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Taiko Fit

by author Michael Carrera, MSc



Depending on your culture, the beating of a drum can evoke powerful memories: a new harvest season, the joys of music class, or the days of playing in a live band. For some, beating a drum is a convenient, fun, and exhilarating way to get fit.

For thousands of years the beating of a large drum, called taiko, has been used for many spiritual practices throughout Japan, China, and Korea. Made from wood, taiko were used to warn villagers about an upcoming storm, to send messages to soldiers on the battlefield, and as a ceremonial method of beckoning a plentiful harvest season.

The loud and thundering bang of the mallet hitting the drum had the power to awaken people physically, spiritually, and emotionally. Due to the spiritual connection to taiko, Japanese culture insisted the beating of drums be performed only by holy men.

Taiko Bangs a New Beat

In the early 1950s taiko evolved from the ceremonial rituals of the past to include a rhythm and group ensemble with many drums of various sizes used in orchestrated performances.

Today taiko performances occur in festivals and events at both private and public places. Audiences around the world are enthralled by the majestic rhythm that is delivered by combining the powerful bangs of a drum with movement, theatre, diverse drumming styles, and martial arts.

Watching taiko experts in action can seem overwhelming, but the simplicity of movement along with the obvious health and fitness benefits has evolved taiko beyond the performing arts to the world of fitness.

Taiko Taps Into Fitness

Taiko fitness can be used to relieve stress and as a way of achieving a full-body workout. Many fitness centres are setting their steps aside and replacing them with waist-high drums and mallets.

The great advantage of taiko fitness is that it can be performed by men and women of all ages and fitness levels. You can set your own pace and involve as much of your body as feels comfortable. Since taiko involves various movements, steps, and jumps as a performing art, these same movements have been implemented into the taiko aerobic fitness movement.

Actively performing the drumming workout for 30 to 60 minutes not only benefits the cardiovascular system but also trains the legs, arms, back, core, shoulders, and especially the triceps.

Taiko classes are generally performed while standing, so strong legs and glutes will help the flow of the workout. A strong core is also an asset, but the simple act of contracting the abdominal muscles with every hit of the drum will improve core strength in no time. Lying on the floor and hitting the drum while holding it between the knees is often used as a way of specifically targeting core muscles.

If you are new to exercise, the workout will feel much more effective once you develop the coordination of the movements. Consistency with the program is the key to improving coordination of movement and truly experiencing the flow of energy and strength as you pound the drums.

As with all exercise classes, the workout begins with a slow cadence to warm up the body; intensity builds as time progresses. As the class winds down, stretching the tired muscles helps relax the body.

At first thought, beating a drum may strike you as boring, loud, and irritating. However, when performed in a group setting with the addition of movements such as squats, v-steps, and leg lifts, beating a drum becomes rhythmical—and also social.

With taiko, not only can you pound your frustrations away, but you can also improve your health while creating music with a group of like-minded drummers.

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