

GET ACTIVE

# THE GREAT OUTDOORS



This autumn leave the gym behind you for a really invigorating exercise experience, says **Dean Hodgkin\***.

**D**espite your best intentions, it's not always possible to get to the gym, even if you really wanted to. But then, to be honest, do you really want to be sweating it out on the StairMaster when you could be in the park having fun? With summer too hot, winter too cold and spring too wet, this is the perfect time to take up an outdoor activity. So wouldn't it be great if there was a workout that gets you out in the fresh air and gives you the same total body benefits as a cardio/weights session at the gym - yet doesn't involve any pre-planning or expensive equipment?

#### A breath of fresh air

Fresh air training has always been popular in the US and Australia where it's common for personal trainers and exercise instructors to shift classes outside and get creative with the natural resources to hand such as branches, benches, stones or steps.

Exercising outdoors is a great way to add interest and variety to your training programme. Whether it's your garden, the park or a children's playground, there are countless ways you can create a safe, effective and fun outdoor workout. A sturdy tree branch is great for assisted chin-ups, a climbing frame for triceps dips. Stones, puddles, shadows, railings, fences, lamp posts, tree trunks, picnic benches: anything can be used as an obstacle or circuit station.

Shifting just one of your weekly sessions outside can give a new edge to your regular training programme as outside exercise equals adventure and an adrenalin high. It's like being

a child again; it reminds us of endless hours spent running about playing and exploring. It lets us enjoy our bodies again.

#### Feel-good exercise

There's certainly something revitalising and motivating about exercising in the fresh air. A comparative study by psychologists at James Cook University of Queensland, Australia, found that exercisers who run outside and focus on the environment feel less anxious, tired and depressed than indoor runners, who tend to focus more internally.

This suggests that the emotional experience associated with exercise is strongly influenced by where it's done. The researchers also found that the outdoor runners had significantly higher levels of the feel-good endorphins after exercise than the indoor runners.

Sports psychologists agree the time-out

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factor of exercising outside is certainly beneficial. We know exercise makes us feel better wherever we do it, so if you exercise in a pleasant environment with trees, open space and fresh air, you're going to feel even better.

Most of us lead urban, indoor lifestyles and getting outside provides a necessary release from this.

Recently there's been a real surge of interest in the healing effects of the outdoors, with psychologists looking into how nature can help relieve depression, anxiety and loneliness. The therapy, roughly defined as the study of the relationship between the human psyche and the natural environment, is known as ecopsychology. Exercising outdoors is one of the main methods being used to reconnect people with nature with therapists taking groups into the countryside to hike, camp and meditate.

#### TOTAL BODY PROGRAMME

- Physiological benefits: Improved agility, balance, co-ordination, power, alertness
- Physical benefits: Increased stamina,



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muscular endurance, strength, flexibility, enhanced body composition

- **Psychological benefits:** Improved wellbeing and increased enthusiasm. A lot of gym workouts are about looking better but this is about feeling better, with the physical benefits being incidental.

This workout plan is a combination of explosive cardio bursts to burn calories and resistance exercises to tone the muscles. Plyometric (or explosive) exercises provide a high-intensity challenge by focusing on large muscles ensuring the calorie expenditure is very high. An added bonus for all you weekend warriors is that these exercises will also help you to develop the power and force needed for many different sports. The order of exercises is not important, just ensure you alternate from a cardio option to a toning option throughout your workout, until you've completed all the exercises.

**Warm up:** Start with five minutes of brisk walking, gently increasing in speed, maybe even up to a jog.

**Cardio:** Aim to work out at around a 7-8 out of 10 on an 'effort' scale, pushing yourself pretty hard on the cardio because the sculpting intervals provide active recovery for your heart and lungs. Beginners should aim for 30 seconds of continuous action, intermediates 45, advanced 60.

**Lateral jumps:** With feet together and knees together, jump from side to side, moving in a forward direction. As your fitness improves, try jumping higher to cover more lateral distance.

**Sprints:** On your marks. Get set. Go! Just run for it.

**Sideways running:** Run sideways criss-crossing feet in front and behind.

**Backwards running:** Run backwards taking small, fast strides and looking over your shoulder.

**Skiping:** Skip (the travelling not the rope kind) like a child but exaggerate it. Push off from your toes and lift your knees to propel yourself forward. Concentrate on coordinating your arms and legs.

**Knees-up jogging:** Move forward pumping arms, aiming to lift your knees towards your chest.

**Sculpting:** Aim for 15 repetitions of each exercise.

**Pull ups (upper back and shoulders):** Holding on to a low branch or fence pole with an overhead grip, hang below it so your body is in an incline position, your feet resting on the floor with knees slightly bent. Pull yourself up aiming to bring your chest close to the branch/pole then slowly come back down under control.



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**Bicep curls (front arms):** Stand with feet hip-width apart. Hold a rock or water bottle in each hand, palms facing forwards. Bend your elbows and lift the weight towards your shoulder, keeping fixed elbows by your side. Slowly lower to start position.

**Tricep extensions (rear arms):** Feet together, bend both knees and hinge forwards slightly at the hips, supporting your weight with your right hand pressed onto your right thigh. Hold a rock or water bottle in your left hand with your palm facing in, bend your left arm so the weight is against the side of your waist.

Straighten your arm behind without locking it, keeping your shoulder, upper arm and elbow in place, then return to starting position.

**Lateral raises (shoulders):** Stand firmly with knees slightly soft, abs contracted and pelvis in neutral so your tailbone points directly down. Holding a rock or water bottle in each hand, let your arms hang straight down from your shoulders with palms facing



in. Raise your arms out and up to shoulder height, keeping elbows slightly bent, until in a crucifix position. Slowly lower the hands back down to your thighs.

**Hanging leg raises (tummy):** Hang from a branch or pole with your arms straight, legs together with your but heels lifted up behind you. Contract your abdominals strongly and lift both knees up towards your chest. If you



strength, which can reduce back pain.  
[www.equine-world.co.uk](http://www.equine-world.co.uk)

### *Beach volleyball*

Jumping around on the sand is much harder than it looks, implying your leg muscles will have to get kicking. You'll probably feel this more in the calves than other activities, so look forward to shapely, toned legs.  
[www.beach-volleyball.co.uk](http://www.beach-volleyball.co.uk)

### *Cycling*

Super for toning the legs but more importantly, one of the best routes to improving cardio respiratory fitness, so reducing the risk of various lifestyle diseases.  
[www.britishcycling.org.uk](http://www.britishcycling.org.uk)

### *Water-skiing*

This a great way to develop extra strength throughout the entire body, which will equip you to better handle your daily tasks such as shopping, gardening etc. After a session on the skis your legs, arms and abs will know you've had a workout. [www.britishwaterski.org.uk](http://www.britishwaterski.org.uk)

### *Surfing*

This is as 'total-body' as it gets so you can look forward to improved muscle tone in both upper and lower body. To counter the unsettling waves your postural muscles will work overtime so a stronger core unit is a welcome by-product, as it can help to improve posture and lead to a leaner appearance. [www.surfshacks.co.uk](http://www.surfshacks.co.uk)

### *Tennis*

Covering the court is nowhere near as easy as Federer, Nadal and the Williams sisters make it look on TV. You'll find you tune up your reflexes and your foot speed with continued practice. In addition to obvious high high benefits of repeated lunging, the upper body positioning requires constant twisting, so helping to trim the waist. [www.lta.org.uk](http://www.lta.org.uk)

### *Sailing*

This involves a great deal of using your bodyweight to counterbalance the force of the wind in the sails, help to improve both your static and dynamic equilibrium - essential skills as we age, in order to avoid the common problem of falls. In addition, pulling the rope is a mirror of the rowing type exercises you would perform in the gym and so will tone the upper back and the arms.  
[www.rya.org.uk](http://www.rya.org.uk)



have back problems only lift them as high as feels comfortable.

**Press ups (chest):** Support yourself on a bench or step with your hands positioned about shoulder-distance apart, arms straight but not locked, keeping your tummy in tight so there is a long incline from your head down to your feet on the floor. Bend your elbows to lower your torso towards, ensuring the arms open out to the side, then push back up to the start position without locking-out the elbows.

**Cool down:** Gentle jog for two minutes, slowing into a walk for one minute, then finishing with stretches for the major muscle groups, held for at least 15 seconds.

### **OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES**

The following outdoor activities will not only bring you the fun factor but can also provide additional fitness benefits:

#### *Windsurfing*

This is a super way to strengthen the muscles of the arms, shoulders and back. It is also a fantastic route to developing balance, often overlooked in today's fitness programmes yet proven to be invaluable in reducing risk of injury to the muscles and joints. [www.ukwindsurfing.com](http://www.ukwindsurfing.com)

#### *Horse riding*

This is a fantastic exercise for toning the lower body and helping to improve core