

Workout Like a Convict



My preferred form of exercise is weight training. It's something I've been doing since I was fifteen and I credit it with setting the foundation for a reasonable degree of muscularity and strength which I've managed to retain to this day at the advanced age of 58. I began lifting weights in the basement of my parents'

home and have continued this practice across several gyms during the intervening years. I've had lapses where I've taken an extended hiatus, but I've always gone back to lifting. I suppose it gets under your skin and in your blood somehow.

Recently, I've begun taking some of my workouts at home. There's no basement in my current home and there's pretty much no extra space available. I also didn't feel like investing in a bunch of new weight lifting equipment, but since there wasn't any place to put it, this was never a viable option. The only alternative was to conduct some form of resistance training in a very confined space. I wonder who else manages to do this.

Please don't think that I'm making light of the situation faced by inmates. I'm not. They're serving their debt to society and make do under some rather harsh conditions to say the least. Prison life is often associated with endless periods of weight lifting out in the "yard" and it seems that just about all inmates are jacked beyond all reasonable belief. The reality is that many prisons have removed weights and weight lifting equipment from their facilities, most infamously, at San Quentin. This has forced inmates to resort to improvised workout routines using mostly body weight movements within the confines of their tiny cells. I'm perpetually grateful for my freedom, but I borrowed some ideas from the guys on the inside to build my own home workout routine.

These sorts of workouts typically combine resistance training along with an aerobic element. They are essentially old school circuit training routines (remember the “Universal” gym?). Nowadays, these kind of routines are referred to as intervals or HIIT (high intensity interval training). There is a core set of exercises that are performed in quick succession with minimal rest between exercises. This is what gets the heart pumping. The exercises are often a mix of cardio style exercises such as burpees, knee ups, mountain climbers, etc. along with resistance movements like pushups, chins, and floor dips. A longer rest period is taken between intervals or circuits prior to commencing the next round. Progression is achieved by increasing the number of intervals, shortening the rest period between exercises and intervals, and increasing the number of reps for the exercises. This kind of routine can really get you sweating – as I can attest – and they don’t need to turn into extended marathons to get decent results. A productive workout can be had for under thirty minutes with some consisting of only twelve minutes or all-out effort [ref. 12min workouts]

My Thirty Minute Interval Workout

I’m fortunate to have a few small pieces of exercise accessories and equipment as an old pair of adjustable dumbbells, which are fixed with the full complement of plates to attain a pair of 20lb bells. In addition, I have a long foam yoga mat which I used for pre-workout stretching and bench pressing, an over-door chinning bar, a jump rope, and some improvised items such as a tennis ball “foam roller,” and a wooden chair for dips and seated dumbbell movements. I’ve listed the primary muscles worked along with any supporting muscles groups for each exercise.

Pre-workout Stretching Routine

At my advanced age, it’s mandatory that I get in a thorough stretching session prior to jumping into the main interval

workout. Long gone are the days when I could start my workout with near max weights without fear of pulling something. I allow a good 10 minutes to stretch out my entire body – especially my torso and lower back which always seem to be stiff and knotted these days. I use an improvised “foam roller” which is simply a tube sock stuffed full of old tennis balls.

- Roll entire body from shoulders down to calves paying particular attention of knotted muscles (trigger points)



- Rib grabs to loosen shoulders while resting knee on “roller”
- Alternating arm back stroke to loose shoulders
- Bridges to loosen hamstrings and lower back

First Interval

(about 20 seconds effort + 10 seconds rest)

- Jump rope (cardio)



- Air squats (quads)
- Paint can deadlifts (simulates kettle bell – hamstrings and glutes)



- Dumbbell bench press on yoga mat (just need to get arms to 90 degrees at bottom – chest)
- Chin ups on bar (lats and delts)



- Standing dumbbell curls (biceps)
- Chair dips (triceps and shoulder)
- Plank (use timer to go as long as possible – core)



- Cool down from plank position doing yoga poses
- Rest 1 minute

Second Interval

- Jump rope (cardio)
- Lunges (10 per side – quads)
- One legged pistols (hamstrings and glutes)
- Pushups (chest, shoulders, triceps)
- Dumbbell bent over rows (lats, biceps, shoulders)
- Pullups on bar (biceps, lats, shoulders)
- Seated triceps dumbbell press (triceps)
- Plank (core)



All Done!

I apologize for not having pics of the actual exercises. At some point, I'll enlist the help of a photographer friend to take those. In the mean time here are some links to give you a better idea of some of the exercises and workouts.

- Krista at 12minuteathlete.com has some really creative routines that don't require weights or a gym membership. She's also quite an inspiration.
- NerdFitness.com has some good improvised resistance training ideas.
- Though I'm not much of a fan of CrossFit, the CF warmup video on this [page](#) has some very good body weight movements.

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- *Pumpkin Cage: Jason Gillman*
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Best Type of Exercise For Losing Weight



Diet and exercise have long been accepted as the foolproof way to lose weight. You might say they go together like love and marriage. For a lucky few, exercise alone can make up for a host of dietary sins. For the rest of us, both the diet and exercise bases need full coverage. The question then comes down to which type of exercise works best at melting off the pounds. And do you need to practically kill yourself like a contestant on *The Biggest Loser*?

There are two basic forms of physical exertion: aerobic and anaerobic.

Aerobic activity requires the presence of oxygen in order to burn energy in muscle cells in response to signals from your brain to contract them. Anaerobic activity on the other hand expends energy without utilizing oxygen. Instead, it's able to burn energy without oxygen, but as you can imagine, your muscles can't do this for very long. You can go a whole lot longer without food than you can without oxygen. Your muscle cells eventually crave oxygen and fatigue quickly sets in. The burning sensation you feel when doing a grueling set of barbell curls is the result of lactic acid being produced in response to metabolizing glucose without the use of oxygen.

Types of aerobic activity are long sessions of low to moderate intensity cardio exercise. Some examples are jogging on a treadmill or Zumba dancing. Short bursts of high-intensity exercise such as going all out on the bench press or running sprints are forms of anaerobic exercise. A rest period is required between these high-intensity efforts to allow oxygen back into the muscle cells and also to allow the lactic that's

built up to be flushed out. This is why you rest between sets of weight lifting exercises or have a resting phase when doing interval training. Different sets of muscle fibers are also called into action. Aerobic activity recruits more of the slow-twitch fibers whereas anaerobic recruit primarily fast-twitch fibers. This is the reason for the leaner physique of the marathon runner and the more muscular build of a sprinter.

Many people are under the mistaken assumption that anaerobic exercise is strictly weight training. In fact, activities that are typically performed in an aerobic manner such as running can become anaerobic when an all-out effort is applied. Running sprints or doing HIIT (High Intensity Interval Training) on a treadmill or elliptical trainer are examples of a cardio movement turning anaerobic. In fact, most forms of physical activities are not strictly one or the other. There is a continuous shifting between anaerobic and aerobic throughout the duration of the exercise—from going all out to the “resting” phase.

So what form of exercise should you perform if weight loss is what you're after? From the caloric equilibrium equation of calories in and calories out, any type of physical activity will cause weight loss provided net calories are below the number of calories required to maintain your current body weight. Things become different when you want to hang onto or even build lean muscle mass while burning off stored fat.

One of the problems I've run into in the past when going on a low-carb or ketogenic way of eating is that even though I've lost considerable weight, I've wound up looking skinny—definitely not the look I was after. Even though I achieved my goal of no longer being overweight; being skinny is far from a healthy look. It also didn't do much for convincing skeptical friends and family that reducing sugar and starchy carbs was a good idea.

The ironic thing is that I lifted weights throughout my

periods of low-carb eating. It took me a while to discover that I was actually doing the wrong kinds of exercise and putting myself into an over trained state. By complementing my weight training sessions with long periods of cardio training, I was burning off a lot more muscle than I realized. I was also relying too much on the scale to gauge my weight loss progress, forgetting that what I really wanted was “fat” loss.

Once, I cut back on both the cardio as well as the amount of weight training exercises (yes, you can also overdo the weights), then I was able to hold onto a little more of my lean muscle mass. It just took some mental adjustment when looking down at the scale and not seeing it budge for days. The real test was gauging my waist size. Even though I wasn't losing body weight as rapidly as during previous low-carb excursions, my body fat was slowly going down. This is where periodically measuring your body fat comes in very handy. I like to use an Omron impedance body fat meter for this. This type of body fat measurement device isn't all that accurate, at least compared to the calipers method or DEXA scan, but it still gives you a relative indication that things are going in the right direction—hopefully downward.

During the early phases of a low-carb or ketogenic diet, I recommend doing some form of resistance training three times per week. It doesn't have to be a long session and you don't even need to have a gym membership or even own a set of weights. A lot can be accomplished in as little as twenty minutes using just body weight exercises performed in a series of cycles.

A good core set of exercises are:

- Pushups
- Body weight squats
- Lunges
- Chair dips
- Jumping jacks

- Running in place

The last two exercises on the list are to add a little cardio activity to your routine. Adding a door chin up bar and a few dumbbells will greatly expand your exercise options. You can also add some brisk walking on the days in between your resistance training to keep burning calories throughout the week. Hopefully, finding the right mix of both diet and the RIGHT kind of exercise will accelerate your fat loss efforts without you winding up looking like you've been on hunger strike at the end!

Benefits of Cross Training



Having a regular workout routine is vital not only to help lose excess pounds and to keep them off, but also to keep your body in good working order. The old adage “use it or lose it” really applies to the human body. Stiff tendons and joints and weak muscles are a direct result of not putting them through their proper paces on a regular basis. The same goes for your lungs, heart muscles, and circulatory system. Finding yourself gasping for air after dashing for a bus or having to take the stairs when an elevator is out of order is just another warning sign that you're not providing your body with sufficient physical stimulation to keep it working smoothly.

None of this should come as a huge surprise and hitting the gym or having a [regular walking or jogging routine](#) is becoming more common as people realize the importance of regular

physical activity, but there is another piece of the exercise puzzle that often gets overlooked.

Doing the same activity over and over, whether it's running on a treadmill or lifting weights, can eventually lock your body into a groove that is pretty much all one way. By this, I mean that the direction of your body's motion and even the pace at which it's performed are very consistent with little to no variety. Please don't get me wrong, as just about any kind of exercise, provided that it's not harming your body in any way, is much better than sitting on the couch watching TV for hours on end. What I'd like to share with you is something that took me a while to discover and something that has made a big difference in both my overall physical conditioning as well as my confidence.

A while back I developed a false sense of security in the belief that I was in great physical shape simply because I lifted weights several days a week and also threw in some cardio at the end of my workouts if time permitted. My muscles grew and my waistline got leaner and so I thought I was in pretty good shape.

At the time I thought it was all about looking good and little else when it came to being fit. It wasn't until I attempted to participate in some other forms of physical activity such as playing basketball, playing tennis, swimming a few laps in the pool, or simply going for a hike over a hilly course that I got hit with some cold reality: I wasn't in very good shape!

This wasn't only somewhat embarrassing, but also rather confusing. How was it possible that I sweated buckets lifting weights 5 days a week in the gym, but I was severely winded running up and down a basketball court a few times or unable to race to tennis shots just out of my reach? The conclusion I came to was that firstly, I wasn't in very good cardiovascular shape because my emphasis was primarily on weight training. This situation was much more obvious than the other conclusion

that I also reached, which was I was just training all one way and had not yet discovered the benefits of employing “cross training” into my physical activity regimen.

Cross training has different meanings depending on the context it's used in, so in order to clarify things for our discussion here, let's define it as performing physical activities outside of your usual exercise routine. And let's define these outside physical activities as being things outside of the gym such as sports as well as social activities involving some kind of physical movement. Listed below are just a few activities that you may wish to explore outside of your usual gym workouts:

- Racket sports such as tennis, racquetball, squash, and badminton
- Baseball and Softball
- Hockey
- Figure Skating
- Martial Arts and martial arts fitness classes
- Soccer
- Rock Climbing
- Surfing
- Skiing and snowboarding
- Golf
- Rugby
- Touch and flag football
- Bowling
- Swimming
- Hiking
- Walking, running, and jogging
- Dancing of all kinds: square dancing, ballroom, hip hop, as well as dance fitness classes such as Zumba.

The activities above can either be competitive or non-competitive and can also involve others or be performed alone. These activities will require that you learn the basics such as rules and movement as well as invest in any necessary

equipment, clothing, and gear. You can take lessons if you want to get more serious. The important thing is that you challenge both your mind and your body in different ways and the best way to accomplish this is to begin moving and thinking in different directions.

Who's The Biggest Loser?



I'll start out by saying that I'm not a big fan of so-called "reality" TV shows, though I will confess that I used to enjoy watching the early episodes of *The Osbournes*. It probably was because I was a big fan of Black Sabbath when I was younger and I also found some humor in the show. It was funny to see "The Prince of Darkness" stumble and mumble his way through suburban living never quite seeming to believe this is where he ended up. As for the rest of the genre, no thanks, I'll take a pass. It does seem that I'm in a distinct minority on this score however.

One reality TV show that is wildly popular and has completed its 13th season is NBC's *The Biggest Loser*. In the interest of full disclosure, I've never watched an entire episode all the way through and probably haven't watched portions of more than a handful of shows. It's not that I don't find the stories inspiring or that I don't think that the premise of the series is valid; it's that I take issue with the way the contestants are directed to lose weight.

Boot camp style fitness programs definitely have their place, but to convey the message that subjecting severely overweight and out of shape contestants to grueling physical exertion

just sends the wrong message to millions of people hoping to lose weight watching at home. I'd venture to say, that I probably wouldn't last long on some of those workout routines, but why should I even want to subject myself to that when it's a totally unnecessary method to lose significant weight?

It's good that the show also deals with the nutrition side of weight loss, but loses significant points in my book because the emphasis is on very low calorie diets, again, something that I'm very strongly opposed to when it comes to sane fat loss. Throw in the highly competitive nature of the show and it becomes more about "winning" or in this case "losing" at all costs. It's been reported that some contestants have even resorted to near starvation diets and also allowing themselves to become dehydrated in order to lose a few extra pounds for the next weigh-in. In fact, one contestant from the third season wound up urinating blood because he allowed himself to become so dehydrated [[source](#)].

Most nutritionists and reputable fitness trainers advocate losing around 1-2 pounds of excess weight per week. On *The Biggest Loser* 5 pounds per week is considered failure and is punished with a penalty for such a paltry weight loss. Someone who shares my loathing for *The Biggest Loser* is Alfonso Moretti at *Angry Trainer Fitness* and his article on the [reasons why "The Biggest Loser" sets the wrong example](#) for people looking to lose weight is well worth reading.

There is no question that as a society we need to do more to take care of our health. This takes the form of eating right, staying active, and living honorable lives. Keeping ourselves fit and also helping others around us to find the best way forward in their own health and fitness quests should be the new priority as the 21st century continues to unfold. The alternative is rather frightening. Shows and other efforts like *The Biggest Loser* may be aiming for the right goals, but the means they advocate to get there are doing much more harm

than good.

Walking for Weight Loss



Walking is touted so often as an easy and effective way for losing weight and maintaining good health that many of us have come to tune this advice out because we consider it outdated. Instead, we look for what we consider more advanced and more rigorous forms of exercise with the belief that only something high-tech and insanely punishing can possibly work for taking off excess pounds and inches. But before you break out your credit card for the latest and greatest weight loss contraption, do yourself a big favor, and consider the benefits of regular strolls around the neighborhood.

About a year ago, while out driving in the early evening hours, I began noticing one of my neighbors out and about around our neighborhood as well as trekking along the main roads surrounding where we live. I was noticing him almost every evening taking a leisurely stroll – definitely no signs of “power walking”. I started getting impressed with the regularity of his walks as well as how far afield his route was taking him. I estimated that his complete circuit was probably close to three miles. What struck me the most was that he didn’t seem at all interested in how long it took him to get back home – it seemed for all the world that he was having a great time just enjoying the journey and we’d exchange waves when I’d pass by in my car.

As for a little background, my neighbor is a middle-aged guy

who is a “big man.” By that, I mean he’s fairly tall and solidly built with a barrel chest and is clearly a strong guy, but over the years he’s bulked up a bit too much around the mid-section. This form of “bulking up” is certainly something that I can relate to!

A few weeks after first noticing my neighbor out walking I encountered him while doing some work in the front yard. I mentioned his walking and how good he was looking. He was noticeably slimmed down. He told me that he had lost around 30 pounds since starting! There was no question that he looked great and he also seemed to be very proud of his accomplishment. I reiterated how good he was looking and told him to keep it up.

Fast forward to almost a year later. I again encountered my neighbor out in the front yard, but now it appeared that he had regained all of the weight he had lost. It then occurred to me that I couldn’t recall the last time I saw him out walking. We chatted a bit about some homeowner issues and then went on our ways. I thought briefly about asking him about the walking, but decided against it. I wasn’t sure how that question would go over, but I may muster the courage to ask the next time I see him – mainly out of concern for his health.

So what are we to conclude from this suburban tale of pounds lost and then recovered?

On its surface, it would appear to be yet another example of a failed attempt to lose weight of which there is an almost infinite supply, however, that’s not the way I look at it at all. Quite the contrary! Unlike most weight loss attempts, this one was incredibly successful and is a strong testament to just how effective a regimen of sustained and regular walking can be for losing a large amount of excess weight. Consider that against all the fad diet plans and belly shaper products that do nothing but drain your wallet and dampen your

enthusiasm for getting in shape altogether.

My neighbor is living (walking) proof that walking, when done consistently at sufficient levels of exertion, can be one of the most effective methods for losing weight around. And did I mention how inexpensive it is? No monthly gym fees or expensive clothing and equipment required!

I should also point out that my neighbor's case wasn't a fluke nor is he a freak of nature; as I've also observed similar kinds of results in others who simply took up regular walking. What happened is that for whatever reason, my neighbor stopped going out for his regular evening walks. I'm not sure of the exact reason, and I'll inquire the next time I see him, but my guess is that the seasons changed on him and he didn't want to walk when it was dark and cold outside.

In light of this, let's next have a look at some important points regarding starting and maintaining a regular walking regimen:

- Wear comfortable, loose-fitting clothing that won't restrict your movement. Dress in layers during colder months.
- Wear quality athletic footwear designed for walking. Running shoes are not ideal since they are very light and are designed for a different kind of impact and motion. Crosstrainers or walking shoes with good arch support are best. This is the one area where you'll need to spend a little money, but compared to almost all other activities is one of the cheapest.
- Be safe! If you'll be walking at night or during inclement weather, be sure to wear light-colored clothing that can be seen in the dark by motorists as well as cyclists. Reflective tape and material on your clothing and shoes is a good idea. Also be aware of your surroundings and avoid going out when it's still dark and there are few people out such as at night or before

dawn.

- Choose a route that is long enough to provide a good cardiovascular workout. Start out easy and work your way up to a walk that takes at least 20 – 30 minutes regardless of your pace. You can increase the intensity of your walks by either increasing the distance or increasing your pace (decreasing the time it takes to complete the route).
- Aim to walk 4 – 5 times per week.
- On days when it's raining or the temperature is too cold, try to reschedule for a better day so you can stick to walking 4 -5 times per week. This becomes much harder during the winter months in regions that actually get cold during the winter, but being able to adapt is the key to making this work.
- Be sure to also begin changing your eating habits so that you're cutting down on the junk and also reducing portion sizes if that's been an issue for you. The "dynamic duo" of diet and exercise is still the most effective prescription of long-term weight loss.
- Enjoy the journey! Being on foot along roads that you usually only pass along while in a vehicle will open you up to experiencing things in a very different way – even just a short distance from home.

Walking as a form of exercise isn't for everyone and I count myself in that group. I have a gym membership and since I also lift weights, I choose to jog on the treadmill while I'm there in order to get in my cardio work. But as we've seen, walking is highly effective for losing weight and is also probably the cheapest form of exercise you can engage in.

I highly recommend getting started on a regular walking regimen if you've been inactive for a long period of time so that you can ease into things. Once you get into a groove, you can then begin looking at other exercise options such as joining a gym or taking up a recreational sport. In the

meantime, a leisurely walk around the neighborhood after dinner will do both your waistline and your soul a lot of good!