



A simple way to think about fitness and health

A practical guide for everyday life

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Fitness doesn't need to be complicated. At its core, there are **three things worth paying attention to**. It isn't about perfection. It's about being a bit more capable than yesterday – and building habits that fit your life.

Illustrations by Millie Chesters for the Guardian

The three elements of fitness

1. Strength

Your ability to move, lift, push, pull, and carry things.

- Helps maintain muscle and bone density as we age
- Supports balance and reduces injury risk
- Linked to long-term brain health

2. Cardio-respiratory fitness

How well your heart and lungs deliver oxygen.

- Protects your heart and circulation
- Improves energy levels and endurance
- Makes everyday movement feel easier

3. Mobility

Your ability to move your body through different positions comfortably and safely.

- Reduces injury risk (including falls)
- Helps you move freely and confidently
- Supports strength and balance



Simple tips to start with

You don't need to do everything. Start out by doing just a small amount as often as possible, then build on it when you can. It's important to always listen to your body and take ample rest periods.

Strength★

- 2 x 20-30 minute sessions per week is enough to contribute to increasing bone density and support general health and wellbeing



Cardio

- Move more during your day. **A short walk after a meal helps you digest** as well contributing to your overall daily movement
- Walking counts - **aim to increase your steps to 6,000 - 10,000 a day** (depending on your age and mobility) if you can. Everything counts, from walking the dog to popping to the shops
- If you have access to a treadmill, **incline walking is a great way to stay fit** - it protects joints while delivering significant cardiovascular and strength benefits. It's important to start low (2-3% incline), maintain your posture and don't hold onto the rails too tightly



Mobility

Do something you enjoy **that moves your body in unfamiliar ways, and through different ranges of motion** - such as lifting your arms above your head or opening up your hips

- Yoga or pilates
- Water aerobics
- Swimming, dancing, bouldering
- Playing with your children/grandchildren in a park
- Playing a sport like table tennis or lawn tennis, or doing Tai chi - good for mobility and a healthy brain

Even small changes help ✓

- Walk instead of driving when possible
- If you can try sitting on the floor occasionally instead of the sofa, this can improve flexibility, mobility, core strength, and spinal health

Over time, you'll feel more capable and confident.



If you have limited mobility or are a wheelchair user

- Focus on **upper body strength training**, and aim to do 2 x sessions per week
- **Swimming** is a great way to get aerobic exercise and improve your cardiovascular health more gently
- If possible, find a **wheelchair-accessible** gym which has the right equipment and staff to demonstrate use.
- **Chair yoga** is a great way to benefit your mobility and improve flexibility
- Find a sport that works for you and join a local team, **netball**, **basketball**, and **racket sports** are all excellent for improving your fitness



Simple strength training principles

Most trainers agree there are a few **fundamental human movements** worth practising:

- **Pushing** - This includes both horizontal movements (such as press-ups or dumbbell chest presses) and vertical ones (such as overhead presses with two bottles of water)
- **Pulling** - This includes pull-ups and 'rowing' movements with a TRX (suspension training straps), but also includes much simpler movements such as bent rows or one-armed rows, which you could do with a loaded rucksack or a couple of tins of beans
- **Squatting** - Getting the full range of motion to do a squat can be challenging, but it's worth working on. Chair squats (where you sit into a chair and get back up) can be a good idea
- **Hinging** - This is one that not many people think about, but it's fundamental to most athletic movements. Whenever you lift an object off the ground or jump horizontally or vertically, there's a degree of hip hinging involved
- **Loaded carry** - This includes carrying things like shopping bags, suitcases or small children, but also things like pushing or pulling weighted sleds



You don't need fancy variations! Simple, repeatable movements work well for most people.

Example easy workouts*

* if you have mobility issues or you're unsure on any movements, please consult your doctor or specialist before trying anything below

Workout 1

Exercise	Sets	Reps	Equipment
Wall or counter press up	3	5-8	Body weight
Bent-over rows	3	5-8	Dumbbells, bottles or cans
Goblet or chair squats	3	12	Kettlebell, dumbbell, or weighted bag
Bag or 'Goat bag' swings	3	15	Kettlebell, or a weighted bag or pillowcase



You can watch tutorials of these movements scanning the QR code



Workout 2

Exercise	Sets	Reps	Equipment
Overhead press	3	8	Dumbbells, barbell or bottles and cans
Single-arm row	3	8 (each arm)	Dumbbells or a weighted bag, bottles or cans
Split squat with support (assisted by holding table or wall)	3	8 (each leg)	Body weight or weighted with dumbbells, bottles or cans
Suitcase carries	3	10m walk	Dumbbells or a weighted bag, bottles or cans



You can watch tutorials of these movements scanning the QR code



Equipment: What's worth buying

- **Resistance bands** - these are the best value and very versatile. You can use them for biceps curls, but also moves like band 'pull-aparts'
- **EZ bar** - underrated and useful. It's less unwieldy than a barbell and can sit more comfortably in your hands or across your shoulders, while opening up a huge variety of moves
- **Dumbbells or cans of beans/water bottles** - great for upper body work and light sets can be added into pilates for extra strength targeting, canned goods or bottles are good alternatives if you don't want to buy a pair

Keep things simple. **You don't need a full gym to get strong!**



How to think about eating

✓ Keep nutrition **simple and flexible**.

Helpful guidelines

- ★ **Build meals around protein and a fruit or vegetable**
 - Aim for ~20-25g protein per meal. Or you can calculate your daily protein intake with the simple calculation: multiply your body weight in kilograms (kg) by 1.2-1.7g of protein (depending on your activity level and goal)
- ★ **Eat the rainbow** - prioritise vegetables, especially colourful ones
- ★ **Add more carbs when you're more active** - Carbs are essential to maintaining energy when you are working out. Examples of healthier carbohydrates include but aren't limited to: quinoa, bulgar wheat, spelt, brown rice, and wholegrain or protein - based pasta (pea/lentil)
- ★ **Avoid ultra-processed foods where possible**, although it requires slightly more effort, homemade meals are the way forward for your gut and brain health