



Easy Everyday Exercises

Take Twenty and Tone Up

I started doing these exercises only recently. About three years ago I was warned off many of those activities that, until then, had kept me fit and toned-up. Fine, I thought. Approaching retirement, I'd had a good run and figured this advice was my ticket to spend more time writing. And that's exactly what I did. Like many of you, I sat for hours at a time, exercising my brain and my fingers as they skipped around the keyboard, but the rest of my body did little else. Other activities were minimal - wandering about the house on odd occasions, shuffling to and fro in the kitchen while preparing a meal. I did try to slot in a daily walk, but the irregularity of it was hardly more than a token gesture. It was obvious I was putting on weight, so I adopted "The No-diet Diet" (see HL07) and was content to be achieving some success. Then, one day, I was in front of the mirror and noticed my upper body had gone to seed. There was no muscle definition to speak of and skin that had once been taut and smooth had become wrinkled and saggy. The old adage sprang to mind - use it, or lose it. The proof of that saying was right in front of me and I didn't like what I saw. My choice was simple - do something about it or just wither away.

I borrowed some appropriate exercises from various sources and have been performing them religiously, twenty minutes every day for ten weeks so far. Even my wife has commented on the difference, and she should know! Apart from improved appearance, I seem to have more energy, certainly fewer aches and pains. My weight has stayed about the same, but I believe that is because the small amount of muscle I'm building is heavier than the fat it is replacing. My plan now is to continue with the program. Maybe you'd like to give it a go.

No expensive equipment is necessary. Most of what you will need, you already have - a floor, a wall, some soft cushioning and a stick about a metre long. A mirror would also be good, plus a few spare minutes each day. I have divided the exercises into sets for both convenience and comfort. That way I find I'm wasting less time switching from one type to another, then back again. Plus, they seem less tiring.

The watchword is "easy". Anything that's hard-going won't be in favour for long, and nothing is likely to happen overnight - you'll need to persevere for a while before you notice any remarkable improvement. To complete the entire session, you'll need up to twenty minutes a day, perhaps less to start with, but I wouldn't advise rushing if you can't spare that. Just cut out some of the exercises and work through the rest at a steady, comfortable pace - anything's better than nothing.

Unless there is some medical reason you shouldn't perform a specific activity, try them all; but for peace of mind, check with your doctor first. If you are like I was, your initial flexibility will be limited. Just move or stretch to the point where it becomes uncomfortable and go no further. Same with the number of repetitions. My physiotherapist suggested building up to twenty repetitions of each, so I started off with five. Next day, I had no painful repercussions, so I increased to ten. That was sufficient to make me aware that I still had some muscles, even if I couldn't see them yet. I continued with the ten repetitions for a week, then put them up to eleven. Adding one a week has brought me to twenty, and that's where I'll stay for a while. The way I figure it, enough is enough. I never wanted to be Mister Muscle, just reasonably fit and healthy.

That's it for talk. Now it's time to bite the bullet and tone up...

FOR EACH EXERCISE - START WITH TEN REPETITIONS (LESS IF TOO HARD)

Upper Body - can be done standing, sitting, or lying down.

Very easy, this set tones up mainly chest, arm and shoulder muscles, but will also have a small impact on neck, upper back, wrists and hands. The idea is to exert pressure to tense the muscles, then release. The harder you push, the better the final result. On the last push of each set, whether you are doing five or twenty, hold the pressure and your breath as you count the number of repetitions you have done, less if you start to feel uncomfortable or dizzy.



1. With hands in front of the torso, place the finger-tips together pointing out, palms apart as if holding a baseball between them. Keep them this way while pushing fingers together as if trying to squash the imaginary ball. You will feel tendons in the hands straining, plus arm and chest muscles tightening. Hold the pressure and count one, then release. Push again and count two, etc. Repeat each push ten times, breathing in deeply as you push, exhaling as you release.

The following variations are performed the same way, but with the hands in different positions:



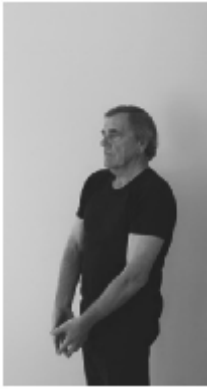
2. Keeping elbows bent with forearms extended in front, turn the wrists until the fingers are pointing at the ground and lower the hands to about waist height.



3. Elbows still bent, swivel the hands so the finger-tips are pointing at the ceiling and bring up until they are in front of the face.



4. Keeping fingers together and palms apart, extend directly in front of the chest so that the arms are at full stretch.



5. With arms still straight, drop the hands to their lowest point, fingers pointing at the floor, elbows and upper arms just touching the body - try to keep the shoulders back.



6. Finally, stretch the arms with hands as high as they will go above the head. This is probably the most uncomfortable of the "squeeze-type" exercises, but it's the last one of this set, so you can breathe a huge sigh when you are done.

Wall Exercises (standing) - tone up shoulders, chest, arms and upper back.

Standing push-ups.



With feet slightly astride, position yourself facing a wall and just over an arm's length from it. Extend the arms to full-stretch, hands spread, now lean forward until palms are resting flat on the vertical surface.



Keeping feet planted and the back straight, bend the elbows until the forehead almost touches the wall. Then, straighten arms to return to the start position and count one. Breathe in as you bend the arms and exhale as you straighten them.

Side pushes.

You'll need two walls meeting at right angles, same as an outside corner of a box. Or you can stand in a doorway facing the wall where the door latches. If you feel the need for some padding on the hand, wrap a towel around, or try a thick oven-mitt.



Left hand (palm). Stand close to and facing the flat section of one wall, with the left foot in line with the return wall. With feet astride, elbow bent and the arm extended out in front of the body, place the left palm on the flat of the return. Now push the palm against it with sufficient force to just take your weight off the right foot. Count one and release. Breathe deeply as before.



Left hand (back). Keeping the left foot on the same spot, swivel on it in a clockwise direction through ninety degrees so that you are side-on to the wall you were previously facing. With the arm in the bent position, place the back of your hand against the wall and push outward until you feel your upper body trying to move away.

Repeat both side-pushes for the right hand, reversing your position as necessary.

Floor Exercises - can be done on the bed, but a firm surface is better.

Take your time with these - don't jerk or try to get them over with too quickly. If using the floor, lay some cushioning down such as blankets or a piece of foam rubber.

Knee push-ups will strengthen the upper body, shoulders, arms and lower back.



Lay face down and place hands flat on the floor just outside the shoulders. Keeping the knees on the ground and back straight, push up with the arms until they are at full stretch.



Now lower until the body almost touches the floor, push back up for a count of one. Try to keep the spine straight and don't let it sag - breathing out and drawing in the stomach muscles as you go down may help.

Still on the floor. This next series is mainly for the mid-section, particularly the lower-back and stomach muscles which help to support the spine. The other straining you feel is exercising that part of your body as well.

Leg side-raises, for the hips and thighs.

Turn on the side and, keeping both legs at full stretch, raise the upper leg as far it will go comfortably.



Remember to keep the leg straight and try not to swivel the ankle. After you have completed the repetitions for one leg, turn over and do the same for the other.

Crunches strengthen stomach and lower-back muscles, essential for supporting the spine.

Laying flat on the back, bring both feet up so that the knees are bent. Place knuckles on your temples and breathe in and out a couple of times. The third time you exhale, raise head and shoulders up towards the knees as close as you can get, but avoid straining the neck.



If you are anything like me, you won't get very close - leave that to the Marines! Breathe out each time you rise.

Leg raises for back, hips and thighs.



Still lying on the back, keep one knee bent and straighten the other leg. Raise this as far as it will go or until you feel the hamstring stretching, then lower for a count of one. Do all repetitions for one leg before reversing to exercise the other.

Hip-twists also loosen up the lower back.



With knees still bent, place hands flat on the floor beside you and swivel from the waist, swinging the knees to the left, then the right. Count one for each side, so you will, in effect, be making twenty movements for ten repetitions. Don't worry too much about the hips rising, but try to keep the shoulder blades flat on the ground. I find this one very relaxing after the previous exercises.

Stick exercises - standing.

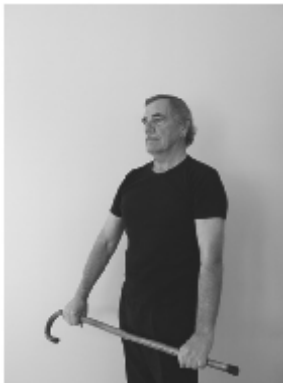
This set is predominantly for the shoulders, but will also impact muscles and tendons in the arms, back, chest and neck. I use a walking stick, but any pole of a similar length will do, even a golf club. If you can, stand in front of a mirror. This has nothing to do with self-appreciation - it is so that you can watch your actions to make sure the body and head don't move around too much.



1. Standing with feet together, grasp the stick near the ends and hold it horizontally in front of the body at its lowest point, palms facing behind, arms straight. Now, bend the elbows, drawing the stick up close to the body towards the chest while keeping the wrists locked, just like lifting a bar-bell without the weight. Go up as far as you can until the tension starts to feel uncomfortable, then lower. Watch yourself and avoid tipping your head forward.



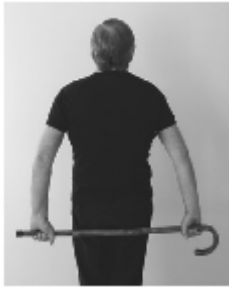
2. With the stick at its lowest point, keep the arms straight and swing out in front of your body and up until you are stretching as high as you can go, then reverse the swing. This one is great practice for the Mexican Wave!



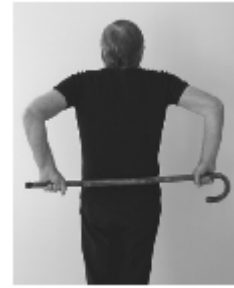
3. With the stick down low, turn the right hand and grip with the palm facing forward - leave the left hand as it is. Now, keeping the stick and left arm close, push across the body, swinging the right hand sideways and up until it is high above your head (a bit like an ordinary wave). Return to the low point for a count of one.



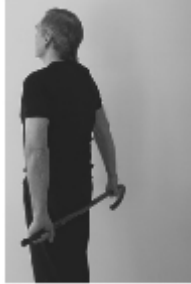
Reverse the procedure to exercise the left shoulder.



4. Transfer the stick behind you and grip just outside the hips with palms facing back. Bend at the elbows to raise the stick close to the body and as high as you can.



Try not to lean backwards.



5. With the stick still behind and in the low position, keep arms straight and swing out and back as far as you can. Avoid leaning forwards.



6. No illustration for this next one, but try thinking about it like a backward shrug. Holding the stick down, rotate shoulders back and try to revolve the shoulder blades first outward, then together. Relax and repeat.

Lucky last - Hooray!! These are mainly waist exercises which also help the shoulders and strengthen the knees.

Waist twists.

Stand with feet apart and knees slightly bent. Position the stick behind your back and hook each end in the crook of your elbow (a bit like they used to do with prisoners in olden times, except your hands won't be tied!).



Find something low and directly in front that you can keep your eye on - this ensures minimal movement of the head and neck. Now, twist at the waist, to point each end of the stick in turn at whatever you are focussing on. If you can manage it, do at least twenty double twists.

Waist side-bends.



Keeping the same stance, bend at the waist from side to side, stretching as far down as you can go. Left stretch, right stretch is a count of one.

Repeat this exercise twenty times if possible.



Please Note:

When doing any exercise no matter how simple, be mindful of what your body is telling you. Pain and discomfort are warnings that should not be ignored. Nerve and muscle twinges, or the clicking of joints are often signs that there is either an existing problem, or the actions necessary to perform a particular exercise need adjusting. If you have been told by a medical practitioner to avoid certain movements or activities, heed the advice. Like us, they are only trying to keep you fit and healthy.

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