

# client handout

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**A**re you planning to kick and punch your way to fitness with one of the hot, new cardio kickboxing programs? Currently, millions of exercisers are trying today's most popular trend in physical activity—fitness programs (such as Tae-Bo™) that provide the heart-healthy benefits of cardio exercise, while offering the gains in agility, strength, balance and coordination that can be achieved through martial arts training.

Although the range of benefits is impressive, cardio kickboxing also poses considerable risk of injury, particularly for new exercisers or participants who don't know how to protect themselves from the potential dangers. Even very fit exercisers can be challenged by their first class.

Cardio kickboxing is a complicated form of exercise because the range and planes of motion differ from what most people are used to, says Los Angeles, California, instructor Keli Roberts, who recently choreographed Kathy Smith's kickboxing video. Roberts notes that traditional martial arts training builds progressively; students learn each new move gradually, giving their bodies time to develop the ability to perform all moves safely and correctly. Moves are not done repetitively to fast music, as they generally are in cardio kickboxing classes.

In your first cardio kickboxing class, you could find yourself performing advanced moves, such as fan and hook kicks, even though you wouldn't do these in a martial arts class until you had progressed through several belt colors, says Roberts. Kicks like these produce explosive forces on the lower back and other joints. The punches and jabs taught in these classes can cause problems for the elbows, neck and shoulders. Unless you progressively develop the necessary strength and stability to perform these moves with good form, you will be at risk for injury.

## How to Be Safe

Roberts offers cardio kickboxers these safety tips:

**1 Go Slow, Low and Easy With Kicks and Punches.** Whatever you do, don't start throwing full kicks and punches in your first class. Progress slowly and keep your kicks low, especially on side kicks and roundhouses. Don't overextend your kicks or lock your joints. Remember, kicks are weapons to the lower body and punches are weapons to the face, says Roberts. Don't act as if you were kicking at an opponent's head—you're kicking at the legs.

## Cardio Kickboxing Safety Tips

**2 Don't Do More Than Three Cardio Kickboxing Workouts per Week.** If you want to have longevity in the sport, start with only one workout per week and gradually build up to no more than three (unless you're also doing some other form of martial arts training or sport-specific strength training).

**3 Look for an Interval Training Program.** A cardio kickboxing program that follows an interval training format will alternate high-intensity work bouts with recovery periods in which moves are performed slowly. By choosing interval training, you reduce your chances of getting fatigued and sacrificing good form.

**4 Select a Trained Instructor Who Offers Progressive Teaching.** Your instructor should be trained and certified as a fitness instructor, in addition to having boxing or martial arts training. He or she should give you specific instructions for modifying moves.

**5 Allow Yourself to Be a Beginner.** Look for a simple program that isn't heavily choreographed, has limited repetitions and isn't extremely fast. Roberts advises that the music speed should ideally be no faster than 135 beats per minute.

**6 Include Strength and Stability Training in Your Fitness Regimen.** If these are not part of your cardio kickboxing program, supplement it with additional training.

**7 Don't Ignore Your Feet.** Consider jump rope drills or other forms of floor-work to strengthen your feet for the specific demands of cardio kickboxing. Your shoes need to be designed for pivots and lateral movement. If you wear running shoes on carpet, you risk spraining an ankle.

**8 Always Warm Up.** Your warm-up should be specific to the class and should include static and dynamic stretching, with some kicks and light punches.

**9 Cross Train With Contrasting Activities.** Complement your kickboxing program with non- or lower-impact, more linear forms of exercise—such as indoor stationary cycling, walking and hiking.

**10 Try Traditional Martial Arts Training.** This will allow you to learn at a slower pace and practice proper technique—both of which are especially important if you are new to exercise.

*Note:* Remember to check with your physician before beginning a cardio kickboxing program.

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