



the ih8exercise.com guide

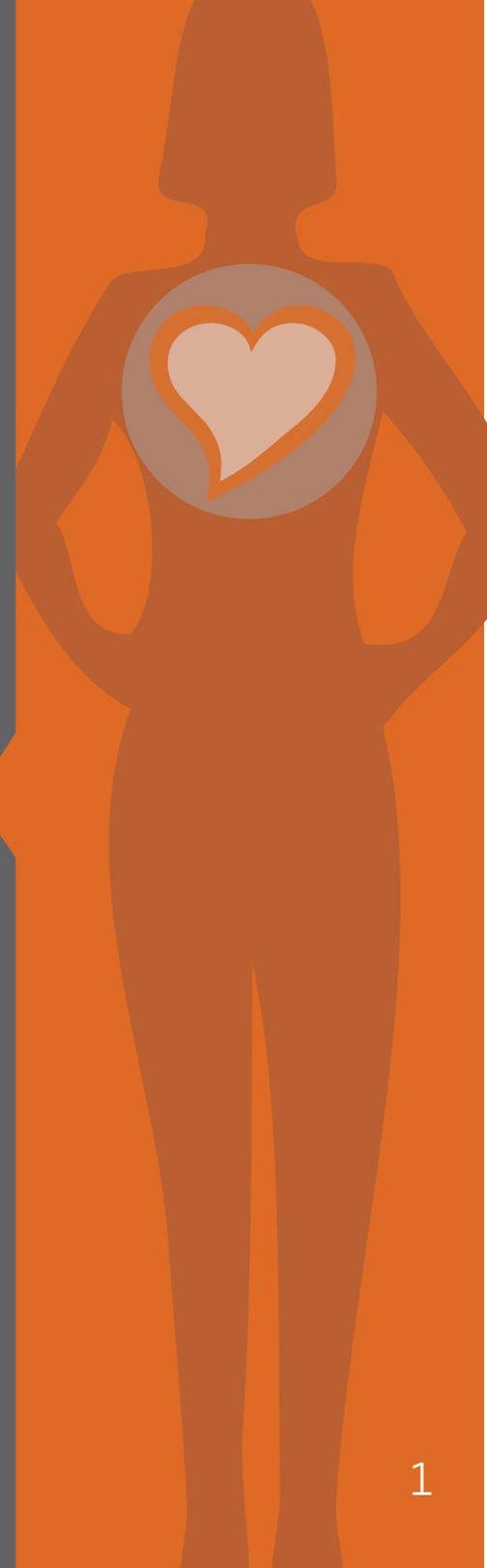
how to tone your back

the [ih8exercise.com](https://www.ih8exercise.com) guide

how to tone your back

So you want to get a better back: Simply put, you want those sculpted shoulder blades, trapezius, and latissimus muscles. A toned back that looks good in shirts, tanks, or nothing at all. If you're a woman maybe you aspire to Cameron Diaz or Blake Lively's super-toned upper back; if you're a guy it could be that you wouldn't mind looking a little more like Matthew McConaughey or Channing Tatum, back-wise. A lean, muscle-y (and back fat-free!) back is one of the top goals for many people, along with a flatter belly, better behind, stronger arms, and toned legs. A stronger low back and abdominal muscles will also help protect you against one of the most common causes of disability and doctor visits: back pain.

While this plan is designed to help you reach your fitness goal, it's important to understand that a better back means eating well, too. You can't "spot reduce"—meaning tone or lose weight in just one part of your body. To get the back you really want, you need to include cardio/aerobic exercise and especially a healthy diet along with the moves we share here.



getting started

As a beginning exerciser you need to need to know a few important points. These will help ensure you see the results you want—in this case, leaner, toned back muscles.

There are three main aspects to this plan:

- * **Resistance (strength) training:** This builds lean muscle.
- * **Cardio:** This burns fat.
- * **Nutrition:** This is what will *really* deliver the results you're looking for.

Cardio leads to fat loss, but too much cardio can lead to muscle loss, which in turn can slow down the rate at which you shed fat. Lean muscle comes from resistance training and can indirectly lead to fat loss. To maximize your weight loss, do both cardio and strength training in moderation and don't try to lose more than a half-pound to 1 pound per week. And definitely talk to your doctor or another healthcare professional if you have any injuries, health conditions, or other health concerns or questions.

Equipment



- * Dumbbells (range of weights, 3 to 15 lbs.)
- * Mat
- * Timer

If you're not sure which weight(s) to choose, choose weight or resistance for each exercise that allows you to complete the first set of each move with perfect form. You should feel challenged, but not be struggling to finish the first set of each move. If you do struggle, drop down to a lighter weight.

warm-up & cool-down

Warm-up exercises are essential to any workout. When you take a little time to warm up you're preparing your muscles and joints for more intense activity, which helps prevent injury as well as promoting circulation. It also mentally prepares and motivates you for the workout to come.

Just like their name implies, warm-up exercises increase the temperature of the body, making the muscles more flexible and receptive to activity. Warming up should slightly increase your heart rate, but you shouldn't be working at the level you're at during your workout.

Every exercise session should also be followed by a cool-down that gradually lowers your heart rate and stretches all the muscles you've just worked. Resist the temptation to skip your cool-down.

easy warm-up

1. Start by doing an easy march in place; this will increase blood circulation and raise the body's core temperature. Count to eight as you march and repeat for 3 sets.
2. Starting in a standing position, extend your right leg forward and touch your right heel to the floor as you bend the left (supporting) leg at the knee. As you do this, swing your arms rhythmically from side to side. Repeat on the left side, extending your left leg forward. That's one set. Repeat for 3 sets.
3. From a standing position, stand tall and bring your right knee up to 90 degrees as the left hand grabs the outside of your right knee. Hold for 1 to 2 seconds. Keep your abs tight, chest up, shoulders back, and back straight. Also keep a slight bend in the supporting (left) leg. Lower your right foot to the floor and repeat on the opposite side. Keep alternating legs and the hold for 30 seconds and up to 1 minute.
4. Return to your easy march for 1 to 3 minutes.
5. Finish your warm-up with 1 to 2 minutes of jumping jacks.

The warm-up should be intense enough to increase your body temperature, but not so strenuous that you end up feeling very tired. A good rule of thumb: Work hard enough to break a mild sweat.

easy cool-down

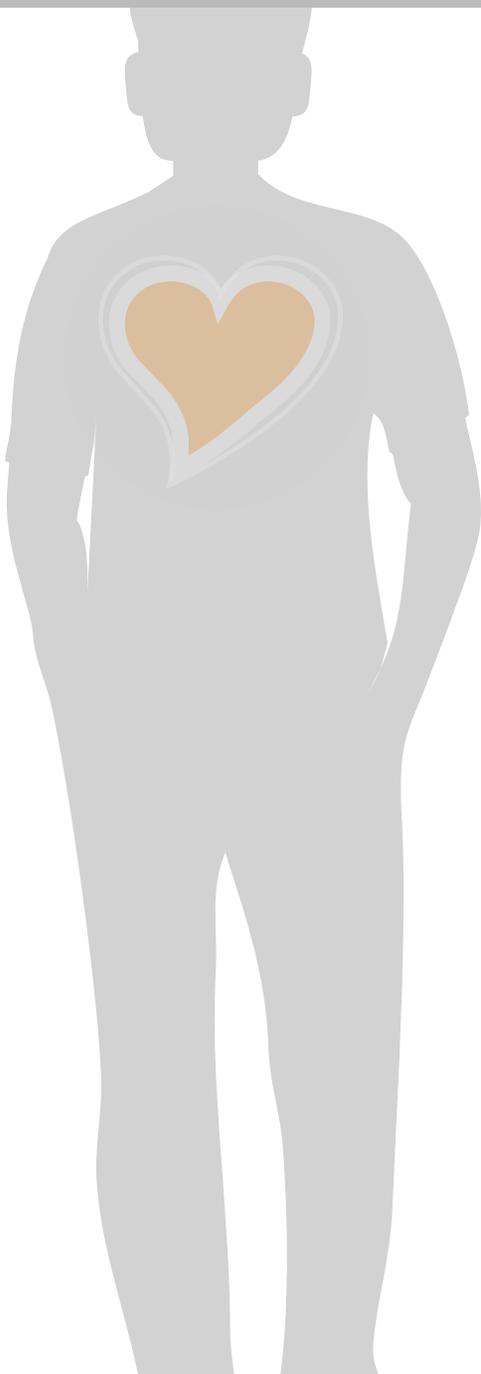
Every exercise session should also be followed by a cool-down that gradually lowers your heart rate and stretches all the muscles you've just worked. Resist the temptation to skip your cool-down.

Stretching now can do a lot to increase your range of motion and enhance your overall flexibility, because the muscles are warm and therefore more pliable. As a cool-down to your aerobic workout, first slow the pace of your activity for a few minutes, then top off the workout with some stretching.

As you stretch, try to do so down the length of the muscle (not just in one area); this is especially helpful in the lower legs and back, which are often tight. Stretch to a point of slight tension (never pain!) and do every stretch slowly and gently. (Bouncing or stretching too fast can lead to muscle and tendon injuries.) Gentle, slow stretching, on the other hand, may help prevent injury and will decrease muscle soreness. Stretching slowly also gives you time to relax and concentrate on your exercise form and it allows you to unwind psychologically and make the switch to the rest of your day or evening.

As you start each stretch, inhale and then exhale your breath as you relax into the stretch. Exhaling as you relax allows you to further lengthen the connective tissue; in other words, as tension is released, the stretch increases. Hold each stretch for 30 to 60 seconds, remembering not to bounce in the stretch. Take a few moments in each stretch to think about how you're feeling in each movement.

the "how to tone your back" plan



Want to know a secret? Creating a workout and eating plan that is **realistic**—*something you can actually do every day, every week*—is one of the things that'll make you far more likely to succeed at both.

When you build exercise into your life in a way that's doable, you're a whole lot more likely to stick with it. And that's the key to both exercise and weight loss. It may take longer to lose the weight you want or get stronger or leaner, but you're more likely to get there in the end if you can stick to a plan and if that plan works well in your regular life.

As you start this program to get a better back, remember that your body needs time to rest between strength-training workouts. Schedule at least one rest day between two resistance-training days. As a beginner, **start with three days of resistance training per week**, such as Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday.

Add in, too, **three days of cardio per week along with the days you strength-train**. You can do cardio on the same days as you do resistance training, if you like—such as doing your cardio for 30 to 60 minutes, followed by a strength session. You can also schedule cardio days to follow resistance-training days; this makes sense if scheduling both cardio and resistance training on the same day feels too demanding for your body.

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If you're trying to drop pounds and are new to exercise, it can be tough to know exactly what's right for you. Here's a weekly schedule to start that'll help you get in all the different kinds of workouts and still see results:

MON	TUES	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
Cardio* (30 minutes)	Strength Training	Cardio* (30 minutes)	Strength Training	Rest	Cardio* (30 minutes) + Strength Training	Rest

**For your cardio days you can mix up the types you do, including running, walking, swimming, elliptical trainer, biking, stairs or any other type of cardio exercise you enjoy.*

On the days you strength-train you should focus on full-body movements (meaning you should work some of your lower body, upper body, and core) along with emphasizing one body part a bit more. That means that in addition to working your legs and butt (lower body) and some arms, chest, shoulders, and back (upper body), along with your abdominals, maybe for Tuesday's strength workout you spend a bit more time on arms (with say, Bicep Curls) and at Thursday's session you do more legs (adding in more Step-Ups or Weighted Squats, for example).

the workout



Warm up before every workout for about five to 10 minutes. Good moves to get your blood pumping: marching in place, jumping jacks, and high knees (jogging in place, lifting knees as high as you can, as quickly as you can).

The workouts to tone your back will include strength and bodyweight moves (these are the three Circuit Workouts below) and cardio.

The Exercise Program

You have three options for a circuit (a circuit simply means that you'll do each exercise, in the order listed, one right after the other). For this workout you'll need 3- to 15- pound weights for the strength moves. Do 10 to 25 repetitions of each move, or go for time, depending on what's indicated for the circuit you choose. Choose any of these three circuits you like, but try to mix them up over the course of the week.

Weight Reminder: If you're not sure which weight to choose, aim for a weight or resistance for each exercise that allows you to complete the first set of each move with perfect form. You should feel challenged, but not be struggling to finish the first set of each move. If you do struggle, drop down to a lighter weight.



circuit #1

For this workout choose a pair of dumbbells from 3 to 15 pounds.

Do 12 to 20 repetitions (depending on what number is indicated) of the first four moves; the other two exercises will be timed, so set your timer accordingly.

When you complete all six moves, that equals one set.

Rest for 90 seconds between sets, completing a total of 3 sets.



warm-up

Click on any move to learn how to do it.



Spinal Extension: 3 sets of 20 reps



Bent-Over Reverse Fly: 3 sets of 20 reps



Bent-Over Row: 3 sets of 20 reps



Romanian Deadlift: 3 sets of 12 reps



Plank: 30-second hold; 3 sets



Jumping Jacks: 1 minute

cool-down



circuit #2

This circuit has four exercises that target your back.

You'll do each for 30 seconds, completing 3 to 5 sets.

You can do up to 8 sets of all the moves and use this circuit as your cardio too.



warm-up

Click on any move to learn how to do it.



Bent-Over Row: Do as many reps with good form as you can for 30 seconds.



Plank: Hold for 30 seconds.



Spinal Extension: Do as many reps with good form as you can for 30 seconds.



Jump Rope: Jump for 30 seconds.

cool-down



circuit #3

For this workout you'll need a pair of dumbbells from 3 to 15 pounds.

To start, do 20 repetitions of each exercise, completing each of the four moves listed on the next page. That equals one set.

Rest for 90 seconds, then repeat that circuit two more times for a total of 3 sets.

You'll do 14 repetitions of each move for the second set, followed by 12 repetitions of each exercise for the last set.

At the very end, after you've completed all three sets of the exercises, you'll hold Plank for 30 seconds for three sets.



warm-up

Click on any move to learn how to do it.

Set 1 - 20reps »



Romanian Deadlift: 20 reps



Bent-Over Reverse Fly: 20 reps



Bent-Over Row: 20 reps



Spinal Extension: 20 reps

Set 2 & 3 »



Set #2: Do 14 reps of each move

1. Romanian Deadlift
2. Bent-Over Reverse Fly
3. Bent-Over Row
4. Spinal Extension

Set #3: Do 12 reps of each move

1. Romanian Deadlift
2. Bent-Over Reverse Fly
3. Bent-Over Row
4. Spinal Extension

After you've done all three sets, do Plank for 30 seconds, repeating for 3 sets.



Plank: 30-second hold; 3 sets

cool-down



Cardio—also known as aerobic exercise, or basically anything that gets your heart rate up for an extended period of time—is one of the quickest and most efficient ways to burn calories. (It's also one of the reasons most people don't like to work out; it can be uncomfortable, boring, and even painful.) That said, as its nickname implies, cardio improves cardiovascular health and is essential for losing unwanted fat—including back fat.

Not sure how hard you should be exercising while doing cardio? If you can talk while you're working out, you're probably moving at a pace that's good for you. If you are too breathless to talk, slow down a little. If you can sing while you're exercising, though, you may not be working hard enough—so it's time to pick up the pace!

To fill in the cardio portion of your plan to get a better back, choose one to three aerobic activities that you enjoy doing (or the ones you hate the least). A few ideas: swimming, hiking, running, cycling, Zumba, jump rope. You'll do each for at least 30 minutes.

Beginners should start slowly, with a basic cardio program and a full-body resistance (strength/weight) training routine. As we mentioned before, you need to have recovery days to allow your body to rest and your muscles to heal from your new routine.

A good beginner program includes two or three days of cardio and two or three days of strength training per week. Once you've been exercising for a while you can switch things up. If your goal is to lose weight, shoot for 20 to 45 minutes of cardio about three or four times a week or more if you feel up to it. You can do cardio and weight training on the same day, depending on your time constraints and how you feel.

cardio: interval training



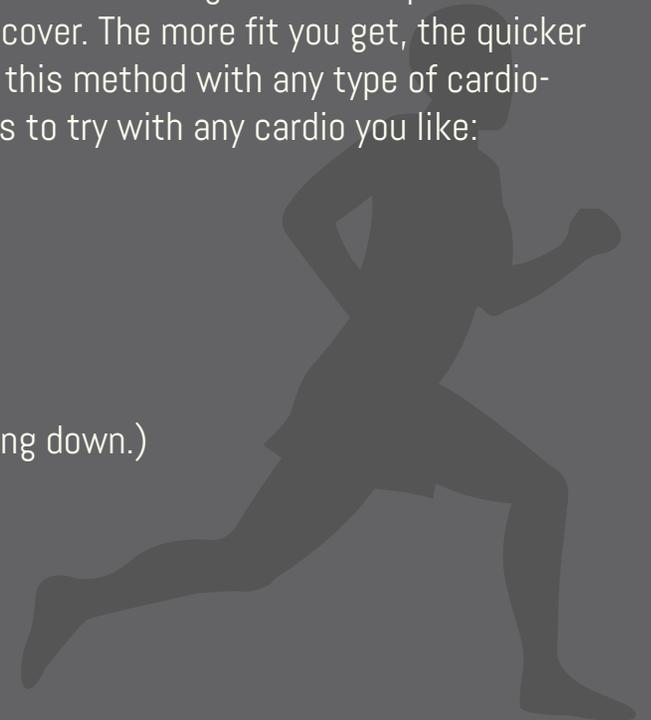
Interval training simply means bouts of exercise where you go fast or hard for a period of time—say, 30 second—and follow that all-out burst with a short recovery time. You keep repeating these intervals of fast/hard training with periods of recovery. The benefits of interval training can be substantial: You'll burn more calories during and after your workout, get faster and stronger, and increase overall cardiovascular fitness. Interval training also helps relieve boredom since you're varying what you do throughout the whole workout.

Interval training can be done on a treadmill, hiking, swimming, jumping rope—with all kinds of workouts and activities. The key is to not allow your body to get comfortable during the workout; if you can continue challenging yourself intervals will become a valuable part of your regimen and ultimately increase your fitness.

The length of the intervals can vary. One minute is a good starting point, but if you're a beginner, you can start at 30 seconds. As you get fitter and stronger, you may want to make each interval 2 minutes. The goal is to keep the recovery period as short as possible, while still allowing your body enough time to recover. The more fit you get, the quicker your body will recover and the shorter your recovery period can be. You can use this method with any type of cardio—running, fast walking, swimming, elliptical training, etc. Here are some intervals to try with any cardio you like:

- * 1 minute work; 30 seconds active rest/ recovery
- * 45 seconds work; 20 seconds active rest/ recovery
- * 30 seconds work; 15 seconds active rest/ recovery
- * 20 seconds work; 10 seconds active rest recovery

(Active recovery means you are moving; you are not sitting, standing still, or lying down.)





Here are two samples of interval workouts:

Treadmill Cardio:



Warm-up: 10 minutes at 3.0 mph
Gradually increase the setting on the treadmill to 4.5 mph and allow your body to adjust to this speed:

Run: 1 minute at 4.5 mph
Recover: 1 minute at 3.5 mph
Run: 1 minute at 5.0 mph
Recover: 1 minute at 3.5 mph
Run: 1 minute at 5.5 mph
Recover: 1 minute at 3.5 mph

Continue to increase the speed by a half-mile at each interval and repeat this pattern for 10 to 20 minutes.

Cool-down: 10 minutes at 3.0 mph

Jump-rope Cardio:



Start with a 5-minute stretch and warm-up. A good way to warm up for this interval workout is to march in place, bringing your knees into your abdomen, or jump lightly in place without a jump rope (or imaginary rope). One jump equals 1 rep.

30 seconds of jumping rope (do as many reps as you can for all these intervals)
30 seconds of active recovery
30 seconds of jumping rope
30 seconds of active recovery
1 minute of as many reps as possible
90 seconds of active recovery

Repeat this circuit four times.

Cool- down

In total, this interval training routine should take you about 25 to 30 minutes. Make sure you don't rest any longer than indicated between sets: This is an essential part of interval training—you need to keep your body moving!

As you finish up your cardio and strength workouts don't forget about stretching—it's an important part of all your training. Not only will it help counter the soreness that typically follows a workout, it also lengthens the muscles, improving range of motion and flexibility, and helps prevent injury.



Maybe you've heard the expression "abs are made in the kitchen." It means that if you want a flat, toned belly, you need to eat well, not just do crunches or even lots of cardio. What you put into your mouth matters hugely, in other words. The same is true of your back: Leaner, more toned back muscles start in the kitchen, too. So with that in mind, you'll need to clean up your diet (meaning what you eat and drink) along with following the cardio and strength-training program we've offered here. Here are some guidelines to keep you on the right path to your goal to get a better back:



1. Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Clean out your refrigerator and pantry and get rid of anything that's loaded with sugar and fat; is processed; or foods that are fattening and/or unhealthy that you know you'll eat too much of. These foods not only add empty calories and fat, they will also make you feel tired, making it that much harder to stick to regular exercise. Worst of all, because they don't provide the energy you need you'll want to eat more to get more energy or feel better. This creates a vicious cycle.



2. Use Exercise As a Release: When you feel you might binge, a workout is a great way to elevate your mood and get your mind off food. It may be hard to see exercise this way right now, as you're just getting started, but try to turn to a quick workout the next few times you feel a craving coming on and see if it works for you. Even five or 10 minutes of moving your body (dancing around your house or doing a little cleaning count) can switch your mood or even just distract you from eating or drinking something that will interfere with your goals to get more fit and toned.



3. Eat Balanced Meals: This is one of the most important things you can do to prevent overeating. When you're regularly supplying your body with food about every three to four hours you'll never reach the point where you feel like you're starving. When you skip meals, though, you'll easily find yourself starving reaching for anything you can. You should have three balanced meals, spaced out every three or four hours, with a snack between lunch and dinner. That's the ideal meal plan for most people for weight loss. Eating every three to four hours stabilizes your blood sugar, optimizes insulin production and manages hunger. Your body will use your energy stores and burn more fat.



4. Get Plenty of Protein: Eating lots of lean protein—turkey, chicken, lowfat cheese, cottage cheese, Greek yogurt—throughout the day helps to curb cravings and prevent overeating. Protein shakes can satisfy hunger, too, but choose those that are lower in calories.



5. Eat Your Veggies: Yes, we had to say it. You know this already, but it's a biggie so we had to repeat it. If nothing else, stick to green, (most) orange, and red vegetables. And if you can't manage that, simply go green: broccoli, asparagus, green beans, spinach, kale, zucchini, and the like. Why these? Beyond the nutrients they provide (for very few calories and no fat, we might add) these vegetables prevent spikes in insulin; that means your blood sugar stays stable and so does your energy level throughout the day. When your insulin levels fluctuate a lot you'll feel hungrier more often, more tired and will have more cravings.



6. When It Comes to Carb, Go Complex: Choose whole grains and brown rice over white breads and rice. Not only are these complex carbs more satisfying and filling, they'll keep your blood sugar stable, which will help prevent overeating.



7. Drink Plenty of Water: Now that you're exercising most days of the week, you need to be sure you're properly hydrated. (Being dehydrated also makes your workouts feel a lot harder.) So make sure you drink lots of water and other low- or no-calorie drinks throughout the day (this doesn't include diet soda, which should not be part of your diet). Drinking a lot of water has another benefit: It keeps you feeling more full throughout the day.

Without good nutrition your body can't properly store muscle and may even eat away at muscle—making it that much harder to reach your goal of a leaner, more toned back.

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