



# If he can do it, so can you

Our lapsed fitness columnist, *Matt Rudd*, asks Lara Milward — Richard Branson’s personal trainer — for her top 10 tips for a health reboot. And, overleaf, she launches her Sunday Times Magazine Fit as a Fiddle newsletter for the over-60s

**I**t’s that time of year again... the time when evangelical people in Lycra give you unsolicited advice on how to get fit. Most of it is just unrealistic, designed for twentysomething gym-goers. What about the rest of us? The lapsed? What do you do if you haven’t done any exercise for ages? How can you be sure what works and what doesn’t? By ignoring the Lycra people and instead listening to Lara Milward, our new super-trainer (who only wears Lycra occasionally). Lara is the 68-year-old Richard Branson’s personal trainer and the official coach for the Virgin Strive Challenge 2018. She knows a thing or two about getting the “lapsed” back into the swing of things. As she launches our weekly newsletter for the over-60s (details on page 47), I asked her how all you naughty sofa potatoes can get fit again...

# Ten small steps to a happier, healthier lifestyle

Lara Milward's no-excuses guide to fitness



## DON'T JOIN A GYM

"You can feel intimidated by other, fitter people pounding treadmills, especially if you haven't done any exercise for ages," Lara says. She's right. Who are these people making love to their skinny reflections as they work out? Too many gyms are soulless, windowless basements with Guantanamo-loud music and awful other people. You'll give up in March and cancel by August. "Don't waste your money," Lara says. So, that was easy, wasn't it? Step 1. Tick.



## HORIZON THERAPY

It's cold, it's dark, it's wintry. "Get outside, find a horizon and walk towards it," Lara says. Preferably the journey will be on a gradient (upwards, not downwards, you understand). A hill will do. Or a hillock. Anything you can walk up, briskly. The goal, Lara says, is twofold: "To boost your vitamin D and your mood." Once you're at the horizon, a quick decision tree: are you a) on the verge of collapse, or b) surprisingly fine. If you answered a), repeat this step until your answer is b). If you answered b), continue to step 3.



## PHONE A FRIEND

"A problem shared..." says Lara, who absolutely insists that her clients who train as a group are twice as likely to keep going as the one-to-ones. "If you get a friend or two along for the ride, you're more motivated to continue and you may even enjoy a bit of healthy competition."



## CHOOSE YOUR WEAPON

"If you don't like running, don't run," Lara says. "It's not obligatory." It sounds so obvious now she's said it. Who does like running? No normal people. Particularly ones with knees. So why not pick another discipline? The key is movement — gradually getting your heart rate up. That's it. So how about swimming, cycling, ballroom dancing, barroom dancing, badminton, table tennis, riding, yoga (if you must), kayaking, "aqua-jogging" (it's a thing), ice-skating (maybe with wrist guards to begin with) or caber-tossing?



## BE CHILDISH

Those games your kids or grandkids play... or should play if they weren't addicted to their iPads. "Have a go yourself," Lara says. "Play Frisbee, garden cricket, Swingball." Yes, Swingball still exists. Or British bulldog, I suggest. Too much, too soon, apparently. But a weekly game of stuck in the mud isn't going to kill anyone.



## PORRIDGE FOR BREAKFAST

This is where Lara and I disagree. Porridge is the worst way to start the day. Miserable. Add banana, cinnamon and almond butter, Lara insists. "The almond butter reduces the glycaemic index of the porridge." Can you add almond butter to a fry-up? No.



## TWEAK YOUR DAILY ROUTINE

Once upon a time, Lara had a stubborn client with high blood pressure, weight issues and a briefcase for his commute. Lara implemented two small changes. First, porridge (of course) each morning. Second, briefcase swapped for a rucksack and the last mile of the commute to be done on foot. Within two months, the plan had dramatically improved his health. "Think of the rucksack as your portable gym," Lara says. "With well-fitting chest and hip straps, you can make it heavier or lighter to suit your level of fitness."



## DON'T DIET, EAT

Everything you do on this little journey should be positive. Don't force yourself to do exercise you don't enjoy. Don't force yourself to starve. Choose healthy options, rather than less food. "Half your plate must be vegetables," Lara says. Half! No excuses. This is step 8. The advanced stage. She also suggests that you replace bread with sweet potato, "which can be sliced and put in a toaster". I tried to toast it... didn't work. You'll do better. Apparently a slice of toasted sweet potato is great with eggs, goat's cheese or peanut butter.



## AVOID GLUTEAL AMNESIA

Or, as we scientists call it, soggy-bottom syndrome. "The body is not designed to sit still for hours on end," Lara says. "If your biggest muscles are constantly squashed in a chair, their blood flow will be restricted and they will atrophy." Take the stairs, not the lift; take your legs, not the bus; take a break and stroll briskly around your office/sitting room/garden/county/hemisphere.



## BREAK YOUR LIMITS

Lara is Richard Branson's personal trainer. A few months ago, he took part in the Virgin Strive Challenge, a 2,000km cycle-paddle-trek-climb from Mount Etna to Mont Blanc. "He nearly died on Mont Blanc," Lara says. "Falling rocks the size of fridges missed the expedition by a few feet." That's not the point. Forget that. The point is that Branson is the Benjamin Button of fitness. The older he gets, the younger he feels. His mantra — find your limits and break them — is our final goal. You don't have to climb Mont Blanc. But if your limit now is a waddle to the shops, by this time next year you'll be doing 10km.

## JOIN OUR NEW FITNESS COURSE, FIT AS A FIDDLE



The Sunday Times Magazine is launching a step-by-step fitness programme for the over-60s with star trainer Lara Milward ([laramilward.com](http://laramilward.com) or on Twitter @laramilward).

Each week, you'll get a range of exercise strategies and targets, as well as food and lifestyle tips to boost your fitness.

To sign up to receive the weekly Fit as a Fiddle newsletter, visit [thetimes.co.uk/newsletters](http://thetimes.co.uk/newsletters) and make sure you've ticked the Fitness box.