

Medicine balls: Exercise tools that add fun to fitness

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(HealthDay)—Want to add a new type of challenge to your exercise

routine?

Consider working out with a [medicine ball](#), an inexpensive fitness tool that's exploding in popularity. This weighted ball helps you develop strength, endurance and even flexibility—and many exercises are done with a partner, adding a fun dimension to workouts.

Medicine balls come in a variety of sizes, from tennis- to basketball-size, and from 1 to 50 pounds and up. For solo exercises, you might like one with handles.

You want to choose a ball heavy enough to challenge you, but not so heavy that you can't maintain proper form. The overall size of the ball matters, too. You may need a larger one to fully work the muscles targeted in power and multi-joint exercises, and a smaller one for other types of moves.

Test out different weights before you buy: One that feels comfortable when you hold it against your chest may be too heavy for exercises done at arm's length from your body.

To get started, try the simple [exercise](#) called the medicine ball V-up. Lie on your back with legs straight and extend your arms over your head, flat on the floor, with hands holding the medicine ball. Simultaneously raise your legs and your arms, aiming to touch the ball to your feet (your upper body and your legs lift to form a V shape at the top of the movement). Return to start position and repeat for the desired number of repetitions.

A medicine ball is also great for buddy workouts. When working out with a partner, always start by practicing each exercise at a slow pace to be sure you're doing it correctly.

A great buddy exercise is the chest pass. Stand about 5-feet from each other, feet shoulder-width apart and knees slightly bent. The passing partner tightens abs and passes the ball at chest level. The receiving [partner](#) tightens core and leg muscles to maintain balance while catching the ball. Start with a set of 10 passes each.

As you progress, keep challenging yourself by moving to a heavier ball.

More information: The University of Arkansas has a detailed factsheet on [choosing and using medicine balls](#).

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