

With so many indoor workout options readily available, there's no reason for not finding the motivation to exercise during the colder months. Read on for helpful tips and tricks to stay on track with fitness, despite the temperature outside.

THREE WAYS... TO SLIM YOUR STOMACH

No, it doesn't have to involve hundreds of crunches. Try this three-step action plan:

TONE

The best exercises for toning your tummy are not sit-ups or crunches. Although they help strengthen abs, they have no effect on the appearance of your stomach. Try static exercises like the plank instead.

STRENGTHEN

Pilates exercises can help condition and strengthen your middle, according to a recent study by Auburn University in the US. So, invest in a Pilates DVD or join a group class and do a session twice a week.

CHALLENGE

While interval training and cardio won't specifically target your belly, it will shape your overall physique. Try running for five minutes, and then walking for one minute over a 30-minute period. According to exercise physiologist Dr Belinda Beck, "The bursts of higher intensity exercise fire up your heart rate, giving your workout more bang for its buck."

PREVENT INJURIES

Before starting any new exercise program, have a check-up with your GP first, especially if you are overweight or haven't exercised in a long time. When you start exercising, don't try and run a marathon all at once. Instead, ease yourself into working out so that your body has time to adjust – and so you protect yourself from injury. Each workout session should start with a five-minute warm-up, like walking, followed by a five-minute cool down, such as stretching. If you're feeling a little sore the next day, that's fine. But if your soreness turns into pain that doesn't go away, then you may have pushed yourself a bit too hard, too early.

fitness

the ultimate

INDOOR WORKOUT GUIDE

Easy ways to slim down
& get the body you want.

TRY THESE... SIMPLE INDOOR WORKOUTS

1 Create a home gym: Save dollars and get fit by creating your own circuit at home. Set up five exercise stations around your home (one for doing lunges, one for step-ups, one for bicep curls etc) and perform three x one minute at each station.

2 Shake it: The Zumba dance craze has brought the spotlight back on the benefits of dance – a great cardiovascular workout with endless variety and, best of all, great fun. Mix it up with ballroom, tap and jazz to keep your interest levels high.

3 Game on: With 60 interactive fitness games currently on the market, you can take your pick. Enjoy a game of tennis, bowling or even run along an electronic beach to keep fit, all in one game, and without having to leave your lounge room.

4 Hit the water: Not a keen runner? Jump in the pool and swim laps for 30 minutes to get a healthy dose of cardio. Even better, it helps build strength, endurance and is great for body tone.

5 Shop slim: Walking around a shopping centre provides plenty of interesting things to view. But before you stop and try on that pair of shoes, clock up 20 minutes of pause-free walking first.

6 Up the fun factor: Ice-skating is one of those fun workouts that takes all the effort factor out of exercise. As a sport, it works your major leg muscles and also helps to improve fitness – provided you manage to stay upright and off the ice!

7 Jump in: Skipping is a great cardiovascular exercise that tones up arms, legs and your core. It's also cheap, easy and fun. Start with a five-minute session at first, then gradually build up.



HERE'S HOW TO... TONE THOSE TROUBLE ZONES

While you can't make your stomach or thighs magically shrink (sorry, ladies!) you can tone up the muscles underneath to get a tighter physique overall. How? By using an exercise ball. This multi-functional wonder will work your whole body in a short space of time. Do the following moves eight to 12 times (one set).

CORE: Sit on the exercise ball, making sure your feet are flat on the floor and hip-width apart. While pulling your tummy in (think navel to spine), lift one knee at a time slowly off the floor, aiming to keep the ball still and your hips level.

BICEPS: With a weight in each hand, sit on top of the ball with arms by your side. Bend elbows and bring weights up to shoulder height. Keep palms facing shoulders before lowering the weights down again.

BUTT: Start by lying on your back with your heels resting up on the ball. Support yourself by bending your knees and arms at right angles to the floor. Squeeze your abs and butt to lift your hips off the floor without moving the ball.

BACK: Kneel on the floor with toes against the wall, then lean on the ball so it is under your abs. Rest backs of hands against your forehead and relax forward over the ball. Extend head and shoulders while straightening your spine.

DO MORE... EXERCISE IN DISGUISE

Keen to rack up more incidental exercise? Too easy. Fitness editor Martha Lourey-Bird shares her ideas for activities you won't even notice.

Step one: While watching your favourite TV show, use the ad breaks to get active, rather than just flicking through the channels. How? Run the vacuum cleaner over your carpet, jog on the spot or do a quick burst of sit-ups and push-ups.

Step two: At work or home, remember to stand up every hour and stretch your legs for five minutes with a quick, brisk walk or a few star jumps on the spot. Do this every hour for seven hours and you'll clock up 35 minutes of activity. Nice!

Step three: If you're talking on a mobile or cordless phone, take the opportunity to walk around, rather than staying put in the same space. The longer the conversation, the better.

Step four: When you're planning your next holiday, factor in active outings (think bike riding or visiting the major sights on foot) in addition to more relaxing activities. This way, you'll strike a balance between resting and moving.

Step five: Love a good cup of coffee? Instead of jumping in the car and driving to your nearest coffee shop, plan to walk there and back instead. Not only will this help you warm up in the chilly winter months, it will also burn calories.





FIND OUT... THE ANSWERS TO TRICKY FITNESS QUESTIONS

Q: Do I really need to stretch before exercise?

A: The short answer? No. "Muscles should always be stretched when they are warm, so stretching after a workout is best if you want to prevent injury and improve flexibility," explains fitness editor Martha Lourey-Bird.

Q: How can I make my workout work better?

A: By changing it frequently. Mix up your routine every few weeks to keep it challenging. The American College of Sports Medicine suggests upgrading your workout by increasing the gradient on the treadmill, cycling in a harder gear or lifting heavier weights regularly.

Q: Will cycling make my butt or thighs bigger?

A: Lower body exercises, such as cycling or stepping, won't blow out your butt or thighs as they involve endurance-based activity rather than strength-based ones. Endurance training involves using muscle fibres that can't grow bigger, but that can be toned up.

Q: How much exercise should I do each day?

A: According to Australian government guidelines, at least 30 minutes every day. Pushed for time? Break it down into shorter increments, such as 20 minutes of walking in the morning and 10 minutes after work.

Q: Does a walk or a run burn more kilojoules?

A: "You can burn the same amount by brisk walking as you can by jogging the same distance," Lourey-Bird says. "But, obviously, walking will take longer." **WWW**