



nawaz modi singhania

perfect fit

Ask me and I'll answer

Exercise on the go

Q. I'm trying to get and keep in shape, but my job demands that I travel frequently, and so my routine is often thrown off track. Are there some exercises I can do in my hotel room, especially for the upper and lower body?

A. Two simple exercises you can do for the upper and lower body, which require only your body weight as resistance, and are the push-up and the lunge. These two can be modified to meet the needs of people of all fitness levels.

Assuming you know how to do a push-up and a lunge, here are a few tips. If you find the classic style of push-up too tough to begin with, start with bent-legged push-ups (do them on your knees instead of on your toes). If even that is initially too challenging, then stand up and do them against a wall, with your arms pressing your body weight into and away from the wall. Exhale as you push away, and inhale as you lower.

Remember never to lock the elbows back when in the 'up' position, and try and go down as low as you can when in the 'down' position. Make sure you keep your hands up at chest height, shoulder distance apart, with your fingers pointing forward.

On lunges, remember not to lunge too far back. Keep your upper body erect at all times, and your leading leg slightly bent and over your foot right through. Figure 1 demonstrates a modification of a lunge. You can lunge forward and back, for variation. Exhale as you lunge, and inhale as you come back to starting position.

Congratulations on your commitment to keep an eye on your personal fitness even when on a busy work schedule out of town. Keep it up!

Health-club savvy

Q. Could you make us a little more savvy on health club and gym facilities? What does one get at centres these days? How does one use the variety of equipment one generally finds at gyms?

A. Health club facilities could range from a fully-equipped gym with equipment, fitness studios which offer all sorts of workouts and classes for varying populations of all ages, fitness levels, and for people with varying goals and health limitations. They may have a sauna, steam room, jacuzzi, massage facilities, aromatherapy, mind-body exercises, personal training, health food and low cal snacks and foods.

Typical gym equipment encompasses the bench press, lat pulley, pec deck, leg extension and leg curl machine (as shown in Figure 2), squat rack, ab machine, cardio equipment (treadmill, cycle, stair climber), free weights. These are the very basics. There can be a whole lot more.

The best way to go about it is to let the trainer work out a programme for you, and help you implement it. Speak to the trainer (make sure they are well qualified!) about your goals, health limitations (if any), current age, and previous experience with exercise. Make sure they draw up a routine tailored to suit your needs. Best of luck.

Steamy session

Q. How long should I sit in the steam room to lose fat and inches?

A. It's a common misconception that sitting in the steam room makes you lose fat and inches. Nothing can be further from the truth. The inch and weight loss which is recorded right after stepping out of a steam room is

merely water lost through sweat, and is quickly replaced as soon as one consumes water.

This has nothing to do with your fat storage. Stop kidding yourself.

Aware and beware

Q. What should I specifically look for when joining a fitness centre, and what should I beware of?

A. Go to a place that is well reputed and well established. First and foremost, look for well-trained and well-qualified staff. This is often not the case. At best, your workouts may be ineffective; at worst, you could end up injuring yourself.

Look for a centre which is convenient for you to visit in terms of proximity and timings, is clean, and has all the basic facilities you'll require.

Try and join a place which will offer you a large variety of routines to look forward to, and that will check on your progress regularly and evaluate it. Look for staff that is helpful and provides individual attention.

Make sure you're getting value for money. If the centre grossly overcharges, and you're being ripped off, and chances are it's not a place you'll keep going back to on a long-term basis — it's just a short-stint for the novelty value. Initially it's a good idea to sign up for the shortest possible period of time to get a taste of what the place is all about. While you're there, talk to other members about their experiences with the centre. You'll quickly find all the answers you want.

Yogic ideas

Q. I've been toying with the idea of taking up yoga classes. What exactly are the benefits? Is it too gentle and safe a form of exercise to be effective at all?

A. Yoga can be gentle but some styles are rather strenuous and demanding, both physically and mentally.

Meditation, balance, coordination, increased flexibility, increased muscle tone and the improvement of certain health problems are the main benefits of yoga. As with any other form of exercise, make sure you find a qualified and well-experienced teacher, so your workout is both safe and effective.

Back bane

Q. I've been exercising on an on-and-off basis for the last three years now. My lower back has always bothered me. Can you suggest some strengthening exercises I can do to prevent low back pain?

A. Firstly, see your doctor to make sure you don't have a serious back problem. Having done this, regular exercise will increase muscle tone and enhance flexibility. Make sure you maintain your weight. Putting on those extra pounds will add to your back problem, as you'll be carrying that excess around on your frame.

Here are a couple of simple exercises you can do anywhere:

Get your shoes off and lie down flat on your stomach. Keep your legs straight and your arms stretched up overhead on the floor. Gently lift one arm and the opposite leg off the floor in a controlled fashion. Hold it up there for a moment and then lower back down to where you started. Do this 10 times, and then switch the arm and leg, and repeat that. Breathe out as you lift, and breathe in as you lower.

Another variation of the same exercise is doing virtually the same thing on all fours. Get up onto your

hands and knees. Get your right palm onto your head, and lift the upper body and your left leg (bent or straight) simultaneously while exhaling. Lower while inhaling. Do 10 here, and then switch arms and legs.

Make sure both these exercises are performed in a controlled, fluid and unjerky manner. Figure 3 demonstrates a more advanced back exercise, which can be taken on at a later stage once your back is reasonably strengthened.

Remember to generally maintain good posture. Don't slouch or slump over when sitting or walking.

Building bulk?

Q. My trainer tells me that if I want to lose weight, then I ought to stay away from weight training because I will bulk up. Is that true?

A. No. Most experts believe that cardiovascular training coupled with weight/strength/resistance training is important in achieving and maintaining healthy body weight. The more toned you are, the less fat you will tend to store on you, as muscles utilise more calories both at rest and at work.

No time

Q. I am a mother of 2, have no household help, and work part-time. I just can't find the time to exercise anymore. Is it better to give up all hopes of trying to squeeze in a bit of a workout whenever possible, or should I drop the whole notion till my personal life is more on track, and I am able to devote more time and energy to this cause?

A. This is exactly the kind of thinking that keeps a lot of people from starting or maintaining an exercise programme.

On an anything-is-better-than-nothing basis, do what you can. Regular walking for as little as one hour a week has been shown to reduce the risk of heart disease. Don't give up on yourself.

Heartbeats

Q. Why is it so important to keep checking your heart rate during exercise?

A. That's how one can determine how hard one exercises, or how intense ones workout is. This way you take the guesswork out of how hard you ought to be working in order to achieve the goals you want.

To appropriately determine the heart rate range that's ideal for you, consult a fitness professional. There are various methods of working it out. Ideally, your personal details such as age, fitness level and goals should be borne in mind when calculating the same.

Accuracy areas

Q. What's the difference between digital and analogue heart rate monitoring, which one sees on cardio gym equipment?

A. Digital is the preferred option as it is more accurate than analogue. It detects electrical impulses given off by the heart with each heartbeat. This system of monitoring focuses on signals given off by the cardiac muscle and it can filter out other electrical noise created by other muscles, which may be contracting at the same time.

Digital processing can perform complex mathematical calculations very fast to analyse a signal from a heart rate sensor.

The analogue system is unable to extract non-heart-rate muscle firings and therefore could be wrong by as

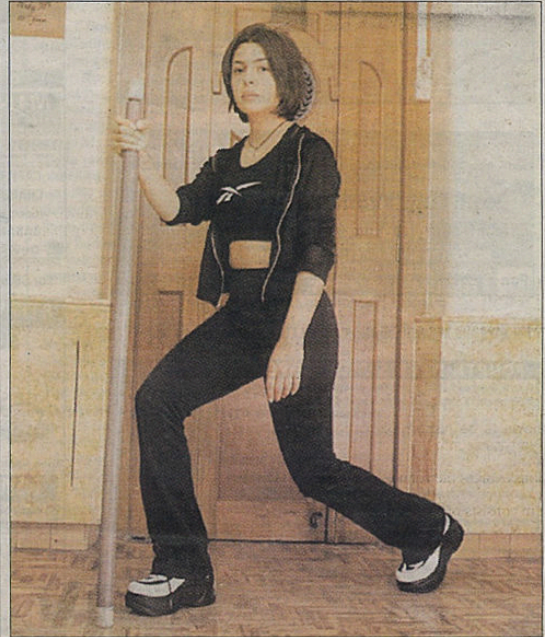


Figure 1: Getting into a lunge for the lower body while using a body bar
PICS: RAM BHERWANI



Figure 2: Using a leg extension/leg curl machine primarily for the hamstrings



Figure 3: Working on keeping the muscles of the back strong

much as 20 to 30 beats per minute. For people who select their workout based upon heart rate monitoring, this would throw their workout off track.

(For a large variety of workouts or gym sessions, contact the colum-

nist's fitness centre, Body Art, at 380-2602 and 380-5929)

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nawaz@mid-day.com