Can Social Media Make You Healthier and Fitter?

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By Jeff Cain

The obvious answer to the question posed in the title of this article is “no”. However, because of my personal interests in both fitness and social media, I have recently discovered the growing influence of Web 2.0 in the health and fitness realm. This prompted me to delve further into how and why social media might be used to enhance the lives of those seeking to make and maintain positive changes in their fitness and health. What I have discovered is that many individuals, companies, and organizations are utilizing social media in exciting ways to help people meet their health and fitness goals.

According to most experts and published reports, Americans are unhealthier now than at any other time in our nation’s history, with obesity described as our fastest growing public health challenge [1]. This has reached epidemic levels with approximately 30% of Americans falling into the obese category [2]. The upward trend is attributable primarily to inadequate physical activity, poor eating habits, and changing food alternatives [1]. Obesity-related conditions such as hypertension [3] and diabetes [4] are also increasing, furthering concerns over national health. Fortunately, this has finally come to the forefront of our attention and numerous efforts are underway to reverse this trend. Calls for reform at the federal, state, and local levels include clear and consistent federal recommendations regarding physical activity and nutrition, obesity-prevention programs, and menu-labeling [5].

In addition to governmental interventions, a plethora of grassroots-type efforts from health, nutrition, and fitness companies, as well as individual health and fitness enthusiasts are underway. They are targeting individuals interested in maintaining health and vitality, and providing the resources to make it happen. While these are not public health initiatives, nor are they likely to affect significantly large populations, they may be very valuable to certain individuals with a baseline level of motivation. In turn, once individuals begin to take their own health and fitness seriously, they may positively affect those family members and friends surrounding them. Research has indicated that social support plays a strong role in continued exercise activities.
This social support can come in a variety of ways including guidance, encouragement, and providing information [6]. For many, if not most of us, maintaining a healthy lifestyle and adequate physical activity is a daily struggle. Encouragement, accountability, information, and tips may help motivate individuals to sustain proper eating and exercise habits. Social media applications are particularly well equipped to help in these areas. First, they are mediated public spaces where people gather to interact, increasing the likelihood that interested individuals will be exposed to the support. Second, the reduced social inhibition in online settings may make conversations regarding one’s health, nutrition, and fitness that much easier. Ease of dissemination, access, and sharing makes applications such as YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, and other social networking applications ideal tools to promote and encourage healthy lifestyles. The following sections highlight several such efforts.

One Company’s Approach to Social Media

I first began to notice the social media influence on fitness through my affiliation with a health and fitness company best known for its infomercials. Beachbody®, owned by Product Partners, LLC is the producer of several highly popular home fitness programs including P90X® and Insanity®. In addition to the television promotion of its products, Beachbody® has developed a social media strategy that provides motivation, encouragement, and support for its customers. The company has a proprietary social networking site, Teambeachbody.com, that connects Beachbody® product customers and offers a plethora of discussion forums, nutrition support, and motivational tools. The WOWY (Work Out With You) gym is an online venue to log workout routine schedules. Users can document the workouts and their scheduled times, as well as invite others to join them virtually. Encouraging users to plan and schedule their workout times in advance is a method to increase commitment to the exercise routines. From a motivational perspective, customers can see that they are not alone in completing the workouts, which in some cases may supply that last bit of encouragement necessary for them to follow through with the commitment.

In addition to their social networking system, Beachbody® utilizes a host of other social media applications to promote health and fitness. At the time this article was being written, a search for the term “P90X” on YouTube yielded 5,680 results. The majority of these are from users of the product who were encouraged to record their body transformation as a result of completing the program. While this involved relatively little effort on behalf of Beachbody®, the videos detailing success can be an incredible motivator for others desiring similar fitness results. The P90X® Facebook fan page [7] has almost 150,000 fans, contains discussions related to their products and is updated frequently with health and nutrition information. The owner of the company, the trainers, and Beachbody® coaches/consultants, also actively promote fitness and their line of products on Facebook and Twitter. One group of coaches (called The Fit Club Network) [8] blogs, tweets, and uses Facebook to offer numerous support resources for participating coaches and clients. These resources include individual consultations, product reviews, meal planning, and a host of other related activities. Numerous connections among coaches and customers across the country have been made via Facebook and Twitter, which further enhance individual commitment to their health and fitness goals. Supporting and motivating customers to succeed
Motivating through Twitter

There is no shortage of fitness and nutrition experts on Twitter. Likewise, there is no shortage of users who follow those experts. Trainers Jillian Michaels (@jillianmichaels) and Bob Harper (@MyTrainerBob) from the popular television show, *The Biggest Loser*, have nearly 150,000 and 80,000 followers respectively. Presumably, many of their followers are interested in becoming fitter and healthier and follow the trainers on Twitter because of those interests. The tweets vary, but often combine information with motivation. The example below is a Tweet that was linked to the Jillian Michaels Facebook fan page [9], which by the way is “liked” by more than 350,000 Facebook users.

“Emotional eating: Create coping mechanisms & recovery behaviors that are life affirming, not self destructive. Instead of binging join a support group, call a friend, get a massage or do something that makes you feel beautiful like a mani/pedi. Go workout. Exercise boosts your mood & put you back in the power seat. & remove crap food from your house. No matter how bad you feel you can’t eat what isn’t there.” [10]

The power of Twitter and Facebook takes that simple message and instantly makes it available to hundreds of thousands of people. For some who do not have support within their traditional social network of family and friends, this may be the only source of encouragement they receive. By enabling access to advisors, trainers, and health experts, social media’s value becomes something more than just a tool to connect with friends and colleagues. It can provide the social support infrastructure necessary for success.

Ms. Michaels and Mr. Harper are just of two of numerous health/fitness advocates on Twitter. Other popular Twitterers include Discovery Health (@Disc_Health), Eat This Not That (@EatThisNotThat), and Men’s Health magazine (@MensHealthMag). Their tweets are a mixture of motivational statements, links to online resources, and informational tips. According to the research alluded earlier, these are vital elements to the success of many embarking upon exercise and diet programs.

Conclusion

Because of the growing influence in our daily lives, social media applications have become an excellent venue for encouraging healthy lifestyles. Many companies, organizations, and individuals are successfully using these formats to provide motivated individuals with all the knowledge and encouragement needed to make positive differences in their health. While social media can be utilized to support people’s health and fitness goals, it is not going to make dinner selections, pedal the bicycle, or lift a weight. Each individual is responsible for his/her own actions and a baseline level of interest and motivation is required to seek these resources initially.

If not readily apparent, it must also be noted that the companies and individuals mentioned above
are using social media as a method of increasing brand recognition, and ultimately profits. However, just because some use social media within a business strategy does not preclude the sincere efforts and time that companies, trainers, and other advocates devote toward improving our country’s health. We should not dismiss the value of the support, motivation, and encouragement obtained through social media simply because it is another cog in our capitalist society. I would even argue that it is the perfect use of these media, because users on both sides of the equation receive something of value.

References


19 THOUGHTS ON “CAN SOCIAL MEDIA MAKE YOU HEALTHIER AND FITTER?”

**best vacuum for pet hair**

on February 3, 2014 at 12:35 PM said:

Ahaa, its nice conversation about this piece of writing here at this blog, I have read all that, so at this time me also commenting at this place.

**best rifle scope**

on February 3, 2014 at 9:16 PM said:

certainly like your web site however you need to test the spelling on quite a few of your posts. A number of them are rife with spelling problems and I in finding it very troublesome to inform the truth nevertheless I’ll surely come back again.

**best vacuum for hardwood floors**

on February 3, 2014 at 10:36 PM said:

When someone writes an paragraph he/she maintains the image of a user in his/her brain that how a user can know it. Therefore that’s why this post is perfect. Thanks!

**infrared grill reviews**

on February 3, 2014 at 11:03 PM said:

I rarely write remarks, however after browsing a few of the remarks on this page Can Social
I actually do have a few questions for you if you do not mind. Is it simply me or does it look like like a few of the remarks appear as if they are written by brain dead folks?

And, if you are posting at other online social sites, I’d like to keep up with you. Would you make a list of every one of all your social networking sites like your twitter feed, Facebook page or linkedin profile?

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**best induction cooktop**  
on **February 3, 2014 at 11:33 PM** said:

I do trust all of the ideas you’ve offered to your post.

They are really convincing and will certainly work. Nonetheless, the posts are too short for newbies. May just you please prolong them a little from next time? Thank you for the post.

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**best pressure washer**  
on **February 4, 2014 at 12:19 AM** said:

Hey there! I’ve been following your website for some time now and finally got the bravery to go ahead and give you a shout out from Humble Tx! Just wanted to say keep up the fantastic job!

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**humidifier reviews**  
on **February 4, 2014 at 1:36 AM** said:

Hello there! Do you know if they make any plugins to help with SEO? I’m trying to get my blog to rank for some targeted keywords but I’m not seeing very good gains. If you know of any please share. Appreciate it!
**recumbent exercise bike reviews**
on **February 4, 2014 at 3:12 AM** said:

I blog often and I seriously thank you for your content. Your article has really peaked my interest. I am going to take a note of your website and keep checking for new information about once per week. I opted in for your RSS feed too.

**best electric tea kettle**
on **February 4, 2014 at 3:32 AM** said:

I love reading through an article that can make people think. Also, thank you for allowing for me to comment!

**best table saw**
on **February 4, 2014 at 5:12 AM** said:

Hey There. I discovered your blog the usage of msn. That is an extremely well written article. I will make sure to bookmark it and come back to learn more of your helpful info. Thank you for the post. I’ll certainly return.

**espresso machine reviews**
on **February 4, 2014 at 4:26 PM** said:

Hello, the whole thing is going well here and ofcourse every one is sharing information, that’s in fact fine, keep up writing.
**best garbage disposal**

on February 4, 2014 at 5:49 PM said:

bookmarked!! I like your web site!

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**best shoes for crossfit**

on February 4, 2014 at 6:20 PM said:

Hi there, after reading this remarkable post i am also glad to share my knowledge here with mates.

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**best robotic pool cleaner**

on February 4, 2014 at 8:55 PM said:

I am truly happy to read this blog posts which consists of lots of helpful facts, thanks for providing these kinds of information.

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**garment steamer reviews**

on February 5, 2014 at 1:25 AM said:

Thank you for another informative web site. The place else may I get that kind of info written in such a perfect manner?

I have a mission that I am just now operating on, and I have been on the glance out for such information.

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**Mallory Nicolia**

on February 5, 2014 at 6:23 PM said:

Hi guys! Ik heb in de pc’s sinds ik een kind was. Ik heb net een nieuwe baan als een desktop-tech bij een accountantskantoor. Ik weet dat ik zal veel vragen voor jullie
hebben, maar ik zal beginnen met een eenvoudige hallo!

Charlie Rothmiller

on February 5, 2014 at 7:33 PM said:

Was würde ich nicht geben, eine Debatte mit Ihnen zu diesem Thema haben. Du sagst einfach so viele Dinge, die aus dem Nichts kommen, die ziemlich sicher Id Im, haben eine faire Chance. Ihr Blog ist gut visuell, ich meine Leute nicht langweilen werden. Aber andere, die an den Videos und dem Layout sehen gewohnt so beeindruckt sein zusammen mit Ihrer generischen Verständnis für dieses Thema.

Alva Vanostrand

on February 6, 2014 at 5:23 AM said:


Monty Tsistinas

on February 6, 2014 at 1:37 PM said:

Tiendo a permanecer lejos de los siguientes blogs que están inmersos en el pesimismo y la representan las personas que han perdido la esperanza y que están simplemente esperando el zapato “final” a caer.