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## Fitness & Recreation



### Hot Workouts

By Mary Lynn Mitcham for WeightWatchers.com

Mat-based Pilates, cardio kickboxing, power yoga ... These days there are more fitness options than ever before, and while the choices can be confusing - even intimidating - it's always good to try something new: Mixing up your workout can get you out of an exercise rut and help you see results quickly.

"Your body is very smart. If you do the same exercise over and over again, it will quickly adapt and become more efficient at it," says Sherri Findley, an exercise physiologist in Jacksonville, Florida. This improved efficiency will reduce the exercise stress level. "It's best to challenge your body by changing your exercise routine somewhat frequently (perhaps every 4-6 weeks) to help improve your overall fitness level." Also, says Findley, "varying or trying new exercises can prevent boredom, particularly for people who have a hard time getting motivated to exercise." So don't stick with the same old routine just because you don't know what to expect from a new one. Here's the lowdown on the hottest workouts around:

#### **T-Tapp**

*What is it?* A total-body workout designed to help you lose inches, not pounds. Exercises include unique spins on lunges, leg-lifts and twists.

*Benefits:* Easy on your lower back and knees.

*Be Aware:* Since the workout comes on video, you do it at home without an instructor. Pay close attention to form, or you risk straining your back.

*Get started:* Videos for this exercise can be purchased at [www.T-Tapp.com](http://www.T-Tapp.com).

#### **Ashtanga Yoga**

*What is it?* Ashtanga yoga, and its spinoff "power yoga," are Hatha yoga practices that involve moving from one yoga pose to another at a quick pace, complemented by deep breathing exercises.

*Benefits:* Boosts your heart rate and tones muscle.

*Be Aware:* If you haven't tried this before, start with a beginner class. You might also consider trying a more gentle form of Hatha yoga, such as Integral or Kripalu, first.

*Get started:* Visit [www.yogajournal.com](http://www.yogajournal.com).

### **Bikram Yoga**

*What is it?* Series of 26 yoga postures that are done in a room that's 105°F. "You can drop into a Bikram yoga class anywhere in the country, and it should be exactly the same," says Nancy Ferguson, the executive director of the Yoga Alliance.

*Benefits:* The heated room helps one to warm up and stretch even more.

*Be Aware:* It's not recommended for people with heart problems. Also, bring water to class.

*Get started:* Visit [www.yogajournal.com](http://www.yogajournal.com).

### **Body Balls**

*What is it?* Also known as stability balls, body balls are big plastic beach balls used for strength and balance training.

*Benefits:* If you want serious toning, this is a great way to get it. Body balls are one of the best abdominal workouts around, and they help improve flexibility.

*Be Aware:* "If you're just starting out, have someone work with you on the ball first. Don't just start rolling around," warns Liz Neporent, an exercise physiologist and staffer at [MyFitnessExpert.com](http://MyFitnessExpert.com) in New York City.

*Get started:* Classes held at many local gyms.

### **Elliptical trainer**

*What is it?* An exercise machine that's a cross between a stair climber and treadmill.

*Benefits:* Burns calories, improves cardiovascular fitness and tones your legs. Plus, many people find elliptical machines more comfortable than other machines.

*Be Aware:* Calorie readouts on these machines tend to be overly generous - take them with a grain of salt.

*Get started:* If your gym doesn't have one, find a new gym!

### **Kickboxing**

*What is it?* An all-over body workout that consists of kicks, punches, jumps, squats, crunches and pushups.

*Benefits:* Great total-body workout in terms of cardio, strength and flexibility. All muscles get worked, and it helps you strengthen your heart and lungs.

*Be Aware:* Beginning exercisers beware: Kickboxing is a very high-intensity workout.

*Get started:* Classes at your local gym, or visit [www.kickboxing.com](http://www.kickboxing.com) for more information.

### **Mat-based Pilates**

*What is it?* Floor exercises that focus on your core muscles (deep abdominals and the back). You'll hold yourself in unusual strength-building postures while you concentrate on breathing deeply.

*Benefits:* Builds abs, stretches your back and improves flexibility.

*Be Aware:* It's somewhat tough for people with limited flexibility (but can help develop that capacity).

*Get started:* Your local gym may have classes, or visit [www.pilates-studio.com](http://www.pilates-studio.com).

## **Pilates Sessions**

*What is it?* A Pilates workout (see above) in which a machine is used instead of mat-based postures.

*Benefits:* Pilates sessions are more of a full-body workout than the mat-based exercises, says Tracy Campoli, an instructor at New York Sports Clubs in New York City. You build and tone your chest, deltoids and lower back, along with your abs.

*Be Aware:* Pilates sessions are about form, control and precision - and require a teacher. "If you have injuries or you're very overweight," says Elyssa Rosenberg, associate director of Pilates Studio of New York, "you should be especially careful and work with someone first. A teacher can create a workout tailored to your body and goals."

*Get started:* Pilates sessions are usually done in a Pilates studio, but some gyms offer the classes for an extra charge. Visit [www.pilates-studio.com](http://www.pilates-studio.com) for more information.

## **Spinning**

*What is it?* An indoor cycling class, done to music, on a bike designed to emulate riding outdoors (read: up big hills). In this form of interval training, you might be asked by the instructor to stand up, sit down and pedal faster or slower (rarely slower).

*Benefits:* Burns calories and tones your butt and thighs simultaneously. Spinning also significantly boosts your heart rate, which improves cardiovascular fitness.

*Be Aware:* It can be very hardcore. If you've never tried it, take a "novice spin" or "beginner spin" class, then work your way up to more advanced classes.

*Get started:* Classes available at your local gym.

## **Super Circuit Training**

*What is it?* A workout involving constant switch-offs between cardio and weight-sets. You may be asked to do a round-robin, for example, of jump rope (one minute), chest press (one minute), step-ups (one minute) and leg presses (one minute).

*Benefits:* It's a fun, high-energy, high-calorie-burning workout that combines aerobic and strength training.

*Be Aware:* It's a pretty good strength-training workout and a pretty good cardio workout, but not as beneficial as doing the two separately.

*Get started:* Found at many local gyms.