

- » What boxing can do for your body and mind
- » Who can benefit from boxing training?
- » Am I too old? Too deconditioned? Too anything to train like a boxer?

Chapter 1

Why Boxing? Why Not!

Boxing may not be for everyone, but boxing training certainly is!

Even if you never make that four-step climb into an actual boxing ring, the skills and training methods employed by professional fighters can benefit everyone, regardless of age, gender, previous experience, or current physical condition. A well-designed boxing program will get you into great physical shape; improve your strength, stamina, reflexes, and balance; and teach you some impressive new skills.

A comprehensive boxing training program incorporates elements of High Intensity Interval Training (HIIT), strength training, cardio training, and flexibility. And it does this in a way that keeps students coming back because of the virtually endless variety of combinations that can be thrown once someone masters a mere six basic punches.

What Can Boxing Do for You?

Well, a lot of things. For one, it will strengthen your shoulders, tone and stabilize your core, and improve your cardio fitness, your balance, and your understanding of how the kinetic chain of the body — the legs, hips, core, shoulders, arms, and fists — works in coordination to produce power you didn't know you had.

It will also increase your self-confidence in both your physical abilities and your analytical and problem-solving skills, because even at the workout level, boxing provides a never-ending stream of challenges to both the mind and the body.

Is it easy? No. In fact, just about all my clients have had the same or similar reaction after their first boxing workout: “I had no idea how difficult this was!”

They were referring not so much to the physical demands of the sport but to the mental demands. And quite candidly, there are a lot of things to remember: Keep your hands up. Keep your chin down. Stay profiled to your target. Keep the correct spacing between your feet. Be mindful of your distance from your opponent. Remember to shift your weight with each punch. Reset yourself into your starting position. And so on.

You get the idea. But believe it or not, with repetition these things will eventually become second nature, as they must be for a boxer in the midst of a tough battle. Don’t be discouraged by how complex it seems in the beginning. Just like learning any other discipline, such as playing a musical instrument, you must practice your patterns slowly until they become familiar, and then gradually increase your tempo until you get up to speed.

With a little dedication, it *will* happen!

The Art of Self-Control

Boxing has been called the art of self-defense, but in truth, it is the art of self-control.

That means control of both the mind and body. Boxers need to be strong, lean, agile, and both aerobically and anaerobically fit. They also need to be able to control their emotions and impulses in order to effectively execute the necessary movements of a good boxer.

Boxing training targets both these goals through a systematic approach combining physical conditioning, technical expertise, and mental discipline. Just as a world-class boxer cannot be flabby or deconditioned, neither can they be prone to anger, panic, or discouragement. The well-trained fighter is in great shape not only physically but also mentally, prepared to evaluate any situation put in front of them and ready to react appropriately.



REMEMBER

Unless you're planning to make a career of the prize ring, you will not get hurt in boxing training. You will definitely get sore, especially in the shoulders, torso, and, if you're punching correctly, in your hamstrings and calves. You might also skin your knuckles on the inside of your gloves. But all this will pass after the first couple of workouts.

In addition to the physical benefits, boxing is problem-solving. The problem, of course, is your opponent, and it's your job to figure out how to solve that person. That requires a cool head and an analytical approach to your task, no matter how chaotic things become in the ring. You'll find that this approach, when mastered, will serve you well in all aspects of your life, not just in the ring. Remember, be analytical, not reactive.

Boxing has come a long way since its origins many centuries ago. There is evidence that people were engaging in some form of hand-to-hand combat since prehistoric times. Through the centuries, boxing has evolved from the days of bareknuckle fights-to-the-finish, through the adoption of padded gloves, three-minute rounds, 15-round, and now 12-round championship fights.

But the essence of boxing has not changed. It is a form of unarmed combat requiring the skillful coordination of hands, feet, and head, and is arguably the sternest test of a human being's courage, determination, and discipline in the realm of sports.

This book aims to unravel the mysteries of what makes boxing both so great and so difficult, and to decode those mysteries so that even the rawest beginner can master them. The object is not to create fighters, but to create lean, mean fighting machines whose pugilistic pursuits are confined to the safety of the gym.

To paraphrase the words of famed ring announcer Michael Buffer, "Are you ready to rumble?"

If so, let's climb those four steps into a new world of fun and fitness.

Boxing Training Is for Everyone

John Hahn is 69 years old and for the past 10 years has suffered from Parkinson's disease. (See Figure 1-1.)



FIGURE 1-1:
John Hahn says
boxing training
has slowed the
progression of
his Parkinson's
disease.

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Dan Schoeffler is 67 years old and three years removed from a massive heart attack. (See Figure 1-2.)



FIGURE 1-2:
Dan Schoeffler
had a near-fatal
heart attack a
year before
beginning
boxing training.

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Mike Sanchez is 56 years old, a former NYPD officer who was blinded in the line of duty. (See Figure 1-3.)



FIGURE 1-3:
Mike Sanchez, a
former NYPD
officer blinded in
the line of duty,
banging the
hand pads.

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What do these people have in common? All are regular attendees of a boxing class, and each has benefited greatly, both physically and mentally, from the workout.

And they are only a small sample of the incredible cross section of people who are regular attendees of my boxing classes at a fitness center on Long Island. Among my members are school teachers, lawyers, retirees, and high school students. Approximately half my members are women. I have young people with aspirations of becoming professional boxers and older people who simply want to try a new form of physical conditioning.

All have discovered that not only are they benefiting from regular boxing workouts, but that they enjoy them more than any other form of exercise they've tried.

There is Christine Lewis, 35 and pregnant with her first child, who comes to boxing class after work and intends to keep coming right up to her due date. (See Figure 1-4.) There is Erin Nostro, a 57-year-old teacher's assistant who came in knowing nothing about boxing but now is capable of throwing 160 hard, technically sound punches in the final 30 seconds of a three-minute round.

FIGURE 1-4:
Christine, training
through early
pregnancy,
intends to keep
boxing right up to
her due date.



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There is Yvette Motta, a 55-year-old nurse at a cancer hospital and a mother of three who discovered just a couple of years ago that she is a Type 1 adult-onset diabetic. Yvette found her first boxing workout so demanding she thought she would need an oxygen tank to recover. But a few months later, she found she could get through 12 three-minute rounds of bag punching and regularly throws 150 punches in the 2-4-6-8-10 drill that comes in the final 30 seconds. (See Figure 1-5.)

“My legs are definitely stronger and my posture is better,” Yvette says. “I feel like it’s a complete total body workout. And it’s fun.”

Erin started boxing after experiencing a life-threatening heart issue a couple of years ago. “It was a little intimidating at first,” she admits. “But I was looking for something different and nothing else was getting my heart rate up to where I wanted it. This gets me really out of breath and my core strength has really improved. I love it!”

When class is not in session, Erin often comes in on her own after work just to hit the bags. (See Figure 1-6.)

Which brings me to Gerry McGrath, 71 years old, 6-foot-3, and 300 pounds, who, despite undergoing cancer surgery a few months after taking up boxing, has become a devotee to the point where he installed a heavy bag in his garage for impromptu workouts between classes. And trust me when I tell you he has learned how to transfer every ounce of those 300 pounds into his right cross. (See Figure 1-7.)

FIGURE 1-5:
Yvette's boxing
workouts are
helping her
manage her
Type 1 diabetes.



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FIGURE 1-6:
Don't let Erin's
smile fool you.
She is a dynamo
on the bags
and mitts.



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FIGURE 1-7:
Gerry is a big
man with a
big punch.



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“Taking boxing has brought out my competitiveness again, after years of inactivity,” he says. “My cardio has definitely improved. At first I couldn’t get through three minutes but now I can, easily. I just feel better overall, and it gives me something to look forward to.”

Doctors have known for years that a boxing workout can greatly benefit patients suffering from Parkinson’s, the disease that robbed Muhammad Ali of his incredible grace and athleticism for the last three decades of his life. The international program known as Rock Steady Boxing has been clinically proven to slow the decline of Parkinson’s. John Hahn, who has battled Parkinson’s for 10 years, finds that the combination of movement and coordination required for a boxing workout has helped to slow the progression of the disease.

“To sit in front of the TV and drink a beer and rot away was not my plan,” Hahn says. “Boxing definitely helps me.”

To augment his workouts, I will occasionally shout out a math problem to John while he’s hitting the pads or ask him to name a state capital. Combining a cognitive test along with the physical workout is immensely beneficial to Parkinson’s sufferers.

Dan, who has an engineering degree from Princeton, is tall and lean and athletic. And he was all those things back in 2023 when in the midst of a dumbbell workout he suddenly experienced a tightness across his chest. He went to the hospital and came out five days later with six stents. Turns out he had had a heart attack caused by a 95 percent blockage in an artery.

“I was this close to sending out funeral invitations,” he said.

Instead, he joined a boxing class at his local YMCA. “I liked it immediately,” he said. “It improved my stamina, my balance, my upper body strength, and my confidence. And it’s helped me learn new things. I could never jump rope before, but now I can.”

Despite his litany of infirmities brought on from years of athletics, Mike Prestia says that boxing class actually provides a respite from the pain.

“It takes everything inside, all the anger that’s built up from all these aches and pains and it’s like a release,” he says. “I actually feel good when I come here. I feel like I’ve gotten stronger and after the workout, I feel light and airy, like a feather. It takes the lead out.”

A true profile in courage and determination is the story of Alex MacPherson, who, despite missing his left hand due to a birth defect, has taught himself to golf and bench press and recently took up boxing as a way to stay fit and bond with his two sons. (See Figure 1-8.)

“The best thing my parents ever did was push me out the front door and say, ‘Go do what everyone else is doing,’” he says.

Alex played high school football and even led his team in interceptions one year. In the boxing gym, he wraps his left arm to keep the glove from sliding off, and punches away with both hands. You would never know he was any different from any of the other boxers in the class.

“I don’t set limitations for myself,” he says. “I just find a way to go and do it.”

But the most remarkable story, and beneficiary, of a boxing workout has got to be Mike Sanchez, who was blinded in a job-related incident while an NYPD officer more than 20 years ago.

“I like doing things that other blind people have not done,” he says. “What I like about boxing is that it’s different from the other exercise classes. It’s all about rhythm and timing. I’m in rhythm with my punching bag. I’m visualizing the bag moving and then coming towards me and I time my punches accordingly.” (See Figure 1-9.)

Of course, you don’t need to be recovering from a major illness or injury to be attracted to or benefit from a boxing workout.

FIGURE 1-8:
Despite being
born without a
left hand, Alex
goes through
a vigorous
boxing workout.



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FIGURE 1-9:
Mike Sanchez
hitting the
heavy bag.



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Walter Bast, 44, is a neuroscientist with a PhD in physics who has the lean body of a gymnast. He began boxing as a workout in his native Argentina in his 20s and has continued steady boxing training after emigrating to New York. (See Figure 1-10.)

“It’s been great for my body. I’m in much better shape than I used to be,” he says. “But the best thing I got from my boxing training is more confidence.”



FIGURE 1-10:
Walter is a
neuroscientist
who took up
boxing in his
native Argentina.

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Andrea Calabretta is 62, a former hairdresser who recently reentered the workforce as an office manager and describes herself as “semi-athletic.” She ventured into the boxing class because “it looked cool and it looked challenging.”

She wasn’t sure if she was coordinated or strong enough to keep up with the routine, but after her first class, she found out she was. Now, Andrea says, “I was addicted. I loved it right away.”

“I knew nothing when I started. I grew up with all sisters. We fought in different ways,” she says. “But the repetition of it taught me how to box and how to punch and it forces you to challenge yourself. Each class you feel a little stronger and you feel more confident in the way you’re punching.” (See Figure 1-11.)

The effect has been apparent in her home as well. “My boyfriend noticed my arms are getting bigger,” she says. “He was like, ‘What are you doing with those arms?’”

Mari D’Alessandro, 75, is an avid tennis player whose dedication to learning technique and mastering the transfer of weight from her legs through her hips and finally to her shoulders has shown benefits on the tennis court. (See Figure 1-12.)

“I hit my forehand like a rocket now,” she says.



FIGURE 1-11:
Andrea working
on the heavy bag.

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FIGURE 1-12:
Mari says her
boxing training
has made her a
terror on the
tennis court.

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Kevin Cooper, a former vice president of operations for Minute Man Press, had something of a background in combat sports, having taken several years of kickboxing in his 60s. But the COVID era sent him to the sidelines until 2024, when at the urging of his wife, Rose Ann, a regular participant in a boxing class, he decided to give boxing a try.

Almost immediately, he saw physical effects. Aside from the cardio benefits, Kevin noticed something else. “I can really feel it in my arms and my shoulders,” he says. When I put my shirts on, there’s a difference now. Even more so than from kickboxing.”

And there’s a psychological benefit as well: “When you land a good punch and hear that crack on the pad, it makes you excited. Wow!” (See Figure 1-13.)



FIGURE 1-13:
Kevin, a big puncher, gets motivated by the crack of his gloves against the mitts.

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Boxing Training Costs Little but Returns Much

Unlike many other training programs, the monetary investment in a boxing program is minimal. A decent pair of gloves can be found for under \$50, and a set of hand wraps can be had for less than \$10. (A full explanation of boxing equipment with representative prices is covered in Chapters 5, 6, and 7.) There’s no need for

expensive shoes or workout gear; standard athletic shoes, shorts, and a T-shirt are sufficient to get you started. And if you join a properly equipped gym, the rest of the modalities you will need — heavy bags, speed bags, jump ropes — will be provided for you. (See Figure 1-14.)



FIGURE 1-14:
Yvette and
Andrea going
through a hand
pad drill.

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The real investment you must make in boxing training is your time and dedication. Almost every client I've trained has had the same initial reaction ("I had no idea how much went into this!") because in all candor, boxing done correctly requires a great amount of precision, which takes some dedication to learn. But I have found through practical experience that once you get a taste of what it feels like to throw and land a good punch against a bag or a pair of mitts and hear that satisfying *crack!*, you'll enjoy the same sensation enjoyed by my students.

"I really like the feeling of the impact of the punches," says Andrea.

Or, in the words of Kevin, "Wow!"