

mind, body & spirit

# fitness

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# “I survived BOOTCAMP!”

How 4:30 A.M. wake-up calls, thousands of push-ups and a whole lot of yelling changed writer Sally Wadyka's body—and her self-esteem

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DIRK WESTPHAL

**On the surface,** SEAL Physical Training Bootcamp didn't sound like my kind of thing. First of all, the 90-minute class in New York City's Central Park begins promptly at 5 A.M. five days a week. For someone who hits “snooze” an average of six times most mornings, this was definitely not a selling point. Nor was the prospect of being yelled at by a Navy SEAL veteran who advertises the two-week course as “the toughest challenge you'll ever love.”

SEALs, members of the U.S. Navy's elite sea, air and land division, do what many consider to be the most rigorous physical training in the world. I'm no fitness slacker—I've run the New York City marathon and lift weights a couple times a week—but I'm also no G.I. Jane. At 37, could I handle the pressure both physically and emotionally? I wasn't sure. What sealed the deal for me, though, was the possibility of burning 1,100 calories before breakfast.

## Day 1

**LESSON: Sometimes your worth is measured in push-ups.**

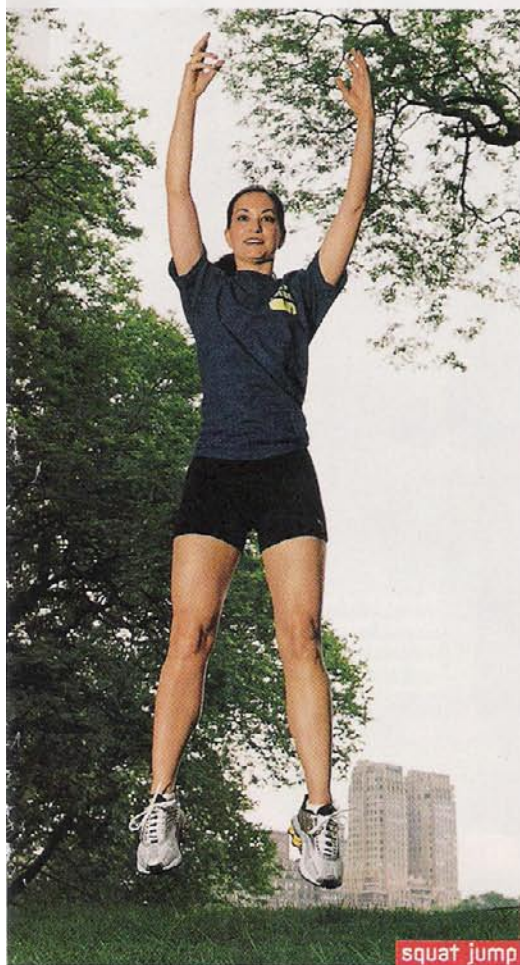
I hail a taxi at 4:45 A.M. to drive me the 20 blocks to our meeting place in Central Park. (I suspect that a real Navy SEAL would not be chauffeured to class. But let's face it, I'm a civilian, and it's scary to be walking the streets of Manhattan at what is, by all reasonable definitions, still the middle of the night.)

It becomes obvious that a few people—namely the ones already wearing the uniform navy T-shirt—have done this before. Richard, a four-time veteran with a shaved head and a steely physique, quickly takes charge, forcing the new recruits into two lines for the slow jog into the park. When we arrive at a blacktop area, Richard gets us into formation and tells us to greet Instructor Jack Walston with a hearty “Hooyah, Instructor Walston” (*hooyah* being the

traditional SEAL cheer). Eyeing my 34 fellow “campers,” I see a surprising array of shapes, sizes and ages. The group is divided nearly equally between men and women, ranging in age from 24 to 50.

Our first priority is “the fitness test.” I partner with Sarah, an athletic-looking 37-year-old mother of four, and we take turns counting how many push-ups and sit-ups the other can do in two minutes. Her 50 regulation-style push-ups seem effortless; I struggle to do 20 and then collapse onto my knees to finish out the two minutes girly-style. My grand total: 35 push-ups and 45 sit-ups. I’m completely winded, while Sarah appears sweat-free and serene. I make a mental note to learn more about this supermom. The session continues with several rounds of jumping jacks, squat thrusts and a move called chase the rabbit (hands on the ground, feet quickly shuffling from front to back).

At 6:45, I stumble home and collapse into bed for one more hour of sleep.



## Day 2

### LESSON: Mental toughness doesn't come in a can.

Squat jumps are the first order of the day. They're just as they sound—squat, jump forward with both feet, and land in a squat. We do this for about a hundred yards and then turn around and sprint back to the start. This continues for about an hour with a variety of lower-body moves—walking lunges, more squats and the bear crawl, where you run on all fours. While we struggle back and forth across the field like a pack of wounded animals, Instructor Walston shouts his version of encouragement: “It’s mind over matter. If you don’t mind, it doesn’t matter.” I can’t seem to make my burning quads and aching back *not* matter, however. I consider taking a break mid-field when someone beats me to it. Walston barks, “You don’t rest here. You can rest when you get to work.” He’s full of great lines. My personal favorite: “Mental toughness doesn’t come in a can. You can’t buy it.” But apparently you can get it if you do enough bear crawls across a field.

## Day 3

### LESSON: Soreness is not an excuse to quit.

When my alarm goes off at 4:30, I’m too sore to raise my head off the pillow. Taking the day off seems like a terrific idea. Then I think about how little mental toughness I’ve got (and how I can’t purchase it at my local supermarket), and I manage to struggle out of bed.



Today’s program revolves around running—timed laps and Indian drills (in single-file formation, the person at the back of the line sprints to the front). Finally, something I can usually do without feeling too much pain. The class ends with a 30-minute sequence of push-ups, arm circles, more push-ups. Instructor Walston does every exercise with a smile on his face, shouting out his special count: “One, two, I’m so happy, three, four, you’re so sad.”

## Day 4

### LESSON: Give 110 percent and see how far you get.

The smell of Ben-Gay wafting off my fellow boot campers is so overpowering it makes my eyes water. On today’s agenda: serious ab work. We do sets of 100 of at least seven abdominal

## Do-It-Yourself BOOTCAMP

Instructor Walston aims to “teach recruits that they can push their minds and bodies harder and further than they thought they could.” Ready to try this at home? Consider his SEAL-approved shape-up plan below. (You’ll just have to push yourself to give 110 percent—since he won’t be there to do it for you!)

**X Test yourself.** Count how many push-ups (on your knees if necessary), sit-ups and jumping jacks you can do in a series of 30-second tests. Add these moves to your routine every time you work out, and retest yourself once a week to see how you’re progressing. When you’ve seen a big increase in the number you can do in 30 seconds, test yourself for 60 seconds, then two minutes.

**X Run or walk with a stopwatch.** Measure out a 1.5-mile course, and time how long it takes you to run or walk it. Give yourself a goal of completing the distance in 12 minutes or less. Time yourself once a week until you’ve broken the 12-minute mark; then raise the bar by lowering the time to 11.5 minutes.



**SEAL P.T.  
COURSE**

Seeing her body change kept Sally motivated during the grueling two-week course.