

on the ball

We all want a workout that's effective and fun,
so grab a **fitball** and get moving, says Damien Kelly.

Balance - it's something many of us wish we had more of in our lives. Getting on a fitball will at least add balance to your health, and while physios have known the benefits of balls for years, they've only recently hit the mainstream.

Jane Kilkenny, Director of Fitness Energy in Melbourne says fitballs can provide a true total body workout. Used correctly, they can benefit anybody - kids and adults, alike. The reason they work so well is that they train your body's core. According to Kilkenny, this is the key. There's no point having strong arms and legs but weak abs.

Robyn Selems, an accounts manager from Tamworth, NSW, first experienced the benefits of using a ball after a minor health scare. "Sitting for half an hour daily changed my life within a couple of weeks. My back and hip pain reduced, and I finally felt control over my stomach muscles."

But there are rules to follow. After all, as Alison Brolsma, CEO of Fitball Training and Therapy says, the only good piece of equipment is one that is used correctly.

So, start with these exercises and before you know it you'll be improving your posture, strengthening your spine and building tone and definition.



which ball?

Your ball must be the correct size. Rebecca McHugh, marketing manager at AOK Health says if you're between 160cm and 175cm tall, go for the 55cm ball and if you're between 175cm and 195cm, go for a 65cm ball. Most ball companies make other sizes too. Alison Brolsma recommends that you only purchase high quality balls from specialist manufacturers such as AOK Health, Fitball and Smart Ball. They are independently tested too.

balls & more - *getting the most out of my ball - long term*

These exercises are just to whet your appetite. But there are literally thousands of ways to be creative and have fun. Most quality balls come with brochures and wall charts of exercises. If you like to buy Aussie, check out the range of videos and books by Lisa Westlake at www.physicalbest.com. Another Australian initiative is an interactive fitball CD-Rom which can be purchased from Fitball Therapy and Training on 1800 225 526.

superman

the move

Lie on your tummy on the ball. Let the ball support your weight, so your hands and feet only lightly touch the ground front and back. Your neck and spine should be parallel to the ground. Simultaneously raise your right arm and left leg as high as you can without twisting through your trunk. As you raise your leg, point your foot outwards.

Hold for a few seconds, lower, and repeat with the other arm and leg. Try between 10 and 20 slow reps and increase over time. As you become stronger, you can add wrist and ankle weights.

the reason - This is a great butt and shoulder workout. The all-important core muscles keep you from falling off.

take care - Keep your eyes looking down, not forward, to avoid a pain in the neck.

hamstring curls

the move

Lie on your back, heels on ball, legs straight, and arms out to the sides. Lift your pelvis until your body's straight from heels to shoulders. Now, slowly roll the ball towards your backside, onto the soles of your feet, and pause. Keep your pelvis high.

Slowly return your legs to almost straight and repeat. Start with three sets of eight reps and gradually work up to 15. To increase intensity, progressively bring your arms closer to your body and eventually try with your arms across your chest - the ultimate hamstring workout.



the reason

The hamstring (back of thigh) is one of the forgotten muscles of the body. We so often over-train the quadricep (front of thigh) that it causes an imbalance between these two muscles. This can then lead to the all-too-common torn hamstring.

take care

On the out-phase, the slower the better. Stop just short of fully locking your knees.

balance push-ups



the move

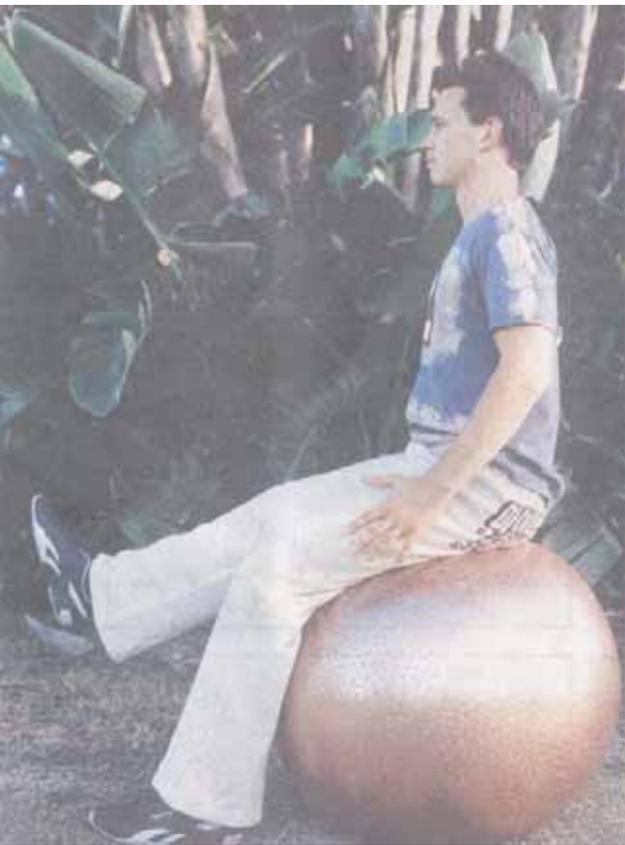
Stand with the ball in front of you and place both hands on top, shoulder-width apart. Walk both feet back and drop your pelvis until your body's straight from head to heels. Your head is hovering over the ball and your heels are raised. Look down (important for neck comfort) and draw in your belly button. Slowly lower a few inches, by bending at the elbows, pause, and return to the starting position. Repeat five to 10 times for three sets. As your balance and strength grow, bend those elbows more, and increase the reps.

the reason

While giving the same chest, shoulder and arm benefits as a normal push-up, it builds core stability. Many small muscles around the shoulder are brought into play, and it's also a good workout for the abs.

watch out for

To protect your wrists aim your nose to the point between your hands. Only lower to a depth which still allows you to keep your mid-section firm and straight like a plank. If in doubt look in the mirror to check.



single leg raise

The ultimate posture trainer! Sit tall on the ball, feet flat on the floor, hands at your sides (not on the ball). Roll your pelvis towards the back, draw your belly button towards your spine and fix your gaze at a point in front of you. Slowly raise your left foot a few inches off the ground, and pause. Straighten that leg so it's parallel to the ground, and pause. Bend your knee, and pause. Then, return your foot to the ground. Alternate legs, for three sets of 10 to 20 reps. To up the ante as you improve, close one eye during the movement, and then both.

the reason

Do you remember when your teacher would tell you to sit-up straight? In hindsight, you probably weren't strong enough to sit straight for any length of time, and you're probably still not. This simple

exercise will strengthen your postural muscles and train your brain, so you can sit and stand straighter for longer. After doing this exercise for a while, people often say, "I feel taller".

take care

You might tend to roll your hips forward as you raise your leg, but this greatly reduces the effect. So, keep your butt back and your tummy braced.

russian twist

the move

Everyone loves this one. Lie on your back, arms out, palms up with your calves on the ball. Roll the ball towards you with your heels until it's squeezed against the back of your thighs. Draw in your belly button and breathe out as you roll the ball over to the left. Pause. Your right shoulder stays flat on the ground. While lowering on the twist, keep it slow and controlled. Now roll the ball back using the side abdominals (not the hips and legs) and repeat on the other side. Do three sets of eight to 20 reps.



the reason

We're constantly twisting during our daily lives, but it's our weakest and most injury-causing movement. This exercise strengthens the twisting muscles in the trunk while giving a magic lower-back stretch.

take care

Easy does it. Slow and controlled are your watch-words for any ball exercises.