

Beat the Winter Blues and Make the Most of Your Gym – and Your Winter

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Wintertime can be the most difficult time of year to stave off extra pounds and stay motivated during these colder and darker days, especially if you are a city dweller. There are even some who suffer from Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), a disorder that brings about a mild to severe depression during winter months. One of the best ways to combat any kind of depression, cabin fever, and those unwanted pounds is getting out and getting fit.

I was inspired to write this article by a personal training client of mine who made the seamless transition from a spring, summer, and fall cyclist to wintertime cross country skier. Adapting her training to prep her for her new winter sport was not only a great deal of fun, but also a great lesson in how to make the most of your gym.

To me, the gym is the training ground for the real world - whether you are training for a specific sport or just want more energy and endurance for everyday activities. There is something for every fitness level and here are a few ideas to keep you motivated during these long winter days.

PICK A WINTER SPORT JUST FOR FUN – and train for it. Nothing beats being outdoors, even in cold weather. New York City is an ideal location nearby a wide assortment of winter sports from ice-skating and hiking to downhill and cross-country skiing. It's not too late to choose a day of fabulous outdoor activity and head off to the gym to prep your body. It just may be a great time to buy a sports-specific training session just for your special activity day. Even if you don't have a personal trainer, there are load of great Internet sites that offer sports specific training tips for your activity of choice.

MAKE THE MOST OF THE CARIO MACHINES – Intervals And Cross Training

For the avid outdoor sportsperson, it's difficult to come indoors for the winter. You may even be a novice and are having trouble keeping yourself interested indoors. One of the best ways to fight boredom is to shake things up with interval and cross training.

Interval Training – Interval training can be an added boost to any workout. On the treadmill, bicycle, or elliptical, try fast sprints for 30 seconds to one minute at high speed and walk or jog for two to three minutes, and repeat at least five more times. If you don't want to sprint, try fast walks at very high inclines for the same interval/rest ratios.

Cross Train - Be brave and step onto that new machine! There are more cardio machines than you think – and getting on just four different ones for fifteen minutes can make any training more fun. Ask for assistance at the gym to learn how to operate and program any new machines. If you suffer from chronic joint pain, try cross training with non-weight bearing equipment such as the Cardio Wave, Rowing Machines, Elliptical, Spin, Lifecycle, and Nordic Track. Program yourself at high levels to achieve and go beyond your expected fitness levels.

Here are some other fun ways to make the most of your gym:

TRY A NEW OR DIFFERENT CLASS - Classes at gyms come with your membership. They are like personal trainers for cardio sessions - especially the ones during non-peak hours. If you haven't ever taken a class at your gym, there is nothing like trying something new (especially you, fellas!). Gyms these days are offering more types of classes - from the traditional Pilates, yoga, spinning, and kickboxing classes, to a great assortment of new innovative and fusion styles under the sun. Just have fun – everyone gets nervous the first time they try some new moves.

CHANGE YOUR ROUTINE – Diversity is the spice of life and that goes for your workout routine. It's also a whole lot better for your body. A few simple changes will challenge you muscles and your mind, making you an active participant in your own workout. If you lift weights, try these changes for each day you work out and then mix and match. Change your rep scheme (try 20 reps instead of 10), change your set scheme (try two

or four sets instead of three), and lastly, change those exercises! Get off the machines and try cables and free weights. If you love the leg press, try some split squats or walking lunges with dumbbells. If you really want to shake things up, change order – but don't forget to keep doing large body parts first. One of my favorites is the upper body/lower body superset at high repetitions for a full body blast.

WORK OUT WITH A PARTNER – Can't get motivated to get to the gym? Talk to a membership advisor and ask for a pass for a friend to try out your gym. If they join, you may end up with a free month. Craigslist also lists postings for partners – under community activities.

TRAIN AT A DIFFERENT TIME – Sometimes our body clock needs a little boost. Switch your training sessions around. Getting out of bed in the dark may be hard, but training before work, even once a week can give you much needed extra energy. A lunchtime workout helps you to stay focused and make you less likely to skip a workout.

USE YOUR COMPLIMENTARY SERVICES – Many gyms come not only with a free fitness assessment, but an additional hour with a personal trainer. Take advantage of these to set new goals and kick-start a new routine.

STEAM IT UP – Use the gym steam rooms and saunas to get rid of unwanted toxins, cut soreness time, and simply to relax and revive your mind, body, and soul.

There is no better time than the New Year to set your new fitness goals and have fun achieving them!

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