

[IMAGE]

Exercise Your Right to Change Up Your Workout

By Editorial Staff

You've been working out for the past three months and you're feeling great. You're losing pounds, dropping inches off your waistline, and toning and tightening muscles you didn't even know you had - and that thought you'd forgotten them. Then you hit the proverbial workout wall and your enthusiasm starts to go downhill. Every workout feels the same, you don't seem to be making any strength or muscle gains, and the scale's stuck at the same place it was last week – and the week before that.

Your body – and mind – are constantly adjusting to the demands placed upon them. If you do the same thing over and over without variation, eventually it becomes routine; and routine is always a recipe for workout disaster. In exercise terminology, it's known as plateauing - the point at which your workouts fail to be effective beyond "maintaining" your current level of fitness.

The solution is a simple one: vary your workouts. By mixing things up periodically, you keep your body guessing, which means it's always working hard to "figure out" the stresses you're placing on it. From a mental perspective, variation will also keep you interested, engaged and enthusiastic, looking forward to the next workout, rather than the "same old" workout. Let's review a few simple exercise variations that can take a basic exercise and give it a fresh new look:

exercise - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark *Push-Up Positions*: Push-ups are a fundamental body-weight exercise that can help tone and tighten your entire upper body, particularly your chest, but after awhile, it may feel like you're repeating yourself. One easy fix is to vary position during the exercise. You can change the position of your hands (inside shoulder width, which will work the triceps muscle of the arms more; or outside shoulder width, focusing more on the outer pectoral / chest muscles). You can also vary from a flat-floor push-up to a raised push-up (placing your hands on a chair, bench, table, etc., to focus on the lower pecs, or placing them on the floor with your feet elevated on a chair, table, etc., to focus on the upper pecs). Finally, try changing your hand position while doing standard push-ups: complete one push-up, then move your right hand to the right a foot or so, follow with your left, then do another push-up; repeat to the right, and then return to your original position in increments, doing a push-up each step of the way. (Essentially, you're doing push-ups while "walking" with your hands across the floor, which will stress your

muscles differently than standard push-ups.)

Arm Angles: The biceps curl is another fundamental exercise that can get old over time. Here are a few variations to spice things up:

1. Reverse curls: Instead of the traditional curl, reverse your grip with dumbbells or a barbell so your palms are facing down, now up. Now do a curl from the thighs to the shoulders, as you would with a standard curl. It may seem like the same move, but you're actually working the outside of the arms and the forearms more than usual – plus it's not the same curl you've been doing for the past three months (or more).
2. Another great variation on the biceps curl is commonly called "7's," although you can choose any number of repetitions depending on your fitness goals and ability. To do this one, start with the dumbbells / barbells at your thighs (standard starting position), but for the first third of your repetitions, only curl the weight to your sternum (until your forearms are perpendicular with your biceps). For the second third, start at the sternum and curl the weight to its upper end point, returning to the sternum on each rep. Finally, complete your last third of the repetitions by doing full curls from thighs to shoulders and back. Trust us, this will leave your muscles burning – and responding, rather than stagnating.

Leg Lifters: Lift your legs out of their doldrums is as easy as varying the position of your feet while doing the traditional squat. Instead of pointing your toes forward (the traditional position), point them out (the "sumo squat") to put more emphasis on the inner thighs, and point them in to work the outer thighs more. You can also work your legs and glutes in a totally different way with jump squats (body-weight only, of course), side squats (leaning to one side and bending only the knee on that side; also known as a lateral squat), and even squat holds (holding your body in the squat position and squeezing your legs / glutes for 5-10 seconds or more).

Keep in mind that with these and other exercises, variations may work better (and be safer) with body weight only versus weights (particularly the squat variations). And always remember to use proper form when performing these and other exercises; that means keeping your back straight, raising and lowering your body / the weights in a smooth, controlled manner, and stopping if you get dizzy or lightheaded. Talk to your doctor for more information.

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