

The Tabata FITNESS PLAN

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Get More from Every Workout!



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Introduction

Looking for a fast, fun, and effective workout?

The Tabata may be exactly what you're looking for. The Tabata was discovered and created by Professor Izumi Tabata in 1996. He studied Olympic speed skaters on a cycle ergometer. The purpose of the study was to see if they could increase the VO2 Max for the athletes.

Those that participated in the Tabata training saw an increase in their aerobic capacity. The method was quickly adapted by many fitness programs, which were beginning to uncover the benefits of HIIT or High Intensity Interval Training.

What it is a Tabata?

A Tabata, as mentioned, is a form of HIIT. It is a repeated cycle of 20 seconds of high intensity all out work, followed by ten seconds of rest. The cycle is repeated eight times, which equates to four minutes of work total. This is another reason why this method was quickly adopted. If you can see aerobic and fitness gains in four minutes a day, that's a workout most everyone has time for.

Why does it work?

The Tabata works for a number of reasons. One, it taps into your anaerobic energy systems, which releases a cascade of hormones that are beneficial when they're released occasionally. The Tabata isn't designed to be something that you do every single day or for a long duration. Generally speaking, you want to add a Tabata into your regular fitness program once or twice a week.

The other workouts should be at a moderate pace, and a few should involve strength training. Tabatas also work because many people are able to push themselves hard for twenty seconds and perform a workout knowing that it's only going to be four minutes long. It's quite a different thing to push yourself hard for twenty, thirty, or even sixty minutes.

Additionally, Tabatas don't cause that post-workout hunger that many other longer cardio workouts do cause. You can do your Tabata and go about your day not feeling like you're exhausted or need food to recover. So there's no unintentional weight gain from exercise.

Who uses a Tabata workout?

Anyone and everyone should use a Tabata workout. The pace you go and the movements you perform are based exclusively on your level of fitness right now.

As you increase your endurance and strength, your Tabata workouts will evolve. They're perfect for beginners and advanced athletes alike.



Different Types of Tabata Movement and Exercises

The Tabata concept can be applied to just about any movement or exercise. To give you a solid foundation of movements you can use, we've listed 10 movements with descriptions, tips, equipment, and variations.

#1 Push-ups

For the push-up, you don't need any equipment. You can do push-ups outside, inside or anywhere you have enough space to lay down on the floor. There are two variations for the push-up Tabata, keeping in mind that it is always twenty seconds of moving and ten seconds of rest.

The first variation is to do push-ups from your knees. Lie face down on the floor. Place your hands on the floor just outside of your shoulders. Bend your knees so that your feet are off the floor. Now push up. It's important to keep your core tight. If you feel like your hips or back are swaying, then tighten your glutes and quads (the muscles on the front of your thighs).

The second variation is to do push-ups from your toes. Lie face down on the floor. Place your hands just outside of your shoulders. Tighten your glutes, your legs and your abdominals. You may feel your thighs come up off of the floor when you tighten everything. This is great. Now stay tight take a deep breath and push up.

Form Tips

The push-up is a full range of motion movement. It starts with your chest on the floor and your chest must touch the floor each time you lower. It ends with your arms fully extended. Don't do movie star push-ups where you only lower halfway before you push back up. Your chest must touch the floor for it to count.

Keep your body tight. The real challenge, in addition to being able to push your bodyweight off the floor repeatedly, is also keeping your body tight. At a certain point, as you begin to fatigue, your push-ups will start to look a bit more like a worm. Your chest will come off the floor and then your hips. It's normal and a result of fatigue. Fight this wormlike movement as long as possible. When you feel your body defaulting to this, try to tighten it back up.

Breathe. A deep breath on the floor and held tight will help your body stay tight, and will make the push-up just a little bit easier.

#2 Squats

Initially, squats should be done without any additional weight. Don't worry, a squat Tabata is an amazing workout and you'll be amazed how tired your legs are going to be when the four minutes is over.

With your feet shoulder width or slightly wider than shoulder width apart, push your rear end back like you're sitting in a chair. Lower until your hips are at or below parallel to your knees. If you cannot drop your hips this low, create a target for your hips. Maybe find a chair that is at a height that challenges you, or an exercise ball. You might even simply stack some books or boxes. You're not going to rest your weight on these targets; you're going to lightly touch your rear end to them and stand back up.

Okay, so squat and look at your knees. Are they caving in toward the center or are they pointing out and tracking over your toes? Push your knees out so that your knees are pointing toward your toes or to the outside of them. Continue to push your knees out as you stand up. Why is this important? You can hurt your knees if they're not tracking properly. If you're having trouble keeping your knees out, adjust your stance until it feels comfortable. Over time, your mobility and strength will improve.

The other option, once you can get 15-20 squats in 20 seconds, is to think about adding weight. If you never add weight, that's fine. If you want to, that's fine too, but make sure you're able to squat to full depth first and that you have good mobility. You can hold dumbbells or kettlebells in your hands and perform the squat Tabata. Enjoy!

Form Tips

It's really important that you stand completely up at the top of your squat. Your hips need to be opened. When you're trying to get as many squats as possible in 20 seconds, it's really easy to forget that the top of the squat is you standing up straight.

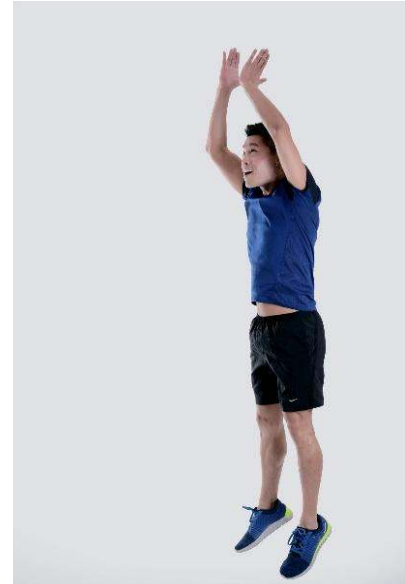
It's also important to keep your back up and not squat with a forward lean. This is also a mobility issue for some. Work on it. It can help your back to stay straight, if you hold your arms over your head. Yes, your arms will get tired. Remember, you have 10 seconds of rest each round. Shake those arms out to get ready for the next 20 second period of work.

#3 Burpees

The burpee is an amazing cardio movement. You don't need any special equipment, just you and enough space to drop to the floor and stand back up. Standing up straight, drop to the floor so that your chest is on the floor. Your chest must touch the floor for this movement to count.

Now, push back up to standing, jump, and clap your hands overhead. Your feet must leave the ground during the jump for the movement to count. That is one rep, standing to ground to standing.

If you want to make the movement more difficult, then you can jump to a target that is 3-6 inches, or more, overhead. Stand under a pullup bar or a tree branch or hang a target from your ceiling.



Form Tips

Some people make the push-up a part of the burpee. When you're on the ground you have to do a push-up and then stand, jump and clap overhead. If you have good push-ups and want to add this level of difficulty to the movement, go for it.

To make the burpee just a touch easier, try widening your feet when you're on the floor. When you stand up, push your backside up into the air, jump and pull your feet together at the same time while you clap with your arms overhead.

This slight variation makes it easier on your legs and removes the squat like movement that is required when your feet are together. Play around with the burpee to find the form that supports you to move as quickly and efficiently as possible.

#4 Pullups

The pullup is a movement that many people cannot do. Because of this, they avoid trying them. Well, guess what, the pullup is also a full body movement and there are ways that you can make them easier right now so that you can build up strength. Eventually you will be able to do them on your own. So, let's look at the variations, starting with a standard pullup.

The standard pullup has you positioned on the bar with your hands about shoulder width apart. Your palms are facing away from you, so you have an overhand grip. Wrap your thumbs around the bar for more stability. Now, tighten your core, take a deep breath and pull. Pull your shoulders back first, and then start bending your arms. The pullup is easier if you are tight and you pull aggressively.

This standard movement can be made easier by changing your grip on the bar. You can flip your grip to an underhand grip where your palms are facing toward you. Same tight core and deep breath. Same aggressive pull. The movement starts with your arms fully extended and it ends with your chin over the bar.

If neither of those variations work for you, the next step is to add a resistance band to the bar. Wrap the band over the bar and back through itself, so that it is secured over the bar and hanging down to the floor. Now, place one foot in the hanging loop of the resistance band and perform a pullup. If you need more than one band, then set up as many bands as you need to get your chin over the bar 3-5 times. This is a good number to aim for during your Tabata. If you can get more than 5 pullups, consider removing one band from your setup.

If you want to make the movement harder, add weight or do L-pullups. This means that you're holding your legs straight out in front of you so that your body is in an "L" shape as you perform the pullup. Difficult but fun!

Form Tips

Like any movement, it's helpful to keep your core tight. If you find that you're arching your back to pull up, try to curl your body so that your legs are in front of you. Try to maintain a "hollow rock" described in the next movement.

#5 Superman/Hollow Rock

This movement is a good core strength movement. Initially, when you're holding it for 20 seconds, you may wonder what the big deal is. If it's too easy, there are ways to make it harder – but trust me, it will get more difficult during this Tabata.

Superman

Superman is when you lie on your stomach on the floor. Now tighten everything, your glutes, your abs, your core, your legs. Pull your legs off the floor. Hold your arms overhead, like superman flying, and lift your chest off the ground. Keep everything tight and raised for 20 seconds.

Rest for 10 seconds and then roll over onto your back.

Hollow Rock

Hollow Rock is essentially the opposite of Superman. On your back, tighten everything. Lift your legs off the floor. Hold your arms overhead and lift your shoulder blades off the ground. You can make it easier by raising your legs up or bending your knees. Make sure you keep your core tight and your shoulders off the floor.

Rest for 10 seconds and roll over.

Keep repeating this for 8 minutes. Why twice the length? Because you're doing two movements. You want a full 4-minute Tabata for each movement.

Form Tips

Breathe. This is important. You can breathe and keep your core tight at the same time.

Start with the most difficult version of these movements that you can. As you fatigue, fight to maintain that version – if you can't, make it just a little bit easier so you can get through the full Tabata.

#6 L-Sits

An L-sit is an advanced movement; however, you can begin with an easier version and gradually work your way to the more difficult version as you get stronger.

An L-sit does require some equipment. You'll need something called a parallette. You can find them online or you can make them yourself with PVC pipes from your hardware store. If you have two really sturdy boxes, you may use these as well. The goal of an L-sit is to be able to hold a perfect L with your body elevated off the floor. You're pressing down on the paralletes with your hands and arms while raising your legs off the ground. Variations include:

Full L-Sit with your legs at a 90-degree angle.

Droopy L-sit with your legs not touching the floor but not quite at a 90-degree angle to your body either.

One leg bent. With this variation one leg is out in front of you while the other is bent. You can alternate legs with each round.

Two legs bent. With this variation both legs are bent, but they're not touching the floor.

Touching the floor. With this variation, one leg is touching the floor while you hold the other as high as you can.

The goal is to make this as difficult as possible. Like the Superman/Hollow Rock, you will start with the most difficult version you can do and strive to maintain it. If you cannot, then you'll make it just a little bit easier while still pushing yourself.

Finally, try a reverse Tabata first. This is ten seconds on, twenty seconds of rest.

Form Tips

Press on the parallettes with your hands and arms. Pressing down helps elevate your body and makes the movement a little easier.

Breathe. Keep your hands at your sides and as close to your body as possible.

#7 Lunges/Jumping Lunges

The lunge is a fantastic movement for strengthening and shaping your legs and backside. To perform the movement, you do not need any additional equipment. However, if you want, you can add weight to the movement. You can hold dumbbells or kettlebells in each hand, or a single weight held in front of you at chest level.

To perform a lunge, you simply step forward with one leg. Lower your back leg until your knee gently touches the ground, then push up from your front leg. Switch legs and repeat on the other side.

To perform this movement quickly, you can jump between each lunge. So instead of pushing up with your front leg, you push up quickly into a jump, switch legs and land with the opposite foot in front. Make sure your knee is gently touching the floor rather than slamming into it as you lower it to the ground. Keep the movement controlled, even though it's dynamic.

Form Tips

Make sure the knee of your front leg tracks over your foot. You don't want it caving in toward the center. Additionally, you want to make sure you're not stepping too far out in front of yourself. Your front leg should be bent at about a 90-degree angle, no more.

Hold your core tight to help maintain stability.

#8 Sit-Ups

Sit-ups are something you probably don't think much about. But when you try to do as many as you can in 20 seconds, and then you repeat that effort 8 times, well... they become a pretty serious effort. You don't need any special equipment for sit-ups, however if you have an abmat, it will protect your spine and make you work your abs just a little bit harder.

Sitting on the ground with your knees bent and your feet flat on the ground, lie back. Throw your arms over your head and swing them up as you sit up. The momentum will help you sit up quickly. Remember, this is about as many as you can in 20 seconds, use the momentum, it's not a cheat. Touch the laces on your shoes. Then repeat.

To make it more difficult, you can add weight to the sit-up. Hold a small dumbbell or weight plate in your hands or on your chest.

Form Tips

Breathe during the movement.

Make sure you sit all the way up at the top of the movement.

Do use your arms for assistance.

#9 Plank Holds

The plank hold is a fantastic core strengthener, and using a Tabata, or a reverse Tabata, to increase your strength is a wonderful addition to your weekly exercise regimen.



The plank is performed either on your hands or on your forearms. Forearms is often more difficult for people, but try it for yourself to determine which position is harder. Lie on your stomach and place your hands on the floor beside your shoulders. Push up so you're on your toes and your arms are straight. Keep your core tight. If you feel your middle sagging, squeeze your glutes. If it's too easy to hold this position, try lowering onto your forearms.

You can also make this movement more difficult by doing a side plank, also called a star plank. This is performed with one arm and one leg on the ground and the other elevated with your arm stretching up as high as possible.

Form Tips

Push through your hands or arms to keep the movement tight and your core engaged.

Breathe.

Balance can be an issue with side plank. You may want to place both feet stacked on top of each other to make it a little easier.

#10 Thruster

The thruster is a full body movement that involves both a full depth squat and a push press overhead. You can use light dumbbells, an empty barbell or even a long stick to press overhead. Kettlebells work as well.

The movement begins with you standing with your feet under your hips. If you are using a barbell or a stick, that should be sitting in your hands with the weight of the stick or barbell resting on your shoulders. Your elbows will be pointing up a bit, not parallel with the floor but also not pointing down at the floor.

Find a comfortable midpoint. If you have dumbbells or kettlebells, hold them in each hand with your palm gripping the weight and facing your shoulders. Your hands should be at about shoulder height.

Lower into a full depth squat. For tips on proper squat movement, refer back the paragraphs about squat Tabata. As you stand, and your hips open up, use that momentum to press the weights overhead. The movement is complete when your hands are directly overhead, and your arms are next to your ears. Lower the weights to your shoulders, drop into a squat and repeat.

Form Tips

Don't start the squat movement until the weights have returned to your shoulders.

Begin the press using some of the momentum from standing quickly out of your squat. This turns the top part of the thruster into a push press rather than a strict press. It's easier on your arms and a little bit faster.

As you can see, you can apply the Tabata concept to just about any movement. You can Tabata jump rope, Tabata run, Tabata hand stand push-up or anything else you can imagine. The key to a solid Tabata workout is to try to maintain the pace and quantity you set in the first round or two while you're maintaining good form.

Reverse Tabata Training

Before we dive into some potential Tabata training workouts, let's quickly address the idea of the reverse Tabata. The reverse Tabata follows the same 4-minute, 8 round, approach. However, instead of twenty seconds on and ten seconds off, you are doing ten seconds of work and twenty seconds of rest.

You might use the reverse Tabata when you're working on form and the movement is new and very challenging to you.

For example, a reverse Tabata for pullups may be good if you've never done pullups and the work you can do in ten seconds is plenty.

As you get stronger, you can transition to a regular Tabata.



Sample Tabata Training Workouts

These workouts are created with 4 movements, each 4 minutes long with one-minute rest between each movement for a total of 19 minutes. If you only have time for ten-minute workouts, divide the workout in two. Do one ten-minute session in the morning with two of the movements and another in the evening.

- Bodyweight Tabata
 - 4 minutes squats
 - 4 minutes push-ups
 - 4 minutes pullups
 - 4 minutes lunges

- Core workout Tabata
 - Plank
 - Sit-ups
 - Hollow rock/Superman
 - L-sit

- Kettlebell Tabata
 - Thrusters
 - Lunges
 - Kettlebell swings (we didn't talk about this movement). Proper kettle bell swing involves two hands on the kettlebell, feet shoulder width apart. Swing the kettlebell between your legs, (it will likely bump your backside if you're swinging it correctly), then, using your hips and momentum as you stand up, you'll swing the kettlebell to eye level or up overhead. It's a good shoulder and core workout.
 - Deadlift. This is another one we didn't talk about, but it's easy to perform. Place the kettlebell on the ground in front of your feet. Standing with your feet shoulder width apart and both hands on the kettlebell, unlock your knees, keep your back flat and stand up with the kettlebell. Lower to the ground, still keeping your back straight.

- Upper body Tabata
 - Push press
 - Plank
 - Push-up
 - Pullup

- Lower body Tabata
 - Squat
 - Lunge
 - Jumping lunge
 - Thruster

- Beginner
 - Push-up
 - Sit-up
 - Squat
 - Lunge

- Intermediate
 - Burpee
 - Superman/Hollow Rock
 - Plank
 - Jumping lunge

- Advanced
 - Thruster
 - L-sit
 - Pullup
 - Star Plank

- Strength
 - Squats
 - Lunges
 - Push-ups
 - Pullups

- Cardio
 - Burpees
 - Thrusters
 - Sit-ups
 - Jumping lunges

Keys to Tabata Success

- **Good form.** Form is important with Tabata to the degree that you don't want to hurt yourself. For example, if you're doing a squat Tabata, you want to make sure that your knees are tracking appropriately. If you are doing a deadlift Tabata, you want to make sure your back stays flat and doesn't round. Moving quickly sometimes causes a lack of attention to form. Find balance where you can move quickly and efficiently.
- **Warm up!** Do not attempt a HIIT workout without first warming up your muscles. Try to warm up the muscles that you're going to work during your Tabata. For example, if you're going to squat and lunge, then perform warmup exercises that work those muscles. You might even squat and lunge in a slow, controlled, and relaxed way. The goal is to start out slowly, gradually increase your effort, and then – when you're warm – it's time to Tabata.
- **The right mindset.** The Tabata is a time to push yourself, not to go slowly and pace it out. Find your number in the first round or two and work hard to maintain it. For example, if you find you can do 10 squats in 20 seconds in the first two rounds, try to get 10 squats in each subsequent round.



Adding a Tabata workout to your current fitness program is easy. Take a look at some of the areas where your current program may have gaps. For example, maybe you run three days a week. You might fill in twice a week with an arm and core Tabata workout.

Tabatas are sprint workouts. In fact, you can run for twenty seconds and rest for ten if running is something that you like to do.

Tabatas help you get past weight loss plateaus and can help you reach your body composition goals. Try to include two Tabata workouts a week, either on days that you don't work out or on days where you have a moderate aerobic workout.

It's not a good idea to perform a Tabata on a day where you really push your heart rate and work out for a long time in addition to your Tabata. You can also do a Tabata on your strength training days. Find what works for you and enjoy this amazingly powerful workout approach.