

## You're Not Too Old For... Box Jumps



Crossfit founder Greg Glassman has had an epiphany of late, shifting the emphasis of his sport to focus on functional fitness for the aging population rather than grooming the world's fittest athletes. While exercise overall is key to longevity, it's movements like box jumps that have the greatest impact.

And regardless of your athletic prowess, you can take advantage of this move that sparks cardio conditioning, increases **bone density**, and helps you keep your balance and coordination as you

age. In functional terms, a box jump is a vertical plyometric move — aka muscles exert maximum force in short intervals of time, with the goal of increasing power — that can be done anywhere. And did we mention they are fun?

## **WHY TAKE THE LEAP?**

Though studies have shown bone mass density is impacted when the magnitude, rate, and frequency of muscle strain occurs, and exercises such as weightlifting, tennis, and running respectively fall into these categories, there is only one movement that fulfills all three: jumping.

Women experience greater bone loss than men, particularly after menopause, which means we suffer from more bone fractures and greater incidences of osteoporosis and osteopenia. But this exercise allstar is a great solution — and an easy one to incorporate into your current routine. And you can't start too soon. "Bones kind of peak out around your 30s, and then you start to decline gradually in your bone and muscle," says Dr. Robert Wermers, an endocrinologist specializing in bone disease at Mayo Clinic.

The *American Journal of Health Promotion* research concurs, noting that jumping 20 times a day may have a significant impact on your risk of osteoporosis. After just eight weeks, researchers found a demonstrable change in bone mineral density in their subjects who jumped.

## **BURN, BABY, BURN**

Jumping burns significantly more calories than walking (800 to 1,000/hourly versus 200 to 300/hourly) while also increasing your strength and muscle tone. And in most cases, you use nearly every muscle in your legs which blasts fat and torches calories. Fun fact for those seeking weight loss: High-intensity jumping stimulates changes in the mitochondria, where fuel is converted into energy at the cellular level, so you burn fat before carbohydrates. And don't even get us talking about the calves you can develop!

Jumping may feel awkward initially but will ultimately contribute to keeping you younger. By mastering box jumps, you strengthen your balance and coordination, which can safeguard you from

falling and injuries as you age. Glassman has said, “The needs of an Olympic athlete and our grandparents differ by degree not kind,” and we are all training “to get better at life.”

## **KEEP CALM AND START SMALL**

Initially standing in front of a box can be daunting. We get it. Start small with step-ups, as they improve your range of motion and strength, but recognize they are not your end goal.

Once you’re ready to jump, you’ll need a plyometric box or sturdy elevated surface (a stack of mats or a step can do the trick) — then follow these steps:

- Stand in front of box with your feet shoulder width apart, bend into a quarter squat and swing your arms back then forward as you explode off the ground.
- Land softly, then straighten your legs while standing atop the box.
- Jump (or step) back down, depending on your comfort level.

The height of your box will depend on your current fitness level, but consider starting at 12 to 16 inches high. Once you have mastered box jumps, attempt 20 inches consistently for greatest benefit.

*PHOTO: MIQUELLLONCH*

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