



Change Beyond Belief™

Exercise Options

Pilates:

PROS: Increases alignment, core strength, lengthens and stretches muscles. Mat pilates includes various exercises to increase core abdominal strength without excessive repetitions. Pilates machines are excellent for stretching, toning, rehabilitating and targeting specific weak areas.

CONS: Popular mat pilates is an excellent complementary exercise. As a stand-alone fitness system it is not enough. Mat pilates is all done sitting or lying down. There is no weight-bearing exercise on your feet and that means no standing balance, standing strength, proprioception or standing agility. Also the exercise routines target women more than men. Men can benefit, but most will be turned off by the "feminine" look of most of the positions. Pilates machines are highly technical, expensive and require expert instruction.

RECOMMENDATIONS: Do mat pilates by Marie Winsor, Stott or Ana Caban as "part" of your fitness regime. If you want to rehabilitate an injury or target flexibility and strength, spend the money and try working with a pilates expert on the various pieces of equipment. Contrary to popular opinion pilates is not for everybody so see if you respond to it.

Free Weights

PROS: Most effective proven method of changing your body. Adding muscle increases your metabolism and helps prevent osteoporosis. Free weights encourage total body use to counteract the muscles doing the lifting. Correct technique and intelligent use of reps and weight helps build and rehabilitate muscles.

CONS: The ego factor makes it tempting to do too many reps or pile on too much weight. As a quantity-based fitness system, it can be boring and has a high burn-out

factor. There is a tendency to use momentum instead of true weight lifting technique. Requires meticulous planning to set up different days for different body parts.

RECOMMENDATIONS: Work with a personal trainer to learn proper techniques and set up a program with reachable goals. Not everybody likes to lift weights. If you don't ENJOY the workout you will burn out and stop your program. Do it if you love it. If you're not excited about lifting weights, find other alternatives to weight resistance, i.e. power yoga.

Yoga

PROS: Increases flexibility, strength, suppleness, lung capacity, excellent for body alignment, increases range of motion, protects the spine, helps the immune system. Decreases stress.

CONS: Only accesses slow-twitch muscles. Unless you become extremely proficient you won't get a good cardio-workout.

RECOMMENDATIONS: Everyone can benefit from adding some form of yoga to their exercise regimen. For basic yoga take Hatha. For an emphasis on alignment do Iyengar. For total body strength and flexibility do Power Yoga or Flow Yoga. For an emphasis on breathing do Pranayama. For a more spiritual and meditative practice do Kundalini. For an extreme athletic experience that also accesses excellent breath control and alignment do Ashtanga. For a balanced physical and spiritual experience do Anura. If you have limited mobility or severe health challenges do Restorative. There are many talented yoga teachers who all have their own manner of communicating and helping you with your practice. Try different classes and different teachers until you find what is right for you. And if you feel too self-conscious to go to a class try private instruction.

Martial Arts

PROS: Increase strength, flexibility, balance, agility, overall fitness, confidence and discipline. Learn usable techniques. Fun. Competitive.

CONS: High incidence of injury. Often a rigid almost paramilitary mentality in the "hard" forms.

RECOMMENDATIONS: There are so many different styles of martial arts ranging from the slow and soft Tai Chi (highly recommended for seniors) to the hard Japanese style of Shotokan to the acrobatic kicks of Tae Kwon Do (Korean Karate) to the artistic dance-like moves of Kung Fu. If you want to learn a system, do some research, select a style that suits your personality and goals and take a sample class to try it out. Don't feel pressured to have to join up, buy a uniform and gear. Once you commit to a style and school, you'll be investing a lot of money, time and effort so make sure you've got the right match. If you don't want to be part of group and feel you need personal attention

or if you want to progress more rapidly take private sessions. A good private instructor will break the techniques down with more specificity than in a class.

Special note: Martial arts are systems that are not specifically designed for street situations. Yes, punching, kicking, blocking, throws and locks can be effective when you become an expert, but in a real confrontation you don't have the time to warm up your legs or hit specific stances. Real life confrontations are split-second high adrenaline rush flashes that are unpredictable. If you want to learn a martial arts system that has been created and further developed for real situations try Krav Maga. Krav Maga was designed and is constantly being modified for the Israeli Special Forces. It's intense, practical and effective.

Mixed Martial Arts

PROS: Same as Martial Arts with an additional twist: Added variety and balance of techniques. Also excellent fitness training techniques combining High Intensity Interval Training, Kettlebells, Speed and Agility and any unique performance enhancement techniques that each instructor utilizes.

CONS: If you spar, you will get hurt. The best Mixed Martial Artists in the world get beaten up.

Recommendations: Do the training, forget the sparring, unless you're young and wired for contact and don't mind spending a lot of time rehabilitating from injuries.

Aerobics

PROS: Increases heart health, fat-burning, lean muscles, agility, use of both slow and fast-twitch muscles. Helps create great-looking bodies.

CONS: The biggest problem with aerobics is that it requires rhythmic repetition to hit a sustained target heart rate and unless your technique and alignment are excellent the tendency is to do things incorrectly over and over and over again. For many people this creates a misleading imprint, a series of muscle memories that make you believe you're doing something right when you're not. Many aerobics routines include punches and kicks which are usually blown through for repetitions and technique tends to get out of whack. Many aerobics routines include dance moves which are usually done incorrectly. In the past, high impact aerobics was causing so many injuries, a wave of low-impact aerobics classes came along in an attempt to solve the problem. On some levels it lessens the stress on the joints, but it doesn't change the fundamental reality that aerobics essentially waters down technique in order to maintain a rhythm and "keep things moving!"

RECOMMENDATIONS: Choose aerobics tapes and classes that emphasize technique and alignment. However, since aerobics puts rhythm and pace above everything else, learn as much technique in a slower setting before doing an aerobics routine. For

example, if you like to punch and kick, take some private martial arts sessions to learn how to do things correctly before you double and triple time to "feel the burn." If you like to dance, take some ballet, jazz or modern "technique" classes. You need to lay down a strong foundation of basic movement techniques to protect yourself in an aerobics class.

Cardio-kickboxing

PROS: Increases heart health, strength, flexibility, agility, balance, fat-burning, movement with a purpose and function that is fun.

CONS: Same as aerobics. Technique is sacrificed for pace and rhythm. Once you get into bad habits of punching and kicking it's incredibly difficult to unlearn them.

RECOMMENDATIONS: Take private martial arts sessions first to learn proper punching and kicking techniques.

Running

PROS: A fast and effective way to boost your heart rate and keep it in the "target zone" to help you burn fat. Jogging allows you to maintain a target pace for 30 minutes plus. Intervals of sprinting activates and maximizes fast twitch muscle fibers.

CONS: Running creates tremendous stress on the lower back, the knees and the hips. It's essentially a young person's activity. With any professional athlete, you'll always hear "the first thing to go are the legs." Athletes in their 30's always seem to lose a step or two. For the fitness enthusiast, running often becomes a tear-down experience, meaning to maintain interest, one needs to increase speed or distance and in the process, the body can't take the added stress and starts to break down. Jogging can be boring and the "endorphin rush" is often cancelled out by the tear-down effect. Sprinting is a high injury enterprise. Even with excellent technique, it is still a young person's activity.

RECOMMENDATIONS: Warm up and cool down properly. Make sure you jog on a surface that "gives." If you want to run barefoot, make sure it is on the sand, which will help strengthen your legs and is an effective training tool for athletes. On other surfaces, wear good running shoes. Jogging on a treadmill usually has enough "give." Watching TV or listening to music will help alleviate the boredom factor. If you jog in a park or track, find a comfortable pace, stick with it and don't give in to the ego push to hang with other joggers/runners. If you want to do interval sprinting, build gradually, mark off your chosen distances with cones, warm up half speed then build to three-quarter speed before going full out. Even though jogging and sprinting seem simple enough, proper technique is still necessary. Make sure your body is aligned from ankles to knees, hips and shoulders. Your feet should be parallel which means you have to be conscious of your toes pointing straight out, not out like a duck, or in like a pigeon. Arms should be relaxed, bent at the elbow and pumping forward and back, not

side to side. Hands should be open and relaxed with your fingers pointing straight from the elbow. Your weight should be tilting forward on the balls of your feet and you need to be aware of your lower back. If it tends to sway and arch, tuck the pelvis under. Imagine a straight line from the back of your neck down through your lower back. Your knees should bend straight over your toes, not inward or outward. Remember, if you are out of alignment, you will be hitting the ground over and over again and creating bad muscle memories and injuries. Once you find your alignment, keep a clear picture of it in your mind and continue to make minor adjustments to line yourself back up again.

Walking

PROS: This is an activity you can do at any age. It's low impact, good for your heart if done at a brisk pace and keeps the body in a decent maintenance mode.

CONS: The only real downside to walking is the "boredom factor."

RECOMMENDATIONS: Walking barefoot in the sand is excellent for the leg muscles. On other surfaces wear good walking shoes. You have many choices to alleviate the boredom factor. On a treadmill, watch TV or listen to music, books on tape, or your favorite self-help guru. Walk in your neighborhood with a friend and maintain a conversation. Videos and audio tapes are on the market to take you through a walking workout. Whatever you choose, make the experience enjoyable or you will burn out quickly.