



Health Advice

Bodyweight: Fit without fitness equipment

If you want to get fit or stay fit, build up your muscles or lose weight, you don't necessarily need special or expensive fitness equipment: your own bodyweight is all you need for an effective full-body workout. Bodyweight training can consist of different exercises like planking, squats or push-ups and therefore trains strength, coordination, speed, flexibility and endurance at the same time.

"Bodyweight training is suitable for every level of ability, from rehabilitation to competitive sports, because you can adapt it to your individual fitness level and training goal," explains Dr Thomas Schulz, sports scientist at BARMER and fitness trainer. This means it can be both a gentle beginner's programme and a full-body workout that works up a sweat. "You can try out the exercises following the instructions, even if you haven't exercised for a while," advises Schulz. "The risk of injuring yourself during bodyweight training is low if the exercises you choose and the amount of strain you put on yourself are appropriate. Beginners in particular should approach the training slowly and gradually increase the intensity. The important thing is to do the exercises correctly and adapt them to your own level of ability," says the BARMER sports scientist.

Regular bodyweight training can improve bone density and metabolism, strengthen tendons and ligaments, and give you a healthy posture. In addition, you can reduce your body fat in combination with a balanced diet and strengthen your whole body. "The many positive effects of sufficient physical activity on the human cardiovascular system, the musculoskeletal system and also on psychological well-being have been proven for decades," explains Schulz. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), we should be physically active for at least 150 minutes a week and, if possible, do moderate strength training twice a week, for example in the form of bodyweight training. Schulz says: "This means you only need to get moving for half an hour a day!"

Five advantages of bodyweight training:

1. You can just get started: You don't need any equipment! Just comfortable clothes, possibly a mat – and off you go.
2. Suitable for everyone: Are you a beginner and want to start gently, or are you already fit and want more? The training can be adapted to any fitness level and training goal: start with easier exercises and slowly increase the intensity.
3. Save time and money: You can work out anytime and anywhere, whether in the morning before work, in the park during your lunch break or at home after work – it won't cost you a penny.
4. Strengthens your whole body: If you want to get in better shape, simply add cardio intervals to the workout. Exercises like jumping jacks boost fat metabolism and burn calories.
5. Natural movements: The exercises follow the natural movement patterns of our body, which reduces the risk of injury.

Start right away with these two exercises:

"Aeroplane" for improved body tension and coordination:

Stand on your right leg and stretch your left leg backwards with the tip of your foot pointing up and back. Keep your upper body straight, stretch your arms horizontally out to the side. Hold the position for 10-15 seconds, then change sides. Three repetitions per side.

"Marching on the spot" for the thoracic and lumbar spine:

Stand up straight with your feet shoulder-width apart and your arms bent beside your body. Tighten your abdomen by pulling your belly button inwards. Raise your right leg with your knee bent, at the same time bringing your left elbow parallel to your right knee in a flowing movement, then change sides. Around 15 repetitions.