

# Hit the Floor: Strength Training With Floor Exercises

Lisa Washburn, DrPH  
Assistant Professor -  
Health

LaVona Traywick, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor -  
Gerontology

Jessica Vincent  
County Extension Agent -  
Family and Consumer  
Sciences

Lauren Copeland  
Program Technician -  
Health

Strengthening exercises are an important part of any well-rounded fitness routine. Experts recommend strength training at least twice weekly with exercises targeting all major muscle groups. Once a regular strength training routine is established, there is a tendency to perform the same exercises week after week. To continue making fitness gains, muscles need to be challenged with different exercises, increased intensity or both. Whether you are new to strength training or a seasoned exerciser, adding floor exercises to your routine can increase the effectiveness of your workouts.

Floor exercises require little equipment and can be performed nearly anywhere. Basic equipment is an exercise mat. Dumbbells and a chair are also used in the exercises included in the Hit the Floor routine.

## Selecting an Exercise Mat

Exercise mats provide cushion for the body and make floor exercises more comfortable. Many types of exercise mats are available. The best mat choice depends on its intended use. Thicker mats provide cushion for floor exercises. Thinner mats are best for yoga, as extra cushion can make balancing poses more difficult. Choice of mat thickness depends on personal preference. Generally, exercise mats are 68 to 72 inches long. Longer mats are also available for those who are tall and need extra length. In general, choose a mat six inches longer than your height and a foot wider than the widest part of your waist.



## Types of Mats

Exercise mats may be made of foam, latex, rubber or PVC. Mats are also made from bamboo, cotton, hemp and jute. There are small but important differences between yoga mats, Pilates mats and general exercise mats. Choose a mat based on your individual needs and preferences.

- Yoga – Most yoga mats are  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch thick. Thinner mats ( $\frac{1}{16}$  inch) are lightweight and used for travel. Thicker mats ( $\frac{1}{4}$  inch) are also available, but the extra cushioning of a thicker mat can make balancing poses more difficult. Yoga mats are sometimes called “sticky mats.” The most common yoga mats are made of PVC and have a raised texture to provide traction for holding yoga poses.
- Pilates – Pilates mats are typically thicker than yoga mats. The extra thickness provides more cushioning.
- General exercise mats may be thicker than Pilates or yoga mats. They provide extra cushion for joints and are  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch thick or more.

## Cleaning Mats

Exercise mats should be cleaned regularly. There are several ways to

Visit our web site at:  
<https://www.uaex.uada.edu>

clean mats, depending on your preference for cleaning ingredients and how dirty the mat is.

## Water and Dish Soap

Mats can be cleaned using a solution of 2 cups of water and four drops of dish soap.

- Place in a spray bottle or use a damp sponge or cloth to apply to the mat.
- After wiping the mat with the soap solution, wipe with clean water. Be sure to remove all soap. Soap residue left on the mat can make it slippery to use.
- After wiping with clean water, rub the mat dry with a clean terry cloth or towel.
- Allow the mat to air until completely dry.

## Heavily Soiled Mats

Heavily soiled mats can be cleaned by submerging in a solution of warm water and mild soap. A bathtub may be the most convenient way to submerge mats for cleaning.

- Hand wash thoroughly, and rinse in clean water.
- To dry, squeeze out the excess water, then lay the mat on top of a dry towel and roll them up together.
- Step on the rolled mat and towel to squeeze out moisture, then unroll the mat and hang to air dry.

## Vinegar and Water

A solution of water and vinegar is another option for cleaning mats.

- In a spray bottle, combine one part vinegar to three parts warm water.
- Essential oils, like tea tree oil, can be added and act as a natural antiseptic. Add 12 to 24 drops of tea tree oil to 1 to 2 cups of water and vinegar

solution. Other essential oils with antiseptic qualities, such as lavender, cedar wood, lemon and spearmint, may be substituted.

Follow directions in Water and Dish Soap method above.

## Commercial Disinfecting Spray

A disinfecting spray can also be used to kill germs and viruses.

- Choose a spray containing a quaternary disinfectant with at least 70 percent alcohol.
- Follow manufacturer's directions to disinfect. Generally, directions usually call for applying disinfecting spray to a wet mat. Allow to sit for at least 30 seconds (some products call for 10 minutes to be effective) before rinsing with clean water.
- Allow mat to air dry.

## How to Use This Floor Strengthening Routine

This strengthening routine includes thirteen exercises targeting all the major muscle groups. Equipment needed includes an exercise mat, a pair of dumbbells and a chair without arms.

- Warm up for five to ten minutes before starting the exercises.
- Perform each exercise eight to twelve times.
- Rest for a minute, and repeat eight to twelve repetitions of each exercise two or three more times.
- Aim to perform strengthening exercises at least two to three days each week. Allow time for your body to rest by skipping a day in between.
- Wear closed-toe athletic shoes.

---

## Chest

### Push-Up

1. Get down on hands and knees, then walk your feet back until your body is parallel with the floor.
2. Your hands should be directly underneath but slightly wider than your shoulders. Point your fingers in the same direction as your head and spread your fingers out.
3. Squeeze your shoulder blades together and unlock your elbows.
4. Be sure to tighten your abdominal muscles so that your lower back does not sway.
5. Bend your elbows to lower your entire body towards the floor.
7. Pause, then press back to the starting position smoothly, and do not allow your back to arch or change position.
7. Stop before your arms are completely straight.



## Chest Press

1. Hold one dumbbell in each hand.
2. Lie on the floor with your knees bent, feet flat on the floor approximately hip-width apart.
3. Move your upper arms out to the side of your body so they are resting on the floor.
4. Raise your forearms straight up and parallel to each other like goal posts. Your upper arm and raised forearm should form a 90-degree angle. Position the dumbbells outside of your body at the level of your mid-chest or bust line. Your palms should face your feet, with your wrists and elbows in a straight line.
5. Exhale and use your chest muscles to slowly press the dumbbells straight up slowly until your arms are fully extended. Do not lock your elbows. Your wrists, elbows and shoulders should be in a straight line.
6. Pause, holding both arms in the lifted position.
7. Inhale and slowly lower the dumbbells back to the starting position.



## Back

### Butterfly Back

1. Lie face down on an exercise mat.
2. Make a "T" shape with your arms by placing them straight out from your shoulders with palms down.
3. Squeeze your shoulder blades together to lift your arms up and slightly back.
4. Holding your arms in this position, slowly make several consecutive figure eight motions with your hands.
5. Control your arms as you smoothly lower them.
6. Release the tight squeeze between your shoulder blades and let your arms rest on the floor.



## Bird Dog

1. Place your hands and knees on the floor keeping your back parallel to the ground.
2. Make sure your hands are directly under your shoulders, your knees are directly under your hips, and your back is flat like a table.
3. Slowly raise your left arm directly in front of you and your right leg in line with your body. Try to raise your extended arm and leg until they are parallel to the floor.
4. Pause for a breath, and then slowly lower your arm and leg.
5. Balance by holding your abdominals contracted and control the movement.
6. Alternate sides, or complete one set on one side, then repeat on the other.



## Abdominals

### Abdominal Curl

1. Lie on your back with knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Your heels should be at least one foot away from your buttocks.
2. Look up at the ceiling and keep some space between your chin and your chest.
3. Use your arm position to increase the challenge of this exercise.
  - Hands touching opposite elbows; arms may be rested on the chest.
  - Hands touching opposite shoulders; arms may be rested on the chest.
  - Hands softly touching the head above the ears.
  - Hands softly clasped behind the head. Avoid pulling on the neck in this position.
4. Slowly contract your abdominal muscles to lift your head and shoulders off the ground.
5. Pause, then slowly lower back towards the ground.



### Reverse Curl

1. Lie on the floor with the small of your back pressed against the floor.
2. Bend your knees and rest your thighs together.
3. Bring your feet off the floor and raise your legs until your knees are directly above your hips.
4. Squeeze your abdominal muscles to pull your buttocks slightly off the ground and toward your shoulders. Avoid rocking or swinging the legs.
5. Your knees will come up and towards your chest a few centimeters.
6. Pause in this position then slowly lower back to the floor.
7. The small of your back should remain pressed against the mat during the lift and lower movements.



### Oblique Curl

1. Lie on your back, with knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Your heels should be at least one foot away from your buttocks.
2. Look up at the ceiling and keep some space between your chin and your chest.
3. Rest your hands gently at the base of your head for support.
4. Curl up slowly a few inches off the floor.
5. Twist your torso as a unit to point your left elbow at your right knee.
6. Pause for a breath.
7. Rotate back to the slightly curled up position in Step 4 and twist your torso in the opposite direction to point your right elbow at your left knee.
8. Pause for a breath.
9. Slowly center your torso, and then uncurl as you lower down to the floor.



## Legs

### Side Leg Raise

1. Lie on a mat on your left side with your legs straight and stacked on top of one another.
2. Bend the lower part of your left leg back behind you to a 90 degree angle, making sure to keep your hips and knees aligned.
3. Your right leg should stay straight with the foot flat and toes pointed straight ahead.
4. Support your head with your left arm and place your right hand on the floor in front of you for balance.
5. Exhale as you lift your top leg up approximately 1.5-2 feet.
6. Pause and hold your right leg in the lifted position for a count of one.
7. Inhale as you slowly lower your right leg down to the count of four until it rests on your left leg.
8. After you complete one set of repetitions, switch and repeat on the other side.



## Hamstring Curl

1. Lie on your stomach on a mat with feet hip-width apart.
2. Raise the upper body by bending the elbows underneath the shoulders.
3. Gently contract your abdominal muscles to stiffen your torso and stabilize your spine.
4. Keep your ankles flexed throughout the exercise.
5. Exhale and curl or bend your knee, bringing your heel towards your buttocks without moving your thigh off the mat, lifting your hips off the mat, or arching your lower back.
6. Continue to bend your knee until your heel nears, or touches, your buttock or you reach the limits of your comfort level. The point where you notice your hips or lower back beginning to move indicates that you have reached your joint's limit of movement.
7. Inhale and slowly return your leg back to starting position.
8. Complete one set on one side, then repeat on the other or alternate sides.



## Arms

### Skull Crusher

1. Lie on your back with knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Your heels should be at least one foot away from your buttocks.
2. Look up at the ceiling.
3. Grasp a dumbbell in each hand, extend your arms straight up toward the ceiling, and keep your palms facing each other.
4. Slowly bend your arms at the elbow, lowering the dumbbells toward your forehead.
5. Stop when your arms have formed a 90-degree angle.
6. Pause for a breath.
7. Keeping your upper arm and elbow in place in the same position, raise the dumbbells to the starting position in a controlled motion.



### Biceps Curl

1. Sit toward the front of the chair seat with your feet flat on the floor about hip-width apart.
2. Hold a dumbbell in each hand with elbows and upper arms snug against the sides of the body. Your forearms should be extended straight down at your sides with your palms facing in towards your thighs.
3. Slowly bend your elbows and lift the dumbbells up towards your shoulders while keeping the upper arm firmly planted at your side.
4. Rotate your forearms in a smooth motion as you lift the dumbbells so that your palms face your shoulders.
5. Pause with the dumbbells in front of your shoulders, but not touching them. Your palms should be directly in front of your shoulders.
6. Slowly lower the dumbbells by rotating your forearms so that your palms face your thighs in the starting position.



\* Note: This exercise can also be done while standing.

## Shoulders

### Front Raise

1. Sit in a chair with your feet hip-width apart and flat on the floor.
2. Hold a dumbbell in each hand, palms facing the floor, and put a slight bend (approximately 30 degrees) in each elbow.
3. Hold your back straight and look forward.
4. Keep your chest up and tighten your abdominal muscles.
5. Lift both arms in front of you by squeezing the muscles in the shoulder. Avoid shrugging the shoulders to the ears. Maintain the bend in your elbows; do not increase or decrease it.
6. Pause for a breath when your arms are slightly below or at chest level.
7. Slowly return to the starting position.

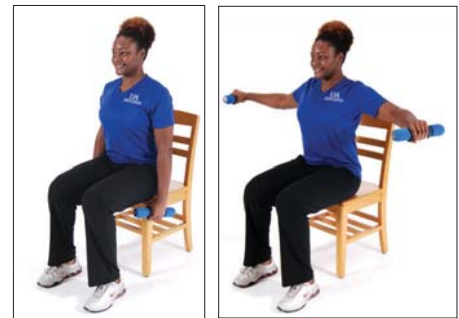
\* Note: This exercise can also be done while standing.



### Side Raise

1. Sit in a chair with your feet hip-width apart and flat on the floor.
2. Hold a dumbbell in each hand and put a slight bend (approximately 30 degrees) in each elbow.
3. Hold your back straight and look forward.
4. Keep your chest up and tighten your abdominal muscles.
5. Lift both arms out to your sides by squeezing the muscles in the shoulders. Avoid shrugging the shoulders to the ears. Maintain the bend in your elbows; do not increase or decrease it.
6. Pause for a breath when your arms are slightly below or at shoulder height.
7. Slowly return to the starting position.

\* Note: This exercise can also be done while standing.



The poster – MP493, *Hit the Floor: Strength Training With Exercise Mat* – is available to order from the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension Service web site at [www.uaex.uada.edu](http://www.uaex.uada.edu) (click the “Publications” link).

Photo credit: Kerry Rodtnick, University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture.

**DR. LISA WASHBURN** is assistant professor - health, **DR. LaVONA TRAYWICK** is associate professor - gerontology, **JESSICA VINCENT** is county Extension agent - family and consumer sciences, and **LAUREN COPELAND** is program technician - health. All are with the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture. Washburn, Traywick and Copeland are located in Little Rock and Vincent is located in Hot Springs.

Pursuant to 7 CFR § 15.3, the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture offers all its Extension and Research programs and services (including employment) without regard to race, color, sex, national origin, religion, age, disability, marital or veteran status, genetic information, sexual preference, pregnancy or any other legally protected status, and is an equal opportunity institution.