

Sneak It In and Tone It Up

Fit in Exercise No Matter Where You Are

- By Jennipher Walters, Certified Personal Trainer and Fitness Instructor

If you think that you're too busy to fit in a full workout, think again. Plenty of research shows that small bouts of exercise can add up and provide just as many heart-healthy benefits as longer workouts. You don't even have to be at the gym or wearing workout clothes for it to count. You can squeeze in little bits of activity here and there so that even when you're too busy for a full workout, you can stay active and burn calories.

Below are simple and inventive ways to transform the must-do activities of daily life into mini-workouts.

Cleaning the House

Unless you're lucky enough to have a housekeeper, most of us probably have cleaning on our to-do lists. Instead of seeing it as a chore, start thinking of cleaning as a serious double-duty workout. Simple and easy cleaning, such as dusting, taking out the trash, straightening and changing the bed linens, can burn up to 170 calories per hour for a 150-pound person. And heavier duty tasks such as sweeping the floor, washing windows and cleaning the garage can burn more than 250 calories an hour.



To up that calorie burn even more, get creative! When scrubbing the bathtub, take fewer breaks, and scrub extra hard to work your muscles (don't forget the switch arms). While vacuuming, add some lunges instead of letting your arms do all the work. When cleaning the stove, don't just bend over; squat down to get those hard-to-reach places. When doing laundry, use the bottle of detergent as a dumbbell and do a few bicep curls on your way out of the laundry room. Or sneak in a few push-ups on the kitchen counter before you start scrubbing. The opportunities when cleaning are endless, and how awesome is it to have both a fit body and a clean house?

At Work

We've all heard the advice to take the stairs instead of the elevator and park at the back of the lot to get more walking in, but there are even more easy ways to squeeze activity into your workday. Instead of emailing or calling a coworker, walk over to his or her office for that report you need. Or suggest trading the normal sit-down meetings (which normally also feature not-so-great pastries and sweet treats) for walking meetings. Walking meetings aren't perfect for all types of business, but the activity and break from the norm can encourage new thoughts and unique solutions to problems, making it great for brainstorm sessions.



If you have a buddy at work who is also looking to get fit, invite him or her to an active lunch break where you go for a brisk walk outside, climb a few flights of stairs or even hit

the work gym if you have one. Plus, having a buddy can certainly help you to avoid office temptations (like the vending machine at 3 p.m.) and remind you to take a break to be active no matter how stressful or busy your day is.

You can squeeze plenty of activity in on your own if you don't have a like-minded coworker. Try a workout at your desk that you can do anytime, as long as you have an open wall and a chair! Better yet, stash a pair of dumbbells or a resistance band in your drawer or locker to use during breaks or while you talk on the phone. If you have the space, play a workout DVD or one of SparkPeople's online workout videos on your laptop and have a co-worker join you. Unless you have a shower at your workplace, go for yoga and Pilates DVDs that will tone your muscles and give your mind a break from work without leaving you a sweaty mess.

During Your Commute

Most of us spend more time in our cars than we'd like, either commuting or driving kids to and from various practices (or both!). Instead of having this time be completely passive and sedentary, make the most of it with a few simple exercises that are safe behind the wheel. The first thing you can do is throw any self-consciousness out the window, turn up your favorite tunes and "car dance" your heart out—just be sure to watch the road and save your most complicated dance moves for sitting at a stoplight. If you're a female, you can also do Kegels, which help with core strength.



Sitting in the car is the perfect time to work on improving your posture. Most of us allow our shoulders to round and our heads to push forward when we drive. Instead, sit with your back straight (adjust your seat back to help with that), your chin tucked in toward the tag of your shirt, and your shoulders relaxed down and back away from your ears. Try to keep your abs engaged and sit with perfect posture for as long as possible, adjusting it each time you notice you're slacking. Sitting tall is hard work and takes effort. Simple adjustments like these can also help alleviate tension as well as pain in your shoulders, neck and back.

And anyone, male or female, accomplished dancer or not, can stretch when stuck in traffic. Shoulder, triceps, neck and spine stretches are perfect for stoplights and also tame your tension; hold each for 30 seconds (or until the traffic starts moving, whichever comes first). Sure, they won't burn mega calories, but they're definitely better than nothing, especially if you tend to skimp on flexibility training! And if you really want to turn your transportation time into a workout, consider walking or biking to work or your destination whenever possible.

Getting Ready

Getting ready in the morning may seem like a weird time to sneak in activity, but you totally can. Make it part of your morning routine to do a few stretches, jumping jacks or push-ups. Just a few minutes of activity first thing in the morning can wake you up and get your endorphins going. Just be sure to start slow and easy if you just woke up, as your muscles may be tight from not moving for hours while you slept.

Try squats and lunges while you blow-dry your hair or pump out a few calf raises while you brush

your teeth. I personally love to stretch in the shower, as the warm water helps loosen up muscles. It's good for you, and it feels great.

Yard Work

Mowing, trimming bushes and gardening are huge calorie burners. A 150-pound person can easily burn 200-400 calories an hour working in the yard. And for those who love power tools, just remember that automatic tools do most of the work, meaning you'll burn fewer calories than if you mowed the lawn with a push mower, for example. So when in doubt, go with the manual option. It might take a little longer to trim that tree, but you'll be getting in quite a workout and keeping your body in tip-top shape.



And don't be afraid to get creative. When working in the yard, there are ample opportunities to squat or lunge to pick up tools or do a few reps with bags of soil or mulch! When it's snowy outside, you can burn 400-plus calories an hour shoveling the powdery stuff.

Shopping

Save time and get fit by making your shopping a full-out workout. Power walk through the store, and unless you absolutely have to, forgo the cart for a handheld basket. As the basket gets heavier, you can build some serious muscle carrying it around the store. Just be sure to carry the basket on both of your arms so that they both get an equal workout. And if you do have to use a cart, do some small lunges while pushing it out to your car and really use your arms to push the buggy.

TV Time

Many of us watch our favorite television shows to relax after a hard day. While it may be tempting to plop on the couch and veg, don't. After a long day the last thing your body needs is to sit down; moving will make you feel better and get you closer to your goals. Vow to do push-ups, crunches, jumping jacks or some sort of exercise during each commercial break. Performing these moves during the commercials of an hour-long show can help you burn at least 100 calories more than sitting, and you still get to enjoy your guilty-pleasure show.



Remember that while you may work out regularly, that's only a few minutes out of your entire day that you're actively moving your body, which is designed for physical activity. Squeezing in short bursts of exercise is great for beginners and experienced exercisers because it burns calories, tones muscles, strengthens your heart and helps you achieve an active lifestyle, the benefits of which are far reaching. So start thinking of more ways you can get active on the job, at home and throughout the day!