An exercise in frugality

You can get into shape without going broke.

Colonnade staff and wire report

Times are tough. We don't need Ben Bernanke to tell us that. So when looking for bargains, even when it extends to fitness classes.

Health clubs, of course, offer an array of options. But for those cost-conscious, it might help to think outside the gym for a fitness class. For example, try yoga, pilates, or lap swimming.

City parks and recreation programs are reasonably priced and offer a variety of activities.

But there's another option, even more frugal than city-run classes, one that you may have not considered:

Go to college.

Community college, that is. Not full time, of course, just in your spare time.

And, for those who fall in the standard 9:00 to 6:00 weekday, many of the community college classes are offered in the early evening or morning.

"It is very reasonable," says Jean Sevigny, dean of the physical education department at American River College, in Sacramento, Calif. You can repeat a class as long as you're making progress, but there is a limit of the number of repeats.

"We have some students and people from the community continually taking classes but we don't let them take the same thing over and over. We're not a health club."

Clark College offers a range of exercise classes for people of all ages, as well as a fitness facility.

Fitness classes available through the Community Education Program at Clark College include aerobic, kickboxing, yoga, tai chi, belly dance and line dancing.

Prices and class sizes vary. A five-week dancing class, for example, is $49 and is capped at 25 participants.

Eight weeks of yoga instruction is $125, and enrollment is limited to 20 students. Most classes are offered in the evenings or on weekends to accommodate working professionals.

Classes at Clark

People can often do repeat classes, said Joan Amos, Clark College Continuing Education Program Manager.

For those 55 and older, Clark College offers fitness classes through its Mature Learning Program. Classes include qigong, a Chinese discipline emphasizing breathing and movement, and tai chi. These classes cost $30 and meet twice a week for 10 weeks.

The Thompson Fitness Center at Clark College is available to a broad section of the community and offers elliptical machines, treadmills and other cardio equipment, as well as weight training machines and free weights.

Anyone taking a Clark College class can get a fitness center membership for $25 per quarter, although those taking certain physical education, Mature Learning and health classes can use the center for free.

In addition, those 15 and older who've taken a Clark College class can join the Alumni Association for $15 per year. They are eligible for fitness center passes at a cost of $30 per quarter or $40 per year.

Athletic Club members also can use the fitness center for $35 per quarter or $40 per year. Membership starts at $20 per person or $10 per family per year and includes free admission to all regular season home athletic events.

On the downside, community college classes tend to be larger than those offered by parks and rec or health clubs.

The intimidation factor

Another hindrance for some people, particularly retirees, is that they might be intimidated by the younger college students.

Even in a class designed for younger students, such as hip-hop aerobics at American River College, instructor Carrie Pereira says: "I get a wide age range of people. They learn principles of cardiovascular and the moves."

And Ron Hubbard, who teaches tai chi and other fitness courses at American River College, says his students are primarily college age but that all the groups work together well. "We do get a sizable number of older adults," he says. Participation in tai chi, more than just the physical activity. Students learn principles of nutrition and stress management, as it may pertain to their activity or fitness level in general.

As Hubbard says, they learn the "why" as well as the "how" during lectures that accompany the actual participation.

"It's important to learn the concepts of an activity," he says. "Our goal is to educate people so that if, at a party, someone asks them what tai chi is, they can answer it intelligently.""}

Talking politics isn't always politically correct

Talking politics: do's and don'ts

Sure, everybody's talking about the election. But doing so unthinkingly may put you in an uncomfortable spot. Some advice:

Do:

Stick to the facts. Don't get emotional, personal or judgmental. Let your facts speak for themselves. Be certain of the candidate and where they stand on the issues.

Know when to zip it. There are times where it's better not to go on at all. Say Area Part of the EMF Poll Institute. If you're already there and realize it too much, you can step back and say, "Let's stop this.""}

Honest about their holidays. Someone told me recently she was planning not to go home for the holidays. She should only talk politics when you're sure the other person will be receptive.

That's considered safe ground.

The workplace. Nancy Mitchell, whose firm, The Etiquette Advocate advises companies on social and workplace etiquette, has a tip. "People assume you know someone else's politics."

What's not safe ground:

Politics. Nancy Mitchell, whose firm, The Etiquette Advocate advises companies on social and workplace etiquette, has a tip. "People assume you know someone else's politics."