

# BODYTALK

trainer. "It's not a gimmick. Stability balls became very popular because you can multitask [different types of exercises]." A former Alvin Ailey dancer, Daniels, author of the book, *Straighter, Stronger, Leaner, Longer*, has included a chapter on core-training, which are workouts focusing on the spine, abdominals, pelvic girdle and hip. The workouts incorporate stability balls into the routines.

In addition to core exercises, stability balls can be used in stretching routines and exercises for the lower body, chest, shoulders and upper and lower back.

Newcomers should start by incorporating fitness balls into more conventional exercises, such as side-lying oblique curls and basic abdominal crunches. Dr. Cedric Bryant, chief exercise physiologist for the American Council on Exercise, based in San Diego, recommends investing in a good quality exercise ball that is burst-resistant. Some balls, he says, "could puncture and put you at risk for injury." Stability balls packages, which include an inflation pump and an instructional video, range from \$35 to \$45.

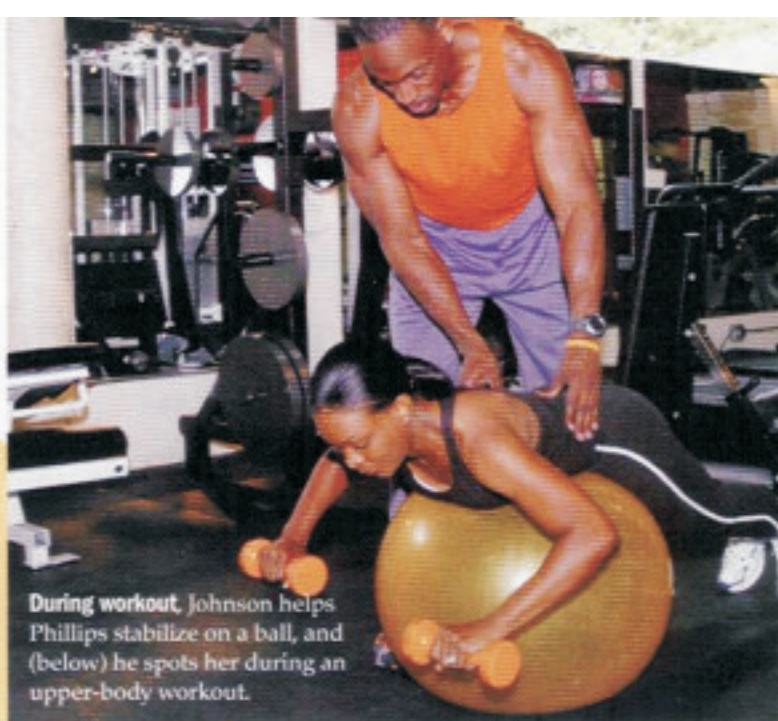
As your fitness regimen progresses, remember these basic rules for a safer and more effective workout:

## Begin with balance.

Balance is the key factor when getting accustomed to working out using fitness balls. One simple exercise for wobbly beginners involves simply sitting on the fitness ball and lifting one foot off the floor. This improves balance and strengthens the core muscles, including the abdominals, trunk and back.

## Tummy roll.

Kai Bandy, a Washington, D.C., physical fitness trainer, instructs her intermediate-level clients to lie flat on the floor with both feet positioned on top of the exercise ball and perform a basic crunch by lifting the upper body a half inch from the floor, then returning to the original position. "This exercise really is putting the focus on the primary muscle—the abdominals," says Bandy.



During workout, Johnson helps Phillips stabilize on a ball, and (below) he spots her during an upper-body workout.

## Strength training.

For a more advanced workout, incorporate resistance equipment, such as free weights, into your stability ball work. However, your focus should be on muscle endurance rather than strength, according to experts. They do not recommend using barbells with fitness balls.

Finally, work with an experienced personal trainer. And it's a good idea to take an exercise class to learn how to use stability balls properly. Before long, your workout will be rolling right along. □

