

## 10 surprisingly effective, low-impact exercises



Whether you're looking to improve your cardio fitness, strength or muscle tone, there's a low-impact exercise that will help you achieve your goal without placing strain on your body – perfect if you're worried about injuring yourself

### 1. Swimming

Hit the pool to burn fat without stressing your body. "Swimming allows you to maintain a fat-burning heart rate of 130–150 beats per minute while working a wide variety of muscles," reveals personal trainer Frank Mayfield (<http://mayfieldfitness.co.uk>). "During your swim, rotate strokes and vary the intensity of your lengths. Try intervals of going faster for two lengths and then slower for two lengths." Here are even more [health benefits of swimming](#).

## 2. Cycling

For a terrific cardiovascular workout that is kinder on the joints than running, get on your bike. “Cycling is an excellent way to improve endurance and strength, particularly in the lower half of the body,” says osteopath Nick Cowan ([nickcowanosteopath.co.uk](http://nickcowanosteopath.co.uk)). “Just be sure to adopt the correct riding position to ensure you don’t overstrain the spine,” he warns. Here are even more [health benefits of cycling](#).

## 3. Walking

“Walking is one of the most fundamental movement patterns. We are designed for it and it impacts less on muscles and joints compared to jogging and sprinting, so it’s a great way for people suffering from knee, hip or lower-back problems to maintain mobility,” Nick points out. A gentle stroll will keep you mobile but to boost your heart rate, burn calories and tone your muscles, get striding or try [Nordic Walking](#). Discover the [top 10 health benefits of walking everyday](#).

## 4. Vibration training

“Whole-body vibration training can enhance strength, weight loss and toning because performing movements on a vibrating platform makes your muscles work hard to counteract the vibration and keep you stable,” says Steve Powell, [power plate](#) trainer. “As the muscle contractions are involuntary, even if you lack strength initially, you can still expect great results.”

## 5. Suspension training

Hanging off ropes is a superb way to build core strength, burn calories and increase stamina and flexibility without overdoing it, as the only weight involved is that of your own body. Completing press-ups, sit-ups and other simple exercises with a part of your body suspended by straps above the ground creates destabilisation and means you have to work against gravity, offering double the workout with zero impact.

## 6. Yoga

“As well as helping to improve posture and flexibility, yoga develops the ability to breathe more efficiently (increasing the amount of oxygen taken in with each breath), optimises the digestive system and helps focus the mind on the body,” Nick explains. Once you’ve got a [yoga mat](#), you can practise some poses by following a book, DVD, or class.

## 7. Pilates

“Pilates is fantastic for boosting muscle tone, core strength and posture – and can stop you from developing stiffness, especially in your lower back and neck,” Frank points out. “You can buy an **exercise ball** and do Pilates in your own home as you only need to master four or five moves to get a great whole body work out.” Unsure whether you should choose yoga over Pilates? Find out **which workout is right for you**.

## 8. Strength training

As well as doing the obvious, strength training can help you lose weight. “Exercises such as **squats, lunges** and deadlifts using kettle bells or dumbbells use multiple muscle groups, burning calories and promoting lean muscle that increases metabolism,” says personal trainer **Dylan Jones**. Not sure where to start? “I recommend using an App, such as **P4 Virtual Trainer**, for a structured programme with online help from a real trainer.”

## 9. Climbing stairs

Got knee problems but still want to exercise? The only way is up! Walking upwards doesn’t strain your knee joints as much as working out on a flat surface. And it can seriously improve your heart and lung health – a **US study** found that short bouts of stair climbing increased cardio-respiratory fitness by 17 per cent. So jump on the StairMaster, sign up for step aerobics or climb a flight at home.

## 10. Water aerobics

“Because water provides both resistance and support for the body, working out in water builds muscle strength and improves joint mobility without posing many of the risks involved in exercising on dry land, making it ideal for those suffering with conditions such as arthritis or hypermobility,” Nick explains. Try aqua Zumba, water aerobics or simply walking or jogging in the pool.

*Check with your GP before you embark on any exercise plan.*

*Words: Gabrielle Nathan*