



# Good Morning Campers!

What really goes on in boot-camp style fitness classes? Our brave writer takes one for the team and reports her findings.

Article By: Dana Robinson



Take two words, “boot” and “camp.” On their own, harmless enough. Put them together, however, and all of a sudden you’re trembling at the thought of red-faced instructors blowing whistles, lowering your face into the mud with a booted foot and screaming at you to “give me 10 more!”

And it’s probably true that there are plenty of boot camp-style fitness classes that take their lead from the toughest military examples out there. But there are

plenty more that, week in, week out, are loyally attended by relatively sane people who just want a darn good workout. And they get it.

## What you’ll find

What you’ll most likely find at any boot camp is a wide variety of people who’ve gathered together to find the next challenging way to reach their fitness goals. “I have clients from their early 20s to late 50s,” says Andre Short, owner of and instructor at Go Hard Bootcamp in Atlanta. “Some are former athletes looking to get back in shape, some are new moms, and some are people who have never set foot in a gym.”

Athletic abilities at boot camps vary as well, as Andrea Hurst, who attended three six-week boot camp sessions at High Definition Bodies Boot Camp in Oklahoma City, discovered. “I had pictured a group of super-fit people taking the class and thought I would be embarrassed by how out-of-shape I was,” says Hurst. “I was relieved to find a group of people ranging from super-fit to average to very out of shape.” Hurst’s other trepidations about boot camp classes were quickly debunked as well. To her surprise, the workout regimen did not involve getting yelled at by the instructor. “The trainer told us to go at our own pace and to take breaks as much as we needed to. He didn’t yell at anyone. Instead he encouraged the group and shouted out compliments to people who were doing well.” Hurst lost several pounds during boot camp and managed to slip into the wedding dress of her dreams — a gown that she was unable to zip up 18 weeks earlier. “I couldn’t have done it on my own,” says Hurst.

## Finding a Camp

Before you decide which fitness boot camp to join, it’s best to do a little homework. Cedric Bryant, PhD, FACSM, chief science officer of the American Council on Exercise (ACE), offers the following points to consider before signing up for a program:

- Sample a class before making a commitment.
- Make sure the instructor is certified by an organization that has been accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies.
- Make sure the instructor asks you to complete a health-screening questionnaire.
- Avoid instructors who recommend or supply nutritional supplements to participants.
- Avoid instructors who adhere to the “no pain, no gain” training philosophy and who encourage participants to work through pain or injury.

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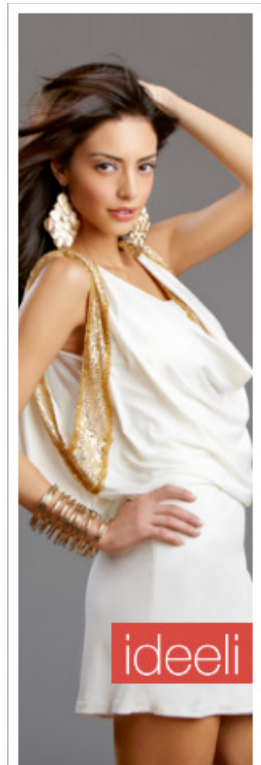
## What you'll do

Aside from making sure that no one gets injured, encouraging the campers — rather than yelling, belittling or intimidating them — is actually one of the main responsibilities of a fitness boot camp instructor. “I motivate, encourage, and help change people’s exercise philosophy,” says J Crawford, Morning Crunch Boot Camp instructor in Sherman Oaks, CA. “It’s about play. I want people to realize it’s fun to move around — just like when you were a little kid.”

Exactly what type of “play” you engage in depends largely on which boot camp you attend and on your instructor. Crawford keeps his classes fun by meeting at a local park and challenging his students to engage in various forms of exercise, including running up and down small grassy hills and doing push-ups on nearby park benches. Other instructors have been known to put their students through vicious games of tag and tug-of-war in addition to traditional circuit and resistance training. “We practice a lot of techniques that are used when training athletes or military recruits — all toned down for the general population,” says John Wayman, owner of Beantown Bootcamp in Boston (where the photos in the slideshow, above, came from). “Drills include circuits that sometimes include a mix of cardio and strength exercises.” His students work up a sweat by jumping rope, running sprints and strengthening their muscles with exercise bands. “Most circuits are structured by time, usually 30 seconds or a minute,” continues Wayman. “This allows participants to be able to take it at their own comfortable pace and progress when they feel ready.”

## Private options

If you’re still not sure if boot camps are for you, there are ways to participate while making yourself a bit more comfortable. Many boot camps offer private group training sessions. “There are tons of boot camp classes in New York City, but we couldn’t find an established one that worked within our schedule and location parameters,” says Stephanie Marks, a prospective boot camp client. “I spoke with a representative from boot camp class, who told me that if I could get a group of at least four people, he would set up a class with a trainer where and when we wanted.” Marks organized a class of moms from her neighborhood and from her daughters’ pre-kindergarten classes. The group began meeting at a local park for six-week sessions three times a week. “Since I knew all the other women, I wasn’t nervous about keeping up and I knew it wouldn’t be competitive,” says Marks. “I have lost some weight... and I would say, without hesitation, that I am definitely the fittest I’ve been in a long, long time.”



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