

# The 100 Best Fitness Tips



A great tip is an awesome thing. Whether it's an undiscovered restaurant, a sleeper stock, or a Sure Thing in the late double at Pimlico, savvy inside info imbues a man with confidence. Control. Strength. we've grilled the world's top experts and combed our own archives to find 100 perfect fitness training tips—small gems that will make a huge difference in any man's life.

Knowledge is power, baby.

It's also the secret to a powerful body, as you're about to find out. In our never-ending mission to get you in the greatest shape of your life, we've grilled the world's top experts and combed our own archives to find 100 perfect fitness training tips—small gems that will make a huge difference in any man's life.

Get ready: You're about to feel the power—and have the body to show for it.

### **Build Better Abs**

Don't work your abdominal muscles every day. "Physiologically, your abs are like any other muscle in your body," says David Pearson, Ph.D., C.S.C.S., an exercise scientist at Ball State University. Train them only 2 or 3 days a week.

### **Protect Your Neck**

Put your tongue on the roof of your mouth when you do crunches. "It will help align your head properly, which helps reduce neck strain," says Michael Mejia, C.S.C.S., Men's Health exercise advisor.

### **Keep Muscles Limber**

If you're under 40, hold your stretches for 30 seconds. If you're over 40, hold them for 60 seconds. As you reach your 40s, your muscles become less pliable, so they need to be stretched longer.

### **Don't Drop the Ball**

To catch a pop fly in the sun, use your glove to shade your eyes. It's bigger than your free hand and puts the leather in perfect position to snag the ball.

### **Grow Muscle, Save Time**

Keep your weight workouts under an hour. After 60 minutes, your body starts producing more of the stress hormone cortisol, which can have a testosterone-blocking, muscle-wasting effect.

### **Exercise in Order**

Use dumbbells, barbells, and machines—in that order. "The smaller, stabilizer muscles you use with dumbbells fatigue before your larger muscle groups," says Charles Staley, a strength coach in Las Vegas. So progress to machines, which require less help from your smaller muscles, as you grow tired.

### **Strengthen Your Core**

Don't be afraid of situps. We've changed our tune on these, and here's why: Situps increase your range of motion, which makes your abdominals work harder and longer. (Doing crunches on a Swiss ball or with a rolled-up towel under your lower back has a similar effect.) Just avoid situps with anchored feet, which can hurt your lower back.

### **Test the Bench**

Press your thumb into the bench before lifting. "If you can feel the wood, find another bench," says Ken Kinakin, a chiropractor in Canada and founder of the Society of Weight-Training Injury Specialists. Hard benches can cause T4 syndrome—a misalignment of your thoracic spine that affects the nerve function of your arm, weakening it.

### **Swim Faster**

To build speed in swimming, develop your ankle flexibility. Flexible feet will act like flippers and propel you faster through the water. To increase your flipper flex, do this: Sit on the floor with your shoes off. Extend your legs in front of you, heels on the floor. Point your

toes straight out as far as possible, then flex them toward your shins as far as you can. Repeat for 1 minute.

### **Buy Shoes That Fit**

Shop for workout shoes late in the day. That's when your feet are the largest. Make sure there's a half inch of space in front of your longest toe, and that you can easily wiggle your toes. Then slip off the shoes and compare them with your bare feet. If each shoe isn't obviously wider and longer than your foot, go half a size bigger.

### **Kill Your Excuse**

If you think you're too busy to exercise, try this experiment: For one day, schedule a time to work out, and then stick to it—even if you can exercise for only 10 minutes. "At the end of the day, ask yourself if you were any less productive than usual," says John Jakicic, Ph.D., an exercise psychologist at the Brown University school of medicine. The answer will probably be no—and your favorite excuse will be gone.

### **Help Your Forehand**

To build forearm strength for tennis and racquetball, crumple newspaper: Lay a newspaper sheet on a flat surface. Start at one corner and crumple it into a ball with your dominant hand for 30 seconds. Repeat with your other hand.

### **Muscle Up Your Back**

When doing lat pulldowns, don't wrap your thumb around the bar. Instead, place it on top, alongside your index finger. This decreases the involvement of your arm muscles, so you'll work your back harder. Works for pullups, too.

### **Drink A Pint, Get Ripped**

If you're a beginner, train to failure—the point at which you absolutely can't do another repetition—then throw back a pint. In a new study, beginners who trained to failure with three sets of six exercises per day then drank a supplement immediately afterward gained over 5 pounds of muscle in just 8 weeks. A pint of 1 percent chocolate milk will provide all the nutrients you need to achieve the same result.

### **Lose Your Weak Spot**

If you don't like an exercise, start doing it. "You're probably avoiding it because you're weak at it," says Mejia.

### **Overcome Injuries, Build Big Arms**

If you hurt your right arm, don't stop exercising your left arm. Researchers at the University of Oklahoma found that people who trained only one arm for 2 weeks managed to increase arm strength in their nonexercising arm up to 10 percent. The reason: Exercising one arm stimulates the muscle nerve fibers in the opposite arm.

### **Cut Pain, Increase Gain**

Count your repetitions backward. When you near the end of the set, you'll think about how many you have left instead of how many you've done.

### **Turn Heads with Your Legs**

Do standing and seated calf raises. You'll get better results. "Your calves are made up of two different muscles, so you have to do the straight-leg and the bent-leg versions of the exercise to hit them both," says Mejia.

### **Keep Your Stats, See Amazing Results**

Test yourself often. Every 4 weeks, measure a variable—waist size, body fat, bench press—that equates to your end goal. "It'll show you the tangible results of your training," says Craig Ballantyne, C.S.C.S., a trainer in Canada. And that translates into motivation.

### **Kill the Pill**

Don't pop a pill after you work out. Researchers at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences found that ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) and acetaminophen (Tylenol) were no more effective than a placebo in relieving postexercise muscle soreness. More important, they say the drugs may actually suppress muscle growth when taken after a workout.

### **Putt Like a Pro**

Roll a golf ball across the carpet to improve your putting. The distance doesn't matter. Just toss it by hand and try to make it stop at a specific target. You'll hone your ability to judge speed and line without even picking up a club.

### **Blow Off Your Belly**

Exhale forcefully at the top of the movement when you do abdominal crunches. It forces your abs to work harder.

### **Build Big Biceps**

Bend your wrists to work your biceps harder. That is, extend them backward slightly—and hold them that way—while you do arm curls.

### **Heal Faster**

Don't exercise when you're sick—unless your symptoms are above the neck. And even then you might do better taking a day off. "Your body will use its resources to heal itself, not build muscle and endurance," says Alwyn Cosgrove, C.S.C.S., a trainer in Santa Clarita, California.

### **Pick Up Your Pace**

Increase the speed of your running strides—not their length—to get faster. Your foot should always land under your body, rather than out in front of it, and you should push off with the toes of your rear leg for propulsion.

### **Ditch the Weight Belt**

Don't train with a weight belt. Over time, regular training in a weight belt actually weakens your abdominal and lower-back muscles. Wear it only when attempting maximal lifts in such exercises as squats, deadlifts, and overhead presses.

### **Ride More Efficiently**

Practice cycling one-legged to ride more efficiently. This forces you to concentrate on pulling up at the bottom of the stroke, which better distributes the work among the major leg muscles. Lock both feet on your pedals, but let your left leg go limp while you do all the work with your right leg. Do this for 30 seconds, then switch legs. Ride normally for 5 minutes, then repeat the drill. Continue this way for a 20- to 30-minute workout.

### **Pay Now, Build Later**

Pay your trainer in advance. "You'll be more likely to follow through on exercise sessions," says Mejia.

### **Flatten Your Gut**

Work your invisible abdominal muscles. Your transversus abdominis lies beneath your rectus abdominis—the six-pack muscle—and flattens your waistline when you suck in your gut. Work it with the vacuum: Pull your belly button toward your spine and hold for 10 seconds while breathing normally. Repeat five times.

### **Stretch for Strength**

Between sets, take 20 to 30 seconds to stretch the muscle you just worked. Boston researchers found that men who did this increased their strength by 20 percent.

### **Save Your Shoulders**

Decrease the weight by 10 percent when you change your grip. So if you've been benchpressing 135 pounds for 10 repetitions with a medium grip, drop to 120 pounds when you switch to a wide grip. "You'll be stressing your joints and muscles in a different way than they're used to, which can cause injury," says Kinakin.

### **Improve Quickness**

For faster foot speed in sports, try this move: Start with your feet hip-width apart and your hands at your sides. Lift your left foot in front of you, touch it with your right hand, and

lower it to the floor. Lift your right foot, touch it with your left hand, and lower it. Then touch your left foot behind you with your right hand, then your right foot behind you with your left hand. Go for 20 seconds at a time, moving as fast as you can, and repeat for a total of three to five sets.

### **Repair Muscle Faster**

Recover faster from a hard workout by lightly exercising the same muscles the following day. Use a light weight—about 20 percent of the weight you can lift one time—and do two sets of 25 repetitions. This will deliver more blood and nutrients into your muscles so they repair faster.

### **Dress Better**

Buy only workout clothes that are black, white, or gray. They'll go with everything, and you'll never again waste time looking for a T-shirt that matches your gold-and-purple Lakers shorts.

### **Eat Meat and Grow**

Eat meat—4 to 8 ounces every day—to grow more muscle. A study reported in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition compared two groups of older male weight lifters: One group ate meat, the other didn't. Both groups grew stronger, but only the carnivores gained significant muscle. Chicken, turkey, and fish count, too.

### **Save Time in the Gym**

Don't worry about specific rest periods between sets. Instead, rest as you need it—less in your early sets when your muscles are fresh, and more as they become fatigued. "You'll cut your workout time between 15 and 20 percent," says Staley.

### **Get Home-Run Power**

To hit more home runs, swing with a slight uppercut at high pitches. The high swing utilizes your powerful hip and midsection muscles instead of just your hands and arms.

### **Shake a Defender**

To come open for a pass in football, run near enough to your defender that you can shake his hand. The closer you get, the easier it'll be to blow past him. As you close in on him, shorten your strides without slowing down—it'll help you cut faster.

### **Stay in the Saddle**

When you cycle, keep your pace between 80 and 110 rpm. You'll ride farther and faster with less fatigue and knee strain. To gauge your pace, count how many times your right leg comes to the top of the pedal stroke in 10 seconds, then multiply that number by 6. The result is your pedal rpms.

### **Build Arms Faster**

Work opposing muscle groups—your biceps and triceps, for instance—back-to-back for a faster workout. "While one muscle is working, the other is forced to rest," says Staley. You won't need as much time between sets.

### **Get a Better Handle**

To improve your ball-handling skills in basketball, practice dribbling while wearing leather or canvas work gloves. The thickness of the gloves helps improve the sensitivity of your fingertips, so you'll have better ball control when you take them off. Jason Williams, a Memphis Grizzlies guard, credits his ball-handling mastery to this training method.

### **Make More Contact**

Play foosball to become a better softball hitter. It improves hand-eye coordination.

Improve Balance

Use a sofa cushion to improve your balance. Stand one-legged on the cushion and move a medicine ball (or a 1-gallon milk jug or heavy phone book) from hand to hand, side to side, and behind your head. Once you've mastered the move, try it with your eyes closed. "You'll improve your balance, coordination, and body control, all important athletic attributes," says Greg Brittenham, assistant coach of player development for the New York Knicks.

### **Get Stronger Fast**

Do the same amount of exercise in 10 percent less time. It forces your muscles to work harder and improves your endurance at the same time. If it takes you 30 minutes to do a full-body workout on Monday, try to do it in 27 minutes on Wednesday.

### **See Ball, Hit Ball**

Play better tennis by training your eyes to focus faster. You'll hit more winners by learning to change your visual focus from distance, when your opponent is hitting the ball, to close up, when you're hitting it. Try this drill while riding in a car: Focus on an object about a tennis-court length away. Then quickly shift focus to a closer object.

### **Double Dip Benefits**

Do dips with your elbows in and your body straight to work your triceps. But lean forward and flare them out to focus on your chest.

### **Bench More Now**

Look at your dominant hand—without turning your head—while you're bench-pressing. "You'll be able to lift more weight," says Staley.

### **Do More Chinups**

Don't think about pulling yourself up when you do chinups. Instead, imagine pulling your elbows down. The exercise will seem easier.

### **Climb Like Spiderman**

For rock or wall climbing, buy shoes that fit your bare feet so tightly you can stand but not walk comfortably. They'll give you optimal control, and you'll be better able to use your legs—the key to successful climbing.

### **Run Injury-Free**

One week out of every six, cut your weekly training mileage and frequency in half. You'll give your body a better chance to recover, and you'll avoid permanent, nagging injuries.

### **Drink Up, Get Lean**

Drink low-fat milk. Scientists in Canada found that people who consumed more than 600 milligrams of calcium a day—roughly the amount in 2 cups of milk, a cup of broccoli, and a half cup of cottage cheese—had lower body fat than those who consumed less than 600 milligrams a day.

### **Slash Your Score**

When you're putting, aim high on breaks. "Whatever you think the break is, double it and you'll come much closer to being correct," says Dave Pelz, author of *Dave Pelz' Putting Bible* and a consultant to dozens of PGA pros.

### **Multiply Your Muscles**

Follow this simple formula to build more muscle: Multiply the amount of weight you lift for a particular exercise by the total number of times you lift it. Try to increase that number every workout by lifting heavier weights, increasing your repetitions, or doing more sets.

### **Be More Flexible**

Spend twice as much time stretching your tight muscles as your flexible muscles. "Focus on problem areas instead of muscles that are already flexible," says Bill Bandy, Ph.D., a professor of physical therapy at the University of Central Arkansas. Typical problem areas for men: hamstrings, shoulders, and lower back.

### **Recover Faster**

When you're recovering from a muscle injury, begin exercising again as soon as you can. Try a few minutes at low intensity to test yourself. Go slowly—no explosive movements. If you experience pain, stop immediately. Afterward, ice the area for 20 minutes and exercise again the next day. You should be able to go a little harder and longer each workout.

### **Reach Your Goals**

Set your goals in reverse. That is, pick a date of completion and work backward, writing down short-term goals as you go. "The goals then seem more like deadlines," says Ballantyne.

### **Run Hills Faster**

When running uphill, keep your head up and your eyes focused on the top of the hill. This opens your airways, making it easier to breathe than if your upper body were hunched forward.

### **Manage Your Middle**

Do your ab exercises at the beginning of your workout if you can't pass this test: Sit with your feet flat on the floor and your legs bent—as if you had just performed a situp. Then place your fingers behind your ears with your elbows pulled back. Lower yourself to the floor as slowly as possible. "If it doesn't take at least 5 seconds, you need to prioritize your abdominal training," says the Australian strength coach Ian King.

### **Win a Marathon**

To build speed and endurance, train like a Kenyan: Go slowly for the first third of your run, at a normal pace in the middle third, and at a faster-than-normal pace at the end. Gradually increase your starting pace each week, and you'll increase your normal and fast paces, too.

### **Outdrive Your Pals**

To hit a golf ball farther, take some practice swings from the opposite side. It strengthens and balances your muscles, which may help you clear that water hazard. Do a few opposite swings on the first three or four holes, or for a minute at the driving range.

### **Sit Back, Squat More**

Use a bench to squat with perfect form. That is, stand in front of the bench when you squat. Lower yourself as if you were sitting down. When your butt touches the bench, push yourself back up. Try it with a light bar or a broomstick first.

### **Shake Your Muscles**

Eat immediately after your workout. A 12-week study conducted by Danish researchers found that older men who drank a shake with 10 grams of protein, 7 grams of carbohydrate, and 3 grams of fat (about the same as in a cup of milk) within 5 minutes after their weight workout gained muscle, but men who consumed the drink 2 hours later did not. For a serious postworkout muscle-building shake, try this formula from Thomas Incledon, M.S., R.D.: Blend a half cup of fat-free frozen chocolate yogurt, a quarter cup of egg substitute, a cup of fat-free milk, a large banana, and a tablespoon of unsweetened cocoa powder, and drink. You'll down 23 grams of protein, 52 grams of carbs, and only 4 grams of fat.

### **Get Stronger Legs**

Do lunges in reverse. This forces your front leg to work throughout the entire exercise. Use the same movement pattern as in a traditional lunge, but step backward instead of forward.

### **Tape Your Jams**

If you have a finger that is frequently jammed, tape it to a neighboring finger when you play sports. Together the two fingers will be stronger and less likely to bend at an odd angle.

### **Use Iron, Get The Lead Out**

Lift weights to run faster. A study in the Journal of Applied Physiology found that 8 weeks of resistance training improved experienced runners' 5-K times by 30 seconds.

### **Save Your Back**

Squeeze your butt muscles when you lift weights over your head. "You'll force your body into a position that automatically stabilizes your spine, which lowers your risk of back injuries," says Staley.

### **For a Better Warmup, Train Your Brain**

Don't forget to warm up your brain. "Preparing your central nervous system for activity is just as important as preparing your muscles," says Vern Gambetta, former director of conditioning for the Chicago White Sox. That's because your central nervous system tells your muscles when to contract. Try standing on one leg while you squat down, and touch the floor in front of it with your opposite hand. Do two sets of 10 to 12 repetitions with each leg.

### **Loosen Your Hips**

Keep your heels on the floor when you squat. If you can't, your hip flexors are too tight. Try this stretch: Hold onto the sides of the squat rack and lower yourself until your thighs are parallel to the ground. Hold for 30 seconds. Return to a standing position, then repeat five times.

### **Squeeze Out Gains**

Squeeze the bar inward when you bench-press. This works more muscles in your chest. But squeeze it outward when you do the close-grip version of the exercise—this hits your triceps harder.

### **Make More Birdies**

For straight-on putts, aim exactly 17 inches past the hole. That's because the 17 inches of green surrounding the cup will be free of footprints, meaning blades of grass there are thicker and more upright and will slow down your putts dramatically.

### **Finish Faster**

To save time, use the same weight for your entire workout. Pick the weight based on your weakest exercise—choose an amount you can lift only six to eight times—and do the moves in a circuit.

### **Save Your Calves**

If you're a runner and your calves feel tight when you wake up in the morning, try sleeping on your stomach with your feet hanging off the bed. Gravity will take over, lightly stretching the calf muscles all night.

### **Go Short, Get Fast**

Go faster for shorter distances to improve your running form. You'll not only perform better, but you'll also be less susceptible to injuries.

### **Go Light, Get Strong**

Lift light weights fast to build strength. Your muscles will generate as much force as if you were lifting a heavier weight more slowly. Try it with the bench press: Use a weight that's 40 to 60 percent of what you can lift one time, and do eight sets of three repetitions, pushing the weight up as fast as possible. Rest 30 seconds between sets.

### **Isolate Your Abs**

When you do reverse crunches and hanging knee raises, round your back by rolling your hips and pelvis toward your chest, instead of simply raising your legs. Otherwise, you're mainly working your hip flexors—the muscles at the top of your thighs.

### **Stay Healthy**

If you're not exercising at all, just try to fit in two 20-minute aerobic or weight-training sessions a week. Researchers at Oklahoma State University examined absentee records of 79,000 workers at 250 sites and found that those who did this minimal amount of exercise had fewer sick days than those who didn't exercise at all.

### **Swipe the Rock**

To make a steal in basketball, swipe up, not down. Refs and whiny opponents are just waiting for you to hack down on the ball. Flicking up is more subtle and surprising—and if you do poke the ball away, it'll be higher and easier to grab.

### **Build Sprint Muscles**

To sprint faster, work your hamstrings. They help you push off and develop speed. Try this variation of the leg curl: Pull the weight toward you with your ankles flexed (as you normally would) so that your toes are pointing toward your shins. But when you lower the weight, extend your ankles so that your toes are pointing away from your shins. Your hamstrings will work harder than with the traditional version of the exercise.

### **Get Up Faster**

To mountain-bike uphill faster, edge forward in the saddle to distribute your weight more evenly between the front and rear wheels. If you slip back too far, you'll cause the front wheel to skitter off the ground. If you lean too far forward, you'll lose traction on the back tire.

### **Save Your Neck**

When doing squats, rest the bar so that as much of it as possible is touching your shoulders. Holding it only on your lower neck causes the entire weight to compress your spine, which can lead to spinal and muscle injuries.

### **Isolate and Grow**

Exercise one arm at a time. Do a set of shoulder presses with your left arm, then do a set with your right. "You'll get higher-quality sets than if you work both arms at the same time," says Ballantyne.

### **Come Clean**

Throw all your dirty workout clothes into one mesh laundry bag. At the end of the week, tie a knot in the bag and throw it in the washer. You'll always know where your favorite workout shirts are, and you won't have to touch your sweat socks when they're fully ripe.

### **Squat for a Six-Pack**

Do squats and deadlifts . . . to build your abs. Research shows that these two exercises force your abdominal muscles to do a significant amount of work to maintain your posture.

### **Flex for Muscle**

When doing standing arm curls, completely straighten your arms by flexing your triceps at the end of each repetition. This ensures that you work the muscle through its entire range of motion.

### **Run Longer, Easier**

When you run, breathe so that your belly rises as you inhale. This ensures that your lungs are inflating fully with oxygen, so you'll be able to go longer. Practice by lying on your back and placing a book on your stomach. The book should rise when you breathe in.

### **Jump Higher**

Do this simple jumping exercise to improve your vertical leap: Stand on the edge of a step that's about 8 inches high. Step off backward with both feet. When your toes hit the ground, immediately jump back onto the step. Concentrate on pushing off the ground as quickly as possible, rather than on the height of your jump. "The speed of the jump is more

important than the height," says Brittenham. Do three to five sets of 10 to 20 repetitions twice a week.

### **Make the Catch**

To catch a football, focus on the tip of the ball. You'll watch the ball into your hands, instead of just tracking the blur. Plus, by concentrating on that specific spot, you'll block out oncoming defenders.

### **Replace Your Shoes (Not Your Knees)**

To avoid injuries, write an "expiration date" on your shoes as soon as you buy them. Shoes last about 500 miles, so simply divide 500 by your average weekly mileage to determine how many weeks your shoes are likely to last.

### **Get Up and at 'Em**

If you want to exercise before work but aren't a morning person, try this trick: For a set period—say, 4 weeks—force yourself to get up 15 minutes earlier than normal and do any type of physical activity (walking, for instance). "Make it so easy that you don't even have to change into your workout clothes," says John Raglin, Ph.D., an exercise researcher. As you near the end of the 4 weeks, you'll have a new habit and will then be able to progress to greater amounts of exercise.

### **Build Quality Quads**

Push from your toes when you do leg presses. Your quadriceps will work harder.

### **Warm Up the Right Way**

Skip the treadmill warmup before lifting weights. Instead, do a warmup that targets the muscles you'll be using. For a full-body warmup, grab a bar and do two sets of 10 repetitions each of the squat, deadlift, bench press, and bent-over row.

### **Get a Better Grip**

To strengthen your grip, wrap a towel around the bar when you do arm curls. It makes the bar thicker, which forces your forearm muscles to work harder.

### **Improve Your Max**

Before you try a maximal lift, load the bar with a weight that's 20 to 30 percent heavier than what you think you can handle. Then simply lift it off the rack, hold for 1 to 2 seconds, and put it back. Wait 3 to 4 minutes, then try your true max—the weight will feel noticeably lighter. Never attempt this without a spotter.

### **Avoid Burnout**

To see if you're overtraining, check your pulse first thing in the morning the day after a workout. If it's 10 beats per minute or more above normal, your body is still recovering.

### **Skip Tendinitis**

Use a shoulder-width grip when doing upright rows. Unlike the traditional narrow grip, it'll help you avoid shoulder-impingement syndrome—an injury that causes tendinitis and bursitis.

### **Build Real Strength**

Don't use machine weights exclusively. A study at Georgia State University found that older adults using exercise machines improved their strength on the machines an average of 34 percent in 2 years. But their strength measures for everyday activities actually declined 3.5 percent.

### **Get a Big Back**

Break cable rows into two parts. Hold the bar with your arms outstretched and squeeze your shoulder blades together. Then pull the bar to your body.

### **Feed Your Muscles**

Satisfy your sugar cravings immediately after your workout. Eat at least 20 grams along with some protein. The sugar will help carry protein to the muscles you've just worked. So have a soda with your tuna sandwich, but limit your sugar intake the rest of the day.

### **End Back Pain**

For every set of abdominal exercises you perform, do a set of lower-back exercises. Focusing only on your abs can lead to poor posture and lower-back pain.

### **Stop Screwing Up**

Don't try to lose your gut by working your abs. Researchers at the University of Virginia found that it takes 250,000 crunches to burn 1 pound of fat—that's 100 crunches a day for 7 years.