



well rounded

Did you scoff the first time you saw a fitball? We hope you've learnt better, because they're an amazing tool.

By **Damien Kelly.**

The truth is, just as the invention of the wheel was a simple, yet ingenious discovery, so, too, is the Swiss ball (or fitball). Developed in Switzerland, it was used for 30 years in medical settings for physio and rehabilitation. Then, in the 1990s, its potential as the wonder fitness tool was realised. Now, says Lisa Westlake, author of *Strong To The Core* (ABC Books), sports clubs and trainers recognise its value for injury prevention, training and athletic performance.

And for the ordinary exerciser, just sitting on one can be one of the most effective workouts possible. Most people find mucking around and exercising with the Swiss ball a lot of fun, and it makes a really comfortable seat.

The beauty of the ball, and what sets it apart, is the "balance factor".

Making the body balance when seated or exercising is like walking in the dark, as it involves a whole new range of senses and muscles to get the same job done.

The ball challenges your brain. As you move, your brain's job is to coordinate your muscles. The ball encourages more muscles to work in synergy, so the brain works harder and you get a deeper workout.

Another of the Swiss ball's magic tricks is the way it works the core abdominal muscles.

When you do normal sit-ups, the big abdominal muscles at the front of your torso contract to pull you

up from the ground. The same exercise on the Swiss ball (or even just sitting on the ball) forces your entire team of core muscles to contract. In an ordinary sit-up, your abdominals only work for part of the movement. Using the ball, every core muscle works hard to keep you balanced. And these balancing muscles are the very same ones you call on for a tall, strong and attractive posture.

simple strength

You're strengthening all the weak muscles that can cause so much discomfort – a great reason to use it as a desk chair. The simple Swiss ball is an ergonomic masterpiece (and a near perfect cure for the post-lunch siesta moment, as it's impossible to fall asleep on).

The simple addition of the ball to many of your favourite exercises converts them into super-exercises.

For example the push-up targets the big muscles in the arms, chest and shoulders. But hold the ball under your feet or hands and, not only do the big muscles work even harder than before, but all your small muscles work too.

Elizabeth Gillies, author of *101 Ways To Work Out On The Ball* (New Holland), says: "My clients who work with the ball are hooked. They've re-shaped their bodies; look and feel energised; and have dramatically improved their posture." Here are some great exercises from her book.

Metallic hooded top in Sky Blue, \$69. Running Bare piped running shorts in graphite, \$49.99.

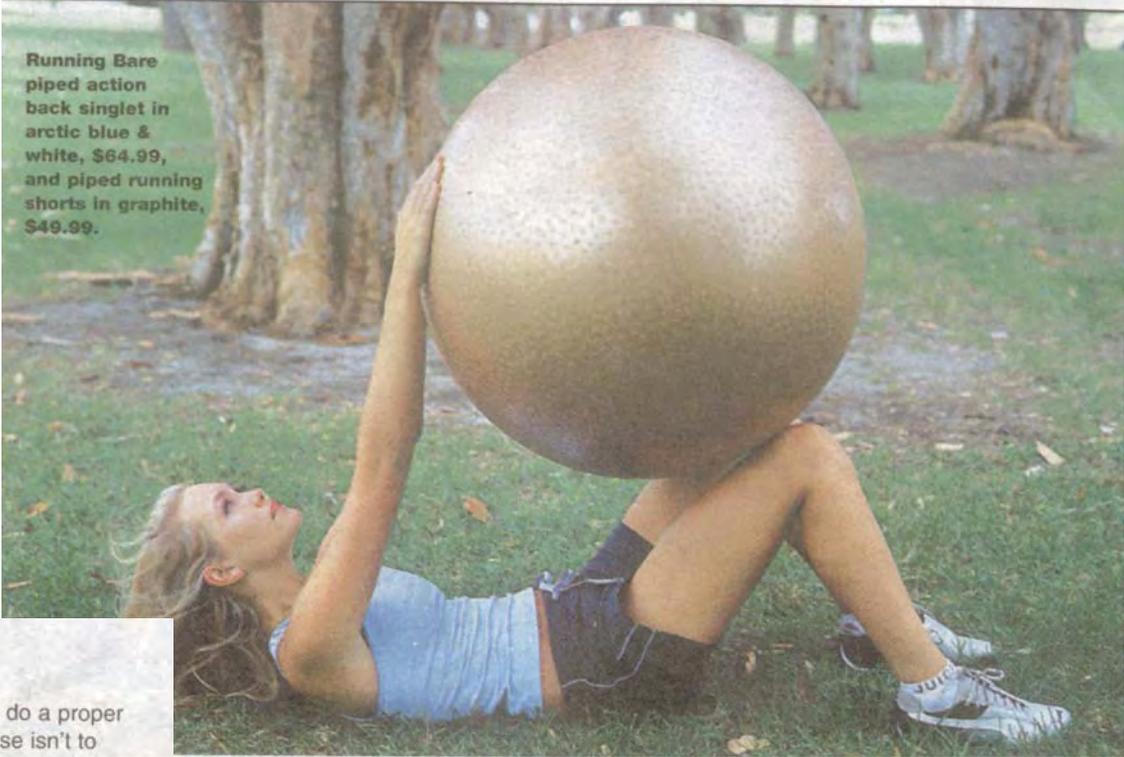


Bella Bustiere red & white striped singlet, \$59.95, and matching capri pants, \$89.95.

rolling front lunge

benefits Tones everything from the waist down and strengthens your core.

exercise description Stand in a lunge position, with the Swiss ball against the inside of your front leg. The weight on your back leg is on the ball of your foot. Now, brace your core muscles and distribute the weight of your body evenly over both legs. Bend both knees as the ball rolls forward, keeping your spine upright. Lower until your back knee is just off the ground and the ball is out in front. Rise, do nine more reps, and then change legs.



Running Bare piped action back singlet in arctic blue & white, \$64.99, and piped running shorts in graphite, \$49.99.

un-crunches

benefits A great way to learn how to do a proper crunch because the point of the exercise isn't to "crunch" but to create long, flat abs.

exercise description Lie on your back, knees bent, feet flat on the floor. Place the ball between your hands and knees. Keep your arms straight. Raise your head, neck and shoulders off the floor, without pressing too hard with your hands. Your spine should remain stable on the ground, without arching. Keep your tailbone firmly on the floor. Repeat this eight to 10 times.

diamond hip lifts

benefits This exercise strengthens and tones your abdominals, inner thighs and butt.

exercise description Lie on your back on the floor, with your legs on top of the ball and the soles of your feet together, knees open and out to the side. Apply pressure to the ball with the outside of your feet, on the little toe side, and continue pressing your knees wide open. Lift your hips up and down off the floor, maintaining a diamond shape between your thighs. Repeat ten times. Then, holding your hips up, pulse ten times.



Running Bare crop top in Wild Rose, \$44.99, and piped track pants in Graphite, \$64.99.

Low Cats trainers, \$140.



floor criss-cross

benefits Strengthens and tones the oblique muscles (side abdominals), creating a lean torso and smaller waist.

exercise description Lie on your back on the floor, elbows bent, with your hands behind your head. Your knees are bent over the ball, and your feet loose. Keep the ball still while you begin crossing one elbow towards your opposite knee. Press your opposite elbow into the ground. Watch you're not doing a forward crunch, which would prevent your obliques from doing the major part of the work. Do 10 reps, then change to the other side.

plié with tricep dips

benefits The best exercises work a number of muscles and here's a great example. The main muscle used is in the back of your arms – the triceps – but you also work your bum and inner thigh.

exercise description Stand in front of the ball, feet apart and legs turned out from the hip about 45 degrees. Your knees should point over toes. Place your hands on the ball under your shoulders, fingertips in. Lift your heels off the ground balancing on the balls of your feet. Use your abs and lower back to stabilise your torso, and keep your spine upright as you bend and straighten your elbows. Use your triceps to lower and raise your body, holding the ball in place. Do this eight times. Next, pulse up and down by raising and lowering your heels to the ground, keeping your elbows straight but rolling the ball back and forward. Do ten reps. Finally, lower your heels to the ground and bend your knees into a deep squat. Do ten reps.

