

Really, Really Short Workouts

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Think you're too busy to work out? We have the workout for you. In minutes, high-intensity interval training (H.I.I.T.) will have you sweating, breathing hard and maximizing the health benefits of exercise without the time commitment. Best of all, it's scientifically proven to work.

What Is H.I.I.T?

Short Workouts 101

High-intensity interval training — referred to as H.I.I.T. — is based on the idea that short bursts of strenuous exercise can have a big impact on the body. If moderate exercise — like a 20-minute jog — is good for your heart, lungs and metabolism, H.I.I.T. packs the benefits of that workout and more into a few minutes. It may sound too good to be true, but learning this exercise technique and adapting it to your life can mean saving hours at the gym. If you think you don't have time to exercise, H.I.I.T. may be the workout for you. You can try it with any aerobic activity you like. The principles of H.I.I.T. can be applied to running, biking, stair climbing, swimming, jumping rope, rowing, even hopping or skipping. (Yes, skipping!) The downside? Even though H.I.I.T. lasts only minutes, the workouts are tough, requiring you to push your body near its limit.

How Intense Is High Intensity?

High-intensity exercise is obviously not a casual stroll down the street, but it's not a run-till-your-lungs-pop explosion, either. Think breathless, not winded. Heart-pounding, not exploding. Legs pumping, but not uncontrolled. You don't need any fancy heart rate monitors to do these workouts. Use cues from your body as a guide. In the middle of a high-intensity workout you should be able to say single words, but not complete whole sentences. So, if you can keep chatting to your workout partner during this workout, pump it up a few notches.

Got 10 Minutes?

A solitary minute of hard work buried in 10 minutes of activity can make a big difference.

If you like to run, bike, row or swim — but only in small doses — this workout is a great option for you. The best part? There's really only a total of one minute of intense exercise scattered in this 10-minute workout. In one study, overweight, sedentary volunteers completed this 10-minute workout three times a week — for a total of 30 minutes of exercise weekly. After six weeks, the volunteers had improved their endurance by 12 percent.



The 10-Minute Workout

If you like to run, bike, row or swim — just a little bit — this workout is a great option for you.

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Got 7 Minutes?

Grab your sneakers, a chair and a bucketful of energy for this workout sensation.

With this scientifically proven exercise regimen, you will use only body weight, a chair and a wall to combine the benefits of a long run and a weight room workout into about seven minutes of steady discomfort.

Perform each exercise in rapid succession, allowing 30 seconds for each. Your intensity level should hover at around an 8 on a discomfort scale of 1 to 10, says the creator of this exercise routine, Chris Jordan, the director of exercise physiology at the Human Performance Institute in Orlando, Fla.

Yes, the seven minutes will be unpleasant, but the upside is, after seven minutes, you're done.



The 7-Minute Workout

12 exercises deploying only body weight, a chair and a wall, it fulfills the latest mandates for high-intensity effort — all of it based on science.

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Got 4 Minutes?

If you can bike, swim or run at top speed for a solid four minutes, this may be all the workout you need.

If push-ups or wall sits aren't your thing, you can still get all the benefits of H.I.I.T. with this four-minute burst of fitness.

In a study, men ran on a treadmill at 90 percent of their maximal heart rate — pretty much all out — for four minutes, three times a week for 10 weeks. Overall, this group improved their endurance, blood sugar control and blood pressure as much as a comparable group of men who did a series of all-out exercise lasting for 16 minutes.

Also, skip the drive to the gym for this workout: It's just not time-efficient. Climb a flight of stairs for four minutes or sprint home from your bus stop. Just make sure you raise your heart rate to a pumping, air-gasping level for four minutes, three times a week.



The 4-Minute Workout

If you don't really like doing push-ups or wall sits, you can still benefit from H.I.I.T. Try this 4-minute burst of fitness.

10-20-30 Training

Add variety to your high-intensity sessions with this easy to remember and surprisingly fun routine.

The essentials of 10-20-30 training are simple. Run, ride or perhaps row on a rowing machine gently for 30 seconds, accelerate to a moderate pace for 20 seconds, then sprint as hard as you can for 10 seconds. (It should be called 30-20-10 training, obviously, but that is not as catchy.) Repeat.

You don't even need a stopwatch to monitor the 30-, 20-, and 10-second time changes. You can just count to yourself, which seems to make the intervals pass more quickly.

Best of all? The grueling, all-out portion of the workout lasts for only 10 seconds. C'mon, you can do anything for 10 seconds, right?



10-20-30 Training

This simple program will help you make the most of a short workout by improving heart health and endurance. Try it with your favorite cardiovascular activity.

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Keep It Interesting

With the right set of music and a little creativity, you'll soon look forward to your new optimized workout.

Get Started

To benefit the most from really, really short workouts, you need to build the habit of doing them into your hectic life. Ideally, you'll complete the workout three times a week. The best way to build that habit is to start small and be willing to tweak your schedule where you can to accommodate your new workout.

First set up a spot in your house for your workout, equipped with whatever you need to get the job done: sneakers, a chair, a towel, etc. **Then slot your workout in before you would normally shower.** (You can even do it in the bathroom.) **Or wake up five minutes earlier** and do it first thing in the morning, so you can head off to work feeling accomplished. **Or do it during your lunch hour.** Run up your office's stairs or grab a private conference room for just a few minutes. **Or work it into your commute.** If you walk or bike to work, add some heavy intervals on the way home.

Get a Boost From Music

Creating a workout playlist of high-energy tunes you love will not make your workout feel easier, but it may cause you to exercise harder without even realizing it. Best of all, if you are doing a really short workout, you need only one or two great tunes to get you through. If you are willing to try something a bit different, make your own music as you exercise. Sing, hum, clap your hands, whatever you can do to jam along to your playlist. It may give you an extra boost to finish strong. Find a song or podcast that's the length of your really, really short workout. By the time the song is over, you're done.

Try a New Activity

The beauty of H.I.I.T. is that you can apply its principles to many different activities. Too hot to be outside? Try some H.I.I.T. in the pool. Spin away on a stationary bike when it's cold outside. If your knees hurt, try an intense workout on an elliptical machine. On vacation, find a corner of your hotel room for some jumping jacks or sprint around the cruise ship. The type of exercise doesn't matter, as long as you alternate really intense, all-out bursts of the exercise with less intense intervals.

Run in Reverse

If you have bad knees and think you can't run, try going in the opposite direction. Backward running works your muscles differently than forward running. It also tilts your body forward, taking the pressure off your knees. Even more, running backward burns extra calories and sharpens balance.

Now, it's hard to find a safe place to run backward for 45 minutes, but how about really, really short backward run? That can happen on a local track, up and down a quiet street or back and forth along a quiet hallway.

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