

PERSONALBEST

WELLNESS REINVENTED

WHAT IS THE BEST EXERCISE FOR ME?



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What is the best exercise for me?

"Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can."

Theodore Roosevelt

As a fitness 'professional', I am often asked what is the best exercise to do?

On the surface, this seems like a simple question to answer, but if you're not an athlete or into exercise and find the gym scene intimidating and overwhelming, it's not so straight forward. Similarly, if you have injuries or illness that may inhibit your exercise goals you will understand that 'exercise' is not a one size fits all solution.

If you were to Google 'what is the best exercise?' you would be confronted with 100's of permutations, covering variables such as weight loss/gain, pregnancy, over 50's, female, male, bad knees etc. So where do you begin and why the need for exercise?

Have you ever wished you could swim with the ease and grace of a dolphin? You may have been lucky enough to sail or swim alongside a dolphin, seen them perform at a waterpark, or perhaps grew up watching Flipper, but I am sure you can picture a dolphin swimming having fun! What you might not know is that dolphins have a great sense of fellowship and are extremely social. By nature, they are very curious and enjoy playing with objects and other dolphins following the waves created by boats. As well as being able to jump almost 5 metres out of the water, they frequently make bubbles and take the time to recreate* themselves in the ocean.

***Recreate** – verb (used with object), rec-re-at-ed, rec-re-at-ing. To refresh by means of relaxation and enjoyment, as restore physically or mentally.

Back on dry land, the impact of the Covid pandemic highlighted that inactivity is now seen as an ongoing pandemic due to the link between poor health and weakened immune system. A point reinforced by the Sport England Active Lives Adult Survey November 2020-21. Their report suggests that 4 in 10 British adults were so immobile they risked their long-term health

From an early age, we are taught that being physically active will go a long way toward good heart health. 'Exercise' is one of your most effective tools for strengthening the heart muscle and keeping body weight under control as well as reducing the risk of higher cholesterol, blood sugar and blood pressure levels that may lead to heart attack or stroke. But even with this knowledge, it is believed that sedentary living now kills more people than obesity. Many health experts predict could soon bankrupt the NHS.



'Exercise', according to Peter Walker, author of 'The Miracle Pill – Why the sedentary world is getting it all wrong.', is the issue. He believes that labelling physical activity as exercise turned off the majority and created a belief that it is a pursuit of a minority, whether that be elite athletes, or a routine squeezed into busy schedules of busy people. Since time began, daily physical exertion was an integral part of humanity, but in less than a half a century movement has almost been designed out of our lives with transformed workplaces, our reliance on the car, and a whole host of appliances that aid our domestic life

So where do you start and what is the best activity to do? According to Steven Blair, one of Americas leading experts on the health benefits of exercise his answer is, "The one you'll do and keep doing." And the good news is, it is never too late to start exercising and benefitting from all the health benefits that physical activity brings. Even if you have had, or you think you have had a lifetime of inactivity, don't worry about which exercise you need to do, or which class to attend, just think about moving more and moving well.

Start by getting up from the sofa. According to numerous fitness experts, strength training is vital. If you can perform strength-training exercises that target multiple muscle groups in one go, then you are on to a real winner, that's why squats or squatting tick all the boxes. When performed well, squats will target the quadriceps, hamstrings, and gluteal muscles, all of which are large muscle groups that help support and move your body weight.

Superior muscular fitness will provide you with a greater capacity to burn calories, but make sure you perform the exercise with perfect form to avoid injuries and poor results. A good technique requires you to keep feet shoulder-width apart and back straight. As you bend your knees you lower your hips whilst trying to keep your knees over the ankles for the duration of the movement.



Once you have practiced the squat and gained some competence in the movement, the next step, (literally!) is to lunge. Just like squats, lunges work all the major muscles of the lower body and can help improve your balance as well. Lungeing is a great exercise because it mirrors many of our day-to-day movements, such as walking and running. It is also very similar to the position we assume when we get up from the floor and creates the same muscle-activation patterns used for ascending or descending stairs.

Any good technique is crucial in order to avoid injury. Take a big step forward with your right foot, keeping your spine in a neutral position. Bend your right knee to create a right angle, focusing on keeping weight on the toes of your left foot whilst dropping the knee of your left leg toward the floor. Then repeat on the other leg.

The ageing body has the propensity to become weaker, and less flexible/mobile which has the consequence of impacting our balance. Brazilian Physician Claudio Gil S Araújo developed a simple evaluation of balance, flexibility, and strength to prove this point. It's called the Sitting-Rising Test ⁽¹⁾. From a standing position, without support or leaning on anything, you slowly lower yourself to the floor, and then attempt to stand back up again.

Starting with a score of 10. You deduct points for the following:

- Hand used for support: -1 point
- Knee used for support: -1 point
- Forearm used for support: -1 point
- One hand on knee or thigh: -1 point
- Side of the leg used for support: -1 point

For example, if you were to sit down placing your right hand on your right knee, then your left hand on the floor before your hips touch the ground, you would deduct 2 points. Then as you attempt to stand up you place your left hand and then left knee on the floor for support, you would deduct a further 2 points giving you a total score of 6 (10-4=6) for the Sitting-Rising Test.

The Sitting-Rising Test, or SRT was performed by over 2,000 patients between the ages of 51 and 80. Araújo and his team found that individuals who scored less than 8 points on the test were twice as likely to die within the next six years. Those who scored 3 or fewer points were more than five times as likely to die within the same period compared with those who scored more than 8 points. Araújo concluded that each point increase in the SRT score correlated with a 21% decrease in mortality from all causes.

The Sitting-Rising Test reinforces the point that muscular strength and flexibility are just as important as aerobic health in delaying the impact of old age.

We are all mortal and our time on this earth is limited, but the quality of that time can be improved if we feel better and move better. Getting started is never easy, but one of the simplest things you can do is to try and lessen the amount of time spent sitting and walk a little bit more every day. The thought of entering a gym can be intimidating and overwhelming for many, but some of the best physical activities for your body don't require the gym or assume you are preparing for an Ironman.

Remember the dolphins? They move just for the fun of it! Find something you enjoy whether it is on your own or in a group, indoors or outside. Don't give yourself a hard time, find joy in moving and recreate just like our aquatic friends!

Reference:

1. The Sitting–rising test: Sex- and age-reference scores derived from 6141 adults.

Claudio Gil S Araújo, Claudia Lucia B Castro, João Felipe C Franca, Denise SMS Araújo

European Journal of Preventive Cardiology, vol. 27, 8: pp. 888-890. First Published May 1, 2019. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/2047487319847004>