

Get slimmer, sculpted, and way
more confident by busting out
of your fitness comfort zone.

From catching your first wave to
finishing an adventure race, here
are six ways to push your limits.

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> Brave new WORKOUTS

Body Glove wet suit and bikini top, GSI surfboard

Sweaty palms, a racing heart, the feeling of all eyes focused on you—trying a new activity can be terrifying. But it has big-time benefits: “Getting comfortable being uncomfortable builds mental strength,” says Jim Afremow, Ph.D., author of *The Champion’s Mind*. And that goes double for your body: Muscles quickly adapt to a workout, and that’s when they stop getting stronger and more sculpted; keep doing new things and you’ll pretty much plateau-proof your routine. Ready to take the plunge? We’ve got the inside scoop from experts on conquering the most intimidating fitness endeavors—because even though you might feel like a rookie, we’d never let you look like one!

THE DIRT WILL WASH AWAY, but the bragging rights will last forever.



1) FINISH AN OBSTACLE RACE
 An estimated 4 million people participated in a mud run in 2013 (twice as many as in 2012)—not too shabby for a category that didn’t exist four years earlier. And as tough as they may look in their Facebook pictures, the majority of race participants are new to the sport. While you can’t fully prepare for challenges like wading through a trough of ice water, crawling under live wires, and climbing over a 12-foot netted wall, a few tricks will make the event much easier to handle. Follow these tips from Casey Stutzman, a trainer in Alpena, MI, who preps clients for the Tough Mudder, to make it to the finish line with a smile.

GET STABLE “When you take a wrong step—and you will when you’re shuffling through mud—good balance helps you quickly correct it,” says Stutzman. To boost yours, stand on one foot while you’re doing strength exercises or even watching TV. Progress by closing your eyes or by standing on a squishy pillow, balance disc, or Bosu balance trainer.

TRAIN IN 3-D The average workout is one-dimensional (forward and back), but navigating obstacles requires multidimensional motion. Prepare by incorporating lateral and rotational exercises—like side lunges, side planks, and woodchoppers—into your routine.

PUT IN THE TIME Even avid runners should give themselves at least a month to prep for an adventure race. (Download a free 30-day training plan from Stutzman at caseystutzman.com.)

EMBRACE THE SUCK
 For most first-timers, the toughest part of a mud race is being soggy, dirty, and too hot or cold. To get used to discomfort, Stutzman recommends listening to an annoying song—his fave is Whitney Houston’s “I Will Always Love You”—on repeat for an hour or taking a cold shower before a run.

2) CONQUER CROSSFIT
 It’s a frustrating reality of many workouts: The stronger you become, the harder it is to get results. CrossFit may be the exception, though: In an Ohio State University study, people who completed 10 weeks of a CrossFit-style plan lowered their body fat percentage by an average of 16 percent and increased their VO₂ max by 12 percent—no matter how in or out of shape they were when they began. The methods that get those results are nothing short of intimidating, but here’s a secret: “The CrossFit community

NIX NERVOUSNESS
 Fear is your body’s way of saying “Hey! Focus here!”—and that’s a positive thing when you’re facing something unknown. But too much of it can overload your brain, affecting your balance and your ability to absorb information. “Being afraid can even increase your injury risk by making your muscles tense,” says Carrie Cheadle, a mental skills coach and author of *On Top of Your Game*. When your nerves go into overdrive, she suggests repeating a mantra to help release stress. Try: “Relax your hands, relax your face, and breathe.” Letting go of the physical tension helps calm your mind so you can focus.



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is made up of teachers, new moms, and overweight people," says Graham Holmberg, owner of Eleventh Element CrossFit in Hilliard, OH, and the 2010 CrossFit Games champion. "Anyone can do it." Here's how:

FIND A ROOKIE CLASS

Locate a CrossFit box (gym) at crossfit.com, and sign up for an "on-ramp" or beginner session. These smaller classes offer extra hands-on coaching and teach modifications for tougher moves. If there aren't any that fit your schedule, try a midday session, which is likely to be less crowded, so you get more attention from coaches.

DITCH YOUR HEADPHONES

The first few minutes are spent socializing. "Members get to know each other," says Holmberg. "The sense of camaraderie is something that makes CrossFit unique."

HOME SURF ADVANTAGE

NOT LUCKY ENOUGH TO LIVE NEAR AN OCEAN? MAKE THE MOST OUT OF A VACATION SURF EXPERIENCE BY PREPPING WITH THESE WORKOUTS:

YOGA "The majority of surfing is lying on your board and paddling in what's essentially cobra pose," says Bellofatto. "And when you pop up, it's not so different from warrior II."

STAND-UP PADDLEBOARDING

"Even though the body mechanics are different, paddling strengthens your arms, back, and core, which will make surfing easier," says Bellofatto.

TRX Suspension training builds upper-body strength—key for paddling and balancing.

COME READY TO LEARN

After warming up, every class includes time for skill development. You'll start by practicing a move with light weights or even a PVC pipe until you've nailed the form.

STAY ON THE SAFE SIDE

Moderate your injury risk by listening to your body—and

3) CATCH A WAVE

Always fantasized about being a surfer—but never got up the nerve? That was the case for Jessica Bellofatto, owner of KamaDeva Yoga in East Hampton, NY, who dived in at age 27 but then didn't get back on a board until five years later. Now 40, she leads surfing retreats around the world. While there are no shortage of physical benefits of the sport (it challenges virtually every muscle in your body), it's the mental perks that have Bellofatto

to the coach. If you're not sure that you're doing something right, ask; and if your form is faltering, take a break. Encounter a bully coach who pushes you too hard? Leave.

GO ALL OUT Focus, try your best, and keep in mind that the actual workout portion of a class is short—just 10 to 20

obsessed. "If I'm having a bad day or my mind is racing, there's nothing more calming than hitting the water," she says. Get the most out of your first lesson and solo outings with these tips:

GO LONG Choose a long board, which is more stable and easier to paddle. You can also ask for a soft-top board—they're light and either made of or coated with foam, so you're less likely to get bruised.

START ON SAND Make sure your instructor begins on the

minutes. (But during it your entire body will be engaged in explosive movements.)

DON'T RUSH Depending on which workout you're doing, everyone may finish at different times. But there's no shame in being last: As people finish, they root for the remaining athletes.

beach. You should master popping up on your board and learn how to read different types of waves before you hit the water.

TIME IT RIGHT It's worth dragging yourself out of bed early (or delaying dinner): The water is usually glassy at sunrise and sunset, making it easier to decipher the waves.

FAVOR FAIR WEATHER

"Cold water makes you stiffen up," says Bellofatto. "Warm temps can help relax your muscles and calm some of those newbie nerves."

Left: Body Glove wetsuit and bikini top; CSI surfboard. Right: Alole bra top; Calvin Klein Performance leggings; Nike sneakers

SEXY-ABS SECRET: You can kick, punch, and twist your way to a flat belly.

4) KICK IT UP WITH KRAV MAGA

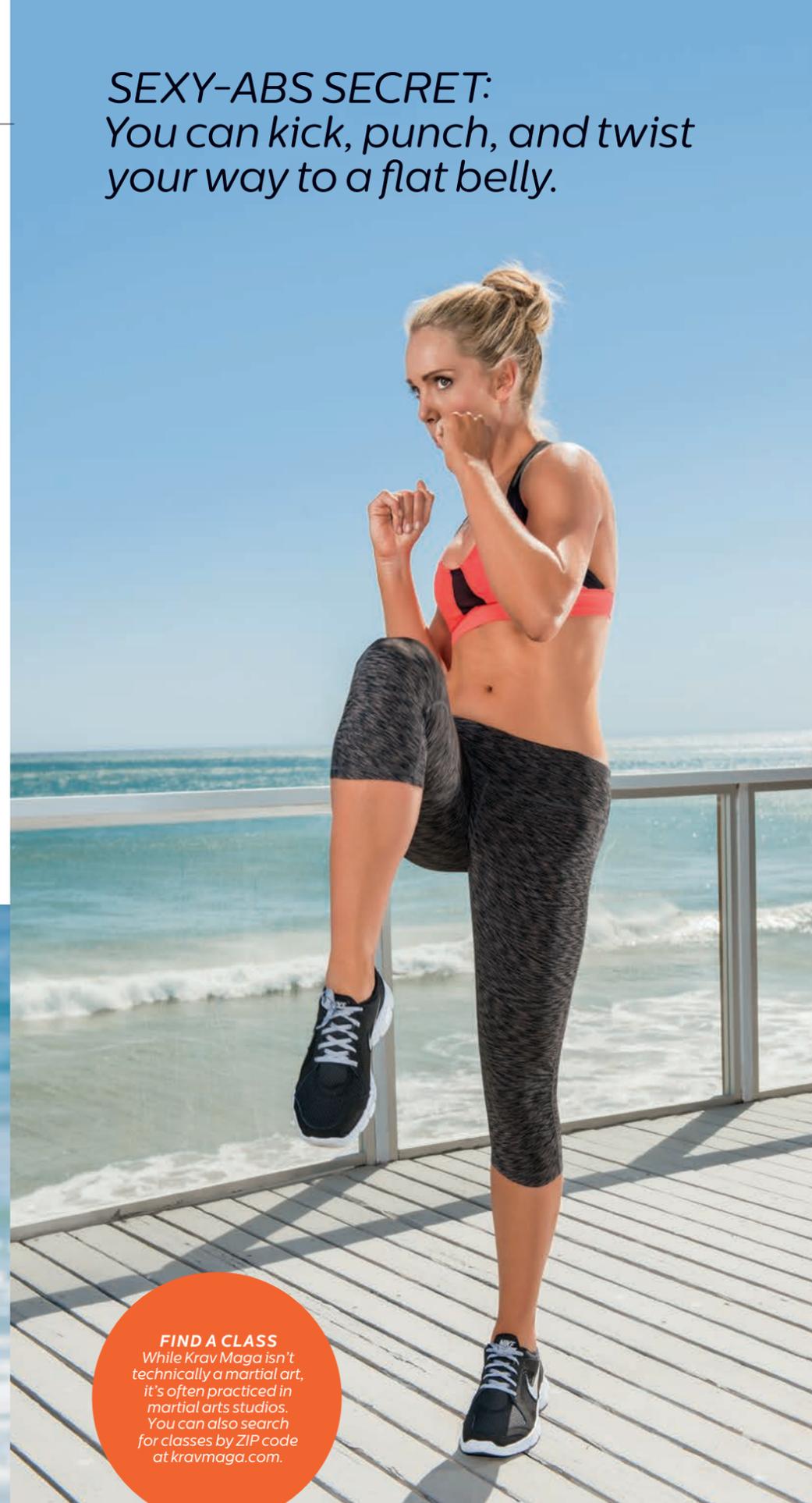
This method of self-defense is based on street fighting, so it involves punching and kicking... hard. You'll learn to use your body to generate maximum force with powerful movements. And big movements mean a big burn. "It's an insane head-to-toe cardio and strength workout," says Jarrett Arthur, a Krav Maga black belt who has taught the defense system to hundreds of people. "After a month of classes, you'll be 10 times tougher, and that feeling migrates to all parts of your life—from your career to your relationships." Stepping into your first class can be scary, but here are four things you don't need to worry about:

YOU ARE FIT ENOUGH Krav Maga was created for the Israeli army, where everyone—male and female, athletic or not—must serve when they turn 18. In other words, it's designed so that even the smallest and the weakest can learn to kick butt (though you won't be weak for long if you stick with it).

YOU WILL FIND A PARTNER The instructor will match people up with partners of a similar size and skill level. But you can also take matters into your own hands by bringing along a friend.

YOU WON'T LOOK SILLY Still, it doesn't hurt to master your fighting stance at home first. To do it, stand with feet shoulder-width apart and take a step forward with your nondominant leg (your left if you're right-handed). Bend both knees slightly, and raise your back heel. Shrug your shoulders up and forward, tuck your chin, and bring your hands up in front of your face with your palms forward, elbows tucked in to your sides.

YOU WON'T GET HURT Anytime someone hits you in class, you'll be holding a thick pad to protect yourself (by the way, bracing yourself against blows is a workout in itself).



FIND A CLASS While Krav Maga isn't technically a martial art, it's often practiced in martial arts studios. You can also search for classes by ZIP code at kravmaga.com.

BIKRAM STUDIOS are usually carpeted to help cushion your joints.



5) BRAVE BIKRAM

Combine the 105-degree temps, 90-minute class time, and scantily clad yogis and is it any wonder that Bikram tops even the fittest woman's blacklist? But if you're a newcomer, have no fear—no one expects you to have all 26 poses memorized or even keep up your first few tries. "As a beginner, it's most important to listen to the instructor's cues," says Susan Antonaccio Goldstein, co-owner of Bikram Yoga SoHo in New York City. "If you get lost, just peek at someone to see what to do." That's why it's best to plant yourself in the second or third row (but steer clear of the center, where temps tend to be hottest). Here's what else you should know before you hit the hot room:

WEAR LESS It's easier to move—and stay cool—in a bra top or tank and shorts than in a t-shirt and pants.

PACK TWO TOWELS You won't want to use the wet one you sweated all over during class for your post-workout wipe-down.

DRINK UP Sipping water is encouraged, except during the first 25 minutes of class. After that warm-up, the entire class will take a water break—often referred to as "party time"—and you're always free to have one between later poses too.

KNOW WHEN TO HOLD 'EM Unlike a flowing yoga class, in Bikram you'll hang out in a pose for 10 to 60 seconds.

REST RIGHT Feeling light-headed or nauseous? Sit or

kneel quietly on your mat. Keep your eyes open, breathe, and rejoin the class when you're ready. (Don't do child's pose: Putting your head below your heart can make dizziness worse.)

LOOK UP The first 50 minutes of class are standing, and many of the poses emphasize balance. Instead of finding a spot on the floor to focus on, pick a spot right in front of you on the mirror. Keeping your eyes raised will help prevent slumping.

STRIKE THIS POSE

The postures that make up a Bikram session aren't all balance-defying challenges. You'll also hold many relaxing positions like the one above. "Half tortoise stretches your back, helps you de-stress, and boosts your mental clarity," says Goldstein. To do it, kneel with your knees and feet together, bend forward from your hips, and extend your arms overhead. Press your palms together and lower your pinky fingers to the floor, keeping your elbows raised. Lower your forehead to the floor and sit back on your heels [shown, above].

QUICK TIP About to walk into a new class or dive into the ocean? Hold Superman position for 60 seconds: Stand with feet shoulder-width apart, place your hands on your hips, and lift your chest and chin. According to mental performance consultant Jim Afremow, Ph.D., research shows that a confident stance decreases levels of the stress hormone cortisol and increases your testosterone, making it easier to take risks.

Left: Lululemon bra top; Hard Tail shorts. Right: Calvin Klein bra top; Tonic shorts

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6) BELLY UP TO THE POLE

"I always liked dance classes, but they weren't challenging enough for me," says Lian Tal-Lebret. "Then I took a pole-dancing session." Within weeks, she saw more definition in her muscles and was hooked; seven years later, she's now co-owner of Body & Pole studio in New York City. "It's intimidating to walk into a studio and see people in short shorts and sports bras," she says. "But it's not your job to come here slim, strong, and flexible—it's our job as instructors to get you there!" Still, it will help calm some of those nerves if you do your homework beforehand. To prep for your first pole-fitness class:

GET INSPIRED Watch YouTube videos and look for the kind of pole dancing you would see yourself doing, whether it's sensual or more gymnastics-like.

REVEAL SOME SKIN Being half naked isn't about showing off—it helps you stick to the pole better. You'll need to make contact at your inner thighs, inner arms, and armpits, so wear a sleeveless top and the shortest shorts you're comfortable in. "Everybody in the studio is going to be sporting something similar, so you shouldn't feel weird," says Tal-Lebret. "And don't worry: Dancers—including the instructors—come in all shapes and sizes."

EXPECT THE SWEAT "Your hands will perspire," says Tal-Lebret. "It's normal and will eventually diminish when you're not so nervous." (And maybe it goes without saying, but skip the body lotion!)

