

Jess Lloyd-Mostyn

While sailing is generally very good for the health, blue water cruising generally includes long periods of doing, well, not very much. There are, however, solutions out there

Sailing is an incredible sport. It can tone your body in so many ways. The strength gained from working with the force and power of the wind all the while balancing your own weight, agility and momentum is a fantastic all-round workout. And then, of course, a lot of sailors ruin that by making up for it at the bar afterwards.

However, sailing and cruising are very different beasts. Cruisers are not out there on the water, pushing their boats and their bodies every day. Instead, those of us who live aboard and sail worldwide tend to have bursts of activity; busy months, seasons or whole years when we're covering big mileage crossing oceans or island-hopping. And this contrasts with long stretches where we are focusing more on the living part of our floating lives. Dawdling at anchor in secluded bays, avoiding tropical storm seasons, getting to know a village or town like a local.

So if your boat is in this type of pattern, with regular extended periods of immobility, how do you keep fit when you're not out there battling the elements or perfecting your racing sail trim? Truth be told the only recognisable exercise we do on board is rolling out our mat on the floor of the main saloon for a half hour or so of yoga. Or swimming and snorkelling at anchor. But that's because there is actually ceaseless activity involved in boat life.

Living at anchor involves constant movement, no matter how slight. Even the flattest anchorage has a continual gentle bob of motion. We've tuned it out so thoroughly that we barely notice it, until non-boating friends step aboard with a queasy grimace. Yet this soft sway underfoot means that your core muscles are continually, subtly and subconsciously readjusting, tensing and releasing as needed. It helps your posture as well, as keeping yourself straight and upright but with the ability to flex and bounce with any motion strengthens your spine. And that's just the base-level movement. Unexpected wakes, uncomfortable wind over tide situations or sudden squalls are common, even in sheltered harbours, and your body is always bracing and adapting to the changes in motion. A



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Jess and James left the UK in 2011 in their Crossbow 42 and have sailed halfway round the world, growing their crew en route. Follow their journey at water-log.com

lot of boats, ours included, are not so flash and fancy that everything is automated. We pump our feet up and down on the salt-water foot pump at the sink to do the washing up and do the same with our arms to flush the hand pump on the marine toilets, which our kids are still not strong enough to do themselves.

We don't have a water-maker and we still prefer to fill jerry cans and lug them back to the boat rather than come alongside to fill directly into our main tank. I think this is simply that we enjoy the habit and the process, being aware of just how much water we need and consume. Although, we've sailed in plenty of remote parts where a trip back with several 20 litre jugs was a more arduous ordeal. And it's not only carting water, all our cooking gas and groceries are hefted on board, no doorstep online delivery here.

We also like to row our dinghy in general, more exercise, but even when we're lazy and using the outboard there is the whole process of lifting the tender off the deck and lowering it into the water, followed by the same action with the outboard. Plus you have to lift it all back on again to put it to bed afterwards.

Then there's the task of cleaning the hull, an ongoing chore unless you want to grow a reef underneath you. Diving in and snorkelling down, all while holding on to scrapers and scouring pads, and then giving the whole boat a good scrub below the waterline, including poking out all the seacocks is like a gym session in itself. But throw in a strong spring tide current or murky visibility and then it's even more of a fitness challenge.

The funny thing is that these are just boat jobs, not considered exercise in their own right. Haring up and down the steep companionway steps; scrambling fore and aft along the length of the inside quickly shutting all the portlights when a rainstorm starts; climbing the mast; getting the boat prepped and ready to move, lifting anchor and then putting everything back when you arrive – even if you haven't lifted the sails and simply driven a mile to the next anchorage. None of it counts as sailing, simply living, and it's far less demanding than racing but all of it keeps us healthy one wave or water can at a time.

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