

Put bounce in your step

Low-impact trampoline exercise making a rebound

BY LIZ NEPARENT

Like Tae Bo, the Abdominizer and the ThighMaster, the miniature trampoline workout enjoyed its 15 minutes of fitness fad fame. Now, after more than 30 years, it's making a comeback, only this time with spiffier equipment, jazzed-up workouts and a bit of science to back it up.

According to J.B. Berns, the founder of Urban Rebounding classes, which are now offered in more than 3,000 gyms nationwide (including BQE Fitness in Queens, Eastern Athletic Clubs in Brooklyn and Equinox in Manhattan), today's minitrampoline workouts feel more like jumping into a puddle than jumping on the bed.

"In the '80s, they used to bounce up and down as high as possible," he remembers. "This was not especially safe or effective. With Urban Rebounding, you lean slightly forward and press your feet down into the rebounder like you're pressing on the gas pedal so you don't lift up very far."

The result, Berns says, is a phenomenal ab workout because your abdominal muscles must constantly squeeze and tighten to keep your acceleration upward and deceleration downward under control. More importantly to those of us worried about the excess layer of fat covering the midsection, it also appears to be a good way to help shed pounds. Research done at the University of New Mexico at Albuquerque found that a 150-pound person rebounding at 130 beats per minute — the inten-

sity of a typical Urban Rebounding class — burns about 9.5 calories a minute, the same as jogging, in-line skating or skipping rope.

Len Kravitz, Ph.D., one of the lead authors of the New Mexico study, recommends rebounding, especially for maturing baby boomers whose bodies are screaming for a break from more jarring physical activities. "You're unlikely to be injured because the rebounder absorbs and decreases the amount of impact sustained by the joints," he says. "This may prevent overuse injuries like shin splints, tendonitis and stress fractures."

A BALANCING ACT

Beyond its body-friendly bounciness, regular trampoline sessions may be beneficial for another reason: They can help improve your sense of balance. "Because the rebounding surface isn't stable, you make micro adjustments with all of your muscles in order to maintain stability when you land. It's an excellent way to enhance your balance," says Dr. Vijay Vad, a sports medicine specialist at the Hospital for Special Surgery in Manhattan who also has done research looking at the benefits of minitrampoline workouts.

Everyone should make an effort to work on balance, Vad says, because it's one of the keys to a smooth walking gait, something that we tend to lose as we age. "Having a sense of where you place your feet

and where your body is in space helps prevent falls," he says, noting that rebounding is one of the better ways for older folks to fine-tune balance skills because there's little chance of getting injured or stressing out joints.

Okay, so the experts give trampolining the thumbs-up for whipping the bod into shape — but are exercisers jumping on the junior-size trampoline bandwagon?

"I've got people who wake up at 6 a.m. to reserve a spot for a 9:30 a.m. class, that's how much they love it," says Herman Walker, a certified personal trainer whose minitrampoline program, Airobix, packs the house three times a week at the Southport Racquet Club in Southport, Conn.

Walker says his fanatically loyal fans come in all shapes and sizes. "It seems to appeal to a lot of different types of people," he says. "I've got families who take the class together, teens, moms and 70-year-olds, too."

Airobix is in such great demand that Walker plans to shoot an infomercial next year to hawk his program, videos and equipment to the world at large.

Urban Rebounding already is running a successful infomercial and has sold close to half a million workout videos. It was named one of the top fitness trends of the year by the American Council on Exercise. To keep up with the demand for classes in the gym, Berns has begun an instructor certification program.

How to get joints jumpin'

If you find the idea of bouncing your way to better health appealing, your gym is likely running minitrampoline group classes already or has private rebounding instruction available. Home users should avoid the minitrampolines sold in department stores; though they sell for bargain prices of around 30 bucks, the springs and jumping surface probably won't hold up to regular use. The Urban Rebounder has sturdier springs and its mat surface is designed to accommodate people up to 300 pounds. It's foldable and comes with carrying bag, stabilizing bar and four instructional videos or DVDs (\$119.97, urbanrebounding.com). The Airobix system comes with a high-quality minitrampoline, hand and ankle weights to pump up exercise intensity and two instructional videos starring trainer Herman Walker (\$150, airobix.com).

BODY WORK



SPRING AHEAD New and improved workouts on miniature trampolines are the latest rage.