

ACTIVITY PLAN: STRENGTH FUNDAMENTALS

Aim: learn to do these fundamental strength exercises that everyone should be doing.

Duration: 10 minutes.

Equipment: a mat/towel and a chair/bench for support.

Frequency of strength exercises: this is a guide, and the aim is to fatigue your muscles without provoking any pain. Listen to your body and contact a health care professional if you are unsure or your pain is worsening.

- **Repetitions:** 10–12 repetitions or 10–12 each side with a 30 second rest between sets. For whole body exercises, hold for as long as you can.
- **Sets:** 1–3 sets each sessions.
- **Sessions:** 2–3 times a weeks.

Squat



Why: builds strength in the lower body and core. Improves balance, mobility, and posture. Supports healthy joints.

Description

1. Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, toes slightly turned out.
2. Engage your core gently.
3. Bend your knees and push your hips back as if you're sitting into a chair.
4. Lower slowly, keeping your chest lifted and back straight.
5. Only go as low as is comfortable, (but ideally until your thighs are parallel to the floor).
6. Check your knees, they should stay in line with your toes, not collapsing inward.
7. Press through your heels to return to standing, squeezing your glutes at the top.

Challenge: hold a heavy object to make the exercise more challenging.

Lunges



Why: builds balanced strength between the left and right sides of the body. Improves coordination. Strengthens legs and increases hip mobility.

Description

1. Begin standing upright with feet hip width apart, and toes pointing forward.
2. Step your right foot forward a metre.
3. Bend both knees and lower your body straight down.
4. Keep your spine tall and chest lifted.
5. Your front thigh should be parallel to the floor, and back knee hovering above the floor, with your shin parallel to the floor. (Think: both legs form a right angle).
6. Push through the front heel to stand back up.

Variations: complete all lunges on one side before swapping to the other side. Complete the above instructions and then step back to your starting position, alternating legs each time.

Push Ups



Why: builds muscular strength in the upper body, core, and lower back. Improves posture. Supports the spine.

Description

Level 1: Wall

1. Stand facing a wall.
2. Place your hands on the wall, shoulder width apart and at chest height.
3. Bend your elbows and lower your chest towards the wall.
4. Keep your body straight.
5. Press back out to the starting position.

Level 2: Bench

1. Begin with your hands on a bench, shoulder width apart.
2. Walk your feet backwards so you're leaning against the bench, and your body forms a straight line. Your hands should be level with your chest.
3. Bend your elbows and lower your chest towards the bench.
4. Press back up to the starting position.

Level 3: Floor

1. Begin on your hands and knees on the floor with your hands shoulder width apart.
2. Bend your elbows and lower your chest towards the floor.
3. Press back up to the starting position.

Challenge: lift your knees off the floor and begin in a "planking" position.

Over time: increase how many push ups you are doing. Progress from wall, to bench, to kneeling, to toes.

Planks



Why: strengthens the whole body, especially the core. Improves posture, balance and stability.

Description

1. Begin on your hands and knees on the floor.
2. Stay on your hands or lower down onto your forearms, with your elbows directly under your shoulders.
3. Walk your feet backwards so your body forms a straight line.
4. Engage your core by gently drawing your belly button in toward your spine.
5. Keep your hips level and your spine neutral, avoid sagging or arching your back.
6. Breathe steadily and hold for the desired time. Start with 10-20 seconds and build up.

Remember to keep your eye gaze down so your neck stays aligned with your spine.

Option: lower your knees to make the plank easier.

Tip: set a timer and see how long you can hold. This is your base time. Work towards longer holds.

Companion video suggestion: Do's and Don'ts of Exercise Alignment. This video features all exercises listed and demonstrates how to perform them safely and correctly, plus a couple of extras.