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The new 'hooping' is a workout

A craze from the 1950s is turning up today in funky neon-stripes, with extra weight to increase the exercise benefit

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One of the hottest new ways to stay fit is a blast from the past.

If you weren't around to catch the Hula Hoop craze in the 1950s (or its comeback in the '80s), you've probably seen the pictures. And we've all been awed by the hoop acts performed by Cirque du Soleil.



CREDIT: Dean Bicknell, CanWest News Service

Helen Vanderburg demonstrates Hula-Hooping, a workout that will make you smile and sweat.

Today, the funky, neon-striped rings are popping up everywhere as a fun fitness workout that tones your body and promotes cardiovascular health.

I remember countless hours in the backyard Hula-Hooping with friends and competing for the best time. The recollection came rushing back when I attended a hoop aerobics class this summer in San Diego at the World IDEA fitness conference.

The **HoopGirl** workout class I took was more like an energetic dance routine than the casual hooping of days gone by.

The workout, choreographed to music, had us twirling hoops around our waists, arms and legs, and rolling them across the floor.

Now called just "hooping," the workout was developed by "hoopstar" **Christabel Zamor** of San Francisco and involves a variety of classes for fitness, dance and performance. It's now spinning its way into fitness clubs around the world.

This workout is for people of all ages. Children love it and it makes adults feel like kids. The **HoopGirl** program is geared toward women, but anyone can join.

Serious athletes may not take hooping seriously but even if you have difficulty wrapping your head around whether this is a valid workout, it will definitely make you smile. And lightening up a little can be good for your psyche.

Hooping takes a bit of practice so the hoop doesn't keep falling to the ground, and at first it will seem more like an exercise in frustration than fun.

But with a little practice and some good instruction you can learn the basic hooping techniques fairly quickly. The more advanced moves will take even more practice as well as good balance and flexibility.

When you are learning how to hoop, the workout intensity is mild to moderate. But the better your skills, the more moves you can do and the more intense the workout becomes. At the advanced skill level you can get a moderate to high intensity workout -- one that can kick the butt of even the fittest person. It's also great for core strength, co-ordination and balance.

Professional hoops come in a variety of weights, designs and colours. There's even a collapsible hoop that can be packed in a suitcase for travel. No other gear is necessary. You do, however, need a fair amount of space in which to work out. Move all breakables out of the living room.

Expect to see Hula Hoop classes on the schedule at fitness clubs this fall. Search "hoop fitness" on the Internet to find a class near you. The **HoopGirl** website (hoopgirl.com) sells two instructional DVDs online, Hoopdance for Beginners and Heart Hulaerobics, for about \$26 each, plus shipping.

You can purchase a plastic Hula Hoop at any toy store for around \$10 or less if you luck into a summer toy sale. The disadvantage is they don't last long and they don't have the added advantage of being weighted.

Weighted hoops cost more, anywhere from \$30 to \$60, but they last longer and give you a better workout. You can get heavier hoops for a strength workout or lighter ones for speed work. Find them at hoopgirl.com.

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