

## **Basic Training: Boot Camp Workouts Have Flex Appeal (eg. Tae Bo)**

by Carol Krucoff  
BodyWorks

Back in the days before Spandex and aerobics, when there were no health clubs or high-tech exercise machines, people who wanted to get fit did calisthenics.

Staples of the military, sports teams and gym classes, these basic conditioning exercises--push-ups and pull-ups and the like--were considered the best way to get strong and fit. In fact, the popularity of the Royal Canadian Air Force's calisthenics program in the late 1950s helped launch the modern fitness movement.

Now--after decades devoted to an explosion of diverse fitness options--these low-tech, low (or no) cost, basic training tools are back. Calisthenics are the mainstay of "boot camp workouts," one of the hottest classes at trendy fitness clubs. New books and videos feature military-style shape-up routines, and there's a boom in outdoor programs led by drill sergeant-inspired instructors who bark their "maggot" charges through basic training regimens.

### **Back To Basics**

The reason? "Anytime you stick to the basics, it's going to work and you'll get results," says Stewart Smith, a former Navy SEAL who trained candidates for the elite group's Basic Underwater Demolition unit.

Calisthenics use your own body weight to provide resistance needed to strengthen muscles, Smith notes, "so you don't need fancy equipment or lots of money to get in top physical condition."

Plus, calisthenics can also provide an aerobic workout. "Try doing a series of exercises called a pyramid where you start by doing one pull-up, two push-ups and three crunches, then do two pull-ups, four push-ups and six crunches and keep progressing until you're doing 10 pull-ups, 20 pushups and 30 crunches, then work your way back down," he says. "You'll get your heart rate up."

But calisthenics only work if you discipline yourself to do them regularly, which is one reason for the popularity of the "drop and give me 20" motivation offered by the new boot camps.

"We hold your hand and kick your butt at the same time," says Patrick "Sarge" Avon, owner of The Sergeant's Program, which runs 6 a.m. and 7 a.m. workouts at 25 sites--mostly parks and playgrounds--around the Washington, D.C. area. "It's like personal training for a group, where we push you harder than you'd push yourself."

About 500 people--evenly divided between men and women, ranging in age from about 25 to 50--work out with the Sergeant's Program. Exercisers must first enlist in a three-week Boot Camp that meets five mornings a week for 45-minutes per session and costs \$345. At the end of "camp," students take a military-style fitness test, which about 65 percent pass. Graduates can join the Sergeant's Maintenance Program, a five-morning a week, hour-long workout, for \$80 to \$95 per month. Those who fail can re-up for Boot Camp, but at the lower fee of the Maintenance Program.

"Lots of people don't want to go to gyms," says Avon, who offers boot camp and other fitness programs to corporations. Basic training offers an appealing, fresh-air alternative to the noise, mirrors, intimidating equipment and hard-body clientele at many gyms, he says.

In addition to shaping up the body, military-style workouts also pay off in mental fitness, says former SEAL Smith, who leads classes for the Sergeant's Program near his home in Annapolis. "The unbelievable amount of confidence you will gain in your abilities will change your life," he writes in his just-released "Complete Guide to Navy SEAL Fitness" (Five Star Publishing, 1998). "Your boss, friends and co-workers will see a lean, fit, self-assured person who has the attitude that anything can be accomplished."

## Getting Started

People who have been sedentary should start any new exercise program slowly and progress gradually. If you're out-of-shape, try modified versions of some calisthenics to avoid injury. For example, when doing a jumping jack, you don't need to bring your arms all the way over your head. Just bend your elbows and raise your arms up as far as comfortable. Instead of jumping out and back, you can simply raise and lower alternate knees.

In general, avoid exercises that involve standing with your knees locked and bending over, such as "toe touches" or "windmills." And if you have back problems, substitute bent-leg crunches for straight-leg sit-ups.

Be sure to warm up first, by walking or jogging lightly to get the blood moving into the muscles, then stretch gently before starting your exercises, says Smith, who offers these guidelines to one of the best calisthenics, the push-up:

**Classic Push-Up:** Position your body at about a 45-degree angle to the floor, with your weight supported only by your palms and your toes.

Keep your feet together, your palms a little wider than your shoulders and your back straight. Look forward, focus your gaze on a spot about four feet in front of you, bend your elbows and slowly lower yourself down until your chest touches the ground, then push back up.

Don't cheat by arching your back or lifting your butt up and down. Keep your legs, back and neck in a straight line, and go all the way up and all the way down by bending and straightening your elbows. Inhale going down, exhale pushing up. Move at a smooth, controlled pace without rushing. The slower you go, the more difficult the push-up.

**Modified Push-Up:** Do the same movements, but keep your knees on the floor. This reduces the amount of body weight you're lifting, so it's easier. But it can be just as effective, particularly for people who lack the upper body strength to do classic push-ups.

**Novice Negatives:** Those unable to do either classic or modified push-ups can start in the "up" position, with weight on palms and knees--or toes. Then slowly lower yourself down to a count of five. Relax, then repeat.

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Exercise Rx for Bone Health

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