

# Create your own mini-gym for next to nothing

January 6 2009, By Cynthia Billhartz Gregorian

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If you're like a lot of us, the New Year means your waist is noticeably thicker while your wallet is depressingly thinner than a month or two ago.

The good news: You've come to the right place at the right time.

Personal trainers put together full-body workout routines that use inexpensive fitness equipment. You can set up a mini-gym in your garage, basement or spare bedroom for less than a month's membership at many local fitness centers. And don't forget one source of motivation that'll help you stay the course better than any piece of equipment: a workout buddy.

Typically, they're free.

Ian Fagala, owner of Essential Fitness in Chesterfield, Mo., recommends buying a large exercise ball ranging from 20 inches to 30 inches in diameter (\$24.95 to \$34.95 at [balldynamics.com](http://balldynamics.com)) and three or four SPRI Xertubes (\$9.99 each at [spriproducts.com](http://spriproducts.com)). The Xertubes are long skinny rubber straps with handles on each end that come in varying degrees of resistance. During workouts, they're looped around immovable objects, such as heavy pieces of furniture, poles or door handles on locked doors. The total cost, Fagala says, should be less than \$100 for the exercise ball and Xertubes, which will provide a full-body workout.

"To incorporate cardio, I would do the exercises nonstop in circuit fashion to keep your heart-rate elevated," he says. "Perform three or four exercises one directly after another then take a break. Start over until you've performed three sets of all four exercises that way."

Laurie Miller has found that without motivation, a room full of expensive equipment is rarely used.

"The first three items I suggest for a home gym is a deck of cards, timer or clock and a notebook," says Miller, owner of Crossfit St. Louis.

She recommends shuffling the deck, flipping over a card at a time and assigning an exercise to each suit. Time yourself to see how long it takes to get through half a deck, record your workouts in a notebook and see if you can beat your times. Do the same workout or mix it up.

Miller also likes making hand weights by filling pieces of PVC pipe typically used for plumbing with sand. She uses duct tape to secure end caps. Several Web sites including [www.getfitsource.com](http://www.getfitsource.com) carry colorful vinyl-covered dumbbells ranging from two pounds to 10 pounds, with prices from \$2.25 to \$10.25 each.

Below are strength, cardio and stretching exercises using some of the equipment recommended above and other inexpensive items. Whatever you do, see a physician before beginning an exercise regimen.

## STRENGTH

### Chest Presses using SPRI Xertube

What it does: Strengthens triceps and chest muscles.

How to: Do three sets of 12 to 15 repetitions of various strength-training

exercises for all parts of the body. To use the SPRI Xertube, loop it around an immovable object that's chest high. Turn back to object, gripping Xertube handles. Walk a step forward pulling handles so arms are straight out in front of you. Slowly allow arms to be pulled back so elbows are bent 90 degrees.

## CARDIO

Jump rope: Experts recommend at least 20 minutes of cardio exercise each day. Jumping burns about 10 calories a minute, increases cardiovascular fitness, improves agility and strength. Start slow and build up in time and tempo. You can also split it into 5-minute bursts. Miller says Sports Authority has a speed rope for \$6. GNC carries the Reebok Mountain Tech Jump Rope for \$15. It has adjustable weight handles and ball-bearing joints for smooth rotation.

## FLEXIBILITY

Squatting Spine Stretch: Experts suggest five minutes of gently stretching your arms, spine and legs before strength training. One way to stretch the spine is to clasp hands around an immovable object. Push hips back into sitting position until you feel your spine elongate. Hold for 15 seconds. Repeat if desired.

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