

Increase Your Speed and Power

Understanding the basics of plyometric exercises.



While weight training will make your muscles bigger and stronger, training with plyometrics will make your larger muscles faster. If you are an athlete interested in increasing your speed and muscle power, you should consider adding plyometrics to your exercise routine.

Developed for athletes in the Soviet Union and brought to the states in the 1970s, plyometric training, also known as jump training, is now a popular workout for any sport, at any age, and for males or females. Through plyometric exercises, you'll improve the stretch reflex of your muscles, making them move faster. Want more? Keep reading.

Benefits of Plyometrics

Whether you play soccer, tennis, or track, plyometric training can improve your abilities. Research has shown that with proper plyometric training, athletes will exhibit improvements in the following:

- leg strength
- muscle power
- vertical jumping
- balance
- acceleration
- bone density
- agility
- weight management
- explosive speed
- hill running
- coordination

Plyometric Technique

Plyometrics condition the body using dynamic resistance exercises that work to quickly stretch and shorten them. This stretch-shortening cycle strengthens the stretch reflex of your muscles and therefore improves the strength of muscular contraction. For example, when you jump, your quadriceps rapidly stretch and shorten. This strengthens them, helping you jump higher, while lessening the impact on your joints.

To reap the greatest benefit from plyometrics and avoid injury, it is important to use proper plyometric technique. Beginners should have trained supervision, start with easy, low-level jumps, and practice on a soft surface such as grass or a gym mat. Regardless of your experience, the quality of the jump is emphasized over the quantity of jumps. More complicated exercises and jumps are slowly introduced depending on your skill level. Between intense training sessions, expect to rest for at least two days.

Remember that any explosive movement, such as those associated with plyometrics, has inherent risk. Participants should already be strong before trying plyometrics, and those with bone or joint problems should avoid it altogether. However, plyometric training is generally safe and beneficial if led by a qualified teacher. Just remember to match your exercises to your fitness level and age and master one technique before moving to more advanced exercises.

Examples of Plyometric Exercises

Interested? Here are a few plyometrics to get you started.

The **box jump** is a plyometric exercise with the goal of running faster. To do this, exercise, squat down and then jump up onto a bench or box as high as 42 inches. When you land, make sure the balls of your feet land first. Return to the ground, and stay on the ground for as short a time as possible. Do two sets of 10 jumps.

If you play basketball or football, the **depth jump** will help you jump higher. To do this, step down off a bench with your right leg. As soon as you land on the ground, immediately explode straight up as high as you can. Get back on the bench and step down with your left leg. Repeat for two sets of five jumps, alternating legs each time.

If your goal is to move faster, try the **speed skater**. Place two markers at a distance of four feet apart. Put your right leg in front of you and your left behind you. Jump quickly to the left, landing on your left foot. Bend your left knee to help cushion your landing. As soon as you land, jump back to the right, landing on your right foot. The motion should resemble a speed skater. Do two sets of 10 jumps.

A fourth plyometric exercise that will help you to hit harder is the **medicine ball slam**. To do this, slightly bend your knees and hold a medicine ball. Lift the ball up behind your head and slam it down onto the ground in front of you as forceful as you can. When it bounces into the air, catch it. Do two sets of five slams.

Get Moving!

If speed and power are abilities you're seeking, look for a qualified plyometrics instructor near you and get moving!