

20 Ways To Stick To Your Workout

There's no feeling like leaving the gym. It's getting there that's the problem. Like at the end of the workday, which suddenly becomes the perfect time to check the supply cabinet and look at the time; you'll get that workout in tomorrow. Why are we paying personal trainers after we get to the gym? What we really need them to do is carry us there. Your motivation needs motivating, so we asked top trainers and athletes to help you firm up your resolve and your glutes, thighs, and abs with these stick-to-your-workout strategies.

1. Get in Over Your Head

Sign up for a race and give yourself a reason to train. "After I retired, it was hard to motivate myself to work out, so I set a goal to run a marathon," says Olympian Nikki Stone, the 1998 gold medalist in aerial freestyle skiing. "It gives you something to work toward." Just be sure to set realistic goals winning your age group in a 5-K or teaming up with two friends for a triathlon relay. Otherwise, you can wind up more discouraged than inspired. If you want help before you jump into a live race, ask for it. Most running clubs sponsor organized training runs, which match you with groups of your skill level and prepare you for specific races and distances.

2. Cut a Soundtrack

"Whenever I do cardio, I listen to something that gets me going," says Emily Copeland, a professional wakeboarder, who won gold at the 2002 X Games. Rip a playlist with music that gets you pumped up; leave off the slow tracks. Upbeat music makes a workout seem easier and go by faster, according to a study led by Ronald W. Deitrick, Ph.D., director of exercise science at the University of Scranton. That's because high-tempo music is a better distractor, Dr. Deitrick says. "It helps you block out the sensations you have regarding pain and effort."

3. Book It

"You'll never find the time you've got to make the time," says Chuck Wolf, manager of sport science and human performance at the USA Triathlon National Training Center in Clermont, Florida. While that seems obvious, lack of planning continues to be the biggest reason people fail to work out, Wolf says. He suggests keeping a calendar and scheduling workouts strength, cardio, new classes you want to try at least a week in advance. Before you set foot in the locker room, have an agenda: which exercises you're going to do, what order, and how many sets and reps. Have a contingency plan, too lifting dumbbells or jumping rope for 20 minutes at home in case the unexpected cancels your workout. "You're 40 percent more likely to work out if you have strategies to help you overcome the obstacles," says Rod Dishman, Ph.D., an exercise scientist at the University of Georgia.

4. Get a Buy-in

Whether it's a husband, child, or boyfriend, you're going to need support from anyone who has a claim on your time. Make an agreement with them: 4 or 5 days a week, you're entitled to 1 all-about-you hour to work out. "Since it's for your health, it's a contract they can't refuse," says Darren Steeves, a trainer in Nova Scotia, Canada. "That will allow you to exercise guilt-free." Better still, make the deal a united effort and see if you can get him to work on his soft spots, too.

5. Start with Squats

No one loves this exercise. But the payoff in places where you're seeking results (glutes, hips, thighs) is unquestioned. And starting your strength-training program with your most dreaded exercise will help you finish strong. "You'll look forward to your favorite moves at the end of your workout, which will encourage you to complete the entire session," says John Williams, a trainer in Atlanta.

6 Ask a Friend

If you'd rather hit the snooze button than the treadmill, try some friendly intervention. Having a friend waiting for you at the gym three mornings a week will get you out of bed. "If you've made a

commitment to someone, you have a tendency to keep it," says Tristan Gale, winner of the 2002 Olympic gold medal for women's skeleton (barreling head first down a bobsled track). But that doesn't necessarily mean your best friend is also your best workout partner. Look for someone who's on the same fitness level and has similar goals. "If there's too much of a disparity, no one will get a good workout," Wolf says.

7. Just Show Up

On really low-energy days, head to the gym with the promise that you can leave after you finish your warmup. "Tell yourself you'll just do some stretches and a few minutes of cardio," says Rachel Cosgrove, a personal trainer in Newhall, California. "Once you get to the gym and get your blood pumping, chances are you'll finish your full workout. Ninety percent of the time, our clients do."

8. Target Your Heart

High cholesterol isn't just a problem for men; heart disease is the No. 1 killer of women, claiming 500,000 lives each year, according to the American Heart Association. Make sure a cholesterol test is part of your annual checkup, and follow up with your doctor on the results. Find out what your cholesterol levels are and what they should be. Then work toward meeting that target by exercising regularly. "You'll decrease your risk of heart disease while providing yourself with a very important, concrete goal," says John Thyfault, Ph.D., an exercise scientist and trainer at East Carolina University in Greenville, North Carolina.

9. Be Defensive

Need more inspiration than trimming your waistline? Consider enrolling in a self-defense class, which will increase your confidence and your heart rate. Learning practical defense skills eye strikes, heel palms, knees to the groin is a workout that will also bolster your sense of control, says Dana Schwartz, who teaches self-defense at Prepare Inc. in New York City. "You get to fight every class, and every class you see improvement in yourself," Schwartz says. "I think people are surprised by how powerful they are." About 10,000 women nationwide take Prepare's 20-hour class.

10. Invest in a Trainer

If you don't know what you're doing when you get to the gym, it pays to hire someone who does. Beyond helping you plan your workout, a personal trainer will observe and correct your form to make sure you produce results and avoid injuries. "They'll spot you through the movements, so you can really feel what muscles [are working]," says Brenda Powell, a certified trainer and general manager of the Institute of Human Performance in Boca Raton, Florida. "For a lot of muscle groups like the glutes and lower back, for example our bodies really don't know how to isolate them correctly. It's often difficult to do that without proper instruction."

11. Don't Do It

You hate fish, but that doesn't mean you stop eating. The same is true for your workout. "If I'm going to recommend exercise, I can say running is the best," Dr. Deitrick says. "But if a person doesn't like running, guess what? They're not going to do it. They don't care what the benefit is." The "perfect" exercise is the one you're happy doing, and you have plenty of options, indoors and out. So don't suffer through a less-than-stimulating routine. Find an exercise you like cycling, yoga, hiking, that rowing machine in the corner of the gym that no one ever uses and you'll find yourself wanting to exercise.

12. Watch the Rut

You found the perfect routine great. Just be sure not to make it as familiar as *Friends* reruns. What bores your mind also bores your body; you need variety to guarantee results like fat loss and muscle tone. If you do the same three-sets-of-eight circuit week after week, you'll stop challenging your body around Week 4, and progress will quickly plateau. "When you impose a stress on your body, your body adapts to it," says Tom Holland, exercise physiologist and author of *The Truth About How to Get in Shape*. Switch your routine do different strength or cardio

moves, or take a new class every 4 to 6 weeks to keep yourself fresh.

13. Write it Down

Write your fitness goals in a journal, and track your workouts. Include the usual stats, such as specific exercises, duration, weight, sets, and reps. Write down your perceptions, too. "Think: Am I having fun, or does it feel like work?" says Sara Ivanhoe, instructor of the *Yoga for Dummies* VHS/DVD series. Determine the exercises that make you feel good and produce results, and note the stressors that tend to derail workouts. "It's a good opportunity to explore what gets in the way of being consistent," Ivanhoe says, whether it's a traffic jam at the leg-press machine at the same time every night or too much time chatting with friends.

14. Work with Him

"Eighty percent of couples who divorce say they grew apart," says Pat Love, Ed.D. "Sharing activities is a surefire way to stick together. Especially activities where you both end up feeling good and energized." Stone is a believer. She regularly jogs with her husband, and they take their English sheepdog for long walks. "We get quality time together and a workout," she says. Exercise releases neurohormones that make people feel happier, more motivated, and less anxious, Dr. Love says.

15. Streak!

No, don't sprint out of the locker room naked. See how many days you can go without missing a workout, and then try to beat your record. "Every time your streak ends, strive to set a longer mark in your new attempt," Williams says.

16. Reward Yourself

You worked for 2 months to reach your goal, and yesterday you ran your first sub-8:30 mile. Celebrate by treating yourself to a facial, a massage, a long, hot bath whatever you want (see "Four Ways to Reward Yourself" at left for more ideas). But don't let the moment pass. Because sometimes, that short-term reward might be the only evidence of your long-term success, says Jacqueline Wagner, a certified trainer in New York City. "Some of the things we see in exercise in terms of maintaining balance, of maintaining bone mass, of maintaining function, we're not going to see for years down the road," Wagner says. A deep-tissue massage, on the other hand, can make you feel good right now.

17. Play the percentages

Have your body-fat level measured every few months to gauge your fitness progress. "You'll actually have numbers that you can shoot for, and something that you can definitely measure, as opposed to, 'I just want my abs to look better,'" says Tim Kuebler, a certified trainer in Kansas City, Missouri. A body-fat percentage from the high teens to mid-20s is considered healthy for most women (ranges vary by age), according to the American College of Sports Medicine. A trainer can estimate your percentage using calipers, and most gyms offer this service for a minimal charge; just have the same person do it each time, as measurement techniques can vary.

18. Take a Chance

Boost your adrenaline with a workout that challenges both your body and your fears rock climbing, for example, or whitewater kayaking. Besides being great exercise, such adrenaline-spiked adventures will help you better manage stress in everyday life, according to a study from Texas A&M University. Adventure sports raise your levels of adrenaline and the stress hormone cortisol, and also provide you with an immediate way exercise to efficiently work that stress out. The fitter you are, the study found, the better you handle stress.

19. Run Away

Sign up for a race in another time zone. "Once you've paid for the airfare and a hotel room, you'll have extra incentive to follow your training plan," says Carolyn Ross-Toren, chairwoman of the Mayor's Fitness Council in San Antonio, Texas. Check theschedule.com for information on

everything from 5-Ks to marathons, usatriathlon.org for triathlon events, and MarathonGuide.com for ... well, marathons.

20. Show Off

A boost to your appearance be it a new haircut or fresh-out-of-the-box running shoes can give you a lift in the gym. "Sometimes, those little things can be very uplifting and motivating," Wagner says. "And when you feel better about yourself, you're going to function better."