

Stay Strong This Winter with Isometrics

By Meagan Wilson

Cold weather and short days make wintertime fitness a real challenge. Indoor gyms offer a variety of exercise methods, but they are not a practical solution for everyone. If you find yourself pressed for time or short on space, isometric exercises might be a great addition to your routine. Isometrics don't take up much room, and they are beneficial even in short intervals.

What are isometrics?

According to The Random House Webster's Dictionary, isometrics is "exercise in which muscles are tensed against other muscles, or against an immovable object." Isometric exercises are static. The ever-popular plank is a great example of isometrics.

Benefits

Isometrics are portable and affordable. Since you can do them almost anywhere and in short spurts, isometric exercises are a great choice when you're stuck inside. You don't need weights, and for many of them, you don't even need a mat. Those aren't the only benefits of isometrics, though. They are often used to rehabilitate muscles and joints, such as with a torn rotator cuff or a knee injury. Since they don't require joint movement, isometrics offer a gentle way to work your muscles back up to strength or prevent muscle loss.

Five isometric exercises to do indoors

The range of possible isometric exercises is nearly endless, and once you get the hang of it, you can probably come up with many of your own. Here are five to get you started.

Wall Sit

Stand with your back against a flat wall. Bend your knees and slide down into a seated position, with the tops of your thighs at a ninety-degree angle to your calves. Your feet should be flat on the floor. Tense your core and legs. Breathe deeply and calmly. Hold for 30-60 seconds.

Plank

This is where a mat might be handy, if you're not on carpet. Get into the top position of a push-up, or for a lower plank, support your body on your forearms. Your body should form a straight line from your shoulders to your heels. No bowing or bending. Tighten your abdominal muscles and hold for 30-90 seconds.

Hand Press/Chest Squeeze

You can do this one seated or standing, so long as your back is straight. Bring your palms together a few inches in front of your chest with your elbows bent, and parallel to your chest. Press your palms together as hard as you can for 30-60 seconds. You'll feel this one in your pectorals. Remember to breathe.

Neck Press

This is another one you can do standing or sitting, as long as your back is straight. Place one palm on the back of your head, and the other palm on top of that hand. Bend your neck forward, like you're stretching it. Gently press your head back, while resisting with your hands. Do this for 5-10 seconds. Switch to the front. Be sure to get both sides, too.

Superman

Lie on your belly with your arms out in front of you, and your legs resting on the floor. Tense your abdominals, and lift your arms and legs as high as you can. You'll feel this one in your core. Try not to tense your neck, and remember to breathe. Hold for 10-30 seconds, then release.

Cautions

Some doctors caution that isometrics can increase blood pressure, due to the muscle tension inherent in this form of exercise.

Also, nothing replaces fresh air and cardio. Even during the cold months, try to go for occasional walks. The exercise is good for your cardiovascular system, and getting outside can be psychologically beneficial. Be sure to dress appropriately for the weather, though.

Always listen to your body when you exercise. A slight burning sensation in your muscles means they are working hard and getting stronger. If you experience serious pain during any exercise, stop and figure out why. If you have arthritis, high blood pressure, or a heart condition, consult your physician before beginning any fitness regime.