

# EXERCISING ON A BUDGET:

## How to Exercise Using Items in Your Home

by Jacy Mullins, MSED, NASM-FNS

*Disclaimer: To develop an exercise program that best suits your needs, please consult with your physician.*

Scratch the old thought of exercising as lifting weights and walking on a treadmill from your mind – it may change the way you think of working out forever. Exercising isn't only about lifting dumbbells or any fancy equipment. It's about the action you take to invigorate your muscles to stimulate growth, and it can be done in any atmosphere! You can get a good workout without equipment by focusing on specific muscles, tightening them and performing simple movements. The purpose of this article is to demonstrate ways in which training on a budget can be easy and achievable.

Exercising can be as easy or hard as we make it, and it can be done in your living room, office or even outside – making “gym” membership a breeze! Calisthenics or exercises that use little to no equipment – even just body weight – can have incredible results. Exercising with household items provides an alternative to traditional gyms and dumbbells.



### UPPER BODY

When you normally think of a push-up, do you automatically think of ground push-ups? Well, put that thought to the side. Body weight is a great natural piece of equipment that you don't have to buy! For example, a great place to begin your push-up journey is the wall.

#### The All for One, One for All Push-Up:

The push-up has two points of contact – hands and feet. Begin by standing close to a wall, placing your hands on the wall at shoulder height. Your body should be parallel to the wall and arms parallel to the floor. Take a small step back and place your feet hips-width apart. Keeping your stomach tight, lower your upper body toward the wall, bending at the elbow until you're close to touching the wall with your face. Push yourself up while keeping your stomach tight and body in a straight line.



Once this angle becomes too easy, take a step backwards and adjust the angle of the push-up – as demonstrated in the picture to the left. This modification allows you to use more of your body weight. So, you've mastered the wall push-up and can't step back anymore? It's time to progress to the chair push-up!



#### Chair Push-Up:

Find a stable chair in your home, like a kitchen chair or bench. Place the chair against a wall so it doesn't slide during the exercise. Using the same form as the wall push-up, place your hands at the edge of the chair, shoulder-width apart. Your legs should be away from the chair and arms shoulder-width apart, directly in line with the shoulders. ***The angle of an exercise equals its intensity!*** If the angle you are at is too challenging and you're unable to keep your body in a straight line while performing the exercise, place your knees on the ground as pictured. Finding that the chair push-up isn't as challenging anymore? Time to make the move to the ground push-up!

## Ground Push-Up:

Using the same form as the chair push-up, relocate to the floor. This transition to the floor continues to increase the difficulty of the exercise. Similar to the chair push-up, if a full plank position on the ground is too difficult, bring your knees down to the floor. **Remember, you are the equipment and every piece of equipment can be adjusted!**

Now that we've discussed the push-up and a few of its variations, consider how you could modify other exercises such as the chest press.

## Chest Press:

Find a comfortable spot on the ground. Place your feet flat on the ground with your knees bent and back flat on the ground. If you're new to the chest press or haven't done it in a while, start by using canned goods in place of dumbbells. Begin the exercise with a 90-degree angle at the elbows and press your hands and arms upwards until your arms are fully extended, lightly locking the elbows. Slowly lower your arms towards your body. Once your elbows are in a 90-degree angle, repeat the exercise. What do you do when the canned goods become too light? It's time to step it up.

## Not Your Average Chest Press:

Depending on your strength and stability, you can either use gallon jugs or a PVC pipe filled with water or sand. A PVC pipe is one solid item that provides additional muscular stability as opposed to using two items such as gallon jugs. Starting off, use a PVC pipe. If you're feeling stable and ready to go to the next level, take two empty gallon milk jugs and fill them with water, and perform the chest press as described above. If you are having difficulty balancing the gallon jugs while completing the exercise, switch to the PVC pipe. As previously mentioned, a single item will allow you to be more stable while pushing the weight up and controlling it on the way down. **Stability is the key to protecting your joints in any exercise – strength will come in time.**

# LOWER BODY

The best way to start any lower body exercise is with body weight. Since the lower body is the area where we bear most of our weight, it is important to maintain proper form for your structure. Keeping added pressure off any joint allows the muscle to work at its maximal capacity. Squats, deadlifts and hamstring curls are a few lower body exercises that require little to no equipment.

## Air Squats:

When performing both a squat and a deadlift, concentrate on elongating your spine – ridding your lower back from its natural arch, which can be done by tucking in your rear. Also, tighten your abdominal muscles and begin the squat movement by pushing your pelvis or hips out, as if you were about to sit down. Once you have initiated the pelvic hip-tilt backwards, go into squat position. By beginning a squat with the pelvic-hip tilt backwards, added pressure is taken off the hip and knee joint – allowing for proper joint stability and for the muscles to work at their maximal capacity. The knees should not move in front of the toes, and your weight should be shifted into your heels.



**Important** – A squat doesn't always mean "go as low as you can go," since everyone has a different skeletal and muscular build. Some builds can actually hinder the angle of the squat, but if you move within your physical limits, an effective squat can be achieved. A good way to gauge the depth of your squat is to use a chair. Lower your body into the squat position and only tap your rear to the chair and come up. After you have progressed into deeper angles of a body weight squat for one month, change it up by adding weight. Start off with canned goods in each hand and progress to a PVC pipe with reusable grocery bags filled with household items, placed on each side.

## Hamstring Curls:

Here's where the Frisbee comes in! Laying down with your feet and back flat on the ground with your knees bent, place two Frisbees or a hand towel underneath your feet. This exercise is best performed on a slick surface (i.e. tile or hardwood floors). Tightening your glutes and hamstrings, slide your feet against the surface, drawing your feet closer to your rear. Then extend your legs outward, pushing your feet away from your body. It's amazing how simple and effective this move is!

Household Items	Upper Body Exercises	Lower Body Exercises
 Gallon Milk/Water Jug	 Chest Press Single Arm Rows Front and Side Raises Tricep Extensions Crunches Bicep Curls Overhead Shoulder Press	Squats Bridges Calf Raises
 Canned Goods	Chest Press Single Arm Rows Front and Side Raises Tricep Extensions Crunches Overhead Shoulder Press Bicep Curls	Squats Hamstring Curls (if canned goods are placed in reusable bag) Bridges Calf Raises
 Reusable Grocery Bag	Chest press Single Arm Rows Overhead Shoulder Press Bicep Curls	Squats Hamstring Curls Bridges Calf Raises
PVC Pipe	Chest Press	Squats Calf Raises
Resistance Bands	Chest Push-Outs Single Arm Rows Chest Press Front and Side Raises Tricep Extensions	Squats Hamstring Curls
Inflated Bouncy Ball	 Front Raises Tricep Extensions Crunches	Squats
Basketball	Chest Press Front Raises Tricep Extensions Crunches	Squats Bridges Calf Raises
Chair or Bench	Single Arm Rows (for support) Push-Up	Squats
Books	Front and Side Raises Tricep Extensions	Squats (use to add height to the chair or bench)
 Towel or Frisbee		Hamstring Curls

A milk or water jug full of liquid weighs approximately 8 lbs. Canned goods roughly weigh 2-5 lbs. depending on their contents. You can find the weight of each canned good on the bottom right portion of the label. Depending on the thickness of the book, some can weigh up to 10 lbs! When your kids are finished with their homework, grab a textbook and use it for your workout.



## Household Items and Exercises for Your Workout

In the chart on page 50, you'll find general exercises listed with non-traditional, but effective and inexpensive home equipment. These exercises are broken down into two separate categories: upper and lower body:

In gyms, these exercises are usually performed with machines, dumbbells, barbells, weighted plates, and/or kettlebells. If you aren't sure how to do any of these exercises, be sure to contact an *educated* fitness professional. One session with a good exercise physiologist or trainer can be within budget and give you the opportunity to learn how to do these exercises in the best form for your body.

## Progressing through the Exercise

Any exercise can be modified to match your current strength. Throughout this article you will have found examples of modifications and progressions for exercises mentioned in the chart on page 50. Each description describes how you can incorporate inexpensive household 'equipment' into the specific exercise.

## Conclusion

The main reason to exercise is to continuously stimulate your muscles for a prolonged period of time, which results in increased strength as well as numerous health benefits. You don't need any equipment – the best piece of equipment you may ever use is yourself! Bodyweight alone is the best place to begin any exercise, and all exercises can be modified to match your exact level of strength – thus working with any limitations and meeting your personal goals. Working out doesn't have to be expensive or hard. Think outside the box and make exercise fun!

### ***About the Author:***

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# ABOUT THE OBESITY ACTION COALITION (OAC)

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Our core focuses are to elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improve access to obesity care, provide science-based education on obesity and its treatments, and fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination.



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