



Here's To Your Health!

A Phoenix Fire Department Health Center Publication

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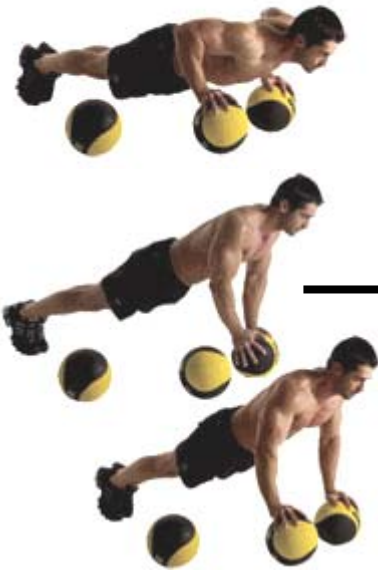
Medicine-Ball Archbishop

Place your hands directly beneath your shoulders. The secret to perfect pushup technique is keeping your body rigid. "Your abs and lower back usually fatigue first," says Mike Robertson, M.S., C.S.C.S., a strength coach in Indianapolis. That's when your hips sag, which increases strain on your back instead of building your chest and abs.

When you place your hands on a medicine ball or Swiss ball, the instability causes your core muscles to work 20 percent harder than when you do pushups on the floor, report New Zealand researchers. So you'll train the muscles of your midsection and hips to remain stable longer. As a result, you'll be able to do more pushups and work more muscle.

How To Do It

- Place three to five medicine balls in a semicircle and assume the pushup position with both hands on the ball to the far left. Your chest should be over the ball and your feet should remain in place throughout the exercise.
- Move your right hand to the ball at right and do a pushup. Bring your left hand to that ball.
- Continue moving right and doing pushups until you reach the farthest ball. Then work your way back. That's one repetition.



Explosive Crossover Pushup

Space your hands slightly wider than shoulder-width apart. Explosive pushups, such as this one, allow you to generate maximum force by pushing your body off the floor. The harder you push, the more muscle fibers you activate. And that means you'll burn more calories, both during and after your workout. What's more, the crossover portion of this movement forces your upper arms toward the center of your body, which is the main function of the pectoralis major, your largest chest muscle. The result: You work as many chest muscle fibers as possible.

How To Do It

- Place your right hand on the floor and your left hand on the smooth side of a weight plate.
- Lower your body.
- Explosively push up and to the left so your hands leave the floor. Land with your right hand on the plate and your left hand on the floor. Reverse the move.



Dumbbell Pushup Row

Forcefully contract your glutes. When most men perform rowing movements, they pull more with their arms than with their middle and upper back, which defeats the purpose. But in this pushup, your arms, abs, and shoulders are forced to work together to keep you steady while your back muscles draw the weight to your rib cage--so you can't cheat. The benefit? You'll simultaneously build your back and chest, which not only saves you time, but also helps prevent muscle imbalances of your upper body.

How To Do It

- Get into pushup position with your arms straight and your hands resting on light dumbbells.
- Squeeze your abs and glutes as you perform a pushup.
- At the top, pull one dumbbell off the floor and toward you until your elbow is above your back. Slowly return the weight to the floor and repeat with the other arm.

Belief in Exercise Boosts the Benefits

People who think they're getting a good workout obtain more benefits than those who perform the exact same activities, but don't think what they are doing is exercise, according to the findings of a study by Harvard researchers. These results support the idea that the benefits of exercise may involve a placebo effect.

Hotel cleaners who were told that their work of cleaning roughly 15 rooms each day was enough physical activity to maintain a healthy lifestyle were more trim and fit four weeks later than their peers who weren't given this message, Dr. Ellen Langer and her student Alia J. Crum report in the February issue of *Psychological Science*.

While the placebo effect of fake pills is widely accepted, Crum and Langer note, no one has yet studied whether the belief that exercise is maintaining fitness might exert a kind of placebo effect as well.

To investigate, the researchers recruited 84 female housekeepers working at seven different hotels. Workers in four of the hotels were told that the exercise they got on the job met or exceeded the Surgeon General's activity recommendations for a healthy lifestyle, while those in the three other hotels were not told anything. Several measures of participants' fitness and health were taken at the beginning of the study and four weeks later.

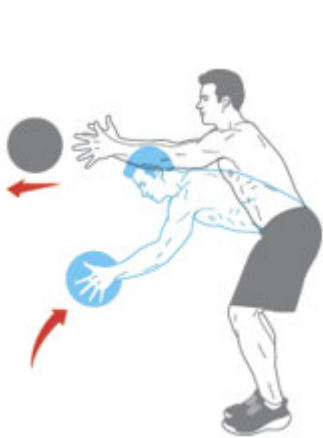
Before the study started, about two-thirds of all participants said they didn't exercise regularly, while one third said they didn't exercise at all. After four weeks, 79.7 percent of the women in the informed group said they exercised regularly. They also lost 2 pounds, on average; lowered their blood pressure by 10 percent; and showed reductions in percentage of body fat, body mass index, and the size of their waists in relation to their hips.

All of these changes were significantly greater than those seen in the group who weren't told that their work was good exercise.

One possible explanation could have been that women in the informed group became more active and ate more healthily, the researchers note, but they found that this was not the case, making it unlikely that the fitness improvements were due to changes in behavior.

"These results support the hypothesis that exercise affects health in part or in whole via the placebo effect," Crum and Langer write. "Whether the change in physiological health was brought about directly or indirectly, it is clear that health is significantly affected by mind-set."

Reuters Limited, Feb 13, 2007



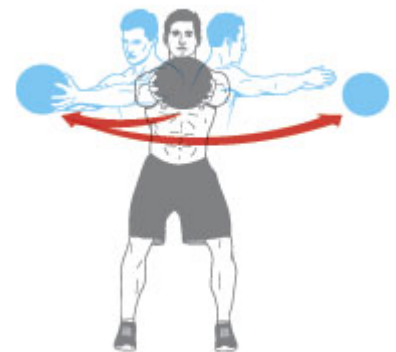
Side-to-Side Shuffle

Stand facing a wall from 5 feet away, holding a medicine ball at chest height. Throw the ball at the wall 3 to 5 feet to your left and at eye level. As the ball bounces off the wall, shuffle sideways and catch it on a hop before firing it back to your right.



A. Assume a pushup position with your hands placed directly under your shoulders and on the sides of a Swiss ball. Spread your fingers, with your thumbs pointing forward.

B. Keeping your core tight, lower yourself until your chest grazes the ball, then push back up. At the top of the move, push yourself as far away from the ball as you can so your shoulder blades move away from each other.



Medicine-Ball 180

Stand with your side facing a wall about 5 feet away. Hold a medicine ball in front of your chest, arms straight. Rotate your torso away from the wall slightly, then rotate forcefully toward the wall, throwing the ball at the wall and slightly behind you. Turn around and catch the ball, then repeat the move in the opposite direction.



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