



HITTING THE WALL

Do you need to spring clean your fitness routine?

Jill Coleman, fitness coordinator for Wake Forest University.

That time period is even shorter for people at advanced level of training. Jeremy Frey, strength and conditioning coach at Cornell College Iowa and sponsored powerlifter for Elite Fitness Systems, recommends people at this level consider changing accessory activities every two to four weeks.

Not incorporating novel activities on a regular basis could keep you at the same fitness level, and likely with the same physique, for years—no matter how impressive or intense your initial plan is. “Without changing the stress, your body will not gain, improve or evolve,” Frey says. Before you begin a total makeover, you’ll want to make sure you keep some core basic exercises in your weight routine like barbell squats, lunges, push-ups, pull-ups, bench and shoulder presses and dips. You can add other fun activities around these basics for a sensible change up.

There are a lot of different ways to go about mixing up your workout. Sign up for a new fitness class, or ask a trainer to show you the proper form for using a machine you’ve never tried, suggests Hannah Johnson, owner of Total Body Turnaround and powerlifter on Team Elite FTS. Just try something new! Changing your cardio routine can mean going from a treadmill to outdoor running, taking an interesting class you’ve been wondering about, trying a sport like swimming or racquetball or simply moving from an elliptical machine to a stationary bike, says Theresa L. Rowe, fitness professional and author of the book *Shaped by Faith: 10 Secrets to Strengthening Your Body & Soul*. Be sure to give time for stretching and flexibility training, she adds. If you want to amp up your weight training, switch from machines to free weights, which offer a more natural range of motion and can work a combination of muscle groups at the same time.

For fitness junkies reluctant to ditch the routine they’ve created altogether, experts suggest doing more repetitions of a slightly lower weight for endurance goals, or fewer reps at a higher resistance level for strength. “To see changes, exercise must be intense,” Coleman says, suggesting weights heavy enough to induce failure by the end of the set.

You go to the gym three times a week, sweat it out doing cardio and weights but aren’t noticing a difference in your weight, muscle tone or strength. What gives? It’s simple—you’ve hit the wall, reached a plateau, and the benefits you used to see and measure have become negligible.

Thank the human body and its amazing ability to adapt to new activities. Your brain became accustomed to your workout routine and is now executing the steps perfectly without putting any energy (read: calories) into it. Think back to when you first learned to drive a car—the excitement, the rush of being behind the wheel—and compare that to driving now. Odds are, your approach to driving is much more automatic and a little more mindless. Your brain is bored so it goes into auto pilot, whether you’re driving or working out at the gym.

The trick to getting consistent results is to keep your brain guessing as to what your next move will be. “By switching up the workout, we will keep our bodies confused and we will continue to make progress,” says Brian Weger, a health coach for Houston’s Kelsey-Seybold Clinic. “Changing your routine can be as simple as changing the number of sets, repetitions, or even rest time in between sets.” If you’re being consistent with your workouts, you may experience a leveling off of results within the first three to six months, says

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Change your tired regimen... Today!

If you know you've reached a plateau using your current workout plan but haven't yet drafted a new approach, experts offer these tips to get you back on the fitness track.

- Get sporty! Incorporate a new exercise into your routine that's sports-specific, like kick-boxing work with a bag, to really add in cardio and work the core and legs, advises trainer Hannah Johnson, owner of Total Body Turnaround and powerlifter on Team Elite FTS.
- If you are trying to lose weight and inches, do most of your cardio before weights, says Brian Weger, a health coach for Houston's Kelsey-Seybold Clinic. To change things up, do weights before cardio one day then switch for your next session.
- Add more weight and lower the number of reps until you feel you're working hard again, or add more reps and drop the weight to increase endurance
- Work the same muscle group with a new exercise. Sit-ups, for example, can be done in 100 different ways, stimulating slightly different ab muscles.
- Change the speed of your workout. Slowing things down makes muscles work much harder, says New York City trainer Ariane Hundt.
- Group fitness classes are a great way to change things up, according to Wake Forest University fitness coordinator Jill Coleman. Pick a new class every 3 months and commit to going two or three times a week.
- Consider a switch from machine exercises to free weight exercises. Free weights force the body to use many more muscle groups as stabilizers and in turn burn more calories and include an element of functional training, Coleman adds.
- See where you can change your diet for the better, making sure to get protein in every meal for building muscles, advises Jeremy Frey, strength and conditioning coach at Cornell College Iowa and sponsored powerlifter for Elite Fitness Systems. Cut back on carbs toward the end of the day, including fruit, unless you need quick energy after a workout. "Keep room in your diet for the occasional bad food," he adds. "This will help keep cravings down."

Personal training tips for a shoestring budget

- When working out in the gym, notice the moves trainers show their clients and try them out on your own. "Don't hesitate to ask trainers. It's their job, and they'll be happy to show you what to do," says New York City personal trainer and nutritionist Ariane Hundt. "You are by no means obligated to sign up for a session with them, so don't be shy and ask."
- Pick the brain of your fittest friend, and learn new moves. Who's your fitness role model? Find out how they got lean and strong, and apply their principles to your own routine.
- "If you want some detailed advice and perhaps a workout overhaul, you (may) need to pay for one session with a trainer to get set up with a new workout," suggests Jill Coleman, fitness coordinator at Wake Forest University. "Or you can find a gym regular who looks approachable and has the dedication and physique you admire, and ask them for advice."
- "Most gyms also offer a group (training) rate," advises Theresa L. Rowe, fitness professional and author of the book *Shaped by Faith: 10 Secrets to Strengthening Your Body & Soul*. "Enlist a few friends and sign up for a week of working out with a personal trainer together."