

# DE-STRESS EXERCISES: STRENGTH TRAINING ROUTINE

with Charlene Hutsebaut



fitness consultant for *The De-Stress Effect: Balance Your Body's Systems for Vibrant Health & Happiness* by Charlotte Watts



[www.charlenehutsebaut.com](http://www.charlenehutsebaut.com)    @positivelyslim  
[www.charlottewattshealth.com](http://www.charlottewattshealth.com)    @cwnutritionyoga

## The De-Stress Effect Strength Training Routine

Studies have shown that people who do shorter, high-intensity toning exercise lose more fat and weight (especially around the middle) and maintain more stable blood sugar than those doing traditional aerobic exercise for hours on end. Lightweight training is one of the best ways of increasing muscle tone, but it doesn't have to be on bulky machines. It can incorporate light weights or even your own body as the force, as many yoga poses do.

A cleverly designed programme can follow muscle patterns that our ancestors would have used and that move intelligently through the body as it was designed.

### Determining Your Fitness Levels

The De-Stress Effect exercise programme has a variety of exercises meant to work the entire body. You may find you are stronger or more flexible on some exercises than others, so your 'fitness level' may vary between exercises.

The press-ups, for example, are divided into three levels for you. If you can do 12 press-ups at level 1, then try some repetitions at level 2. When you are confidently able to do 12 at level 2, feel free to try several repetitions at level 3. If you can do 12 at level 3, then add more repetitions in a set. All other exercises have a range of either sets or repetitions or both.

If you can do two sets of the lowest amount of repetitions comfortably, you are ready for level 2. You can move to three sets of the lowest repetitions for several weeks, then move to three sets of the highest repetitions listed, level 3. To keep challenging yourself, add a fourth set. Another way to challenge yourself at any level is to add a heavier weight or larger cans in your hands in the exercises requiring lifting.

- **Level 1:** 1–2 sets of 6–8 repetitions
- **Level 2:** 2 sets of 8–12 repetitions
- **Level 3:** 3 sets of 12–15 repetitions

### Safe Exercise Technique

Mimic the sketches given with the exercises below, keeping a neutral spine. Imagine how a spine should look with all of its natural curves. Whether you are standing, squatting or bending at the waist, the spine should be neutral. If you are moving through a set and your back gets tired or the weights start to feel too heavy and cause you to come out of the proper neutral alignment, you are ready for a break. Stay at the level of sets and repetitions you are at until you feel stronger and can get through more repetitions with safe technique.



## De-Stress exercise attitude – smart training to suit you

If you are a beginner, aim to do this quick strength workout once or twice a week. If you are intermediate or advanced, go for up to four times a week, ensuring you have rest days between workouts. Over-exercise is a form compulsive behaviour that can also sabotage any weight-loss efforts by flooding the system with stress hormones. On the days you don't do this routine, make sure you maintain your activity levels with walking, swimming, social exercise and yoga.

This strength workout is designed to be done at home, in the park or gym and there are instructions for options in those locations as well as some tweaks for different levels. It should take you around 25–30 minutes to complete depending on the number of sets you do. Beginners can begin with the lower number of repetitions and work up towards 12; if intermediate or advanced you can do the higher amount, but everyone should complete all sets. The weight used for each set should challenge you by the end and you may want to progress with a trainer.

### Warm-Up first

Warming up the body is an important part of an exercise routine to ensure it's not a sudden shock to your nervous system and you can build strength without strain or injury. Walking is one of the best ways to ease the body into increasing blood flow to the working muscles and stimulate natural lubrication at the joints. Below are other options. Remember to be conscious of your breathing as you move and build slowly to develop mindful attention to your body responses.

#### Home:

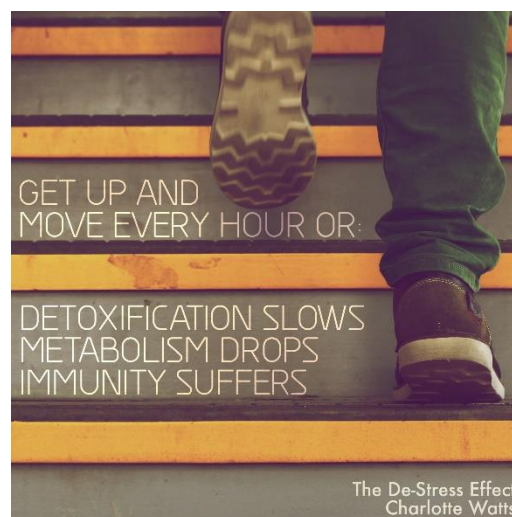
- March on the spot for 5 minutes.
- Walk up and down stairs 5 minutes.

#### Gym:

- 10 minutes easy on cardio machine of your choice.
- Ask a class instructor of any type if you can participate in his or her warm-up and then quietly leave to continue your own workout in another part of the gym – a good instructor shouldn't mind if you do this.

#### Outside:

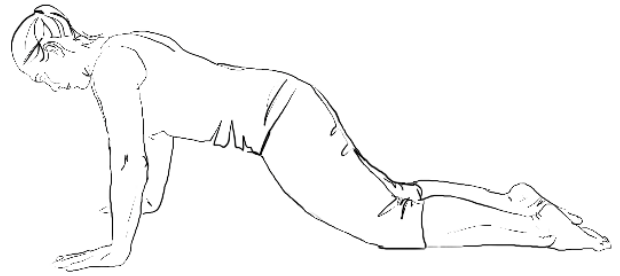
- Walk or gently jog around the park/block for 10 minutes.



# The De-Stress Effect Strength Training Routine

## 1. Press-ups

3 sets of 6–12 repetitions



- **Level 1:** Start on your hands and knees, hands just wider than shoulder-width apart, hips over knees.
- **Level 2:** Start on your hands and knees, hands just wider than shoulder-width apart. Form a long board position from your shoulders to knees (imagine a straight line from your shoulders through hips to knees).
- **Level 3:** Start on hands and toes – keep the body straight like a board from the shoulders to the toes.

### All levels:

- Breathe in to bring your chest towards the floor or exercise mat, bending your elbows only to a 90-degree angle.
- Breathe out to come back up, straightening your elbows.
- Throughout the entire movement, keep your abdominal muscles gently tight by pulling your belly button towards your spine.
- Keep your shoulder blades in a neutral position (floating flat on the back/rib cage, down towards the hips).
- Lead with your chest, keeping your head and neck in line with your spine. The old school ‘take your nose to the floor’ ... is not safe!
- Ideally you should be able to do a set of between 6 and 12 press-ups at the level you have chosen, keeping your back in a neutral position.
- If you can do 12 of a level, then try some repetitions of the next level up.
- If you can do 12 of Level 3, then add more repetitions in a set.

## 2. Wall Squats with Bicep Curls

3 sets of 10–15 repetitions

- You will need dumbbells or plastic water bottles, filled equally to the weight that suits you at the moment.
- You can also use two tins of equally weighted food (usually about 500g)
- Make sure you use a weight level that challenges you without making your muscles hurt (beginner – 1.5kg dumbbells or small H2O bottle, intermediate/advanced 3kg dumbbells and above – 750ml-1L water bottles)



- Start in the position shown.
- Your legs will work isometrically (without movement) by keeping you in position
- Feet should be at least 12 inches/30 cm from the wall, pelvis, mid-back and shoulder blades against the wall for support.
- Think of leaning against the wall in a 'good posture' position.
- The only movement to occur is with the arms.
- As you breathe in, ease the dumbbells down beside your legs.
- As you breathe out, pull the dumbbells back up, bending your elbows to the start position.
- To get the most efficient use of the arm muscles keep the elbows tucked in to the sides of your body throughout entire movement.
- Keep your abdominal wall gently tight throughout without pushing your lower back into the wall.
- The back of your head should touch the wall as well – you can do this by pulling the chin back and in just ensure you feel comfortable.

### 3. Double Arm Rows

3 sets of 8–12

- You will need equally two weighted tins, dumbbells, kettlebells or bags of groceries to help with this one.



Step 1



Step 2

- Both knees should be bent, then bend from the waist to tip over so that your torso is at a 45-degree angle to the floor.
- Engage abdominal and lower back muscles to ensure a safe position for your lower spine and to work your core muscles.
- Breathe in, don't move.
- Begin with cans, dumbbells, kettlebells or bags full of groceries below your shoulders (Step 1), arms hanging, then, breathing out, pull both arms up at the same time, bringing the hands to touch the hips, elbows up at a 90-degree angle (Step 2).
- Breathe in to lower the arms to the start position and continue the reps to suit you.

## 4. Lunges

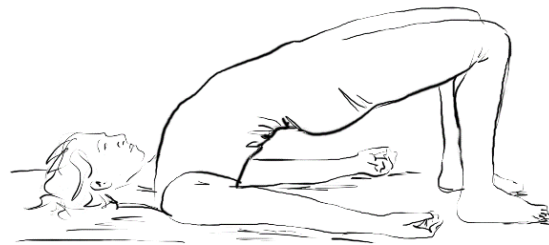
3 sets of 6–12 on each side

- You will need dumbbells, tins or kettlebells.
- Start by standing with feet together, holding dumbbells, cans or kettlebells in hands.
- Take a long step forward with one foot.
- Keeping your torso in 'good posture', breathe in to ease your way to the position shown here, bending your knees.
- Only go to a position where the knees feel comfortable, you will still achieve a good workout even if you only do a quarter or half of the position shown – the important thing is that you feel safe through all joints.
- Stand up to the start position on an out-breath.
- Complete 6–12 repetitions on one side, then switch to the other leg.
- Keep abdominal muscles gently tight while moving, and torso perpendicular to the floor (upright).



## 5. The Bridge (Hamstring and Glut Lifts)

3–6 held for 10 seconds each



- Remove any head support and tuck the chin lightly to the throat. Place feet comfortably close to the buttocks, hip-width apart or wider if your lower back needs.
- With hands palm-up by the hips, inhale and lift the pelvis off the floor one vertebra at a time. Keep rooted in the feet, (especially base of the big toe), roll the thighs in, flatten the belly and lift the heart.
- Stay as long as you can lift your chest with easy breath and soft face. Roll the spine down and rest until back muscles settle.

This can be practiced as a loosening motion at the beginning of a practice as described in The Yoga Sequences chapter of The De-Stress Effect. It can be practiced rolling up on an inhale, down on an exhale and repeating. Arms can also be lifted up and over the head as pelvis lifts, back down with out-breath as it descends.

## 6. Oblique Abdominal Rollback

2 lots of 3 on each side



1



2

3



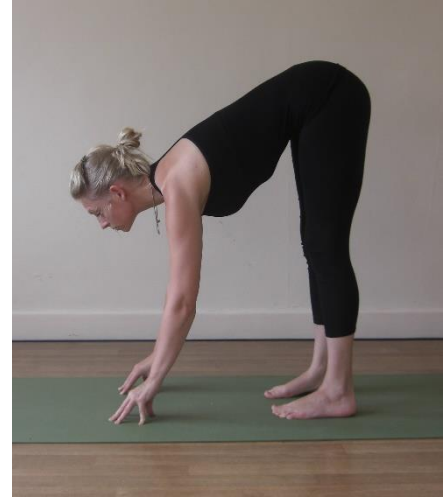
- Begin in the seated position (1).
- Breathe in, staying centred.
- Breathe out, drop the sacrum (triangular bum bone) down to floor as you twist to the left and tighten the abdominal muscles as you imagine pulling the bottom portion of your rib cage towards your hip bones, forming a C-curve through the lower back (2). Think of pulling your belly button and breastbone through your back to create a strong connection.
- Extend your left hand (3), following it with your eyes.
- Breathe in to return to the starting position (1).
- Repeat the movement to the right.
- Shoulder blades (shoulder girdle) stay in a 'good posture' position throughout the movement.
- Movement happens at the pelvis, lower back (flexion) and the shoulder joints.



## Cool-down

Don't simply spring up out of these exercises and leave in a flurry of stress. Spend a minute or two stretching your muscles and relaxing; see the De-Stress Strength Training Video for a targeted sequence or use any yoga poses you know to stretch out hamstrings, quads, shoulders and back.

Stretching adequately after exercise help muscles recover more quickly and prevent post-workout muscle soreness. By lengthening the connective tissues, muscles and ligaments between the joints in this way, the body's range of movement is expanded – and this can reduce the likelihood and severity of injuries both from exercise and everyday life, including contractions of the fight-or-flight response.



[www.charlenehutsebaut.com](http://www.charlenehutsebaut.com)    [@positivelyslim](https://www.instagram.com/positivelyslim)  
[www.charlottewattshealth.com](http://www.charlottewattshealth.com)    [@cwnutritionyoga](https://www.instagram.com/cwnutritionyoga)