

RACHEL FELBER, MD

The 2-Day Home Workout

Two full-body strength workouts. Knee-friendly options for every movement. All you need is your body, a couple pairs of dumbbells or some household items you can hold in one hand, a chair, and a stair or step stool.

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The plan

The week	Workout A once, Workout B once, with at least one full day off in between . Monday and Wednesday, Tuesday and Saturday — whatever fits your schedule.
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Sets	3 sets of every exercise.
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Reps	Pick a range and stay in it. 6 is the floor, 15 is the ceiling. New to lifting, or working around joint issues: 10–12 or 12–15 . Comfortable with the movements, no serious joint issues: 6–10 or 8–12 .
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Rest	Rest until all three are true: your heart rate is back down, your breathing is back down, and you feel recovered and ready for another hard set. It will be longer than you expect at first — often 2–3 minutes.
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Going up	When you can hit the top of your rep range, add weight.
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Time	About 40 minutes per workout. 90 minutes per week. That's it. That's enough.
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What you need

- A couple pairs of dumbbells
- A chair or bench, and a stair or step stool
- A wall, counter, or piece of furniture to hold on to

No weights yet? Start with bodyweight, or use what's around the house. Water jugs are great because you can fill them differently to get different weights: too heavy, pour some out; too light, add some. You will need real weight eventually, though, since the idea is to incrementally increase the weight over time.

Before you start

If your doctor, surgeon, or physical therapist has told you not to do a movement, that overrides anything here. If something hurts or feels unsafe, don't do it.

Where are the core exercises?

Every exercise here is a core exercise, as long as you brace your core and go heavy — heavy *for you*. The squat, the hinge, the overhead press — these will do more for your core strength and balance than crunches or planks ever could.

1 Squat

LEGS · GLUTES · CORE

Build up: Sit-to-stand from a chair → lower chair → bodyweight squat → add dumbbells → deeper and heavier

Form: Sit down slowly and stand back up without using your hands. The chair sets your depth for you.

Holding the weight: Down at your sides, up on your shoulders, or one dumbbell against your chest. Whichever feels best.

2 Step-Up

LEGS · GLUTES · CORE

Build up: Stair or step stool, holding a rail → let go of the support → taller step or add weight

Form: Drive up through the **front** foot — don't push off the back one. Lower slowly; no crashing down.

Knee or hip pain: add weight before you add height.

3 Hip Hinge

BACK · GLUTES · HAMSTRINGS · CORE

Build up: Bodyweight → a dumbbell in each hand → heavier → single-leg

Form: Knees soft, not locked. Push your hips back like you're closing a car door with your butt. Back flat, not rounded. Stop where you feel the hamstring stretch — a tug, not pain.

Back injury or surgery, herniated disc, or sciatica: skip this one, or ask your doctor first. Do a couple extra sets of squats and step-ups instead, or swap in the glute bridge from Workout B — doing it both days is fine.

4 Single-Arm Row, Underhand

UPPER BACK · REAR SHOULDERS · ARMS · CORE

Build up: Something light → heavier → add a 1–2 second pause at the top

Form: One hand braced on something for support, bent at the waist, back flat. Palm facing forward. Lead with your elbow, pulling the dumbbell up and back toward your hip, then lower slowly.

Shoulder pain: turn your palm to face your body — a neutral grip. Works for any push or pull in either workout.

5 Pullover

BACK · CHEST · TRICEPS · CORE

Build up: One light dumbbell → more range of motion and/or heavier

Form: Lie on the floor, a bench, or the couch. Both hands on one dumbbell, held over your chest. Lower it back overhead only as far as your shoulders allow, then pull it back up. Core tight the whole time.

If it's uncomfortable for any reason, swap in the reverse fly from Workout B.

6 Chest Press

CHEST · SHOULDERS · TRICEPS · CORE

Build up (push-ups): Against a wall → lower the height incrementally

Build up (dumbbells): Light dumbbells on the floor, bench, or bed → heavier

Form: Knees bent, feet flat, palms facing forward, press up over your chest.

Do it on the floor rather than the couch or bed if you can — getting down and back up counts as part of the workout.

Workout A: Squat · Step-up · Hinge · Row · Pullover · Press

1 Split Squat

LEGS · GLUTES · CORE

Build up: Bodyweight, holding on, shallow → let go of the support → a dumbbell in each hand → deeper, if it stays pain-free

Form: One foot forward, one back, holding a wall or piece of furniture. Holding on is not cheating — it's how you learn the movement safely and train your balance.

Knee or hip pain: don't chase depth. Progress with balance first, then weight, at whatever depth stays pain-free.

2 Suitcase Carry

FULL BODY · GRIP · CORE

Build up: One dumbbell or household item → heavier and/or more steps

Form: Carry it in one hand like a suitcase and walk the hallway. Back straight, eyes ahead, shoulders down and back. Switch hands and repeat.

Variation: the farmer's carry — one dumbbell in each hand. You'll carry more total weight and finish in half the time, but your core works less, since the two sides balance each other out. Either is great.

3 Glute Bridge

GLUTES · HAMSTRINGS · LOW BACK · CORE

Build up: On the floor → more reps or a longer squeeze → feet elevated on a step or couch → single-leg → single-leg with the working foot elevated

Form: Knees bent, feet flat and close enough that your knees hit about 90° at the top. Push through your heels, lift your hips all the way up, squeeze hard, lower slowly.

On single-leg: start with your weaker side, then match that number of reps (not more) on the stronger side.

4 Bent-Over Row

BACK · SHOULDERS · ARMS · CORE

Build up: Both arms, overhand → add a 1–2 second pause at the top → heavier

Form: Bent at the waist, back straight, neck neutral. Shoulder blades down and together, shoulders not rolling forward. Pull your elbows back as your hands come toward your hips.

5 Overhead Press

SHOULDERS · TRICEPS · CORE

Build up: Seated with light dumbbells → heavier → standing

Form: Palms forward. Press up slightly in front of your head, ending with your arms close to your ears. Lower slowly.

Standing isn't more advanced — it trades weight for core work, since you can't lift as heavy while staying stable. Pick whichever you'd rather focus on.

6 Reverse Fly

REAR SHOULDERS · UPPER BACK · CORE

Build up: The lightest dumbbells you own → slower reps and a longer pause → more reps

Form: Palms facing each other, hinge forward, raise your arms out to the sides like wings. Lead with your elbows. Only as far as your shoulders allow.

Don't chase weight on this one — form falls apart fast. It's one of the best exercises for undoing rounded shoulders.

Workout B: Split squat · Carry · Glute bridge · Row · Press · Reverse fly

The rest between sets

The set should leave you spent

Once you're a few weeks in and confident in your form: you should finish a set with your heart rate up, your breathing up, your muscles tired, and not much left in the tank. If you don't feel that, it probably wasn't hard enough to signal your muscles to grow.

Then rest longer than you're used to

This can often mean **up to 3 minutes**. If you rest 15 seconds and go again, you weren't lifting heavy enough. You're ready for the next set when your heart rate is back down, your breathing is back down, and you feel recovered and ready for another hard set.

This counts as cardio, too

Go hard, recover, go hard again — that's the structure of a [HIIT workout](#). Lift twice a week this way and get your walking in, and you may not need any additional dedicated cardio.

Two days a week is enough — if

- ✓ **You go heavy for you** once you're comfortable with the movements.
- ✓ **You add a little over time** — another rep, or a little more weight, as often as you safely can.
- ✓ **You eat enough protein and enough calories.** Your body can't build muscle out of nothing.
- ✓ **You sleep well.** That's when your body actually does the rebuilding.

Do that consistently and you will be noticeably, unmistakably stronger within 8 weeks. You'll hold yourself differently, you'll have more energy, and the people in your life will notice.

Working around knee pain? My free lower-body guide for women with knee pain walks you through knee-friendly swaps and rules — rachelfelber.com/knees

Want a plan built around you?

This two-day plan is a great place to start. When you're ready for a plan that accounts for what's specific to you — your schedule, your injuries, the equipment you actually have — that's my digital book, **Your First Strength Program**. You work through it and come out the other side with a plan made for you.

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