MILWAUKEE, WI – Beginning a new fitness program can be tough – but studies show that participating in a program with a friend or loved one can lead to a more successful outcome. As Valentine's Day approaches, consider how inviting your special someone(s) to participate with you on a wellness journey could improve your health and your relationship.

Members of TOPS Club, Inc. (Take Off Pounds Sensibly), the nonprofit weight-loss support organization, have experienced success in reaching their fitness goals by partnering with loved ones and friends to get moving! No matter your goal, losing weight with a friend can be easier than going it alone. In fact, according to a study from the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, people who work out with friends spend an average of 40 percent more time exercising than those who exercise alone.

TOPS members belong to local chapters, where group support provides positive reinforcement for follow-through on nutrition and exercise programs. Weekly weigh-ins and meetings provide accountability and camaraderie. And when members achieve a goal, they are recognized and celebrate together. The following TOPS members agree.

A chapter in Kansas had an influx of new members last spring who joined at the urging of each other. Linda Culbertson and Judy Harvey joined first. "I had some good success, and started telling everybody I work with that they should join TOPS," says Culbertson.

One month later, Glen Harvey, Judy's husband, joined the fitness fun, followed by Mary Orr, Pam and Chuck Ireland, and finally, Pat Orr, husband of Mary.

Since joining, the group of co-workers and spouses are successful and encouraging to each other. "You feel like you don't want to let the other person down," says Glen Harvey.

Couples who may be looking for a new way to express their love for each other should remember to keep it positive and enjoy time together in their new endeavor towards wellness. Consider these tips for fitness success:

• Be open to trying an activity that is different or completely new for both of you, like salsa classes or indoor rock-climbing. Incorporating new activities adds to your shared interests and helps keep things fresh.
• Try activities you can do side-by-side but at different paces. It's okay to work out on adjoining machines and pick your own level of intensity.
• Do assisted stretches together to increase both of your flexibility.
• Challenge yourself, but don't do too much too soon. The purpose of working out together is getting motivated to go farther than you think you can while spending time together.
• Be supportive, kind, and encouraging. Don't criticize each other.
• Bring the kids, too. Research indicates that family lifestyle influences children's weight. Family walks and pickup games, like basketball and soccer, are good exercise.

TOPS Club Inc. (Take Off Pounds Sensibly), the original, nonprofit weight-loss support and wellness education organization, was established more than 63 years ago to champion weight-loss support and success. Founded and headquartered in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, TOPS promotes successful, affordable weight management with a philosophy that combines healthy eating, regular exercise, wellness information, and support from others at weekly chapter meetings. TOPS has about 170,000 members in nearly 10,000 chapters throughout the United States and Canada.

Visitors are welcome to attend their first TOPS meeting free of charge. To find a local chapter, view www.tops.org or call (800) 932-8677.

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