

Think you're too busy for strength training at work? Try this quick and easy guide

September 7 2024, by Ashley Gluchowski



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Do you sit at a desk all day and then find you're exhausted, your back aches and exercise is the last thing on your mind? I hear you. But desk jobs can be killers, so taking regular [strength breaks](#) during the working

day is essential to your health and well-being.

Strength training at work might sound like a strange concept, but it's one of the best things you can do to protect your health and mitigate the [adverse effects](#) of a sedentary job.

Still not sure whether you fancy the prospect of pumping iron in the office? I've got your back. As a clinical exercise physiologist, [my research](#) focuses on finding new and innovative ways to improve participation levels of [strength training](#) in the general population.

If you want to boost mood, [energy levels](#), mental focus and reduce the risk of developing [long-term health conditions](#) then read on.

Step 1: Week one and two

Try the exercises below using just your [body weight](#).

The first couple of weeks are about building confidence with the movement patterns to prepare for adding weights to the routine in the third week.

These five exercises don't require any furniture or walls, which saves the awkwardness of having to use a wall near a colleague's desk—and they're done from a standing position, so you don't have to get on the floor if you're in a shared office space.

- [Squat](#)
- [Reverse lunge](#)
- [Kickstand deadlift](#)
- [Overhead shoulder press](#)

- [Bent-over row](#)

One set = 12 repetitions and rest for one minute. Repeat with each of the five exercises.

You'll work your way up to two or three sets over the coming weeks. Fit the strength breaks into your day by doing one set of each of the five exercises at the end each hour—or between meetings.

You should be taking a break away from your screen [every hour](#) anyway, so set a timer for every 50 minutes and get that strength break in.

So, the first two weeks of your strength training will look like this:

- Repetitions—12
- Sets—start with one, work your way up to three
- Exercises—five
- Weight—body weight
- Frequency—twice a week

Step 2: End of week two

Get yourself some equipment, such as a kettlebell or a couple of dumbbells. Safely stow the equipment near your desk but where you can see it as a reminder. This purchase is one of the best investments in your health.

Skip the one to three kilogram pieces, you'll outgrow these quickly. Pick a weight that you can grow into over the next four to six weeks.

If you can, try the weight out in the store. If you can do 12 or more repetitions with it then it's too light.

Can't lift it off the shelf? It's too heavy—for now.

Can you perform two to eight repetitions with good form and some effort? Then that's the one to take home.

Step 3: Weeks three to eight

Add equipment to the exercises you've practiced in step one. For example, the squat now becomes a [goblet squat](#). Repeat the five exercises with equipment for four to six weeks.

Once you're doing 12 repetitions with good form easily, you're ready to increase the challenge for step four.

Your routine for weeks three to eight should look like this:

- Repetitions—two to 12 (your last [repetition](#) should feel hard to complete with good form)
- Sets—two to three
- Exercises—same five exercises
- Weight—any external weight
- Frequency—twice a week

Step 4: Week eight+

Find a slightly heavier piece of equipment than you used in Step 3.

The goal of strength training is to get stronger and to do that you must practice lifting heavier weights every four to six weeks. This is called [progressive overload](#).

There are other ways of overloading or challenging your muscles—by

increasing your sets or the complexity of exercises, for example—but for work day strength breaks, adding load is the most effective and efficient method.

From week eight onwards, your strength training routine should look like this:

- Repetitions—two to 12 (your last repetition should feel hard to complete with good form)
- Sets—two to four
- Exercises—same five exercises
- Weight—any external weight, but slightly heavier than in step three
- Frequency—two to three times per week

That's it!

When starting strength training for the first time, you might gain strength [relatively quickly](#). However, as you become more experienced and closer to your genetic potential, it will take more consistent effort to gain and maintain strength.

In my experience, beginners usually add more repetitions when strength training gets too easy, and some people even do sets of 50 repetitions or more. If you want to build and maintain strength, though, then keep repetitions at a much lower range, increasing the weight or load instead.

Adding weight (instead of repetitions) can feel easier too. Although you'll work hard to lift something heavy, you'll lift for only for a few repetitions before taking a one to three minute break between sets—and the heavier the weight you are lifting, the [longer your break](#) should be.

Strength training also gives [immediate benefits](#). Strength breaks provide

an instant boost to our [immune system](#), happiness, productivity—and you should even [sleep better](#).

We know that having high levels of [strength is key](#) to living a happier, healthier, more independent life, so be sure to increase your strength now to invest in your future.

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