



GDC Coaching

Specializing in Weight Management

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Are You Suffering From Exercise Burnout?

By [Kristen Stewart](#) | Medically reviewed by [Christine Wilmsen Craig, MD](#)

Get tips on how to avoid exercise burnout and maintain a healthy fitness schedule.

Two of the most popular New Year's resolutions are to exercise more and get in better shape. Many people start January with high hopes of big success, yet by March find themselves struggling to get to the gym and watching their home treadmill collect dust. What happened in the intervening weeks?

A simple thing called, "exercise burnout," most likely. "Positive enthusiasm often turns into negative because the individual forgets another key component of success: moderation," says Erica Tuttolomondo, athletic director at Rush-Copley Healthplex, a fitness center in Aurora, Ill.

While many believe the faster and harder they exercise the better; in reality, this can lead to physical and mental exhaustion. Overtraining can cause loss of appetite, lack of progression, extreme fatigue, and even recurring injury. The mind, too, needs time to adjust to exercise. "For many, the thought of exercising every day becomes a chore," says Tuttolomondo. And that's when many people quit.

Beat Exercise Burnout

"Spend a week evaluating current activities," says Thomas A. Fox, an exercise physiologist and author of *The System for Health and Weight Loss*. "Look at what you're eating and even use a camera to help. Then it's easier to know what to change."

If exercising is new to you, start out slowly, gradually building up to a reasonable routine. Beginners should keep with the same routine for a couple of months. At first, you will notice physical and mental changes until eventually your body adapts to the routine and hits a plateau. At this point, it's time to add variety to the workout by using different machines or adjusting frequency, intensity, and time spent exercising.

"If you're carrying extra weight, physical activity is going to be more difficult for you than for someone else, so be realistic in your goals," adds Edward Abramson, PhD, professor emeritus of psychology at



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California State University, in Chico, and author of *Body Intelligence: Lose Weight, Keep It Off, and Feel Great About Your Body Without Dieting!*

Be sure to go in with the proper mindset. Realize that you won't see results overnight. It takes time to get into shape. Weight loss occurs gradually over time, so don't get discouraged if the scale doesn't show a big drop after one week of working out.

Set a Realistic Exercise Schedule

While everyone's situation is different, the American College of Sports Medicine and the American Heart Association recommend aiming for moderately intense cardio, 30 minutes a day, five days a week (or vigorous cardio 20 minutes a day, three days a week) plus 8 to 10 strength training exercises at 8 to 12 repetitions of each exercise, twice a week, to maintain health. (For weight loss, 60 to 90 minutes of exercise a day may be necessary.) These guidelines are for healthy adults under age 65.

If exercise is new to you or if you have an existing health problem, consult with your doctor before beginning an exercise program. "A beginner should start at the low end of the recommendation," says Tuttolomondo. Consider two 20-minute sessions per week and aim to increase the time each session. Alternating between two or three different cardio machines during a single workout is a good way to avoid physical and mental fatigue.

Choosing a time and place that is easy and convenient will also help you maintain a successful exercise schedule. Tracking your progress on a chart may give you extra motivation as well. "Research shows that graphic feedback about our performance tends to be even more effective than written or verbal feedback, probably because we can see our improvements over time," says Nicole Gravina, PhD, assistant professor at Roosevelt University in Chicago.

Most importantly, find something you enjoy. Before long, the dreaded chore of exercise might become something to look forward to.