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The Top 10 Mistakes People Make in the Gym

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More and more people are choosing to have regular physical activity in their life. Whether it be taking a regular walk or having a structured workout routine, people are making the commitment to improve their health.

This time of year is no different - the numbers are up! - people are into their fall routines whether it be heading indoors to fitness clubs and gyms or signing up for that run clinic or rowing club.

But are you getting the most out of your workout? Is your training program helping you achieve your goals? Or are you doing the same routine every time with little or no variation? Are you putting yourself at risk for inevitable injury by using gigantic weights on a fragile joint through the wrong range of motion?

For some, admitting when help is needed in the technical aspects of fitness/sporting endeavors is outweighed by pride. To others, seeking the help of a qualified professional is an essential ingredient to optimum fitness.

The American Council on Exercise (ACE) - a leading authority on fitness - asked industry experts what mistakes they see exercises make in the gym. With tips to improve the safety and effectiveness of a workout, here is "The Top 10 Mistakes People Make in the Gym":

1. **THE ALL-OR-NOTHING APPROACH.** Not having a full hour to exercise is no reason to skip your workout. Research shows that even 10 minutes of exercise can provide important health benefits.
2. **UNBALANCED STRENGTH-TRAINING PROGRAMS.** Most people tend to focus on certain muscles, such as the abdominals or biceps, because they have a greater impact on appearance or it is where they feel strongest. But to achieve a strong, balanced body, you have to train all muscles groups.
3. **BAD FORM.** Bad form is a sure way to get injured in the gym. For example, the knee moving in front of the toes during a lunge or squat can put undue stress on the knee. Using your back to gain momentum during heavy lifts or not exercising through a full range of motion are other ways to achieve less than optimal results.

4. NOT PROGRESSING WISELY. Exercising too much, too hard or too often is a common mistake made by many fitness enthusiasts. Rest and gradual progression are important components of a safe and effective exercise program.

5. NOT ENOUGH VARIETY. Too many people find a routine or physical activity they like - and then never change it. Unchanging workouts can lead to boredom, plateaus and/or injury, while overdoing it can lead to injury or burnout.

6. NOT ADJUSTING MACHINES TO ONE'S BODY SIZE. Most exercise equipment is designed to accommodate a wide range of body types and sizes, but requires you to adjust each machine to fit your body. Using improperly adjusted machines can lead to poor results and increase your risk of injury; you should seek the assistance of gym personnel when needed.

7. FOCUSING ON ANYTHING BUT YOUR WORKOUT. The importance of being "mindful" of the task at hand cannot be overstated. Reading or watching TV can adversely affect the quality of your workout because the distraction will literally slow you down.

8. NOT PROPERLY COOLING DOWN AFTER YOUR WORKOUT. Too many people wrap up their workouts and head straight to the showers. Instead, take a few minutes to lower your heart rate and stretch your muscles. This not only improves flexibility, but also helps prepare the body for your next workout.

9. POOR GYM ETIQUETTE. This can range from simply being rude - lingering on machines long after you are done or chatting loudly on your cell phone - to poor hygiene and not wiping your sweat from machines once you're finished. Always be considerate of other exercisers.

10. NOT SETTING REALISTIC GOALS. Unrealistic and vaguely stated goals are among the leading causes of exercise dropout. The key is to establish a training goal that is specific and appropriate for your fitness and skill levels - something a bit challenging but not overly difficult.

A certified Fitness Trainer can help individuals achieve their health and fitness goals by designing specific personalized weight training, aerobic conditioning, flexibility and nutritional programs. Think of it as making an investment in the most important asset you have - yourself!

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