



EXERCISING DEMONS

PAY NO HEED TO ACHY-BREAKY LEG MUSCLES
BECAUSE RUNNING STAIRS PURGES THE SOUL

AS MY SHORT-LIVED jog turns into a laboured walk, my lungs push forth an unearthly noise I cannot control. I begin to wheeze. I look down at my legs. They sure look like mine — but I feel like I'm on rubber stilts.

I run — okay, I *walk* the stairs of Commonwealth Stadium like a man possessed, and I mean that in the most literal sense. It's not that I'm attacking this task with a vigour that would garner the respect of athletes who call the stadium home; rather, the demons of my unhealthy lifestyle are

truly calling the shots in this workout.

Greasy chicken wings, pizza, hamburgers, nachos, beer, pop, chocolate, fast-food breakfasts and cigars — oh God, the cigars — have all found their way into my body (although, I didn't put up much of a fight) and now refuse to leave. They protest my attempt to evict them through my wheezing, all-around pains and too-frequent notions to vomit.

Feeling on the verge of collapse, I cave. At the bottom of a 90-step flight of stairs, I crumple into a chair. As my back heaves and my heart lunges in its bid to break free of my

chest to run for its life, I tuck my head between my knees and brace for the worst. It turns out to be a false alarm. Never trust a demon.

In addition to breaking new ground in my journey to get back into shape, I've learned a valuable lesson this day: the trip through hell isn't complete until you've done a 45-minute stair workout. You can't convince me otherwise.

Kevin Dunsing tries to, though. A certified personal trainer at Commonwealth, the stair-climbing-class instructor says that people who stick with stair climbing see results. >>

"It's a different type of workout than running on a track or treadmill," he says. Stair climbing is an anaerobic workout, which means that oxygen is depleted quickly. So muscles must draw their energy from stored sources. Anaerobic exercises build endurance and boost metabolism. "I'd say if you're doing it twice a week, you should start seeing results in four to six weeks, if you're doing it on a consistent basis with other exercises as well."

Stair climbing has proven a mainstay for active Edmontonians for years. Drive about the city and you'll surely spot dedicated souls making their way up one of the more than 100 staircases scattered about the river valley.

Witness the hub of activity at Ezio Farone Park, just west of the High Level Bridge. As a connecting point between downtown and the university area, it attracts joggers, cyclists and folks who run the enormous staircase at the park's south end.

Samantha McRae took up stair-running a year ago. The 24-year-old started running stairs as soon as the snow melted. As much as she now enjoys it, she says her first few forays felt torturous.

"It was horrible," she laughs. "It was so hard." The hard work paid off for her, however. She attacks stairs on days when she isn't running; her benefits have quickly accrued. "It probably took two months, (but) my resting heart rate has dropped. Everything is working better."

STAIR CLIMBING IS ANAEROBIC EXERCISE — IT BUILDS ENDURANCE AND BOOSTS METABOLISM

Even after just one outing, the advantages of running stairs are obvious. When your legs ache five days after a workout, you know you're on to something. That's why Jimmy Lee, 25, intends to return to Commonwealth for a second season of drop-in stair-climbing classes when they resume May 1 (weather permitting). The engineer looks forward to the workout being easier than it was last year.

"My first time wasn't bad, the second time was horrible," he recalls, laughing.

"The second time I came I wasn't really prepared. I felt like throwing up by the end of it. I couldn't finish." Like McRae, though, Lee craves the post-workout buzz that lurks behind the brink of exhaustion. "You always feel better afterwards."

You'll burn more calories if you run stairs in short, high-intensity workouts, says Dunsing. But it's still beneficial to walk them if that's all you can manage, and better to burn fewer calories than pass out. His classes also include a full-body stretch, warm-up, some weights and abdominal exercises.

Stair climbing also exercises your thrift; dress like you would for a run, find a set of stairs or pay the stadium drop-in fee (less than \$5 this year), and you're good to go. When the weather's poor, Dunsing encourages people to take their activity indoors.

"If you have steps inside a building, that's great. I work in an office building downtown and it's 18 floors tall. If you get out there at lunchtime and you're using the stairway in your office building, that's a suitable replacement."

Then it's just you and your demons. **E**



THE STAIRS

STEPS

THE PAYOFF

Government House
(12845 102 Ave.)

50

With steps cut into small gentle hills, this is a nice, easy stair climb for beginners or those new to cardio workouts.

Clareview
(139th Avenue and 20th Street)

131

Set in a residential area overlooking an undeveloped stretch of the river valley with a view of the city to the west, this set features a cluster of 20 stairs, some embedded in the hill, and a main set of 111.

Connor's Hill
(91 St. & Strathearn Drive)

132

A nice hill/stair mix with steps leading up from a hilly, forested area. Definitely save this one for daylight.

Laurier Drive
(North side of the Quesnell Bridge)

165

Add to your workout by accessing these stairs via a lovely two-kilometre paved path from the parking lot of the Valley Zoo. The staircase borders busy Laurier Drive, but it's still relatively secluded.

Ezio Farone Park
(111 St. and 97 Ave.)

186

A two-landing staircase connecting the park on the west side of the High Level Bridge to a convenient parking lot east of the Royal Glenora Club.

Fairmont Hotel Macdonald
(10065 100 St.)

202

Climbing this gruelling set of stairs is worth the fantastic view of the Muttart Conservatory in the valley below.

Concordia College
(71st Street and Ada Boulevard, in front of college)

**130
& 114**

Two sets of stairs with a built-in, catch-your-breath break. The first set heads towards a public path. The second set leads to the golf course.

Whitemud Park toboggan hill
(South of Fox Drive, east of Whitemud Drive)

261

This monster of a staircase looks daunting from the bottom — and it probably is for most beginners. The set is in good shape, but keep an eye out for one broken stair near the top.