

Be A superhuman

The history of calisthenics is both interesting and helpful in legitimizing this training method.

“Calisthenics” comes from the Greek “kallos,” meaning beauty, and “sthenos,” meaning strength—which gives you a good impression of what it’s really all about. Amazing physiques and powerful bodies.

The first mention of calisthenics was recorded by the ancient Greek historian Herodotus, who noticed how the **Spartan armies** would “dance” in order to prepare for battle. These types of bodyweight exercises have been recorded in numerous cultures over centuries—so this is definitely not a fad.

Our modern version of calisthenics began in Germany before it was brought to the United States where it took on sports-based physical education in a so-called, “battle of the systems.” And as we can see with hindsight, it lost this battle and was mostly relegated to the fringes of physical education in the USA.

BODYWEIGHT TRAINING VS. CALISTHENICS TRAINING

If you haven’t heard of calisthenics, you’ve probably heard of bodyweight exercises.

Bodyweight exercises are all those that are done by only using body weight as

resistance. Things like push-ups, pull-ups, burpees, muscle-ups, and even handstands can all be considered bodyweight movements.

So, what's the difference?

Since there's no officiating body or any "official" consensus, it comes down to what people are saying—and people say a whole bunch of conflicting things. For our purposes, and especially in the context of a beginner workout routine, the terms are interchangeable. But saying that, it is helpful to remember the Greek roots of the term; beauty and strength. This can be seen with the higher popularity of "holding" movements (isometric exercises) in more advanced calisthenics, over the concentric exercises more often found in bodyweight routines.

For example, exercises such as human flags, handstands, the planchet, and pistol squats can be more closely associated with calisthenics.



WHY CALISTHENICS?

The greatest practical benefit of calisthenics is that you don't need much to do them.

At most, you need a pull-up bar, and a dip bar won't hurt, but they're not very necessary. Not to mention that you can find a lot of these things either around the house or outside. For example, an empty playground is a great place for a street workout.

But if you have quick and easy access to training facilities and a gym membership, why would you ever consider calisthenics?

It's not just strength that's developed, but also a holistic development of agility, coordination, balance, and flexibility. Since these exercises rely entirely on the movement of your body, you can accomplish some amazing things in terms of development by allowing your body to train as a complete unit, rather than isolating muscle groups.

For example, let's take flexibility.

Calisthenics isn't just pull-ups; it's also things like yoga, gymnastics, and even different forms of dance. It takes flexibility to perform these actions—flexibility that relies on a full-body workout. This will also increase your range of motion in other movements, including the traditional lifts. It doesn't matter how much you can bench if you can't go through the entire range of motion.

But that doesn't mean you have to trade out the resistance training benefits from traditional lifts.

Just because you're not going to be using any free weights doesn't mean that you're not resistance training. With calisthenics, your body is what provides the resistance and imparts all of the benefits in question. For example, strengthening bones and joints, increasing strength and muscle mass, and increasing longevity.

But it's also important to remember that you won't be able to overload your muscles as you would with weights, so high levels of strength training might prove more difficult.

It is, however, perfectly possible to overload your muscles without actually using heavier weights. An example would be simply working out more often, but it can also mean increasing the number of reps and sets that you do.

Even decreasing rest times in between sets can have positive effects on your physical development. This brings us to our next point; supersets.

FAST AND SLOW

When it comes to building endurance, supersets are your best friend. As the name suggests, they're bigger and better than a regular set.

This is because resting times are completely eliminated (or minimized as much as possible) in between sets of different exercises. So, for example, if your workout routine called for 10 push-ups followed by 10 pull-ups, you would move from the push-ups to the pull-ups as fast as you could; not allowing your body to recover in the process.

If that sounds exhausting, it should. Performing a superset of 5 exercises can really strain both your muscular and cardiovascular endurance, depending on the movements done. While calisthenics might be better suited for doing supersets since there's very minimal equipment to move between, supersets themselves aren't unique to

calisthenics. What is unique to calisthenics is a slower and more methodical approach to the movements themselves.

What does that mean?

Especially when **conscious calisthenics** are brought up, there's an emphasis on making a "mind-muscle" link, in which you really put your concentration into completing the movement correctly and slowly. And before you say this sounds like a load of BS, just know that it has a lot of parallels to Schwarzenegger describing visualization during weightlifting. He described it as putting yourself "into" the muscle as you engage it.

This type of mindfulness can help us to get to know our bodies better and how all the muscles and joints interact with one another. In turn, this can prevent us from overtraining certain muscle groups, or focusing on an area that we've been forgetting about.

Completing movements slower—whether they're calisthenic or not—also increases our muscles' **time under tension**, which is good for muscle building and strength. A jerky pull-up or push-up where you're "bouncing" at the bottom of the movement is just utilization of momentum to make it easier.

And at that point, you're chasing numbers instead of real progress.

This leads us to our final point; calisthenics are generally safer in the long term. Their "slow and steady" nature doesn't put much stress on joints and ligaments—something that traditional weightlifting movements get a lot of flack for. While lifting done with proper form shouldn't lead to damage, it's still a lot of stress you're putting on your body.

Calisthenics exercises have the advantage of not being able to overload your body to that high of a degree. And furthermore, its pace doesn't allow for many "jerky"

movements that force your body to push and pull large weights in short time spans. Something your body will probably thank you for once it hits old age.

THE CALISTHENICS WORKOUT PROGRAM

When it comes to programming, the bodyweight workouts below can be heavily personalized. If you're feeling up for it, do each in superset fashion without resting in between individual exercise sets. But try to do at least 3 rounds of each workout, resting for no more than 5 minutes in between. If you want, you can also rest in between individual sets.

Furthermore, feel free to switch up the number of reps you're doing. Depending on whether you're just getting into calisthenics or just getting into fitness as a whole, the recommended reps below will probably either be too high or too small for you. It's best to take each workout through a test run and make sure that you're being pushed far without stepping into injury-territory.

Make sure you're keeping a record of how you're improving. Not only will it work as a motivational factor, but you'll also be able to better know how to scale up the beginner's workout into a more difficult session.

If you're looking to increase the difficulty of the movements rather than the volume itself, we've provided a few variations of certain exercises that can ramp up the difficulty. And you'll be surprised how much you can do with a single bar—and how hard you can push your body.

In terms of equipment, all you'll really need is the aforementioned bar, a set of parallel bars (even certain bike racks will do), a raised surface, a jump rope, and a willing body.

While the programming is entirely up to you, try to complete each circuit 4 times while taking minimal breaks in between sets and cycles. And don't forget to warm-up beforehand!

DAY 1

7 Chin-ups: Something we're all familiar with, these will probably be easier than their close cousin the pull-up. This is because we tend to use more of our arms and chest—but you should keep in mind to pull with the back.

7 Pull-ups: A classic back exercise, this movement engages pretty much the entire body if done properly. Remember to keep your core braced throughout to prevent swinging.

7 Dips: A great way to target the triceps, chest, and the general upper body area.

15 Push-ups: How much more classic can you get? Another great upper body movement, this one will also benefit from keeping your core tight and glutes squeezed.

5 Leg Raises: A great core workout that really strengthens your lower abdominals.

10 Jump Squats: A great way to work your explosive power output, you'll also burn a lot of calories.

Pull-up Hold: This leans into that isometric method that we mentioned before; also helps out with your regular pull-ups.

DAY 2

Plank for 30 seconds: If you're up for a challenge, go for as long as you can.

8 Squats: Need another challenge? Switch these out with some pistol squats and your legs will never be the same again.

8 Lunges with each leg: In order to get the most out of this exercise, try switching things up with some forward/backward lunges and sideways lunges.

10 Push-ups: Too good to include just once.

5 Calf Raises: As the name suggests, these will really let you feel the burn in your calves.

20 Mountain Climbers with each leg: A terrific way to build up your endurance, agility, and core strength.

5 Decline Push-ups: Up the ante and put your feet up on a higher surface, building strength in the upper body.

DAY 3

20 Wide Push-ups: The wider the push-up, the more of your back and lats it will engage.

20 Mountain Climbers with each leg

60 Second Wall Sit: A great isometric exercise that will build muscle and strength in the calves, quads, hamstrings, glutes, and adductor muscles.

5 Clap Push-ups: If you can do these, they're a terrific way to train your upper body's explosive power.

30 Back extension hold: This position primarily targets your lower back, but its benefits extend to your core, glutes, and hamstrings.

20 Squats: Once again, there are plenty of variations that can make these either easier or more difficult.

30 Crunches: Another gym class classic, you'll really feel the burn in your abdominals.

DAY 4

1. **30 Second Jump Rope:** The list of benefits is too long to talk about here, but it includes things like an improvement of coordination, burning a ton of calories, strengthening bones, and improving cardiovascular health.
2. **10 Second L-sit:** A more difficult maneuver, it's worth it in the end for the 6-pack, improved flexibility, midline stability, and better midline tension.
3. **45 Second Jumping Jacks:** Many of the same benefits of the jump rope and a perfect complementary exercise.
4. **10 Pull-ups:** Once again, remember to keep your core tight, but also feel free to experiment with different movements and holds to keep things fresh.
5. **30 High Knees:** Another great cardiovascular exercise, high knees are also great for strengthening your leg muscles and entire posterior chain.
6. **20 Mountain Climbers with each leg:** Or as many as you can do once you've got this far into the routine...
7. **15 Second Plank:** And the classic plank to round things off.

REST DAYS

Let these coincide with your cheat days to make it a special treat; rest days are not only essential for keeping up your motivation, but also allowing your body to recover.

But while rest days imply full days of rest, there's nothing wrong about including some activities.

For example, stretching is a great thing to do every day and especially on rest days, to loosen up your body. You should also be stretching before every workout session.

Furthermore, you can include active recovery days where you go hit the basketball court, do some cardio, or go on a hike. Every little thing will snowball into getting you into better shape, faster.

NOTHING WITHOUT THE PROPER DIET

And while you can do everything we've talked about above to the best of your ability, you still won't get very far if you don't have the proper diet.

Diet is the single most important thing when talking about fitness goals—no matter whether you want to get bigger or smaller. Pay close attention to what you fuel up your body with and the more care you take in this department, the more improvements you'll see. If you want to get the ripped-calisthenic gains, make sure to take in a good amount of **high-quality protein**.

And while it's easy to get hung-up on constantly eating well, don't forget to include some cheat meals into your week. It won't break you (unless you're performing at a very high level), and it'll be a good thing for your motivation as well. It's not called "Saturday—Fatter-day" for no reason, after all.

Keep in mind the tenets of using your own body weight; going slow, working out with intent and concentration, and pushing how far you can take your body. Leverage that hard work with the proper amount of sleep, good nutrition with enough protein, carbs, and healthy fats, and you'll be well on your way to looking like a chiseled statue.