

This home workout experiment could transform the way you exercise.

Whether you're short on time or want to try something new, "trigger workouts" might be just what you're looking for.

By [Craig Weller, CPT, US Navy SWCC, SFG1, PN Master coach](#)

Please note: this article has been revised to highlight the main points, go here to see the [full article](#).

We have a workout experiment for you. It's simple. It's effective. And it's tailor-made for people who work from home. If that's your situation right now, there may be no better time to try it.

Give it a shot, and it might help you:

- **Move more frequently throughout your day for better overall health**
- **Make working out seem "easier" while improving your fitness**
- **Do lots of exercise—without needing an hour of uninterrupted time**
- **Take short work breaks that invigorate your mind**
- **Have fun trying out a new approach to exercise**

Let's start with the background. Most well-rounded workouts last about an hour and total around 100 to 200 reps at most.

But what happens after this hour of hard work? Chances are, you go sit in your chairs for the rest of your day. Chairs? As in plural? Well, yes. There's probably the chair where you do your work and the chair where you eat your meals. And the chair where you relax in front of your TV. (Or don't relax, if you're watching the news.)

That one hour is still a brief intermission in a day that's otherwise defined by stillness. Modern workers can spend as much as 15 hours per day in a chair.¹ This takes a toll on our bodies and our minds.

Some research has shown that even an hour of intense exercise isn't enough to counteract all the effects of a sedentary lifestyle.² What would happen if we reversed this?

What if we spent most of the day physically moving, with only an hour or two of stillness in the middle?

What if we moved continuously and did thousands of reps of movement over the entire day? This may sound ludicrous, but think of people who do manual labor for a living. Construction workers, furniture movers, military personnel and agricultural workers regularly see long days of almost continuous movement. Professional and Olympic athletes may spend much of their day training.

The benefits don't stop at your muscles. Our brains also change in response to movement. Physical activity, ranging from traditional gym exercise to simple walking, can improve mood and cognitive function, and helps reduce the effects of aging on the brain.⁶⁻¹⁰

In one study a group of people were fed an extra 1,000 calories above their baseline for eight weeks. Based on simple calorie math, they should have each gained 16 pounds by the end of the study. Instead, some gained as much as 9.5 pounds, while others added less than a pound.

The main difference? The people who gained the least weight compensated for the extra calories by moving more throughout the day.

This doesn't mean they went to the gym for longer. Instead, it was "non-exercise physical activity" that made the difference. The people who gained the least weight did the most fidgeting and walking spread throughout the course of their day.

Remember, our bodies are in a state of constant flux. We're always adapting to whatever we're doing in a given moment. So if we're sitting still for hours on end, we're getting better at... sitting still for hours on end. But if we're moving around a lot—and then recovering from that movement—we're getting better at that instead.

How to build your own intermittent workout

We call this idea of doing a set or three of an exercise every time you walk past a certain object or are reminded by a timer a **trigger workout**. (It's way easier to say than "intermittent.")

It's a great way to improve fitness and motor skills. It's also a sneaky way to get in a lot of exercise on days when you otherwise wouldn't have time for a full workout.

Here's what you do.

Step 1: Establish your trigger.

This can be anything from a timer to an object in your house. Lately, I've been putting a kettlebell on my floor near the stairs. I run into it whenever I'm either going to the kitchen or the bathroom. Every time I walk by it I do a few sets of swings, snatches, or ab movements.

Whatever you choose, make it somewhat frequent.

Ideally, you'll be moving around about once per hour.

If you're working from home (like millions of others right now), this gives you enough time to do focused work, while still keeping your body from fusing with your chair. It also gives you a brief, regular break from the mental demands of work.

Step 2: Pick an exercise.

Generally, choose a movement that works a lot of big muscle groups (not a good place for curls) and that can be done safely without a warmup. Read: It's not the best time to test your personal best deadlift.

Consider exercises like:

- **Kettlebell swings or snatches (*only if you've been well-trained in the technique*)**
- **Goblet squats**
- **Bodyweight squats**
- **Lunge variations**
- **Pushups**
- **Dumbbell rows**
- **Ring rows**
- **Pullups**
- **Overhead presses (if your shoulders do well with them)**
- **Band movements like pull-aparts or no-moneys**
- **Ab movements like roll-outs or planks**

You can also mix in some favorite stretches or mobility drills. Come up with a handful of movements, and try to get about an equal mix of upper and lower body movements.

For the sake of your shoulders, it's often **helpful to do about twice as many reps of pulling movements**—such as rows and pull-aparts—as you do pushing movements like pushups and presses.

Step 3: Decide how many reps and sets to do.

The specific number here isn't critical. You're just trying to make physical work feel easy. Stay at a level where you don't feel a significant "burn," and you're nowhere near failure. As a general rule, it's better to do multiple sets of lower reps than one long set of a bunch of reps. For most exercises, try starting with 5 reps at a time.

An example day:

8 am: 5 pushups, 5 dead bugs (per side), repeated for 4 total rounds

9 am: 5 goblet squats, 10 kettlebell swings, 5 lunges (per side)

10:30 am: 10 band pull-aparts, 5 pushups, repeated for 3 total rounds

11:30 am: 5 goblet squats, 5 dumbbell rows (per side), repeated for 4 total rounds

1:00 pm: 5 ab wheel roll-outs, 5 banded no-moneys, 5 pull-aparts, repeated for 3 total rounds

2:30 pm: 10-second side plank (per side), 5 dumbbell lunges (per side), repeated for 2 total rounds

3:30 pm: 5 dumbbell rows (per side), 5 single-leg dumbbell deadlifts (per side), repeated for 3 total rounds

5:00 pm: 5 dumbbell overhead presses (per side), 10 band pull-aparts, repeated for 2 total rounds

Total repetitions: 359

Of course, you can also just pick one or two exercises, or a single circuit, and repeat that over the course of the day.

You don't have to give up other types of exercise altogether. In fact, don't. Where possible, use trigger workouts *with* some conventional training, and go play outside.

This training method works best when it's done in combination with the type of maximal strength training and periodic high-intensity work that's done in a gym (even if that's your home gym). At least over the long term. It's also best when balanced with dynamic, open-ended, and enjoyable activities outdoors. The kind that put you in situations that require more movement variability. So once in a while (or as often as you can), go for a real hike.

We hear that's pretty good for you, too.

References

Click [here](#) to view the information sources referenced in this article.