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Play Ball To Get Fit

By Lynn Bode

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Chances are if you've stepped foot in a gym or watched a television fitness program in the past year then you've seen the "big balls". You've probably wondered what all the fuss is about. Well, they may look like something found on a children's playground, but don't be deceived. These balls offer one of the best methods for strengthening your abdominals and core.

That is why the fitness industry is jumping on the ball bandwagon. According to the 2003 Idea Fitness Programs and Equipment Survey, 89 percent of IDEA businesses were offering balls to their customers and 71 percent had added ball group fitness classes in 2003.

Find it hard to believe that simply sitting, rolling or bouncing on a big inflatable ball can make you more fit? Read on to learn just how effective ball fitness can be.

While they are somewhat of a new craze in the public domain, the ball (commonly known as stability ball, fitness ball, Swiss ball, physio ball, etc) was used as early as the 1960s. It originally was used by physical therapist to assist with rehabilitation.

But, the ball is far more versatile and valuable then simply for re-hab use. It is a very inexpensive piece of equipment that offers a total body workout while also improving your balance. There are literally hundreds of different exercises that can be used with the ball. And, both beginners and advanced exercises can benefit from it. Plus, children to seniors can use it.

What makes this piece of fitness equipment so uniquely effective? It works multiple muscles at one time while forcing your body to balance itself. This creates a very effective and challenging workout. For example, lying on a bench to perform tricep extensions is a good exercise but it's limited to working primarily just the triceps. However, perform that same move on a stability ball and you have created an unstable environment. Additional muscles are activated that work to keep you balanced on the ball. That means you are now working harder and essentially getting more bang for your buck while not

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increasing your exercise time.

So, if you haven't already gotten on the ball, it's time to give it a try. You may think that your workout already provides everything you need but chances are you are focusing the majority of your exercise time on the lower body. It is essential to concentrate fitness time on your core, which is responsible for stabilizing the rest of your body. Having a strong core improves your performance in all activities, not just exercise but also daily activities like carrying groceries. The ball can help improve your posture, balance, and core strength. Virtually every exercise performed on the ball works your core area. And, yes, it can even help you get that sought-after six-pack!

Before you try out the ball be sure to choose the right size and firmness. The harder the ball is then the more difficult the exercise move will be. Therefore, beginners should probably choose a ball that is softer (e.g. not overly inflated). Also, it is important to choose the right size based on your height. The ball manufacturer or your fitness center can provide height guidelines.

As previously mentioned, the ball can be used for a total body workout. With the ball you can work your legs, arms, chest, back, abdominals and you can even get a cardio workout by doing such moves as sitting jumping jacks. Below are a few examples of the types of exercises that can be done with the stability ball.

Oblique Twist:

Begin lying with ball resting under your back. Place hands behind head for support. Using your abdominal muscles slowly raise up lifting your shoulder blades off of the ball and rotate left shoulder toward right hip. Do not strain neck by pulling on it with hands. Keep elbows out to your side. Return to starting position and repeat then switch sides.

Chest Fly:

Lie across the ball with your head and shoulders supported on the ball and your legs bent with heels about two feet from ball. Extend arms overhead with palms facing away from you. Slowly separate your arms in a circular motion and bend your elbows slightly as lower your arms down and rotate your palms to face each other. Return to start position and repeat.

Squat Against Wall:

Lean your back against a ball that is placed against a wall and stand with your feet hip-width apart and about a foot away from the wall. Keep your back in a straight position. Bend your knees and let the ball roll up your back until your knees bend to about a 90 degree angle. Keep your knees behind your toes as you bend. Return to start position and repeat.

Lynn Bode is a certified personal trainer specializing in Internet-based fitness programs. She founded Workouts For You, which provides affordable online exercise programs that are custom designed for each individual. Visit:

for a free sample workout and to sign-up for their monthly fitness newsletter. Fitness professionals, visit:

The Swiss Ball Makes Exercise Fun and Effective!

By Dan Farrell

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If you haven't experienced a workout using a Swiss ball, another name for a fitness ball, you don't know what you're missing.

There's a reason it has become so popular and it's not just a fad. The Swiss ball has been used for many years in physical therapy. It's actually recommended by many physical therapists as a way to help you relieve back pain.

The effectiveness of the Swiss ball is due to the fact it's round. That creates in-stability which in turns causes your body's core muscles to come into play.

Listen, when you do a crunch on the floor, basically your upper abs muscles are working. When you do it on the Swiss ball, your core muscles; which consist of all the muscles in your abs area, muscles in your back, your pelvic area and hips are working to help keep you on the ball.

You just did your crunch but since more muscles were brought into play, you actually increased the value of your exercise. The result is you can actually do fewer repetitions and get more benefit.

That's just the beginning. There are so many exercises you can do on the Swiss ball that you'll never get bored.

Try some pushups, not only with your feet on the ball and your arms on the floor, but with your feet on the floor and your hands on the ball. Spreading your feet apart gives you more stability and bringing them closer together makes the exercise tougher.

Do a few pushups with your feet close together and your hands on the ball and you won't believe the effect! Your arms will scream for mercy!

You can also do some dumbbell training on the Swiss ball and, once again, since you are bringing those core muscles into play, you get a good body core workout as well.

It takes a little while to get used to the ball. You should begin by sitting on it and just getting a feel for it. Roll it back and forth. Side to side.

It's not a bad idea to have someone with you when you first start working out on the ball to help you stay on. And definitely don't begin using weights of any size until you are comfortable and have been

exercising on the ball for some time.

I urge you to try including the Swiss ball into your exercise routine. You will see and feel a difference!

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