

HEALTHY LIVING

HOME FITNESS

Simple steps can downsize your workout budget without sacrificing results

BY VIKKI CONWELL

Cox News Service

Ronald and Jennifer Bull trimmed the fat from their health and fitness budget without adding it to their waists.

When the economy forced them to tighten their wallets, the suburban Atlanta couple put a squeeze on their expenses. A \$200 monthly family membership at a small health club plus \$150 a week for sessions with a personal trainer left Jennifer Bull feeling embarrassed about the size of the family's fitness budget and shortchanged by their physical results. So, the couple canned the fitness-club membership and returned home for some basic training.

"With everything that is going on with the economy, we just want to be responsible, but we don't want to lessen our quality of life," said Jennifer Bull, owner of an advertising firm who describes fitness as essential to her family's life. A personal trainer at \$75 a session helped them develop a home-based program using two yoga mats (\$10-\$20), two pairs

of dumbbells (\$4-\$6) and a stability ball (about \$20). They now spend a third of what they did before and have improved their health and fitness.

"We've kept the same level of fitness and cut the fitness bill," Bull said.

The Bulls are not alone — more economy-plagued fitness buffs are seeking ways to downsize their budgets without up-sizing their bodies. Average health/fitness club memberships run about \$35-\$40 a month, but with gas and food costs, job losses and economic uncertainty, many people are contemplating less-expensive alternatives.

At Concourse Athletic Club in Sandy Springs, Ga., membership terminations are increasing and more members are opting to downgrade from family (starting at \$170 a month) to individual plans (starting at \$95 a month). Membership fees fluctuate based on the full-time or weekday/daytime hours of use.

Other members are exercising a leave of absence (at \$30 a month) option that allows them to suspend their membership and return without paying another \$250 initiation fee.

"We have always worked with terminations, but now we're working with them more," said general manager Suzanne Cypert, who estimates the club "saves" about 10 percent of members considering termination through conversion packages and leaves of absence. Even the YMCA of Greater Atlanta, which offers family health and wellness memberships for about \$53 a month, reported a 20 percent increase in the number of members requesting financial assistance since July.

"More people have come in saying it's tough," said Kristen Obaranec, a spokeswoman with the YMCA, which subsidizes costs for members unable to pay the full fee.

The economic downturn may stimulate an upswing of returning to the basics, said Peter McCall, exercise physiologist with the American Council on Exercise.

People are using what they have, incorporating tools such as jump ropes and sandbags and realizing that they don't need to be in a gym to maintain fitness, he said.

The council recommends walking, jog-



RICH ADDICKS / COX NEWS SERVICE

Jennifer Bull, who is three months pregnant, and her husband work out in their kitchen now instead of at a health club.



Ronald Bull's routine includes dumbbells, which cost \$4-\$6. He also gets help from a personal trainer who visits the Bulls' home.

ging, dancing and bike riding as cost-effective means to conserve gas while losing weight. Beefing up household chores also revs up the metabolism and energy level.

If you want to maintain a consistent routine, you can spend less than \$150 for exercise balls, a jump rope, a set of dumbbells and resistance tubing for a total-body workout. For another \$100 (per one-hour session), a personal trainer can help you design a safe, effective program

to follow in your own home, he said.

Personal trainer Ligia Carvalho, who designs programs for corporate and individual clients, has experienced a surge in requests for home-based routines. Many people need the accountability that a trainer brings to create a work/life balance, she said.

"Stress levels are high and lifestyles are changing," said Carvalho, who trains the Bull family. [But] exercise doesn't have to be expensive." ■

Balanced diet includes portions of protein at each meal

BY CAROLYN O'NEIL

Cox News Service

Just when you thought it was fine to relax with a glass of well-earned wine and nibble on a few whole-grain crackers, nutrition researchers are here to ask, "Did you have enough protein today?"

OK, we know you're not into body-building competitions, but get a load of this midlife reality check: You could be losing muscle mass and strength — a condition called sarcopenia — if you don't consume enough high-quality protein on a daily basis.

"We're seeing sarcopenia, which commonly occurs in the elderly, in younger subjects in their early to mid-50s," said Susan Hewlings, a registered dietitian and assistant professor at Stetson University in Florida who specializes in protein metabolism. Hewlings and other researchers presenting at the 2008 American Dietetic Association's annual Food and Nutrition Conference shed new light on the connection between what we eat and the health of our aging muscles. Bottom line: Research shows that to prevent and treat lost muscle mass you must consume 1.5 grams of protein for every

kilogram of body weight per day. That translates to about 90 grams of protein a day for a normal weight man and would be less if you're a tiny gal.

But here's where the real specific advice kicks in: You should be including sources of high-quality protein such as eggs, milk and meats and balancing

your protein intake throughout the day.

"Typically, people eat less protein at breakfast, a little more at lunch and then eat a lot at dinner," Hewlings said. "To optimize protein synthesis and prevent sarcopenia, it needs to be more evenly distributed." There goes that diet plan to starve

all day and splurge on a big steak for dinner. Your muscles are hungry for amino acids found in protein foods all day long.

Since foods are often a combination of the three macronutrients (protein, carbohydrates and fat), choose protein-containing foods wisely with other health concerns in mind. For instance, a 6-ounce broiled porterhouse steak is a great source of complete protein — 38 grams — but contains 44 grams of fat. The same amount of salmon gives you 34 grams of protein and 18 grams of fat, and it's the kind of fat that's good for you. ■



PHIL SKINNER / COX NEWS SERVICE

Steak is a good source of protein, but it's also high in fat. Find wiser choices, balancing fats and carbohydrates.

AFFORDABLE FITNESS

Don't sacrifice your health and fitness because of the poor economy. Here are ways to cut costs and stay in shape:

- Walk or bike to work. Burns calories, saves money on transportation and helps the environment.
- Find a park with a fitness course. Follow the directions on the obstacles for a fun exercise session in the fresh air.
- Volunteer to clean up a neighborhood park. Vigorous chores like yard work are great calorie burners, and this would be a great way to improve the neighborhood, meet neighbors and make new friends.
- Buy a jump rope. Jump rope for 15 to 20 minutes a day, three days a week.
- Use video on demand. You can access workout videos cheaper than purchasing a DVD.
- Dance. It's not just for the stars. Make use of your weekend social time.
- Choose activities that get you moving. Go to the park, walk the dog, play catch, plan trips with family and friends that involve activities such as biking, paddle-boating, hiking, swimming, skiing — or just walking to a museum.

- Park away. Stop driving around looking for a close parking space. Park in the spot that is farthest from the mall or grocery store and get some exercise.
- Take the stairs. Climbing the steps at work or other buildings burns a lot of calories and really revs up the heart.

Sources: American Council on Exercise, staff reports

CHORES BURN CALORIES

You don't have to adopt an extra workout regimen when so many of the household chores burn plenty of calories.

- Mowing the lawn (half-hour) = 150 calories burned.
- Gardening (30 to 45 minutes) = 150 calories burned.
- Raking leaves (half-hour) = 150 calories burned.
- Vacuuming (half-hour) = 100 calories burned.
- Washing windows (15 minutes) = 50 calories burned.
- Sweeping (15 minutes) = 50 calories burned. ■

Sources: American Council for Fitness and Nutrition