



End of summer fitness challenge

The start of a new season is always a good time to take stock and reevaluate. No matter how old you are, the end of summer/start of fall feels like a new beginning, like it did when you were school-aged.

Run with this feeling and use this time to relaunch your fitness activities. The timing feels good—daylight is still long and there's not yet a chill in the air. Challenge yourself to establish a good habit or reignite a dormant one before closing out the year.

Escape into the wild

Spending time outdoors is good for your body and mind. Knowing that warm weather won't last long should drive you to grasp those last great days outside. Incorporate your physical activity into your time outside. Consider:



Daily jogs through local parks or on nature trails. Switch it up to see the sunrise a couple days each week.



Walking lunch breaks. Grab a friend or two and take a tour of the area.



Get your wheels rolling by biking, skating or scooting a loop through your neighborhood.



Pick up a paddle and learn pickleball. Play on outdoor courts until the weather changes. Then find an indoor court.



Try classes that meet in local parks. They can range from yoga and tai chi to bootcamps and dance classes.

What's your number?

There are always new combinations of fitness activities being developed by athletic and personal trainers and shared online. While not every combination will work for everyone, something could work well for you. Pick one and commit. Challenge yourself to try it for a week, and if it's not for you, try another one. See which one of these trending fitness routines is your lucky number.

3-3-3

Each week, aim for three moderate-intensity days and three lower-intensity (active recovery) days. Mix and match activities to include three sessions each of strength (resistance) and cardio. With this plan, the goals are clear, and you'll rarely get bored.

5-5-5-30

Dive into this workout as soon as you wake up, before the day (and your mind) gets cluttered. It's five push-ups, five squats, five lunges (per leg) and a 30-second plank. Start by doing one cycle. When you feel strong enough, add another set of reps. Before you know it, you'll see and feel the difference.

6-6-6

This workout is a version of interval training we can all embrace. Start with an easy walk for a six-minute warm-up, follow it with a brisk walk for six minutes and then take an easy six-minute cool-down stroll. Do this series six times each week and you'll have accomplished more than 100 minutes of activity.



12-3-30

It's a high-intensity treadmill workout.¹ After a warm-up, the goal is to walk at a 12% incline at 3 miles per hour for 30 minutes. Work up to five days each week to help hit your fitness goals, burn calories, improve your cardiovascular health and tone lower-body muscles.

15-15-15

This is a cross-training series loved by celebrities (or at least that's what they say). Spin (or cycle) for 15 minutes (including warm-up), switch to an elliptical machine for 15 minutes and run (or walk briskly) on a treadmill for 15 minutes (including cool-down). Done back to back, 45 minutes of cardio work is efficient activity.

Challenge yourself to get moving every day for better mental and physical health.

Before starting any new exercise routine, talk to your healthcare provider to make sure it's safe.

¹<https://runningmagazine.ca/sections/training/try-the-12330-workout-ramp-up-treadmill-training-with-a-tiktok-trend/>



The secrets to making habits stick

We are creatures of habit.

Almost half of what we do in daily life is habitual: bathing, dressing, eating, commuting, doing parts of our jobs, exercising, and so on. You don't really think about it—you just do it. Have you ever arrived home from work and could not remember a moment of your commute? It's because it's a habit. These actions are filed away in your brain to be used on repeat so you don't have to think much about them.

Breaking or making new habits requires conscious decisions. In theory, it sounds simple: decide to change or make a habit, and it's done.



However, forming new habits is more challenging than it appears. The brain stores repeated actions as patterns, and motivation comes from the release of dopamine as these patterns become familiar.¹

How many times do you have to do something to make it a habit and for your brain to recognize it as worth keeping? Research shows it can take anywhere from a few weeks to several months—the average is about 70 days.¹ That's quite a challenge, though there are techniques that can help get you there faster.



Hidden triggers

One of the fastest ways to create a habit is to find something that can act as a trigger—reminding you to do it.² Simple is key. Choose something that happens without your control and make it work for you.

Example: You want to practice deep breathing. Take one deep breath (or more) every time you stop at a red light while driving. Your trigger becomes the red light.

Habit stacking

Similarly, habit stacking is a way of capitalizing on what you already do. Again, keep it simple—one action that can be wedged in with your other activities.

Example: You want to take a vitamin every morning. Write down the series of actions you automatically take each day. Make coffee, make toast, pack lunch, eat, start the dishwasher. Stack taking your vitamin into this sequence and before you know it, it will be a habit.



Environmental anchors

When you see a plate of cookies, you can't help but take one and eat it. That plate is an environmental anchor for our collective cookie-eating habit.² Our minds react to visual cues more than you think.

Example: You want to drink more water during the day. Keep a refillable water bottle on your desk or in plain sight as a reminder. It works.

Doorframe technique

You come and go through doors daily. Use this transition to your advantage by attaching a desired habit to it. Again, simple is best.

Example: You want to stop hunching your shoulders and slouching. Use each doorframe you pass through as a reminder to stand up straighter and relax your shoulders.



**Use these techniques to help you form good habits in your own life.
They may work faster than you think.**

¹<https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/best-practices-in-health/202506/the-neurobiology-of-habits>

Your guide to meal prepping

What's for dinner?

It's the most dreaded question of every day. To save time, money and make it easier to eat healthy all week long, consider meal prepping.



What is meal prepping?



Meal prepping involves planning and preparing meals in advance. Choose which method works best for you. You could try:

Batch cooking

Think chili, soup, egg muffins, burritos or steel-cut oats—items that can be reheated when it's time to eat.

Preparing all at once

Get parts of meals started ahead of time. Wash and chop vegetables. Cook whole grains like quinoa or farro. Roast a chicken. Make a dressing or sauce. Wash fruit in advance. And multitask: while the chicken is in the oven, roast vegetables on a sheet pan on a lower oven rack.

Buying pre-prepped ingredients

Save on time by using sliced and diced vegetables, bagged salads, rotisserie chicken, frozen steamable veggies and ready-to-heat, pre-cooked grains.

Planning your meal prep

Meal prepping starts with a game plan. Think about what you'd like to eat for the week and plan accordingly.

Determine how much you want to prep. Which meals do you want to streamline? Do you want to make assembling a healthy dinner go faster? Perhaps you want to prepare lunches that you can grab and go. Start slow so you don't get overwhelmed. Choose one eating occasion (like a snack or lunch) to start with. Or prep for just a few days rather than the whole week.

Decide what foods you want to make. What would you like to eat this week? Find your favourite recipes or research new ones.

Consider what ingredients you have versus need. To save money, think about what you have in the pantry, like vinegars, soy sauce and spices. Focus on buying just the fresh ingredients, like vegetables and proteins.

Schedule your meal prep time. Look at your calendar to plan when to shop for food and prep meals.

Putting it all together

Don't be overwhelmed by the many ways to meal prep. See what works for you—that's key. Excitement and inspiration will follow. A place to start: Try this excellent recipe for your lunch prep.



Chopped chicken salad

Makes: 2 servings | Prep: 10 mins

Rotisserie chicken is a great way to stretch your dollar. After first using it for dinner, the leftover chicken can be repurposed in many ways, including in this chopped chicken salad.

Ingredients

- 1 cup chopped chicken
- 2 cups of chopped crunchy vegetables (carrots, celery, onion, mini peppers, cucumbers, radishes, etc.)
- ¼ cup edamame
- ¼ cup chopped pickled, preserved or fermented vegetables (pickles, kim chi, pepperoncini, olives, etc.)
- 2 Tbsp plain low-fat Greek yogurt, light dressing or light mayonnaise

Preparation

Chop chicken and crunchy vegetables. If you have a manual vegetable chopper, use it (do not use an electric food processor—it will chop too fine). Chop pickled vegetables. Mix all chopped ingredients and edamame in a medium-sized bowl. Dress the salad and season with salt and pepper to taste. You can experiment with flavour by adding fresh or dried herbs (tarragon, parsley, dill) or spices (celery seed, coriander, cayenne pepper, curry powder). Serve with lettuce cups or crackers.

Nutrition

Serving size: ¼ cup



Calories: 161 | total fat: 4 g | saturated fat: 1 g | sodium: 283 mg | cholesterol: 62 mg
total carbs: 5 g | fibre: 3 g | sugars: 2 g | protein: 26 g | potassium: 554 mg



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