

Get Out

Try BalleCore

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Students lie flat on their backs on purple mats and kick their legs above them as if riding imaginary bicycles. "Push, release, push, release," says instructor Stephanie Sarkis, whose voice leads the dozen or so people in time with the "lite" jazz soundtrack. Later, they sit with their legs spread in front of them in a "V," hoist up a specially designed bar (which looks like a wooden baseball bat with two handles), and roll their midsections in circles -- like working a hula hoop without the hoop. This is BalleCore, a new exercise craze combining aspects of ballet, Hatha yoga and Pilates in a routine designed to strengthen the "core" muscles -- those deep in the abdomen that help with posture and stabilize body parts such as the spine.



The lightest-weight bench press ever? Nah, it's closer to abs of steel. But with more pliancy. And nifty props. (Nate Lankford For The Washington Post)

Developed in 2001 by Boston dance teacher Molly Weeks, BalleCore has been featured in glossies including Newsweek and Self and is now being offered in the District exclusively at the Sports Club/LA. Through its methodical series of bends and stretches, it's said to trim inches from the waist, hips and thighs, and increase muscle stamina and flexibility.

The moves look easy enough -- in one students raise a leg behind them in a graceful arabesque, in another they make like dogs getting ready to run by getting down on hands and knees and arching their backs up and down -- but look closely and you'll see the sweat. During some exercises, you can see muscles quivering, and several people grab for nearby towels to pat themselves dry. Sarkis, sensing the discomfort, at least reacts sympathetically, reassuring the students during certain combinations: "Just one more, and we're done!"

**What to Expect:** Lots of stretching over the course of 50 minutes -- especially of muscles that don't usually get extended much, like those in the feet, ankles and inner thighs. Experience in Pilates, yoga or ballet helps but isn't necessary. Some of the combinations of moves may seem baffling at first, but the instructor helps by walking around and giving pointers to anyone not getting it.

**What to Bring:** Workout clothes, such as sweat pants and a comfortable T-shirt. Students exercise barefoot (no need for dancers' socks or shoes), and the Sport Club/LA provides mats and other equipment.

**Cost:** Free with club membership (see below).

**Notes:** For more information on BalleCore or founder Molly Weeks, call 617-698-2673 or see [www.ballecore.com](http://www.ballecore.com); the Web site features a two-minute video of the workout's moves. Tony Sclafani

**Where to Get Bendy**

The Sports Club/LA. Ritz-Carlton Hotel, 1170 22nd St. NW. 202-974-6632. Wednesdays, 12:30-1:30 p.m., and Thursdays, 6-7 p.m. Basic club membership is \$135 to \$230 a month; there's also an initiation fee of \$600 to \$1,350, depending on the membership level.