

The Four Exercises You Should Be Doing

Strengthen your body with these do-anywhere moves.

BY CAREY ROSSI

Getting the best quality is paramount, whether it's building materials, cars or food. Paying less for it is even better.

Exercise is no different—you want to get the best results in the shortest amount of time. After asking fitness trainers and researchers around the country which exercises give more bang for the exercise buck, the moves below won their approval. “All of the exercises are multi-joint, large muscle group exercises, which means they will create potentially more energy expenditure,” says Chris McGrath, MS, a certified strength and conditioning specialist in New York City. Focusing on strength, balance and stabilization, the below exercises are easy to do anywhere, anytime.



1. The Push-Up

“Push-ups work the most number of upper body muscles; the chest, triceps, shoulders—and your core also comes in play because you need to tighten your abs to keep your back from sagging,” says Cindy Whitmarsh, CPT, president of UltraFit Nutrition Systems in San Diego, California.

How to do it: Assume a prone position on the floor with your bodyweight supported by your hands and your knees or balls of your feet. Palms should be slightly wider than shoulder width; arms are extended. Body stays straight through the movement. Descend until elbows are bent approximately 90-degrees, then straighten arms to return to the starting position, instructs Lisa A. Reed, M.S., CSCS, Director of Strength & Conditioning at National Cathedral School in Washington, DC. Do up to 3 sets of 12-15 repetitions.

Tip: Whitmarsh suggests that beginners start with a wall push-up (hands on wall, feet further away

than shoulders and lowering chest to wall), then graduate to floor push-ups from knees and then basic military push-ups.

2. The Squat

Squats target almost all the muscles in your legs and your butt. “They can be as simple as chair squats (standing and sitting), or can be performed easily with weights in the hands (such as evenly weighted, handled grocery bags),” says McGrath.

How to do it: Stand erect with your knees slightly bent and your feet about hip width apart. Squat down, pushing your hips back as if you were sitting in a chair, bringing your thighs parallel to the ground. Squeeze your glutes (the muscles in your butt) as you press back up. Do 2 sets of 8-10 repetitions slowly twice a day.

Tip: Michele S. Olsen, Ph.D., FACSM, professor of exercise science at Auburn University Montgomery in Alabama suggests when first doing any kind of squat movement that you

use a door knob on a closed door for balance by holding it with one hand. Do 2 sets of 8-10 repetitions slowly twice a day.

3. The Lunge

"Lunges target two primary muscles groups: 1) the hip extensors, comprising of the glutes and hamstrings; and 2) the knee extensors, made up of the four muscles collectively known as the quadriceps," says Reed. "The muscles used in the lunge are the same as those utilized in the squat, but the lunge provides greater range of motion, allowing more substantial glute and hamstring development."

How to do it: Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart. Step backward with your right foot. Drop your hips straight down, bending both knees as you go. Continue to lower your body by bending your knees until there is about a 90-degree bend in

each. Return to the start position (standing upright) by pushing up with your forward leg. Keep your body upright at all times – do not bend forward at the waist. Reed recommends doing 12-15 repetitions each leg up to three times.

Tip: "The most important factor here is balance," says Reed. She suggests that while performing the lunge, you hold the stomach muscles tight and keep the shoulders over or slightly in front of the hips.



Bonus Move

4. Standing Back Extensions

"This exercise is a back, chest and neck reliever," says Dr. Olsen. "It counter-balances all of the leaning and bending-over [we do]. Physical therapists recommend similar things to workers who stand and lift a lot on the job."

How to do it: Olsen instructs that while standing up, place hands on the back of the hips, kind of like putting your hands into your back pant pockets, then, stick your chest out and direct it upward to the ceiling as your back curves inward, hold for 5 counts and rest for 5 counts. Repeat 5 times; do several times a day.

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