

MAIL TODAY

By RITUPARNA MUKHERJEE

GET an idea of what Parkour is all about, just recall the opening scene of *Casino Royale*, which has the kind of improbable stunts usually found in a video game. Daniel Craig chases his quarry by jumping from the boom of one tower to another, scaling unbelievably high walls and leaping across terrifying gaps that seem impossible to cross. Closer to home, Akshay Kumar moves with the grace of a jungle cat while he sprints across terraces and shimmies down incredibly tall and rickety buildings in quest of a cola. Even if the idea of being able to imitate some of these moves seems rather far-fetched, the fact is that with the right dosage of tenacity, enthusiasm and dedication, you could come close enough. That's exactly what parkour — or free running — teaches you to do. Fast catching on as a fitness trend, this sport offers the opportunity to sharpen balance and build the body simultaneously.

LEARNING TO MOVE

L'ART DU DÉPLACEMENT or the art of moving is what parkour is all about. This form of movement was started by a French naval officer as a training program in World War I and II. It taught the most efficient way to get from point A to point B by using obstacles in the path to increase efficiency. Parkour athletes perform gymnast-like flips, vaults, and jumps—all en route from one point to another, in urban environments like parks and other open spaces, using the benches, trees railings and streetlights as equipment. The physicality of the sport is also intertwined with a philosophy that there is no obstacle you can't overcome. Parkour's custom-made obstacles are walls, stairwells, fences, railings, and gaps between roofs. The movements are performed at a dead run. The more efficient and fluid the path they define, and the more difficult and harrowing the terrain they cross, the more elegant the performance is considered by the discipline's practitioners, called traceurs or traceuses depending on gender. The parkour sequence in the opening scene of *Casino Royale* shot this form of sport to the limelight and it has gained increasing popularity as one of the fastest growing forms of exercise since then.

TEACHES SELF-MASTERY

PARKOUR is not for the faint hearted and those afraid of physical aches and pains. This sport teaches you to be rough and tough and ups the physical fitness of the body as well as teaching one better coordination and balance. "You need all three when you run jump down from a great height on all fours on a slim railing, straighten up and nimbly run along it before springing off and vaulting a gap of about 10 feet — all in a sequence," says Gungun Sharma, parkour trainer at Team Mutants, a parkour training club. Parkour is based on control of movements. Apart from all the other fitness benefits, the reflexes are also honed — something that a gym workout doesn't do. The health benefits of parkour are numerous, with one of the most important factors being that it encompasses both your mental abilities as well as your physical skills. "In order to be proficient at parkour you must be constantly 'thinking on your feet,' always anticipating what will come next so that you know the best way to move your body to accomplish your goal," says Gungun. Those who are successful at practicing parkour, have really learned how to master their own bodies and are always fully in control. Individuals who overestimate their abilities of strength, flexibility and balance often wind up injured. In this way, parkour is much more than just exercise; it's about knowing yourself and your own personal limits. Every single movement in parkour, be it the 'cat balance', 'rolls',

'tic-tac' or 'reverse and forward vaults' engage every part of the body, providing a thorough workout. These movements should be practiced thoroughly as one false step can result in a hurt back or sprain.

HIGH IMPACT ACTIVITY

PARKOUR has some basic movements which can be modified to suit individual needs once they have been mastered. These movements are key to completing each sequence with grace and precision. The exercises that act

as warm ups and training also help improve fitness as well as the movements themselves. "As many of the movements in parkour include rebounding off walls, the ground or other objects, the legs gain an immense amount of strength. Hand stands are a common feature in parkour which requires a great deal of upper body strength to maintain the stance and also to rebound out of it and continue into another one," says Vicky Sharma, a 22 year old parkour enthusiast. Pull ups at the basic level helps to develop strength in the arms as well as the awareness of body

position in space. Plyometric push ups are another integral part of parkour training. These gruelling exercises — in which one has to propel oneself of the ground and then clap hands in mid air before lowering the body to the ground — fine tune the muscles in arms and shoulders considerably. The jumps, runs and vaults that are a part of the training are unfamiliar and different every time so the mind is taught to focus because a slip can mean a painful fall. Core strength is also developed as a strong core will protect against back injuries and efficient

flow of movement. "During the workout your heart rate fluctuates between a steady and intense rate, depending on the activity and how much running is done between exercises. Plus, it is a good mix of cardiovascular and strength training — you typically approach each move with a run and use your strength to propel yourself over an obstacle," says Vicky.

IN SYNC WITH THE BODY

THE defined movements of parkour are broken up into bits and taught — and each 'bit' has

Swinging your way through

If you are attracted to adventure sports and have always longed to do the kind of stunts Akshay Kumar is famous for, then you should consider learning Parkour



HIGH ENERGY SMOOTHIES

FRUIT POWER SMOOTHIE

Make this smoothie which is rich in vitamins, antioxidants, fibre, omega-3 fats, monounsaturated fats and soy protein.

You need: 1 banana; 1/2 apple; 1 kiwi, peeled; 1/2 cup mixed berries; 1 cup orange juice; 1/2 cup soy milk; 1/2 cup plain yogurt; 1/2 cup tofu; 3 tablespoons unsalted natural peanut butter; 2 tablespoons aloe vera juice; 2 tablespoons flaxseed oil.

Blend banana, apple, kiwi, mixed berries and orange juice until smooth. Add soy milk, yogurt, tofu, peanut butter, aloe vera juice, and flaxseed oil until smooth.

MINT & WATERMELON COOLING SMOOTHIE

Watermelon contains lycopene, which helps fight cancer, while yoghurt has friendly bacteria to combat nasty gut bacteria that cause stomach upsets. The mint aids digestion.

You need: 1 mug watermelon (diced); 4-6 mint leaves; 1 mug yoghurt; 1/2 mug of runny honey (to taste)

Chill water melon and then remove the seeds. You can retain the seeds if you don't mind them. Cut the flesh into chunks and put in the blender / smoothie maker with all the other ingredients. Whizz till smooth and put into the freezer for a few minutes.

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to be practiced till fluency is achieved before moving on to the next. "This ensures that the body has time to get used to the movement," says Gunjan. As the days go by the drills increase the movements till the entire sequence is mastered.

"The best part about learning parkour is learning to move spontaneously — my coordination has increased in leaps and bounds and so has my concentration as we are taught to focus on every movement

we make," says 20-year-old Nidhi Upadhyay, who has just started learning parkour in her quest to get a fit body. At the beginning it is a rather awkward experience as the body is not used to back flips or somersaults, but these are taught to make the student comfortable with the body and after a few practice sessions these come naturally. "Now vaulting backwards, or setting off at a run and clearing a gap of 10 feet at a somersault is easy," says Vicky.

NOT FOR EVERYONE

HOWEVER interesting a sport this may seem, it is not for everyone as it puts the body through a high amount of stress. Fractures and broken bones can happen if one is not careful and in the initial stages sustaining injuries in the form of bruising and sprains are not uncommon. Those with joint and bone problems should especially consider the health risks before joining up. However Gunjan stresses that unless there

are major health problems, anyone can give this sport a try because each individual is taught the basics depending on his or her capability.

"We carefully evaluate a candidate's fitness in the beginning and build on that with training exercises and yoga breathing before introducing him or her to the basic steps of parkour. It's a slow and steady process because one improper move can seriously injure health," says Gunjan. Proper shoes are a must for this sport because it involves rebounding off walls and jumping down from heights. Shoes with a padded sole and good grip are a must and this is absolutely necessary — when you are jumping from heights you place almost treble your body weight at a great force and if you are wearing incorrect footwear, you could fracture your feet and shins," warns Gunjan. Sometimes students tend to wear hand gloves to prevent calluses but this is not advised as this reduces the ability to grip well, again necessary when you are swinging from one pole to the next — 10 feet away! And of course, never attempt to master parkour by yourself — training under a professional is a must.

Parkour classes are held in various locations of Delhi and NCR. Call Gunjan Sharma at 886842263, 0112075234 to find one closest to you.

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PEANUT BUTTER POWER SMOOTHIE

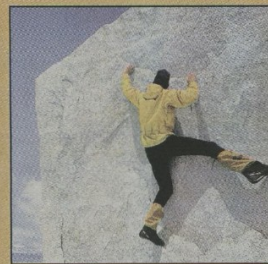
This smoothie recipe contains a healthy quantity of protein (essential for growth and repair of the body) which is found in the yoghurt, peanuts and milk.

You need: 1/2 cup soy milk; 1/2 cup silken tofu; 1/3 cup creamy peanut butter; 2 bananas — frozen; 2 tablespoons chocolate syrup

Combine soy milk, tofu, and peanut butter in blender. Add bananas, chocolate syrup, and ice cubes if desired. Blend until smooth.



EXTREME MEASURES



JUMPING off a cliff or shimmying up a tall pole might seem bizarre ways to get fit, but are actually the right choices for some. A new sport is born every week, each as thrilling as the last one. Some examples are BASE-jumping — which involves parachuting off buildings and cliffs; bungee jumping, sky flying, free climbing up sky scrapers; and skateboarding down mountains. Just as the term suggests, extreme sports demand an extreme levels of fitness.

Extreme sports work both the body and mind. "They enable you to confront fears. Some free runners are scared of heights, yet will perform complicated leaps between high buildings. The challenge is to overcome their fear," says Gunjan Sharma, parkour expert. While it takes willpower to complete that set of crunches, picking your way across a vertical rock face 40 feet off the ground takes focused mental training. "A gym offers a thorough physical work out but participating in extreme sports conditions and trains the mind. Reflexes are finely honed and the body is attuned to every move it makes," says Dr Rajeev Mehta, physiotherapist, Apollo Hospital.

Extreme sports are not only the domain of brash thrill seekers. "It takes years of dedicated training to reach the highest levels in this kind of sport and the training ensures that a person learns how to listen to his body and achieve a level of fitness and control that allows him to minimise any risks," says Gunjan. The entire body is rendered fit and supple in extreme sports, which are not just about lifting weights and working specific portions of the body at specific times. "The reflexes might dull if you stop an extreme workout but the fitness factor stays in place for some time," says Dr Pradeep Kumar, senior physiotherapist, Max Healthcare. Skating, biking, rock climbing and even skiing all help to improve balance and the youngest of children can participate, guided by professional trainers.

ANYONE WHO plunges into extreme sports without attaining a basic fitness level risks health consequences. If you want to venture into any extreme sport like even a marathon, you must go through a health check up. This kind of workout places the body under stress and tension. "Extreme sports place immense pressure on the joints. Considering that Indians do not have the mindset to warm up and cool down before any physical activity, plunging into extremes can be harmful," says Geetika Tekchand, physiotherapist, Artemis Hospital. Those with asthma, osteoporosis, heart and joint problems and any other health issues should seek the advice of a medical practitioner before considering leaping off a cliff or jumping into the sky. The back, spine as well as the legs sustain the most injury and should be built through special strength training in the preliminary stages. "A combination of cardiovascular and muscular strength is employed every minute during extreme sports so it is imperative that muscle strength is developed and the cardio status is thoroughly analysed," says Dr Kumar. One also risks over use of muscles so a significant period of rest in between the sessions is a must.