No hotel gym? No problem.

These 10 gear- and equipment-free exercises can help you stay fit on the road

BY MELANIE D.G. KAPLAN

Nothing puts a damper on travel quite like a bum back or screaming sciatica. Just sitting for long stretches in a car or on a plane, lifting luggage and slumbering in different beds not to mention diving into new adventures can spell trouble for even the most dependable spine. When you're down for the count in foreign lands, sometimes all you can do is figure out how to ask for an ice pack or hot water bottle in the local language. I've been there, and I don't care to return.

With the help of physical therapy and a strong desire to minimize pain, I've developed some good exercise habits. But I've also learned that those habits don't get a free pass just because I'm in a different time zone.

"Travelers will be well-served by exercis-

ing," said Robert Gillanders, a physical therapist at Point Performance in Bethesda, who helped me recover from debilitating neck pain several years ago. "On vacation, you may not be able to do exactly what you do at home, but mixing up your routine is good — and often invigorating."

It's easy to pack running shoes or goggles and a swimsuit for a vacation workout. When I have space in the car, I bring my bike, but even when I arrive sans wheels, most cities now have bike-share programs that make it a cinch to get moving. If I'm traveling light, I toss a resistance band and jump rope in my bag.

But what if you're footloose and gear-free? What if you — gasp!— end up overnighting somewhere without a gym?

One way to get your heart pumping on a road trip is to knock out one push-up for every

dollar of gas when you fill up — a ritual I adopted from the Black Lillies, a Tennesseebased band known to do the same on tours. Drop for 30 every several hours, and you, too, will consider taking your motorcycle next time.

For all the other travel times, be resourceful with your surroundings. Former New York Yankees first baseman Mark Teixeira used to vacation in a timeshare during the offseason, and he once told me in an interview that he'd cobble together a high-intensity barefoot workout. He moved furniture in the house and created a circuit of bodyweight exercises, including lunges, squats, calf raises and dips. When all you need is floor space, he said, you don't have any excuse.

I recently asked Gillanders, a marathon runner and spokesman for the American

Physical Therapy Association, to recommend some simple, gear-free ways to stay fit during travel. When you begin looking at your travel destination as a big playground, you'll find countless spots to move your body: curbs for calf raises, jungle gyms for pull-ups, boardwalks for lunges and walls for — what else? wall sits.

I met Gillanders outside the District's Rock Creek Park Tennis Center, next to a park bench, and he coached me through a workout. He recommends performing each exercise for 15 to 60 seconds, depending on your fitness level, and cycling through the entire set. If you're feeling good, try it twice or thrice. Remember to engage your core, breathe and focus on your form. "I would rather see five good reps," Gillanders quipped after watching my (conceivably sloppy) push-ups, "than 15 slacker reps."



Warm up

Get your joints loose, muscles moving and heart pumping with some easy movements. Gillanders suggested skipping with an imaginary jump rope or going oldschool with jumping jacks. Swap the Stairmaster by stepping up on a park bench or running bleacher stairs. You can even march in place for a few minutes. "Channel your Jane Fonda and get your arms going," Gillanders said.

2. Squat or lunge These exercises work your quadriceps, glutes and hamstrings. For good squat form, try standing about six inches in front of a chair or bench, and lower your hips until your bottom taps the seat. Look forward, and counterbalance the squat with arms extended to the front. A lunge is essentially a half-squat. Gillanders recommends stepping back, which makes it easier to keep your torso upright. Swing forward the arm opposite your front leg. Avoid undue strain by keeping both knees at about 90 degrees.

3. Channel the bird dog If you've been treated for back pain, you've likely seen this exercise – it's one of the best for your core. Begin on your hands and knees, then lift and extend one arm (thumb up, palm in) and opposite leg (only as high as your hip). Your middle shouldn't move; imagine trying not to spill a drink on your lower back. Pause before alternating.

Push it up

For a proper push-up, place your hands on the ground, about shoulder width apart, fingers facing forward. Position your elbows at roughly 4 and 8 o'clock. Lower your body so upper arms are parallel to the ground. Common mistakes are letting your hips rise or lower back sag. You can start from a knee position and progress to regular push-ups. For superstar status, work toward decline push-ups with your feet on a bench.



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Take on the deceptively difficult plank

• From the push-up position, lower your upper body so your forearms are flat on the ground, parallel to each other. Keep your core tight, and for extra challenge, alternate lifting each foot up a few inches, or try a side plank.

Rock the dead bug This exercise is essentially the opposite of bird dog. It's great for your core, and minimally stressful for your spine. Flat on the floor, raise your arms straight up, fingertips pointing to the ceiling. Lift your legs so your hips and knees are both at 90 degrees. With a tight middle, slowly lower one leg and the opposite arm toward the floor, without arching or flattening your back.

Go for a dip

Tone the back of your arms with • tricep dips, which you can do off a park bench or even a step. Sit with your palms on the edge of the bench, beside your legs. Scooch your bottom forward until it's off the seat, with your knees at about 90 degrees. Slowly drop your hips a couple inches until your upper arms are parallel to the ground (bending your elbows more can strain your shoulders). Return to the starting position. The farther out you move your legs, the greater challenge for your arms.

8 Practice your balancing act "People roll their eyes at me all the

time about balance," Gillanders told me. "But so many things we do - traveling or otherwise - require balance: walking, climbing stairs, hiking." Just like strength and flexibility, he said, we lose balance with age. But with a little work, it's possible to maintain mad skills in the stability department. Stand on one leg and engage your core, quad and glute. If you're wobbly, stand in a doorway for support. Once you can stand like a flamingo for 30 seconds without losing balance, progress to swinging your leg forward and back, like a pendulum, then left and right in front of you. Advanced: Turn your head side to side and up and down, close your eyes, or stand on a folded towel.

9 Cool it Gillanders recommends dedicated stretching time after your workout, when muscles are warmed up. "People don't like the idea of stretching," Gillanders said, "but think about your non-vacation habits (hunch over a computer screen, anyone?) and areas where you're prone to tightness, such as your hamstring, back and hip flexor." The Mayo Clinic offers a helpful slideshow on basic stretches online: mayocl.in/2zfNyp9.

Finally, remember mental fitness

LV • Stop. Listen to waves crashing or birds chirping. Wander. Get lost. Sit in the sand and breathe deeply. "Most folks think of exercise as go-go-go," Gillanders said. "The practice of mindfulness and meditation demonstrates the upside of slowing down." He suggests travelers ditch their devices and scrap their schedules. "Staying fit doesn't have to be moving," he said. "It can be going into a field and meditating."

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