

CIRCUIT TRAINING BASICS

Looking for a way to infuse your fitness routine with some new energy and excitement? Whether you're a seasoned athlete or just getting started with physical activity, circuit training is a great way to challenge your body in a variety of ways while boosting the fun factor.

What Is Circuit Training?

A typical circuit training workout includes about 8–10 exercise stations. After completing a station, instead of resting, you move quickly to the next station. A muscular strength and endurance circuit alternates muscle groups, such as upper body, lower body and core, so little or no rest is needed in between stations.

This article focuses on another form of circuit training: aerobic + strength. This type of circuit alternates 2 sets of resistance exercise (body weight, free weights, dumbbells, kettle bells, bands, etc.), with brief bouts of cardiovascular exercise (jogging in place, stationary cycling, rowing, etc.) lasting anywhere from 30 seconds to 3 minutes. Depending on your goals and the number of circuit stations, you can complete 1 or more circuits in a 30–60 minute session.

Advantages of Circuit Training

Boredom and time constraints are frequently cited reasons for giving up on a fitness routine. Sound familiar? Circuit training offers a practical solution for both. It's a creative and flexible way to keep exercise interesting and saves time while boosting cardiovascular and muscular fitness. You'll burn a decent amount of calories too—in a 1-hour circuit training session, a 150-pound person

burns about 308 calories at a moderate intensity; and 573 calories at a vigorous intensity.

Because the exercises can be performed in any sequence, you can create an endless number of combinations and design every workout to match your mood or specific training goal. Participating in a group circuit-training class is a great way to discover new exercises you might not have tried on your own.

At Home

Set up strength and cardio stations indoors or outdoors. Cardio could include going up and down stairs, marching or jogging in place, running up and down the driveway, using home exercise equipment and jumping rope. For strength stations, do push-ups, planks and lunges, using your own body weight. You can also use dumbbells, bands and Kettlebells. For more ideas, look for a fitness DVD featuring circuit-training workouts.

At the Gym

Check to see, if your gym offers circuit training classes. You'll need to move quickly from station to station, so it's tough to do on your own during regular gym hours when others are using equipment. If you're working with a [certified personal trainer](#), ask for help in building a custom circuit training workout using a variety of equipment.

At the Park

The fitness trail, or [parcourse](#) are popular features at many parks across the United States and around the world. This can be considered a form of aerobic + strength circuit training. The parcourse consists of walking trails with exercise stations located along the way. But even if your local park doesn't have a circuit set-up, you can create your own aerobic + strength circuit by alternating brisk walking, bicycling or running on a trail with push-ups, dips, and squats, incorporating things found in nature, such as a tree, a boulder, or even a park bench.

Turn Up the Heat

If you've been doing circuit training for a while and are ready to push harder, try these ideas:

- **Shorten your time intervals.** If you're currently doing 2-minute cardio intervals, shorten them by 30 seconds. This will keep you moving faster through the circuit, allowing you to complete more stations in the same amount of time.
- **Boost your intensity.** If your strength sets are feeling too easy, increase the resistance or choose a different exercise that works the same muscle group. Take your cardio intervals up a notch by accelerating or adding another cardio exercise.
- **Do a backward circuit.** If you always complete your circuit in the same direction, start at the opposite end to challenge your body and your brain in a new way.

Additional Resources

[Take a Shortcut to Fitness with Circuit Training—WebMD](#)

[Circuit Training: Fast, Flexible, and Fun—USC Norris Cancer Hospital](#)



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