Hit the GYM

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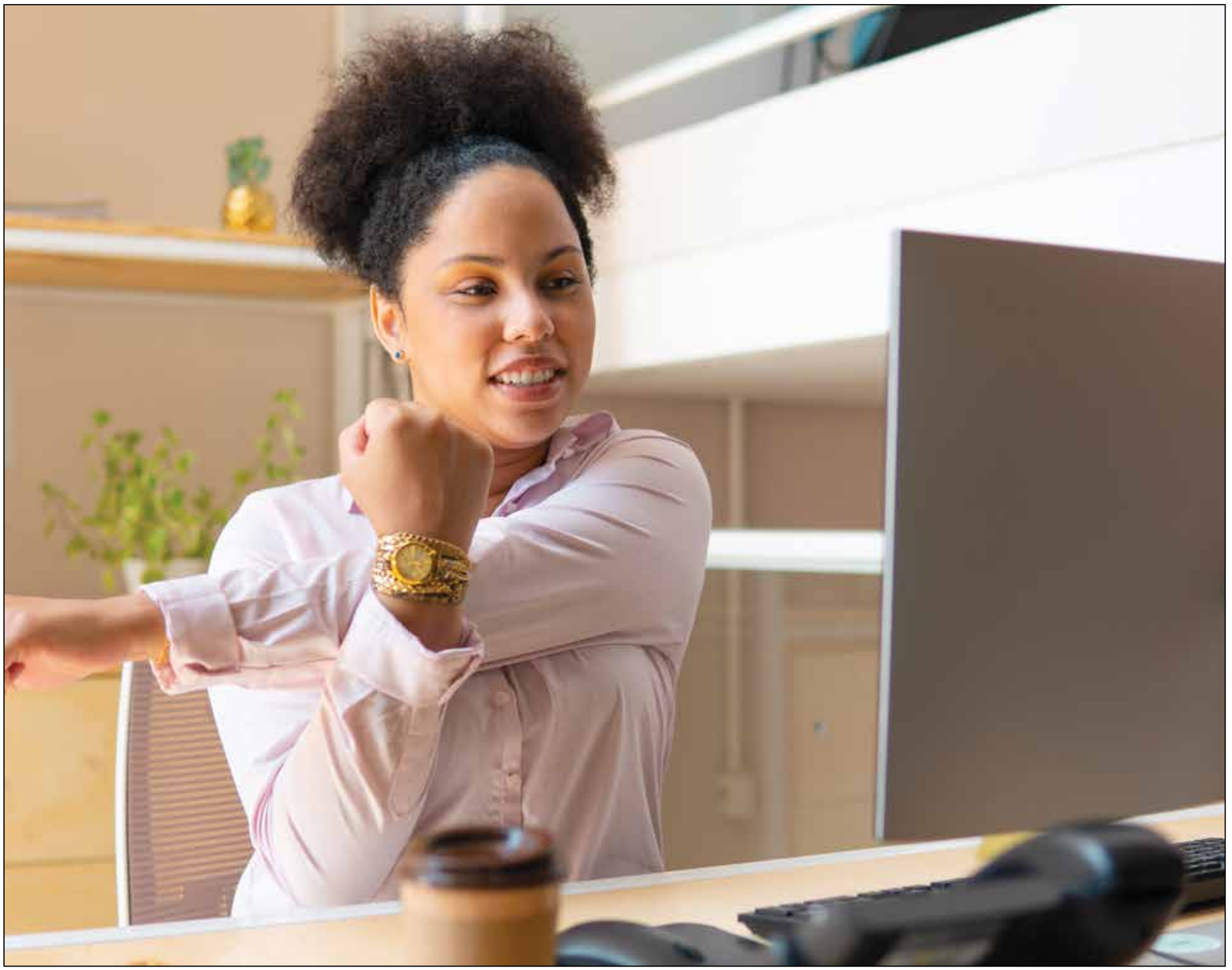
Lunch Break Workouts

If you're struggling to find time to get your steps in and hit your activity goals, try these lunch break workouts to get in shape.



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HIIT IT

High intensity interval training, or HIIT, can give people pressed for time a great workout. It's a cardio circuit that alternates speed exercises with short rest periods. You should feel like you're working out at 80-95% of your maximum capacity, so don't max yourself out during the most intense cycles. Set a timer and do 20 seconds of work followed by 10 seconds of rest, and do these exercises: Burpees, mountain climbers, squat jumps, high knees and plank to push ups. Go for 10-15 minutes or for four sets.

BODY WEIGHT CIRCUIT

These exercises don't require extra equipment, just using the weight of your own body to get more fit. Try this circuit of exercises, done in five-minute rounds. Round 1: 10 bench or chair dips (don't use your rolling office chair!), 10 sit ups, 10 squats. Do as many rounds as you can in five minutes. Round 2: 30-second plank, 30 bicycle kicks, 30 lunges (15 on each leg). Repeat the two rounds in order once again to wrap up 20 minutes of activity.

STRETCH IT OUT

Sitting at your desk all day can cause pain in your neck, shoulders, back and more. These simple stretches can help you loosen up and be ready to take on the rest of your day. Hold each of these stretches for 10-30 seconds:

• Tricep stretches, where you raise your arm and bend it so that your hand is reaching toward the opposite shoulder. Using your other hand, pull your elbow toward your head and hold it.

• Overhead reach: Extend one hand above your head and bend at the waist, reaching toward the opposite side. Hold it.

• Stretch your shoulders by clasping your hands behind your back. Sit tall and push your chest outward, raising your chin. Hold.

• Forward stretches work your upper back. Place your arms straight out in front of your shoulders. Lower your head in line with your arms. Press forward and hold.

• To stretch your hips and knees, while sitting, hug your knee to your chest. Hold.

Workouts to Counter Sitting

One in four U.S. adults sits for more than eight hours per day, a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study says.

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Prolonged sitting is linked to health risks such as obesity, heart disease, type 2 diabetes, cancer and poor blood circulation, the Mayo Clinic says. Switching to a standing desk or taking frequent breaks to get up and walk are both good ways to counteract the effects of prolonged sitting, but not all people have that option. The following exercises can start to mitigate some of the negative effects.

SEATED SPINAL TWIST

This easy twist can improve spinal mobility and alleviate tension in the lower back, says the Living Well Center for Integrative Health. Here's how to do it. Sit upright in a chair with feet flat on the floor. Place your right hand on the back of the chair and your left hand on your right knee. Gently twist your torso to the right while keeping your back straight. Hold for 15-30 seconds and return to the starting position. Repeat on the other side.

DEAD BUGS

Self Magazine says these exercises focus on the stabilizer muscles of the core. Lie on your back with your arms at shoulder level and raised toward the ceiling. Bring your legs up into tabletop position with your knees bent 90 degrees and stacked over your hips. Slowly extend your right leg straight while simultaneously lowering your left arm over your head. Keep both hand and foot a few inches from the ground. Come back to start and repeat on the other side to complete one repetition. Continue for 12-15 reps.

GLUTE BRIDGES

This exercise stretches the hip flexors and works your glutes. Lie flat on the ground with your feet flat and your knees bent. Place your arms out from the shoulders, making a T. From this position, bridge your hips up as high as you can, lifting your hips and glutes off the floor and pressing your shoulders down into the floor. Hold it for up to three seconds and slowly go back to the starting position. Repeat 12-15 times.

Stability Starts at Your Core

Arm day and leg day are both great, but stability and strength start with core exercises.

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Core muscles are more than your abs, they also include the muscles that wrap around your trunk, including your pelvis and lower back. Working these muscles together leads to better balance and steadiness, the Mayo Clinic says. Weak core muscles can leave people more prone to poor posture, lower back pain and muscle injuries.

Strengthen your core with these exercises, making sure you're breathing deeply and evenly during each one.

ABDOMINAL CRUNCH

Lie on your back and place your feet flat on a wall so your knees and hips are bent at 90-degree angles. Tighten your abdominal muscles. Raise your head and shoulders off the floor. Cross your arms on your chest to avoid straining your neck. Hold for three deep breaths, then return to the start position and repeat.

SINGLE-LEG ABDOMINAL PRESS

Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Keep your back neutral; don't arch it or press it down into the floor. Raise your right leg off the floor so that your knee and hip are bent at a 90-degree angle. Rest your right hand on top of your right knee. Push your hand against your knee while using your abdominal muscles to push your knee toward your hand. Keep your arm straight and hold for three deep breaths. Repeat with your left hand and left knee.

MODIFIED PLANK

Lie on your stomach and raise yourself up so that you're resting on your forearms and knees. Line up your head and neck with your back. Place your shoulders above your elbows and tighten your abdominal muscles. Create resistance by pressing your elbows and knees toward one another. Don't move them from their spots on the floor. Hold for three deep breaths. Return to the start position and repeat.

SUPERMAN

Lie on your stomach with a rolled towel supporting your hips and, if you want, another supporting your head. Raise your arms over your head and point your toes. Tighten your abdominal muscles and raise your right arm off the floor. Hold for three deep breaths, then repeat with the other side.

Staying in Shape After Menopause

Menopause brings with it a host of challenges for staying in shape, including joint pain, weight gain and other physical and mental changes that can make working out more difficult.

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But exercise, even when it's hard to get motivated, can help alleviate some of the symptoms of menopause and post-menopause.

WHY CAN IT BE MORE DIFFICULT TO STAY IN SHAPE?

During menopause, women experience a drop in estrogen, which can lead to symptoms such as weight gain, a drop in bone density, joint pain, fatigue and poor sleep. Not only can exercise help with these symptoms, it can reduce the risk of other chronic conditions such as heart disease and diabetes, the University of Rochester says.

TRY THESE EXERCISES

The University recommends a balanced menopause exercise plan that includes aerobic activities such as walking, jogging, swimming and biking; strength training by lifting weights, using resistance bands and doing bodyweight workouts; flexibility and stability workouts with tai chi, yoga and Pilates; and high-intensity interval training (HIIT) circuits to improve cardiovascular health.

You can get some relief through everyday activities such as gardening or even housework. Choosing stairs instead of elevators, parking farther away at work or on errands and other, consistent activity can also help. Make sure you pick activities you enjoy for both a workout and a mental boost.

PRIORITIZE SELF CARE

It's not just working out that helps with menopause symptoms. Recovery is just as important as the workout itself. Stay hydrated, get enough sleep and eat a nutritious diet to support hormone balance and long-term success.

"Menopause is a time when women navigate through many physical, mental and emotional changes," says menopause coaching expert Ging Hoang. "This is a reminder to be gentle with yourself and to take a step back and to choose exercises that will support you at this moment."

Hoang says to pay attention to how you're feeling in the moment and let that guide you to an enjoyable activity that fulfills you.

"Following evidence-based guidelines is important; however, being able to lean into your needs and picking a form of movement that matches that specific need is also powerful," Hoang told the university.

Results Beyond the Scale

The bathroom scale doesn't tell the whole tale when it comes to the fruits of your hard labor.

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There are other victories, too, to celebrate in your exercise routine.

WHEN YOUR CLOTHES FIT BETTER

Your clothes can tell you you're seeing results before the scale can. You may notice you feel more comfortable in clothes that were previously tight.

WHEN YOU HAVE MORE ENERGY

You might notice you have more energy to do the activities you love to do, such as playing with your children or grandchildren, playing with your pets, gardening, dancing and more. You might find that you get more done in a day or feel better even after more activity than normal.

YOU GET BETTER SLEEP

A study in 2018 found that people who lost around 15 pounds improved the quality of their sleep. Losing belly fat has a particularly positive impact on sleep quality, Healthline says.

YOUR MIND IS SHARPER

Weight loss is also associated with better memory and increased attention span as well as faster mental processing, Healthline says. You may notice your mental acuity improving along with your shrinking waistline as the positive health changes you're making help your brain to function better.

YOUR SKIN LOOKS BETTER

Healthy eating and exercise can improve your skin health as well, Healthline says, especially eliminating dairy products and high-glycemic foods such as bread and sugar. Eating more fruits and vegetables can also help ward off DNA damage from sun exposure and lower the risk of skin cancer.

YOU'RE IN A BETTER MOOD

Healthline says healthy eating and getting more exercise can help improve people's mood and keep it better even up to two years after their weight loss.

YOU SAVE MONEY

Eating healthier may mean skipping the drive-thru line and that could save you money in the long term. You may save money by eating smaller, less-expensive portions at restaurants as well.

YOU'RE COPING BETTER

About 80% of people experiencing illness, conflict, trauma or loss change their eating patterns, Healthline says, and about 40% of those increase the amount. Emotional eating or stress eating has been linked to the release of reward hormones in your brain, but improving your health and fitness can cause you to cope with stress in a more healthy way.

Gym Bag Essentials

Having everything on hand for a great workout makes you more likely to go to the gym.

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These essentials can lower your stress and make your workouts more productive.

CLOTHES AND SHOES

Breathable clothes will help you stay comfortable and mobile. Have an extra set of sweat-friendly gym clothes such as a T-shirt, tank top, sports bra, leggings or shorts, sweatpants and socks. A good pair of gym shoes is required. Properly fitted shoes not only keep you comfortable but reduce your chances of injury.

KEY FOB OR ENTRY CARD

Make sure you have your key fob or smartphone if you have a digital key or entry card to get into the gym, Anytime Fitness says. If you don't have one or need a backup, see the gym staff during normal business hours. And never let in anyone without proper entry credentials, especially after hours.

WATER BOTTLE

Hydration is important, especially when you're working out. Bring a clean water bottle. Most gyms have fountains so you can refill them.

SHOWER ESSENTIALS

Bring everything you need for a post-workout shower so your gym routine can fit into your day seamlessly. Include a clean towel, shampoo and conditioner, a comb or brush, soap and shower shoes. Save the deep conditioning mask and other labor-intensive hygiene routines for home.

HEADPHONES OR EARBUDS

Music can help you have a more productive and enjoyable workout. Studies even show it can help people push through fatigue and other exercise roadblocks. Make sure your headphones or earbuds are water proof or water resistant so your sweat doesn't short-circuit your routine.

ENERGY BARS AND RECOVERY DRINKS

Post-workout recovery is just as important as the workout itself, and giving your body the proper fuel it needs to recover is critical to a smooth, painless day after you worked out. Consider a high-protein bar or beverage and plenty of water to keep you moving through your day.

HEART RATE MONITOR

A heart rate monitor can help you track how hard you're working, especially during routines such as interval training. You can get wristband monitors or even higher-end models that also measure steps and more.

A Fitness Routine that Lasts

Committing to a fitness routine is a great first step, but if you don't stick to the plan, it won't actually produce results.

Tailoring a routine to your specific abilities, resources and lifestyle will help you follow through and meet your goals.

START WITH YOUR 'WHY'

First identify what you actually want from exercise. Is it more energy, strength, weight management, better mobility, stress relief or improved health?

A specific goal makes it easier to choose appropriate activities and stay motivated.

CHOOSE ACTIVITIES YOU'LL ACTUALLY ENJOY

Exercise doesn't have to mean spending an hour on a treadmill. Consider strength training, hiking, cycling, swimming, yoga, group fitness, dance or recreational sports.

Trying different classes or facilities can help you discover what keeps you engaged.

Cardiovascular exercise is any rhythmic, continuous activity that raises your heart rate and breathing into your target aerobic zone for 10 minutes or more.

This could include gardening, housework or walking your dog at a brisk pace.

BUILD A BALANCED ROUTINE

Aim for a routine that combines cardiovascular activity, strength training, flexibility/mobility and rest. Beginners shouldn't feel pressured to do everything at once. Start with a couple of these components and add others as you begin to feel confident in your routine.

A personal trainer or qualified fitness professional can help develop an appropriate routine.

DON'T FORGET NUTRITION

Exercise and nutrition work together.

If you're trying to lose weight, look at food as a way of fueling your body, rather than relying on restrictive diets.

Standard exercise alone without dietary changes typically results in minimal short-term weight loss, according to the National Institutes of Health.

A registered dietitian or qualified nutrition professional can help develop an eating plan suited to your individual needs.

LISTEN TO YOUR BODY

It can be easy to overdo it when starting a new fitness routine. Stay tuned in to your body's signals. Muscle soreness can be normal when beginning a new activity, but persistent pain shouldn't simply be ignored.

If you have injuries, chronic conditions or other health concerns, talk with your doctor before changing your exercise routine.

MAKE FITNESS PART OF YOUR LIFE

You're more likely to stick to a new fitness routine when you make it part of your life like any other routine. After all, the goal isn't a temporary fitness challenge but a routine you can maintain year-round.

Consistency is more important than perfection.

Here are some practical ways to make your fitness routine … routine:

- Schedule workouts into your week.
- Find an accountability partner.
- Join a class or gym.
- Track progress and set small milestones.

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