



Why Your Workout isn't Working and 7 Steps to Fix It!

You've been at it for a while now. Going to the gym. Running miles upon miles. You try to do everything the magazine says you should do, but somehow, when you look in the mirror, you don't see results. Your pants fit the same. The scale still shows the same number. When you climb your office stairs you're still out of breath. After all of your work, all of your time, you have little to show for it, and you wonder, "*Why isn't this working?*"

We all know the importance of fitness, but too many people approach it with the wrong attitude and misinformation. Here are the seven main reasons we've found that most people's workouts are failing to yield results and what you can do to fix it. The tips below will help you zap your boring routines, boost your motivation, and exercise the right way. The most successful clients we've had have all taken these steps to lose weight, tone muscles, and enjoy living every single day. These tips worked for them. They will work for you. If you are truly ready to make fitness a priority in your life, let's get started:

Problem 1: Wrong definition of fitness. Odds are that your definition of fitness is a bit skewed. Media and society in general often regard people who can run, bike or swim long distances as being the picture of "fitness." This is a problem. While these people may have superior cardio-vascular endurance, they are not necessarily truly fit. Many people focus on long, slow, aerobic activity for exercise. The benefits include fat burning and increased cardio vascular endurance. But aerobic exercise also induces muscle loss, and the fat burning is limited to the time spent actually working out. There is more to fitness than cardio.

Fix: Broaden your definition of fitness. We define fitness as your body's ability to support its own functions (breath, beating heart, digest food, etc.), and the body's ability to perform work (work in the general sense, i.e. move stuff around). With this definition, fitness is multi-faceted, including a variety of elements. It requires a fit person to perform well in any imaginable task. Fitness includes anaerobic and aerobic exercise. Strength and speed. Power and flexibility.

Problem 2: No definition of success. Most people begin a new fitness regimen without having any idea of where they are going. Their goal is to get "in shape." What does "in shape" mean? Based on our definition, there hundreds of ways to measure fitness. How do you measure it? If you don't have an answer to that question, you will never know when you are "in shape."

Fix: Write it down —Start with a goal and write it down. Your goal can be related to body function or performance. Some examples include losing weight, losing body fat, running a faster mile or 5k, doing more push-ups, being able to do one pull-up, etc. Start with a goal and write it down. Caution: don't write, "I



want to lose weight.” Write “I want to lose 10 pounds by my birthday.” Write “I want to do 30 push-ups on my toes by Jan. 1.” Write, “I want to run my first 5K this summer.” Have a specific target for your goal and give yourself a deadline. But don’t stop there. Write down your workouts on your personal schedule. If you want to workout three times a week, put the workouts on your calendar at the beginning of the week. There will be a smaller chance that you’ll skip your workout as the stresses of the week pile on. Next, write down your performances in those workouts – record reps, times, rounds, sets and turn your fitness into a sport in which you compete against your own previous bests. Write down your food intake, too. Most people know what foods are good for them and what foods aren’t. The problem is that people are not truly deliberate about their diet. By writing down everything you eat, you’ll see how much bad (truly awful?) food you’re actually eating, and be more motivated to select healthier foods.

Problem 3: You’re doing the same thing over and over again. You started running every day to lose weight, and you lost weight. Now you still run, but you don’t lose any weight. Or, your weightlifting routine now fails to build muscle. Why is this? Your body has adapted to your routine. Our bodies are remarkably good at adaptation. Over time, your body will get used to anything you do. Every routine has a shelf life, and no routine will produce results forever.

Fix: Strive for variety – In fitness, it all works, but nothing works for very long. To be truly fit, you need to be capable in many areas of physical activity. Experiment with other types of workouts and activities to find methods of exercise that stress your body in new and different ways. Hit the track for some sprints. Go on a long bike ride. Play a game of soccer. Take a kettlebell class or a karate class. Keep doing what you like, and add variety so that you are training under the broad definition of fitness.

Problem 4: You don’t know what you are doing. You can follow the pictures in the fitness magazine and watch yourself in the mirror, but do you know what you’re looking for? There is one right way to perform most exercises, and 1000 wrong ways. It’s very likely that you’re doing the exercises incorrectly. A great exercise done improperly can lead to injury and actually stall progress. Even if you know what exercises to do, you obviously have to do them correctly to maximize effectiveness and to avoid injury. If you’ve never learned that there is a proper way to run and that running can be labor free, you’re missing the boat. If you think the squat is just a leg exercise, you’re only half right! If your source for the latest fitness news is one of those late night infomercials, you’re in trouble. If you don’t know exactly what you’re doing, you won’t find the results you are after and you’re setting yourself up for injury.

Fix: Hire a professional—Consider this: the best athletes in the world have someone coaching them daily on how to do things properly. They can do every exercise better than most of us, and they still need help with technique. Find a trainer or fitness class to help you. In addition, when you commit your hard-earned cash you will be more likely to stick with a new program, and you will learn how to exercise properly. But be smart about it. Sign up for something you



know you'll like, and do your research about the people who will be teaching you. At a minimum, check to see that your trainer is certified. Talk to references and other clients. Give them a test drive with a trial class. There is no substitute for personal experience.

Problem 5: You eat crap. Body composition (how fat you are) is based on three things: genetics, activity, and nutrition. We've seen experts report that nutrition is anywhere from 30% to 80% of the equation. We agree that nutrition is VERY important—at least 50%. Your genetics are roughly 30-40% and your activity at about 10-20%. To put it another way, you can always out eat what you do in a workout. If you're not seeing results in the mirror and on the scale, you are likely doing just that.

Fix: Eat well—There are countless diets out there that can lead to seeing your abs in a few short weeks. For long-term success, we recommend *The Primal Blueprint* by Mark Sisson, *The Paleo Diet* by Loren Cordain, and *Enter the Zone* by Barry Sears. To find true success with a diet, you need to make it a life-style. This is perhaps the most difficult thing to do, and you will need help. Read the books and use your family and friends for support.

Problem 6: Your effort is negligible. I love the people on the recombant bikes at the gym—reclined, reading a magazine, steadily pedaling along while they listen to their iPod. After 30 minutes in their “target heart rate” they don't even need a shower. No sweat, not even breathing hard. How can they honestly believe they are improving themselves? Your body needs to be continually challenged in order to make progress. Remember, your body is good at adapting. The 25 lbs. dumbbells don't feel as heavy after a month, but you continue to use them. You run 3 miles in 30 minutes. Have you tried running further? Have you tried running faster? How does it feel when you workout? Are you breathing hard, sweating? Do you ever fail to complete a rep? If your workout is “easy” for you, then you will not see any results.

Fix: Assess your progress—How you measure your progress will depend on your goal. If your goal is weight loss, then you'll need to step on the scale on a regular basis. If you want to run faster or further, you'll need to do a timed run. Shoot for an assessment directly related to your fitness goal every week. Once a week will give you enough time to see some results, and it will be frequent enough for you to change something in your regimen if you're not seeing the results you want.

Fix: Try—you have to actually try to beat your previous best. Try very, very hard. Fitness is one of the only things in life where you can succeed just by trying. You don't have to be strong or fast or even very coordinated. You will get better at all of those things with effort and time, but you really don't have to be good at. You just have to try. But try hard. Every day. If you're not sweating and breathing hard, you aren't going to see the results you want.

Problem 7: You hate your workouts. Everyone dreads going to workouts sometime, but if you're doing something you enjoy, you should be thrilled that



you went to the workout. The runner's high, the pump. These emotions exist. You should feel elated about your workout after the fact. Not always, but more often than not. If not, you probably aren't having any fun, and your effort will reflect your lack of enthusiasm.

Fix: Bring a buddy—Physical activity is always more enjoyable with other people. Find a friend, relative, or coworker who has similar fitness goals as you, and commit to reaching your goals together. Not only will your workouts be more enjoyable, but you will also have additional accountability to your fitness partner, which will further motivate you to stick to your regimen.

If you are not seeing the results you want from your workout routine, chances are that you are experiencing some combination of all seven of the problems above. Use the fixes to make change as soon as possible. It sounds simple enough, but you need to take action. Start with a specific goal and write it down. Find a fitness activity that is fun for you, and sign up with a friend. Give your best effort during each and every workout, and track your progress weekly. By following these tips, you can take deliberate, meaningful steps to reaching your fitness goals, making fitness a priority—even in your busy life.

For workouts and more fitness tips, go to:
<http://www.fitwit.com>

Ben Thoele MS, CSCS, CrossFit Level I (ben@fitwit.com)
Josh Guerrieri, ACE (josh@fitwit.com)
FitWit