

# fit for all: women's fitness groups

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**a**T 37 YEARS OLD, Lara Zent felt out of shape. She decided the time was right for a positive change when a friend inspired her to participate in the 2006 Danskin Women's Triathlon, an event designed for beginners.

To prepare, Zent joined Iron Chicks Tri Training, an Austin-based Rogue Training Systems women's group, so she could train in a fun, supportive environment with professional coaching. "It was such a great and unexpected feeling the way my body responded to the training and that I was able to be competitive at a sport that I just had started in my late 30's," she says.

Rogue's head coach, Ruth England, says Iron Chicks is geared toward those just entering the sport. "We have kind of a little family," she says. Participants can attend informational clinics and social activities that allow women to connect with each other "while wearing real clothes."

## overcoming the fear

Many women feel self-conscious about their bodies and working out in front of others, and training groups are an opportunity for them to work through their anxieties - literally - with all ages, sizes, and experience levels, explains England. Motivated by events ranging from divorce to cancer, they find a safe and supportive environment for their personal growth.

Despite the initial hesitation many feel, "Women tend to underestimate their skill. When there's a will, there's a way. As long as the (training) plan is written to slowly let the body adapt, it will adapt to anything," she says.

## meeting your goals

Training programs make goals achievable for women across Texas. Dallas-area Fit2Train offers women's weekend camps that pair wine tastings with Hill Country scenery on 40 or 60-mile bike rides for all-ability cyclists.

Austin-based Fit Divas allows women to connect online

while participating in Fit Divas, a 12-week total body program, and Distance Divas, a six-month walking and running program. Diva Coach Amy Gayle provides weekly workouts via e-mail. "One of the cool things about it is people from everywhere can do it," she says, with the only requirement upon joining being the ability to walk for 30 minutes at a steady pace.

Carrie Godfrey, co-owner of Houston-based Ironbabe Sports, says many beginners fear swimming in open water so some women's events offer extra support for this part. The Ironbabe Tri uses buoys connected by ropes to keep swimmers on track, and foam noodles are available for those who need a break.

## fitness fun

Patti McKeever, event manager of San Antonio-based Soler's Sports and producer of the all-women Siren's Triathlon, says while many women initially participate in triathlons to lose weight and get in shape, they often continue because it's fun. "A lot of women get back to being a girl - not just a mom, wife, or whatever they are doing in life," she says.

Siren's Triathlon, which features palm trees and volunteers in hula skirts, is designed for first-timers, with a 150-meter pool swim, 6-mile bike course, and 2-mile run. And, while a "sirenitas" category is open to six to 16-year-olds, there are no age-group awards, unlike many races.

Lynn Francis, who finished the race as part of a mother-daughter relay team, appreciates the warm, supportive atmosphere. "It's nice not to have to look out for somebody attempting to crawl up my back on the swim or bike."

## fit for the future

Zent now looks forward to getting into shape again through triathlons after having a baby this year. "I was really impressed with all the women competing into their 40s, 50s, and even 60s, and it made me feel that this was a sport that I could continue to enjoy for years to come."★