

Strength in Numbers

Getting fit and building relationships does every body good. See how these tribes found motivation through the power of sisterhood.

BY HOLLY PEVZNER

EXERCISING DURING AND AFTER PREGNANCY CAN BOOST WELL-BEING AND DECREASE POSTPARTUM SYMPTOMS.

Raquel Roman (top) and

her support network



WE ALL KNOW that working out does wonders for the mind, body, and soul. But did you know that getting your sweat on alongside your amigas can be especially beneficial? A study in the *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology* found that jogging, spinning, and pumping iron with others actually increase persistence and motivation. And for mothers, it's extra important. Not only does exercise improve psychological well-being and protect against postpartum depression, but authentic relationships have been shown to buffer new moms against the

challenges of parenthood. Just take it from these Latina squads who fueled fitness with friendship.

1 The Running Mamis

LOS ANGELES

Every other Saturday at 7:45 A.M., 100 moms with children in tow meet up at Los Angeles State Historic Park to walk, run, or do

“whatever you want,” says the group’s cofounder Raquel Roman.

➤ **Origin story:** Back in 2018, Roman, a Mexican-American mom of a now 3-year-old son, Francisco, and her pals Raquel Zamora and Jo Anna Mixpe Ley were struggling to merge their love of running with their roles as mothers. Paths and parks weren’t always stroller- or kid-friendly. Neither were local races. And it was rare to encounter a fellow Latina jogger. Roman and her friends got to talking and decided to start a running club. It would be a safe space for mothers who were new or returning runners—children more than welcome. The meetups were bolstered by both word-of-mouth and social media. “As Latinas, we found common ground based on understanding and respect,” Roman says.

➤ **Good vibes only:** Roman also wanted to create a body-positive experience. “Like a lot of Latinas, I don’t match the image people might have of a long, lean runner—I’m 5 feet 5 inches and 170 pounds,” she says. “Running Mamis proves you don’t need to look a certain way to be an athlete.” Her new tribe helped her get back in shape, and then some. “We talk, jog, and solve problems—from parenting to career issues,” she says. “I feel so powerful running alongside such amazing Latinas. They make me feel that I can do anything.”

➤ **Next up:** The Mamis are gearing up for Nike’s LA 13.1 half marathon in April. “We have different training groups to accommodate varied levels of running,” Roman says. “We aren’t doing it to compete or win, but to build a village where everyone feels accomplished.”

2

The Stroller Striders

AUSTIN

Karla Monroe Castellanos found her ride-or-dies through Stroller Strides, a statewide exercise program that offers classes specifically for mothers. They get together almost every day at a local park, with their kids and strollers, for a jam-packed hour of high-intensity interval cardio, mountain climbers, and burpees.

> In the beginning: In 2014, Monroe Castellanos, who is Guatemalan-Mexican, joined the group following the birth of her first daughter, Marley. She had moved to Texas a few years earlier from California and was hoping to make new connections. After her first few meetups, she zeroed in on three women who were speaking Spanish. “I could relate to them, and they reminded me of home,” she says. She loved the confidence boost that came from the class too. “There’s something about looking over at the mom next to you and seeing the same focus in her eyes,” she says. “Our kids are watching us, and that drives us to be our best.”

> Turning point: It wasn’t until she had her second daughter, Makenna, and experienced postpartum anxiety, though, that Monroe Castellanos realized how important her newfound friends were for her mental health. The moms, sensing she was overwhelmed, supplied endless encouragement, reminding her she wasn’t alone. “When I was down, they picked me up,” Monroe Castellanos says. “They made me feel that we were on this parenting journey together.”

> Amigas for life: “It’s hard not to be your genuine self when you’re sweating next to someone and have a crying baby at your side!” Monroe Castellanos says. “They’re my girls. We push one another through every hurdle, whether it’s squats or sleepless nights!”

> Fun and games: The kids—seven in total—run, play, and even do planks while their moms exercise. “We’re one big family,” Monroe Castellanos says.

3

The Yogi Mamas

NEW YORK CITY

When the weather warms up, Stephanie Acosta and her besties head to Central Park for 75 minutes of yoga. The fresh



“WE ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER TO BE STRONG MAMAS,” SAYS MONROE CASTELLANOS (SECOND FROM LEFT).

air leaves the group clearheaded and energetic, but the real reward is getting to spend some much-needed gal time together after class. “We pack a picnic and socialize,” Acosta says. “It’s a great way to decompress!”

> How they met: Three years ago, Acosta, a Puerto Rican–Ecuadorian yoga instructor and mom of a 4-year-old daughter, Kloé, was determined to make more Latina friends. “I’m a single mother, and I really wanted my own little support system so I wouldn’t feel as if I was parenting alone,” Acosta says. “It’s also important for Kloé to grow up surrounded by strong Latinas as role models.” Since her work is such a big part of her life, Acosta got in touch with three mothers

she knew from yoga and the *mami*-only sessions began. Now, Acosta posts to social media about their outings, inviting other moms and yogis to join in.

> Beyond the mat: Yoga helps Acosta maintain balance. “We’re all better parents because of it,” she says. “When I’m having a hectic day, I’ll calm my breath to recenter myself. I even taught my daughter to do the same when she has a tantrum.”

> Instant inspiration: The ladies communicate via a group chat, frequently reminding one another to invest in self-care. “They’re the first ones to tell me I need a day off,” Acosta says. “Being a mom is tough enough. We help one another walk a little taller and stand a little straighter.”



Acosta (second from right) and her BFFs

LOOKING FOR WORKOUT BUDDIES?

These digital tools make connecting a total breeze.

● **PEANUT** The app sets you up with potential pals based on location, kids’ ages, and interests—you can even tailor your search to match with a “Fitness Friend.” Once you spot a like-minded mami, simply swipe up! *Free for iOS and Android*

● **FITBIT** Through the wearable tech brand’s app, you can join a virtual exercise group—there are many local and even Spanish-speaking options available—or simply create one of your own and find other parents to work out with IRL. *Free for iOS and Android*

● **OHBABYFITNESS.COM** The website allows you to browse mom-centered classes—from yoga and toning to water aerobics and Pilates—taught by instructors specifically trained in prenatal and postnatal fitness.

● **NEXTDORR** Maybe you already consult the app when you need to locate the best mechanic or babysitter in your area. But you can also use it to connect with moms in your neighborhood who are interested in getting healthy. *Free for iOS and Android*