

# fighting fit

Looking for a new CHALLENGE? Sign up for an obstacle race to test your FITNESS on a whole new level

It may sound better suited to primary-school children than adult fitness fanatics, but don't be fooled by the name – obstacle racing is fast becoming one of Britain's hottest new exercise crazes. We're not talking egg-and-spoon races either – these are army-designed cross-country runs of up to 20km, punctuated with tough, military-style challenges like crawling under barbed wire and jumping through fire. They're physically and mentally demanding in the extreme.

One of the most successful is Tough Mudder, a gruelling 20km course designed by British Special Forces. More than a million people have signed up for the challenge, with a growing number of women participating. "At our first events in 2010, about 20 per cent of our participants were female," says Sarah Harvey, Tough Mudder's senior vice president. "In 2013, we saw our global average rise to 30 per cent." Why are more women getting involved? "For many, the teamwork element is a big pull – our events are challenges, not races, so teamwork and camaraderie are at the core of everything we do. For others, the most attractive part is the physical challenge – you're pushed to your absolute limits."

She's not kidding. Each obstacle is designed to test your agility, balance, endurance, strength and speed, as well as your core fitness. They include "electroshock therapy", which involves sprinting through a field of live wires carrying as much as 10,000 volts of electricity (not dangerous, but definitely painful; described by one participant as "a static shock x 100"); "spider's web", which is scrambling up and over a giant cargo net suspended between two trees; and the charmingly named "Arctic enema", where you swim through tanks of icy water.

The payoff? A sense of achievement like you've never experienced before when you cross the finishing line, a trimmer, toned body, and the added bonus of seeing your friends covered head to toe in mud.



WORDS BY

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**THINK YOU'RE TOUGH ENOUGH?** Here's our pick of the best UK obstacle races in 2014...

**EVENT** Muddy Trials

**ADDRESS** Kilmarnock, East

Ayrshire, Scotland KA3 6BS

**DATE** 30 March 2014

**COURSE LENGTH** 5km or 10km

**WHAT TO EXPECT** An all-natural terrain, you'll be running through woodland, crossing rivers and wading through deep ditches. One thing's guaranteed – lots and lots of mud.

**DETAILS** From £20 per person.

Visit [muddytrials.co.uk](http://muddytrials.co.uk)



**EVENT** Xtreme Beach

**ADDRESS** Bradwell on Sea,

Essex CM0 7QJ

**DATE** 6 April 2014

**COURSE LENGTH** 6km, 12km or 18km

**WHAT TO EXPECT** You'll be running on sand, into the sea and through muddy marshland, making your way over natural obstacles along the way.

**DETAILS** £25 per person.

Visit [xtremerunning.co.uk](http://xtremerunning.co.uk)



**EVENT** Spartan Sprint

**ADDRESS** Pippingford Park, Nutley, East Sussex TN22 3HW

**DATE** 30 August 2014

**COURSE LENGTH** 5km

**WHAT TO EXPECT** Expect the unexpected: the obstacles at each race are kept under wraps to surprise the participants. Fire, mud, water and barbed wire have all featured in past events.

**DETAILS** £50 per person.

Visit [uk.spartanrace.com](http://uk.spartanrace.com)



**EVENT** Tough Mudder

**ADDRESS** Boughton House, Kettering, Northamptonshire NN14 1BJ

**DATE** 12 and 13 July 2014

**COURSE LENGTH** 20km

**WHAT TO EXPECT** One of the UK's most brutal races, you'll be pushed way out of your comfort zone with military-inspired obstacles. Be warned – only 78 per cent of participants actually make it across the finishing line.

**DETAILS** From £75 per person.

Visit [toughmudder.co.uk](http://toughmudder.co.uk)

