

## Fitness program members don't go it alone | Center gets people to exercise together

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### Document Text

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SAN YSIDRO -- Lorena Godinez, 36, wants to be a healthier mother. Virginia Rodriguez, 45, plans to lose weight and get in shape. And Martha Grijalva, 35, hopes to encourage others to stop making excuses and walk, dance or otherwise get fit.

All three San Ysidro residents are recent participants in a new program called Familias Sanas y Activas, or Healthy and Active Families. The program trains promotores, local residents who then measure, guide, push and encourage others.

The free program is sponsored by the San Diego Prevention Research Center, which conducts research and provides educational tools to promote physical activity and improve the health of Latinos.

Grijalva, who lives in the Villa Nueva apartment complex, was invited to get involved by Godinez, a neighbor whose children go to school with hers. She then volunteered to be a promotora.

"I used to exercise when I was 21 or 22, aerobics when I lived in Tijuana," Grijalva said. "But when I came to San Ysidro I stopped because I couldn't find any programs. Now, they've taught us that we can walk in local parks and do many exercises at home."

Lisa Hoffman, a research center project manager, said a community telephone survey conducted last year on behalf of the center revealed that nearly 57 percent of San Ysidro residents have been diagnosed with either diabetes, hypertension or high cholesterol.

A lack of physical activity is a major risk factor for the chronic diseases that affect the Latino community, such as diabetes and obesity, according to the state Department of Health Services. In California, physical inactivity and obesity among Latinos cost more than \$21 billion in direct and indirect medical care, workers' compensation and lost productivity in 2000, according to department statistics.

To combat those risk factors, the research center -- in conjunction with San Diego State University, the University of California San Diego, and the San Ysidro Health Center -- created its program. Recruitment started in June.

"Our hope is that the program creates a behavior change," Hoffman said.

Last month, Maria Pittenger, 54, was weighed, measured and completed a one-mile walk. Pittenger had her blood pressure checked, attempted a few sit-ups and push-ups and demonstrated her flexibility.

Pittenger was deemed eligible for the one-year program. She and other participants receive a backpack of fitness tools, including a pedometer, a stretch band and a water bottle.

"I'm participating because my doctor told me to join an exercise and diet program," Pittenger said. "My sister told me about this program. She's already a member."

Participants are given personalized goals and are monitored throughout the year. Each receives a calendar that lists all San Ysidro parks, and handouts in Spanish provide stretching techniques, nutritional guidelines and instructions for exercise equipment.

Many say they like the bonds they are forming in their neighborhoods. Former acquaintances are now friends who inspire and encourage each other.

"Sometimes, you don't feel like exercising because you don't want to do it alone," said Martha Haro, 45, a stay-at-home mother. "But when you're with a group, you're motivated."

The research center partnered with officials at Villa Nueva, social services agency Casa Familiar, and the health center to recruit participants. The program is a public health study funded by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Hoffman said they hope to generate more interest through word-of-mouth. There is funding for up to 500 members. Currently, there are 97 members and more signing up daily.

Elsa Escalante, a supervisor at a gym run by Casa Familiar, heard about the program, and she and her husband, Octavio, both 44, became promotores. Each leads a regular walking group. Members of Elsa's group of 19 walk in the morning. Octavio has two members. They walk in the afternoon.

While most members are women, the program encourages men, women and children of all ages to join. The Escalantes' own children tag along.

"They get their exercise, too," Elsa Escalante said. "They play soccer while we do our exercises."

### DETAILS

Call the agency nearest to you for more information or to sign up

San Ysidro Health Center:

(619) 662-4100, ext. 6340

Casa Familiar:

(619) 428-1115

Villa Nueva:

(619) 213-3031, ask for Lorena Godinez

Familias Sanas y Activas at the San Diego Prevention Research Center:

(619) 594-8319

Credit: STAFF WRITER

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