

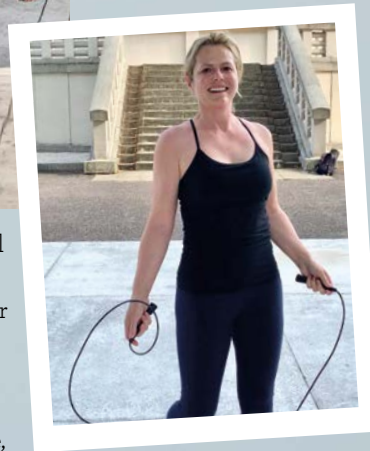
HOP, *skip* AND A JUMP...

Liz reveals the fitness secrets of the simple jump rope.

Skippping is one of the cheapest, easiest and most effective forms of exercise we can do. There's a good reason why we so often see boxers and other elite athletes with a rope in hand – it's one of the fastest ways to improve stamina and agility. Leading personal trainer and fitness adviser to *Liz Earle Wellbeing*, Michael Garry (michaelgarry.london) is a fervent fan of skipping. He often introduces it into his clients' workout routines (including mine – as is so often evidenced by the huffing and puffing on my personal Instagram).

Many celebrities also cite skipping as a regular part of their fitness programme. Katy Perry says: 'I love jumping rope. I can double jump, I can cross – all of it. I look like Rocky!' She's even performed musical numbers while skipping on stage, with her backing dancers copying her on jump ropes. One reason why it's so popular with celebrities is that they are often travelling, so don't have much time for fitness – yet need to stay in

shape. The most highly rated Victoria Secret's underwear model, Adriana Lima, cites skipping as her top fitness hack before parading down the catwalk in her pants. And it's not just the girls, guys are seeing its benefits too – Justin Bieber, Jake Gyllenhaal and Sylvester Stallone (who played Rocky, the original skipping boxer) can all be found sharing their impressive fitness regimes online, with rope in hand.



Start to skip

All you need to make a start is a simple skipping rope, easily found in a sports store or online. Most are one-size and you adjust to fit. To find the right length, stand on the middle and pull the handles up until the rope is taut. The ends should be in line with your chest. It's the only piece of kit you need, which makes skipping one of the simplest, cheapest and most portable forms of high-intensity interval training around. I make sure I pack mine whenever I travel, even for a single night away. Not only useful, it's also a visual reminder for me to use it!

It's worth investing in a supportive pair of trainers if you're going to skip regularly, or wear your usual

running shoes. Skipping is high-impact, which is great for bone-building, but means footwear should give good lateral stability to support the feet as well as plenty of cushioning. Running shoes designed for cross-training are ideal. Purists advocate skipping on a sprung gym-style floor, but a large exercise mat is also a good option, or even on carpet or

short grass. Skipping on a cushioned surface in correct footwear reduces any impact injuries, such as shin splints. However, skipping outdoors on concrete or tarmac shouldn't present too much of an issue, provided you're wearing good trainers and are skipping for just a few minutes at a time.

You might want to tune into your favourite tracks too, as a study published in the *Journal of Physical Therapy* found that skipping to dance music improved lung function and reduced obesity in overweight women, compared to other forms of exercise.

TECHNIQUE TIPS

Before you start to skip, be sure to warm up with some dynamic stretches to prep the body. Dynamic stretching means moving through the stretch, as opposed to holding static stretches (static are held for a count of 40, best done at the end of your workout). You could also do a few minutes of brisk walking, marching on the spot or jogging. When I'm out with Michael Garry, he'll get me to skip after my run, when my leg muscles are nicely warmed up.

A good skipping technique includes making sure you lift off and land on the balls of your feet and

keep eyes looking ahead, with head back and shoulders down to stop yourself hunching over; always skip with a straight back. Don't jump too high – just a few centimetres off the floor each time. They're small moves, but each adds up to make a big difference. At first, skipping can seem like a challenge, but with improved coordination and fitness you'll find you can skip for a bit longer each time. I find counting my jumps is a good way to track my improving fitness.

Begin by jumping over the rope with both feet together. Then progress to alternate feet – try a circuit of ten jumps with both

feet, ten jumps on your right foot, followed by ten on the left, and repeat. Skipping is perfect for monitoring progress as you can simply increase the amount of jumps you do each time. Aim for at least five more than the previous session, working up to 100 jumps or more. Gradually raise your knees as you jump to increase intensity.


Once you've mastered it, skipping is both a highly effective form of fitness training as well as being fun; whether it takes you back to your childhood or just gets you moving. It's a brilliantly simple way to exercise the whole body, and gives such a boost to your physical as well as mental wellbeing.

Skipping stats

According to the British Rope Skipping Association (who knew there was one?), we don't need to be an expert to reap all the benefits of skipping, which can burn up to 1,600 calories in a single hour. If you're not a runner, it can be a fun and easy alternative way to raise your heart rate – ten minutes of skipping (harder than it sounds) is equivalent to running an eight-minute mile. As a weight-loss incentive, it is one of the fastest ways to speed up metabolism. Skipping is also gentler on our legs than running, as it tends to be less jolting on the joints.

Those looking to tone calf muscles without strain can turn to skipping as it both exercises the muscle group and improves the strength of the tendons and ligaments there. It's also a weight-bearing exercise, which helps to strengthen bones and ward off osteoporosis by improving bone density, but be sure to wear well-cushioned trainers for stability and shock absorption (and consult your doctor or physio if you do actually have osteoporosis).

Not just for the legs, skipping is a full-body workout that strengthens lower limbs as well as our abdominals – and even the arms. By working our abs, skipping helps our core to maintain balance, too. Most sports and other physical activities rely on strong, stable core muscles, and skipping helps general stability, coordination, stamina and balance in our day-to-day life. If you're the sporty type, skipping is great for agility. No wonder it's a favourite of boxers and ballerinas, as the activity helps with a sense of timing. Skipping for long periods of time encourages our feet and hands to move in harmony without us even thinking about it. It's an exercise in agility too, keeping us on our toes and our footwork light.

Those who run often find their speed increases when they introduce skipping into their training programme (myself included). If you play tennis, skipping can help with stamina as well as coordination and focus. Not only helpful for weight-loss by giving the metabolism a boost, skipping also increases immune and lymphatic functions too. And in other news, it helps improve mental health by releasing endorphins, the happy hormones that ease depression and reduce anxiety levels. 

See brsa.org.uk for details of skipping classes and competitions



Here are some of the most popular moves:

SINGLE JUMP Keep it low and steady, speeding up to increase intensity.

DOUBLE JUMP Turn the rope more slowly, giving more time for a double bounce.

SKIP JUMP Jump on one foot, alternating with each jump.

HOP JUMP Continuously jump on one leg, then repeat on the other.

HIGH JUMP Bring your knees up as high as possible with each jump or every other jump.

CROSS JUMP The boxer's classic, which looks good to anyone watching, too. Use the double jump technique and as the rope comes above your head, cross your arms over as far as possible and jump a bit higher so you don't catch the rope.

As with all exercises, it's important to cool down and stretch out after each session. Finish with a few slower, lower-intensity jumps and focus on leg stretches afterwards, especially the calves, to keep these lower leg muscles long and lean. A good calf stretch is to stand on one leg on the bottom stair or a step, with your heel dropped down towards the floor. Hold for a count of 40 and repeat on the other leg.

An abridged version of this article can be found in Liz's eBook: *A Stronger, Slimmer You*, together with more high-intensity training techniques and stretches, £4.99, exclusive to lizearlewellbeing.com