

Playground power

Skip smart to torch fat and build endurance

The chances are that you don't do much skipping. Whatever your reason – 'my gym doesn't have ropes' or 'I'm not an eight-year-old girl' – it's time to ditch the excuses.

There are so many health and fitness benefits to rope skipping that I'm amazed more men don't include it as part of their regular training programme,' says British skipping champion Beci Dale. It's a quick and easy way to get your heart rate pumping, so it serves as an excellent warm-up before your main cardio workout. Or you can make skipping your main fat-burning session because ten minutes of jumping ropes burns around 110 calories – that's more than if you spent that time running.'

In addition to the cardiovascular benefits, rope skipping improves co-ordination, balance, timing, agility and foot speed, making it a vital training component for boxers, MMA fighters and other physically demanding sports. 'It also builds muscle strength, especially in the glutes, quads, hamstrings and hard-to-hit calves,' says Dale. 'And because it's a high-impact activity it can help maintain and improve bone density, which can reduce the risk of osteoporosis when you're older.'

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Stay relaxed
'Relax your shoulders and arms and use your forearm and wrists to turn the rope over,' says Dale. 'A relaxed upper body will make it easier to add in tricks and speed changes.'

Keep your body upright
'A good posture is also important. Stay upright to allow the rope to move over and under you, and keep your shoulders back to avoid leaning forward.'

Jump on the balls of your feet
'Being light on your feet is vital for smooth skipping. The more relaxed you are, the easier it is to introduce harder moves.'

Find the right length
'Stand on the middle of the rope with both feet. Ideally the ends should reach your armpits and no higher. Once you are more confident you can progress to a shorter rope.'

Start slowly
'Start with the rope behind your heels and slowly swing it over your head,' says Dale. 'As soon as it passes in front of your eyes, lift both feet off the ground, then keep repeating this. If you're new to skipping, start slowly and get used to the timing and footwork required to keep the rope in motion. Practise skipping continuously for a set amount of time or number of skips before resting.' Once you're confident, begin to introduce some faster skipping before adding some variations (see opposite).



Beci Dale is the reigning British skipping champion and a senior member of the Great Britain Skipping team. She is also a qualified fitness instructor and a British Rope Skipping Association coach (brsa.org.uk).



Steve Shreeve has played and coached basketball at local and national league levels for 12 years and has been skipping for eight years. He aims to win a medal at next year's British speed skipping championships.

Rope work Steve Shreeve demonstrates skipping variations



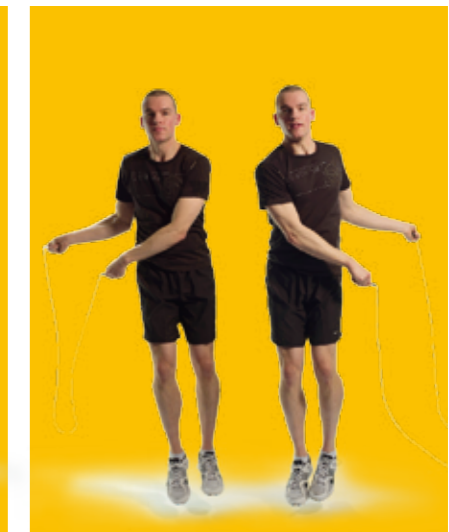
1 Speed step

Every time the rope passes under your feet you switch to the other foot, as if you were jogging on the spot.



2 Side straddle

Move your feet so they are shoulder-width apart for one jump, then back together for the next and repeat.



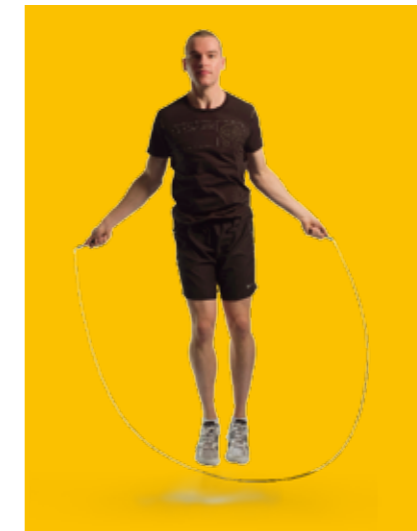
3 Side swings

As the rope comes over your head bring the handles together to one side of your body, but keep them in separate hands. Do a swing down each side of your body then continue skipping.



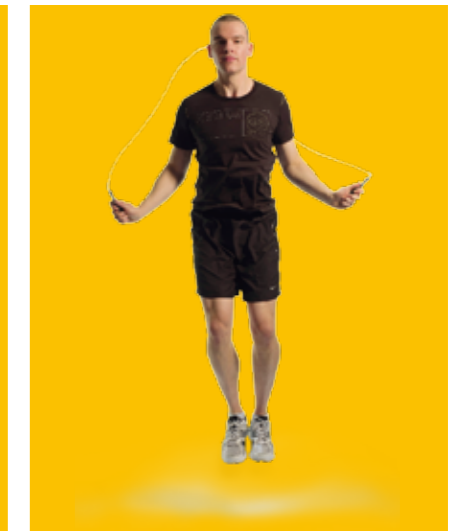
4 Crossover

As the rope passes over your head bring your arms across your body until your forearms touch, ensuring your wrists are wide enough apart so that you have enough space to jump through the rope.



5 Double-unders

Pass the rope under your feet twice before landing. To do this you need to jump higher and turn the rope over faster by increasing your wrist speed and keeping your arms still.



6 Triple-unders

Like double-unders, but you need to jump even higher and turn your wrists even faster. Make sure you carry on skipping afterwards to complete the trick.

Skipping workouts Get fit like Rocky with these routines

Beginner

Do sets of 10 basics, 2 side swings, 10 speed steps, 2 side swings, 10 side straddles. Gradually increase the number of skips and the speed as you become more experienced.

Intermediate

Do sets of 10 basics, 5 crossovers, 10 basics, 1 double-under, 5 side swings, 10 speed steps, 1 double-under, 10 basics.

Advanced

Do sets of Whatever you want. Start linking together the different variations, gradually building up the pace until you can add triple-unders and then continue with your routine.