



Have a Ball

Add a Swiss ball or medicine ball, and these 10 common exercises become uncommonly better

By: Scott Quill

Bench Press

Lie on a Swiss ball and have your workout partner hand you a barbell loaded with a 5-pound plate on one side and a 10-pound plate on the other. (You can use dumbbells if you train alone.) As you press the weight up and lower it, focus on keeping the bar from dipping to the heavier side, says Men's Health exercise advisor Mike Mejia, C.S.C.S. This will work the small, stabilizing muscles in your shoulders. Do five or six slow, controlled repetitions.

V-Up

Grab a medicine ball and lie faceup on the floor. Raise your legs and back until only your butt is touching the floor and your body forms a V. Holding the medicine ball in front of your chest, twist your torso to the left and touch the ball to the floor, then twist to the right and touch the ball to the floor. That's one rep. Do two sets of 15.

Hamstring Curl

Improve your core stability with this move from Jon Crosby, C.S.C.S. Lie on the floor with your calves on top of a Swiss ball, your back on the floor, and your arms out to the sides. Squeeze your glutes and raise your hips off the floor so your body forms a straight line. Maintaining this bridge position, pull the ball toward your butt by digging your heels into the ball. Pause when your butt is high in the air, then push the ball away until your legs are straight.

Sit-Up

Lie with your back on a Swiss ball and your feet flat on the floor, holding a medicine ball with your arms straight above your head. Have your workout partner sit on a Swiss ball about 10 feet in front of you. As you sit up, throw the ball to your partner--aim over his head--and remain in an upright position. He should catch the ball and immediately lower his upper body on his Swiss ball, then toss the medicine ball to you as he returns to an upright position. Do 12 repetitions. Jim Liston, C.S.C.S., says this is better than any ab move you can do on the floor.

Incline Chest Press

Grab a pair of light dumbbells and lie on a Swiss ball, with your hips and thighs in a straight line and parallel to the floor. Holding the weights in front of your shoulders, crunch forward so that your upper body is in an inclined position. (Your hips and legs should stay still.) Now press the weights straight up from this crunch position, lower them to your shoulders, and repeat.

Decline Chest Press

Position yourself so your shins are resting on a Swiss ball and your hands are on the floor directly under your shoulders. Keeping your abs tight, do a pushup. Then bring your knees to your chest to roll the ball forward. Pause, then straighten your legs to roll the ball back out. This really fatigues your shoulders and builds your hip flexors, says Crosby.

Leg Raise

Start in the same position as for the decline chest press, above, but with your toes on the ball. After you do a pushup, roll the ball toward you by raising your hips, bending your knees, and pulling the ball with your feet. Pause, then lower your hips to roll the ball back to the starting position. You'll feel this in your abs, chest, and shoulders, says Scott Rankin, C.S.C.S., a strength coach in Toronto.

Lateral Lunge

Stand with your feet about 6 inches wider than hip width and hold a medicine ball in front of your belly. Lower your body by bending your right knee as you twist your torso and reach your arms to the left. Repeat on the other side. This works your obliques, quads, hamstrings, and glutes, says Liston.

Squat

After your squat routine, grab a medicine ball and hold it with arms straight so it's in front of your belly button. Lower your body until your thighs are parallel to the floor. Pause, then jump up as you toss the ball into the air. (Not in the basement, dude.) Move to catch the ball, then get back into position and repeat.

Chest Pass

This medicine-ball drill can boost your power in sports that require a lot of stopping and starting, says Rankin. Place a medicine ball on the floor and crouch behind it with your hands on the ball. Now quickly explode up and forward, pass the ball to a training partner, and continue sprinting for 10 yards. Repeat this eight times, then recover while he tosses the ball to you. Do three sets.

