

THE MEDI-BALL IS FAST CATCHING ON AS A FUN WAY TO TONE YOUR BODY AND CONQUER BACK PAIN AT THE SAME TIME. IT'S THE LATEST CRAZE TO HIT GYMS, OFFICES AND LABOUR WARDS ACROSS THE GLOBE

on the

Although it looks like just a large inflatable rubber ball, the medi-Ball is quickly earning a reputation as one of the most popular pieces of exercise equipment to hit the fitness circuit. It's recently been included in training sessions at the Australian Institute of Sport, and now women everywhere are turning to the medi-Ball to strengthen and tone their bodies.

The reason? Exercising with a medi-Ball is a more effective way to work out than using ordinary gym equipment because you have to work harder, using your whole body to maintain your balance, according to Perth-based corrective exercise trainer Neil Whyte.

"And that means you use a lot more muscles," he says. "To maintain your centre of gravity, you have to make weight-shifting adjustments to correct posture and to activate all the muscles that usually lie dormant.

"It's also far healthier because your musculo-skeletal system is in a more balanced position than when you are training on a bench or machine. Also, you're more likely to

discover the areas you're weak in, so you can improve them."

All of this means that your training routine is far less risky as it is less likely to cause injuries.

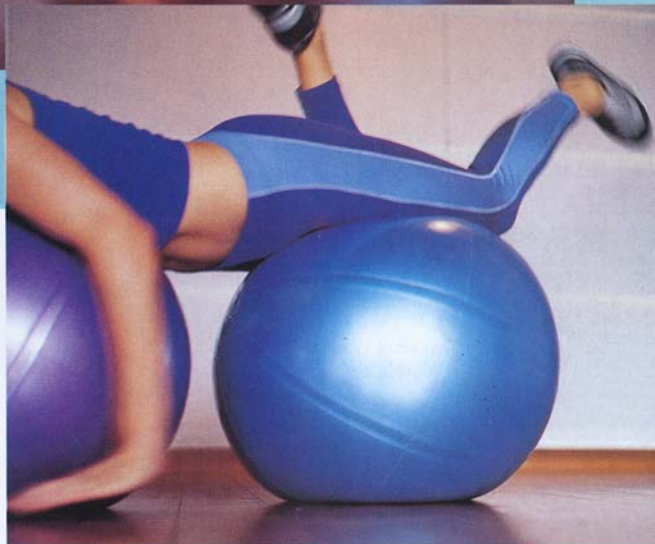
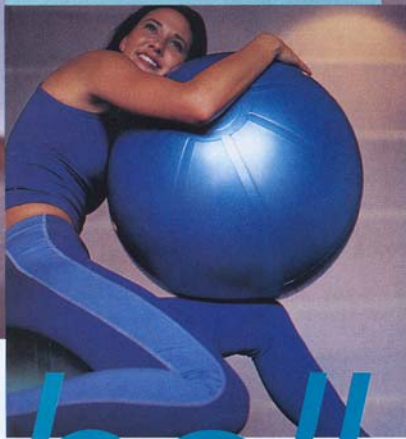
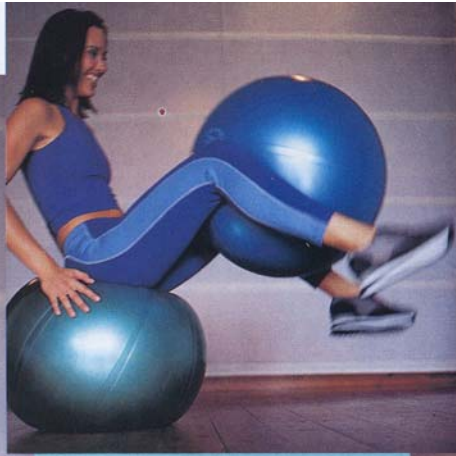
The other benefit is that the medi-Ball can be used for an unlimited variety of exercises – and to work a number of different muscles simultaneously. In contrast, most other fitness equipment targets only one area of the body.

"On the medi-Ball, with just one base exercise, say push-ups, you can do about 10 different variations, simply by moving the arms or legs," says Whyte.

In fact, there's very little you can't do with the medi-Ball. For example, using the ball for support during sit-ups can also strengthen the back and buttocks.

"It's balanced, whereas on machines and on the floor your body is not. Once you overload one area too much it creates problems. So you're better off activating more muscles and strengthening the whole body instead," says Whyte.

"That's why I think all people should at least be performing the popular abdominal curls on the ball. Doing sit-ups on the floor



ball

STORY: ERIN CRAVEN, STYLING: NICOLE CATLEY, PHOTOGRAPHER: ELLI DANKOU
HAIR AND MAKE-UP: BRENDAN ROBERTSON, CLOTHES: REBEL SPORTS
SHOES: ESPRIT, BALLS: AOK HEALTH (02) 4960 9955

shortens your abs, and rolls the shoulders inwards and forward, as most people grab their neck and pull themselves up. Ultimately this can end up damaging your posture and increasing lower back pain."

back booster

While most exercise equipment is too bulky to be stored easily, the medi-Ball can simply be used as a seat when it is not being used for exercise.

In fact, using the ball as a seat helps to stabilise the lower back muscles and prevent back pain.

A 1990 University of NSW study found that lower-back stabilisation training can speed the recovery of people who are suffering with mechanical lower-back pain.

This is why many physiotherapists are encouraging their patients to use balls as seats, at work and at home, and as support for back-strengthening exercises.

Most people tend to slouch while sitting on conventional chairs, but using a medi-Ball makes this impossible as the

unstable surface forces the back and abdominal muscles to tighten in order to maintain balance. So, even while you're working at your desk, you can strengthen your abdominal and back muscles without even trying.

pregnant applause

It's not just at the gym and in the office where medi-Balls are making a big impact. Several maternity wards are also providing medi-Balls for women to use during labour.

"The response from the women who use them has been very positive. In fact, the hardest thing is actually getting them off the ball," says Susie Thomas, Public Relations Director at the Mitcham Private Hospital in Melbourne.

Medi-Balls used in maternity wards allow women to sit in a comfortable position while resting their legs during labour.

"Often during a contraction, women want to rock their pelvis, and when you sit on the ball you can still do this.

"The only thing you can't do is actually deliver sitting on the ball, but you can deliver leaning over it." →



ball workout

Always use a medi-Ball where possible for a healthier spine and full range of motion. Here are three exercises that work to maintain a healthy spine and muscle balance by integrating many postural and movement muscles. It's a fun and highly effective way to motivate yourself to exercise. Have a ball!

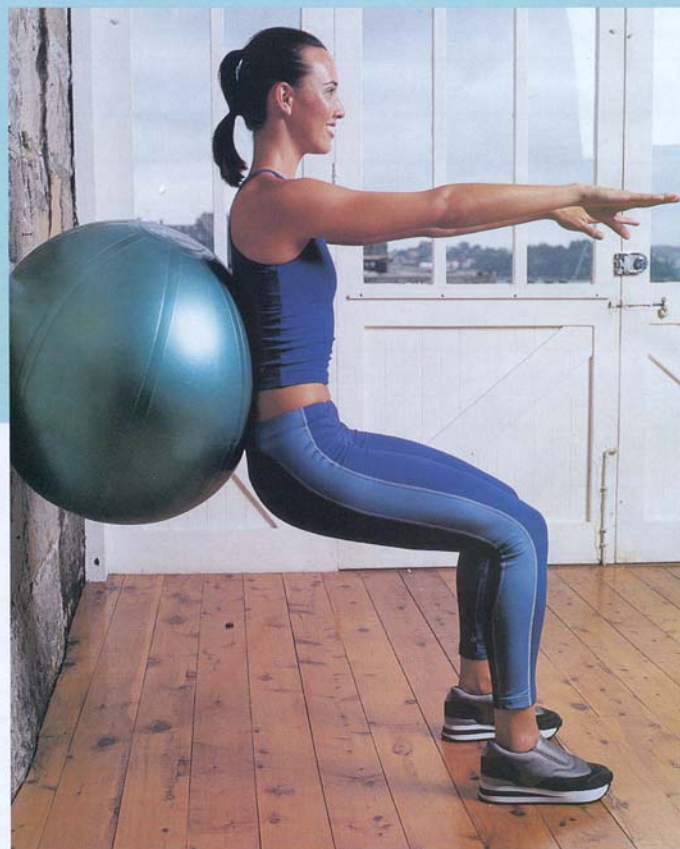
the right ball

Medi-Balls can cost between \$75-\$110 – depending on the size. There are five different sized balls, in a variety of colours, on the market and it's very important to get the right one for your height in order to reap the full benefits and to exercise safely. Medi-Balls are the strongest and safest fitness balls available in the world, with an anti-burst rating of 500kg.

Check out the chart below to work out what size ball you need.

BODY HEIGHT	BALL SIZE
up to 145cm	45cm
145-165cm	55cm
160-180cm	65cm
180-190cm	75cm
over 190cm	85cm

Note: If you are a heavy build, you should choose the next size up. For more information call Corrective Exercise Systems on 0412 977 487, or phone/fax them on (08) 9315 9469.

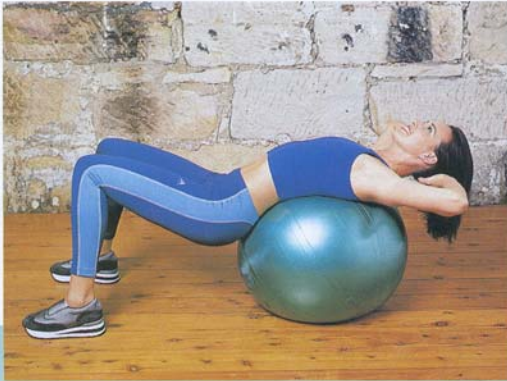


1 squat

Place the medi-Ball between the wall and your lower back. Move your feet forward approximately one foot and at least shoulder-width apart with your toes slightly turned out. Descend slowly whilst keeping a straight back with your buttocks slightly curved under the ball until your thighs are parallel to the floor. Push through your heels to activate your buttocks and hamstrings.

Technique check: Do you have approximately a 90-degree angle between your ankle, knee and hip when your thigh is parallel to the floor? Are you activating your abdominal wall to maintain a stable trunk?

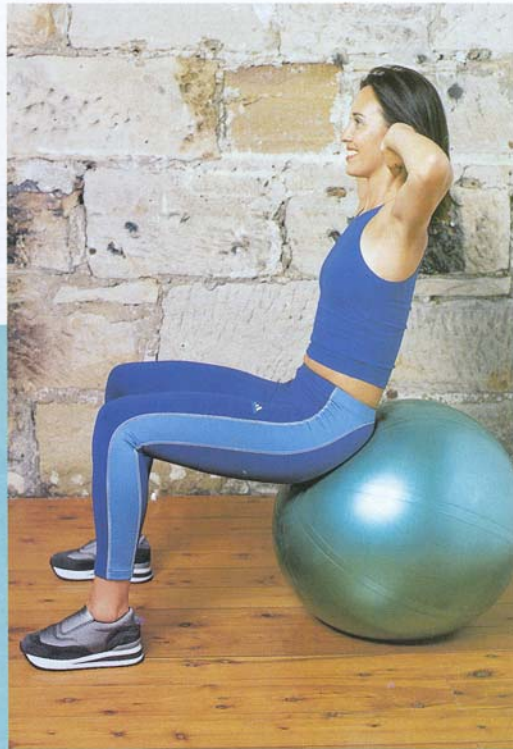
Breathing: Inhale down, exhale up.



2 abdominal curl

Position your spine over the ball with your hip joint lower than your knee joint. Place your fingers on your ears and elbows back to maintain proper form. An approximate 90-degree angle between your ankle, knee and hip should be present. Slowly curl your spine drawing your lower ribs toward your hips whilst maintaining a neutral head position. Then slowly extend your spine back over the ball.

Technique check: Are you keeping the ball stable rather than rolling it? Are you maintaining a neutral head position without supporting your head?
Breathing: Inhale down, exhale up.



3 walking out

Place the ball under your stomach and roll over the ball walking on your hands until your shins are on the medi-Ball. Hold for 5 seconds. Slowly walk backwards to starting position. If you find this too easy, try bringing your knees into your chest or lifting one leg while in the holding position. Using both legs, this position can also be used for push-ups. Simply bend the elbows, until your chest is just above the floor, keeping your back straight, and push upwards. If this is too difficult only roll out halfway before doing the push-up.

Technique check: Are your shoulders, hips and ankles level for optimal postural alignment? Are you keeping your head, shoulders, elbows and hands stable during the exercise?
Breathing: Inhale ball in, exhale ball out.

