



THE **FIT** FACTOR

WHY IS AUSTIN SO MUCH THINNER THAN THE REST OF AMERICA?

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WE'RE NO. 39! THAT'S RIGHT, TEXAS IS THE 39TH healthiest state in the nation, according to *Forbes*. Not exactly bragging rights. But Austin, always the rebel, has been making headlines of its own for years. As consistently as our neighbors make it onto the top-10 lists of fattest cities in the country, Austin ranks on the fittest-cities lists. Why is Austin so healthy when the rest of Texas—the rest of America, for that matter—is so notoriously overweight?

For starters, look at the infrastructure. This is a city built on trails, hills and lakes. We have weather that keeps us outdoors and energized year-round. And when the temps climb into the hundreds, we hit the water.

Then there are our hippie roots. We have always cared about the food that fuels our bodies. We flock to Whole Foods, Central Market, Wheatsville Food Co-op and the area's many farmers' markets. We eat at Mother's, Eastside Cafe, Casa De Luz and Daily Juice.

And don't forget about our beloved Longhorns. The facilities and coaches at The University of Texas attract athletes from around the world. Throw a guitar pick, and chances are, you'll hit an Olympic gold medalist.

But the biggest reason for our collectively narrow waist? We're a passionate lot. While Americans have been hitting the gym regularly since Jane Fonda sported her first pair of Reebok high-tops, many see it as a 20-minute chore to finish before supersizing it at Mickey D's. But working out here is as much a part of life as, well, work. Just as we search for that perfect career, we seek out activities that keep us fit *and* happy. We ride our bikes and paddle our kayaks with big ol' grins on our faces.

And we're always looking for the next great challenge. Fitness "secrets" like cutting back on carbs and getting your heart rate up for 20 minutes might satisfy the New Year's-resolutions masses in other cities, but they don't cut it here. Fortunately, we're a creative city, so we asked some of our fittest citizens—coaches, trainers, athletes—for ideas on raising fitness regimens to the next level, and they delivered. We also got the lowdown on four of the nation's hottest workout crazes, all of which are becoming increasingly popular here in town. Just when you think you've seen it all, there's someone standing atop a big board on Lady Bird Lake, paddling off into the sunset.

WHAT

Gyrotonic

**WHY REALIGN THE SPINE,
STRENGTHEN THE CORE,
IMPROVE FLEXIBILITY**

Stand up straight! I can still hear my grandfather's words from my days as the prepubescent shy girl who slouched because she hated being the tallest kid in the class. Now, while I embrace my 5-foot-8-inch frame, I'm the middle-aged editor who slouches because she spends too much time hunched in front of her laptop. I just tell myself that the cricks and aches and cramps are normal at 40.

But, dang it, I have far too many 50- and 60-something friends who prove otherwise. "Gyrotonic will change your life," one of those friends recently told me. She's had back problems for years, and Gyrotonic is the only thing that's brought her relief. The sharp pain emanating from my back to my feet convinced me to give it a shot.

As Lucky Dog, the resident pooch at Core Therapy & Pilates in Westlake, greets me, I take in the rows of assorted machines. I'm not entirely sure I want to know what all the pulleys and stirrups are for on the big scary-looking device in the corner, but when Susan Clark, who teaches Gyrokinesis (Gyrotonic moves without the machines), sits on the pulley tower and makes flowing, circular movements with her arms, it looks graceful and easy. (For the record: graceful, yes; easy, no.)

Hungarian dancer Juliu Horvath developed the Gyrotonic Expansion System in the '80s to help him heal from career-related injuries. It has many of the same benefits as yoga, dance, tai chi, swimming and gymnastics, and it's a close relative of Pilates, except while Pilates is very linear, Gyro uses 360-degree moves. "They're both about lengthening your body, postural awareness," says Cheryl Dunn, who runs the studio with her husband, Stephen.

I learn that I have a lot to learn. Cheryl sits me down on a stool and teaches me about "narrowing," pulling up on my pelvic wall and tightening my abdominal muscles to stabilize my body. When she has me arch my back, she shows me how the center of my back barely moves, while my head and lower back do all the work. She tells me to imagine a string pulling me slightly forward and up from the top of my head. Then when I arch, I notice the center of my back starts to bend. As I practice arching and

curling, I become increasingly aware of the movements throughout my body.

Posture awareness is a big part of Gyrotonic. Stephen, who magically loosens some locked vertebrae in my back during my post-workout physical therapy session, tells me that many exercises take their toll on the body. Even sitting at a desk can cause problems over time. But Gyro strengthens and reeducates bodies, not only to correct those problems but to teach people to do those activities in a safe way.



Above: Cheryl Dunn guides instructor Dixon Mena on body placement at Core Therapy & Pilates in Westlake. Behind them is the pulley tower, which is at the core of Gyrotonic. Facing page: Cheryl works out with her husband and partner, Stephen Dunn.



The jump-stretch board

Chula Reynolds is amazed by the difference it's made in her life. She was hit by a car 16 years ago and as she approached 60, her aches grew unbearable. A year ago, she couldn't drive; she recently went hiking. "I started coming here as many days a week as they would let me," she says. By the way, when combined with prescribed physical therapy, Gyro is often covered by insurance.

Athletes use it to improve their skills and stamina. Businessman Stephen Jones insists it has made a huge differ-

ence in his golf swing. Even Madonna swears by it. "We're realigning postures," says Stephen Dunn. "We get to see some really big changes."

I try the jump-stretch board, sliding my hands and knees along detachable skates and rotating pads, then twisting and stretching my arms to the bars above while taking the thrusting breaths Cheryl taught me. I'm definitely getting a workout. When I walk out of the studio, I'm standing stick-straight. Grandpa would be so proud. —M. DELANEY



Where can you try it?

CORE THERAPY & PILATES
3534 Bee Caves Road, Ste. 110, 215-4227, therapyandpilates.com

REFORM PILATES
3110 Windsor Road, Ste. A, 236-9595, reformpilates.net

PILATES SOUTH
3001 Oak Park Drive, 462-1971, pilatessouthaustin.com

MECCA GYM & SPA
524 N. Lamar Blvd., 321-2680, meccagymandspa.com