

Frequently Asked Questions: Exercise

So you want to lose weight, gain energy, build muscle, or just live healthier, but you've got some questions?

Here are the most common questions I am asked:

Questions

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How hard should I workout?

Your exercise intensity level will vary depending on your fitness level.

Some people should consider a light intensity level, for example, if you're obese, or in poor health. You're doctor will provide advice to meet your comfort level.

Many people prefer a moderate, or "medium" intensity level. The advantage is that it's fairly comfortable, the disadvantage is that it takes time.

A few over-achievers and athletes prefer a high intensity level. The advantage is that you spend less time exercising to get the same effect. The disadvantage is that is it neither comfortable nor easy.

Almost everyone can benefit from another intensity level that includes the advantages of all the other levels, it's called interval training. You vary the intensity level throughout the workout, following a prescribed routine of "ups" and "downs". Studies have shown that, unbelievably, interval training requires less time and provides greater benefit than even vigorous exercise. And, due to the built-in variety, there is little chance of becoming bored.

To learn more, call the YMCA, or ask your company's health and wellness department for information. I include a workout based on interval training in my book: HateExerciseLess.org. Bill Phillip's also included a workout based on interval training in his book: Body-For-Life.

How do I *know* how hard I'm working out?

There are three methods to find intensity—lungs, heart and brain.

The first way to find exercise intensity is through the lungs. It works by measuring the amount of air you use when exercising and is the most accurate of all methods. This method requires an oxygen mask and lots of other equipment, so it's not very practical.

The second way to find exercise intensity is through the heart. It works by measuring your heart rate and, while in principle is accurate, in reality, it varies with the collection method. The collection method usually consists of a sensor (the most common consists of metal plates attached to a handle you grip, but there are many possibilities). Another, less practical way to measure your heart rate is to stop and take your pulse. Although it's easier to measure your heart rate than your oxygen intake, it's still not ideal.

The third way to find exercise intensity is through the brain. It works—not by sticking sharp probes in your brain—but rather by self evaluation. Amazingly, studies show it's about as accurate as the first two methods. No equipment is needed, just come up with a number from one to ten, where one is very low intensity and ten is full intensity. Moderate intensity sits between numbers three and five.

How do I flatten my stomach?

Well, for starters, stop doing situps. Fat doesn't melt away by moving it around, if it did, those silly vibrating belt machines would be in every living room. Remember those machines from the old black and white movies? You stand on a platform and let the belt vibrate the fat away. Great idea, but they don't work and neither do situps. Besides, doing the same exercise over and over and over again is boring—what's the chance, even if situps work, that you'll keep doing them? I'm falling asleep thinking about it.

So what should I do to flatten my stomach? In a word, aerobics. Only cardiovascular exercise will reduce those problem areas where fat collects. Hop on a treadmill, call your neighbor to go for a walk, or go biking with the kids.

How do I gain muscle?

I've got three choices for you: strength training, strength training or strength training. Before you start pumping dumbbells though, consider three factors.

First, genetics is the single biggest factor in gaining muscle. For starters, you'd better be a guy—women won't gain muscle naturally, in large part, because they don't have as much testosterone as men. Even if you're a guy, some guys will grow muscles much easier than others.

Second, nutrition plays a minor role in gaining muscle. Contrary to the "guy at the gym", you don't need to eat truckloads of protein. In fact, you just need to eat healthy—eat things that are good for you, avoid things that aren't. It's not as easy as it sounds: find a nutritionist and learn how to eat, avoid the diet books.

Finally, "artificial enhancers", namely, drugs like steroids, are often associated with muscle growth. Herbs, vitamins, and drugs are a huge business, but they either don't work, or are dangerous—which option do you chose? A special mention goes out to anabolic steroids, both because they will increase muscle mass and they're in common use. Steroid use is quietly rampant throughout high-level bodybuilding contestants like Arnold Schwarzenegger. The drug's affects on the body (increased blood pressure and liver cancer) and on the mind (sharp mood swings) are well documented.

Back to strength training. Start out with sets of 8-12 reps each. As you progress you'll need to learn about intensity levels and planned variety to avoid over training, under training, getting stale, or getting injured. If you're an adult male you will see improvements in your body, but they **will** be limited by your genetics.

How do I prevent muscle gain?

What exercises won't cause muscle gain? This answer goes out to the women of the world.

You avoid touching a dumbbell for fear of muscle growth, after all, you don't want to look like a man. I have some good news for you, those dumbbells won't make you look masculine, in fact, quite the opposite. Impossible? Consider two points.

First, women, you won't bulk up with dumbbells. (Or barbells, or machines, for that matter.) Men have genetics and hormones that can, given the right workout routine, promote bigger muscles. Women have neither the genetics nor the hormones to promote bigger muscles. If you don't believe me, here's a tip: do 10-15 reps, even men won't gain muscle with this routine.

Second, you *want* to lift weights. What! Why? Strength training helps your posture and bones. You lose about a half pound of muscle every year after age 25. Lift weights to bring back those muscle cells and build new ones. The boosted muscles also prevent osteoporosis.

What about those freakishly muscular women bodybuilders, how did they wind up looking like men? The answer is: incredibly hard work, unusual genetics, and often, steroids. (Sadly, steroid use is quietly rampant throughout high-level bodybuilding contestants--men and women alike).

I know some women who like strength training even more than aerobic training (although you need both types of exercise). Also, you're not alone with strength training either. Anchorwoman Katie Couric is rumored to work out with light weights. Singer song-writer Christina Aguilera lifts weights, and actor Kim Basinger is into strength training.

Review: Lifting weights won't make you more masculine, in fact, it will improve your posture, produce feminine muscle tone, and, keep your bones strong.

Can I lose weight with pills, herbs, or diets—you know, the easy way?

Lose weight by taking a pill—what a concept, you become skinny without changing your life. How exciting! You want to believe it's true--companies can't lie on TV—but how true is it?

Watch diet pill ads for the following:

1. Do they recommend diet and exercise?
2. What are the side effects?

Most diet pills have little effect without diet and exercise. They are designed to *supplement* diet and exercise--that's just the way they work, but why would you take a pill if you were willing to diet and exercise?

All drugs have potential side effects, after all they are basically a foreign substance to your body. The most common side effect for diet pills is anal seepage. Honest, ask your doctor or pharmacist.

Companies proclaim these facts on their commercials (albeit in fine print), so they haven't lied, but some ads *are* misleading. For example, my wife noticed the disclaimer in a recent commercial which declared the “doctor” promoting the product was a PhD, not an MD. Would you trust your health to *that* company?

So far we covered medications, drugs that are regulated by the FDA, but what about supplements? These remedies promise to help you lose weight “naturally”--the implication being that they are better than over-the-counter medicine. Yet there are two problems with supplements.

First, there has been little success from legitimate research studies to show an herb or spice or vitamin will cause weight loss. Few of us want to believe this, what a terrible idea! Think about it this way: you have an ancient weight loss formula passed down from your great-great Grandmother--a tribal medicine woman. Wouldn't you either share the secret formula so other's would benefit, or sell it to a big company so they could patent it and publish studies? Why, you'd be rich or famous, or both. If it really worked would you, instead, package it up as a secret supplement, and never publish results from legitimate studies? What's to hide?

Second, the supplement market implies that natural is better. Their products are natural, and the products you get at a pharmacy are *unnatural*. Yet, in both cases, they're foreign substances you are swallowing. Is there any reason to think they are fundamentally different? Furthermore “natural” and “good” don't automatically go together. Poison mushrooms are natural, would you swallow them? While the drug industry is regulated by the FDA, the supplement industry is not. Protect yourself by avoiding the small supplement suppliers with little reputation to protect and, instead, buying from the large supplement suppliers with big reputations to protect.

If you still feel the urge to use supplements, look for the USP logo (*not* just the text, which dishonest companies use), or evidence that the supplement is approved by ConsumerLabs. Also, tell your doctor what you're taking—it can react with other drugs.

Today, diet pills require healthy eating and exercise before they'll help you lose much weight. Additionally, you can expect side effects.

Tomorrow, or in the distant future, scientist may find a diet pill or magic food with no calories that makes you skinny with no extra effort or side effects, but today it seems there's only false hope. After all, if diet pills work, why are there fat people in the world? Sometimes we want to believe so badly in diet pills that we ignore the facts. Hey, we're only human. :)

Can I hate exercise less?

OK, I admit—few people ask this question, mainly because it never occurred to them.

The general consensus is that health nuts were born to exercise and couch potatoes were born to hold remote controls. But reality turns out to be less rigid than my gross exaggeration. For example, I've seen several "couch potatoes" dramatically alter their behavior. They start eating healthier and working out. What's the motivation? Sometimes it's a sick friend, sometimes it's old age, sometimes it's a new grandkid, and sometimes it's nothing at all. The point is that you're not born to do what you do—you have choices, even if they're small.

What if you had some tools to help you lose weight and gain energy? A little something to give that edge in life, to tip the scale—so to speak—in your favor.

I've discovered that there is both a "hard" side to working out (for example: which exercises to do and the minimum time to do them) and a "soft" side to working out (for example: motivation, conquering boredom, and importance of the people around you).

I could go on and on and on, but there's just isn't the space. If you'd like to know more, checkout my book: HateExerciseLess.org

If that's too commercial for you, or you don't have the money, or you suffer from bibliophobia (fear of books), but you're still unhappy with the way you look or feel, then promise me you'll take one step today! What do I mean by a "step"? I mean action. Today. Now. Set some goals. Call a friend and setup time to go for a walk. Tour the local YMCA. Just do *something* and do it now.

Warnings

1. Before starting, see a doctor

Tell your MD you are beginning an exercise program and explain any health problems and note any medications. Make note of your pulse, blood pressure and clothes sizes because they will change.

2. Get qualified instruction

My book contains a safe, effective workout for healthy individual. If books aren't your style, call the YMCA, local gym, or find a certified fitness instructor.

3. If something doesn't feel right, stop

Who are you?

Greg Mumm is an obsessive learner and, like a curious detective searching for clues, has spent a lifetime collecting knowledge and information. Greg is also ambitious, and in 2004 decided he would dedicate his life to helping as many people as he could.

Bothered by people doing endless situps, time-wasting stretches and other unproductive—and mind-numbing--exercises; motivated by people who discipline themselves to exercise, but are miserable; puzzled by individuals who don't exercise, but want the benefits; mesmerized by freaks of nature who unexpectedly came to enjoy exercise...

For his first task he would help people [Hate Exercise Lesss](#).

As a certified fitness trainer with a computer science degree (now there's a combination), he has the background and brains to utilize his vast knowledge and experience. In fact, his first book showed others that there was a "hard" side (for example: which exercises to do and the minimum time to do them) and a "soft" side (for example: motivation, conquering boredom, and importance of the people around you) to working out.

When not helping people lose weight and gain energy, Greg lives in Wisconsin with his wife, two kids and wide array of pets. He enjoys reading, writing, working out, programming computers and a host of other activities.

