



Hit the  
GYM

# Maximize Your Workout

The range of exercise options can be mind-boggling. Your best option has to take into account your height, body weight, and fitness and skill levels.

You may also worry about form, and that's something online tutorials or a personal trainer can help with. In the end, however, there are a number of basic exercises that will help you get the most out of your trip to the gym.

## **PUSH-UPS**

Push-ups are far more versatile than many people would guess. Depending on your approach, you can develop your biceps, deltoids, pecs and triceps, of course, but also your glutes and abs. Once again, it's important to keep your back straight to get the best results and remain injury-free. Lower yourself until your arms are at a 90-degree angle, with your rear on an even plane with your back. Those looking for a less intense workout can put their knees on the gym floor. On the other hand, if you want to up the intensity levels, lift one arm or leg — or put your feet on an exercise ball or bench.

## **SQUATS**

For this one, use your own body weight or add free weights to any shoulder bar. You'll be toning and strengthening muscles, working on



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your core, and burning lots of calories along the way. The primary focus is on your thighs and glutes, but this exercise also develops your abs, calves and hamstrings. Just remember not to extend your knees beyond your toes, and not to arch your back.

## **PLANKS**

Begin in the standard push-up position, with either your elbows or hands and either your feet or knees on the floor. Keep your spine straight, and line up your hands and feet with your hips. As with push-ups, you can

level up the intensity by lifting an appendage.

## **DEADLIFTS**

Properly handled dead weights can work several areas of your body, including your back, legs, arms and rear. You'll need something heavy

to hold, either on a bar or free weights, in order to do this one. Proper form is also important to avoid injury: Put your feet just a bit wider than your shoulders, and keep your knees slightly bent, as you lower the weights. As always, keep your back straight.

# Stay Safe at the Gym

Exercise has been shown to reduce your risk for a range of health issues, including heart disease and diabetes.

You'll also be improving your cardiovascular and muscle strength. But these regimens are not without risk if you don't follow important safety measures. Follow these easy steps before heading to the gym to ensure you reap the most benefits from all of that hard work.

## SEE YOUR DOCTOR

It's smart to check in with your primary care physician before starting any new exercise regimen, but particularly so if you suffer from certain health issues — including heart disease, joint or bone diseases, respiratory ailments like asthma, high blood pressure, neurological illnesses and diabetes. Pushing yourself too hard while dealing with these very difficult issues without consulting with your doctor could make them worse, or lead to illness or injury. Stop any regimen if you experience chest pain, dizziness or shortness of breath, and consult a physician. These are common red flags for more serious problems.

## TAKE IT EASY

Many injuries happen because people are pushing themselves too hard, or simply



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going too fast in the gym. Issues like stiff or sore muscles and joints, stress fractures, and inflamed ligaments and tendons can usually be prevented simply by taking it a little easier during your routine. Mixing up your exercises also helps lessen these risks, since overuse while focusing for too long

on certain areas can lead to nagging injuries. Take extra precautions when jogging, swimming or playing tennis since these activities are so closely associated with certain leg, arm or hand injuries.

## LEVELING UP

Those who listen to their

body typically avoid most of these issues, if not all of them. You won't dominate a workout or routine on the day you walk into the gym for the first time. As you try new things, allow for a smooth physical transformation. The best results are associated with consistent workouts that become steadily

more difficult and then level out once you're reaching reasonable goals. This isn't about a single amazing workout. At the same time, if you end up in a lull and can't get to the gym for a while, understand that there is a reconditioning process. You will need to re-start at a previous step.

# Spin Class Basics

Ready to quickly improve your endurance and cardio capabilities?

Spin classes are indoor cycling exercises that often happen in high-energy settings. Their mixture of interval training helps increase endurance and strength — and the cardiovascular benefits are incredible. Specialized bikes with weighted flywheels are utilized, offering riders the chance to burn hundreds of calories an hour from the comfort of their neighborhood gym.

## INSIDE THE CLASSES

Participants gather on stationary bikes as an instructor leads the class through positions and movements meant to simulate various conditions outside. Music, visualization and motivational techniques are all standard elements of the class. Different classes will be held for people of varying fitness levels and goals. Some even focus on certain kinds of music, or coaching approaches. Pre-class technical advice helps ensure that students avoid injury, including tips on how to adjust the difficulty of the workout. Riders can change the speed in which the pedals turn, or the resistance of the flywheel. (Pedal speed is called “cadence,” and is usually below 100 revolutions per minute.) Students are then put through a series of core movements, including seated flat



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and seated climbs, and standing flat, running or standing climb. There may also be jumps and lifts.

## SIGNING UP

Local gyms and fitness centers are your go-to source of spin classes. Pick one that's close to home or on the way to and from work to make sched-

uling easier. If you can't make the gym class, there are also lots of apps and online sources for virtual indoor cycling to bridge the gap.

## WHAT TO WATCH FOR

Spin classes are ideal for people who want to focus on lower-body areas. You'll be toning your legs, hips and

back — while getting in some serious cardio. Listen carefully to your instructor, and follow their advice.

If your bike needs adjusting, discuss that early on so that you can move forward with good form. Knee injuries and lower back injuries can happen when exercises aren't done properly or if a rider is

overextended on the bike.

The seat should come up to a student's hip when standing next to the spin-class bike. Your knee and the ball of your foot should be in line when the pedal is pointing toward the front. Newer riders may choose to adjust the handlebars to a higher position if they experience back pain.



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# Should You Get a Trainer?

Are you unsure where to start, or worried you won't be able to keep pace?

That can turn working out in a public setting into a very anxious experience. Personal trainers can help. They'll help you become familiar with the gym's equipment, while offering hands-on advice on which exercises to do in order to achieve your personal goals. As you gain confidence, they will also be there to challenge you to heights you might never have imagined.

## SETTING GOALS

Take your time, do your research and meet more than one trainer. This will be

a personal relationship, so there needs to be a good personality fit. Ask others and dig into online reviews. You should also arrive with a clear idea of your fitness and health goals. That's going to be one of the first questions they ask. Are you looking to build muscle mass or lose weight? Recovering from surgery, or hoping to complete some endurance goal like a 5K or mountain climb? Be honest about your limitations, either from inexperience or from taking a hiatus from the gym. Once you have all of these challenges and objectives in mind,

share them with your trainer so they can craft a personalized plan to help you get there over a safe and steady timeline.

## FINDING A GYM

Next, it's time to find the right spot to work out. Dig into each individual gym's offerings, including the equipment, personnel, location and schedule of classes. (Some gyms actually offer training services as part of an expanded membership package.) Ask your trainer for their advice on local facilities, including success stories they've helped create. Talk to gym members about their experiences, and visit at different times over a period of days to

check on issues like overcrowding.

## GETTING UNDERWAY

Ask about long- and short-term contract options for both the personal trainer and the gym. Take advantage of complimentary workouts if you're still unsure about either situation. This will help you further evaluate the trainer's personality and style, as well as the gym's individual fit. Don't be afraid to ask questions — lots of them. Trainers and those who work at gyms are there to help you reach your personal goals, and that starts with building confidence in their ability to optimize your fitness journey.

# Stay Hydrated

Not getting enough to drink can be devastating at the gym.

Medical experts already warn that a staggering 75% of Americans may be in a state of chronic dehydration. That's bad news for anyone, but particularly so for anyone who is exercising. The risks are great but sometimes poorly understood in a marketplace that's saturated with buzzy drink alternatives that may not provide the same benefits as old-fashioned water.

## A CRITICAL NEED

As we're often told, the human body is comprised mostly of water. At the same time, however, we're constantly losing water through perspiration, urination, even breathing. Sweating, of course, is the main concern when at the gym, because vigorous exercise can cause us to lose critical amounts of water. Everyday hydration rules state that the average person drinks eight glasses of eight ounces per day — stylized as “8x8.”

Gym patrons will undoubtedly need much more. As with any exercise regimen, listen to your body. If you're hurting, slow down. If you're thirsty, drink more water. Water does lots of heavy lifting, flushing waste from our system while carrying nutrients and oxygen that are critical to body function. Those who don't get enough can face



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catastrophic consequences — and exercise only speeds up the process.

## WHAT TO DO

Gyms will come outfitted with water fountains, and some sell water. But it's best to bring a water bottle with you. This is actually a good rule of thumb for life. You'll regularly

exceed the “8x8” paradigm during everyday activities, and you'll lower your risk for dehydration in the gym since water will be so readily available. Proper hydration is critical to avoiding spikes in body temperature that can lead to heat stroke, as well as muscle fatigue, injury and soreness. You'll also lower your risk of

fainting or dizziness.

## MIXING IT UP

Quite frankly, some people don't drink enough water simply because it's not as exciting as other drink alternatives. More recently, a number of flavoring options have become quite popular, but there's a danger of adding lots

of unhealthy ingredients — including sugar and salt. Opt for all-natural enhancers, including fresh items like cucumbers, mint, lemon or watermelon. Soda drinkers may consider sparkling water, since it will also have a carbonated kick. Just be on the lookout for unneeded sugars and artificial flavors.

# Consider Pilates

Pilates consists of low-impact exercises that improve flexibility, strength and balance.

Originally created by Joseph Pilates in the early 20th century as a new fitness regimen called Contrology, these exercises offer people a fun, peaceful, low-impact way to improve flexibility, strength and balance through controlled movement.

Now renamed in honor of its creator, Pilates emphasizes developing a strong core, better balance and body alignment. The exercises are governed by a series of timeless principles, including breathing, control, concentration, centering, precision and flow.

## BREATHING AND CONCENTRATION

Joseph Pilates believed that deep breathing was an invigorating, cleansing activity. Decades later, practitioners of his exercise routine still completely inhale and exhale, bringing the maximum amount of air into their lungs in order to expand the rib cage. While exhaling, the abdominal and pelvic-floor muscles are engaged, then held throughout the inhalation. This coordination of movement and breathing is similar to the practice of yoga. At the same time, form is a critical element of Pilates, so concentration plays a foundational role. Long-time Pilates practitioners will tell you that



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the process is in many ways more important than the actual movements.

## CENTERING, FLOW AND PRECISION

Finding your center is critical to properly controlling your body in Pilates. So everything grows out of a focus on the abdomen, back, rear, thighs and hips, then moves outward

to the arms and legs. Transitions then create a flow, building stamina and strength through an economy of movement. The results are meant to be precise, as graceful movements become second nature during Pilates and then pattern into everyday life.

## HELPFUL TIPS

Resist the urge to rush. A

more measured approach is ideal, and it will also allow you to get the most out of each different exercise. Focus on your posture, with your core engaged and your shoulders down. Form-fitting clothes are a must so that movements can be tracked by practitioners and their instructors. You also don't want loose clothing to get caught in your movements, or

in any equipment you may use. Women should opt for capris or leggings, while men seek out fitted biking-type shorts to avoid clothing that rides up. Lastly, resolve to stick with it. Joseph Pilates memorably said, "In 10 sessions, you will feel the difference. In 20, you will see the difference. And in 30, you'll be on your way to having a whole new body."

# Post-Workout Meals

It's not uncommon after a vigorous session at the gym to come home in the grips of hunger.

After expending so much energy, the temptation is to eat as if you're undernourished. But large meals aren't actually the best idea. Better to eat a snack shortly after returning from the gym, ideally within 15 to 30 minutes after working out.

This will curb your appetite without undoing all of the good from your trip to the gym. At the same time, there are significant advantages and disadvantages associated with your dietary choices. The goal is to replenish your energy levels without gaining excess weight. Here's how to make strategic choices that will work in concert with your exercise regimen.

## WHAT HAPPENS

Glycogen, the body's best fuel source, is depleted during a workout. As this fuel runs low, proteins in your muscles can break down and become damaged. That's why it's critical to rebuild the body's stores of glycogen after your gym visit. Carbs and proteins help decrease the breakdown of protein, increase muscle growth and restore glycogen.

## THE BIG PICTURE

You're actually looking for nutritional options that work

on several different levels: Muscular recovery, energy restoration, curbing your appetite and maximizing the impact of your routine. Think healthy proteins, nuts and carbohydrates. Their nutritional balance restores energy without too many excess calories, and they speed along recovery too.

This doesn't happen all at once. For instance, experts recommend that you consume protein throughout the day in order to properly build new muscle tissue as needed. The ideal intake is not right after exercising, but in three-hour intervals over the entire day. How much depends on your body weight and fitness goals.

## PROTEINS

Consuming protein after exercising helps muscles heal while preserving lean mass and contributing to a toned, muscular appearance. Find it in chicken, fish, nuts and protein shakes. Dairy protein also helps rebuild amino acids and repair new cells. Dairy products to look beyond milk include cot-

tage cheese and Greek yogurt.

## FATTY ACIDS

Supplementing your diet with Omega-3 fatty acids — found in fatty fish like salmon and in supplements — helps boost muscle proteins, while increasing muscle cells in healthy younger people and reducing muscle soreness after exercise.



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