

## Getting a Move On

### Specialized gyms cater to a kid crowd.

By Elena Cabral

When most people think of fitness gyms, they picture rows of whirring treadmill machines and TV's blaring CNN's 24-hour news channel. But imagine a place with video games, kid-size stationary bikes, and a few rounds of Dance Dance Revolution.

These are some of the features of new gyms popping up around the country that are designed especially for kids.

Many parents, doctors, and other health experts are worried that kids are not getting enough exercise. To address this concern, new gyms catering to kids are opening their doors. The goal of these gyms is to get kids moving by making exercise fun. Exercise is needed to keep the heart healthy and to maintain a healthy weight. Exercise also can help prevent medical problems, such as high blood pressure and diabetes.

Suzanne Rostler works with children at the Optimal Weight for Life Clinic at Children's Hospital in Boston, Massachusetts. "Kids are eating more and moving less," she says.

Rostler says many kids have unhealthy eating habits. They drink too much soda and eat too much fried food. Worse, some schools have done away with gym classes and even recess. These are periods of time, often after lunch, when kids can run around and play.

Kid gyms can make exercising more fun. At Knuckleheads Gym in Newbury Park, California, kids riding stationary bikes can view videos of real bike trails to go on a "virtual" ride.

At Just Fitness for Kids in Manassas, Virginia, kids train and play games together. For example, members play dodgeball, but players who are struck "out" don't just watch from the sidelines. Instead, they have to do an exercise like five push-ups or sit-ups.

"It's fun, it's entertaining," says Luciana Lima, 11. "It takes only about an hour out of your day."

Luciana joined Just Fitness for Kids with her cousin. She says she likes that the gym is a place where she can hang out with other kids.

Andy Pfefferkorn is a fitness trainer who co-owns Just Fitness for Kids. He says he was bothered by the idea that kids seemed to have fewer and fewer opportunities to move around.

"I realized society is moving in the wrong direction," he says. "If [kids] go home and the cupboards are filled with candy and chocolate, if moms and dads are continually buying video games and allowing [kids] to sit in front of the TV for hours and hours, things are not going to change."

Schools have been doing their part to cut out sugary snacks and sodas from cafeterias. But experts say exercise is still needed to help burn calories and stay at a healthy weight.

Rostler says she likes the idea that gyms are being made specifically for kids and are not just smaller versions of adult gyms. She even wants to avoid the use of the word "exercise". That word makes many kids think of work, Rostler says.

"I prefer the words "physical activity" or "movement"," she says. "Just getting kids to move is the goal."

Just Fitness member Felipe Fernandez, 14, talks with trainers about how to reach his fitness goals--not only by exercising, but through smarter eating habits. Making different food choices, in addition to exercise, has helped Felipe progress. He also can bring his parents along.

Many kid gyms are designed for kids only. But Just Fitness encourages parents to join their kids in the gym. That's fine with Felipe.

"I think it's kind of funny that there are parents working out with kids," he says. "But I think it's pretty nice."

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