

These mini mental and muscle tweaks will take a load off your body, not your calorie burn, for bigger exercise bliss.

BY HOLLY ST. LIFER PHOTOGRAPHS BY LAURA DOSS

love your workout

Psst! You over there leaning on the treadmill grips—want to get that giddy, in-the-zone feeling from exercise again? Follow these simple tactics to instantly perk up your mind and body and make every stride, stroke or sit-up feel easier.

Get a New Sweat-itude

“Preconceived notions about your routine can make it feel either less difficult or harder,” says Shaun Goodsell, a sports performance coach in Elk River, Minnesota. So that your next session falls into the former category, give yourself Goodsell’s 30-second attitude adjustment: When an “I can’t face the elliptical” thought bubbles up, immediately replace it with a

payoff-focused statement like, “Working out makes me feel healthier, more accomplished and energetic.” When she’s dreading a workout, Jillian Mastroianni, 28, a law student in Nashville, hits a virtual fast-forward button. “I remind myself of all the ways I feel so much better afterward—my head is clearer, my body feels stronger—and those thoughts always get me going,” Jillian says.



Forget Workout Monogamy

Turns out, playing the fitness field a little could change your “Oh no, not again” outlook on your regular routine. Think of your motivation level as you do your muscles, suggest scientists: Mixing up the types of workouts you do can ensure that you don’t hit a plateau with either one. In fact, when exercisers in an Arizona State University study were divided up based on whether they worked out alone, in a group or using a combination of both, those who went for the combo reported feeling the most energized, and only 7 percent of them felt that exercise was hard work. “We’re more apt to want to exercise and to stick with it over time if it satisfies a variety of physical and emotional needs rather than just one or two,” explains Kate Hays, Ph.D., a sports psychologist in Toronto. Loners can link up with group walks (ava.org), runs (rrca.org), yoga (yogaclassesearch.com) or bike rides (specializedridersclub.com) a few times a week. If you usually burn cal with pals, try a solo stroll or run (mapmyrun.com) or an at-home sculpting session (www.fitnessmagazine.com/video).

Go to Pieces

During the toughest part of your workout, think small. Rather than wallow in how hard Spinning is, admire how your legs move like pistons. “Called chunking, this distraction strategy shifts your attention to just one chunk of your body so the rest of you doesn’t feel as tired,” Goodsell says. On long runs, Allyson Lee, 25, a retail manager in New York City, focuses on proper arm form to ignore aches: “I think about driving my elbows forward and backward, as if I’m jabbing an invisible person behind me.” Breaking your loop into mental bits also helps, says Chris Carmichael, Lance Armstrong’s coach. “When the idea of maintaining your effort level for the next two miles is too daunting,” he says, “focus on getting to the next telephone pole and so on.”

Throw In the Towel

Surprise—mopping up your sweat will only make your body feel as though it’s working harder. “As you perspire, the evaporation process is what cools your body down, lowering your perceived exertion,” explains John Porcari, Ph.D., professor of exercise and sports science at the University of Wisconsin-LaCrosse and a FITNESS advisory board member. Unless the sweat is running into your eyes, don’t wipe, Porcari adds. Another drip tip: Switch to breathable, synthetic workout wear, because water-absorbing fabrics can hinder the evaporation process too. Upgrade your sweats to the moisture-wicking Saucony Women’s Hydrator Long Sleeve shirt (\$38; saucony.com) and New Balance NBx Thermal Capri (\$60; newbalance.com for stores).



You’ll get more of a mental kick from exercise if you mix some group sessions in with your solo routine.

Rock On

If you’re trying to maximize the take-my-mind-off-my-muscles effect at the gym, listen to tunes. Music can lower exercisers’ perceived exertion by about 10 percent when they go at a moderate pace, according to a study at Brunel University in London. Plus, the researchers found that matching music tempo with your stride rate can boost treadmill endurance by up to 15 percent. (Get a by-the-beat playlist for your preferred workout on page 74.) But skip those other favorite cardio-machine time killers. “If you’re talking on your cell phone or reading a book, it’s likely you’re not getting your heart rate up high enough for an effective aerobic workout,” Porcari says.

Don’t Go Full Tilt

Tackling hills can be a slog, but if you resist the temptation to take them on headfirst, you’ll have an easier time getting over the hump. “It’s a natural

instinct to want to lean forward when we run uphill, but that posture actually places stress on the back and neck,” says Jeff Galloway, a former U.S. Olympic athlete who has coached thousands of runners. “Instead, keep an upright stance by imagining you’re a puppet on a string that runs straight down from the top of your head through your shoulders, hips and feet.” Reducing your stride length will further lessen fatigue and ease tight muscles on inclines, Galloway says.

Stay Chest Deep

If you get whipped quick doing laps in the pool, you may be making the common swimming mistake of letting your hips and legs float lower in the water than your torso, thereby creating drag. “When you feel your hips sink, drop your head and look down at the bottom of the pool,” says Olympic swimming star Dara Torres. Or imagine you have a giant T on your chest, suggests

Mike Monroe, a trainer and endurance athlete in New York City: “Visualize pushing the T down toward the bottom about half an inch, and that subtle movement will give your hips a lift.”

Just Cool It

If the memory of your last workout is more exhausting than exhilarating, you may not be taking enough time to wind down afterward. In a study at the University of South Florida in Tampa, treadmillers who walked or ran at various speeds for 30 minutes straight discounted how they felt during the routine and associated the toughness of the workout only with how they felt in the last minutes. “Forming a memory of an experience based primarily on its end is a common phenomenon called the recency effect,” says lead study author Marcus Kilpatrick, Ph.D., director of the university’s health and exercise science laboratory. “These findings suggest that taking an easy five- to 10-minute cooldown—stretches or a light walk—may leave you with a more positive impression of your workout.” The payoff: If you remember today’s sweatfest as feeling like a breeze, you’ll be more motivated to get up and do it again tomorrow. ■



An après-sweat stretch can give you a whole new simple-as-pie memory of your workout.