

Into the great outdoors



Stand to attention: British Military Fitness provides a boot-camp alternative to the gym

Alfresco fitness: You may not get a complimentary water bottle or personalised locker but the great outdoors beats any swanky gym, says ANTONIA KANCZULA

Not only does keeping fit outside have physical advantages but the natural light, stimulating views and fresh air can work wonders on your energy levels and mood.

'Research shows daylight is great for your brain and, since you can be much more imaginative with what you do, the outdoors offers plenty of opportunity to get fit while enjoying yourself,' says trainer Tommy Matthews from Outdoor Extreme (www.outdoor-extreme.com).

Running outside is infinitely more stimulating than the monotony of the treadmill, and ditto swimming outdoors. Kate Rew of the Outdoor Swimming Society (www.outdoorswimmingsociety.com) says: 'Most people can't spend longer than 30 minutes in an indoor pool but outside, with the clouds above, you forget everything and can easily while away an hour.' City-dwellers can try these more unusual options...

GREEN GYM

Ideal for: the eco-conscious
Forget pumping iron and think pruning. Orchestrated by the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, a Green Gym lets you do your bit for the planet while getting a workout. In each session, participants contribute to a community project, be it clearing a garden or laying a path, and are



In pole position: Nordic walking is low-impact and ideal for those with joint issues or injuries

guided through basic exercises. According to BTCV, an hour's vigorous gardening can burn one-third more calories than a step aerobics class and, in a recent survey of participants, 100 per cent said that taking part had boosted their self-esteem. See www2.btcv.org.uk for your nearest class.

NORDIC WALKING

Ideal for: anyone recovering from injury
Nordic walking (www.nordicwalking.co.uk) burns up to 46 per cent more calories than regular walking and engages 90 per cent of the skeletal muscles. But despite all this, it's low-impact and suited to anyone with joint issues or those recovering from injuries. Courses are available throughout the country.

T'AI CHI

Ideal for: the anxious and stressed

There's a mounting body of scientific evidence to suggest the ancient Chinese art of t'ai chi (www.taichifinder.co.uk) has a powerful impact on health. The slow-moving martial art relieves stress, aids concentration, boosts the immune system and improves flexibility. T'ai chi teacher Sue Woodd (www.suewoodd.com) says: 'You'll instinctively pick up on the energy of the season.'

BRITISH MILITARY FITNESS (BMF)

Ideal for: demotivated gym-goers
British Military Fitness (www.britmilfit.com) welcomes all ages and levels to boot camp-style classes around the country. Barney Lurkin,

marketing manager at BMF, says: 'You're divided into ability groups and led through a full cardio workout, including paired exercises, circuits and running. And strength work is not neglected, either.'

ADVENTURE RACING

Ideal for: adrenaline junkies
Cross country meets The Krypton Factor. Tackling various disciplines from mountain biking to free-running, you work in a team to navigate a course that remains a surprise until the start and can last up to a few days. A sturdy pair of trainers, technical skills and a huge amount of mental steel required. For more details, visit www.sleepmonsters.co.uk. And for city-based events, see www.ratraceadventure.com