



nawaz modi singhania
perfect fit

Millions are exercising and enjoying themselves through cardio kick-boxing

HHEY, you! Are you really ready for the next century? Do you have what it takes? Get lean and mean, and lose your flabbiness! Find yourself, a new and better you, through your evolving workouts! Have you considered kicking and punching your way to fitness with one of the hot and happening new cardio kick-boxing programs?

Whether marketed as taekwondo, boxercise, tai-chi, cardio-karate or cardio kick-boxing, these classes take the upbeat music and high energy excitement of aerobics and combine it with martial art moves, athletic drills and the boxing flavour. This makes for a great, highly effective workout.

Today, millions of exercisers are trying this popular trend in physical activity. This is presently a very hot sport for men and women of all ages and all fitness levels.

It was inevitable! Boxers are excellent examples of physical fitness in every sense. Fitness just had to borrow from the sport.

These workouts provide the heart all with the benefits of a cardiovascular workout, while offering gains in agility, strength, flexibility, balance and coordination. They're great for stress-relief, discipline, self-esteem and weight control. They're designed to work all parts of the body and due to the great new variety of movements, the likelihood of injury due to overuse is reduced.

The range of benefits is certainly impressive, but cardio kick-boxing imposes a considerable risk of injury for new exercisers or participants who don't know how to protect themselves from the potential dangers. Even very fit exercisers can be challenged by their first class.

Cardio kick-boxing is a complicated form of exercise because the range and planes of motion differ from what most people are used to. Traditional martial arts training builds progressively.

Students learn each new move step by step, allowing their bodies time to develop the ability to perform all moves safely and correctly. Moves are not done repetitively to fast music, as they generally are in cardio kick-boxing classes.

In your very first cardio kick-boxing class, you could find yourself performing advanced moves, such as fan and hook kicks. However, you wouldn't do these in a martial arts class until a very advanced stage. You would first have to progress through several belt colours.

Kicks like these produce explosive forces on the lower back and other joints. The punches and jabs taught in these classes can cause problems for the elbows, wrists, neck and shoulders. Unless you progressively develop the necessary strength and stability to perform these moves with good form, you will be at risk for injury.

Safety guidelines

Play hard, but play it safe! It's easy to get carried away with your workout and ignore safety guidelines, but it's just not worth it.

■ **Start low and slow with kicks and punches:** Whatever you do, don't start throwing full kicks and punches in your first class. These can be very explosive to areas such as the back and knees, in particular. Begin slowly



Figure 1: A straight jab aimed at the opponent's head

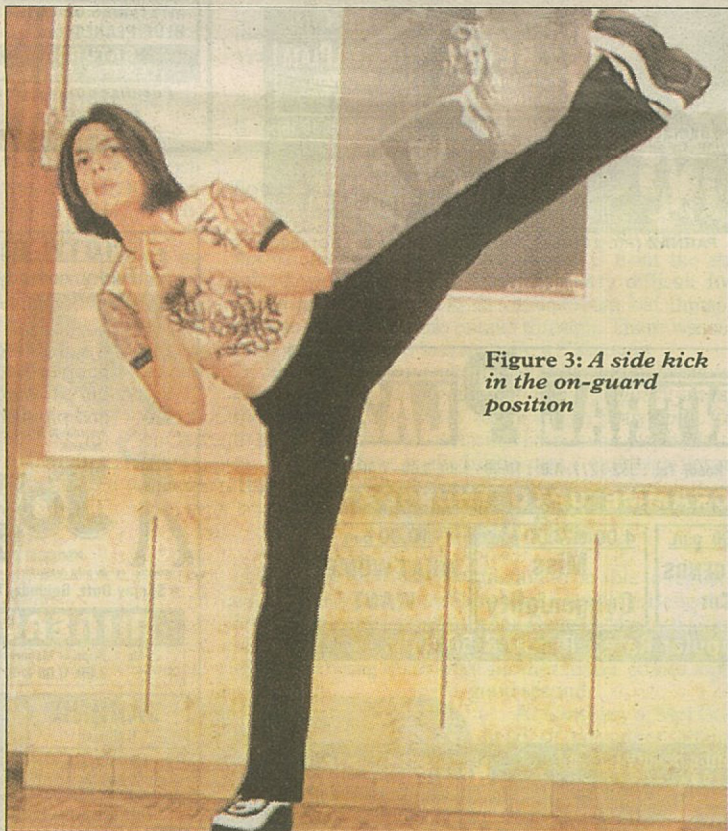


Figure 3: A side kick in the on-guard position

and keep your kicks low, especially on side kicks and roundhouses or fan kicks. Don't overextend or hyperextend your kicks or lock your joints. This sort of 'snapping' at the joint is potentially very harmful. You can take on the move extent of the move once you're clear on safety precautions and once your ability and flexibility improves.

■ **Easy does it!** Remember that usually kicks are weapons to the lower body and punches are weapons to the face. Don't act as if you were kicking at an opponent's head — you're often kicking at the legs.

■ **Do just one to three cardio kick-boxing workouts per week:** If you want to have longevity in the sport, start with only one workout per week and gradually build up to no more than three (unless you're also doing some other form of martial arts training or sport-specific strength training). This way your workout will remain both effective and stay safe.

■ **Take on an interval training programme:** A cardio kick-boxing programme that follows an interval

training session will alternate high-intensity workouts with recovery periods in which moves are performed slowly, which provides a breather. By choosing interval training, you reduce your chances of getting fatigued and sacrificing good form. You'll end up doing it just right! This is also an excellent method of burning fat.

■ **Select a trained and qualified instructor:** Your instructor should be trained and certified as a fitness instructor, in addition to having boxing or martial arts training. He or she should give you specific instructions for modifying moves to include people of varying fitness levels, ages, having different goals and at different stages of learning. You'll learn about correct form and body alignment, intensity, the proper range of motion, and how to maximise muscle toning.

■ **Watch yourself:** Keep a constant eye on yourself in the mirror. No, that's not because I think you're self-obsessed, but because this way you'll be more aware and in control of your body form and alignment. You'll



Figure 2: An uppercut, aiming at the chin and jaw

keep yourself in check. We often think we're doing one thing, but when looking at ourselves in the mirror, more often than not, we find we're doing quite another. Funny, isn't it?

■ **Take it easy initially:** When starting out, look for a relatively simple programme that isn't heavily choreographed, has limited repetitions and isn't extremely fast. Ideally, the music speed should be no faster than 135-140 beats per minute. Take the time to focus on your form and body alignment before progressing to the next stage.

■ **Hit it right:** Never 'snap' at the elbow. Extend the arm out to 80 or 90 per cent of your full reach, but never 100 per cent. This way the joint remains slightly bent or soft, and is well protected. Snapping at the joints is damaging.

■ **Proper footwear:** I strongly suggest you never compromise on footwear. Your shoes need to be designed for pivots and lateral movement. If you wear running shoes on a carpet, you risk spraining an ankle.

■ **Focus on your footwork:** Consider taking on jump rope drills or other forms of floor-work to strengthen your feet for the specific demands of cardio kick-boxing.

■ **Circuit train:** In aerobics, a fusion of the shadow boxing spirit and aerobic moves are well blended. This makes for a great cardiovascular workout, while increasing upper body strength and tone.

In circuits, a variety of equipment placed on different exercise stations are utilised during the workout. Suitable exercise stations might include shadow boxing, focus pads, stair running, heavy punch bags, floor to ceiling balls, skipping or rope jumping, abdominal crunches, sprinting, speed balls, weights, etc. A participant works on each station for a minute or two in a systematic way.

■ **Impact concerns:** It has been estimated that during high impact activities where one is jumping or hopping off the ground with both feet at the same time, the lower limbs, especially the knees, ankles and the shins, can take up to 5-6 times one's body weight. This can lead to injury if not judiciously used. Your trainer or instructor should be able to address this issue and make sure you stay safe, while gaining the maximum from high impact simultaneously.

Wooden flooring with an air layer under it is the best surface to exercise on. A suspended wood floor can

absorb up to 2.5 times your body weight, to minimise the ill effects of impact.

■ **Cross train using different activities:** Complement your kick-boxing programme with non-impact or low-impact, other forms of exercise — such as indoor stationary cycling, walking, jogging, playing a racket game and swimming.

■ **Medical clearance is important:** Remember to check with your physician for his/her recommendations and restrictions before starting a cardio kick-boxing program.

This way your trainer can ensure you get just what the doctor ordered!

Some basic punches

A straight jab: As demonstrated in Figure 1, it is aimed at the opponent's head. Your body weight must go across your body and behind the punch in order to power it. Make sure you go for an 85-90 per cent of your full arm reach, but never 100 per cent. That sort of 'snapping' at the elbow is harmful for the joint as described above.

An uppercut: This blow is aimed from under the chin and jaw. As demonstrated in Figure 2, one must go through the legs and deliver this one in a crouched position so as to get the body weight behind the punch.

A side kick: This has been demonstrated in Figure 3, and may be aimed at the opponent's head or body. Lean over in the opposite direction to accommodate the kick, while keeping the standing leg slightly soft from the safety angle.

Besides being highly effective and energising, kick-boxing is also a fun workout. So get into gear, and get punching and kicking!

Who knows, the side benefits of training might just come in handy with your boyfriend or husband! Unless they start treating you with a new respect, that is! (Hey! Relax! I'm just kidding!)

(For a large variety of classes or gym training, contact the author's fitness centre, Body Art, on 380-5929/380-2602)

For all previous columns by the author go to the columns section of chalomumbai.com

nawaz@mid-day.com