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A Different *Spin* on Exercise

With Its Growing Popularity, Spinning Offers the Same Health Benefits of Bicycling ... Only Indoors

Story by Carrie Lovejoy

Bicycling is an excellent fitness activity, offering no-impact calorie burn and muscle toning. But in the winter months, it can get painful.

Chapped lips, wind burned cheeks, cracked hands and cold teeth are not the best ways to get motivated to work out, but they are the reality of the outdoor cyclist in the winter months. It doesn't have to be this way.

Indoor cycling, also called spinning, is an alternative that offers all the same health benefits without the unpredictability of weather. With origins that can best be tracked back to the late 1980s, spinning has evolved into an incredibly popular way to get impact-free exercise in a group environment, and perhaps most importantly this time of year -- it's indoors.

Pina Patel of La Plata attends several spin classes a week at Southern Maryland Martial Arts in La Plata, and is a true believer in its effectiveness.

"It's excellent cardio," she said. "I've had a knee problem since 2007, so when I was looking for cardio, biking was the way to go. It doesn't bother my knee as much."

Mike Ramos of Waldorf has been teaching spinning classes at different

gyms and studios for decades, and for him, spinning is the perfect way to emulate the cycling about which he is so passionate. Calling Ramos an avid cyclist is an understatement. He logs thousands of miles on Southern Maryland roads each year, has been through more than a dozen bikes, and has all the stories, bumps and scars to prove his love of the sport. Several years ago, Ramos was struck by a car while cycling, and after surgeries and recovery, he climbed right back into his bike saddle and continued to ride. Spinning has been a way for him to recover from injuries, stay fit and share his love of biking through his classes.

"Spinning is a reproduction of outdoor cycling; nothing more, nothing less," he said. "It's great rehab. Many students come in after knee and ankle surgeries. I've had both knees replaced, but with spinning there's no weight bearing so you're not wearing your joints down. ... I had one guy come in after open-heart surgery."

Hope Anderson owns Salt Cycle in Great Mills along with her business partner, Alexa Spinney. Anderson said she was able to continue indoor cycling while



PHOTO COURTESY OF PATTY WARD

Spinning instructor Patty Ward

"It's something anybody can do. It's non-impact, non-competitive and you can make it your own. If you only go a certain number of rotations per minute, then that's what you do."

-Patty Ward, spinning instructor

she was pregnant, which was a great relief to her.

"You still get the calorie burn and the endorphins, but you're saving your body." Anderson's students vary in age, size and fitness level, but everyone is able to find a groove in the cycling saddle. "We had a swim team from St. Mary's College cycling along with a 68-year-old who had never done any exercise at all, in the same room, with the same instructor, taking the same class. They all left with the workout that was the best fit for them. They all have the same endorphin boost and spent the rest of their day on that high."

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Patty Ward had the same sentiment. The 20-year spinning instructor teaches at the World Gyms in Owings and Prince Frederick, and said the adaptability of spinning is what makes it so universal.

"It's something anybody can do," Ward said. "It's non-impact, non-competitive and you can make it your own. If you only go a certain number of rotations per minute, then that's what you do."

Making Exercise Fun

Spinning has an enthusiastic fan base, and most will agree: spinning is so fun that it's easy to forget you're exercising.

Ramos brings an energy that is basically unmatched to just about everything he does, and spin classes are no exception. He likes to set up lights and play heavy metal music.

"It's entertainment, like you're going to a concert," he said. "We get their

minds off their pain. Everybody leaves dripping, soaking wet and they have smiles on their faces." Ramos has even taught kids' classes. "We played Disney music, and we just have a grand time."

For Patel, the class is about meeting people and sharing a good time with her classmates. "You make friends, and you push each other along. You get really into it and you don't even realize where the time goes because it's fun. No two classes are the same."

Ward said she always works to motivate her students, which could be difficult considering she teaches eight classes a week, but she loves it. "It should be the best hour of your day," she said. "I've been teaching for 20 years and I'm still not tired of it."

It's All About the Tunes

"It's a music-driven workout," Ward said, and that seems to be the theme for most spinning enthusiasts.

"It's got to be fast music, because you're following the beat of the music,"

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Spinning instructor Mike Ramos

Ramos said. He is known for his high-energy, heavy metal music blasting throughout his classes. "Music is a critical component. You're not going to motivate the students with John Denver."

As a student, Patel agreed that music is the basis of her workout. "It's very fast and uplifting; it's music that you can set your pace to."

Highly Effective Workout

Ward said the average 45-minute spin class is expected to burn about 600 calories, "and I would say that's low."

That incredible exercise was the motivator for Anderson and Spinney to start Salt Cycle, which was named for the purifying effect of sweating and exercising. "It's about a mind/body transformation," she said. "You feel pure."

And while Patel enjoys the classes, the friendship and the music, it's the end result that means the most to her.

"You're working out your legs like crazy, plus cardio," she said. "You have to keep your form up, so it's an all-over exercise. And you look awesome in jeans." •

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