

Sports Dr.: Boxing for Fun and Fitness

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BOXING FOR FUN AND FITNESS

New boxing franchises are stepping away from the gritty, hard-nosed atmosphere of old-school boxing facilities and are creating environments that are welcoming for almost everyone. And, frankly, it's about time.

Boxing's Benefits

As a sport, boxing requires a high level of athletic prowess: strength, speed, agility, hand-eye coordination, endurance, nerve and power, just to name some. Boxing as a fitness activity enables the average person to develop those same athletic skills, all without having to take a punch. If you're hoping to get in great shape and improve your health, you might want to join your local boxing gym. Here are 10 reasons why.



1. Enhanced cardiovascular health: Boxing can be a great fitness activity for individuals who want to perform a cardio workout, but are getting bored with more traditional aerobic activities such as running, cycling and aerobic classes. The whole point of cardio is to place a moderate amount of stress on your heart and lungs so they're challenged enough to make beneficial physiologic adaptations to support the higher level of physical activity. But how you choose to place stress on your heart and lungs is up to you. As long as you keep your heart rate up during your workout, there's no reason you can't punch, kick and jump your way to a healthy heart at your local boxing gym.

When you throw punches, a huge number of your body's muscles are contracting at the same time. This makes your heart and lungs work overtime to pump blood-containing oxygen throughout your body. Boxing will test your cardiovascular system to the max, forcing your body to adapt by making your heart and lungs better at delivering oxygen. This means you can train at a higher intensity, giving an even greater fat burning effect.

2. Improved total-body strength: During a boxing workout, you may punch or kick a bag hundreds of times, requiring your upper body, lower body and core to engage as you make contact with the bag. Plus, most boxing gyms incorporate other strength training moves into a boxing workout. For example, many workouts include squats, pushups, planks, and weighted medicine ball exercises all within the context of a fast-paced 30-minute circuit workout.

3. Better hand-eye coordination: You may not think about the importance of hand-eye coordination and its effect on total health, but hand-eye coordination plays an important role in a person's gross and fine motor skills. Individuals with good hand-eye coordination tend to have faster reflexes and reaction times, and better physical coordination as a whole. This is particularly important as you age when coordination and balance tend to become compromised, increasing the risk of falls. Additionally, boxing can help hone hand-eye coordination. When you're tasked with punching a speed bag or you're paired to spar with a partner, you must be able to see, react to and hit the target, all while the target is moving and changing position.

4. Decreased stress: When you're pushing yourself through a couple of minutes of high-intensity punching or kicking, you don't have much mental power left to worry about how awful your job is or how dirty your house is. And even during rest periods, you'll be focused on sucking wind and mentally preparing for the next round, not stressing over your



packed schedule. There is an incredibly cathartic release when you get to take some of your stress out on a punching bag. It's an empowering feeling to punch your stress to smithereens.

5. Improved body composition: Boxing is great for improving body composition, and some might say it's great for weight loss. Ultimately, if you want to lose weight, what you really want to do is improve your body composition—to increase your muscle mass and decrease your fat mass.

Boxing can easily burn as much as 500 calories per 30-minute session. Boxing, however, has an additional benefit thanks to the fact that it is high intensity training. When performing high intensity training, you not only burn calories during the session, but for hours after the training session has ended. Typical cardio activities do not have this post training calorie burning effect. Hence, boxing is your best friend when it comes to losing weight.

Boxing is an incredible mechanism for improved body composition because it perfectly combines muscle-building strength training moves and calorie-torching bouts of cardio. By regularly participating in a boxing program and following a nutritious eating plan, you'll likely see changes in your shape and improvements to your fat mass percentage.

6. Improved core stability: Anything that causes your body to become unstable requires your core muscles to work harder to keep you balanced. Boxing requires lots of fast rotational movements and these core muscles will develop to allow you to punch hard without losing your balance.

7. Build strong bones and ligaments: Resistance training strengthens your bones and reduces the progression of osteoporosis. In boxing, focus pads and punching bags provide resistance, as does your own body weight, when you perform pushups, pullups, lunges, burpees and various other exercises. Your joints, tendons and ligaments will also get stronger when working against resistance.

Using your body weight can also help you maintain or increase your lean muscle mass, which is critical to keeping your metabolic rate burning at maximum capacity.

8. Improved strength and power: Punching is a fast repetitive action that produces toned taut muscles, in contrast to the slow, controlled, very heavy movements involved in



body-building or weight lifting, which produce size or bulk. Boxing is the ultimate full body workout. Correctly thrown punches use your legs, hips, glutes, core, obliques, back, shoulders, chest and arms. Punching against resistance causes all of these muscles to contract with more force and speed, further developing your body strength.

9. Confidence: Contrary to popular belief, boxers typically do not seek confrontation. Their skills and confidence convey an inner belief that they have nothing to prove. However, if boxers need to protect themselves in a self-defense situation, they will be more adept at finishing things quickly and cleanly. When people feel secure about their ability to defend themselves physically, this often translates to a psychological benefit of self-contentment and peace of mind.

10. Makes you super-fit: To get the most out of your body, you need to work it the right way through a variety of different forms of exercise and by keeping your heart rate at the right level. For overall fitness, you need to get your head around both aerobic and anaerobic exercise present in boxing. Boxing is estimated to be 70-80% anaerobic and 20-30% aerobic. A boxing workout helps maintain the heart rate at 75%-85% of the maximum heart rate, which is the recommended range if you are exercising. This means that aerobic exercise is low energy exercise that can be done for extended periods of time (think yoga, swimming and running). Since aerobic exercise is relatively gentle, your body is able to maintain a reasonable amount of oxygen, which is then carried to your muscles to use as energizing fuel. This type of exercise is good for burning fat and improving cardiovascular health. Anaerobic exercise, any short, intense exercise, uses up oxygen fast. This means lactic acid is produced and your body will not be able to sustain its energy levels for long. This type of exercise increases your endurance, muscle mass and metabolism.

Getting Started

Boxing is a jarring, contact-heavy workout, and there are important reasons why you shouldn't just hang up your bag and start flailing. The human body isn't designed for repeatedly generating and accepting the kinds of forces that can be generated in any intense workout; a good boxing coach can help you develop the technical proficiency you need to reduce your risk of injury. He/she will also prevent you from reinforcing incorrect habits. The more bad punches you throw, the deeper your poor technique becomes ingrained and the harder it's going to be for you to unlearn.

A common goal is to work your way up to a simulated regulation boxing match: 12 rounds c



three minutes a piece, with one minute of rest between rounds.

There are basically two types of boxing training: training that focuses on teaching boxers to compete in the ring, and training that focuses on helping “everyday athletes” get in better shape. The basic difference between the two forms of training is that athletes who want to learn how to compete in boxing must learn to land and take punches with human opponents. They have to learn to hit and be hit by a competitor. Gyms that teach boxers to compete typically have boxing rings in their facilities and offer opportunities for boxers to fight one another.

If you have no interest in taking a punch, you’ll want to look for facilities that offer classes and programs outside of the ring. The basic skills are the same—you learn to jab, uppercut and hook; you work on footwork and speed, core strength and agility, and power and flexibility. In some cases, depending on the facility, you’ll also learn MMA-style kicking sequences.

With today’s fitness-friendly boxing clubs, just about anyone can walk in and get started, regardless of baseline fitness. Given that most boxing classes focus on body-weight exercises, you can go at your own pace and ramp up the intensity as you see fit. The facility you attend should be welcoming, classes should be held by certified trainers (preferably with a certification or experience specifically in boxing), and the facility should be clean and well maintained.

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