

The Push-Up Test

The push-up, or press-up test is a really simple test. It measures your upper body strength and fitness.

The push-up mainly uses your pectoralis major muscle (chest) your anterior deltoid (front of shoulder), your triceps (backs of upper arms) and when performed correctly, it will also condition your core (abdomen) and some of the muscles that control the movement of your scapula (shoulder blade)

These muscles are not just important to perform this exercise, they're also important for other sports (like swimming, throwing etc.) and for everyday life when lifting and carrying is required.

After you complete the test, you can compare your results to the norms and recommendations for your age and sex in the table below. Track your progress by performing the test every two months or so.

How to do the push-up test

While performing push ups, you lift up to 70% or so of your total body weight. Using a modified push-up position reduces this amount by a good 10% of your total body weight – and so makes it easier.

Standard push-up test

- Perform a short warm-up
- Adopt the push-up position on hands and toes with hands shoulder-width apart and elbows fully extended
- Keeping your back straight lower your body so your elbows bend to 90 degrees



- Push back up to the start position.
- That is one repetition.
- Complete as many repetitions as possible without losing form – record this figure.

Modified Push-Up Test

A modified version of the test is typically used for women – who tend to have less relative upper body strength than men. The test is the same, apart from the position is modified to make it slightly easier.

- Perform a short warm-up.
- Adopt a modified push-up position, on the hands and knees with hands shoulder-width apart and elbows fully extended.
- Drop the hips, and move the hands forward until you create a straight line and straight back from the knees, to the hips, and to the shoulders.
- Keeping a straight position, lower your upper body so your elbows bend to 90 degrees (slightly lower than the picture below).



- Push back up to the start position.
- That is one repetition.
- Complete as many repetitions as possible without losing form – record this figure.

Score your test results

The table overleaf shows the norms and recommendations for your age and sex. Don't test yourself every week, your muscles need to adapt to your training programme. You should leave at least 4-weeks between tests.



The Push-Up Test

Score your performance

Men	Age: 20-29	Age: 30-39	Age: 40-49	Age: 50-59	Age: 60+
Excellent	54 or more	44 or more	39 or more	34 or more	29 or more
Good	45-54	35-44	30-39	25-34	20-29
Average	35-44	24-34	20-29	15-24	10-19
Poor	20-34	15-24	12-19	8-14	5-9
Very Poor	20 or fewer	15 or fewer	12 or fewer	8 or fewer	5 or fewer
Women	Age: 20-29	Age: 30-39	Age: 40-49	Age: 50-59	Age: 60+
Excellent	48 or more	39 or more	34 or more	29 or more	19 or more
Good	34-48	25-39	20-34	15-29	5-19
Average	17-33	12-24	8-19	6-14	3-4
Poor	6-16	4-11	3-7	2-5	1-2
Very Poor	6 or fewer	4 or fewer	3 or fewer	2 or fewer	1 or fewer

Reference: McArdle W.D. et al, (2006) Essentials of Exercise Physiology. Lippincott Williams