

Operation: Get Fit

For a workout that works, enlist in fitness boot camp

By Jennifer Nelson

YOU'RE UP TO YOUR ANKLES in mud, and it's pouring rain. You've just hit the ground for 25 push-ups. As the mud flies from your fingertips, you're ready for the one-mile sprint uphill and slow jog downhill, all the while singing in a military cadence: "Sound off, one-two; sound off, three-four." No, you're not in the Army, soldier, you've enlisted in fitness boot camp.

Andy Dear of Newburyport, Mass., who has diabetes, hadn't worked out in about two years when he joined Nancy McCarthy's Get Real Fitness Boot Camp. "The first week was just misery," says Dear, 43.

A lot of the exercises focus on core strength: running, sit-ups, push-ups, dips, pull-ups, jumping jacks, planks, jump rope, and more. Generally, boot camps are held outdoors up to five days a week and alternate between aerobic and strengthening exercises like calisthenics. Fitness boot camps take their name from both the military-style exercises they incorporate and the drill sergeant-type instructors in command.

Reasons for Being

A 2008 Fitness Trend Predictions Forecast from the American Council on Exercise (ACE) says outdoor boot camps are gaining in popularity because the focused activities hide the fact that participants are exercising. "People are really tired of doing the same old thing. Gyms have run out of options for how to put classes together and there's just a general lack of creativeness in the gym

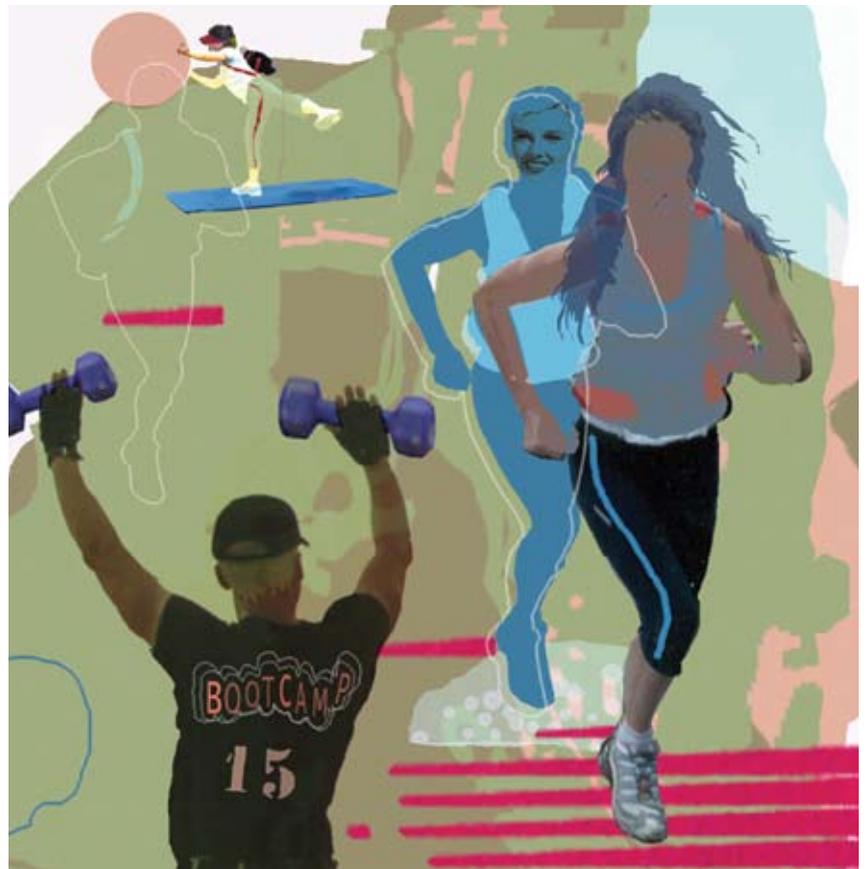
environment," says Laura Cisneros, an ACE certified trainer and owner of Tonic Training, which runs four boot camps in Austin, Texas, including the aptly named Torture and Burn. Ironically, Torture is for beginners or those coming back from an injury.

"How many people do you know that make these New Year's resolutions, join gyms, and then waste the monthly fee?" says Harvey Walden, a retired Marine drill sergeant and

a trainer on *Celebrity Fit Club*, the VH-1 series in which D-list celebs like Erin Moran (*Happy Days*) and Willie Aames (*Eight Is Enough*) sign on to drop weight and get in shape. Walden works them over in fitness boot camp, barking orders all the way to weigh-in day.

A Sense of Accomplishment

The theory behind boot camp is that when you use your own body weight



FIT TO TRAVEL

and the environment, workouts become more efficient. Many gym-goers think they must do an all-cardio workout followed by a strength-training session. But if you tackle the two together, the constant movement keeps your heart rate elevated as if you were doing a full hour of cardio. There are no breaks.

“It’s what’s called an active rest, which means while you’re working one muscle group, you’re resting another,” says Stacy Berman, an ACE and National Academy of Sports Medicine

look for an instructor who’s certified, and observe one of his or her sessions. Perhaps most important, ask if the sessions are appropriate for your fitness capabilities. Some programs modify exercises for varied fitness levels; others don’t. Picking the wrong camp could sideline you from duty.

Try to gauge whether the instructor’s style meshes with yours. Do you like the drill sergeant type, barking orders and calling you to task when you’re slacking? Or do you prefer something

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(NASM) certified trainer who runs Stacy’s Boot Camp in Manhattan. If you do a set of push-ups, then squats, your upper body is technically resting during the squats.

“The good thing about boot camps is that whatever your goal is, you’re going to get it,” Berman explains. “Weight loss, endurance, toning, everything.” Using your own body weight is more effective than artificial weight. To illustrate, she compares a gym chest press with a push-up. For the press, you maneuver the weight machine and work your chest muscles. With the push-up, you work the same chest muscles, but you also tighten your glutes, thigh muscles, and upper and lower back, which provides toning, tightening and body reshaping benefits that the machine does not.

The Ways and Hows

The average cost for a four-day-a-week, six-week camp runs \$250–\$300, less than you might pay to work with a personal trainer over the same length of time. Before you sign on the dotted line,

less extreme? Berman explains, “I don’t want anyone yelling at me; I just want a good workout. So that’s how I do it.” Clearly, there are different philosophies. Walden says he’s a kinder, gentler version of his ex-Marine persona. “I can’t train them the same way I train Marines, without a doubt. But I don’t sacrifice what I want to get accomplished because they’re a bunch of whiners.”

Finally, if you want to try and replicate boot camp results on your own, devise a circuit that combines strength training with cardiovascular exercise. It must be high-intensity though — two minutes at kick-butt level on a Stairmaster or hoofing up steps, immediately followed by 25 push-ups and 25 squat thrusts, and back to the Stairmaster — a total of 50 minutes’ exercise, minus rest. You may want to work with a buddy to replicate the camaraderie. And, of course, check with your physician before beginning any exercise program. 

Writer Jennifer Nelson is based near Jacksonville, Fla.