Don’t Just Do It, Work Out Right

Avoid these common exercise errors.

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Don’t work out on an empty stomach. When your body isn’t properly fueled with the right food, you may exercise less vigorously. The result? Fewer calories burned. “Try eating a small, rapidly digestible carbohydrate and protein snack, such as a banana and 4 ounces of nonfat plain yogurt, about 30 to 60 minutes before you exercise,” suggests Jessica Matthews, MS, an exercise physiologist with the American Council on Exercise.

Don’t stretch without warm-ups. “When muscles aren’t completely warmed up, this may lead to strains and pulls,” Matthews says. The remedy? Spend five to 10 minutes doing arm circles or leg swings. This loosens muscles and makes joints more flexible, which in turn reduce injury risks. After your muscles are warm and loose, then stretch.

Don’t skip the cool-down. It’s not good to stop moving as soon as you’re done working out. Instead, do several minutes of low-intensity, cool-down exercises. This keeps blood flowing to the heart and helps your muscles recover more quickly.

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