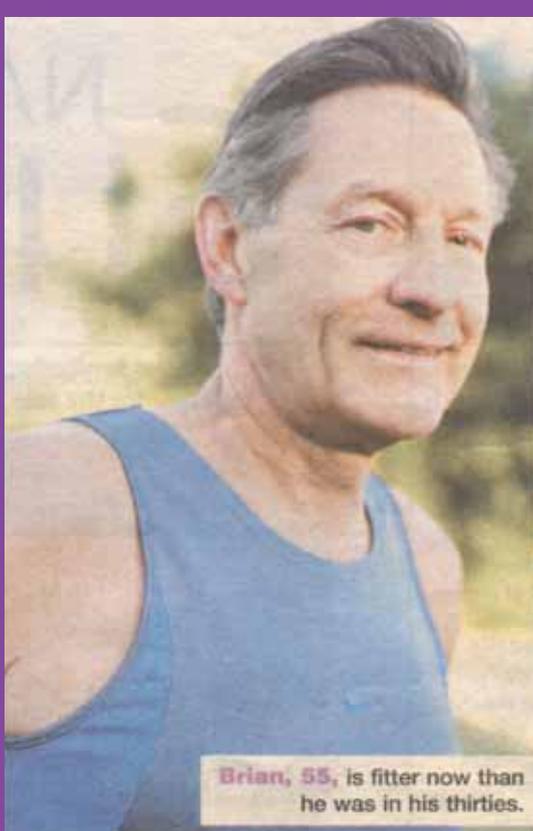




Irina, 40, has recently taken up Capoeira.



Brian, 55, is fitter now than he was in his thirties.

be
fit
for
life

be fit for life

Worried about loss of fitness as you age? It's never too late to do something about, it says **Damien Kelly**.

You're reading your Sunday paper through glasses you never thought you'd need and swallowing cholesterol tablets along with your coffee. You look at people in their 20s and think, "That was me - young and fit and ready for anything."

Are you finding it hard to remember exactly when you retired from fitness? Are you exiled instead to a new world of your high pressure job, mortgage, kids or grandkids, and no time? The doc's saying your blood pressure's too high. Even the dog feels sorry for you and no longer begs for a walk. Oh, the joy of getting older! Brian Russell (pictured), 55, a recruitment consultant from Centennial Park was a state-level athlete but, by his thirties, the pressure of work and family began to tell on his fitness. Two years ago, concerned about his blood pressure and weight, and watching friends and colleagues struggle with health worries, he bit the bullet and started training.

He says, "I now feel so much better and have more energy than 20 years ago. I'm happier about myself and more motivated.

My cholesterol has come down from 7 to 4.8. My blood pressure is now in the ideal range. Even my sex life has improved."

Exercise slows, and even reverses, the effects of ageing. Regular exercise increases stamina, muscular strength, bone density, balance and coordination. It also enhances posture, self-esteem and functional abilities.

Even two 20 minute walks a day may reduce physiological age by nearly five years. Some experts claim that only about 30 per cent of the characteristics of ageing are genetically determined. The other 70 per cent are linked to lifestyle.

Dr Mark Yates, Clinical Director Aged Care and Rehabilitation, Ballarat Health Services says that if you have lost fitness, you can get fit again, no matter what your age.

"Thirty minutes of exercise three times a week will maintain your current health," he says. "When you're younger you have a routine. Footy or netball training or running is often simply part of life. But that fitness routine can be put aside when you have kids or get a big promotion."

Tim and Adrienne Read, from 50+ Fitness, Bondi, are a husband and wife team who have set up a fitness company for older people.

Tim says it's the fastest growing area of the health industry as older people recognise "use it or you lose it" is the name of the game.

As our inspirational models, Brian and Irina, show, it's just a matter of having a go.

think outside the square



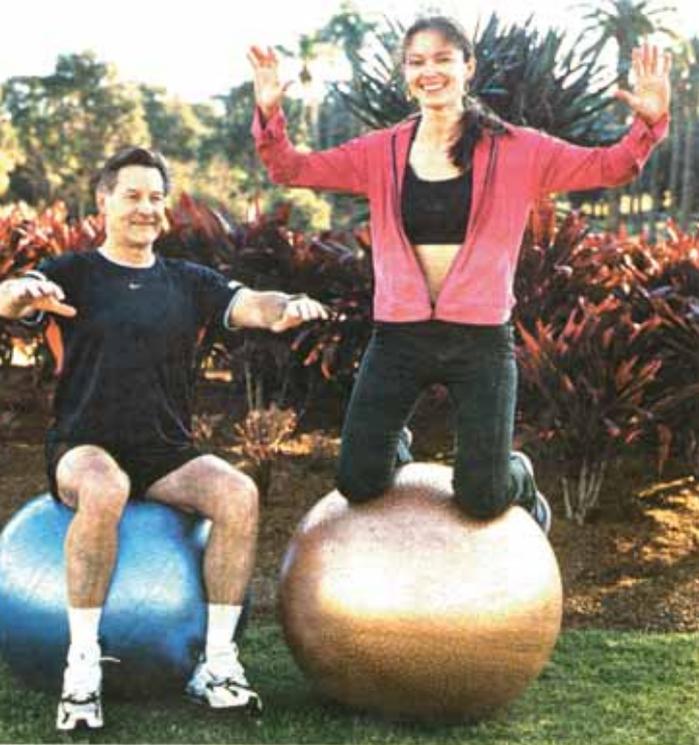
"Fit" needn't be synonymous with jogging or the gym. Find a physical activity that suits your needs and temperament and appeals to your sense of fun. Think outside the square. Irina Singleman, 40, an Interpreter from Centennial Park knew she was after a class that encouraged social interaction, fun, involved music and provided mental and physical challenges. "When you get older you can't help but think of the numbers. All I knew was that I was determined to not let it get to me."

Singleman challenged the stereotype of being a Mum and followed her sons into Capoeira, a Brazilian workout that incorporates dance, non-contact fight moves, strength and flexibility. She says she sees positive changes in her body; she has more energy, keeps up with the kids without puffing and finds her general quality of life has improved. "It even made me a better parent, because it taught me to be more patient, and understand the challenge of learning new things."

playing to your strengths

Tasks like lifting, bending, squatting, carrying and balancing don't pose much of a problem when we're younger. But if we don't keep up a level of strength those everyday activities become harder as we get older - this is what leads to poor balance and falls, backache and injuries. Karen Byrush, Council of the Ageing, Victoria is the Coordinator of Living Longer, Living Stronger, a government initiative to increase strength in people over 50. Byrush has seen participants with arthritis, diabetes, osteoarthritis, heart disease and depression all improve their quality of life with strength training. Of course, for most people the benefits of strength training are simply looking, feeling and functioning better. Fortunately, older adults respond just as well to strength exercise.





the core of your training

Lower back pain affects 80 per cent of the adult population and becomes significant around the age of 35. The logical explanation for a sore back is a weak back.

However, the best solution is strength training for all the core muscles in the trunk (the abdominals, hips and lower back).

Nowadays, core training is done by placing the body in an unstable position, and it doesn't get more unstable than on a big inflatable ball. Not only will you rid yourself of back pain but you'll improve your posture and balance.

Start by simply sitting on one of these balls for a few minutes each day.

Then, you can transfer your exercises to the ball and turn them into super exercise. Contact any of the ball manufacturers and ask for an instruction video or book.

get moving

two years ago, before Brian Russell chose running to lose weight and increase his cardiovascular fitness, he felt lethargic and knew he lacked the energy levels of his youth.

Choosing to get fit was a life-altering decision, confirmed by his recent stress test, which astounded his cardiologist as he rocketed into the top five per cent of cardio fitness for his age.

His main motivation was his father's early death from heart disease. "I knew if I could get fit again I could add another 10 years to my life. What I didn't expect was that I'd be able to run the City to Surf faster now than I did in my thirties."

Cardio fitness comes from regularly raising your heart rate to an intensity of exercise where you can't comfortably hold a conversation. You could try walking, swimming, bushwalking, cycling, dancing, or aerobics.

stress busters

Stress is the silent killer today, but combating it can be a pleasure. Lina Ishac, Director of Escape Creative Services, Parramatta, recommends massage, breathing exercises, adequate hydration and stretching for a happier outlook on life, better circulation, freer movement and less stress.

A few minutes of slow deep breathing is a great start to the day. Follow this with plenty of water to stop lethargy and flush out toxins.

Do stretches before bed and have a regular massage. "The benefits are huge," says Ishac.

The Sunday Telegraph, body+soul, July 25 2004

