

BOOSTING METABOLISMS & MEMBER ACQUISITION

by Karlie Intlekofer, Ph.D.

Many people think our metabolism slows down due to old age and diet, but the truth is that low physical activity is among the top drivers of metabolic dysfunction. Regular cardio exercise and strength training can actually improve metabolic rate, allowing for greater dietary flexibility and making weight management less challenging. Fitness professionals who share the metabolic benefits of exercise can help their facilities attract and retain more members.

Understanding Metabolic Dysfunction

When a person develops poor metabolic health, they may qualify for a diagnosis of Metabolic Syndrome (MetS). This diagnosis is made when a person has at least three out of five possible conditions, which include low levels of good (HDL) cholesterol, excess fat around the waist, high blood pressure, elevated triglycerides and high fasting blood sugar. All of these are signs of metabolic impairment that can accelerate heart and blood vessel damage. Unfortunately, the prevalence of this condition is on the rise, affecting at least 30% of adults worldwide. The Americas and Eastern Mediterranean regions in particular have a dangerously high prevalence of MetS. Luckily, the active lifestyle of someone who regularly visits a fitness facility like yours can help virtually everyone improve their metabolic health without prescription medications.

Fighting MetS with Fitness

Staying fit can provide a remarkable defense against MetS. In fact, studies have shown that those with high levels of fitness are 20 times less likely to develop MetS compared to those with low fitness! But what if a person has already been diagnosed with MetS? As it turns out, regular exercise can still address each condition of metabolic impairment. A recent study demonstrated that just five months of regular fitness facility visits can eliminate 31% of MetS diagnoses while reducing the symptoms of metabolic impairment for all remaining study participants.

METABOLIC SYNDROME (MetS)

Having three out of five metabolic conditions:

- Low HDL cholesterol
- Large waist size
- High blood pressure
- High triglycerides
- High fasting blood sugar



Diet vs Diet + Exercise

Improving one's diet can also alleviate many of the conditions associated with MetS, but research suggests that a healthier diet and exercise together are much more effective than adjusting diet alone. Large-scale studies have found that any amount of vigorous physical activity reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease, even in those with poor diets. Healthy eating guidance can be difficult to communicate to fitness facility members, but fitness professionals like you can still emphasize regular activity as a way to improve metabolic health.

Recruiting & Retaining Members

Despite public health initiatives to encourage exercise, at least half of all adults are inactive. For instance, surveys reveal that 45% of Europeans say they never exercise, with particularly high rates of inactivity in Portugal (73%), Greece (68%), and Poland (65%). As a fitness professional, how do you get these people into your facility and keep them coming back for more? Start by considering a mix of the following tactics:

Educational Marketing

Persuasive marketing campaigns can draw attention to the metabolic benefits of exercise and show your community that MetS is a preventable lifestyle disease. Providing real-life success stories of metabolic health improvements can motivate your community to get active and boost your recruitment efforts.

Personalized Programming

Consider on-ramp fitness programs to welcome new members who are eager to get their health back on track. Guide these beginners toward options appropriate for lower baseline fitness. Emphasize how your facility's programs and trainers are well-equipped to support them in achieving their metabolic health goals. For those just starting their fitness journey, this can counter anxieties about not knowing what to do and help them make exercise a habit.

Community Collaboration

Establish partnerships with local healthcare providers to raise awareness of your fitness facility and the success stories your team supports. Offer brochures and other club information in waiting rooms and develop referral programs or personal training packages for referred patients. These partnerships will enhance your credibility and expand your reach to potential members who have been encouraged to exercise by health care professionals.

Referral Incentives

Most of your current members have friends and family with metabolic issues who may not know what your fitness facility offers. By incentivizing your current members to bring in new members — with discounts, special offers, gift certificates, free apparel and more — you can expand your reach to a wider audience.

Talking About MetS

As a fitness professional, you can start by informing your current and prospective members about the risk factors of MetS and letting them know that exercise offers a proven solution for improving metabolic health. This can set your facility apart from the competition in a way that shows you go above and beyond for the people you serve. Better still, as word gets around about the unique ways in which you support your members, your facility will become an attractive destination for all the people in your community who are ready to make a change.

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