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Get Fit Now: Exercises Guaranteed to Get Your Body In Tip Top Shape

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Get Fit Now: Exercises Guaranteed to Get Your Body In Tip Top Shape

Having a strong healthy body isn't just about looking and feeling good; it's about taking care of the one body you will have for the rest of your life. It's important not only to develop your cardiovascular system and stay at a healthy weight, but also to build muscle strength all over to help support the bones of your skeleton. Upper body strength is key because of all the everyday tasks and demands we place on our arms, shoulders and back. When your muscles are weak, you are more prone to aches and pains as well as potential injuries.

The best way to protect your body from injury as well as diseases like osteoporosis is to strengthen the muscles and bones. Fortunately, it's easy to do that and with regular exercise or workouts, and you can see results in just a few weeks. Take the initiative to care for your body, and it will thank you by keeping you strong and healthy.

10 Things You Should Know About Stretching

Before fitness training, one must give importance to doing warm-up or stretching exercises to prevent accidents or to enhance the output during the training. There are also a number of precautionary measures and tips to serve as guidelines when doing fitness exercises. Here are some of them.

1. To increase your flexibility and to avoid injuries, stretch before and after workout. Almost everyone knows that stretching before workout prevents injuries during the exercises, but only few people know that stretching after workout, when muscles are still warm, can increase flexibility.
2. Hold your stretching position for more than 60 seconds to increase flexibility. While holding your position for 20 seconds is enough for warm ups, holding each position for at least 60 seconds will develop the body's flexibility.
3. Do not go into a stretching position then immediately return to the relaxed position, and do it repeatedly. This is more appropriately termed as bouncing while in a position. When stretching, hold that position for several seconds, and then slowly relax. You may do this exercise repeatedly this way. Bouncing or forcing yourself into a position during stretching can strain or damage some joints or muscles.
4. Work slowly in increments instead of immediately proceeding to doing the hardest exercise or position.
5. Make sure that you have stretched or warmed up all muscle groups. For some people, even if they have strong bodies, they tend to neglect the neck when stretching.

Stretching the neck muscles can be as simple as placing the palm of your hand against the front of the head and pushing it. Then, do the same to the sides and the back of the head.

6. Stretch regularly to continually increase your range of movements and your level of flexibility and strength.

7. Workout considering only your capabilities and not of others. Do not force yourself to do exercises that you are not yet capable of just because there are people who can do it. Increase your limits slowly. Listen to your body. There are days when your body may be too tired that you may have to consider reducing your range of motion.

8. Learn to rest. Rest in between sets and stations to make sure that the body has enough time to recover its energy. Also, it is advisable that you don't work the same muscle groups consecutively for two days. The muscles grow during the period when you rest and not when you are working out.

9. Do aerobic exercises to strengthen your heart. Aerobic exercises are those physical activities that much oxygen for fuel. This includes cardiovascular exercises such as skipping rope, running or swimming.

10. Music may help you when you want to train for longer periods or to increase your intensity. You can use mp3 players, CD players or lightweight am radio receivers for this. Just make sure that you brought your headset with you so you wouldn't disturb people who don't prefer music while exercising.

Apart from preventing injuries and increasing one's limit, it is also said that stretching is good for a tired body and also for a stressed mind and spirit.

The Easiest Upper Body Strengthening Routine

Weight-lifting is one of the fastest ways to see changes in your body but too many people are scared away from it by horror stories of women turning into bulky Schwarzenegger clones as well as torn ligaments and other afflictions. The reality is nothing like that; women will firm up, not bulk up, and when you lift weights properly there's practically zero risk that you will injure yourself.

Don't miss out on the benefits of weight lifting any longer; start one of these simple routines and be on your way to firmer muscles right away! Follow the exercises described below and incorporate them into your exercise plan at least three times per week, and you will start to see results in as little as three weeks. Pair your weight lifting up with daily cardio exercise and watch your body truly reinvent itself!

Begin by assessing your current strength level. If you are a member of a gym, the staff can help you determine the best weight for you, but if you're a home exerciser, don't worry. Invest in a good set of dumbbells that range in weight from three to ten pounds (more if you are an old pro at weight-lifting and expect to increase your strength considerably).

Hold the 5-lb. weight in your dominant hand and do as many bicep curls as you can before tiring. If you can do more than 15 curls without feeling your muscle tire, you need to use a higher weight. On the other hand, if you were only able to do twelve repetitions or less, you should probably use a lower weight until you have built up more strength. Between twelve and fifteen reps means the five-pound weight is appropriate for you right now.

Once you have identified the right weight for you, the next step is to know the right form to use. Proper alignment is crucial to avoiding injury and getting the most out of your workout, so stand up straight as you move the weight and remember to keep your shoulders back and lifted and your head high. Imagine there is a string attached to the top of your head that is pulling your body straight. If you feel yourself begin to hunch over or slouch, stop and take a deep breath and then resume your good posture. Staying in alignment earns you the most results from your workout.

Build Upper Body Strength

This is a simple routine that you can easily incorporate to your preexisting workout schedule. Simply add these exercises three to four days per week and watch your muscles become shapely and defined.

Bicep Curl (tones front of arms)

The classic move, bicep curls can be underestimated and overused if you're not careful. It's not just about lifting a weight up and down; when done correctly, this can be one of the most powerful moves in your arsenal. Begin by holding one weight in each hand with your palms facing inward. Rotate your arms out so that your palms now face to the front and slowly lift the weight almost one hundred and eighty degrees until your palm and the weight face your shoulder. Slowly lower the weight back to its original position and then repeat. By slowing down the speed of the movement, you force the muscle to work harder than it would with the momentum of a fast action. This develops the bicep muscle faster and better. Repeat this move for three sets of 25 repetitions for each arm.

Tricep Press (tones back of arms)

The tricep muscle can be one of the most difficult muscles to develop primarily because most people do not use it very often in daily life. Running along the back side of the arm opposite to the bicep, the tricep muscle can turn flabby and droopy without exercise. The best move to tone saggy arms is to begin standing with feet shoulder-width apart with weights in hand. Take a giant step forward with your right foot, lean forward slightly and then raise the weights behind you with your palms facing the ceiling. Raise the weights toward the ceiling as far as possible and then slowly lower. Repeat this

move for three sets of 20 repetitions: on the final repetition of each set, hold your arms up and gently pulse the weight up no more than a few inches. Asking your tricep muscle to squeeze every ounce of strength out of it will start to show serious results in a short amount of time.

Overhead Raise (tones shoulders)

Shoulders can be neglected when you focus on improving the arms, but having strong, healthy shoulders is vital to many everyday movements. Strengthening the shoulders will allow the arms to grow stronger as well and improve your overall upper body muscle. Begin by standing with weights in hands about shoulder height. Slowly lift the weights overhead and then lower. Repeat the movement for three sets of 25 repetitions. This move tones the muscles that run on top of your shoulder and increase performance from the bicep. When these muscles grow in strength, they complement each other and increase effectiveness as well as turning your muscles into lean, beautiful powerhouses.

Best Moves for Biceps

Having strong arms is important to make your day easier, but many people seem to expect their arms to pick up anything and everything without ever making an effort to develop and strengthen the muscles. While you can go through life without building arm muscle, think about how much easier it is when you do: you'll be able to pick up your child and not worry about being strong enough.

Don't forget about the nice side benefit of having lean, shapely arms! Building the strength in your arms is an investment in your future health and something that will repay you over and over as you call on your muscles to help you through your day.

When it comes to the subject of weight training, many women are frightened off by mental images of bulky female bodybuilders with protruding veins and think that that's what weight lifting will do for the body. That's just not so! For one thing, female bodies are not built to develop large, hulking muscles – that's more for males. When you see a female bodybuilder with muscles similar to her male counterparts, you should know that that's not natural and requires hours of devotion to exercise and weights.

Some individuals choose to use steroids despite the banned status of the drug within the bodybuilding community, and that further defines and enhances the muscles so they appear larger. That is not what the purpose of strength training; rather, lifting weights challenges and strengthens muscles in order to make them stronger. The stronger your muscles are the better support you will have for your body. Support your body and you cut down on aches and pains, injuries and even possible fractures.

Now that you're no longer concerned about your body bulking up out of proportion, it's time to think weights. If you already strength-train you probably have a good set of

weights to use, but if you're just beginning, consider purchasing a basic set of hand weights ranging from 3-10 lbs. These are typically not very expensive and most will come with a rack to use for storage. A major advantage of a set of weights is that you can begin with the lowest weight you need and then work your way up slowly. Buying weights individually means that you'll have to go back to the store to purchase another set when it's time for you to increase the weight.

Now it's time to think about working the muscles in the arms. Most people are familiar with biceps and triceps muscles, but there are actually two other muscles that allow the arm to follow a full range of movement. These are the brachialis, covering the front of the elbow and allowing you to curl the arm up; and the brachio-radialis, situated on the outside of the forearm and performing twisting motions. These four muscles work together to allow you make even the simplest of motions with your arms. In terms of strength training, it's primarily the biceps and triceps that you will focus on but the remaining muscles can also benefit from exercises not targeted at them.

One of the best movements to strengthen the biceps muscle is the bicep curl. It's a classic because of the way it builds the muscle without a complicated movement. Begin by holding the weights comfortably in your hands with arms extended by your sides. Keep your elbows tucked firmly against the body and slowly raise the weights up and then lower. Repeat this for 3 sets of 20 repetitions. To maximize the movement, slow it down. This requires the muscle to work harder and will develop it faster. A variation of the bicep curl is to begin the same way but angle your arms at a wider angle to work more of the muscle.

A more unusual method of building the bicep is performing the Plank pose from hatha yoga. It's very easy and doesn't even require a mat. Simply lie facedown on the floor with your hands at about shoulder height. Take a deep breath and, using your core muscles as well as arms and legs, push your body off the floor until your back is straight and you are balanced on arms and feet. Maintain this position for a count of 20; lower and rest for a minute, then repeat for 2 sets of 10 repetitions. This movement not only works the biceps but it also toughens up the core muscles.

Plan to work your arm muscles about three times a week to begin with. Investing as little as 15 minutes in challenging the arms and you'll begin to see results in little as three weeks. Keep it up and you'll see benefits that last throughout your life.

Best Triceps Moves

Strengthening and shaping the biceps muscles is a relatively easy thing to do. It's a commonly used muscle that easily accessible and doesn't require any strange movements to develop. The triceps muscles, on the other hand, aren't used as often as the biceps and are located on the back of the arm in a slightly tricky position to work. That's why many people have 'batwings': saggy upper arms from little or no use.

It doesn't have to be that way, though: trainers have come up with a variety of movements that can be used to strengthen and shape the triceps area so that your arms will be fit healthy both front and back.

When you think about the arm muscles, biceps and triceps are what typically come to mind, but there are actually two other muscles that assist the biceps and triceps in performing work, and allow you to move your arm through a full range of motion. The brachialis wraps around the front of the elbow and is what allows you to curl your arm up and down. The brachio-radialis sits on the outside of the forearms and is what makes your arm twist from side to side. Without these muscles it would be impossible to perform the toning actions that allow you to build the triceps, and luckily they can benefit from strengthening movements for other parts of the arms. As you go through your triceps strengthening routine, think about the underappreciated duo of the brachialis and the brachio-radialis that allow you to fully develop your arm strength.

One of the best movements to develop the triceps is the triceps dip. Find a sturdy chair or table, or any surface that is solid and has an edge. Face away from the chair and place the heels of the hands on the edge. Walk your feet away from you until there is about 30 inches distance from your hands to your feet. With the bulk of your weight concentrated on your hands, slowly lower your body down for a count of 5 and then rise. Repeat for 3 sets of 15 repetitions. This is one of the best ways to work the triceps and see fast results. Since you're using your body's own weight, there are no weights or accessories to carry around. By walking your feet away, you use them solely as a support while the triceps muscle is isolated and required to do the bulk of the work. Thanks to this movement, your triceps will firm up fast and be stronger than ever before.

Another popular movement for triceps strengthening is the overhead triceps press. Start by standing with feet about shoulder width apart and weights held comfortably in your hands. Raise the weights directly above your head until your arms are almost fully extended. (Remember not to lock the elbow joint or else you risk injury.) Slowly lower the weights behind you until the elbow forms a 90-degree angle; raise the weights slowly. Repeat for 3 sets of 15 repetitions. This movement also isolates the triceps and places the burden of the effort on it. Depending on the weight you use, you can see your triceps firm up anywhere from 10 days to three weeks. Monitor your progress and when you are breezing through your sets without any real struggle, it's time to move up to the next higher weight. Keep challenging your muscles to build the best strength you can.

Another weight training exercise to build the triceps is the backwards lift. Begin by standing with feet about shoulder width apart and holding the weights comfortably in your hands with arms extended by your sides. Turn your palms to face behind you and raise your arms backward as far as is comfortable. Slowly lower back to the starting point. Repeat for 3 sets of 15 repetitions. For an extra boost of toning, on the last repetition of every set, raise the weight slowly and hold; pulsing the arms up and down about a inch to really fatigue the muscle. That little movement can have a big impact on the ultimate shape of your triceps.

Be sure to stretch the back of your arms after working out and if you ever feel any pain, stop and consult a trainer or medical professional. Stay with your program three times weekly and your arms will be looking sleek and toned in no time!

Best Moves for Waistline

Shaping and toning the waistline is one of the top areas of concern for both men and women of all ages. Go to any gym and you'll see dozens of people lining up for belly dancing, crunch classes, and anything else that promises to shrink your waistline fast. The fact is that shaping and strengthening any part of the body always takes time and you typically have to wait two to three weeks before you can tell any real difference. The waistline in particular can be a challenging area to tone, but if you stick with it you will see results.

Most people want their waistlines to be slimmer for appearances' sake, but the government is concerned about waistlines for an entirely different reason. Several independent scientific studies over the past few years have shown that men with a waist measurement greater than 40 inches and women with a measurement greater than 35 inches are at increased risk for heart disease and stroke. Think about it that way and it becomes even more important to slim the waistline down and keep it toned.

Shrinking your waistline should be addressed with a two-pronged plan: diet and exercise. It's not much use to spend hours working on the waist if you go out and eat a burger and fries afterward. The most successful programs to shape up the body address both exercise and food intake to increase the odds of success. When you're talking about slimming the waist, there will be some measure of fat reduction involved and that requires exercise as well as the proper diet to fuel your body and avoid empty calories that lead to more fat. You can see that in order to get the best results you need address more than one area; hence the exercise and diet approach.

Thinking about diet, there's not really a need to go on any specific diet to see results. Simply maintain a healthy diet that incorporates plenty of vegetables and fresh fruit as well as adequate protein and unsaturated fat. Keep a food journal to track your meals and exactly what is going in your mouth and body every day. This can be a powerful tool to identify problem areas and cravings.

One thing you may want to avoid while working on the waistline is too much fiber. Since fiber is bulky, it fills the stomach up faster but it can also lead to bloating. To have the flattest stomach possible, avoid eating too much fiber without pairing it with plenty of water or fresh fruit to help move it through the system. Also cut back on sodium to avoid bloating from water retention. The typical adult diet contains more than 3500 mg of sodium – over one thousand milligrams more than the recommended daily allowance. Smart people will cut back on sodium not just to avoid bloat but to decrease risk of high blood pressure and kidney disease.

You're eating healthy and keeping a daily journal to track your food intake. Now what? It's time to think about cardiovascular exercise! There are some cardio exercises that are better than others for toning, but if you have fat around the middle you need to lose that first before concentrating on toning and shaping the muscles of the middle. Excellent activities that promote weight loss are swimming, brisk walking, and interval training. Swimming is among the highest calorie-burning activities because of the way the water supports your body. Since your muscles don't have to split attention between keeping your frame upright and moving you forward, they will expend more effort (calories) in propelling you through the water. Swimming is also great because water requires a greater effort to push against it and move forward, requiring greater effort from muscles. Thus you burn a larger amount of calories and fat.

Brisk walking is also good for burning calories but try to stay away from flat surfaces and instead walk in hilly areas that will surprise and challenge your muscles. You duplicate that effect by using a treadmill that has an adjustable incline. Some treadmills have programs that replicate walking in a hilly area and adjust the incline throughout the workout to strengthen and tone more than one area. Include arm movements with your walk and you boost your heart rate and metabolism, firing more calories in the process. Interval training is a good choice as well because of the amount of calories you can burn during a workout. It can be incorporated with brisk walking whether you're at the gym or on the street; simply make sure your strength training equipment is nearby so you can switch from cardio to strength training quickly and easily.

Burn the fat away from your middle and you're halfway to having the waistline of your dreams. The last step of the successful waistline shrinkage program is to work the waist with toning exercises. Performing sit-ups is a time-honored method of firming the stomach but won't really make your waistline any smaller. Instead, try a hula-hoop (seriously!) or take a waistline-focused class from your gym. Belly dancing is also great for slimming the sides and can burn a fair amount of calories, but don't let it take the place of your regular cardio workout. Cover all your bases with diet, exercise and toning, and before you know it your waistline will be slim and trim!

Shaping Up the Hips and Thighs

For the vast majority of women, shapeless hips and thighs with excess fat are a major complaint. Thanks to female physiology, women's bodies are simply designed to retain fat in the hip/thigh area to assist with childbearing and be available for energy in case of famine. That was great back in the caveman days but in modern times the typical woman is not likely to need several months' worth of fat stored on her hips. Physiology is not likely to change any time soon, though, so women have to combat fat on the hips and thighs in a different way. Fortunately the area can be slimmed down through a combination of diet, exercise and specifically targeted toning movements so that your hips and thighs no longer resemble that of a cavewoman.

Begin by assessing your diet – do you eat a lot of junk food or dine out frequently? Oftentimes a busy schedule can prevent people from eating as healthy as they would like, especially since it can be difficult to get away from work for a real meal. What about cravings? Women especially are prone to cravings for high-fat, high-calorie foods that have no real nutritional value. Premenstrual syndrome can be responsible for many of those cravings but often emotional eating is a factor as well.

You should take an honest look at your diet and keep a food diary for a few days. Write everything you eat and how you felt at the time. That can provide insight into your choices for nourishment. If you're dealing with stressful situations at home or work, that can reflect itself in your daily diet. Make a commitment to yourself to change your eating habits and take care of your body by providing yourself with healthy, nutritious foods that give you the right kind of fuel to make it through the day. Eating a properly balanced diet can actually help to alleviate many symptoms of stress and may help you deal with your situation more effectively. When you know how to use it properly, food is a powerful tool.

As part of your program, you should keep a food journal to track your eating and also motivate yourself to eat better every day. Knowing that you will have to write down two chocolate bars including the amount of calories and fat can deter you from eating them in the first place – one of the reasons that food journals are so powerful. Being able to track your feelings at the time you ate can help you identify emotional issues and encourage you to eat because you want to, not because your boss yelled at you. Consider also using your food journal to keep track of your weight and measurements once a week to provide yourself with an accurate record of your progress over the weeks.

Consider your exercise program – do you have one? You should! When the hips and thighs are chubby and out of shape, that's typically a situation that will require a lot of fat-burning. The issue is not so much that the muscles aren't in shape but that there's too much fat over the muscles to show any real definition. Fat-burning activities will be a vital part of reshaping your lower body and you should plan to work out at least four times every week for about thirty to forty-five minutes each time.

The good news is that you don't have to work out all at once – fit three 10-minute workouts into your day and you've done your exercise. Recent studies show that short, intense spurts of exercise can be just as effective as longer workouts. That's good news for everyone with busy days and busier nights. The best choices for fat-burning are swimming, power-walking, and high-intensity aerobics. All three of these options will blast calories from your body and help torch the fat from your body.

Burning the fat off is your first priority in order to see the true shape of your body underneath. In between your fat-blasting workouts, make time to strengthen your hip and thigh area by doing squats and lunges as well as lateral raises to tone the outer thighs. You may want to wait to focus on the strengthening exercises until you have lost fat from the hips and thighs, but fortunately this is an area that builds muscle fairly quickly. Squats are an especially powerful move to tone up the buttocks and increase

the power of your workouts.

Shaping up the hips and thighs is by no means impossible. Make your plan, keep a daily food record, and burn fat through cardiovascular exercise – your lower body will start to reshape itself within a few weeks. There's nothing better than looking in the mirror and knowing that the strong, beautiful lower body is thanks to your hard work and effort.

Best Moves for Shapely Legs

Legs are frequently the subject of self-recrimination among many people, men and women included, but it doesn't have to be that way. Your legs are a vital part of your body, carrying you around every day and rarely complaining. It's important to keep your legs in the best shape possible so that years from now the two of them will still be taking you up stairs and around town. Leg health is also important in case of illness that confines you to bed. Bedridden patients whose legs were not healthy before illness suffer Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT) up to twice as often as those with strong legs. You may never end up in a hospital bed, unable to get out, but good leg health will ease your mind just the same.

The legs are made up of six major muscles and muscle groups. Located in the front of the thigh is a group of muscles known as the quadriceps. Opposite the quadriceps is another group of muscles called the hamstrings. The inside thigh is the location of the adductors. The lower consists of the gastrocnemius and soleus muscles in the back and the tibialis anterior muscle in the front. Connecting the leg and hipbone to the spine are the hip flexors and the iliopsoas.

All of these muscles must work together in perfect harmony in order for you to be able to walk, point your foot up, straighten your knee, and much more. When these muscles are strong and well conditioned they become firm and well defined, but let them get weak and the muscles will sag. Good muscle tone also helps prevent varicose and spider veins in the legs. While neither type of vein is especially dangerous, they are both unattractive and will rarely disappear on their own. Most varicose and spider veins must be treated by a doctor with either a laser or an injected saline solution. Keeping your legs healthy will prevent 95 percent of all varicose and spider veins.

Deciding to make a point of maintaining strong, healthy legs is a wonderful decision and fortunately many of the muscles in the legs are some of the fastest to respond to conditioning. Aerobic exercise is great for some toning but concentrated work is best to shape the individual muscles. Some of them, like the adductors, are used so rarely that they can be challenging to tone but it is possible. To see maximum results for your legs, you should plan to work out at least three times weekly. Four to five sessions during the week are better and will give you faster results, but if you can only do three for now that's fine to start.

The granddaddy of all leg conditioning movements is the lunge. Trainers across the nation put their clients through the lunging paces thousands of times every day and there's a reason for that. The lunge is the one movement that can target most of the major muscles within the leg and shape them up fast. Lunging down requires the use of both lower leg muscles to help stabilize you and then the upper leg muscles to raise your body back up. By performing the same movement over and over you condition the muscle to take on the strongest form possible.

If you have bad knees, though, lunging can be difficult and sometimes downright impossible. Rather than trying to force your body through pain, though, try modifying the movement. Instead of dropping your body all the way to the bottom of the movement, go only halfway or as far as you feel comfortable. Don't step too far forward in the beginning and that will lessen some of the strain on the knee joint. The ultimate solution is simply to not do lunges at all and for some people it may be the only option. There are plenty of other choices that will help strengthen your legs without placing so much demand on your knees.

Squats are another excellent choice for firming and shaping the buttocks and upper thighs. As you squat, you demand a lot of work from the muscles in your buttocks and legs both going down and coming up. That demand intensified by 20 times results in some serious definition after several sessions. To work the inner and outer thighs, lateral raises are wonderful. Begin with your weight on your left foot and your right foot pointed slightly behind you. Hold on to a chair or wall for balance and slowly raise and lower your right leg out to the side. Raising your leg high isn't so much the issue as just raising it and asking your muscles to make the effort. Do at least 20 repetitions for 3 sets several times per week to tone hips and back of the thigh.

The inner thigh is a bit more challenging. Typically only used in climbing stairs or inclines, the inner thigh can get flabby fast without regular exercise. To condition the muscle, stand again with your weight on your left foot, raise and point your right foot in front of you, and slowly move your right foot and leg across your left leg. You should feel the stress in your inner thigh – if not, turn your leg so that the inner thigh is facing the ceiling and slowly sweep the leg back and forth across the other. Repeat for 3 sets of 20 repetitions.

Strong, healthy legs are worth the effort but the best part is that they respond quickly without putting in weeks of work. Incorporate squats and lunges into random parts of your day – brushing your teeth, doing laundry, washing dishes – and you'll be pleasantly surprised at how fast your legs shape up!

Building Leg Strength

You may not realize it but your legs are the very foundation of your day – they carry you places, lift you up stairs, and provide you with a way to get around. Few people grasp

the importance of leg strength until they meet with something unexpected that restricts leg power. Having strong legs means power to get around and make your day work for you, and that is why it's important to build up strength in your legs. The good news is that leg muscles are among the fastest in the body to respond to training, so you may see results in as little as ten days!

Many people fear that by performing strengthening exercises for the legs, they will end up with tough, masculine-looking legs. It simply isn't possible! When legs become strong they become lean and beautiful, not big and bulky, so don't be afraid to tap into the power that lies in your legs. Cardio training is a great way to condition the legs while burning fat and calories at the same time, but cardio alone will not shape and define your legs without the assistance of exercises directed specifically at the muscles that make the legs work. Fit this easy routine into your weekly exercise schedule and soon your legs will be the talk of the town!

Strengthening Your Legs with Simple Moves

Lunges, the King of Leg Exercises

Lunges are the hands down favorite with trainers across the country and it's not hard to see why: doing lunges works all muscles in the legs with one simple move. There's no fancy footwork required! Stand with your feet about shoulder-width apart and then take one giant step forward with your right foot. Place your hands on your hips for balance and then lower your body straight down until your back leg forms a right angle at the knee. Using your leg muscles, raise yourself back up slowly and then repeat the movement for three sets of 30 repetitions for each leg. (Don't forget working the back leg!) Remember to keep your upper body aligned over the knee that is bent and raise and lower slowly to get the maximum benefit.

If you have bad knees, modify the movement by taking a smaller step forward and only drop down as far as is comfortable. While lunges are a fantastic move for legs they can be especially challenging for people with bad knees and you may decide to abstain from lunging entirely. If so, there are plenty of other exercises that strengthen the legs without placing too much stress on the knee. Use the other moves mentioned here or talk to a trainer or knowledgeable friend. It is possible for people with sore knees to strengthen and tone the lower body.

Pliés: Not Just for Ballerinas

Don't be scared off by the fancy French name; plies are one of the best ways to tone up the inner and outer thighs without driving yourself to insanity. Performing plies also places less stress on joints and can be as intense or moderate as you need. Begin by standing with your feet slightly more than shoulder-width apart. Take one small step out with each foot and then turn your feet outward like a duck. Place your hands on your hips or hold the back of a chair for support. Gently lower your entire body down about six inches and then raise it back up slowly. Repeat the movement for three sets of 30 repetitions. By moving slowly, you force the muscle to work harder without the benefit of momentum and thus the muscle becomes stronger faster.

Pliés can be modified almost endlessly. You can drop down more or less depending on your needs, move your feet closer or farther apart, or even work on your core muscles by holding one arm curved over the head and the other in front of the body a la ballerinas.

An excellent modification for those who want a greater challenge is to perform a full set and on the thirtieth repetition, hold the lowered position for 15 seconds. At the end of fifteen seconds, gently pulse your body up and down no more than a few inches for an additional thirty seconds. This works the muscle overtime and can define and tone even faster.

Heel Raises: Fast Toning on the Go

Heel raises are a wonderful exercise for people on the go because the exercise can be done practically anywhere without attracting odd glances from strangers. The target of the heel raise is the calf muscle, which can be a problem area for many people. Calves tend to respond to strengthening very quickly and gain definition in a matter of days, so this can be a very rewarding exercise for people who like fast results.

Begin by standing with your feet slightly wider than shoulder-width apart. You may want to place your hands on your hips to help with balance. Simply raise your body up onto your tiptoes and hold it there for a few seconds. Lower back down slowly. Repeat this movement for three sets of 40 heel raises. You can do this standing in line at the grocery store and no one will think anything about it.

When you are ready for a bigger challenge, stand on a stair or sturdy elevated surface and let your heels hang off the edge. Slowly raise and lower your body for three sets of 25 repetitions. This asks for greater work from the calf muscle and shows up almost immediately. Use this move at work by taking the stairs and stepping only halfway onto the next step, forcing your calves to work harder.

Build a Better Butt

Everyone wants to improve his or her rear views. For some, it's too flat; for others, too saggy. Still more people think it's just too big. The thousands of different complaints at the back end indicate that the majority of people dislike the way their buttocks appear. Fortunately the rear end is one of the easiest muscles to firm up and will respond to exercise very quickly, usually within three weeks. Shaping up the buttocks is not just about looks – a strong and toned rear end can make your daily tasks easier as well as increasing your calorie burn during cardiovascular exercise. The muscles in the buttocks are used to walking, sitting, standing, and many more movements. When your backside is powerful and well-developed, you will be able to move better through the day since your muscles can respond to your body's needs better than ever before.

The muscles in the buttocks are actually considered part of the lower back. A group of muscles known as the gluteals, provide support and play important roles in development of both the legs and the torso. The largest one, the gluteus maximus, lies on the backside of the hip on each side of the body and makes it possible to extend and move the thighs outward. Just in front of the gluteus maximus are the gluteus minimus and medius, which enable the thigh to turn outward. The delicate and complex relationship between the gluteal group of muscles and the rest of the body allows you to squat, raise your body back up, step to the side, and perform dozens of other common daily actions. When your gluteal muscles are strong and fit, they can do a much better job of supporting your body throughout your challenging days.

Before you embark on a program to build a better butt, it's important to assess your attitude. Do you consider your back end to be a nuisance because of its shape? What are your reasons for changing it? While most Western cultures place some measure of sexual appeal on the shape, size and firmness of buttocks, your goal should be to appreciate what you have regardless of condition. Without being aware of it, your buttocks are working for you every moment, even when you're sitting, to keep your body centered and balanced. Work to change your butt because you want the strongest, healthiest body you can have. If your butt fills out your jeans better than ever, that's great, but let the change be for the sake of your body.

In terms of reshaping your buttocks, this can be one of the fastest and most rewarding fitness goals. If you are overweight, you will still see results but be aware that burning calories through aerobic exercise will reveal more of your newly firm buttocks. Because the muscle group is so large and is used almost constantly, it responds quickly to conditioning exercises. Most people see a difference within three weeks and many actually feel the difference in a matter of days. The exercises below are all wonderful for firming and strengthening the gluteal muscles, and should be done in 3 sets of 25 repetitions. Be sure to maintain good posture with your back straight and shoulders back. Work on your gluteal muscles three to four times a week and you will be amazed and pleasantly surprised at the fast response and amazing muscle tone that quickly becomes evident.

Squats: Prepare for squats by standing about six inches in front of a straight-back chair with your feet slightly wider than shoulder-width apart. You may want to put your hands on your hips or raise them in front as you squat. Begin to slowly lower your body backwards as though you were going to sit down in the chair. When you feel your buttocks just barely touch, slowly stand up.

It is vital to maintain excellent posture during squats to get the maximum benefit from the movement. Use your heels as the primary weight-bearers and imagine yourself pushing down through the heels to the floor. Because the gluteus maximus is so large, it requires plenty of calories to fuel its movement. Incorporating squats into an aerobic exercise is a powerful way to torch even more calories.

Leg Press: Use the leg press machine at the gym for this exercise. If the machine is weight-based, adjust the weights to the appropriate level. If it is hydraulic-based, simply sit down and position your feet. You should place your body in the seat so that you are

sitting up with good posture. Your legs should reach the pressing platform without stretching or feeling uncomfortable. Place the entire soles of both feet against the platform and slowly push away. When you have extended your legs almost fully, slowly allow the weight to push your legs back.

Performing this exercise slowly is the key to building up strength. Be sure to avoid using only the balls of your feet since that builds the calf muscles rather than the buttocks and thighs.

Six Workout Ideas That Won't Drain Your Budget

It's important to find new activities to incorporate into your exercise regimen to keep your mind and body challenged, but some fitness trends can be expensive. To ease the strain on your wallet, here's a list of seven free and inexpensive workout ideas that won't empty your savings account!

Indoor Rock Climbing

Rock climbing may seem like an odd Iron-man type of activity but the demands it places on the body end up providing a fantastic workout. You'll need strength, flexibility, and a sense of humor as you scale specially built walls with total heights of thirty feet or more. Safety is vital and all climbers are required to wear helmets, climbing shoes, and safety lines to prevent dangerous falls. Indoor rock climbing can range from \$15-\$30 but it's cheaper if you have your own shoes. Call ahead and ask if there are discounts available.

Rollerblading in the Local Park

This is an absolutely fantastic workout for the hips, thighs and buttocks, especially if your park has inclines to challenge you. The best part is that it's totally free! The majority of public parks welcome rollerbladers but checking before skating is a good idea. Remember that you do skate at your own risk, so exercise caution, especially around large groups or playgrounds with small children.

Take a Trial Class

Nearly all studios and gyms will allow you to try out their facilities and classes if you are interested in possibly joining. Find a gym that offers a class that interests you and explain you'd like to try it out. Nine times out of ten you will be allowed to take the class for free and get a stellar workout at the same time.

Rent a Bike

Bicycle riding is an excellent way to shape up the legs but if the bike you owned was in the sixth grade, you can still get in on the benefits by renting a bike from a local shop

and tooling around town. In larger cities bike shops frequently offer tours or suggestions for routes, so check out the local place and rent a bike for a couple of hours. This usually costs between \$8-\$20 and there may be a small fee involved to release you from any responsibility for accidents or damage.

Get a One Day Pass

All gyms offer some kind of program where you can check out the facilities and services, and frequently this program is in the form of a one-day pass. Call a gym that you're interested in and let them know of your interest. Ask if they offer temporary passes for guests to evaluate the gym. The answer is yes almost every time. Take your one-day pass and make the most of it – take a class, try out new machines, and definitely use the sauna. You get to check out the gym and add some variety to your routine at the same time!

Do Some Good and Exercise At the Same Time

Call your local animal shelter and check to see if they use volunteer walkers to help with the animals. Many times these shelters are understaffed and need the help of volunteers to give proper care to each animal. By donating your time to walk dogs, you give animals the chance to enjoy life outside the shelter and fit in a workout at the same time. Doing good for others and exercising at the same time? Getting fit has never felt this rewarding!

Fantastic Five-Minute Workouts

Time is in short supply for almost everyone these days but it's still important to include physical activity throughout your busy day. Most people believe that to get a good workout, you must exercise for thirty minutes or more without stopping or else you don't get anything out of it. Wrong! Research proves that short, intense segments of activity spread throughout the day are just as effective as one long workout, so there are no more excuses about not having enough time.

Everyone can spare at least five minutes somewhere and there are brief workouts that challenge your whole body in that amount of time. To get you started, here are some fantastic workouts that really only take five minutes!

Workout 1: Fast and Furious Cardio & Conditioning Work

Have hand weights nearby and ready to use.

0:00 – 0:30: Warm up by briskly walking in place.

0:31 – 1:00: Increase the pace to a power-walk speed.

1:01 – 1:30: Keep walking and add a simple overhead reach by raising your arms straight up with every two steps.

1:31 – 2:00: Change the arm movement to reaching in front and then pulling back. Continue walking.

2:01 – 2:45: Pick up the hand weights and perform as many bicep curls as possible while you continue your walk.

2:46 – 3:30: Change the movement to pushing the weight directly overhead and then lowering as you keep the pace.

3:31 – 4:00: Put the weights down and slow down to your original pace.

4:01 – 4:30: Perform as many squats as you can by sitting back and keeping your heels pressed into the ground.

4:31 – 5:00: Walk slowly as your breathing and heart rate return to normal.

This workout increases your heart rate quickly and conditions the cardiovascular system with the high speed of walking in place. Using weights for arm work while you walk maintains the aerobic work while you build muscle at the same time. By gradually slowing down, you allow your body to return to a normal state slowly but still fit in muscle toning by doing squats. The steadily decreased demand on the body allows the body to stabilize comfortably. By combining aerobic conditioning with muscle toning, you get twice the benefits in one brief workout – what could be better?

Workout 2: Steady Muscle Work

0:01 – 0:30: Warm up by walking gently and moving your arms at the same time.

0:31 – 1:00: Begin working the lower body muscles by doing as many squats as you can for thirty seconds. Make sure your body is properly aligned with your knees forming a right angle with your thighs and your back staying centered over your buttocks. Keep your heels pressed into the floor for support as you slowly lower and raise the body.

1:01 – 1:30: Stand up straight with your feet slightly wider than shoulder-width. With hands on hips, lower your body into a plié and then raise for as many repetitions as possible in thirty seconds. At the end of the time, lower your body one more time and hold.

1:31 – 1:45: Stay in your lowered plié position and move up and down very gently, no more than an inch or so. This helps isolate the inner thighs and tone them up.

1:46 – 2:15: Stand with your weight on your left leg, point your right foot behind you, and lift your right leg as many times as possible in thirty seconds. This helps tone the muscle at the back of the leg.

2:16 – 2:45: Switch legs, stand with your weight on your right leg, and lift your left leg behind you as many times as possible in thirty seconds.

2:46 – 3:15: Stand up straight with feet shoulder-width apart and then bend from the waist until you are slightly more than at right angles with your lower body. Stretch your arms in front of you and then raise each arm back. Repeat for thirty seconds. Be sure to hold your abdominal muscles in tightly. This tones the arms and upper back as well as the abs.

3:16 – 3:45: Stand up straight and place hands at shoulders. Begin reaching arms up and bringing back down to shoulder height. Repeat for thirty seconds.

3:46 – 4:15: Drop to the floor on hands and knees, and then 'walk' your hands forward several inches. Begin performing modified push-ups and do as many repetitions as possible.

4:16 – 4:30: Lay on your back, knees bent, with arms behind head and fingertips just touching the back of the head. Use your abdominal muscles to pull your upper body towards your knees but not too far. Lower down slowly for maximum muscle building.

4:31 – 5:00: Still lying on your back on the floor, stretch legs out and raise arms above the head, inhale deeply and stretch. Let your breath out slowly and let your body relax.

This workout focuses on building muscle and strength all over. The variety of exercises works dozens of muscles all over the body for an overall toning effect. Switch between the two workouts for maximum results in your weight and muscle tone.

Better Work Out

1. Stop and Go

If you play a sport that requires a full sprint, remember that a full sprint strains the muscles of the lower body. To combat this, do stop-and-go exercises. For example, run 30 meters at about 80 percent of your effort, slow to a jog for five to 10 meters, then run again for another 30 meters. Repeat this process five times.

2. On bended knees

Almost 3 out of four ACL injury occurs when players are landing or turning. If your knees are bent instead of straight, the risk of injury is greatly reduced according to a report in the JAAOS (Journal of the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons).

3. Cool down

Heatstroke is not something that can be easily cured like headache. To avoid it, stay cool and hydrated. Be sure the combined temp and humidity is less than 160. This is according to Dr. Dave Janda of the IPSM.

4. Get the proper equipment

Badly fitting gears or ill sized equipment can be a cause of training injuries. The extra money spent on proper equipment goes a long way.

5. Do it the right way

Bad technique is just as bad as, well, bad equipment. Seek advice from pros and trainer, this advice are invaluable to your exercises or training.

6. Go West (or whichever direction)

If you're playing or training in multiple directions, your warm up should also. Move sideways, backward, forward and all the motions you might be doing. This allows your body to be prepared.

7. Have yourself filmed

The camera doesn't lie. Show your video to a person well verse in your training, so he can give a critic of your fitness regimen.

8. Loosen the shoulders.

Even a slightly injured rotator cuff can shut down the function of a shoulder. You might want to include stretching to protect your rotator cuffs.

9. Take an early dip

Schedule your swimming sessions early. The less people in the pool means less of everything in the pool.

10. Protect yourself

Wearing custom-fitted mouth guards reduces the risk of injuries by as much as 82 percent, according to a study at UNC at Chapel Hill. Plunk out the cash for a custom-fitted mouth guard and it'll last for years including your smile and teeth.

11. Smooth out your tendon

Inquire about ultrasound needle therapy. This procedure is minimally invasive by using ultrasound to guide a needle. The needle smoothes the bone, breaks up calcifications, and fixes scar tissue. Thirteen out of twenty patients saw improvement, and the session takes only about 15 minutes of your time.

12. Buy your running shoes after work.

Shop in the evening, the feet are swollen after a day of work. It approximates how your feet will be after three miles of running.

13. Do off road running.

If the surface is unstable, it trains the ankles to be stable.

14. Know where you're going.

Whether its biking, or skiing, be sure to have a dry run down any path first. A lot of injuries can be avoided when you're familiar with the route taken.

15. Train hard.

Anxiety reduces your peripheral vision by three degrees and slows the reaction time by almost 120 milliseconds, according to an article of the Journal of Sports Sciences. When the going gets difficult, the veteran athlete rely on skills they've trained for and practiced. It keeps them cooler under pressure, widening their vision so they can see react much faster.

Muscle Building Fiction

If you've been training, here's a short list of bodybuilding fiction.

1. 12 Rep rule

Most weight training programs include this many repetitions for gaining muscle. The truth is this approach places the muscles with not enough tension for effective muscle gain. High tension e.g. heavy weights provides muscle growth in which the muscle grows much larger, leading to the maximum gains in strength. Having longer tension time boosts the muscle size by generating the structures around the muscle fibers, improving endurance.

The standard prescription of eight to 12 repetitions provides a balance but by just using that program all of the time, you do not generate the greater tension levels that is provided by the heavier weights and lesser reps, and the longer tension achieved with lighter weights and more repetitions. Change the number of reps and adjust the weights to stimulate all types of muscle growth.

2. Three Set rule

The truth is there's nothing wrong with three sets but then again there is nothing

amazing about it either. The number of sets you perform should be based on your goals and not on a half-century old rule. The more repetitions you do of an exercise, the fewer sets you should do, and vice versa. This keeps the total number of repetitions done of an exercise equal.

3. Three to four exercises per group

The truth is this is a waste of time. Combined with twelve reps of three sets, the total number of reps amount to 144. If you're doing this much reps for a muscle group you're not doing enough. Instead of doing too many varieties of exercises, try doing 30 to 50 reps. That can be anywhere from 2 sets of 15 reps or 5 sets of 10 reps.

4. My knees, my toes

It is gym folklore that you "should not let your knees go past your toes." Truth is that leaning forward a little too much is more likely a cause of injury. In 2003, Memphis University researchers confirmed that knee stress was almost thirty percent higher when the knees are allowed to move beyond the toes during a squat.

But hip stress increased nearly 10 times or (1000 percent) when the forward movement of the knee was restricted. Because the squatters needed to lean their body forward and that forces the strain to transfer to the lower back.

Focus on your upper body position and less on the knee. Keep the torso in an upright position as much as possible when doing squats and lunges. This reduces the stress generated on the hips and back. To stay upright, before squatting, squeeze the shoulder blades together and hold them in that position; and then as you squat, keep the forearms 90 degree to the floor.

5. Lift weights, draw abs

The truth is muscles work in groups to stabilize the spine, and the most important muscle group changes depending on the type of exercise. The transverse abdominals are not always the most important muscle group. Actually, for most exercises, the body automatically activates the muscle group needed most to support the spine. So if you focus only on the transverse abs, it can recruit the wrong muscles and limit the right muscles. This increases the chance of injury and reduces the weight that can be lifted.

Eight Secrets of Top Trainers

Don't you wish sometimes that you had your own personal trainer to guide you through your workout and give you hints about getting more out of your exercise? You may not be able to afford a trainer of your own but by incorporating these trainer hints and tips into your day, you'll be on your way to making your workout even more effective!

Buddy up – One of the best benefits of having a personal trainer is having someone to hold you accountable for your exercise. A trainer is paid to do this for you but the easy (and free!) solution is within your own circle of friends. Ask a reliable friend to be your workout partner and just the knowledge that she's depending on you to work out with her will increase your odds of staying on track with your exercise. A unique way of ensuring success is to allow each partner a certain number of "cuts" per month – at a price. Failing to show up for a session with your trainer still costs you money and so should skipping your workout with your friend. Pony up \$10 for each cut and let it accumulate for six months or longer. At the end of a predetermined time frame, count the money and use it to treat you and your workout partner to a luxurious splurge.

Shorter workouts can be as effective as longer ones – Sure, everyone would like to be able to work out for forty-five minutes of uninterrupted time, but let's be serious! With today's busy schedules and demanding jobs, finding time to exercise can be a struggle, but the good news is that you don't need a huge block of time to see results. Studies have shown that workouts as short as ten to fifteen minutes can strengthen the body and improve your health. Fit several brief workouts in your day and you not only increase your metabolism throughout the day but you also reach the ideal activity level of 45 minutes to one hour. Don't let yourself be discouraged by a lack of time; do the best with what you've got.

Add variety to see results – Undoubtedly the fastest way to see changes in your body is to keep surprising it! Changing up your routine every few days prevents your body from becoming conditioned to the same exercise day after day and requires it to call on different muscles for different activities. This means more muscles are worked over the course of just a few days, so you see the effects on your body in much less time than usual. An excellent method of adding variety is to incorporate weight lifting into your cardio routine. This requires the body to respond to challenges to balance, strength, and more, and speeds up your results.

Intensify for more strength – Most trainers recommend increasing the intensity of your workout to see improvement in your strength and aerobic capability. Too often people become comfortable with their level of exertion and aren't working as hard. Boosting the intensity keeps the body challenged and working harder. Taking deep, wide steps during aerobics and squeezing the buttock and thigh muscles challenge the body to a higher level of exertion and produce some amazing changes in just a few workouts. Weight-lifters should try adding 3-5 pounds to their current weight and see the difference in toning and strength after a few sessions.

Know your excuses and head them off – Personal trainers often deal with clients who make all kinds of excuses to get out of a session or to avoid a certain exercise, and must keep the client on track without offending. When you are your own personal trainer, though, it can be difficult to discipline yourself to your exercise schedule unless you give yourself an advantage. Sit down and write down all the excuses you would use to avoid exercising. Once you've done that, go back and counter all your excuses. If you wrote down lack of time as an excuse, oppose it with suggestions for short, frequent workouts rather than one long session. If you can anticipate your own excuses and

know how to respond to them, you've won half the battle against apathy.

Make it fun! – Perhaps the most common complaint about exercise is that it becomes boring too quickly. Personal trainers help you get through boredom by changing your routine or offering you new choices for activities. Help yourself break out of the boredom rut by choosing activities that appeal to you. Instead of spending thirty minutes inside on the treadmill, go for a hike on a local nature path. Rather than doing your aerobics video for the millionth time, go outside with your kids and jump on the trampoline for a while. The goal is to choose an activity that you enjoy and that requires physical activity, so break out your tennis racquets and bicycles!

Schedule & Commit.

Signing up for a personal trainer is a commitment of your time, money and energy, and perhaps because of that commitment people with personal trainers tend to stick with the program. Apply that same sense of obligation to your personal at-home exercise program and you'll increase your chances of having a consistent workout plan. Schedule your workouts just like any other appointment and write it in on your calendar or Palm. Knowing that you have set aside time for exercise can help you follow through and stick to a successful program.

Reward yourself.

Set checkpoints throughout your exercise program to assess your progress. Whether your goal is to lose weight, build muscle, or simply improve your health, take the time to check up on your improvement and then reward yourself for all the hard work!

Fitness Trainer: Boredom Busters

One of the biggest obstacles to staying on track for fitness is losing motivation. People who are just starting an exercise program can find themselves quickly getting tired of the same routine. Keeping exercise appealing and maintaining a good fitness perspective is key to long-term success.

If you had to watch the exact same episode of your favorite television show every day for the rest of your life, you would probably be banging your head against the wall by the end of the week. You would change the channel, pick up a book or do anything you could to avoid the constant repetition of something you once enjoyed.

Yet, many people starting on a fitness program feel compelled to follow the same routine, day after day after day, and consequently fall off the exercise wagon due to sheer boredom.

This is why many seek out the services of a fitness trainer in order to provide them with some diversity in their fitness program and carry out the program in a livelier style.

Fitness trainers are experts in analyzing and creating a fitness program that is right for you. They will calculate your appropriateness to a certain program with regards to your "fitness level," create the program according to your specific needs and keep you stimulated and inspired by giving you activities that will not bore you.

But, as with other entities included in the fitness world, not all fitness trainers are created equal. They may vary from the different trainings that they have, the health education they have acquired, and the skills that they have learned. Therefore it is important for you to consider some factors that will determine if a certain fitness trainer is right for you, such as:

1. Certification

Before you choose your fitness trainer, it is important to verify that he or she is duly certified by a highly regarded fitness association. It is also best to choose a trainer that has a CPR certification or first aid qualifications.

2. Education/Trainings

Be sure to choose a fitness trainer who had acquired an adequate training and education as far as health and physical fitness is concerned. Even though it is not necessary, trainers who have acquired education connected with health or any other related field will definitely have an edge over the others.

3. Knows how to give the right attention

A good fitness trainer should know how to provide his or her client with undivided attention whenever their session is going on. In this way, the trainer will be able to focus more on the details that need attention and immediate consideration.

4. Knows how to track development

It is best to choose a fitness trainer that knows how to track his or her client's progress as far as fitness is concerned. In this way, the trainer will be able to generate new activities and trainings designated for a particular result of the client.

5. Good Personality

Since you will be dealing most with your fitness trainer, you will want somebody with a pleasing personality, somebody with whom you can feel comfortable. It is best to hire the services of somebody with whom you can easily get along.

Boiled down, the services of a fitness center and the contributions it can give you while working out on those belly fats, are, indeed, one of the best help that you can get from a professional person who knows what he is doing.

Bottom Line, it is best to choose the best person who can give you the best services that you need so that you can look forward to your exercise sessions every day and never get bored again.

Getting Fit on the Road

Traveling for a living can be challenging enough but when you add in the complication of trying to stay fit at the same time, it can seem nearly impossible. The good news is that getting fit while on the road is entirely possible with a few good tools and a lot of determination. The traveling exerciser faces unique obstacles in physical fitness but thanks to recent innovations, all travelers can work out whether the road takes them to Los Angeles or Toledo.

When you first get your itinerary, sit down and read it thoroughly so you don't get any unpleasant surprises. Check your hotels and then contact them to ask about workout facilities. The numbers of hotels that offer exercise facilities has skyrocketed in the past few years as more people are becoming concerned with health matters. Everyone knows that exercise is one of the most powerful tools in the fight against sickness and weight gain, and this means that more people are demanding the ability to exercise no matter where they may be. That's good news for the chronic traveler because it increases the likelihood that his itinerary includes hotels with workout equipment.

Taking the time to call can confirm this, and even if your hotel does not have workout facilities, it will almost always have a pool. Swimming is a fantastic way to shape up and burn calories, and really builds your aerobic capacity quickly. If you know ahead of time that you won't have access to exercise facilities but will be able to use a pool, be sure to pack your swimwear. When you arrive at the hotel, challenge yourself to complete a certain number of laps – then do it!

If you really aren't the kind of person who uses a gym or enjoys public pools, that's no reason why you can't stay fit on the road, too. With a few well-chosen fitness accessories, you will have everything you need to maintain a strong, healthy body with beautiful muscles. One of the best fitness tools for frequent travelers is the stretchy band. Stretchy bands come in a wide range of elasticity and the stiffer ones require more effort on your part, thus building muscle with isometric movements. The great thing about these stretchy bands is that they are practically weightless and take up almost no room in your suitcase. Pack four or five of varying resistance and you have a whole range of exercises and challenges for your body.

Another fitness tool for the road is the BOSU ball. BOSU, which stands for Both Sides Up, has a flat wooden bottom with one half of a rubber ball on top. You can stand on the ball to put yourself slightly off balance and require more effort from your core muscles, or put the ball side down and stand on the flat wooden part, requiring a lot of

effort from your core muscles to keep you upright. You can use the BOSU ball while you do squats, lunges, and many other movements to tone the body. The BOSU ball enhances your effort and calls on your body to work harder. Simple toning movements are also a fantastic tool for road warriors – do several sets of squats, push-ups, and lunges to keep your body strong and well- defined.

Staying fit on the road is a difficult task and requires a lot of determination and dedication on your part, but having a strong, healthy body that can take the stress of life on the road is worth the effort. Using hotel fitness centers and swimming pools are fantastic tools that can make a serious difference in your fitness level, but humble isometric exercises are just as valuable as any fancy machine. Taking care of your body is a priority anyway but it becomes especially important when you're on the road and dealing with traveling stress. Being physically fit and maintaining that fitness can simplify matters when dealing with the craziness, so don't give up on being fit on your travel schedule – it's really worth all the effort.

Moderate Exercises to Fitness!

Have you ever felt tired and stressed out from work and by the time you get home you see your three children running towards you asking you to play basketball with them? You refuse and promise them that you will after you take a rest.

Instead of disappointing your children, why not say, "yes" instead? You will be surprised by the amount of energy you will have after that 30-minute activity.

Did you know that by exercising at a moderate pace for only 30 minutes, you would feel a lot better, both mentally and physically? It has been proven that this improves the appetite and sharpens your mind in problem solving. Not only that. You may also find it easier to sleep at night if you do moderate exercise for only 30 minutes each day.

What are the benefits of regular exercise? It promotes self-discipline and has a positive impact on how you perceive life. Exercise helps in lifting your spirits and getting you out of any depression. For first timers, it can be done for 15 minutes for 2 to 3 days a week. You can increase the time you spend once your body gets tuned up for it.

DON'T you ever force your body! If you get hurt, then stop. You can take a break from exercising for a few days and then you can start again but you need to start from day 1.

Here are some moderate exercises you can do and enjoy:

1. Walking. Make use of your surroundings. You can walk your dog, with your partner, children or other family members or friends. Not only will you find yourself burning calories while enjoying the surroundings, but you will also be absorbing vitamin D from

the sunlight which is good for your body.

2. Discover the wonders of Yoga. Yoga is one effective exercise that energizes not only your body but also your soul. Start off by learning the basic yoga positions that are not too complicated but proven effective. A five-minute yoga exercise can perk you up and recharge your body with enough energy to last you for the whole day. You relax and at the same time you stretch!

3. Engage yourself in sports. Play basketball, football, baseball, tennis or go swimming. Many doctors have recommended sports as an effective way to stay fit and healthy. Sports can also be done in moderation. Do not take it too seriously. Shooting basketball with a friend is one moderate exercise that is also considered a sport.

4. Join exercise programs at work. If you still do not have an exercises program at work, then why not start one? You can talk to your boss about it and start one – or several - with your colleagues. Not only will you lose calories but it is also a good way to bond with your associates. This can be done 30 minutes, 3 times a week.

5. Exercise while doing household chores. Gardening, raking leaves, lawn mowing, doing the laundry, vacuuming and car washing are effective moderate exercises at home. Make use of these chores to sweat and burn calories. Instead of using machines and gadgets to perform these chores, why not do it with your hands and lose some fat?

Making exercise part of your daily routine will surprise you how much weight you will lose virtually effortlessly. Doing these moderate exercises almost every day can burn anywhere from 150 calories up to 1,000 calories a day!

Yoga Versus Pilates

The yoga craze of the late twentieth century ended up segueing into the Pilates craze of the early 2000's but many people questioned the exercise value of both. Despite media hoopla, few people actually seemed to understand the physical benefits of either. The truth is that both forms of exercise have unique approaches to fitness and can provide significant benefits for the strengthening and conditioning of the body. Though similar in the focus on strengthening the body through isometric movements, the paths of yoga and Pilates ultimately diverge.

Yoga was developed over five thousand years ago in Northern India. It is first mentioned in the sacred Hindu text Rig Veda. During its first clear period, yoga was practiced and refined by Vedic priests, who documented the practice in their writings. Patanjali, who is considered by most to be the father of classical yoga, fostered the next phase of yoga's development. Following Patanjali's broad expansion of yoga and its

meanings, Tantric yoga became accepted as the new form of yoga and concentrated on cleansing both the mind and the body.

Yoga finally neared its modern form in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century when more and more Indian yogis traveled to the West, sharing their art and increasing the world's interest in yoga. The 1947 premiere of Indra Devi's yoga studio in Hollywood became the opening bell to the American fascination with yoga. While most incarnations of yoga have had a strong spiritual element, modern Hatha yoga does not align itself with any religion or spirituality; instead it focuses primarily on the yoga postures and using them to reach and maintain strength and flexibility as well as inner calm.

Compared to yoga, Pilates is a spring chicken in terms of age. Joseph Pilates, who was born in Germany and suffered frail health as a child, created the program. Pilates overcame his childhood sicknesses through exercise and began to create a system of physical development that would later become his legacy to the world. In his thirties, Pilates traveled to England to work as a self-defense instructor to Scotland Yard but was forced into an internment camp during World War I. Despite the hardship of internment, Pilates went about his business within the camp, teaching his physical program to his fellow internees.

During the terrible flu epidemic of 1918, thousands of people died, but none of Pilates' protégés were affected. Following the war, Pilates returned to Germany but left for good when asked to teach his method to the German army. Settling in New York City with his new wife, Pilates opened his first fitness studio. He taught thousands of students until his death in 1967 at the age of 87. Trusted students carried on with the Pilates name and method, and by the early twenty-first century more than 5 million Americans were practicing Pilates.

Despite the wildly different histories, yoga and Pilates share the same focus on developing the muscles of the body and strengthening it by primarily using the body's own resistance to build up power. The postures of yoga and the movements of Pilates are sometimes strikingly similar, but ultimately the two follow separate roads. Yoga has spawned a multitude of varieties that range from Kundalini to Iyengar to Tantric, though Hatha remains the most popular form in the United States. Many first-time yoga practitioners can find the pace to be overly slow or grow impatient while waiting to see results. The best candidate for Hatha yoga is a person who appreciates time to slow down, meditate, and spend quiet time with oneself, and does not become easily discouraged by failure to immediately master a pose.

Yoga requires a certain measure of patience and while this can be developed through practice, lacking it can make the first several weeks of yoga practice very trying for a person. The good thing about yoga is that it rarely requires extra equipment. You will need a yoga mat to begin with but after that, accessories are optional. Blocks, straps, and other tools can be helpful, but are not required.

Pilates is a method that is fairly easy to master. It doesn't call for complicated movements and is usually straightforward and simple to understand. The program's movements also tend to build strength fairly quickly so that results are apparent sooner

than in yoga. The ideal Pilates practitioner should be able to discipline himself to complete his routine every day, which is a large part of the method. Attending classes is a great way to start but for the maximum results, the method should be practiced daily. Pilates typically doesn't require many props, though advanced practitioners will probably want to add tools to their workout in order to maintain a high level of fitness.

Exercises for Bad Knees

Weak and painful knees can be the result of injury, over-stress or simply genetics, but the aching truth is that bad knees can seriously limit your workouts. Knee replacement surgery is not recommended except in absolutely vital situations and the cost is prohibitive to the average exerciser, and many people eventually give up on ever being able to carry on a normal fitness program. There is good news, though: think outside the box of normal exercise and there are still plenty of options that don't place as much stress on the knee joint. You may not be able to run a marathon but you can still build a healthy body without totally ruining your knees.

Yoga is an excellent option for achy knees. The activity has gained in popularity since the 1990's, not simply because it can be very relaxing but because it builds strength without putting the body under duress. Even professional sports players now incorporate yoga practice into everyday fitness because of the benefits for both mind and body. Most yoga studios will offer classes that are as low-stress as possible, so call around and talk to some of the staff to find out. Explain that you are looking specifically to avoid strain on the knees – qualified yoga practitioners will be able to tell you if their studio will meet your needs. You can almost always observe a class for free and typically you will be allowed to take one free session, so make the most of this consumer advantage to identify if this is an exercise and class that you enjoy.

You may not have a local yoga studio or simply have no interest in taking outside classes – no problem! The teacher will simply come to you. There are literally hundreds of yoga videos on the market today, many of them specifically designed with bad knees in mind, so all you have to do is find the video that suits you best. Do an internet search for specific videos and read reviews from other users. If you order through a catalog, you frequently are allowed a grace period in which to try the video out and return it if it is unsuitable.

Once you have found a video that fits your lifestyle and appeals to you, watch the video several times to learn the rhythm of the instructor and become comfortable with the pace of the movements. Learning the poses ahead of time makes your practice with the video much easier. Once you've got the hang of your yoga video, practice with it three times during the week to begin with and then as your strength increases, practice more until you have a daily routine built up. Yoga is a very gentle exercise but you will be amazed at the changes you see in your body within the first two or three weeks.

If you really do want the teacher to physically come to you, many professionals are available for private at-home sessions for a price. It may be expensive, so consider splitting the price and sharing the instructor with two or three friends. The practice is still private and the teaching is individual, but the price becomes much more manageable.

A practice similar to yoga is Pilates. Yoga focuses more on stretching and toning while maintaining deep breathing, but Pilates focuses on building strength. Originally developed by Joseph Pilates in a World War II concentration camp, the program uses a series of movements that employ the body's weight as its resistance to train and strengthen muscles. Few movements require strain on the knees and the leg exercises can increase the strength of the quadriceps and hamstring muscles to better support the knee joints. The first movements of Pilates zero in on the "powerhouse" or core area to build muscle support for the spine. By having a strong midsection that can keep the upper body erect, you lessen the strain placed on the knees by poor posture. Pilates can correct and relieve many areas of stress for people with bad knees.

Find a practitioner in a similar way to yoga – call around to local studios to learn information about classes and instructors. Many Pilates studios frequently offer the same option as yoga studios and allow you to observe and even participate in a free class before making a decision about joining. Individual instructors are also available for private home lessons, though this can be more expensive than yoga depending on where you live. If you're interested in home Pilates lessons, go in with some friends and have your own mini-class – since each person pays a portion of the total price, it costs you far less but still gives you wonderful individual attention.

Well, you say, yoga and Pilates are great for building muscle and strengthening the body but what about burning fat? There is some debate about the aerobic quality of Pilates and yoga practice with most people falling on the side of a decreased calorie burn. The exception would be Ashtanga yoga, which is very physical and hard on tender knees. Pilates ultimately builds your muscles, though using the Reformer machine can help increase heart rate. Reformers are still relatively rare in gyms and studios, and the cost is prohibitive for individuals, so it seems like it is back to square one. The solution is simple: start swimming! Swimming laps is a wonderful workout for everyone but especially for people with arthritis and tender joints because the water supports the body and decreases the pressure on the frame in favor of working the muscles and cardiovascular system. Add three days of thirty-minute swim workouts to your schedule and see the fat disappear while your muscles become strong and beautiful.

Foolproof Your Back From Injury

Oh, my aching back! It's a complaint everyone hears regularly. The back seems to be the prime target for injuries and stress, and practically everyone will experience a back

injury at some point in life. You definitely need something to tip the odds back in your favor and fortunately there are many exercises you can do that can help protect your back. Maintain a regular schedule of preventative care for the back along with your weekly workout schedule and you just may escape the curse of the bad back!

A strong body naturally supports itself with muscles depending on other muscles. The muscles responsible for supporting the back are your core or abdominal muscles, which wrap around your middle (core) and sides to help you remain upright. When you build strength in your core, you are on your way to building a better support system for the spine. This is why this plan includes movements that strengthen the abdominal muscles as well as back muscles. You will need a yoga mat to use with all three exercises.

If you already have trouble with your back or have experienced an injury to the spine, do not perform these exercises without consulting your doctor. Placing more stress on an injured spine can aggravate the damage and create more problems. Your doctor or chiropractor should be able to prescribe a wellness regimen for your back and spine that heals and strengthens at the same time. Even if you have not yet seen a medical professional or been diagnosed with a bad back, do not perform these exercises without the benefit of an expert opinion.

Superman! Building a Back of Steel

One of the best and most popular moves to strengthen the back is a yoga move known colloquially as the 'Superman.' You will need a thick yoga mat to kneel on. Begin on your hands and knees with your head up and slowly raise your right arm and left leg at the same time. Hold the pose for a count of ten and then slowly lower both to your starting position. Repeat with your left arm and right leg. Do this movement 25 times for each side for a total of fifty movements at least once every two days. Raising the opposite arm and leg forces your body to balance on the remaining limbs and calls your core muscles into action. Stronger core (abdominal) muscles mean a stronger back – that's why it's important to build strength in the core. To modify this move for a less flexible back, simply extend your leg out and place your toes on the floor to provide more support.

An interesting variation on Superman is to perform it on your bed. If you have a very soft mattress this may not work as well for you but by performing the exercise on a slightly unstable surface, you demand more work from your muscles and shape them up faster. Make it a part of your morning and evening routines and see your abs go from flab to fab!

Cat Moves

Cats are supposed to be some of the smarter animals around and the flexibility and grace of felines certainly contributes to this theory. Think of a cat waking up from a nap and stretching his body. He knows his body needs the stretch to loosen and relax muscles and joints. For this exercise, begin in the same position on your yoga mat as for the Superman. Lower your head, drop your tailbone and suck your belly to your back as you round your spine into the letter "C." Hold the position for a count of six and then

slowly lower to your original position. Repeat the movement for three sets of 10 repetitions. This strengthens both the spine and the abdominal muscles, and increases support around the back.

Add a variation on this move by dropping your spine all the way down as you release. Lift your head at the same time and tighten your abs for a count of ten. This is known as the 'Cow' and also works to firm up the core and provide more care for the spine.

Deadly Cobra for Strong Backs

The final move assists with building and strengthening the same muscles as the Superman and Cat with a little more focus on creating more flexibility in the spine. Begin by lying facedown on your yoga mat. Place your hands on the floor at about shoulder height and breathe out as you press down with your hands and lift your upper body. Your head should be high and your feet should stay relatively close together in the back. Don't let your hands carry all the burden of holding you up; involve your core muscles in the job, too. Hold the pose for a count of eight; then release and repeat for three sets of ten repetitions. This is known as the Cobra pose and can work wonders for relieving tension in the upper back and shoulders.

Modifying this move by moving your hands slightly farther up from your shoulders and lifting your body as much as is comfortable.

Ten Energizing Exercise Soundtracks

Sometimes the prospect of exercising just doesn't thrill you the way it used to. When you've lost that enthusiasm for fitness, it can really discourage you from your regular workout. One of the best ways to get your groove back and start enjoying exercise again is to find some energizing music that gets your heart pumping and your feet tapping. Here are some suggestions to start your engines!

Britney Spears, In the Zone

The whole album is full of fantastic dance beats that get inside your head and start your feet moving. Sure, the lyrics may be simplistic at times but you're really just here for the music, right?

Chumbawamba, Tubthumper

Yes, it has that song on it and no, it doesn't make much sense, but the irresistible beats will sneak into your blood and keep you moving long after the workout has ended.

The Beach Boys, Summer Days (And Summer Nights!)

The quintessential California soundtrack is the perfect speed for interval training – fast songs followed by a slow one match your movements and keep you engaged.

Switchfoot, Meant to Live

Driving baselines and steady drums keep this album moving through a variety of songs that keep your feet moving.

Madonna, Music

Full of techno flourishes and pounding beats, you can't help but get up and dance when you hear it. Maybe it's not the album of the century but the energy is palpable and begs you to move.

Coldplay, A Rush of Blood to the Head

The music will move you but more than that, the lyrics will make you think. This is a good soundtrack for when you need to work things out while working out.

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