

# On the ball

By Dan Sullivan



If you have been to the gym lately, you have probably noticed the latest workout craze. People are using stability balls (a.k.a. gym balls, physioballs, resist-a-balls) to strengthen their abs, back, buttocks, thighs and more. Rest assured this is no gimmick. Stability balls are safe and effective for overall fitness. They have even been recommended for use by chiropractors to augment their care.

Swiss balls, as they were originally known, were first used by Swedish physiologist Susanne Klein-Vogelbach more than 90 years ago to treat European children suffering from cerebral palsy. Stability balls were first seen in the United States during the 70's and 80's when they began appearing in rehabilitation. It was not until the advent of "functional training" and "core training" that stability balls crossed over into the general fitness arena.

"Stability balls teach us how to use those core muscles that have become deconditioned due to lifestyle," says

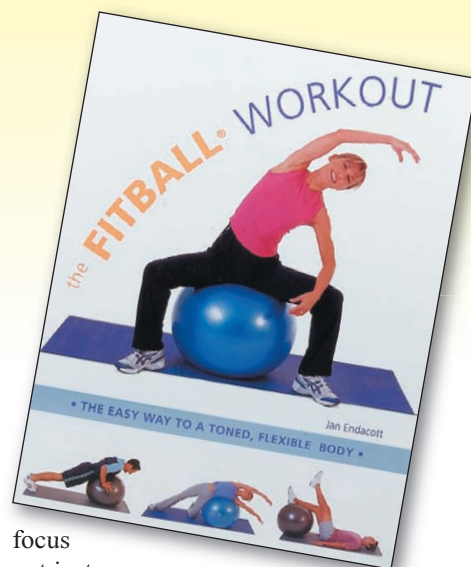
Dr. Cedric Bryant, Chief Exercise Physiologist of the American Council on Exercise (ACE). "By forcing the user to maintain stability and balance while simultaneously learning to engage and contract all the muscles of the trunk and associated appendages, stability balls train the foundations of movement throughout the entire body." By incorporating stability balls into a comprehensive exercise routine, users can burn more calories, build more muscle and improve strength, balance, coordination and flexibility.

## MUSCLE CONDITIONING

"The proper use of a stability ball promotes quicker reaction time, better coordination and better awareness of body positioning ["proprioception"]," says Dr. Kevin Maggs, a chiropractor and owner of Arlington Neck and Back Center PC in Arlington, VA. "This activates certain small muscles responsible for stabilizing the spine." Such conditioning ultimately prevents these small muscles from wasting away and prevents patients from developing back injuries that need chiropractic care.

## THE CHIROPRACTIC CONNECTION

Chiropractic care has evolved from pain relief to restoration of function. "While chiropractors do treat patients for their immediate pain, they also hope to help patients establish the necessary correction in the way their body moves so as to avoid further pain," says Dr. Keith Overland, a chiropractor with the New York Mets baseball team who has offices in Norwalk, Connecticut. "By incorporating the stability ball into their protocols, chiropractors have begun to



focus not just on recovery from injury, but on injury prevention as well." In some cases patients can receive treatment for postural deficits they were not even aware existed.

This does not mean that stability balls are ideal for all scenarios. "People who suffer from vertigo or any sort of balance deficit should probably avoid using stability balls," says Maggs.

In addition, Bryant points out that, "people who are excessively overweight might need to workout on a more stable surface." Stability balls should be chosen according to the height of the individual user and need to always be inflated properly.

"Stability balls are not the perfect solution to training the core. They are simply one of many tools available to people and should be used only after properly progressing from basic floor exercises," says Overland.

## Typical ball exercises focus on:

### Abs and back:

Sit ups, ab twists, side rolls and wall slides.

### Upper body:

Wall press ups, chest press, shoulder shapers and arm circles.

### Legs and buttocks:

Inner thigh squeezes, and lifts.