



By Mark Stables

At midnight on January 1st, millions of people entered into the New Year by resolving to pursue positive lifestyle changes. Many of those resolutions were related to fitness and wellness. How many times have you heard people say that this is the year they are going to lose those extra pounds by going to the gym? February is here, however, and statistics say that in the past few weeks, more than 50 per cent of New Year's resolutions have already been abandoned.

For individuals living in condominiums, goals of improved health are not only achievable, but, more importantly, sustainable. With an increasingly competitive marketplace emerging in the 1980s, condominium developers began designing on-site amenities to gain a competitive advantage. With a rise in condominium living and new lifestyles emerging, condo gyms, once rare, have evolved and are now a standard feature in new condo developments, which promise five-star and state-of-the-art amenities to appeal to their target market. Older developments are designing or re-designing amenities to meet the needs of residents and potential buyers.

Having fitness amenities right in your building is not only cost-effective and a great way to socialize with your neighbours, but convenient as well, saving you time and aggravation. No more rushing out into the cold first thing in the morning, trying to find parking, fighting crowds at public gyms or having to get ready for work away from home. When the gym is an elevator ride away, do you really have a valid excuse not to exercise?

That having been said, let's consider what constitutes a state-of-the-art or five-star condo fitness facility and what is has to offer residents. Gone are the days when a condo gym consisted of leftover space, poorly lit and ventilated, with low ceilings, populated by basic equipment, such as a rowing machine and a universal gym. Times have changed and fitness amenities have evolved into well-designed mini-gyms that allow for an enjoyable and effective fitness experience. What follows are some key factors to consider when evaluating condominium fitness amenities.

Design and Safety

State-of-the-art fitness facilities feature simple design considerations, such as lighting and flooring, which facilitate a safe environment for an enjoyable workout. Proper lighting of the space provides good visibility when working out or walking around fitness equipment. Flooring should ensure you won't slip and serve to reduce the transmission of noise to residents above or below the facility when weights are dropped.

Shape up!

Getting the most from your condo's fitness amenities

Well-designed amenities are spacious, providing high ceilings, good ventilation and plenty of room between pieces of equipment. All facilities should have phone or buzzer access to the front desk or 911 should an injury arise. This is an important feature for all buildings, especially those where middle-aged residents are the primary demographic.

For many residents, fitness equipment can be intimidating. To ensure a safe and effective workout, your condominium's recreation staff or a certified personal trainer should provide equipment orientations at regular intervals. This will provide you with the education necessary to develop flawless form and technique, which are equally important for attaining your desired results and preventing injury.

Equipment

What would a fitness amenity be without equipment? More importantly, what if that equipment was out of service most of the time? Proper layout of *quality* equipment will translate into an exceptional workout environment. Generations X and Y expect that modern fitness amenities not only include trendy equipment such as Arc trainers, functional trainers and other multi-plane pulley systems, but indoor pools, squash courts, basketball courts, aerobics studios and other progressive fitness amenities as well. Traditional equipment such as elliptical trainers, treadmills, stationary bikes, rowing machines and Nautilus-style equipment allow baby boomers and seasoned fitness gurus to enjoy a safer workout, without sacrificing technique or intensity.

Making your fitness experience even more enjoyable, new condominiums may offer entertainment systems such as televisions and DVD players with individual headphones and channel selection to help motivate and entertain you while you're sweating it out on the treadmill.

Lastly, an exceptional amenity will be kept clean, with towels and water provided for your convenience. Also, all equipment should be regularly inspected to allow for maintenance and replacement of parts as necessary.

Fitness and Recreation Services

If your condominium has many units, an on-site recreation management company may offer programs at little or no charge to the residents. These may include group exercise classes such as aerobics, tai-chi, pilates, yoga, squash ladder, swimming lessons, personal fitness training, and wellness-based seminars and workshops.

Your condominium may have a committee that addresses the specific needs of residents and those using the facilities on a regular basis. This committee is there to answer questions about your facilities, the equipment and any programs being offered. The committee also acts as a conduit, reviewing and implementing any suggestions residents may have.

Wellness or fitness-based newsletters are excellent sources of information for programs being offered in-house and can usually be found in the fitness amenity area. Stretching charts, equipment instructions, healthy eating tips, group exercise class schedules and other fitness information are often available on bulletin boards.

Although the amenities (and sometimes the people using them) may be intimidating, don't be afraid! If you are unsure of safe equipment use, speak with a personal trainer or member of the recreation staff. Once you overcome the fear of not knowing, you will have the confidence you need to reach your personal wellness goals.

10 Tips for Wellness Success

1. Define your fitness goals using a 12-week time frame. Set goals that are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and have a timeline.
2. Go to the gym. Half the battle is actually getting there.
3. Have a buddy go with you as a support system. Establish a routine by developing a workout strategy for two people and schedule your workouts together as an appointment.
4. Focus on activities you enjoy.
5. Explore new fitness equipment that you haven't used before.
6. Concentrate on large muscle groups and use multi-joint exercises for optimal results.
7. Keep the intensity up. You will burn fat at all intensities, so don't pay any attention to the 'fat burning zone' information on fitness equipment.
8. Stay hydrated; bring water with you if your facility isn't equipped with a water cooler.
9. Take music for motivation. Use a heart-rate monitor on cardio equipment to keep you working hard.
10. Hire a professional. A personal fitness trainer or wellness coach will help you take it to the next level.

One of the first individuals in Canada to hold a Wellness Coach license from the International Wellcoaches® Corporation, Mark Stables is a licensed Lifestyle Coach, Certified Fitness Consultant and Personal Trainer, and Director of the benchmark group. Specializing in condo and loft residences, the benchmark group provides fitness amenity design for developers and builders, as well as fitness consultation for individuals and corporations. For more information, visit the benchmark group online at www.benchmarkgroup.ca.