

Real World Muscle

Bear-Hug Squat

Good prep for hefting heavy duffels and armloads of firewood, it exercises the hips, thighs, abs, and upper back.

1. Clasp your arms around the midpoint of a sandbag that's not filled completely.
2. Keeping your chest elevated, bend your knees to squat as deeply as you can but at least until your upper thighs are parallel with the ground. Avoid leaning forward with your torso. Pause, and then press up through your heels to the standing position.

That's one repetition. Do 10.



Sandbag Drag

Total-body resistance exercise builds pulling strength and marching power.

1. Place a heavy sandbag (or two) on one end of a large old blanket or heavy-duty tarp. Stand facing the blanket and grab the two corners farthest from the weight. Lean back and walk backward to drag the weight. Pull it around your yard until you tire.
2. Rest, then repeat the exercise, this time with your back to the blanket and pulling it forward as if you were a husky pulling a dogsled.

Do one to three sets of pulling in each direction.



Farmer's Walk

An ideal cardio exercise for pre-hike training, it builds hand, wrist, shoulder, and leg strength.

1. Grab a pair of sandbags and let them hang at your sides. (You can also use heavy dumbbells or 5-gallon buckets filled with water.)
2. Walk forward, or around in large circles, for as long as you can. If you can walk for a minute without becoming exhausted or dropping the weight, you should be using a heavier weight.

3. Walk for 30 seconds to a minute, rest for a minute, and then repeat twice more.

Try doing one set while walking on your toes to work the calves and the tiny muscles supporting your ankles.



Half-Moon Snatch

Works the legs, back, shoulders, and core muscles, especially the obliques on the sides of your abs. Helps you avoid lower-back strain when lifting heavy packs or catching yourself when you slip while wearing a backpack.

1. Stand with feet spread a little less than shoulder-width apart. Place a sandbag to the outside of your left foot. Keeping your feet facing forward, crouch down to grasp the sandbag by the ends with both hands.
2. Explosively stand up while yanking the bag above your head.
3. When the bag reaches above your head, transfer the weight to your opposite side and place it outside of your right foot. (Take care to lower the weight under control and more slowly than you lifted it to avoid injury.)

Reverse the movement, lifting explosively from the right this time. Do eight to 10 repetitions.



Sandbag Stand-Up

Strengthens the arms, back, quadriceps, and gluteals for backpacking on steep, rocky terrain.

1. Kneel on the floor holding a 20- to 50-pound sandbag in your arms and pulling it into your chest as shown. Lift your left leg and place your foot flat on the floor so both legs form right angles.
2. Press through your heel to stand up. Bring your right foot to the floor and stand perfectly straight on both feet. Bend both legs and kneel to the floor first on your left knee then your right until you are in the starting position.

Repeat the movement, this time starting the standing sequence with your right leg. Do eight stand-ups with each leg.



Grab Bag

You can swing by your local home-improvement store for a 50-pound bag of sand or empty bags made of heavy-duty cloth, canvas, or plastic and fill them yourself with sand, pea gravel, or kitty litter. But you can also purchase zipper- or Velcro-close workout sandbags with built-in handles (without the sand) from Web sites such as henkinfitnesssystems.com and sportsandbags.com.

To fill your bag, first fill heavy-duty zip-close bags with your sand or kitty litter, double bag them, and secure the closures with duct tape. This keeps the material from spilling and also allows you to easily adjust the total weight by adding or subtracting the individual plastic bags from the larger sandbag.

Another option: Use an old daypack, fill it with plastic bags of sand, put it on your back, and go for a walk or do backpack squats and lunges.