



A CANADIAN PUBLICATION

STRATEGIES FOR A TOTAL BODY WORKOUT

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Guest Writer

COMMON BEGINNER WORKOUT MISTAKES TO AVOID

Diving head first into an exercise program is encouraged from a motivational standpoint, but it can also be dangerous if there's no foresight or planning.

By Debi Lander, M.Ed.

If you are a beginner, your body isn't prepared for acclimatized to the types of strains exercise can place on it. As a result, engaging in an exercise program unprepared both physically and mentally can lead to burnout, frustration and injury.

Indeed, maximizing workout results takes a combination of motivation and information. To help you get the best result for your efforts, here are 21 common fitness mistakes that can be easily avoided:

1. Skipping the warm-up

Muscles need time to adjust to the demands placed on them during exercise. Before hitting the weight room or jumping into your regular cardio workout, you should take a few minutes

to gently walk, bike or whatever you choose to prepare the body for heavier activity. Breaking a light sweat will get your blood pumping, warm up muscles and ligaments, greatly reduce your risk of injury and increase the effectiveness of your workout.

2. Skipping the cool-down

Due to time constraints, many people head straight to the showers after their last repetition or as soon as the timer on the stairclimber runs out. Instead, take a few minutes to lower your heart rate closer to its resting rate. This will reduce your risk of injury and give you a few minutes to incorporate some relaxation into your routine.

3. Not stretching

Flexible muscles are far less likely to be pulled than tight ones. Stretch before a heavy workout or after your workout as a warm-down. Never stretch a muscle without warming up first to reduce your risk of injury even further. Regular stretching greatly increases your flexibility.

4. Lifting too much too fast

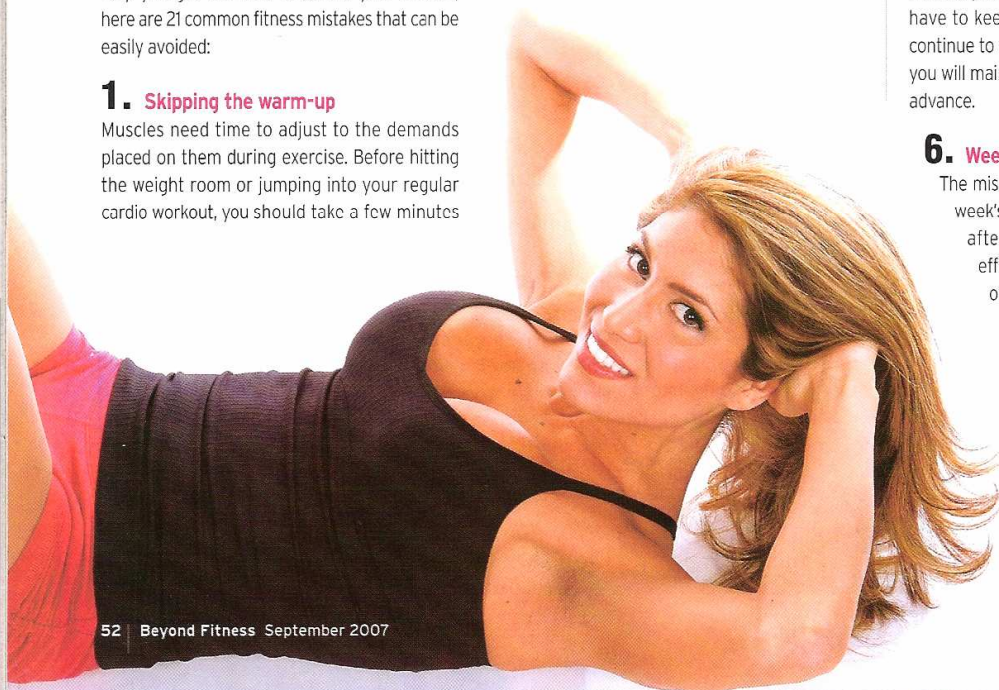
Placing demands on your muscles that they are not prepared to handle is the best way to injure yourself. Gradual, progressive resistance is a far more effective - and safe - way to increase muscle strength. You should select a weight that allows you to do 10 to 15 repetitions. If you can't do 10 reps, the weight is too heavy. If you can do 15, then increase the weight by 5%.

5. Using too light of a resistance


If you are doing over 15 reps or have not increased your resistance in over two weeks, it is time to progress. If you want to improve, you have to keep your muscles stimulated. If you continue to do the same weights with high reps, you will maintain your current physique and not advance.

6. Weekend Warrior

The mistake of the person who tries to fit a week's worth of exercise into a Saturday afternoon. For weight loss, it's more effective to sustain a moderate workout for longer periods of time than to exercise intensely for only a few minutes. For others, the expectation that a workout must be intense to be effective can lead some to burnout or injury while others abandon their training altogether.



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7. Waiting until you are thirsty to drink

Only camels can go without water— for the rest of us water is a necessity! Don't wait until you feel thirsty because you are already dehydrated at that point. Drink plenty of fluids before, during and after your workout.

8. Using bad form

It's much more effective to choose a lower level, speed or weight and perform the exercise properly than it is to go too fast or too heavy and use poor form and momentum. Lower the intensity to the point at which you can maintain good posture. An example of poor form would be leaning on the stairmaster hand rails or swinging the dumbbells during a bicep curl.

9. Resting too much

While it's true you don't want to overdo it, taking too much time in between exercises can decrease the training benefits and set you up for injury. Allow for about 30 seconds between toning exercises - which is usually just enough time to move to the next station and set up. Sitting on the equipment without moving won't build muscle or burn too many calories. You should exercise intensely enough to work up a light sweat, get your heart beating and feel a sense of satisfaction for having completed your workout.

10. More is better

It is not necessary to spend over an hour doing cardiovascular exercise. Studies show that the risk of injury outweighs the benefits after 60 minutes. Performing cardio exercise consecutively for over an hour increases the injury rate significantly. The surgeon general recommends 45+ minute sessions most days of the week for weight loss.

11. Avoid eating for a marathon

Just because you're exercising a little doesn't mean you need to double your daily calorie intake. It's important to know how many calories you need to reach your goals. Beware of meal replacement drinks and bars that advertise "high energy". High energy often means "high calorie". There are many low to moderate calorie meal replacement drinks and bars available that will supply the proper balance of calories, carbohydrate, protein and fat. If you are working out for less than an hour, you do not need to eat during your workout.



12. Exercising above your determined heart rate range

You do not need to place such high demands on your heart to see cardiovascular benefits or to burn fat. Keep in mind however that an estimate of maximal heart rate is only accurate to within plus or minus 12 beats per minute for most people. If an individual is healthy and has no limitations to exercise, adjustments to the charts should be made according to how they feel.

13. Stopping exercise if you become pregnant

Exercise is the best thing for mother and baby during the gestation phase. Consult with your doctor and consider enlisting the help of a certified fitness professional with experience in prenatal exercise. Try low impact activities such as water aerobics, pay attention to any unusual symptoms and stop if you feel uncomfortable. If you experience anything unusual, stop exercising and call your physician. Check hospitals or fitness centres for special pregnancy exercise programs.

14. Using hand or ankle weights while walking or during aerobic classes

Many fitness guidelines indicate that the use of hand weights during the aerobic portion of step training produces little if any increase in energy expenditure or muscle size. The risk of injury to shoulder joints is significantly increased when weights are rapidly moved through a larger range of motion. It is recommended that hand weights be reserved for the strength segment of the class where speed of the movement can be controlled.

15. Putting children on a formal exercise program

With the increase in the number of obese children, there is an accompanying rise in heart disease risk factors (high blood pressure, etc.). Parents, teachers and fitness professionals should expose kids to fun physical activities. Rather than push-ups or sit-ups, try hiking, game playing, skating, rope jumping, etc. Plan outings that involve walking (hiking, trips to parks, a day at the fair). Finally, praise children for trying, for doing - this is a great motivator!

16. Employing a no pain-no gain attitude

Exercise doesn't have to hurt to be beneficial. Actually, physical activity to the point of pain can be harmful. Fitness can be improved for most people with brisk walking 30 minutes or more daily. People who are moderately active substantially reduce the risk of coronary heart disease and improve health in general. Research shows that you can benefit even from exercising three times a day for 10 minutes at a time. Increasing daily physical activity can add years to your life and life to your years.

17. Wasting money on fat-burning equipment

Exercise inventions and contraptions may improve muscle tone, strength or endurance but they can't increase fat burning in one specific area of the body. The key to losing weight is a low-fat diet and an exercise program that includes aerobic activity and strength training. For long-term weight control, you need a comprehensive exercise program

that includes aerobic activity for at least 30-45 minutes, four to six times per week, strength training two to three times per week and flexibility exercises. Remember: don't start out too strenuously ... keep exercise comfortable ... increase intensity gradually... and above all, enjoy yourself!

18. Discounting the value of walking and increasing activities in your lifestyle like taking the stairs

A regular walking program can help reduce blood pressure, increase cardiovascular endurance, boost bone strength, burn calories and keep weight down. If walking is your exercise of choice, experts recommend that you walk a minimum of 30 minutes each day. You can fit walking into your routine whenever possible - the best schedule is the one that keeps you walking!

19. Worrying about bulking up if you are a woman

Only about 10% of women will build large muscles due to genetics. If you are one of the 10% and don't want to gain muscle bulk, concentrate on high repetitions, low weight and variety in your aerobic exercise routine. Focus on how good exercise makes you feel and not how you would like to look. Accept your body for what it is and not on other standards.

20. Just doing cardio and skipping the toning

Yes! A well-designed strength training program helps you manage and lose body weight, decreases injury risk and keeps you functional and independent as you age. Aim to exercise each muscle group at least two times a week with rest between days. Use a variety of resistance training equipment. Strength training combined with cardiovascular and flexibility training provides the benefits of a total fitness program.

21. Not having a physical prior to beginning an exercise program

You want to have the most benefit with the least amount of risk and it would never be wrong for you to get a complete check-up prior to beginning activity - especially if you are over 45 or have other risk factors like smoking, hypertension, high cholesterol, are obese or sedentary.

You're now equipped to pursue and maintain a fit, active lifestyle - safely. Remember that physical fitness benefits every system in your body as well as your mind and spirit. Use these tips to add longer stronger years to your life without being worse for the wear. **by**

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