

*The Quickie workout (2-3x/week)

About 700 skeletal muscles support and move the 206 bones in the adult body. The larger muscle groups are the legs, chest, back, and the 'core' or mid-body (abdominals and lower back). Only five exercises for these areas can affect most of your 700 muscles. A *compound* exercise is a basic movement which uses a wide range of muscles. Doing *compound* exercises can assure an effective full-body workout in a short amount of time. That's good news for those with no time or no desire for long exercise sessions. *** To avoid injury, have your technique checked for the following exercises . . .**

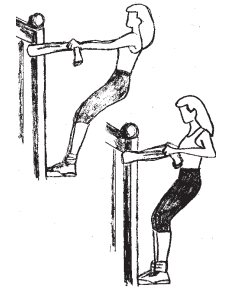
1 WARM UP (3-5 minutes). Brisk walk, bike, skip rope, jump on a mini-trampoline, or use the bottom step of your staircase. See article below for stair-stepping tips. Strengthens all the lower-body muscles. This can also be your "cardiovascular" (heart/lung) workout, especially if you do it for a longer time (20 minutes or more).

2 (OPTIONAL) LEGS: The modified squat. This version of the squat needs no weights, and is easier on the knees and low back. Grasp a secure object (like a railing or doorknob) at about waist height. Position feet about a foot apart with toes against the base of the object you're grasping. Straighten arms, and lean back. Now squat down until thighs are parallel to the floor. Smoothly push back to standing position. Repeat. See illustration at right. Gradually progress to doing 2-3 sets of 12 repetitions. You can skip this step if you're pressed for time or don't need the extra emphasis on legs (your legs will get a good workout on the stepping exercise).



3 CHEST. Pick an exercise to work the chest, like the bench press if you have equipment. Without equipment, do push-ups off the floor, or against a table or wall. Strengthens the chest, shoulders (particularly the front & sides), and triceps (back of upper arms). Do as many as you can up to 12, resting whenever you need to. Eventually progress to doing 2-3 sets of 12 repetitions.


4 BACK. Choose an exercise for the back, like the chin up or seated row. No equipment? Loop a towel, or a rope around a secure object, at about upper chest height. Lean back, arms straight. Keep knees flexed. As you pull yourself forward, pull shoulders back and squeeze shoulder blades together. Eventually work up to doing 2-3 sets of 12 repetitions. Strengthens the back, back of shoulders, and biceps (front of upper arm). See illustration at right.



5 MID-BODY: Abdominals and low back. For abdominals, do the *Crunch*. Lie on your back, legs bent at the knees. Slowly raise head and shoulders from the floor. Hold briefly. Lower and repeat. Progress to doing 2-3 sets of fifteen repetitions. Do the *Superman* exercise for the lower back. Lie face down on the floor. Raise one leg no more than a foot off the floor. Keep head down. Lower leg back to floor. Repeat with other leg. Do 2 sets of 8 to 15 reps for each leg.

6 STRETCH (3-5 minutes). Important for flexibility and to coax your muscles to relax after they've been stressed.

Congratulations! You've just exercised every major muscle in your body in about 20-30 minutes. **And you only have to do it two or three times a week for significant health/fitness benefits.** You can't prepare for the Olympics with the Quickie Workout, but at least you'll be prepared for life's unexpected physical demands. **OPTIONAL:** As your fitness improves and time allows, spend more time on step 1 for increased fat burning and cardiovascular benefits. You can do this on the days you don't do the Quickie Workout. Always finish with step 6 (stretching).

To avoid boredom, substitute other exercises for those mentioned above (i.e., substitute stepping with another aerobic activity like rope jumping, stationary cycling, using a mini-trampoline or mini-stepper, or a brisk walk around the block). 

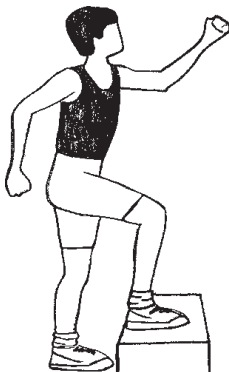
Safe stepping tips

Step training, or bench stepping, is a great workout for the heart and the muscles of the lower body. You can safely follow a step training workout in your own home if you practise good form.

Use a sturdy stepping box or bench, at least two feet long by one foot wide, and up to 12 inches high. Make it yourself, or buy one at a fitness store. You can also use the bottom step of a stair well (the standard height of a staircase step is about seven inches, a good start for beginners).

When stepping off the platform, step down -- not back. There's a tendency to reach too far back with the leading leg when stepping down. The body then leans forward, and more stress falls on the lower back, the foot, achilles tendon and calf muscles. The force increases if you're moving rapidly, or stepping off a higher step.

Place your entire foot on the step, and don't let your heel hang over the edge. By distributing body weight evenly over the entire foot, you can maintain your balance and reduce the stress on the leg, ankle and foot. Landing too frequently on the ball of the foot will increase risk of injury, because of the high impact in the forefoot area. Having a bounce in your step can also make you stay on your toes. Not good.



Use the right height. If you're not very fit, or you've never step trained before, start with a four-to seven-inch height. Using a platform that's too high may cause you to lean forward, stressing the lower back. Increase the height of the step gradually as you become more fit and your body accustoms to the change in height. Studies show cardio-respiratory fitness is effectively improved by using an eight-inch step. Using a higher step may be more challenge for those more fit, but it can also increase injury risk. Avoid *repetitive* stepping from a height over 12 inches, or a height that causes your knee to flex less than 90 degrees.

Step up with your left foot, then up with the right. Step down with the left, and follow with the right. Repeat at a steady, controlled pace. Going too fast may cause you to trip. A general recommendation is approximately 118 - 120 steps per minute. To make the workout harder (and still keep it safe) try adding more arm movement or increasing the platform height, instead of increasing your speed.

Wear supportive shoes. To absorb the repetitive shock on your feet, calves and knees, you need forefoot and heel cushioning. Cross training or aerobic shoes offer adequate shock absorbency and stability, due to a wider heel.

If you have pain under or around the kneecap, stepping may not be a suitable exercise for you.

Follow these guidelines to be a smart bench stepper -- not an injured bench warmer. 