

family health

Choose the RIGHT workout

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY SUSAN ASHUKIAN

Finding the right workout for your fitness level, goals and personality is the key to staying motivated. While any class can motivate you in the short term, the right workout will keep you exercising for the long haul. Take our quickie quiz and find out which of today's most popular classes – yoga, interval boxing, tai chi, Pilates or hip-hop dance – will keep you on the road to fitness and good health.

1 My main workout goal is to:

- A** tone and strengthen my upper body and get a great cardio workout
- B** get some cardio work, and tone and strengthen my lower body
- C** tone and strengthen my abdominals
- D** improve my physical balance
- E** tone and strengthen my muscles head-to-toe without a lot of sweaty jumping around

2 I'm looking for a workout that is:

- A** high energy and intense
- B** fun and feels more like dancing than exercise
- C** slow with lots of intense, focused movements
- D** gentle and will reduce my risk of injuries
- E** flowing and focused on stretching my body and calming my mind

3 In terms of my current fitness level, I consider myself:

- A** extremely fit...and loving my tough workouts
- B** fit and looking for something high-energy that's less like a workout and more like fun
- C** fit but wanting to take my workout intensity down a bit and focus more on muscle conditioning
- D** a couch potato looking for something different to motivate me
- E** fit but needing something to help me stretch more

4 I want to be healthy, but for me exercise is mainly about:

- A** losing weight and looking good
- B** having fun and socializing
- C** getting long, lean muscles
- D** increasing my energy
- E** giving me a mental and physical break from my busy life

5 I would describe myself primarily as:

- A** unpredictable and competitive
- B** outgoing and fun loving
- C** detail-oriented and introverted
- D** methodical and quiet
- E** inquisitive and experimental

6 I find inner peace when I am:

- A** working out hard (I love runner's high)
- B** the centre of attention
- C** focused on a goal
- D** meditating
- E** stress-free and focusing on my inner self ▶



If your answers were...

MOSTLY As: Interval Boxing

You could be the next Million Dollar Baby. Interval is the class for you.

What it is: An explosive power workout that uses choreographed boxing drills. It focuses on increasing upper body strength with punches, blocks and upper cuts. But, says Kathy Ure, a provincial boxing champion and Canadian gold medalist in London, Ont., who developed the Box On program for Boxing Ontario, instructors also include kicking, shuffling on the spot, skipping, high knee lifts and dips, so you will see some benefits to your lower body. This high-intensity workout offers lots of quick changes, and a sense of camaraderie often develops between students and the instructor.

Why it might work for you: You are a highly physical person who wants to have fun and move fast no matter what

you're doing. You love a challenge and are demanding and always willing to try something new. High-energy music and hard-driving instructors pump you up (and help you get out your frustrations), and you don't mind a little competition on the exercise floor. Not for the faint of heart or body, interval boxing raises the heart rate rapidly and burns lots of calories so you see results – such as weight loss – quickly. You'll tone up and become more muscular, especially in your upper body. Interval boxing makes you feel strong, says Ure, and many participants feel empowered in and out of the workout room.

MOSTLY Bs: Hip-hop

All you want to do is dance, dance, dance. Sign up for a hip-hop class.

What it is: Hip-hop is a high-energy class fashioned after all those dynamic moves you see in music videos by entertainers such as Janet Jackson, Britney Spears and 'N Sync. Hip-hop has roots in street dance, African dance and jazz. Shawn Byfield, a Toronto-based choreographer and entertainer who teaches hip-hop, explains that each class is choreographed, and participants learn one short routine, one section at a time, practising each section individually. You'll be stomping, clapping and learning footwork combinations. Then, you'll put the moves together for the whole dance sequence at the end of the class. This is a moderate- to high-

intensity workout that tones and strengthens muscles, mostly in your lower body. Many fitness clubs and dance centres offer hip-hop classes.

Why it might work for you: You don't want to exercise; you want to have fun. You love to dance and have lots of energy. Bored by most regimented exercise options, you'll find hip-hop an exciting challenge because there are lots of moves to learn and you really have to focus (which relieves stress). All this burns calories, so you may lose weight, too. And don't worry about dressing the way you would for an exercise class, says Byfield: toss your spandex and wear casual, loose clothes that don't restrict your movements. So grab a few friends (or better yet, your teenagers) and express yourself.

MOSTLY Cs: Pilates

You've wanted to firm up your abs for years. Pilates will help you do that and much more.

What it is: An exercise technique that provides deep body conditioning and injury prevention by strengthening and stabilizing muscles in the core (abdomen, lower back and buttocks). The technique was developed 70 years ago by Joseph Pilates, a German-born exercise enthusiast who used exercise to help rehabilitate injured soldiers during the First World War. When Pilates brought his technique to New York in the 1920s, ▶

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dancers used it for conditioning and rehab. More recently, Pilates has become a standard type of one-on-one training, using unique Pilates-specific apparatuses, such as the Reformer, with adjustable cables, pulleys and bars designed to isolate and strengthen individual muscles. In the last several years, Pilates mat classes designed for larger groups have become all the rage. The instructor leads participants through a series of exercises (mostly lying on the mat). This slow-moving class targets smaller muscle groups that stabilize joints, which can help you prevent injuries, says Moira Merrithew, the executive director of education at Stott Pilates in Toronto. The movements are performed slowly and with intense concentration, and there are minimal repetitions.

Why it might work for you: You've had enough of high-impact exercise (maybe you never liked it) and are more interested in taking care of your body at a slower pace. You get your cardiovascular exercise elsewhere (walking or riding your bike) and you like to work at your own pace. You'll enjoy how a Pilates class provides a nurturing environment for all fitness levels and that there's no pressure to perform. Along with helping you flatten your stomach, Pilates will help you develop long, lean muscles and a strong back. It improves flexibility, posture and balance. There's mind-body appeal, too: doing Pilates creates an awareness about the way your body moves and functions, explains Merrithew.

MOSTLY Ds: Tai chi

You're working through some health issues and want to improve your balance – without sapping all of your energy in a cardio class. That's why the gentle art of tai chi is perfect for you.

What it is: Tai chi is an ancient Chinese martial art that combines gentle flowing movements, breath work and mental concentration. This combination is said to help harmonize the mind, body and spirit, which restores and enhances *qi*, or

energy flow in the body, for better health and well-being. In a tai chi class, gentle warm-up movements progress to a series of slow and gentle dancelike movements (there are 108 in the whole series that you learn and continually practise), ranging from blocking motions and arm circles to moves that mimic animals, such as white crane and snake. The movements are done in unison with others in the class, which is why it's often called "meditation in motion."

Why it might work for you: You have health issues of some kind; perhaps physical ones, such as being overweight or suffering from an injury, or mental ones, such as mild depression. In any case, better physical and mental health are your main goals. Most of the exercises are done while you stand, and there is a lot of shifting (transferring of weight) from foot to foot, which enhances your balance, says James Fitzpatrick, an instructor at Healing Arts Centre in Toronto. Tai chi is low impact, and its gentleness will appeal to you, moving your body and lifting your spirits at the same time. It's not physically overtaxing, so you'll finish each class with energy circulating through your body – and that will feel great, says Fitzpatrick. Research has shown that ▶



tai chi lowers blood pressure and heart rate, and improves circulation, strength, flexibility and balance. It also helps improve your concentration and may ease back problems.

MOSTLY Es: Yoga

You want an activity that stretches and strengthens your body and mind. Yoga is the class you've been seeking.

What it is: Developed in India more than 5,000 years ago, yoga is a mind-body discipline that uses a series of physical postures, breathing exercises and sometimes meditation to improve and increase flexibility, strength and muscle tone. Many yoga instructors offer spiritual wisdom from traditional yogic teachings and suggest ways to incorporate yoga into your daily life. There are many different yoga classes, each with its unique focus; for example, ashtanga, or power yoga, is a series of quick movements from posture to posture, which makes it a great

cardiovascular – as well as strength and stretching – workout. At the other end of the spectrum, hatha yoga focuses on slow stretching moves. There are even hot yoga classes, in which you burn off energy in a 38 C (100 F) studio. The type of yoga offered by a club or centre is usually specified; if it's not, it's usually a form of gentle hatha yoga.

Why it might work for you: You've arrived at a place in your life where you demand downtime away from kids, groceries and work, says Connor Mac Laren, a yoga instructor in Toronto. You want to feel good – and feel good about yourself. Yoga is a low-impact mind-body workout that will take care of all of you. It relieves stress and encourages you to relax while it improves your flexibility, strength, stamina, balance and range of motion. Many forms of yoga, such as ashtanga, can help increase your cardiovascular fitness, too, says Mac Laren. Be prepared: it's addictive. One class a week is definitely not enough. ●

FINDING A FITNESS CLASS

Fitness clubs, community centres and specialty clubs provide a range of classes, and the more specialized the club, the more specialized the classes. Maureen Hagan, vice-president of operations for Good Life Fitness clubs, suggests that you talk to the instructor to get a good idea of whether the class you want to take is appropriate for your fitness level and your personality. Once you have taken several classes and understand the goals of the exercise and the importance of proper form, there are lots of exercise videos that you can do in the privacy of your own home. Just be sure to follow instructions and try to do the routine in front of a mirror so you can keep an eye on your form.