



Peak performance

Picking up running in your 30s or 40s is easy with the right encouragement, writes **Ivy Ong-Wood**

MOST OF US are familiar with that exercise slump in our 20s. You may have been a school athlete but now that you're working 18-hour days to advance your career, there is no time to exercise.

Dentist Francis Chan knows that feeling all too well. The 45-year-old had been a swimmer in school but stopped exercising when he started work.

He took up running in his 30s. He recalled: "I weighed 85 kilograms then and was an avid smoker. I started running for exercise after I saw pictures of myself without a shirt on. I was quite shocked and, at first, I didn't think the pictures were of me as I looked flabby and unfit."

Needless to say, his first race was not a success. "It was quite an eye-opener. My friend signed me up for a half-marathon race of 21 kilometers. I didn't even know what a half marathon was so I was totally unprepared. It took me three and a quarter hours to finish the race, and I came in second last."

Since then, he has been building up his fitness and now weighs a healthy 72.5kg. But it wasn't an overnight achievement.

"I started by running short distances and as my stamina improved, I increased the distance. Running with friends helped a great deal," he said. "When we first started, I was the least fit. I used to have to bring money with me because I'd get left behind and had to get a taxi home. Now, I'm more or less at the same level as the rest."

He's since taken up cycling and is now an avid triathlete. His wife and three-year-old daughter have also taken up running. His next aim is running up the Swiss Alps.



Francis Chan

He and his running mates decided to formalize their weekly runs by starting Club Balance early this year. The nonprofit club aims to encourage other couch potatoes to give up the remote control for running shoes.

Unlike some running clubs where all the members are scarily young and fit, Club Balance is mostly made up of professionals aged above 40. As most have families, the activities are always a mix of exercise and family fun.

Said fellow founder Andrew Sum, an executive vice-president at RBS Coutts Hong Kong: "All the founding members have benefited from the discipline of ensuring a balanced lifestyle. We

work hard but we also ensure we make time for our family and engage in hobbies that we enjoy."

The club's first event is the Victoria to Peak Challenge 2009, a fun family-oriented race that takes runners through some of the most famous buildings and historical sites in the city.

Runners get to enjoy breakfast together on The Peak after the race.

Sum said: "We wanted this race to be different. Our experience with previous races is that you disperse immediately after. There is very little mingling or meeting people with similar interests."

"What we enjoyed most was our own post-race gatherings, where we could share our experiences about the race and have a good laugh together. The race is not the end game. It's also about friendship – bringing together the runners, volunteers and their families."

Fit runners are expected to complete the race in under an hour but to accommodate the not-so-fit, the cut-off time is two hours.

One thing's for sure – there's no shame in carrying along a little extra money for that taxi ride home if you can't finish the race.

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Victoria to Peak Challenge 2009

What: 10km race from Victoria Harbour to The Peak

When: 7:30am, October 1

Entry fee: HK\$250, including breakfast on The Peak. Proceeds to go to charity.

Entry form: www.clubbalance.org

Deadline: September 25