

As seen in the January 2010 issue of
Living MARTHA STEWART

FROM MY HOME TO YOURS

A fitness routine that works.

TEXT BY MARTHA STEWART PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHN HUBA

I HAVE ALWAYS led an active life: working full time, gardening, home-keeping, tending family and pets. But it wasn't until my early 30s that I discovered the tremendous value and importance of structured physical workouts several times a week. Since then I've tried a wide variety of exercises, and now I have a sensible program that keeps me strong, flexible, clear minded, and energetic.

Of course, the biggest challenge in figuring out the most effective workout routine is finding the time to do it. Squeezing in an hour or even a half hour a day of exercise that increases heart rate, tones muscles, and improves flexibility is essential to looking and feeling good. A proper diet, good skin care, and regular medical checkups round out a personal care regimen—and we should all have such a program, no matter what.

Trying different types of workouts is the key to finding a routine that keeps you motivated. Almost every community has a gym that offers classes and trainers to help structure an exercise program. When I lived in Westport, I started at a dance studio, where a lovely couple held daily classes incorporating stretching, aerobics, and weight-bearing exercises. After that, a few great gyms were built in my town, and I worked out with a trainer, learning how to use a treadmill and other big machines.

For me, working with a trainer, for 30 or 60 minutes several times a week,



WORKING OUT WITH TRAINER MARY TEDESCO

is a great way to stick to a program and stay in shape. When I moved to Bedford, I was introduced to Mary and Mike Tedesco, who run Body Fit Personal Training (marytedescofitness.com). Mary became my trainer, and I have benefited greatly from her practical and personalized exercise routine, which is outlined here.

Mary is always chipper in the morning, and her attentive and educated approach keeps me strong and full of energy—and anything but bored.

BALANCE BEAM

WHAT The Beamfit Activity Beam (beamfit.com) is a foam plank that's low to the ground. It's five feet long and six inches wide.

WHY Exercising on a beam, rather than on the floor, improves balance and engages the core muscles along the spine and midsection.

MARTHA'S LUNGE In sneakers or barefoot, place one foot in front of the other on the beam, two to three feet apart. Square your hips to the front, keeping your back straight and shoulders relaxed and down. Bend the back knee, toward the beam; make sure the front knee doesn't bend past the toes. Straighten both legs and repeat for a total of 20 lunges. Switch legs, and repeat 20 times.

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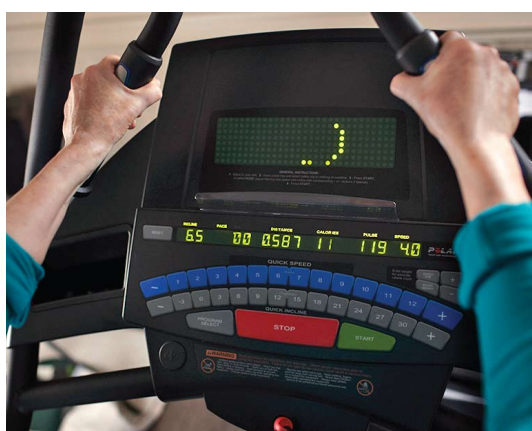


TREADMILL

WHAT It's the quintessential cardio machine. The springy conveyor belt helps absorb the shock of each step, whether you're walking, jogging, or running. Common features include adjustable inclines and heart-rate monitors, below.

WHY Aerobic exercise, such as vigorous walking, improves circulation, which boosts heart health. Plus, it's a great calorie burner.

MARTHA'S ROUTINE Start with a 10-minute walk at a level 1.5 or 2 incline, going about 4 miles per hour. Continue for 20 minutes more, increasing the incline; or create an interval workout by walking briskly between weight-training exercises.



TARGET HEART RATE

WHAT Think of it as the sweet spot for exercise. The goal is to keep your rate within your optimal range, using a heart-rate monitor (treadmills often have one).

WHY This kicks the cardiovascular system into high gear and can boost weight loss.

HOW TO CALCULATE IT Mary's formula is simple: Subtract your age from 220. Multiply that number by 0.65 for the low end of the range and 0.85 for the high end. (To learn more about target heart rates, go to americanheart.com.)

PILATES RING

WHAT This flexible metal exercise ring is 12 or 14 inches in diameter, with two contoured grips on the outside.

WHY The ring adds resistance to adduction exercises, such as arm or inner-thigh squeezes. The range of motion is minimal, but the exercises have big benefits.

TWO-ARM SQUEEZE Sit upright with knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Hold the ring with open palms in front of your chest, right. Press with both hands and release, 20 times. Then press and pulse, 20 times. Repeat for four more sets. This strengthens the pectoral muscles and biceps. Variation: Sit on a stability ball for extra core work.

RAISED-ARM SQUEEZE Sit upright, with a grip on one shoulder and a hand on the other grip, far right. Press and release, 20 times; pulse, 20 times. Switch shoulders, and repeat the exercise. Repeat for four more sets. This works biceps and triceps.

BONUS The Fitness Circle Pro, by Stott Pilates (stottpilates.com), is light enough to pack in a suitcase, so Martha can get in a workout when traveling.



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HAMMER CURL

WHAT Strength exercises, such as hammer curls, tone muscles using resistance equipment such as weights or cables.

WHY This type of exercise helps you increase lean muscle mass, rev up the metabolism, and burn more calories at rest. Weight-bearing exercises also help maintain bone density as you age.

SEATED HAMMER CURL Sit upright and hold the dumbbells in a vertical position, arms down with the elbows tucked into the waist, left. Lift both weights toward your shoulders, exhaling. Lower weights, inhaling (keep a slight bend in the elbows). Martha usually does 16 reps with 12½-pound weights, two to three sets total.

VARIATION For a two-step hammer curl, lift both weights halfway, pausing when your forearms are parallel to the ground. Lift the weights toward your shoulders, and lower halfway, pausing again when forearms are parallel to the ground. Lower, and repeat for a total of 16 reps; do two to three sets.



ONE-LEGGED HAMMER CURL

WHAT Building on the seated hammer curl, this one-legged version improves core strength, balance, and stability—and gives the biceps and the standing leg a workout, too.

WHY This is the ultimate multitasking exercise, working many muscles at once.

ONE-LEGGED HAMMER CURL Stand upright on one leg, with a slight bend in the supporting knee, left; bend the raised leg. Holding the weights in the vertical position, lift them as in seated hammer curl, for 16 reps using 12½-pound weights. Switch legs for the second set.

MEDICINE BALL

WHAT This heavy ball is used in many conditioning exercises. The ones Martha uses are 9 and 12 pounds each.

WHY The medicine ball is another good tool for core-strengthening exercises. Varying the routine keeps the body alert as it adapts to new tasks—“muscle confusion,” as Mary calls it.

MEDICINE-BALL TWIST Sit upright on a stability ball, with your feet rooted to the floor, your torso engaged, and your shoulders relaxed, right. Holding the medicine ball, twist twice to the left, exhaling; return to center, and inhale. Twist twice to the right. Repeat for a total of 16 to 20 reps; do two to three sets.



SIDE BEND

WHAT With free weights, a basic side stretch turns into a toning exercise for the obliques (abdominal muscles that run along the sides of the torso), as well as the biceps, shoulders, and lower back.

WHY The core muscles—the corsetlike support system in the abdomen, lower back, and pelvis—play a key role in spine health and posture. “Everything you do starts with your core,” Mary says, from bending over to twisting. Training these muscle groups helps keep your body working properly and efficiently.

SIDE BEND WITH WEIGHTS Stand with your feet hip-width apart, above, with a slight bend in the knees. Keeping your lower half stable, bend to the left, and lift the right dumbbell toward your armpit. Move laterally as if sliding between two panes of glass—don’t lean forward or backward. Slowly straighten up; bend to the other side. Repeat for a total of 16 reps; do two to three sets. Martha uses 12½-pound weights.



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STRETCHING

WHAT Light stretches give muscles a chance to lengthen after they've contracted in aerobic and strength-training exercises. Plus, taking the time to stretch clears the mind and helps Martha get ready for her busy schedule.

WHY "Stretching is key to feeling good every day," Mary says. "I call it preventive medicine." It increases your range of motion and helps ward off injury. Don't forget to breathe.

KNEES TO CHEST Lie on your back. Bring your knees to your chest, keeping the lower back on the floor and your neck relaxed, right. Hold knees with your hands, or wrap your arms around them, clasping wrists or elbows.

LEG EXTENSION Lie with both legs straight on the floor. Lift the left leg to the ceiling, keeping hips square and knees straight, below right. Using your hands or a yoga strap, slowly lower leg toward your body, pausing when you feel the stretch. Repeat on the other side.

HIP OPENER Lie on your back, with knees bent and feet flat. Place the right ankle on the left knee, bottom right. Using your hands or a strap, bring left knee toward body, gently pressing right knee open; both knees should be at a 90-degree angle. Repeat on other side.



BONUS Canine company! Sharkey, above, and Francesca tag along for the morning workout. "They're always there, doing their little downward dogs," Mary says.

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