

Working out at home has its benefits: It's convenient, it's time-efficient (compared with traveling to a gym or fitness studio), and it's cost-effective.

No matter your fitness levels, exercise history, or at-home equipment set-up, home workouts can help you meet specific exercise goals (like improving strength or boosting cardiovascular fitness) and can improve boost overall health.

Plus, they're infinitely customizable. Here are some tips on how to create an effective home workout schedule, what equipment you might need, and how to get started.

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First Things First: How to Train at Home Safely

Exercising at home doesn't necessarily pose any greater risk of injury than you'd run into training somewhere outside the home. But if you're working out in an exercise class or with a trainer elsewhere, there may be someone watching you and correcting you if your form is off or you appear to be training in a potentially harmful way. At home, you're on your own.

Injuries happen when you don't use proper form or you overstress any one muscle group (or overdo it with any one type of exercise), which can contribute to muscle imbalances and overuse injuries, says Prentiss Rhodes, a master instructor and manager of live events with the National Academy of Sports Medicine (NASM), who is based in Scottsdale, Arizona.

To keep risks to a minimum, it's important to dial in and focus just like you would if you were in the gym or working out under the watchful eye of a personal trainer, says Cordelia Carter, MD, director of the Pediatric Sports Medicine Center at NYU Langone in New York City.

For instance, before beginning any new exercise, Dr. Carter recommends watching instructional videos from qualified trainers. The YouTube channels of certifying fitness organizations such as the American Council on Exercise, NASM, and National Strength and Conditioning Association are great resources for mastering exercise technique.

Working with an online trainer — a certified expert who can design customized workouts and help you improve your form by watching you and coaching you via video — can be another great move for reducing the risk of injury. Virtual trainers can also help you modify exercises to take into account existing aches, pains, injuries, or other limitations you may have. (Tip: Before reaching out to any online trainers that you find via Google, social media, or YouTube, run their name through the U.S. Registry of Exercise Professionals to verify they are certified by a respected organization.)

An added benefit of choosing online workouts is that you could review the workout before doing it and research a move that you may not be familiar with in order to get more familiar with its proper form. This can also save time, as you will know exactly what equipment is needed, can set it out ahead of time, and make any adjustments, such as substituting for equipment that you don't have with something that you do have in your home. Also, researching alternate exercises that may hit the same muscle ahead of time can make the workout go smoothly.

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Make modifications if you're following an online workout or class to make the workout appropriate for you, just like an instructor would have you do in a live class. For instance, if you're new to strength training, substitute plyometric and jumping exercises for nonexplosive variations, recommends Caroline Juster, a personal trainer certified by NASM, who is based in Chicago.

If you experience knee pain with lunges, split squats or single-leg glute bridges might be more comfortable for training your quads, she says.

Once you have your program ready, give it your best shot, and give it your full attention. "The main reason I see people get injured from at-home training is because they don't concentrate on what they're doing," Rhodes says. Resist the urge to multitask with chores, other at-home tasks, or conversations. "Let your family members know to respect your workout time," he says. "For example, my daughter knows when I go into my space that she is to let me train."

You can also consider scheduling workouts for times when interruptions or distractions are less likely, such as before other family members are up or when they are out of the house.

To evaluate and constantly improve your form, consider setting up your phone to record you doing a few reps; it's a great way to check and improve your form from various angles, Carter says.

How to Design an At-Home Workout Routine

Variety not only keeps things interesting, but when it comes to fitness, a variety of types of workouts and muscle groups targeted makes you stronger and helps prevent injury. How much variety do you need? The foundation of any well-rounded workout routine includes both aerobic and strength training. Start with the guidelines for physical activity for Americans.

Getting outside is another way to incorporate variety into your workouts, assuming the weather is cooperative.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that all adults get at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity each week, in addition to two days per week of total-body muscle-strengthening activities. After building a foundation, increasing your total exercise time or intensity comes with even greater health benefits.

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Health Conditions A-Z Wellness & Self-Care News Product Reviews Find a Doctor Tools & Resources About Us body aerobically is to perform various low-intensity exercises back to back with minimal rest, explains Rhodes. Do the exercise for a minute, rest for 30 seconds, and then do it again for up to 15 or 30 minutes. (You can tweak the length of your work and rest bouts based on the exercises you're performing and how they feel.) This allows you to sustain an elevated heart rate and focus on developing cardiovascular over muscular strengths.

Some body weight exercises to try it with include:

Lunges Pushups Squats Planks Pullups

Glute bridges

For strength training, prioritize squats, lunges, hip hinge exercises (like deadlifts and hip thrusts), pushing exercises (like chest and shoulder presses), and pulling exercises (like rows and pull-ups), Rhodes says. These compound exercises focus on strengthening the human body's basic movement patterns, so they'll provide the most benefit to the muscles that tend to get a lot of wear and tear. Plus, all of these movements work multiple muscle groups simultaneously, making them time-effective moves, too.

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Whether you're exercising with dumbbells, resistance bands, or your own body weight, to get the most out of a strength workout, it's important to push your muscles to fatigue — that point when you feel your muscles burning and might only have a couple good-quality reps left. You can either up the intensity by increasing weights and resistance levels if you've got the equipment, Juster says. Or you can up the challenge on body weight exercises by increasing your reps and sets, slowing down your movements, or trying an advanced exercise variation. (If you usually perform body weight squats, you could progress to a single-leg variation, for example.)

And do give yourself a day or two in any week for rest and recovery! Everyone will need to factor a different amount of recovery days into their fitness routine, largely based on how long and how intense your workouts are, Juster says. The harder and longer your workouts, the more time you will need to

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Balance Trying Out New Workouts and Consistency for the Most Fitness Benefit

Trying new workouts keeps exercise fun. And for people exercising at home, online workouts — available through streaming websites and apps — are really useful for getting acquainted with new forms of exercise, too.

"Novelty is the sexy side of fitness," Juster says. "Everyone loves to try new things, and many of us actively scroll Instagram looking for newer, better, and more exciting workouts."

Performing different types of workouts throughout your weekly routine is important for keeping things interesting, preventing workout ruts, optimizing results (you *want* to be doing a mix of different types of movement), and preventing injury, Carter adds.

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Health Conditions A-Z Wellness & Self-Care News Product Reviews Find a Doctor Tools & Resources About Us composition (muscle gain or fat loss) pursuits — progressive overload (practicing, getting stronger, and then gradually making your existing workouts harder) is what triggers fitness gains, Juster says.

"To balance consistency and novelty, I recommend repeating the same set of workouts for four to six weeks at a time," she says. "Then, when training starts to get stale or progress slows, you can switch things up with small progressions." Examples of such small progressions include: changing your reps and sets, increasing workout intensity, or adding exercise variations. For example, if you've done standard squats for a month or longer, you could switch to performing a split squat or overhead squat.

If your training goals are less specific, do switch up your workouts as much as you want — even on a daily basis.

Staying Motivated and Enjoying Your Workouts

When working out at home, there's no such thing as gym closures, class cancellations, or inclement weather (if you're working out inside) to throw off your workout schedule. But there's also less accountability to show up because only you'll know if you skip it.

And yes, it's important to leave some room for flexibility in your workouts for unforeseen conflicts or obstacles. However, the reality is that some days, you may need to expend a bit more mental fortitude to stick with your movement goals and stick to your movement plan than others. So how do you stay dedicated to your at-home training plan without that exercise buddy or gym instructor to hold you accountable?

Here are a few tips:

Do forms of exercise that you enjoy. You're far more likely to stick with workouts that are fun for you, Juster says.

Keep distractions to a minimum. When exercising, staying mentally engaged — tuning into your body and being conscious about every movement — is a critical component to mental flow, the foundation of the famed "runner's high," Rhodes says. Good news: You can experience the high during any workout, but not if your mind's on other things.

Keep your exercise intensity at a level that feels good and doable. Try to not push yourself so hard that you feel you need distractions to keep going.

Health Conditions A-Z Wellness & Self-Care News Product Reviews Find a Doctor Tools & Resources About Us **Give yourself some time before each workout to get in the zone.** "Don't expect to be able to easily shift gears into workout mode immediately after doing another household task," Juster says. Play some energizing music, drink some water, and eat a small preworkout snack if you're running low on energy.

Do mini workouts throughout the day. If you have trouble making time for longer workouts, try doing three 10-minute workouts instead of one 30-minute workout, Juster recommends.

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At-Home Workout Equipment 101

"Although you *can* spend a lot of money building a fancy home gym, you can also get a high return on a small investment if you have limited funds or space," Rhodes says, noting that the only equipment you really need is yourself.

Investing in equipment, however, can help to fill two gaps that easily pop up in at-home workout routines (types of movement that tougher to do without equipment):

- 1 Cardio Streaming aerobics workout videos, doing strength circuits, and dancing around all provide opportunities for improving your cardiovascular health. But if running, biking, rowing, or using the elliptical or stair-climber is your cardio method of choice, it could be worth looking into a cardio machine (like a treadmill, exercise bike, or elliptical or rowing machine) that fits your budget and space. If you do, make sure you always take into account the height of the machine and how much room you need (especially vertically) to effectively use it. Just because the machine fits in the desired space does not mean that you will be able to get on it and exercise.
- 2 Pulling Exercises Weights or resistance bands come in handy for training the back and biceps with upper-body pulling movements. After all, while you can easily train your chest and triceps with pushups, training your back and biceps with rows or other pulling movements requires equipment. Dumbbells, pull-up bars, kettlebells, and resistance bands are all very versatile. And resistance bands are incredibly budget- and space-friendly, so they can be a great set of equipment for testing the at-home-workout water. "It's best to buy a set with multiple bands of varying resistance levels because you'll need different size bands to effectively target different muscles and movements," Juster says.

In the end, when it comes to any piece of at-home fitness equipment, Rhodes recommends asking yourself the following questions:

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 Would I use this regardless of my current situation?

Do I have space for it?

"If you can answer yes to all of these, then you should buy the piece of equipment," he says.

If you answered no, but still want to do a workout that requires it, try these smart at-home workout equipment swaps:

Instead of a cardio machine, use a jump rope.

Instead of 1- to 5-pound weights, use cans of food or books.

Instead of a heavy weight, use a loaded backpack or bag of pet food.

Instead of a kettlebell, use a weighted backpack.

Instead of a yoga block, use a shoebox.

Instead of a medicine, stability, or BOSU ball, use a pillow.

Instead of a box or step, use your stairs or a sturdy stool.

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