

alpha
books

THE COMPLETE IDIOT'S GUIDE® TO

"Fitness should be kept simple, easy to understand, and easy to use. *The Complete Idiot's Guide® to Fitness* keeps it fun, energizing, consistent, and results-oriented. My hat's off to this book, this concept, and the people who championed this cause."

—Tony Little,
America's Personal Trainer

Fitness

- ♦ **Quick and easy guidance** on choosing the right workout
- ♦ **Idiot-proof steps** for setting and meeting your goals
- ♦ **Valuable tips** on making fitness a painless—and permanent—part of your life

Claire Walter
with **Annette Tännander Bank**





Achtung!

Red-flag products include creams, pills, supplements, and other chemicals that you rub on or swallow. Although exercise gadgets at best can be beneficial and at worst can be a waste of money, lotions and potions often are useless even if you do use them, and some might carry hidden dangers to your health.

Strike Up the Bands (and Tubes)

You can do practically a full-body workout using *stretchericers*—various styles of oversized elastic bands, cords, or tubes with or without loops or handles. These are portable, easy to use, inexpensive, and effective strength-training aids. Bands are flat pieces of elastic rubber with various resistance levels. Some come premade into loops; others need to be knotted for exercises that require loops. Exertubes are elastic tubes, usually with handles, that also come in various strengths. Less elasticity requires more strength and vice versa. Both types are color-coded so that their relative resistance is easy to identify. Just as you use different weights for different exercises, you may find yourself using different elasticities. You also can increase the amount of force required for an exercise by shortening a band.

Bands and tubes are extremely versatile because you can do versions of various curls, presses, leg lifts, leg raises, and other *stretchericers*. They work the muscles when both stretching and releasing the tension—which, if you recall, is one of the benefits touted of expensive, gym-quality pneumatic and hydraulic strength-training apparatus. Exercising with bands or tubes mimics weight training, because they come in varying degrees of stretchability and require commensurate amounts of effort. Unlike iron weights, however, you can't precisely define how much resistance you are using when you are working with elastic. In other words, a 10-pound weight weighs 10 pounds, but a band offers relatively easy, moderate, or challenging resistance, and it can change as the band begins to wear. Before you begin working with any kind of "*stretchericer*," check the band or tube for wear, especially in a gym, where it may get a lot of use.

SPRI Products sells several styles of *stretchericers*: Xertube, Xercise Band, Can-Do Xercise Band, the Door Strap, the Xercuff, the Xering, and even the Step Tube, which is designed for use with a step routine. Most sell for less than \$10. For information, call 1-800-222-7774.

Isometrics: Icing for the Fitness Cake

Charles Atlas was America's first fitness god. Before "beefcake" was a word and workouts were a way of life, his story was known all over the land. "I Changed Myself from a Puny 97-Pound Weakling into the World's Most Perfectly Developed Man," screamed magazine ads in the 1930s, '40s, and '50s. The Atlas approach to muscular

training and body-building went by the trademarked name of Dynamic Tension—in other words, it was built on a strong isometric foundation. It is still around, and while it is a quicker fix than most fitness professionals now prefer, his system certainly has withstood the test of time. With a holistic approach to strength and health, Charles Atlas was way ahead of his time.



Fitness Fact

Atlas passed on some years ago, but Charles Atlas Ltd. is still around marketing its low-cost fitness program which promises fitness in “only 15 minutes a day.” Contact the company at 888-MR-ATLAS or www.charlesatlas.com.

What worked for Charles Atlas and his 30 million reported students throughout the world can help you strengthen and tone, too. Think of isometrics as equipment-free strength training. Isometrics, which often are used as rehabilitation, are muscle contractions. Most people do not consider them to be their main workout routine, but they are good to have in your fitness repertoire because you can do them anytime and with no equipment. Isometrics use minimal movement to build muscles. Instead, the force of muscle contraction, muscle-against-muscle resistance, or muscle-against-stationary-object resistance builds strength. This concept is easy to understand as soon as you try it. Hold your hands out in front of you with your left palm up and your right palm down. Press your hands together as hard as you can. You can feel your pectoral, shoulder, and arm muscles working. This is an example of isometric exercise. (In fact, you can add this to a list of isometric exercises.)

You most likely have been doing isometrics without even realizing it. When you suck in your gut, you’re doing an isometric contraction. Runners automatically use isometric contractions to stabilize their torsos. Another example is the Kegel exercise, a



Fit Tip

Get into the habit of contracting and releasing muscles—abdominals, glutes, shoulders, even your chin—when you are stuck in traffic, standing in line, sitting in a theater waiting for the show to start, or anytime you think about it.