

STEP TRAINING FOR FITNESS AND FUN

Within the last few years, step training's popularity has climbed rapidly. An estimated 10 million people have tried step training.

Could 10 million steppers be wrong? On the contrary—vigorous stepping provides the cardiovascular benefits of running but stresses the joints little more than walking. Performed to invigorating music with creative choreography, this low-impact workout is also lots of fun.

The First Step to Stepping

Before beginning a step-training class, be sure that your step—the platform—is secure and at the proper height for your fitness level. If you are new to step training, or just beginning a fitness program, start with a platform height of 4 to 6 inches. (Regardless of fitness level, the platform height should not require bending your knees more than 90 degrees.)

Keep the area around your platform dry and remove objects that could interfere with your workout.

Align Your Body

Proper body alignment during step training helps prevent injuries. While stepping:

- Relax your neck and keep it straight.
- Always keep your knees soft and don't lock the knee joints.

- Maintain good posture with the shoulders back, chest lifted and pelvis tucked under.
- Lean from the ankles, not the waist, as you step onto the platform; do not bend from the hips.
- Don't arch your back.

Proper Stepping Techniques

Correct stepping technique also prevents injuries and improves your workout:

- Always place your entire foot on the platform; no part of the foot should hang over the edge.
- Step close to the platform, allowing the heels to contact the floor. *Note:* Only the ball of the foot, not the heel, should touch the floor during lunges or other rapidly repeated movements (called "repeaters").
- Step quietly. Pounding can unduly stress the ankles and knees.

- Keep an eye on the platform at all times.
- Don't use hand weights. They may increase the risk of injury and provide no significant benefit.

Stepping Out

If you initially find step training difficult to follow, focus on learning the foot patterns and omit arm movements. You can add arm movements later.

Remember that raising your arms above shoulder level makes your heart work harder and can leave you breathless. So, if you have a hard time keeping up, lower your arms and catch your breath.

To avoid injuries caused by too much stepping, alternate step-training classes with a variety of aerobic workouts like bicycling, walking or other recreational activities.

Step-training workouts may seem difficult at first, but beware—they're habit-forming! Just remember to maintain proper body alignment and stepping technique to keep you stepping injury-free for years to come.

Additional Resource

American Council on Exercise—*Step Training* by Sabra Bonelli: www.acefitness.org/acestore/p-587-traditional-aerobics-and-step-training.aspx

If you are interested in information on other health and fitness topics, contact: American Council on Exercise, 4851 Paramount Drive, San Diego, CA 92123, 800-825-3636; or, go online at www.acefitness.org/GetFit and access the complete list of ACE Fit Facts.™



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