

FRIEND for all

Beat bridal stress – without breaking the bank – with our guide to the best no-pay fitness options



Planning a wedding can be a rollercoaster. One minute, you're riding high with the excitement of having finally ordered your dress or an excellent tasting session with your caterer; the next, you're plunged into despair by late RSVPs, or by needing to pay a string of deposits simultaneously. It's all too easy to let your stress levels get out of control. And, given how many new to-dos you have in your daily life, it's tempting to simply crash out in front of Netflix during any downtime you do get. After dealing with a multitude of planning problems, surely you deserve a rest? But the key to beating wedding stress may in fact lie in adding some extra activity. The physical benefits of exercising are well known, but

studies have found it can improve your mental wellbeing, too. Exercise of all kinds not only raises levels of mood-enhancing endorphins, it also reduces stress hormones such as cortisol. What's more, one study suggests regular exercising can improve your response to stress – so whatever wedding planning throws at you, you'll have the resilience to deal with it. And the best bit is, you don't have to pay a fortune to reap the benefits. In fact, there are increasing numbers of spend-free fitness options across the UK. We've rounded up our favourite ways to get fit for free, covering all kinds of exercise style and ability, to help you feel your bridal best.

Run away

On Saturdays, our Instagram feeds fill up with sweaty, happy selfies – and it's all because of Parkrun. These weekly timed 5k runs take place around the country. It's free to take part – and, by the looks of it, very good fun. Head to parkrun.org.uk to find your nearest event and register. If 5k sounds rather, well, long, check out Couch to 5K, created by the NHS. You can either download the weekly podcast or get the whole programme as an app. With a mix of walking and running, it's a great way for novices to build up to running 5k without stopping. nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/get-running-with-couch-to-5k

Join the club

If 5k doesn't quite cut it for you, but you'd still prefer not to run solo, do some research into running clubs. Most of these are free, and depending on the size, they might have different groups depending on ability. You'll be able to pick up tips on everything from technique to trainers.

Walk it off

Of course, running isn't for everyone – and you can actually reap benefits from walking, provided you keep up an energetic pace. A study by the London School of Economics found that people who walk briskly for more than 30 minutes every day had smaller waists and lower BMIs than those who don't. Plot your route and track your progress with the free app MapMyWalk.

Get digital

Speaking of apps, these really have transformed the at-home fitness scene. Whatever your exercise style, there's an app for you, from yoga to strength training. You can watch and copy workouts and create a personalised plan. You can also specify no-equipment routines. Many are free to download, though you can choose to pay extra to unlock bonus content. It's worth trying a few to discover which best suits you – we particularly like Nike+ Training Club, Sworkit and Yoga Studio.

WORDS BY HANNAH DAVIES. PHOTOGRAPHS BY SWEATY BETTY. GETTY IMAGES



“THE KEY TO BEATING WEDDING STRESS MAY LIE IN ADDING SOME EXTRA ACTIVITY”

Go green

Green Gyms are outdoor activity sessions where you get to do environment-boosting tasks, from helping protect wildlife habitats to planting trees, while also getting fit. According to the company, you can burn a third more calories in some Green Gym sessions than in an average aerobics class – so you'll be doing yourself good as well as the planet. There are local sessions available around the UK, tcv.org.uk/greengym

Park it

Our Parks offer one-hour fitness classes, taught by qualified coaches, in parks and open green spaces. At the moment, most take place in London, but they're expanding throughout the UK, so keep an eye out if you live further afield. You can choose from Pilates, dance, circuit training, box fit and more – it's an impressive list, ourparks.org.uk

Feel good

In a similar vein, Good Gym is a community of runners that combines pounding the pavements with helping others. When you go on a “mission run”, for example, you run to the house of an older person to offer a friendly face and help them out with a task they can no longer do themselves. A “group run” involves running together with others to a site where you carry out jobs to help a community. Volunteering + working out = winning. Take a look at goodgym.org for opportunities near you.

Explore social

There's a plethora of fitness influencers and bloggers out there. While some of these can be good sources of workout ideas, do approach with caution. If the person in question isn't a qualified trainer, take their suggestions with a pinch of salt. There's also a fine line between inspirational and unrealistically aspirational – cut abs are not a prerequisite for happiness. We like @ellelinton for her excellent at-home exercises and positive attitude.

Get some class

If you're not a fan of the great outdoors, you may be able to get your indoor class fix for free. In London, for example, luxe fitness brands Sweaty Betty (sweatybetty.com/discover/workouts) and lululemon (lululemon.co.uk) offer complimentary classes, as does the Adidas studio in Brick Lane (adidas.co.uk/studioldn_152bricklane).