



Exercising twice daily is a new way to socialize

By [Gracie Bonds Staples](#)
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One woman is 38 and the other is 42, but Elle Starr and Amy Bell have the sculpted bodies of fit twentysomethings.

And although neither considers herself an athlete and isn't particularly required to look good for a living, they sweat through double and sometimes triple workouts a day, seven days a week.

Indeed, for a growing number of women — and a few men — fitness has become the new "triple ventilate, non-fat please," said April Masini, writer of the critically acclaimed 'Ask April' advice column.

In other words, fitness is the way people are socializing.

"For anyone still squeamish about online dating, this is arguably just as effective," Masini said. "There are lots of singles working out in gyms, running on high school tracks on weekends, through the park, at the local YMCA pool or at the beach."

And for busy married people and parents, doubling exercise with a friend date is a great way to kill two birds with one stone.

For instance, Masini said, it's often easier to go speed-walking around your neighborhood with neighbors than find time to have them over for dinner.

Bell, who enjoys the social aspect of her three-times-a-day workouts, said her main goal is to stay fit and healthy so she can compete and maintain her youthful appearance.

"I actually workout at the gym alone," she said. "My best friends don't play tennis, but I've formed some close friendships with the ladies who do."

While working out at the gym may not be exactly cost effective — memberships can cost upward of \$500 a year — you do get the benefit of seeing potential dates in gym clothes before a first date, a benefit the local Starbucks can't provide.

"Physical attraction matters and you can decide if you have it or not a lot more easily at a fitness venue," Masini said.

Plus, she said, fitness buffs who are two-a-day workout fiends can find each other.

"Lots of time exercise rate is a compatibility factor in a relationship," Masini said. "Couch potatoes and marathon veterans are often as incompatible as Republicans and Democrats. Find your soul mate on the yoga mat next to you."

Although meeting her soul mate was never her goal, Starr, a Fayetteville hairdresser who travels more than 30 miles to the heart of midtown to work out twice a day at Ultimate Bodies by Carlos, admits to having met some interesting people with whom she has created great relationships.

Bell, a mother from Marietta, works out at the gym three to four times a week and plays tennis at least twice a day, every day.

It started, she said, in 2005 when her husband decided to start a mixed doubles team in their neighborhood.

"I joined and got the bug," Bell said. "I felt like I could be good at it and that's what drives me now to play so much."

She does drills every Monday and Wednesday morning, a Round Robin on Friday mornings and a private lesson once a week. And every evening, she hits the gym, mostly for weight-training.

"Each week can vary, but I usually get some kind of exercise in the morning and at night," she said. "Occasionally, I will run on my treadmill at home."

While Bell said she is never going to be a pro, her tennis game has improved considerably.

"It's really the weight-training that's become obsessive," Bell said. "When I started lifting weights and could see the cut in my arms and legs, I liked that. "

So did Starr, who started her twice-a-day workout because she wanted to drop 40 pounds.

"I came in for a lifestyle change," Starr said. "I was 5'7", 165 pounds."

Her workouts are such priority, Starr gets up at 4:30 a.m. each day to arrive at the gym by 6 a.m. for her exercise regime. She comes in a second time around midday or in the evening after work.

"If I can't make it back to the gym, I jump rope at home," she said.

The workouts, Starr said, aren't the hard part of her routine. The tough part is "people really judge you because they think you're obsessed with the way you look," she said.

"I have friends and coworkers, who say that's not living," she said. "But it's so fulfilling to me. That's what keeps me going. Besides, I'd much rather be obsessed with something that will make me healthy and extend my years on this earth than alcohol, drugs or partying."

Carlos Jordan, owner of Ultimate Bodies By Carlos, said while it isn't usual for major-league athletes to workout

two to three times a day to remain competitive, he is seeing more and more people like Starr come in to get in shape and stay in shape.

Either way, the challenge is pretty much the same: eat right, do strength-training and conditioning in the morning and add in squats, work the quads in the evening or mix it up.

Still, Jordan said, the average person only needs about 45 minutes to an hour of exercise three times a week to maintain a healthy weight.

"It just depends on the needs," he said.

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