

If you want a healthy heart, strengthen your calves

Balance news

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Did you know you have a second heart? People often refer to calf muscles as your peripheral heart because they play a vital role in circulating blood around the body.

How does it work?

When you walk, run or stand on your toes, your calf muscles contract, squeezing the veins inside your legs. This squeezing motion pushes the blood back up to your heart, acting as a secondary pump.

But that's not all. Inside these veins are one-way valves that close when the muscles relax, preventing blood from flowing back down the body.

Why is this good for your health?

Your heart pumps oxygen-rich blood throughout your body. But what would happen if gravity kept the deoxygenated blood in your lower extremities? It would collect in your lower legs and feet, causing swelling, fatigue and conditions such as deep vein thrombosis, also known as blood clots.

In short, if you want to stay healthy now and in the future, start training your calves.

Easy ways to strengthen your second heart

Sitting, dehydration and poor posture can all contribute towards weakening your calf muscles. And let's be honest, in today's modern world of work, most of us spend hours at our desks or hunched over our devices.

So what can you do?

- **In 5 minutes:**

When you're making coffee, cooking or brushing your teeth, try doing:



- **Calf raises:** from a standing position, slowly raise your heels from the ground. Pause for a second when you're standing on the tip of your toes, then slowly lower your heels back to the ground. Repeat as many times as you can, with slow and controlled movements.
- You can also do **calf raises on a step** with the balls of your feet balanced on a stair, or **eccentric calf raises** where you step up with both feet, then slowly lower down on one.



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- **In 15 minutes:**

Take a break from your computer or television and:

- Go for a **walk** around the office or take walking meetings.
- Take the **stairs**, flexing your calves as you go up.
- **Jump rope:** keep a skipping rope in your desk drawer and jump for 15 minutes outside or in a communal area. Make it fun by turning it into a team challenge.

- **In 30 minutes:**

You can do a lot in 30 minutes. Schedule time for yourself to:



- **Go for a walk:** take the dogs to the park or walk around the block. Remember to track your steps with a health app or fitness device linked to your Balance profile You can earn 50 points a day for 5,000 - 9,999 steps or 100 points a day for 10,000+ steps.



- **Go to the gym:** from strength training to dance classes, you can do just about anything at the gym and enjoy the help of expert trainers. Work out for 30 minutes and earn 100 points a day. Plus, get 30% off your monthly gym fees at Virgin Active or Planet Fitness as a Balance member.



- **Cycle or go for a run:** Now you're training both your hearts! Track your run or ride with a Balance-linked fitness device and earn up to 300 points a day based on your age-related heart rate.
- You can also join Team Vitality - South Africa's most rewarding running and cycling club that gives up to 25% back on select race events - and train with the support of an inclusive community.

Live life with Balance.