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No pain, your gain

4 fitness strategies make getting back in shape easier than you think

By Andrew deGrandpre
adgrandpre@militarytimes.com

Hey there, beer belly. Here's a dollop of deep-fried honesty for you: Your family, friends and fellow service members can see that extra 15 pounds you've been lugging around — and they're all talking about it behind your back.

Take a moment to digest that. Stings a little, doesn't it?

Yes, as you age it gets harder to keep your weight in check. Your body won't melt those mashed potatoes as aggressively as it did when you were a raw metabolic machine fresh out of boot camp.

But you're not a lost cause. You've just got to climb back on that StairMaster — and here's why.

Dedicated physical activity is essential for a healthy, happy, long life; for Joe and Jane Staff Sergeant, it is vital for a fruitful career. Let your tummy blubber swell too much, and you'll struggle on your next fitness test. Fail it, and you can forget about that next promotion.

Scary, but there is some encouraging news: Maintaining sufficient fitness does not require that you kill yourself doing endless wind sprints, arm curls and squat thrusts. No, "it doesn't come easy," said Air Force Lt. Col. Mark Cucuzzella, a Reserve family doctor

and flight surgeon with the 79th Medical Group at Andrews Air Force Base, Md., but "if your goal is health, general fitness and weight control, you don't have to do any painful exercise. People don't have to 'hit the gym,' 'work out hard,' 'push it' or [strain themselves to complete] 'one more rep.'"

You read that right, ladies and gentlemen: no pain, yet plenty to gain. Cucuzzella advocates moderate- to low-intensity exercise; "movement at a pace that's sustainable," he calls it. Focus on large muscle groups, like those in your legs and butt, which are resilient to injury and capable of working for "hours at a time," he said. "If [service members] do that, they will be in shape enough so that they don't have to worry about their fitness test."

It's tough to make the time needed to keep your physique looking respectable. But trust us: The payoff is worth it. You will feel healthier, you will look better and you will have more get-up-and-go.

So carpe diem, friends — exercise options are abundant. Here are four fitness strategies for improving your life and your livelihood:



Tech. Sgt. Lavar Gilliam is a biomedical equipment technician at Andrews Air Force Base, Md., and a precision-guided fitness munition.

SEELA
VINCENT/STAFF

Find some tough love

Patrick Avon has a curious way of introducing himself. It's barely 6 a.m., and he has just ordered his "recruits" to the ground for some interval ab blasting. Sarge, as he's known, counts aloud while walking among the members of the class, inspecting and, if necessary, correcting each person's form. He pauses beside a first-timer and hovers above him. "Don't hold your breath," Avon growls. "That's how you get hemorrhoids." With what little air they can gasp between crunches, others in the class join in on the jeering. "It'd be a shame if you ruined that brand-new running suit," he jabs before resuming his count.

A former Navy medic and den-



TOM BECHTOLD/STAFF

tal technician, Avon, 45, left the service in 1986 as a petty officer third class and within three years was running The Sergeant's Program, a Monday-

through-Friday early morning outdoor boot camp that serves hundreds in and around Washington, D.C. He's one tough cookie, and his classes are no joke;

Patrick "Sarge" Avon, who runs The Sergeant's Program, gives Janet Albarron of Bethesda, Md., instruction during an early morning workout Dec. 20.

the last reporter to audit one yakked 20 minutes into a ranger run, Avon proudly notes. (This writer hung onto his Count Chocula, thank you very much.)

The back-to-basics brand of exercise thrives on two key components: community and accountability. It's a class, after all, so you don't go it alone. Sure, you've got to drag your carcass out of bed at 5 a.m., but camaraderie is a natural incentive. And unlike the archetypal drill instructor, Avon doesn't get in your grill and chew off your eyebrows. Miss a class, though, and you can expect a phone call; he's not the least bit shy about

needling you to push harder.

"We like to hold your hand and kick you in the rear end at the same time," he said. "We're not gonna kill ya. We're not gonna embarrass ya. I might tease ya, poke at ya a little, but I am gonna correct your form and make sure everyone gets a solid workout."

Exercise boot camps market this external motivation. And while they can be expensive (The Sergeant's Program, for example, costs about \$1,300 a year), the philosophy is free. So don't let your paycheck stop you from seeking some tough love if that's what you need.

"If you know you can't do it yourself," Avon advises, "find a guy that's really fit in your platoon, your squad, your company, your battalion and say: 'Hey dude. Help me. Let me be your workout partner. Let me run behind you.' Most people that are really fit are happy to help."

Tough love: You're up

Now try one of the Sarge's workouts — he calls it "90-second Thursday." All you need is a stopwatch and a set of dumbbells (8 or 10 pounds for women, 12 or 15 pounds for men). His gender-neutral conditioning sessions focus on cardio and calisthenics (you get one day dedicated to running, two days to work everything above your bellybutton and two days to work everything below it).

■ **Warm up.** 10-minute jog followed by a light stretch.

■ **Work your core.** Start with pelvic tilts. Lying on your back with your hips raised, lift one leg slowly and hold it in the up position for three seconds. Repeat for 90 seconds, alternating legs throughout.

Progress this exercise by crossing one leg over the other, so your ankle is resting on your knee. After 90 seconds, slowly switch legs without tilting your hips and repeat for another 90 seconds.

Now flip over onto your belly for an exercise called the bridge (or the plank). Lift your body onto your forearms and toes, making sure to relax your back muscles by squeezing your abs and glutes. Rotate one leg in a 12-inch outward oval for 45 seconds. Repeat, using the other leg for 45 seconds.

■ **Work your abs.** Do some five-second sit-ups. Place your legs far enough away from your butt

so it takes five seconds to do one sit-up (18 in 90 seconds).

Next, do some one-dumbbell side bends. Holding the weight with both hands, raise it over your head as far as you can and bend to the left (your hips should go to the right). Slowly come back and bend to the right. Be sure to squeeze your glutes. Perform this drill for 90 seconds.

Now progress to one-dumbbell circles. Keep the weight over your head, but this time rotate so the dumbbell goes to the side and close to the ground in a complete circle. Alternate directions after 90 seconds.

Lastly, perform 60 seconds' worth of hanging knee raises. Just grab onto a pull-up bar and raise your knees above your waist. It's harder than it sounds.

■ **Work your upper body.** Start with push-up rotations. Get into a push-up position with your feet spread hip-width apart. As you lift your body, raise one arm and extend it straight up into the air. Follow your hand with your eyes the entire time. Then, lower your arm back to the ground and immediately descend to the start position — don't pause. Switch arms with each push-up. Stop after 90 seconds.

Now do some bent-over shrugs. Holding both dumbbells, bend down and touch your toes, making sure to keep your back flat. Tighten your abs. Now slowly shrug your shoulders. Stop when you feel the squeeze through your upper middle back. Slowly return your arms to the original hanging position and repeat for 90 seconds.

Progress the exercise by moving the dumbbells up to your lap and shrugging backward in a circular motion so you can rest the weights on the top of your butt before bringing them to the front again. Stop after 90 seconds.

You're almost done. But first, do the crunch punch. Lie on your back and lift your feet so they are perpendicular to the ground. Using one dumbbell at a time, punch

the weight toward the opposite knee and come up into a crunch. Repeat for 90 seconds.

Wrap things up with chest flies. Keep your legs in the air and hold the dumbbells at 90 degrees with one arm straight above your chest and the other raised slightly off the ground. Lift the one dumbbell off the ground and then lower the other. Repeat so when one comes up the other goes down, with your arms at a constant 90-degree angle.

Stop after 90 seconds.

■ **What it's good for:** An hour of rigorous calisthenics can burn between 500 and 700 calories.

SEE MORE EXERCISES

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Gilliam demonstrates a push-up rotation. For more on Gilliam, including his favorite exercise routine, go to armytimes.com/offduty.

BECKA VIGGORS/STAFF

Reconnect with nature

Maybe you're the outdoors type. Well how do you feel about climbing Mount Everest, oh, three times in 10 days? Coast Guard Lt. Kim Andersen plans something similar in late June — only in Montana, not Nepal.

The operations officer for Maritime Safety and Security Team Seattle, Andersen, 40, is a team adventure racer. She's training for Primal Quest, a day-long trek across several hundred miles of Big Sky wild. All told, she'll climb more than 100,000 feet (Everest's tallest peak measures 29,000) while paddling and splashing through miles of white water along the way. To complete the competition, she'll need to be uberfit — in body *and* mind.

"I don't think we ever really know our real limits until we push ourselves to the next level," Andersen said in December during a break in training. "We set mental limits for ourselves. We say, 'Oh, I can run only 9-minute miles,' but really, once you get into it, you find out that your limits aren't really where you thought they were and that we all have a little bit further to push. It's a metaphor for life, as well."

Andersen stays in shape by enjoying the outdoors; she simply reaps the physical benefit of doing what she loves. To prepare for Primal Quest, she exercises five



PAUL WILLIAM B. MITCHELL/COAST GUARD

Coast Guard Lt. Kimberly Andersen ascends toward the finish line of the final event of the Wilderness Challenge in Fayetteville, W.Va., on Oct. 6.

or six days a week, running, biking, swimming and kayaking for miles at a time.

It's not exactly the low-to-moderate intensity that Cucuzzella, the Air Force doc, advocates for folks looking to lose a little weight and improve overall wellness, but Andersen is quick to note that adventure-style workouts needn't send you down a path of muscle breakdown and injury. Determine what you want to achieve, she said, and then map a route to get there.

"A lot of people say they want to get in shape this year, or they want to lose weight," she said. "Well, how much weight do you want to lose? What's your goal? You want to do a triathlon. OK, pick a date and find a work plan. You have to start with the end in mind."

exercise and nutrition — what the former F-14 backseater calls the "fitness life cycle." To their detriment, too many people fail to recognize that it's a package deal, he said. Similarly, too many throw in the towel when they don't murder their gut after three workouts.

Folks, it doesn't work like that. Before you return to the gym,

Thomas recommends stripping down to your Underoos and posing for full-body photos of your front, back and profile. You've got to know where you're starting, he said, to know where you need to go.

"Don't look for anything to change for at least 45 days," Thomas said. "The best thing to do is at six months, take another set of pictures, compare 'em, and then

Nature: You're up

Now it's time to try one of Andersen's routines. Keep in mind that she's gearing up for a beast of an endurance race, so if you're just getting back into the swing of things, take it easy and augment these workouts to suit your level of fitness — or lack thereof. Try dividing her workout times by three.

Andersen's activity
Dec. 10-16:

■ **Monday.** A 90-minute kayak ride over five miles (averaging 18 minutes per mile) followed by 30 minutes of core conditioning (15 exercises, 10 reps each). New to the game? Try 30 minutes in the kayak to see if you like it.

■ **Tuesday.** A 90-minute bike ride on the snow and ice, climbing 1,500 feet over 10 miles (averaging 8½ minutes per mile). A novice will benefit from 30 minutes — sans snow.

■ **Wednesday.** Two hours indoors on a stationary bike. (Yeah, all in one sitting.) Can't pedal for that long? Strive for 40 minutes instead.

■ **Thursday.** Rest.

■ **Friday.** A 90-minute trail run over 13 miles (averaging less than 7 minutes per mile). Don't let those numbers discourage you, tenderfoot; see how far you can get in 30 minutes.

■ **Saturday.** Rest.



SHIELA VEDIG/STAFF

Combine your fitness plan with something you enjoy.

■ **Sunday.** A 72-minute run on an indoor track (varied pace over nine miles) followed by 10 minutes of core conditioning and five minutes of stretching. Again, don't focus on distance. Shoot for 24 minutes; you'll feel like a champ afterward.

■ **What it's good for.** An hour of

whitewater kayaking can burn between 300 and 450 calories depending on your weight. Mountain biking is good for 500 to 750 calories. An hour of hiking will burn between 350 and 520 calories, and an hour of swimming will burn between 600 and 900 calories.

Get your butt to the gym

Bob Thomas' vision of total fitness, ironically enough, is shaped like a Boston cream pie.

The retired Navy commander, now director of the wellness center at Naval Air Station Pensacola, Fla., illustrates it with a circle sliced into quarters. But they're not filled with custard and sponge cake, and they sure as heck aren't smothered in chocolate.

The pieces represent flexibility, strength training, cardiovascular

"Fitness is long-term. You've got to be able to use your body to do whatever it is you've got to do ..."

BOB THOMAS



BILLY RICHMOND

Bob Thomas, director of the wellness center at Naval Air Station Pensacola, Fla., coaches physical therapy technician Hospital Corpsman 2nd Class Christian Beramina.

when you lift, and committing to amplify your output as the weeks wear on.

"You don't want to start off cream puff," he said, "but you also don't want to start off with such an intense workout that you're not going to go back [to the gym]. It's got to be somewhere in the middle, knowing that you're going to ramp up the intensity as you go along."

Thomas advocates exercises aimed at improving balance, coordination and mobility. His philosophy: no restrictions. "Fitness is long-term," he said. "You've got to be able to use your body to do whatever it is you've got to do — whether it's combat or gardening when you're 75."

at a year, when you're really looking for your big change, take another set of pictures."

So how do you make it happen? Two words: variety and intensity. Don't settle into a routine. "You'll

flatten out," Thomas cautioned. "Change it up. Never give your body a chance to know what the hell it's doing." That means alternating between cardio machines, targeting multiple muscle groups

Exercise anywhere

Remember being 12 years old and telling all your pals that one day you were going to join the Navy SEALs? You saw that movie with Charlie Sheen and for two weeks straight dressed like a ninja in flippers. All your free

time was spent researching what it takes to become one of these elite special operators. But life caught up with you, and the hope of attending SEAL school got bumped to the backburner and then off of the stovetop altogether. Now overweight and out of shape, you slouch at a desk five days a week, able only to fantasize about that career that could've been.

Big stinkin' deal: SEAL envy is so 1990. Besides, now you can at least train like a death-defying commando and reap the fitness benefits. Randy Hetrick, a former SEAL who left the service after 14 years to attend business school, has given that capability to service members, pro athletes and average joes everywhere. His TRX suspension trainer, born from his days holed up in wharf-side warehouses with no "traditional" exercise equipment readily available, is a lightweight, yet super-sturdy cloth strap attached to a pair of handles. You can use it anywhere: outside or inside, in Tacoma or Tikrit.

Leveraging your body weight, the device allows you to perform hundreds of strength-training



COURTESY OF FITNESS ANYWHERE

The TRX Suspension Trainer was conceived by Navy SEALs determined to stay fit during covert missions far from any traditional workout facility.

and flexibility exercises that target every key muscle group. A former lieutenant commander, Hetrick and his SEAL teammates noticed that many in the military — especially dudes — "overtrain" their chests, abs and biceps, paying too little attention (or sometimes none at all) to muscles such as the rear deltoids, back extensors and obliques, all of which facilitate functional movement. It creates a muscular imbalance and leaves folks prone to hurting their shoulders, backs and knees.

"It doesn't matter how strong your biceps are if when you go to pick up something your back won't support it or your glutes won't support it," Hetrick said.

Using your body weight alone, every TRX exercise works to improve strength and stability. The best part: You set the pace.



Gilman proves resistance is far from futile.

SHIELA VIGGOS/STAFF

TRX: You're up

Some base gyms have a TRX. If yours doesn't, ask the staff about investing in a few. If you want one to yourself, visit Hetrick's Web site, <http://www.fitnessanywhere.com>, and look for the model that suits your level of fitness and goals. They range in price from \$150 to \$450.

The TRX Force Training Kit, which sells for \$200, includes a 12-week strength-training and cardio program that's designed to grow more challenging as the weeks wear on. Expect to run seven days a week and perform strength exercises for

four. An overview: **Weeks 1/2.** You'll perform a variety of exercises, including suspended lunges, single-leg squats, hamstring curls, tricep presses, elevated back rows, low deltoid flies and suspended oblique crunches.

Weeks 3/4/5/6. You'll perform many of the same exercises that you did during weeks one and two, but with more repetitions and less rest.

Weeks 7/8. Muscle endurance is put to the test. You'll perform more reps than in previous weeks, resting only 15 seconds between sets on days one and four. The intensity con-

tinues on days two and five as you get less time than you did during the previous two weeks (from four minutes to 3½) to complete the suspended incline presses.

Weeks 9/10. "Power training" is added to the mix of leg exercises, demanding greater speed and contraction force, and the first three-set exercise is introduced.

Weeks 11/12. Most exercises are three sets. Only two minutes are allowed to complete 20 reps of suspended inclined presses.

What it's good for. You'll sweat like a pig and burn plenty of calories. ☐

Military Times fitness columnist Bob Thomas contributed to this report.

The gym: You're up

Now try one of Thomas' 90-minute workouts. It's designed to get you on track fast. Note, though, that these exercises don't need to be done in any particular order. Be sure to check with your fitness center trainer for technique and starting weights.

Warm up. Start off with 15 minutes of light cardio — the bike or elliptical trainer will cut it — followed with a short total body-stretching session.

Cardio. You're looking to maintain an elevated heart rate for 30-40 minutes. Try different pieces of equipment at each session, or do 20 minutes each on two pieces of equipment.

Strength. Perform these five core lifts to work multiple mus-

cle groups and build a solid base from which to advance later. For the upper body exercises, start with one set of 12 reps. For each leg exercise, do one set of 15 to 20 reps. When you can easily do the maximum number of reps, tack on a second set, then a third. When you can easily do three sets, it's time to boost the weight.

1. Squat. Keep your head up, your back locked and your butt out; you want to create a 90-degree angle. You're working the biggest muscles in your body (the quadriceps), so shoot for a high number of repetitions (about 15 to 20).

2. Deadlift. This works your core along with your legs, lats and shoulders. Keep your back

locked and slide the bar up your shins as you raise it and hit them again on the way down.

3. Military press (also called shoulder press). At full extension, the bar should end up just above the top of your head — not out in front of your forehead.

4. Bent over row. Don't round your back as you lean forward, and be sure to bring the bar to your navel, not your chest.

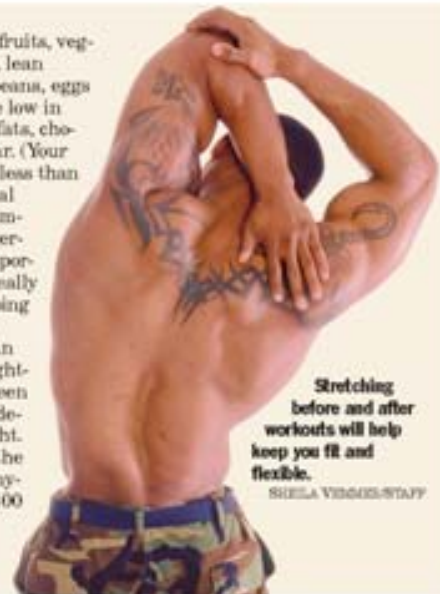
5. Pull-ups and dips. Start on an assisted pull-up/dip machine, and adjust the plates so you're using a percentage of your body weight. Decrease that percentage as you get stronger.

Flexibility. Hit all your muscle groups from your feet to your neck. Hold the stretch for 20 seconds, relax for three, and repeat. The second stretch is where you make your money.

Nutrition. Diet is important.

Yours should include fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, eggs and nuts. It should be low in saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, salt and sugar. (Your fat content should be less than 30 percent of your total caloric intake.) The simplest rule: eat less, exercise more. Start with portion control. Do you really need that second helping of ... anything?

What it's good for. An hour of intensive weightlifting will burn between 350 and 550 calories depending on your weight. An hour-long run on the treadmill will burn anywhere from 475 to 1,400 calories, depending on your weight and pace.



Stretching before and after workouts will help keep you fit and flexible.

SHIELA VIGGOS/STAFF