

[IMAGE]

Take Your Workout to the Next Level

By Chelsea Cooper, MPA, CPT

OK, so it's a new year and I'm sure fitness is on your list of resolutions - it's probably the most popular resolution people make every new year. Unfortunately, it's also right up there in terms of the resolutions people break shortly thereafter. Here's another snag: You aren't looking forward to doing the same exercises you did last year. Although squats, push-ups, lunges and pull-ups are the foundation for most, if not all exercises, they can get monotonous over time and your body could do the thing we don't want it to do: plateau. If your body plateaus, it means it essentially gets used to the exercises and figures out a way to burn less calories efficiently. That means a less productive workout for you, which is never a good thing.

I'm all for keeping things the same if it works; you know the saying: "If it's not broken, don't fix it." At the same time, if you can tweak a few things and infuse more excitement and fun into your workout, I'm all for it, too. After all, the key to sticking with an exercise plan is just that: *sticking with it*. The more fun you have and the more you challenge your body, the happier you'll be. With that said, let's change up some oldies but goodies and see how variations on common exercises can keep you mentally and physically challenged in 2011.

Push-Ups

Uchimata Push-Up Variation

- From a one-leg push-up position and squeezing the glute (buttock) of your support leg, slowly lower your body as one unit until your chest grazes the floor and pause for a count.
- From there, use your glute to slowly raise your lifted leg as high as you can without overly hyperextending your lower back.
- Then push back up to the starting position, switch sides and repeat for time.

push up - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark The one-leg lift really increases the demands on your core, lower back, glutes, and hamstrings; and since it shifts your weight forward onto your hands, it really challenges your shoulders, too.

Leg Kick Push-Up Variation

- With tight abs, tight elbows and tight glutes, slowly lower your body as one unit until your chest grazes the floor.
- From there, slowly kick one leg straight out to the side to form as close to a 90-degree angle as possible without bending your knee.
- Pause for a count, then move your leg back to the starting position. Then push back up, switch sides, and repeat for time.

By pausing at the bottom position, you eliminate the stretch reflex (the natural bounciness and elasticity in your muscles), which makes your upper body work harder. Plus, the slow kicking action requires stellar strength and fabulous flexibility for your hip flexors, groin/adductors, hamstrings and glutes.

Alternating Grip Single-Leg Push-Up Variation

- Assume a standard one-leg push-up position while squeezing the glute of your support leg.
- Move the hand on the same side as your down leg a slight 1-2 inches forward.
- With tight abs, tight elbows, and tight glutes, lower your body as one unit until your chest grazes the floor.
- Pause for a count and then push back up to the starting position, switch sides, and repeat for time.

The alternating grip increases the demands on your lower abdominal and upper body muscles. More specifically, it activates the often-dormant serratus anterior muscles, key shoulder stabilizers that run from your chest along your rib cage to your shoulder blades. Thus, it's a great exercise to bulletproof your shoulders and improve posture.

Squats

Vertical Squat Jump

- Stand in the start position for a body-weight squat. Squat down and then jump up as high as possible.
- Bend your knees when you land to absorb the force with your muscles. As soon as you land, jump up again. Repeat for 10 reps.

Siff Squat

- Stand on the balls of your feet, with your feet just greater than shoulder-width apart. Stay on the balls of your feet for the entire exercise.
- Start the movement at the hip joint. Push your hips backward and "sit back," as if into a chair. Make your hips go back as far as possible.
- Squat as deep as possible, but keep your low back tensed in a neutral position. Don't let your lower back become rounded.
- Push with your glutes, hamstrings, quads, and calves to return to the start position. Repeat for 10 reps.

squats - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark One-Leg Squat

- Standing with your feet slightly greater than shoulder-width apart, pick one foot off the ground and extend that foot forward.
- Contract your glutes, brace your abs and keep your spine in a neutral position. Extend your arms forward or to the sides to increase your balance.
- Start the movement at the hip joint. Push your butt back and "sit back," as if sitting into a chair. Squat slowly and focus on balance.
- Squat until your thigh is parallel to the floor, but keep your lower back flat. Push with your buttocks, hamstrings, and quadriceps to return to the start position. Repeat for 10 reps.
- Go as far as you can with good form. Halfway down is great! If you are advanced, you may be able to squat all the way to the floor.

Lunges

Lunge Hops

- Start in the bottom of a split-squat position (one leg in front, one in back). Your front thigh should be parallel to the floor, your torso upright and your abs braced.
- Jump up explosively and switch leg positions in the air. Your back leg becomes the front leg, and vice-versa. Absorb the landing with your muscles.

Keep your abs braced and torso upright. Alternate sides without resting between sides. Repeat for 10 reps total.

Forward Lunge/Walking Lunge

- Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart holding dumbbells at arm's length.
- Step forward with one leg, taking a slightly larger than normal step. Keep your back toe on the ground and use it to help keep your balance. The back knee should also be bent.
- Lower your body until your front thigh is parallel to the ground. Keep your upper body upright and your lower back flat.
- Pull with your lead leg to return to the standing position, one step ahead of where you started.
- For the walking lunge, walk forward for all 10 repetitions, alternating sides.

Reaching Lunge

- Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart and then stand on one leg, balance yourself, and then bend your knee and reach forward as you squat down.
- Reach as far as you can while keeping your chest up and back flat. Return to the starting position without losing your balance. Perform all reps (10) for one leg and then repeat with the other leg.

Reverse Lunge

- Stand with feet shoulder-width apart. Brace your abs and contract your glutes as if you were squeezing something between them.
- Step backward with the left leg, resting the toe on the ground. Then squat straight down with the right leg supporting your body weight. Lower yourself until your right thigh is parallel to the floor.
- Return to the start position by pushing with the muscles of the right leg. Focus on pushing with glutes and hamstrings. Repeat for 10 reps.

One-Leg Elevated Lunge

- Place the laces of one foot on a bench. Step forward with the other foot, taking a slightly larger than normal step (split squat stance).
- Contract your glutes, brace your abs and keep your spine in a neutral position.
- Lower your body until your front thigh is parallel to the ground. Keep your upper body upright and your lower back flat.
- Push up to the upright position. Stay in a split-squat stance. Perform all reps (10) for one leg and then

switch.

Pulling Exercises

Inverted Rows

- Set a bar at hip height in the Smith machine or squat rack. Lie underneath the bar and grab it a few inches wider than shoulder-width apart.
- Row (pull) yourself up the top position with your upper back and lats. Keep the abs braced and body in a straight line from toes (knees) to shoulders.
- Slowly return to the start position. Repeat for 10 reps. (For beginner inverted rows - keep feet on the ground.)

Dumbbell Renegade Row

- Start in the push-up position with your hands wrapped around two light dumbbells.
- Keep your abs braced and row (pull) one dumbbell up to your rib cage. Slowly lower under control and alternate sides. Repeat for 10 reps.

Hope these twists on some original exercises get you excited and ready for a new, better you in 2011. I have been incorporating many of these exercises into my routines and find my clients get great results and more importantly, enjoy being challenged. After all, having an arsenal of exercises that you can do safely and effectively is the only true way to lose weight, gain strength and stay healthy in the long term. Now go out there and get started! Remember to talk to your doctor before beginning any new exercise routine, particularly if you have a health condition that could impact performance or safety.

Complexes: Another Way to Turn Ordinary Into Extraordinary

exercise - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark There is no simpler and more effective way to burn belly fat, crank up metabolism, and tone and tighten your whole body than the training style referred to as "complexes." Complexes allow you to get a maximum amount of work done in a short period of time and a small amount of space, making it the perfect fit for home and travel workouts.

Complexes Defined:

Choose two or more exercises using the same implement or load (for example, 15 lb dumbbells) and then perform each exercise for either a certain number of repetitions or for a certain period of time. The key to properly performing complexes is to perform each movement/exercise back-to-back without any rest between exercises. In other words, you should not put the implement or load down at any point until completing all exercises within a given complex.

Like anything in fitness, progressive overload is the key to building lean muscle, burning belly fat and improving conditioning. Complex progression is accomplished in any of the following ways:

- Increasing the number of exercises within the complex: Moving from a two-exercise complex to a four-exercise complex and then to a six-exercise complex.
- Increasing intensity: Using heavier loads and/or more advanced exercise variations within each complex.
- Increasing density: Completing more reps with a given load within the same work period or completing the same reps or more with a given load while employing shorter rest and transition periods.

Sample Dumbbell Complex:

- Beginner: Dumbbell squat to curl to press
- Intermediate: Dumbbell burpie (standing position to squat to push-up and back up to your feet) to push-up row, to curl to press
- Advanced: Dumbbell burpie to push-up row to curl to press, to overhead lunge

For the above sample complex, try to perform 2 minutes of continuous work followed by 45 seconds of rest for up to five total rounds.

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