

Exercise Your Inner Child

Is it possible to rediscover the silly, sweaty joy of playing—and still get a good workout? Four O editors find out.



Aqua Zumba

Try it if you like: the Latin-dance-inspired fitness craze known as Zumba

Health perks: Water provides 12 to 14 times the resistance of exercising on land, so even simple moves (like high kicks or tossing a beach ball while treading in the deep end) are more challenging.

Goofiness factor: I love to dance...after two or three cocktails. But while I'm far too self-conscious to shake my groove thing in Zumba, I was drawn to Aqua Zumba because the grooving happens *underwater*, where no one can see. My first class made me feel as if I were 7 years old again. Imagine a pool party complete with foam noodles, splashing, even hooting and hollering—set to reggae and calypso. We probably seemed silly to the lifeguard, but kids don't worry about seeming silly, and by the time we were riding noodles across the pool, neither did I. (zumba.com) —*Catherine DiBenedetto, articles editor*

Fun scale: 8/10



Pogo Running

Try it if you like: running

Health perks: The makers of these shoes say their product protects your joints by reducing ground impact by up to 80 percent. Because the boots are fairly heavy, you may burn more calories running in them than you would in sneakers.

Goofiness factor: When a friend suggested I try Kangoo Jumps to bust out of my running rut, their utter nuttiness made me hesitate. Developed in Switzerland in the 1990s, the contraptions look like ski boots on top of oval-shaped springs. Still, I pushed aside my vanity and headed to Central Park. Strapping on the padded plastic shoes took a bit of work, and I did feel wobbly for a few minutes. But once I found my stride, I couldn't stop smiling. At the end, I felt like an astronaut: One small step for me, one bouncy leap toward making running way more fun. (kangoo-jumps.com; from \$229) —*Emma Haak, assistant editor*

Fun scale: 9/10



Laughter Yoga

Try it if you like: slow yoga or guided meditation

Health perks: Based on breath exercises called *pranayama*, laughter yoga started in India and is now practiced in 60 countries. Because a good chuckle—spontaneous or not—has been shown to reduce stress, yogis yuk it up through a series of moves.

Goofiness factor: While I abhor silliness, I was curious to find out whether a belly laugh really could trim my belly fat. Within minutes of my arrival, our instructor had the group in pretend giggles: We lifted imaginary barbells overhead, then snickered as we threw the weight to the floor. We skipped around, flapping our arms like chickens. Embarrassing? You bet. But a funny thing happened during this session of artificial gaiety: I let out a genuine laugh. By the time we said a closing prayer, I felt lighter in spirit—if not on the scale. (laughteryoga.org) —*Ashley Williams, senior editor*

Fun scale: 4/10



Scooting

Try it if you like: biking

Health perks: Scooters deliver the cardio benefits of gym equipment—plus the mood boost of being outside.

Goofiness factor: My bike is great for getting around, but decades have passed since I yearned to pedal circles around the block. So when a woman zoomed by me recently, grinning atop a scooter, I thought: *I want to try that.* The Xootr Ultra Cruz made me feel as cool as a skateboarder, minus the fears of falling. The WingFlyer Z150 requires you to pump your legs up and down; my initial jabs of self-consciousness (*Is my butt wiggling on this as much as I fear it is?*) were soon wiped out by the pleasure of cruising along. The ElliptiGo 8C, essentially an outdoor elliptical machine, is pure fun to pedal. Next up: handlebar streamers. (xootr.com, mywingflyer.com, elliptigo.com; from \$199 to \$2,499) —*Kate Rockwood, senior editor*

Fun scale: 7/10