

IMAGE

NUTRITION, WEIGHT LOSS AND FITNESS FOR EVERY BODY

the top 10 gym mistakes

BY DEBBIE MANDEL, M.A.

Going to the gym helps us organize our day around good health: We eat balanced meals and drink plenty of water to adequately fuel our exercise regimens. To maximize your workout, it helps to be aware of some fitness myths and gym mistakes. Here are the 10 most common mistakes people make when exercising in the gym:

1 IMPROPER FORM. Proper alignment is crucial when executing an exercise to get maximum benefit and avoid injury. A quick check in the mirror can help with posture and position. Gradually, you will learn to feel when your body is not in good alignment and correct it. Ask for help from the staff, too.

2 USING MOMENTUM. When weight training, do not use momentum (i.e., swing your weights), as you are not working the muscle specifically. Do each repetition slowly and carefully, imagining the mind-muscle connection.

3 LOOSE ABDOMINALS. Hold the abdominals in tightly to help support the back and create core stability.

4 MORE IS BETTER. A workout should not exceed 90 minutes. When you exercise for hours at a time, you burn muscle and erode your joints. Incorporate 24-hour rest periods between workouts for muscles to recover and repair. Muscles grow during rest.

5 PAIN MEANS GAIN. If your shoulder or wrist hurts, don't work through the exercise, because you are at risk for injury. Your body is trying to tell you something: Stop! There is a big difference between feeling a burn, working a muscle to fatigue, and experiencing pain.

6 AN UNBALANCED EXERCISE PROGRAM. Alternate between weight-training and cardio components. You need both. Incorporate a balance of the two.

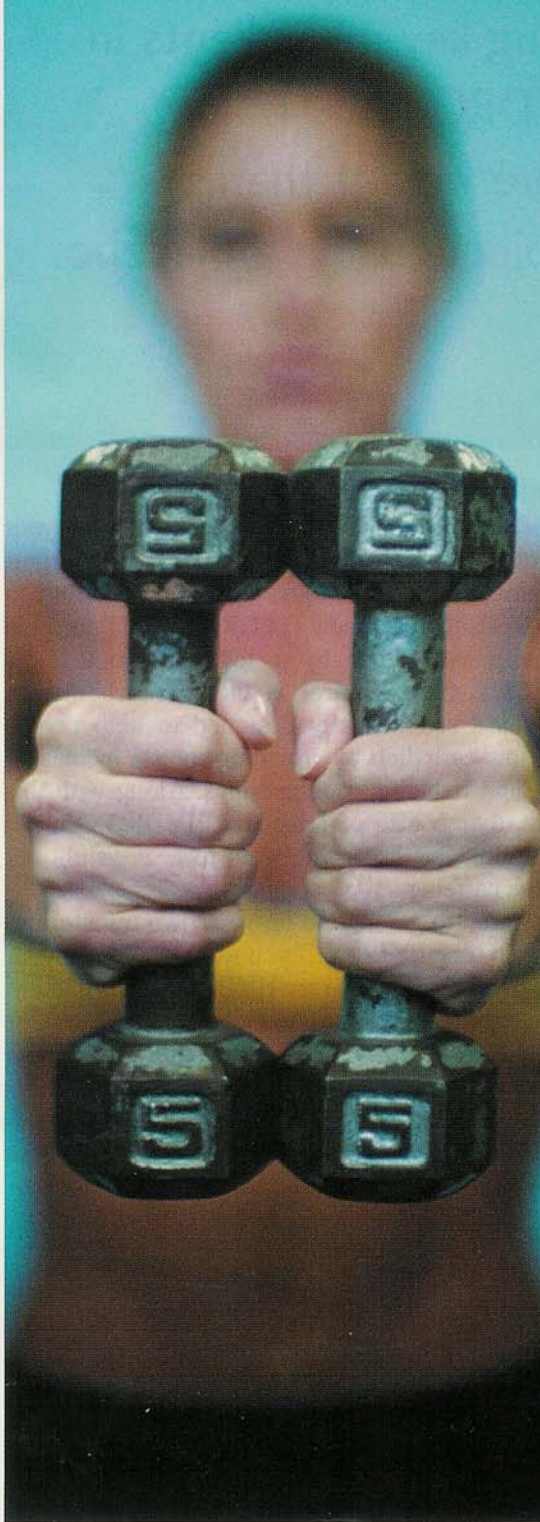
7 HOLDING YOUR BREATH. Breathe rhythmically, and exhale upon exertion. Holding your breath may raise your blood pressure.

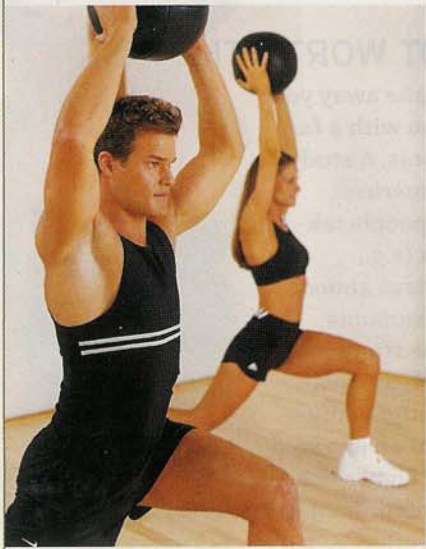
8 TALKING ON A CELL PHONE. You need to focus on your workout to be in proper form and to execute. This is your personal time to de-stress and improve concentration. Leave all distractions behind. Bring your mind to your workout and let the body do its job.

9 IMPATIENCE. It took you awhile to get out of shape; it will take you awhile to get into shape. Raise weights in small increments and increase machine levels gradually.

10 SAME OLD ROUTINE. Keep advancing in your workouts and change them periodically to stimulate your body and mind; otherwise, your body will adapt and not improve; you might lose motivation. Nothing deadens the heart like routine.

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move of the month: medicine ball lunge

Here's a workout for all fitness levels from top trainer Frank Mikulka of the Hollywood Atrium Club, in Lawrence, N.Y. It's all about integration, teaching all the muscles to work together rather than isolating them to work independently. Do as many reps as you can. Your set ends when you can no longer perform the exercise with proper form.

Standing straight up, hold a 3- to 8-lb medicine ball in front of you at your waist. Lift the ball over your head, and get into a lunge position. (Step forward with the right foot as you bend both knees, and drive your body weight through the heel. The right knee is at a 90-degree angle; make sure that the front knee does not extend over the toe. The left knee is bent to the floor, almost touching.) Holding the medicine ball overhead with arms extended straight up, do walking lunges by alternating legs. Try to walk the length of a room back and forth. This exercise recruits the lower and upper body muscles as well as balance and core stability. For a challenge, put the ball down and do leaping split lunges in place. Maintain the position, and repeat the cycle.