly, carefully and gently and get their strength and confidence back so they don’t fall.”

Tai chi is not only for seniors or those suffering from maladies. “I’ve been studying martial arts for 30 years,” says Mr. Bouguynons. “I only got into tai chi 14 years ago. I wish I had gotten into it when I was 12. If I had known the principles then, it would have helped me protect my body. I’m now dealing with arthritis and other injuries from the abuse I gave myself.”

Part of the stress reduction of tai chi is the very slowness of it. “I see people come in and they’ve been doing aerobics most of their lives,” says Mr. Bouguynons. “They say, ‘Oh, this is not for me.’ Are you kidding? This is exactly what you need because you’re bouncing off the walls.”



Jaclyn Evans and Chris New

photo by Chris Fritchie

### HOT CHA CHA

Do your toes tap whenever music starts playing? Do you secretly dream of moving like Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers or Emmitt Smith on *Dancing with the Stars*? If so, maybe social dancing is for you. Whether you prefer ballroom, Latin, country western or swing, there are multiple benefits from moving to music.

Physical stamina is certainly a benefit of dancing, but what about the popularity and desirability of being a good lead, guys? Chris New at Classic Dancing in Frisco says, “All girls love to dance. The girls are going crazy over these guys who know how to dance. Why can’t guys get that through their heads? Girls love to dance.”

“For a guy, it’s like driving a car. He has to learn where the seat belt is, which is

what we call the frame,” says Mr. New. “He has to know where the steering wheel is; he has points he uses to move his partner and steer. He has blinkers, a gas pedal and a brake. Here at the school, that’s the first thing we teach. Once the guys learn that, they all love to dance because they know how to lead.”

Don’t we all have to look like the *Dancing with the Stars* contestants to dance? No, says Mr. New. “I don’t get *Dancing with the Stars* clients. My clients are average Janes and Joes. They’re office workers, bank workers, doctors, lawyers, secretaries, school teachers, all physical sizes,” says Mr. New. “We have a theory in dancing. If you can walk, that’s a good start. If you can’t walk, that’s fine too. I’ve taught a girl in a wheelchair before. Taught her how to sit up straight, how to keep tone in her upper body, how to feel



John Ward (climbing) and Matt Lee  
at Canyons of Frisco  
photo by Chris Fritchie

pretty on the dance floor.”

Mr. New finds a lot of teens and young adults interested in dancing these days because of the *Dancing with the Stars* phenomenon. The younger crowd has also been inspired. “For young kids, there was that movie *Mad Hot Ballroom* which was excellent for children. It showed how young kids can do this and how learning to dance literally changed their lives,” says Mr. New. One student who started ballroom dance lessons at Classic Dancing when he was 10 years old was deluged with calls from girls before a school dance when word got out that he could dance.

Physically, dancing helps reduce weight, increases afternoon stamina, strengthens legs and tones the body all over.

Dancing has multiple benefits besides the fitness and social value. It fosters an appreciation of music and its rhythms; creates an increased sense of balance; and cultivates more fluid movement when walking and running. It can help develop more open, responsive and supportive relationships with a partner and others and can create a more positive outlook on life.

Physically, dancing helps reduce weight, increases mid-afternoon stamina, develops a circulatory “second heart,” strengthens legs and tones the body all over. Add to that stress relief and more popularity at social functions. In the end, though, what keeps people coming back is the sheer fun and joy of it.

#### MONKEY SEE, MONKEY DO

It’s the end of a long day at work or with family and you feel like you’re “climbing the walls.” Now you can do just that and reap tremendous fitness benefits at the



same time. Frisco is fortunate to have a state-of-the-art climbing facility that provides a safe, supervised environment to get fit, blow off steam and socialize with other participants.

John Ward is general manager at The Canyons of Frisco. While rock climbing may seem to some like an extreme way to gain and maintain fitness, he doesn't see it that way. "Climbing is very innate to being human. Having the physical structure we are blessed with, we have characteristics similar to monkeys.

They're great climbers, so it's an activity that is natural for us." Mr. Ward has seen participants from the ages of three to 70 successfully climb and climbing team members at the gym range from six to 60.

The Canyons of Frisco offers 30-foot walls, nearly 10,000 square feet of climbing area, more than 30 climbing stations and four basic climbing activities:

**Top roping** in which the safety rope is already in place above the climber. A belayer anchors the rope on the ground.

The climber moves up the wall wearing a harness clipped to the rope and only falls 2-6 inches if a slip occurs.

**Bouldering** is a height-restricted, unroped climb. In case of a slip, crash pads create a safe place to fall. Participants work in teams and spot each other, just as weight lifters do on a hard lift.

**Lead climbing** is when the safety rope starts on the ground with the harnessed climber who moves up the wall, clipping onto "quick draws" anchored to the wall or ceiling. If a fall occurs, the climber falls



*Cycling race at the Superdome  
photo by Will Swetnam/WillShootPhotos.com*

only as far as the last anchor.

**Rappelling** is when the individual moves down the wall holding a rope anchored at the top, controlling the descent. If the rappeller loses control, there is a spotter below who can slow the speed.

What are the benefits of climbing? Mr. Ward sees the activity as cognitive as well as physical. "I enjoy unlocking the problem that's on the wall before me and I get a workout from it," says Mr. Ward. "I also learn something about my own



Tug-o-war

photo provided by Lisa Sabin of Frisco Adventure Boot Camp

physical obstructions. If it's a move I can't do because I'm not flexible enough, I stretch more. If it's a strength issue, I get on the weight system and lift some to get past it. If I can't maintain the stamina to get up to a particular point, I stay on the wall and do endurance training." Weight loss is a definite benefit. One regular climber lost 30 pounds after about seven months with the climbing gym as his only workout.

Many climbers choose to climb in a natural environment. There are areas not too far away that offer an outdoor climbing experience. Mineral Wells State Park, Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge near Lawton, Oklahoma, Reimer's Ranch Park outside of Austin and the Austin Greenbelt within the city of Austin are a few.

#### YOUR OWN SPIN

Bicycling has tremendous health benefits like cardio fitness and calorie burning. It also has enough variations to appeal to almost everyone. Choose an evening "getaway" ride around the neighborhood, a family ride on a local trail, an off-road adventure on the weekend or an

adrenaline-pumping spin around a track to prepare for a race. A longer road trip is just the ticket for some bicyclists. When the weather doesn't cooperate, try a spin class for exercise and camaraderie.

On some of the longer rides, you can almost go sightseeing. You see things at a different pace than driving by at 60 miles per hour.

Tom Ernst, assistant manager at Richardson Bike Mart in Frisco rides when he gets the chance. "On some of the longer road rides, you can almost go sightseeing. You see things at a much different pace than driving by at 60 miles per hour. I've started to notice the birds we have in this area. I see herons and hawks, all kinds of cool things I never notice when I'm looking through the windshield."

Some prefer their bicycling while dodging rocks, trees and roots. In the communities surrounding Frisco, there are many off-road bicycle trails to explore. Denton Greenbelt Park, Erwin Park in McKinney and Isle du Bois State Park at Lake Ray Roberts are a few options. For other locations, visit the Dallas Offroad Biking Association (DORBA) website at [www.dorba.org](http://www.dorba.org). It offers a list of trails in the area, weather information and trail conditions.

For those who like to push a sport to its limit, Frisco has the Superdrome, one of 20 operational velodromes or bicycle race tracks in the United States. Bicycle racing is an Olympic sport and the Superdrome is an Olympic-certified track. Located on the Preston Ridge campus of Collin College, the Superdrome has hosted events such as the World Cup Track Racing Championship, the U.S. Olympic Trials and the NCAA Collegiate National Championships.

Superdrome riders range in age from eight to 70 and free youth programs are available. Riders can come for fitness purposes or use the track to train for a race. Be prepared, though, because this

is about as extreme as bicycling gets. Bicycles used on the track have no brakes and racers ride on a banked surface banked 27 degrees on the straightaways and 45 degrees on the turns. The Superdrome is maintained and funded by a volunteer staff and is open six days a week, weather permitting.

If they go to the gym and do the same thing five days a week, they'll either plateau or get bored and quit. We do something different every single day.

Weather or darkness can put a crimp in a bicycling workout. In that case, Richardson Bike Mart offers spin classes on Tuesday and Thursday evenings. Bring your bike and rent an indoor trainer from the store if you don't have one. It's a great way to stay in condition year round and also offers opportunities to socialize with other riders.

#### BASIC TRAINING

If you prefer some...er...encouragement with your workout, a fitness boot camp may be for you. Inspired by military boot camps that quickly whip recruits into shape, civilian boot camps combine the benefits of personal training with the competitive and social advantages of a group setting. How extreme is it? Enough to have participants sweating on a 37-degree morning.

Participants range in age from 23 to 51, and do not need a particular level of fitness to take part; the exercise programs adapt to different fitness levels. Because of the intense workouts, the coaching, camaraderie and competition, the classes provide fast fitness results. In a four-week class, it can mean shrinking one to two dress sizes, losing three to 10 pounds and 25 percent increases in strength and endurance.

Linda Sabin is owner of Frisco Adventure Boot Camp, a four-week outdoor fitness program for women held

at Pizza Hut Park in Frisco. She says, "It's like having a personal trainer at a fraction of the cost; in the company of other women. It keeps you accountable," says Ms. Sabin. "Everybody is watching each other, so they want to do well, not slow somebody else up. I push participants a bit, but I tell them to always get water when they need it and let me know if they are having pain or just can't do the activity. I make sure it's safe but still effective."

Ms. Sabin schedules her classes from 5:30-6:30 a.m. on weekdays. It's the best time for women because they can jump-start their day. There's no carpool or shopping; kids and husband are asleep; and women can get away, get back and still have plenty of time to get family members up and ready for the day.

The program has been successful over the last year, enjoying a 70 percent participant return rate. "Women have a tendency to get bored doing the same thing every time or their body adapts to one certain group," says Ms. Sabin. "If they go to the gym and do the same thing five days a week, they'll either plateau or get bored and quit. With this, we do something different every single day. Whether it is military training using sandbags, what I call "suicide drills," or soccer or football themed days, I incorporate competition and games so it keeps participants interested enough to keep coming back. They never know what we're going to do next."

"People want to be entertained, not educated," says Ms. Sabin. "So I try to make it fun and they don't realize what they're doing until they get to the end of the four weeks and do their mile run and they're two minutes faster than when they started."

#### MUST LOVE WATER

Think water aerobics is for sissies? Just try it. It's a workout. One of the beauties of it is that all ages can participate, regardless of fitness level or joint issues that might make land-based exercise difficult. You just have to love the water, like to be cool while you work out and prefer a low-impact activity.

Keri Kirkwood is the aquatic program supervisor for the City of Frisco Parks and Recreation Department. "It's the resistance that makes it a little bit harder.



### The Linebacker

4 ounces water  
4 ounces strawberries  
46 grams of Iron Tek Protein  
1 whole banana  
12 ounces ice

Process in blender until smooth.  
Makes a 32-ounce smoothie

*From the Smoothie Zone*



### Trueblue Flufighter Smoothie

2 cups of TrueBlue Blueberry Cocktail, chilled  
1 cup vanilla probiotic yogurt  
1 capsule of vitamin D  
1 capsule of vitamin B  
1 capsule of Ginseng  
1 capsule of Zinc (Helps lymphocytes which fight viral infections)  
1 tsp. of honey  
1/2 cup of water

Mix in a blender, serve chilled.

*From TrueBlue*



Water aerobics at Frisco Athletic Center

photo by Chris Fritchie

In the water you have the resistance to push against. On land you just have air," she says. "It seems like a lot of people like to cross-train. They work out, plateau, and don't see results. They change their routine and come into the water once or twice a week and work out on land the rest of the time."

The City of Frisco Parks and Recreation Department offers water aerobics at Frisco ISD Natatorium and Frisco Athletic Club. The classes have intriguing names and appeal to varied tastes.

**Roaring Rapids** uses the current in the "river" for resistance.

**Deep Core Challenge** offers a variety of exercises in the deep end.

**Fluid Fusion** is a combination of cardio, weight training and flexibility exercises offered in the pool.

**Yo-chi** is a mixture of yoga and tai chi held in the warm water pool.

When it comes down to it, exercise that is fun and pleasant is exercise people will stick with. Water aerobics burns about 292 calories per hour for an average-sized person, about the same as brisk walking. But it offers the workout in a creative and fun setting. Classes also offer social opportunities for participants. "It can sometimes be a social hour," says Ms. Kirkwood. "I've noticed students building friendships. They stay in the same class, stick together and keep coming back. They're in the water getting exercise, but they're also enjoying communication with other people."

#### CHOOSE TO PLAY

Yes, it is important to move our bodies

for physical health, but we can choose how we get there. The very act of considering what we like to do separate from family and job responsibilities can be a welcome break. When we evaluate our own needs and care for ourselves, we have more resources for important people and activities in our everyday lives.

Whether playtime means the excitement and adrenaline rush of bicycle racing, a brisk walk and conversation with a friend or gliding gracefully across a dance floor, pick an activity and go with it. If it's not your cup of tea, pick again. There are many ways to get there and a lot of fun to have along the way.

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*Susan Mardele is a freelance writer living in Princeton.*