



Photos by JAMES M. THRESHER / The Washington Post

HOWARD SCHNEIDER DEMONSTRATES exercises with a resistance band. You don't need to spend a lot to stretch your fitness dollar. A set of elastic resistance bands can help with an exercise plan.

You don't need to spend a lot to stretch your fitness dollar

A few simple items can help you stay in shape

By HOWARD SCHNEIDER
THE WASHINGTON POST

I haven't seen it documented yet, but you can be certain that with unemployment rising, incomes stagnant and a brooding sense of uncertainty about what is ahead for the economy, gym memberships and personal training sessions are on the chopping block in many household budgets.

But giving up the fancy venue and the personal attention doesn't have to mean giving up altogether. For a minimal investment — say a hundred bucks or less — you can assemble the tools needed to get (or keep) yourself in shape.

You can stick to running and walking through the neighborhood. If you keep the shoes laced and the feet moving, that will go a long way toward keeping you healthy. But it won't do much to enhance your flexibility and upper body strength or help maintain your ability to bend and twist and turn. For that, it helps to have a couple of simple items from the local sports store and a willingness to learn how to use them.

When I asked local trainer Michael Everts, owner of Fit in Washington, what he'd recommend to someone who wants to stay in shape on the cheap, he boiled it down to two items: a yoga or Pilates mat (\$20 to \$25, and a lot more stable and cushioning and better to sweat on than an old blanket) and a set of elastic resistance bands. (Thera-Band is the major brand name, but you'll find knock-offs at the big-box stores for as little as \$15 for a pack of three.)

I gulped a bit when he said this. Elastic bands, strips of rubber color-coded to indicate different levels of resistance, are often associated with physical therapy, where they're used to help get injured or malfunctioning joints and muscles back into working order.

But, as Everts explained it, resistance is resistance. It doesn't matter if you are lifting a dumbbell or a milk jug full of water, or pulling on a rubber band, as long as the muscles have to overcome SOMETHING. For a lot of staple exercises, he said, a couple of bands can provide the same effect as several pairs of dumbbells, for a lot less money (and a lot less space and clutter).

Lie on one (or wrap it beneath a bench) for a chest press. Stand on it to do shoulder presses and biceps curls. Tie it to a door handle for back rows; throw it over the top of the door and grab the two hanging ends for triceps push-downs. If the intensity seems inadequate, double them over, or use two bands at once.

"They are a full-body piece of equipment," Everts said.

Rubber tubes (also at the big-box stores and inexpensive) are an alternative. But in my experience the wide elastic bands work better. They are easier to grip and wrap around your hands if you want to increase the resistance. Both have the advan-

tage of being portable, an easy way to take your gym on the road.

With the upper body finished, Everts recommended body weight exercises for the legs and hips: standard moves such as squats, lunges and calf raises. If you're just starting, you can use a chair to assist with the squats; even sitting and standing a few times is a beginning. For lunges you can put your hand on a chair or table for assistance. If you want to increase the intensity, experiment with combining upper- and lower-body exercises: Stand on the band, for example, and as you rise from a squat, do a shoulder press; or tie the band around your shoe, and as you step into a lunge, do a biceps curl.

For the abdominal and core muscles, Everts' scaled-down, no-machines-or-dumbbells-needed routine involved five exercises done on the mat, with 30 repetitions each. They should be done in order ("synergistically," he said) to take advantage of how the different abdominal muscles work together. All are done lying on your back.

1. Hip thrusts: With legs in the air, push the hips up and the toes toward the ceiling.

2. Oblique crunches: With the hands behind the head, raise the right shoulder off the ground and rotate toward the left thigh; after 30 repetitions, do the same thing with the other side.

3. Standard crunches.

4. Reverse crunches: With knees bent, raise the legs toward the chest.

5. Lifts: With the legs in the air, raise the shoulders off the ground, but, rather than "crunching," push the chest toward the ceiling.

Jason Riddell, head strength and conditioning coach at American University, added another dimension to the idea, coming at the problem as someone who spends his days trying to tweak an extra bit of power out of the college's athletes, while working in his own sets of 300-pound-plus squats.

His on-the-cheap gym would include a jump rope, a pull-up bar, a six- to eight-pound medicine ball, and a Jumpstretch band, which is basically an industrial-strength rubber band, popular with conditioning coaches.

A couple of these are pretty obvious. Jumping rope is a powerful cardio exercise. The medicine ball is a versatile tool, useful for abdominal twists, playing various types of catch if you have a partner, adding resistance to crunches and squats, or simply raising overhead and slamming to the ground.

The pull-up bar may be difficult to accommodate. There are various models designed to fit in doorways that may or may not work for your home. If that's not a problem, the pull-ups themselves may be difficult anyway. These are one of the exercises that many trainers and athletic coaches recommend because they recruit so much muscle: chest, back, abs and arms all at the same time.

They are also hard as heck. Many people can't do them at all. That's where the Jumpstretch band comes in. Big, closed-loop pieces of rubber, in the thickest version they offer up to 200 pounds of resistance. (The term is used loosely here because resistance with these is not fixed, and it increases as the



IN THESE PHOTOS, Howard Schneider demonstrates a series of exercises with a resistance band. If the intensity seems inadequate, double the band over, or use two at once.



band is stretched.)

The light versions (the purple one offers a 50-pound resistance and can be ordered online for about \$18) can be used to do assisted pull-ups. Looping it through the bar, step into the end that is hanging down and let your body weight stretch the band out. The resistance of the band will help pull you up.

They can also be used for some other exercises popular among weightlifters, including the "good morning": With the band looped over the head and secured to the floor with the feet, bend at the waist and try to straighten, lifting with the hamstrings and gluteal muscles. You can also strengthen the knees by standing on the band, grabbing opposite sides with the hands so it

forms an X, and walking sideways.

If you are serious about ditching the gym, books can help. The recently published "No Gym Required," by Jennifer Cohen, is a bit chatty but includes a nice set of body-weight and other home-based exercises. She works wonders with a kitchen chair and has lots of recommendations for using an inflatable stability ball (another good investment, at maybe \$20 to \$30).

A final idea: Shop for some discount DVDs for instruction in yoga, cardio, Pilates, martial arts or other different types of exercise. The variety will be beneficial.

And be patient. The economy may take years to turn around, so we could be in the basement for a long time to come.

Weekend Doctor

By DR. THOMAS F. VAIL

Although rest and relaxation are the goals for most vacations, they usually involve a lot of walking. Unfortunately, a lot of walking usually involves sore feet.

Walking is a great exercise and one of the most reliable forms of transportation. However, if your feet aren't in the best shape or you don't have the right shoes, too much walking can cause foot problems.

Good foot care is essential if you plan to subject your feet to long periods of walking. Here are some simple foot care tips:

- Wear thick, absorbent socks. Try acrylic instead of cotton.
- Dry feet thoroughly after bathing, making sure to dry between your toes. Use powder before putting on shoes.
- Nails should be cut regularly, straight across the toe.
- Bunions, hammertoes or any other serious foot problems should be evaluated by a foot-and-ankle surgeon.

The right shoe is also important to healthy walking. The ideal walking shoe is stable from side to side, well-cushioned, and will allow you to walk smoothly.

While many running shoes will fit the bill, there are also shoes made specially for walking.

Walking shoes tend to be slightly less cushioned and are not as bulky. They are also lighter than running shoes.

Whether you choose a walking or running shoe, the shoes need to feel stable and comfortable.

Warm-up exercises that are done before walking can help alleviate muscle stiffness or pulled muscles. Loosening up the thigh muscles and heel cords (in the Achilles and calf) before a walk is especially effective.

If you're not used to long walks, start slowly and rest if your feet start to hurt.

Above all, have fun!

Vail is with Advanced Footcare Clinic, Findlay. Questions for Blanchard Valley Health System doctors may be sent to weekend@thecourier.com, or to Weekend, The Courier, P.O. Box 609, Findlay, OH 45839-0609.



Vail

Studies: Drug shows promise against hepatitis C

By ALICIA CHANG
AP SCIENCE WRITER

LOS ANGELES — An experimental drug greatly increased the number of people who appear to be cured of hepatitis C infection, according to results of mid-stage testing.

The findings also suggest the drug telaprevir, made by Vertex Pharmaceuticals Inc., which sponsored the two studies, can cut treatment time from one year to six months. However, those taking the drug reported more side effects including severe rash, nausea and anemia than those on standard treatment alone.

Still, telaprevir and similar drugs that other companies are testing offer hope of a major advance against the disease, which afflicts about 3.2 million Americans and 180 million people worldwide. It is caused by a bloodborne virus that can lead to liver scarring or liver cancer.

Treatment is aimed at helping the immune system eliminate the virus. Current therapy combines the drugs peginterferon and ribavirin, but less than half on it are cured. Telaprevir and similar drugs under development are a potential game-changer because they specifically attack the hepatitis C virus.

In the two studies, roughly two-thirds given telaprevir with standard therapy for six months showed no signs of the virus after six months, which doctors considered being cured of the disease. That's compared to 40 percent to 50 percent on standard treatment alone.

"We can now sit down with our patients and tell them that 2 of 3 patients can be cured with a 24-week course of therapy," said Dr. John McHutchison, a Duke University doctor who led one study

and has consulted for Vertex, based in Cambridge, Mass.

Telaprevir is in late-stage testing and is not available commercially; the company plans to seek government approval next year.

Results were published in the New England Journal of Medicine.

Hepatitis C is a huge and growing problem because for years there was no way to screen the blood supply for the virus. Infection often doesn't produce symptoms for many years, so many of these cases are just now being recognized even though they may stem from transfusions a decade or more ago.

In one study of 250 people with chronic hepatitis C in the United States, 61 percent who took telaprevir with standard therapy for six months cleared the virus, compared with 41 percent on standard therapy alone. Among those who took the drug and standard therapy for a year, 67 percent had no signs of infection.

However, twice as many on telaprevir stopped treatment because of side effects.

In another study of 334 people in Europe, 69 percent on telaprevir and standard therapy for six months had undetectable virus levels compared with 46 percent on standard treatment alone.

The European study was led by Dr. Christophe Hezode of Henri Mondor Hospital in France. Hezode has consulted for Swiss drug maker Roche, which makes peginterferon and ribavirin.

Testing of even shorter treatment times did not show benefit in either study.

Other companies developing similar drugs include Idenix Pharmaceuticals, Schering-Plough Corp. and InterMune Inc.



KAHUNA IN THE MORNINGS

MONDAY—FRIDAY 5 AM TO 10 AM

