

Flying higher in the big green gym

If you prefer to be exercising outdoors than sweating it out in the gym, follow **Peta Bee's** guide to the top ten ways to get fit in the town and country

IN THE CITY PARK CIRCUITS

A fitness revolution of recent years has been an outdoor circuit class in which groups of people are led through gruelling army-style workouts that involve lunging, sprinting and bench-dipping in parks, commons and any open space. In London the trend was triggered by British Military Fitness, started in 1999 and run by former Army PT instructors.

Body boosting

Muscles The upper and lower body exercises test every muscle, but especially the hamstrings, quadriceps and calf muscles.

Calorie burn Between 7.4 and 10.9 a minute. Within six weeks expect to lose 5lb-6lb in weight and to lower your body fat percentage. Several studies have confirmed that circuit training is the best way to burn calories as it incorporates all essential aspects of fitness.

Risk factor Low.

Contact britmilfit.com; outdoor-extreme.com

IN-LINE SKATING

Mass skating events through the streets of Paris and similar group skates in Amsterdam and London have transformed in-line skating into a boom sport. Check that in-line skating is permitted in your local park; some councils ban it for fear of collisions with pedestrians.

Body boosting

Muscles Helps to create a strong, toned core section that will improve balance, posture and prevent back pain. It will also give your leg muscles a good workout.

Calorie burn About 200 an hour.

Risk factor Medium. There will be falls, especially when you are learning. Lessons are recommended to minimise the damage.

Contact citiskate.co.uk; iisa.org

FREE RUNNING/PARKOUR

If any activity embraces the urban landscape to the full, it is free running, or Parkour. Buildings, fences, walls and lamp-posts become obstacles and facilitators of movement, as you scramble, climb, leap and vault over them, moving through the city with a fluidity of motion akin to dance. The man widely credited with founding the activity is David Belle, who began practising it as a teenager in the Parisian suburb of Lisses. A BBC trailer called *Rush Hour* introduced Parkour to a wider audience in the UK.

In the film Belle is shown crossing a gridlocked city; at one point leaping from building to building 100ft up.

Body boosting

Muscles One of few sports to test every muscle in the body. The more accomplished you become, the wider the range of muscles you will engage.

Calorie burn At least 412 an hour, but the top free runners can burn as many as 600 in that time.

Risk factor Potentially huge.

Contact urbanfreeflow.com; parkouruk.com

ULTIMATE

Played by two teams of seven, think of football with a Frisbee replacing the ball, and without a referee dictating the flow of the game, and you have an idea what the game of Ultimate is about. Although you can play ad hoc in the local park, your best bet is to join a club.

Body boosting

Muscles The calf and thigh muscles are heavily recruited during the running phase, but jumping also engages the buttocks and core muscles around the midriff.

Calorie burn About 450 an hour.

Bones The constant leaping and landing is an

GOLF

The game has undergone a dramatic makeover and is attracting a younger generation of players. Unlike other sports, the biggest opponents are yourself and the surroundings. Even at professional level, golfers claim to battle the course as much as their rivals. The basics are simple: hit a small ball into a hole with the fewest possible shots. Repeat 18 times (nine-hole courses are also common).

Body boosting

Muscles Not so much a good walk spoiled, as Mark Twain famously described it, but a good walk enhanced by the technical demands of the game and of carrying a hefty bag (weighing up to 15kg) as you cover the fairway. Golf develops good core stability and back strength.

Calorie burn Between 250 and 320 an hour.

Risk factor As the numbers of newcomers to golf rise, so too does the tally of injuries they suffer as a consequence of poor technique, researchers at the Union Memorial Hospital in Baltimore found. The most common problems are damage to the lower back caused by the twist of swinging, tennis elbow and shoulder damage. Physiotherapists recommend that any golfing programme be complemented by pilates-style exercises to strengthen core muscles.

LAND-YACHTING

A basic land-yacht has three wheels, a large sail and two pedals in the body of the yacht to enable you to steer, like a windsurfer on wheels. With funding from Sport England, the British are highly successful at this worldwide sport. Age is not a barrier; people in their seventies have represented the British land-yachting

team. Most schools will provide the equipment you need. Helmets are compulsory.

Body boosting

Muscles All the pulling on the rope to change direction works the arm and shoulder muscles. You also use your leg muscles and regularly engage the core muscles as you turn to slow down the yacht.

Calorie burn About 220 calories an hour.

Risk factor Lessons are crucial to learn safety procedures and good technique.

Contact bsfly.org.uk

KITE FLYING

There is a huge spectrum of kites on offer, from power kites to stunt kites, and kites that come with engineered skateboards, surfboards and buggies. The sense of liberation experienced by harnessing wind power in this way can be exhilarating and soul-soothing.

Body boosting

Muscles The extent to which muscles are used depends on kite size and the wind resistance it creates. The arm and shoulder muscles are used to hold the kite in position, but much of the power comes from the legs, especially the thigh muscles, which are engaged to keep the kite-flier grounded.

Calorie burn Between 180 and 320 an hour.

Mind The mental health charity Mind cites kite-flying as among the best ways means to alleviate depression and stress.

Risk factor Can be dangerous if kites fly into pedestrians and bystanders.

Contact bkfa.org.uk; thekitesociety.org.uk

GARDENING

Research has shown that pruning, weeding and tending your flower beds can help to rid the body of tension in the same way as yoga. A scheme called Green Gym, run by the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, offers those who don't have access to a garden a way of keeping fit in the open air by engaging in everything from clearing woodland and building dry stone walls to repairing footpaths.

Body boosting

Muscles Research carried out at Oxford Brookes University found that regular Green Gym sessions improved cardiovascular fitness and muscular strength.

Calorie burn About 400 an hour, as many an hour as step aerobics.

Mind More than 24,000 people a week use gardening projects to benefit their health, and research by Thrive, the therapeutic horticultural society, suggests that many of those claim it helps to boost their mood significantly.

Risk factor Back ache; stretch before and after.

Contact btcv.co.uk; thrive.org.uk

Extract taken from *Wild Gym: 50 Ways to Get Fit Outdoors*, by Peta Bee (*Guardian Books*, £14.99). Order on 0845 6064232



TAI CHI

Tai (meaning ultimate or supreme) chi (meaning energy) is characterised by slow, precise and

flowing movements. Traditionally used as a form of combat, practitioners claim that its moves are more defensive than offensive, and that the meditative calm it induces is beneficial for mental health. In the UK a growing number of gyms and health clubs are including it in their timetables.

Body boosting

Muscles Similar benefits to running when it comes to improving leg muscles.

Calorie burn About 200 an hour.

Balance Known to improve balance and co-ordination. A study of 78-year-olds who were prone to falling showed a significant improvement in their strength, balance and stability after a 12-week course of tai chi.

Mind Has been shown to have a positive effect on people suffering from depression, anxiety and stress.

General health One study found that regular classes gave patients who had suffered heart failure better movement, and reduced the potential for recurrence.

Risk factor Very low.

Contact taichionion.com; tcfce.org

IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

RETRO RUNNING

Retro-running (walking or running backwards) dates from the 1970s when a group of physiotherapists began recommending it to injured athletes. Now leading athletes — including footballers, rugby players and referees — use it as part of their training.

Body boosting

Muscles Uses the same muscles as running or walking, although the hamstrings tend to work harder than the quadriceps, as do calf muscles.

Calorie burn Proponents claim that it burns one fifth more calories than walking or running.

Cardiovascular

Researchers looked at the effects of a six-week, thrice-weekly backward running programme on female students compared with a group who stuck to their regular activity schedule. At the end of the study, the retro-runners were found to have significant decreases in oxygen consumption, meaning that they had become aerobically fitter, and had lost an average 2.5 per cent of their body fat.

Other benefits There is less movement of the hips which means less impact on the joints, making it ideal for people recovering from knee and back problems.

Risk factor Beginners complain of stiff neck muscles as they look behind to avoid collisions.

Contact runnersworld.co.uk



Catch of the day: An ultimate frisbee player shows off his acrobatic skills