

Hula Hoops for Fitness Training

by Pamela Fay

You may fondly remember the Hula Hoop you played with as a child. If your hoop spent more time wrapped around your ankles than whirling around your waist, you may wonder if you can actually get a workout from one. You can — and you would be in good company. First lady Michelle Obama spun a Hula Hoop 142 revolutions at the 2009 Health Kids Fair held on the White House lawn. Now it's your turn.

Background of Hula Hoops in Fitness

The Hula Hoop, an invention of the toy company Wham-O, has been around since 1958. According to Walsh, author of “Wham-O Super Book,” It was introduced as a toy, not as a fitness device. However, Hula Hoops were inspired by a 50s fitness trend in Australia. The fervor for Hula Hoops had all but died by the 1990s but was allegedly revived by the String Cheese Incident band who would throw Hula Hoops out to the crowd.

Type and Size of Hoop

The Hula Hoop is the pre-cursor for fitness hoops today. Modern hoop dancers make their hoops from irrigation tubing and colorful tape. You can purchase exercise hoops online at sites like Sports-Hoop.com and eSportsonline.com. The hoops are naturally heavier than a Hula Hoop due to the materials from which they are made. For fitness use, hoops may be made with heavier materials or filled with sand. These weighted hoops are popular for weight loss. However, the heavier the hoop, the easier it is to keep aloft. Lighter hoops require faster movements and burn more calories. For adults, fitness experts recommend a hoop that is between one and two pounds. This is heavy enough to reduce the frustration and light enough to get a good workout.

According to the American Council on Exercise, you should select a hoop that, when stood upright, is at least waist level and no larger than chest level. Smaller hoops require more effort to keep up. Beginners should start with a larger hoop. For fitness hooping, you may also want to purchase smaller arm hoops.

How Hoops are Used

Hooping burns calories through aerobic exercise and also strengthens the core muscles. Although most people believe they cannot hoop because they are unable to move their pelvis quickly enough, hooping does not need to rely on hip gyrations. The easiest way to keep the hoop airborne is to engage the legs in a back and forth, rhythmic motion. Fitness hoop enthusiasts start by mastering the basic movement. Ten minutes of continual movement is a good start. Over time, work up to 30 minutes or more. To add greater complexity and engage more muscle groups, fitness hoopers introduce dance moves and multiple hoops.

Impact

Hooping is considered a low impact exercise. There is little or no impact on joints. It is a safe exercise for nearly every fitness level. According to a study conducted by the Appleton Post-Crescent, moderate hooping burns approximately 8 calories per minute.

Actual calories burned would depend upon your size and level of exertion. In an hour workout, you could burn nearly 500 calories.

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