



8 Moves to Make Everyday Tasks Easier

Functional training mimics the movements you need for daily life. Here's how to get started.

By Alyssa Ages Videos by Theodore Tae

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When I was seven months pregnant, my trainer added a new exercise to our sessions to prepare me for the demands of parenthood: One-arm heavy kettlebell carries. These would mimic my soon-to-be daily task of hauling my infant in a car seat. Doing this regularly without pain would require upper body strength, core control and balance, all of which we could train for in the gym.

Functional training, the subject of many popular fitness videos on TikTok and Instagram, is a buzzy term for a simple concept: It's training to improve the way you move in daily life, said Eric Salvador, a head instructor at Fhitting Room, an exercise studio in New York City.

Many everyday tasks require you to move while carrying weight, even if it's just your own body. If you haven't prepared your muscles to handle these movements, you can increase your risk of injury and make recovery more difficult, said Leada Malek, a physical therapist in Oakland, California.

By practicing similar movements with weight, you can build strength, stability and control, and reduce your chances of sustaining an injury while doing simple tasks, said Dr. Malek.

To make functional training work for you, choose the exercises that will help you train for the way your body moves on a daily basis — farmer walks for lugging groceries, loaded carries for hauling your toddler home from the playground — and add one or two to an existing workout. If you're looking for a higher-intensity workout that hits most major muscle groups, you can also perform all of these movements back-to-back as a stand-alone routine.

Overview

Time: Roughly 5 minutes for all sets of a single exercise. Roughly 45 minutes for the full routine.

Intensity: High



What You'll Need

- A pair of heavy kettlebells (20 pounds or more)
- A pair of medium-heavy kettlebells (between 10 to 20 pounds)
- A box or bench

Adjust for You

Use heavy weights when possible, Mr. Salvador said. By the end of your set, you should feel like you could only do one or two more repetitions without reaching failure.

Begin with three sets of each exercise. To build strength, Mr. Salvador recommended four to eight repetitions per set. As you become more comfortable, you can increase to four sets. Take between 90 seconds and two minutes of rest between sets.

Loaded Carry

Targets: Back muscles, shoulders, biceps, core

Similar daily movements: Carrying a heavy object, like a one-shoulder bag or a bag of pet food

Hold a heavy kettlebell at chest height with your right hand, keeping your wrist straight and your knuckles pointed toward the ceiling. Engage your core and begin walking forward. Keep your hips facing forward, avoid twisting your torso and maintain an upright chest without allowing the weight to pull your upper body to one side. Walk for 60 seconds. Switch hands and repeat.

You can make this move more challenging by holding two kettlebells at your chest, one in each hand, and by increasing your walking time, working up to 90 seconds.

Farmer Walks

Targets: Back muscles, glutes, core, forearms, biceps

Similar daily movements: Walking with a heavy load in each hand, like groceries or luggage

Place a pair of heavy kettlebells on the floor, about hip-width apart, and stand between them. Keeping your back flat, squat down and grasp the handle of each kettlebell. Press your feet into the floor, squeeze your glutes and stand up. Begin walking forward, keeping your chest upright and your shoulders pulled back and down. Walk for 60 seconds. When you're done, squat down with a flat back to return the weights to the floor.

You can adjust this move as needed to more closely mirror your daily tasks.

Holding a different weight in each hand will prepare you for carrying uneven loads like grocery bags, while carrying just one weight can help you build the strength and stability to carry something like a car seat. Try to build up to 90 seconds of walking.

Suitcase Deadlift

Targets: Hamstrings, quads, glutes, core, upper back, forearms

Similar daily movements: Lifting a heavy object from the ground, like a suitcase or a car seat

Place a heavy kettlebell on the floor and stand with your feet hip-width apart beside it, with your right leg closest to the weight. The kettlebell should be touching the outside of your right foot, in line with your heel. Hinge at your hips and slightly bend your knees, while keeping a flat back. Grasp the handle of the kettlebell with your right hand. Try to keep both shoulders facing forward and avoid twisting or leaning to your right side. Press your feet into the floor and stand up, fully extending your hips and knees and squeezing your glutes at the top. Pause, then slowly return the weight to the floor, keeping a flat back and keeping your hips and shoulders centered. That's one repetition. Complete all repetitions on one side before switching sides.

For an added challenge, try this move with a kettlebell in each hand.

Weighted Box Squat

Targets: Glutes, hamstrings, quads, core

Similar daily movements: Sitting down and getting up from a chair

Stand with your back to a bench, box or sturdy chair, with your heels about six inches away from the base. Hold the handle of a heavy kettlebell to your chest with both hands. Keeping your torso upright, push your hips back and bend your knees to slowly lower your butt to the box. Once it touches the box, press your feet into the floor to stand back up, maintaining a flat back.

Kettlebell High Pull

Targets: Glutes, hamstrings, lower back, shoulders, lats, traps

Similar daily movements: Bringing items from the ground to a high shelf

Stand with your feet slightly wider than shoulder-width, with a medium-heavy kettlebell on the floor between your feet. Your ankles should be in line with the handle. Squat down with your back flat and your arms hanging in front of you.

Grasp the handle with both hands in an overhand grip. Press your feet into the floor and stand up. When the handle of the kettlebell reaches hip height, begin to pull the weight up, driving your elbows high until the handle reaches your chin. Pause, then slowly lower the kettlebell as you squat back down. Let the kettlebell touch the floor, but keep your hands on the handle. That's one repetition. Try to move explosively and with good form as you stand, and slowly and with control as you squat.

Bent-Over Row

Targets: Upper back

Similar daily movements: Lifting any heavy item from the floor; pulling a heavy door open

Stand with your feet hip-width apart, holding a medium-heavy kettlebell in each hand. Keeping your shoulders pulled back and your back flat, hinge at your hips until the kettlebells are hanging just below your knees. Allow a soft bend in your knees. Drive your elbows up and back, pulling the weights to about hip height. Pause, then slowly lower the weights to the starting position.

You can make this more challenging for your core strength and spinal stability by doing single-arm rows, making sure you avoid twisting your torso as you pull.

Weighted Step-Ups

Targets: Quads, glutes, hamstrings, core, inner thighs

Similar daily movements: Walking up stairs while carrying an object, like a laundry basket

Stand facing a box or bench, with your toes a few inches from the edge and a medium-heavy kettlebell in your right hand. Step up to the box with your right foot. Press your right foot into the platform and straighten your right leg, allowing your left leg to follow. Your left foot can hover just off the platform behind you, or you can briefly rest your toes on the platform. Pause, then slowly bend your right knee, allowing your left leg to gently return to the floor. Keep your right foot on top of the platform until you've completed all repetitions on that side.

Push-Ups

Targets: Chest, shoulders, triceps, core

Similar daily movements: Pushing a lawn mower, shoveling snow, opening a heavy door

Begin in a plank position with your arms straight and your hands directly under your shoulders. Engage your glutes and core to keep your hips from sagging. Slowly bend your elbows away from your sides, keeping your body in one straight line as you lower your chest toward the floor. Just before you touch the ground, press through your hands to rise back to the plank position.

If a standard push-up is too challenging, you can perform the same movement with your knees on the floor.

On-set trainer: Anna Maltby

Alyssa Ages is a journalist in Toronto and the author of “Secrets of Giants: A Journey to Uncover the True Meaning of Strength.”