



get fit

Half-hour power

Can you fulfil your fitness requirements in just 30 minutes a day? **Linda Drummond** finds out.

The 30-minute workout has spread across Australia, with new centres popping up in suburbs across the nation. But what's involved in a 30-minute workout and is it here to stay or is it simply a fad? While circuit training has been around for ages in gyms, it is the only thing on offer at many of the new wave of fitness centres. You can walk in at almost any time during opening hours and get yourself a fast – and, some would say, complete – workout in 30 minutes. What's not to love?

The 30-minute workout is based around a hydraulic weight circuit, usually with cardio stations in between. It's a simple way to work on your strength, aerobic conditioning and flexibility in one fast hit. From a health perspective, good exercise is something that gets your heart pumping to improve your aerobic conditioning. Cardiovascular exercise should form a solid base of your training; you should be huffing and puffing a few times a week.

However, there's increasing evidence that strength training could be just as important to our health – it increases our bone density, burns fat faster and has a host of other benefits. That's why interval training is so successful. Interval training is basically circuits with strength and cardio stations that you move between quickly, working both your muscles and your heart.

“From a circuit point of view, this kind of training is ideal in that it combines resistance training and cardio,” says exercise scientist and author of *Exercise And The F Word... Fun!* (Insight Publications), Martha Lourey-Bird. “Women really need resistance training to maintain their muscle mass and increase their metabolic rate. Ideally, the circuit needs to be set up with regular cardio stations between the resistance work to keep the heart rate up. You need to do quick reps of light weights to maintain a high heart rate, and hydraulic equipment is really good for that because there's no fiddling around changing weights or pins; you just flick a dial.”

One fast exercise devotee is 23-year-old Melissa Dando, who has been going to women-only gym Contours to work

out for over a year. Ideally, Dando gets to her local centre three to five times a week and finds that because of the speed of the workout, it easily fits into her busy schedule. “I like that it's only 29 minutes, and if I want I can extend it and do an extra workout.”

Having lost almost 40 kilos before joining Contours, Dando says her body is getting more toned and her strength is improving too, with a workout that's unlike a traditional gym's. “When you go to other gyms you have to think about how many reps you're doing and which weight you're using, but at Contours, all the work's done for you.”

Research is substantiating the claims that fast fitness can work. A five-year study at Baylor University in the US followed over 1500 participants from Curves clubs and found that women who exercised for 30 minutes three times per week lost weight, improved strength and increased their aerobic capacity.

In Australia, similar results have been claimed with the members of Contours. Associate Professor Steve Boutcher, from the University of NSW, found that overweight women who undertook interval training three times a week, for no more than 30 minutes, lost weight. The activity elevated the production of a chemical compound called catecholamine, which drives solid, consistent weight loss.

NO BOYS ALLOWED

While a few gyms are attempting to create franchises using the 30-minute formula for men and women, by far the biggest growth is in the women-only area.

While many of these gyms have members who range from their early teens to their eighties, it's the female baby boomers who've embraced them most strongly. These are often people who've never really exercised regularly before, and have been scared off traditional gyms. The attraction of these women-only fitness centres lies in their promise of a friendly, non-intimidating atmosphere, and their offer of results in the minimum amount of time. They're getting a whole new group of people active.



For optimum health, you should try to be active for at least 30 minutes every day, says Trevor Shilton, national physical activity manager with the Heart Foundation. "For best results, do something you enjoy, preferably with a friend. Exercise is more beneficial if we do it with someone else. For a start it's more enjoyable, and you're also more likely to make a commitment to stick to it."

According to Shilton, over half of the Australian adult population don't exercise often enough. Study after study has shown that exercise is a wonderful tonic for good health, not just for weight control and self-esteem, but for disease prevention, mental health and increasing our sociability.

"What else can you take once a day that'll do all this with no side effects?" Shilton asks. "Most of us drive to work, sit at a desk all day, then come home, exhausted." So instead of relaxing by flopping on the couch, Shilton suggests finishing off a busy day with exercise."

Lourey-Bird says that the most positive aspect of the 30-minute workouts is simply that they get people to exercise regularly. To maximise their benefits, Lourey-Bird says to make sure there's an adequate warm-up before, and a cool down afterwards. "If you live close enough to a gym, try walking to and from your workout. Or park your car 10 minutes away to get a good warm-up and cool down before and after a class."

"Finding the right gym is like finding a good hairdresser," adds Lourey-Bird. "So look around to find one you like."

You owe it to your body and your mind to get active. Surely you've got 30 minutes a day to spare.

The key players

■ **Fernwood**, Australia's first women-only gym, was formed in 1989 in Victoria. It now has over 80,000 members nationally. Fernwood Women's Health Clubs offer 30-minute compound strength sessions to maximise the benefits of strength training. Call 1300 FERNWOOD or visit www.fernwoodfitness.com.au to find your local branch.

■ **Contours** launched in Australia in 2005 with over 150 studios across the country. Contours offers the super-speedy 29-minute workout, which provides positive and negative resistance for increased efficiency and consistent results. Call 1300 657 339 or visit www.contours.net.au to find your local Contours.

■ With 10,000 branches worldwide and over 400 in Australia, **Curves** is the largest fitness franchise in the world. Curves offers a 30-minute workout three times a week – and promises to make it fun. And because there are no scheduled classes, you can exercise at a time that suits you. Call 1300 CURVES or www.curves.com to find a Curves near you.

