

Break Out of Your Exercise Rut

Learn new fitness routines to improve results and beat the boredom

By [Olivia Putnal](#) Posted June 08, 2011 from [WomansDay.com](#)

While commitment is key to a successful fitness regimen, practicing the same routine over and over is not. In fact, when you perform identical [exercise](#) moves day in and day out, your body begins to adjust, causing your calories burned to dwindle and progress to stall. The solution? Switch things up! Whether you love running, biking, Pilates or walking, you can spice up your current exercise routine—WD spoke with the experts to find out how.

Exercise Rut #1: You always do the same strength-training moves.

Lifting weights is a great way to build muscle and burn calories, but if you're always doing the same exercises with the same weight amount and number of reps, it's time to challenge yourself. *Photo: Creatas/Thinkstock*



Variation: Pace

“One way to increase the benefits [of strength training] is to start doing the movements extra, extra slowly—triple the time you would normally take to lift and lower the weight,” says American Council on Exercise (ACE) national spokesman Bobby Morrow. Instead of doing bicep curls for one count down and one count up, go down in three counts, then come up just as slowly. “You will probably run out of steam long before the end of your regular number of repetitions, but that’s good—you’re hitting new territory.”

Variation: Drop Set

A “drop set” is when you start your reps at a much higher weight, causing your muscles to fatigue, then do another set of reps at a lower weight. “You absolutely ‘max out’ your muscles somewhere between 8 and 10 repetitions on your first [heavier] set, then reduce the weight by 10 to 20 percent and immediately get in as many additional repetitions as possible—you are looking to get an extra 3 to 5 reps out of the second set—totally burning out that muscle you thought was already done,” says Morrow. So, for example, do 8 to 10 biceps curls with 10-lb dumbbells before decreasing the weight to 8 lb for another 3 to 5 reps.

Variation: Singles

Mix up your old routine by performing “single” versions of common arm and leg exercises. “Instead of a seated row, try a [one-arm](#) cable row, or instead of a weighted squat, try a [one-leg squat](#) [lift one foot off the ground as you do a squat balanced on the other]. Using only one side of your body at a time engages the stabilizing muscles and forces your core to work harder,” says [Steve Ettinger](#), CSCS, certified [fitness](#) expert and author. Just remember to always work one side, then the other—you want to be sure you’re exercising both sides of the body equally.

New Exercise: TRX Suspension Training

Available at some gyms and for purchase, [TRX Suspension Training](#) is an exercise program "that focuses on building muscle by suspending part of the body off the ground, allowing you to sink deeper into squats and lunges without compromising form," says Sarah Dussault, certified personal trainer and founder of [SarahFit.com](#). Another benefit? "It's ideal for people who love to strength-train but frequently travel, since it's light and can be used in a doorframe or hung from a jungle gym," Dussault adds.

New Exercise: CrossFit

An innovative exercise class to try if you love strength-training is CrossFit. "It's a high-intensity workout that incorporates free weights, pull-ups, weighted bars, kettlebells, sprints and a medicine ball," says Ettinger. CrossFit exercise sets tend to be short, but very functional and effective. "Strength training is resistance training, and so is CrossFit, plus a lot more. CrossFit workouts change every day, keeping your muscles guessing and making for more efficient routines," he adds.

New Exercise: Kettlebells

"Kettlebells (weighted iron balls with handles) tend to be more effective in reaching most goals, including weight loss, sculpting and defining the body. [They] allow you to exert more energy by having to maintain certain positions that you couldn't using traditional weight-lifting equipment," says Cassandra Bodlak, assistant fitness manager and private trainer at the Sport Club/LA in San Francisco. To learn the moves, attend a class at your local gym or purchase a DVD and a set of kettlebells to use at home.

Exercise Rut #2: You walk the same route at the same pace every day.

There are a couple of ways to make your current walking routine—whether it's outside or on the treadmill—more fun, while also burning more calories.

Photo: Jupiterimages/Thinkstock



Variation: Running

While walking is great for your body, your progress will plateau if you aren't constantly pushing yourself. To give yourself an extra challenge, start training to become a runner. To prevent injury, [start slowly](#) by incorporating walking and jogging intervals, eventually building up to a full run.

Variation: Walking Backward

Bodlak suggests walking backward as an alternative. "Naturally, because we're forward-moving creatures, a certain amount of stress is going to build up in your joints that can be alleviated by moving in the opposite direction."

Variation: Walking Lunges

Walking lunges are killer for your legs—you'll feel the burn much more than with your typical walk, and the movement will strengthen the hips, quads, glutes, hamstrings and calves. "Walking lunges are best performed outside and off the treadmill, but if you're on a treadmill, make sure to slow down your pace and take really long strides," says Gregory

Florez, ACE spokesman and CEO of FitAdvisor.com. “Start with two sets of 10 on each leg and progress to 25 on each.”

New Exercise: Underwater Running

“Running in the pool puts zero stress on your muscular system, provides great resistance, burns more calories and will help correct your running and walking posture,” says Florez, who recommends participating in a pool-based class first for expert instruction.

Exercise Rut #3: You've got your Pilates routine down pat.

Whether you take a Pilates [class at the gym](#) or practice in your own living room, the movements can get a little monotonous after a while. Break up your typical routine by trying some of the latest exercise trends. *Photo: Thinkstock*



Variation: Props

“Try using props like the Physioball, small hand weights, a foam roller, Thera-Bands and ankle weights, all of which can add another variation to a Pilates routine and make you feel the exercise in a fresh way,” says Carrie Janik, Pilates instructor at The Sports Club/LA in Boston. With hand weights, hold a 2-lb weight when you do the classic mat routines. To use Thera-Bands, attach one to the bottom of your feet while doing the Pilates roll-down with bent knees, holding one end of the band in each hand as you roll your spine to the mat. Using the foam roller, you can also amp up your favorite Pilates moves. “Both the [bridge](#) and [swan](#) exercises can be done with a foam roller—not only will this allow you to see where you’ve been cheating in certain positions, but you’ll have more range of motion, too,” says ACE spokeswoman Elizabeth Larkam.

New Exercise: Gyrotonic

The Gyrotonic Expansion System improves strength, flexibility, energy and vitality through fluid exercises that utilize a specially designed pulley and weighted equipment. “Both Pilates and Gyrotonic exercises focus on movement and building strength and flexibility in an interesting way,” explains Janik. You can find a Gyrotonic class in your area [here](#).

Exercise Rut #4: You bike the same route at the same speed.

Outside or inside, biking burns calories and tones the body—but if you're taking your bike out for the same loop every day, or you go the same speed for the same amount of time on a stationary bike, your progress will plateau. *Photo: BananaStock/Thinkstock*



Variation: Intervals

“This may seem obvious, but most people forget that on fixed cardio machines you can increase more than just resistance and incline. Work short sprint

intervals into your training and you'll have a much more efficient workout," says Ettinger. Do this by changing the speed you are pedaling (revolutions per minute) or by increasing the resistance on the bike at regular intervals. "I normally have clients do a combination of both, but here's one easy idea: If you time your workout, choose a ratio (e.g., 3:1) and stick to that for the duration of your ride. This means you pedal at a normal speed for three minutes and then sprint for one minute," Ettinger says.

Variation: Hilly Terrain

Ditch the flat terrain and explore nature with your bike. "Typical mountain biking involves lots of hills and bumpy terrain, forcing you to work harder and use more stabilizing muscles all while having a fun adventure," says Ettinger. Visit MapMyRide.com to discover new areas around town or in your neighborhood to bike.

New Exercise: Cycle Yoga, "Cy-Yo" or Yoga Spin

Cycle Yoga is exactly what it sounds like—both yoga and cycling in one workout session. Whether you purchase a DVD or take a class at your local gym, you'll do a cycling workout followed by yoga (e.g., 30 minutes on a stationary bike, then 30 minutes of yoga). "Many cycling addicts shy away from beneficial yoga classes because they tend to be more focused on cardio rather than flexibility. However, flexibility is extremely important for injury prevention, and nonprofessional cyclists tend to be injury-prone, given the nature of the exercise's seated and bent-over posture," says Dussault.

Exercise Rut #5: You use the same cross-training machine every time you work out.

If you're married to your gym's elliptical trainer or StairMaster, consider branching out with these new exercise ideas. *Photo: Sheer Photo, Inc/Getty Images*

Variation: New Direction

Ever thought of revving up your elliptical workout by pedaling backward? "To really maximize your time on the machine, vary your forward and backward movements—you should be moving in each direction for an equal amount of time," says Florez. But only go backwards on the elliptical. "Using machines such as treadmills or stationary bikes to go in reverse can be ineffective at best and in the case of a treadmill extremely dangerous," Florez warns.



New Exercise: Kickboxing

"Kickboxing is a great way to get in your cardio. Just like elliptical machines and other cross-trainers, it will work your arms, legs and core. The big difference? You can punch, kick and sweat your way through an awesome workout," says Ettinger. Try a class at the gym for expert instruction or try a DVD in the comfort of your own home.

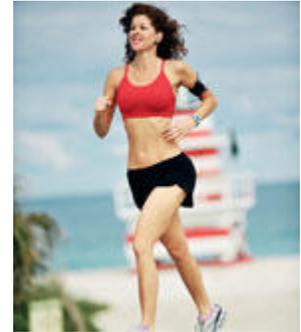
New Exercise: Tennis

"Tennis is great aerobic exercise that will get your [heart](#) rate up just like your normal bout on the elliptical trainer or StairMaster," says Florez. Whether you play singles or

doubles, tennis burns calories and gets your adrenaline pumping just like your cross-training routine.

Exercise Rut #6: You run the same distance at the same pace.

No matter how much you love running, it's always good to challenge yourself a bit more. Discover new ways to train and other exercises you can do instead. *Photo: iStockphoto/Thinkstock*



Variation: Racing

“Registering for a race always kicks my butt into gear,” admits Dussault. “You’re less likely to slack off if you make a specific commitment.” If you’re new to races, Dussault recommends starting with a 5K. “Seasoned veteran? Challenge yourself to a longer distance or personal record time, incorporating advanced training techniques like intervals and hills.”

Variation: Intervals

As with biking, your normal running pace can get a little boring. “On those days you want something different, vary your pace. Pick a stop sign or a parked car up ahead and increase your pace 10 to 15 percent while you run to that point,” says Florez. Or try intervals: “running one minute, then jogging three minutes, and gradually increasing your pace until you’re doing three minutes of running and one minute of jogging.”

New Exercise: Swimming

“Swimming is a non-weight-bearing sport, so it provides outstanding aerobic and strength benefits without the pounding on your joints and bones,” says Florez. You’ll get the same endorphin rush you do from running, while benefitting from different physical advantages.