

Work Smarter, Not Harder!

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"Work smarter, not harder", a phrase we often hear being used by corporate America. I believe this phrase also applies to physical fitness. Below are some tips I have picked up during my years in the fitness industry. If you begin to apply some of these to your own fitness routine, not only will you be working smarter, but you'll feel the results!

Tip #1: A Well Balanced Workout! Just as a well balanced meal is to every vital organ of the body, so is a well balanced workout to the muscular, skeletal and cardiovascular systems. Often times, people get stuck in the rut of either strength or cardio training with no balance between the two. My experience is that men very seldom work on cardio and favor strength training. The opposite is generally true of women. However, it is important to incorporate both into your fitness routine. Strength training helps you build lean muscle mass which increases your RMR (Resting Metabolic Rate) or simply, the number of calories you burn at rest while sleeping, sitting or in otherwise non-active periods. This helps your body operate more efficiently and effectively while also providing a strong core foundation for posture and balance. Lean muscle mass will also assist your body in burning more calories during cardio workouts. Likewise, cardiovascular training is also important as it is the only means by which true "fat burn" can occur, and it is the best way to condition and strengthen your heart. Strength training alone does not generally provide heart rates that are elevated long enough or high enough to produce these heart healthy benefits. Have you ever heard someone say, "I've been working out for so long, and I just keep getting fatter"? This person is likely to be focusing on strength training and lacks the cardio activity necessary for fat burn. You can build all the muscle you want, but if you fail to burn off the fat layer covering the muscle, you will actually appear larger. So, the lesson here is keep it balanced!

Tip #2: Strength Before Cardio! This tip applies if you are going to combine strength and cardio sessions within the same workout period. You always want to do your strength training first, followed by cardio. Why? The first 10 - 15 minutes of any workout is mostly glycogen burn; burning off the excess sugar in the body that is readily available for quick energy. Therefore, when you strength train first, you take care of this glycogen burn. Then, as you move into cardio, you can take your body straight into its fat burn, making the most of your cardio minutes.

Tip #3: Incorporate Free Weights! The free weight area of the gym is an uncomfortable area for many. However, by using free weights that mimic the moves of strength training machines, you actually engage many more muscles over the range of the move. Most importantly, you must use your core to keep the weights balanced and movements smooth. Why not make the most of your time and work as many muscles as you possibly can with one move? If you're not sure how to get started, enlist the advice of a trainer or watch others using free weights. Don't be shy! Believe me, most of those guys in the free weight area are so busy looking at themselves in the mirror that they won't even notice you don't know what you're doing (except, of course, the humble readers of our newsletter! :-)).

Tip #4: Form Over Flair! Form is one of the most important factors not only in weight training, but also in cardiovascular training. Let's talk about strength training first. One of my biggest pet peeves is walking into the free weight area and seeing people lift weights that are much too heavy. They lose proper form, and instead of targeting the desired muscle, they throw their whole body into the move just to get the weight up. This is what I call the "flair" or trying to look good. Not only is it unsafe, but it is counterproductive. It is much safer and a heck of a lot more productive to decrease the resistance and target the muscle with proper form. You will notice better definition and tone in half the time. Equally important is form during cardiovascular exercise, for example, jogging. One must focus on the heel/toe roll to prevent injury and shin splints. If you are unsure of the proper form for a particular type of cardio fitness, consult with a trainer or fitness expert. Improper form may lead to serious injury.

Tip #5: Change It Up! So many of us get stuck in a rut when it comes to our fitness routines. We find ourselves going to the gym day after day, repeating the same series of exercises. If we fail to change it up, our bodies become so accustomed to the routine that they stop responding. This is known as an exercise plateau, and many people find themselves giving up because they aren't seeing results. To help prevent this plateau, exercise regimens should be changed every 4 - 6 weeks. I personally believe you should switch it up even more often. For example, when I conduct a 6 week Boot Camp Challenge class, we never do the exact same workout twice in the entire 6 weeks. This keeps our bodies guessing as to achieve maximum results. So, venture out and try some new strength moves, maybe a new type of cardio exercise. You'll see the results!

By incorporating some of these basic tips into your exercise program, you will definitely experience the benefits of "working smarter, not harder"!