

# Best Rowing Machines For Home

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## This Is The One Dynamic Cardio Machine You Need To Stop Ignoring

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If you're a *House of Cards* fan, you may have Frank Underwood to thank for bringing indoor rowing into your life. During times of stress, this protagonist (who, let's be honest, is really more of an antagonist) turns to rowing for exercise. His was a woodgrain WaterRower designed to replicate the feeling of gliding over a river or lake.

Frank needed an outlet — a place where he could be in full control of everything without distraction, including his own body. It also turns out to be a great workout.

For starters, rowing is a full-body scorcher. It's not about just gripping and ripping back on the handle. You engage your entire body, using 84 percent of your muscles with each stroke, explains Lisa Niren, ACE, trainer at City Row in New York City. "I look at each stroke on the machine as essentially a jump squat and a deadlift, because it mimics the action of both," says Niren. "Plus, there is no other machine or piece of equipment in the gym that provides a more efficient or beneficial use of one's time. Rowing is a one stop shop for fitness — strength, cardio, and endurance all rolled into one."

Related: [The Best Treadmills For Your Home](#)

So you light up most of your body while rowing but which muscles are doing the work? About 60 percent of the work comes from your legs in the initial drive, Niren explains. This includes the glutes, quads, and hamstrings. Then the rest is split between the core and the arms, pulling in the handle to finish off the movement.

If you have knee issues or are just looking for a low-impact form of cardio, an alternative to pounding the *dreadmill*, let rowing be the challenge you need. Working from a seated position allows for less pressure put on the knees, which makes rowing easy and accessible for individuals of all ages and abilities.

Rowers, however, do sit you close to the ground, so anyone with lower back issues may experience discomfort because of the flexion and extension angles you create with your body while you stroke. Not only that but prolonged rowing (we're talking hours of training) does have the potential to result in low back pain because of bad posture, especially due to fatigue. Be aware and let your instructor or doctor know if you're experiencing any issues.

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### Benefits Of Rowing

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Like with many forms of fitness, when it comes to the indoor rowing machine, you control the intensity of your workout based on how much effort you put into each stroke. When done correctly with proper form, rowing can provide boost cardiovascular fitness, muscular endurance, fat-burning potential and improved conditioning, says Niren. To break it down, rowing benefits include:

1. Full-body workout
2. Increased aerobic and anaerobic capacity
3. Burns fat
4. Helps preserve joints because while it's high intensity, it's also low-impact and non-weight bearing

Related: [Exercise Like A Pro With These Top Shelf Heart Rate Monitors](#)

### Types Of Indoor Rowing Machines

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There are four distinct types of indoor rowers including:

1. Air-based (also known as cylinder machines)
2. Hydraulic
3. Magnetic resistance
4. Water

Niren noted that many consider hydraulic machines to be a bit out of date now.

## How To Buy An Indoor Rowing Machine

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If you're considering getting an indoor rower, think about the following questions before making your purchase:

1. Is noise a factor? Are you living in an apartment building where the sound can affect others? How much noise does your indoor rower make?
2. What is the surface made of that the rower will rest on? Hard wood? Do you need to make sure the indoor rower won't slip around or scratch your floor? Can you put a mat under it to reduce vibration?
3. Does it fit? How tall are you? How big are your feet? Do you fit on the indoor rower comfortably?
4. How can the indoor rower be stored? How large is the space where you'll be storing the indoor rower? Does the machine break down and store easily? How much room will it take up?
5. Is space an issue? How large is the machine when set up? Will it fit without issue? Do you have space to row comfortably on it with proper form?
6. How much are you looking to spend? How often do you plan to use the indoor rower? Is it worth the investment?
7. What type of indoor rower are you looking for? Does it simulate rowing on water or does it feel different? How smooth are the strokes? Does the resistance feel comfortable?
8. How much maintenance is needed? Is there a warranty on it? Will you have to set it up yourself? And if so, is the set-up easy?)

## Understanding The Display

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Each indoor rower provides different stats, but in general, there is the feedback provided on the display.

**Strokes per minute (aka "SPM" or Stroke Rate):** This is your speedometer. Stroke rate is the number of strokes you can complete in one minute. A higher stroke rate does not necessarily mean you are more powerful, have more intensity or are at a better fitness

level. But remember, rowing is about power not speed. A higher stroke rate simply means you are completing more strokes in one minute.

**Split time:** Split time is a measure of the pace you are rowing per 500 meters. This measure is affected by speed and power. Generally, the split time is an indication of pace, or the amount of power you can expend per stroke. The lower you drive the number, the more powerful your stroke and the quicker you will cover 500 meters. The lower the split time, the faster you're going. If you were on water, imagine that as your split time goes down, your boat goes faster. So if that the number stays up, you are lagging behind. Split time indicates how much power is being exerted throughout every stroke you take, thus it can change every time you take a stroke. The key to decreasing your split time is to recruit as much power from your legs as possible.

Related: [Get Shredded With These Monster Rowing Workouts](#)

**Watts:** Some indoor rowers have a measure called watts, which is the amount of power you expend in a single stroke. The higher the wattage, the more power behind each stroke. More power behind each stroke means the lower your split time, typically. Think of it this way: If you exert more power through the drive, you're propelling your boat forward even faster. Although the measure of watts isn't as important as split time and strokes per minute, it can be a good way to gauge split time and power.

**Total Meters Traveled:** On all indoor rowers, you get a measure of total meters rowed while on the machine in that session.

**Meters:** The measure of how far you have been rowing or how much farther you have to row.

**Total time:** How long you have been on the machine.

**Time:** How long you have been actively rowing. Or if you are rowing for time, how long you have left to row.

**Calories:** This is not the number of calories your body is burning. The calories on a rower refer to the total energy calories expended on the machine, which can be thought of as the force you are exerting on the rower.

**Timer Button:** This button can be set in 30-second increments. You can track how many meters you can row in that given amount of time. Try to travel more meters or cover more distance in each interval while keeping your strokes per minute consistent.

**Distance Button:** Set distance goals by 50-meter increments in order to see how long it takes you to cover that distance. Try to complete the same distance in less time as you get better at these intervals.

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## The Best Rowing Machines

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## Concept2 Model D Indoor Rower

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If you're looking for reliability, this is the best selling indoor rower in the world. Used by both Olympic and elite-level athletes, this model comes in two colors: grey or black. Monitor your workout on the backlit display, which also has the ability to wirelessly track your heart rate. Simply lift up the side opposite the flywheel and wheel it away for easy storage.

[\\$900.00 at Concept2.com](#)

## NordicTrack RW200 Rower

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Connect your music with this indoor rower's iPod compatible system so you can row to the beat. The monitor is adjustable and displays the wattage you're putting out with each stroke, strokes per minute, total strokes, time, calories, and distance. And the pedals pivot to give you better range of motion.

[\\$599.00, NordicTrack.com](#)

## Stamina ATS Air Rower 1399

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Track your speed, distance, time, and calories burned on this wind-resistance indoor rower. The harder you row, the more resistance you'll feel. The padded seat and large foot plates make it perfect for different body types.

[\\$299.00 at Amazon.com](#)

## WaterRower GX Home

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Channel your inner Frank Underwood on this water rower, which uses actual water as resistance to better replicate actual rowing. This model is made of Ash wood and finished with Danish oil, so you won't be embarrassed if guests happen to catch a glimpse of it when they come over. The monitor allows you to track your workout including stroke rate, speed distance, and time.

[\\$945.00 at WaterRower.com](#)

## Technogym SKILLROW

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Created with the help of Olympic athletes, this indoor rower focuses on gradual resistance, making the rowing movement more fluid and easy on the lower back. Plus, the company's MULTIDRIVE technology allows you to add more resistance on top of the air resistance for a more strength driven workout.

[\\$2,590 at TechnoGym.com](#)

## How To Row With Proper Form

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**Catch:** This is the starting position for your row and the position you will return to for each pull. Start with your arms fully-extended. With your feet in the stirrups, bend your knees so that your

shins are at a near-90-degree angle to the floor. Tilt your hips forward and grab the rower's handles. Keep your back flat.

**Drive:** Begin your first pull by pushing hard away from the rower with your legs, driving through your feet. Keeping a flat back and a tight core, continue pulling with your arms straight until your legs are straight. Then lean your torso back slight and begin pulling with your arms.

Related: [Three Treadmill Workouts That Won't Bore The Crap Out Of You](#)

**Finish:** Maintaining that straight back and your legs straight, pull the handles into your sternum, just below your chest. Try not to flare your elbows but keep them tucked to your sides.

**Recovery:** Reverse the movement. Release your arms back to a straight position and tilt your hips forward. When your arms straight and have passed your knees, start to bend your knees and return to the catch position. Keep your back flat throughout.

## Rowing Workouts

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Once you have you're rower, you may need some ideas for what to do on it. We asked Niren to share some of her favorite, fat-burning, heart-rate spiking workouts with us, categorized by sprint versus distance.

## Sprint Workouts

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### Sprint Workout #1

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**Power pull:** a full rowing stroke that focuses on power instead of speed

**Recovery row:** a stroke at about 50% intensity

### Interval 1: Rowing

Warmup: Row at a moderate pace for one minute (recovery row about 50% intensity)

Perform 5 power pulls

Hold your drive on the final stroke (keep your legs straight) and isolate your arms by pulling the handlebar in and out 5 times.

Return to the catch (knees bent) and perform 10 power pulls , this time holding drive on the final stroke and performing handlebar isolations 10 times.

Repeat 5 power pulls followed by 5 arm isolations

Repeat 10 power pulls followed by 10 arm isolations

5 Minutes - 30 seconds sprints rowing with one minute recovery rows to follow, but dropping recovery to 30 seconds for last 2 rounds.

## **Interval 2: Strength**

Instructions: Perform each exercise for 30 seconds with no rest in-between sets & quick transitions. Once complete, 30 seconds rest & then repeat 2 more rounds of these exercises.

Walkout to plank & shoulder tap each side

Push-ups

Air squats (can be loaded as goblet squat)

Bent-over row - medium sized dumbbells

Kneeling bicep curl into overhead press

Tricep dips - performed on the edge of the row machine

## **Interval 3: Rowing + Strength**

Row 100 Meters

45 seconds of push-ups

Row 200 Meters

45-second plank hold

Row 300 Meters

45 seconds tricep dips off the back of the rower

Row 200 Meters

45 second plank hold

Row 100 Meters

45 seconds of push-ups

Row 200 Meters

45 second air squat (can be loaded as goblet squat)

Row 300 Meters

45 second alternating forward lunges

Row Finale: Row 600 Meters

45 Single Leg Step Up on to the rower. Switch legs halfway through.

## **Sprint Workout #2**

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Warmup (see above in workout 1 for breakdown of recovery row vs power pull):

Recovery Row

Stroke Breakdown

Recovery row

Stroke Pyramid

Power pull row x 5 strokes every 30 seconds for 90 seconds

Power pull row x 10 strokes every 60 seconds for 3 minutes

Circuit 1: Row 100 meters + 10 squats (bodyweight or with weights by your side for suitcase squats)

Circuit 2: Row 200 meters + 10 squats + 20 alternating reverse lunges

Circuit 3: Row 300 Meters + 10 squats + 20 alternating reverse lunges + 10 kneeling bicep curl into overhead press

repeat 3x add weights round 2 and/or 3

Finisher

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4 Minutes: Repeat the following interval x 4 rounds with no breaks

30 seconds Power pull row

30 seconds Recovery row

Sprint Workout #3

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Warm Up Part 1: Row 200 meters at a moderate pace

(Split time between 2:15-3:30 min)

Warm Up Part 2: Alternate between 5 reps of pushing only with your legs (arms remain straight the entire time) and 5 full strokes. Isolate the handle bar after the fifth stroke to your the top of your sternum 5 times. Do this series 10x through to complete your warmup.

**Pyramid workout**

100 meters at a hard intensity with a split lower than your warm-up. Ideally 2 minutes or faster.

Complete 5 air squats, 5 push-ups and 5 tricep dips

200 meters at a hard intensity with a split lower than your warm-up. (2 minutes or faster.) See if you can complete it in double the time of 100 meters or a second less.

Complete 10 air squats, 10 pushups, 10 tricep dips

300 meters

Complete 15 air squats, 15 push-ups, 15 tricep dips

200 meters

Complete 10 air squats, 10 pushups, 10 tricep dips

100 meters

Complete 5 air squats, 5 push-ups and 5 tricep dips

Low plank hold: 60 seconds

Finisher

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500 meter effort. See how long it takes to complete this interval.

Cool down 250 meters at a recovery pace to bring heart rate down.

## Distance Workouts

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### Distance Workout #1

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Row 30 seconds

Recover and/or recovery row pace 15 seconds

Row 30 seconds

### **Core Strength Training**

Plank Pike: Facing away from the rower in a plank, place palms on the floor about one foot in front of the back of the rower and feet on the seat. Pull your feet in toward your hands, piking or lifting your hip high and lower back to start. Repeat 15 times.

Row 30 seconds

Recover and/or recovery row pace 15 seconds

Row 30 seconds

### **Core Strength Training**

Elevated Mountain Climber: Begin with your body perpendicular to the rower in a plank position with palms on the floor and feet on the railing of the rower. Pull your right knee toward your chest, return to start & then switch sides to the left. That is 1 rep. Repeat 20 times.

Row 1 Minute

Recover and/or recovery row pace 30 seconds

Row 1 Minute

### **Core Strength Training**

Complete the exercises below (same from above plus one more without stopping between each movement)

Plank Pike: Facing away from the rower in a plank, place palms on the floor about one foot in front of the back of the rower and feet on the seat. Pull your feet in toward your hands, piking or lifting your hip high and lower back to start. Repeat 15 times.

Elevated Mountain Climber: Begin with your body perpendicular to the rower in a plank position with palms on the floor and feet on the railing of the rower. Pull your right knee toward your chest, return to start & then switch sides to the left. That is 1 rep. Repeat 20 times.

Elevated Scorpion Mountain Climber: Begin with your body perpendicular to the rower in a plank position with palms on the floor and feet on the railing of the rower. Pull your right knee toward your chest, then back to start, then right knee to right elbow, then back to start. Switch sides. Repeat 20 times.

### **Distance Workout #2**

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Declining speed - starting at 28 SPM going down to 22, trying to row as many meters in each endurance interval with each round.

Warm-Up:

5 min easy row

50-65% intensity

#### **Interval 1**

**Instructions:** Complete 4 rounds

1 min sprint (max effort) at 28 SPM

45 seconds rest

Renegade Row: As many reps as possible in 2 minutes

#### **Interval 2**

**Instructions:** Complete 4 rounds

1 min sprint (max effort) at 26 SPM

45 seconds rest

Push-ups: As many reps as possible in 2 minutes

### **Interval 3**

**Instructions:** Complete 4 rounds

1 min sprint (max effort) at SPM 24

45 seconds rest

Mountain climbers: As many reps as possible in 2 minutes

### **Interval 4**

**Instructions:** Complete 4 rounds

1 min sprint (max effort) at 22 SPM

45 seconds rest

Air squats: As many reps as possible in 2 minutes

### **Distance Workout #3**

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Warmup:

5 min easy row

50% intensity

Workout:

1 min row

1 min rest

2 min row

2 min rest

3 min row

3 min rest

4 min row

4 min rest

3 min row

3 min rest

2 min row

2 min rest

1 min row

1 min rest

Stroke rate 24-28 and intensity starts each push at 75% max effort, ending with an all out effort.

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