

A woman with long blonde hair, wearing a white visor with a gold Nike logo and a green athletic top, is shown in profile. She is holding a thick, braided rope with both hands. The background is a red brick wall. A red circular callout box is positioned over her arm.

**KNEES
UP, LADIES!**
Fitness tests are like
any other workout
– it's important to
warm up with a cardio
activity such as
walking, jogging
or cycling.

5 simple DIY fitness tests

Challenge yourself and chart your progress. All you need is a timer and these five tests by **fitness editor Martha Lourey-Bird.**



fitness

Making the decision to get fit is a marathon rather than a sprint. It involves training, information and a few basic benchmarks you can improve upon. By keeping a record of your progress, seeing what works (and what doesn't), you'll know how to improve. Try these five simple fitness tests every six weeks. Whatever stage you happen to be at, it's good to know you're in better shape than you were. And what better motivator is that?

STATIC HOLD TEST for core strength

Core strength is important for improving your posture and supporting your back. Lie face down with your forearms and either knees (easier) or toes (harder) on the floor. Lift your chest and tummy up off the ground and lower your bottom to keep your back flat. As you breathe out, imagine you're trying to bring your belly button up towards your spine. Hold your abdominal muscles in this position and keep breathing. Once you drop or change, stop timing.

To improve, try: Pilates classes or other core-specific exercises like the plank or fit ball work 2-4 times a week.

What you should notice: Improved posture, firmer abdominal muscles and a reduction in back pain.

CAN-YOU-DO? TESTS for muscular strength

Muscular strength is important for everyday tasks such as pushing and pulling, lifting groceries or the kids. These simple activities test the strength of your muscles. Record how many of each of the following you can do: chin-ups, full sit-ups, full push-ups, one-arm push-ups, full squats, squat balances (on one leg). At first, you may record a lot of 'nos' but remember that every 'yes' is a positive result.

To improve, try: Lifting heavier weights such as barbells and dumbbells, 2-4 times a week.

What you should notice: An improvement in six weeks, when you repeat tests, and greater ease in daily tasks.

BODY RESISTANCE TESTS for muscular endurance

Muscular strength is the ability to exert maximum force once, but muscular endurance is being able to repeat sub-maximal actions for a more extended period. It tones muscles, increases muscle density, strengthens bones and also boosts your metabolic rate. These simple endurance tests break the body down into three areas: upper, middle and lower. Record the number of the following activities you can do in 60 seconds: push-ups or half push-ups to test the upper body; sit-ups or half sit-ups for the mid-body; and squats or half squats for the lower body.

To improve, try: Repeating as many of the activities for each section of the body as you can in 60 seconds and record the numbers so it's easy to track your progress.

What you should notice: You'll be able to walk up a flight of stairs more easily and should also be able to see a more toned physical appearance.

RESTING HEART RATE TEST for cardio-respiratory stamina

A normal resting heart rate is 70 to 72 beats per minute. The heart ejects blood with each beat and as you get fitter, the heart gets stronger, pumps out more blood with each beat and doesn't need to beat as often (so the lower the rate, the better). Factors such as being unfit or lack of sleep can account for a raised heart rate. Use your middle three fingers to find your pulse, either on the thumb-side of your wrist (radial pulse) or on the side of your neck (carotid pulse). Rest fingers on your pulse and count how many times your heart beats in 60 seconds. It's best to do this first thing in the morning while you're still in bed.

To improve, try: Cardio activities such as cycling, swimming or walking. For details, find the Government's *Physical Activity Guidelines for Adults* by visiting the site www.healthysite.gov.au and clicking on 'publications'.

What you should notice: Less huffing and puffing climbing stairs. Something that you won't notice, but is definitely happening, is a reduction in risk of other health problems such as osteoporosis, diabetes and stroke.

ARM OVER/UNDER TEST for upper body flexibility

Good flexibility benefits both the joints and the muscles surrounding them, as well as helping prevent soreness and pain. To test your upper body flexibility, reach one arm up and bend from the elbow behind your back so your hand touches your back. Then swing the other arm from the elbow behind your back. Now, try to grasp one hand with the other. If you can't reach, ask a friend to use a tape measure to see how far away your finger tips are from each other, or how much they overlap. Swap your hands over, try the exercise again and repeat in six weeks.

To improve, try: Upper-body stretches, especially those for the back and shoulders. Visit www.mydr.com.au and search for 'stretching' to find an illustrated guide. Aiming for evenness on both sides is more important than how much your fingertips overlap, so work on weaknesses. Stop holding your mobile in the crook of your neck and use a backpack instead of an over-the-shoulder handbag.

What you should notice: Greater mobility and a reduction in pain or headaches if you suffer from them. www.