A 10-minute warm-up

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Ten minutes is enough: five of easy cardio, a few minutes of moving your joints, then lighter sets of your first exercise.

Why it matters: A warm-up improved performance in most studies, and moving stretches before training help slightly while long held stretches can hold you back a little (see "Warm-ups, cool-downs and stretching"). This routine puts that into practice.

Part 1: get warm (5 minutes)

- Brisk walking, an easy bike, a rower or an elliptical.
- Start easy and build to a pace where you're breathing a little harder but can still talk.

Part 2: move your joints (3 to 4 minutes)

Do each for about 30 seconds, or 8 to 10 reps per side. Move smoothly; don't force the end of the range.

1. **Arm circles:** small circles growing larger, forward then back.
2. **Arm swings across the body:** swing both arms out wide, then hug across your chest.
3. **Hip circles:** hands on hips, circle slowly in each direction.
4. **Leg swings, front to back:** hold a wall or rack for balance and swing one leg forward and back.
5. **Leg swings, side to side:** face the wall and swing one leg across your body and out.

6. **Bodyweight squats:** sit down to a comfortable depth and stand. Hold onto something if you need balance.
7. **Walking lunges or split squats:** short steps, controlled depth.
8. **Cat-cow:** on hands and knees, slowly round and then arch your back.

Part 3: practice sets (2 minutes)

- Before your first exercise, do 1 or 2 light sets of it. For example, 10 reps with about half your working weight, then 5 reps with about three-quarters.
- For later exercises in the session, one light set is usually enough if the muscle is already warm.

Tips

- **Match the warm-up to the day.** On a leg day, spend more of Part 2 on hips and legs. On an upper-body day, more on shoulders.
- **Save long stretches for later.** If flexibility is a goal, hold stretches after your session or at another time.
- **Cool down if you enjoy it.** A few easy minutes at the end is fine but optional.

Warm-up checklist

1. Five minutes of easy cardio.
2. Arm circles and swings.
3. Hip circles and leg swings.
4. Bodyweight squats and lunges.
5. Cat-cow.
6. One or two light practice sets of your first exercise.

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