Foundations of Weight Training: Part 1

*Consult with your doctor before embarking on any fitness program

Weight training is a type of exercise that uses body weight and free weights to provide resistance to the muscles. This type of training will build and tone your muscles, increase bone density and burn calories to help decrease your body fat. This curriculum is designed to introduce you to the principals of training with weights. Household items can be used in lieu of weights.

Safe and effective weight training depends on a strong core. The term "core" specifically refers to those muscles that control the alignment of the torso: the pelvis, the shoulder blades, the rib cage, and the spine. A strong core provides the stability necessary to isolate the muscles being worked, especially the muscles of the arms and legs. Therefore, you must learn to develop a strong core when initiating a weight training program. Think of the core as the foundation of your movement.

Here are some basic exercises to help you develop a solid core. Do these exercises at least twice a week to build stability. If you already exercise, add two or three of these exercises to the beginning or the end of your workout.

1) **Circuit for core mobility and stability**
   Repeat these four exercises without a break, then rest 30 seconds before repeating them again. Use this circuit first thing in the morning for spinal health.

Cat/Cow

1) Kneel with your knees and your feet hip width apart. Hands are placed directly under shoulders.
2) Begin with spine in a neutral position, abdominals engaged to avoid arching or sagging. Take a deep breath in.
3) To do the Cat, exhale very slowly while contracting your abdominal muscles and arching your back toward the ceiling, allowing the pelvis and the head to follow the line of the arch. May be held up to 15 seconds.
4) Now do the Cow by relaxing and letting the body slowly give in to gravity, allowing the shoulder blades to sag together, the belly to drop, and the lower back to arch. The head and the tail should be slightly lifted upward. Breathe in before repeating 3) and 4).
5) Repeat 8-12 times.

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	Bird Dog 1) Begin on your hands and knees, with shoulders and hips parallel to the floor. 2) Slowly raise the right arm while simultaneously extending the left leg. The shoulders and the hips MUST remain parallel to the floor; the body must not tilt to the side. 3) Return the arm and leg to the beginning position and repeat with the other arm and leg 4) Repeat both sides 8 – 12 times.
	Lumbar crunches 1) Lie down face up. Extend one leg out and bend the other leg at the knee, with foot flat on the floor. Note that there is a natural curve in the lower spine; this curve must be maintained throughout the exercise. 2) Cross one arm on the chest and place the other hand in the curve of the lower back. Take a deep breath in. 3) Exhale slowly and raise your shoulder blades off the floor, moving the upper torso. Pause while continuing to exhale. 4) Slowly return to beginning position. Repeat 8-10 times with one leg bent, and then repeat all repetitions with the other leg bent.
	Glute bridge 1) Lie face down on a mat with the knees bent, feet flat on floor and hip width apart, and the hands by the hips. Tighten your abdominal muscles; try to keep these muscles engaged throughout the entire exercise. 2) Gently exhale and slowly push hips up off the floor by contracting the glutes while pressing the heels into the floor. Avoid hyperextending (overarching) the lower back. Hold the top position for one count. 3) Inhale and slowly lower the pelvis back to the floor. 4) Repeat 8-12 times.

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2) Development of shoulder stability

This exercise targets the muscles that maintain the alignment of the shoulder blades.


Shoulder packing

1) Stand erect with feet hip-width, facing front. Engage lower abdominals to keep pelvis stable.
2) Take a deep breath in and lift shoulders up.
3) Exhale and push your shoulders blades back (retract), then –
4) Push shoulder blades down (depress), keeping abdominals contracted to prevent lower back from arching. Maintain head alignment.
5) Pause holding this position, then relax for one second.
6) Repeat 8-12 times.

3) The front plank

This exercise targets not only the abdominals, but also the lower and upper back, and the quadriceps. This exercise is timed so use a clock timer or a watch with a second hand.


Basic Plank

1) Lie on your stomach with elbows close to sides, elbows directly under shoulders with palms flat on the floor.
2) Extend your legs out and flex the ankles, preparing your feet to take weight off the body.
3) Stiffen torso and legs, and push the body up so that the upper arms are perpendicular to the floor. Ensure that the weight is distributed between the arms and the feet. Keep your back long. Keep pressure into the elbows to ensure that the shoulders blades are wide. Do not allow the lower back to sag.
4) Hold this position. Work up to 30 seconds, and then one minute.
5) Gently lower the body to the floor when timed interval is over, maintaining the rigidity in torso and legs.
6) Repeat after resting for 30 seconds.

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	Variation: The plank can also be done from the knees instead of from the feet. Maintain the alignment of the torso, legs, and head as explained above.

4) The push-up

A basic body weight exercise that is done in a series. Think of it as a moving plank.

 	The Basic Push-up 1) From a kneeling position, extend feet out so that legs are horizontal to the floor, feet together. Place hands under shoulders with fingers facing forward. Now straighten arms so that shoulders are positioned over hands, tightening your core muscles so that there is long line from the top of the head to the heels. An extended plank position. 2) Slowly lower body by bending arms until chest almost touches the floor, maintaining a rigid torso. Allow elbows to flare out slightly. Keep head extending out from the spine. 3) Push body back up until the elbows are straight. Think about pushing the floor away from the body. Keep the back straight, with the head aligned with the spine. Repeat Variation: 1) Take the extended plank position (see Step 1 above), then drop the knees. 2) Continue as explained in Steps 2-3 above.

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5) Torso rotation with weight (Low to High Woodchop)


Torso rotation

1) Begin in a wide stance with both hands holding the weight with arms extended. Weight should be 5-10 pounds.
2) Breathe in and execute a small squat while twisting the weight to the outside of the left leg.
3) Exhale and straighten the legs while bringing the weight diagonally across the body and above the head on the opposite side. Allow yourself to pivot on your right foot.
4) Return to the starting position and repeat.
5) Repeat on the other side 8-12 times.

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