Benefits of bodyweight exercises

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Some of the most common obstacles for fitting regular exercise into our daily lives are time, money, and energy. But what if I told you it was possible to invest in your health without having to go to a gym, buy fancy equipment or spend a lot of money? Bodyweight exercises are a convenient and free way to improve your health and energy level.

Bodyweight exercises are strength training exercises that do not require free weights. Rather, an individual’s own body weight provides the resistance for the movement.

Multiple health goals can be achieved using bodyweight exercises, including weight loss, muscle gain, and increased range of motion.

Our skeleton’s job is to hold and support the entire weight of the body, but if you don’t move, the bone is sent the message that it doesn’t have to maintain as much density. Bodyweight exercises can help prevent osteoporosis by boosting the bone-building forces and improving bone density. Simply stressing your bones by the force of your own body weight stimulates more bone growth to protect your skeletal frame. Bodyweight exercises also increase muscle mass, meaning you rely less on your joints to move because your muscles are stronger. Additional benefits include improved heart health and circulation, reduced risk for diabetes, reduced stress and increased energy levels.

Bodyweight exercises work numerous muscle groups simultaneously and can be modified, which allows you to customize the exercises to your level of ability. They are simple enough to perform without supervision and have a low risk for injury. All you need is your own body and enough space to jump around a bit – and, of course, water is highly encouraged.

Push-ups are a great bodyweight exercise that strengthens the chest, shoulders and arms. (Be sure to stabilize your core by pulling your belly button in toward your spine.) They can be performed with various hand placements to isolate different muscle groups. Also, push-ups can be done at different levels of incline or decline. For example, beginners can start by pushing off of a wall or kitchen counter, progress to the floor on their knees, and eventually to their toes using full bodyweight.

Squats help build leg muscles and also help make daily life activities easier. You can begin squats against a wall and progress to air squats, but make sure your knees never bend past your toes. Other bodyweight exercises include bicycle crunches, reverse flies, tricep dips, planks, leg-raises, flutter kicks, bridges, donkey kicks, burpees, mountain climbers, lunges, sit-ups, reverse crunches, and step-ups.

You can customize your own workout by combining five to 10 different bodyweight exercises that target opposing muscle groups to create a circuit. Aim for 10 to 20 reps of each exercise. For best results do not rest much in between exercises in order to get – and keep -- your heart rate up.

If you are not accustomed to physical activity, start with a few exercises and, after you become stronger and more adapted, add more exercises to your routine. Increase the number of circuits and repetitions of each exercise as you become more physically fit.

After completing bodyweight workouts, it is important to stretch to increase range of motion, flexibility, prevent injury, and decrease recovery time. Aim to perform your bodyweight circuit two to three times per week.

Whether you’re a weekend warrior, a mom who chases after a toddler, or a mature adult trying to reduce your risk of falls, strength training helps build strong muscles and bones to make the activities of daily living easier! While high intensity workouts, cardio, and strength training have their benefits, bodyweight exercises are the most convenient and least expensive workouts for those lacking time and money.