

[IMAGE]

The At-Home Athlete

By Perry Nickleston, DC

Getting in shape doesn't have to be expensive if you learn the tricks of the exercise trade. Why spend the time and money to go to a gym and then end up waiting in line to use the equipment? Here are 10 easy ways to get in shape fast without ever leaving the comfort of your own home.

When it comes to getting in shape, there are several Golden Rules: train smart, not hard; rest and recovery are critical; intensity is more important than duration; and proper nutrition is vital. Notice what's not on the list: expensive gym memberships, fancy pieces of equipment and time.

It's possible to sculpt a better body with simple, inexpensive equipment, smart training and fast-paced, intensity-focused routines that take minimal time. The problem for most people embarking on a home fitness routine is learning where to begin, how often to work out and what equipment to use.

- Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark Where to start? Every great journey starts with a single step. Keep it simple at first and increase training intensity once you begin to see changes in your body and your endurance improves. A lot of people feel overwhelmed with the commitment it takes to follow a regular exercise plan, so they keep putting it off. It's the classic story: *Oh, I'll start exercising next month.* But that month never seems to arrive. Motivate yourself to exercise for just 30 days. Why 30? Because it takes 30 days to form a new habit. After a month, it will be an activity you truly enjoy doing. Imagine that.

So, how often should you exercise? That depends on your level of experience, endurance, and the type of exercise program. It is recommended that you exercise a minimum of three, but no more than five days per week. Your body needs time to recover after a strenuous workout. No program should exceed one hour or you risk overtraining and possible injury. A full-body circuit routine, when performed correctly, should be completed in a maximum of 30 minutes. Additional cardiovascular (aerobic) exercise may be added if desired.

What type of equipment can you use at home? Below are the top 10 recommended tools for an all-inclusive full-body workout. Some are inexpensive pieces of equipment; others are simple methods of training. Remember, the goal is to take that first step - don't think you need all 10 before starting. Choose one and

slowly build your fitness foundation.

- Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark **Light Dumbbells**

A set of dumbbells is the "king" of any home fitness program, with virtually unlimited uses. The key is using high repetitions and compound exercises to reduce the need for going heavy. *Compound exercise* means moving from one body part to the next without rest. For example, do 15 repetitions for a biceps (front upper arm) curl and move immediately into 15 reps on a triceps (back upper arm) extension. It decreases the time needed for an effective workout and you *feel the burn* faster. This is a slang term used in the fitness world for the burning sensation felt in a muscle when exercised correctly.

Body-Weight Training

Otherwise known as "gravity training," body-weight training involves exercises against the gravity resistance of your own body. Examples include pushups, sit-ups, chin-ups, squats and lunges. The great thing about body-weight training is that regardless of age, strength or experience level, everyone can do it, and everyone can benefit from it. It doesn't matter whether you are a top-level athlete looking to enhance your competitive skills or a couch potato who hasn't exercised in years. Body-weight training will deliver results. You can get into great shape without wasting time going to the gym, and it doesn't cause the sore knees, backs and shoulders that often result from heavy lifting.

Plyometrics

Plyometrics is a form of training that uses explosive movements such as jumps, skipping, bounding, jumping rope, hopping, lunges, jump squats and clap push-ups to develop muscular power. It acts on the muscular and neurological systems to increase your power output. These quick, powerful movements increase your stamina and metabolic rate. When mixed with resistance exercises, it can significantly elevate your heart rate, replacing the need for traditional cardiovascular work. If you suffer from knee, hip or back pain, be careful when introducing plyometrics, as it can be rough on your joints.

- Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark **A Stability Ball**

Exercise (stability) balls focus on core and functional training, which involves strengthening the torso for better workouts and fewer injuries. Fitness experts know it's one of the best ways to strengthen the abs and

back to increase stability. Exercise balls challenge muscles by putting your body in an unstable environment. When you lie on the ball, your legs and abs immediately contract to keep you from falling off. Add an exercise (like a chest press or a crunch) and you've just increased the intensity of the movement. Exercise balls are versatile enough to use for just about anything. Make sure to choose the proper ball for your height and body weight.>

A Weighted Fitness Bar

This is a classic fitness tool: a simple, one-piece, solid steel, weighted fitness bar covered in rubber. It is very user friendly and extremely versatile. You can do a wide variety of workouts, including strength and conditioning, circuit and interval, martial arts, sports conditioning, balance and alignment, Pilates- and yoga-based workouts, and flexi-bility training. It has a beginner-level weight as low as 3 pounds to an advanced-level weight of 36 pounds. It replaces the need for heavy Olympic-size bars that take up too much space and are not practical for home use.>

A Medicine Ball

A medicine ball is a weighted ball between 3 and 25 pounds. Medicine ball exercises are an excellent way of training the core muscles to develop power. They help keep exercise fun by making the same old boring routines dynamic and interesting. It's important to remember, though, that unlike weight training, you shouldn't aim to keep increasing the weight to get results. When you see the benefits of improved balance, power and stability, you will be motivated to continue with this style of training. Keep your workouts fun - mix in a couple of medicine ball exercises and see what happens. You will be pleasantly surprised with the results.

- Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark **A Jump Rope**

Jumping rope is a tried and true method for improving conditioning and coordination. If you have never jumped rope before, you can expect a challenge. The rope can be very frustrating to a beginner. You will not become proficient with the rope overnight. It takes time and practice. Many athletes get frustrated and quickly find alternative conditioning tools. Do not allow your frustration to interfere with your quest for a better body. Jumping rope increases agility, quickness and endurance. When mixed in with a strength conditioning program, it can be the secret weapon in the battle to achieve a lean physique.

A Chin-Up Bar

The chin-up is a powerful exercise that will significantly increase upper body strength and muscle tone. An inexpensive addition to your home that is attached to the inside of any doorway, the chin-up bar will become a base foundation exercise. Now you might be saying, *"There is no way I can do a chin-up!"* On the contrary, you can do a lot of chin-ups until you get strong enough to do them without help. Simply put a chair underneath the bar and use one leg to push off of the chair to help perform the exercise. Removing a slight bit of your body weight makes it easier to complete. The key is not to help too much. You want enough weight to struggle after 8-10 repetitions. In no time at all, you will be doing them unassisted.

Resistance Bands/Tubing

Resistance bands are ideal for home exercise programs and can easily be incorporated into a circuit-training routine, helping to condition the cardiovascular system as well as strengthening specific muscle groups. Resistance tubing is extremely adaptable, and exercises can be completed with very little additional equipment. The unique toning effect of the bands comes from the eccentric (pulling) resistance on your muscles at the midpoint of each movement. Smaller muscle groups that are hard to train with more traditional free-weight exercises can be targeted. This makes it ideal for home athletic conditioning.

A Kettlebell

If I had to choose one single fitness tool to use, this would be it! Created in Russia, the kettlebell is a round iron weight with a handle on it. (Like a cannonball with grips). If you've ever had a gym membership, you've probably seen someone using it. This fun-to-use tool can shred body fat like crazy, especially for women wanting to get rid of stubborn hip and thigh fat. The secret is a series of dynamic swinging movements. You use practically every muscle for whole-body resistance training and high-speed, fat-burning cardio. A must-have for your fitness routine. >

It is recommended that you always check with a health professional and ask their opinion before undertaking any strenuous exercise program. Here are some general guidelines to follow when you begin:

- Start off gently and work within your comfort zone.
- Increase your intensity gradually over several weeks.
- Maintain regular breathing throughout the exercises (do not hold your breath).

- Try to keep strict form with control.
 - Do not undertake any exercise if you are in pain. If you feel faint, dizzy or unwell while exercising, stop immediately.
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