

# *Exercise*

EXPERTS SAY THERE IS NO MAGIC TO EXERCISE: YOU GET OUT OF IT WHAT YOU PUT IN. THAT DOESN'T MEAN YOU HAVE TO WORK OUT FOR HOURS EACH DAY. IT JUST MEANS YOU NEED TO WORK SMART.

THAT SAID, EXPERTS AGREE THAT NOT ALL EXERCISES ARE CREATED EQUAL. SOME ARE SIMPLY MORE EFFICIENT THAN OTHERS, WHETHER THEY TARGET MULTIPLE MUSCLE GROUPS, ARE SUITABLE FOR A WIDE VARIETY OF FITNESS LEVELS, OR HELP YOU BURN CALORIES MORE EFFECTIVELY.

SO WHAT ARE THE BEST EXERCISES? WE POSED THIS QUESTION TO FOUR FITNESS EXPERTS AND COMPILED A LIST OF THEIR FAVORITES.

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# 7 Most Effective Exercises

- **Walking** - Any exercise program should include cardiovascular exercise, which strengthens the heart and burns calories. And walking is something you can do anywhere, anytime, with no equipment other than a good pair of shoes.
- **Interval Training** - Whether you're a beginner or an exercise veteran, a walker or an aerobic dancer, adding interval training to your cardiovascular workout will boost your fitness level and help you lose weight. The way to do it is to push the intensity or pace for a minute or two, then back off for anywhere from two to -10 minutes (depending on how long your total workout will be, and how much time you need to recover). Continue doing this throughout the workout.

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- **Squats** - Strength training is essential, the experts say. "The more muscular fitness you have," says Cotton, "the greater the capacity you have to burn calories." And our experts tended to favor strength-training exercises that target multiple muscle groups. Squats, which work the quadriceps, hamstrings, and gluteals, are an excellent example.
- **Lunges** - Like squats, lunges work all the major muscles of the lower body: gluteals, quadriceps, and hamstrings. A lunge is a great exercise because it mimics life, it mimics walking," only exaggerated, says Petersen. Lunges are a bit more advanced than squats, says Cotton, helping to improve your balance as well. Here's how to do them right: Take a big step forward, keeping your spine in a neutral position. Bend your front knee to approximately 90 degrees, focusing on keeping weight on the back toes and dropping the knee of your back leg toward the floor.

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- **Push-ups** - If done correctly, the push-up can strengthen the chest, shoulders, triceps, and even the core trunk muscles, all at one time. For someone who is at a more beginning level, start by pushing from the kitchen-counter height. Then work your way to a desk, a chair, the floor with bent knees, and, finally, the floor on your toes. Here's how to do a perfect push-up: From a face-down position, place your hands slightly wider than shoulder-width apart. Place your toes or knees on the floor, and try to create a perfect diagonal with your body, from the shoulders to the knees or feet. Keep the glutes [rear-end muscles] and abdominals engaged. Then lower and lift your body by bending and straightening your elbows, keeping your torso stable throughout.

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- **Abdominal Crunches** - Who doesn't want firm, flat abs? Experts say that when done correctly, the familiar crunch (along with its variations) is a good choice to target them. For a standard crunch, says Cotton, begin lying on your back with feet flat on the floor and fingertips supporting your head. Press your low back down and begin the exercise by contracting abdominals and peeling first your head (tucking your chin slightly), then your neck, shoulders, and upper back off the floor. Be careful not to pull your neck forward by sticking the chin out; don't hold your breath, and keep elbows out of your line of vision to keep chest and shoulders open.

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- **Bent-over Row** - Talk about bang for the buck: This exercise works all the major muscles of the upper back, as well as the biceps. Here's how to do it with good form. Stand with feet shoulder-width apart, then bend knees and flex forward at the hips. (If you have trouble doing this exercise standing up, support your weight by sitting on an incline bench, facing backward.) Tilt your pelvis slightly forward, engage the abdominals, and extend your upper spine to add support. Hold dumbbells or barbell beneath the shoulders with hands about shoulder-width apart. Flex your elbows, and lift both hands toward the sides of your body. Pause, then slowly lower hands to the starting position.