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Workout Tips that Won't Freak Out Fitness Newbies

The Center for Disease Control discovered that 80 percent of American adults don't get recommended exercise. While it may seem like everyone is killing themselves at TRX, Soul Cycle, and CrossFit, this just isn't the case. If you want to ease into fitness, **certified NYC fitness trainer, exercise physiologist, and nutritionist Franci Cohen** has savvy tips that won't have you heading for your nearest Orthopedist.



Start off by making a workout plan that mixes it up. Does it work with your daily schedule AND your exercise preferences. A good rule to follow: include at least four cardio exercises and two or three strength training circuits. Use the off days to allow your muscles time to recover and get stronger.

Know when to stretch. While it might seem like the best thing to do, stretching before a workout may put you at risk of injury. Try stretching your muscles for 15 seconds AFTER you warm up. You are less likely to get hurt from stretching if your muscles are already warmed up.

Keep track of your workouts as well as your food intake using a tracking log. The wonderful thing about tracking your exercise and food intake is that it allows you to see any progress you have made, and gives you a visual picture of the habits you might need to change in order to hit your ultimate goals! Tracking your progress is also a wonderful tool to help motivate you through your transformation.

Keep small exercise equipment in your living room. No one wants to turn their house into a gym. On the other hand, placing a few small pieces of equipment around your living room, like dumbbells, leg weights, steps and rotational discs, can provide some motivation while watching TV. "They will be difficult to avoid when you're looking right at them," suggests Franci Cohen. If you really don't want exercise gear cluttering your home, she suggests, make time to perform short activities that get your heart rate up but require little or no space or equipment, like jumping jacks.

Stay loose. Whether it comes from a lack of confidence or a determination to lose weight fast, beginners are particularly prone to tensing up when working out. "If you're white-knuckle-gripping the bars on the bike and clenching your teeth, you're wasting a lot of energy," says Franci. "Relax the muscles you're not working, and focus on the ones you are. You'll have more energy and get better results."

Don't get stuck on the treadmill. New exercisers often do the same routine for the same duration and at the same intensity every time they work out. "So you'll stay on the treadmill until you either die of boredom or get hurt," says Franci. This bad habit gets reinforced because, as your workouts get easier, you're fooled into thinking

you've become uber-fit. In reality, your muscles have just grown accustomed to the challenge. Be sure to mix up your routine by varying your time and intensity and by cross training on the bike or elliptical machine, or by going for a jog outside.

Don't be a slave to the numbers. Tracking your heart rate or running time can provide instant, valuable feedback; but when used obsessively, these tools can dampen the joy of exercise itself — or even make you push yourself when you're not feeling 100 percent. "Every now and then, go unplugged and focus your attention on what your body is telling you," advises Franci. Move at a pace that feels good, listen to your body, and enjoy the experience.

Know When to Take a Break. When people start out, they are often overzealous and try to get to the gym every day, says Franci. However, by not letting your body rest, you can be doing much more harm than good. "If you don't give your body time to heal and repair itself, your performance will go down and you'll get into a vicious cycle where you never fully recover," she says. And if you're sore after a workout, that's good -- unless it hurts too much. "It is normal to have pain and soreness after exercise," says Franci. "Don't run to take a painkiller, because that can mask pain and cause you to do real damage to your body. Let yourself recover naturally."

Flexibility training. The American College on Exercise recommends doing slow, sustained static stretches three to seven days per week. Each stretch should last 10-30 seconds.

Exercise videos and DVDs. Before working out with a home exercise video or DVD, Franci recommends watching through it at least once to observe the structure and proper form of the workout. To further improve form, she suggests working out in front of a mirror, if possible, or having someone else watch you do the exercise.

Flexibility training or stretching. This type of workout enhances the range of motion of joints. Age and inactivity tend to cause muscles, tendons, and ligaments to shorten over time. Contrary to popular belief, however, stretching and warming up are not synonymous. In fact, stretching cold muscles and joints can make them prone to injury.

Know Your Weight and the Right Way to Use it. Most people are confused the first time they walk into a gym, says Franci, but are afraid of asking for advice. But if that's you -- get over it. "If you don't know ask," she says. "By law, gyms have to have people who can help show you how to work out on the machine, and it can save you from badly injuring yourself." In addition, many gym newbies go for the heaviest weight they can -- a rookie mistake. "Go on a weight machine and, starting at the lowest weight, pull it down and keep adding on from there. Just keep increasing the weight until you reach a point where you can only do one or you can't do any. That's too much" Once you find your maximum weight, two-thirds of that number is where you should start. "You should be able to do about 12 reps," Franci says. "It should be easy, but it shouldn't be difficult to the point where you're straining." Finally, once you have a weight you're comfortable with, don't get too eager to increase it. "You should not increase it more than 10 percent in a week," says Franci. "If you do, your risk of injury increases exponentially."

Don't be self-conscious. Remember that everyone else is far too absorbed in their own workouts to be scrutinizing yours!