

A man with tattoos is performing a handstand on a rocky beach. He is wearing dark cargo pants and sneakers. The background shows a cloudy sky and the ocean. The title 'THE EVOLUTION OF exercise' is overlaid in large white text.

THE EVOLUTION OF exercise

Break your routine, and your limits, with this take-anywhere body-weight training plan

BY ARTHUR JONES • PHOTOGRAPHS BYRON KEULEMANS

It's 5:30pm on a Monday, and you're staring at the back of a flabby, vest-wearing guy with rogue body hair. He's sweating, quietly swearing and checking his watch impatiently while eyeing the cardio machines. Vest man is third in the queue for the treadmill, and it's going to be a while before he starts pounding the moving tape. That makes you fourth. Ironically, after the manic traffic rush to get to the gym, you're feeling more stressed than ever. Around you, people are waiting their turn for benches and dumbbells or are being herded into classes. This is meant to be your release valve, your escape from your desk and ill health. The reality: it's more like canned exercise; an expensive routine that deals with symptoms of a bad lifestyle and not the source.

Now, take a look at Mike Fitch, this issue's cover model. He's the guy doing the perfect handstand push-up with a view over Llandudno. He doesn't deal with queues, membership fees, recycled air, exercise boredom or those people who flex in the mirror. Fitch trains outdoors using his body weight as resistance, and he never gets tired of his brand of workout. The good news? You don't need to be a model or personal trainer to do this — you too can swop the queues for sunshine and bird sounds. Even better, you could end up looking like this guy. Turn over for a look at the evolution of exercise.

Fitch takes after his father, a serious health fanatic, and has been strength training from the age of 15. Together, they built their own basement gym as, even in those days, they wanted to exercise on their own terms. Through research and utilising the advice from other non-conformist trainers, Fitch built up his exercise vocabulary. Kettlebells, powerlifting, gymnastics, hand-balancing, capoeira, parkour, warrior movements and even some break-dancing. He was tired of relying only on the heavy metal of dumbbells and barbells, and started searching for fitness truths in other exercise disciplines. He also focused on nutrition, trying new diets and eating methods to find the best food fit. He even gave himself a 50-pound challenge (25kg), where he purposefully added the weight just to find the best ways to lose it.

This constant search for the perfect fitness formula motivated him to become a personal trainer, looking after everyone from professional athletes to a 90-year old granny who had broken her hip. After 12 years of personal training and sampling everything he could find in fitness, he created the Global Bodyweight Training system, or GBT (read more at www.globalbodyweight-training.com), which is a mash-up of the best parts of different fitness disciplines around the world. The most powerful benefit to this training method is that it can work for everyone, from seven-digit-income athletes to your grandmother.

The effectiveness of the GBT plan (and bodyweight training in general) is something called "neural adaptation", where your body is forced to adapt and improve to the challenges you place on it. "In GBT you'll start with a simple push-up but eventually progress to a single arm push up, which requires an incredible amount of strength as well as total body stabilisation," says Fitch. "This is an exercise that has a high neural demand where more muscles are working to perform a given task, which results in more oxygen being used and more kilojoules being burnt."

HOW DOES THIS PROGRAMME WORK?

With GBT you start with the Basic exercises outlined below and then, after you've mastered those, you can progress to Intermediate and Advanced. "Since you can't add more weight, you have to challenge yourself by decreasing your leverage, which means that gravity makes you work harder," says Fitch. Don't be frustrated if you can't do the more advanced moves; there are still techniques that will take Fitch another two years to master. "There is no limit to the challenges you set yourself, and by starting this you'll realise just how much incredible potential your body has," Fitch explains. If possible, invest in a pair of gymnastic "O" rings, which you can buy at www.globalbodyweighttraining.com.

WARM-UP AND WARM-DOWN

Do the exercises in the order shown, without resting. This routine not only gets your blood flowing, warms your muscles and improves your mobility, but it also ensures that you'll perform your best during the actual workout.

- 1) Jog for 350m.** Swing your arms back and forwards as you run.
- 2) High knees.** Run for 50m while raising your knees as high as you can.
- 3) Power skips.** Skip for 50m, but lift your knees as high as you can, and swing your arms.
- 4) Side shuffle.** Shuffle to your left by moving one foot and then the other. Once you've gone 50m, switch over and repeat on your right.

Once you have completed the workout, do some stretching. "Flexibility is extremely important, not only for injury prevention, but also in improving your performance," says Fitch. "If a muscle is too tight, it can decrease the amount of power it can generate." The main inflexibility cause? Sitting at a desk all day, looking at a computer screen. "This usually leads to tight hip flexors, which can cause back pain, then in the upper body we get tight chest and neck muscles." Visit www.mh.co.za for a comprehensive stretching strategy.

NATURE CAN NURTURE

20

The percentage by which you can improve your attention span and memory skills if you choose to walk in a natural outdoor environment versus an urban one.

A study at the University of Michigan tested volunteers who'd just walked 4.5km either in a park or along a city street. The nature hike proved highly restorative, sharpening memory and attention by about 20%.

5

The least number of minutes required for outdoor exercise to have a positive affect on both self-esteem and mood. A study of over 1 255 people by the journal *Environmental Science & Technology* looked at the effect of intensity and duration of exercising in nature on self-esteem and mood. Exercising in nature for as little as five minutes of moderate activity promoted very significant improvements in both self-esteem and mood.

Immunity Increase

In one study by the Nippon Medical School in Japan, one group of men spent three days and two nights in a forest and, before that, the same amount of time in a city. The researchers then analysed the men's blood. The result: forest time, but not city exposure, boosted immunity by increasing the number and activity of natural killer cells and related anti-cancer proteins. These changes persisted for at least a week. The researchers suspect that phytoncides as well as decreased stress-hormone levels might be contributing to the effect.

90

The percentage of time we spend sealed off from nature, stuck behind a desk, in front of a television, behind a steering wheel and, at times, on training in a gym.

Stress Decrease

In a study done by the Centre for Organisational and Occupational Science in Zurich, they found that people going outdoors for physical activity experience a decrease of their stress levels as they arrived at their outdoor exercise location – even before starting their exercise.

The Benefits of Bodyweight Training

1 It can be done anywhere. Fitch showed off his moves on a peachy day at Llandudno, but you can do your workout anywhere – back garden, sports field, park or even in your hotel room when you are away on business.

"The success of a workout programme may be dependent simply upon how much you enjoy your workouts, and the monotony of going to the gym can kill your motivation," says Fitch. "When you start looking at the outdoors as your own gym, the possibilities are endless."

2 You become more aware of how traditional training can hurt you. We were built to handle our own body weight and, as a result, it's pretty difficult to injure yourself when using only your own weight and gravity as

resistance. But add heavy dumbbells, barbells and weight plates, and you are literally arming yourself with more damage potential. "Working out without fancy gym equipment allows you to be more conscious and focused on your movement. You can perfect your technique and cut out the risk of injury drastically as you hone your one true tool: your body," says Fitch.

3 It requires minimal equipment. "The beauty of bodyweight training is that you don't need anything other than yourself and gravity to develop a perfect body," says Fitch. "However, if you do have the luxury of picking up a few tools, my favourites are gymnastic rings, a stability ball and a pair of parallettes [parallel bars]," says Fitch. Parallettes are similar to the parallel bars that gymnasts use and you can learn how to make your own on the GBT website.

4 This training is totally functional.

"Your body doesn't work in isolation," says Fitch, "and so your training shouldn't focus on isolating single muscles." How often do you find yourself doing a limited range movement, like an arm curl, in your day-to-day activities? Also, treadmills and indoor gym cardio machines stress our bodies in a very repetitive, uniform way while every metre of running or cycling outdoors is on unique terrain and is a muscle challenge. Body-weight training focuses on functional, compound moves that incorporate large muscle groups and the crucial smaller supporting ones at once. The benefit? The movements you do every day become easier and more fluid thanks to your new found, total-body strength.

5 Modify it for any goal. "The main obstacle for guys to begin using body-weight

training is that they just lack the knowledge of what to do," says Fitch. "Sure, most guys know how to perform a basic push-up, pull-up, squat and lunge; but they just don't know where to go from there." With this plan, we show you how to progress from the simple stuff all the way through to the gravity-defying stuff Fitch now uses to train himself.

6 It improves your core. The term "core" has become the buzzword of training in the last decade, and for good reason. By improving your core you can correct your computer-crippled torso, and help to ward off any injuries. Fitch has used GBT to fix athletes and their sports injuries for years now, so not only can you use this for rehab work, you can also use it to strengthen and harden your body against injuries and correct any muscle imbalances you may have.

- This is broken down into two workouts, upper and lower body, which you should perform at least twice a week.
- Do three circuits of 12 to 15 reps of each exercise with good form, then rest for 60 seconds in-between each circuit.

Upper body



1. Push-up Balance your weight on your toes and palms, with your hands slightly beyond shoulder-width apart. Tuck your pelvis in slightly, which will help straighten your back. Slowly lower yourself to the floor, pause and push yourself back up.

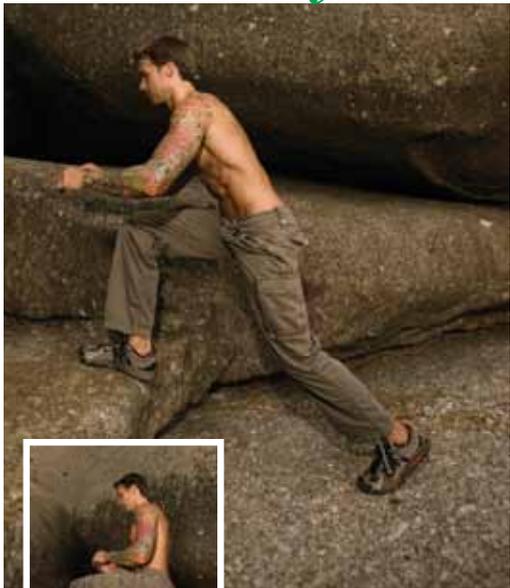
2. Row Using your "O" rings, suspend yourself so that your feet are on the floor and your arms are straight above you. Pull your upper body towards the sky using your back muscles until your arms make a 90-degree angle. Then slowly lower yourself back down to the start. If you don't have "O" rings, you can fill a two-litre plastic bottle with sand and do bent over, single arm rows. This exercise can also be done on a hip-high railing like a hand rail that's over flat land, same movement as with the rings.

3. Jump chin-up Find a bar, ledge or doorway that you can use for chin-ups. Position yourself below the bar, and jump upwards. Using the momentum of the jump, pull your chin over the bar, holding it with your palms facing away from you. Slowly return to the start.



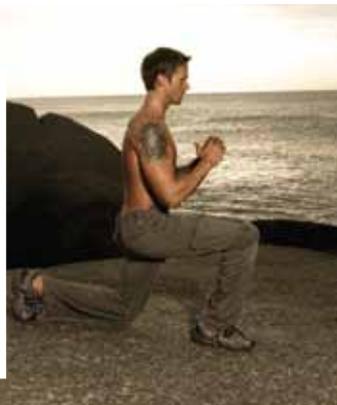
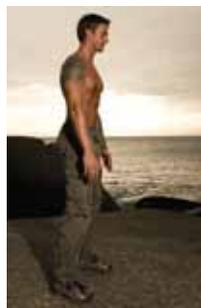
4. V-shoulder press Position your feet wider than shoulder-width apart, and then lean forwards so that you rest your upper body on your outstretched hands. Slowly lower your head towards the ground between your hands while keeping your back and legs straight. Once it's almost touching, push back to the start position.

Lower body



1. Step-up Find a ledge or platform that's raised at least 70cm high. Stand facing it, placing one foot onto the ledge. To start the move, lift your back foot by pushing upwards, following through by lifting that back leg up in front of you and bending at the knee. Drop back to the start to complete all the reps, then repeat it after changing sides.

2. Squat Stand firmly with your legs in line with your hips and your toes pointing slightly outwards. Lower your body until your legs reach 90 degrees, keeping your spine straight and arms straight out in front of you. Push back up to the start position.



3. Lunge Stand with your hands clasped together in front of you. Step forwards with your right foot, keeping your torso upright. Focus on moving your torso up and down, not backwards and forwards, while dropping your back knee straight down to the floor. Go back to the start, complete all the reps and then change sides.

4. Dead lift Start by standing with your feet shoulder-width apart and your arms pointing straight towards the floor. Squat down until your knees make a 90-degree angle, pushing your hips back as far as possible while bending forwards with a flat or slightly-arched back. Your weight should be in the heels with a slight lift of the toes off of the ground. Return to the start position by extending your knees and hips.

intermediate

• Perform three circuits of 10 to 12 reps of each exercise with good form, and break for 60 seconds in-between each circuit.

Upper body



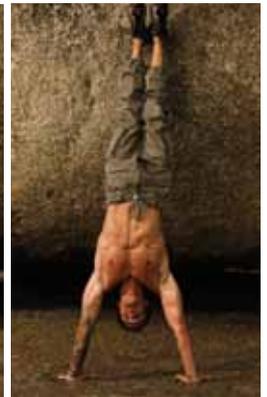
1. Push-up with alternating lifts Start in the normal push-up position. As you push upwards, lift your right hand and your left leg off the floor, and hold them in line with your torso. Hold that for one second, then return to the start. Do 15 reps of lifts on both sides.

2. Elevated row Do the exact same move as in the basic row technique, except that in this case your feet need to rest on an elevated platform throughout the exercise.



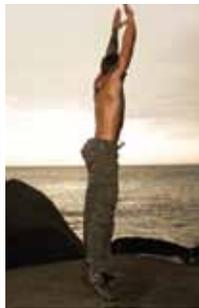
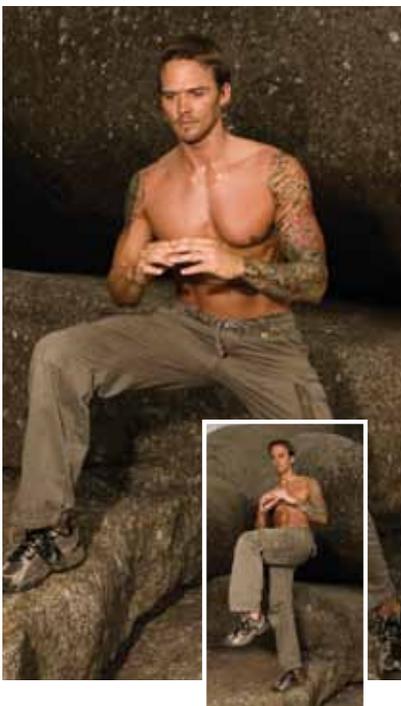
3. Climber's chin-up Once again, find a bar, ledge or doorway that you can use for chin-ups. Pull yourself up towards one hand and lower, then pull up towards the other hand. Return to the start. That's one rep.

4. Wall handstand push-up Find a sturdy wall, and then get into a handstand position so that your feet are supported by the wall. In a controlled and slow movement, lower your body, head and shoulders towards the floor. When your head is almost touching, push back up to the start.



Lower body

1. Lateral step-down Use the same technique as with the basic set-up, but in this case, turn your body so that you are stepping down and up sideways.



2. Spiderman jump squat Start in a crouching position, with your right hand flat on the floor and your left extended behind you to help balance. By pushing through your heels, jump up explosively as high as you can. Swap hands with every rep.



4. Straight-leg dead lift Use the same technique as with the basic dead lift, but in this case, aim to keep a slight bend in your legs throughout the move. The movement should come from your lower back and hips.



3. Multi-directional lunges For these lunges, imagine you are standing in the middle of an imaginary clock face. For this exercise, you will be stepping out to each number of the clock face, but while staying facing forwards (towards "12" on the clock). Start at "12" by stepping your right foot forwards, and swap legs when you hit "6". In the images, Fitch is showing a lunge out towards the number "3".



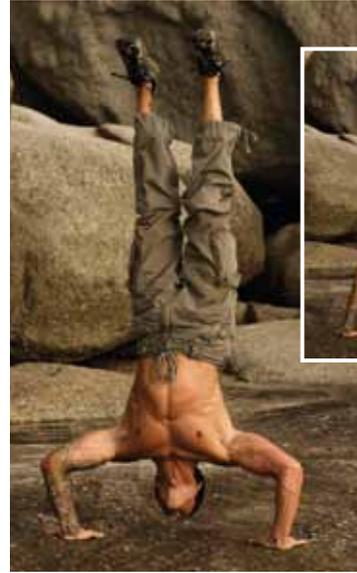
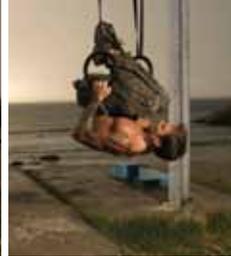
• Do three circuits of six to eight reps of each exercise with good form, and break for 60 seconds in-between each circuit.

Upper body

1. Behind the back clap push-up Start in a push-up position, and then lower yourself as you would in a normal push-up. Push upwards explosively so that you lift your torso high enough to clap your hands behind your back before returning back to the start position.



2. Front-lever tuck row Using your "O" rings again, suspend yourself so that your back is facing the floor, your knees are tucked into your body and your arms are holding your weight. Lift your body towards the sky using your back and arm muscles until your arms form a 90-degree angle. Lower yourself slowly back to the start.

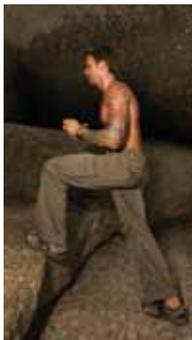


3. Handstand push-up Follow the exact same technique as the wall push-up but, in this case, you don't use a wall for support. Recruit your core muscles to stop from falling over.

4. L-sit chin-up Use the same technique as the basic chin-up, but keep both your legs in front of you so that they form a "L" shape (90 degrees to you body). Hold it for a second, then return to the start.

Lower body

1. Jump step Start with one foot placed on a raised platform, the planted foot flat below you. Jump into the air and switch feet in mid-air so that your opposite foot is now on the platform. Do eight reps on both legs.



2. Pistol squat For this squat, you need to keep one leg straight out in front of you as you lower down into a complete squat on one leg. Hold your arms out in front to help you balance. Complete eight reps on both legs.



3. Jump lunge Start in a lunge position with your left foot forwards. In one explosive movement, jump into the air and switch your legs so that you land in a lunge position with your right leg forwards.

4. Single-leg dead lift In the start position, lift your right foot off the floor and hold your arms out in front of you. Lower your torso towards the ground while extending your right leg behind you and leaning forwards. Return to the start position. Do eight reps, then swap legs. **M-F**

