



Dr. Huizenga

GIRLS' LIFE

JUNE | JULY 2017

HOW FIT ARE YOU?

BY AMANDA TARLTON

Whether you want to slice some seconds off your timed mile in gym class next fall or simply show off sculpted abs and arms at the beach, getting fit takes focus. And a *lot* of it.

Which is why it's not so shocking that a whopping 66 percent of girls ages 12 to 15 are considered unfit by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Even worse, that number appears to be increasing each year as girls become less and less active.

But here's the deal: Finding your fitness doesn't mean spending mega minutes on the elliptical or hitting up boot camp on the daily. It's about maintaining a well-rounded routine to improve your speed, strength, endurance, flexibility and balance. Sounds complicated, but trust us: You can do it.

And to help you out, we tapped Dr. Robert Huizenga of *The Biggest Loser* fame for six mini challenges that'll help you figure out just how fit you are—and help you become faster, better and stronger. Ready? Go!

UPPER BODY STRENGTH

A strong upper body makes all of your everyday activities—carrying your backpack, lugging

your textbooks, pushing your baby sister on the swings—more of a breeze than a burden. And if that's not enough to persuade you to drop and give us 20, consider this: Strong shoulders and a ripped back are awesome accessories to any tank top or off-shoulder sundress.

WE CHALLENGE YOU TO...

See how many pushups you can do (on your toes, not on your knees) until you can't hold proper form (see girlslife.com/iti). Your goal? At least 10.

BUFF UP YOUR BICEPS AND SHOULDERS.

Fun fact: You don't need weights to get strong arms and shoulders—pushups are one of the best all-around bodyweight exercises for building a buff upper bod (and a stronger core). On alternate days, try a pushup-centered workout that involves all different types—from diamond to incline (see girlslife.com/iti for tutorials). Or, head to your yoga mat. A flow that includes arm balances, planks and chaturangas will work your upper half all while getting your *om* on.

LOWER BODY STRENGTH

Listen to Drake and start from the bottom. Your legs, glutes and hips are the foundation for your entire body, so working them on the regular is key to keeping yourself stable, strong and free from injuries. Plus, the fitter your lower body is, the faster you'll be.

WE CHALLENGE YOU TO...

Count the number of squats you're able to do while holding 10-pound dumbbells. Aim to complete a minimum of 20—as always, with proper form (go to girlslife.com/iti).

SCORE STRONGER STEMS.

Strength-train your lower bod three times a week with a combo of bodyweight exercises like lunges, wall sits and jump squats. (Find how-tos on page 82!) For an extra challenge, add dumbbells or resistance bands. Just remember that the tearing-and-repairing process is what builds muscle, so take rest days to recover. Dr. Huizenga recommends alternating lower and upper bod workouts so that you aren't working the same muscles two days in a row.

BALANCE

If you're the girl who is always tripping over her own two feet or who can't surf to save her life, this one's for you. Being balanced is about more than proving yourself at hanging ten; superior stability also improves your overall coordination and posture. Bonus: When you practice balance, your muscle memory learns to adapt better to different situations so you can do things like run on a rocky path or jump to catch a fly ball.

WE CHALLENGE YOU TO...

Stand on your right leg and see how many times you can lift your left knee all the way up to your chest without losing

your balance. Don't touch the floor between reps, either—lower your foot until it's an inch above the ground before lifting your knee again. Then repeat on your left leg. Twelve lifts per leg is a sign of solid stability.

FIND YOUR CENTER.

The *real* key to building better balance is a strong core. Treat your abs just like you would any other muscle: Avoid training them every single day and instead, tack a mix of crunches, planks and leg lifts onto your usual routine two to three times a week. You also can take any basic exercise like lunges or pushups to the next level by doing them on a stability ball, BOSU ball (that stands for "both sides up" FYI) or balance board.

ENDURANCE

We get it—cardio is, um, *hardio*. But it's a must if your goal is head-to-toe health. Cardiovascular strength keeps your heart pumping the way it's supposed to and increases blood flow and oxygen to all parts of your bod. Not to mention it's a total mood-booster (hello, runner's high!) thanks to the endorphins released during exercise.

WE CHALLENGE YOU TO...

Run a timed mile either outside or on the treadmill (set your incline to 2 percent to mimic running on the road). If you're able to finish in under 11 minutes, your endurance is right on track (no pun intended!).

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GO THE DISTANCE Increasing endurance is all about patience, so don't plan to run five miles tomorrow if you've only ever logged two. A good rule of thumb? Increase your mileage by 10 percent each week (so if you ran five miles this week, you'll run 5.5 next week). Every four to six weeks, schedule a recovery week—this is especially important if you're a beginner—where you run the same or less as the week before to avoid injury or burnout. Continue your training until you reach whatever goal you set for yourself...10K, anyone?

SPEED

Even if you aren't lacing up for a track meet, speed is still an important aspect of overall fitness. Picking up the pace gives you more power (how efficiently you can put your body into motion), improves your reaction time and develops your fast twitch fibers, which help form stronger muscles.

WE CHALLENGE YOU TO...

Sprint 40 yards (that's the length of two bowling lanes or a little less than half a football field) in under 7.5 seconds.

PICK UP THE PACE Simply telling yourself you're going to run faster isn't going to cut it. "You get out what you put in," Dr. Huizenga stresses. To ramp up your speed, incorporate more HIIT training or Tabata-style workouts into your schedule (go to girlslife.com/iti for a roundup of some of our faves). You also can turn any of your cardio activities into speed interval training—go as fast as you can for 30 seconds (whether you're biking, running, swimming, etc.), then recover at a slower pace for 90 seconds. Repeat for the duration of your workout.

FLEXIBILITY

Fact: Some of us just aren't built to be über bendy. That said, working on your flexibility increases the range of motion in your joints, leading to better posture, less risk of injury and even stress relief.

WE CHALLENGE YOU TO...

Stand with your legs straight and bend at the hips. See how much of your fingers (or hand) you can get on the floor—tips touching should be your goal, but if you can get down on your elbows, even better!

BEND IT LIKE A BALLERINA Start every workout with dynamic stretches (meaning they involve movement to warm up the body) like lunges, arm circles or butt kicks. Then, when you're done, finish off with static stretches (think: side bends and hamstring stretches). Hold each stretch for 15 seconds, then repeat 2 to 3 times, resting for 5 seconds in between. For each repetition, try to stretch *juuust* a little bit further—it's OK to feel some tightness, but be careful not to push yourself to the point of pain.

KEEP IT UP!

As the meme says, fitness isn't a fad—it's a lifestyle. So don't look at these challenges as a one-and-done kind of thing. Work them into your week until they're as routine as, say, brushing your teeth or scrolling through your Insta feed. Need help staying focused? Set a big—but doable—goal and share it with your squad, your family or even on social media. That way, you'll get all of the love and support you need to slay all summer long—and then some. 