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Family-oriented facilities are a safe space to ease into exercise

YOUR HEALTH | By [Katie Murdoch](#), Herald writer



Weekly Herald/CHRIS GOODENOW Michael Walton, of Lynnwood, downsized from a 52-inch waist to 42 inches in less than a year through regular attendance at fitness classes and time in the weight room at the Lynnwood Recreation Center. That is a couple of inches skinnier than he was before he was diagnosed with a lung infection and went through a period of inactivity. Walton's goal is to reach 38 inches. "When you first come to the gym, you think everybody is looking at you. You just have to get over that fear," Walton said.



Weekly Herald/CHRIS GOODENOW Michael Walton, of Lynnwood, downsized from a 52-inch waist to his current 42-inch waist in less than a year through regular attendance at fitness classes and time in the weight room at the Lynnwood Recreation Center. That is a couple inches skinnier than he was before he was diagnosed with a lung infection and went through a period of inactivity. Walton's goal is to reach 38 inches. Walton said, "When you first come to the gym, you think everybody is looking at you. You just have to get over that fear." Photo taken Monday, May 7, 2012 at the Lynnwood Recreation Center.

Trying something new can be scary. But the rewards can make pushing through that fear and intimidation well worth it.

Michael Walton, 48, can attest to that.

Since November, the Lynnwood resident has lost more than 70 pounds by

staring down intimidation and making lifestyle changes. “When I don't work out I don't feel good,” Walton said. “I feel like I'm missing something.”

He started taking classes at the Lynnwood Recreation Center last winter after a friend told him to stop feeling scared. “I was nervous,” he said. “I used to pass it every day and I used to be nervous to go in.”

There he met Brian Hendricks, athletic and fitness supervisor, and started a regimen. The routine consists of going to the rec center six days per week for fitness classes, weight lifting, and using the treadmill and elliptical machines. Additionally, Walton works with a dietician once per month and eats carbohydrates in moderation.

Two years ago, Walton survived an infection on his lungs. The infection spread to his kidneys, forcing his lungs and heart to work harder. He underwent surgery but doctors never learned the cause of the infection. Despite the life-saving surgery, Walton was prescribed 12 types of medications and couldn't walk more than 20 feet without losing his breath. His weight went up to 355 pounds; he collected disability because he couldn't go to work.

“My doctor said, ‘You're cutting years off of your life,’” Walton said.

Now, more than 70 pounds lighter, he has cut the number of medications in half. “I feel great,” he said. “I'm ready to go back to work and tackle the world again.”

Joining something new can always be intimidating, said Tammy Rankins, recreation coordinator for the city of Edmonds.

To ease people's insecurities and fears, Rankins reminds those who are new they are not alone; many people get intimidated. Arrive early to introduce yourself to the instructor, who can offer pointers and connect with you during the class. Also, don't be hard on yourself if it takes time to get comfortable -- and don't give up.

“I encourage people to try things more than once as you are bound to learn something new each time you participate which could lead to higher level of enjoyment as things get familiar,” she said.

It's a natural tendency to be timid around fitness classes and equipment, said Elizabeth Kovar, fitness coordinator for the Lynnwood Recreation Center.

“Honestly, the majority of people are intimidated,” Kovar said.

Family-oriented recreation centers can be a good place to ease into a fitness routine, versus big box-style gyms that draw a clientele keen on trendy workouts and equipment.

“No matter if you've been working out at a facility a long time or you're a new member, the (recreation) facility is there for everyone,” Kovar said.

To overcome his fears, Walton remembered his mother's familiar saying: “Where could you be if you weren't afraid?”

Recreation staff were friendly and happily showed him how to use equipment without judging or looking down on him, he said.

“Just go to the gym, take your time and do it,” he said.