

How To Break Through A FITNESS PLATEAU

Your body gets bored when you exercise the same way over and over again. By changing your routines and giving your body a jolt, you can get over a fitness plateau.

You're doing everything right. You're eating healthy foods in limited portions. You're working out regularly. But suddenly you reach a certain point—the dreaded fitness plateau—and you just can't seem to lose any more weight or gain any more muscle mass. What gives?

The problem lies in the body's ability to adapt. Unfortunately, that applies to things that are good for you as well as things that are bad for you. The more fit you become, the better able your body is to handle the same level of exercise. You burn fewer calories, your metabolism decreases, and you find that your progress stalls out.

"You're at a fitness plateau because your body has reached a comfort level," said Nicki Anderson, a personal trainer in Naperville, Ill., and the IDEA Health and Fitness Association Trainer of the Year for 2008–2009. "You need to get out of that comfort zone by challenging yourself."

Exercise: Breaking the Fitness Plateau

The best way to challenge yourself and get past a fitness plateau is to shake up your routine. Tactics you might want to try include:

Take a break. Put your training on hiatus for one week to give your muscles a chance to reset their baseline.

Mix it up. Challenge your body and your mind by changing up your program. If you're the treadmill master, switch to an elliptical machine or swim laps once or twice a week. If you weight-train with free weights, try resistance machines instead.

Focus on training neglected or weaker body parts. For instance, if you spend hours on sit-ups, shift your attention to your shoulders and back.



Image Taken From MomStrong.com

Give your muscles a jolt. Challenge different sets of muscles by pushing them to their limits, where they are barely able to successfully finish the last rep with a higher weight.

Turn up the intensity on cardio workouts. Try the technique called interval training to push yourself to new fitness levels. Whether you're on the treadmill, elliptical machine, or stationary bike, increase your speed or intensity for one minute of every three to five minutes at your usual exercise pace. Repeat this pattern for the entire length of your aerobic session. After a few days, you'll probably be able to raise the intensity of those one-minute spurts even more.

Rethink meal sizes. When your metabolism is crawling along, readjusting your calorie intake might help move it back into high gear. Instead of eating the typical three meals a day, divide the same number of calories into five or six meals. Spreading calories out throughout your day can spark a spurt in your metabolism. You also should be adding new foods to your diet all the time to prevent boredom, Anderson says. For instance, if you eat oatmeal for breakfast and a garden salad for lunch every day, you will quickly get tired of that routine. Eat healthy, but try new recipes, even new cuisines, as often as you can.

Exercise: Beating the Boredom in Your Head

There's also a psychological aspect to a fitness plateau that you'll have to overcome. You might get so bored and frustrated by your lack of progress that you start doing things that are counterproductive to your overall goals, like snacking on junk food or skipping workouts. "Usually that's the main reason people stop working out—because they're bored and no longer seeing the results they used to," Anderson explains.

Besides changing up your workout schedule, you can jumpstart your program by taking an exercise class or working with a personal trainer, she Anderson. Both will push you to work harder and better. "A class can be fun and really challenge your body," she said.

—DENNIS THOMPSON JR.