



MH'S RAY KLERCK
STRUGGLING THROUGH
HIS TACFIT INITIATION.

THE WORLD'S SMARTEST WORKOUT

**TACFIT IS THE
REVOLUTIONARY
TRAINING SYSTEM
USED BY ELITE LAW
ENFORCEMENT
AND MILITARY
UNITS. ITS AIM: TO
DEVELOP LETHALLY
FUNCTIONAL
FITNESS AND
TURN YOUR MIND
INTO A FORTRESS
AGAINST STRESS**
BY RAY KLERCK

I shut my eyes mid-set, half hoping to "astral-travel" into another less-painful body, because my current one is shaking with exhaustion. My eyes reluctantly open as I hear our timekeeper bellow: "That's round 12 of 20!"

Welcome to Tactical Fitness (Tacfit), a new body-weight exercise movement that's taking the world by storm. This particular workout, the third of the day, has the affable name of "Charlie" (see page 72), but trust me, there's nothing friendly about it. The brutal circuit involves rounds of 10 squats – made tougher by holding a heavy club bell against my back – followed by five modified triceps push-ups, then five presses with my hands in Olympic rings. My mission: to complete one circuit of these moves every minute for 20 minutes, with my rest time limited to however many seconds I have left after completing my allocated reps. As a personal trainer who's at the gym five days a week, I pride myself on being fit enough for just about anything. Right now, though, I'm sweating myself dizzy and praying my legs hold out.

I'm braving this Tacfit Instructor Certification Course at Brisbane's Flight School Gym to investigate whether this emerging discipline lives up to the considerable hype. It certainly boasts an impressive line-up of endorsements. Tacfit has become the official training program for US special ops personnel and federal law enforcement agencies, Italy's Carabinieri Special Operations Unit (their equivalent of the SAS) and the Israel Defense Force Counter-Terrorism School, to name but a few.

Tacfit has won this elite following because it has seemingly found a solution to a problem that's troubled the fitness industry for generations. High-intensity workouts are known to deliver enviable conditioning and a shredded physique. But these heavy training schedules can also over-tax your system and put you at risk of niggling injuries, torn muscles and general burnout. Drawing on martial arts, what Tacfit claims to have found is a magic formula that combines hardcore fitness with injury prevention and stress relief.

The man behind this innovative training system is Tacfit's founder, Scott Sonnen, who is overseeing today's master class. With his shaved head, lurid tattoos and frame of leanly coiled muscle, the American doesn't look like someone to mess with. My instinct is right. Voted one of "the six most influential martial artists of the 21st century" by *Black Belt Magazine*, Sonnen is a five-time world martial arts champion and a physical training consultant for the US departments of Defence and Homeland Security.

What Sonnen has created in Tacfit is a unique discipline that hones your mind as well as your body. "I camouflaged stress management into a workout, so people of any age can reach their peak condition while removing injuries," he says. Now you can use his principles to revolutionise your own workout and grow military-grade muscle. →

BREATHE EASY

Although it may sound like a self-defence class, Tacfit actually consists of a series of 20- to 30-minute circuits that combine unusual body-weight moves with exercises using lopsided weights like kettlebells and club bells.

After the first flesh-pounding set of our initial workout, Alpha (see opposite page), I'm told to rest my index finger on my neck and take my heart rate (HR). I've just used a Tabata protocol: 20 seconds' work followed by 10 seconds' rest, before repeating for the next move and doing this circuit eight times. All using six body-weight exercises that are totally new to me. As a result, my heart's machine-gun beat is alarming.

"We do reps as fast as your form can hold it," says Sonnen. "However, I noticed people couldn't recover fast enough during the rest periods, so I developed recovery tools that help you seize back good exercise form."

Sonnen believes that one of the best forms of recovery is controlled breathing. This sounds worryingly like something you'd hear in a Byron Bay health retreat, but I figure that as I'm breathing anyway, I'll follow his instructions. "Take 2-3 short, sharp breaths, then exhale very slowly and your heart rate will drop," explains Sonnen.

The results are instantaneous. Amazingly, my HR reading is at least 30-40 beats per minute lower than it was before. Sadly, my smile lasts all of 10 seconds before I'm back into the work phase of the Tabata workout.

USE TACFIT TODAY

Sonnen's technique is backed by solid research from the American Institute of Physics, which found that your HR and breathing cycles can become synchronised so that your breathing directly affects your heart rate. It certainly works for me. Controlled breathing decreases my HR to accelerate recovery so the sets feel progressively easier. Whether you're doing intervals or circuit training, the breathing technique is an effective tool for improved bounce-back-ability.



"The police couldn't process anxiety and wore their job like rusty armour"

– Tacfit founder Scott Sonnen

3 VARY YOUR INTENSITY

Tacfit may be tough, but it's not about mindless intensity. When it comes to the long-term scheduling of workouts, Sonnen takes the Goldilocks approach: not too much, not too little, but just the right amount of exercise-induced stress. "Most people neglect high stress for too long or don't reduce stress low enough for long enough," he insists.

To avoid overtraining, Sonnen developed a long-term plan designed to deliver the optimal balance of stimulus and rest (see below). "You can use this schedule for 28 days straight without having a single rest day," he says.

What Sonnen prescribes is the antidote for gym-junkies or CrossFit devotees who risk burnout by handcuffing themselves to hardcore workouts. →



USE TACFIT TODAY

Even if not for a Tacfit routine, follow this plan to remain active without succumbing to overtraining



DAY 1

Very low intensity

Types of exercise: mobility work, Tai Chi, light stretching, walking, swimming or gentle hiking.
Intensity: 20-40 per cent of your heart-rate maximum; about 3/10 in terms of exertion.



DAY 2

Low intensity

Types of exercise: yoga, Pilates, core exercises, jogging, cycling.
Intensity: 40-60 per cent of your heart-rate maximum; about 5/10 in terms of exertion.



DAY 3

Moderate intensity

Types of exercise: climbing, mountain biking, rowing, running, moderately hard circuit training.
Intensity: 60-80 per cent of your heart-rate maximum; about 7/10 in terms of exertion.



DAY 4

High intensity

Types of exercise: sprinting, hard circuit conditioning, high-intensity weight training, competitive sports.
Intensity: 80-100 per cent of your heart-rate maximum; about 9/10 in terms of exertion.

2 COMBAT STRESS

Stress isn't just emotionally damaging. Ohio State University found that it also makes your immune system less effective and can cause chronic inflammation, which increases your risk of heart disease. "Your central nervous system doesn't differentiate between physical, emotional or symbolic threats," says Sonnen. In other words, your body treats all kinds of stress the same.

During his years of martial arts training, Sonnen made a startling discovery. As part of his former role as team coach for the American Sambo Association, he trained police and amateur fighters in the Russian combat sport. What he found surprised him. "Police excelled in training, but amateurs shone in competition," he says. "Logic says that police should have done better in competition, thanks to their experience with violence. But the stress load from their lifestyle was excessive compared to the amateur athletes. The police couldn't process anxiety and wore their job like rusty armour."

Sonnen's conclusion: stress has a corrosive effect on high-intensity performance.

Admittedly, I don't have to deal with anything like the same stress-load as the average cop. But Sonnen's words ring true. When I flick through my phone and compare my training journal to my work calendar, I find a tight link between lacklustre workouts and deadline weeks.



USE TACFIT TODAY

Stress may temporarily sabotage your physical potential, but that doesn't mean you should avoid the gym whenever you're under the pump. In fact, the opposite is true. Getting sweaty plays a crucial role in stress control – the University of Maryland found that moderate exercise helps people to cope better with anxiety long after the workout is over. The key word here, however, is "moderate".

This principle guides the Tacfit philosophy. Sonnen encourages a self-assessment of your overall stress levels before you shoot for personal bests. Whether you do Tacfit, hit the gym or simply pound the pavement, don't go all out when you're under pressure at work or at home. Instead, look to actively halve your workload during times of stress.

It's an approach that definitely works. Halfway through the morning, I'm struggling with the physical demands of the course and frustrated by the fact that men half my size are flying through the drills with relative ease. Then, before lunch, I try Tacfit's easy workout called Bravo (see page 70), which involves four-minute sets of Kettlebell deadlifts, kneeling push-ups, overhead club bell rotations and a plank-like move where I swoop my leg under my body. At the end, my shirt is soaked in sweat yet I feel as calm as a Hindu cow. The proof of Sonnen's claim seems to be in the pudding. And not just because stressed is "desserts" spelled backwards.

ALPHA WORKOUT

1 LUNGES

A. Stand with your feet hip-width apart and hold your hands at chin height with your elbows tucked in.



B. Take a giant step forward with your left foot and bend your left knee until your left thigh is parallel to the floor and your knee is at 90°. Your back should remain straight throughout the exercise. Step back into the starting position and repeat on other side.

2 PULL-PLANK KNEE

A. Kneel on the floor with your arms fully extended and palms flat on the floor.

B. Pull your body forward so that your chest ends up in line with your hands and your elbows are bent to 90°. Return to the start.



3 SIT-THROUGH KNEE

A. Begin in downward dog, where your palms are flat on the ground, your feet are out behind you and your glutes are raised in the air.

B. Lock your right elbow, lower your glutes and rotate your body to the left so that you're almost sitting with your right knee flat on the floor and your left knee pointing upward. Return to the start and repeat on the other side.



4 TACTICAL PUSH-UP

A. Get into a push-up position with your hands slightly wider than your shoulders.

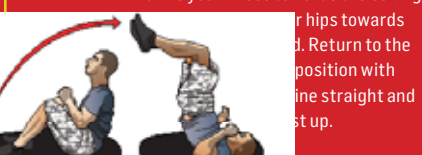


Your body should form a straight line from your shoulders to your ankles. Keep your back flat.
B. Lower your body while keeping your elbows tucked to your sides. Your chest should fall between your hands but shouldn't touch the floor. Rise to the starting position.

5 SPINAL ROCK

A. Sit on the floor, feet flat, arms holding your knees.
B. Roll back, one vertebrae at a time. Let your arms and palms stay flat on the floor.

C. As your back is flat on the floor, use momentum to drive your knees towards the ceiling.



6 TRIPOD VERTICAL

A. Get onto all fours so your chest faces up rather than down. Your knees should be bent, your feet flat on the ground. Rest your body weight on your right arm.

B. Place your left elbow on the floor, arm facing upward. Push your hips up and then raise your left leg as high as you can. Lower your leg and repeat on the other side.



4 INJURY-PROOF YOUR BODY

Stamina, agility, strength, coordination, speed... these are all assets that Tacfit promises to enhance. But that's not why US federal law enforcement agencies use it as their training method of choice. The reason they now rely on it stems more from Tacfit's remarkable record for injury prevention.

"After law enforcement agencies used Tacfit, not only could officers perform better in exercise tests, but there was a zero per cent injury rate," says Sonnen. "This came down from a 40 per cent injury rate using normal training methods."

In part, this is a result of Tacfit's emphasis on varying workout intensity. It's a stark contrast to current fitness trends, where you're encouraged to blast through the pain barrier and where ripped calluses become badges of honour. "Nowadays, many fitness professionals are just smart enough to be stupid enough to kill people," says Sonnen. "We aim to change that through careful movement structures."

Additionally, Tacfit focuses on specific moves that prime your connective tissues and joints to absorb force. There is an emphasis on natural, flowing motions that help you activate your inner Bruce Lee to move like water. Throughout the workouts, I tried new exercises that put my body in contact with the ground more than usual. It was pretty unusual stuff, but the net result was zero pain.

USE TACFIT TODAY

Tacfit may not put your chiropractor out of business, but Sonnen, who has broken his back, developed this system to help create spinal strength. The exercise I found most useful was the "Spinal Rock" (see Alpha Workout). This loosened my upper back because my spine and body were forced to move together in a very natural flow. Try inserting 2-3 sets of 10 reps into your warm-up to roll out any aches and pains.



BRAVO WORKOUT

Do each exercise for four minutes for one minute, then begin the next. Tally up the reps and improve your time with each session.

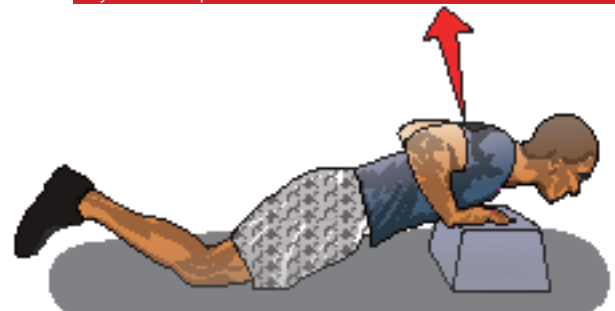
1 KETTLEBELL TWO-HANDED DEADLIFT

Muscles: *quads, glutes, lower back, abs*
A. Place a kettlebell on the ground in front of your feet shoulder-width apart. Bend at your knees and bring your upper body towards the weight.
B. Grab the handle with an overhand grip. Use your legs to raise the weight so your legs become straight. Lower the weight, keeping your back



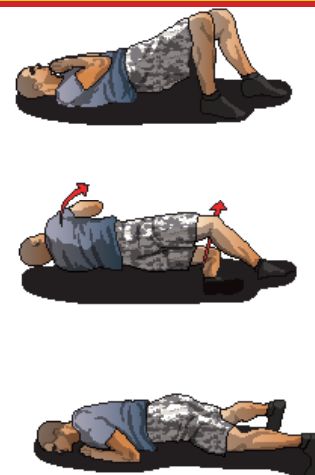
2 FEELING BOX PUSH-UPS

Muscles: *shoulders, chest, triceps*
A. Place a 30- to 50-centimetre-high box in front of you, then get into a push-up position and drop your knees to the floor.
B. Lower your elbows, keeping them tucked into your sides, to lower your chest to the edge of the box without allowing yourself to rest there. Push your arms to push back to the start.



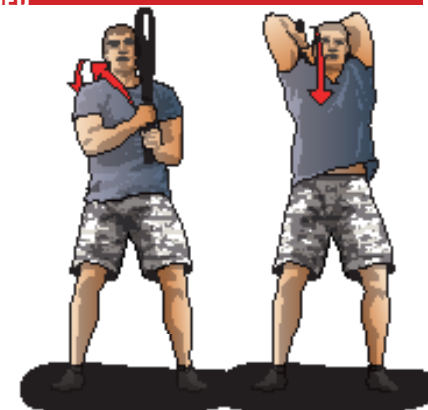
3 LEG THREAD

Muscles: *core, lower back, glutes, hamstrings, quads*
A. Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet placed slightly wider than shoulder-width apart. Place your hands together in front of your chest.
B. Bring your left knee beneath the gap of your right knee and roll over onto your forearms while keeping your hips high and placing your body weight on your toes. Return to the start by bringing your right knee beneath your left knee. Repeat on the other side.



4 CLUB BELL TWO-HANDED GAMMA CAST

Muscles: *shoulders, core*
A. Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, knees slightly bent. Place the club bell in front of you with the side facing up. Your elbow is parallel to the ground.
B. Drive the club bell over your shoulder next to your right arm (not over your head) while keeping your forearms perpendicular to the ground. Pull the club bell across your body and return it over your left shoulder. Repeat the process on your right side, continuing to alternate.



*No club bell

5 RE-STRUCTURE YOUR WORKOUTS

At the end of my Tacfit experience, I reflect on the three workouts I've done. I've always chased that utterly spent buzz you get after a workout. But the downside of doing so is I often barely have the energy to shake up my post-session protein drink – its lumpiness invariably betrays my level of exhaustion. Today, however, despite some gut-wrenchingly tough workouts, the whites of my eyes have never been brighter and I still feel strangely energised.

This, it turns out, is no coincidence. Tacfit workouts are carefully structured with in-built recovery so you can regain good form. "The hardest part of Tacfit workouts is in the middle, so you start to recover while exercising," explains Sonnen. "This means you finish up with more energy."

This philosophy was evident in the first workout, Alpha. It started with lunges, then sit-through knees, then push-ups (the workout's hardest move), and then the Spinal Rock that involved plenty of momentum – a godsend when you're shattered.



USE TACFIT TODAY

Traditional gym wisdom is to tackle the toughest exercises at the start of your workout while you're still fresh and strong. However, this tack can leave you feeling smashed by the end of your session – bad news when you have a busy day ahead. Instead, try experimenting with the Tacfit approach and leave the most challenging moves until the middle of your workout.

If, for example, you're doing a 20- to 30-minute body-weight workout, the order of your schedule might be: squats, lunges, chin-up, push-ups, leg raises and plank. The chins-ups are arguably the most demanding exercise, so Sonnen would suggest doing them in the middle when you've had a comprehensive warm-up.

Research in the *Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research* supports this approach. It found that dynamic warm-ups lasting up to 10 minutes helped to create more power, with the first few exercises priming you for the tougher ones. Liken this process to Wednesday hump day: once the bulk of the work is over, you get a second wind that'll help you coast home. ✕

CHARLIE WORKOUT

This workout is done for time: 20 minutes. You have one minute to do five reps of each exercise. However many seconds you have left after your reps of the three exercises are completed is your rest time. Repeat this 20 times



1 CLUB BELL SHOULDER-PARK SQUAT

Muscles: *glutes, hamstrings, quads, calves, shoulders, core*

A. Stand with your feet slightly wider than shoulder-width and rest the heavy end of a club bell against your right shoulder.

B. Bend your knees and hips until the tops of your thighs are parallel to the ground, then rise up to the start. Do five reps, then switch shoulders and do another five reps.



2 QUAD PRESS BASIC

Muscles: *triceps, chest, shoulders, core*

A. Get on all fours with your knees bent forward and body weight resting on your toes. Place your hands together beneath your chest.

B. Bend your elbows to lower your chest to the floor, allowing your knees to splay outwards, then straighten your arms to return to the start.



3 RING KNEE PRESS

Place the Olympic rings to about knee height, then sit in front of them and place a hand in each ring. Your elbows should be locked and turned in so they are parallel to the floor.

B. Bend your elbows to lower your chest between the rings, then straighten your arms to return to the start.

FOR A FULL TACFIT WORKOUT, TURN TO PAGE 104

The next Tacfit certification course will run from December 4, 2014 (tacfit.com.au)

