Building a Balanced Body:

The Role of Cardio, Strength & Mobility

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT EXERCISE, AND HOW IT FITS TOGETHER.

Welcome to the Building a body that's strong, capable, and built to last.

I created this guide to help you see exercise differently — not as a set of rules to follow, but as a toolkit you can build around your goals, lifestyle, and energy. Every type of training has value, and when you understand how they fit together, it becomes much easier to create balance without burning out.

Whether you're here to get stronger, improve your fitness, or simply feel better in your body, this is your starting point. Use it as a reference, not a checklist. Learn what works for you, take what you need, and let it evolve as you do.

Let's build a body that feels capable, confident, and built to last.

Briony

The Holistic Health PT

INTRO TO EXERCISE

Building a body that's strong, capable, and built to last.

Exercise isn't just about what happens in the gym — it's about how your body moves, functions, and feels in everyday life.

The right mix of training builds more than fitness. It builds confidence, resilience, and longevity.

There are many ways to move, and each plays a different role:

- Cardio keeps your heart healthy and supports recovery.
- Strength training builds muscle, bone density, and power.
- Mobility, stretching, and core work improve control, stability, and how freely you move.

Together, they create balance — a body that not only performs well but feels good doing it.

This guide will help you understand how each type of training fits together and how to build a routine that works for you— one that's sustainable, balanced, and aligned with your goals.

You don't need to train every day or chase exhaustion. You just need to move with purpose, stay consistent, and give your body what it needs to grow stronger over time.

Coach's note

Every form of exercise serves a purpose. Your job isn't to do them all perfectly — it's to find the mix that keeps you progressing, recovering, and enjoying the process.

THE HOLISTIC HEALTH PT

NOURISH · BALANCE · TRANSFORM

Cardio

BUILDING A FOUNDATION OF ENDURANCE THAT SUPPORTS EVERY OTHER GOAL.

ZONE 2 CARDIO

The Foundation of Endurance and Recovery

Zone 2 training is where your body learns to work efficiently, burn fat for fuel, and recover faster between harder sessions. Most people think of cardio as either "gentle walking" or "all-out HIIT," but Zone 2 is the sweet spot in between — the steady, sustainable effort that builds real aerobic capacity over time.

Zone 2 is defined by heart rate rather than speed or effort alone. It's typically 60–70 percent of your maximum heart rate (or roughly 65–75 percent of your VO_2 max). At this level, your body relies primarily on oxygen to create energy — meaning it's aerobic rather than anaerobic. You should be able to hold a conversation but not sing; breathing is deeper, but it's still controlled.

This kind of training builds your aerobic base — the foundation for every other kind of exercise. When your aerobic system is strong, you recover more quickly between sets, sustain energy for longer, and feel less fatigue in day-to-day life. It also helps regulate stress hormones, lower resting heart rate, and improve metabolic flexibility (your body's ability to switch between fat and carbohydrate as fuel).

You don't need to spend hours doing it, but consistency matters more than intensity. Around 30–60 minutes per session, two or three times a week, is ideal for most people. Over time, your pace at the same heart rate will naturally improve — a clear sign your fitness is progressing.

Benefits of Zone 2 Training

- Strengthens the heart and lungs for better endurance
- Enhances recovery between strength or interval sessions
- Improves energy efficiency and fat metabolism
- Supports stress regulation and overall health

Examples include brisk walking, cycling, steady jogging, hiking, or a moderate-intensity spin class. Anything that keeps your heart rate within that 60–70 percent range counts.

Zone 2 isn't glamorous, and it won't leave you gasping for air — but it's the quiet work that builds a fitter, more resilient body. If strength training shapes your structure, Zone 2 training keeps the engine running smoothly underneath it.

OTHER STYLES OF CARDIO:

Zones 3 to 5

While Zone 2 forms the foundation of your aerobic fitness, the higher zones — 3, 4, and 5 — help you build stamina, speed, and power. They push your heart, lungs, and muscles to adapt to greater levels of effort and stress, making you fitter, faster, and more resilient. The key is knowing when to use them and when to back off.

Each zone represents a percentage of your maximum heart rate (MHR):

- Zone 3: 70–80% of MHR – moderate to hard effort
- Zone 4: 80–90% of MHR – hard effort
- Zone 5: 90–100% of MHR – maximal effort

The higher the zone, the more your body relies on anaerobic energy systems — using stored carbohydrates rather than oxygen to create quick bursts of power. These sessions are tougher on your nervous system and require longer recovery, which is why they should be used strategically, not daily.

Zone 3: Tempo or Threshold Training

Zone 3 sits in the grey area between comfortable and uncomfortable — that space where you're working hard but could still sustain it for a short period. It's often called tempo or threshold work because it pushes your aerobic system near its limit without fully crossing into anaerobic territory.

This kind of training is useful for building stamina, teaching your body to clear lactate more efficiently, and preparing for endurance-style events or longer workouts. It's best used sparingly — for example, during a steady 20–30 minute run, cycle, or row at a "comfortably hard" pace.

Key benefits:

- Improves lactate threshold (your ability to sustain harder efforts)
- Bridges the gap between endurance and power
- Builds mental resilience for longer efforts

INTERVAL TRAINING

The Power of Short Bursts

Interval training is where intensity meets purpose. It involves alternating between bursts of hard effort and periods of recovery — challenging your cardiovascular system to adapt quickly and handle greater workloads over time. Unlike steady-state cardio, which maintains one consistent pace, intervals train your body to perform under pressure and recover efficiently.

At a physiological level, interval training improves both aerobic and anaerobic capacity. During high-effort phases, your body relies on quick-burning energy stores (anaerobic), while recovery periods allow your aerobic system to replenish oxygen and clear waste products. Over time, this back-and-forth strengthens your heart, increases oxygen delivery, and boosts your overall endurance.

Structured Intervals

Structured intervals are precisely timed and measured — perfect for tracking progress and building performance in a controlled way. These can be tailored to your goals, experience, and available time.

Common examples include:

- 1:1 Intervals: Equal work and rest (e.g. 1 minute sprint, 1 minute recovery). A balanced way to train both endurance and recovery.
- 1:2 Intervals: Longer rest than work (e.g. 30 seconds sprint, 60 seconds recovery). Ideal for beginners or power-focused sessions.
- Tabata: 20 seconds of all-out effort followed by 10 seconds of rest, repeated for 4 minutes. High intensity, short duration, maximum challenge.
- Pyramid Intervals: Work periods increase, then decrease (e.g. 30s, 45s, 60s, 45s, 30s). A great option for variety and pacing practice.

These sessions usually last 15–30 minutes including warm-up and cool-down. One session per week is enough for most people alongside Zone 2 work and strength training.

Key benefits of structured intervals:

- Builds cardiovascular fitness and VO_2 max
- Improves speed, stamina, and recovery
- Maximises results in minimal time
- Keeps training engaging and time-efficient

INTERVAL TRAINING

The Power of Short Bursts

Fartlek Training

"Fartlek" is a Swedish word meaning speed play — and that's exactly what it is. Unlike traditional intervals, Fartlek training is unstructured and guided by how you feel. It combines bursts of faster effort with periods of easy movement, but without fixed timings or rigid pacing.

For example, during a run you might:

- Pick a landmark in the distance and run hard until you reach it
- Jog lightly to recover
- Pick up the pace again when you feel ready

Fartlek training can be adapted to any form of cardio — running, cycling, rowing, or even spin. It builds endurance and speed, but also keeps training fun and intuitive. Because there's no strict structure, it helps develop body awareness and pacing control, making it ideal for people who prefer flexibility over precision.

Key benefits of Fartlek training:

- Encourages variety and enjoyment
- Improves pacing and self-regulation
- Builds both aerobic and anaerobic endurance
- Can be performed anywhere, with or without equipment

Integrating cardio training into your week

Intervals are demanding, so recovery is crucial. For most people, one high-intensity session per week is enough to see progress without overloading the body.
Pairing this with steady Zone 2 work gives the perfect balance between endurance and power.

If your energy, recovery, or sleep start to decline, it's a sign to pull back intensity — not add more.

THE HOLISTIC HEALTH PT

NOURISH · BALANCE · TRANSFORM

Strength Training

DEVELOPING POWER,
CONFIDENCE, AND CAPABILITY
THROUGH MOVEMENT.

STRENGTH TRAINING

Building Power, Shape, and Longevity

Strength training is one of the most valuable things you can do for your body. It doesn't just build muscle—it strengthens bones, joints, tendons, and your nervous system. It improves posture, boosts metabolism, and keeps you moving well for life.

Where cardio strengthens your heart, strength training strengthens your structure. It's the foundation for long-term health, performance, and confidence.

Why Strength Training Matters

Muscle is metabolically active tissue—it burns energy even at rest. Building and maintaining it supports body composition, energy levels, and healthy aging.

Strength training also improves how you move day to day. Lifting a shopping bag, climbing stairs, or carrying your child all rely on strength, stability, and coordination.

There's also a mental side to it. Progressing with weight training builds confidence and resilience. You start to see proof that consistent effort creates real, visible change—and that mindset carries over into every other part of life.

Key benefits of regular strength training:

- Builds lean muscle and supports fat loss
- Increases bone density and joint stability
- Enhances posture, coordination, and balance
- Improves insulin sensitivity and metabolic health
- Boosts confidence and body awareness

DIFFERENT STYLES

And what they do

There's no single "right" way to train for strength—it depends on your goals. The main styles are powerlifting, hypertrophy (muscle growth), and functional strength. Each has its place, and many people benefit from blending elements of all three.

Powerlifting: Maximal Strength

Powerlifting focuses on developing the highest level of absolute strength through three primary lifts: squat, bench press, and deadlift. The emphasis is on moving as much weight as possible with perfect form.

It's demanding but incredibly rewarding, improving body awareness, discipline, and mental toughness.

Typical rep range: 1–5
Rest periods: 2–4 minutes
Focus: very high load, low reps, maximal effort
Best for: advanced lifters or those seeking measurable performance goals

Key benefits:

- Builds maximal strength and power
- Increases bone density and connective tissue strength
- Develops precision and control under heavy load

Hypertrophy: Muscle Growth and Shape

Hypertrophy training is about increasing the size of muscle fibres. It uses moderate loads, higher repetitions (usually 6–12 per set), and shorter rest periods. The emphasis is on time under tension—controlling the movement through its full range and maintaining constant engagement.

DIFFERENT STYLES

And what they do

This approach is ideal for changing body composition, improving symmetry, and enhancing muscle definition. It also supports joint health by building the muscles that stabilise your frame.

Typical rep range: 6–12
Rest periods: 60–90 seconds
Focus: moderate weight, full range, controlled tempo
Best for: improving body composition and building balanced muscle

Key focus:

- Moderate weight, moderate reps
- Shorter rest periods (60–90 seconds)
- Controlled tempo and full range of motion

Strength: The Foundation of Power

Strength training focuses on lifting heavier loads with fewer repetitions to develop the ability to produce force efficiently. It's where you build true capability—learning to move with control, confidence, and precision.

This phase often follows hypertrophy work and prepares the body for heavier, more explosive training.

Typical rep range: 4–6
Rest periods: 90 seconds–3 minutes
Focus: heavier weights, excellent technique, progressive overload
Best for: improving pure strength and structural integrity

Key benefits:

- Builds force production and overall capability
- Improves neural efficiency (how well your body recruits muscle fibres)
- Lays the groundwork for power and performance

DIFFERENT STYLES

And what they do

Endurance Strength: Building Work Capacity

Endurance strength training focuses on improving muscular stamina — your ability to perform repeated contractions over an extended period of time. The goal isn't maximum load, but sustaining effort while maintaining good technique.

This type of training supports both performance and longevity, helping your muscles resist fatigue and recover faster. It's ideal for beginners building a foundation, or for anyone balancing multiple forms of training like cardio or sport.

Typical rep range: 12–20+ reps per set
Rest periods: 30–60 seconds
Focus: lighter weights, controlled tempo, maintaining form throughout
Best for: improving muscular endurance, work capacity, and overall conditioning

Key benefits:

- Improves muscular endurance and fatigue resistance
- Supports recovery between heavier strength sessions
- Builds base conditioning for all other training styles

Functional Strength: Movement and Control

Functional strength focuses on practical movement—lifting, pushing, pulling, twisting, and stabilising the body in ways that transfer to real life. It's less about load and more about control, coordination, and balance.

This style complements all others, improving performance, injury prevention, and confidence in everyday movement.

Typical rep range: variable (8–15 common)
Rest periods: 60–90 seconds
Focus: multi-joint, stability-based exercises; unilateral and rotational work
Best for: improving athleticism, balance, and movement efficiency

Key benefits:

- Enhances coordination and core stability
- Corrects imbalances and improves posture
- Builds strong, adaptable movement patterns

Mobility, Stretching & Core

KEEPING YOUR BODY
STRONG, STABLE, AND ABLE
TO MOVE FREELY

MOBILITY, STRETCHING & CORE:

The Unsung Heroes of Movement

If strength builds your structure, mobility and flexibility keep it usable. These elements are often treated as "optional," but they're what allow you to move freely, train effectively, and stay pain-free long term.

Mobility, stretching, and core work aren't about being bendy or showing off balance tricks. They're about keeping your joints healthy, maintaining control through your full range of motion, and supporting every lift, stride, and daily task your body performs.

Mobility: Strength Through Range

Mobility is the ability to move your joints through their full range of motion with control. It's not just flexibility—where you can reach—but strength within that reach.

When mobility is limited, your body compensates elsewhere. That's often when discomfort or injury occurs. Building mobility helps your muscles and joints move in harmony, improving form and stability across all types of training.

Examples:

- Hip openers before squats
- Shoulder rotations before pressing
- Controlled articular rotations (CARs) for daily joint health

Key benefits:

- Improves movement quality and joint health
- Increases performance and range of motion
- Reduces injury risk
- Supports balance and stability in strength training

Coach's Note:

Think of mobility work as prehab, not rehab—it prevents problems before they start. Just 5–10 minutes a day can make a big difference over time.

MOBILITY, STRETCHING & CORE:

The Unsung Heroes of Movement

Stretching: Flexibility and Recovery

Stretching is often misunderstood. It won't "lengthen" muscles in the literal sense, but it does improve how easily they move, reducing stiffness and promoting better posture and relaxation.

There are two main types:

- Dynamic stretching: movement-based (e.g., leg swings, torso twists). Best before training to prepare your body for movement.
- Static stretching: holding a position (e.g., hamstring or quad stretch). Best after training or on rest days to support recovery.

Stretching helps release tension, enhance circulation, and signal to your nervous system that it's time to relax—especially valuable if your routine includes high-intensity or strength-based work.

Key benefits:

- Improves flexibility and muscle recovery
- Reduces post-exercise soreness
- Promotes relaxation and stress relief
- Enhances posture and range of motion

MOBILITY, STRETCHING & CORE:

The Unsung Heroes of Movement

Core Training: Stability Over Aesthetics

Your core is more than your abs—it's everything that stabilises your spine and pelvis, connects your upper and lower body, and allows force to transfer efficiently through movement.

A strong core doesn't just help you "tone up"; it improves your lifts, balance, and posture. It also protects your lower back and supports nearly every functional task you perform daily.

Effective core training goes beyond crunches. It should include:

- Anti-extension work (e.g., dead bugs, planks)
- Anti-rotation work (e.g., Pallof presses, woodchops)
- Dynamic control (e.g., rollouts, mountain climbers, hanging leg raises)

Key benefits:

- Improves posture and spinal stability
- Enhances performance in strength and cardio training
- Reduces risk of lower-back injury
- Builds a foundation for controlled, confident movement

Coach's Note:

A strong core isn't about how long you can hold a plank—it's about how well you can brace, stabilise, and move under control. Think of it as the link between every movement your body makes.

MOBILITY, STRETCHING & CORE:

The Unsung Heroes of Movement

Bringing it all together

Mobility, stretching, and core work are the finishing touches that make your training complete. They improve how you move, how you recover, and how long you can keep doing the things you love.

Try weaving them naturally into your week rather than treating them as an afterthought:

- Add 5–10 minutes of mobility before your strength sessions.
- Include a few stretches or yoga poses after cardio or at the end of the day.
- Train your core 2–3 times per week with intention, not just repetition.

When you build strength, keep your heart healthy, and stay mobile—you don't just train for fitness. You train for longevity, confidence, and freedom in how your body moves.

Planning Your Week

BUILDING A ROUTINE THAT WORKS WITH YOUR GOALS, NOT AGAINST THEM

PLANNING YOUR WEEK

Finding the Right Balance

The most effective training plan isn't the one that does the most — it's the one that balances effort, recovery, and purpose.

Every session you do serves a slightly different role: some build strength, others improve endurance or flexibility. The key is to organise them so each type of training complements the next, rather than competes with it.

Setting Your Priorities

Before planning your week, start by asking: What's my main goal right now? Your goal determines what comes first — both across the week and within each day.

- If your goal is strength: Prioritise lifting when you're freshest, either at the start of a session or the start of the week.
- If your goal is cardio fitness or endurance: Do your cardio first, when energy and focus are highest.
- If your goal is overall balance or longevity: Alternate between strength and cardio across the week, leaving at least one day between similar sessions.

Think of your energy like a budget. Spend the most on what matters most, then use what's left for supporting work like cardio or mobility.

PLANNING YOUR WEEK

Finding the Right Balance

How to Structure a Training Day

The order you do things in matters. It affects how well you perform, how efficiently you recover, and how much progress you make over time.

A simple, effective structure looks like this:

1. Mobility and Activation (first)

- Prepares your joints and muscles for movement.
- Helps improve form, range, and stability during training.
- Example: hip openers before squats, shoulder circles before pressing.

2. Strength or Cardio (based on your goal)

- Do the most demanding part of your session when you have the most energy.
- If strength is your priority, lift first.
- If endurance is your focus, do cardio first.

3. Accessory or Secondary Work

- Lighter movements, isolation exercises, or shorter bursts of cardio.
- Great for rounding out a session without burning out.

4. Stretching and Cool Down (last)

- Static stretching or yoga poses to aid recovery.
- Helps the body relax and transition back to rest mode.

PLANNING YOUR WEEK

Finding the Right Balance

Balancing a Week of Training

Let's use a three-day programme card structure as the base — Upper, Lower, and Whole Body. This gives you strength balance, space for cardio, and recovery time without overload.

Here's an example framework that most people can adapt:

Monday – Upper Body Strength

- Focus: pressing, pulling, shoulder and arm work.
- Include 5–10 minutes of mobility before (shoulders, spine, wrists).
- Optional: short Zone 2 cardio finisher (10–15 mins) or a walk later in the day.

Tuesday – Zone 2 Cardio or Active Recovery

- Focus: steady effort to support endurance and recovery.
- Example: 30–45 min brisk walk, cycle, or light jog.
- Add gentle stretching after to aid recovery.

Wednesday – Lower Body Strength

- Focus: legs and glutes — squats, hinges, lunges.
- Include mobility and activation before (hips, ankles, glutes).
- Optional: 10–20 mins Zone 2 cardio after lifting, or a short incline walk.

Thursday – Rest or Mobility Session

- Focus: recovery, joint health, and movement quality.
- Example: yoga, mobility flow, or 20 mins of stretching and foam rolling.

Friday – Whole Body Strength

- Focus: compound lifts, stability, and core.
- Include mobility prep before.
- Optional: interval cardio finisher (e.g., bike or rower 30s on / 90s off for 6–8 rounds).

Weekend – Cardio or Lifestyle Movement

- Saturday: Interval or Fartlek cardio (short, focused, high energy).
- Sunday: Active recovery, light walk, or outdoor activity (Zone 2).

COMMON MISTAKES

What to avoid

Even the best plan can lose its impact if it's not balanced properly. Most people don't struggle because they're not training hard enough — they struggle because they're not recovering, prioritising, or sequencing things effectively. Here are a few common pitfalls to watch out for:

1. Doing Everything, All the Time

Trying to cram strength, cardio, and mobility into every session usually leads to burnout and slower progress. Focus on one or two main goals per workout and let the rest support them.

2. Ignoring Recovery

Progress doesn't happen during training — it happens between sessions. Skipping rest days or training through fatigue stops your body from adapting. Schedule downtime the same way you schedule workouts.

3. Putting Cardio Before Strength (When Strength Is the Goal)

If you lift after a long run or intense cardio, your energy stores and focus are already depleted. Always lift first if strength is your priority, and save cardio for after or on separate days.

4. Skipping Warm-Ups and Mobility

Jumping straight into heavy lifts or fast cardio without preparing your joints and muscles increases injury risk and limits performance. Even five minutes of mobility makes a difference.

5. Stretching at the Wrong Time

Static stretching before lifting can reduce strength output. Keep stretching for after your session, when muscles are warm and relaxed.

6. Chasing Exhaustion Instead of Progress

Feeling tired after every session isn't the same as improving. Quality, consistency, and gradual overload build results — not constant intensity.

7. Forgetting the Bigger Picture

It's easy to focus on one goal — strength, fat loss, or endurance — and neglect the rest. Real fitness comes from balance: a strong heart, capable muscles, and a body that moves freely.

I hope you've enjoyed this guide! You've now got everything you need to create a routine that supports your goals. The aim isn't to do more; it's to move with intention, stay consistent, and keep your focus on progress, not perfection.

Your strength, stamina, and mobility will grow as you do. Keep showing up, listen to your body, and remember that balance isn't built overnight — it's shaped by the small choices you make each week.

When in doubt, come back to the basics in this guide: move, recover, and repeat. That's where lasting change happens.

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