



Home for the holidays. Rich food, freely flowing drink, sibling rivalry—sounds like you need an escape plan. With all the good and not-so-good things going on at home over the holidays you need your exercise more than ever. Keeping active will burn off some of those extra calories and help keep your spirits up when those inevitable, weird family dynamics flare up.

Thanksgiving and Christmas are probably the hardest days to get a workout. Gyms are closed, there's fattening food all around and nobody is thinking about exercise. But I would argue that these things make it one of the best times to exercise. A good workout before settling down to feast will help keep you from overeating. And what you do eat will be put to good use building muscle. Best of all your family will look at you with awe and bewilderment (mostly bewilderment).

Here are some ideas for things you can do while your in-laws watch *It's a Wonderful Life*. When I'm home for the holidays I love doing rigorous outdoor work. You know those muscles you spend all those hours sculpting? You can actually use them for practical things. Splitting wood is my favorite. Hauling logs and swinging a maul will make you feel a he-man and impress the neighbors. An hour of raking leaves will work your shoulders and back and keep your heart rate up, not to mention getting you in good with Mom.

If the weather permits, go for a run—marvel at the empty streets, laugh about everyone else getting fatter and lazier on the couch. A hike in nature will give you the serenity to deal with obnoxious siblings. Jumping rope is harder than you remember: it conditions your arms and shoulders and gets your heart rate cranking (why do you think elite boxers swear by it?). Shoot down to the sporting goods store and pick one up for under \$10.

There's a lot you can do inside as well. Your old free weight set is now an anchor for your Dad's bass boat? No problem—there's plenty you can do with whatever is at hand. Got a small niece or nephew? Do push-ups with them sitting on your back. It makes the push-ups a lot harder and they'll think it's hilarious. Find something heavy but easy to hold and do squats. If you can't find some kind of weight do lunges. Do them until you're your vision blurs and you'll feel it in all the right places the next day. Fill a pail with soup cans and do curls, upright rows. Use your imagination, sport, there's plenty out there to lift so lift it.

There's almost no limit to the ab exercises you can do on the living room floor. Believe it or not you can get great abs without late-night infomercial equipment that looks like leftovers from the Soviet space program. Basic crunches will take you a long way. Do them slowly and with a concentrated squeeze at the top. Also try them pointing the elbow to the opposite knee as you come up to work the obliques. Sit-ups will work if you have a heavy couch to slide your feet under. With sit-ups it's imperative that your knees be high—that you're butt is almost touching your heels. The further back you slide (the lower your knees are, in other words) the more your hip flexors take over. This is not desirable since your abs will do less work and your lower back will experience strain. My favorite lower ab exercise is the leg raise. Lie on the floor with your hands just below your butt (not under it but further down). Put your legs in what I call a "chair position:" hips at 90 degrees and knees at 90 degrees. Lift your hips off the ground and bring the knees to the chest (really crunch them into the chest) while maintaining the 90-degree angle at the knees (very important). Return to chair position and repeat until you feel like the turkey being gutted in the kitchen.

There you have it: a good excuse for not watching football with your illiterate brother-in-law. You've put in too much time on your health and fitness to let it all go. Keep moving and don't give in to inertia. You'll feel great, eat less, digest your dinner better and be free of guilt.

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