

A workout plan for remote workers: training around a workday at home

Working from home takes away the commute, and with it the walk to the car or the train and the hour that used to separate work from the rest of the day. The day turns into one long sit, and work spreads into the evening. Here's a plan that puts the hour back: three full-body sessions anchored to a slot in the workday, and breaks that get you out of the chair.

Short answer: Train three times a week, full body, for thirty to forty minutes, in one fixed slot of the workday: the hour your commute used to take, a long lunch, or straight after you stop work. Block it in your calendar like a meeting. Walk before you start and after you stop, and get up between calls. One session is the floor in a deadline week.

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Most workout plans quietly assume a commute. The day has an edge: you leave, you work, you come home, and the gym fits at one of the edges. Working from home removes the edges. There is no walk to the car or the train, no hour that separates work from the rest of the day, and a workday that can start at the kitchen table and end at nine at night. The training doesn't get skipped because it's hard. It gets skipped because there's never a moment that says "now".

This plan gives you that moment. It's three short full-body sessions anchored to one slot in your workday, a home version and a gym version of every exercise, and a few rules for the hours at the desk. (How many people work from home where you live: [commute times and working from home by state](#).) It's training only: if sitting all day hurts somewhere, in your back, your neck or your wrists, see a doctor or a physical therapist. I'm a fitness coach, not a doctor.

The idea: two jobs, one plan

A day at a desk asks for two different things, and the guidelines treat them separately.

- **Train, two or three times a week.** The American College of Sports Medicine's 2026 position stand makes lifting with high effort at least twice a week, with all major muscle groups trained, its primary recommendation, and says even "minimal doses" of lifting bring substantial gains.¹ Two or more days a week of muscle-strengthening activity is also the World Health Organization's guideline for adults.²
- **Sit less, every day.** The same WHO guidelines ask adults to limit the time they spend sedentary, and say that replacing it with activity of any intensity, light included, has health benefits. For adults who sit a lot, they go further: aim for more than the recommended amount of moderate-to-vigorous activity.² That recommended amount is 150 to 300 minutes of [moderate aerobic activity](#) a week, and some activity is better than none.²

One honest caveat: the WHO's guideline group looked at breaking up sitting and found the evidence was not enough to say how often or for how long the breaks should be.² So the break routine further down is practical scheduling, not a research number. The training sessions are where the research is.

When to train: pick one slot and keep it

For strength and muscle, the hour matters less than you'd think: a 2019 meta-analysis of 11 studies found strength gains were similar whether people trained in the morning or the evening, and so were gains in muscle size.³ So pick the slot your workday can protect, and attach the session to it, not to a clock time that meetings can move.

Slot	Why it works	Watch out for
Before work: the old commute	The hour you used to spend getting to work. Nothing is booked yet, so nothing can take it.	Starting work "just for a minute" first. Train, then open the laptop.
Lunch	Splits a long sit in half. The paired version below fits thirty minutes.	The meeting that lands on it. Block it in the calendar the way a meeting is blocked.
After work: the commute home	Gives the workday an end. Closing the laptop and training is the line between work and evening.	A workday that never quite stops. Set the stop time first, then the session.

Hybrid week? Train on the home days, when the commute time is yours, and walk the commute on the office days.

The plan: two full-body sessions, three times a week

Two sessions, A and B, alternated: Alternate them across the week, so whichever one you did last, the other comes next. Each has five slots in the same order (a squat, a hinge, a push, a pull and a core move), so every session trains the whole body. The home version assumes a pair of dumbbells, or nothing; the gym version is for a gym near home or the one in the building.

Slot	Day A	Day B
Squat	Goblet squat with one dumbbell, or a slow bodyweight squat. Gym: back squat or leg press	Bulgarian split squat on a chair or a couch. Gym: the same, or hack squat
Hinge	Romanian deadlift with dumbbells. Gym: the same with a barbell	Hip thrust off the couch, a dumbbell on your hips. Gym: barbell hip thrust
Push	Push-ups, hands on a kitchen counter if the floor is too hard. Gym: bench press	Dumbbell shoulder press. Gym: overhead press
Pull	One-arm dumbbell row. Gym: lat pulldown	Band row with the band in a door (the band workout). Gym: seated cable row
Core	Plank	Dead bug

Sets and reps: three sets of eight to twelve reps, two sets in your first two weeks; the ACSM's 2009 position stand recommends loads you can lift eight to twelve times for people new to lifting.⁴ With light dumbbells or bodyweight, work in twelve to twenty: the ACSM's 2026 stand found muscle growth didn't

depend on whether loads were light, around 30 percent of a one-rep max, or as heavy as a one-rep max.¹ Every set stops with two or three reps still in you ([how to judge reps left](#)). A session runs thirty-five to forty minutes.

The lunch version: pair the push with the pull and the hinge with the core move, and rest after each pair. A 2021 review of time-efficient training found that supersets, drop sets and rest-pause training roughly halve a session's length while keeping the volume, and advises keeping warm-ups specific to the exercise rather than long and general.⁵ It advises against pairing heavy barbell lifts like the squat and bench press, so pair the dumbbell versions.⁵ That brings a session to about thirty minutes. ([How to pair exercises.](#))

Progression: when you reach the top of the rep range with reps to spare, add the smallest step next session. The ACSM's 2009 stand puts that step at 2 to 10 percent more weight once you can do one or two reps beyond your target.⁴ At home, where dumbbells jump in big steps, add reps first, then the weight. ([Progressive overload, explained.](#))

The hours at the desk: getting out of the chair

This part isn't a workout. It's what keeps a day at home from being nine hours in one chair. None of it is a research number (see the caveat above); it's practical scheduling that gives the day some shape.

- **Walk a fake commute.** A walk before you sit down and another when you stop gives the workday a start and an end, and puts two walks in it.
- **Stand up between calls.** When a meeting ends, stand up and move before the next one: refill the water, go up and down the stairs, step outside.
- **Walk the calls you can.** A call without slides or a camera is a call you can take on a walk.
- **Count the walks.** A walk counts toward the WHO's 150 to 300 minutes when it's moderate, which the guidelines put at about a 5 or 6 on a 0-to-10 scale of effort.² At that pace, two fifteen-minute commute walks on five workdays come to 150 minutes.

What to protect when the week fills up

- **The slot.** It lives in the calendar as a block, the same as a meeting. A block you defend twice is a block people stop booking over.
- **The stop time.** If you train after work, the session only happens when the workday ends. Decide when that is before the day starts.
- **The floor.** In a deadline week, keep one session and drop the rest: Day A or Day B, all five slots, one or two sets of each at last week's weights, in whichever slot the calendar leaves you. Cut sets, not load. A 2021 review of the least training needed to hold on to performance found that, at least in younger people, one session a week with one set per exercise kept strength and muscle size for up to 32 weeks, as long as the load stayed heavy for the lifter.⁶
- **The log.** A 2016 meta-analysis of 138 studies, about goals in general rather than lifting, found that monitoring progress helped people reach their goals, and helped more when the progress was physically recorded.⁷ ([A workout log you can copy.](#))

Common questions

Is it better to work out before work or at lunch?

For strength and muscle, morning and evening training built about the same in the 2019 meta-analysis.³ Pick the slot your calendar leaves alone most often. [The best time to work out](#) has the full research.

What about exercises at my desk?

This page doesn't give desk or chair exercises. The breaks above are about getting out of the chair, and the training is the three sessions. If sitting causes pain, that's a question for a doctor or a physical therapist, not a workout plan.

Do I need a gym?

No. Every slot has a home version. With dumbbells, [the dumbbell workout plan](#) is a fuller home program; with nothing, [the bodyweight workout](#); with a rack and a bar in the garage, [the home gym workout plan](#).

I sit all day. Should I start with something easier?

Never lifted before? [The first four weeks](#) covers the basics, and the two-set first two weeks here are already gentle. If you have a medical condition or haven't been active in a long time, check with a doctor first.

If you'd rather not plan it alone

A plan on a web page can't see your calendar. Coaching is the version where your workouts live in the Trainerize app, built around the days you actually have, and a weekly call looks at the week you just had and rebuilds the next one around what's coming: a launch week, a run of early calls, a week in the office. [Coaching for a week that doesn't hold still](#) explains how that works, and [apply](#) tells me about your week. Otherwise: open tomorrow's calendar, block the slot, and do Day A.

General education only, not medical advice. If you have a medical condition, are pregnant, or take medication, check with your doctor before changing how you train or eat.

Sources

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