

Exercising with mini-trampolines and other “toys” ^[1]

Dear Alice,

I have two questions:

(1) What are the benefits of jumping on a mini-trampoline?

(2) Are there any benefits to using a hula-hoop?

As you can probably see, I'm looking for exercises that are fun.

Answer

Dear Reader,

Whether you're jumping on a trampoline or a basketball court or gyrating with a hula-hoop or on the dance floor, you're burning calories! Might as well have fun with physical activity! Some people dread heading into a cramped gym with lines of manufactured machines. Creative and fun alternatives like yours help break the routine. Tapping into motivations like fun, positive childhood memories, and being social (what's more fun than having friends over to jump around?) is likely to develop healthy physical activity routines you look forward to!

You don't have to be a circus performer or an Olympic gymnast to get low impact cardiovascular benefits from mini-trampolines. In fact, a movement called "rebounding" promotes this form of exercise. Whenever you're taking up a new activity, remember to focus on developing the proper form and fundamental skills first, especially before you attempt any advanced moves. Some moves really aren't meant to be tried at home.

In using a mini-trampoline, it's good to learn how to control your bounce. You may want to visit a fitness center to try it out before investing in your own equipment. A lesson or two from a fitness professional would provide the guidance you need to proceed on your own.

As with any new exercise equipment, it's vital to investigate the product. You may want to try one out before investing in your own equipment. If you decide to get your own, make sure that the trampoline frame is sturdy, has good suspension, and that the padding is adequate. If the model opens and closes, take a good look at these mechanisms; check to see that the trampoline won't

collapse while you're jumping. Also, find a good place to jump, with adequate space so that you won't smash into walls, ceilings, other furniture, or small pets. Similar to when you were younger, keep in mind some safety precautions:

- "Bounce with me!": it's more fun and safer with other people watching!
- Take turns: have only one person jump at a time to avoid colliding your forehead into someone's neck.
- Start slow: warm up your ankles and joints to avoid twists and sprains.
- Leave it to the pro's: it's tempting, but try to avoid doing somersaults and shoulder, stomach, or back landings.
- Bounce on an empty stomach: time to take a break if you feel nauseous.
- Know when it's time: tune into your body, remembering that a little soreness may be a good indicator that you're working your muscles and that pain means stop.

Hopping into your second question, hula-hoops may be a lot of fun and a good source of coordination development. Using hula-hoops may not build lots of muscle, but you may get some light cardio benefits if you hula long enough. The effort you put forth is sure to make for an amusing performance or two. Consider using a jump rope if you want to kick your cardio up a notch. This exercise may really rev up your heart rate. Toys and games with cardiovascular benefits may help keep everyone young at heart!

Mixing it up a little is good for your fitness and happiness. Anything that gets and keeps you moving and puts a smile on your face is probably worth the effort!

Alice!

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