

How To Jump Higher By Mastering Just 5 Moves

The Tupperware on your tippy-top shelf doesn't stand a chance.



BY JULIA SULLIVAN, CPT

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Even for the most enthusiastic exerciser, sticking with a consistent workout routine is no piece of cake. Oftentimes, fatigue, boredom, and frustration with a lack of tangible results threaten to throw us off the bandwagon.

Luckily, according to Danyele Wilson, CPT, trainer for the app Tone & Sculpt, there's one simple way to stick to your fitness goals: Make them more *fun* and exciting.

That's where power comes in. "Power is the product of strength and speed," explains Wilson. "More specifically, it's your ability to exert optimal force to overcome resistance in the least amount of time."

And while there's a trove of power moves out there, one of Wilson's favorites is also one of the most accessible: the vertical jump. "The more power, the higher the jump," she says. "Testing your vertical jump is a phenomenal way to measure progress over time."

Even if you don't have aspirations of joining the WNBA anytime soon, working on your jump skills pretty much guarantees to make you feel like a badass — and help you with moves like box jumps. Here's how to take your fitness to new heights.

What To Know Before You Leap

While humans have been jumping, well, pretty much forever, it's not for everyone. People with bone-density issues should chat with their doctor before starting any jump training regimen.

And “anyone with medical rods or structural injuries that can't absorb the impact of landing a jump probably should not attempt this kind of exercise,” says Luke Guanzon, CPT, founder of Refinery Strength and go-to power trainer for a slew of NBA players.

Not that you need to be a pro athlete to make your training more power-oriented — many of Guanzon's other clients are women in their 30s, 40s, and 50s who want to refine their explosive power. “They love it,” he says. “They see the athletes in my gym and say, ‘I want to do that too.’”

How To Do A Vertical Jump

Of course, to level up your power, you've got to make sure you know how to jump properly in the first place.

Before you get hopping: “Always complete a proper dynamic warm-up before any kind of jump training to avoid injury,” Wilson says. A few moves Guazon loves include side shuffles, inchworms, bodyweight squats, and knee pulls. Once you're feeling loose and limber, it's air time.

Here's how to do it: Start standing with feet directly under hips and core engaged. Quickly bend knees and sink hips back and down into a shallow squat, simultaneously dropping chest slightly forward and swinging arms backward to gain momentum. From this crouched position, extend through hips, knees, and ankles as explosively as possible, swinging arms forward and up overhead as feet lift up off of the floor. Land softly in a demi squat with core braced, and ensure that knees do not cave inward.

To *really* reach high, Wilson recommends incorporating a pro technique or two to power up your vertical jump after getting comfortable with it:

- **Take a power step or running head start.** This tactic builds momentum, but you might want to enlist the help of a trainer before trying it to ensure you're approaching it correctly.
- **Start with an iso-hold entry.** What this means is that you hold your starting squat position for one to two full counts, creating as much tension as possible in your glutes, hamstrings, quads, and calves to leap extra explosively off the ground.
- **Drop to depth before jumping.** Instead of launching yourself from the ground with your thighs parallel to the floor, push your hips just past that point to create a slight downward angle. This increases the amount of time you have to push off the ground, allowing you to harness more power.

The Muscles That Help Your Jump

All power exercises require you to activate multiple muscles simultaneously, which, unsurprisingly, means they'll all need to be strong if you really want to soar, Wilson says.

And that's certainly true for jumping. “To properly perform a jump, an athlete must achieve triple extension, which is the simultaneous extension of the hips, knees, and ankles,” she explains.

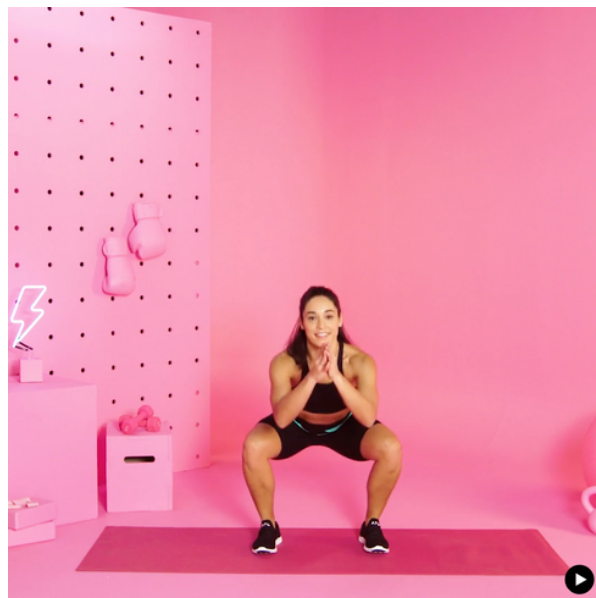
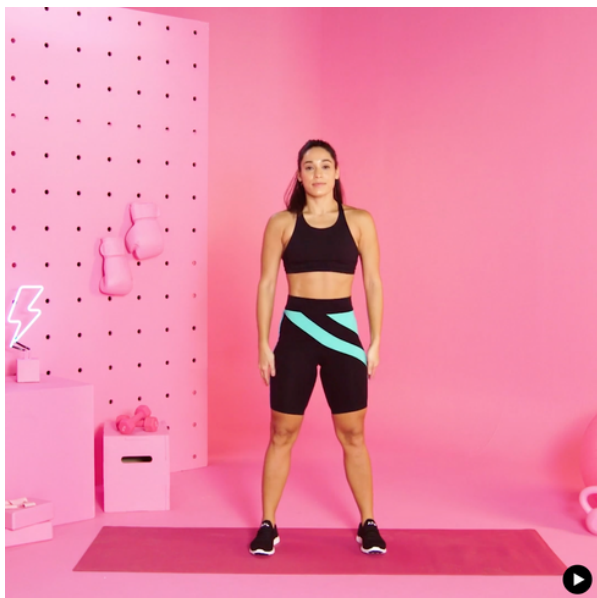
Here are five of the major muscles you're working in a vertical jump:

1. **Glutes**, which work as you extend your hips
2. **Quads**, which activate as you push off the floor and extend your knees
3. **Hamstrings**, which play a role in hip extension and absorbing your landing
4. **Calves**, which also help to promote propulsion up off the floor
5. **Core**, which keeps your trunk stable

5 Exercises That Strengthen Your Jump Power

Here are five exercises that will help your jump:

1. Squat

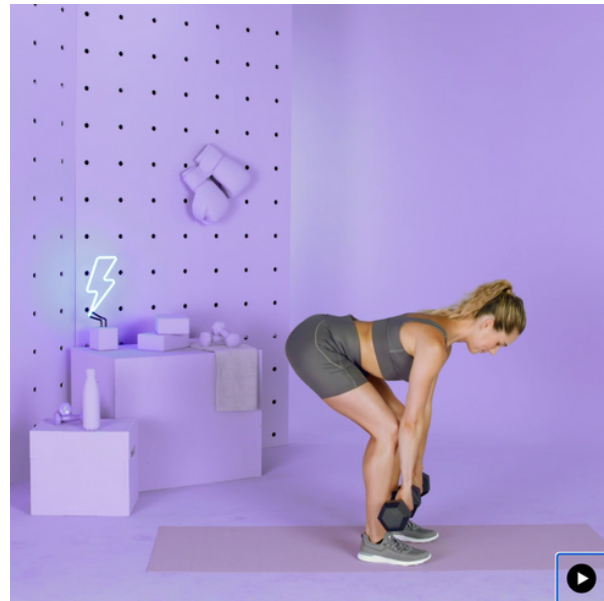
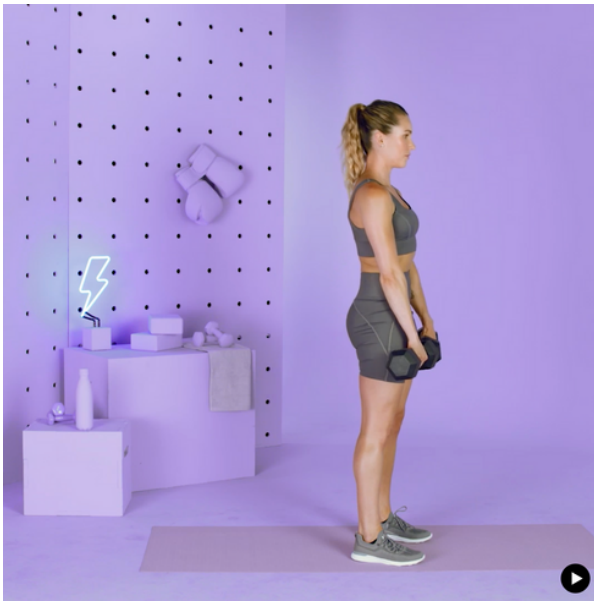


Why it rocks: “A squat, either bodyweight or loaded, is the base for any vertical jump,” explains Guanzon. After all, the vertical jump is basically an amped-up squat. That's why Guanzon ensures his clients nail squats before attempting any power moves.

How to do it: Start standing with feet shoulder-width distance apart, arms at sides. Engage core and push hips back as if lowering into a chair while simultaneously reaching arms forward until clasped at chest height. (Keep torso upright and spine straight, press knees outward, and distribute weight evenly between both feet.) Once thighs are at least parallel with floor, press through heels to reverse the movement and return to start. That's one rep.

When and how often to do it: If bodyweight, perform three or four sets of 10 to 12 reps. If you're loading your squat, pick a weight that feels manageable (but still difficult) and perform three or four sets of six to 10 reps. Complete once or twice per week. (Bodyweight squats are also great in warm-ups.)

2. Romanian Deadlift

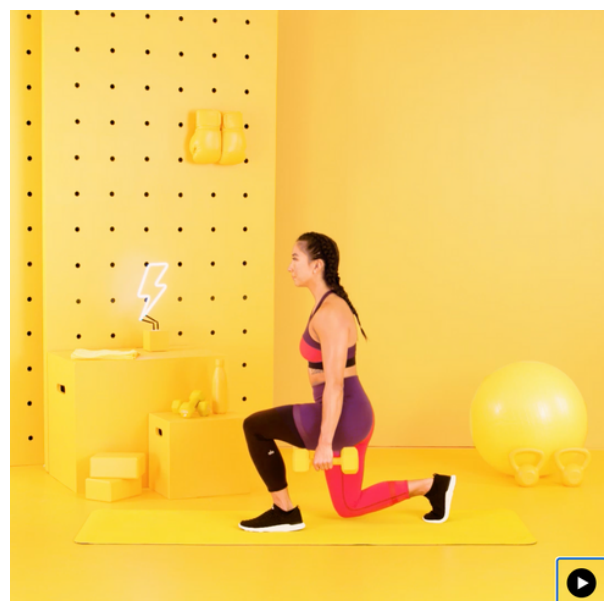
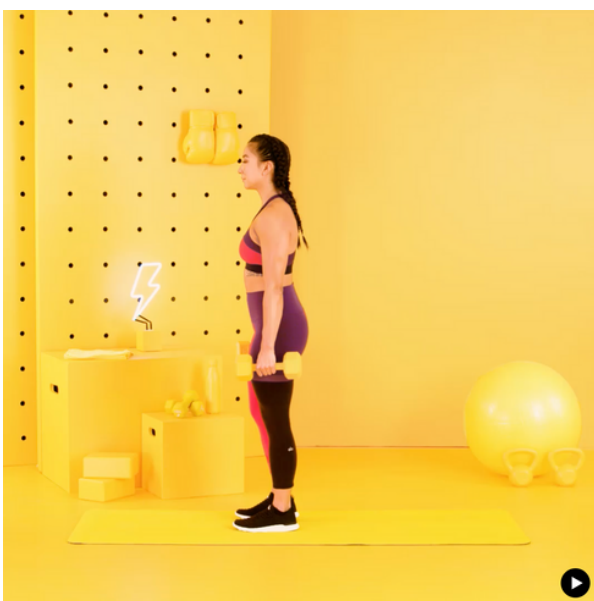


Why it rocks: This move is an all-around leg-strengthener; your quads, hamstrings, glutes, calves, and core all work in tandem to lift the weight from the ground and lower it back down again. No barbell or dumbbells available? A heavy suitcase or duffle bag loaded with books works just the same.

How to do it: Holding weights in both hands, stand with feet hip-width apart, knees slightly bent. Position the weights in front of thighs with palms facing body. This is your start position. Keep knees slightly bent and back neutral, then press hips back and hinge at waist to lower the dumbbells toward floor. Squeeze glutes to return to standing. That's one rep.

When and how often to do it: Perform three or four sets of six to 10 reps once or twice per week.

3. Reverse Lunge

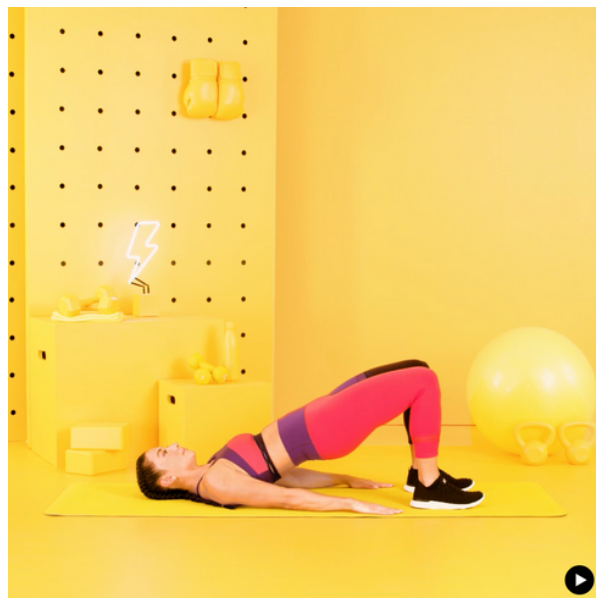
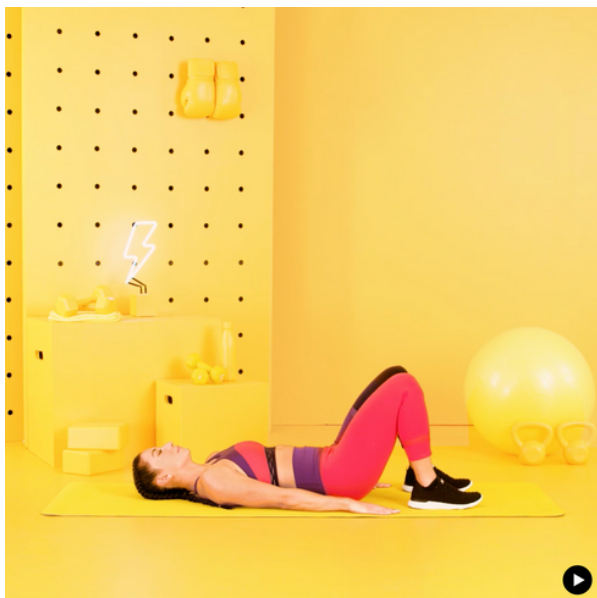


Why it rocks: Similar to deadlifts, lunges activate multiple muscles at once—with an added balance challenge, making them perfect for learning to land on your feet after flying into the air.

How to do it: Start standing with feet hip-width apart holding weights in either hand at sides. Step back with right leg, bend both knees, and lower until knees both form 90-degree angles. Push through left foot to press back up to standing. That's one rep.

When and how often to do it: Perform three or four sets of six to 10 reps on each side once or twice per week.

4. Glute Bridge

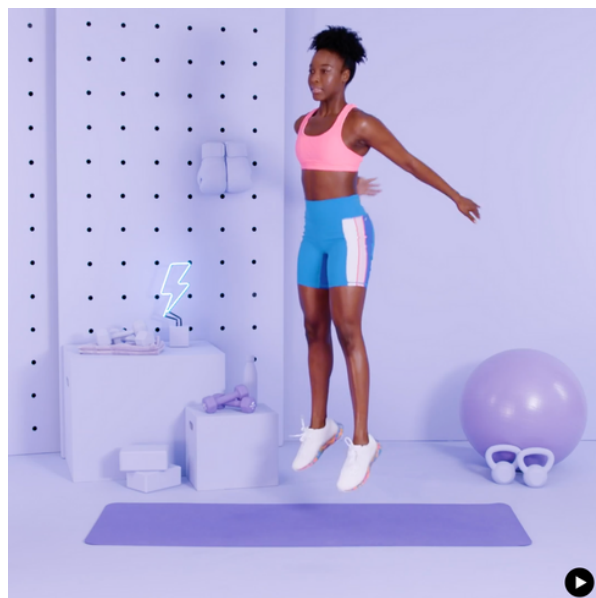
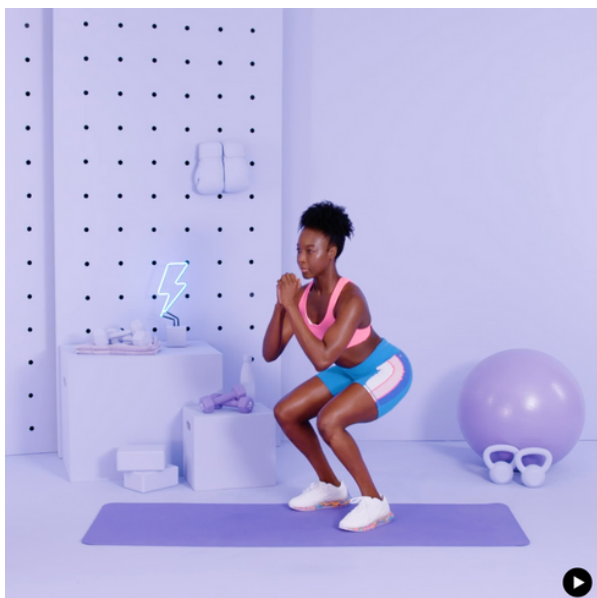


Why it rocks: According to both Wilson and Guanzon, your glutes have a major impact on how high you can leap, making bridges an especially helpful strengthening move.

How to do it: Lie on back with knees bent, feet on the floor 12 to 16 inches from butt, and arms at sides. This is your start position. Brace core, then press into heels and squeeze glutes to raise hips toward the ceiling while pushing upper back into the ground. Pause in this position and expand the band by pressing knees apart. Return to start. That's one rep. (Add in a resistance band for an extra glute challenge!)

When and how often to do it: Perform three or four sets of six to 10 reps once or twice per week.

5. Jump Squat



Why it rocks: As far as exercises that prep you for vertical jumps go, you can't do much better than a jump squat, says Guanzon. That's because it truly mimics the motion of an explosive vertical jump.

How to do it: Start standing with feet shoulder-width distance apart, arms at sides. Engage core and push hips back as if lowering into a chair while simultaneously reaching arms forward until clasped at chest height. (Keep torso upright and spine straight, press knees outward, and distribute weight evenly between both feet.) Once thighs are about parallel with floor, explosively jump up into the air as high as possible, swinging arms straight behind body for momentum. Land softly on balls of feet and immediately lower into next squat. That's one rep.

When and how often to do it: Do three to four sets of up to 15 reps once or twice per week. This move can also be included in your pre-vertical jump warm-up.

How To Test Your Vertical Jump

Now that you're ready to embark on your jump-higher journey, it's time to see how high you can fly. "The most common way to measure and track progress is with a vertical jump tester," Wilson explains. (This tall pole contraption, which you'll find at lots of gyms, has hanging markers that you try to smack as you jump.)

"First, measure your standing reach (how high up the wall you can touch while standing). Then, test your vertical leap reach (how high you can reach when jumping)," she suggests.

The difference between your vertical leap reach and your standing reach is known as your *vertical* and represents your true jump power. For women, 12 to 15 inches is an average vertical. Surpass 24 inches and you're pretty much a pro.

Don't have a vertical jump tester handy? You can get a general idea of your vertical jump height and progress by putting a little chalk on your fingertips and jumping next to a wall you can brush with 'em. One important tip to keep in mind when putting your jump power to the test: Do it at the beginning of a workout, so your legs are still fresh, Wilson says.



The bottom line: If you want to learn how to jump higher, you need to build power in your lower body. Exercises like squats and glute bridges can help you train your quads, glutes, and hamstrings to be high-flying machines.

JULIA SULLIVAN, CPT

Julia Sullivan, CPT, is a New York City-based writer, indoor rowing instructor, outdoor enthusiast, newbie powerlifter, and devoted cat mother. Her work has been published in *Women's Health*, *SELF*, *Health*, *Huffington Post*, and more. She holds a B.A. in journalism and gender studies from Arizona State University and a personal training certificate from the American Council on Exercise. When she's not covering the latest health and wellness trends, you can find her hitting the hiking trails, working toward her deadlift goal of 400 pounds, and forcefully hugging her cat, Jeeves, against his will.
