

The Best Home Gym Exercises You've Never Heard Of

10
Exercises
Total-Body



By Nick Nilsson

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The Best Home Gym Exercises You've Never Heard Of - 10 Exercises

Training at home with basic equipment like barbells and dumbbells can still get you fantastic results!



Home gyms are a great way to train...but sometimes you do miss the wider range of equipment available at a commercial gym. The exercises in "[The Best Home Gym Exercises You've Never Heard Of](#)" book will help you not miss the commercial fitness centers at all.

If you have specific goals... whether it's strength, muscle growth, specialization or fat loss... you'll find movements that target them. You'll also find exercises that target different angles, functions and aspects of each muscle.

[This book includes 10 sample exercises taken directly from the book](#), one each for every major muscle group covered in it.

Try all of these exercises out...it'll give you the best idea of the power of the REST of the 270+ exercises you'll find in the full book!

Nick Nilsson
The Mad Scientist of Muscle

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Dumbbell Squeeze Sit-Ups



This exercise is deceptively simple and it will target your lower abs very strongly.

Set two dumbbells on the floor, set beside your hips. I've got a pair of 65's but weight isn't too important as you won't be lifting them.



The most critical thing to remember is to squeeze the dumbbells inwards. Press them hard against your hips then perform a straight leg sit-up.



This inwards tension takes the hip flexors almost completely out of the exercise and puts the tension right into the lower abs.

Keep squeezing inwards until you're sitting upright.



Lower down under control and repeat.

It's surprisingly tough. My lower abs were on fire by the end of the set...get as many reps as you can.

If you try it, let me know how it goes...

Seated Barbell Shrugs



The barbell shrug is the well-known exercise for working the upper traps, however it has a major flaw...your body is in the way.

This is the reason why the trap bar was first created...to get the bar around your body so that you can perform the shrug with a straight up and down movement.

If you don't have a trap bar, you can do something very similar...and potentially even better...with a straight bar and a bench.

Sit on the very end of the bench with your feet in front of the bar, lean forward and grip it, then sit back upright. That's the start position.

I recommend using grip assistance for these so that grip strength isn't a limiting factor.

I would also suggest not using super heavy weight on this one to start with...we're looking for solid trap contraction without heaving the bar up, and the seated position **FORCES** the issue. When you're seated, you can't use your legs to heave the bar up.



Now, with the bar directly under your thighs (make sure it's not under the bench end or that

will shorten the range of motion by a few inches), shrug the bar up.



Pull the bar up and into your hamstrings...this adds an "immovable object" to the top of the shrug, similar to if you were pulling into the bottom of the rails of the power rack.

Hold that contraction at the top and keep pulling the bar into your hamstrings for a few seconds.

Lower the bar down, get a stretch at the bottom (leaning forward just slightly is fine), then repeat.

You may also notice that I have a slight bend in my elbows at the top of the shrug...this isn't 100% required but I find it does deliver a better contraction at the top of the shrug, so feel free to give it a try.

Aim for 6-8 reps with this one, doing the movement under full control with pauses at the stretch and contraction.

This is great exercise for hammering the traps without needing to have a rack or a trap bar.

Lying Side Dumbbell Flyes



If you're training with just free weight, it can be tough to find an exercise that really targets the inner pecs (and the peak contraction of the pecs). This one is all about hitting that peak contraction position that really targets the inner pec area.

This exercise gets around the problem of having no cable equipment by using just a dumbbell and a bench...it's all about how you position your body.

Lie on your side on the bench with your shoulder off the end, holding the dumbbell in one hand.

Hook your feet under the other end of the bench (bottom side leg in front, other leg in back) then set your non-working hand on the end of the bench to support your body.



Then, keeping your elbow slightly bent but **LOCKED** (this is not a curl!), you bring the dumbbell up and around in front of you until it's even with your other shoulder.



Hold that top position for a few seconds on each rep and **SQUEEZE** your pec.

Because you're lying on your side, you won't get much resistance at the bottom but you will get a **HUGE** contraction at the top.

Be sure to start out lighter than you think you'll need to with this one. I'm using a 35 lb dumbbell in the demo here. The leverage is not great but the effect on the chest IS.

Do all your reps on one side then switch over to your other side.





This one is great for carving up the chest - not a building exercise but a "definition" type of exercise (i.e. it's not going to burn fat directly from the chest but it will help improve the overall appearance of the pecs by helping fill out the inner area and increasing muscle density from that squeezing).

Towel Plate Lateral Raises



I love exercises that use equipment not only in ways you've never thought they could be used in but exercises that make equipment out of things you never really even thought WERE equipment!

That's the beauty of this exercise...it's a lateral raise done with a towel and a weight plate. You're going to string a towel (at least 2 to 3 feet long, ideally) through the center hole of a weight plate (I'm using a 25 lb plate).



Then you're going to grip onto the ends, with the plate hanging down in front of you.



Now you're going to do a lateral raise, bringing your hands up and out to the sides as you raise the plate up. The cool thing is, because you're also straightening out the towel, you're getting direct sideways resistance on the side delts, which makes for VERY effective on those side delts.

This is my preferred way to do lateral raises, to be honest. Once you've tried it, you won't want to go back to regular raises.



Come up until the plate is at your upper chest and hold for a moment, if you can. The plate will come in contact with your upper chest. Your upper arms should be almost horizontal and your forearms will be up a bit higher.



Lower and repeat.

Here's a side view.





This is a really simple way to essentially double the effective tension going onto the side delts when performing a lateral raise. You get the up and down resistance of gravity then the lateral resistance from the effort of straightening out the towel.

Very Close Grip Barbell Rows



This is a back exercise that doubles as an upper arm exercise...I actually came up with this one as a way to do a compound exercise for the biceps that wasn't a pull-up.

So to do this, I basically focused on what made the barbell row hit the arms more...this is accomplished by moving the hands in right close together on the bar.

This results in greater elbow flexion during the movement (ie. the arms bend more) which means the upper arms take more of the brunt of the exercise.

This one DOES still hit the back (especially the teres major, rhomboids and posterior delts) because it is a rowing movement. But you'll really feel the focus on the upper arms - more the brachialis rather than the biceps because the hand position makes it work like a neutral-grip hammer curl type of exercise.

You can work up to a relatively heavy load for this exercise, because the back muscles are involved strongly. I've got 185 lbs on the bar for this one.

Step up and grab it with an overhand grip - hands very close together in the center of the bar. They don't need to be touching but should be within an inch apart.



Now lift the bar up to the bottom start position of the row - lower back arched and tight, knees bent, core tight.



Row the bar up into your abdomen - whatever track feels best to you. Note the bend in the elbows as I get to the top (flexion). This is a lot of load on the upper arms using a weight you'd have a hard time doing a reverse curl with.



That's the movement...just row until your arms are toasted. It allows you to use your back muscles to push your upper arms to the limit.

I find exercises like this so useful for building arms because I find arms respond better to heavier-weight movements. It's the heavy rowing, pressing, chins and deadlifting movements that really build serious arm size.

This is a great way to target a row for building arm size.

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Barbell Lever Pushdowns



This is a great way to isolate the triceps using very simple equipment, especially if you don't have access to a cable machine or bands.

It's going to give you an excellent "at-home" pushdown setup.

You'll be using a simple see-saw setup...a first-class lever made up of a barbell, a bench and some weight.

First, to set this exercise up, load one end of the bar with the bar on the floor. This makes it much easier to load and unload as if you try and load it with the bar already on the bench, the downward angle makes it easier for the plates to slide down.



I've got 90 lbs on the end of the bar here. Then just lift the unloaded end up and set it over the bench. I recommend setting it with the middle right over the bench. This will give you a good range of motion for the exercise.



Kneel down by the unloaded end and set your hands on the end of the bar. You'll notice that your hands are at angle...this means you will get uneven loading on the triceps. Remedy this by switching the way you face on the next set.



Then just perform a pushdown.



This mimics the mechanics of a cable pushdown very effectively, though the changing angle of the bar does take some getting used to.

On the next set, face the other way to keep it even.



As with the regular pushdown, focus on getting a hard squeeze at the bottom of the push.

You can also perform this exercise facing in at the end of the bar, with both hands on the end.



This hand placement will work the medial (inside) head of the triceps very effectively. The internal rotation of the arms at the shoulder puts them in the best position to contract.

Overall, this is a great way to isolate the triceps when you have limited equipment to work with.

Barbell Cursing Walking Lunges



This one is fantastic for hammering the quads and all you need is a barbell...and you'll find out pretty quick why I call it a "cursing" lunge...

It's very simple...hold the bar behind your legs with an overhand grip, resting it against your upper hamstrings.

I'm using 95 lbs on the bar here... you don't need a lot of weight. This one is more about the burn on the quads and the pump rather than weight.



Do a walking lunge. Step forward with the bar held in position.

The bottom gives you a nice stretch on the quads.

Now, as you come up, straighten up the BACK leg first then step forward. This hits the quads on the back leg, similar to a sissy squat but without the knee stress.





In the video, you'll notice I'm not focusing as much on the stretch, just on plowing through the reps to generate as much lactate as possible (though you CAN pause at the bottom and lean your upper body back to get more stretch).

And this lactate generation is where the "cursing" part of the name comes from...

The video shows just once up and down the gym floor. You can keep going for as long as you can...until your quads turn to pudding.







Overall, if you're training with minimal equipment (or honestly, even if you have a full commercial gym), and you love blasting your legs into oblivion, you're going to enjoy this one.

Roll-Up Barbell Plate Leg Curls



If you train at home and don't have a leg curl machine to hit the knee flexion aspect of your hamstrings, this is going to be a great option for you.

Stiff-legged deadlifts are great for targeting the hip extension function of the hamstrings but for complete development, you need to hit flexion as well.

This is done using a loaded barbell and your bodyweight...and a dumbbell, if you want to add resistance.

You're going to be doing a roll-up type of exercise that you may have seen done using a Swiss ball. I like this version better as it provides more stability than the ball, allowing you to use extra resistance and really load the hamstrings.

Since the hamstrings really only contract in one direction (being a strap-like muscle group), you don't really need a lot of stabilization training for them.

First, you want to load a barbell with some plates. I recommend at least 3-4 plates on the "working" end. You really only need one plate on the other end. I did this exercise after doing sets of another exercise with the bar loaded with 405, so it was already set up like this.

The plates aren't for resistance...you're going to put your feet on them, which is why you need enough surface area to set your feet on top.

Start with just your bodyweight to get an idea of how the movement works.

Set your heels on top of the plates while lying on your back.



Now roll the plates towards your butt, coming up on your feet.



This top position provides an incredibly strong contraction on the hamstrings. When your hips are fully extended, the hamstrings can achieve full contraction.

Roll down and repeat.

Once you get the idea, you can start adding some weight. I've got a 30 lb dumbbell set on my hips.



Perform the exercise, just like before.



The dumbbell provides you with direct extra resistance.

Now it gets fun...you can move to heavier weights and really take advantage of the extra load to get a strong stretch at the bottom, along with the peak contraction.

I've got an 85 lb dumbbell here.



In between reps, don't touch your butt to the floor. Keeping your glutes off the ground means the hamstrings must contract in order to maintain position. It's a **STRONG** stretch, which you can then move into a strong contraction.





You'll notice that the other end of the bar doesn't really move. Only the working end rolls. This means you will get a bit of an arc to the movement, which is something you want to adjust for in your body position.

As you come to the top of each rep, contract the glutes hard to force your hips up towards the ceiling. This will maximize the contraction. Hold for a second or two then lower under control.

This is a phenomenal way to target the knee flexion aspect of the hamstrings without needing a leg curl machine.

One-Legged Glute Deadlifts



This one looks very much like a Bulgarian Split Squat but without the squatting.

The Bulgarian Split Squat is where you set your back leg up on a bench then come down in the lunge position (a.k.a. split squat).

With THIS exercise, however, you're going to be doing a one-legged stiff-legged deadlift with your back leg up on the bench.

I was actually quite amazed at how strongly this one targeted the glutes...the best part is, it hits the glutes

without involving knee flexion to any substantial degree.

What THIS means is that you can build bigger glutes (and/or maintain glute size) when you have knee problems or injuries that prevent you from squatting or lunging.

Now there's no excuse...unless you have back problems, of course!

So here's what the exercise looks like...you'll need two dumbbells and a bench for this one.

Set the dumbbells in front of the bench (I'm using a couple of 85 lb dumbbells - start lighter than this when you try these the first time). You should be comfortable with the normal stiff-legged deadlift exercise before you try this one as it hits a lot of the same muscles and the same general movement pattern.

Now set the top of your foot and potentially part of your shin on the bench, not just your toes. You'll need this for some degree of stability. We're not trying to make this exercise unstable, per se. What we're trying to do is get your body in the right position to force the glutes to activate.

You may need to slide the dumbbells forward a bit. Set your front foot in between the two dumbbells, get into position on the bench (like you were going to do that split squat movement). Both knees should be bent but held in that same position throughout the exercise.

Bend forward and grab the dumbbells. Keep your core tight.



Now pick the dumbbells up off the floor. The pressure should be on the heel of your front foot and your glute should be feeling it. Your glute will not only be providing the hip extension that gets you to the upright position, it's also contracting isometrically to maintain that bent-knee split position - double whammy!

Come all the way up until your torso is vertical.



Then lower the dumbbells slowly back down and set them on the ground. Repeat the movement, lifting the dumbbells off the ground - setting them down allows you to reset your body position and keep your lower back well stabilized.

Do your reps on one leg then switch legs. I prefer lower reps with this exercise since the glutes are powerful muscles and need to be hit hard.



Remember, you're setting the dumbbells completely on the floor in between reps. Breathe out on the way up and keep your core tight. Try to keep an arch in your lower back throughout the

movement as well.

This one targets the glutes INCREDIBLY well even though you're not squatting or lunging. Holding that split position while doing the stiff-leg deadlift movement targets them strongly.

Double Captain Morgan Calf Raises



For complete calf development, you need to hit both of the major calf muscles...the gastrocnemius and the soleus.

Since the soleus (which lies underneath the gastroc) is primarily active when the knee is bent, it's important to do some form of calf raise with that leg position. Seated calf raises are the main exercise for that.

If you don't have that machine, you can do THIS exercise that hits a straight leg and a bent-knee position at the same time.

Basically, you do a Captain Morgan pose (like the alcohol mascot...one leg up on something, one straight) with two dumbbells...one resting on end on the leg that's on the bench (a bent-knee calf raise which hits the soleus) and a standing calf raise on the other leg, with the dumbbell hanging down beside you (mostly gastroc).

With the foot that's on the bench, make sure you just have your forefoot area on the bench. You want the heel to be free to get a bit of a stretch (there won't be much stretch, though, because of the loading and the strength of the Achilles tendon).



Then you do a calf raise with BOTH legs at the same time.



This works both calf muscles VERY strongly.

Key point...make sure with the dumbbell on the knee that it's only RESTING on the knee...use your hand to balance it, not to pull on it at all.

Take a rest...don't go immediately into the other leg combination because the calves will be fatigued and your reps and form will suffer.

Then switch legs and go again.





This is a great at-home way to work your calves VERY hard. If you're using lighter weight, go for more reps.

Even with the half range of motion on the bottom leg, because that bottom foot starts flat on the floor, you still get major calf work.

These Exercises...

- ✓ Can be done at home with very little equipment...just a couple of dumbbells, a barbell and a bench will allow you to do literally HUNDREDS of incredibly effective, new exercises.
- ✓ Destroy boredom in your training so that you're ALWAYS looking forward to your next workout. Motivation will never be an issue when you've got amazing, new exercises to try every day.
- ✓ Work even BETTER than many commercial gym machines costing thousands of dollars or expensive home gym multi-station units that take up way too much floor space in your home.
- ✓ Target a tremendous variety of different angles and movement patterns so that you get complete muscle development, working your muscles in ways you thought only machines could.
- ✓ Use common pieces of free weight equipment in ways you've never even imagined to achieve results you might have thought only possible with commercial gym equipment.
- ✓ Work for EVERYBODY, no matter where you're at currently with your weight...whether you're looking to drop a lot of extra fat or if your goal is to get ripped while staying muscular and strong.

When you're ready to take a crack at 270+ more home gym exercises using just dumbbells, barbells and a bench, [click here to go grab your copy of the full book now!](#)

