

A plate to shake it off



THESE days Mark Watson packs his workouts into 15-minute sessions, and reckons it's just as good as an hour at boot camp. Watson is one of a growing number of people (said to include Madonna, Clint Eastwood and Russian cosmonauts) who have discovered vibration exercise.

Vibration exercise is a new neuromuscular training method which is also used to help treat and prevent osteoporosis. Users stand on a vibrating plate and perform exercises such as squats, dips and curls.

Vibrations trigger rapid involuntary muscle contractions, which is a more efficient way of exercising than on a static surface.

Managing director of the SureSlim clinic in Canberra Amy Luttrell says vibration exercise is backed by scientific research and is definitely not just a fad.

Her clinic has offered exercise sessions on Power Plate machines for 18 months. She says it's been great for her clients, many of whom are overweight or obese and too embarrassed to go to a gym.

During a session, clients will hold a pose, for example a squat, for 30-60 seconds. The vibrations send a message to the brain, which causes muscles to contract. Because the plate vibrates at 30-50 times a second, the muscle contractions happen at the same speed.

Luttrell says as well as causing the muscles to contract and relax, vibration exercise uses more muscle fibres than regular exercise.

"In conventional exercise, it is acknowledged that 30-35 per cent of muscle fibres are used. Power Plate uses 95-100 per cent," she says.

The makers of the Power Plate says "this also means that the deeper posture and stabilising muscles, such as the spinal muscles and the pelvic basin muscle, that are normally hard to train, can be stimulated".

It says that unlike weight training where adding extra weight makes the muscle adapt to a heavier load and become stronger, by changing the acceleration factor instead of the weight, there is much less strain on the ligaments and muscular-skeletal system.

Other benefits attributed to vibration training include improving circulation, flexibility, coordination, hormone efficiency and helping maintain or improve bone mineral density in post-menopausal women.

While a person's heart rate does increase during the training, studies have shown that the cardiovascular effects are mild, making it suitable for the elderly.

Luttrell's clients range in age from their early 20s to their 70s.

Training intensity is varied by using different mats on the platform, and there are introductory, intermediate and advanced programs.

There are four main groups of exercises: strengthening, stretching, massage and relaxation, which incorporate a range of exercises for the whole body.

Because each session is only 15 minutes,

Luttrell says it is perfect for people who don't have time to spend an hour or two exercising. However, it is recommended clients do not go more than three times a week, as the muscles need rest time between workouts.

She says first-timers can expect to feel muscle soreness and even though the sessions are short, they will "definitely feel like they've done a workout".

Watson decided to give vibration exercise a go when he started working in Civic and has been impressed with the results.

He says it offers a surprising variety of strengthening and conditioning exercises and the instructor guides you through each one.

He took up boot camp and vibration exercise to get fitter. "I am 40 and thought if I didn't start doing something I never will."

While vibration exercise does not make him sweat like boot camp (which means he can do the session in his business clothes), "the fatigue in my muscles feels the same as if I'd been to the gym".

Watson says because the Power Plate sessions are short, he is able to fit two to three into his busy working week.

what you need to know

Cost: Non-clients \$15 a session

Session length: 15 minutes

Details: SureSlim, Allara Street, Civic, 6262 6088

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Mark Watson uses the Power Plate exercise machine under the watchful eye of SureSlim Clinic owner Amy Luttrell.

Photo: GARY SCHWARTZ