

# BENEFITS you won't want to *skip!*



SKIPPING IS THE HIGH-INTENSITY, FUN WORKOUT YOU MAY HAVE BEEN LOOKING FOR! FITNESS COACH KELLY CHANDRAPAUL BREAKS DOWN THE BASICS FOR US.

BY CHARIS TORRANCE

**IT** may make you think back to your childhood, but skipping is actually a great weight-loss tool. This high-intensity workout has helped boxers the world over to improve their coordination, endurance and balance. And it has lots of benefits outside the ring.

'The great thing about skipping is that you can do it anywhere, anytime,' says Cape Town-based fitness coach Kelly Chandrapaul. As a qualified fitness instructor and dance teacher, Kelly often recommends skipping to her clients and students to help them with their balance, coordination and stamina. If you've been sedentary for a while, approach with caution, she warns. 'Work up to it with a low-impact cardio exercise like walking or light jogging.'

## BEFORE YOU JUMP IN

'The first thing you need is, of course, a skipping rope,' Kelly says. So what should you look for? 'The basic plastic (PVC) rope you'll find at most shops works fine, but there are also weighted skipping ropes and speed skipping ropes for advanced skippers.'

To see if a skipping rope is long enough for you, step on the midpoint of the rope with one foot while holding the handles in

each hand and pull it taught. You should be able to tuck your hands under your armpits. If the rope is too long, you can always adjust the handles to shorten the length. Kelly says the best rope length is your height plus 90 cm.

Then you need to invest in the right shoes. 'If you don't have enough support around your ankles, you could injure yourself,' Kelly says. 'Try to find a pair that is good for running and fitness, as those will offer the right support.'

Once your equipment is sorted, find an appropriate place to skip. Avoid slippery, uneven areas or surfaces that are hard on your joints. When in doubt, you can always use your yoga mat, because it has the excellent side-effect of softening the impact on your joints, Kelly says.

Now, with a little beginner know-how on proper form, you're ready to get started!

## LANDING THE TECHNIQUE

As with most exercises (and life, really), posture is everything. Keep your shoulders down and back, chest up, back straight, and eyes looking straight ahead – with your core activated. Your feet need to be pointing forward and parallel to each other, about shoulder-width apart, with your elbows close to your sides and arms out at a right angle. For your jumping pose, your knees need to be slightly bent and you should stay on the balls of your feet. You only want to jump high enough to clear the rope with your arms locked and your wrists moving in a circular motion.

Once you've landed the form, work on your rhythm. This can be tricky for those of us who are rhythmically challenged, but stay with it! 'You can do this by skipping on one side, holding the rope in your one hand instead of both so that you can get your timing right, or you can "skip" without a rope while watching your timing in a mirror.' Skipping to music can help.

## HOP ON TO IT!

Now that you're all set, you need to warm up. Kelly recommends strength training to begin with to activate the muscles. 'A good warm-up for me is a 20-second plank, or calf raises.' Don't stretch before your workout, however, Kelly warns, because you're weakening the muscle fibres.



Before jumping right in, work on your coordination. Kelly recommends skipping with one arm while you work on your rhythm.



Stretch during or after your workout, not before. Side stretches can help when you have a stitch.

'Rather stretch during a session or afterwards.' Then you're ready to get skipping!

Work at your own pace so that you don't overdo it and injure yourself. 'I try to get clients to do 20 seconds skipping with a 10-second break, repeated for eight rounds,' Kelly says. 'It works really well when you're starting out, because the breaks are short enough that you don't really have time to think about how out of breath you are.' Once you're ready, you can move up in 10-second increments. ■

## Limitations

Skipping isn't for everyone. If you have any medical condition or recent surgery, Kelly cautions, always consult your doctor before incorporating anything new into your exercise routine. This is especially true for those with a leg or lower-back injury, anyone recovering from surgery, and pregnant women. Skipping is a high-impact exercise that can put stress on your legs and lower back.

## Benefits of skipping

Kelly says you'll start experiencing some of these benefits almost immediately.

### • Gives a great cardio workout

'It is one of the best cardio exercises you can do, and it increases your heart strength and lung capacity,' Kelly says. When coupled with a healthy lifestyle, it can even reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke.

### • Boosts cardiovascular health

Skipping increases your heart rate and breathing, and just 10 minutes of skipping every day can improve cardiovascular health. Studies have shown that it not only improves your health in a short time, but it also boosts your immune system and metabolism.

### • Increases stamina

Skipping boosts your heart rate quickly and, when you can keep your heart rate up over longer periods of time, your cardiorespiratory endurance improves. Start slow and steady, with your goal being a 20–30-minute session.

### • Improves coordination

You cannot skip without coordination between your hands, eyes and feet, all while keeping time – and the more you work at it, the better it will be. It's all about focus and balance. You set the pace, so start slowly and work your way to that seamless rhythm.

### • Tones legs

Skipping works your calves, quads, hamstrings and the muscles in your feet and ankles – and as you stabilise your body, you also work your ab muscles.

### • Increases bone density

'Because skipping is a high-impact exercise, it puts stress on the bones – in a good way,' Kelly says. As you jump, your bones respond to that stress, making them denser. Case in point: a 22-week study of Olympic swimmers found that, after participating in 20 minutes of skipping and full-body vibration twice a week, there was a significant increase 'in the bone mineral density of the lumbar spine and femoral neck (a part of the thigh bone).'

### • Improves agility

Working on the balls of your feet helps to improve footwork and agility. Especially as you master the basic technique and change it up to include running in place, the boxer step, high knees and skipping jacks.

### • Burns calories

Just 30 minutes of skipping can burn 200–300 calories. Though that sounds like a long time, skipping is also great for increasing your stamina, so with regular practice you'll be able to increase your time.