

# Bodyweight Training

By Jeffrey S. Harrison



**T**'is the season for the flood of infomercials pushing the latest fitness craze or groundbreaking piece of exercise equipment. After the holidays have passed and the masses have made their resolution to become more fit in 2006, late night and weekend airtime will be saturated with ad campaigns designed to capture that desperate audience. The truth is that the best piece of exercise equipment will not be found on television. It is state of the art, truly one-of-a-kind, better than anything man can build, and best of all, it won't cost you a dime! In fact, it's priceless! Sound too good to be true? Well, look no further than your reflection because that priceless, one-of-a-kind, state of the art, piece of exercise equipment is your own body.

The thought of looking at oneself in the mirror can sometimes conjure up feelings of fear, disgust, or gleaming admiration (or maybe a combination of the three) in an individual. Unfortunately, in society today, we tend to measure our worth through our outward appearance. But beneath the clothes and other superficial cover-ups is an intricate network of nerves that coordinate muscles, which move a system of bones and joints to create movement.

Our bodies, truly magnificent pieces of machinery, are capable of doing much more than we could ever possibly imagine. Ever see a Cirque de Soleil show? While this is not a call to become a contortionist, there is really no other piece of equipment you need to exercise other than your body. In fact, using the body as an apparatus for performing exercise is not a new fad or phenomenon. It is as old as the human species itself, disguised more recently under the category of bodyweight training.

Bodyweight training, simply stated, is any exercise that involves using the body as a means of resistance, or more technically put, working against gravity. Walking, for example, is as basic a bodyweight exercise as there is. Problem is, too much of the population is not doing enough of it. Bodyweight training however, goes well beyond even something as basic as walking. Some of the other better known types of bodyweight training are calisthenics, such as jumping jacks, push-ups, sit-ups, etc. (Who would have thought that your high school gym teacher might have been on to something?); plyometrics, otherwise known as jump training, used predominantly in sports conditioning to develop quick, explosive power; yoga, an ancient but recently popularized form of bodyweight training in which the connection between the mind and the power of the body is emphasized.

Still have reservations about bodyweight training? Think about all of our service men and women. They do not use fancy gym equipment to get in shape. How about gymnasts or ballerinas? They, too seldom if ever, use more than their own bodyweight to develop greater strength and stamina. Some consider ballerinas to be the best athletes in the world and they will not be found grunting under the squat bar! The list goes on and on. Bodyweight training, plain and simple, is an effective means of getting in shape, and as with traditional training, when properly manipulated, can produce considerably measurable results. How is that so?

The muscles of the bodywork with the levers created through the bones and joints, thus generating the required movement. With bodyweight training, movements are not used to move equipment or other exercise modalities. These movements are used to move the body against the always present forces of gravity and ground reaction forces (the work of our bodies against the weight of the earth). Unlike most traditional strength training techniques, bodyweight training is more functional and effective because it allows the individual to work in a three-dimensional,

or multi-planar environment to overcome the forces of gravity. But even better is that it does not cost you a thing. No down payments, no refinancing, no excuse for not being able to get to a gym, etc. Bodyweight training does not require special instructions, special equipment, or a specific location. So then, how did something so primal become so technical?

There are reasons too numerous too list, but at the root of the problem is that we, as a population, have gotten away from one of the benefits of being human, which is movement. If a sedentary life were what we were designed for, we would have been born as rocks! Bodyweight training is what our great, great, great ancestors relied on for their exercise, except that they did not refer to it as exercise. It was their way of life. Fancy equipment and techniques were not necessary because the land provided enough obstacles all on its own. Bodyweight training is a return to a simpler time and is a reminder of just how state of the art, beautiful, and powerful our bodies really are.



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