

# SUPERFAST FITNESS

**These 5-minute workouts burn fat,  
build strength, and banish holiday stress.**

BY EVELYN SPENCE PHOTOGRAPHS BY JAMES FARRELL

**W**ho can carve out 45 minutes a day for exercise in December, arguably the busiest month of the year? Most of us are totally overcommitted during the holidays. As a result, it's easy for our exercise routines to take a vacation.

Well, let's unwrap a gift just for you: a plan to get and stay fit in 5 minutes a day. For an investment of 300 seconds, you can boost your energy, fire up your metabolism, and tame holiday tension.

Supershort workouts offer another benefit for the time-crunched: stick-to-itiveness. "If you give up exercising for a month, it will be a lot harder to start again in January," says Nick Clayton, personal training manager at the National Strength and Conditioning Association. But 5 minutes a day can keep you mentally committed to fitness.

Each day, choose one of the ultraefficient workouts on the following pages. Do others if you have more time, but avoid strength workouts on consecutive days. Alternate routines throughout the month to achieve what we all really need in December: balance.

Strengthen your  
core with the  
bridge, p. 77.



Perform each move for 60 seconds, then rest for 15 seconds.



### Seal Jack

Stand tall, feet together, abs engaged, arms held straight in front parallel to floor, palms together. Jump, spreading legs and arms out to sides simultaneously, as shown. Quickly jump back to starting position, clapping hands together (like a seal).

**CARDIO**

“Bigger movements that engage more muscles will give you the biggest bang for your buck,” says Chris Jordan, director of exercise physiology at Johnson & Johnson Human Performance Institute in Orlando. To keep workouts short, choose exercises that work multiple parts of your body at once, like the four here.

WARDROBE STYLING BY ALLISON ST. GERMAIN; HAIR AND MAKEUP BY MEL PALDINO



### Modified Mountain Climber

Place hands on seat of sturdy chair or arm of sofa and walk feet back to push-up position. Arms should be nearly straight with slight bend in elbows, hands directly under shoulders. From this position, bring right knee forward, tapping foot on floor before returning it behind you. Repeat on opposite side, then continue alternating as fast as possible with good form.



### Squat

With feet a bit more than hip-width apart, lift chest, extend arms forward, and shift weight back onto heels. Bend knees and push hips back and down as if sitting in a chair. Don't let knees travel forward past toes. Sit back until thighs are almost parallel to floor, then push up through heels to return to starting position.

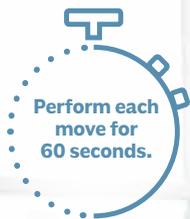


### Bicycle Crunch

Lie on back with knees bent, feet flat on floor, and hands behind head. Lift left leg and crunch torso to left to bring right elbow toward left knee. Return to starting position and repeat on other side, bringing left elbow and right knee together. Continue cycling legs and twisting upper body, alternating elbows and knees.



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Perform each move for 60 seconds.

### Extension

Sit forward in chair, push feet into floor, reach arms overhead, and lean back gently. Hold 10 seconds, straighten up, then lean again—an inch farther if possible. Hold 10 seconds. Lean back farther and hold 10 seconds more. If your lower back hurts at any point, stop. The stretch should feel good, not painful. Lower your arms, then repeat sequence once more.



## FLEXIBILITY

“We spend most of our lives flexed forward—sitting at computers, holding phones, and driving,” says Joy Keller, a personal trainer in San Diego. Hunching rounds the shoulders, creating a curved posture and tightening neck muscles. These moves loosen your shoulder, neck, and upper-back muscles to release tension and counter what Keller calls “tech neck.”

## STRESS-FREE SEASON EXERCISE



### Forward Fold

Sitting in chair with knees together and feet flat on floor, inhale, then exhale and bend forward, rounding shoulders. Concentrate on curving your spine one vertebra at a time. Let arms hang by sides toward floor. Hold 30 seconds, allowing gravity to stretch spine. Sit up, then repeat once more.



### Neck Stretch

Sitting up straight in chair, place right hand on top of head near left ear and let weight of arm gently pull head toward right shoulder. (Don't bring shoulder up to ear.) Relax, hold 30 seconds, and slowly return to starting position. Switch hands and tilt head toward left shoulder. Hold 30 seconds.



### Seated Figure-Four Stretch

Scoot butt forward on seat of chair. Keeping a lengthened, straight spine, anchor right foot on floor and lift left leg, placing left ankle over right knee. Hold. To increase stretch, gently push down on left leg and hinge forward at hips. Hold 30 seconds before repeating with opposite leg.



### Seated Chest Stretch

Sitting on edge of chair with knees together and feet flat on floor, rotate torso to right, extending right arm back over top of chair, thumb up. Rest left hand on knee. Look back over right shoulder and hold 20 to 30 seconds, then slowly turn torso forward, bringing arm to front. Repeat on opposite side, extending left arm over chair.

# CORE

You use your core muscles every time you move, whether you're walking or lifting a bag of groceries. These muscles support your spine, holding your upper body erect and letting you twist and bend. "Working your core means working all of it: abs and back, side to side, inside and out," says Keller. Do this workout at least twice a week.

## Standing Cross Crunch

Stand with feet slightly more than shoulder-width apart. Place hands behind head and keep elbows pointed out to sides. Rotating torso, crunch at waist, bringing left elbow down and right knee up to meet elbow. Return to standing and repeat with right elbow and left knee. Alternate until you need to rest, then continue.



Perform each move for 45 seconds, then rest for 15 seconds.



## Straight-Arm Plank

Get into push-up position, hands directly under shoulders, back straight, with your body forming a straight line from head to heels. Contract abs. Hold with good form as long as possible. Rest when needed, then assume plank again.



## Swimmer

Lying facedown with core engaged, extend arms in front of you with palms on floor and legs outstretched. Lift head and upper back off floor slightly, then raise left arm and right leg simultaneously. Return to starting position, then raise right arm and left leg. Continue alternating until you need to rest, then resume.



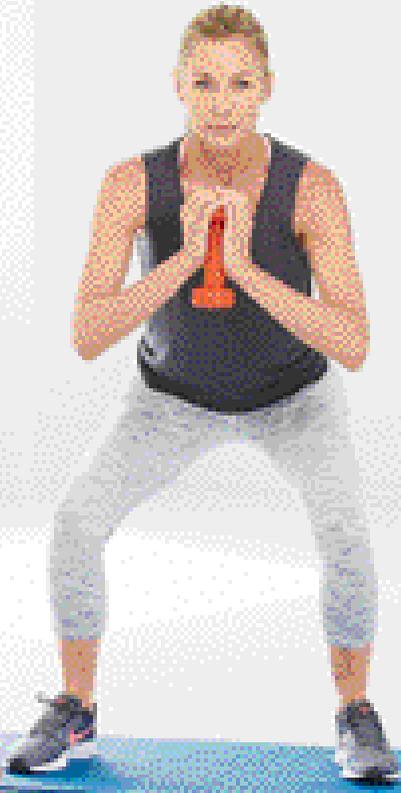
## Torso Twist (left)

Stand with feet shoulder-width apart. Engage core muscles to brace torso without arching back. With hands behind head, elbows out, rotate torso to left. Hold briefly, keeping abs tight, then rotate to right. Rest when needed, then continue.

## Bridge (photo on p. 70)

Lie on back with knees bent and feet flat on floor, arms at sides. Contract abs to flatten lower back against floor. Keeping abs engaged, lift hips off floor, forming a straight line from shoulders to knees. Hold 10 to 15 seconds, then lower. Repeat 3 times.

Perform each move for 90 seconds, then rest for 15 seconds.



### Goblet Squat With Dumbbell

Grasp a dumbbell vertically at one end with both hands, holding it close to chest with elbows bent. Place feet more than shoulder-width apart, toes pointed out slightly. Keeping chest up and back straight, bend knees and push hips back, as if sitting in a chair, until elbows meet knees. Press through heels to rise, then repeat.

### Dumbbell Chest Press on Floor

Lie on back with knees bent and feet flat on floor. Grasp 1 dumbbell in each hand and hold both above you with straight arms, palms facing forward. Bend elbows until upper arms rest on floor. Forearms should be vertical (as shown). This is starting position. Now push dumbbells above chest until arms are straight. Pause, squeezing chest muscles. Slowly bring dumbbells down to starting position. Repeat.



### Dumbbell Bent-Over Row

Holding 1 dumbbell in each hand at sides, stand with feet shoulder-width apart and knees slightly bent. Bend forward at hips until back is between 45 degrees and parallel to floor (A). Squeezing shoulder blades together, pull both weights toward sides of chest (B), pause, then lower. Repeat without standing up.



## STRENGTH

Need some incentive to pick up weights? Once you put them down, you'll not only get stronger but also burn calories at an accelerated rate. That's because strength training causes microscopic tears in your muscle fibers. While repairing those muscles and making them stronger, your body uses more energy, says Wayne Westcott, exercise physiologist at Quincy College.

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