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Chapter **1**

Calisthenics: When Your Body Is Your Equipment

Congratulations! You're now holding the only thing you need — other than your own body — to get into the best shape of your life.

We've already done the hard work for you: Distilling three decades of experience and a billion-dollars-worth of complex sports science down to a simple, lifelong program that takes less than 1 percent of your time each week.

The exercises in this book comprehensively and methodically cover all muscle groups, joint functions, and athletic skills. And they're for people of all abilities. They can help you get and stay strong, lean, healthy, mobile, and injury free.

Calisthenics: For All Bodies and Abilities

With calisthenics and bodyweight exercises, you use the body you have to build the body you want. You don't even need to use equipment or machines. You were born with world's most advanced fitness machine: You.

What's so great about this fitness machine is that it's always there. It is the one and only thing you are never without. It's no longer necessary to spend hours at a gym. In fact, you don't have to go to a gym at all.

With these workouts you will not waste a single moment of your valued time using ineffective training methods. And no longer will you be able to use the #1 excuse for not training: "I don't have the time."

Because bodyweight movements are the safest and most functional exercises, they are for people of *all* athletic ability levels. The ones in this book are tailored to suit many needs and lifestyles. Clear, concise, and complete, we bring these exercises into your home, workplace, nearby park, or wherever you like.



REMEMBER

The metric of your merit is not based on the amount of weight you can lift. Instead, it's all about performance. Gauge your success by how properly you can perform an exercise. This is the most fundamental idea of calisthenics.

Posture and ideal joint alignment determine performance in all you do. Proper performance, as you'll soon see, determines your athletic skills, and in turn, your appearance. At the end of the day, we all want to look good.

Why Calisthenics Is Better than Any Other Workout

This section outlines the top eight advantages that calisthenics has over working out with equipment. These are the reasons so many people who start a bodyweight program actually stick with it.

You save time

Let's do some quick math. Say it takes you 25 minutes each way to get to and from the gym, and then another 45 minutes to use a bunch of machines. That's one and a half hours per workout. Do that three times a week, and you're at four and half hours. That's over half of a work day. Who wants to sacrifice that amount of time?

With calisthenics, there's no packing, traveling, parking, or changing at the gym, then doing it all in reverse to get back home.

Also, trying to work out your whole body by exercising muscle groups separately, with machines and dumbbells that isolate only certain muscles, is unfunctional

and inefficient. It takes far less time to get a full body workout when you're actually doing full body exercises.

You save money

Instead of fancy fitness contraptions, gym memberships, parking, and gallons of gas, for just the price of this book, you now have a lifelong fitness program.

You save space

You only need to temporarily create enough space to lie down in. And there's no need to store whatever latest contraptions are gathering dust in your home.

You can do it anywhere

You can turn any area into your fitness center: Your bedroom, living room, garage, driveway, yard, office, park, playground, beach — you name it. And if you're traveling, there's no need to search for the nearest gym. You can turn your hotel room, just like almost any other place on Earth, into a full fitness center.

No gymbarrassment

Plenty of folks want to get in shape, but cringe at the thought of putting themselves on display at a fitness center. But with bodyweight exercises, you are the boss now: Crank those tunes up as loud as you please or watch whatever channel you want. No gym clothes required. (In fact, no clothes at all are required.)

It's always open

Early in the morning, late at night, Christmas, New Year's, snowstorms — you name it. You can work out wherever and whenever it fits your busy schedule.

It's safer

Many people who try aerobics hurt themselves, even when it's "low-impact." By using motions that are natural for your body, these low impact bodyweight exercises help you avoid the myriad chronic and acute injuries like joint problems associated with weight lifting. Of course, you should always consult a qualified doctor before beginning any fitness program.

You will not stop seeing results

This is not some short-term fix or fad, but a fun, functional program that will never stop working for you. Variety is the spice of life. This book provides many ways to vary these exercises so you won't get stuck in a rut. Instead they'll remain enjoyable and they never stop increasing your fitness. Keeping your muscles guessing is how you keep them growing.

Getting the Results You Want

For thousands of years — from Ancient Greece's Olympic athletes to tomorrow's Special Operations forces — humanity's greatest physical specimens have *not* relied on fitness centers in their towns or dumbbells in their homes. Instead they mastered the art of moving around what matters most: their own bodies.

Become stronger

Rarely do you do anything in life that isolates only a single muscle group. Our bodies were designed to become stronger as a whole. It's how you not only look your best, but feel your best.

But most weight training exercises only isolate certain muscles, requiring a fairly small portion of your body's total muscle mass. In contrast, even the most focused bodyweight exercises not only emphasize your “targeted” muscle groups, but, unlike using those fancy machines in the gym, they develop your stabilizer muscles that surround the targeted area as well, and do a far better job of that than using free weights either. This creates more muscle, and more muscle means burning more fat!

Burn more fat

These exercises will crank your body's metabolism better than using weights or aerobics, because they build more muscle. And muscle is the most metabolically expensive tissue we can manipulate, meaning it burns up a lot of calories — even at rest.

This is a prime example of the snowball effect: The more muscle you have, the more calories you burn, and so the less you have to worry about what you eat. While the less muscle you have, the more likely it is that extra calories will turn into fat. And so you're more prone to become overweight, and get stuck in a never-ending battle of guilt vs. goodies when it comes to food.

Get better with age

It takes about ten calories a day just to keep one pound of muscle alive, even if you are completely inactive. An extra five pounds of muscle can burn up to 1,500 calories in a month — that's the equivalent of five pounds of fat per year, which more than reverses some negative effects of aging on your metabolism.

Regain your youthful metabolism

One reason many people gain weight as they age, especially beginning in their 30s, is because they have less muscle than they had in their late teens and early twenties. As we age, our bodies naturally lose muscle, especially if we become less active. This muscle tissue loss results in a decreasing metabolic rate. And then, if you continue to eat like you did when you were younger . . . Well, you'll slowly gain weight, pound by pound, month by month, year by year, until one day you look in the mirror and wonder, "What happened?" This is how the average American adult gains 2.2 pounds per year.

The key to eliminating accumulated body fat is regaining your youthful metabolism by regaining your muscle through strength training.

Live injury free

Most aerobic activities carry with them a great risk of injury. Even so-called "low impact" classes or activities like stationary cycling are not necessarily low-impact. Things like running are extremely high-impact, damaging to your knees, hips and back. Aerobic dance is even worse.

Sure, you'll hear the occasional genetic exception declare that they've never been injured doing these exercises. But overuse injuries are cumulative and often build undetected over years until it's too late, leading to a decrease or loss of mobility as you age, which, in turn, too often leads to a shortened lifespan.

In contrast, the movements in this book, when done properly, have virtually zero impact. You'll be moving your body how it was designed to move. Not how it gets broken.

Getting Comfortable with Bodyweight Exercises

To beginners, it can feel pretty weird trying to exercise without the typical exercise machines. Instead, you're going to start using your body the way it was meant to be used — the way you used it when you were first learning to crawl, walk, run, and climb.

Use muscles you didn't know you had

With the proper bodyweight movements, you can isolate and work all your muscles. Everything from your neck to toes are fair game and tied together. You'll discover muscles you have and muscles that might have atrophied in our modern sedentary lifestyles. You will literally become a stronger person.

Get off the bench

Your arms were made to push and pull your bodyweight, not to grasp handles on machines or metal bars while you sit on a bench. I mean, lying down on a soft surface is just fine — when you're sleeping. Sitting on a cushioned seat is fine if you're driving, or looking at your computer or TV. But not if you're doing real exercise.

Discovering the Eight Abilities You'll Build Through Calisthenics

We realize most people are reading this book because they want to look and feel better, not necessarily improve their balance, flexibility, and coordination. But this is a common misconception and many programs put the cart before the horse. By focusing on developing these eight skills, you will make your best gains, both in ability and in appearance.

In the decade I spent honing military units assigned to carry out the most dangerous missions, it was always my experience that the individual with the best development in all areas of physical ability succeeds the best operationally.

This program develops the entire spectrum of physical skills. Form follows function. You look your healthiest by being your healthiest. Your physique and

your fitness are determined by the degree to which you possess the following eight qualities that define fitness.

Muscular strength

Your ability to exert a force through a given distance, muscular strength can be determined by the difficulty of an exercise that you are able to perform for a single repetition. For example, if Tarzan, with maximal effort, can perform one normal push-up but Jane can perform a handstand push-up, then Jane has greater muscular strength.

Power

Power is the amount of force you can exert in a specific amount of time. $\text{Power} = \text{Work}/\text{Time}$. If Tarzan and Jane are both able to perform one pull-up with maximal effort, but Jane can perform that one pull-up faster, then she has more power even though they have the same strength.

Muscular endurance

Muscular endurance is how long you can exert a specific force. Jane and Tarzan could compare their muscular endurance by seeing who can hold the peak position of the pull-up the longest.

Cardiovascular endurance

This is your body's ability to supply working muscles with oxygen during prolonged activity. Jane and Tarzan challenge and improve their cardiovascular endurance by performing 200 non-stop squats together.

Speed

Speed is measured as your ability to rapidly and repeatedly execute a movement or a series of movements. If Jane can do 45 lunges in 30 seconds and Tarzan can do 25, then Jane has greater speed.

Coordination

Coordination is your ability to combine more than one movement to create a single, distinct movement. For example, performing a simple jump requires that

you coordinate several movements. The bend at the waist, knees, and ankles and then the correct extension of those joints must all be combined into a single movement. Your ability to combine these movements, with the proper timing, into one movement determines your coordination, and in turn, how well you can do the exercise.

Balance

Balance is your ability to maintain control of your body's center of gravity.

Flexibility

Flexibility is your range of motion. If Jane, while doing a squat and using good form, can go down until her bottom touches her heels, and Tarzan can only go until his thighs are parallel to the ground, then Jane has greater flexibility.

Rounding Up Your Gear for Home Workouts

As you've seen, you don't need equipment to achieve optimal fitness. But some readers might prefer to complement a calisthenics program with movements — such as isolation exercises — that involve equipment, perhaps to focus on particular muscle groups to meet their particular goals.

You'd be surprised at how much resistance equipment you can create from basic household items, replacing the need for dumbbells in traditional strength exercises.

Take bicep curls for example. Just because you don't have dumbbells doesn't mean you can't do them. You can use gallon jugs of water (filled to your appropriate level), grocery bags filled with things, big books, bricks, soup cans, or my favorite whether I'm at home or in another country: a backpack. Check out Figure 1-1 for examples of the gear discussed in the following sections.

A backpack

You can fill a backpack (or duffel bag) with books, magazines, newspapers, cans of food, rocks, sand, and/or full water bottles. Add to the backpack until you have the perfect weight and hold the top strap. You can even make a proper handle out

of it: Just break off a few inches of a stick or branch that's the proper width for a handle and use tape to fasten it to the backpack's top handle. Most backpacks can easily hold up to 60 pounds, some a lot more.



FIGURE 1-1: Calisthenics involves simple body weight exercises you can do in your home with normal, everyday objects.

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You can use backpacks in place of dumbbells for myriad movements like bicep curls, shoulder raises, tricep exercises, and upright rows. Throw it on your back to increase the resistance to any pull-up, squat, lunge — you name it. (Or give your child a piggyback during leg exercises.)

Wearing a backpack full of rocks and holding a five gallon bucket filled with water (which equals 40 pounds) adds some serious intensity to calf raises. You can place sandbags on your knees for sitting calf raises.

Towels

It's pretty hard to tear a towel. They make great makeshift straps (as do ropes or belts) for let-me-ins (covered in Chapter 9) by looping one around a tree, fence or railing, using one or both hands.

Trees

Some people don't think you can do any great pulling exercises with only your bodyweight. But you just need to try some tree-hugging. Put your feet around the base of the tree, keep your legs bent at 90 degrees, stick your butt out, grab on to the trunk (higher is easier, lower requires more strength) and you can crank out some let-me-ins — maybe the best all-around pulling exercise there is. Likewise, you can use any stable railing or pole or post.

Table

You can lie under a strong desk or kitchen table and use it to do let-me-ups (covered in Chapter 9). Or put your hands on top and do triceps extensions, or easier push-ups.

Chairs

Great for dips (with your legs out straight, heels on the floor or up on another chair) and triceps extensions. Two chairs also create a great raised surface for easier push-ups. You can bring your chest down into the empty space between them for deep push-ups. And put your feet up on a third chair or surface — the higher your feet are the more intense the push-up.

Video camera

It's a superb idea to film yourself doing new movements. That way, you can see what you're doing wrong and how to do it better. Remember, posture = performance = results.

Pull-up bar

Relatively inexpensive and easy to install, these bars can be used for any kind of pull-up you can imagine. Or install them at waist height for triceps extensions, let me ups, and let me ins.

Bosu ball

A Bosu ball creates an unstable surface to put any of your limbs on. Unstable surfaces require more core strength because they utilize your stabilizer muscles.

Try putting one hand on a basketball for push-ups. If you're really advanced, you can roll the basketball back and forth between hands between reps.

You can also try one-legged leg exercises on a pillow. Unstable surface forces your muscles (and your all-important stabilizer muscles) to work harder. Just be aware of maintaining your balance so to avoid injury.

Suspension straps

Suspension straps give you the ability to alter the height of your hands or legs to your liking. Plus, they have the added ability of being unstable, thus requiring more of your muscles and joints.

Elastic bands

Elastic bands are much easier on your joints than weights. They come in different strengths, and you can even stack them together and attach a few at once to the handles to really increase the resistance.

You can put them around trees, railings, poles, fences, or underfoot. The best way to make these truly versatile is to screw strong hooks into a vertical post (like a 4x4 or wall stud) at different heights and use these as anchors. Then there's just about no upper body exercise you can't do with elastic bands.



TIP

WHAT TO WEAR, WHAT TO WEAR

The great thing about working out in privacy is that you can wear anything at all. Including nothing. Of course, if you do wear clothes (an especially good idea in public!), be sure they are baggy or flexible enough that they don't constrict your movements. Since you're moving how nature intended, bare feet are fine. Or else some light shoes with very basic support, like Keds, are great.

Since you're not doing high impact activities that put a lot of stress on your feet, you don't need expensive sport shoes or thick insoles. Often, shoes with thick, soft soles are a detriment for your legs, because they can cause your stabilizer muscles to disengage since there's less risk of strong impact with the ground. Ideally, the muscles in your feet, ankles, and calves are stabilizing and supporting you. Not your insoles.

Your Body Is Your Home

Your real home is not your apartment or your house or your city or even your country, but your *body*. It is the only thing you, your heart, your soul, and your mind, will always live inside as long as you walk the earth. It is the single most important physical thing in this world that you can take care of.

We all have a choice: To take care of ourselves or to simply let time takes its toll. If you truly want to look and feel better, you have everything you need to do that, right now. The good news is that taking care of your body is mentally and physically uplifting. In addition to controlling your waistline and increasing your energy, exercise can clear your mind and reduce stress. Also, it just really feels good to take care of yourself.



TIP

A realistic goal for fitness requires an understanding of nutritional basics, as well as working out 20–30 minutes a day, 4–5 times a week — that's about 1 percent of your time. That's all you really need.

Adding exercise to your life can help you meet life's obstacles with physical, mental, and spiritual strength. You'll thrive on the energy exercise gives you every day. It can mitigate many of the bad things in life — depression, anxiety, nervousness, tension, boredom, and impatience. It can help you think more clearly. It can help you stay mobile as you age. Remember that only you are in control of how you treat your body. Don't let the excuses hijack your journey to a healthy mind and body. You've taken the first step by buying this book. Let's get started!