



## Fun Fitness: 5 Active Childhood Games for Adults

Bored with the same old fitness routine? Mix it up with your favorite childhood activities, like hula hooping, hopscotch, dodgeball and jumping rope. They'll blast calories – up to 300 in under an hour – and will make you smile...

They will tighten and tone your body. Best of all, you don't even have to leave the house.

Getting fit with games we played as kids – when we were doing them for fun rather than our waistlines – is a good way to stay motivated, says fitness expert [Kathy Smith](#), creator of two dozen exercise DVDs and mother of two.

"My friends talk about playing games with their kids at the park," she says. "I believe schoolyard workouts are a natural progression" for adults.

They're easy to do and don't cost a lot of money.

Plus, they really do help you lose weight.

"The bigger you are, the more calories you burn regardless of what you're doing," Smith says.

As long as your activity is vigorous, you're getting an effective workout.

In fact, you can burn 300 calories in about 30 minutes with some schoolyard games, she says.

Smith recommends adding 1-2 recess-inspired workouts a week to your regular routine.

Read on to learn how to turn your favorite childhood games into effective exercises.

## Hula hoop



***Time:*** 30 minutes

***Benefits:*** While you burn fat and calories, you're also strengthening your core, back, hips and butt muscles.

***How to start:*** Put the hoop around your waist and hold it with both hands. Place one part of the hoop against your body, and give it a spin.

Move your hips in a circle and rock forward and backward with your feet to keep it turning.

Don't get discouraged if you can't get it at first. It takes some coordination.

***Caution:*** Warm-up first to ward off back injuries. Small circular movements have less impact on your lower back.

***Calories burned:*** 150

# Hopscotch



**Time:** 1 hour

**Benefits:** Because it requires bending over, hopscotch lets you work the large muscles in your back and legs and you'll improve balance and leg strength by hopping on one leg. Another benefit: You can play with a group of people or on your own.

### **How to start:**

Find an open stretch of sidewalk or driveway, and use a piece of chalk to draw a hopscotch board.

Don't remember what it looks like? Draw a series of 10 boxes.

A typical board combines single boxes stacked on top of one another with 2 squares alongside one another (where you switch from hopping to planting both feet down, one in each box).

Mark each square with a number, 1 through 10.

Toss a rock into the first square, then jump over it on one foot. Hop through all the single squares on one foot and jump down with both feet when 2 squares are next to each other.

When you get to the last square, either jump off the board or hop back to pick up your rock. Then toss it into the second square, and start over, jumping over the square the rock is in. Your turn ends if your rock lands outside the square you're tossing it into, or you step on a line or lose your balance.

**Caution:** Watch your lower back and knees.

If you're not warmed up, bending could strain your back. And since jumping on one foot can aggravate knees, switch up the foot you're hopping on.

**Calories burned:** 340

# Jump rope



**Time:**20 minutes

## ***Benefits:***

Jumping rope can be an intense cardiovascular activity. Most people burn about 100 calories for every 10 minutes of steady two-foot jumping.

***How to start:*** Because it can be hard to get the hang of jumping rope, Smith recommends this gentle warm-up:

1. Hold the rope handles, and sway your arms from side-to-side. At the same time, rise up on your toes, then lower down a few times.

Then, put the handles together and move the rope to the left side of your body and then the right [the rope will make a figure eight on the ground].

Once you've mastered the swaying movement, jump for a few minutes until you find a rhythm.

Most of us can jump briskly for only 3-5 minutes at a time before needing a quick breather.

Recover with the swaying technique above or, for a tougher workout, do push-ups or sit-ups.

As you get stronger, jump for longer stretches and take shorter recovery breaks, says Smith.

## ***Caution:***

Choose a soft, lightweight rope. When you're learning, you'll probably smack yourself with the rope a few times.

Jump on a wood floor, rather than a harder surface like concrete. This helps protect knees and ankles during all that high-impact jumping.

***Calories burned:*** 200

# Dodgeball



**Time:**45 minutes

**Benefits:** Dodgeball is a form of interval training, meaning it alternates periods of high-intensity motion with lower-activity movements or rest.

The result: It blasts body fat and conditions muscles from head-to-toe, says Smith.

Because it involves sprinting and stopping, moving quickly and repeatedly changing direction, the sport builds both balance and agility.

Also, the side-to-side movements common in this game tone inner and outer thighs – and the leg as a whole.

**How to start:** Grab a lightweight ball – a dodgeball should weigh at most 2 pounds, according to the [National Dodgeball League](#). Then pick your teams. (For a good workout, have at least 6 people.)

Throw the ball, trying to hit players on the opposing team. And be ready to move when they toss it back toward you.

**Caution:** Stay focused. There's always a risk of tripping over the ball, losing your balance, falling, or getting hit too hard.

And when going from a dead stop to a quick sprint to avoid the ball, be careful you don't jerk your body too hard. That puts stress on lower-body joints.

**Calories burned:** 230

# Walking or running backward



**Time:** 20 minutes

**Benefits:** You'll kick-start cardio endurance, tone your lower body and improve agility.

**How to start:** Walk forward briskly to warm up, and then try walking backward.

Gradually, add in running. In the beginning, run forward for 20 feet, and stop for 15 seconds. Then turn around, and then run backward for another 20 feet.

Stop again, turn around and start over.

Eventually, you should be able to run backward the entire time, looking over your shoulder to make sure you're not about to bump into something.

**Caution:** Running while looking over your shoulder can be disorienting.

Only try this activity on a track or other area with no traffic, Smith advises.

"You can really take a tumble running backward, so it's at the top of my danger list," she says.

For another spin, add sidestepping [moving sideways with one foot leading, or alternating feet] to your running routine.

**Calories burned:** 100-300, depending on how quickly you walk and run.

# Wise Ways to Warm Up



Ready to grab family and friends to try these moves? Before you do, check out Smith's rules for preparing your body:

1. Stretch beforehand, focusing on your body's sore spots. If your back's tight, stretch your lower back. If it's your legs, work on hamstrings.

"It takes another 90 seconds, but it can do a lot to prevent you from getting injured," says Smith.

2. Don't play to win; play to have fun. For the first 10 minutes, find the tempo of the game and judge how your body feels doing these movements.

"As you get older, you'll require a longer warm-up to get the kinks out," she adds.

3. Stretch thoroughly after your workout to ward off sore muscles.

These exercises may make you feel like a kid again, so make sure your body can keep up.

# 5 Workout Games That Can Transform Your Fitness

*These play-based activities provide a fun break from your day and deliver serious physical benefits to boot.*

[Greg Presto](#)

Contributing Writer

You've got enough work in your life, and when exercise is just one more task competing for your precious time, it's easy to lose motivation. So why not try a physical activity that's actually fun to do?

Sports are great for this, but if you're not the competitive (or coordinated) type, play-based workouts are an even simpler alternative. There's plenty of science that says play is great for the brain activity of adults, but here's the real reason to turn your workout into a play session: "We have to encourage and coax working out. You have to keep someone on the treadmill," says David Jack, a strength and conditioning specialist in Phoenix, Arizona, and the founder of the [ActivLab](#). "You have to be stopped from continuing to play."

When an activity is fun, you may also work harder than you realize. "Most people usually smile at the end of exercise, but not during," says Jeremy Frisch, owner and director of Achieve Performance Training in Clinton, Massachusetts.

Frisch says those smiles help people forget about the work they're doing and focus on the game. In a relay race, his clients might do six sprints of 60 yards each. "But if I said, 'We're going to do six 60-yard sprints,' they'd look at me like I was crazy. With a race or game, you don't think twice about statistics."

Most importantly, if the exercise you're doing is effective, easily accessible, and keeps you injury-free—and you have fun doing it—you're more likely to stick and stay. And see lasting results. You don't need a coach to tell you how to play—just follow these suggestions for active games you can do with kids, with other adults, and even by yourself.

## With a Group: These Cups Make Fitness a Party

With just a pile of party cups (or cones or other plastic cups), Lance Breger, founder of Infinity Wellness Partners in Washington, DC, plays a simple game with both his children's wellness and corporate wellness groups—and the adults who are playing can't stop laughing.

"As adults, most of us are working really hard. We laugh 30 times per day, as opposed to 300 times per day as a kid," says Breger. Games like this allow stress to melt away. "As soon as you start a game, it's like everyone flashes back. Everything adult that's caught in their mind is gone."

What You Need:

- Stack of cones or plastic cups, at least three per person playing
- 1-1,000 people to play with



**How to Play:** Place the cups around a large, open area like a driveway, yard, or floor. Divide the players into two teams—one team of “tippers,” and one team to stand the cups back up. Set a timer for a short duration (about a minute), and send the teams off to play. When time expires, whichever team has more cups in “its” position wins. Then do it all again.

**Fitness Benefits:** When playing this game, you’re not just tipping cups or standing them up. You’re sprinting, changing directions, and moving laterally—a component that’s missing from many gym fitness programs and can help prevent injury. The short bursts of time turns the game into interval cardio—an alternating protocol of high intensity work and rest—that’s been proven to burn more fat than traditional, steady-state cardio. And each time you bend down, you’re squatting or lunging—two primary movement patterns that can strengthen your butt, quads, hamstrings, and core.

## **With a Friend: A New Way to Play with Cards**

Like Frisch’s relay race, this fitness game from David Jack takes what would be a tortuous, traditional workout— isometric holds of squats and lunges—and distracts the player with a fun goal. And the distraction piles additional benefits onto each exercise that translate to the real world.

Moving this way “tests our competence with movement patterns. You don’t own a movement until something unexpected happens, and you can manage it,” he says. So when you lean to the right to catch a card while lunging, you test your balance and coordination, as well as your mastery of that lunge position. “You’re able to extend your bubble of effectiveness [in that movement] away from yourself in all directions. We want to not just have strength but to be able to use it. And this drill does that.”

Of course, you won’t notice. You’ll be playing the game.

### **What You Need:**

- Deck of playing cards (or business cards or index cards)
- A partner

**How to Play:** Stand a few feet from each other, with one person holding the cards. Both players assume a split-squat position—to do this, take a large step forward with your right leg, descending as you step until your left knee almost touches the ground. At the bottom of the split squat, both of your knees form right angles, with your right knee above—but not in front of—your toe.

In this position, the player with the deck throws one card at a time in the area of the partner. The partner must catch cards while maintaining the lunge position, leaning left and right, reaching up and down. Try to catch five or 10 cards, then rest, switch legs—and switch the thrower/ catching roles.

The game can be played with other exercises, too—try holding a squat position, stand on one foot with a knee raised, or assume a bird dog (or Warrior 3) position. For more high-intensity movement, Jack says to face each other and do shuffles left and right, trying to throw and catch while maintaining the same speed.

**Fitness Benefits:** Besides the burning benefits of isometric lunges and squats, leaning from side to side and reaching up and down adds a ton of core stability to each of these movements. Having to maintain these positions also means training your balance and preparing for unexpected shifts—which translates both to sport and life, says Jack. When you’re out for a run and an unexpected divot or bump pops up in the grass, you will be better equipped to maintain your balance and avoid injury due to this game.

# With a Kid (or Two): Turn a sheet into a full-body workout

As part of her fitness education programs for kids, Yvonne Kusters, founder of Let's Play Today, an educational fitness program for kids based in Philadelphia, suggests parents create an exercise "treasure box" in the house—kids and adults fill it with scraps of paper, each with an activity written on it. Once per day, each child chooses one scrap, and the family gets active together.

"It makes it more random, so it's not like, 'I don't want to do that,'" says Kusters. "It's, 'Let's do the treasure chest game! We'll do what the paper says.' It becomes part of the family culture."

One suggestion she gives for treasure chests with young children is a game with a sheet—it takes the old elementary school gym class game of using a parachute to create ripples and brings it down to house-size. (Oh, and it'll tire you out, too.)

## **What You Need:**

- A sheet
- 1 to 3 kids
- Some open space

**How to Play:** Spread the sheet out and have each kid (and adult) grab it with two hands. Work together to make waves in the sheet—start with small waves, then do large ones. Do one-handed waves, two-handed, and alternate.

To mix it up further, have one kid release her hands. Raise your arms way overhead to make the sheet act like a parachute, and see if one of the children can run under the sheet from one side to the other before it reaches the floor.

After all this, turn the sheet into a "sled." Have the children sit on one side while you drag them on the sheet—try pulling with just your arms, or walk forwards or backwards while pulling. Have them do the same with you (or another child) on the sheet.

**Fitness Benefits:** The rippling of the sheet mimics the rope training popular for interval cardio in gyms—this pumping action is like sprinting for your arms. And the sled dragging is just like doing sled training in the gym: It's powerful functional training for the legs, core, arms, and butt.

# Make a Bet with Friends: Go Back to School

## with an Obstacle Race

Some friends may be up for any fitness game, but others might take some convincing. To get friends (or reluctant teens) to join in a race with you, Breger suggests creating stakes. Set up a race or competition where the winner gets to pick a dinner location—and the losers have to pay.

Once the bet's set, set up an obstacle race in the backyard, Frisch suggests. Work together with lawn chairs, balls, and tables and include jumping, crawling, running, and throwing elements.

"Of course, we squat and lunge and pushup and row, but there's time for races and play, too," Frisch says of ending adult sessions with such races. "Anything you can do to change the monotony of exercise can be good."

### **What You Need:**

- Space
- Obstacles like chairs, tables, and balls
- A watch (for timing)

**How to Play:** Really, however you want. Choose a timed race or relay with multiple teams.

**Fitness Benefits:** Besides high-intensity work plus sprinting and start-stop motions, crawling patterns can have great strength benefits—and wear you out quickly.

The crab walk, for instance, is great for the butt and core and is a pattern Frisch uses with many clients. To make it harder with this variation, you can add to your race: In the top of the crab position, reach one arm forward while maintaining a flat body position, then return the hand to the ground. Repeat this with each arm and leg.

### **When You're Alone: Grab a Balloon and Get Laughing (and Fit)**

For fitness fun alone, every expert seems to recommend dancing—closing the door, rocking out to your favorite five songs, and getting funky when no one's looking.

"Go where you go. Ten minutes later ...that was amazing," Jack says. "And you got 10 incredible minutes of free play fitness."

But for those who are even embarrassed to boogie by their lonesome, Breger suggests grabbing a balloon. The balloon can do what Jack's cards did in the partner game—make regular movements more challenging for your core and balance by adding unpredictable changes.

### **What You Need:**

- A balloon

**How to Play:** Breger suggests starting a few feet from the wall with your feet firmly planted. Bounce the balloon against the wall and catch it again and again, keeping your feet planted.

Once you've got that, try the same wall dribble in various positions—on one foot, while holding a squat, or holding a lunge.

To incorporate more movement, perform a crab walk, reaching a hand or leg up to keep the balloon airborne as you move across the room.

**Fitness Benefits:** As with Jack's card partner game, each shift in the traditional movement pattern you choose—squat, lunge, crab walk—forces your core to stabilize your body, meaning you're adding abs work onto the benefits you already get from each exercise.

#### Normal Childhood games

Touchers

Hide and go seek

Volleyball

Swing ball

Baseball

Badminton

Cricket

Tennis

Frizbee

Pool Volleyball

Pool Football/ Rugby

Gardening

Basket Ball

Ball Toss

Netball

Soccer

Other Physical Activity Ideas that will blast the calories.

Swimming

Walking

Biking

Hiking

Dancing