# All Substance, No Flash

**SUSPENDED BODYWEIGHT TRAINING OFFERS A SIMPLE AND LOW-TECH WAY TO GET FIT.**

*BY MATT FITZGERALD*

Suspended bodyweight training is new, but it looks and feels old. A simple, low-tech exercise modality, all substance and no flash, it could have been invented decades or even centuries ago, but for whatever reason it was not.

They say necessity is the mother of invention, and the invention of suspended bodyweight training is a good example of this principle. Several years ago, while deployed in Southeast Asia, U.S. Navy SEAL Randy Hetrick put his creativity to use against the challenge of finding a way to keep in shape without having any fitness equipment. So he used parachute materials to create a strap with stirrups at either end, looped it around a horizontal pole overhead, and used it to perform a variety of bodyweight exercises that he came up with one at a time.

In 2005, Hetrick founded Fitness Anywhere, a company that sells a more refined (but still appealingly primitive) version of this device, which is now called TRX. Based in San Francisco, Fitness Anywhere has become a multimillion-dollar business and TRX—which does have one or two competitors—has become standard equipment in physical therapy facilities and alternative fitness centers such as CrossFit gyms. Suspended bodyweight training is also catching on as an effective and convenient at-home and on-the-road training modality among competitive athletes.

I incorporated suspended bodyweight training into my minimalist, injury-prevention-focused strength training program several months ago, and I like it enough that I plan to continue using it. Beyond offering a wide range of functional exercises with clear benefits for triathletes, suspended bodyweight training is fun. Performing moves such as atomic pushups on my TRX feels more like play than doing regular pushups.

San Diego-based TRX master trainer and competitive triathlete Neil Mallinson regularly shows new triathlete clients how to reduce their injury risk and enhance their swimming, cycling and running performance through suspended bodyweight training. We asked him to do the same for you by creating the following workout.

Mallinson recommends doing sets of 15 to 20 repetitions of each of these eight exercises and two to three sets per workout. Complete the entire workout three times per week.

## 1. BILATERAL SQUAT

The bilateral squat is a relatively easy exercise that makes for a good warm-up, priming the leg muscles for the more challenging exercises that follow. It also increases lower body stability and mobility in the hips and ankles.

Stand facing the attachment point with your feet placed shoulder-width apart. Grasp a handle in each hand with your palms facing each other. Stand far enough away from the attachment point so that your hands are at chest level, but close enough so that there is no tension in the straps.

Squat back and down as if to sit down in a chair behind you. Concentrate on keeping your pelvis neutral, your core tight, your weight on your heels and your torso upright. Keep your eyes focused upward at the attachment point. Squat until your thighs are parallel to the ground, keeping as little tension on the straps as possible. Use them more to maintain balance than to assist the squat movement. Press your heels into the ground and return to a standing position.

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## 2. SINGLE-LEG SQUAT

This exercise is a powerful strength developer for the thighs, hips and glutes. It improves the stability of the pelvis, hips and knees during running and thereby reduces injury risk. The single-leg squat is also a great way to identify and correct left-right strength imbalances. "When you start doing it, you will probably find that one leg is stronger than the other," says Mallinson.

Start in the same position as in the bilateral squat, but with your right leg aligned with the attachment point and your left foot elevated an inch or two above the floor in front of you. Squat down and back, bending your right knee as much as you can without feeling pain or wobbling at the knee. Extend your left leg in front of you to keep your left foot elevated above the floor. Press your right heel into the floor and return to a standing position.

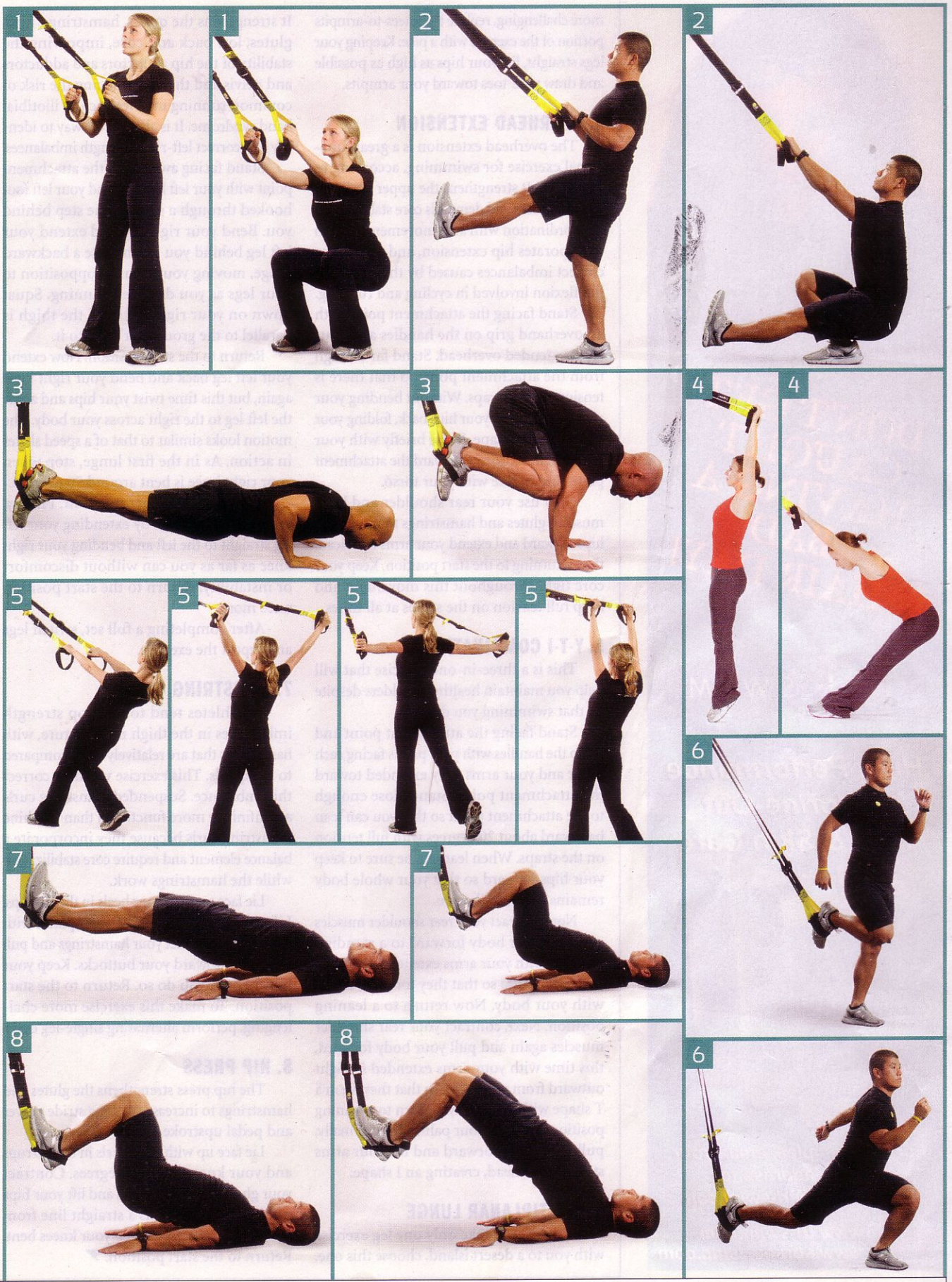
If you find this exercise very challenging, use your arms to create tension on the straps and assist the movement. But don't use any more tension than necessary. All of the cues that apply to the bilateral squat apply to this exercise also: Keep your eyes up, your core tight and so forth.

After completing a full set on your right leg, repeat the exercise on your left leg.

## 3. ATOMIC PUSH-UP

The atomic push-up is an advanced movement that develops upper body strength and core stability. Assume a push-up position with your feet elevated above the floor in the stirrups. Lower your chest toward the floor, keeping your core tight and your spine neutral. Stop when your chest is an inch above the floor and press upward to the start position. Now bend your knees, lift your hips and draw your knees forward toward your armpits. Go back to the start position once more.

To make this exercise easier, do half push-ups instead of full ones. To make it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more challenging, replace the knees-to-armpits portion of the exercise with a pike: Keeping your legs straight, lift your hips as high as possible and draw your toes toward your armpits.

## 4. OVERHEAD EXTENSION

The overhead extension is a great functional exercise for swimming, according to Mallinson. It strengthens the upper back and rear shoulders and demands core stabilization in coordination with arm movements. It also incorporates hip extension, and thus helps correct imbalances caused by the repetitive hip flexion involved in cycling and running.

Stand facing the attachment point with an overhand grip on the handles and your arms extended overhead. Stand far enough from the attachment point so that there is tension on the straps. Without bending your arms or legs, drop your hips back, folding your body into a V shape. Pause briefly with your arms extended directly toward the attachment point and in line with your torso.

Now use your rear shoulder and back muscles, glutes and hamstrings to press your hips forward and extend your arms overhead, thus returning to the start position. Keep your core tight throughout this movement and keep full tension on the straps at all times.

## 5. Y-T-I COMBINATION

This is a three-in-one exercise that will help you maintain healthy shoulders despite all that swimming you do.

Stand facing the attachment point and grasp the handles with your palms facing each other and your arms fully extended toward the attachment point. Stand close enough to the attachment point so that you can lean backward about 20 degrees with full tension on the straps. When leaning, be sure to keep your hips forward so that your whole body remains in a straight line.

Now contract your rear shoulder muscles and pull your body forward to a standing position with your arms extended overhead and to the sides so that they form a Y shape with your body. Now return to a leaning position. Next, contract your rear shoulder muscles again and pull your body forward, this time with your arms extended straight outward from your sides so that they form a T shape with your body. Return to a leaning position and turn your palms down. Finally, pull your body forward and lift your arms straight overhead, creating an I shape.

## 6. MULTIPLANAR LUNGE

If you could take only one leg exercise with you to a desert island, choose this one. It strengthens the quads, hamstrings, hips, glutes, low back and core, improving the stability of the hip abductors and adductors and pelvis and thereby reducing the risk of common running injuries such as iliotibial band syndrome. It is also a great way to identify and correct left-right strength imbalances.

Stand facing away from the attachment point with your left leg bent and your left foot hooked through a stirrup one step behind you. Bend your right leg and extend your left leg behind you to simulate a backward lunge, moving your arms in opposition to your legs as you do when running. Squat down on your right leg until the thigh is parallel to the ground, or close to it.

Return to the start position. Now extend your left leg back and bend your right knee again, but this time twist your hips and angle the left leg to the right across your body. The motion looks similar to that of a speed skater in action. As in the first lunge, stop when your right knee is bent around 90 degrees.

Return to the start position. Finally, perform a side lunge by extending your left leg straight to the left and bending your right knee as far as you can without discomfort or instability. Return to the start position once more.

After completing a full set, switch legs and repeat the exercise.

## 7. HAMSTRING CURL

Triathletes tend to develop strength imbalances in the thigh musculature, with hamstrings that are relatively weak compared to the quads. This exercise will help correct this imbalance. Suspended hamstring curls are infinitely more functional than machine hamstring curls because they incorporate a balance element and require core stabilization while the hamstrings work.

Lie face up with your heels in the stirrups. Lift your hips to form a straight plank with your body. Contract your hamstrings and pull your heels toward your buttocks. Keep your hips high as you do so. Return to the start position. To make this exercise more challenging, perform alternating single-leg curls.

## 8. HIP PRESS

The hip press strengthens the glutes and hamstrings to increase running stride power and pedal upstroke power.

Lie face up with your heels in the stirrups and your knees bent 90 degrees. Contract your glutes and hamstrings and lift your hips until your body forms a straight line from the knees to the neck. Keep your knees bent. Return to the start position.