

How to Exercise Using Your Stairs

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Co-authored by [Brendon Rearick](#) and [Christopher M. Osborne, PhD](#), and 15 contributors

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Sure, you can get a great workout with complicated (and expensive) exercise machines, but why not try using something as simple as a staircase? You don't even have to leave your home to use them, and there are a ton of different exercises you can do on stairs. This article lists several stair-based cardio and strength training exercises, so read on and then hit the stairs for a great workout!

Method
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Method 1 of 10: Stair sprints



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1 Step up to more intense cardio if you're able to do stair sprints. This one's pretty straightforward: run up the stairs as fast as you can, walk briskly (or jog) back down, then run back up again. Keep going up as fast as you can for as long as you can—this may only be for 1-2 minutes or even less. Stay loose during a 1-2 minute break and then do 1 or 2 more sets of sprints.^[1]

- Sprinting up the stairs really gets your heart pumping. Keep in mind that this can be dangerous if you're not yet in shape for such an intense workout. Use caution and increase your speed gradually—you don't want to risk either a cardiac episode or an injury due to a fall.^[2]
- To help keep your pace, pump your arms back and forth. This helps keep you going and works your body harder.
- Avoid taking the stairs two at a time while doing stair sprints unless you feel really comfortable and safe doing so. Also, avoid this exercise if you have knee problems.

Method 2 of 10: Stair hops



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1 Hop up step by step with one or both feet—but be careful. Hopping or jumping up stairs is a plyometric exercise that also gets your heart pumping as a great form of cardio. Start by facing the stairs with your feet on the floor or bottom step. Bend your knees slightly and push yourself off the ground so that you land cleanly and safely on the next step up. Continue this all the way up the flight of stairs.^[3]

- Stair jumping is a great workout, but there's a definite risk of slipping and falling if you don't have great balance and aren't in good physical condition.
- Don't do this exercise if you have shallow steps. Your whole foot needs to be able to land flat on each stair tread and not hang off the edge.
- Some people do one-leg hops for an even more intense workout, but keep in mind that the risk factor is even higher.

**Method 3 of 10:
Stair lunges**1
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1 **Stair lunges are a great strength training exercise for your legs and glutes.** Start your lunges by standing at the bottom of the stairs. Step your right foot up 2 or 3 stairs, making sure to stretch but not overstrain your leg muscles. Focus on pulling yourself up the stairs using your right leg—if you're doing it correctly, you'll really feel it in your thigh muscles! Bring your left leg up to meet your right leg on the step. Start with your left foot for the next lunge and keep alternating.^[4]

- Aim for 10 lunges per side or do as many as you can.
- Stair lunges can be hard on your knees. If forward lunges cause you knee discomfort, try doing reverse (or backward) lunges going down the stairs.^[5]

**Method 4 of 10:
Side steps**

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1 Target your inner and outer thighs with this complement to lunges. Start by standing at the bottom step with the right side of your body pointed towards the stairs. Take a side step up to the first stair with your right leg, then bring your left leg up beside your right. Repeat this until you get to the top of the stairs, then walk down and do it again, this time leading with your left leg.^[6]

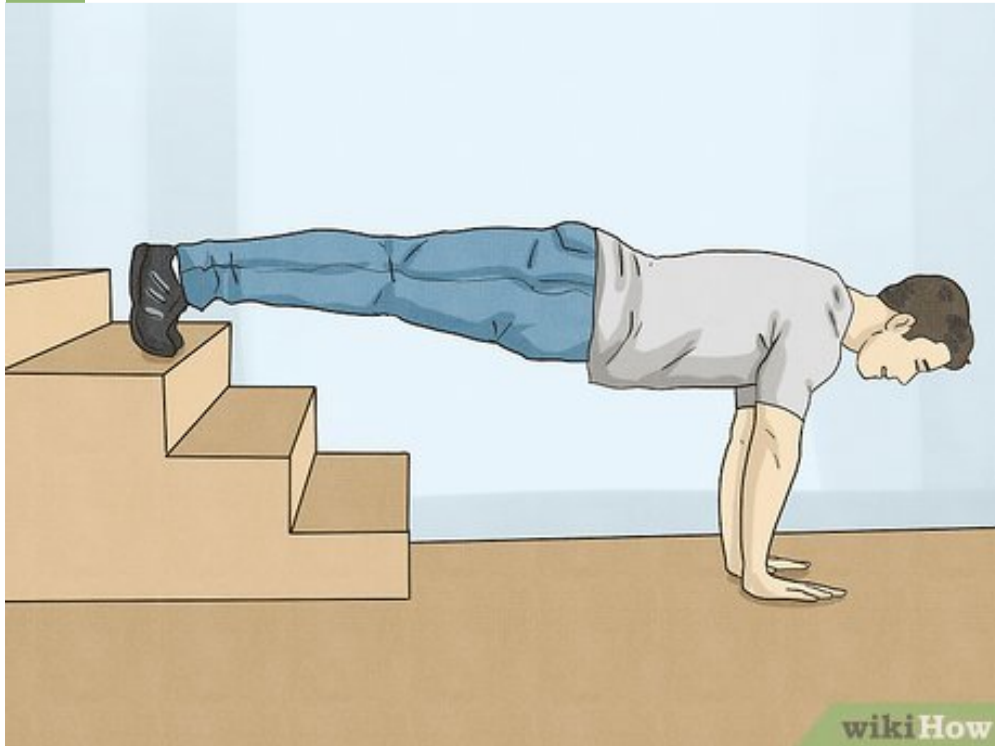
- Don't do this exercise if the stair treads aren't deep enough to fit both of your feet side-by-side.
- Try alternating sets of forward lunges, backward lunges, and side lunges. You'll definitely feel the burn!

**Method 5 of 10:
Calf raises**1
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1 **Tone your calves by lifting up on your toes at the edge of the step.** Calf raises really make your calves pop by targeting your gastrocnemius muscles. Here's how to do them:[7]

- Start by standing with both feet on the edge of the bottom step. Only about the front 1/4 to 1/3 of each foot should be on the step; your heels should be hanging off the edge.
- Rise up on your toes as high as you can. Keep your back, legs, and feet straight, and don't allow yourself to lean forward or backwards.
- Hold the calf raise for 5-10 seconds, then lower back down and repeat 10-20 times. Take a 1-2 minute break and do a second set if desired.
- Keep at least one hand on the banister or handrail if balance is a concern.
- Try doing this on one leg for an even more effective exercise, but only if you have handrails on both sides to support your balance.

Method 6 of 10: Stair push-ups

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1 **Work your arms, chest, and core with incline and decline push-ups.** Push-ups are a terrific strength training exercise, and using the stairs takes them up another notch! Try doing 2-3 sets of 10-20 repetitions of both incline and decline push-ups with the following technique:^[8]

- Face the stairs and place your hands on the first step (for a greater challenge) or second step (for an easier push-up). Keep your arms straight without locking your elbows and extend your legs straight behind you.
- While keeping your hands shoulder-width apart, slowly bend your elbows so that your upper body and face slowly lower down towards the step.
- Lower down until your nose is almost touching the step. Pause in this position for at least 1 second, then slowly push yourself back up to the starting position.
- When you're done with a set of incline push-ups, do a set of decline push-ups by placing your feet on the bottom or second step and your hands on the floor at ground level.

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1 Mix and match several stair-based cardio exercises in a single session. Doing one stair-based cardio exercise for 10, 20, or even 30 minutes may get physically tiring or just plain boring, so don't be afraid to mix things up by creating your own interval training routine. The simplest form of interval training involves alternating between going up and down the steps at moderate pace and at your fastest pace, each for about 1-2 minutes at a time. But feel free to piece together your own interval training program with a variety of stair-based exercises.^[9]

- Do a 5 minute warmup, such as by slowly walking up and down the stairs, and finish with a 5 minute cool-down. Sprinkle in 1-2 minute rest periods during your session as well.
- Here's a sample interval session after your warmup: do 5 minutes of jogging up the stairs, 1 minute of sprints, and 5 more minutes of jogging, then rest for 2 minutes. Also add in stair jumps and hops between the intervals to really get your heart pumping. Then walk for 1-2 minutes and repeat the routine.

**Method 8 of 10:
Walking or jogging**1
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1 Go up and down the stairs for 5-10 minutes at a time. It's no joke—walking up the stairs can be a serious workout! While a long stretch of stairs, such as at a sports stadium or office building, is great for this, your home staircase is more than suitable. Simply walk or jog the stairs for 5-10 minutes, or as long as you can manage. Take a 5 minute break and do a little walking, stretching, or strength training, then hit the stairs again for 5-10 minutes. Do it all again one more time if you wish.^[10]

- Power-walking or jogging up the stairs will get your heart pumping and elevate your breathing rate—which makes it the kind of moderate intensity aerobic exercise that health experts recommend you do for at least 150 minutes each week.

Method 9 of 10: Long strides

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1 **Walk up the stairs briskly, covering 2 or more stairs with each step.** Walking up stairs is a great workout, but you can make it more challenging! Try lengthening your stride and skipping as many stairs as you safely and comfortably can with each step. Long strides work your leg muscles more than just walking on the stairs—especially the muscles in the back of your legs.^[11]

- Walk down the steps normally, then take long strides back up the stairs. Repeat this for around 5-10 minutes if you can manage it, take a short break, and then do another 5-10 minutes if you can.
- You may be able to cover 4 stairs with each step if you have long legs, but don't be surprised if you're in the 2-3 step range.

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1 Take the stairs more often as you go through your daily routine. Stairs are a great form of exercise because they're something you already use regularly. That said, look for little ways to take the stairs even more often. For example, at home, make multiple trips to bring items upstairs or downstairs so you get more exercise—and not just because you keep forgetting to take things with you!^[12]

- Also find ways to use stairs more often when you're away from home: take the stairs to your office instead of the elevator, or park higher up in the parking garage so you have more stairs to climb on your way out.
- Exercise is exercise, whether it's a structured routine or an unstructured "lifestyle activity" like walking up the stairs. Studies have shown that lifestyle activities can be as beneficial to your health as aerobic exercise routines.



Expert Q&A

Question

Can I strength train on stairs?



Brendon Rearick
Personal Trainer & Strength
Coach
Expert Answer

Absolutely! You can do incline push-ups, decline push-ups, or reverse lunges.

Helpful 4 Not Helpful 0

Question

Does climbing stairs burn calories?



Community Answer

Yes. Climbing stairs can be a great way to burn calories, especially if you run up the stairs as fast as you can. Just be careful not to trip.

Helpful 8 Not Helpful 2



Tips

- Health professionals recommend that you do about 150 minutes of cardio activities every week. Stair exercises, especially stair running or jogging, are great cardiovascular exercise that count towards your 150 minutes.^[13]
- In addition to cardiovascular exercises, also include at least 2 sessions of strength training per week. During each 20+ minute session, aim to work every major muscle group. Many of the stair exercises described here, such as lunges, stair jumps, push-ups, and calf raises, qualify as strength-training exercises.^[14]
- Although the stairs are great to use for exercise, alternate with other forms of exercise to avoid stressing your knees and other joints too much.^[15]
- Doing stair exercises can be difficult and physically demanding. Allow your body, muscles and joints to rest in between stair workouts.
- Don't be completely inactive on rest days—do something restorative and relaxing, like gentle yoga or a leisurely walk or bike ride.

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About This Article



Co-authored by:

Brendon Rearick

Personal Trainer & Strength
Coach

This article was co-authored by **Brendon Rearick** and by wikiHow staff writer, **Christopher M. Osborne, PhD**. Brendon Rearick is a Personal Trainer, Strength Coach, Fitness Program Director, and co-founder of Certified Functional Strength Coach (CSFC), a fitness education company in the San Francisco Bay Area. With 17 years of experience in the fitness industry, Brendon specializes in strength and conditioning, and his company CSFC has certified over 3,000 trainers in over 20 countries. Brendon has worked as a Program Director for Mike Boyle Strength and Conditioning (MBSC) and earned his massage therapy license from the Cortiva Institute-Boston. Brendon holds a BS in Kinesiology from the University of Massachusetts Amherst. This article has been viewed 74,598 times.



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