

on your feet:

Treadmills are for hamsters – stimulate your body and your mind by tackling a climbing wall, says **Daniela Blayne.**

If you want to stay fit and toned but find a gym workout dull and repetitive, the adrenaline-pumping buzz of indoor climbing might be just your thing – provided you've got a head for heights!

I turned up for my introduction to climbing one grey winter afternoon, certain that the class would be packed with karate kids and Lara Croft lookalikes. I had never set eyes on an artificial climbing wall before, let alone attempted to climb one. However, upon emerging from the changing rooms wearing my distinctly un-cool tracksuit, I found just a group of normal-looking guys and girls who, like me, wanted to keep in shape whilst doing something fun.

Our instructor was not one to hang around so after short introductions and an explanation of the session's objective, we moved on to familiarising ourselves with the equipment and some endless knot-tying exercises. We then took it in turns to try out our new skills, which are closely observed by an ever-present member of staff, all of whom make every effort to ensure that the basics of indoor climbing are well understood.

The concept of indoor climbing was evidently new to everybody, which was reassuring – if I'm about to make a spectacle of myself, I thought, at least somebody else is likely to follow suit! My fears, however, proved to be completely groundless as the ensuing session of abseiling, scaling and belaying (controlling the rope between two climbers) went swimmingly, leaving me sweaty, exhausted, but totally exhilarated.

Climbing can be categorised in many ways but the indoor type comes in two main forms: rock climbing and bouldering. The main difference between the two is that in contrast with rock climbing, bouldering involves climbing routes made up of a series of technical moves which are near to the ground and therefore

don't require protection from a rope. Crash pads are used as a preventative measure in the event of a fall. All indoor climbing walls have colour-coded routes of varying difficulty so that climbers of all levels can find a route that poses a challenge to them.

Contrary to popular belief, you don't have to be in great physical shape to be able to enjoy this sport. Your body will naturally develop greater strength over time and you will start noticing positive changes in your muscle tone. Scaling a rock face gives you a full body workout as you need to locate the nearest handhold with your hands and arms and pull yourself up. The strength of your powerful leg muscles enables you to push yourself up and you use your feet to support your body weight.

Climbing is also intellectually challenging as you have to strategically plan your every move in order to successfully conquer a given bouldering 'problem'.

# Reaching for the top

To become a registered member of a climbing club and enjoy climbing without supervision, it's essential that you first familiarise yourself with safety skills and master some basic techniques. Most centres with climbing facilities run regular induction sessions led by qualified instructors and designed to give an intensive introduction to the sport. If by now you're still not quite sold on the idea, why not give your local club a call and book yourself in for a taster? It is bound to be closely followed by a call to your gym to finally cancel the direct debit!

## Useful websites

[www.ukclimbing.com/databases/walls/index.html](http://www.ukclimbing.com/databases/walls/index.html)

[www.abc-of-rockclimbing.com](http://www.abc-of-rockclimbing.com)

[www.castle-climbing.co.uk](http://www.castle-climbing.co.uk)