

Step-by-step exercises for a stronger back

April 11 2019, by Len Canter, Healthday Reporter



(HealthDay)—Are you neglecting or even unaware of the muscles in your back? If so, you're putting yourself at risk.

The trapezius is the diamond-shaped [muscle](#) that runs from neck to middle back and from [shoulder](#) to shoulder across the back. The latissimus dorsi—or "lats"—are the large back muscles that run from either side of the spine to your waist.

Here are two strength-training exercises that will help you develop these muscles for better upper body fitness.

Important: Start with a [weight](#) that allows you to complete at least eight reps with [proper form](#), perhaps as low as 2-pound dumbbells. Build up to 10 to 15 reps for one complete set, and progress from one to three complete sets before increasing the weight. Never jerk the weights—controlled, steady movement is what brings results.

Standing dumbbell rows target the trapezius muscles as well as the upper arms and shoulders. Stand straight, feet shoulder-width apart, with a weight in each hand. Your elbows should be slightly bent, the dumbbells touching the fronts of your thighs, palms facing your body. As you exhale, use a slow, controlled movement to lift the weights straight up by bending the elbows up and out to bring the weights to shoulder level. Hold for a second, then inhale as you lower your arms to the starting position. Repeat.

Bent-over one-arm rows target the lats as well as the upper arms and shoulders. To work the right side first, stand to the right side of a bench. Place your [left knee](#) and left hand on it for support. Your back should be nearly parallel to the floor. Hold a [dumbbell](#) in your right hand, palm facing inward. Using only your upper arm, bend at the [elbow](#) to lift the dumbbell straight up to your waist as you exhale. Hold for a second and then lower it with control as you inhale. Complete reps, then switch sides and repeat.

You can also do bent-over rows using both arms at once. Stand with feet

about shoulder-width apart. Hold a dumbbell in each hand and, bending from the waist, bring your back to nearly parallel with the floor. Keeping arms close to your sides, bend the elbows to lift the weights, bringing them up to waist level. Hold for a second and then lower the weights with control as you inhale. Repeat.

More information: The American Council on Exercise has more on [exercises](#) targeting the back muscles.

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