The Water Bottle Workout

You Can Do These 7 Strength Training Moves Without Even Leaving Your Home

By Kelly James-Enger, ACE-CPT

Short on time to go to the gym? That’s no excuse not to exercise. In fact, you can create a challenging workout with an item you probably already have in your refrigerator—a gallon-sized plastic bottle.

When it’s filled, the bottle weighs nearly 8.5 pounds. Fill it only halfway, and you have a “dumbbell” of just over 4 pounds. We’re calling this the Water Bottle Workout, but you can get strength training benefits using plenty of household items like a gallon milk jug, soup cans or even a bottle of dishwashing detergent! Just make sure that you use something that won’t break—like glass—if you drop it.

The key to this workout is to do the moves in a slow, controlled fashion. You’re not lifting a lot of weight, but as the water moves around in the bottle, it will force your stabilizer muscles to come into play, adding a little more of a challenge.

Before you get started, make sure that the water bottle is in good shape—and that the lid is on nice and tight! Start with one set of these seven moves. As you get stronger, you can work up to two or three sets.

Remember to always do only what you can. If you’re just starting to get active, you can even do these moves with an empty water bottle. Always check with your healthcare professional before beginning a new exercise routine.

Bottle Squat
A. Hold the bottle in both hands in front of your chest, with your feet slightly wider than hip width, toes pointing out just a bit.
B. Slowly bend your knees, pushing your bottom back and down. (Imagine you’re going to sit down in a chair behind you.) Make sure your knees do not go past your toes, and then return to your starting position without locking your knees at the top, holding the bottle in front of your chest.

Do this 8 to 12 times. If you want a bigger challenge, hold a water bottle in either hand at your sides, and do the same move.
Bottle Chest Press
A. Lie on your back, with your knees bent, keeping your knees hip-distance apart. Pick up the bottle and hold it in both hands over your chest, letting your elbows flare out to the sides.
B. Brace your abs and slowly lift the bottle straight up, keeping the bottle over your chest, not your shoulders. Slowly lower the bottle, bending at your elbows to return to your starting position.
   Do this 8 to 12 times.

Prone Bottle Pullover
A. Lie on your back, with your knees bent, feet in line with your hips. Pick up the bottle and hold it with both hands over your chest.
B. With your arms straight, extend your arms to bring the bottle over your head. Tap the bottle lightly on the ground and then return to your starting position. If it’s too difficult to pull it back, pour some water out to make it lighter.
   Do this 8 to 12 times.

Prone Bottle Crunch
A. Lie on your back, with your knees bent, feet in line with your hips. Pick up the bottle and hold it with both hands over your face. (Hold on tight!)
B. Slowly lift your head and shoulders up off the ground, pressing the bottle up, toward the ceiling. Pause and then return to your original position.
   Do this 8 to 12 times.
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One-Armed Bottle Curl
A. Stand up with your feet just outside your hips, toes out, holding the bottle in one hand at your side, palm facing forward.
B. Keeping your chest up and shoulders back, bend your arm toward your shoulders until the bottle touches your shoulder; then slowly lower the bottle back down to your starting position.
Do this 8 to 12 times, and then switch arms and repeat.

One-Armed Bottle Kickback
A. Stand with your feet under your hips, the bottle in your left hand. Step your right foot forward 12 to 18 inches and hinge forward so that your back is nearly parallel to the floor.
   Bend your left arm to pull the bottle toward your body, keeping your arm close, so that your elbow is bent at a 90-degree angle.
B. Extend your arm so that it’s straight. Pause and return your arm to the 90-degree angle position.
   Do this 8 to 12 times. Then take the bottle in your right hand, step forward with your left foot, hinge forward and repeat with your right arm.

Bottle Dead Lift
A. Stand up with your feet just outside your hips, toes out, holding the bottle in front of your thighs.
B. Hinge forward, keeping the bottle close to your body, and lower the bottle to your knees. Pause and then squeeze your bottom to return to starting position.
   Do this 8 to 12 times. For a bigger challenge, hold a bottle in each hand in front of your thighs.

Kelly James-Enger has been an ACE-certified personal trainer since 2007 and is the author of books including Small Changes, Big Results: A 12-Week Action Plan to a Better Life (with Ellie Krieger, RD). She’s also a successful “loser,” having maintained a 45-pound weight loss for 25 years.

Leaders, are you looking for more workout ideas to share with members? For simple exercises using easy-to-find items, such as a towel or backpack, go to the Leaders Corner of www.tops.org.