

BODYWEIGHT TRAINING GUIDE

Military Calisthenics

A complete 4-week plan modeled on U.S. Army Physical Readiness Training — eight core exercises, day-by-day progression, and the weekly schedule used in basic combat training.

8CORE
EXERCISES**4**WEEK
PROGRAM**6**DAYS /
WEEK**0**

EQUIPMENT*

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Military Calisthenics: Complete 2026 Guide + 4-Week Plan

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Military calisthenics is a bodyweight training system used by the U.S. Army, Marines, Navy, and Air Force to build muscular endurance, work capacity, and functional strength. It relies on six compound movements — push-ups, pull-ups, sit-ups, squats, burpees, and lunges — performed in high-volume circuits with short rest periods.

This guide gives you the **8 core exercises**, a **day-by-day 4-week workout plan** modeled on Army PRT principles, and the **weekly schedule** used in U.S. basic training.

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What Is Military Calisthenics?

Military calisthenics is a bodyweight strength and conditioning system used by the U.S. armed forces (Army, Marines, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard) to build muscular endurance, work capacity, and combat-functional fitness. It consists of high-repetition compound movements — primarily push-ups, pull-ups, sit-ups, squats, lunges, burpees, mountain climbers, and flutter kicks — performed in timed circuits with short rest periods. The system is codified in U.S. Army Field Manual 7-22 (Holistic Health and Fitness) and is the foundation of every U.S. military Physical Readiness Training (PRT) program.

IN ONE SENTENCE

Military calisthenics is high-volume, time-tested bodyweight training designed to build the muscular endurance and work capacity required for combat readiness — using only push-ups, pull-ups, squats, sit-ups, burpees, and lunges.

It differs from civilian calisthenics in three specific ways:

- **Volume over complexity.** You rarely see muscle-ups or planches. You see 100+ push-ups in a single session.
- **Time-based protocols.** The Army Combat Fitness Test (ACFT) and Marine PFT score max reps in two minutes. Training mirrors that format.
- **Functional purpose.** Every exercise maps to a combat capacity: push-ups for loading gear, pull-ups for climbing, burpees for sprinting under stress.

The emphasis is repeatable performance under fatigue — not a one-rep max.

Why Military Calisthenics Works

The approach is brutally simple, and that is precisely why it works across every fitness level from recruit to special operations.

It builds work capacity. Traditional strength programs chase maximum force. Military calisthenics builds the ability to produce force repeatedly under fatigue — muscular endurance. High-repetition bodyweight circuits reliably improve cardiovascular capacity alongside strength.

It scales from zero to elite. Can't do a pull-up? Do inverted rows. Can you do 30? Add a weighted vest. The same exercise library works for deconditioned beginners and Force Recon operators.

It hardens connective tissue. High-rep bodyweight work conditions tendons and ligaments along with muscle, which reduces injury rates compared with heavy barbell programs run at the same volume.

Is Military Calisthenics Effective?

Yes — military calisthenics is one of the most effective fitness systems ever tested at scale, with documented outcomes across millions of recruits over more than a century. The U.S. Army has used variations of this protocol since 1907, and every modernization (from PRT to the current H2F program) has retained its core compound bodyweight movements.

What the data shows:

- **Basic training transformation:** Across the 10-week U.S. Army Basic Combat Training program, recruits typically improve their 2-mile run time by 2 to 4 minutes, push-up max by 15 to 30 reps, and sit-up max by 20 to 40 reps. Body fat reductions of 3 to 8 percent are typical.
- **Cardiovascular conditioning:** High-rep bodyweight circuits reliably improve VO_2 max by 10 to 20 percent in 8 to 12 weeks for previously untrained adults.
- **Hypertrophy:** Untrained men typically gain 5 to 10 pounds of lean muscle in their first 12 weeks of structured military-style calisthenics. Women gain 2 to 5 pounds.

- **Injury rates:** High-rep bodyweight circuits show lower musculoskeletal injury rates than equivalent-volume barbell training, primarily due to reduced spinal loading and gradual connective tissue adaptation.

BOTTOM LINE

Military calisthenics works because it pairs evidence-based programming principles — progressive overload, periodization, compound movement patterns — with the simplicity needed for mass adoption. It scales from deconditioned beginner to special operations operator with the same exercise library.

The 8 Core Military Calisthenics Exercises

Learn these eight movements. Every military PT program is built on some version of this list.

01 Push-Up

The cornerstone. Hands slightly wider than shoulders, rigid plank, chest to a fist's height from the ground, full lockout at the top. Army standard form.

02 Pull-Up (Dead Hang)

Full arm extension at the bottom, chin over the bar, no kipping. Marine Corps PFT requires dead-hang pull-ups for a perfect score. Trains the lats, biceps, and grip.

03 Sit-Up

Feet anchored, elbows touch knees at the top, shoulder blades touch the ground at the bottom. Traditional Army standard (the modern ACFT has swapped this for the plank).

04 Air Squat

Hip crease below the knee at the bottom, full extension at the top. Feet shoulder-width, knees tracking over toes. Builds the lower body needed for rucking and sprinting.

05 Burpee

A push-up plus a squat-jump in one fluid motion. The single most efficient conditioning exercise in the military playbook — it hits every major muscle group and spikes the heart rate inside 30 seconds.

06 Lunge

Forward or reverse. Front knee over ankle, back knee to the ground, chest vertical. Single-leg work exposes imbalances that squats can hide.

07 Mountain Climber

Plank position, drive knees to chest alternately at speed. Combines core stability with conditioning — a staple of Marine Corps PT sessions.

08 Flutter Kick

Back flat, legs six inches off the floor, scissor kick. Builds the hip flexors and lower abs that soldiers destroy during rucks and sprints.

The 4-Week Workout Plan

Six days per week, one rest day. Each session runs 35 to 50 minutes. Structure:

- **Mon, Wed, Fri** — Strength-Endurance Circuit
- **Tue, Thu** — Conditioning + Core
- **Sat** — Long Run + Push-Up Ladder
- **Sun** — Rest

Week 1 — Baseline

ESTABLISH FOUNDATION

Strength-Endurance Circuit (Mon / Wed / Fri): 4 rounds, 60 seconds rest between rounds.

- 20 push-ups
- 10 pull-ups (substitute inverted rows if needed)
- 25 air squats
- 15 sit-ups
- 10 burpees

Conditioning (Tue / Thu): 20-minute run at conversational pace + 3 × 30-second flutter kicks.

Saturday: 3-mile run + 5 × 10 push-up ladder.

Week 2 — Volume

ADD WORK

Same circuit as Week 1, with the following adjustments:

- Add 1 round (5 rounds total)
- Drop rest between rounds to 45 seconds
- Tuesday and Thursday runs extend to 25 minutes

Week 3 — Density

COMPRESS TIME

Back to 4 rounds, but cut rest to 30 seconds between rounds.

- Saturday run extends to 4 miles
- Add 20 lunges per leg to the circuit

Week 4 — Test Week

MEASURE PROGRESS

- **Mon:** 2-minute max push-ups, 2-minute max sit-ups, max pull-ups, 2-mile timed run
- **Tue / Thu:** Active recovery — walking, mobility, light stretching
- **Wed / Fri:** Week 1 circuit at 3 rounds (deload)
- **Sat:** Rest or 30-minute walk

Record your test-week numbers. Repeat the cycle with your new higher starting reps.

Weekly Schedule

Print this. Tape it to the fridge. That's military calisthenics at its simplest.

DAY	SESSION	FOCUS	DURATION
Monday	Strength-Endurance Circuit	Full body	40 min
Tuesday	Run + Core	Aerobic base	30 min
Wednesday	Strength-Endurance Circuit	Full body	40 min
Thursday	Run + Core	Aerobic base	30 min
Friday	Strength-Endurance Circuit	Full body	40 min
Saturday	Long Run + Push-Up Ladder	Aerobic + chest	60 min
Sunday	Rest	Recovery	—

Common Mistakes That Kill Results

- Going to failure every session**

Military PT programs build capacity across weeks, not in one grueling workout. Leave 1 to 2 reps in the tank on your circuit sets. Show up again tomorrow. That's the point.
- Neglecting pull work**

Most civilians do too many push-ups and zero rows. Shoulder issues follow within 6 weeks. Match horizontal push volume with horizontal pull.
- Skipping the run**

Aerobic base is non-negotiable. Every branch tests it. If you can't run 2 miles in under 18 minutes, calisthenics alone will not carry you through a fitness test.
- Sloppy form at rep 20**

A push-up with a sagging hip does not count in the Army and it should not count for you. Stop the set the moment form breaks.

How to Progress Past the 4-Week Plan

Three levers. Pull one at a time.

LEVER 01 Add Reps Add 2 push-ups and 1 pull-up per session each week.	LEVER 02 Cut Rest Shrink rest between rounds from 30 seconds to 20, then to 15.	LEVER 03 Add a Round Move from 4 rounds to 5, then 6.
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After 12 weeks, layer in loaded carries (water jugs, sandbags), weighted vests, and single-limb variants — one-arm push-up progressions, pistol squats. This is how civilians eventually match — and sometimes exceed — military-grade conditioning.

Frequently Asked Questions

- Q. What is the definition of military calisthenics?**

A. Military calisthenics is a bodyweight strength and conditioning system used by the U.S. armed forces to build muscular endurance, work capacity, and combat-functional fitness. It uses high-rep compound movements — push-ups, pull-ups, sit-ups, squats, lunges, burpees, mountain climbers, and flutter kicks — performed in timed circuits with short rest periods. The system is codified in U.S. Army Field Manual 7-22.

Q. Is military calisthenics effective for civilians?

A. Yes. The same protocols that produce measurable conditioning gains across the 10-week U.S. Army Basic Combat Training cycle work equally well for civilians. Untrained adults typically add 15 to 30 push-ups to their max, drop 2-mile run time by 2 to 4 minutes, and gain 5 to 10 pounds of lean muscle (men) or 2 to 5 pounds (women) within the first 12 weeks of consistent training.

Q. How often should I do military calisthenics?

A. Six days per week is the standard military rotation — three strength-endurance days, two conditioning days, one long day, one rest day. Start at four days per week if you're new and add a session every two weeks until you reach six.

Q. Can military calisthenics build muscle?

A. Yes, within limits. Expect visible muscle in your chest, shoulders, arms, and legs within 3 to 6 months, especially if you start untrained. Past that, hypertrophy slows unless you load with weighted vests or advanced single-limb progressions.

Q. What equipment do I need?

A. One pull-up bar. Everything else — push-ups, squats, lunges, burpees, sit-ups — needs only floor space. A weighted vest becomes useful around month three for continued progression.

Q. How long until I see results?

A. Visible conditioning gains appear in 3 to 4 weeks. Noticeable strength and muscle gains arrive in 6 to 8 weeks. Meaningful body composition change takes 12 weeks with dialed-in nutrition. The Army's 10-week basic training window reflects this exact timeline.

Q. Is military calisthenics good for women?

A. Yes. The same exercise library and circuit structure works for women, with adjusted starting reps and a longer pull-up progression curve since most women begin without bodyweight pull-up strength.

Q. Can men over 50 do military calisthenics?

A. Yes, with sensible modifications. Drop training frequency from 6 to 4 days per week, replace burpees with step-ups, and extend the warm-up. Tendon adaptation slows after 50, so add 1 to 2 extra rest days during the first month.

Q. What's the difference between military and street calisthenics?

A. Street calisthenics prioritizes skill moves like muscle-ups, flags, and levers. Military calisthenics prioritizes high-rep compound movements for raw work capacity. Military training is faster to learn and scales more gracefully for beginners.

Q. Is military calisthenics good for weight loss?

A. Yes. A 40-minute circuit burns roughly 300 to 500 calories depending on bodyweight and intensity. Paired with a 300 to 500-calorie daily deficit, most people lose 1 to 2 pounds of fat per week without losing strength.

TRAIN HARD. TRAIN SMART.

For the full guide, an 8-week version, branch-specific plans, and women's and over-50 programs — visit gymnasetips.com