

Start strong. Build slowly.

A simple full-body routine for adults beginning or returning to strength training.

2 DAYS A WEEK

Example: Monday + Thursday. Repeat the same workout. Allow at least one full day between sessions. Plan about 25-40 minutes, including your warm-up.

Equipment: dumbbells, a sturdy nonrolling chair secured against a wall, and a mat. Different exercises may need different weights.

Warm up: walk or march for 5-10 minutes, then rehearse a few easy repetitions of each movement without weight or with very light weights.

YOUR WORKOUT

- | | | |
|---|--|---------------------|
| 1 | Chair squat
Thighs + glutes | 8-12 reps |
| 2 | Dumbbell Romanian deadlift
Glutes + hamstrings | 8-12 reps |
| 3 | Supported one-arm row
Back + biceps | 8-12 each side |
| 4 | Dumbbell floor press
Chest + triceps | 8-12 reps |
| 5 | Dumbbell overhead press
Shoulders + triceps | 8-12 reps |
| 6 | Suitcase hold
Core + grip | 15-30 sec each side |

HOW MUCH TO DO

Week 1: 1 set of each exercise at each session. Weeks 2-4: 2 sets if recovery and technique feel good; staying at 1 set is fine. One set means completing the listed reps or hold time.

Finish all sets of one exercise before moving on. For rows and holds, complete both sides for one set. Rest 60-120 seconds between sets, and longer if needed to feel ready.

Pick the right weight: finish each set feeling you could do 2-3 more clean reps. Start lighter while learning. If 8 reps are a struggle or your form changes, reduce the load.

Make each repetition count.

Use a comfortable range of motion. Move smoothly and keep breathing.

01 Chair squat

Stand in front of a secured chair, feet about shoulder-width apart. Sit back and down with feet flat, lightly touch the seat, then stand. Let knees follow the direction of your toes.

Easier option: Start with body weight or a taller chair. Add one dumbbell at your chest when ready.

02 Dumbbell Romanian deadlift

Stand tall with weights in front of your thighs and knees softly bent. Push hips back, keeping weights close to your legs and your back comfortably neutral. Stop before your back rounds; stand by driving through your feet.

Easier option: Practice the hip hinge without weights. You do not need to reach the floor.

03 Supported one-arm row

Support one hand on a sturdy chair secured against a wall. Stagger your feet and hinge forward. Let the other arm hang, then pull the dumbbell toward your hip. Lower slowly without twisting your torso.

Easier option: Use a lighter dumbbell and a more upright torso if needed.

04 Dumbbell floor press

Lie on your back, knees bent and feet flat. Start with elbows resting lightly on the floor, about 30-45 degrees from your torso. Keep wrists above elbows; press up, then lower until upper arms gently touch the floor.

Easier option: If getting onto the floor is difficult, do 8-12 wall push-ups instead.

05 Dumbbell overhead press

Start with weights at shoulder height, palms facing inward or slightly forward. Keep ribs stacked over hips. Press upward through a comfortable range, then lower slowly. Avoid leaning back or shrugging.

Easier option: Use very light weights, or sit on a sturdy chair. Skip if overhead movement hurts.

06 Suitcase hold

Stand tall with one dumbbell beside your thigh. Keep shoulders level and torso upright, without leaning toward or away from the weight. Breathe normally, then set the weight down carefully and switch hands.

Easier option: Use a lighter weight or shorten the hold. Stop while you can still keep your posture.

Breathing: breathe out as you stand, pull or press; breathe in as you return. During holds, keep breathing freely. Never force a painful movement.

Progress at your pace.

Repeat the basics. Record what you did. Let confidence grow with practice.

WHEN TO GO HEAVIER

When you complete 12 controlled reps in every planned set, with 2-3 reps still available, at two consecutive sessions, try the smallest weight increase. Return toward 8 reps. If you cannot do 8 clean reps, go back down.

For suitcase holds: build to 30 seconds with level shoulders and easy breathing, then add the smallest weight increase and return to 15-20 seconds.

YOUR FOUR-WEEK CHECK-IN

Use each row for one session. Record weights per dumbbell, reps and sets on a separate note if you need more space. Example: row - 5 lb, 2 x 10 each side.

SESSION / DATE	WEIGHTS + REPS / HOLD	HOW IT FELT
Week 1 / A _____		
Week 1 / B _____		
Week 2 / A _____		
Week 2 / B _____		
Week 3 / A _____		
Week 3 / B _____		
Week 4 / A _____		
Week 4 / B _____		

RECOVERY + ADAPTATIONS

On other days, walk or do gentle movement as comfortable. If soreness limits normal movement, take extra recovery time or reduce sets. Soreness is not required for progress. If you have exercise restrictions, adapt this plan with a qualified professional. Stop for sharp pain; chest pain, fainting or unusual breathlessness need prompt medical attention.

SOURCES + VIDEO DEMONSTRATIONS

- CDC: activity and strength-training basics >
- Mayo Clinic: technique, warm-up and recovery >
- Mayo Clinic: how-to video collection >

General guidance reviewed Oct. 18, 2026. This routine is an example, not an official CDC or Mayo program.