

ADVENTURES IN FITNESS

WITH DANETTE M. WATT



THIS MONTH'S ADVENTURE

ROCK-WALL CLIMBING

INTENSITY LEVEL

BASIC

MODERATE

HIGH

My son, Sam, loves to rock climb—indoors and out. I, on the other hand, start to hyperventilate if I look out of a 10-story window.

But, when Sam suggested we go climbing, I decided to quit being a wimp and give it a try.

We headed over to Upper Limits in St. Louis where the main climbing area is about 35 feet high. Climbers wear a safety harness and traverse a path to the top by following colored hand- and footholds. Each path has a number near the bottom to indicate its level of difficulty. The routes on this day ranged from 5 to 12. I decided to stick with those between 6 and 8.

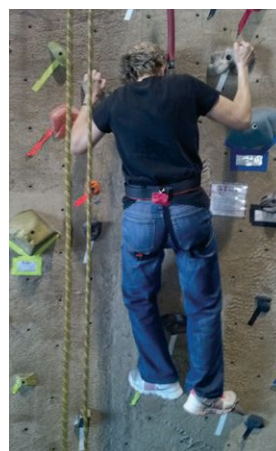
We climbed for about two hours, which doesn't seem like a long time, but it is if you're a newbie. I did most of the climbing and was getting tired by the end. I'm in good shape, but climbing can be physically demanding. You're using your legs to push off footholds and your fingertips to grip handholds, some of which are narrow or bumpy, just as rocks are in real life.

Climbing is also mentally challenging. Sam was encouraging and patient as he gave me cues as to where I should next place my hand or foot. But at times, I felt stuck. Hugging the wall. Toes balancing on a narrow slab of plastic. Fingertips gripping more narrow pieces of plastic. Frozen with fear.

I had to take a deep breath and say to myself, "Just let go. You can't fall." In all honesty, you technically can fall, but the harness's rope is controlled by a belayer, either human or automatic, which manages a climber's rope and can catch a climber's fall.

I was thrilled when I reached the top on my first climb. My hands were sweaty from nerves, and my heart was racing from exertion, but I felt like I was on cloud nine.

Starting a climb can sometimes be the hardest part. But, if you keep moving forward an inch at a time, you'll soon find yourself at the top.



Danette *above* works her way to the top of the rock-climbing wall at Upper Limits in St. Louis. Danette's son, Sam, *left* joins her on the wall.

TAKE IT TO THE TOP

What are the benefits?

This low-impact exercise develops strength, agility and self-confidence in a positive, and supportive environment.

Where do I go?

There are more than 3,000 climbing gyms worldwide, according to IndoorClimbing.com. Many larger cities have one. Some universities even have their own wall. Check with a fitness facility in your town or in a nearby city to see if they have a rock-climbing wall or know where one is located.

Is rock climbing right for me?

Rock climbing is great for thrill-seeking teens, and active kids and adults who want a challenge. In short, it's good for just about anyone looking for a fun sport.

How much will it cost me?

Day passes are cheap—about \$12 in St. Louis. Discounts may be available for groups, seniors, kids and military. Expect to pay a small fee to take a test if you plan to belay. Many rock-climbing gyms also offer introductory classes for beginners, which can cost about \$30 to \$40 per person.

What equipment do I need?

You'll need shoes and a harness, for sure. I rented a climbing package in St. Louis for \$8 that included a harness, shoes and a belay device, or chalk bag.



YOUR TURN

Go to IndoorClimbing.com/worldgyms.html to find a rock-climbing facility near you.