

IT'S not for the faint-hearted, but a military-style boot camp could be the perfect way to kick-start the quest for physical perfection in 2009. With nowhere to hide, an intensive, week-long residential course run by ex-special forces marines will push you to the limit. Such courses are designed to transform flabby civilians into lean, fat-fighting machines. Participants are re-educated on diets and the merits of maintaining blood sugar levels as they are whipped into shape. So fat-burning and getting fit, while learning to watch what and when you eat, is what to expect. Here's the lowdown ...

CIRCUIT TRAINING

Even those saddled with the metabolism of a mating whale cannot fail to get into the fat-burning zone thanks to daily 6am outdoor circuit-training sessions. Completing a series of basic exercises including shuttle runs, press-ups and sit-ups for 50 minutes pre-breakfast not only revitalises the grey matter but ensures that from the moment of waking, the body is focused on one main objective: to burn fat and increase lean muscle tissue. Why? The more muscle the body has the higher its metabolism. The higher your metabolic rate the more efficient you are at burning off those excess inches. By increasing muscle percentage the body will burn more calories even when asleep. What's more, just one additional pound of muscle can use up an extra 50 calories a day.

RIVER CROSSING

It may sound insane, but plunging head-first into cold water and swimming 100 metres is good for you. A bit like jump-starting a car, the body has to quickly expend a huge amount of energy to regain a temperature of 37C, following a sharp dip in an icy loch. This energy is taken from stores within the body that would not normally be utilised, again encouraging and prolonging a higher-than-normal metabolism. Being very cold can increase your metabolic rate by up to 20%, helping you to burn fat in the process. So when the boiler breaks, it's not all bad.

SEVEN-HOUR HIKES/BIKE RIDES

Over the course of the week, a restricted calorific intake combined with long periods of constant activity equals one thing: shrinkage, notably of the thigh, stomach and bum regions. It's not rocket science but simple maths: reducing the number of calories consumed, while simultaneously massively increasing the number burned via long periods of low-impact activity, means the inevitable outcome is weight loss. Stunning Scottish countryside, rolling hills and magical forests help distract the brain from concentrating on what the body is going through and eliminates the boredom usually associated with going to the gym.

Body combat

THE LIFESTYLE DOCTOR

NUTRITION

Rookies are not quite subject to a strip-search on arrival, but prior to pitching up at this sort of camp it will be made very clear to you that any type of unauthorised food – and all alcohol – is banned. The boot camp typically adopts a "little but often" mantra when it comes to nutrition. Three small, high-protein meals per day interspersed by a mid-morning and mid-afternoon snack is all you get, plus one piece of fruit. With carbs restricted to breakfast only and recipes favouring thermogenic ingredients such as cinnamon and chilli, which promote fat-burning, an in-house chef ensures that no camper falls off the weight loss wagon. By increasing your heart rate, spices like cinnamon and chilli can raise your metabolism by as much as 50% for up to three hours after eating. Fruit tea is in abundance, but caffeine is a strict no-no. The aim is to maintain clients' blood sugar at a constant level throughout the day, which ensures adequate energy for the activities. Eating regularly also means that calories are burned while the body digests and absorbs food.

BOXING

Well, you didn't expect to go to an army-style boot camp and not encounter some form of combat, did you? Boxing is a fantastic way to tone up the arms and chest and burn more unwanted calories. An abundance of gloves, pads and instructors will be happy to take a pounding if you think you are up to the challenge. Fat never becomes muscle as such, but an increase in muscle of just 1% equates to a fat loss of 2lbs. Since muscle is

far thinner than fat, this explains why you can weigh the same and yet fit into a smaller pair of skinny jeans.

Starting price for a room at The Camp, a military-style boot camp in Dumfries and Galloway, is £1350 for a week including all activities, meals, equipment and insurance. Call 0870 033 2375 or visit www.thecamp.co.uk for more details.

BY ALI PATON

