

CALISTHENICS. The world's oldest form of resistance training

From the very first caveman to scale a tree or hang from a cliff face, to the mighty armies of the Greco-Roman empires and the gymnasiums of modern American high schools, calisthenics has endured and thrived because of its simplicity and utility. Unlike strength training which involves weights, machines or resistance bands, calisthenics uses only the body's own weight for physical development.

Calisthenics enters the historical record at around 480 B.C. in Greece. The Greeks took calisthenics seriously not only as a form of military discipline and strength, but also as an artistic expression of movement and an aesthetically ideal physique. Calisthenics experienced its second golden age in the 1800s. This period is also when the phenomena of strongmen developed. These were people of astounding physical strength and development who trained using hand balancing and horizontal bars, as modern weight machines had not yet been invented.

In the 1960s and 1970s calisthenics and the goal of functional strength combined with physical beauty was replaced by an emphasis on huge muscles at any cost. This became the sport of body building. Although body building's pioneers were drawn from the calisthenics tradition, the sole goal soon became an increase in muscle size. Body building icons, people such as Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sergio Oliva were called mass monsters because of their imposing physiques. Physical development of this nature was only attainable through the use of anabolic steroids, synthetic hormones which boosted muscle development while harming overall health. These body builders also relied on free weights and machines, which allowed them to target and bloat the size of individual muscles rather than develop a naturally proportioned body. Calisthenics, with its emphasis on physical beauty and a balance in proportions, had little to offer the mass monsters.

In this "bigger is better" climate, calisthenics was relegated to groups perceived to be vulnerable, such as women, people recuperating from injuries and school students. Although some of the strongest and most physically developed human beings ever to have lived acquired their abilities through the use of sophisticated calisthenics, a great deal of this knowledge was discarded and the method was reduced to nothing more than an easily accessible and readily available activity. Those who mastered the rudimentary skills of calisthenics could expect to graduate to weight training rather than advanced calisthenics.

In recent years, however, fitness trends have been shifting back toward the use of calisthenics. Bodybuilding approaches that promote excessive muscle development frequently lead to joint pain, injuries, unbalanced physiques and weak cardiovascular health. As a result, many of the newest and most popular gyms and programmes emphasise calisthenics-based methods instead. Modern practices often combine elements from a number of related traditions such as yoga, Pilates, kettle-ball training, gymnastics and traditional Greco-Roman calisthenics. Many people are keen to recover the original Greek vision of physical beauty and strength and harmony of the mind-body connection.

Complete the sentences below.

Choose **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS** from **the text** for each answer.

1. During the sixties and seventies, attaining huge muscles became more important than (1) or having an attractive-looking body.
2. The first people to take up this new sport of body building had a background in calisthenics but the most famous practitioners became known as (2) on account of the impressive size of their muscles.
3. Calisthenics then became the domain of 'weaker' people: females, children and those recovering from (3)
4. Once a person became skilled at this, he would progress to (4).....
5. Currently a revival of calisthenics is under way as extreme muscle building can harm the body leaving it sore, out of balance, and in poor (5)

Chinese Stretch to Catch up with Teenage Model

THE young in China are going to desperate lengths to add extra inches to their height in pursuit of celebrity and wealth. They are being urged on by a government shamed by the news that, for the first time in history, the Japanese now stand taller than the Chinese. There is constant pressure on Chinese adolescents to think tall. The government is encouraging them to drink milk as a way of promoting growth, while magazines and television are replete with the images of lanky supermodels and basketball stars.

One of the greatest influences has been the astonishing success of Huang Xinye, a 14-year-old schoolgirl from a fishing village in southern China. She was whisked away by talent scouts for a modelling contest late last year. Until then, her 6ft 1in frame had marked her out as a gawky

also-ran in the school playground. Having won the contest, Huang was spotted by the international modelling agency Elite and flown to Europe. The news of her glamorous new life and the £12,000 that she won in the modelling contest has inspired thousands to attempt to follow in her footsteps - even if they don't have her natural advantages.

Teenagers are inundating hospitals that claim to be able to enhance their height with requests for leg-lengthening operations. Xia Hetao, a doctor whose clinics perform the operation said: "I have received many letters from people saying that, because they were born short, they have suffered from continuous feeling that they are worse than other people and are looking for some solace."

If they are accepted on Xia's waiting list, the aspiring patients are guaranteed only more pain in the short run. Xia slices the thigh bone in half and inserts a steel rod supported by a metal frame on the outside of the bone. The patient cranks the mechanism wider every day, forcing the leg to grow longer. Most can stand the pain only for the month that it takes to stretch an inch, but others persist. The record is held by a young man who gained 6.5 inches. Even in successful cases in China, the lengthening and attendant physiotherapy and rehabilitation lasts months. Frequently, however, the result is disastrous - the bone never sets properly, but constantly breaks, eventually turning the patient into an invalid. Those who either cannot afford the equivalent of the £2,000 that the doctor charges or are unwilling to suffer the pain that it entails can take advantage of scores of products that claim to boost growth - ranging from the absurd to the downright dangerous.

For centuries, the Chinese have derisively referred to the Japanese as "dwarfs", which is why the news that the average Chinese person is now smaller than his Japanese counterpart caused such official consternation and confusion. The explanation is undoubtedly the better nutrition enjoyed by recent generations of Japanese, which is why Beijing has made it compulsory for every schoolchild from nursery school upwards to drink a quarter-pint of milk every day. Officials believe that the reason for China's physical shortfall is the fact that Japanese children drink 18 times as much milk a year as Chinese infants. However, the order to drink milk is not popular with children, most of whom (as with the majority of Chinese) are lactose-intolerant and, therefore, have difficulty digesting the natural sugars in milk. It has been accepted by all, however, as a necessary evil if modern Chinese people are to achieve the greater goal of a taller nation.

Questions 1-5

Choose the correct letter, **A**, **B**, **C** or **D**.

- 1) Which of the following is the Chinese government using to stimulate their citizens to grow?
 - A Huang Xinye.
 - B Magazines and television.
 - C Dozens of products.
 - D Milk.
- 2) How much taller does the average patient grow per month after having the bone stretching operation?
 - A 6.5 inches
 - B 1 inch
 - C 5 inches
 - D 16 inches
- 3) Generally, the Chinese are motivated to have the operation because of the possibility of:
 - A being taller than their Japanese counterparts.
 - B being world class athletes.
 - C becoming rich and famous.
 - D overcoming an inferiority complex.
- 4) The main problem with the government's strategies is that:
 - A the operation is too expensive.
 - B many of the growth stimulating products do not work.
 - C the recovery process puts the patients' health at risk.
 - D the Chinese race cannot digest milk properly.
- 5) The Chinese government adopted the new policy because it:
 - A wants China to be a great sporting nation.
 - B it is embarrassed.
 - C wants to promote a better quality of life for its citizens.
 - D is trying to stimulate the growth of new industries.