

ENTERTAIN TO SUSTAIN HEALTHY HABITS

by Karlie Intlekofer, Ph.D.

Let's be honest; healthy cardio exercise can be uncomfortable. Between the sweating, heavy breathing, burning muscles and central fatigue — we all have moments when we doubt our ability to keep going. Yet as the health and wellness expert at your fitness facility, you can help all the people you work with keep fighting the good fight by introducing elements of entertainment and distraction to their workouts.

Supporting Healthy Intentions

As always, it starts with helping people get started. Successful marketing campaigns, for example, can seed ideas in your members that strengthen their intentions to exercise. But even if the people you work with have strong exercise intentions, their enjoyment may be a better indicator of whether they will remain committed to regular exercise. While intentions are helpful, research clarifies that "enjoyment has the strongest effect on exercise persistence, explaining the need to feel pleasure and joy … as a way of maintaining commitment in the long term." Positive workout experiences in your facility offer the most powerful way to retain your valued members.

The Power of Autopilot

When it comes to workouts on cardio equipment in your facility, you can help each user enjoy it more by shifting their attention away from the physical sensations of exercise. By providing plentiful entertainment options — whether on the console, on an equipment-mounted screen or on large wall-mounted screens connected to the user with digital audio — you can reallocate their attention in ways that offset their discomfort and reduce their perceived effort. This is especially true for low- to moderate-intensity exercise, because our thoughts greatly influence our perceived effort at submaximal intensities.

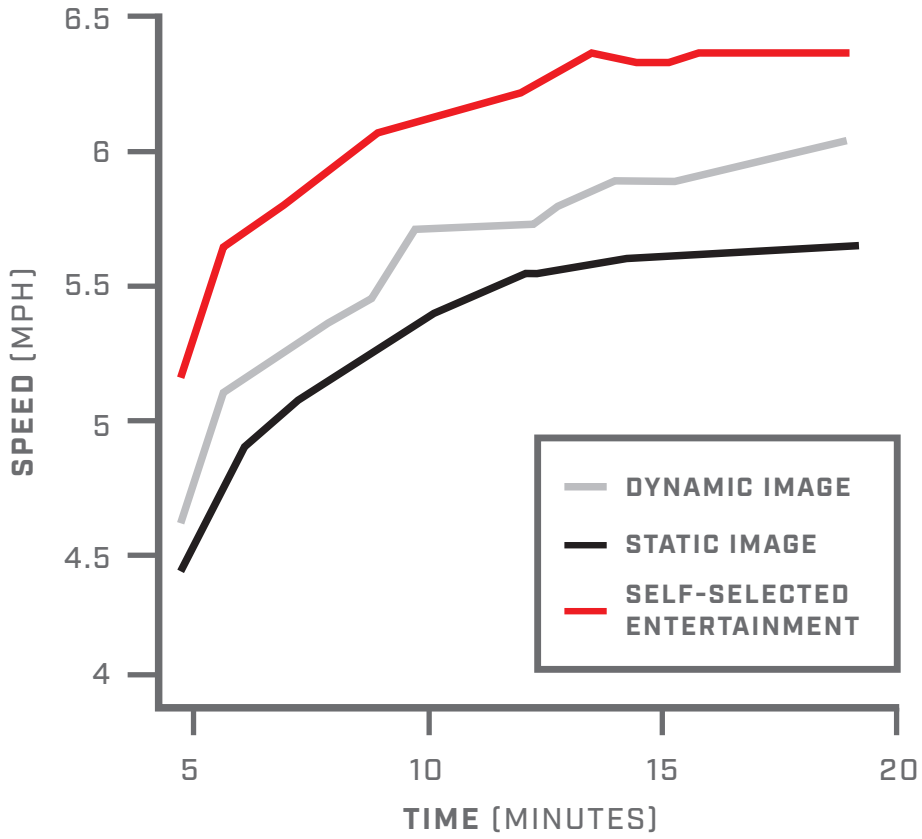
THE SPEEDS DURING A 20-MINUTE TREADMILL RUN REVEALED THAT THE ENTERTAINMENT GROUP PUSHED THEMSELVES EVEN HARDER THAN THOSE VIEWING NATURE SCENERY.

Different Kinds of Distraction

As it turns out, it seems the specific kind of entertainment or distraction influences the exercise experience as well. Researchers have investigated the conditions for the best workouts from the perspectives of both subjective enjoyment and objective physical performance. Findings suggest that cardio equipment is more enjoyable when viewing nature scenery or using self-selected entertainment, increasing happiness and reducing anxiety after a single workout. Research also indicates that self-selected entertainment may offer even more advantages, because the speeds selected during a 20-minute treadmill run revealed that the entertainment group pushed themselves even harder than those viewing nature scenery. Given that a workout's degree of challenge determines the physical adaptations during recovery, self-selected entertainment is a great way to get both more enjoyment and more health benefits out of challenging cardio exercise.

Distraction as a Differentiator

In addition to getting your people to come back for more, entertainment options on your cardio equipment can help set your fitness facility apart from competitors. During facility tours, make sure to highlight these options to prospective members. Offering a variety of entertainment choices can help members gain more enjoyment from their workouts as they sweat their way to a higher level of fitness.



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