

How to Build a Home Gym That'll Give You a Big Return on Investment

[Editor's Note: We're going to do something a little different today. This guest post was submitted by WCI reader Dr. Alex Robles, an OB/GYN Resident, and founder of [The White Coat Trainer](#). His blog is designed to help doctors, students, and other hard-working professionals integrate health and fitness into their busy schedules. Together with his wife, Dr. Brittany Noel Robles, they carve out time from their ultra-busy schedule to work out and share their passion with others. Passion like this is a huge factor in fighting off physician burn out and staying happy in medicine and life. It might be climbing, traveling, running, or [in Brittany's case deadlifting 300 lbs.](#), that keep us going. Katie and I were pleased to see we've basically followed their instructions for making a home gym, although we probably need to spend a little more time there! We have no financial relationship.]



Investing in your physical fitness can often be quite expensive. Just like the stock market, you can choose to invest in fancy holdings, or you can stick to the basics- the things that are proven to work time and time again. Whether you like it or not, you should probably be investing in your physical fitness, right now.

Staying Fit Can Cost a Lot of Money and Time

Depending on where you live and how many amenities you'd like to have, a regular gym membership can run you anywhere between \$30-150 a month. That's just to use the facility. You also need a few outfits to wear to the gym, a pair of workout shoes, and possibly a gym bag to bring a water bottle and a few other things. Then, don't forget about the cost of eating an optimal post workout meal after each workout. If your gym is far from where you live, you may have to spend approximately 30 minutes commuting back and forth to the closest gym, as well as another 60 minutes working out. [Physicians simply don't have that kind of time to spend!](#) And, when your "[living like a resident](#)" you just don't have that kind of money to spend.

How Can a Physician Make Fitness Work?

First, by utilizing the highest yield training programs, and second, building a useful home gym.

Why Build a Home Gym?



Dr's Brittany & Alex
Robles

There are many benefits to owning a home gym:

1. You save money on gym membership costs.
2. You save time commuting to and from the gym.
3. You don't have to worry about inconvenient gym hours or unexpected closings.
4. You don't have to worry about crowded gyms and waiting for equipment.
5. It helps to instill the value of regular exercise to your family, as your kids often imitate what you do.
6. You Improve your physical fitness which has the potential to save you a ton of money in the future!

Do you need any more convincing?

Isn't Gym Equipment Expensive?

Gym equipment has the potential to be extremely expensive, and there are so many different things you can purchase. Fortunately, there is no need to spend thousands of dollars on all the fancy stuff you see at commercial gyms. Funny enough, the most expensive gym items tend to be the least useful! This post will go over the items that you actually *need* so that you can spend your money and your time on other worthwhile investments.

Building a Basic Home Gym on a Budget

When building a home gym, it is important to get only the stuff that matters and not a random assortment of equipment

with a lot of bells and whistles. We will focus on the essential equipment that is most likely to give you results in as short a workout as possible. This is one of those situations where the quantity of your training is nowhere near as important as the quality of your training.

[The key functional exercises](#) of a high-yield training program are the [squat](#), [deadlift](#), [bench press](#), and [overhead press](#). These exercises are your biggest return on investment. Here is the equipment you'll need in order to do the "Big 4" [as well as most other exercises](#) that can be added to a strength training program:

1. A **Power rack** or **Squat stand**
2. A good quality **Barbell**
3. A stack of **Weight Plates**



Let's go over each one individually.

The Power Rack: The Single Most Important Item in Any Gym

Just like a retirement account, this is the first thing you should invest in. A power rack is a large metal frame that allows you to support weights at varying heights for different exercises. They are extremely versatile and allow you to

perform almost all major compound barbell exercises. There are many different kinds of power racks, all with varying levels of sophistication and attachments. If the power rack has a pull-up bar attached at the top, that's icing on the cake. Another great addition to the power rack are pegs that allow you to store the weighted plates alongside it. The Rack should be able to support about 1000 lbs of weight and should have hooks that you can adjust to various heights. This kind of power rack can cost you anywhere from [\\$500-\\$1500](#). If that is out of your budget, you could also get a Squat Stand. Squat Stands are a simplified version of a power rack without any of the fancy add-ons. They can still be adjusted to allow you to place your weights at any varying height to perform the major exercises. Squat Stands are about [\\$200-\\$400](#).

An Olympic Barbell

Too many people make the mistake of thinking that a set of bow flex dumbbells are a good investment. While they look nice and high tech, dumbbells should not be the first piece of gym equipment you buy.

What you need is a Barbell.

Barbells provide several advantages over dumbbells:

1. They can easily be loaded to any desired weight.
2. You can lift more weight using a barbell than a dumbbell
3. They require A LOT less storage space than a full set of dumbbells



A good quality barbell can cost approximately [\\$100-300](#). It should weigh 20kg/45lbs and it should be an Olympic barbell that can easily support 500+ lbs. of weight. If you are a beginner or a smaller individual, you can purchase a lighter Olympic Barbell of 35 lbs. Most of the exercises that you can perform with dumbbells can also be performed with a barbell.

Weights

The last things you need are weight plates. You should buy approximately 285 lbs. of weights in this fashion.

4 plates of 45 lbs.

2 plates of 25 lbs.

4 plates of 10 lbs. are

2 plates of 5 lbs.

2 plates of 2.5 lbs.

[This can be the most expensive item in the home gym.](#) Each plate will roughly cost \$1.50 per pound. This will be plenty of weight to start off with and will allow you to get any combination of weights you may need. Of all the types of weights, metal plates are the cheapest option. They are extremely durable, but they may rust over time.

Where to Purchase Your Equipment

Websites that sell good high-quality gym equipment include [Rogue Fitness](#), [Vulcan Strength](#), and [Elite FTS](#). (I do not have any financial relationship with any of these companies). You could find some items on Amazon too, but just make sure that the reviews are great and hold up to the standards described above. The best way to purchase cheaply is to search Craig's List or your local classifieds to find high quality used equipment.

Total Costs of Your Home Gym

Those are the big three. I will call this the bare minimum of gym equipment that you need to achieve great results. If you only owned these three things, (Just like the three major funds: total stock index, total bond index and total international stock index) you would be fine. All of these things can be purchased for under \$1000. That may seem like a hefty upfront investment, but it's one that can pay dividends for a lifetime.



The gym should pay for itself after about one year of regular use, especially if someone else is using it too.

Extra Credit Items

[If your budget still allows you to get more equipment](#), here are a few other high yield items in order of importance.

Adjustable Bench

A bench will allow you to perform many different exercises from varying angles. These include exercises while lying flat on an incline or completely sitting upright. It is also necessary to perform the ever-popular bench press exercise inside your power rack or squat stand. A [good quality adjustable bench](#) can be purchased for ~\$300. If you would like a cheaper option, you could get a non-adjustable bench, without wheels to keep the savings going. A high-quality nonadjustable bench is about \$150.

Flooring/Heavy Duty Mat

This item is most important for performing deadlifts or any other exercise where the barbell starts on the floor. This helps protect your floor and also your weights. You can also use the mats to perform floor related exercises such as planks, ab wheel rollout, and lunges. You can purchase rubber mats that can be pieced together, a full Oly, or Deadlift Platform. This item can cost anywhere from [\\$100- \\$300](#).

Adjustable Dumbbells

Finally, adjustable dumbbells are worthwhile, but only after you have purchased the aforementioned items.

There is no need to purchase the fancy ones from the commercials, as dumbbells are just dumbbells. You can get adjustable dumbbells for a significantly cheaper price with the same utility.

[You can get 200 lbs. worth of dumbbells for ~\\$200](#) (Which is more than you will need).

Dumbbells should only constitute a minority of your exercise program as you will get the biggest bang for your buck using compound Barbell and body weight exercises.

Dumbbells represent holdings that you would get in a taxable account, only after you've maxed out your 401k.

Final Words on Designing Your Budget Home Gym

It should go without saying that you should design your gym in a place where the floor can handle heavy weights, such as a basement or a garage.

If you only had the bare minimum that we described above, you will be able to perform >80% of all the exercises that you will ever need to do.

Focus on large compound exercises that look like real-world movements.

Start light and make small progressions using the smallest margin you can think of. Check out our series on training, starting with [3 Essential Principles of Successful Training](#) to learn more.

Don't major in the minors. Build yourself an effective home gym, an efficient training program, and improve your fitness!

What do you think? How have you stayed fit as a busy professional? Would you consider building yourself a home gym? Comment below!