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## Dogs get their share of attention, too

By Felix Sanchez  
Staff writer

Eat too much fusion cuisine over the holidays? That anti-carbohydrate fad diet have you craving hamburger buns?

Then jump on to the latest fitness trend among flabby Americans: fusion fitness workouts.

The nation's big fitness centers, and an exploding number of smaller, more personalized workout gyms are taking unique routines and activities and "infusing" them into exercises that have the out-of-shape sweating in growing numbers.

Pilates and yoga. Kickboxing in the swimming pool. Cycling and jump-roping. Hot, hot yoga with stretching in a superheated room. Martial arts to hip hop music. Zen massage. Zen boxing.

In Long Beach, one of the newest fitness centers to take advantage of fusion workouts opened its doors in August but businessowner and fitness buff Dex Graham merely thought he was giving his clients a "holistic" workout combining massage, yoga, cardio, meditation and other physical activities.

It wasn't until one of his students remarked, "Hey, this is like that fusion thing I'm hearing about at health clubs," that Graham, 48, realized he was riding the crest of a trend.

"Fusion is the big word now, the big trend in the fitness industry," Graham said.

Dexoflex Studios, Graham's fitness venture on Viking Way, offers a variety of fusion classes and fitness programs, including pilates/yoga, Zen belly dancing and zen boxing - a combo of kick boxing and yoga.

"Who would have thought of that two years ago? Not me. But it turns out to be a really great class and a lot of fun," Graham said.

The American Council on Exercise said fusion fitness has become popular because it gives people a workout that actually is interesting. And for health clubs and fitness centers constantly trying to find ways to keep people coming back to the gym, that is a business blessing.

"For many people it takes variety for them to stick with a regular exercise program," said Richard Cotton, an exercise physiologist and a spokesman with the council.

"All the novelty you can integrate is helpful in attracting a segment of the exercising population and non-exercising population," Cotton said. "It's always been a motivation (of the industry) to be innovative with an exercise program. That's what brought us the step and the slide."

But fusion, Cotton and Graham said, is more than just a novelty because it can make people exercise more and gives the entire body and mind a workout.

And that's what could keep fusion fitness from going the path of previous fitness fads like step classes.

"I've had people I've counseled who ride a stationary bike. They'll get on at 6:35 in the morning, ride a half hour, get off and shower and they're happy," Cotton said. "But that's a minority. If it were much more interesting, maybe they would go for an hour."

"Variety is the spice of exercise. It's what really makes exercise more interesting; it enhances the benefits."

Graham added: "What we're doing is combining physical activity with mind and body activity and they're walking away feeling like they got the whole package in one class."

To a visitor to Graham's gym it might seem that the licensed massage therapist, as well as certified personal trainer, group exercise instructor, master yoga instructor and personal fitness trainer, is taking fusion fitness to the dogs.

It all started when a massage instructor was teaching a fitness class and during a break began massaging a student's dog, Graham said.

"She started getting phone calls from other people wanting their animals massaged so she decided to hold a workshop to do it yourself and it sold out in no time," Graham said. "Now we have a second one in February and will be doing more."

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So far Graham said his business, which he financed using his life savings, is faring well. He has a staff of nine instructors, four massage therapists and three front desk workers, all in a 2,500-square-foot facility.

"Of course you get jitters when opening up a business, but when I saw the space here was available and I came and looked at it, I knew instantly I wanted to be here," Graham said.

Well, actually Graham had to sleep on it. Literally.

"I asked the people who were the leasing agents could I stay in the space overnight," he said. "I brought my dog and sleeping bag and boombox and slept here overnight. I woke up and had slept so soundly and felt so good when I woke up I said this is the space I want to be in."

Graham is capitalizing on another trend in the fitness world: people are more comfortable going to smaller studios where they can get one-on-one attention, or at least feel personally tended to, and shying away from the big fitness studios.

The fitness publication, Club Industry, reports a five percent growth in new gyms in recent years, and Cotton said trends are that a growing number of yoga studios and smaller, personalized fitness centers, like Curves, will give bigger centers a run for their money.

The exercise council said private studios and YMCAs are offering direct competition for larger clubs and are listening to their customers' needs, particularly on issues like fusion fitness innovations and personal attention.

Cotton said small or large, and no matter how many fancy workout machines and equipment are on hand - the challenge will be to keep exercise interesting and innovative.

AT A GLANCE:

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Open seven days a week, class times vary (562) 429-7509

[www.dexoflex.com](http://www.dexoflex.com)

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