

# Back to basics: Researchers find simple exercises are a practical, time-efficient way to boost fitness

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Martin Gibala, Professor of Kinesiology, McMaster University. Credit: Georgia Kirkos, McMaster University

Kinesiologists at McMaster University who examined the effectiveness of old-school physical training have found that simple bodyweight exercises, when performed vigorously over short periods, improve cardiorespiratory fitness.

The findings, published recently in the *International Journal of Exercise Science*, are a reminder of the health benefits of practical, time-efficient and low-tech conditioning.

Bodyweight style interval training is popular, but to this point there had been only limited research into its potential for improving cardiorespiratory [fitness](#), which researchers say is an important measure of health and disease risk.

The new study was modeled on classic principles of physical education and a [fitness plan](#) known as "5BX" or Five Basic Exercises, originally developed in the 1950s by Dr. Bill Orban for Royal Canadian

Air Force members stationed in remote outposts.

The plan is not dependent on any specialized facilities or equipment and can be scaled to suit an individual's fitness level.

"A cruel twist of the pandemic is that, at the height of the lockdown, the public health response has largely removed one barrier to fitness but worsened another. Many people have time to spare, but closures and physical distancing provisions have limited access to facilities and equipment," says lead author Martin Gibala, a professor of kinesiology at McMaster who published a study in 2019 showing the health benefits of brief bouts of stair climbing throughout the day.

"Gym closures in some places will likely exacerbate the struggle that a lot of people seem to face in keeping fit," he says.

The exercises included simple calisthenics such as running in place, modified burpees and squat jumps. Participants performed the activities at a self-selected "challenging" pace, interspersed with light active recovery periods.

The 11-minute routine, which included a brief warm-up, does not demand extraordinarily high levels of motivation or "all out" efforts, which are common to many intense interval training approaches.

After six weeks of training, three times per week, [cardiorespiratory fitness](#) was higher than in a control group that did not [exercise](#).

"Our findings have relevance for individuals seeking practical, time-efficient approaches to at least maintain their fitness. The obvious advantage is that a workout of this nature can be done practically anywhere, in a time-efficient manner and without

the need for specialized equipment," says Gibala.

**More information:** Simple Bodyweight Training Improves Cardiorespiratory Fitness With Minimal Time Commitment: A Contemporary Application of the 5BX Approach. *International Journal of Exercise Science*.

[digitalcommons.wku.edu/ijes/vol14/iss3/2/](https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/ijes/vol14/iss3/2/)

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