

Exercise is a critical component of your overall health; it may even be one of the most critical. Of course, there are an infinite number of ways that one can get the requisite exercise, and many of us are on the search for the program or type that fits us best.

It is my strong belief, that just as important as what exercise you're doing, is that you are changing what you are doing over time. [Variation](#) is a key component to consistently improving your fitness. Our bodies are incredibly adaptable and will quickly get used to any movement or set of movements that we repeat on a regular basis. This will initially result in significant gains, as your muscles and neurology adapt to the new movements. However once they've mastered that particular motion, the progress will begin to taper off. Every single muscle in your body can be worked in different ways, from different angles, at different speeds, to achieve different results.

This is why the primary concept behind P90X is variety. They refer to the approach as 'muscle confusion'. The idea being that you work your muscles in a variety of unique ways to keep your body from getting used to any one particular movement and hitting a plateau. With enough changes, your neurology has a harder time locking onto a particular exercise and understanding it. Before you know it, you're hitting it with another variation to keep it on it's toes.

The first thing that you'll notice about the program right out of the gate will be Tony Horton. As with all video-led exercise programs, if you can't stand the instructor, it makes it really hard to keep hitting play day after day. Tony is an enthusiastic instructor, keeping you entertained and motivated throughout your workouts. It is tricky to pull off enthusiastic without occasionally dipping into annoying, so it's hard to really blame Tony if he slips past your annoyance filters from time to time. All things considered, he doesn't bother me at all; his energy is high enough to be appropriate, but not over the top. The videos are really well done, with the workouts involving 4 to 5 total participants of varying skill levels so that you can see variations on each exercise. There are plenty of cameras moving around so that you can get all angles of each exercise and there are never any questions about how a movement should be done.

THE P90X PROGRAM

The [P90X program](#) itself consists of a nutrition plan, a fitness guide and 12 different workout videos.

Each video focuses on a different section of the body, and a different goal. The videos consist

P90X - Extreme Home Fitness Training System

Written by Ben Anderson

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of Chest and Back, Plyometrics, Shoulders and Arms, Yoga X, Legs and Back, Kenpo X, X Stretch, Core Synergistics, Chest, Shoulders and Triceps, Back and Biceps, Cardio X, and Ab Ripper X. They provide charts that detail which videos to do on which days throughout the entire 90 day program. The program is 6 days a week, 3 weeks on and one week off, for 90 days. During the rest week, they recommend you do cardio and stretching to allow your body to recover from the beating you have been giving it. This is a key concept to any exercise program and is implemented very well in this set. Recovery is when you actually build muscle; the exercises themselves are only breaking down your muscles in preparation for the recovery phase.

The strength workouts themselves are probably closest to your traditional circuit training workouts. You move through the exercises quickly, with little rest in between. This keeps the heart rate up and keeps you sweating! I don't think that I would quite classify this workout as volume training. Tony frequently reminds you to keep your reps between 8-10 for strength and bulk, and 12-15 for lean muscle mass. However, even with those rep counts, the number of sets of the exercises are high enough that you're definitely over the volume that's done for a high-intensity training session or a super-slow motion workout. All in all, I think that the relationship between volume and intensity is about right and you end up with an incredible pump.

This is a workout that is perfectly adaptable for men and women both. They have women in the videos and they are doing the same exercises as the men are. Granted they aren't using as heavy of weights, but the intensity level can still be high. My girlfriend has expressed concern about bulking up due to doing the same workout that I'm doing. The truth is that it's very difficult for females to put on bulk the way that males do. The way muscle is built on your body is largely a function of testosterone, and women simply don't have the testosterone levels naturally in their body to support kind of bulk.

What this workout will do is increase the amount of lean muscle mass in your body. This is a good thing in many regards. Yes, it will provide that 'toned' look that is so desirable, but it also increases the basic fat burning capabilities of your body when it is *at rest*. Each pound of muscle burns

[approximately 35 calories per day](#)

[approx](#)

. Which would mean, every 10 pounds of extra muscle will burn approximately 350 calories a day, or an extra pound of fat every 10 days. Regular weight training also boosts your basal metabolic rate by about 7%, which causes you to burn more calories while not even moving. Hopefully this is enough to convince you that strength training is an important part of overall health, even if your fitness goals consist primarily of weight loss.

Of course they do address cardio in this program, and they do it well. The cardio workouts will definitely get your heart rate up! The Kenpo X is a type of Tae-Bo workout that involves punching, kicking, blocking and throwing elbows. It's a really fun workout that hits your whole body and gets your blood pumping. The Plyo workout is one of the toughest workouts in the program. It's basically jump training, and has you jumping all over the place in a way that absolutely pushes you to the edge. The schedule sets you up to alternate between strength training and cardio, which is a good recipe for success.

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It should be noted here that these workouts are HARD. This is not a program to get you into shape, this is a program to get you into BETTER shape. If you are starting from a level of no physical activity whatsoever, this is probably not the program to start with. That being said, the videos are set up so that you don't have to be able to completely follow along the whole way. Tony gives you ways to modify the movements to make them easier, and frequently reminds you that you can pause the video to catch your breath or take a quick break throughout. The benefit of this approach is that you won't outgrow this system, regardless of how good of shape you are in today or in the future. The concepts are sound and it's built with plenty of headroom, you can simply increase the weight and intensity in order to keep progressing.

Progression is an important principle in weight training, you want to make sure that you are consistently moving forward, and not getting stuck in a plateau. This program is very well suited for this, with workout tracking sheets included for each video so that you can keep track of your weights and reps. This allows you to get direct feedback on how you're progressing. This way you can monitor as your strength increases to ensure that it continues.

Why This Works For Me

This program has been a perfect fit for me. As someone who has always gone to the gym and focused on bodybuilding principles and powerlifting techniques, this has been a huge shift in approach and one that has worked really well. I can honestly say that I'm in the best shape of my life now at 31 and it's primarily due to this system. The higher volume and faster pace of the workouts gives you a very functional result. The gains that you get from this program tend to translate very easily into other athletic activities. I've found my snowboard, rock climbing, mountain biking and sprinting capabilities have all improved as a result of the type of conditioning I've been getting from P90X. In addition to the athletic increases in strength, endurance, and cardiovascular facilities, I'm also much more flexible than I have been in a long time. This is a much better feeling than I would have expected, and I've developed a bit of an addiction to stretching and flexibility. While Tony doesn't spend an inordinate amount of time on stretching, he's consistent with it and you feel the effects.

This is a very involved system, with each video lasting about an hour, with some being slightly shorter and others being a bit longer. Keep in mind that this is time you'll need to set aside each day in order to stay on track. The nice thing for me has been that it all happens in the comfort of your own home. You can finally avoid the busy crowded gym, and you can work out on your schedule. You simply pop in the video and get started right in your living room. This makes a world of difference to me when it comes to staying on track. The initial commitment required to get started is lower, and once you're started, you want to keep going. It's another aspect of the video-led workout that I really enjoy. Even though it's just a video, you get the feeling that there's someone there, pushing you along. Tony keeps you in a rhythm, doesn't let you rest for too long or slow down too much. This provides the motivation for me that I don't get working out by myself at the gym.

P90X - Extreme Home Fitness Training System

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Once you complete the first 90 days, which is a complete rotation of the program, you have several options. They have a [P90X Plus](#) set that you can purchase to take your workouts to the next level. They are another set of videos, and another schedule that directs you to work in the new videos along with the original ones to continue your progression

Of course another option for progression is to simply work P90X videos into your other forms of physical activity. With a little creativity and a basic understanding of fitness theory, you can create a holistic lifestyle approach that accompanies P90X workouts with your own. This is how I've been applying them lately, having completed two rounds of the 90 day schedule. Now I work in trips to the gym, alternating higher volume workouts with bench equipment and machines, along with my old powerlifting techniques for variety. I also work in other forms of strength training and cardio, like running, mountain biking, rock climbing, hiking, etc. My basic premise is to ensure I'm exercising 6 times a week, and alternating strength training with cardio training days. In this approach, P90X becomes another tool in the toolbox for continuing physical fitness.

The Diet

Anyone familiar with physical fitness is certainly aware that 60% to 75% of your success is attributed to your diet. Constant exercise can do a lot to overcome a poor diet, however you are really hurting yourself and your progress if you're constantly combating your diet and having to utilize exercise to correct those mistakes. This is absolutely understood in the P90X system and they provide you with a very comprehensive diet plan. If you are unfamiliar with proper diet and eating healthy, you'll find the plan very easy to follow and very comprehensive in it's approach. It includes specific goals that you'll be working toward and even a book of recipes that you can use to achieve those goals.

If you are familiar with dieting and healthy eating, you'll find that the diet is really nothing special or extreme, which is a good thing. Fad diets rarely work, and if they do, they're rarely

P90X - Extreme Home Fitness Training System

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Tuesday, 18 August 2009 17:36

sustainable for a long period of time. The most successful approach is to implement a balanced diet that is healthy, without being too extreme. You want something that you can maintain over time. The P90X diet is a good example of this. That being said, I didn't follow it very closely at all. I'm confident in my diet and my ability to maintain it, and therefore I simply continued my standard healthy eating throughout the program - which ended up being very close to the prescribed specifics already.

The takeaway is to not forget about the diet component of your system, as it's critical to your success. And if you're not comfortable generating your own diet routine, then you don't have anything to worry about because it's all spelled out in the program. However, if you already eat healthy, it's one less thing for you to alter.

The Equipment

One of the key elements to this program that makes it so accessible is that it focuses primarily on body-weight exercises and dumbbells. You don't need a lot of fancy equipment to make this work. This is a hard to find quality for a strength-oriented fitness program. The P90X program provides you with many options for equipment that can be altered depending on your collection of fitness equipment, or lack thereof.

You can perform every exercise in the program with nothing more than a set of elastic bands and a mat. And they show you how to do that in the videos, where there is always at least one person performing the exercises using the bands. This is a great way to get started in the beginning without spending a lot of money on equipment. Or if you want to take this on the road, the bands are great to travel with, as they only weigh a few ounces and can easily fit in your luggage. If you're taking this route, you have two basic choices, one is what I would call your [entry-level bands](#), these are good and inexpensive, although not very durable. If you're just getting started, or are not planning on working with much weight, they are a good option. However, from personal experience, my handle ended up breaking after a few weeks of using them. I was up to fairly heavy weight at the time, attaching several bands to each handle. If you want a band solution that will put up with some abuse, try something like these more [professional bands](#)

. The handles are built much better and will withstand more punishment.

If you're really going to take this seriously however, you're going to want to get yourself some dumbbells. If you're strapped for cash and want to get started right away, I recommend picking up a pair of [rubber dumbbells](#). I used the 25lb version of this in the beginning and they lasted me about a month before I outgrew them. But they are cheap and they are easy to use (they even double as push-up bars). Another option if you want to stay relatively cheap and light are these [25lb adjustable dumbbells](#).

Before too long though, you may notice that you have outgrown this weight and you're going to want to tailor your workout for maximum progression. You're ultimately going to want to get

P90X - Extreme Home Fitness Training System

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yourself a set of adjustable dumbbells. These are the perfect piece of equipment for this program. You want some that you can change the weight of quickly and that aren't too bulky. I also recommend a stand, you don't want to be bending over to pick these up off the floor every time. You're going to spend a bit more money on something like this, but you'll thank me for it. It will make a huge difference in your workouts when you're using the right weight for each set. I won't go into all of the options that you have here, since I've covered this in my article on [adjustable dumbbells](#), but you can follow the link and take a look if this is something you're interested in.

For those of you who elect for the bands or the non-adjustable dumbbells, just remember that you want to make yourself work hard. You have several ways to do that, you can do slower reps, and you can concentrate on squeezing your muscles on the contraction. You'd be surprised how much of a good burn you can get when you include a bit of isometric contractions at the top of each rep.

Now, back to essential equipment. This program has a LOT of pull-ups in it. Don't worry, if you're not good at pull-ups, Tony shows you ways you can modify them to make them easier. You will be amazed at how quickly you'll progress on your pull up skills. You can do these exercises with bands, and they show you how, but they really aren't a good substitute for a real body weight pull up. Therefore, I highly recommend that you get a pull up bar as one of your first pieces of equipment. Again, I will direct you to our [pull up bar](#) article on this site for a review of a good pull up bar. These are inexpensive, of high quality, and really easy to set up, you want to do yourself a big favor and get one of these.

The last truly necessary piece of equipment that I would recommend is one that you likely have laying around anyway. This of course, is a good floor mat. Again, these come in all shapes and sizes. A typical [yoga mat](#) will work, however you may find that it's not enough cushion for you if you're working out on hard wood floors or on concrete slab. In that case, I recommend something thicker so you'll get some cushion. The problem with those type of mats is that they don't have the lateral fortitude that a yoga mat has, so when you're doing some Yoga poses, you'll find that they tend to stretch out, which has a less than desirable effect. I actually use both, I lay the thicker [flo](#)
[or mat](#) down first and then lay my Yoga mat down on top of it. This way I get the best of both worlds and it works out really well for me. You might be able to get the same effect out of a [thicker Yoga mat](#), but I can't speak from personal experience.

Last but not least, you may want to juice up your push-ups with a set of [push-up bars](#). These may seem superfluous but they really do help you get a lot more range out of your push-ups. Those last couple of inches are critical when you're trying to work out your full range of motion. Sometimes you can use your dumbbells for this purpose, and if so, then great. If you're looking to take your push-ups to the next level, get the [Perfect Pushups](#). These things will really make you work for your push ups.

Conclusion

I can't recommend the P90X program enough. This system truly changed my life. I have always been in pretty decent shape, but this took it to the next level. I can truly say I'm in the best shape of my life and I can do things now that I haven't been able to do for years. I get out of bed with more energy and I can enjoy sports activities at a higher level than ever. It's great to know that a system exists that can get you into as good of shape as you want, you just have to expend the effort to get there.

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