

# Top Ways To 10 Train Smart!

By Alexis Andrianopoulos



Many people make New Year's resolutions very similar to this one: this year, I will get in shape/lose weight/join a gym/get stronger/lose my pregnancy weight/insert appropriate weight or training resolution here. Were you one of them this year?

Instead of just resolving to get in better shape, resolve to do it the right way. Without guidance, your earnest efforts to improve your overall health might accidentally cause more harm than good. Here to help you are some of the Philadelphia area's top personal trainers and health experts with the all-too-common mistakes they see people making... and quick fixes to correct them.

**1** Use the correct amount of weight. "Men tend to use too much weight, while a great number of women use too little weight for fear of bulking up," says personal trainer and triathlete Andrew Urion, who works at Club La Maison in Wayne. "Using too much weight can lead to incorrect form, which in and of itself is a huge workout mistake." Urion explains. "When you use too much weight, you often cannot work the muscle through its full range of motion. I'll see men bench pressing way too much weight but taking the bar down only to about 5 inches above their chests, rather than all the way down to their chests."

Women, on the other hand, tend to fear gaining too much bulk. If and when they use weights, they use too little weight. "Typically, women want to just tone their muscle, not gain or increase the size of their muscle. The problem is, when they use too little weight, they accomplish neither," says Urion. If you want to build size and muscle, Urion recommends using a weight that allows you to complete 6-10 repetitions before the muscle fatigues for maximum results. If, on the other hand, you wish to tone and shape your muscle, use a lighter weight that allows you to complete 12-15 repetitions before fatiguing.

**2** Are you training far too much but not working nearly hard enough? This sounds like a contradiction, but Roger Schwab, owner of Main Line Health and Fitness in Bryn Mawr, explains, "There is an inverse relationship between the amount of work and the intensity of work: the harder you train, the less your body can tolerate." Schwab recommends the following formula: "train briefly, train hard, use more weight, and lift slowly" in order to get stronger without getting injured.

**3** Give yourself enough time to reach your goals. Mike Wharton, Director of Sports Performance at ACAC in West Chester, trains young athletes who have hopes of becoming the Next Big Thing... tomorrow. "You're not going to become Barry Bonds overnight," he cautions. "Give yourself a good base first and follow a logical progression." Wharton advises his young clients - and their parents - to step back, start slow, and evaluate the big picture and their starting point. Then they can design a program and schedule that includes progressions toward their goals.

**4** Don't use exercise as a weight loss tool. Dwayne Wimmer, owner of Vertex Fitness in Bryn Mawr, sees far too many people who think exercise burns off enough calories by itself to result in weight loss. "To lose weight, you need a combination of exercise and a reduced calorie diet," explains Wimmer. "There is a misconception of how many calories exercise really burns. For example, if your cardio machine of choice - treadmill, elliptical trainer, or stationary bike - says you've burned 300 calories during your workout, you have to realize that that basically translates to about a Snickers bar and half a soda, or a bagel with cream cheese and a container of juice." Wimmer is not saying that exercise is not valuable. Indeed, cardiovascular exercise is good for your heart and lungs, strength training is great for your muscles and bones, and stretching is



beneficial for your overall flexibility. However, exercise should be combined with smart caloric intake in order to really see results. "To lose one pound of body fat, the average 150-pound person would have to walk 44 miles. 44 miles! Instead, that person should try to create a caloric deficit of 500 calories per day - through a combination of a

reduction of daily caloric intake and exercise - to lose that pound in one week," Wimmer offers.

[It's not all or nothing.](#) Many times, joining a gym or resolving to get into better shape happens at about the same time as adopting other healthy habits like not smoking, eating better, going on a strict diet, etc. "Don't overwhelm yourself," advises personal trainer Christine Leedom of B&R Family Fitness Club in Feasterville. "Don't try to do it all at once. Focus on one thing at a time." Even in the gym, Leedom says many people try to do too much at once. "Women have a tendency to drastically diet and do all cardio workouts while neglecting strength training, while men starting a new workout program go back to the one they used when they were 20 and lifting heavy weights, setting themselves up for injury."

The fix? "Start slow," urges Leedom. "Get evaluated by a doctor and a fitness professional to come up with a workable plan that includes light to moderate weights and 20-30 minutes of cardiovascular exercise." Keeping your expectations realistic will help you feel more successful and decrease your risk of injury. "You can always work your way up, adding more weight and longer cardio workouts later."

[Make sure you exercise your body in the right order.](#) "I see a lot of people who simply do not understand how their bodies work," says Ed Winfield, fitness director at Club La Maison in Wayne. "Many people come in to the gym, do their cardio workout, lift a few weights, and then go home." The problem with this routine, according to Winfield, is that the cardiovascular workout fatigues the person's heart and lungs, as it's supposed to do, but then the heart and lungs cannot pump blood into the working muscles as efficiently as possible during the weight workout. "By doing your strength training first, you can efficiently get the necessary blood to the muscles you're working."

Even strength training workouts have a proper order based in science and fact, says Winfield. "You want to work on your larger muscles and larger body parts first, and then your smaller body parts." For example, a very simplified upper body routine should look something like this: the larger muscles of the chest and back first, followed by shoulders, biceps and triceps. For the lower body, start with squats and then progress to leg press, leg extension, and leg curls before doing stability-challenging exercises like walking lunges.

[Steady-state cardiovascular workouts are not an efficient tool to change your body composition.](#)

By exercising in the so-called aerobic zone (at roughly 60-80% of maximum heart rate), you might think you're burning enough fat to change the shape and makeup of your body. You are, to an extent. But personal trainer Bruce Kelly of Healthplex Sports Club in Springfield has a better idea. "I recommend interval-based workouts for clients who have a solid fitness base to burn more calories and increase metabolism," offers Kelly. "While steady-state cardio workouts burn additional calories for maybe an hour or two after your workout ends, interval-based workouts keep your metabolism ramped up for 12-36 hours after you stop exercising."

For clients who are doing aerobic exercise four to five times per week, Kelly recommends replacing two of the workouts with the Tabata Protocol, based on the work of an exercise physiologist who worked extensively with Japanese speedskaters to maximize their efficiency. With a doctor's OK, you might want to try it too. Warm up for 4-5 minutes doing your favorite cardiovascular exercise (running, biking, elliptical trainer, rowing machine, etc.). After your warm-up, sprint for 20 seconds. Those 20 seconds should be at an all-out effort. Then recover for 10 seconds. Repeat seven more times for a total of eight intervals, and then cool down for another 4-5 minutes. Note: Kelly does not recommend trying this workout on a treadmill because the belt will take too long slowing down and speeding up.

[Another person's workout might not be right for you.](#)

You see someone at the gym who looks good. Really good. You think, "Wow, they are doing that exercise, and they look really fit. So maybe I should do that exercise too." Stop right there, says Don Veon, owner of Fitness for Living, who trains clients at 12th Street Gym in Philadelphia. "Every body is different. Just because one person does something does not mean you should. That particular workout or exercise may or may not be right for you. Certain exercises may not be gender- or age-appropriate." Instead of assuming your fellow gym-goer has all the answers, "ask a professional for help," urges Veon. "Most trainers are very approachable. Don't be afraid to ask for help." Furthermore, Veon suggests that you be a little leery of people who are quick to give advice about how, when, and how long to exercise... unless they are trained fitness professionals. "Take their advice with a grain of salt, but realize that even if their intentions are good they might not have the knowledge necessary to offer that advice." A trained, certified professional is your best bet.

[Make sure you set realistic expectations.](#) "Don't choose a weight goal you haven't seen since puberty," advises Registered Dietitian Margaret Moses, Director of Nutrition Services at ACAC in West Chester and Adjunct Professor of Nutrition at West Chester University. "Be realistic, or you are setting yourself up for failure. Set a realistic goal, and then break it into even smaller, more manageable goals." Ideally, a dietician can help you determine your specific calorie requirements and set personal goals based on that information. If you can't afford a dietician, however, all is not lost. Moses advises her clients to focus on making positive changes that will naturally lead to weight loss, such as not eating in front of the television after dinner and/or exercising for 30 minutes three times per week.

"Manageable weight loss should be between ½ to 1 pound per week," continues Moses. "That doesn't seem like a lot, but realize that to lose one pound, you need to reduce calories by 500 per day for a week. To succeed, weight loss technically should not be a goal, but an outcome of positive changes in your lifestyle."

[Don't exercise at your maximum capability 365 days a year.](#) In other words, more is not necessarily better. Rob Russell, Fitness Director at Northeast Racquet and Fitness in Northeast Philadelphia, lists this as one of his biggest workout pet peeves. "You have to understand that not even professional athletes work out as hard as they can every day. You have to

periodize - or cycle - your workouts from a low level to your peak level and then back down to a lower or recovery level, depending on your goals, the event you might be training for, and what time of year it is." Russell acknowledges that new or returning exercisers can tend to overdo it; the old "If working out three or four times a week is good, then six or seven times a week must be even better" syndrome. "If you do this, you are setting yourself up for overuse injuries. Give your body the time it needs to recover from hard workouts." Russell reminds readers that strength gains are made during the recovery phase of a workout program, namely the day or two after you lift weights. "During your work phase, you actually tear down your muscle fibers. Your body needs to rest in order to make the gains you are seeking. That's why you should never work the same muscle or muscle groups two days in a row when you do a strength training program."

One last bit of free advice from Club La Maison's Ed Winfield. "Ask questions. Lots of questions. You should always feel comfortable asking your trainer why she or he recommends a certain exercise or a certain order of exercises. The trainer should be able to give you a simple answer based in scientific research."



*When she's not running, lifting weights, or working at her full-time job, Alexis Andrianopoulos teaches a variety of fitness classes at gyms in and around Philadelphia, the western suburbs, and Delaware. She has worked part-time in the fitness industry for the past 14 years. Contact Alexis @phillyfitmagazine.com.*