Exercise Substitutions

Exercise Substitutions · https://www.fitnessacademy.com/help-center/exercise-substitutions/

This page provides alternatives for **skill-specific limitations**, such as if you're unable to perform a pull-up, wall walk, or toe-to-bar. These substitutions are not meant to replace long-term progressions but are designed to help you complete the workout effectively.

- For **equipment or space-related limitations**, visit the Equipment Substitutions page.
- For **aerobic exercises** like running, cycling, rowing, or double-unders, go to the Aerobic Substitutions page.

Most substitutions are scaling options. In some cases, we've also included advanced variations to scale up.

Strict Pull-Up

The goal of strict pull-ups is vertical pulling strength. Substitutes should maintain this pulling angle and load the upper back and arms appropriately. Avoid replacing with movements that remove time under tension or grip involvement.

These substitutions are for when strict pull-ups are programmed. Some will help build toward your first pull-up, but the goal here is simply to replace the movement in the context of the workout.

Use pulling variations that keep the elbow path vertical when possible. Horizontal rowing is less specific but acceptable if it's the only option.

Vertical Pulling Options (Preferred)

- **Banded Pull-Up Variations**
  Use a single or multiple bands to hit the target rep range. For conditioning pieces, you can anchor the band horizontally to speed up transitions.
- **Toe-Assisted Pull-Ups**
  You control the level of assistance with your legs. Not ideal for fast-paced workouts.

- **Feet-Supported Rack Pulls**
  Great for consistent setups. For conditioning, this is usually a better option than rows.

Horizontal Pulling Options (Less Ideal)

- **Inverted Row or Ring Row**
  For strength work, elevate your feet. For conditioning, keep your hips bridged and the setup simple for repeatability.
- **Dumbbell, Barbell, or Kettlebell Rows**
  Includes Pendlay Row, Gorilla Row, and Alternating Row options.
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Scaling Up

- Kipping Pull-Up
- Butterfly Pull-Up
- Bar Muscle-Up or Ring Muscle-Up

These dynamic pull-up variations (kipping, butterfly, muscle-up) are only relevant if your goals include competing in CrossFit or similar events. For general fitness, focus on strength and control. Avoid adding momentum-based movements unless your technique is already sound and the workout specifically calls for them.

Toe-to-Bar

Toe-to-bar is not just a core movement. It heavily taxes grip, shoulders, and hip flexors. The goal is to cycle reps under fatigue, not to build max core strength. Do not substitute this with strict core work. This movement is almost always programmed in conditioning settings, so the goal is cyclical grip fatigue and hip flexor endurance.

Hanging Movement Substitutions

- Limited Range Toe-to-Bar
- Knee-to-Elbow
- Limited Range Knee-to-Elbow

The goal is to preserve grip fatigue and hip flexor endurance under aerobic demand. If you replace this with slower, strict movements, you'll more than likely change the intent of the workout. Prioritize

options you can cycle quickly while maintaining form.

Floor-Based Substitutions

- V-Up *(can be just as hard, keep the same number of reps)*
- Alternating Leg V-Up
- Supine Toe-to-Dumbbell or Kettlebell
- Wall-Assisted V-Up

These should only be used if hanging is not possible. If your grip can tolerate it, even a limited range bar movement is better aligned with the intended stimulus. Floor core movements reduce grip loading, which is a major component of the original movement. Use these only if hanging is not an option, and scale volume accordingly.

Dynamic Option

- **Butterfly Sit-Up**
  Easy to cycle and matches the intent of the workout, although hip flexor engagement is reduced.

Wall Walk

Wall walks build strength, agility, and endurance but can be intimidating. **Modifying** (scaling the movement) is better than using **alternatives** because it helps you progress toward the full movement if that's your goal.

Wall Walk Modifications

- **Weight Shift Drill**
  Step feet up wall, shift weight side to side, step down. Builds hand positioning confidence.
- **Partial Wall Climb**
  Walk hands toward wall, raise feet to comfortable height, return to start. Practice the movement pattern.
- **Extended Wall Climb**
  Gradually walk hands closer to wall and feet higher each session. Progressive challenge.
- **Full Wall Walk**
  Complete movement – only attempt if you can safely control the descent.

Wall Walk Alternatives (if modifications aren’t suitable)

- **Plank Up Down** (aka Commando Planks)
- **Pike Wall Walk** – Less coordination demand
- **Inchworm with Push-Up** – Similar crawling pattern
- **Inchworm with Knee Push-Up** – Reduced strength requirement

Key Points

- Choose the level that challenges you while maintaining perfect form
- Focus on **quality and control** over speed
- Progress gradually through each level
- Master safe dismounting before attempting full wall walks

Box Jump

Despite being labeled plyometric, box jumps involve minimal eccentric loading. Broad and vertical jumps create more impact, so don’t try to match exact distance or height. Choose a realistic target and stick to it.

Better Options

- Broad Jump
- Vertical Jump

If you absolutely cannot tolerate any jumping motion:

- Step-ups (not ideal as they don't match the explosive power component, but acceptable if jumping is not possible)

Box Jump is an explosive movement intended to train fast-twitch power, coordination, and bounding. Your substitute should feel like a jump, not a step or squat.

Wall Ball

Wall balls are a hybrid squat and press movement with a reactive overhead element. They test timing, power endurance, and consistency. Substitutions should keep that rhythm and range intact as much as possible.

If you lack confidence, coordination, or consistency with the throw, do not skip the movement. Try one of the following:

- Use a lighter ball and lower the target height until you can hit it consistently
- Perform "wall ball thrusters": Hold the ball throughout the movement, squatting down and pressing it overhead without releasing. This maintains the squat-to-press pattern and timing while you build confidence with the movement

This keeps the pattern smooth and trains the timing without compromising your pacing. As you build confidence, start increasing the height or add the throw back in.

Double Unders

The purpose is usually to spike heart rate quickly while also challenging rhythm and timing. This is not a make-or-break skill for general fitness. Choose a version that keeps you moving and keeps your breathing elevated..

You are not missing out on results by substituting them. The key is to match the intended intensity and aerobic demand.

Recommended Substitutions:

- Perform about 1.5 times the reps using single-unders
- Or use the same number of jumping jacks or pogo jumps for a quick, rhythmic option

Avoid doubling the reps with single unders. That usually slows down the workout too much and shifts the focus away from intensity and consistency. This is a common modification that's inherently incorrect. Other programs just repeat it without thinking about the actual workout intent. Our approach prioritizes maintaining the cardiovascular demand and movement flow that makes the workout effective.

Choose the option that lets you keep moving with minimal disruption. You can always build the skill separately without letting it interrupt your training flow.

Scaling Up: Optional Variations

This program is built around general physical preparedness. It is not a competitive or sport-specific training plan. While advanced skills like handstand push-ups, muscle-ups, or pistol squats can be

great personal goals, they are not required for improving strength, conditioning, or performance in daily life.

That said, the structure of each workout follows proven principles in strength and conditioning. If you have the skill and want to challenge yourself further, you can scale up select movements. Just make sure the substitution makes sense in the context of the workout.

Examples:

- Replace push-ups with handstand push-ups for vertical pressing
- Replace pull-ups with bar muscle-ups for added complexity
- Replace lunges with pistols for single-leg strength and control

However, be cautious about disrupting the intended movement patterns. For instance, if a workout includes push-ups followed by a push press, the original design likely trains horizontal pressing endurance followed by vertical pressing power. If you replace push-ups with handstand push-ups, you now have two vertical pressing movements back to back, which changes the purpose of the workout.

Scaling up should feel like a progression, not a rewrite. When in doubt, keep it simple and consistent with the intent of the original structure.