

GYM SINS

Do you skip stretching? Hit the bike hungry? Trudie McConnochie exposes fitness faux pas that foil your best body

Sometimes, the hardest part of a workout is getting to the gym. The office, couch and pub can present compelling arguments against exercise, so when you overcome those hurdles and get to the treadmill, you want to get the most out of your session. Problem is, some of us aren't getting the best results because we don't stretch properly, eat for fuel or push ourselves. To help you avoid a fruitless workout, *Good Health* asked Kiwi fitness experts to name the most common exercise errors.

HOLDING BACK TO BURN FAT

Many of us are labouring under the delusion that working out at around 65 per cent of your maximum heart rate will burn more fat than going hard-out. There's an element of truth behind this theory, says Auckland-based health and exercise coach Jonathan Callinan, but that approach isn't an effective use of your workout time. Exercising at full intensity is the key to losing weight, he says, as you'll burn both fat and calories.

"Once you've used up your available carbohydrates you

start using fat for fuel," he says. "So when your body needs more fuel than your carbohydrate stores can provide, it starts breaking down fat stores into carbs – so you're going to end up burning more fat when you're working hard. You don't get that if you're just working out at 65 per cent. "A lot of people on cross-trainers and treadmills are just plodding along, reading their books and not pushing their heart rates up, thinking they're burning fat. But the best way to lose weight and reduce fat is to burn more calories overall."

EXERCISING WHEN HUNGRY

The desire to burn fat is why some gym-goers like to work out on an empty stomach. If there are no available carbohydrates, won't the body go straight to its fat stores for fuel? Yet it doesn't work like that, says Callinan.

"If you're training on an empty stomach your body will be sluggish and your metabolism won't be working efficiently," he says. "That means you won't burn fat efficiently."

However eating directly before a workout will give you stitch, because your body is working hard to digest while you're exercising.

"For a one-hour gym session, you want to eat something with a low GI (Glycemic Index) rating 60 to 90 minutes beforehand, which will release sugar slowly into the blood system," Callinan advises. Visit www.glycemicindex.com to check the GI rating of your pre-gym snack.

HEADING HOME VIA MCDONALD'S

When you're feeling triumphant after a kick-arse

exercise session, it's tempting to "reward" yourself with a junk food fix. That jeopardises your hard work, Callinan says.

"What you put in your body is how it performs, how it recovers and how your muscles grow," he explains. "In terms of your results, 70 per cent is down to nutrition, including water, and 30 per cent is the actual exercise."

The ideal recovery is to reach for a carbohydrate and protein boost no sooner than one hour after you finish your workout.

"A lot of people eat straight after training, but to optimise calorie burn after a workout it's much better to wait an hour because you're still burning calories after you train," he says.

OVEREXTENDING DURING CLASSES

Still learning the ropes at pump class? Don't try to keep up with the regulars.

"Going too hard, too soon is a common mistake," says Carla Fitzsimmons, group fitness operations manager for Les Mills. "The only thing a new participant ▶

FORGETTING TO HYDRATE

Are you one of those people who hits the gym without a water bottle? Bad idea. During a one-hour workout, you should drink at least 750ml of water, Callinan says. "If you've got no water, training is pointless. The ratio is, about one per cent in dehydration will result in a 20 per cent drop in performance."

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should focus on is getting in a routine.” And don’t hide away at the back of the room, she adds.

“You don’t have to stand up the front but if you could stand where you get a good view of the instructor, then you are more likely to get help if needed.”

AVOIDING STRETCHES

It’s easy to see stretching as an annoying chore, and skip it completely. Not only is that counter-productive, it could leave you in worlds of pain the following day.

“Stretching is actually more important than the exercise itself,” Callinan explains. “It reduces your chances of DOMS – delayed onset muscle soreness – and helps your flexibility for next time. If you continuously don’t stretch after exercise you’re hampering your own performance and making yourself more susceptible to injury,” he says.

He recommends 10 to 15 minutes of stretches after a one-hour workout – holding each stretch, breathing in, then exhaling as you push a bit further for a “a real pull, but not causing pain.”

And before your session, spend at least five minutes doing dynamic stretches (stretching with movement).

“Think about which muscles you’ll be working and focus on getting blood to that muscle, with a pulsing movement, and limbering up the joints. That’s a lot more effective than simply holding a stretch when your muscles are cold,” he says.

To stretch your quads, for example, he suggests bringing each knee up to your chest in turn, gradually increasing in speed.

LEAVING YOGA EARLY

Auckland yoga guru Mande White has noticed that some of her students leave classes before the relaxation lie-down at the end.

“People think it’s a waste of time, because they think lying down is doing nothing,” she says. “We have this fast frantic lifestyle and we want to do everything speedily.

“But the relaxation is allowing the nervous system to catch up, and soothes it so you can withstand adversity in life. Being able to relax makes you mentally and emotionally stronger.” ◉