



TIP: The Benefits of Pushups

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Perhaps the best exercise to tone and strengthen our upper body is pushups. They can keep us fit and healthy by strengthening our muscles and bones while creating lean muscle mass that raises our metabolism. This complete upper body exercise is indeed a miracle exercise. So, let's explore how they benefit us, which muscles they affect, and why we should do them.

Pushups have had a prominent place in workouts for many years because every muscle in the upper body is affected when we perform them. All of the muscles in our arms -- biceps, triceps, and forearms -- are strengthened. Pushups strengthen and tone our shoulders. Strong shoulders and arms help us lift heavy objects and avoid injury when lifting those objects. Pushups work our chest and build the muscles in our upper back. Back muscles are important because they essentially carry our entire body and, when strong, help prevent back injuries. By incorporating pushups into our routine, we can be assured of a balanced development in our chest and back. This is important in all lifting and movement. It should now be easy to see why pushups have stayed popular for so long. They actively work many different muscle groups at one time. Pushups may not be the easiest way to get a fit upper body, but they are the most efficient. As an added bonus, we don't need equipment since our body weight is our resistance.

One of the biggest organizations that use pushups for physical training is the United States military. Pushups are a mandatory part of the Physical Fitness Test that every member must pass. The men and women in our military must get and stay in top physical condition in the shortest amount of time. For the upper body, this can be accomplished by doing as many pushups as possible. We will also see the quickest results when we perform as many pushups as we can. So let's get started!

Pushup: Level 1

Set Up: Find a stable elevated bench on which to perform this exercise (if you're at home, use the back of your couch or coffee table; if you're at the gym, use a weight bench). Place your palms slightly wider than shoulder-width apart. Step your feet back behind you so that you're balancing in a prone (stomach down) position with your chest over the bench. You should be supporting your weight on the underside of your toes and the palms of your hands.

Execute: Bend your elbows and lower your entire body down. Your chest should line up with your hands about a fist distance from the floor, and your elbows should be bent in 90-degree angles at the bottom of this exercise. Your neck and back should be straight and your eyes should be focused on the floor in front of you. Keep your abs tight. Exhale as you push back up to your starting position, and repeat.

To advance from Level 1: Keep lowering the bench until your hands are on the floor. Try to avoid doing pushups on your hands and knees. The classic version is much better because it forces us to fully utilize our core muscles; the knee version does not. Keep working and before you know it, you'll be asking me about decline pushups, one-arm pushups, ...

Reference: LosingIt@JillianMichaels.com 2008; www.alwayslookfit.com 2007