

It's for absolute beginners like you, takes just 10 WORLD'S EASIEST

By **LOUISE ATKINSON**

AS WELL as losing weight, a commitment to getting fit is one of the most popular health-related resolutions at this time of year, as the countdown to summer begins.

It is certainly a good one. Studies show exercise can reduce your risk of stroke, type 2 diabetes and even some cancers by up to 50 per cent — and lower your risk of early death by up to 30 per cent.

It also reduces your risk of depression and Alzheimer's disease.

'Physical activity is the most important thing you can do for your health,' says Professor Stephen Harridge, director of the Centre of Human and Aerospace Physiological Sciences at King's College London. 'It can't stop the ageing process, but it will allow you to age optimally.'

In terms of staying well and mobile it could 'give you a 30-year age advantage', he adds. And it can cost nothing.

An estimated 44 per cent of adults never exercise. It is easy to be put off by the seemingly Draconian official guideline of two-and-a-half hours of physical activity a week. But ask Professor Harridge for his prescription and he says: 'Just do something — anything that raises your heart rate and uses your main muscle groups is good. Do a little bit and do it regularly.'

What if you don't know where to start? We asked personal trainer Nicola Addison, of Eqvvs Training in London, to devise a unique, low-intensity exercise programme for people who have never worked out before, or who are returning after a long break, whatever their age.

It's a calendar of exercise, with a plan for every day over four weeks.

Each week, the exercises become more challenging, but you can repeat the first week as many times as you need before moving on. And while most exercise plans can swiftly become boring and monotonous, ours offers something different every day to keep you motivated.

FOR week one, you need to set aside only ten minutes a day. In week two, it increases to 15 minutes. By week three, move up to 20 minutes a day if you feel able. Your strength and confidence should be growing to prepare you for week four's 30 minutes of exercise a day.

Try to make Saturdays a time for sociable exercising, and Sundays your day of rest when you can check your progress.

'If you stick with this plan right to the end, you will be so much stronger and fitter and fully prepared to launch yourself into whatever regular, fun exercise you enjoy the most,' says Nicola.

If you have any concerns, check with your GP first and stop if you experience any pain or discomfort.

WEEK ONE

EVERY day, start your session with a warm up (see box above), then aim to do 20 repetitions of each exercise, in order, with 30 seconds of rest between each.

Keep your tummy muscles tightly

YOUR DAILY WARM UP AND WARM DOWN

BEFORE every daily session, do this two-minute warm-up to mobilise your muscles and joints — preventing injury and preparing your body for exercise. Do a slower version as a cool down afterwards.

1. Standing, lift one knee high, hugging it to your chest if you can, alternate knees. Repeat.

2. Lift right arm above your head, bend arm at the elbow, reach back and try to tap fingers/palm between shoulder blades (or as close as you can). Alternate arms. Repeat.

3. Standing with your feet shoulder-width apart, step your right leg out to the side, keeping your feet flexed, and reach for your toes with your right hand. Alternate.

4. Clap your hands in front of the body, then open your arms out wide. Repeat.

5. Right hand resting against a wall for balance, bend your left knee behind you and try to grab your foot and pull it towards your bottom. Switch legs and repeat.

6. Place hands on shoulders and roll, squeezing elbows all the way round. Repeat forwards and backwards.

7. Feet wide, eyes forward, tighten tummy muscles and slowly rotate torso, twisting body one side to the other.

pulled in throughout. Finish with a cool down. This should take no longer than ten minutes.

MONDAY

Chair squat

STAND one pace in front of a (sturdy) chair and face away from it with your feet hip-width apart.

Gently lower your bottom until it touches the chair (try not to use the arm rests), then squeeze your bottom muscles and push through the heels to stand up again.

Backwards toe tap

(See illustration)

Hip bridge

(See illustration)

Side steps

WITH feet hip-width apart, take a big side step to your right, keeping hips facing forward. Then take a big side step left, pushing through your right foot to return.

TUESDAY

Brisk walk

WALK for 30 minutes. At some point, up the pace for ten minutes, swinging your arms. You should be able to talk but not sing (try it).

WEDNESDAY

Chest openers

STAND with one foot in front of the other, arms straight, clap your hands in front of you at chest height, then open out as wide as you can, palms facing forward.

Standing plank press

(See illustration)

Towel raises

HOLD a hand towel very tightly in both hands. Stand with one foot in front of the other and slightly bend the knees. Slowly lift the towel in front of you and high above your head, then lower to your thighs (keeping tension in the towel the whole time).

Standing plank rotations

(See illustration)

THURSDAY

DO THE following exercises as energetically as you can. Spend 30 seconds on each and have a 30-second rest before moving on to the next one. Repeat the cycle of four exercises for ten minutes.

■ **MARCH** on the spot, knees high.

■ **HALF** star jumps — take a step to the right, lifting your right arm, then return to standing position and do the same on the left.

■ **STEP** up and down stairs.

■ **SLOW** spotty dog — jump with right leg in front of left, then left in front of right, alternating.

FRIDAY

Leg lift

LIE on your back, knees bent, feet flat on floor, arms out wide in line with your shoulders, palms up.

Pull your tummy in to your spine, pushing your lower back against the floor and slowly lift one foot (keeping your knee bent) an inch off the floor. Pause, then return your foot to the floor. Switch legs.

Crunch

IN THE same position, place your hands on top of your thighs, look at the ceiling, and slowly lift your shoulders an inch or two from the floor, sliding your hands towards your knees. Slowly lower back.

Plank on knees

ON all-fours, draw your tummy towards spine and squeeze abdominal muscles. Hold for 15 seconds.

Leg swing

(See illustration)

SATURDAY

GO TO the park with a ball or Frisbee and play with your children or grandchildren; go dancing; or get busy in the garden. Make sure you're moving around for at least ten minutes.

SUNDAY

REST and test your progress (see box right).

WEEK TWO

EVERY day, start with a warm up then complete 20 repetitions of each exercise in order, with 20 seconds' rest in between.

Finish with a cool down. If you found last week's exercises tough, go back over them again this week. If you're up for a slightly bigger challenge, try these.

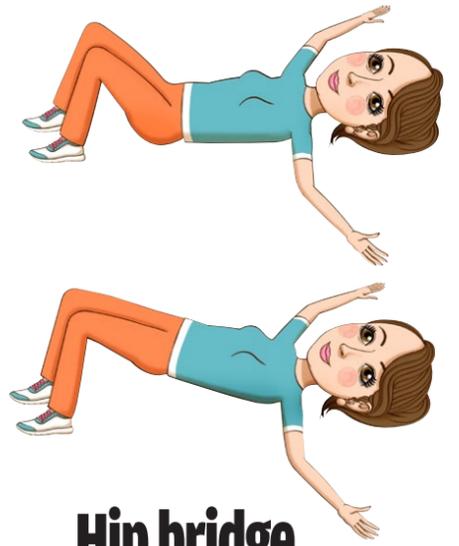
WEEK ONE

BEFORE you start these exercises, read and follow the full plan below



Backwards toe tap

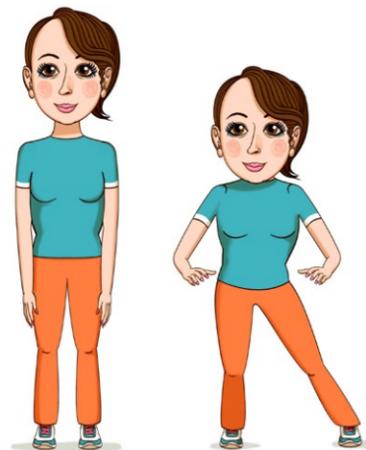
STAND with feet hip-width apart. Step one foot behind you, bend both legs and reach to touch floor, with both hands if you can. Then with weight on your front foot, push through the heel to stand up. Alternate legs.



Hip bridge

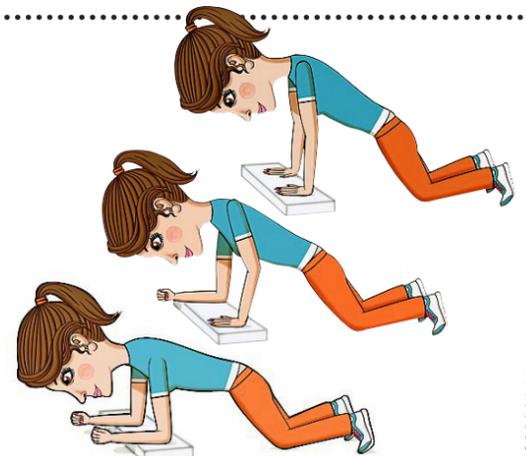
LIE on your back, knees bent and feet flat on the floor hip-width apart, arms out wide, palms up. Clench buttocks, peel hips off floor as high as you can. Keep buttocks clenched and lower slowly back to floor.

WEEK TWO



Side lunge

TAKE a big side step to your right, bending your right knee, keeping the knee facing forward. Pushing from the outside of right foot, return to standing. Switch sides.



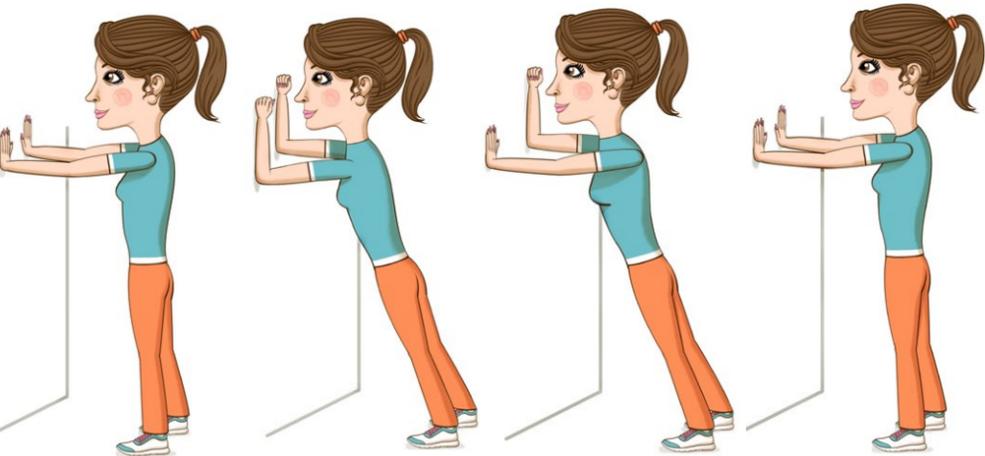
Plank press

GET on all-fours, with a step in front of you. Place your hands on the step, under your shoulders, and shift your weight on to your hands. Bending your right elbow, lower your body so your elbow is on the step. Repeat on the left. Brace tummy muscles and place your right hand where your right elbow was and the same on the left.

HEALTH

minutes a day AND could transform your health

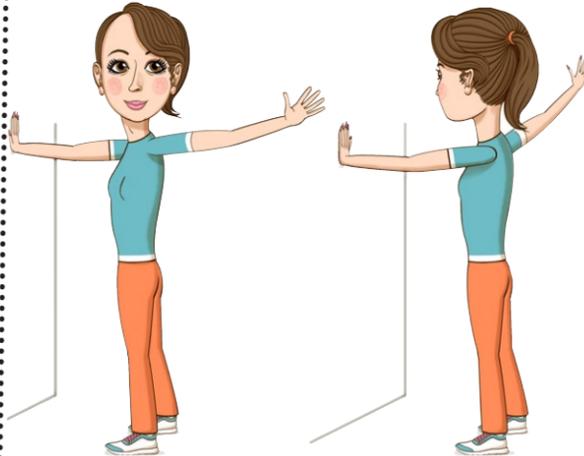
EXERCISE PLAN



Standing plank press

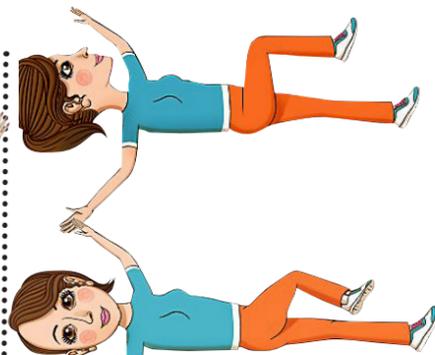
STAND facing wall, a couple of feet away, and place hands on wall in line with shoulders. Brace tummy muscles and lean in to wall, bending first your right, then left arm so

elbows are on the wall. Reverse this step, placing one hand at a time where elbows were, and push yourself to start position. Repeat, starting with the other hand.



Standing plank rotations

STAND, place your hands on a wall at shoulder height. Brace your tummy muscles and lift your right hand off the wall, out to the side, then behind you (eyes should follow your hand). Slowly return hand to wall. Switch arms.



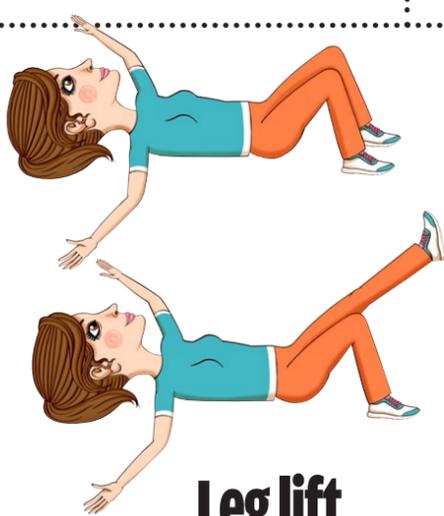
Leg swing

LIE on your back, legs flat (or slightly bent to make it easier), arms out wide in line with shoulders, palms up. Bend your right leg and lift it across your body — try to touch your toes to the floor on the left hand side of you. Using tummy muscles, slowly bring the leg back to the start position. Repeat 20 times with right leg, then switch to left.



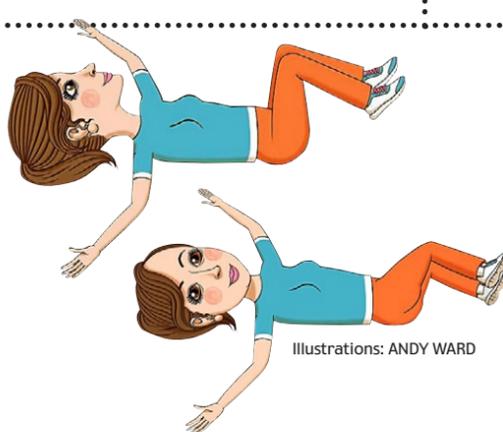
Plank rotations

START as you would for the plank press. Lift your right hand off the step, out to the side, then above you — in line with your shoulder. Follow the movement with your eyes. Slowly lower your right hand to the step. Switch sides.



Leg lift

LIE on your back, knees bent, feet flat on floor, arms out wide in line with shoulders, palms up. Draw tummy button in, pushing lower back against floor. Slowly lift one foot up, straighten knee, pause, then return slowly to floor, bending knee. Switch legs.



Twist

LIE on the floor, knees bent and feet raised, arms out wide in line with shoulders, palms up. Take knees slowly over to one side, gently return, then twist to the other side.

Illustrations: ANDY WARD

TEST YOUR PROGRESS

YOU'LL be amazed how quickly you progress. To judge this, before you begin, take the 30-second chair test, then repeat this test at the end of each week. It measures leg strength, endurance and balance. Sit on a dining room chair, your feet on the ground. Set a timer,

and simply stand (without using your hands or arms), then sit again (gently) as many times as you can in 30 seconds. If you find this easy, progress to a softer, lower chair, which demands greater strength and balance to get up and down without support.

MONDAY Squat

STAND with feet hip-width apart and lower yourself slowly as if sitting on an imaginary chair. Push your arms out in front, don't look down and hold briefly. Keeping your body weight in your heels, return to standing.

Toe tap

IN THE same position, tilt forward from your hips, bend your right knee and put both palms flat on floor as you take a large step back with your left foot. Keep your weight on your front foot. Push back through your heel and return to standing. Switch legs.

Hip bridge

LIE on your back, knees bent, feet flat on the floor, arms out wide and palms up. Position your feet apart — about one-and-a-half times your hip width. Turn out your toes, clench your bottom, push through your heels and lift your hips. Keep your buttocks squeezed as you gently lower back to the floor.

Side lunge

(See illustration)

TUESDAY

TAKE a 30-minute walk and ensure 15 minutes of it is energetic.

Try power-walking — wiggle your hips and swing your arms — or find a more challenging uphill stretch so you feel puffed at the end.

WEDNESDAY

Thumbs up

STAND with one foot in front of the other, stretch out your arms to the sides at shoulder height, thumbs up. Rotate thumbs backwards so they are pointing behind you. Now squeeze your arms behind your back as if you're trying to get your thumbs to touch.

Plank press

(See illustration)

Towel high row

HOLDING a hand towel tightly between your hands, stand with one foot in front of the other, arms out in front of you at chest height.

Keeping elbows high, slowly drag the towel back to touch your chest (keeping tension on the towel), then return to start position.

Plank rotations

(See illustration)

THURSDAY

TRY the following exercises as energetically as you can for 30 seconds, with a 30-second rest between each. Repeat the cycle for 15 minutes. Or, dance enthusiastically to your favourite songs.

■ JOGGING on the spot.

■ FULL star jumps (if you can).

■ WALK up stairs two at a time (and down one at a time).

■ SLOW spotty dogs (adding arms) on the spot — jump right leg and right arm forwards, then switch.

FRIDAY

Leg lift

(See illustration)

The lie-down

SIT on the edge of a bed with your hands on your thighs. Lean back until you're lying flat, then lean forward to a sitting position — you may need to use your hands at first, but aim to do this without.

Plank

ON all-fours, with hands shoulder-width apart, draw your tummy towards your spine and squeeze your abdominal muscles. Hold for 30 seconds.

Twist

(See illustration)

SATURDAY

WHATEVER leisure activity you do — dancing, playing with the kids — ensure you get properly puffed for at least 15 minutes.

SUNDAY

REST and test your fitness.

LOTS MORE EASY-PEASY EXERCISES NEXT WEEK