



Make 2008 Your Best Fitness Year

Do you work out regularly but aren't getting the results you want? Have you found that spending time exercising doesn't necessarily produce results? You could be making mistakes that make your workouts less effective. These 5 common workout mistakes can sabotage good intentions, waste time and, in some cases, lead to injuries. Let's avoid them in 2008!

Not Stretching: You're busy juggling life's demands and barely finding time to squeeze in a workout, so taking extra time to stretch seems like a waste. Recent studies have shown that stretching is neither a waste of time nor something we can do without. Flexible muscles are less likely to get strained or pulled than tight ones. Stretching combined with strength training can make you stronger than strength training alone. Your body will feel less sore and stiff the next day if you've stretched between sets or immediately after your strength or aerobic workout. When your muscles are warm and pliable, they respond better to the stretches.

Not Warming Up: You're short on time so you jumping right into your workout without giving your body a chance to warm up. This is a shock to your body. Your muscles need time to adjust to the increased demands. A short warm-up raises your core body temperature and allows your heart rate to increase gradually. This will make a big difference in your strength and endurance, and ultimately the enjoyment of your exercise session.

Not Using Appropriate Weight: Do you try to lift more than your muscles can handle and end up jerking the weights and/or minimizing your range of motion? The best way to build strength and muscle tone is to control the weight through the exercise's full range. If you can't fully extend the movement or have to swing the weight, it's too heavy. Excessive momentum takes resistance off the working muscles and transfers it to your joints and other muscles. Your back is particularly vulnerable to this. Slow, smooth movement through the full range of motion will avoid strain and injury while producing beautiful results.

Leaning on Cardio Machines: Are you one of those people who crank the cardio machine to a high level of resistance, speed, or incline, and then spend your whole workout leaning on the handrails? This leaning posture puts extra stress on your shoulders, elbows and wrists -- and you aren't getting the workout you think you are. For an effective workout, adjust the intensity to the point at which you can maintain an upright position while only using the handrails for balance. This way, the large muscles in your legs will have to work to support all your weight, your heart will pump harder, and you'll burn more calories.

Over Fueling: Consuming sports drinks and energy bars to "fuel" your workout can ruin your weight-loss efforts. These products often have a calorie count roughly equal to what you just worked so hard to burn off.

Most experts agree that you only need sports drinks and energy bars when you're exercising intensely for longer than two hours at a time. Instead, drink lots of water before, during and after your workouts. A healthy diet fits most exercisers' needs.

You're investing time and effort to improving your body. So, you deserve to get the best return on that investment. Don't make these common mistakes and you'll reap better benefits from the time you invest in your workouts. 2008 will be a great fitness year!

Contributing Source: Los Angeles Times Health Section, 2000.