

# New Home Workouts Come With New Aches and Pains; Many people trying online routines during the coronavirus pandemic are finding it's not so easy to do them right. Here's advice from the experts on improving your form.

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## FULL TEXT

PHOTO: Ivan Canu

Like many people, Cheryl Caveney has had to adapt her workouts during the coronavirus pandemic.

The Stamford, Conn.-based jewelry designer was a Soul Cycle devotee. Now, she's trying substitutes from Pilates classes via Zoom to fitness tutorials and dances on TikTok. But they haven't given her only the endorphin boost she was looking for. "I could barely walk after some of the classes," she says. "They've left me so sore I've had to take days off from workouts."

As people take on push-up challenges and attempt to follow workout classes from their living rooms, aches and even injuries can arise, whether they are old hands at workouts or new to classes. "It's normal for people to experience sore muscles if they've started working out in new ways," says Phil Page, the research director for physical therapy at Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady University in Baton Rouge, La. "The soreness might even take 24 to 48 hours to kick in—but if it limits your daily routine, you know you've overdone it."

The pros have advice on how to avoid the pain. Focus on form instead of trying to keep up with your virtual class. If you've never tried to do an exercise before, take the time to learn the mechanics before attempting 10 repetitions. Many personal trainers and physical therapists are offering one-on-one sessions virtually. If you have questions about technique and form, invest in a session. Don't be afraid to modify an exercise, and if you start to feel any pain, stop. Start slow and remember to take rest days.

Jill Henderzahn-Mason, a wellness physical therapist at the Mayo Clinic Healthy Living Program in Rochester, Minn., says it's important to move mindfully. Rather than try to keep up with the instructor on your screen, go at your own pace and get familiar with the mechanics of a move. For instance, the burpee—a combination of a jump, a squat and a push-up—is a complex exercise tossed into boot camps, she says. If it's new to you, rather than attack it all at once, break down the different elements.

Maybe you just jump up and drop into a squat and pause there while the instructor drops into a push-up. Or maybe you go down into a plank pose and skip the push-up. "Now isn't the time to be worried about getting in a heavy workout," Ms. Henderzahn-Mason says. "Focus on feeling good and as with any new routine, ramp up the intensity gradually."

The beauty of working out at home is that no one is judging if you only do 10 push-ups instead of 20, says Ninia Agustin, a physical therapist at SPEAR Physical Therapy in New York City. "And, unlike class, you can hit pause on your computer. Go at your own pace." Ms. Agustin suggests trying to work out in front of a full-length mirror to monitor alignment. If you live with someone, she says, you can ask them to police your technique. Be sure to wear supportive shoes, especially if you are new to exercise and doing any type of jumping activity that can strain the ankles, she says. Cluttered living rooms can be hazardous, so clear your space before you exercise, she says. And,

of course, it's a good idea to consult with your doctor before doing any new routines.

Here, experts deconstruct common exercises:

#### Push-up

Start in a plank position, with hands shoulder-width apart, says Ms. Agustin. "To maintain neutral cervical alignment, have a little bit of a chin tuck," she says. "Your body should form a straight line from the base of the neck to the tailbone." Your elbows should be at about a 45-degree angle to your body as you bend them and lower toward the ground, she says.

Common mistakes: "When the core is not engaged, the hips start to sink down or hike up, putting strain on the lower back," she says. As soon as you feel this happening, drop to your knees, with your feet up. Your spine should still form a straight line. If you feel pain in your wrists, drop to your knees, she says. If you feel discomfort in your knees, put padding under them or drop to your shins. Beginners can start by performing standing push-ups against a wall and then progress to a table edge, she says.

#### Squat

Stand with feet hip-width apart, says Ms. Henderzahs-Mason. Keep your chest tall as you push your hips back, bend at the knees and lower into a squat. You can keep your hands by your sides, clasped in front of you or crossed over your chest. Beginners can place a chair behind them and practice as though they were sitting down, without actually touching the chair before they stand back up. Be sure that your knees track in line with your ankles and toes, and don't let them go forward past your toes, she says. "Don't feel like you have to sink super deep," she says. "Only lower to the point that you can keep your back neutral."

Common mistakes: "If you have poor hip stability your knees will collapse inward," she says. "Keep them tracked over your ankles." You want to keep your weight in your heels and push your hips back rather than curve the spine, she says.

#### Lunge

Start with your feet hip-width apart, hands on hips, and step your right foot forward, says Ms. Agustin. Keeping your spine tall and the weight in your heel, lower your body until both your front and back legs form 90-degree angles, she says. Your front knee should be directly over your ankle and your back knee can tap or hover above the ground. Rise up and repeat. "If you feel wobbly, you can lightly hold on to a chair or even put a hand to the wall to help with balance," she says. Once you have mastered the stationary lunge you can move up to a forward lunge, where you step forward, lower and, as you rise, bring your front foot back to starting position, she says.

Common mistakes: "If your shoulders tip forward, your back muscles have to work harder to maintain the position," she says. "Think about keeping your bones stacked over each other." Don't let your front knee collapse inward, she says. Keep it over your second or third toe. When doing a forward lunge you want your pelvis to stay in the same plane, she says. "Make fists and put them on your hip bones," she says. "This will help you feel if your hip hikes up as you step back to the starting position."

#### Crunch (or Plank)

For a crunch, lie on your back, knees bent, feet flat on the floor, says Mr. Page. Cross your arms in front of you and lift your shoulder blades off the floor a couple of inches, pause and lower down, he says. Keep your chin slightly tucked, ears aligned with your shoulders the entire time. If you feel it's causing a strain, a plank is an alternative, says Ms. Henderzahs-Mason. "Crunches can put a lot of pressure on the disks of your back," she says. You can work your core by holding a plank on your hands (see example in push-up section above) and hit your obliques by doing a side plank.

Common mistakes: When doing a crunch, "don't wrap your hands around the back of your neck and try to sit all the way up," Mr. Page says. "This puts strain on the neck." As you rise up, watch that you don't jut your chin forward, he says. If your hips or chest start to sag during a plank, drop to your forearms, says Ms. Henderzahs-Mason.

#### Do-It-Yourself Massage

During this time of social distancing, we no longer have the option to book a massage or pop into the gym to foam roll when muscle aches arise. Jill Miller, the L.A.-based creator of the Roll Model Method, a self-massage practice,

shares tips for relieving sore muscles caused by everything from doing jump-squats during live-stream boot camp to sitting hunched over a computer.

#### Neck and Shoulders

"All of the #pushupchallenge competitions, not to mention the computer strain, can lead to tight and tense upper-back and neck muscles," says Ms. Miller.

With your back to the wall, pin a shoulder blade against a ball of about 2½ inches in diameter. Ms. Miller likes to use a lacrosse ball or a tennis ball covered in duct tape. "The tape adds a nice grip to the surface of the tennis balls, which otherwise are a bit too plush to really grab hold of your skin," she says. Lean back against the wall and trace the outline of your shoulder blade over and over, moving slowly over the ball and adding more pressure as needed.

#### Tight-Hip Release

"How many more jump squats and split squats will we be doing over the next 12 weeks?" asks Ms. Miller. "Many of us have also been doing much more sitting at our laptop and binge-watching Netflix, which leads to tight glutes." Lie on your back and place two tennis balls side-by-side under your hip. They should fall into a little cave of soft tissue. Take a breath in, hold your breath and activate your glute by squeezing the muscle or by pushing your knee toward the ground. Exhale and release. Move the balls a quarter of an inch higher, take a breath in, hold, activate the glute, exhale and release. Do this in slow motion, moving the balls across the glute toward the base of the spine, then switch sides.

#### Back

Sitting with poor posture or doing burpees or a plank pose with poor technique can cause pain, says Ms. Miller. For a lower-back massage, lie on your back and bend your knees, putting your feet flat on the floor. Put a pair of therapy balls, or tennis balls, under your lower back. Expose your skin so the balls are in contact with the soft tissues of the lower back. Roll over the balls from the pelvis to the rib cage over and over.

Or, for the upper back, lie on your back with a foam roller just below the shoulder blades, perpendicular to the spine. Interlock your hands at the base of your neck to support your head. If you don't have a foam roller, you can roll up a yoga mat and tape it tightly, says Ms. Miller. "It's an awesome substitute and not as cruel as a wooden rolling pin," she says. Lift your hips and slowly roll down to your mid-back, stopping to breathe in at any tender areas, then work the roller back up and repeat.

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#### Share Your Thoughts

What workout moves have you been doing at home? Join the conversation below.

Credit: By Jen Murphy

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