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perfect fit

Crossing tracks

Is your workout not working anymore? Cross training could be the solution to your problems



Figure 1: Using a resistance band to work on the upper body, including correcting postural deviations (rounded, droopy shoulders)



Figure 2: Working with a body bar



Figure 3: Fist grips target the arms

ALTHOUGH your workout routine may be highly effective, the problem is that it's not going to stay that way for long. Unfortunately, after the initial spate of results, you're just not going to see any more! The body gets used to and then immune to the additional stresses and strains of your workout. Unless one overloads, progresses and varies their routines, nothing further is gained; you will just plateau out.

In order to see regular results, it is important to continuously challenge the body differently by engaging in a wide variety of activities. This is known as cross training. It is the only key to long-term success.

When cross training, one can take on all sorts of activities such as walking, swimming, aerobics, rope jumping/skipping, weight/resistance training, skiing, mountaineering, racket games, yoga, rollerblading, skating, jogging, cycling, and so on. Both aerobic and anaerobic activities should be included.

In a class setting at a fitness centre these may include circuit training, step workouts, boxercise, hi-low fusions, slide training, calisthenics, callanetics, new body format, pilates, body sculpt, spinning/indoor cycling, trampoline workouts, weight training, yoga and more.

It's important to carefully address all the major aspects of physical fitness and encompass them in your programme. These should include body composition (lean body mass vs body fat), flexibility, strength, and endurance (both cardiovascular and muscular).

Circuit training

CIRCUIT training envelops all of the above. It includes the use of various circuit stations placed around a room. Circuit training equipment can include steps, boxing pads and gloves, weights, resistance bands, X-ertubes, footballs, body bars (weighted bars), speed balls, punching bags, fist grips, Swiss balls or medicine balls, slides, trampolines, hip 'n' thigh toners, dyna bands, etc.

A participant goes from one circuit station to the next in an orderly fashion, taking a go at each stop for one to three minutes. This is ideally

done with a partner, as there may be partner work or teamwork included in the circuits. For instance, in the boxing circuit, one person is the boxer, while the other is the pad person who calls the shots. In ball training, often a partner is required. In upper and lower body muscle toning segments, sometimes a partner is required to both give and get resistance from the other.

Intensity options are always given to accommodate participants of all ages and fitness levels, with modifications implemented wherever necessary, like for instance for those with certain health problems or physical conditions.

The whole circuit may be done once or twice. On the second time around, the circuits may or may not be the same, while the exercises change.

If the class caters to the general population, it should have cardiovascular circuits and circuits which target to all the major muscle groups, while toning, reshaping and correcting postural deviations such as a forward pelvic tilt, or droopy, rounded shoulders.

If the class caters to a special population, with particular goals or requirements, such as athletes, the cricket team, classical dancers, the physically handicapped, then obviously modifications must be made to the routine, after the goals pertaining to a certain group have been redefined.

For instance, a ballet dancer would be more interested in building up on lower body strength and stamina, flexibility, balance and coordination, posture and cardio-respiratory stamina, rather than upper body strength and tone.

In a class setting

HERE'S a brief description of the circuit equipment you might see in an exercise class.

✓ **Boxing pads and gloves**
This circuit is done with a partner. The pad-person is the one that asks the boxer for punches or kicks in different combinations.

✓ **Step**
This literally is a step, as used in bench step classes.

✓ **Resistance bands, dyna bands and X-ertubes** (Figure 1)

These are virtually large rubber bands (of different sizes and shapes) which can offer resistance to most body parts.

✓ **Swiss balls**

Marketed under all sorts of names such as medicine balls, Fit balls, FlexaBalls, Resist-a-balls, and more, these can make for a fabulous whole body workout. You can target flexibility, strength, endurance and get a great cardiovascular workout in.

✓ **Body bars** (Figure 2)

These are weighted tube bars, which can train the upper and lower body.

✓ **Punching bags and speed balls**
Basically boxing equipment. These target speed, strength, stamina and cardiovascular fitness.

✓ **Fist grips** (Figure 3)

They're also known as wrist grips. They basically target the forearms and wrists (especially important for those who play racket games) but your workout can be modified so that the whole upper body is targeted while using these.

✓ **Slides**

This is lateral movement training where choreography is tailored around the basic sliding motion.

✓ **Trampolines and skipping rope**
Think back to your childhood days. Need I say more? You got it!

✓ **Hip 'n' thigh toners**

As the name indicates, these help you tone different parts of the thighs and hips.

At home

YOU can circuit train even at home! With a bit of an imagination and a few modifications, you can create your own equipment and a fabulous workout.

Let's see how.

Running/briskly walking up and down one or two floors of your building, and/or wall to wall touches can give to a great cardio workout. Using a small bathroom stool, one can get into calf raises to target the

calf muscles. This is done by placing only the front half of your feet on the stool, while the back half of the feet remain off.

Keeping the legs straight, and the upper body erect, rise up on the ball of your feet or the toes. This is the working phase of the exercise. Lower back down.

This stool of yours can also be used for tricep dips (to tone and strengthen the back of the upper arms) and for back hyperextensions to strengthen the back (if it's not too small).

Push-ups are great for upper, and even mid-body, strength and endurance building.

When embarking on an exercise programme, modified push-ups may be more appropriate (do them bent-kneed, or even standing against a wall) rather than the full classic push up.

As you get fitter and stronger, you can take the classic push-up on at that stage. As for the abdominals, one can get into crunches and curls on the floor. You might want to use a mat of some sort here for cushioning. Free squats and lunges can be added in for the lower body.

Keeping a pair (or two) of light dumbbells around (1-3 lbs) handy is a great idea.

That way you can have a large variety of exercises you can engage in from bicep curls, tricep extensions and kick backs, lateral raises (upright and bent over), upright rows, overhead lifts, the Good Morning, the dead lift, squats, lunges, calf raises and many more basic and not-so-basic moves.

Chuck a chair into your circuit and you have a whole host of other exercises you can perform. For instance, while sitting on the chair, lift and lower one leg continuously, without allowing the rest of the body to rock. Doing this while lifting a straight leg makes the exercise tougher. This targets the front of the thigh.

Sitting down on the floor behind the chair with the legs completely straight, get your legs in between the chair's legs.

From this position, pushing your legs outward against the legs of the chair will target all the lower limb muscles, particularly the outer thighs.

In the same position, but with your feet on the outer side of the chair's legs, pushing inward will again target all the lower limb muscles, but primarily the inner thighs.

If you've got kids around the house, you'll probably have access to a ball. Any ball - a cricket ball, a basketball, a foot ball - again opens up many avenues to a whole host of new exercises.

These are just some basic ideas. There is nothing structured or regimented about this. You can invent your own workout.

Safety tips

▼ Never skip your warm up and cool down segments. They play a vital role in injury prevention. They help the whole body adjust to the new demands being imposed upon it.

▼ Your warm up should aim at stretching all the large muscle groups of the body and include whole body moves along with limbering exercises. Your cool down should target gradually lowering your heart rate to near pre-exercise levels through gradually decreasing range-of-motion exercises, while stretching and relaxing the muscle groups you worked.

▼ Watch your technique. Make sure you maintain good alignment and body form throughout to avoid injury and to get the maximum out of your workout.

▼ Start with easier options and gradually move onto the tougher ones as you get fitter, stronger and adjust to the exercises.

▼ Pay attention to correct breathing patterns. A general thumb rule to remember is to breathe out during the most difficult part of an exercise and to breathe in during the easier phase. Never hold your breath.

STILL reading this? Looks like you're well on your way already!

For classes or gym training call the writer's fitness centre, Body Art, on 380-5929 or 380-2602.

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