

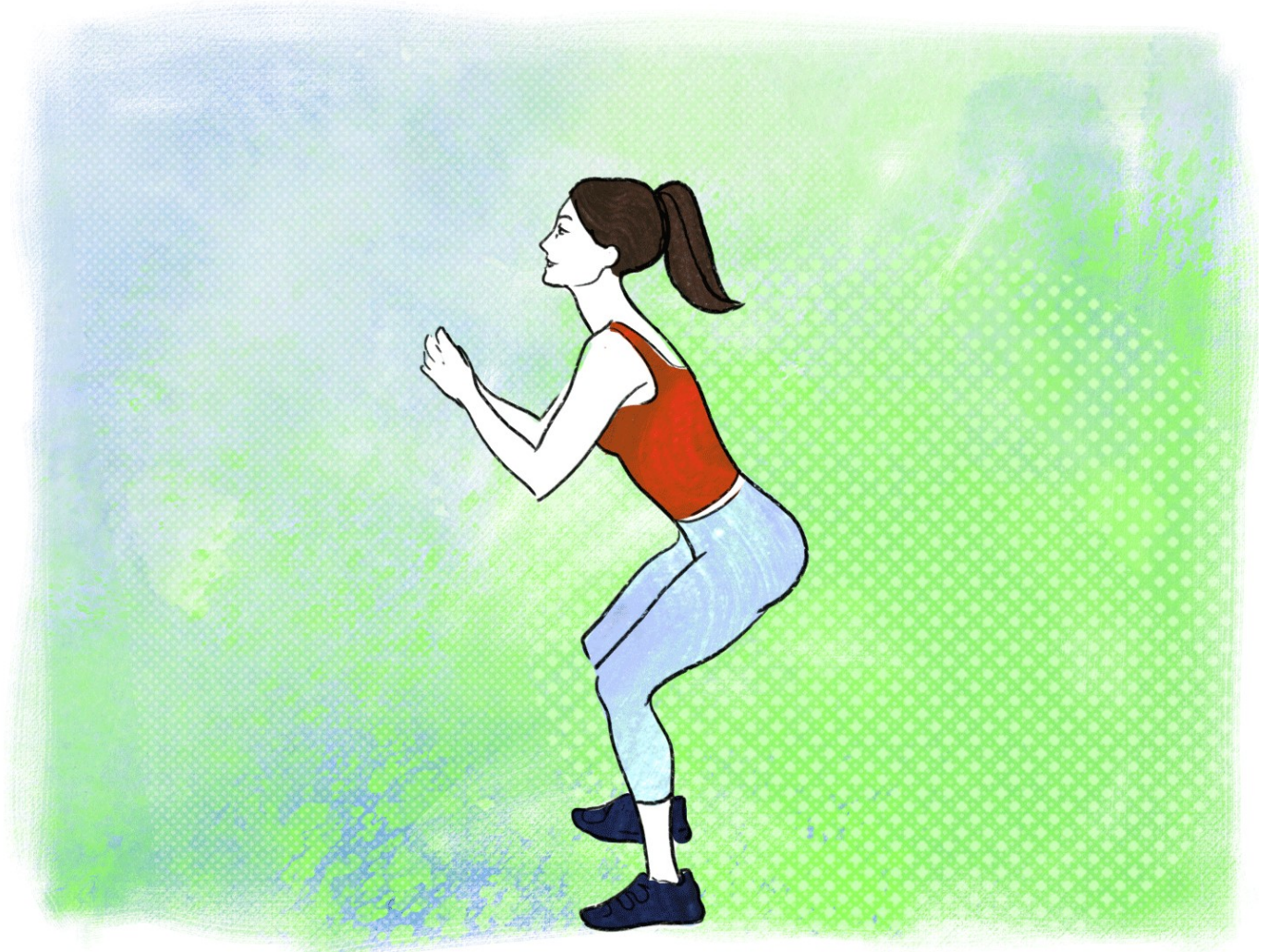
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THE **FINE LINE** —

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Burpees: Yay or Nay?



Burpees, for most people, are a four-letter word. Though it's rare they are met with enthusiasm, they're irrefutably an exercise that, when performed correctly, torches calories and tones the whole body. But are they good for aging bodies? That depends on whom you ask.



THE CASE FOR YAY

According to Michael Joyner, a physician-researcher and one of the world's leading experts on human performance and exercise physiology, just two exercises can keep you fit for life: burpees is No 1. (The other? **Jumping rope!**)

Because everyone loses muscle with age — according to Harvard Health, after age 30, people typically lose 3 to 5 percent per decade — building new muscle is critical. And it's never too late to start. Studies have shown that frail older adults can improve strength and performance in just a few months. Fit older adults can stand tall knowing that their muscles and bones often resemble those of people decades younger. According to Joyner, "There is a clear relationship between how easy it [is] for people to get off the floor and how long they live."

And that is where burpees come in. Sure, you can build strength in a lot of ways — **lifting weights in particular** — but burpees build endurance and strength simultaneously. The ability to burn 50 percent more fat than with moderate exercise (even speeding up your metabolism if they're done with intensity) coupled with scalability depending on age or athleticism, make burpees an ideal choice. And the impact burpees have on everyday activities is impressive. People who do burpees can carry a case of water up a staircase or lift a heavy suitcase into an airplane's overhead bin more easily than people who do not.

The key to burpees at any age? Proper form. Start slow and with limited repetitions to ensure you master it

- Starting from a standing position, squat until you can put your hands on the ground.
- Jump back into plank position.
- Do a push-up.
- Jump back into a squat position.
- Jump, arms overhead, to standing.



Once you're confident about your form (have a trainer evaluate you), here are some fun burpee drills to consider:

TWO-MINUTE DRILL

Do as many burpees as you can in two minutes. Track results over time to celebrate improvement.

100 BURPEE CHALLENGE

Do 100 burpees. Time yourself to track your progress.

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DESCENDING BURPEE LADDER

Start with 10 burpees. Rest one minute. Do nine burpees. Rest one minute. Do eight burpees. Rest one minute. You get the idea.

THE CASE FOR NAY

Ben Bruno, celebrity trainer best known for sculpting Chelsea Handler, Kate Upton, and Victoria's Secret model Barbara Fialho, opposes burpees for his clients. "The risk isn't worth the reward," he says.

"Most people lack the requisite strength and mobility to do them properly at all, let alone for high reps, which is how they're programmed since the goal is metabolic conditioning," Bruno says. "Fatigue exacerbates form faults." He continues his disdain for the movement, saying that burpees put undue stress on wrists, shoulders, knees, and lower back.

One of the foremost experts in the fields of functional fitness, Michael Boyle, concurs. "In a burpee, you're jamming your wrist into extension, then you're putting a huge amount of stress on the anterior shoulder, which is the weakest part of the shoulder. Neither of those things is good in a singular sense, and they're clearly not good in high repetitions. People like the idea of the burpee because they think it's a total-body exercise — that it works their upper body, their lower body, and their



cardiovascular [system]. But there's no *one* exercise that does that. And the reality is that if the risk outweighs the benefit, then the exercise isn't a good one."

Boyle concludes that "the burpee is trying to be three things at once, and it's not very good at any one of the three: You can do literally *any other exercise* and you'd be better off."

Both Bruno and Boyle believe there are alternatives to burpees that provide the same results:

- **Box jumps** – If you want the lower-body plyometric challenge of the burpee's kicking back
- Push-ups – To replicate the burpee push-up
- Anything cardio – **Spinning**, **rowing**, running sprints, and more require you to exert a lot of energy

THE VERDICT

There are as many viewpoints about fitness as there are methodologies. The one constant is the research indicating the numerous health benefits of strength training — even movements like burpees — and the need to continue to push yourself as you age.

Our recommendation? Listen to your body to make the right decision for you.

ILLUSTRATION: ALEXANDRAGRITZ

BY

TAGGED

Christine Morrison **Yay** **or**
Nay