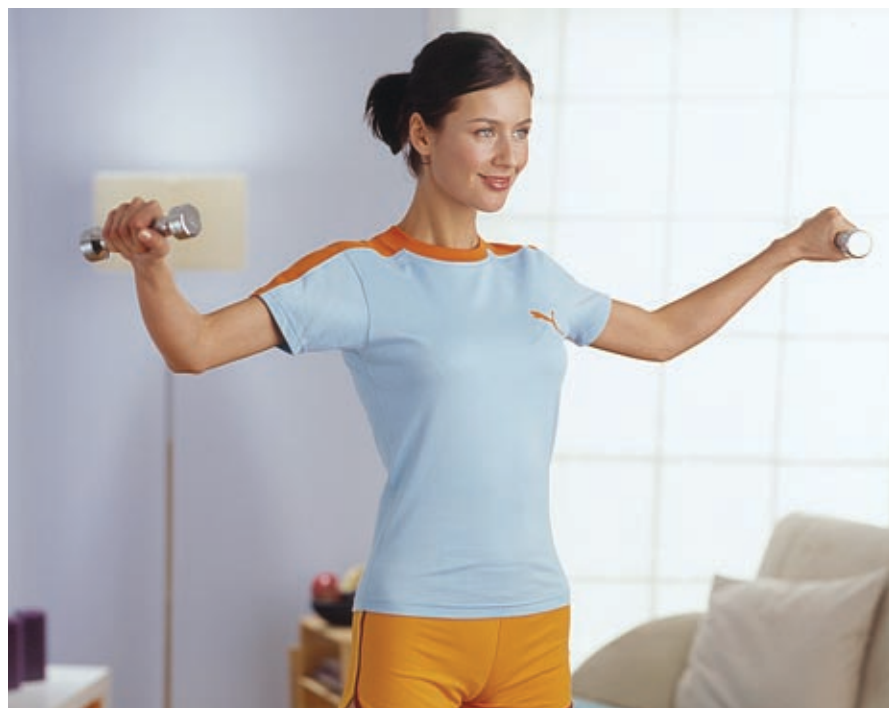


A home gym that you'll

Everything you need to get a great workout—even in tight spaces



YOU DESERVE A LIFT

Weightlifting is the easiest way to turn back the clock, or at least slow it down, because it helps reduce the loss of muscle mass that happens as we age. Here's how to get the most out of your routine:

- **Weight-train two to three days a week.** To properly tone your muscles, rest a day or two between workouts. When you lift weights, you tear tiny fibers that need time to heal and become stronger. If you work out daily, focus on different muscle groups.
- **Start slowly; be thorough.** A good set of beginning exercises covers all major muscle groups—chest, upper back, shoulders, arms, abdominals, lower back, thighs, and calves. As you get stronger, add weight slowly.
- **Don't worry about getting bulging manly muscles.** No matter how hard most women work out, they do not have enough testosterone to build humongous he-man muscles.

Face it: The main reason (OK, excuse) you use to avoid the gym is that you have no time. There's no time to get there, no time to learn a free-weight routine or take a class, no time to wait for a shower, much less drive home, even if your gym is around the corner. But if you have a place to work out at home, those excuses melt away—just like the pounds you'll shed. You can buy enough basic equipment for less than \$50 to get a great total-body workout. If you spend more, you can replicate a fitness-club experience. You just have to keep your workout space inviting so your investment doesn't end up gathering dust (see "The Irresistible Gym," on page 66) and keep yourself motivated (see "Why Workouts Are Good Medicine," on page 64).

You should be able to find almost everything you need at local specialty stores that sell fitness equipment or at major chains like Dick's Sporting Goods or Sports Authority. Since much of the equipment is heavy, it's a good idea to give it a try before you buy (see "How to Pick the Big Stuff," on page 66), so you may want to skip shopping online.



actually use

and on tighter budgets

1. the basics

To get a good workout you need strength training, cardio, and flexibility exercises. Luckily, a few pieces of equipment will do the trick: some dumbbells, a set of exercise tubes or bands, and an instructional video to get you moving. This gear can cost less than \$50. The other items on this page are optional but nice additions.

DUMBBELLS

Cost \$6 to \$60 a pair
Lifting them will give you a more toned body and may help your balance (you can finally conquer stilettos). Do a few bicep curls with different models (vinyl covered, chrome, etc.) before you buy to see which kind you like best. Consider getting at least two pairs, one that's the weight you usually use, and one that's a bit more challenging.

WORKOUT DVDS

Cost About \$15 each
DVD or tape workouts help get your cardio groove on. The best will include strength and flexibility training and cardio routines. So you won't get bored, buy a couple with sessions of different lengths at different paces. You can search for a DVD by fitness level and other criteria at www.collagevideo.com.



ELASTIC BANDS OR TUBES

Cost \$5 to \$15 each
Bands and tubes are used for resistance training to strengthen and tone your muscles, and they're so light you can stuff them in your bag when you're on the road. They come in a variety of thicknesses to give you different levels of resistance. Consider getting one with less resistance and one that's a little tougher so you have two levels of resistance.



HEART RATE MONITOR

Cost Around \$60
For peak cardio benefits, you should work out in your target zone. Models with a chest strap and a wristwatch monitor make it easier to track your heart rate. Models we tested a few years ago from Acumen and Polar were consistently accurate.



EXERCISE MAT

Cost About \$20 for a 2x6-foot mat

Exercising on the floor can be hard on the joints, so consider a pad for support. For most folks, a thin mat made from antimicrobial material like the ones used in yoga classes is fine. They're inexpensive, and you can roll them up.

STABILITY BALL

Cost \$20 to \$40

They take up a bit of room, but stability balls can add variety to your ab workouts and amp up your core training routine. To store them, try propping them up on a wide shelf. Don't cheap out; the thin balls you find at discount stores may pop. Try a 45-centimeter model if you're under 5 feet tall; a 55-cm model if you're 5-foot-1-inch to 5-foot-7-inches tall; if you're taller, go with a 65-cm ball.



PERSONAL TRAINING SESSIONS

Cost \$30 to \$100 per 45-minute to one-hour session

To make sure your form is spot on, consider hiring a trainer for two home sessions to learn a routine that fits your goals. Then in a few months schedule another session to reassess. Search engines on the Web site of the American Council on Exercise or the American College of Sports Medicine list the names of trainers those groups have accredited in your area.

2. a step up

If you have the space and can spend more money, consider adding the equipment on this page. Keep in mind that a treadmill can take up as much room as a small couch (unless it's foldable, like the one at right).



ADJUSTABLE BENCH

Cost \$150 to \$200
Look for a bench that can be adjusted from flat to a straight back and has an inclined stop in between. Make sure it has a wide, sturdy base so it won't tip over, even if you're holding a pair of heavy weights near the edge. Another nice feature is lumbar support to protect your lower back.



BARGAIN TREADMILL

Cost \$800
The **Nordic Track C2255** folding treadmill has "iFit" cards with workouts designed by trainers. Plus, it was easy to use in our tests. It has a shorter deck than some, so if you have a long stride, try it out first to make sure you can run on it without falling off.

MORE VERSATILE DUMBBELLS

Cost \$150 for a pair that goes from 2.5 to 20 pounds
An adjustable pair of dumbbells allows you to switch the weight with just the turn of a dial—no need to add or take off plates. The plates you don't need stay put in their holder.



EQUIPMENT MATS

Cost About \$30 each
The shop where you buy your equipment should have inexpensive mats that you can place under your bench, and your elliptical or treadmill machine to protect your floors and carpets.

Why workouts are good medicine

- **They act like a magic pill.** Not only do regular workouts strengthen your muscles and improve heart and lungs, they can also slash your risk for major diseases and stimulate the growth of new brain cells.
- **They combat stress.** Regular cardiovascular exercise lowers levels of stress hormones. For many people, exercise helps relieve depression as effectively as antidepressants.
- **They prevent heart attacks.** Exercise raises "good" HDL cholesterol and lowers blood pressure, and

new research shows it reduces inflammation in arteries, another risk factor for heart attacks and strokes.

- **They control blood sugar.** Exercise helps maintain healthy blood-sugar levels. Even regular brisk walks can significantly cut the risk of developing type-2 diabetes.
- **They may help reduce your risk for illness.** Moderate workouts temporarily rev up your immune system and may protect against breast cancer by regulating hormone levels. And improving aerobic capacity by just 15 to 25 percent is like shaving 10 to 20 years off your age!

3. top-shelf choices

If you can afford to put lots more dollars into your home gym, you can opt for a swanky heart monitor and fitness club-like aerobic equipment. Or add a machine to the one you already have for variety. And why not put some cushy flooring under it all? Here's what to buy.



INTERLOCKING FLOOR MATS

Cost From around \$15 to cover 10 square feet to \$65 to cover 48 square feet
These mats will provide floor protection, shock-absorption, and that fitness-club feel. Plus, they fit together easily so you can just snap them in place—and they're really not all that expensive. For examples, go to www.interlockingfloor.com or www.greatmats.com.



GYM-QUALITY TREADMILL

Cost \$3,000
The **Landice L7 Cardio Trainer** is the only treadmill that got top marks in all our testing categories. Testers found the machine easy to use, sturdy, and well-designed. And it provides enough range of exercises to satisfy everyone from couch potatoes to well-conditioned athletes.



HEART RATE MONITOR/FITNESS TRAINING WATCH

Cost Around \$170
At this price you can get a model that will tell you not only whether you're in your target heart range but also how many calories you've burned (this a rough estimate). It should have an alarm, a stopwatch, and the ability to transfer data to a computer (you may need to buy an additional cable for that) so you can maintain a personal training log.



TOP-TIER ELLIPTICAL

Cost \$3,700
This **Precor 5.31** has a ramp you can adjust electronically while working out to make it feel like you are on more, or less, of an incline. Plus, our testers say it's super stable.

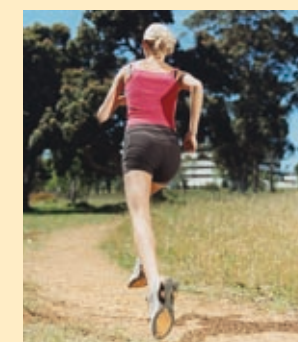
TAKE HEART

How to calculate your target heart range

For a safe and effective cardio workout, check your heart monitor periodically and try to adjust your workout to stay in your target heart range. To find yours, use this formula from the American Council on Exercise.

- 1) Subtract your age from 220
- 2) Multiply that number by 0.5 and by 0.8

So, let's say you're 37;
220-37=183,
so your target heart range is between **91.5 (183 x 0.5=91.5)** and **146 (183 x 0.8=146)**.



4. good gear for small spaces

If space is keeping you from building a decent home gym, check out these machines. They fold up and can be moved out of sight when guests drop by. Your friends will assume you're just naturally toned and skinny!

THE IRRESISTIBLE GYM

It's no accident that garages across America are filled with unused exercise equipment. According to Pamela Peeke, M.D., author of "Fit to Live" (Rodale, \$18), there's a direct link between organization and fitness. To make your workout space an inviting spot to sweat in, ban the clutter. And try these tips:

Turn it into a mini fitness center. Roll up a pile of fluffy white hand towels on a convenient shelf next to your dumbbells, and keep a few bottles of water chilled in a cooler or mini fridge. If you have a treadmill or elliptical, slip magazines into a wall pocket nearby. Bring in a floor fan from another room.

Move in things that make exercising fun. Like to listen to music or watch TV when you exercise? Move your CD player or iPod docking station next to your exercise mat, or set up a TV so you can watch.

Make getting ready a no-brainer. Keep your cutest running shoes next to your treadmill. Fold your exercise shorts, shirts, bras, and socks in shelves right in your

workout space. Keep your weight gloves on top of your dumbbells.

Hang mirrors. Don't want to see yourself sweat? Au contraire, Peeke says; it leads to bliss. "I can go into my home gym in a virtual coma each morning, but when I'm done and see the sweat, I know I started the day right."



FOLDING ELLIPTICAL

Cost \$1,000

The **Nordic Track AutoStrider 990** has features normally found in more expensive models, including programs controlled by its heart monitor and a ramp that you can adjust electronically while working out. One downside: In our lab tests, we found it was a little less stable than pricier models.

FOLDING TREADMILL

Cost \$1,500

The **Bowflex 7 Series** treadmill is durable, easy to use, and comes with 15 programs. And it has two cup holders, so if you're not very thirsty you can use one for your water and the other for the remote.



How to pick the big stuff

If you're going to spend the bucks on a treadmill or elliptical, you deserve a machine you'll want to use, not one that ends up a convenient spot to toss your sweaters. Here's how to choose.

■ **Give it a test run or spin.** And we don't mean just stand on it in the store for a couple of minutes. Not every machine will fit your body or have programs you like. So get a salesperson to help you, come dressed in clothes you can work out (and be seen) in, and use different programs for 15 to 20 minutes. "That's the only way to know it will keep you engaged," says Gregory Florez, a fitness trainer and spokesperson for the American Council on Exercise.

■ **Check out the vitals.** For treadmills, look for a sturdy frame, a long enough deck to run on, and stable side rails. If an elliptical comes with back-and-forth handles, watch out that they don't whack you in the arms. A narrow stance is preferable to a wider one, and make sure the range of motion feels natural to you.

■ **Take a close look at the display.** Some are hard to read because they lack sufficient contrast or have small characters.