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cardio activity at least five days per week (150 minutes per week)at least 25 minutes of vigorous aerobic activity three days per week (75 minutes per week)Aim for two to three days per week of strength training. Include both compound exercises. These are moves that work multiple muscles at a time. Examples include: squats with a shoulder pressdeadlift with a bent-over rowlunges with a lateral raisecalf raises and plank with a one-arm rowOther key exercises to include in your strength training program include: squatslungespulsiuspushupsstraight leg deadliftsbench-pressespushup dipsoverhead pressespullupsplanksexercise ball crunchesTo get the most out of your weight loss workouts, make sure youre following these guidelines:Vary the intensity of your workouts. Include both HIIT and moderate-intensity exercises.Perform different methods of cardio in a week, like running on the treadmill, biking, and swimming. Use circuit training when lifting weights to keep your calorie burn high. Circuit training involves doing a series of exercises, one after the other, with no rest between each exercise. At the end of the series of exercises, you typically rest for a set period (30 to 60 seconds) and repeat the circuit two or three more times.Take at least two days of rest each week. Finding the right balance of cardio exercise and strength training is key when it comes to putting on lean muscle. Do too much, and you risk overtraining and losing your hard-earned muscle. On the other hand, if you dont up the intensity and put the time in, your muscle gains will be minimal. Stick to two to three days of cardio per week. Focus on shorter, higher-intensity sessions, such as 25 minutes of HIIT. You need to be hitting the weights at least three days per week. The research says that at the very least, training a minimum of two days per week is needed to maximize muscle growth. How you structure your workouts and the amount of days you devote to strength training depends on your current fitness level. Consider this schedule, depending on your training level:If four days of strength training feels right, consider splitting your week up into upper (arms, chest, and abs) and lower (legs) body segments. For example:If youre not gaining muscle as quickly as you like, you might be facing the dreaded plateau. When you train the same body parts with the same exercises and amount of weight over an extended period of time, theres a good chance your body will stop responding. In order to get back to a muscle-building phase, you need to change things up. Here are some ways to do so:Add weight to your lifts.Swap out your current exercises for a fresh set.Change the number of sets and reps youre performing. By varying the rep range, you combine lighter and heavier loads to elicit greater increases in strength and muscle size. For example, a heavy day will consist of three to five reps, a moderate day will have 8 to 12 reps, and a light day will be 15 to 20 reps. When it comes to adding muscle to your frame, you need to make sure youre giving your body plenty of time to rest between strength training sessions. Doing the same amount of exercise day after day can inhibit recovery and cause you to lose muscle over time. If the idea of taking a day or two off each week is hard for you to manage, consider treating these days as active rest. Do a gentle yoga class or spend extra time stretching. Cardiovascular exercise and strength training both play a significant role in targeting weight loss and increasing muscle size. Finding the right balance of the two will depend on your individual goals, how quickly you want to achieve them, and the amount of time you can commit to exercising. Verywell Fit uses only high-quality sources, including peer-reviewed studies, to support the facts within our articles. Read our editorial process to learn more about how we fact-check and keep our content accurate, reliable, and trustworthy.Boutcher SH. High-intensity intermittent exercise and fat loss.J Obes. 2011;20(1):868305. doi:10.1155/2011/868305Hartmann H, Wirth K, Klusemann M. Analysis of the load on the knee joint and vertebral column with changes in squatting depth and weight load.Sports Med. 2013;43(10):993-1008. doi:10.1007/s40279-013-0073-6Podstawski R, Markowski P, Clark CCT, et al. International standards for the 3-minute burpee test: High-intensity motor performance.J Hum Kinet. 2019;69:137-147. doi:10.2478/hukin-2019-0021Machado AF, Evangelista AL, Miranda JMQ, et al. Description of training loads using whole-body exercise during high-intensity interval training.Clinics (Sao Paulo). 2018;73:e516. doi:10.6061/clinics/2018/e516Rossetti ML, Munford SN, Snyder BW, Davis SE, Moir GL. 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The effects of place running exercises on the pulmonary function of normal adults.J Phys Ther Sci. 2017;29(9):1490-1493. doi:10.1589/jpts.29.1490Marchetti PH, Guiselini MA, da Silva JJ, Tucker R, Behm DG, Brown LE. Balance and lower limb muscle activation between in-line and traditional lunge exercises.J Hum Kinet. 2018;62:15-22. doi:10.1515/hukin-2017-0174Bergquist R, Iversen VM, Mork PJ, Fimland MS. Muscle activity in upper-body single-joint resistance exercises with elastic resistance bands vs. Free weights.J Hum Kinet. 2018;61:5-13. doi:10.1515/hukin-2017-0137Page 2 Athletes rely on powerful hip muscles to compete in their sport. Recreational exercisers count on these muscles to propel them through a grueling run. And pretty much all of us need the hip flexors to fire when we want to walk, stand, climb stairs, run, squat, sit up in bed, and so many other daily activities.This is where hip flexor exercises come in. Collectively, these muscles allow you to flex or lift your thigh towards your torso. You also recruit the hip flexors when bending your torso forward at the hip. But when these muscles are weak or tight, you may experience low back pain or tightness through the front of your hip. Thats why its essential to keep the hip flexors strong and flexible. A well-rounded lower body workout should include exercises that specifically target the hip flexor muscles. These muscles include: Psoas majorIliacusRectus femorisPectineusSartorius Here are seven of the best hip flexor exercises you can try at home or the gym.Straight leg raiseSliding mountain climbersPigeon poseJump lungeBulgarian split squatKettlebell swingBanded hip march 1 One of the easiest and most gentle hip flexor exercises you can do is the straight leg raise. This move targets the hip flexors as well as the core muscles. Its often included in a rehab program after a hip or pelvis injury, and its also an excellent exercise to add to a lower-body routine. Youll need an exercise mat to perform the straight leg raise. Lie on the floor with your legs straight and arms by your sides.Bend your right knee at a 90-degree angle. Plant your right foot on the floor.Engage the quadriceps muscles in your left leg, inhale, and lift the left leg to about a 45-degree angle, keeping the leg straight.Hold for three to five seconds.Exhale and slowly lower the left leg to the starting position.Repeat 10 times before switching legs. Modification: Decrease the distance you lift the straight leg. Start with lifting your leg a few inches off the ground and increase each time you perform the exercise. 2 Mountain climbers are already a challenging exercise. Add a set of slide discs to the move, and you will feel the burn for days. This move targets your core and hip flexor muscles specifically. They also improve agility and burn calories. Put a pair of slide discs or furniture sliders on the floor.Get into a plank or push-up position and put your feet on the discs. Your hands will be shoulder-width apart, arms will be straight and beneath your shoulders, with your back flat and body in a straight line from shoulders to ankles.Engage your core and slide your right knee towards your chest. Go as close to your chest as you can while keeping the rest of your body in a straight line. Return the right leg to the starting position.Switch legs and alternate right and left legs for 30 seconds. Modification: To make mountain climbers easier, you can eliminate the sliding discs and perform a traditional exercise. You can also shorten the distance that you slide your leg towards your chest. 3 Photo: Ben Goldstein / Model:Ana Alarcon Pigeon Pose (aka Eka Pada Rajakapotasana) is a hip opener yoga pose that includes a forward bend. The extended leg recruits the hip flexors and specifically targets the psoas muscle.Begin in Downward-Facing Dog position or get in a tabletop position on all fours. From this position, bring your right knee forward and place it in line with your right wrist. Your right ankle will be toward your left wrist.Slide your left leg back. It should be straight, with toes pointed and heel pointing towards the ceiling. You should be sitting up with a slight bend at the waist.Lower your hips to the ground.Move your hands forward until your forearms are on the floor, and your head is resting on your arms. If this is too difficult, keep your torso upright and only lean forward as much as you can.Stay in this position for five breaths.Push back through the hands, lift your hips, move your leg back into all fours.Repeat the pose with your left leg. Modification: If step four is too difficult, do a lifted pigeon pose. Keep your torso upright and only lean forward as much as you can. Also, try resting your head on a yoga block or placing a yoga block under your hip to decrease the distance between your body and the floor. 4 The jump lunge combines plyometric movement with the strengthening of the quads, hip flexors, hamstrings, and glute muscles. Plyometric exercises like the jump lunge improve power and performance in the lower body. Stand with feet shoulder-width apart.Get into a lunge position: Take a big step forward with your right leg then shift your weight forward, so your heel touches the floor first.Lower your body so the forward leg is parallel to the floor. Place your arms at your sides.Jump up with both feet, switching position of feet mid-air. Your left leg will now be forward and your right leg back behind you. Land in a lunge position with left leg forward. You can pump your arms in the air while you jump.Repeat the lunge jump movement for 30 seconds or 10 jumps on each side. Modification: The jump lunge is an advanced move. If it is too difficult, take the polymeric jump out of the exercise and perform a stationary forward or reverse lunge or do a set of walking lunges. 5 Bulgarian split squats are an intermediate exercise that strengthens the hip flexors, glutes, and calves. You need a bench or box that is knee-height. The move is performed unilaterally, which means that you target one leg at a time. This can help improve side-to-side muscle imbalances. Set a bench or box behind you. Make sure it is knee-height and level.Stand in front of the bench, about two feet, with your feet hip-width apart. Keep your chest and eyes pointing straight ahead. Be careful not to round your shoulders.Starting with the right foot forward, pick up the left foot and place it on the bench behind you with the ball of your foot in contact with the bench.Keep your back straight and lower the left knee towards the floor, but dont let it touch the floor. It will hover over the floor before returning to the starting position. Your right knee should form a 90-degree angle, so your thigh is parallel to the floor. You will feelPress the right foot into the ground and push the top of the left foot into the toe box and return to standing.Complete 12 to 15 reps on each leg. *You can add resistance to this exercise by holding a dumbbell in each hand or a weight plate or small kettlebell with both hands. Modification: Ease into this exercise by starting with bodyweight only. As you progress, consider adding a light weight and increasing as your legs and core get stronger. If having your leg on the bench is uncomfortable, bring the move to the floor. Keep your back foot on the floor as you perform the exercise. 6 Extreme Photographer / Getty Images The kettlebell swing is part cardio, part explosive strength, and all about working every muscle in your body. Your hip flexors, mostly, play an active role in performing this move. Place a kettlebell in front of you.Stand tall, feet slightly wider than hips, legs slightly turned out.Keeping a straight spine, bend knees, and bend at hips to pick up the kettlebell with both hands.Pull shoulders back and lift the chest.Bend knees and bend at hips to swing the kettlebell between your legs (like passing a football), and then stand tall, swinging the kettlebell up in front of the chest as you squeeze your backside and press hip forward. Try to swing the kettlebell to shoulder level. Keep bodyweight towards heels.Lower the kettlebell and swing through your legs to repeat.Continue kettlebell swings for 60 seconds or 15 to 20 repetitions. Modifications: Theres not much you can do to modify the kettlebell swing other than taking your time learning how to do it. Consider hiring a personal trainer or physical therapist to walk you through each step and watch as you perform the move. They can make sure youre executing each step correctly. 7 Getty Images / Wavebreakmedia The banded hip march (aka the psoas march) is an excellent move to strengthen the hip flexors. Plus, the addition of a band around the ankles means you're working against resistance making the exercise more challenging. Stand hip-distance apart with your arms at your sides. Keep your chest lifted and core engaged.Loop a mini resistance band around the balls of both feet.Contract your abdominal muscles, and bring your right knee up and out in front of you like you are marching. Stop when it reaches the height of your hips.Raise the left arm as your right knee comes up towards the hips. You will repeat opposite arm to opposite leg the entire round.Slowly lower the right leg and repeat on the left side.Do 8 to 10 reps on each leg, alternating sides. Modification: You can drop the band and just do a psoas march. Think of this as a low-impact high knees exercise. You can also shorten the march by bringing your knee up half the distance.Verywell Fit uses only high-quality sources, including peer-reviewed studies, to support the facts within our articles. Read our editorial process to learn more about how we fact-check and keep our content accurate, reliable, and trustworthy.Cleveland Clinic. Psoas Syndrome. (2018).Tyler T, Fukunaga T, Gellerl J. Rehabilitation of Soft Tissue Injuries of the Hip and Pelvis. Int J Sports Phys Ther. 2014 Nov; 9(6): 785797.Davies G, Riemann B, Manske R. Current Concepts of Plyometric Exercise. Int J Sports Phys Ther. 2015 Nov; 10(6): 760786.Lockie RG, Lazar A, et al. Between-leg mechanical differences as measured by the Bulgarian split-squat: exploring asymmetries and relationships with sprint acceleration. Sports (Basel). 2017;5(3):1-12. doi:10.3390/sports5030065There are also plenty of cardio classes out there that you can try. Heart-pumping examples includeindoor cycling, kickboxing, HIIT classes, dance cardio, running classes, rowing classes, and more.Rest days: 2 times each weekWhy: Taking a break lets your body recover and rebuildand gives it some time forpost-workout muscle soreness to ease upso you can get back to your workouts refreshed and ready to rock it.There are a few ways to work in a rest day. A rest day can involveactive recovery, meaning you dont have to hit the gym or break a serious sweat, but you still dosomething. Its not just about the physical recoveryits also the mental, Tamir says. Doing something that you enjoy thats active is great for the mindand it assists in residual fatigue.But sometimes the bestrest day is a day ofactual rest. Its perfectly okay to do absolutely nothing on your rest day. Whats most important is that you listen to what your body and brain need. Some rest days, that might be doing a light morning stretch routine. Other days, it might be binge-watching Netflix on the couch. Both have a place in your weekly workout plan!How: Active recovery shouldnt require much effort. Think low-key, gentle movement. You can do somestretching, justtake a walk, or try a class like restorative yoga. Its also okay, as mentioned, to do nothing physical on your rest day. If you do choose active recovery, aim for 3060 minutes of really light activity.Where you place these rest days is up to you!If you to your workouts Monday through Friday, feel free to take the whole weekend off, Tamir says. Or you could break them up by doing a strength day, a cardio day, then a rest day before getting back to weight training. AsSELF previously reported, theAmerican Council on Exercise recommends taking at least one rest day every 7 to 10 days of exercise, but when and how often to take rest days is highly individualized, which is why its important to tune into what your body is telling youand then heed that advice.Is two hours in the gym too much?When it comes to exercising, more doesnt always equal better. In general, a smart approach to working out is quality over quantity.Ava Fagin, CSCS, director of sports performance at Cleveland State University, tells SELF.Its totally possible to get a good workout in, or enough of a workout, to elicit the goals you want without exercising for hours at a time, Fagin says. Of course, some people, like marathon runners, may actually need to spend multiple hours exercising at a time as part of their super-specific training programs. But for the general population, logging two hours at the gym isnt necessaryand, in some cases, could even be counterproductive if you push yourself too far and overwork your muscles.So how much time at the gym is ideal? In general, a strength-training session should last 4060 minutes, plus foam rolling and aquick warm-up beforehand. As for cardio, theAmerican College of Sports Medicine recommends logging 150 minutes of moderate-to-intense activity per week. How you split up those 150 minutes will depend on what type of training youre doing, whether thats longer, steady-state sessions:shorter HIIT workouts; or a mix of the two.Is it bad to work out every day?Now, it may sound counterintuitive, but rest days are on the schedule for a reason: Working out every day is not a good plan if you want to improve your fitness long-term.Working out too much without giving your body the down time it needs is akin to taking two steps forward, one step back, explains Fagin. Eventually, taking that one step back over and over again elicits a downward slope of progress just because youre so tired, she says.Not taking a rest day when you need it, especially if you arovertraining, can increase your risk of overuse injury, decrease your performance, crush your motivation, and suck the joy out of an activity you once loved, according toACE.Instead, follow the advice above for building weekly workout plans that include doses of work and doses of rest. With that kind of balanced approach, youll get to your goals faster and with less risk of injury (and enjoy the process more!). Now thats what we call a workout win.Related:

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