

Upper Body Fitness

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Having upper body strength and endurance is important in performing your everyday tasks. With a minimal upper body workout, you can facilitate the everyday tasks such as lifting, pushing, carrying and pulling, which all require the use of the upper body.

Here are a few great upper body exercises. Perform one set of 8 to 12 repetitions of these exercises, increasing the amount of sets when it becomes too easy.

I. PUSH-UPS

Push-ups are one of the best exercises to develop and add definition to your upper body. They work out your chest, shoulders and triceps. Push-ups require no equipment -- you are exercising with your own body weight.

Start your push-ups with your hands at shoulder width apart and your arms straight. You can do them with your feet on the ground, or if you find this too hard, with your knees on the ground. This is referred to as the "modified push-up". Inhale as you lower your body and exhale as you are coming back up. Do not lock your elbows and make sure your back is straight.

II. CHIN-UPS

Chin-ups are another excellent way to build upper body strength. They strengthen your middle back, arms and shoulders.

To do chin-ups you will need a chin-up bar. They are inexpensive and are easily installed between a doorway. A great investment! Like Push-ups, you are also using your own body weight to exercise.

To do chin-ups, hang from the bar with your arms wider than shoulder width apart and your palms facing forward. Pull your body weight up until your chin is level with the bar. As you are pulling yourself up, keep your abdominal muscles tight and exhale. Then slowly lower your body to the

starting position, inhaling as you do this. You can do this exercise with either wide grip or narrow grip, affecting different parts of your muscles.

Chin-up bars are also great for flattening your stomach by hanging on it and pulling your knees up. This is known as hanging leg raises.

III. CHEST/BENCH PRESSES

Chest presses strengthen the chest (pectoral) muscles and also have an effect on the muscles of the back of your arms (triceps).

To do a chest or bench press, lie on a bench or on an exercise mat. Using barbell or hand weights, rest the weight/bar across the top of your chest. Extend your arms up until your arms are upstretched. Then lower the weight back to chest level. Do not lock your elbows.

If you are using a bench that has adjustable inclines, then you can add some variation to your presses. If you have your bench at a slight incline, you will be working out the top of your chest. If the bench is at a steep incline, then you will be developing your shoulders and back of your arms.

IV. SHOULDER PRESSES

Having strong shapely shoulders help shape your whole body.

Shoulder presses are a good way to develop your shoulder muscles and also your upper back and arms. You can do this exercise using dumbbells, hand weights or a barbell.

To do this exercise, stand with your feet shoulder width apart. Hold your weights at shoulder height with your palms facing forward. Raise (press) the weight above your head and then return to starting position.

If you have lower back problems, this exercise can also be performed in a seated position.

V. DUMBBELL ROWS

Rowing develops the muscles of your upper back, trunk and the front of your upper arms. Dumbbell rows is a good exercise to simulate the act of rowing.

To do this dumbbell rows, stand in front of a chair or bench and lean forward with your legs slightly bent. While supporting yourself with one hand on the chair or bench, hold the dumbbell in the other hand hanging it down below the shoulder. Raise the dumbbell, bending your elbow, until it reaches the side of your chest. Then lower the weight back in the starting position. When doing this exercise, keep your lower back tight as you are raising your weight.

A rowing machine is also an excellent way to improve upper body fitness, combining strength and cardiovascular fitness. Of course rowing a real boat would be the natural way to gain this type of exercise; however, we do not all have that opportunity on a regular basis.

Various household chores such as painting, cleaning, gardening, moving furniture, vacuuming/shampooing carpets, shoveling snow, etc. are all activities that also help strengthen your upper body.