



ST PHOTO: LAU FOOK KONG

"I used to have to stop and rest for one to two minutes after every three floors to recover but now I can finish the climb to my home without stopping."

WILMA KRISHNAN (above), who climbs nine storeys daily to her flat



ST PHOTO: STEPHANIE YEOW

Three-time Swissotel Vertical Marathon champion Thomas Dold says there is no restriction to training with stairs.

cardiovascular workout, especially for the lower part of the body.

Sports Solutions physiotherapist Gino Ng explains that stair-climbing uses "pretty much all the lower limb muscles such as the buttocks, hips, quadriceps, hamstrings and calves".

The vigorous stepping exercise is such a good cardiovascular exercise, it burns slightly more calories per minute when compared to running and swimming, he adds.

Depending on speed, stair-climbing burns 8 to 17.1 calories per minute, compared with 7.9 to 17.47 calories for running.

But Mr Ng cautions stair-climbing rookies against racing up multi-storey buildings.

"If you haven't done it before, start slow. Do it at a moderate pace and be patient. Don't start with 20 storeys," he says.

Tan Tock Seng Hospital senior physiotherapist Swapna Tony also advises those who suffer from arthritis or any pain in the knee joint to consult a physiotherapist as "stair-climbing can aggravate knee pain".

She adds that certain people should consult a doctor before adopting stair-climbing in their exercise regimen: women above the age of 55, men above 45, smokers and people suffering from cardiovascular conditions such as hypertension and high cholesterol.

To reduce the risk of injury from stair-climbing as an exercise or sport, Raffles Hospital principal physiotherapist Lim Hun Teck emphasises the importance of a short warm-up of about five minutes, as it is for any other aerobic activity.

He says it is important to maintain a proper climbing posture by "leaning forward slightly from the hips but keeping the back straight".

Avoid hunching to prevent straining the back, he adds. "At no time should you be rounded in the lower back area."

He also advises stair-climbers to place the whole foot on the step instead of climbing with the forefoot, heels hanging off the edge. Failure to do so could injure the Achilles tendon, which connects the calf to the heel.

Practised correctly, stair-climbing has another benefit. It frees up the lifts for people who really need to use them.

A Tan Tock Seng Hospital spokesman says if stair-climbing takes off among the hospital's employees, it would "free up the lifts for more patients' use".

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Step up and lose weight

Take the stairs to burn calories faster but doctors advise caution for people with health problems

Cheryl Tan

Forget weight loss centres, "miracle" diets and expensive gym memberships.

The flights of stairs in your office building and HDB block might just be your answer to shedding those kilos.

It was for assistant nurse Wilma Krishnan. She shed 7kg in three months after she started her daily regimen of climbing the stairs to her ninth-floor HDB flat in Yishun.

Aside from stomping up her HDB block daily, she also takes the stairs wherever she

can - at Khatib MRT station, she walks up to the train platform every morning instead of riding on the escalator.

Combined with a controlled diet she started about the same time she began stair-climbing, the 46-year-old has whittled her weight down to a healthier 71kg.

"I used to have to stop and rest for one to two minutes after every three floors to recover but now I can finish the climb to my home without stopping," says Ms Krishnan, who has cut the time she takes to walk up nine floors from three minutes, excluding rest, to 1½ minutes.

Besides saying no to soft drinks and snacks such as goreng pisang, she also goes for weekly half-hour treadmill sessions at the gym and twice-weekly brisk walks with her colleagues for about an hour at their workplace, Tan Tock Seng Hospital.

The hospital recently invited Mr Thomas Dold, winner of this year's Swissotel Vertical Marathon, to conduct a

clinic to promote stair-climbing as a form of exercise among its staff.

"You can train anywhere, anytime. Staircases don't close like gyms. If you don't use the elevator, you can cut time off a gym session," says Mr Dold, who has won the Empire State Building Run-Up six times.

The New York landmark is 381m tall with 1,576 steps.

This year is the third time he has won the Swissotel Vertical Marathon. The race has no cash prize.

"Stair-climbing is becoming much bigger around the world," he adds.

There are nine other vertical marathons held around the world, including the Taipei 101 Tower Run-Up, which is 448m tall with 2,046 steps and the Sydney Tower Run-Up in Australia, which stands at 305m with 1,504 steps.

The annual Swissotel Vertical Marathon, conducted at Swissotel The

Stamford, the tallest hotel in Singapore, puts stair-climbers through a gruelling race of 73 storeys or 1,335 steps to the hotel's helipad.

The recently concluded event is usually held in the second week of November and has been around for 22 years. This year, it hosted more than 1,600 participants, 90 per cent of whom were Singaporeans. The rest of the field comprised athletes from places such as Australia, Macau, Austria and the United States.

The record is held by Mr Dold at 6 minutes and 46 seconds, a time he achieved this year.

While stair-climbing is only one reason Ms Krishnan lost 7kg in three months, she says the stair exercises helped her "thighs feel more toned". Her jeans also started to feel looser, especially around the thigh area.

Physiotherapists whom LifeStyle spoke to agree that stair-climbing is an intensive