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UK EDITION

# Men's Fitness

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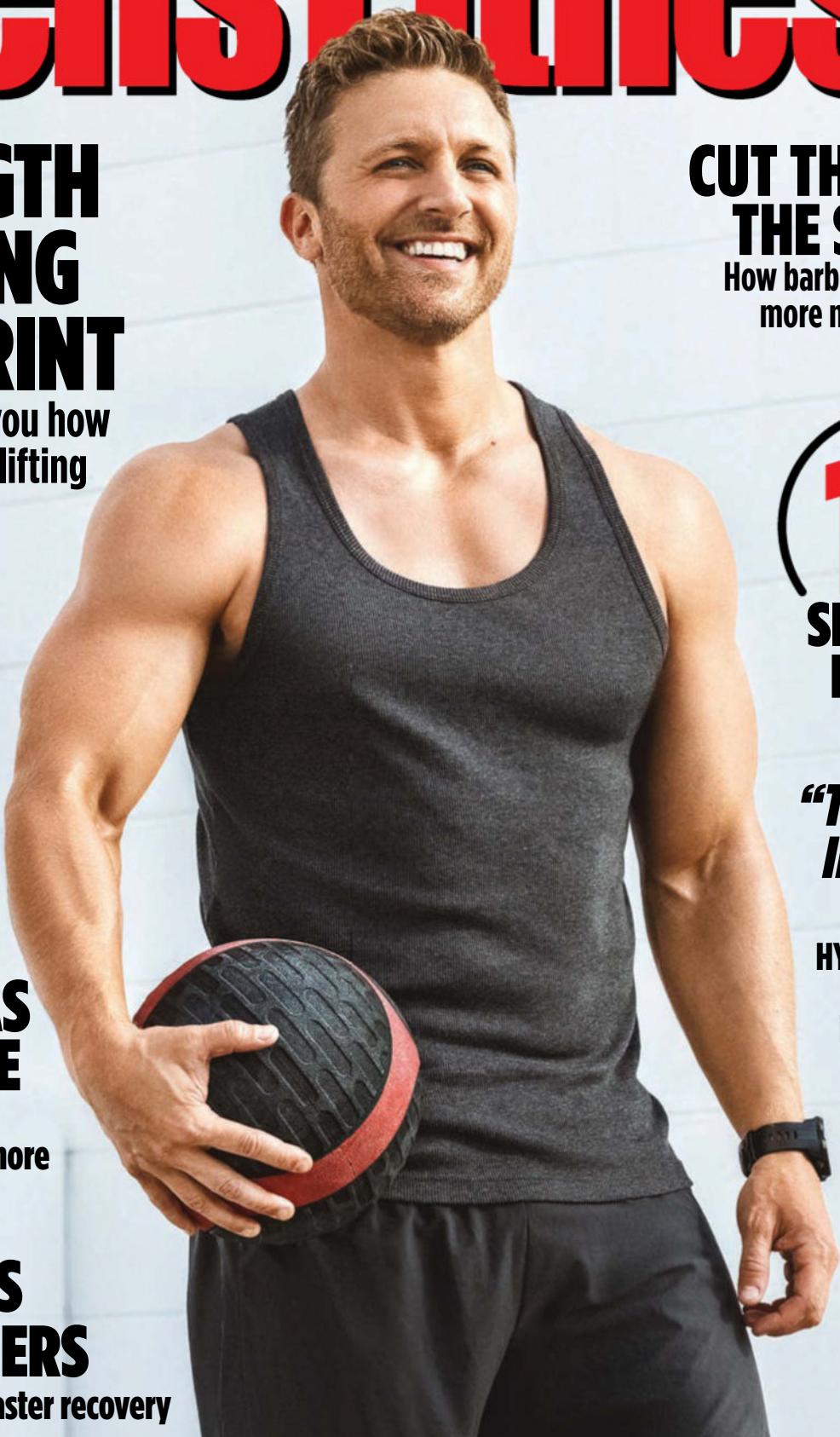
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# EDITOR'S LETTER

ISSUE 296  
DECEMBER 2024



Photography: Gareth Barclay

If you'll allow me a little self-indulgence, this is my final issue as editor of MF. And while I'll leave with lingering regret that in five years I've come no closer to an impressive set of abs, I'm proud that the past 64 issues have seen a broadening of Men's Fitness' horizons. Of course, there's been no shortage of muscle-bound cover models and fat-blasting workouts, but we've also tackled mental health and navigated the waters of modern masculinity, highlighting that real strength is more than just the size of your biceps (important as that is).

This issue is no different. Alongside a TRX guide, total-body sessions, and lifting advice from one of the strongest men in the world, we've got a feature on how barbershops are becoming a safe space for open conversations, and Hyrox elite Jake Williamson discusses his experiences as an openly gay athlete.

Fitness, as I wrote here in 2020, is just one part of the good-health puzzle. Hopefully, between then and now, we've equipped you with some of the other pieces needed to form a fuller picture of your own mental and physical wellbeing.

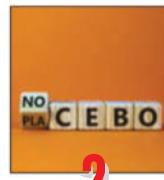
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**Isaac Williams, Editor**  
[isaacwilliamscontent@gmail.com](mailto:isaacwilliamscontent@gmail.com)

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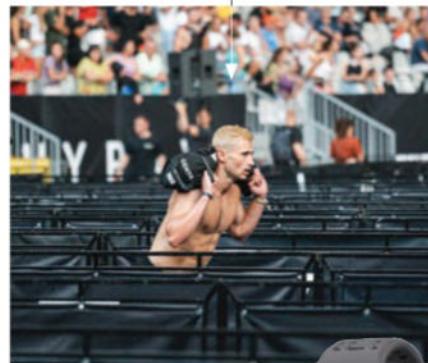
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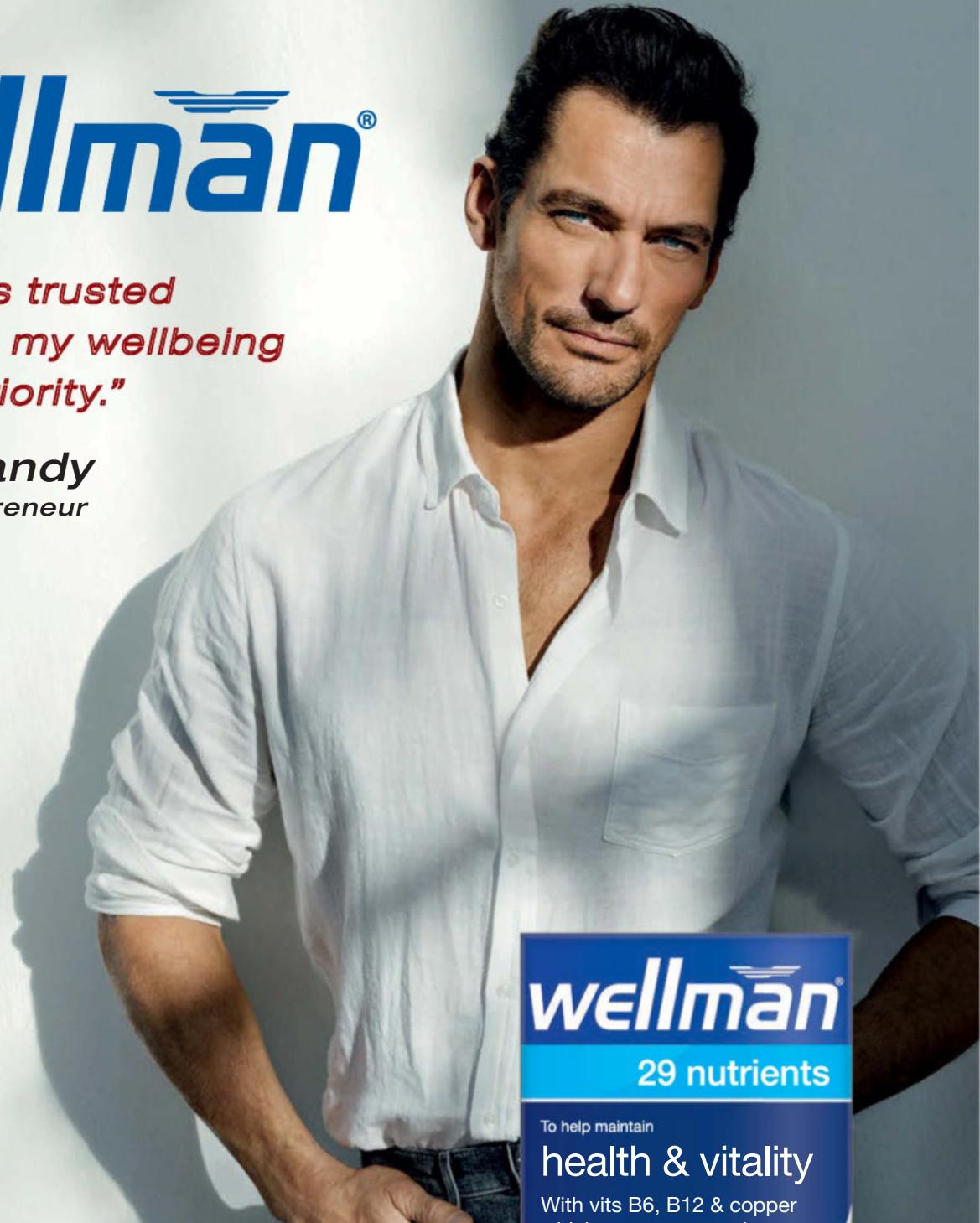
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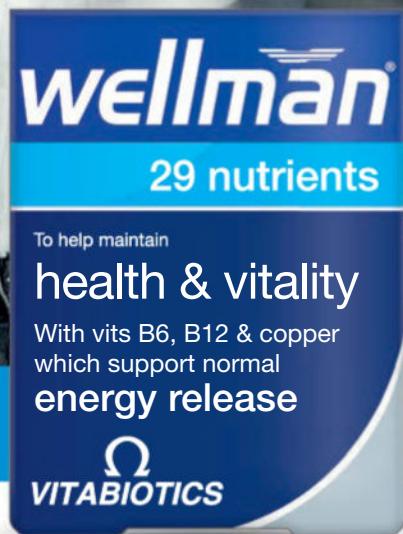
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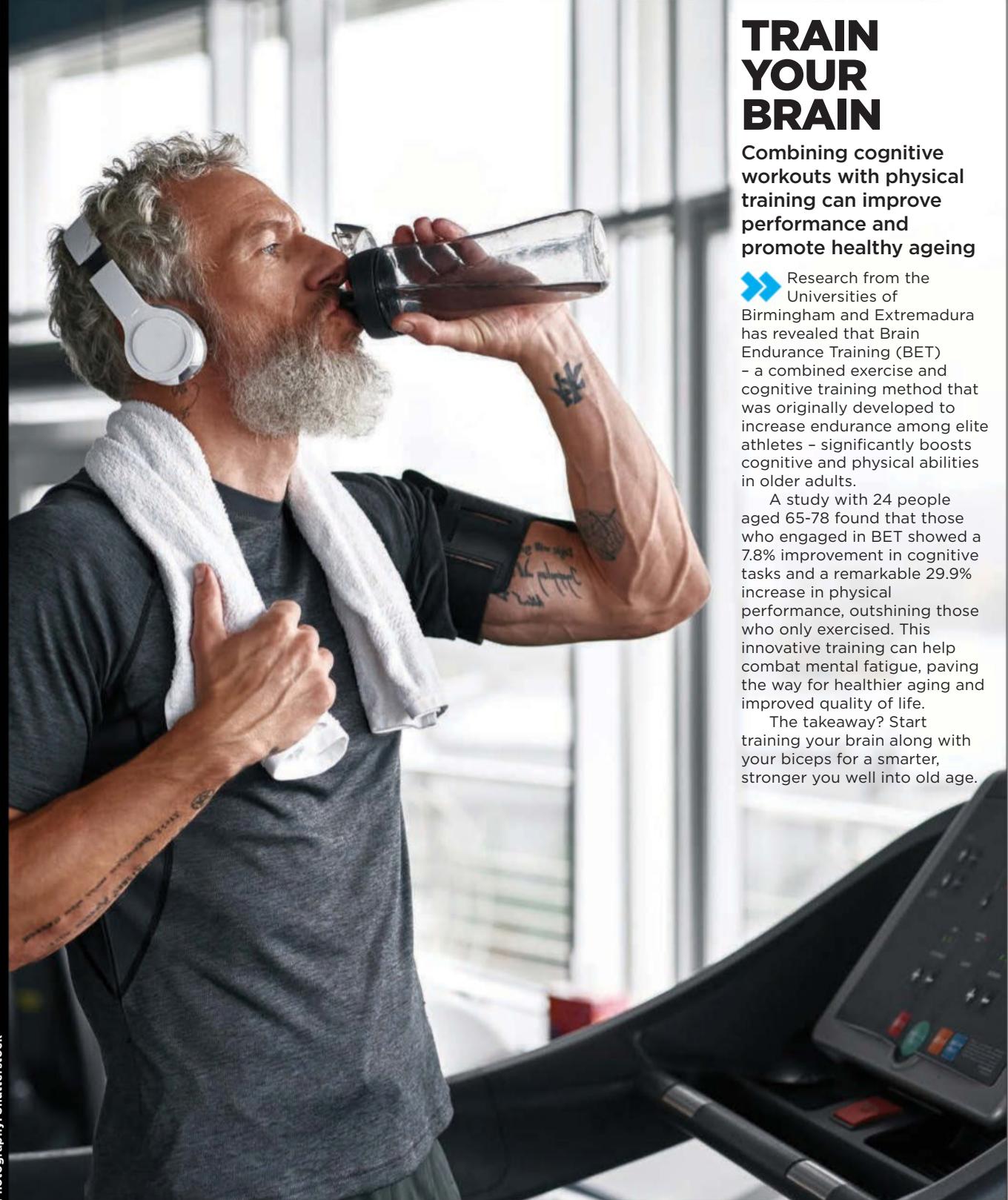
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NEED-TO-KNOW FITNESS NEWS

# UPDATES



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## TRAIN YOUR BRAIN

Combining cognitive workouts with physical training can improve performance and promote healthy ageing

 Research from the Universities of Birmingham and Extremadura has revealed that Brain Endurance Training (BET) - a combined exercise and cognitive training method that was originally developed to increase endurance among elite athletes - significantly boosts cognitive and physical abilities in older adults.

A study with 24 people aged 65-78 found that those who engaged in BET showed a 7.8% improvement in cognitive tasks and a remarkable 29.9% increase in physical performance, outshining those who only exercised. This innovative training can help combat mental fatigue, paving the way for healthier aging and improved quality of life.

The takeaway? Start training your brain along with your biceps for a smarter, stronger you well into old age.

## GUT FEELING

**Why your gut microbiome could hold the key to unlocking more motivation**

We all have some days when we're pumped for the gym, and others when we need a ton of motivation just to get there. The issue, though, may be more than mental. Researchers at the University of Pennsylvania have discovered an intriguing connection between your gut health and your drive to work out.

Your gut microbiome houses over 200 species of bacteria, viruses, and fungi. While some of these microorganisms can be harmful, most are vital for your wellbeing.

In a study with mice, researchers found that genetics have less impact on motivation than gut bacteria. When antibiotics wiped out gut bacteria, the mice's running performance plummeted by 50%. Once the antibiotics were stopped, their stamina bounced back, indicating that the microbiome may influence exercise motivation.

Two specific strains of bacteria appear to interact with gut receptors, triggering the brain to produce a compound that helps break down dopamine – the feel-good chemical linked to the workout high. Less of this compound means more dopamine and potentially more motivation.

Human trials are next, with hopes of developing nutrition strategies to boost motivation for everyone, from beginners to pro athletes. Until then, foster a



healthy gut by managing stress through meditation, eating mindfully, staying hydrated, and getting adequate sleep.

While the benefits of supplements like probiotics and prebiotics are still debated, adding these foods to your diet could support your gut health and, just maybe, your motivation:

1. Fermented foods like yogurt, kimchi, and kefir.
2. High-fibre foods such as broccoli, chickpeas, oats, almonds, and peaches.
3. Collagen-boosting foods including eggs, meat, and citrus fruits.
4. Garlic, known for promoting bacterial diversity.



### MOTIVATION PAYOFF

At the University of Stirling, a study explored what truly motivates men to lose weight. Two groups were compared: one received daily supportive text messages, while the other received the same digital encouragement plus a £400 incentive for reaching specific weight loss goals at 3, 6, and 12 months. The outcome? It seems money speaks volumes – those with the financial reward shed nearly twice the pounds of the text-only group.

To which you might say, "Well obviously," but there is an important lesson here: motivation is key to successful weight loss. The findings illustrate that financial incentives can significantly enhance your commitment to fitness goals. Consider implementing your own reward system, whether through personal challenges, joining supportive communities, or even treating yourself to small rewards for reaching milestones. Reflect on what truly motivates you – be it money, personal pride, or health benefits – and harness that to power your weight-loss journey.



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## BACK IT UP

Push past plateaus with backdown sets

**H**itting a plateau can be frustrating, but it doesn't mean you're stuck. It's simply time to shake up your routine with a fresh strategy.

Backdown sets allow you to maintain high intensity while boosting volume. Start heavy, then drop the weight for lighter sets. Unlike drop sets, which involve decreasing the weight immediately after each set, backdown sets involve a rest between efforts, giving you a strategic edge.

Here's the power behind this approach: lifting heavier first ramps up your central nervous system, activating more muscle motor units for increased strength in your subsequent sets – a phenomenon known as 'post-activation potentiation' (PAP). This means when you switch to lighter weights, you'll be able to crank out more reps and enhance your session's volume – key for effective progress. Here's how to implement backdown sets:

**1. Warm-up.** Ease into your session with 15 reps at 30% of your one-rep max (1RM), 12 at 40% 1RM, and 10 at 50% 1RM.

**2. Heavy lifting.** Hit 3 sets of 3-5 reps at 90% of your 1RM.

**3. Backdown sets.** Reduce the weight for 3 sets of 8-10 reps at 70% of 1RM.

If your target is strength, keep the weight reduction minimal and focus on fewer reps. To build muscle, drop the weight further and increase both the reps and sets.

## SUGAR RUSH

Recent research from the University of California reveals a connection between sugar intake and diminished lifespan. The study discovered that each gram of added sugar consumed accelerates biological aging, even with a diet rich in vitamins and minerals. This finding is crucial, as biological age – not just the number of candles on your birthday cake – is a more accurate predictor of healthspan, influencing our ability to combat diseases as we age.



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## MUSCLE MASTERY

**By understanding and applying these principles, you can take your training to the next level and achieve significant muscle growth**

**B**uilding muscle involves more than just hitting the gym; it requires a holistic approach that includes balanced nutrition, proper rest, smart use of supplements, and staying hydrated. Weight training, however stands out as a key driver of muscle growth, so are you leveraging your workouts to their fullest potential?

### THE SCIENCE OF MUSCLE GROWTH

Muscle growth is largely stimulated by muscle damage, often experienced as delayed onset muscle soreness (DOMS). This discomfort is actually beneficial, indicating that your muscles are repairing and strengthening. This process includes the activation of satellite cells that aid in muscle regeneration. Your body adapts by building stronger and larger muscles through a phenomenon known as 'super-compensation'.

### Optimise with eccentric movements

Muscle damage is significantly linked to eccentric muscle contractions, or negative reps. Aim to lift weights for one second and lower them slowly over two to three seconds to increase this effect.

### Harness mechanical tension

Mechanical tension activates mTOR, which is essential for muscle protein synthesis and growth. This process, known as 'mechanotransduction', occurs when muscles convert physical tension into growth signals. Achieving mechanical tension often requires lifting heavy weights.

Improve mechanical tension by performing 6-8 sets of 1 to 5 reps with high resistance.

### Create metabolic stress

Metabolic stress, caused by the accumulation of metabolites like lactate, promotes the release of human growth hormone. This hormone plays a crucial role in building lean mass and burning fat.

To induce metabolic stress, incorporate higher reps with longer workout durations, using techniques like supersets or drop sets.

### Structure your workouts

Incorporating all these techniques into a single workout can be challenging but is possible with methods like backdown sets. Alternatively, vary your weekly routine. Dedicate one session to negative reps, another to heavy loads, and a third to high reps. You may also periodise your training by focusing on one format for an entire month before switching to another. This cyclical approach allows comprehensive development over time.

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# "THE MOST COMMON MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE IN THE GYM IS GOING IN WITHOUT A CLEAR PLAN"

Build your strength with the help of former World's Strongest Man Eddie Hall

**F**ormer World's Strongest Man and six-time UK's Strongest Man Eddie Hall may not have appeared on our TV screens performing feats of strength lately, but there's a good reason for that. In-between training for an eagerly awaited MMA fight and making a Hollywood movie, he's now fronting a new Currys campaign urging British consumers to 'Repair, not Replace'.

"I'm one of the guys who, if I break something, I just bin it and buy new – but it's costing me a fortune, and I'm keen to repair what I've got instead," he says. Hall is still lifting weights, too (really big ones, naturally), so when *Men's Fitness* managed to wrestle him away from his promotional duties, we asked him to preach his essential strength training tips.

## 1. TRAIN LEGS

It's the age-old thing with a lot of guys building muscle: they neglect the legs and lower body in pursuit of the chest, arms, and back. I recently took part in a study at Loughborough University, looking into the DNA of my muscle structure, and it turns out I've got a rare genetic trait called the 'Hercules gene', which allows me to carry much more muscle mass than the average person.

During the study, we found my leg muscles were three-and-a-half

times larger than the average man's. But while my muscles were 300% bigger, my tendons – like the patella and knee tendons – were only 15% larger. So, I've got regular tendons supporting muscles that are way bigger than normal, which shows that it's hard work and not just genetics.

## 2. HAVE A MASTER PLAN

The most common mistake people make in the gym is going in without a clear plan. They do random exercises, hitting a bit of everything – arms, legs, back – without any focus. To build muscle effectively, track the weights you use and aim to gradually increase them over time to ensure you're progressively overloading.

## 3. KEEP CONSISTENT

I've always emphasised the importance of consistent training to achieve progress. My training has changed a lot, especially since transitioning from strongman. Back then, I would train for about four-and-a-half hours a day, mostly strength training with little bits of cardio. Now, I do much more cardio – about an hour every morning – and I strength train in the afternoon. On average, I'm training between eight and 12 times a week, twice a day most days.

But you don't need to spend hours in the gym – 45 minutes a day can transform your body. Stick

to the basics, enjoy what you're doing, and be consistent. It took me 30 or 40 competitions before I won World's Strongest Man. It's about perseverance and believing in yourself. Just keep going, and the results will come.

#### 4. THROW SOME PUNCHES

A lot of strength trainers don't enjoy running, but you need cardio work to increase your muscles' ability to synthesise energy. More energy equals more intense sessions. My cardio involves lots of fight drills: throwing punches, kicks, grappling, and doing rounds that simulate actual fights, with three to five minutes of work followed by a minute of rest. Right now, it's all fight training. I've turned to MMA, and one of the fights I'm trying to line up is against Mariusz Pudzianowski, who won World's Strongest Man five times and has been an MMA fighter for 15 years. We're working on getting the contract signed.

#### 5. MOVE YOUR MUSCLES

The best shoulder power-building moves I ever did in my entire strongman career were drills where you kept the muscles under constant pressure. At my peak, I could easily press 120kg dumbbells in each arm, but I would do 50% of that (60kg), for 40 to 50 reps in one go. These weren't strict, full reps - maybe an inch off the shoulder and probably an inch-and-a-half from lockout. That way, you're keeping the pressure on your muscle - you're working the muscle constantly, not resting at



Eddie Hall eating an ice cream behind a washing machine, while leaning against a phone box - obviously

the bottom or at the top. Just keep it moving - it worked wonders.

#### 6. TRAIN HEAVY, TRAIN SMART

I've always believed in heavy lifting, but also in smart programming to avoid burnout and injury. You've got to find the right balance, too. I'm sitting around 160kg now, which is about 26 stone. When I won World's Strongest Man, I was 32 stone - just under 200kg. The fight training I do now requires me to be a lot lighter so I can stay fast and nimble. I've found a balance where I'm still strong but can move well and fight comfortably. You need to train smart and adapt to make your training suit your goals.

#### 7. DEVELOP YOUR DIET

My diet is always evolving. Right now, I'm on the carnivore diet. It's been great for reducing inflammation, improving sleep, and boosting performance. I'm giving it a try for three months, but I'm

always a bit sceptical. Sometimes your body adapts or rejects a diet after a while, so I'll decide afterward if I stick with it or go back to eating some carbs. I'll tell you one thing, though, I'm missing pizza and cheesecake!

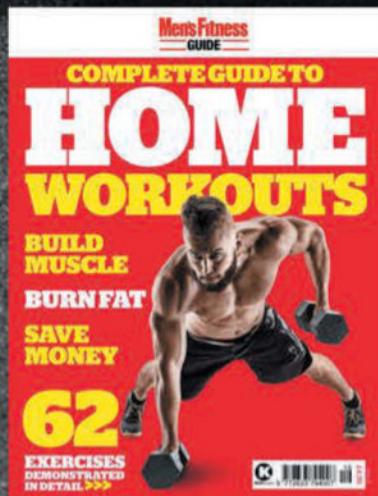
#### 8. AND DON'T SIT STILL

Things like lifting Atlas stones and pulling planes are old news for me now. I've done it all - won World's Strongest Man, lifted half a ton. I've proven what the human body is capable of, and I'm happy to leave it there. I want to live a long, healthy life, and staying at 200kg for too long just isn't sustainable. ☀

Self-confessed 'clumsy man' Eddie Hall teams up with Currys to urge British consumers to 'Repair, not Replace' as new research reveals the nation wastes over £9 billion per year replacing broken technology. Find out more at [currysplc.com/sustainable-business/circular-economy](http://currysplc.com/sustainable-business/circular-economy)

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THIS [HYROX] IS  
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After facing discrimination in football, openly gay athlete [Jake Williamson](#) has found his true calling in Hyrox, breaking records and inspiring others with his journey of self-acceptance and inclusivity ➡



Jake Williamson was pursuing a career as a promising footballer when Covid put paid to planned trials in Chicago. "I think everything happens for a reason," says the now 26-year-old. The pandemic gave him space away from the laddish culture of the changing rooms, where homophobia, racism and close-to-the-bone jokes were brushed off as banter. He also met his partner, Paul.

"It made me realise, 'Maybe I am gay,'" he tells *MF*. "You spend a lot of the time denying it to yourself because of those



environments." After appearing on the BBC's *The LGBT Sport Podcast* where he shared his story, Williamson was dropped from his Sunday league team. But while his first love might have turned its back on him, the Birmingham-based personal trainer soon threw himself into another pursuit.

A county-level middle-distance runner as a teen, he excelled in the burgeoning Hyrox scene, winning his age group in his first event in Barcelona 2023. An age-group world record followed at his next event in London, while at the 2024 Hyrox World Championships he was part of the winning England team in the Elite Relay.

From Hyrox's inclusivity to using his social media to help others, he shares his experience as an openly gay athlete.

**Men's Fitness:** What was it like being kicked off of your football team for your sexuality?

**Jake Williamson:** I'd done a podcast for the BBC and when I shared it, most people were messaging me being like, 'Oh my God, I didn't know' sort of thing. I was playing for a Sunday league team, and they heard the podcast. I'd already texted the manager saying, 'I'm available for the weekend' and I didn't hear anything. And then I was removed from the group chat.

There are still behaviours and things that aren't acceptable, which make it difficult for people to come out, especially within football and male-dominated sports. When you have a group of 15-16 lads in a changing room, there's going to be an element of childish behavior, but I think people often forget there's always going to be one person within that 16 who's affected by whatever you're saying. We need to have a reminder that these topics aren't OK. But 99% of the time, [coming out] is well received – people ask questions and they care about it.

**MF:** Why did you take up Hyrox?

**JW:** I was working in a gym as a personal trainer, and training for

“  
There is that level of acceptance because it's a new sport

the 2022 London Marathon. Someone sent me a message on Instagram, saying 'Have you heard of this? I think you'd be great at it.' I did my marathon, had a great time and, when I could finally walk again, I looked at where the next Hyrox was and saw it was Barcelona. My partner and I flew out on a whim, and I ended up winning the event.

Once you do one, you get a taste for it. It was helped as well because Hunter [McIntyre], who was the best in the world, was there, and he broke the world record at the same race. I was like, 'This is cool, I want to be like that guy' and then I was invited out to Malibu in LA to train at his house. It all happened quite quickly in terms of the Hyrox journey and the growth of it, as well as my profile.

**MF:** And less than two years later, you're a world champion?

**JW:** Michael Sandbach is the best in the UK and [Elite Relay] team captain. He'd already taken one of the two male slots. I said he should pick me and, luckily, he did. The relay is a lot faster than a singles race because you only do two stations [each]. My track



background gave me that advantage over the other guys. I did the first leg, which I was a bit nervous to do because it was against some of the big guns. Hunter only beat me by three seconds, which I can be quite proud of - he's a hell of an athlete. We ended up somehow taking the win in the first ever Mixed Relay World Championships.

**MF:** How has the Hyrox community reacted to your sexuality?

**JW:** I was such an early adopter of Hyrox, and when I came into the sport I was already openly gay. It wasn't like I had to come out to people, they already knew, and there were never any conversations around it. It's always been extremely welcoming.

Sports can naturally feel a bit cliquey and scary, but I've been able to set a precedent early on that this is an inclusive sport. I'm openly gay, and I've just won the World Championships with England. You can come and do this sport regardless of your sexuality, or whatever it is you feel might be a limiting factor.

There is that level of acceptance because it's a new

sport. Men's football, for example, has historical factors: it's got hooliganism, racism, homophobia, which is still relevant today, unfortunately.

**MF:** How does your training differ compared to football?

**JW:** A lot more volume and a lot more gym work. The Hyrox space is such a difficult world because you can't be the best at everything. You have to work on your weaknesses, but then you have to keep your other things topped up. You've got to have every single piece of your sport and athleticism - decent running, high-end strength, and strength endurance - which is why it's so great.

**MF:** What are your hopes moving forward?

**JW:** Anyone competing competitively within Hyrox will say, 'I want to be in the Elite 15 as a regular.' I've been in once, but it changes all the time, because there's so many athletes coming in, and 15 isn't a lot. Until you've put those times down regularly, though, you can't make those claims. I want to let my performances do the talking.

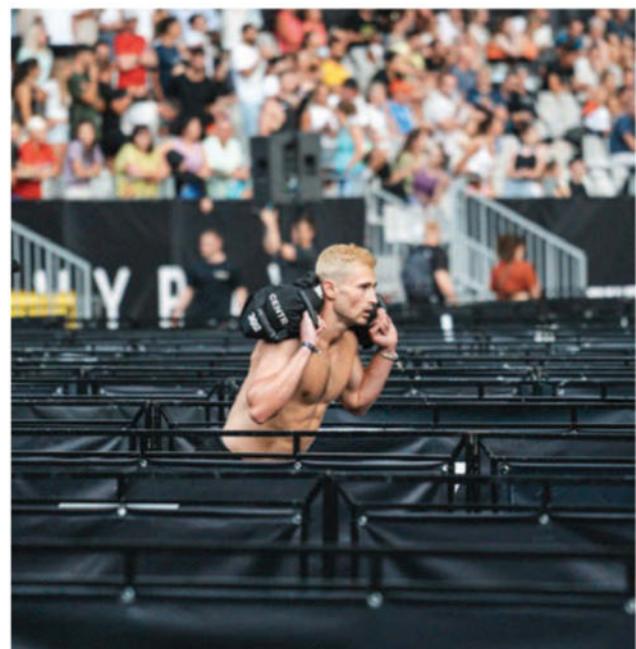
Getting back into the relay team for next year would be a big goal and then there's also an Elite 15 doubles competition. Me and my friend Sam, who trains with me at Forder's in Redditch, Birmingham, have said we're going to try and qualify for that at Worlds. So at least that will be a buffer if I don't make the Elite 15 again this year.

**MF:** Finally, tell us about how you're using your social media to help others.

**JW:** It's quite difficult to come out as gay in a sporting environment, because you feel like you're very much on your own a lot of the time. That isn't actually the case, because there are people that will support you, but when you're going through that process and that journey, it can be lonely.

I was starting to share more about my experiences with coming out, but also coming out within sport, and it just grew and grew and grew. I'm lucky enough to have a partnership with Instagram, to help other gay men in particular, but also to share other athletes and push the fact that it's really not as bad and as impossible as you think when you're trying to come out. 🏳️

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EXPERT-TESTED PRODUCTS

# PERFECT FIT

## MEN'S FITNESS CHRISTMAS GIFT GUIDE

Gifts for the modern man, featuring our top product picks that blend style, performance, and innovation



### Pininfarina Sintesi Hybrid Watch

£329, [pininfarina-hybridwatchbyglobics.com](http://pininfarina-hybridwatchbyglobics.com)

This is a stunning smartwatch blending Italian design and smart technology. Inspired by the legendary automotive legacy of Battista 'Pinin' Farina, the Sintesi is constructed from durable SUS 316L stainless steel. And with a scratch-resistant sapphire crystal, it's built to withstand daily wear and tear. The watch is water-resistant up to 50 meters, too, making it a reliable companion for anyone who leads an active lifestyle. Available in four striking colours, including the Sand Dune inspired by a concept car, it balances style with practicality.

On the tech side, the Sintesi is equipped with advanced health monitoring features, tracking your heart rate, sleep quality, and activity levels. With up to 30 days of battery life on a single charge, it's designed for convenience and longevity. The companion app enhances usability, providing smart notifications and real-time updates without disrupting your flow.



State-of-the-art SpO2 sensor detects breathing disturbances by checking oxygen levels in your bloodstream. Like an oximeter on your wrist, the sensor aids early prevention of breathing-related infections, as well as overall health.

### Loewe We. HEAR Pro

£255, [currys.co.uk](http://currys.co.uk)

A collab with French football superstar Kylian Mbappé, this special-edition speaker delivers a remarkable 100W of Class-D amplification, packing a powerful punch in a sleek, cylindrical design that's just slightly larger than a regulation football.

The We. HEAR Pro features an impressive array of full-range drivers and passive bass radiators, expertly tuned by Loewe's audio team. With a touch-sensitive volume slider for bass and treble adjustments, you can customise your sound experience on-the-fly. Available in vibrant neon yellow, chic denim, or black, each speaker is adorned with Mbappé's initials and comes with a matching adjustable shoulder strap.

Thanks to its IPX6 certification, this speaker is built to withstand the elements, letting you enjoy your favourite tracks regardless of the weather. With up to 20 hours of battery life and a quick two-hour charge via USB-C, it can even function as a power bank for your other devices.



Featuring Loewe's multi-pairing technology, you can wirelessly sync up to 14 speakers simultaneously.

The Responsible Down Standard (RDS) ensures TNF's goose down is ethically sourced, responsibly produced and traceable. Natural down delivers the highest warmth to weight ratio of any insulation.



## The North Face 30th Anniversary Himalayan Parka

£400, [thenorthface.co.uk](https://www.thenorthface.co.uk)

The North Face celebrates three decades of its iconic Himalayan Parka with this modern twist on a classic, designed for durability and extreme warmth. First launched in 1994, the original parka was built for the harshest conditions, and this updated version maintains that spirit while reimagining it for everyday wear.

Combining a relaxed fit with cold-weather performance, it's an ideal choice for urban explorers and outdoor adventurers alike. Drawing inspiration from Everest expeditions, this special 30th-anniversary edition is crafted from waxed ripstop fabric, ensuring durability against the elements. Packed with 600-fill responsibly sourced down, the Parka delivers exceptional warmth for the coldest winter days. Key features include an adjustable hood and hem for a customisable fit, along with dual-entry pockets perfect for warming your hands in frigid conditions.



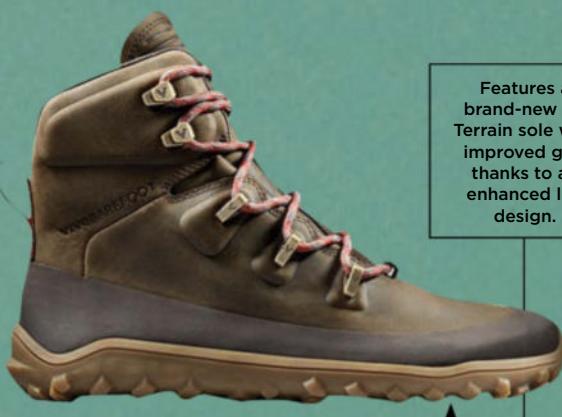
## Google Pixel Buds Pro 2

£219, [store.google.com](https://store.google.com)

Elevate your audio experience with the Pixel Buds Pro 2, designed for comfort, performance, and seamless integration into your active lifestyle. Crafted from insights gathered from no less than 45-million ear data points, these lightweight earbuds ensure lasting comfort for all-day wear and feature a twist-to-adjust stabiliser for a secure fit during workouts.

Equipped with the Tensor A1 chip, the Pixel Buds Pro 2 deliver powerful Active Noise Cancellation with Silent Seal™ 2.0 technology, adapting to your surroundings in real-time. Enjoy immersive sound with rich bass and clear treble thanks to the 11mm drivers, complemented by spatial audio capabilities.

Perfectly compatible with your Pixel devices, these earbuds make voice commands effortless, allowing you to access information hands-free. And innovative features such as beamforming mics enhance call clarity, making conversations crystal clear. With up to 8 hours of listening time and a total of 30 hours with the charging case, the Pixel Buds Pro 2 are the ideal audio companion for anyone on the go.



## Vivobarefoot Tracker Leather

£200, [vivobarefoot.com](https://vivobarefoot.com)

This is a reimagined take on the ultimate barefoot hiking boot that blends performance with comfort. Say goodbye to the heavy, sweaty restrictions of traditional boots; the Tracker Leather features a breathable design that enhances airflow by removing the waterproof membrane while still keeping your feet protected in wet conditions.

The All Terrain sole is a game-changer, offering improved grip and traction thanks to its enhanced lug design. This lightweight boot weighs just 459g, making it a solid choice for extended hikes without weighing you down. And the removable thermal insole cleverly regulates temperature, keeping your feet warm in cold conditions and cool when it heats up. With a focus on natural movement, these boots provide excellent sensory feedback, ensuring you feel connected to the terrain beneath you.



Polar's Running Performance Test helps you keep track of your progress and personalise your heart rate, speed and power zones. The Cycling Performance Test, meanwhile, helps you follow your progress, allows you to personalise your power zones and tells you your personal functional threshold power (requires a compatible power meter).



### Polar Vantage M3

£349, [polar.com](https://polar.com)

Polar's latest release: a smart multi-sport watch boasting over 150 sport profiles, offering comprehensive training and coaching tools for a variety of activities. It features dual-frequency GPS for precise location tracking and full-colour topographic maps for advanced outdoor navigation.

With an AMOLED touchscreen display, automatic sleep and recovery tracking, and Polar Elixir™ Biosensing Technology, the Vantage M3 monitors your vitals effectively. It has a robust battery life of up to 7 days on a single charge, making it perfect for long training sessions or daily wear. Whether you're hitting the trails or tracking your sleep, the Polar Vantage M3 is your ideal companion for bolstering both performance and recovery.

### Castore Golf Jacket

£165, [castore.com](https://castore.com)

Elevate your game, even on rainy days, with the Castore ProTek Water-Resistant Golf Jacket. At £165, this outer layer boasts advanced Protek™ technology that ensures full rain protection. Made from lightweight 100% polyester, it features a stand collar, adjustable cuffs, and a centre front zip for optimal temperature control. Hydrophilic taping deflects water from seams and zip openings, while water-resistant side pockets keep your essentials dry. Available in sizes XS to 2XL, it's designed for comfort and performance on the course.



## Coros Pace 3

£219, [uk.coros.com](https://uk.coros.com)

The Pace 3 is the latest lightweight offering from Coros, with a sleek, low-profile design and impressive battery life delivering up to 15 days of regular use and 38 hours on full GPS mode. Equipped with advanced optical heart rate and SpO<sub>2</sub> sensors, the Pace 3 provides meticulous health monitoring and performance metrics. The dual-frequency GPS allows for pinpoint distance calculation, even in challenging environments. Whether you're tackling the trails or pounding the pavement, breadcrumb navigation keeps you on course, complete with turn-by-turn directions.

With an always-on 1.2" transreflective touchscreen, you get clear visibility in any lighting conditions, and built-in music support keeps your favourite tunes at your fingertips. Available with various bands, the Pace 3 adapts to your look and needs, offering extensive activity modes tailored for running, biking, swimming, and more.

Coros doesn't just track your stats, either; it enhances your training regime with plans and workouts, plus integration with popular apps like Strava. Whether you're training for a 5k or an ultramarathon, the Pace 3 offers the support and insights you need to exceed your goals and explore your limits.

Continuing on from the mighty impressive Coros Pace 2, the new-and-improved version offers outstanding battery life, with 38 hours of continuous GPS use (in standard GPS mode).

Featuring a re-designed earbud and stem, angled to create a truer fit inside the ear canal.

## Marshall Minor IV

£119.99, [marshall.com](https://marshall.com)

Discover the iconic Marshall sound with the Minor IV earbuds. These buds deliver a balanced sound profile for music and superior clarity for calls, all in a sleek design. Enjoy 7 hours of wireless playtime on a single charge, with a portable case extending total playback to over 30 hours. The ergonomic design ensures a secure fit, and their water-resistant build means you can listen rain or shine.

Customise your audio experience with mirrored touch-sensitive controls and benefit from in-app battery preservation and Over-the-Air (OTA) updates to maximise lifespan. With Bluetooth LE Audio technology, the Minor IV promises enhanced sound quality and syncing. Plus, made from 42% recycled plastics, they're a sustainable choice for the eco-conscious listener.

## Detrash Watches

£380, [detrash.com](https://detrash.com)

Detrash introduces a refreshing take on timepieces with five unique styles that blend fun, ethics, and design. Founded by Guy Blaskey, Detrash stems from a passion for watches that break away from the mundane and overpriced options dominating the market. Inspired by the need for purposeful creativity in an industry often lacking ethical considerations, Detrash believes in watches that not only look good but also do good.

Crafted in Dorset, these watches celebrate sustainability while supporting charitable causes instead of lining celebrity pockets. With a mantra of 'Have Fun. Do Good', Detrash offers a unique opportunity to express your style without compromising your values. Check out the collection that's designed to brighten up your wrist and your day – all while making a positive impact.

A 41mm dive watch made with 80% recycled steel, on an ocean-plastic strap, with a Seiko NH35 automatic movement, 200m water resistance and sapphire crystal.

28 DECEMBER 2024



Long-lasting, with distinctive notes of wood and amber.

### Gisada Titanium

£137 (for 100ML), [gisada.com](http://gisada.com)

Launched in 2024, in collaboration with Anthony Joshua, this signature scent balances aromatic, woody, and ambery notes. The fragrance opens with a vibrant blend of pink pepper, artemisia, sage, and cardamom – offering a lively kick that sets the tone without being overpowering. As it evolves, you'll discover hints of lavender, cinnamon, sandalwood, cedarwood, and leather. The base notes of vanilla, tonka bean, iris, and balsam fir add depth, leaving a lasting impression.

### D-Robe Beaufort Robe

£155, [d-robeoutdoors.com](http://d-robeoutdoors.com)

The D-Robe Beaufort combines outdoor comfort with a stylish twist, perfect for the modern adventurer. Crafted from recycled materials, this robe features a soft grey fleece lining, with a practical design that includes multiple pockets and adjustable features, making it versatile enough for everything from dog walks to post-surf changes. With an improved fit that enhances mobility, you'll stay warm without compromising on style. Throw it over your gear after a workout or while lounging at home – it's a smart addition to your active lifestyle that looks good no matter the activity.



Designed with extra pockets, a two-way zip and fleece lining.

### MODO sunglasses

From £225.30, [nordstrom.com](http://nordstrom.com)

Founded in 1990 by Alessandro Lanaro in New York City, MODO epitomises modern minimalism with clean lines and versatile designs suitable for any occasion. The bold acetate full-rim frames are lightweight for all-day comfort, while titanium options offer a sleek alternative. Available in classic neutrals like black and tortoise, as well as vibrant colours like red and blue, MODO caters to both subtle and statement-making styles.

Its 'Paper Thin, Titanium Strong' mantra highlights ultra-light frames, while the Eco collection utilises recycled materials and eco-friendly practices. Renowned for innovation and quality, Modo remains dedicated to responsible design, ensuring you look good while supporting the planet. ☀



Renowned for its lightness, strength and flexibility, titanium is MODO's metal of choice for creating high-quality, premium eyewear that lasts.

# PEAK PERFORMANCE

Snowsports enthusiast **Dominic Bliss** gathers some expert skiing tips straight from the pristine slopes of Utah's renowned Deer Valley Resort. Whether you're gearing up for your first descent or seeking to polish seasoned skills, these insights will equip you for a successful season on the snow





**W**ith over 2,000 acres of skiable terrain, Deer Valley is big. And it's about to get a lot bigger. By the late 2020s, this Utah ski resort – one of the largest and most upmarket in the Rockies – will more than double in size, offering over 5,700 acres of skiing across 238 pistes and ten different mountain peaks. All of which makes it the perfect resort to hone your skiing skills.

I visited Deer Valley earlier this year, keen to progress, and immediately felt spoilt by the facilities on offer. Under bright blue winter skies, and on top of fresh, thick snow, I explored many of the 100-plus pistes currently in operation. At many of the chairlifts, guides were marshalling the skiers onto the chairs with military efficiency, cutting waiting times drastically. Unusually (some might say churlishly), snowboarders are not permitted here. While that's bad news for boarders, it ensures skiers have more room to work on improving their skills.

On my first day, I joined a free mountain host tour where a guide led me and a group of other newly-arrived skiers on a mixture of on- and off-piste terrain, down steep red slopes and through thick forest, offering tips all the while. Later in the week, I benefitted from ski lessons from two experts – Michael Koeller, a coach at the resort's ski school, and Fuzz Feddersen, a former US Olympic freestyle skier. Both were keen to push my ski level higher, offering invaluable advice on carving turns, negotiating moguls and off-piste forest, catching air, falling with style, psychological confidence and ski equipment.

By the end of my two lessons, I genuinely felt I had advanced. Here's what I learned...

#### PERFECTING POSITION

Feddersen says most of the intermediate skiers he observes tend to ski too far back on their heels. "I really encourage people to get forward in a more aggressive position," he says, "like a boxer"





**Carving turns allow for smoother, quicker progress down the slope**

with hands forward and shins pushing into their boots.

"I tell them to grab an imaginary steering wheel in front of them. By keeping their hands out in front, they will steer in the direction of each turn."

### CARVING TURNS

A true sign that you've progressed from intermediate to advanced skiing is when you can successfully execute carving turns. This is when you shift the skis onto their edges as you arc round each turn. This type of turn is faster than normal because, unlike on traditional parallel turns, your skis don't create drag by sliding sideways.

Koeller advises intermediate skiers to start off on flat, wide terrain, practising tipping their skis over in order to feel the edges catch the surface of the snow. "Finding that sensation on flat ground first is necessary to build up to higher speeds and higher pitches," he says. "It will give you a solid understanding of how the shape of the ski works."

He explains how most of your body weight (around 70 per cent) should be on the inside edge of your outside ski as you carve the turn, while the remaining 30 per cent of your body weight should be on the outside edge of your inside ski. Roll your knees and your ankles, and try to keep your skis parallel through the turn.

As Feddersen points out, you need to push your shins right to

the front of each boot before you start each turn, angulating your knees towards the centre of the body while lifting the skis onto their edges.

### MASTERING MOGULS

"This is one of the trickier areas to master," says Feddersen. He advises intermediate skiers to start off by traversing all the way across the mogul field at a shallow angle, absorbing each bump with their knees. "When you come over the top of each mogul, push the ski

Sunset over Deer Valley



tips down the back side of the mogul so that your skis stay on the snow," he adds. "Then, when you feel comfortable enough, make a big turn and traverse the mogul field the other way."

Gradually, skiers should make smaller and smaller turns. "At first you might be traversing ten moguls," Feddersen says. "As you get more confident, you'll traverse seven, then five, then four. Before you know it, you're ready to cross just two moguls before turning. Finally, you'll be ready to link turns together."

Koeller says you need to ski lightly as you rise up over a mogul and more heavily as you descend the other side. "Use the skis as



Writer Dominic Bliss (right) with ski coach Michael Koeller

## SLOPE SHRED

**Skiing is a full-body workout that builds endurance, balance and flexibility, all while torching calories**



### Full-body workout

Skiing engages multiple muscle groups simultaneously. Your legs, including are constantly active. Meanwhile, your core muscles stabilise your body, and your arms get a workout from using poles for balance and propulsion.

### Balance and coordination

Navigating varying terrains requires a keen sense of balance and precise coordination. Skiing regularly can enhance proprioception and agility, translating to better performance in other physical activities.

### Cardiovascular endurance

Skiing is a dynamic aerobic activity that effectively elevates the heart rate, improving cardiovascular endurance. This cardio workout helps lower the risk of heart disease and increases stamina for other endurance sports.

### Increased flexibility

Managing turns and movements on the slopes requires flexibility, particularly in the hips and joints. Regular skiing can enhance joint flexibility and range of motion, contributing to overall functional fitness.

### Calorie burn

Skiing is an excellent calorie burner, with vigorous downhill skiing burning over 400 calories per hour.



**“Try to keep your skis parallel through the turn”**

feeler as to where you're putting the pressure," he adds. "You want to feel all parts of the bump and how your knees and ankles absorb different parts of the terrain."

Initially, skiers find it easier to make their turns in the little valleys in between each mogul. But as they improve, they'll find they're able to pivot on top of the moguls to make the turn.



One of the 21 ski lifts across Deer Valley Resort

### DODGING TREES

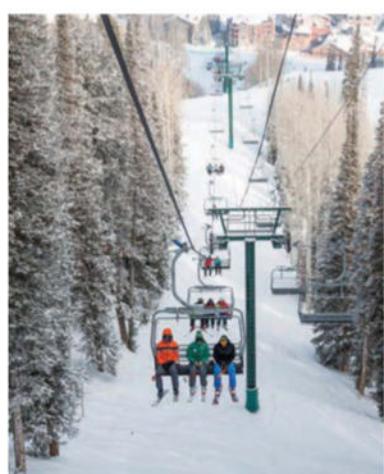
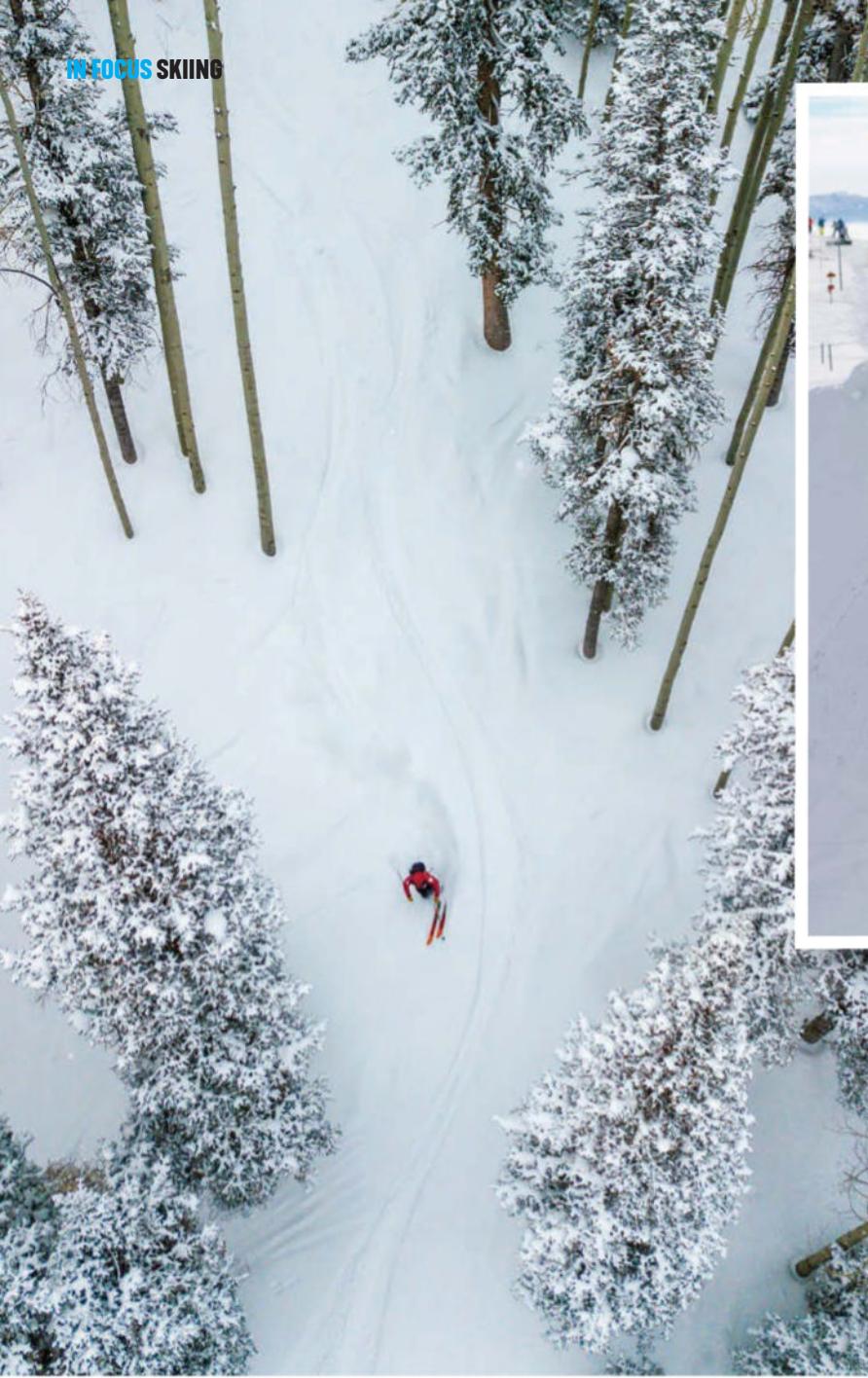
Both Koeller and Feddersen warn skiers not to look at the trees, but instead at the gaps between the trees. "If you look at the trees, it's a magnet and it pulls you right towards them," Feddersen says. "But if you shoot for the spaces between the trees, somehow, mentally that works much better."

Koeller suggests you pick your line early, traversing the hill slowly at a shallow angle, until you're comfortable to make the next turn. "That way you'll control your speed and get down safely."

Feddersen says if he's skiing slowly through trees, he sometimes does a little jump to pull himself clear of the deep snow before he initiates a turn. But for less confident skiers, there's nothing wrong with making snowplough turns between the trees. "If you get in trouble, go for the pizza slice," he says, referring to the snowplough shape. "It's just one of the tools in the arsenal. Why not?"

### TAKING TO THE AIR

Feddersen represented the US team in freestyle skiing at three Winter Olympics. While today's trick skiers use airbags (in winter) and swimming pools (in summer) to practise their jumps, he started out at the age of 11 using pits filled



with straw. His most advanced jump was a quadruple-twisting triple back flip, which involved three backflips with four full twists. He is better placed than most to offer advice on basic jumps.

"Find the right location, with nobody around," he says. "Choose an area that's not too steep with just a little jump – 12 inches of snow is enough."

Giving yourself a dead straight approach, he says you need to do a little hop as you hit the top of the jump, with your hands forward and weight in the middle of your skis.

"You'll only get one or two inches off the ground, but you'll feel like you're way up there," he adds. "The more speed you have, the more air you'll get. Land with the slope, on the middle of your skis, with the skis flat. If you land with the tails or tips of the skis first, you're in trouble. And if you land with your hands back, rather than forward, you're immediately out of control. The problem with jumps is people try to go too big, too early."

### FALLING WITH STYLE

All skiers, from beginners to advanced, will fall one time or another. "Learning to fall is a skill in itself," says Koeller. "You need to understand the physics of it."

He advises skiers to fall forward down the hill, rather than back against it, and not to fight the inevitability of the fall. "Once you realise you're going down, just go down," he says. "If you start leaning back, you're fighting gravity and you're not going to win. You might end up landing on your head or twisting your knee. If you roll forward, though, you might get

bruised, but you're not going to get twisted up in your skis."

### BOOT FITTING

If there's one item of ski equipment worth buying, it's got to be the boots. "Invest in boots that fit well, with the right flex for your weight and skier type," Koeller advises. "If you can afford it, buy a customised pair. We use our feet, ankles and knees to initiate each turn, so having a boot that fits well, with the right flex, is really important. If you're heavier, you'll want a stiffer boot; if you're lighter you'll want a softer boot."

Koeller also advises that improving skiers buy ski boot liners, which mould to the shape of one's foot, ensuring a customised fit. And he recommends the BOA Fit System, a device that tightens

the forefoot of boots with a dial and a wire cable, reducing the pain typically associated with traditional boot bindings. It's available on multiple boot brands. "It gives you a tighter fitting boot without being uncomfortable," Koeller adds.

Another boot-mounted technology he swears by is something called Carv, which includes a device you clip to both of your boots. Containing an accelerometer, magnetometer and gyroscope, each device measures the movement of your skis and sends messages to an app in your phone which in turn gives you real-time coaching advice through headphones.

### SELECTING SKIS

Koeller points out how there's a current trend in the ski industry to

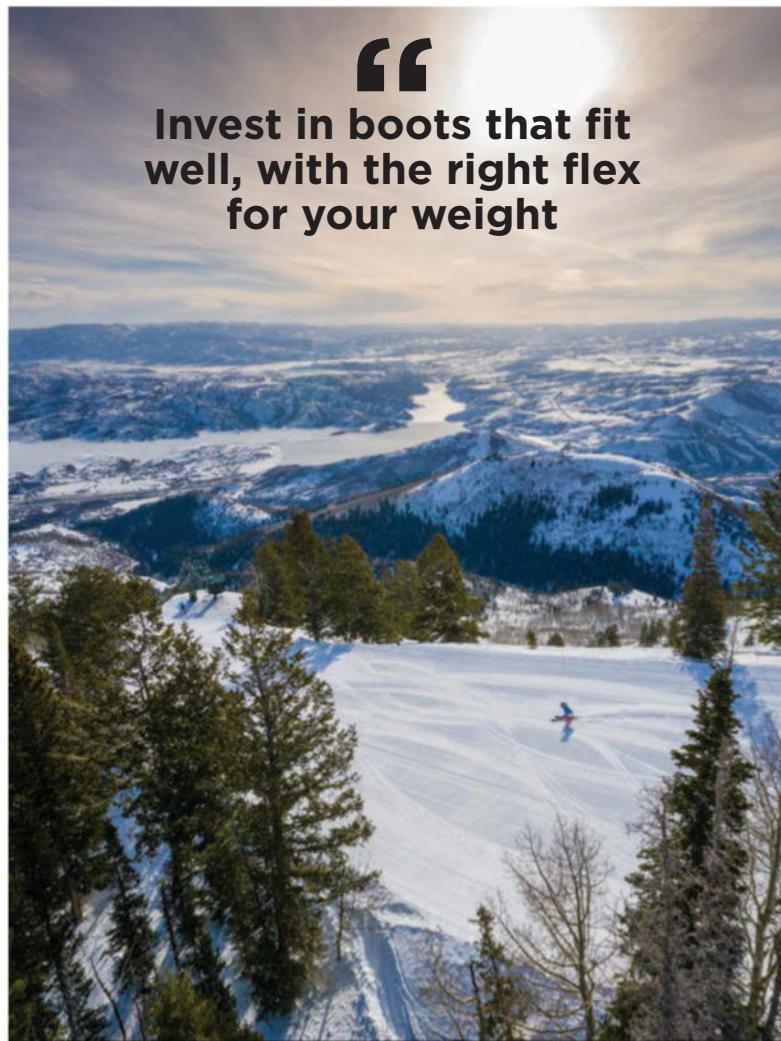
## DEER VALLEY RESORT, UTAH



**Deer Valley** is in the Wasatch Range of mountains, close to Salt Lake City, in Utah. It currently offers 122 pistes and 24 lifts across more than 2,300 acres of skiable terrain. It's due to double in size once expansion has been completed by the late 2020s. The resort will be one of the venues for the 2034 Winter Olympics. It is also one of the many resorts on the Ikon Pass, which offers lift access to 50-plus resorts worldwide.

- [ikonpass.com](http://ikonpass.com)
- [deervalley.com](http://deervalley.com)

**“Invest in boots that fit well, with the right flex for your weight”**



Photography: Deer Valley Resort

promote fatter over shaped skis. "Fat skis are great for skiing on powder, but they hinder an intermediate skier's ability to develop edge control and carving skills," he insists. "It's really important for people to have more hourglass-shaped skis."

He explains how many intermediate skiers have seen film clips of really advanced skiers descending through deep powder on big, fat skis, before assuming that's what they need for their own on-piste skiing.

"That's wrong. Fat skis won't help them," he adds. "In fact, it makes it harder for them to progress. They need shaped skis to get better."

# FAITH

Believing is achieving for advocates of the placebo effect, but does it have any credible role to play in performance,



# LIFT

or is it nothing more than a trick of the mind? ➤



The chances are you've heard of the placebo effect; the chances are you've also heard it described in a dismissive way. Even the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a placebo as 'a substance that has no therapeutic effect', so it's little wonder it has become known as

fake medicine: a worthless trick of the mind. But the placebo effect – a desirable outcome resulting from an expected or learned response to a treatment – has been shown time and again to be very real indeed. Credible scientific studies have shown placebos can have powerful effects on strength, endurance, and pain tolerance, and tests have highlighted performance improvements for weightlifters, sprinters, runners, and cyclists.

Countless anecdotal accounts also suggest the effect is at work across the spread of sports and full range of abilities, with both subjective benefits such as pain relief and objective performance results reported. In medicine, the placebo effect has brought improvements for sufferers of irritable bowel syndrome, depression, and migraines, among many other things. Some research has even measured positive



impacts when those taking part were told they were getting a chemically inactive treatment.

"There's no reason to doubt that placebo effects work across the spectrum in sport," says Chris Beedie, an honorary professor of psychology at the University of Kent, and director of science and research at Chamonix Hard Cross Performance, who has been studying the placebo effect for 15 years. "We get a placebo effect in

nearly all situations associated with human performance. It sounds very far-fetched at times, but I've seen it work on very high-level athletes."

When Beedie led a review of the early studies of the placebo effect in sport, he found performance improvements were generally in the one to five percent range, so could you harness its potential to help make you that much fitter, faster, or stronger? And if you could, would it be a good idea?

#### **Believe in recovery**

The belief effect, as some advocates like to call it, doesn't add to your physical capabilities, but it does allow you to realise more of your potential. The concept is thought to work at the conscious and subconscious level in the brain, with major factors including belief and the context in which the treatment takes place, for example at a doctor's surgery or on the advice of a trusted coach. Some people are more likely to respond than others, and the way your brain is wired is probably key. It's been suggested personality

at would be recovery, not least because there are great gains to be had if you get this component of training right. Hard physical efforts may be where the work feels like it is being done, but it's after you've stressed your muscles, fibres, and tissues that the body performs its magic: repairing the micro-damage to make you stronger.

Getting this super-compensation, as it's known, should be easy enough if you eat, drink and sleep well, but bouncing back sufficiently to perform another hard workout is intimately connected to how someone feels, too, and this complicates matters. "Recovery involves a lot of things, including two of the most highly placebo-responsive variables from the research: pain and fatigue," says Beedie. "They are both subjective, of course, in that most good athletes through their experience and determination can modulate or suppress them."

#### **Cashing in**

Perhaps because of this lack of objectivity, a huge industry of recovery products has emerged:



**Scientists are confident it can have a powerful effect on pain, anxiety, confidence, and motivation**

traits play an important role, with potential links to optimism, suggestibility, empathy, and neuroticism for responders.

As you can probably tell, the scientists don't have the causes of the placebo effect fully worked out yet, but they are confident it can have a powerful effect on pain, anxiety, confidence, and motivation – all of which can be critical to sports performance. If you're thinking about taking advantage of the placebo effect – or trying to work out if it's at play in the things you already do – one area to look

think specially formulated post-workout drinks, foam rollers, cryotherapy chambers, Epsom salt baths, compression gear, nutritional supplements, hyperbaric chambers, and so on. However, the proportion of commercial recovery products or treatments that have credible scientific backing for delivering anything other than a placebo effect is small.

"In the last ten years, and particularly in the last five, there has been a huge growth in the number of products being offered," says Christie Aschwanden, author





Words: Leo Spall | Photography: Shutterstock

“

## The placebo effect is not a bad thing

of *Good To Go*, a book about sports recovery. “I found most of these products [that I tested or researched] use the placebo effect when they work, but I don’t think that is something we should dismiss out of hand. The placebo effect is not a bad thing.”

Aschwanden, a former Nordic skier for Team Rossignol, is among the growing chorus of voices championing simple methods of recovery, but she sees value in relaxation tools. Her book suggests ice baths, made popular in recent years by top-level sports stars from Andy Murray to Premier League footballers and top-flight rugby

players, may only be working through the placebo effect. Similarly, whole-body cryotherapy, which has brought the world’s best athletes – from basketball and rugby to MMA – into its chambers, may also rely on placebo.

This short, sharp shock of a treatment remains popular. Some even credit it as a factor in Leicester City’s surprise Premier League title triumph in 2016. However, the year before, a Cochrane review – considered the gold standard in healthcare evidence – concluded there was insufficient evidence to support its use to relieve muscle soreness after

exercise. Massage and foam rolling didn’t get the thumbs up from Aschwanden either, and the science on them is mixed. In fact, there were few treatments that could be solidly recommended from the popular commercial aids that Aschwanden investigated.

### Feel-good effect

Yet the truth is many recovery devices can make you feel good and create the perception of actively accelerating physical repair. Much of the research refers to reductions in the ‘perception of fatigue’, which, while not hugely scientific, can make a significant difference to recovery and performance. Despite receiving negative feedback on the efficacy of many recovery aids, Aschwanden ended up adopting the method of ‘floating’, which uses Epsom salts to give buoyancy in an enclosed pool of water.

“I expected to hate it and only did it in service of the book,”

Aschwanden says of the recovery ‘modality’ that is often accompanied by unproven claims. “It was kind of forced meditation for people who can’t meditate, and that’s me!”

Dr Shona Halson, one of Australia’s leading performance recovery experts, has pointed out that the body doesn’t differentiate between physical and psychological stress. She authored an academic paper in 2013 with Dr David Martin, who later became director of sports performance and research for NBA team the Philadelphia 76ers, which argued in favour of harnessing the placebo effect.

However, not everyone is a fan of exploiting belief and expectations for recovery. Steven Fawcett, the first British man to qualify for the CrossFit Games in 2015, advocates for sporting simplicity. “There are a lot of gimmicks out there, and a lot of expensive devices,” he says. “You probably get the same results from just working at a low effort on a bike after a workout. If you don’t have your nutrition or sleep dialled in, the other options are pointless.”

#### **Supplement dangers**

Phil Hurst, a psychology lecturer at Canterbury Christ Church University, shares similar reservations. Ten years ago, he was a promising under-20s 1500m and 3000m runner who was influenced by the aids used or endorsed by athletes he admired. His faith in devices like Power Balance bands and beetroot juice (which now has some scientific basis) didn’t produce the desired results, and he associates the bands with a poor performance at an important event.

Hurst might be a non-responder, or maybe his level of belief wasn’t strong enough, but this led to much of his work in academia. “If you’re an athlete and you really believe in something, you are going to get the most out of it,” says the retired runner who represented Britain in 2015. “But there are risks.”

Experiencing the ‘nocebo effect’ – the negative ‘twin’ of the placebo effect – is also a consideration. It can amplify doubts and anxiety, add to soreness, or even induce headaches or upset stomachs. In recovery, the latter two effects

are more likely linked to some form of supplement intake rather than using a device, and Hurst, who is also a UK Athletics anti-doping educator, warns against potential ‘gateway’ dangers.

“You might start with a sports drink, then maybe caffeine, sodium bicarbonate,” he says. “Once you’re done with the benefits of that, you might think, What else can I start taking? And maybe be tempted by anabolic steroids or testosterone.”

The exact ingredients of many supplements can be hard to ascertain due to production standards and outsourcing, and the substances found in them – ranging from testosterone to rodent feces, according to Hurst – are alarming. Financial and time costs of potentially ineffective placebos should also be considered, and being mis-sold a product can be troubling. “If there’s no harm associated with the product, it’s probably OK to use it,” says Beedie. “But if there’s the slightest risk of harm – unless there’s a good mechanism identified and credible proof – you shouldn’t use it. Irrespective of belief.” ☀



# CUTTING THROUGH THE SILENCE

Barbers across the UK are helping men to open up by becoming trained mental health first aiders, creating a safe space for honest conversations ➤

Words: Joe Phelan

## DID YOU KNOW?

In the UK, the Mental Health Foundation reports that suicide is the leading cause of death for men under the age of 50. This stark statistic underscores the critical importance of mental health awareness and intervention efforts targeted towards men.





more than just a place to sit while getting a trim, for some men the barber's chair is a welcome sanctuary, a place to unwind, relax, and engage in judgement-free conversation. These chats have, traditionally, revolved around sports or entertainment, perhaps with an infrequent nod towards something a little deeper, but a new trend is emerging, reshaping the role of barbers in men's lives.

Recognising that men can be unwilling to showcase vulnerability - a recent Hallmark study found that 50% of men 'fear' expressing

emotions - a growing number of barbers are undergoing mental health first aid training. They are learning skills that will enable them to listen, support, and provide guidance to customers who might be grappling with personal issues, but don't feel as though they have an outlet.

By becoming mental health first aiders, barbers are stepping up as informal counsellors, and helping men to tackle mental health issues, one haircut at a time.

#### **Clipping the stigma**

One of the men pioneering this movement is Jake Cox, who moved to Medway to open his first cutting venture, the No Bad Days

Barbershop in St. Mary's Island, Kent. Keen to use his own experiences of grappling with mental health issues to allow his customers to open up, Cox has created a bespoke, one-on-one setup, allowing for an uninterrupted and wholly personalised customer-centric experience.

"I've struggled with my own mental health for years," he tells MF. "I thought, if I can help others, that will also inspire me to do better every day. I took the [mental health first aid] training in lockdown to better myself, and to help my customers if they need it."

"Being a barber isn't easy. You hear a lot of things in your day that



you can sometimes bottle up and take away with you. So, this isn't just about providing a service of care to my customers, but also protecting my own wellbeing."

Cox firmly believes that once people feel comfortable in their surroundings, and trust that they will be listened to without judgement, they will naturally become more willing to discuss topics that would, under different circumstances, be far more difficult to broach.

"Being open and honest is a personal trait that has always helped people relate and open up to me," he says. "Letting them know they're not alone, and that others have been through the same thing(s) they're going through, is important. Over the years, I've learned the skills of listening, conversing using open questions, and allowing people time to talk and express. A lot of customers have come to me to talk about things they've never spoken to anyone about, including miscarriage, depression, anxiety, loneliness, medication, and addiction."

Cox, who donates 10% of the profits generated by product sales to mental health charity Mind, has also organised training sessions to help other barbers follow in his footsteps. He believes more barbers would benefit from taking the time to embrace mental health first aid training.

"Do it for yourself and for your customers," he says. "You'll see a new side to customers you've never seen before, and you could even help save lives. I love knowing that people see me as a person they can trust and turn to. I may not have the answers, but I'm always here to listen."

#### Beyond the chair

Murdock, with stores in Soho, Covent Garden and Shoreditch, is well on the way to becoming a London institution. It has firmly established itself as one of the capital's premier establishments for exceptional male grooming, while it has also made a conscious effort to

set itself apart from competitors by openly offering a 'more than a barber' service.

Murdock has rolled out mental first aid training to all of its barbers, giving them the skills and knowledge to provide comfort and support to customers exactly when it is required. As well as being a valuable addition to the traditional barber service, Murdock's employees are adamant that the focus on mental health has helped to build strong, appreciated relationships with customers.

"I have always struggled with my mental health and, although I'm not great at talking about myself, I found that as my relationship with my clients grew stronger, they were starting to share and confide

**Murdock has rolled out mental health first aid training to all of its barbers**



in me," says Murdock master barber Joe Pomper. "I felt I needed training for my own health, but also to be able to pass on helpful suggestions to others, rather than skirting around difficult conversations."

This is a view shared by fellow Murdock master barber Miles Wood-Smith. "Knowing that we're in a privileged position as barbers when it comes to men opening up about their mental health," he says, "it made sense to actively seek out ways I could improve how I dealt with their issues."

"It's definitely given me more tools and more confidence in being able to spot clients who are suffering quietly, or less eager to share their worries. I think it's about authenticity. If we are our authentic selves and open up to our clients, then hopefully they feel more comfortable in opening up to us. It should be a natural conversation, not an inorganic interrogation."

The Murdock team note there are some mental health issues they encounter relatively frequently, but highlight that every conversation is



Photography: Bruce Middlemiss

different, and no two customers will ever have the exact same interaction with their barber.

"Anxiety and depression are rampant issues with men, especially in a city like London, with all the stress that it brings," says Wood-Smith. "It definitely helps that I suffer with those things as well, as it means we have common ground when we're talking about it. I find just validating that they're 'allowed' to feel those things is a huge help."

It's a message Ben Vowles, another of Murdock's master barbers, is keen to promote: "In my experience, anxiety is the most common [mental health issue]. I'm quite fortunate in that when I ask my clients how they are feeling, they tend to open up. But, if I do have someone who doesn't quite seem themselves, and they give me the 'Yeah, fine mate,' I just stop, take a second, and simply ask, 'Are you sure?' Sometimes it's necessary to make a point of turning off the entertaining barber routine and turning on the, 'I'm here if you need it' side of the job."

#### Listening with care

Being openly willing to talk about mental health issues means these barbers are often granted access to their customers' innermost thoughts – often without much prior warning. Which means, especially when customers raise their worries or challenges for

the first time, it is crucial to be attentive and responsive, and to ensure that every interaction is handled with care and sensitivity.

"One of my clients told me he was expecting his second child, and my natural response was to congratulate and share the usual outpour of emotion," says Joe Pomper. "However, he wasn't sharing it as joyous news; rather, he explained that he'd struggled with postnatal depression after his first child was born. We talked about coping mechanisms, and I remembered a related charity from my training that I pointed him towards. He contacted them and got advice. It helped him massively."

For Jake Cox, one of the most important elements is trying to help people see the positives: "I try to encourage people to live in the now. Look within yourself to find happiness. People with social anxiety feel comfortable in my shop. We can talk as much or as little as they want."

#### Measuring impact

With mental health, quantifying recovery or the reduction of negative emotions is often tricky. Unlike physical health, where the healing of a broken bone is easily observable, internal struggles are harder to assess, address, and monitor. Each of the barbers we spoke to has come to recognise this complexity, acknowledging



## REAL TALK

Five ways to encourage honest conversations with friends

### 1. Lead by example

Share your own experiences and feelings openly. By being vulnerable, you demonstrate that it's OK to talk about mental health and emotions.



### 2. Ask open-ended questions

Instead of yes/no questions, ask questions that invite more detailed responses, such as 'How have you been feeling lately?'

### 3. Be a good listener

Create a safe space by actively listening without judgment or jumping to solutions. Sometimes just being heard can make a huge difference.

### 4. Choose the right environment

Engage in conversations during comfortable and informal settings, like on a walk, while driving, or over a drink, where the pressure is less and the setting feels natural.

### 5. Express empathy and support

Let your friends know you care and are there for them. Acknowledge their feelings and ask how you can support them further. This reinforces that they don't have to face challenges alone.



the difficulty in measuring progress. However, they also point out that makes receiving positive reactions from customers all the more rewarding.

"The most memorable feedback I had was from a lady called Yvonne, someone I had only met very briefly once before," says Pomper. "She wrote to me to say her partner, my long-standing client Ian, had very sadly passed away. I was devastated. I'd seen him on the first Wednesday or Saturday of every month for eight years. He'd either be on the way to meet his mates or Yvonne for a few drinks. She explained how much he looked forward to his appointments, how great he looked and felt after a trim, and often mentioned me at home. I felt – and still feel – truly humbled to have had such a positive impact on someone's life."

Ben Vowles has also been privy to feedback that shows Murdock's focus on mental health is making a tangible, meaningful difference to people's lives: "We received an

email from one of my regular clients about a year into looking after him. It simply said that he was struggling with anxiety and that coming to the shop every month, and having someone listen and talk to him on a level that felt more like a friend, helped him kick on and reduce his anxiety dramatically."

#### Bridging the gap

Studies designed to assess the prevalence of mental health difficulties in men have gone a long way to showcasing both how common it is to feel stress or anxiety at some point in one's life, but also how unwilling a large proportion of men are to proactively seek help.

According to research carried out by the Office for National Statistics, 77% of men have experienced common mental health issues such as anxiety, stress, or depression, yet only 36% of NHS talking therapy referrals are for men. What's more, according to a Mind study, one in four people will experience a mental health

problem each year, meaning that a great number of male sufferers are either unwilling to open up, or simply don't know who to turn to.

Miles Wood-Smith believes that he, and other barbers trained to help customers confront mental health issues, have a vital role to play in helping people to recognise that they are going through difficulties, that they're far from alone, and that there is assistance available. "I know a lot of clients that have found it easier to open up to therapists or doctors because they opened up to us first," he says. "That's really the goal for me."

Indeed he, along with the other barbers we spoke to, wants to urge fellow barbers to recognise the unique power they have in helping their customers open up and be vulnerable in a safe space. "A simple Google search will direct you to reputable MHFA trainers," adds Joe Pomper. "You can visit them or they can come to you, and you can get your whole team involved."

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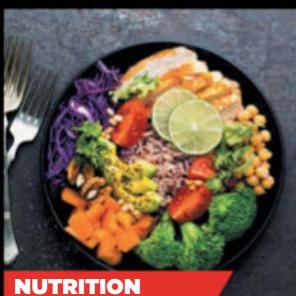
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# FUEL

## LEAF CRAVINGS BEHIND

Nature has the power to nip unhealthy habits in the bud

► The therapeutic benefits of nature are well-recognised, especially in promoting wellbeing and reducing stress. New research from the University of Plymouth suggests that spending time in green spaces can also positively influence our dietary habits. The study found that exposure to natural environments can decrease cravings for alcohol, cigarettes, and unhealthy foods. Access to a garden or allotment was linked to fewer cravings, and similar effects were observed in residential areas where views included more than 25% greenspace.



# IN THE RED

*Are you exercising more, controlling what you eat and still not losing weight? Or maybe you've been pursuing a long-term goal that's left you wiped out and feeling low? REDs may be to blame, as performance dietitian Renee McGregor explains >>*



# A

s you're reading this, the chances are you understand the importance of keeping physically fit. You might even take it one step further and measure your performance at regular intervals. But whether you thrive on competition with yourself or others, competitiveness

- continually striving for progress
- isn't always a positive influence.

From my experience of working with athletes of all levels – recreational through to Olympic and Paralympic standard; young to old, male and female – it's like walking on a tightrope. Stay balanced and you will make it to the other side, but it doesn't take much to push this balance off kilter.

We live in a society that's always demanding that we prove our worth through our achievements. For athletes, this will be through sporting success. And while healthy competition doesn't hurt anyone, when it becomes something that creates anxiety and defines your worth, it can be something that becomes destructive and dysfunctional, which can result in short- and long-term health problems.

## **It's all relative**

This phenomenon has recently been described as REDs, or 'relative energy deficiency in sport', and is an extension of the 'female athlete triad', which is well known in the sports world. It was noted that female athletes who didn't meet sufficient energy requirements for the work they did often suffered from hypothalamic amenorrhea (loss of periods), which then had a negative impact on bone density. However, in recent years, it has been determined that not only does low energy availability affect bone health, but it also actually has a much wider reach affecting all biological systems, and it's been

shown that male athletes are also at risk.

Physical presentations may be any one or a combination of the following: low energy levels; increased prevalence of bone and soft-tissue damage; low mood; poor or stagnating performance; low libido and a reduction in morning erectile function due to declining testosterone levels. There are two types of REDs, voluntary and involuntary, but both will present with the same symptoms.

Involuntary REDs is simply a case that the individual involved doesn't appreciate just how much fuel they require for the work they are doing: that is the energy required for biological function and then the energy for their physical activity. While most athletes will consider training as physical activity, they often forget about the day-to-day activity that will also contribute to the demand. For example, commuting by bike or foot, having an active job, as well as the cost of just living: respiration, metabolic function, etc. These people are easy to work with, as you provide them with the information they require, and they are happy to put the intervention into practice. Their body usually responds very quickly.

Voluntary REDs, on the other hand, is a conscious decision to restrict intake and/or over-train. This is a far more complex issue because it often involves a psychological aspect and can take the individual a lot longer to recover from. Both forms of REDs may or may not involve weight loss. The body always prioritises movement, so when there is low energy availability within the system, it often tends to down-regulate biological processes, lowering metabolic rate to preserve energy. So while many assume restricting intake and increasing movement will result in weight loss, that's not always the case.

## **Knock-on effects**

It's important to remember that the mind and body are not separate



## **RED ALERT**

**Addressing REDs involves creating a balanced approach that includes nutritional, psychological, and training adjustments. Here are five strategies that can help**

### **1. Nutritional assessment**

Work with a registered dietitian or nutritionist to develop a diet plan that meets your energy needs. This plan should ensure adequate caloric intake to fuel both your exercise and basic physiological functions.

### **2. Monitoring and adjusting training loads**

Re-evaluate your training regimen to ensure it's aligned with your energy availability. Incorporate rest and recovery days to prevent overtraining and allow your body to recover.

### **3. Psychological support**

Engage with a sports psychologist to address any underlying issues such as perfectionism, anxiety, or disordered eating patterns. This can help in developing healthier coping mechanisms and improving mental wellbeing.

### **4. Education and awareness**

Educate yourself on the signs and symptoms of REDs, as well as the importance of energy balance. Understanding the long-term health consequences of energy deficiency can encourage healthier behaviours.

### **5. Regular monitoring**

Conduct regular health and performance assessments, including monitoring weight, energy levels, and hormonal panels. This helps catch early signs of REDs and adjust your strategies accordingly.



entities: making a change at one level can have severe implications and consequences at another point within the body.

If we look at the example of restrictive eating in athletes, the culture within their given sport often creates this belief that being lighter will improve their performance. What they don't stop to consider is that maybe their body is already as low as it needs to be. The need to be the best, the inability to manage expectations, drives them to a place where they overly restrict their intake and/or significantly increase their training. While they may find that initially they do see positive results, it soon plateaus and usually declines rapidly. Instead of being able to see that their stagnating and deteriorating performance is a direct result of these extreme behaviours, they further crack the whip, believing they're still not working hard enough.

Over time, their high training volume and low energy intake becomes so restrictive it leads to biochemical and hormonal irregularities. These could include reduction of testosterone in men that results in depression, anxiety and many long-term physical consequences, such as gastro-

## “ My experience is that it is more common in recreational or semi-professional athletes

intestinal symptoms, a depressed immune system and poor adaptation to training, including holding on to fat rather than putting on lean muscle mass.

While many may believe that REDs is specific to the world of elite sport, my experience is that it is more common in those who are recreational or semi-professional: people who often don't have a wider support network monitoring training load, performance outcomes, and overall health.

Many athletes are of a particular personality: obsessive, self-critical perfectionists. While these traits can result in positive outcomes, when combined within a competitive environment they can become dysfunctional – creating the perfect storm for extreme behaviours.

The difficulty is that their compulsive behaviours create both physical pathways to a decline and an irrational way of thinking, making it very challenging to work with. Physically, when the body is under stress, levels of cortisol rise; when this is chronic, it prevents the pituitary gland from working effectively, leading to hormonal disturbances that have serious negative consequences. The more obsessive and restrictive an individual becomes, it affects not only the levels and transmission of neurotransmitters, but has also been shown to structurally affect the brain, making it more and more difficult to make decisions.

### Pursuit of perfect

In athletes, highly competitive environments create the need to constantly push and prove their place, often to the detriment of their long-term health. For the rest of us, when we struggle with our sense of self, anxiety increases and we crack the whip harder, but no matter what we do, we are never good enough. While love and happiness are positive emotions to experience, many of us run a mile (quite literally) when it comes to experiencing difficult emotions such as loss, uncertainty, pain, and trauma.

It's understandable. Many of us who suffer from anxiety know that it can be debilitating: the severe physical feelings that you can sense deep within you make you want to unzip and escape from your own body. However, the problem is that no matter what coping mechanisms you put in place to control, contain, and numb these difficult emotions, they are always temporary. Eventually, you have to choose to accept and work your way through them in order to finally come out the other side and get on with your life. This obviously feels terrifying, but working with a qualified psychological practitioner, as part of a wider support network (including a coach, dietitian, and medic) is critical. In order to change a behaviour, we have to challenge it. ☀

# POWER PLANTS

*The Happy Pear 20* is a celebration of two decades of delicious and sustainable living

Celebrate two decades of plant-based cooking with *The Happy Pear 20*, by David and Stephen Flynn (aka The Happy Pear). The book features revamped classics and fan favourites from their café, alongside stories and insights from the twins' journey in the food industry. With over 100 recipes, *The Happy Pear 20* is a testament to the flavourful

and healthy potential of plant-based cuisine, making it a valuable addition to any home cook's collection.

"Our diets consist of natural, plant-based food," The Happy Pear brothers tell *MF*. "Our philosophy is about eating as much whole plant food as possible, and to focus on as much local, seasonal, organic, nutrient-dense veg as we can."

"Our new book celebrates 20 years of our learnings, our failures and our experiences. It features our 100 best recipes that we've refined. And it's also our learnings and our failures from having been 20 years in business helping people to eat more veg. We've designed the book so that it's bursting full of soul and personality. We hope people will love it!"

## CINNAMON SWIRLS

We make hundreds of cinnamon swirls every weekend in our bakery. They are our most popular treat by a distance. This version is so practical and quick to make. We have simplified the process so they don't require any proofing, as they have no yeast. You can bake these in the oven or even in an air fryer.

### INGREDIENTS (makes 8):

#### For the dough

- 200g self-raising flour
- 35g icing sugar
- ¼ tsp salt
- 80g cold vegan butter, cut into cubes, plus extra for the tin
- 100ml oat milk

#### For the cinnamon filling

- 2 tbsp vegan butter
- 90g brown sugar
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- Cream cheese icing
- 4 tbsp vegan cream cheese
- 65g icing sugar
- ¼ tsp vanilla extract
- 1 tsp oat milk

#### METHOD:

1. Preheat the oven to 180°C / gas 6, or the air fryer on bake function to 160°C. Grease and line a 900g loaf tin.
2. Add the self-raising flour, icing sugar and a teaspoon of salt to a mixing bowl, and stir together. Add the butter, and use your fingers to rub the butter into the flour mixture until it looks like damp sand or breadcrumbs. Stir in the milk.
3. Using your hands or a wooden spoon, bring the dough together into a rough ball. Coat the dough in a little flour so it is easy to handle. Dust your counter with flour, place the dough on it and knead for 2-3 minutes. Using a rolling pin, roll out into a rectangle roughly 45cm x 30cm.
4. Melt the butter. In a separate bowl, mix the cinnamon and sugar together. Using a pastry brush, spread the melted butter over the dough, bringing it right to the edges. Then sprinkle over the cinnamon sugar as evenly as you can.
5. Starting at the long end of the rectangle, roll the dough up tightly into a log. Cut the log in half, then halve both pieces, and then halve each remaining piece - you should have 8 evenly sized swirls. Place them in the loaf tin face up.
6. Place the loaf tin into the preheated oven and bake for 25 minutes, or bake in the air fryer for 18-20 minutes.
7. While the rolls are in the oven, place the cream cheese in a bowl, then add the icing sugar, vanilla and milk. Use a fork to break it down and stir until smooth and super creamy.
8. When the rolls are ready, remove them from the oven or air fryer and drizzle the glaze over the top. They'll keep for 2-3 days in an airtight container.

PER SWIRL: Kcals: 298; Protein: 3g; Carbs: 45g; Fat: 13g; Fibre: 1g



## CARAMELISED RED ONION AND MUSHROOM TART Tatin

This is super-easy to make and serves as a beautiful light meal – the caramelised onions elevate the earthy mushrooms, and the flaky puff pastry gives it an indulgent quality.

### INGREDIENTS (serves 2-4):

- 4 red onions
- 2 cloves of garlic
- 150g mushrooms (oyster mushrooms are ideal)
- 1 tbsp oil
- 3 tbsp maple syrup
- 1 tbsp balsamic vinegar
- 2 tbsp tamari or soy sauce
- 15g fresh thyme
- 200g vegan cream cheese
- 1 sheet vegan puff pastry (320g), thawed if frozen

### METHOD:

1. Preheat your oven to 180°C fan / gas 6.
2. Peel the onions and cut them into fine halfmoons. Peel and finely dice the garlic. Roughly chop the mushrooms into slices.
3. Heat a large wide-bottomed frying pan over medium heat. Once hot, add 1 tablespoon of oil, followed by the onions, garlic and mushrooms. Cook for 10-15 minutes, stirring regularly, until they begin to char. To prevent sticking and to deglaze the pan, add 2-3 tablespoons of water as needed.
4. In a mug, combine the maple syrup, balsamic vinegar and tamari or soy sauce. Stir with a fork and add to the vegetables in the pan. Allow the mixture to reduce for 1-2 minutes, stirring frequently. Remove from the heat and allow to cool slightly.
5. Strip half the thyme leaves from the sprigs and stir them into the vegetable mixture.
6. Line a baking tray the same size as your puff pastry sheet with baking parchment. Spread the cooked vegetable mixture evenly across the tray. Dot the vegan cream cheese in small blobs over the vegetable mixture, distributing it as evenly as possible.
7. If necessary, trim the puff pastry to fit the size of your baking tray. Place it over the vegetables and cream cheese, tucking in the edges.
8. Bake in the preheated oven for 20-30 minutes, or until the pastry turns golden.
9. Remove the tart from the oven, and place a board larger than the pan over the top. Carefully invert the tart so the pastry is on the bottom. Garnish with the remaining thyme leaves, slice and serve warm.

PER SERVING: Kcals: 535; Protein: 8g  
Carbs: 58g; Fat: 33g; Fibre: 6g





taylor  
eye  
witness



Top the potato with  
100g of your favourite  
pesto before baking to  
take it to the next level.

“

This is the  
most popular  
main course  
in our range of  
food products

## SHEPHERDLESS PIE

Growing up, shepherd's pie was one of our favourite dishes on a cold winter's evening. This is our 'shepherdless' version, and it's the most popular main course in our range of food products. It's easy to make, and if you want to make it a little richer, add some grated cheese to the top before baking.

### INGREDIENTS (serves 4-6):

#### **For the lentil and vegetable filling**

- 2 onions
- 3 cloves of garlic
- 1 carrot
- 1 parsnip
- 10 fine beans
- 2 x 400g tins of lentils
- 1 tbsp oil
- 2 x 400g tins of chopped tomatoes
- 1 tsp smoked paprika
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 tbsp maple syrup
- 2 tbsp tamari or soy sauce

#### **For the mashed potato topping**

- 1½ kg potatoes
- 100ml oat milk
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- Salt and ground black pepper

#### **To garnish**

- A few sprigs of fresh thyme

### METHOD:

1. Preheat the oven to 200°C fan / gas 7. Peel the onions and garlic and finely dice. Chop the carrot, parsnip and fine beans into bite-sized pieces. Drain and rinse the lentils. Cut the potatoes into even, bite-sized pieces for even boiling, leaving the skins on.
2. Fill a saucepan with boiling water. Add the chopped potatoes and 1 tablespoon of salt. Bring to a boil, then reduce to a simmer, and cook for 20 minutes or until soft. Drain and set aside.
3. Heat a large saucepan over a medium heat, add 1 tablespoon of oil, and sauté the onions for 5-6 minutes, until lightly browned. Add the garlic, chopped vegetables and lentils with a pinch of salt. Cover and sweat for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally. If necessary, add 2 tablespoons of water to prevent sticking.
4. Stir in the chopped tomatoes, 1 teaspoon of salt, 1 teaspoon of black pepper, the smoked paprika, bay leaves, maple syrup and tamari or soy sauce. Mix well, bring to a boil, then reduce the heat to medium, and simmer for 5-6 minutes. Remove from the heat and adjust the seasoning to taste.
5. To the boiled and drained potatoes, add the oat milk, 3 tablespoons of olive oil, 1 teaspoon of salt, and 1 teaspoon of black pepper. Mash until smooth and adjust seasoning to taste.
6. In a casserole dish, add all the lentil filling, ⅔ of the way up the dish, then top with the mashed potato, spreading evenly.
7. Use a fork to create ridges on the mashed potato topping for a crispy finish.
8. Bake in the preheated oven for 15 minutes, or until the potato topping is golden.
9. Remove the thyme leaves from their stalks and sprinkle over the cooked pie. Serve hot with your favourite salads.

PER SERVING: Kcals: 463; Protein: 16g; Carbs: 80g; Fat: 10g; Fibre: 15g

## MUSHROOM AND PUMPKIN WELLINGTON WITH REDCURRANT JUS

This Wellington is a stunning centrepiece, perfect for any festive occasion, such as Christmas dinner. The savoury filling encased in flaky puff pastry pairs beautifully with the tangy and sweet redcurrant jus, making it a hit for any gathering. Serve with roasted veggies for a complete meal. This recipe makes two Wellingtons.

### INGREDIENTS (serves 6):

#### For the almonds

- 200g almonds
- 2 tbsp tamari or soy sauce
- 2 tbsp maple syrup

#### For the Wellington

- 1 leek
- 2 cloves of garlic
- 200g oyster mushrooms
- 10 medium sage leaves
- 10 sprigs of fresh thyme
- 200g pumpkin
- 200g cooked chestnuts
- 1 tbsp oil
- 3 tbsp tamari or soy sauce
- Pinch of salt
- ½ tsp black pepper
- 150g cooked couscous
- 2 × 320g sheets vegan puff pastry, defrosted if frozen
- 2 tbsp oat milk or non-dairy milk of choice

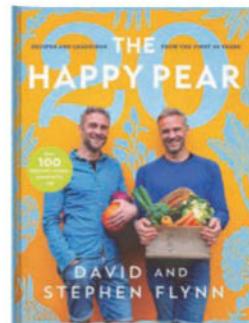
#### For the redcurrant jus

- 100g fresh redcurrants
- 4 tbsp maple syrup
- 200ml red wine
- 1 tbsp balsamic vinegar
- 500ml vegetable stock

### METHOD:

1. Preheat the oven to 200°C fan / gas 7. Roughly chop or crush the almonds, then spread on a baking tray. Drizzle with 2 tablespoons of tamari or soy sauce and 2 tablespoons of maple syrup, and roast for 10 minutes.
2. Slice the leek and wash thoroughly. Peel and dice the garlic. Roughly chop the mushrooms. Remove the sage leaves and thyme leaves from their stalks, and finely chop the sage. Grate the flesh of the pumpkin, discarding the skin and the seeds. Roughly chop the cooked chestnuts.
3. Heat a large pan, add 1 tablespoon of oil, and sauté the leek for 3-4 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add the garlic, mushrooms, grated pumpkin and a pinch of salt, and cook for a further 7-10 minutes. Stir in the chestnuts, tamari or soy sauce, thyme, sage, and black pepper, and cook for 3-4 minutes, stirring regularly. Remove from the heat and mix in the cooked couscous and roasted almonds. Adjust the seasoning to taste.
4. Lay out one sheet of puff pastry on a piece of baking parchment. Place half of the filling in the centre lengthwise, leaving space at the edges. Compact the filling to help it hold its shape. Fold the pastry over the filling, connecting in the centre. Brush with a little water or oat milk and press the join together, sealing it, and then trim any excess. Once the Wellington is sealed, carefully roll it over so that the seam is at the bottom. Tuck and seal both ends. Lift the baking parchment with the Wellington and place on a baking tray. Cut out decorations from any leftover pastry, if you like. Gently score the pastry in a criss-cross pattern (ensuring not to cut through the pastry) and place any pastry decorations on top. Brush with oat milk. Repeat this process with the second sheet of pastry to make the second Wellington.
5. Bake in the preheated oven for 30-45 minutes, until golden.
6. Combine the redcurrants, maple syrup, red wine, balsamic vinegar and vegetable stock in a saucepan. Put on a high heat and bring to a boil. Whisk to break down the currants. Once boiling, reduce to a simmer and cook until it reduces by about two-thirds, which will likely take over 20 minutes.
7. Use a serrated knife to slice the Wellingtons. Serve with the redcurrant jus and your choice of roasted vegetables. Enjoy! 🍂

PER SERVING: Kcals: 800; Protein: 21g; Carbs: 83g; Fat: 46g; Fibre: 11g



*The Happy Pear 20* by David and Stephen Flynn is published by Gill Books, priced at £23.99. It's available from all good booksellers.



If fresh redcurrants are unavailable, you can use 2 tablespoons of redcurrant jelly instead of the currants and maple syrup. And if cooked chestnuts are unavailable, just use 200g of cashew nuts instead.

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YOUR BLUEPRINT FOR SUCCESS

# TRAINER

## 25 BEST TRX EXERCISES

In the pages that follow, TRX expert Rob Carr demonstrates how suspension training can elevate your workouts with versatile bodyweight exercises that enhance strength, flexibility, and core stability ➤







“The TRX Suspension Trainer is a remarkably versatile fitness tool that stands out for its lightweight and portable design, allowing you to train virtually anywhere,” says Carr. “Focused on bodyweight movements, it promotes natural joint alignment and reduces undue stress. Its effectiveness lies in its ability to challenge users to perfect foundational movements before advancing to more complex exercises, making it a truly humbling fitness experience.”

For advanced gym-goers, TRX training offers unique benefits by enhancing functional strength, improving flexibility, and engaging core stability in ways that traditional weightlifting might not. It challenges your body in multiple planes of motion, increases muscular endurance, and can help break through fitness plateaus by adding variety and intensity to your routine. “With over 12 years of experience using and coaching clients on the TRX,” adds Carr, “across the pages that follow I’ve compiled my top five favourite exercises for each body part.”

## SUSPEND BELIEF

**Five benefits of suspension training**

### 1. Core stability

Suspension training requires constant core engagement, which enhances overall core strength, stability, and control. This foundational strength translates to better performance in other physical activities.

### 2. Functional strength

By incorporating bodyweight movements that mimic everyday activities, suspension training helps develop functional strength, improving your overall physical capabilities and reducing the risk of injury.

### 3. Versatility and adaptability

Suspension training can be used for a wide range of exercises targeting different muscle groups, making it suitable for all fitness levels. You can easily adjust the intensity by changing your body angle or the strap length.

### 4. Flexibility and mobility

Many suspension exercises promote flexibility and mobility by allowing for a greater range of motion. This can lead to improved athletic performance and decreased tightness.

### 5. Effective cardio workouts

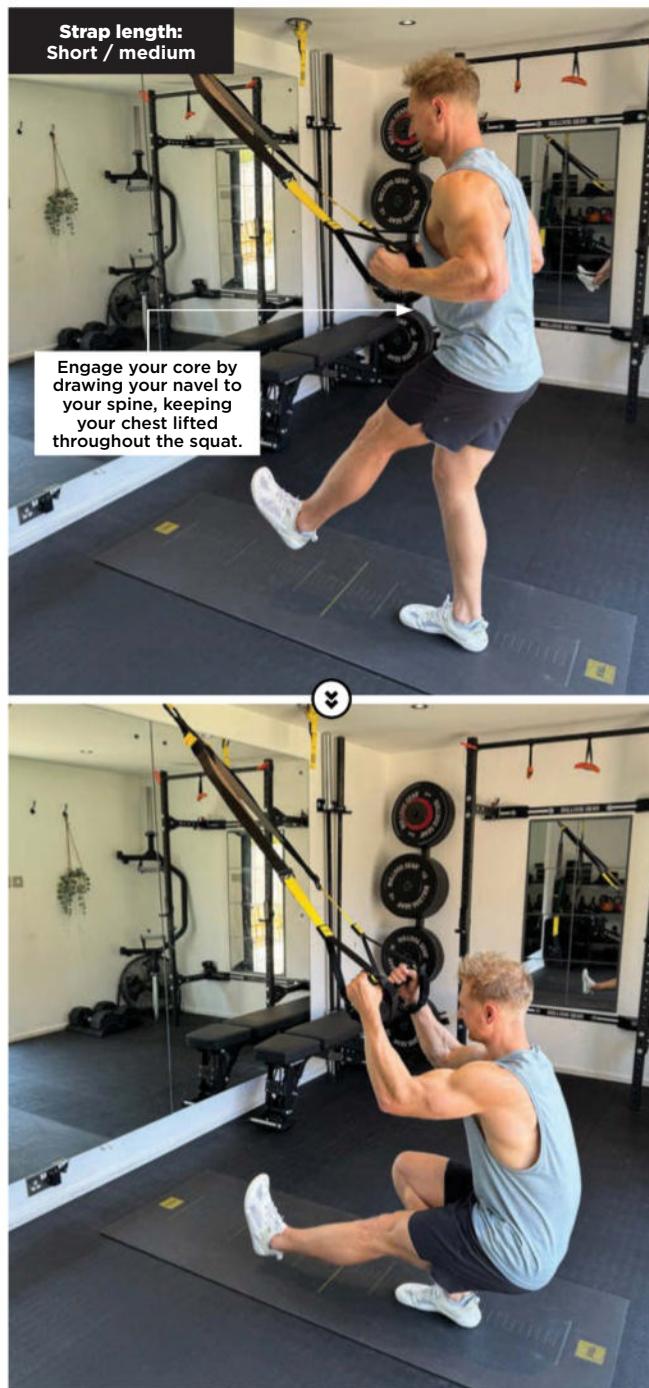
Suspension training can be combined with HIIT to provide an excellent cardio workout. The dynamic movements elevate the heart rate, helping to improve endurance and torch calories.

**1. TRX PISTOL SQUAT** 

**Recommended reps:** 8-10 each leg

**Why:** A great movement to identify strength and mobility differences between legs and train each individually.

- Hold the TRX with your arms bent by your rib cage
- Lower your bum towards your heel, trying to keep your knee vertically in line with your toes. The non-working leg stays straight out in front
- Drive up by pushing the ground away, using the straps a little for support

**2. TRX HAMSTRING CURL** 

**Recommended reps:** 10-15

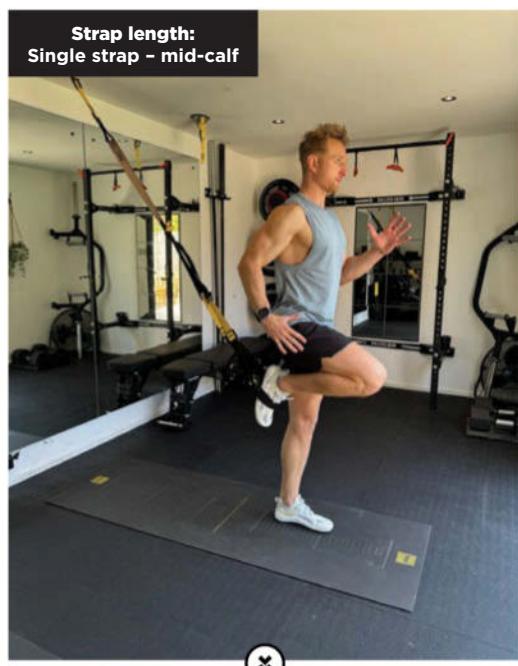
**Why:** An excellent exercise to engage the hamstrings, mimicking movements like sprinting and jumping explosively.

- Place your heels in the foot cradles while lying on your back
- Drive your elbows down by your side and push the heels down into the TRX to create tension
- Push your bum in the air and pull your heels towards your bum, aiming to get your hips high as you pull the heels in
- Slowly extend the legs away back to the starting position, lowering the bum to the floor

### 3. TRX SUSPENDED LUNGE

**Recommended reps:** 10-12 each leg  
**Why:** All runners should perform this move! It loads the hip flexors and maintains balance through powerful single-leg drives.

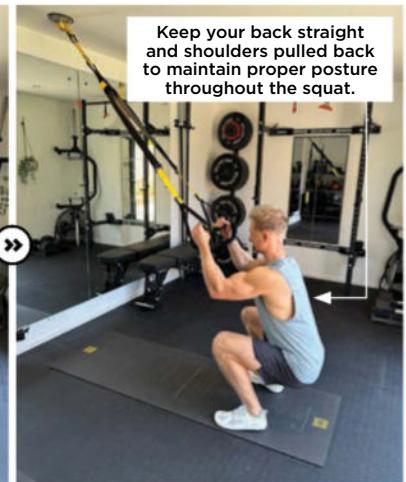
- Place one foot in the TRX strap and move away from the TRX with your standing leg
- Lower down into a lunge so your back knee almost touches the floor, simultaneously raising the opposite arm to the working leg
- Drive the ground down and push up to a high position, changing arms as you move up



### 4. TRX SQUAT

**Recommended reps:** 15-20  
**Why:** A perfect way to rehab or introduce beginners to squatting correctly by using the TRX to counterbalance. This enables more depth and control in the bottom phase of the squat.

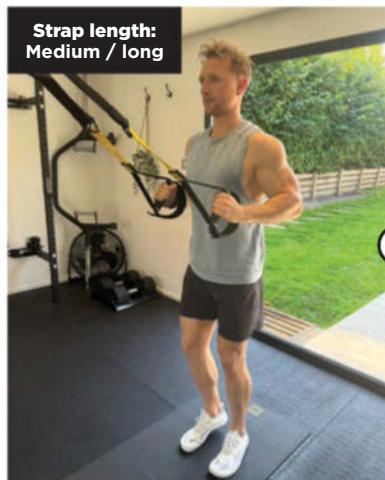
- With your feet hip-width apart, hold the TRX with your arms bent by your rib cage
- Lower your bum down towards your heels, holding the TRX for balance and taking some weight off the legs
- Once you reach your lowest point, push the feet down into the floor and return back to a tall stand



### 5. TRX LATERAL LUNGE

**Recommended reps:** 10-12 each leg  
**Why:** For added hip strength and mobility, holding the TRX straps allows you to get deeper into the lateral movement.

- Hold the TRX straps to your rib cage and step towards one side, lowering your bum down and bending your outside leg
- Aim to keep the central leg straight as you lower down with your arms fully lengthened at the bottom
- Push off the outside leg back to the starting position and repeat



**6. TRX WIDE-GRIP PULL-UP** ✓**Recommended reps:** 8-10**Why:** Wide-grip pull-ups are one of the best upper-body exercises. By reducing the load, you can perform these with perfect execution and the right amount of range.

- Sit under the TRX straps and ensure your arms are fully lengthened when you hold them
- Pull your head through the straps and move the arms and elbows out wide
- Once your head has reached the top, lower down under control by lengthening the arms back to the start

**7. TRX LOW ROW** ✓**Recommended reps:** 10-15**Why:** A fan favourite that fires up the posterior chain by pulling the torso towards the straps using the lats, rear deltoids, and biceps.

- Begin with your arms fully lengthened and shoulders down and back. Your body should be in a standing plank position
- Pull your torso towards the TRX with your rib cage coming to your hands. Keep your head in line with the spine
- Lengthen the arms and lower under control, without dropping the hips at the end

## 8. TRX SHOULDER Y ❤

**Recommended reps:** 8-12

**Why:** This move allows you to work the shoulders and improve upper back posture without the difficulty of overhead pressing.

- Begin with your arms fully lengthened and shoulders down and back. Your body should be in a standing plank position
- With your arms completely straight, pull your body through by lifting your arms into a 'Y' position (like the YMCA dance pose)
- Lower your arms back down in front of you with your body moving back to the start

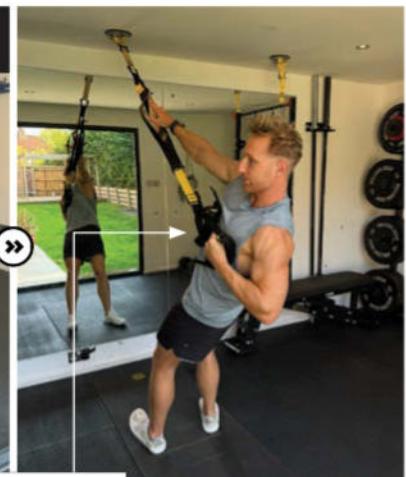


## 9. TRX POWER PULL ❤

**Recommended reps:** 8-10 each side

**Why:** This move encourages powerful pulls and core rotation, mimicking the dynamics of sports with throwing movements.

- Hold one TRX handle and step as close to the TRX as you can while keeping your body straight
- Open the torso by rotating backward, reaching towards the floor behind you, looking to the side
- Rotate and pull back towards the strap, reaching the free hand up towards the strap, finishing with the 'TRX hand' close to the rib cage

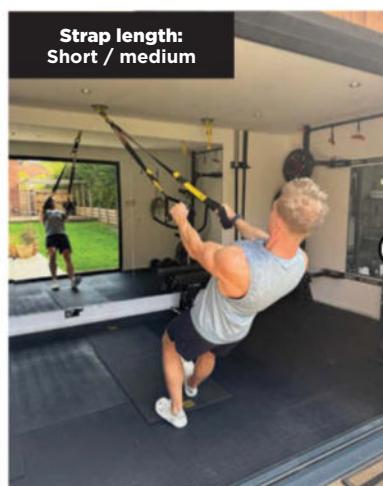


## 10. TRX HIGH ROW ❤

**Recommended reps:** 12-15

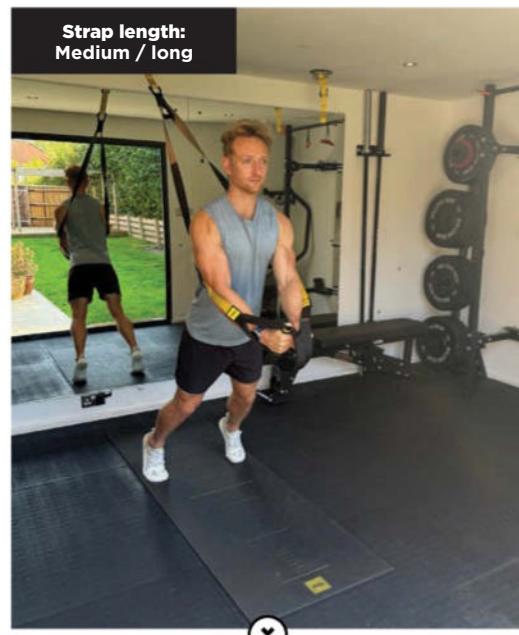
**Why:** A great exercise to strengthen the upper-back muscles, which helps lift the chest and improve overall posture – a must for desk workers.

- Begin with your arms fully lengthened with your hands facing down
- Pull your face towards the TRX, driving the elbows back and finishing with your fists on either side of your mouth
- Lengthen the arms slowly back to the start position and repeat



**11. TRX CHEST PRESS** **Recommended reps:** 10-15**Why:** Similar to push-ups but with less stable weight, requiring increased shoulder stability and range of motion due to the added depth potential.

- Begin with your arms straight, TRX straps just above the arms, either side of your shoulders
- Engage your core and lower the body down by bending the elbows as far as your shoulders feel comfortable
- Push your body back to the starting position, keeping your shoulders low and core engaged throughout

**12. TRX FLYE** **Recommended reps:** 8-12**Why:** Strengthens the pecs and anterior deltoid, and requires engaging the obliques more due to the instability of the straps.

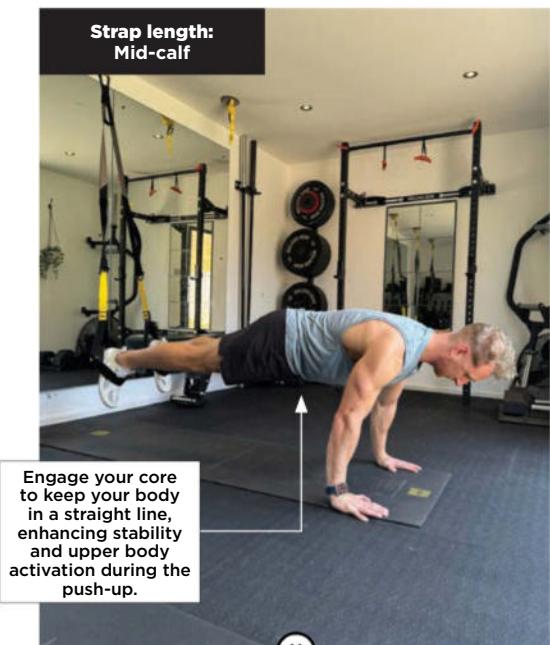
- Start with your arms straight, TRX straps just above the arms, either side of your shoulders, and palms facing each other
- Lower the body by moving the hands away from each other to the side, keeping a slight bend in the elbows
- Grip tightly on the handles and pull the hands back together, simultaneously moving the body back to the start position

### 13. TRX PUSH-UP

**Recommended reps:** 8-12

**Why:** For a more challenging core and upper-body workout, this push-up variation engages the core and requires more upper-body strength due to the raised, unstable legs.

- Place your feet into the TRX foot cradles, with your toes pointing to the floor, and assume a high plank position
- Bend the elbows, moving the body towards the floor, keeping your hips in line with the body throughout
- Push the ground away, returning to the start

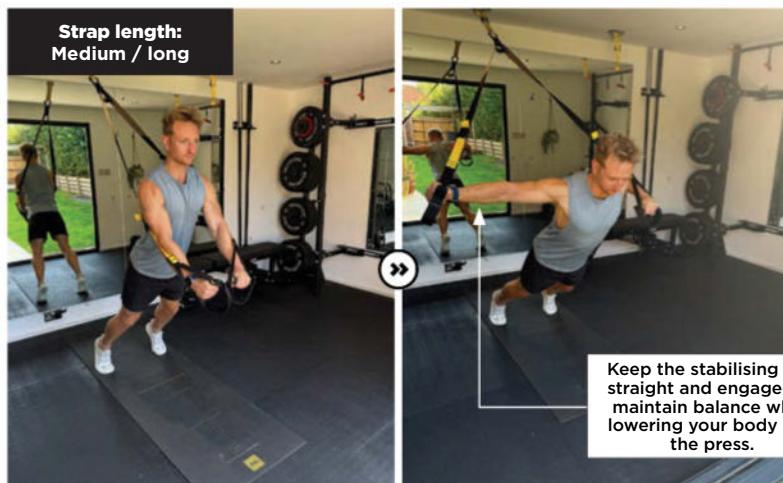


### 14. TRX ARCHER PRESS

**Recommended reps:** 4-6 each side

**Why:** This is a great regression from the TRX flye, offering stability from the other arm while experiencing the flye's movement.

- Start with your arms straight, TRX straps just above the arms, with one fist facing forward and the other at a 90-degree angle
- Bend the fist-facing arm while lengthening the other arm away, lowering the body down slowly
- Press the bent arm and move the lengthened arm back to the start, then repeat on the other side



### 15. TRX PRESS TO FLYE

**Recommended reps:** 6-8 each side

**Why:** An advanced movement requiring mind-muscle connection, serious shoulder stability, and constant core engagement for controlled rotation.

- Hold the TRX with one arm and place the other hand on the floor. Keep the legs wide for added stability
- Perform a push-up and on the way up ensure you keep the TRX close to the body by moving the TRX hand under your chest
- When stable, rotate the arm, looking at the hand in the air, and repeat



**16. TRX REVERSE CURL** ❤**Recommended reps:** 8-10**Why:** These work the brachialis under the biceps, which adds size to the entire biceps and pushes them up and out.

- Hold the TRX straps with long arms and palms facing down
- Grip the handles tightly and pull your fists to your eyes, keeping your elbows high
- Lengthen the arms slowly, trying to keep your elbows up throughout

**17. TRX SINGLE-ARM CURL** ❤**Recommended reps:** 10-12 each arm**Why:** Training each arm individually helps identify weaknesses. Full arm lengthening ensures maximum range of motion in each curl.

- Stand side-facing the TRX, holding the handle with one arm, positioning your outside leg in front
- Pull your body towards the TRX by pulling the strap towards your ear, keeping your elbow high
- Lengthen the arm slowly, keeping your elbows up throughout and body straight

## 18. TRX TRICEPS EXTENSION

**Recommended reps:** 12-15

**Why:** Isolates triceps by keeping elbows in your eyeline, preventing shoulder assistance - a perfect tri training movement.

- Stand facing away from the TRX, holding grips with arms out straight, hands in line with your head
- Lower the body by bending the elbows, allowing hands to move behind the head
- Push against the TRX to lengthen your arms, moving back to the start position

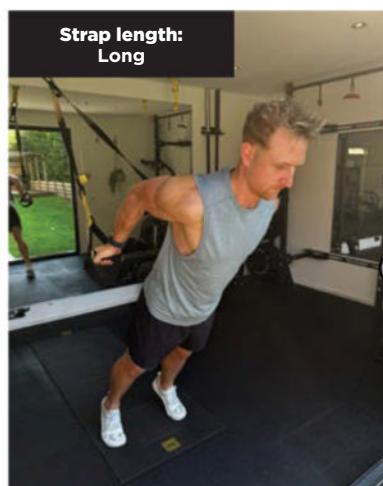


## 19. TRX DRAG CURL

**Recommended reps:** 6-10

**Why:** Emphasises the long head of the biceps for improved 'peak' when flexed.

- Begin holding TRX handles facing away, palms forward, elbows behind, slightly bent. Body leaning forward at start
- Pull on the TRX straps, moving body backwards as hands come close to ribs
- Lengthen arms slowly, lowering body back to start



## 20. TRX LOW BICEPS CURL

**Recommended reps:** 6-10

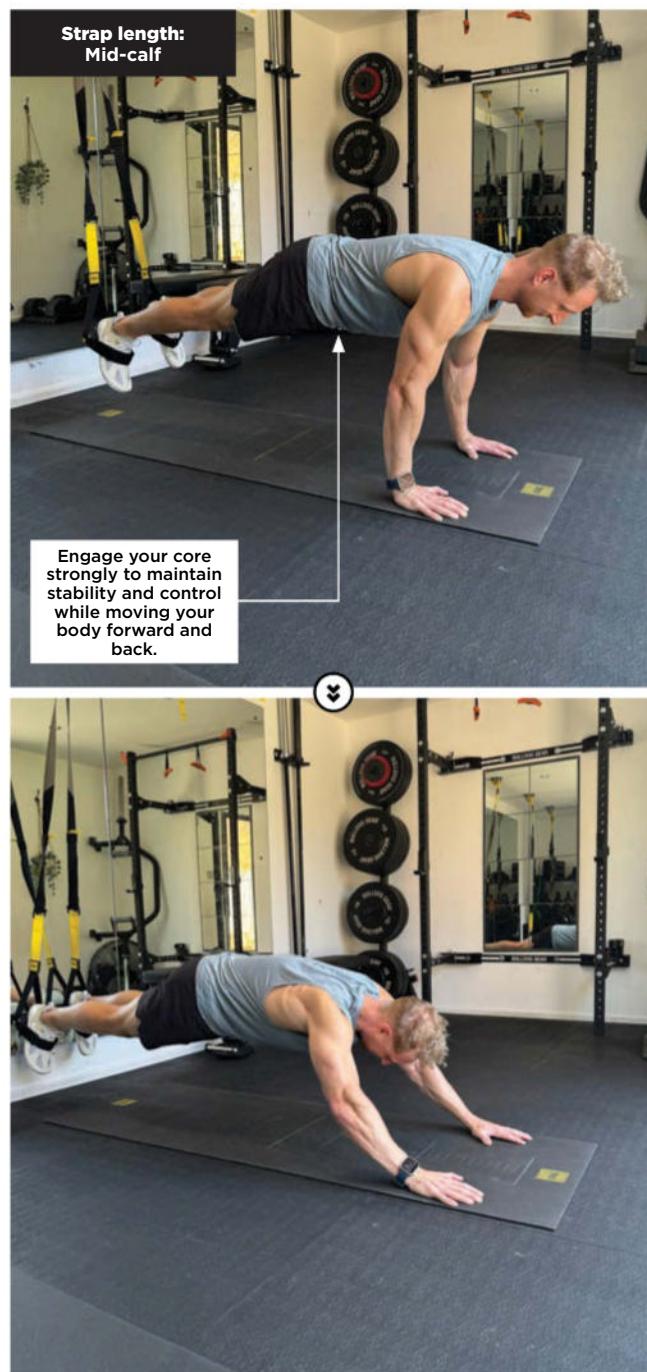
**Why:** Close to the anchor point, these curls add serious load, maximising biceps strength and size.

- Hold the handles and bend your knees to get close to the TRX straps, keeping your hips up by squeezing your glutes
- Start with straight arms and pull the straps so your eyebrows meet your fists
- Control the lowering of your body by lengthening the arms, returning back to the start



**21. TRX BODY SAW** ❤**Recommended reps:** 4-8**Why:** A challenging core exercise, intensifying the plank to test strength and stability; only progress when ready, to avoid discomfort.

- Place your feet into the foot cradles, pointing your toes to the floor, and position yourself in a forearm plank position
- Move your body backwards, keeping your hips in line with the body and forearms still; only move back as far as comfortable
- Move the body forwards to the start position and repeat

**22. TRX KNEE TUCK** ❤**Recommended reps:** 10-12**Why:** Strengthens core muscles and enhances control, similar to a hanging knee raise focusing on lower abs.

- Place your feet into the foot cradles, with toes pointing to the floor, and position yourself in the high plank position
- Pull your knees into your chest, slightly raising your hips as you do so
- Return the legs back to the straight position and repeat

## 23. TRX PIKE ❤

**Recommended reps:** 8-10

**Why:** A progression from the TRX Knee Tuck, increases load on core and upper body while challenging hamstring flexibility.

- Place your feet into the foot cradles, with toes pointing to the floor, and position yourself in the high plank position
- Keeping your legs straight, pull your feet towards your face, driving your hips up high so your head moves between your shoulders
- Lower the legs back down and your body back to the straight position and repeat

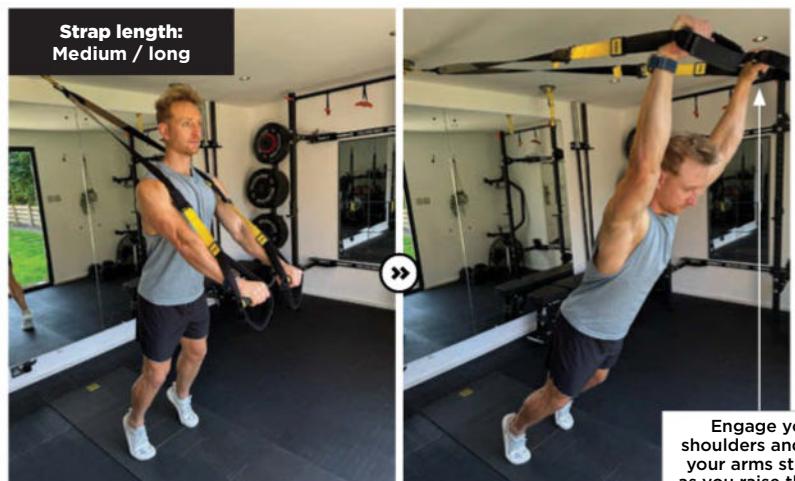


## 24. TRX SUPERMAN ❤

**Recommended reps:** 6-10

**Why:** Functions like an abs roll-out but with 360-degree strap instability, strengthening core for limb movement across daily activities.

- Begin with your arms straight, TRX straps just above the arms, either side of your shoulders
- Engage your core and lower the body down by raising the hands up, keeping the arms straight
- Once the head is between the shoulders and the body is straight, push the handles down and return the body to the start position



## 25. TRX SIDE PLANK HIP DIP ❤

**Recommended reps:** 6-10

**Why:** Enhances the side plank by adding movement and rotation, intensifying oblique activation.

- Place your feet into the foot cradles, and turn them so the straps are on the outside of one foot and inside the other. Position the top leg in front of the bottom
- Assume the side plank position with your elbow under your shoulder and raise the hips, rotating the torso and threading the free hand between the floor and your lower hips
- Lower the hips down, turn back, open the chest, and raise the arm in the air



# SWEET SIXTEEN

**Sculpt and strengthen your core with these 16 abs-defining exercises**

**A**chieving a rock-solid core isn't just about aesthetics; it's about enhancing your strength, stability, and overall health. Whether your goal is a defined six-pack, better posture, or improved sporting performance, honing in on your core is essential.

In this section we've rounded up some of the best abs exercises to hit every angle of your midsection, from the rectus abdominis to the obliques and deeper stabilising muscles. Integrate these exercises into your routine two to three times a week, and you'll not only build visible muscle definition but also fortify your core against injuries. Pair these moves with cardio and sound nutrition to reveal the full potential of your newfound strength.

## YOU WILL NEED:

- Exercise mat
- Bench
- Dumbbell
- Medicine ball
- Gym ball
- Barbell

## WHAT WEIGHT?

When doing exercises that require additional resistance, 7-12kg is recommended for a dumbbell or medicine ball. Increase or decrease this weight if you're able or unable to complete the prescribed number of reps.

## FIND YOUR LEVEL

**Beginners** are those who haven't trained regularly in the past six months and who cannot do 5 chin-ups and 15 full push-ups.

**Intermediates** are those who have been regularly doing bodyweight or resistance-training exercises in the past three months.

**Advanced** are those who have trained regularly for three months or more and who can perform more than 5 chin-ups and 25 push-ups.

### 1. RUSSIAN TWIST

**Beginner:** 2 x 8-10 reps

**Intermediate:** 2 x 10-12 reps

**Advanced:** 2 x 12-15 reps

**Why:** Primarily targets the obliques and transverse abdominis, essential for maintaining balance, enhancing athletic performance, and supporting proper posture.

- Sit on the floor with your hips and knees bent, holding a medicine ball close to your chest
- Lean back to 45 degrees, keeping your back straight
- Twist to the right and touch the ball on the floor lightly, return to the centre and twist to the left to complete 1 rep





## 2. REVERSE CRUNCH

**Beginner:** 2 x 8-12 reps

**Intermediate:** 2 x 12-15 reps

**Advanced:** 2 x 15-20 reps

**Why:** This exercise helps isolate and strengthen the lower abs more effectively than many traditional abs exercises, which is crucial for developing a balanced core.

- Begin lying on your back with your hips and knees bent at 90 degrees, your feet off the floor and arms across your chest
- Exhale and crunch upwards, lifting your upper back 4-6 inches off the floor
- Lower and repeat to complete set

**3. REVERSE CRUNCH WITH TWIST ➔****Beginner:** 2 x 8-10 reps**Intermediate:** 2 x 10-12 reps**Advanced:** 2 x 12-16 reps

**Why:** This variation targets multiple muscle groups in the core, including the lower abs and obliques. It also improves rotational strength, which is beneficial for sports that involve twisting motions, such as tennis or golf.

- Begin lying on your back with your hips and knees bent to 90 degrees, feet off the floor with a medicine ball between your knees. Place your arms by your sides with palms facing down. This is the start position
- Contract your abs and pull your knees towards your chest, lifting your lower back off the floor, then return to the start position
- Lower your knees slightly to the right and then return to centre – that is 1 rep
- Lower your knees to the left on the next rep, continuing to alternate sides with each rep

When twisting, ensure your shoulders stay in contact with the floor.



The combination of strengthening both the front and side abdominal muscles can contribute to better posture and reduce the risk of lower back pain.





Keep your lower back pressed into the floor to protect it from strain.



Exhale as you crunch up and inhale as you return to the start.



#### **4. DOUBLE CRUNCH**

**Beginner:** 2 x 8-10 reps

**Intermediate:** 2 x 10-12 reps

**Advanced:** 2 x 12-15 reps

**Why:** This move combines the movements of both traditional crunches and reverse crunches, engaging the upper and lower parts of the abs simultaneously.

- Begin lying on your back with knees bent, feet slightly off the floor and crossed, with a medicine ball between your knees and your hands across your chest
- Exhale and lift your upper body off the floor and pull your knees in towards your chest. Holding this position, take hold of the ball and bring it towards your chest
- Inhale and return your upper body and legs to the start position. Transfer the ball back to your legs on the next repetition; continue alternating ball position with each rep

**5. STAR CRUNCH** ❤

**Beginner:** 2 x 8-10 reps  
**Intermediate:** 2 x 10-12 reps  
**Advanced:** 2 x 12-15 reps

**Why:** This movement not only strengthens the core but also engages the hip flexors and improves mobility.

- Begin lying on your back with legs straight and feet around three feet apart, your arms extended with hands around three feet apart
- Crunch slightly upwards, lifting your right leg. Bring your left hand to meet your right foot, keeping arms and legs straight
- Lower to the start position and repeat, lifting and reaching your right hand towards your left leg
- Continue, alternating arms and legs with each rep to complete the set



## 6. SEATED JACK-KNIFE

**Beginner:** 2 x 10-12 reps

**Intermediate:** 2 x 12-15 reps

**Advanced:** 2 x 15-20 reps

**Why:** The simultaneous coordination and movement of the upper and lower body engages not only the rectus abdominis but also the obliques and the transverse abdominis muscles.

- Begin seated on a sturdy chair or bench, holding the back of it for support
- Extend your legs in front of you with knees slightly bent and lean back to a 45-degree angle
- Simultaneously bring your legs towards your chest and your chest towards your knees
- Return to the start and repeat to complete the set



Avoid using momentum by performing the movement slowly and deliberately.



## 7. GYM PALL PIKE

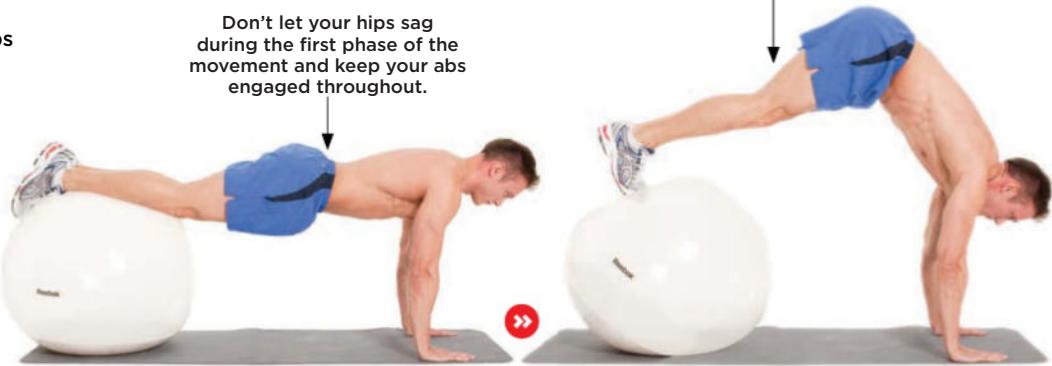
**Beginner:** 2 x 10-12 reps  
**Intermediate:** 2 x 12-15 reps  
**Advanced:** 2 x 15-20 reps

**Why:** The instability of the ball adds an extra challenge, forcing the core to work harder to maintain balance and control.

- Begin in a push-up position with your hands directly below your shoulders and your shins resting on a stability ball. Your body should be in a straight line from shoulders to ankles
- Roll the ball in towards your hands, contracting your abs and lifting your hips
- Pause, then roll back to the start position and repeat

Don't let your hips sag during the first phase of the movement and keep your abs engaged throughout.

Keep your legs straight and focus on using your abdominal muscles to control the movement, rather than relying on momentum.



## 8. SICILIAN CRUNCH

**Beginner:** 2 x 4-6 reps  
**Intermediate:** 2 x 6-10 reps  
**Advanced:** 2 x 10-12 reps

**Why:** Extended arms require your core to work harder to stabilise your body, enhancing overall core engagement and strength.

- Begin lying on your back with knees bent, feet flat on the floor and holding a medicine ball to your chest
- Raise your upper body to around a 45-degree angle, then, holding this position, extend the medicine ball above your head
- Keeping the medicine ball above your head, lower your upper body to the floor for a count of four
- Return back to the raised position



Sit up further and hold a more upright position if you feel any pain in your lower back.



Before you start the crunch, engage your core by drawing your belly button slightly towards your spine.



## **9. WEIGHTED COMBINED CRUNCH**

**Beginner:** 2 x 8-10 reps

**Intermediate:** 2 x 10-12 reps

**Advanced:** 2 x 12-15 reps

**Why:** The added weight increases the resistance and effort required, which helps build muscle strength and endurance more effectively than bodyweight crunches alone.

- Begin lying on your back with your hips and knees bent, a medicine ball between your knees with feet off the floor, crossed slightly. Place a dumbbell across your upper chest and hold in place with your hands
- Crunch up, bringing your knees and shoulders towards each other, then slowly lower to the start



Choose an appropriate weight that challenges you without compromising form. If you find yourself straining or unable to maintain form, opt for a lighter weight.



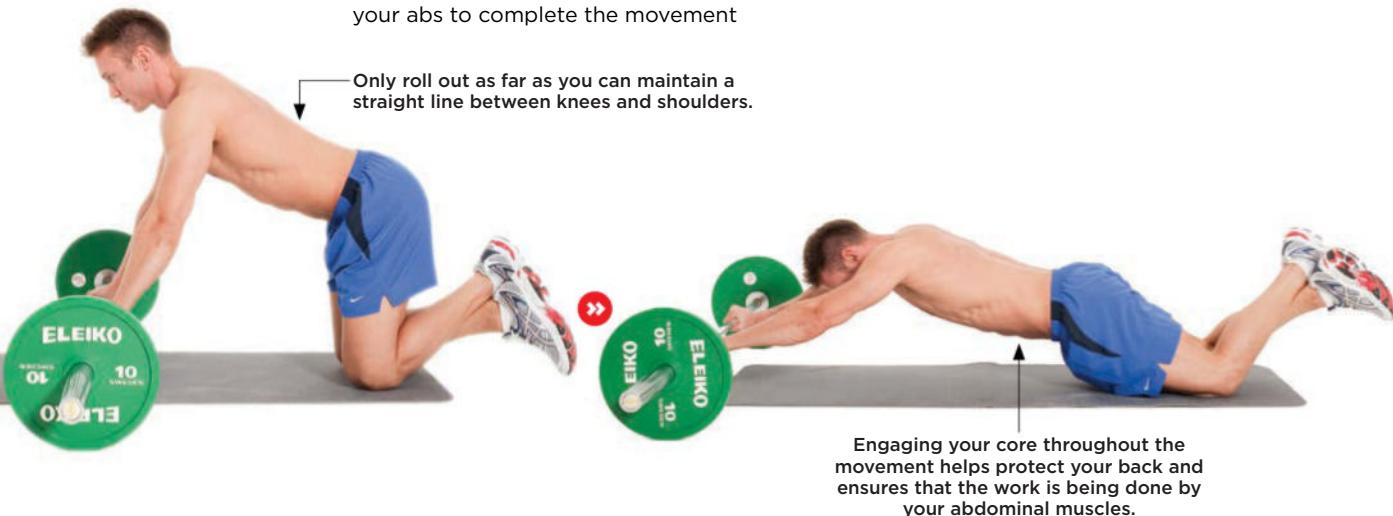
## 10. ROLLOUT

**Beginners:** 2 x 6-8 reps  
**Intermediate:** 2 x 8-10 reps  
**Advanced:** 2 x 10-12 reps

**Why:** Intensely targets the entire abdominal region, including the rectus abdominis, obliques, and the deep core muscles such as the transverse abdominis.

- Begin on your knees holding an ab roller or barbell in front of you with both hands, arms straight
- Keeping your abs engaged, roll the barbell or roller forward as far as you can without arching your back
- Slowly roll back to the start position, concentrating on using your abs to complete the movement

Only roll out as far as you can maintain a straight line between knees and shoulders.



Engaging your core throughout the movement helps protect your back and ensures that the work is being done by your abdominal muscles.

Move slowly and deliberately, ensuring that you are using your abs to twist, rather than pulling on your neck or using momentum.



## 11. BICYCLE CRUNCH

**Beginner:** 2 x 8-10 reps  
**Intermediate:** 2 x 10-12 reps  
**Advanced:** 2 x 12-15 reps

**Why:** A highly effective exercise that targets the entire core, particularly the rectus abdominis and obliques, through a dynamic, twisting motion.

- Begin seated on the floor with your hips and knees bent, feet off the floor slightly. Lean back so your upper body is at around a 45-degree angle to the floor, with your hands by either side of your head
- Twist your torso to the right as you bring your right knee towards your chest and straighten your left leg
- Twist to the left and alternate leg positions
- Continue to twist to either side with each rep, performing a slow cycling movement with your legs

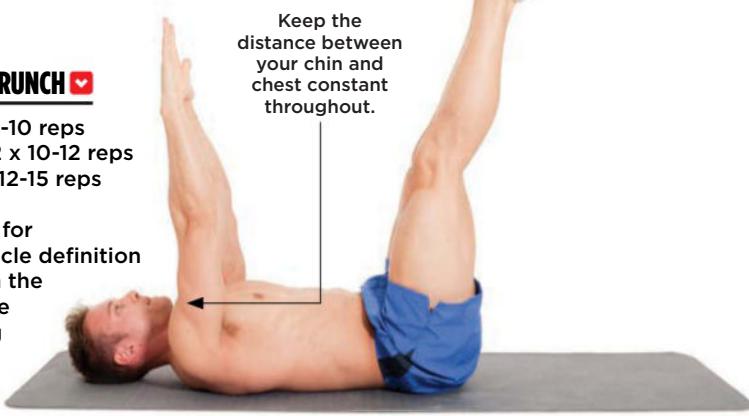


## 12. TOE-TOUCH CRUNCH

**Beginner:** 2 x 8-10 reps  
**Intermediate:** 2 x 10-12 reps  
**Advanced:** 2 x 12-15 reps

**Why:** Effective for enhancing muscle definition and strength in the upper abs while also promoting flexibility in your hamstrings and lower back due to the extended leg position.

- Lie on your back with your legs and arms extended towards the ceiling
- Slowly lift your head and shoulders off the floor, reaching as high as you can towards your toes
- Lower down and repeat to complete the set



Engage your core to keep your hips in line with your body and prevent them from sagging or lifting too high.

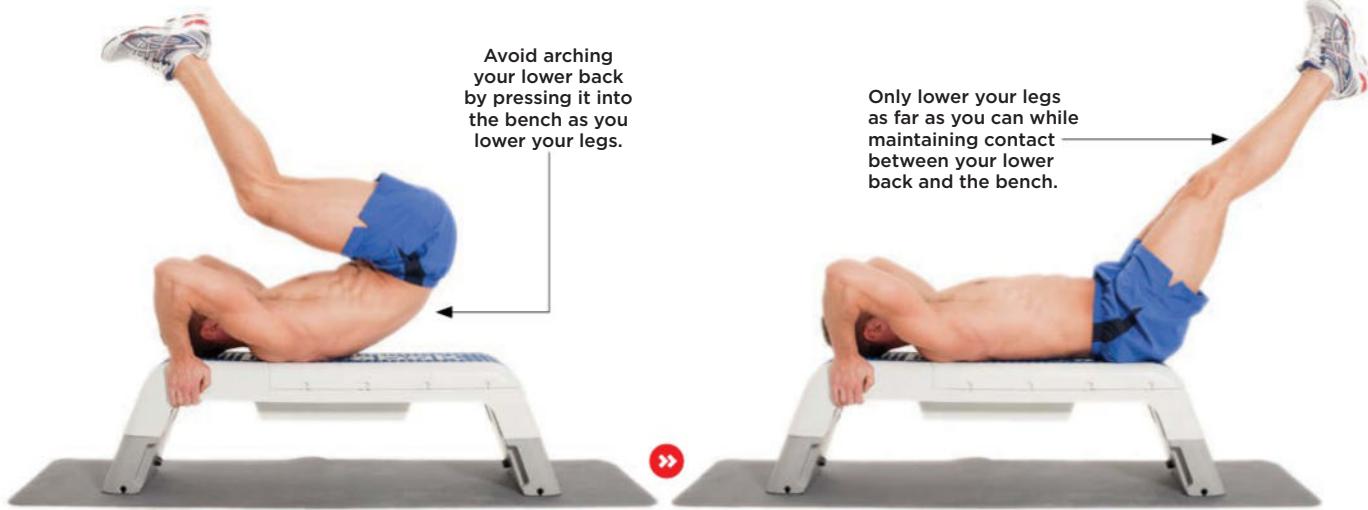


## 13. GYM BALL PLANK

**Beginner:**  
2 x 15-20 secs  
**Intermediate:**  
2 x 20-30 secs  
**Advanced:**  
2 x 30-45 secs

**Why:** The gym ball plank increases instability, requiring your core muscles to work harder to maintain balance.

- Begin with your shins resting on a gym ball and your upper body resting on your hands, your body in a straight line from head to toes and shoulders directly over hands
- Maintain this position without lifting your hips or letting them sag



#### 14. LEG LOWER

**Beginner:**

2 x 8-10 reps

**Intermediate:**

2 x 10-12 reps

**Advanced:**

2 x 12-15 reps

**Why:** This exercise is excellent for building strength and endurance in the lower abs, which are often underutilised.

- Begin lying on your back on a bench, holding the sides of the bench either side of your head, legs extended to about 45 degrees
- Bring your knees in towards your chest, lifting your lower back off the bench
- Slowly lower your back onto the bench and extend your legs back to the start position

#### 15. WEIGHTED CRUNCH

**Beginner:** 2 x 10 reps

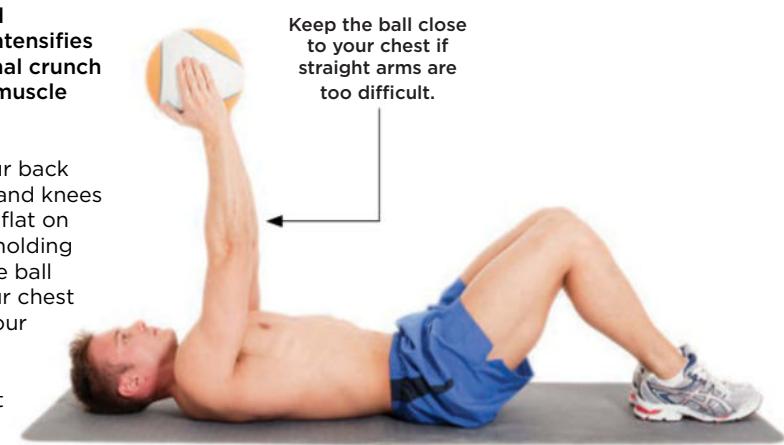
**Intermediate:** 2 x 12 reps

**Advanced:** 2 x 15 reps

**Why:** Added resistance intensifies the traditional crunch for greater muscle activation.

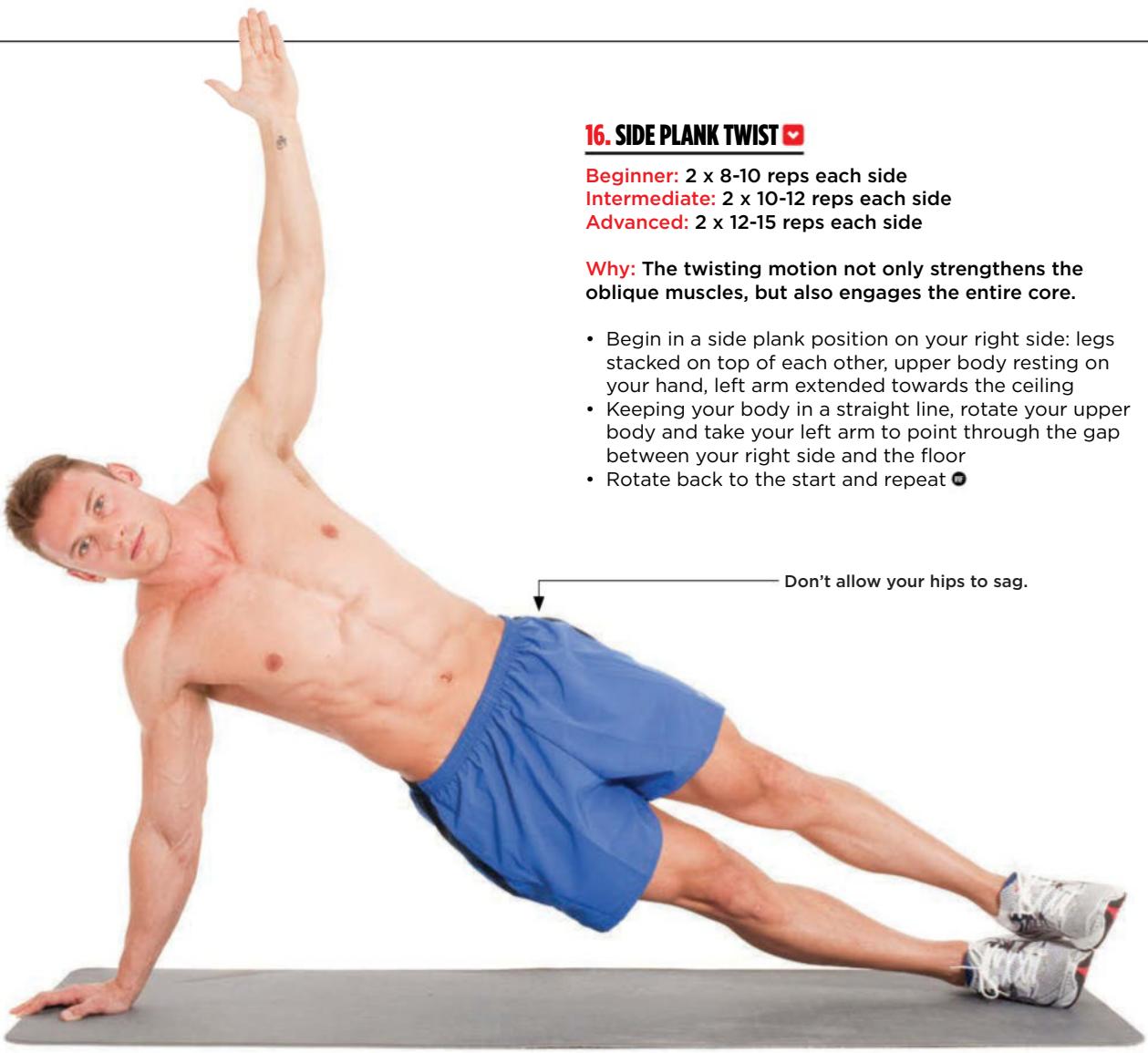
- Lie on your back with hips and knees bent, feet flat on the floor, holding a medicine ball above your chest
- Tighten your stomach, lifting your chest towards the ceiling, without taking your chin towards your chest
- Slowly lower to the start and repeat to complete the set

Only lower your legs as far as you can while maintaining contact between your lower back and the bench.



Keep the medicine ball directly above your shoulders throughout.





### 16. SIDE PLANK TWIST

**Beginner:** 2 x 8-10 reps each side

**Intermediate:** 2 x 10-12 reps each side

**Advanced:** 2 x 12-15 reps each side

**Why:** The twisting motion not only strengthens the oblique muscles, but also engages the entire core.

- Begin in a side plank position on your right side: legs stacked on top of each other, upper body resting on your hand, left arm extended towards the ceiling
- Keeping your body in a straight line, rotate your upper body and take your left arm to point through the gap between your right side and the floor
- Rotate back to the start and repeat



# ACCESS ALL AREAS

**Work every muscle from top to toe with this comprehensive total-body test**

**F**or the modern man on the move, high-octane workouts seem like the perfect answer to fitting exercise into a packed schedule. This, however, is not another quick-fix routine.

While intense AMRAPs and high-intensity circuits have their place – burning calories and building a resilient mindset – they're not the only way to achieve results. Your body craves a balance, and a slower, more controlled workout can yield powerful benefits.

This session is structured into six blocks. You'll do 18 exercises that encompass six fundamental movement patterns: squat, lunge, push, pull, hinge, and twist.

The workout isn't solely about building muscle – though your chest, legs, and everything in-between will definitely feel the burn. It's designed to enhance your overall physical performance by training your body to move as it was intended. Expect improvements in mobility, strength, proprioception, and core stability, leaving you primed for whatever life throws your way.

## HOW TO DO IT:

Complete the moves in the first block back-to-back with minimal rest

For blocks 2, 3, 4 and 5, you're going to adopt the EMOM (every minute on the minute) format.

Simply start the first exercise at the beginning of a minute, complete the prescribed number of reps, then rest for the remainder of the minute. Once the next minute begins, so does the next exercise, and so on.

To finish, a simple (simple, not easy) superset provides some direct ab work. Rest for 90 secs between sets, and shoot for 3-4 in total.

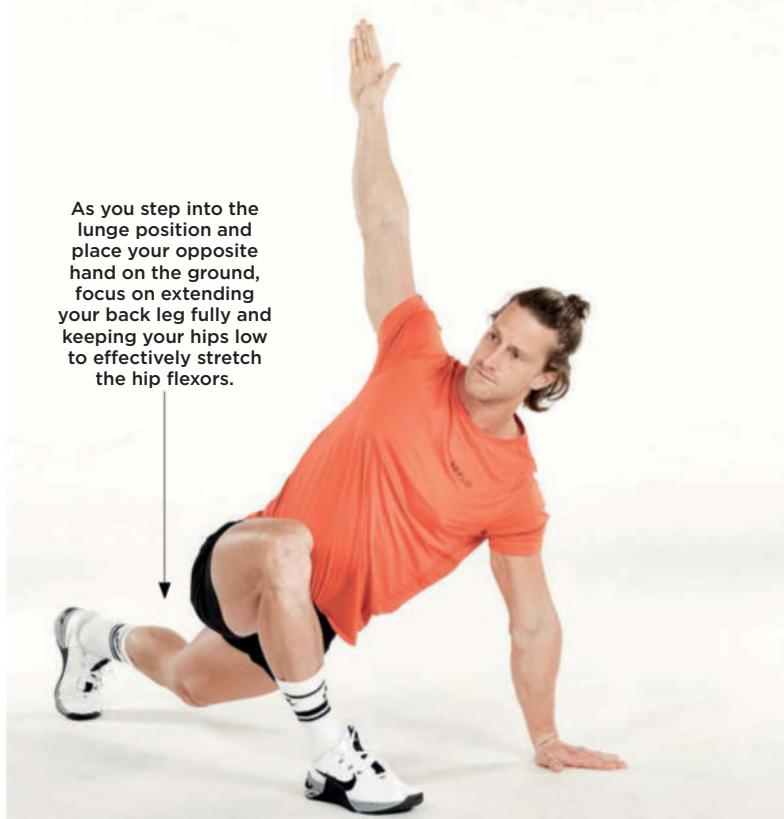
## 1. MOBILITY WARM-UP (x 2)

### 1a. WORLD'S GREATEST STRETCH

**Reps:** 5 each side

**Rest:** Move straight on to 1b

- In a high plank position, step your right foot towards the outside of your right hand
- Move your right elbow inside towards your right foot, then rotate and reach for the ceiling
- Return to the start and repeat on the other side



As you step into the lunge position and place your opposite hand on the ground, focus on extending your back leg fully and keeping your hips low to effectively stretch the hip flexors.

## **1b. WALK-OUT TO SHOULDER TAP**

**Reps:** 5 each side  
**Rest:** Move straight on to 1c

- From standing, fold forward to place your chest on your knees and your hands on the floor
- Slowly walk your hands out until you're in a high plank
- Brace your core to keep a steady torso and tap one hand on the opposite shoulder
- Repeat with the other hand
- Now walk your hands back until you're in the forward fold position



## **1c. BAND PASS-OVER**

**Reps:** 5  
**Rest:** 60 secs, then repeat the circuit once more

- Stand tall and hold a light resistance band between your hands
- Maintain this position as you raise both arms overhead
- Now pull the band apart further to allow you to move your arms behind your back, finishing just above your bum
- Reverse the movement to complete 1 rep



**2. SQUAT & PUSH (EMOM x 3)**

**2a. DUMBBELL FRONT SQUAT** 

**Reps:** 10

**Rest:** Remainder of the minute, then move on to 2b

- Hold a pair of dumbbells on your shoulders
- Keeping your back straight and chest up, lower into a deep squat
- Drive through your heels to stand



Experiment with foot placement. A slightly wider stance can help with stability and allow for deeper squats while maintaining proper form.

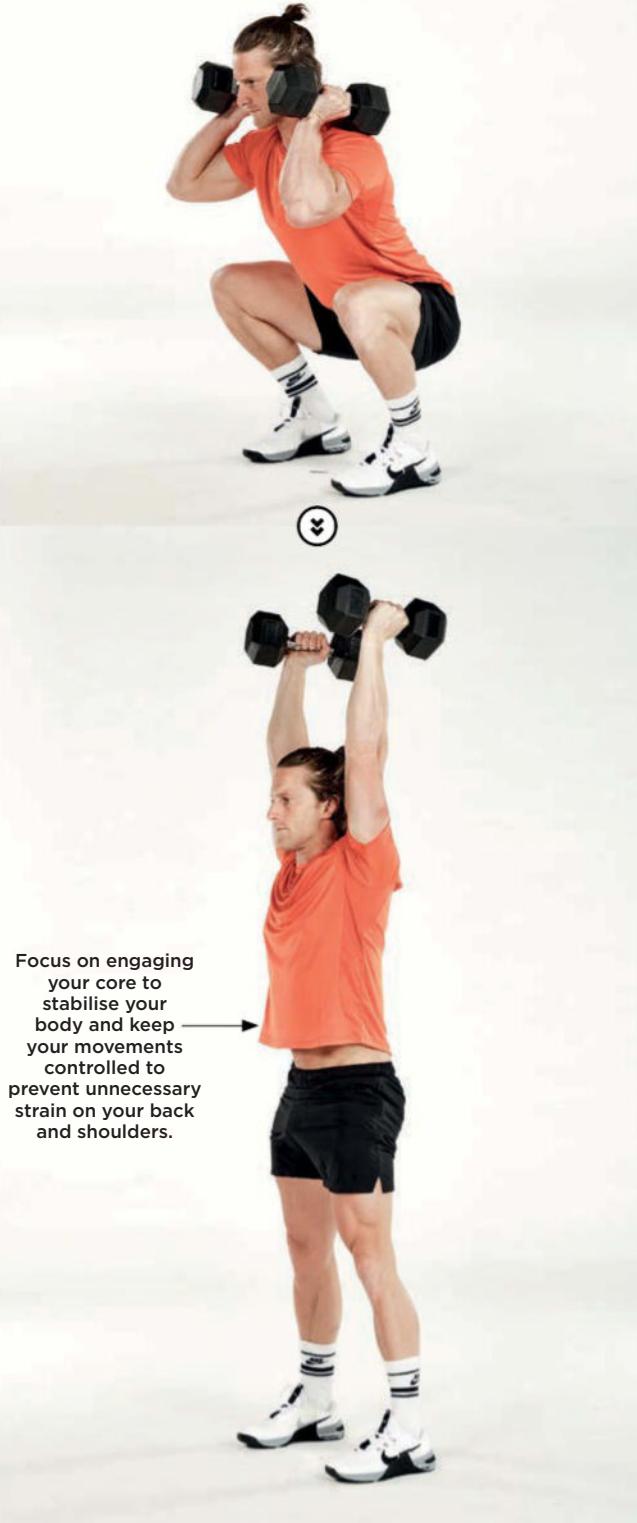
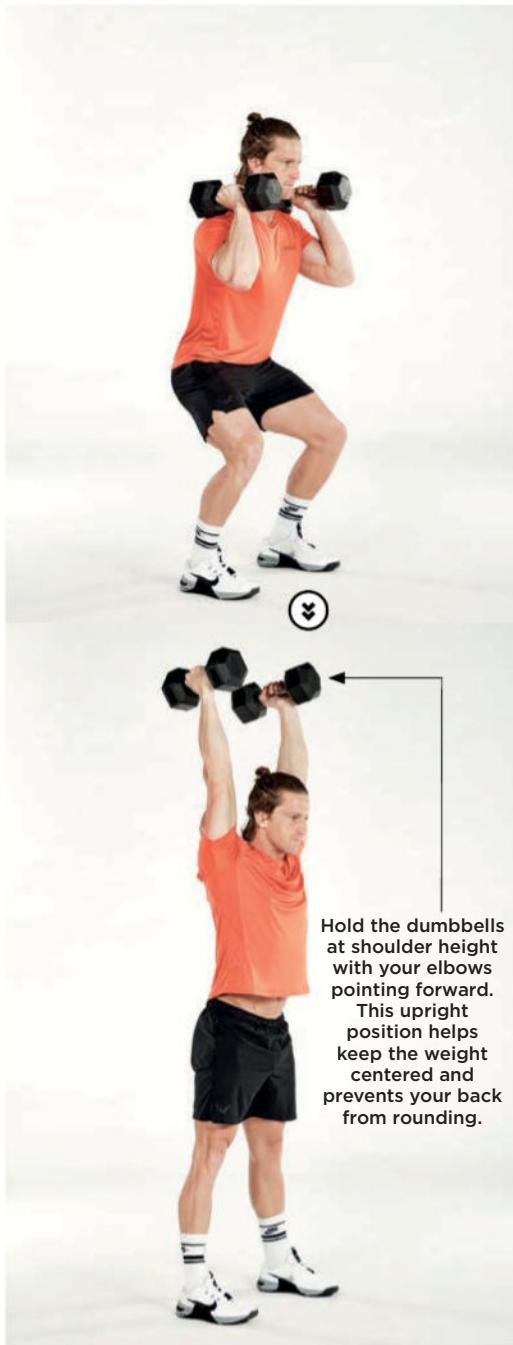


## **2b. DUMBBELL PUSH PRESS** ❤

**Reps:** 10

**Rest:** Remainder of the minute, then move on to 2c

- Hold a pair of dumbbells at shoulder height
- Instead of pressing them straight overhead, drop into a quarter squat, then drive back to standing
- As you do so, use the momentum to help press the weights up
- Lower back to shoulder height and repeat



## **2c. DUMBBELL THRUSTER** ❤

**Reps:** 10

**Rest:** Remainder of the minute, then repeat 2a

- Hold a pair of dumbbells on your shoulders, with your hands in a neutral position
- Do a deep squat, keeping your back in good alignment
- Drive up through your heels and punch the weights straight up in the air
- Drop down into the next squat and repeat the process

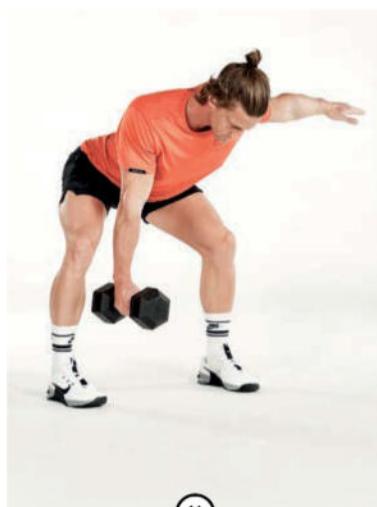
**3. PUSH & PULL (EMOM x 3)**

**3a. DUMBBELL SINGLE-ARM ROW** 

**Reps:** 12

**Rest:** Remainder of the minute, then move on to 3b

- Bend your knees, press your hips back, keep your chest up and your shoulders down. This is your starting position
- Row the weight up to your side, turning your hand as you go and keeping your elbow tucked in
- Pause at the top, then return to the start



As you row the dumbbell towards your torso, focus on drawing your shoulder blade back and down, keeping your elbow close to your body.



**3b. HAND-RELEASE PUSH-UP** 

**Reps:** 12

**Rest:** Remainder of the minute, then move on to 3a

- Assume a push-up position, with a straight line from head to heels, and core braced
- Keeping your elbows tight to your sides, lower until your chest touches the floor
- Now, instead of pressing back up immediately, put all your weight onto your torso and lift your hands an inch off the floor
- Place your hands back beside your chest and press back up to the start

## 4. FAT BURN (EMOM x 3)

### 4a. KETTLEBELL SWING

Reps: 15

Rest: Remainder of the minute, then move on to 4b

- Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart and push the kettlebell off your body to start the swing
- As you lower, hinge at the hips by pushing your glutes back
- When you feel a stretch in your hamstrings, drive your hips forward, swinging the kettlebell up
- Don't worry too much about how high the kettlebell gets - the hip snap and drive through the glutes is more important than air time



### 4b. KETTLEBELL GOBLET REVERSE LUNGE

Reps: 15

Rest: Remainder of the minute, then move on to 4c

- Stand holding a kettlebell upside down, with the base between both hands
- To maintain balance, keep your gaze fixed on a spot on the floor just in front of you
- Now lift one leg behind you and drop both knees into a lunge, until the back knee almost touches the floor
- Drive through your front heel to return to standing, then repeat on the other side



### 4c. KETTLEBELL RUSSIAN TWIST

Reps: 10 each side

Rest: Remainder of the minute, then repeat 4a

- Hold the kettlebell in front of your chest with both hands and bring your legs off the floor
- Brace your core to keep your balance, and slowly twist to one side, then the other, without letting your legs drop



## 5. ACCESSORY BLOCK (EMOM x 3)

### 5a. DIAMOND PUSH-UP

**Reps:** 15

**Rest:** Remainder of the minute, then move on to 5b

- In the push-up position, bring your hands together, with your index fingers and thumbs forming a diamond shape underneath your chest
- Slowly lower yourself down until your chest touches the backs of your hands
- Slowly press back up to the start position and repeat

As you lower yourself, keep your elbows tucked close to your sides to maximise triceps engagement and minimise stress on your shoulders.



### 5b. DUMBBELL BICEPS CURL

**Reps:** 12

**Rest:** Remainder of the minute, then move on to 5c

- Standing with a dumbbell in each hand (palms facing up) and your elbows slightly flexed, curl the weights up to shoulder height
- Squeeze at the top of the move, then return with control

Lower the dumbbells back to the starting position slowly; this eccentric phase is crucial for muscle growth.



Avoid rounding your back; maintain a straight spine to protect your lower back and ensure effective muscle engagement in the rear deltoids and upper back.



### 5c. DUMBBELL REVERSE FLYE

**Reps:** 15

**Rest:** Remainder of the minute, then repeat 5a

- Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, then hinge at your hips until your torso is almost parallel with the floor
- Hang the dumbbells straight down from your shoulders, with your elbows slightly bent (not fully straight) and palms facing each other
- Keeping your core tight, your chest up and your back in alignment, pull your shoulder blades down and back, then raise your arms out to the side until your elbows are at shoulder height

## 6. CORE FINISHER (x 3)

### 6a. ALTERNATING V-UP

**Reps:** 10 each side  
**Rest:** Move straight on to 6b

- Lie on your back with legs out flat and your arms extended overhead
- Keeping your arms close to your ears, contract your abs to press your lower back into the ground
- Point your toes and, squeezing your quads and glutes, lift your legs and upper back off the ground, while reaching your hand forward to meet your opposite foot
- Keep your core engaged as you slowly lower to the start
- Repeat on the other side



Engage your core by pulling your belly button toward your spine and focus on keeping a straight line from your fingertips to your toes.



### 6b. HOLLOW HOLD

**Hold:** 1 min  
**Rest:** 90 secs, then repeat 6a

- Lie on your back with legs and arms extended
- Squeeze your abs, quads and glutes, then lift your legs and shoulders off the ground. Keep your head in a neutral position so you're not straining your neck
- Your legs and the middle of your back should both be off the ground. Only your lower back and hips should be in contact with the ground
- Hold this position

# AT A STRETCH

Unlock your athletic potential with this targeted mobility routine designed to boost flexibility and prevent injuries

This mobility flow from recovery app pliability focuses on the quads, hamstrings, hip flexors, adductors, and calves to improve flexibility, strength, and overall mobility. By targeting these areas, it alleviates strain and enhances the range of motion in the hips and legs, which is beneficial for anyone who runs or plays sport regularly.



## 1. RUNNER'S STRETCH

**Hold:** 1-2 mins

**Why:** This stretch helps improve flexibility, enhance stride length, and prevent muscle tightness by stretching the hip flexors, hamstrings, and calves.

- Begin by standing and take a large step forward with one leg
- Keep the heel of the opposite leg down on the ground and ensure the foot is pointed forward
- Feel a stretch through the back of the calf of the extended leg
- Hold the stretch, focusing on breathing deeply. Maintain good posture throughout
- After one minute, switch to the other leg, repeating the process



## 2. FROG

**Hold:** 1-2 mins

**Why:** This stretch improves flexibility, releases tension in the hips, and enhances mobility by targeting the inner thighs, groin, and hips.

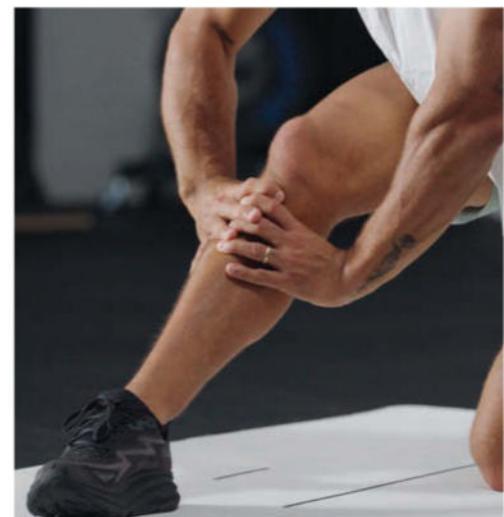
- Begin on your hands and knees in a tabletop position. Slowly widen your knees as far apart as is comfortable
- Position your lower legs so they form a 90-degree angle with your thighs, with your feet flexed
- Lower your forearms to the ground or a yoga block, keeping your back straight
- Hold the stretch, focusing on deep, steady breathing

### 3. HALF SADDLE

**Hold:** 1-2 mins

**Why:** Helps open the ventral side of the body, targeting hip flexors, quadriceps, and sacrum.

- Starting from a seated position, extend your left leg forward, and tuck your right foot back next to your right hip
- Lean back on your hands or elbows
- Breathe and relax, then switch sides



### 4. KNEE FLEXION ROTATION

**Hold:** 1-2 mins

**Why:** Loosens knee stiffness, increasing hip and lower back mobility.

- Start in a half kneeling position with your right knee up, hands on the knee, and turn the knee to the outside
- Lean forward, then back off the pressure, and turn the knee to the inside
- Perform these rotations, then switch sides



### 5. COSSACK SQUAT

**Hold:** 1-2 mins

**Why:** Improves lower-body range of motion and strengthens the adductors.

- Stand with legs spread wide outside the shoulders
- Reach your hips back towards one heel while keeping the other leg straight, pause, then press through the heel to stand
- Continue alternating sides

The pliability app is available to download on iOS, Android and any web browser. All users get a 7-day free trial before a flat rate of £16.95 per month or £169.95 annually. Visit [pliability.com](http://pliability.com)



Words: Dean Hodgin | Photography: Shutterstock

## RECONNECT TO RECHARGE

Overwhelmed by wellness pressures?  
Connecting with others is key

The 2024 Global Wellbeing Report revealed that 61% of people feel a societal push to stay healthy, yet this pressure often leads to physical and mental exhaustion. Adding to the challenge, 53% of participants confessed to being bewildered by conflicting wellness advice. The most troubling discovery, however, was that 89% of those experiencing burnout cited loneliness as a key factor.

Fortunately, the report offered practical solutions to help you regain balance. Reducing social media use, steering clear of perfectionism, and establishing boundaries in work and relationships proved beneficial. Yet, the most powerful remedy is human connection. So, every now and then step away from isolation at the squat rack, ditch the headphones, and engage in small group training sessions with fellow fitness enthusiasts. Not only will you break a sweat, but you'll also cultivate connections that can lift your spirits. ☀️

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