

Beijing resumes radio exercise sessions

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This file photo taken on August 9, 2010 shows Chinese workers doing group exercises prior to the opening of a shopping mall in Beijing.

Photograph by: STR, AFP/Getty Images

BEIJING — Thousands of workers across Beijing have started exercising twice a day to music on the radio, as the capital resumes mandatory calisthenics after a three-year break, state media said Wednesday.

The radio exercise sessions resumed Monday and authorities hope as many as four million workers will perform the routines broadcast twice a day, at 10:00 am and 3:00 pm, the Global Times and China Daily newspapers said.

The group calisthenics started in 1951 but were stopped in the lead-up to the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008 due to programming demands, the reports said.

The Beijing Federation of Trade Unions wants the eight-minute exercise programme to be mandatory for all state-owned companies in the capital by 2011 and for 60 percent of workers across the city to participate.

"The radio gymnastic exercises can help people acquire a healthy body," Yu Junsheng, the federation's vice chairman, was quoted by China Daily as saying.

"Through collective activity, people feel more relaxed and have greater efficiency at work."

About 5,000 instructors will be trained to teach employees how to perform the routines, which are part of a 10-year plan announced by the government last year to improve the health of the population.

As China's economy develops, more and more people are leading sedentary lifestyles, eating richer food in larger quantities than before and putting on weight -- raising concerns about public health.

Yan Tao, who works for China Everbright Bank, said the radio exercises helped him take a break from his busy day.

"It was a little bit weird at first... but having done the exercises I feel they are a sort of relaxation period during my work," Yan, 24, was quoted by China Daily as saying.

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