



Trashmagination Podcast #91 – Exercise Equipment

Welcome to Trashmagination, a podcast about reimagining trash. I'm Carla Brown.

Today's episode is about making exercise equipment from recycled materials. It's almost the new year and many of us will set a goal of increasing our physical activity. Many activities do not require exercise equipment. But if you want to add activities that increase your strength and flexibility, you might find homemade exercise equipment increases your motivation. You can often find secondhand exercise equipment at places like Play It Again Sports or a thrift shop. I saw kettle bells which cost \$40-50 selling for \$10-15. When you buy secondhand, you reduce items going to landfill. You can also request exercise equipment on your Buy Nothing Group, which is where I got dumb bells, yoga mats and an agility ladder.

I became interested in making exercise equipment from recycled materials for my taiko group. One month each year, I lead the practice. To warm us up, I created activity stations around the room. People rotated through the circuit every 2-3 minutes in pairs. Everyone got a kick out of my homemade equipment, and if you are laughing while you are exercising, that's a good thing. Another fan of my homemade exercise equipment is my son when he was working on his Personal Fitness merit badge for Scouts. My homemade items made him laugh and engaged him as well.

As much as possible, I look for ideas that you could make if have items to reuse such as old blue jeans, old socks, old backpacks and maybe even a few pieces of PVC pipe from some of your previous creative reuse projects.

Medicine Balls / Sand Bags

Let's start with medicine balls, one of my favorite pieces of exercise equipment. Here are my favorite exercises:

1. I throw a medicine ball down to the ground as hard as I can. Then I bend my knees, pick it up and throw it down again. This is a great cardio exercise and works on your squats.
2. I hold a medicine ball at waist-level and twist side-to-side to warm up my lower back. The added weight of the medicine ball makes the twists more effective.
3. When doing crunches, I lift the medicine ball so it is suspended up over my chest. I don't curl towards my knees but push the medicine ball straight up towards the ceiling while engaging my upper abdominals.

Medicine balls are made from strong materials like leather. I saw tutorials which involved cutting a basketball and filling it with sand up to your preferred weight. Then you wrap the ball with many layers of duct tape [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3EK-rQbWLEg>]. We own a basketball that is getting old, but it's not defunct. I could ask for a ball and sand on my Buy Nothing group, but I decided to make a medicine ball with materials I already own.

I cut six squares from ragged denim jeans that were 9 by 9 inches. I sewed them with my sewing machine into a cube, leaving a small section unstitched so I could turn the cube inside out and hide the raw seams. Then I started stuffing the cube with old socks. I mend socks a few times, but soon they get too worn out. When I stuffed my cube full of socks as tight as I could, it weighed six pounds. At the gym, I use a medicine ball that weighs 15 or 20 pounds so my homemade ball was too light for most of my favorite activities. My plan is to make a larger one cube to get it up to 15 pounds.

A similar piece of exercise equipment to a medicine ball is a sand bag, which is a long tube with handles on each end. You can make it the way I made my medicine bag but fill it with sand or water inside bottles. Or you can creatively reuse small duffle bag which already has straps on the ends.

Kettle Bells

Kettle bells are made from a big chunk of metal. This makes a very dense, heavy object with a handle. The exercises I like to do with kettle bells involve lifting them up from the ground or swinging them around my waist. One way to make a homemade kettle bell is to fill a plastic milk jug with water or sand. I made my 9-inch square medicine ball into a kettle bell, meaning that I added a handle to it. I took a recycled taekwondo belt from my friend Jen and I sewed it on the medicine ball.

Wrist and Ankle Weights

You know I love creative reuse projects that involve sewing, so I love the idea of making wrist and ankle weights from fabric scraps [<https://www.thesprucecrafts.com/wrist-ankle-weight-sewing-pattern-2977689>]. You sew a small rectangle-shaped pillow and attach strapping. I have strapping that I saved from old backpacks or canvas bags.

Dumb Bells

The next type of exercise equipment you can make are dumb bells. There is a tutorial by master recycler Danny Seo where he makes dumb bells from recycled CDs and a pipe [<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=518609508505348>]. He uses a one-foot long metal pipe that fits through the center of the CDs. At one end of the pole he puts a nut, then slides on about 20 CDs, then another nut. Then he balances out the pipe with the same amount of CDs on the other side.

Great dumb bell moves - <https://greatist.com/fitness/30-dumbbell-exercises-missing-your-routine>

Agility Ladder

An agility ladder is made from two long straps with horizontal bars between them, like a fabric ladder. You put it on the ground and then you run or hop very fast in the spaces without touching the bars or straps. You probably have seen football players doing these types of drills. This is a great piece of equipment to make cardio more fun. With my taiko group, we run through the ladder one after the other, then circle back for the next movement.

I lucked out a month ago when my neighbor gave me her agility ladder, but in case you don't have a neighbor giving one away, you can also make an agility ladder from recycled materials [<https://www.instructables.com/id/Agility-Ladder-free-and-easy/>]. This tutorial took 11 paint stir sticks and laid them on long strips of duct tape. Then they put another strip of duct tape to cover all the sticky bits. This tutorial recommends spacing the paint sticks 18 inches apart.

Agility ladder drills - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iICTuTZCjyM>

Gliding Discs

The next type of exercise equipment is gliding discs. You put your feet or hands on these discs. If you put the discs under your feet when you are in a push-up position, you can then walk across the room on your hands with your feet gliding behind you. This is a very tough workout! If you are working out on wood floors, replace gliding discs with socks or wash cloths. On carpet, paper plates work. I'll link to paper plate and wash cloth workout videos so you can see how it works.

- Paper plate workout - <https://www.shape.com/fitness/workouts/home-workout-challenge-your-muscles>
- Wash cloth workout - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bbNtA1SrTPQ>

Battle Ropes

Battle ropes are 50-foot long heavy ropes folded in half and anchored in the middle. You hold the two ends of the rope and then whip them for an incredible arm and cardio work-out. Battle ropes costs \$50-70. One creative reuse alternative

is to ask your fire department for old hoses. They have to replace them on a regular basis and often will give them to you for free [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nw0CwPK13XU>]. Other people use recycled garden hoses filled with sand or water, although they are not as heavy as battle ropes at the gym.

Resistance Bands

Resistance bands are long pieces of rubber that you put under your feet or around an object and then pull on them to build strength. The challenge with most resistance bands is that they are made from a material that breaks down over time, especially if you store it in a hot place like your car. (Ask me how I know this). But you can make homemade resistance bands from a recycled t-shirt or a strip of spandex fabric. You can cut the t-shirt to make a loop that you pull on. I will link to a tutorial about this on the block "And then came L" [<https://www.andnextcomesl.com/2014/10/homemade-stretchy-resistance-bands.html>] which is a resource blog for families supporting a family member with autism. These resistance bands can be used by people with autism as a calming technique. There is a product called Stretch-Eze which is like a giant loop sewn from spandex, which is in effect a giant resistance band. If you had a piece of spandex clothing like leggings, they might be a great thing to creatively reuse into a resistance band as well.

Slosh Pipe

This next piece of equipment has a fun name – it's a slosh pipe. The most challenging part about this project is finding a PVC pipe that is about four feet long. You purchase end caps to put at each end. You mostly fill the pipe with water. As you walk, squat or do lunges, the water sloshes back and forth along the pipe, causing you to get a great core workout [<https://experiencelife.com/article/how-to-make-a-slosh-pipe/>]. This is only a creative reuse project if you can get some pipe from a handy friend or maybe the Habitat for Humanity ReStore.

Wrist Roller

A wrist roller is a piece of exercise equipment for strengthening your forearms. It also conditions the front part of your shoulders or deltoids and your core. A wrist roller is a pole with a weight attached to a rope. You roll the pole forwards or backwards to wrap the string around, causing the weight to rise. You can make your own by drilling a hole through a dowel and tying a rope through the hole [<https://www.instructables.com/id/Home-Made-Wrist-Roller/>]. Then you attach a weight to the end of the rope. The weight could be a plastic milk filled with water.

Foam Rollers

I am saving ideas for a podcast episode on creative reuse of yoga mats, but for today I will share an idea about how to make a foam roller from a recycled foam yoga mat. A foam roller is a firm tube that you lay on and roll back and forth to give yourself a massage. I learned about foam rollers last spring. That's the busy season for my taiko group during cherry blossom season. I had chronic pain in my quads during that time. Did you know that taiko is a huge workout for your quads? That's because we stand with our knees bent while we play to be more grounded. I told a personal trainer about this pain which did not go away unlike typical muscle pain that gets better after a few days. She said it was likely because my fascia or connective tissue had gotten too tight and the best solution was a massage or rolling on a foam roller.

You can make a foam roller by wrapping a PVC pipe with a recycled yoga mat [<https://wellnessmama.com/60292/foam-roller/>]. It would be great if you can get the PVC pipe at a place like Habitat for Humanity Restore or ask on your Buy Nothing group because a short length of PVC pipe is probably something that people would be happy to clear out of their work rooms. Another way to make a foam roller is to put a dowel like a broomstick through a pool noodle [<http://lovinghere.com/rollin-rollin-rollin-a-diy-foam-roller/>].

Yoga Equipment

Next I'll share ideas for yoga equipment from recycled materials. This week I sewed a yoga block or brick. A yoga block is usually made from rubber, wood or cork and it is the size of a typical construction brick. A yoga block provides support for certain yoga poses. I will link to an article in the show notes by Yoginomics about how to use a yoga block.

One way to make a yoga block from recycled materials is to cut scrap wood and sand the edges until they are smooth (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oJHHKssD9Bo>). I like that idea, but I got inspired by Candice D-Reverdy on my Facebook group Upcycled Cloth Collective [<https://www.facebook.com/groups/UpCycledClothCollective/permalink/1448084492025286/>]. She sewed a yoga block from denim scraps, similar to my medicine ball, stuffed with fabric scraps. I stuffed mine with old socks like my medicine ball. My denim yoga block not as sturdy as a wooden or cork yoga block, so it's only useful for a subset of poses that involve supporting your joints.

Another piece of exercise equipment that I made from fabric scraps was a yoga bolster. This is a firm pillow that you put under your lower back, or sit on it, and again it provides support to your body during specific poses. My friend and Iyengar yoga instructor Leanne asked me to sew a new cover for one of her yoga bolsters because the cover had ripped. I sewed together upholstery samples into a bolster cover. I made two layers of patchwork fabric back-to-back to ensure it would be extra strong. You can learn more about my bolster cover in the show notes [<https://trashmagination.com/sewing-a-cover-for-a-bolster-from-recycled-upholstery-samples/>]. I hope to make more yoga bolsters and stuff them with recycled blankets or quilts that are falling apart.

Many yoga practitioners also creatively reuse belts as part of their yoga practice.

Regarding yoga mats, there are tutorials showing how to sew your own yoga mats [<https://mesewcrazy.com/2015/05/yoga-mat-diy.html>]. While most people use foam yoga mats, the problem is that foam yoga mats are challenging to recycle, but that's a topic for a future episode. You can do yoga on any mat that is a non-slip or you can be like me and get them secondhand on your Buy Nothing group.

Thank you!

Thank you for listening! Get more ideas for exercise equipment from recycled materials on my Pinterest board [<https://www.pinterest.com/Trashmagination/exercise-equipment/>]. How have you made exercise equipment from recycled materials? Please let me know at trashmagination@gmail.com. As I said at the start, you don't really need exercise equipment to exercise more in 2020. Don't say to yourself, "I'll start exercising once I can do those creative reuse projects." Instead, you can make these items as you have time and need a boost in your motivation.

There are many benefits to making exercise equipment, especially if it means you exercise more. However, I am very concerned that as a society, many people are becoming more isolated and lonely. If you can share your exercise equipment, you might find it more energizing, even if you are more introverted. I am lucky to be in a special taiko group. We make exercise fun. Share your homemade exercise equipment with a group to have more fun!

Are you setting any new year's resolutions related to creative reuse? My word of the year for 2019 was "inventory" so my focus has been using the items I collect in real projects, and not just collecting them! I also gave away many collections of recycled materials. My creative reuse resolution for 2020 is making 12 fidget quilts for seniors with dementia. I talked about that back in episode 72 which was about community service through creative reuse. If you make fidget quilts, let's connect and keep each other accountable!

I don't ask often, but it would be a generous year-end gift if you gave a review of this podcast wherever you listen to podcasts. It's a zero-waste gift with zero cost. Until next time – may you get inspired to move more in 2020 with exercise equipment made from recycled materials!