



# Good or Bad?

BY SCOTT HARRUP

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**P**eople have come up with an endless array of ideas for staying in shape. Some have proven to be effective. Others, not so much. A tactic that works well for one person can prove ineffective or even unhealthy for another. The important thing to remember — choose any exercise tool carefully and consult your doctor.

**SWEAT SUITS:** Normal warm exercise clothing is fine, but watch out for extreme sweat suits, or sauna suits, that promote excessive sweating while you exercise. As Stew Smith notes in his “Weight Loss Myths” article for Military.com Fitness Center, “Sweating excessively has no useful purpose in healthy weight loss. The dangers of sweating to lose weight ... include overheating (heatstroke), extreme loss of electrolytes (kidney damage/death), and other cardiovascular related emergencies.”

**ANKLE WEIGHTS:** Some athletes strap on small weights while running in order to increase leg strength. According to Dr. Anthony Luke, assistant professor of orthopedics at UC San Francisco, such

weights give an increased workout to joints as well as muscles. In a *Los Angeles Times* interview, Luke points out the devices can make existing joint problems worse. In the same article, Kent Adams, director of the exercise physiology lab at Cal State Monterey, believes regular weight training is a better idea for increasing leg strength.

**PERSONAL TRAMPOLINES:** Jumping in place on one of these devices can be a great cardiovascular workout. But a Google search of “personal trampolines” also reveals a ton of Web sites dedicated to litigation for trampoline injuries. Kind of a red flag?

**WII FITNESS:** Newsweek.com’s Sarah Ball noted “Wii Fit Ski-Jump” in her article “Seven Silly Fitness Fads.” “Marked as a balance improver,” she writes, “the ski-jump requires the jumper to remain in a slight squat position for a few seconds before quickly straightening up.” Virtual ski jumping is certainly a lot safer than the real deal, but since “Wii workouts can be virtually sweat-free,” are you really exercising?

**WEIGHTED HULA HOOPS:** Another entry in Ball’s article, these are twirled around one’s torso and outstretched limbs. The article recommends sticking with traditional hoops since “beginners could pull a muscle” with the weighted variety.

**FITNESS BOOT CAMPS:** About.com’s Elizabeth Quinn sees this trend as one of the best. “While there are a variety of styles of fitness boot camps,” Quinn notes, “most are designed in a way that pushes the participants harder than they’d push themselves, but with the support of a group.”

**KETTLEBELL WORKOUTS:** Quinn also recommends these “bowling ball-sized cast iron weights. ... Lifting and controlling a kettlebell forces the entire body, and specifically the core, to contract as a group, building both strength and stability at the same time.”

**INVERSION FITNESS BOOTS:** I can’t help it. I always think of Batman when I envision these things. Manufacturers’ claims point to a variety of benefits to reversing the effects of gravity by

hanging upside down for even a few minutes. A variety of inversion tables are also on the market. When I was a kid, however, hanging upside down always made me feel like a blood vessel was about to burst in my head.

**BODY WEIGHT EXERCISES:** These have to be the oldest form of fitness. Variations of push-ups, sit-ups, squats and other exercises use nothing more than your own weight to create resistance for your muscles. You can find an amazing and challenging variety of tips online and in the health and exercise section of most bookstores.

**TAE BO:** A huge hit in the late ’90s when it first gained national prominence, this martial arts-style exercise program offers plenty of no-contact kicking and punching action and continues to attract a wide audience.

**PILATES:** Because the movements are so carefully controlled

in this system of exercise aimed at strengthening the body core (early 20th-century inventor Joseph Pilates actually called the system “contrology”), some research has found it beneficial for people with Parkinson’s disease.

**EXERCISE PETS:** “So you can’t afford a personal trainer?” asks WebMD’s Colette Bouchez in her article “Exercise Trends.” “Maybe your pet can serve as your exercise buddy.” Bouchez notes a 12-month study by Northwestern University’s Feinberg School of Medicine in Chicago found both people and pets were more successful with a weight loss program when working together than in separate groups. **tpe**

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