

PLANNING YOUR BOOTCAMP FITNESS PROGRAM

By Georgette Pann

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This short report will explain the various strategies and elements that go into creating a boot camp fitness program and will walk you through part of the process of creating your own fitness bootcamp.

Types of Exercise

There are five basic types of exercise, and you may include some or all of them in your boot camp program, depending on what you're trying to achieve. Exercise categories include:

- Resistance Training - Develops strength and power and endurance to a lesser degree. Examples: Push ups, pull ups, sit ups, body squats, any exercise using dumbbells, barbells or resistance bands and tubes.
- Cardiovascular Training - Develops heart and lung efficiency and endurance. Examples: Running, biking, swimming, aerobics, Tae Bo, and any activity done at an elevated heart rate for an extended period of time.
- Agility and Speed Training - Develops fast movement and precision reflexes. Examples: Sprints, running sideways or backwards, running tires and obstacle courses, shuffles, martial arts movements.
- Plyometrics - Develops power in movement and resilience. Examples: Vertical jumps, long jumps, medicine ball exercises, hopping, skipping.
- Stretching - Develops flexibility. Examples: Hurdler's stretch, most yoga poses, toe touches.

Fat Loss and Exercise Types

Cardiovascular exercise does the most to burn fat during exercise. Cardiovascular exercise, like running, quickly depletes the energy stores that muscles prefer to use and forces them to burn fat for energy. Studies show that cardiovascular exercise burns the most fat when done at a moderate pace that increases heart rate but allows the trainee to hold a conversation. Fat burning due to cardiovascular exercise stops soon after heart rate and breathing rates return to normal.

Resistance training burns little fat during the exercise compared to cardiovascular exercise, but it has a longer lasting fat burning effect on the body. An increase in metabolism from resistance

training can last for hours, and resistance training increases muscle size and density, which causes the muscle to burn more calories every time it's used. Muscle growth results in a more or less permanent increase in calorie consumption, which is essential to long term fat loss.

Agility, speed and plyometric training can burn fat like cardiovascular exercise when it raises the heart rate high enough for an extended period. They can also spur muscle growth and its resulting calorie consumption, similar to resistance training but not as effectively. Stretching has little impact on fat loss, though when done with enough intensity, stretching can increase metabolism and overall calorie consumption. For a boot camp program that catches fat in the crossfire, emphasize resistance training and cardiovascular work.

Equilibrium

A major source of problems affecting the skeletal and muscular systems of the body is muscle imbalances. A muscle imbalance occurs when muscles on one side of a joint are significantly stronger or more developed than those on the opposite side. Avoid a program that promotes muscle imbalance by including resistance exercises for all of the following muscle groups:

- Chest, shoulders and triceps - Push ups, bench dips, bench press, military and over head presses
- Upper back and biceps - Pull ups, rows, shrugs
- Abdomen - Sit ups, crunches, leg raises
- Lower Back - Good mornings, modified cat stretch, locust, cobra
- Thighs - Squats, deadlifts, lunges, leg press
- Hamstrings - Straight leg deadlifts, good mornings, lunges

Compound vs. Isolation Exercises

One of the things that separates boot camp fitness programs from typical gym programs is the emphasis on compound exercises. Where many fitness club programs with resistance training emphasize isolation exercises, which involve exercising the muscles for only one joint at a time, the efficiency required of bootcamp programs demands the use of compound exercises that utilize multiple joints and muscle groups at a time. For example, the barbell curl is an isolation exercise that works the biceps, while the pull up is a compound exercise that works the biceps, lats in the upper back and the serratus. Nearly all of the exercises included in the next section are compound exercises.

Cadence

Cadence refers to the tempo or speed at which trainees perform repetitions. In the military, recruits do their push ups and other calisthenics to the same beat, usually dictated by the drill instructor. You may wish to do the same with your boot camp platoon, or you may want to let trainees do them at their own speed and tempo. If you are dictating the cadence, you can control the intensity of the exercise by speeding up or slowing down the cadence.

Expect the Unexpected

Another trait that sets boot camp programs apart from the typical fitness club program is the variety of exercises, intensity and schedule. Boot camp programs keep trainees on their toes with program changes from day to day and week to week. This variety prevents the body from getting accustomed to the workout, which cues an internal response to adapt to new conditions and better prepares the trainee to handle whatever life throws at him or her. Here are six ways to add variety to your program:

1. Train different body parts on different days. This works best in a five-day-per-week program. For example, train upper body on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays and train lower body on Tuesdays and Thursdays.
2. Train using bodyweight exercises on some days and weighted exercises on other days. This variation strategy works well with three-days-per-week programs. For example, train with bodyweight exercises on Monday and Friday and train with dumbbells or resistance bands on Wednesday.
3. Schedule resistance training some days and cardio on other days. This really works well for five day programs because you can work resistance hard two or three days and rest in between those days by doing cardio instead.
4. Do basic exercises such as push ups and pull ups some days and power exercises like power cleans and vertical jumps on other days.
5. Vary the forms of exercises from day to day. For example, do standard pull ups one day and wide grip pull ups, narrow grip pull ups and commando pull ups on other days.
6. Alternate light days and heavy days (i.e., work with high intensity on some days and low intensity on other days).

Progression

Most boot camp programs are geared for people who, previous to enlisting in your program, have not

exercised much or at all. In those cases, you need to start the program at a level your recruits can handle. That doesn't mean they won't moan, groan, wail and cry trying to fulfill the program's requirements. It just means you don't want to over train or injure them so they can't continue the program. Here are a few strategies for making sure new recruits can stick with it:

- Start by asking trainees to only do 85 percent of their maximum reps on the first day and try to add a rep each session. So someone that can only do 10 push ups will do nine the first day, 10 the second and 11 the third day.
- Set a low goal (10 reps) and require trainees to do as many as they can with strict form, like a standard push up on the toes, then allow them to switch to modified forms like push ups on the knees to finish the set.

Do multiple sets within each session.

- Set a high goal (25 or 30 reps) and let the trainees use any combination of advanced, standard or modified forms to achieve the goal. You may also want to allow up to three 15-second rests during the set.

Because this is boot camp and not nursery school, you'll want to progress fairly quickly to a more difficult program. Progression is essential to growth and development. The body adapts and stagnates in ability fairly quickly, so you have to continually challenge it to keep muscles growing and metabolism advancing.

Here are six ways to add progression to your program:

1. Add one rep to each exercise each session or five reps to each exercise each week.
2. Increase the percentage of standard or strict form repetitions in a set. For example, if you've set a goal of 30 push ups and trainees on average do standard push ups for half of those, require them to increase that number to 17 or 20.
3. Switch to more difficult versions of an exercise. For example, replace standard push ups with wide grip push ups or push ups with feet elevated. Or let them move from push ups with feet elevated to standard to modified push ups in order to complete the set.
4. Use ladders and increase by one step each week. A description of ladders is later in this section.
5. Reduce the length or frequency of rest periods between sets or exercises (i.e., if trainees are accustomed to two minute breaks between exercises, reduce them to one minute).
6. Increase the cadence or decrease the amount of time trainees have to reach the goal.

Intensity

Intensity refers to how hard the trainee works to do the prescribed exercises. In the early weeks of your program, you'll want to start with a relatively low intensity and progressively increase the average intensity each week. You'll also want to vary the intensity within each daily session because most of your recruits will not be able to maintain anything but a low intensity workout for the duration of a workout session. By including some low intensity portions of the workout, you give trainees an opportunity to recover and prepare for more high intensity work.

For five day programs, you'll want to vary the intensity of workouts within the week. They need the challenge of some high intensity days, but if they're all high intensity, trainees will over train and are more likely to incur injuries.

You can increase the intensity of a workout in three ways:

1. Use more difficult exercises or increase resistance (weight).
2. Decrease the length or frequency of rest periods.
3. Increasing the tempo or speed of repetitions (see Cadence above).

Likewise, you can decrease the intensity of a workout in three ways:

1. Use easier exercises or decrease resistance (weight).
2. Increase the length or frequency of rest periods.
3. Decreasing the tempo or speed of repetitions (see Cadence above).

Exercise Order

When deciding what order to schedule the exercises in a session, consider the following:

1. Start with resistance exercises, which require more control and effort, and work toward cardiovascular exercise, which consumes energy too quickly to do before resistance work. If you include power exercises, plyometrics and speed and agility training, schedule them in that order between resistance and cardio exercises.
2. Break periodically for stretching and allow trainees to catch their breath. If you use low rep sets, schedule rest/stretch periods after every three to five sets. If you use high rep sets, schedule short periods after every set.
3. After a warm up, start with some low intensity exercise before you get into high intensity work. Alternate between high and low intensity periods and end with a low intensity period before the cool down at the end.

Ladders

Ladders are one way of breaking down high repetition sets to make them more manageable by beginning trainees. They are used extensively in military physical training programs. With ladders, trainees start by doing one rep, take a 15 second rest, do two reps and continue on in this fashion until half the set is done or the trainee cannot complete the mini set. Then they work back down the ladder doing one rep less than the last mini set until they reach zero. So a set of 25 reps would be broken down into the following mini-sets: 1-2-3-4-5-4-3-2-1 with 15-second rests in between.

Circuits

Circuit training is another way to break down large quantities of repetitions while keeping the intensity high. In a circuit, several exercises are scheduled in rapid succession with only a few reps of each. Trainees are allowed little to no rest between exercises, but they get a rest period after completing all the exercises in the circuit. Then trainees repeat the circuit a designated number of times.

Here's an example of a circuit:

- Pull ups - 10 reps
- Push ups - 10 reps
- Sit ups - 10 reps
- Bodyweight squats - 20 reps
- Bench dips - 10 reps
- Good Mornings - 10 reps
- Two minute rest
- (repeat three times)

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