

The Top Five Fitness Mistakes



By Michael Scholtz, M.A., Best Life fitness expert

We all make mistakes—but let's be honest: It's so much better when someone else makes them before you get around to it so you can learn from them. Making fewer errors when you're working out means faster progress, less chance of injury, and a greater likelihood of sticking with your program. Check out the top five slip-ups I've seen clients make, so you can steer clear of them:



1. Skipping warm-up and cool-down

Your body's like a car: It needs to be warmed-up before going full-speed. Warming up helps muscles contract better, lubricates joints, and allows your heart rate to increase gradually. Skip it and at best, you'll make your workouts less effective and at worst, you'll risk injury to yourself. The same goes for cooling down. When you stop too quickly, you cause blood to pool in the extremities, create extra stress on the heart and let your muscles stiffen up.

To make the most of your pre- and post-workout time, warm up for at least five minutes. Any aerobic exercise, like cycling, walking or the elliptical, will do, but make sure to do it at an easy pace. Then, gently stretch for about five minutes; make sure you stretch your chest, shoulders, upper and lower back, hips and legs. Cool down in the same fashion.

2. Skimping on strength training

Have you ever weighed your briefcase, purse, gym bag, or heaviest bag of groceries? Want to bet most of them weigh more than that three-pound weight you're using for your strength training? The only way to improve the strength of your muscles is to overload them; that means making your muscles work against a resistance that your body is not used to. Bottom line: That three-pound weight just won't cut it. Make sure you challenge yourself enough so that your last few repetitions of each set feel like they really are *the last* reps you could do with good form.

3. Doing too much too soon

Starting out like a house on fire is exciting; after all, why not get a quick start when your motivation is high? But maintaining this pace is too tough, and you'll likely experience fatigue, frustration and aches and pains. To avoid this trap, be sure to start with an amount of exercise and an intensity that's comfortable. Even just a five-minute walk can give you the positive feelings of having done something good for yourself.

4. Trying to slim down certain body parts

Spot reducing is one of the most widespread myths in the fitness industry. Once and for all, let's lay it on the line: It's not possible to shrink the fat in just one area of your body. But still, so many people base their fitness programs on the prospect of trimming fat by focusing their exercise on one body part. Remember, changing body composition is best achieved through eating fewer calories and burning more. Therefore, your fitness program needs to be made up of regular aerobic exercise and strength training for *all* major muscle groups.

5. Falling into a rut

Doing the same workouts each week can offer familiarity and comfort, but a big part of improving

your fitness level is stepping out of that comfort zone. You had to do it when you first started exercising. Maybe it's time to take that leap again. It could be as simple as varying your intensity from harder one day to easier the next, instead of always doing the same old pace. Or perhaps you've been thinking of trying a new class. Anything that challenges you more than your tired old program or just works your body in new ways can help bust you out of that rut. Learn from the trials of those who have gone before and you'll stay healthier and get fit faster. Plus, you'll look really smart!