



Boot camp fitness: Let's Go! Let's Go! Let's Go!

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By Dorene Internicola

NEW YORK (Reuters Life!) - You may not be in the army now, but if your workout lacks inspiration, maybe what you need is a drill sergeant barking orders in your ear.

Boot camp-style group fitness classes are typically relentless and noisy, but they will whip you into fighting shape.

At Warrior Fitness Boot Camp in Manhattan, shouting is as much a part of the regimen as squat thrusts and push-ups and the challenge is to "train like a marine with real marines."

"We pack so much into one hour that you get the most intense total body workout," said drill instructor Alex Fell. "We took our experience as former marine sergeants and melded it with more traditional-type workouts."

He combines a military-type obstacle course and calisthenics with workouts found in a gym, such as free weights, upper body exercises and sprinting up the stairs.

Fell co-owns the gym, which is decorated with recruitment posters and military memorabilia, with Ruben Belliard. Both are certified fitness instructors as well as veterans of the corps.

Fell said his clients range from 18 to 65.

"We have all fitness levels, from people who've never worked out before to people who run triathlons and marathons."

And 70 per cent of his warriors are women.

"Women love it," Fell said. "People always hear that the Marine Corps boot camp is the toughest training to go through, so they say, 'I wonder if I can handle that?'"

The yelling, and there's a lot of it, is meant to be motivational, not degrading.

"It's more an encouraging type of screaming," he said. "We get them to push a little harder than they think they can."

Jessica Matthews of the American Council on Exercise (ACE) says although boot camp workouts have become very popular lately, they've been around for a while.

"It's really getting back to basics, with lots of calisthenics, push up squats," she said. "They are challenging, intense workouts and they can be very well-rounded."

Matthews said an ACE research study found that subjects who exercised to a 40-minute boot camp DVD burned nearly 400 calories.

"That's 9.8 calories per minute, a pretty significant burn."

But she cautions that all boot camps are not alike and advises people to ask questions and observe a class before starting an intense regimen.

"You want to make sure it's safe," she said.

Lashaun Dale, national creative manager for group fitness at Equinox, thinks boot camp workouts are popular because the commitment and intensity they demand yield dramatic results.

"You need a level of intensity to make a change in your body," she explains. "People have come to terms with that and they're willing to show up for it."

As for the yelling: "If you don't respond to in-your-face motivation it can be hard," she admits.

"But it is also calling up this deeper part of you."

She thinks the military affectations are just part of the ride.

"Part of group fitness is the entertainment factor," she said. "You (students as well as teachers) have to step into a role. As long as everybody remembers that, it works out."

Not all boot camp instructors are ex-military, Dale says, but sometimes it helps.

"If you know that the person leading you has been through life-threatening situations, you're probably not going to whine so much about doing 10 more pushups."



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