

# DIABETES

## SELF-MANAGEMENT<sup>®</sup>

### THE CURVES WORKOUT

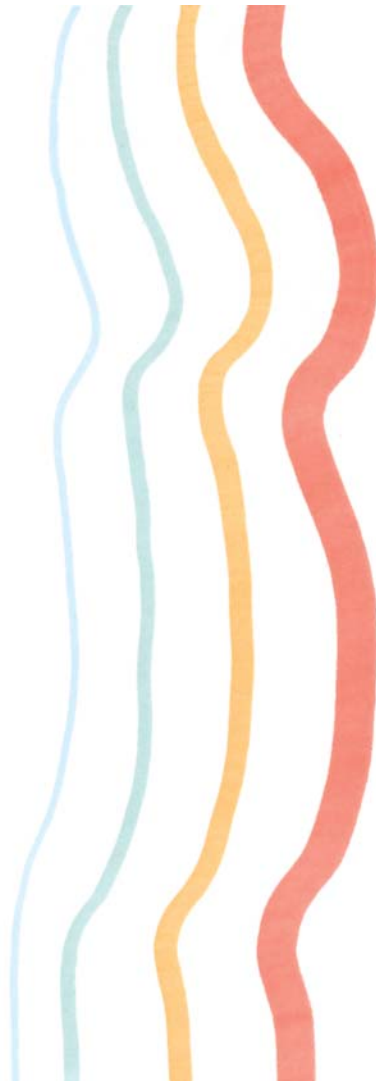
#### A New Option for Exercise

by Cynthia Mascott

If a Curves International fitness club hasn't already opened in your neighborhood, chances are that one soon will. The gym, designed especially for women (but also used by men in some locations), is one of the fastest-growing franchises in the United States, with over 7,000 American locations and more than 8,000 locations worldwide.

Although each club is owned independently, all locations follow essentially the same model. Most Curves clubs are located in large, one-room facilities in shopping centers or business districts. The facilities contain between 8 and 13 resistance exercise machines set up in a circle so that all exercisers are facing toward the center. The gyms typically don't have mirrors, a feature that appeals to many of the core Curves clientele—generally middle-aged women who are new to exercise and often intimidated by conventional health clubs.

The Curves machines are designed for a woman's smaller frame and use hydraulic pressure, or the pressure of confined liquid in a cylinder, rather than metal weights to provide resistance. Because the equipment uses the



resistance of confined liquid, it provides an opposing force in both directions, engaging a different set of muscles depending on whether the user is pushing or pulling. How much resistance the machine provides depends on how hard and how fast the user pushes or pulls. For increased resistance (and a harder workout), the user increases the speed of the repetitions. This enables each exerciser to work at a comfortable level without having to adjust the machine.

One drawback to the Curves machines is that the seat heights are not adjustable, meaning the machines may be less comfortable for people who are not within the average size range. Shorter women, however, may be able to modify the seat height with a cushion. Another potential disadvantage of the machines is that the hydraulic system means that the exerciser does not perform the "negative" portion of the resistance exercise. (The "negative" portion is when the exerciser lowers the weight back to its starting position in a controlled manner. This part of the exercise helps to build muscle in a somewhat different way from the "positive" part of the movement.)

## The setup

The following eight machines compose the standard setup that is found in all Curves locations:

- **Biceps/Triceps:** Works the muscles in the backs and the fronts of the upper arms
- **Leg Extension/Leg Curl:** Exercises the muscles on the fronts and the backs of the thighs
- **Shoulder Press/Lat Pull:** Targets muscles in the shoulders and the upper back
- **Hip Abductor/Adductor:** Focuses on the inner and outer thighs and the hips
- **Chest/Back:** Exercises muscles of the chest and back
- **Squat:** Works the fronts of the thighs and the buttocks
- **Abs/Back:** Targets the muscles running vertically along the mid-line of the stomach and the back
- **Leg Press:** Strengthens muscles in the fronts of the thighs and the buttocks

In addition, certain locations may have some or all of the following four machines:

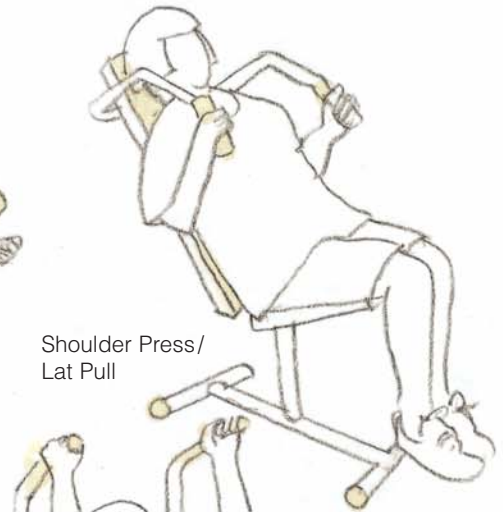
- **Dip Shrug:** Focuses on the shoulders and the back
- **Pec Dec:** Works muscles in the chest, shoulders, and back
- **Oblique:** Targets the sides of the abdomen
- **Glute:** Strengthens the fronts and backs of the thighs and the buttocks
- **Lateral Lift:** Works muscles on the sides of the waist

Between every two exercise machines is an “aerobic recovery station”—a small, cushioned platform on which members are encouraged to engage in an aerobic activity such as dancing, doing jumping jacks, or jogging in place to keep their heart rate elevated while giving their muscles a rest. Some facilities have storage lockers and changing areas. Many Curves locations also offer some form of nutrition counseling. However, the clubs do not offer the amenities found in many traditional gyms, such as showers, a sauna, or day care for children.

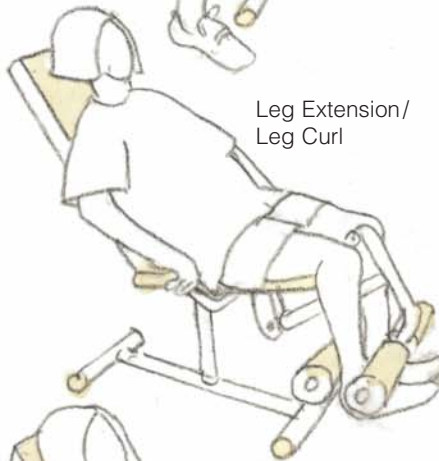
Biceps/Triceps



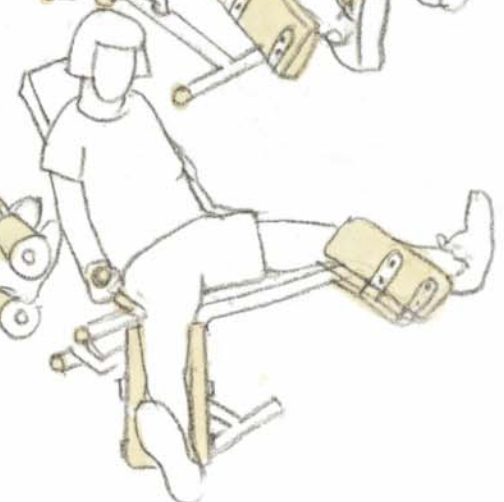
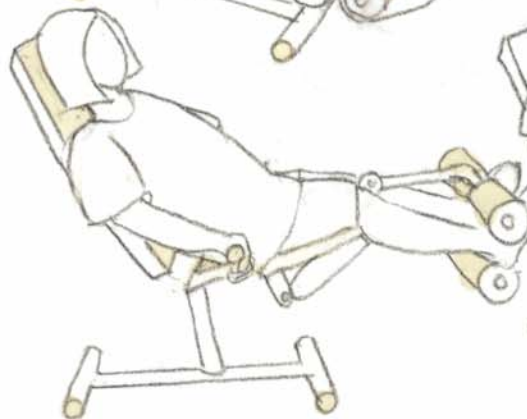
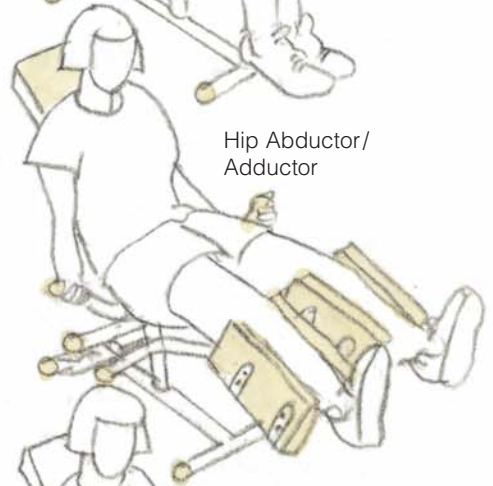
Shoulder Press/  
Lat Pull



Leg Extension/  
Leg Curl



Hip Abductor/  
Adductor



## The workout

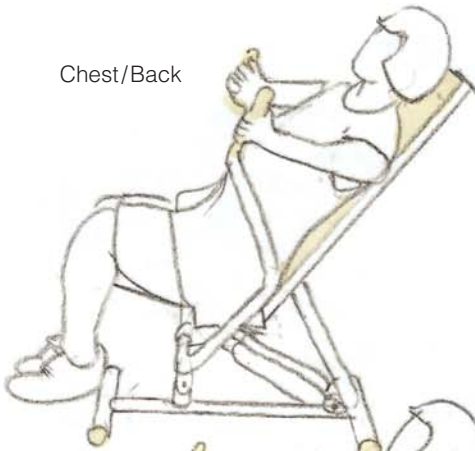
At their initial visit to the club, members are weighed and their body measurements and body fat percentage are taken. They then have the option of repeating the process every month to chart their progress. A full health history is also completed at the initial visit and put on file.

Before their first workout, members are given instructions on how to use the hydraulic machines to ensure that their form is correct; on visits thereafter, a fitness trainer is available for assistance. The exact breakdown of the routine varies slightly from location to location, but generally an exerciser enters the circuit at any available machine and works out at a low intensity for about three minutes while progressing from machine to machine as guided by an audio recording. Starting at a low intensity helps to increase heart rate and body temperature so that there is less chance of stress on the heart or injury to the joints or muscles. After the initial warm-up, the exerciser increases the intensity of the workout.

Each machine is used for approximately 30 seconds, at which point a recorded voice interrupts the music and instructions are given to move to the next station. The entire workout lasts for about 30 minutes which, depending on the number of machines at the facility, usually takes exercisers around the circuit two to three times. For the last three minutes of the workout, exercisers are advised to slow down a bit to allow their heart rate to return to normal; they then wrap up the routine with three minutes of stretching.

Every eight minutes throughout the routine, members are instructed to check their pulse to ensure that they are working within their target heart rate range. Although many exercise professionals have moved away from this idea, according to

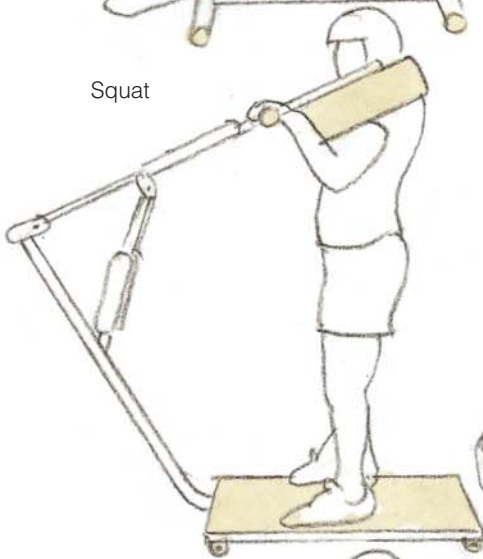
Chest/Back



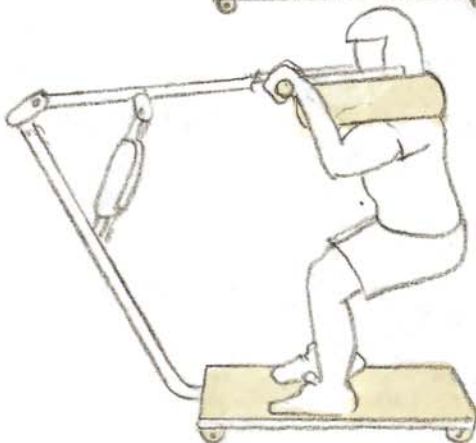
Abs/Back



Squat



Leg Press



the Curves philosophy, the goal for people in the general population is to work out at 60% to 80% of their maximum heart rate. New members are shown how to find their pulse and target heart rate by a Curves employee. Maximum heart rate is generally determined by subtracting one's age from 220. There are a number of ways to calculate the target heart rate range, but the Curves formula suggests multiplying the maximum heart rate by 0.60 and 0.80 to find the 60% to 80% range. For instance, if you are 60 years old, your approximate maximum heart rate would be 160 beats per minute. Your target heart rate would therefore be between 96 ( $160 \times 0.60$ ) and 128 ( $160 \times 0.80$ ) beats per minute.

For people who are just beginning an exercise program or those who have a medical condition such as diabetes, heart disease, or high blood pressure, Curves suggests working out at only 50% of maximum heart rate. A wall chart posted in the club helps users easily determine whether they are within their target range.

According to Curves founder Gary Heavin, a Curves workout is an efficient combination of strength training, aerobics, and stretching. He suggests members visit the center three times a week and incorporate walking or stretching into their routine between visits to the club. Although research on the Curves workout plan is limited, Heavin's recommendations are generally in line with both the American College of Sports Medicine's recommendation of 2–3 days per week of resistance training for people who are just starting out on an exercise plan and the Surgeon General's recommendation to do at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise on most days of the week. And at least one study has shown a circuit training program using a combination of aerobic and resistance exercise to be effective at

improving blood glucose control in people with Type 2 diabetes.

## Safety guidelines

There are a number of precautions that people with diabetes should take to ensure a safe workout. Before beginning an exercise program, it is a good idea to get clearance from your doctor and possibly your eye doctor, particularly if it has been more than a year since your last eye exam or if you have been diagnosed with or had laser surgery for diabetic retinopathy.

It's also a good idea to check your blood glucose level before each workout. If your blood glucose level is below 100 mg/dl, you may need a snack before getting started. Because of the possibility of exercise-induced hypoglycemia, monitor your blood glucose level after your workout as well, especially if you take insulin, a sulfonylurea such as glipizide (Glucotrol, Glucotrol XL), glyburide (DiaBeta, Micronase, Glynase), or glimepiride (Amaryl), or the drugs repaglinide (Prandin) or nateglinide (Starlix).

Be sure to wear a well-fitting, comfortable pair of shoes to your workout, and keep a source of carbohydrate, such as glucose tablets or raisins, nearby in case you develop hypoglycemia.

## The staff

The owners and managers of Curves franchises must complete a 40-hour training program at the Curves International Headquarters in Waco, Texas. They are also required to attend quarterly Advanced Camp training. Curves additionally encourages them to complete an 18-hour online college certification program in Fitness and Wellness through Thomas Edison State College in New Jersey. The fitness technicians who work at Curves must complete a two-week training program as outlined in the

Curves Training Manual. All Curves employees are required to be certified in CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) and first aid.

## Hours and rates

Hours of operation vary from location to location, but during weekdays, most facilities open between 6 AM and 7 AM. At noon, there is generally a brief closure for lunch, with doors reopening around 2 PM or 3 PM until about 8 PM. Saturday hours are typically limited to the morning, and only a small number of locations are open on Sundays. There is a one-time initiation fee of \$149, although there are often specials available that can reduce this price. Monthly dues are generally between \$29 and \$59; costs vary depending on the package you choose and the facility you go to.

## Curves ahead

Any step toward more physical activity is a step in the right direction. Even integrating several short walks into your day can improve your health. But if you feel that a more structured program as well as the opportunity to exercise with others might help you stick to a regular exercise routine, you may want to give Curves a try. Many have found that the convenience, camaraderie, and feeling of well-being gained from exercising at Curves keeps them coming back and sticking to a fitness program for the first time in their lives. Look at the book *Curves: Permanent Results Without Permanent Dieting*, by Gary Heavin and Carol Coleman, for more information. To find the Curves International nearest you, call (800) 848-1096 or log on to [www.curvesinternational.com](http://www.curvesinternational.com). □

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*Cynthia Mascott is a freelance writer in Sherman Oaks, California. She has had Type 2 diabetes since 1996.*