

HIGH-INTENSITY
INTERVAL TRAINING

Is the short, sharp shock of an intense 30-minute regime going to break deputy editor **Emily Dean**?

THE TRIAL Exercise fads in my life are a bit like regrets – I’ve had a few. There was the time I decided to join a boxing gym thinking it might a) give me Michelle Obama arms, and b) introduce me to a welterweight champion boyfriend. Then there was my brief flirtation with yoga. I loved the yummy mummy-style mats but the gamine instructor who smiled with spiritual kindness every time I missed a session simply wasn’t cut out for dealing with my epic indolence. I needed to be knocked into shape by someone with an SAS-style zero-tolerance approach.

So I was intrigued when I saw a bijou training studio in my north-London neighbourhood: “30-minute high-intensity workouts with a personal trainer – £25. Work smarter, not harder.”

High-intensity interval training – or “HIIT” as it’s becoming known – is 2014’s Zumba. You work out for 30 minutes, with short bursts of intense cardio-based exercise. Celebrities have rushed to embrace it (it’s handy when you have a 4am call time on set).

It’s an exercise strategy that’s also got the weight-loss equivalent of a royal warrant – the man behind the 5:2 diet, Michael Mosley, is a huge fan. “It’s not how long you spend working out that matters,” he says. “It’s how hard you push yourself.”

My trainer at Equals Results – the reassuringly buff Browne Bailey – warns me that HIIT is not for sissies. We kick off with my nemesis – the treadmill – but instead of an endurance jog, you sprint flat out for two-minute intervals before a brief recovery period. Then, to my horror, he turns things up to 13kph. It is the fastest sprint I’ve done since I went skinny-dipping in Kos and someone stole my clothes.

I stagger off the treadmill to tackle the rowing machine (I’ve always thought rowing looked the easiest of Olympic sports – at least you get a seat). After warming up slowly, then 90-second bursts of high-intensity pulling, my legs feel like they’re on some *Game Of Thrones* torture rack.

Weights, after all the manic exertion, are a curious relief. There are ten reps of bicep curls and a set of dumb-bell bench presses, followed by shoulder raises. Then it’s over. Except it isn’t – it’s time to do it all again.

Browne thrusts a pair of boxing gloves at me. Boxing is a brilliant all-over workout if you do it at full blast and think of an ex. I throw left hooks and right hooks, upper cuts and jabs. Despite my exhaustion, I feel totally, as the kids

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would say, “pumped”. And a little bit like I’m preparing for a movie role as a street fighter.

Meanwhile, my hair is frizzy with sweat and the grey Adidas by Stella McCartney top I’d spent £50 on now seems like a terrible idea (it turns out grey really shows perspiration). But, it hasn’t finished. It’s time for push-ups, followed by the dreaded burpees, where you place your hands on a platform and kick your feet back. Repeatedly.

The best bit? The post-workout stretch. “You’re done,” declares Browne. “You’ll ache for a few days. And then we’ll do it all again.”

THE VERDICT Bizarrely, I’ve returned to the crime scene. I’m forming some strange things called deltoid muscles around my collarbone. And it’s all because 30 minutes of intense working out just seems doable. And because £25 a session is what I spend on Starbucks a week. But mainly it’s because Browne sends me more texts asking when he’s going to see me again than a jealous ex-boyfriend. And he knows where I live. □
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