

BODY-WEIGHT EXERCISES

No equipment, you say? No problem!

Body-weight exercises—or calisthenics, as they're sometimes called—have long been used as a simple, quick method of resistance training to improve and maintain strength.

Body-weight exercises are a good place to start if you are

- under 15 years of age;
- an inactive, older adult (you get to decide what “older” means!); or
- *any* age and beginning an activity program after an extended period of being sedentary.

An equipment-free routine allows you to ease gradually into resistance training before moving on to the tubing routine in Chapter 7 or the routines using weight equipment outlined in Chapter 8.

It's also a perfect maintenance program for those who usually pursue a routine with equipment, as described in Chapter 8. If you're traveling on business, away on holidays, or just too busy for a while, this exercise series (or the one in Chapter 7) can keep you going until you return to your normal routine.

For a safe, effective program, follow these guidelines:

- Warm-up first. See page 54.
- Work through the exercises leisurely the first few times you do them. Learn proper technique.
- Do them as a circuit and in the order shown. This way, you can move comfortably from one exercise to the next.
- Start with two sets of 10 repetitions of each exercise. Eliminate a few exercises initially if that proves to be too much. Add reps and sets later when you're ready for them.
- Breathe comfortably. Inhale and exhale on every repetition, exhaling on effort.
- If you are using this as a starter routine, do it for three weeks (or a minimum of nine sessions) before moving on to routines in Chapters 7 or 8.

PARTIAL CURL-UP

Starting Position: Lie supine with your legs bent and feet flat on the floor.

Movement: Press your lower back to the mat. Tighten the abdominals as you slowly curl forward, lifting your head, shoulders, and upper back off the floor. Slide your hands along the floor as you curl up. Hold the up position three to five seconds, then slowly curl back down.

Precautions: Exhale as you curl up. Keep your chin in (head in a neutral position) and look toward the ceiling, not at your knees, throughout. When doing partial curl-ups, do not

anchor the feet down or use an incline board—these variations bring the hip flexors into play even more, thus decreasing the value of the curl-up for improving abdominal strength. They also put undue pressure on the lower back. Done properly, partial curl-ups ensure an appropriate balance of hip-stomach strength, which in turn contributes to proper posture.

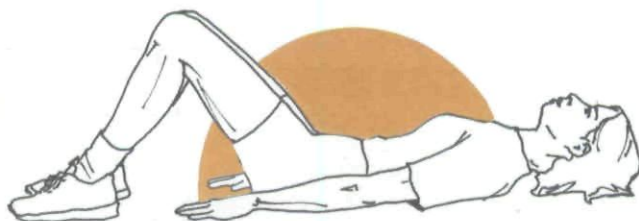
Muscles Used:

Prime movers: abdominals

Stabilizers: hip flexors

Variations: As you feel yourself becoming stronger you can change your arm and hand positions to make the partial curl-up more challenging. Here, listed in increasing order of difficulty, are more advanced versions of the partial curl-up:

- Slide your hands up your thighs toward your knees as you curl up.
- Cross your arms on your chest throughout the movement.
- Bend your arms and place your hands against your ears throughout the movement.

START**FINISH**

PELVIC TILT

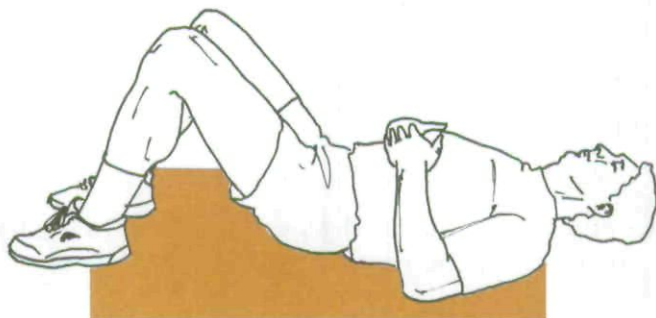
Starting Position: Lie supine with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Leave your arms at your sides or cross your hands on your abdominals.

Movement: Tighten your abdominals as you press your lower back and hip bones to the mat. You should feel your gluteals tighten and lift off the mat slightly.

Muscles Used:

Prime movers: abdominals and gluts

START



FINISH



CURL AND STRETCH

Starting Position: Kneel on all fours, with your knees directly under your hips and your hands under (and slightly wider than) your shoulders.

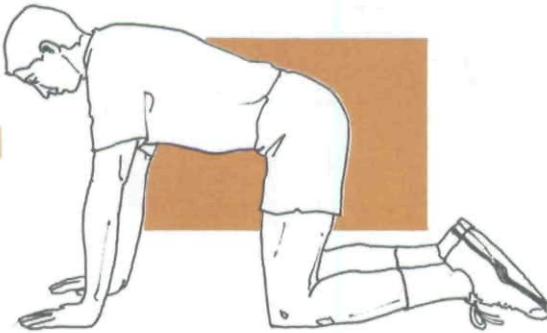
Movement: Curl one knee toward your nose, then slowly swing the leg back to a straightened, horizontal position. Return to the start position, then repeat with the opposite leg.

Precaution: Keep your head and neck neutral, looking toward the floor throughout the entire movement.

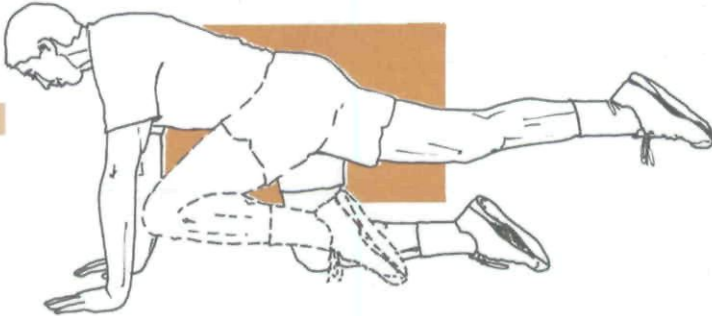
Muscles Used:

Prime movers: gluts, hamstrings, paraspinals, hip flexors, and abdominals

START



FINISH



SIDE LEG RAISE

Starting Position: Lie on one side with your head resting on your forearm. Tilt your hip forward slightly.

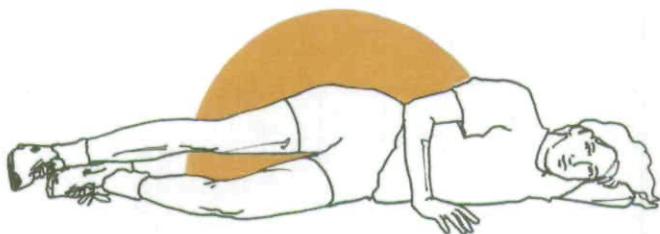
Movement: Raise your top leg slowly. Keep the leg straight and your toes pointed toward the floor. Lower the leg and repeat. Change sides and repeat with the opposite leg.

Muscles Used:

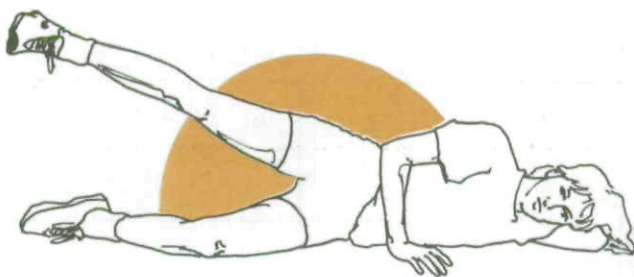
Prime movers: gluts and tensor fascia latae

Stabilizers: abdominals and paraspinals

START



FINISH



HIP TWISTER

Starting Position: Lie supine with your arms outstretched at shoulder level. Keep your head on the mat. Draw your knees toward your chest, dragging your heels on the floor.

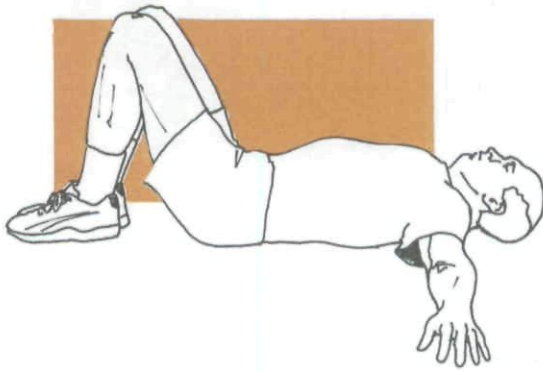
Movement: Roll your legs to one side toward the floor while turning the head and looking toward your opposite hand. Repeat alternately to each side.

Precautions: Keep your knees together, feet on the floor, and shoulders flat on the floor throughout.

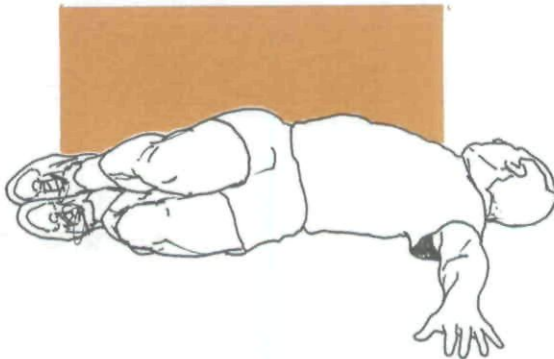
Muscles Used:

Prime movers: obliques, abdominals, and paraspinals

START



FINISH



SHIN PULL

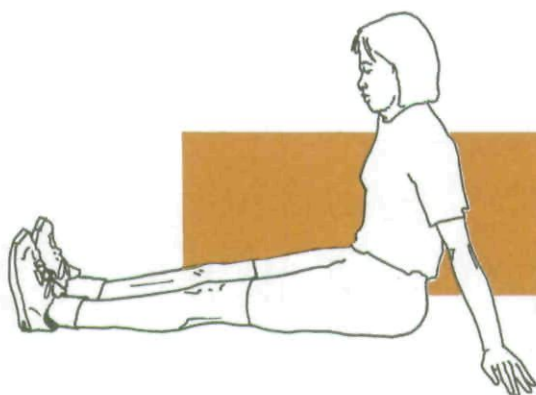
Starting Position: Sit with your legs out straight.

Movement: Dorsiflex the ankles, pulling the toes toward your knees. Hold this position, pulling the toes up hard, for three to five seconds. Relax and repeat.

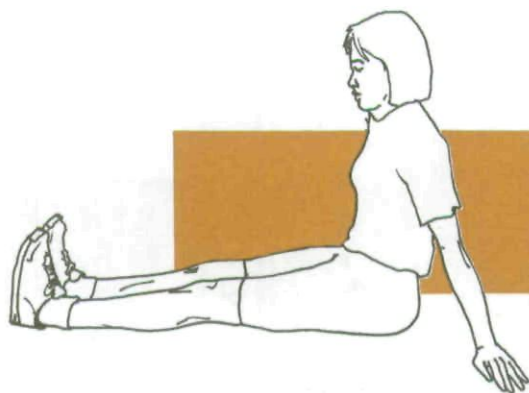
Muscles Used:

Prime movers: tibialis anterior

START



FINISH



STRETCH AND TUCK

Starting Position: Lie on your side with your knees slightly bent and arms outstretched overhead.

Movement: Pull your knees toward your chest. Curl your upper body and draw your arms in to arrive in a tuck position with the elbows touching your knees. Return to the starting position and repeat.

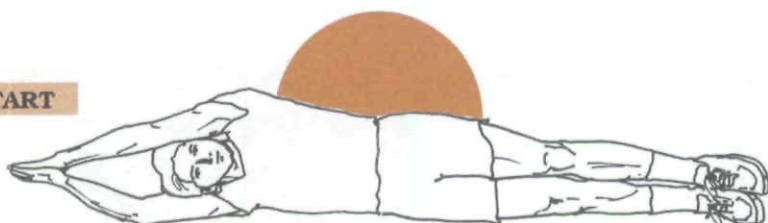
Muscles Used:

Prime movers: abdominals, hip flexors, gluts, and paraspinals

Variation:

- Do the exercise lying in a supine position, dragging your heels along the floor as you curl up.

START



FINISH



PUSH-UP

Starting Position: Lie prone with your hands at shoulder level, your palms flat on the floor slightly more than shoulder-width apart, and your toes tucked under.

Movement: Keeping your body straight, straighten your arms, exhaling, then lower your body again until it's almost touching the floor. Repeat.

Muscles Used:

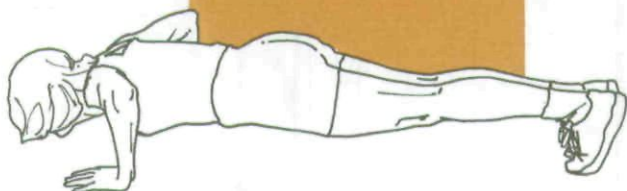
Prime movers: pecs, triceps, and deltoids

Stabilizers: abdominals, paraspinals, gluts, and hip flexors

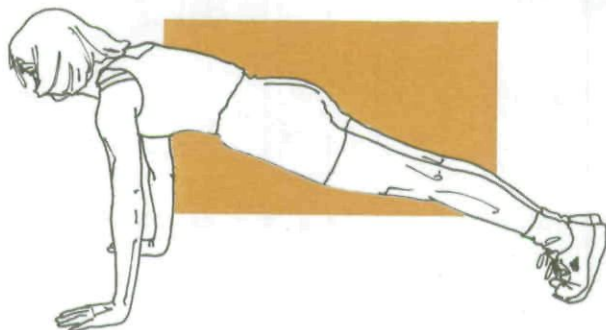
Variations:

- A less difficult push-up uses the knees rather than the feet as the pivot point.
- You can also do "incline" push-ups while standing. Lean into a wall, or place your hands on the edge of a counter or on a bench, and push up from there.

START



FINISH



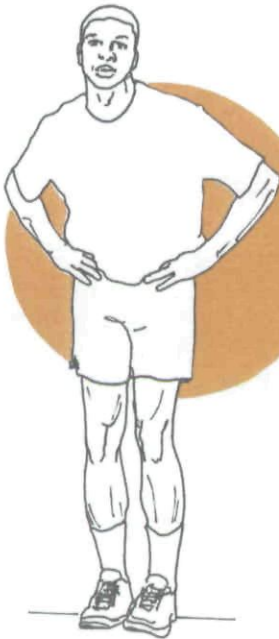
ANKLE ROCKER

Starting Position: Stand with your feet three to six inches (10 to 15 cm.) apart.

Movement: Rock slowly around on the outside borders of the feet, from your heels, to one side, to your toes, to the other side. Your knees should make a small, circular motion in the same direction. Repeat in the opposite direction.

Muscles Used:

Prime movers: tibialis anterior, gastroc, soleus, and peroneus



START



FINISH

CALF RAISE

Starting Position: Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart. Keep your knees straight but not locked.

Movement: Rise up on your toes, lifting your heels as high as you can, then lower them slowly back to the floor. Repeat.

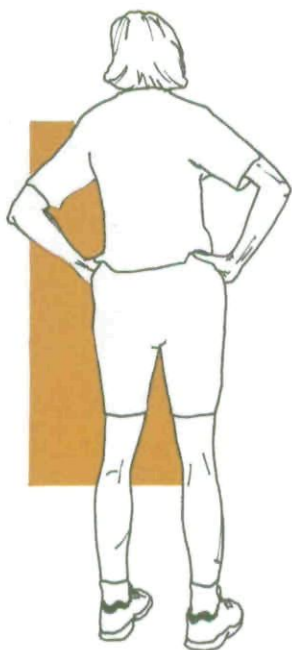
Precaution: Hold on to a chair, wall, or door frame for balance.

Muscles Used:

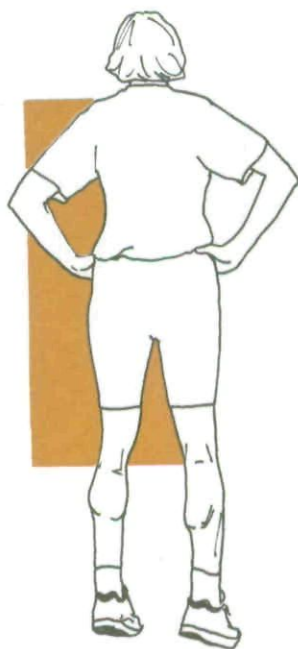
Prime movers: gastrocs and soleii (i.e., the soleus in each leg)

Variation:

- Do the exercise with a single leg, bending the other knee to hold your foot off the floor.



START



FINISH

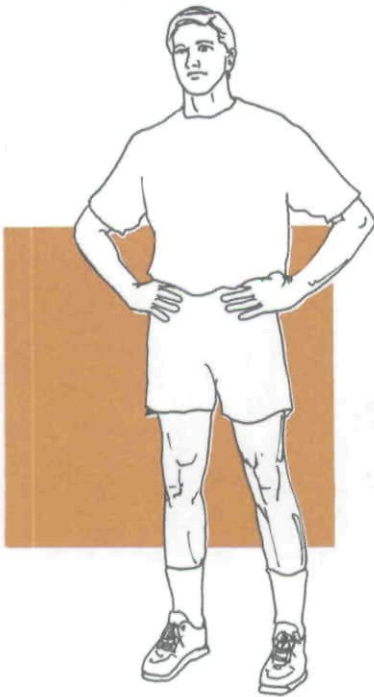
HALF SQUAT

Starting Position: Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart and flat on the floor. Put your hands on your hips.

Movement: Squat slowly until you have a 90° bend in the knees. Straighten the legs and hips to return to the start position. Repeat.

Muscles Used:

Prime movers: quads, gluts, and hamstrings



START



FINISH

L-SEAT DIP

Starting Position: Place two sturdy chairs shoulder-width apart. Support yourself with your palms on the chairs and your arms straight. Place your legs in front, knees straight and heels on the floor.

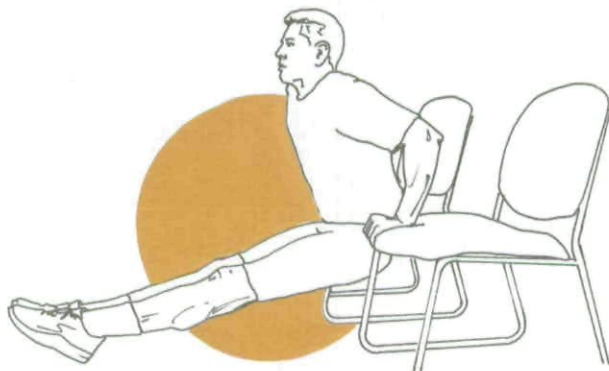
Movement: Lower the body toward the floor by bending the elbows. Straighten the arms returning to the start position. Repeat.

Precaution: Go down only as far as is comfortable for you. You can go lower as you get stronger.

Muscles Used:

Prime movers: pecs, triceps, and lats

Stabilizers: deltoids

START**FINISH**

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