

Five Big Fitness Mistakes

1. Sticking to one routine. Avoid an exercise rut. Changing up your workout every two weeks will prevent boredom, making you less likely to skip the gym if a better offer comes up (like, say, a root canal). Your body adapts to a routine fairly quickly and requires less energy to complete it, so repeating the same workout will produce fewer results. Increase the intensity every few weeks, try a new machine, or brave a spinning class instead of the treadmill.

2. Running on empty. According to some conventional wisdom, working out on an empty stomach will force your body to burn more stored fat. The reality is that without food for fuel, you'll tucker out sooner and sprint for the fridge

after your workout. Though exercising while hungry will burn more fat calories at first, people who eat a small breakfast before their workout sweat for 30 minutes longer than those who skip breakfast altogether, thus burning more calories overall. Eat something small, like a piece of fruit, to give you energy.

3. Staying too long. Spending an hour at the gym every day is a noble goal—and one you're likely to abandon when your schedule interferes. The U.S. National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute recom-



Don't get locked into **the wrong habits** when it comes to **your exercise** routine. Finding your groove is one thing, but **too much repetition** can become a boring rut.

ARE YOU A NATURAL-BORN COUCH POTATO?

Can't peel yourself away from prime-time TV? You may be able to blame it on biology. A recent study found that certain brain chemicals might determine whether a person is inclined toward rest or activity. Researchers found that lean rats were more sensitive to a stimulating hormone called orexin A, which causes fidgeting and helps the body burn energy. Rats specifically bred to be obese were less receptive to orexin A, suggesting that frequent unconscious movement, like fidgeting, can help regulate weight. The good news for lazy types is that these findings may help in the development of new weight-control drugs.

mends at least 30 to 60 minutes of activity per day, but it's cumulative. Whittle away at your exercise time by squeezing in five- or ten-minute bursts of activity throughout the day, like taking the stairs instead of riding the elevator at work.

4. Guzzling protein. Unless your NFL tryout is next month, there's no need to choke down protein shakes before lifting. Most Americans already eat about 90 grams of protein a day—

enough for a pro bodybuilder, and more than enough for the average desk jockey.

5. Rewarding yourself. You ran two miles on the treadmill, but that doesn't mean you "earned" that slice of cake. Junk food is the worst reward for a good workout. For a 180-pound man, a 20-minute jog burns 270 calories; a sliver of frosted chocolate cake is 388 calories. Nonedible incentives, like a nap, are a better bet.

DON'T CHOKE

Outdoor fitness buffs, beware. Working out in urban areas may be hazardous to your health. Dr. Joseph T. Cooke, an associate professor at New York Presbyterian Hospital/Weill Cornell Medical Center, warns that elevated air-pollution levels in cities may pose problems for exercisers. While you're panting your way through a run or bike ride, pollutants like carbon monoxide, ozone, and fine particulate matter from diesel engines can irritate your lungs, making it harder to breathe and aggravating problems like asthma or bronchitis. For a breath of fresh air, run in parks or on less-traveled roads, work out in the early morning or late evening, or exercise indoors.