

A woman with a muscular physique stands in a gym, wearing a white sports bra with a crisscross pattern and black leggings. She is holding a black kettlebell with yellow accents in her right hand. The background features a grey brick wall and black metal gym equipment, including a pull-up bar and a weight rack. A thick rope and a weight plate are visible on the floor to the left.

the world's 10 best FUNCTIONAL EXERCISES

These demanding exercises hit all your major muscle groups, training them to work in concert — improving performance in the gym or on the field.

BY MICHAEL BERG, NSCA-CPT PHOTOGRAPHY BY IAN TRAVIS BARNARD

We get it. Ranking the “world’s best functional exercises” is an exercise in futility. Because really, what makes a thruster better than a jump squat or a handstand push-up? The actual rankings aren’t really the point. Our aim is to give you 10 incredible, valuable, time-tested moves to choose from that will improve your movement patterns, body awareness and total-body power. Debate the order if you want, but implementing the moves on this list into your programming will get you fitter, faster.



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Wall Handstand Push-Up

Hits: Shoulders, triceps, traps, core

Sure, it's fun to show off by doing a free-standing handstand push-up, but if you don't have a gymnastic bent, a handstand push-up done against a wall is just as effective, developing shoulder and triceps strength while also calling on upper-body and core stabilizers to help you maintain balance.

To Do: Place your hands about a foot away from a wall spaced shoulder-width apart on the floor. Kick up one foot at a time into a handstand position, or have a partner help you get there, and hold here with your heels touching the wall, body straight, feet together. Look straight ahead (not down at the floor) and slowly, under full control, bend both elbows to lower yourself as far you can without letting your head touch down. Keep your core tight as you press back up to the start.

Expert Tips: "Before going for a push-up, practice holding a handstand against the wall for 10 to 20 seconds for three to six sets," suggests former IFBB Fitness pro Carla Sanchez, owner of Performance Ready Fitness Studio in Lane Tree, Colorado. Do this for several weeks until you're comfortable upside down, then go for the push-up.

Wary of flipping ass over teakettle? Practice in a pike position with your feet on a box and your hands on the floor to build confidence.

Model: Crystal Sauer; Hair: Malena Bares; Case: Top: Brock; Leggings: Madet's Own; Shoes: D'Neck

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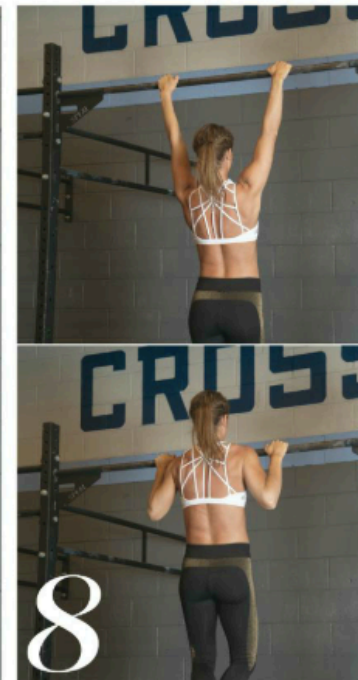
Farmer's Walk

Hits: Grip strength, shoulders, quads, hamstrings, calves

This is as basic as it gets, testing just how long you can lug heavy, awkward objects around without dropping them. This sort of long-winded grip strength comes in handy for chipper-style deadlift workouts or unrelenting reps of pull-ups — as well as for unloading all your grocery bags in one trip.

To Do: Pick up a heavy dumbbell or kettlebell in each hand and draw your shoulder blades down and back to stabilize your shoulders. Keeping your core tight, chest elevated and head up, walk forward with even, steady steps for time or distance.

Expert Tips: "When learning the farmer's walk, use quick, short steps," says Los Angeles-based trainer Teri Jory, creator of the Poise method. "As you get comfortable, you can move faster and lengthen your steps, leading with your hips."



8

Pull-Up

Hits: Lats, upper back, middle back, biceps

Being able to hoist your bodyweight up to a bar is an essential component of everyday strength, and a functional, powerful body begins with a back primed with pull-up training.

To Do: Take a wide overhand grip on a pull-up bar and hang freely with your arms fully extended and your ankles crossed behind you. Draw your shoulder blades in toward one another, then drive your elbows down and back, pulling your body upward until your chin crosses above the bar. Hold momentarily, then lower slowly back to the start.

Expert Tips: "The pull-up is challenging, but you can make it even more so as you get stronger by using ankle weights, varying your timing or adding in knee tucks," says Samantha Clayton, personal trainer, former Olympic runner, and vice president of worldwide sports performance and fitness at Herbalife Nutrition.





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Woman Maker

Hits: Quads, hamstrings, glutes, lats, upper back, middle back, chest, shoulders

This move is a clever combination of several functional movements (burpee, renegade row, push-up, squat clean and overhead press), which add up to a challenging, rut- (and gut-) busting exercise.

To Do: Hold a pair of dumbbells at your sides, then crouch and place them parallel on the floor in front of you. Keep your hands on the dumbbells as you jump your feet behind you into plank, then do a push-up. Hold at the top and do a one-arm row on each side, elbows in close to your body. Do another push-up, then jump your feet back underneath you. As you stand, pull the dumbbells up along the front of your body, shrugging as you reach full extension and flipping your elbows underneath to bring them to shoulder level. Drop into a full squat, then explode upward, pressing the weights overhead as you come to standing.

Expert Tips: "This exercise requires a good connection to your core and gluteal muscles," explains Patricia Friberg, creator of the *Bottom Line & A Core Defined* and *Belly Beautiful Workout* DVDs. "Do some glute activation exercises in your warm-up, such as squats with a resistance loop above the knee, to prepare for this move."

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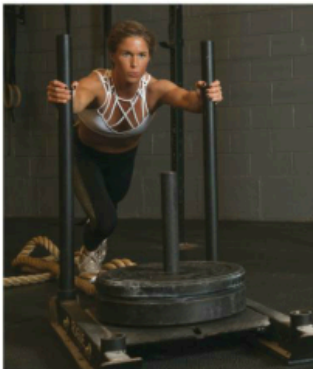
Sled Pull/Push

Hits: Glutes, quads, hamstrings, calves, middle back, lats, chest, shoulders, triceps, biceps

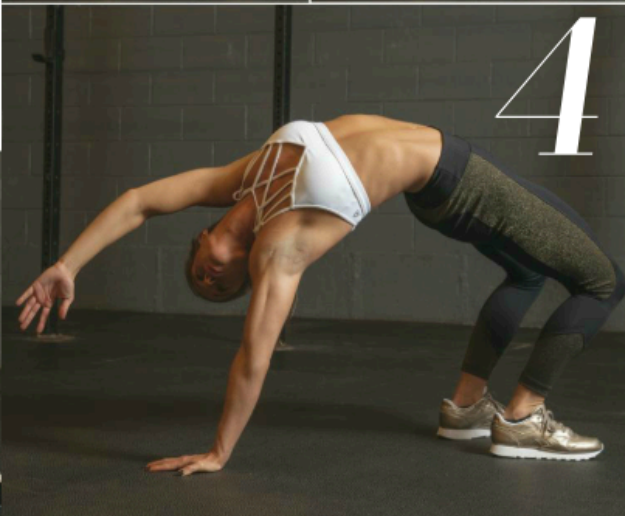
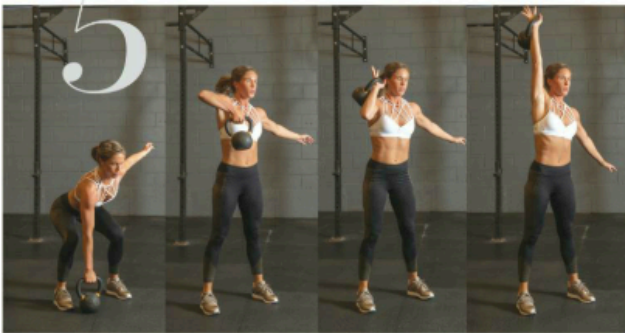
Pushing and pulling are innate human movements, and as such recruit pretty much every muscle in your body. This combo using a loaded sled gets you both coming and going.

To Do: Attach a rope securely to one end of a loaded sled. Extend the rope along the floor and face the sled with your feet shoulder-width apart. Grasp the rope with both hands and bend your knees and lean away from the sled to pull the rope taut, back straight. Pull the sled toward you, hand over hand, until it reaches your feet. Then place your hands on the uprights and push the sled back to the start — hips low, elbows bent — taking strong, steady steps.

Expert Tips: "This is high-intensity training without the high impact," Sanchez says. "Load the sled with heavy weight to build strength and power, or use lighter weight and move with more velocity for conditioning benefits."



5



One-Arm Kettlebell Snatch

Hits: Back, shoulders, traps, glutes, quads, hamstrings

When doing bilateral (two-limbed) exercises, the stronger, more dominant arm or leg often takes on an unequal amount of the load, creating imbalances. A functional, unilateral exercise like this kettlebell snatch can serve as a remedy for those deficiencies.

To Do: Stand behind a kettlebell with your feet shoulder-width apart. Keep your chest lifted as you push your glutes back and bend your knees to grasp the handle with one hand, extending the other arm to the side. In one smooth motion, stand up quickly to pull the kettlebell off the floor, bringing it straight up along the front of your body. As the weight comes above your shoulder and feels almost weightless, punch your arm up toward the ceiling and allow the kettlebell to roll softly to the backside of your wrist. Finish with your arm extended straight up over your shoulder, palm forward. Reverse the sequence to bring the kettlebell back to the floor. Do all reps on one side before switching.

Expert Tips: "Before attempting this with a challenging weight, it's important that your movement fundamentals are sound and you have good shoulder stability," says Patrea Aeschliman, CSCS, Power Pilates instructor. "If you can, have a kettlebell-certified trainer help when doing it for the first time."

Crab Reach (Thoracic Bridge)

Hits: Back, shoulders, chest, glutes, hips, core

The crab reach is the antidote for prolonged bouts of sitting, stretching and strengthening key areas, including your shoulders, hips, lower back and abdominal region.

To Do: Sit on the floor with your knees bent, and place your hands behind you with your fingers pointing backward. Press down into your hands and feet to lift your glutes off the floor, then continue lifting your hips as high as you can. Reach your left hand overhead toward the floor and turn your head to look at your right hand. Pause, then return to the start. Continue, alternating sides.

Expert Tips: "Start with your palms far enough from your feet so that you do not over-flex your wrist when you press up," says Missy Reder, personal trainer, yoga instructor and creator of the AB-EZE core training tool. "Plus, the added space will allow you to get your hips even higher."





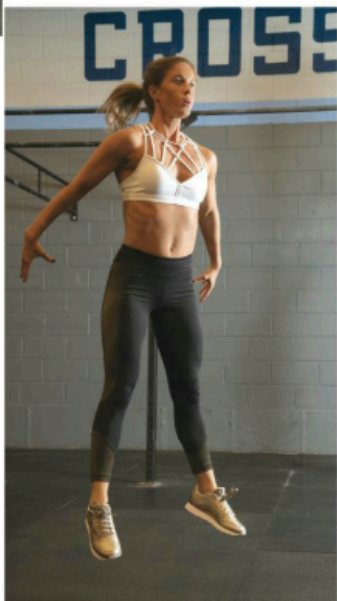
Jump Squat

Hits: Quadriceps, hamstrings, glutes, calves, shoulders

This simple bodyweight exercise combines the best overall resistance exercise (squats) with a plyometric component, training the fast-twitch muscle fibers in your lower body to fire as they propel you into the air and contract to decelerate you on the return.

To Do: Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart and quickly lower into a squat, kicking your hips back and bending your knees to load up your posterior chain while swinging your arms in front of you. Extend your knees and hips and explode into the air, reaching your arms back to generate height. Land softly and descend immediately into the next squat.

Expert Tips: 'Always land with your knees slightly bent and aligned with your hips and ankles,' Sanchez advises. 'If you add weight in the form of dumbbells, a weighted vest or a barbell, use no more than 10 percent of your maximum regular back-squat load.'



2

Turkish Get-Up

Hits: Quads, hamstrings, glutes, lats, middle back, traps, shoulders, chest, core

This multi-part movement brings you from a lying to a standing position, all while holding a kettlebell perpendicular to the floor and engaging all your major muscle groups along the way.

To Do: Lie faceup with your legs extended and hold a kettlebell straight up over your left shoulder, elbow locked. Extend your right arm to the side and look up at the weight. Bend your left knee and place your foot on the floor close to your glutes, then use your right hand and left foot as support as you roll toward your right side. Bridge your hips and bend your right knee, sliding it underneath you and rising into a half-kneeling position. From here, stand up. To return to the start, reverse the steps until you are flat on the floor. Continue, alternating sides.

Expert Tips: 'Keep your eyes focused on the weight throughout the entire movement, and take your time,' says Ilyse Baker, Los Angeles-based trainer and creator of Dancinerate. 'Concentrate on each segment of the exercise without rushing and you'll master it much more quickly.'



Dumbbell Thruster

Hits: Quadriceps, glutes, hamstrings, shoulders, triceps, core

Dynamic and explosive, the thruster engages your entire body from your legs to your delts as you work synergistically and fluidly to move a load while transitioning from a squat to an overhead press. You can use any implement you like — barbell, dumbbells, kettlebells — but any way you slice it, a thruster will spike your heart rate in seconds.

To Do: Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart and hold a set of dumbbells at your shoulders, palms neutral. Bend your knees and drop your hips into a deep squat, bottoming out if possible, then keep your weight in your heels as you drive forcefully upward. As you come to standing, use that upward momentum to press the dumbbells overhead. Lower the weights to your shoulders and repeat.

Expert Tips: 'This exercise needs to be done in one fluid movement,' says trainer Jennie Goll, owner of boutique Pilates studio Relevé in Ripon, California. 'Also, it's common to hold your breath, but you need it for power in this exercise. Inhale as you squat and exhale at the top.' 🗨️



FUNCTIONAL FORTITUDE

Wondering what to do with these movements? All of them can (and should) be peppered into your usual routine, but if you want some ideas for dedicated functional workouts, here are two samples to try.

SAMPLE 1		
Exercise	Sets	Reps*
Wall Handstand Push-Up	3	AMRAP
Pull-Up	3	5-8/EMOM
Woman Maker	5	5, 4, 3, 2, 1
Crab Reach	4	8, 8, 8, 8
Farmer's Walk	3	Walk until grip fails
SAMPLE 2		
Exercise	Sets	Reps*
Dumbbell Thruster	3	10, 10, 10
One-Arm Kettlebell Snatch	4	12, 10, 8, 6
Turkish Get-Up	3	3-5
Jump Squat	3	15/EMOM
Sled Pull/Push	3	30-50 meter pull/30-50 meter push

*AMRAP = As many reps as possible; EMOM = Every minute on the minute. Do the prescribed reps, then rest any remaining time until the top of the next minute when you start the next set.

