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THE GUIDE
health

SECRET PERKS OF EVERY WORKOUT

No matter what form of exercise you love, chances are you're getting even more benefits than you thought. Here's proof.



fitness: Maybe you don't need another reason to hit the gym, but if you do... Did you know that exercising three times a week can lower your chance of depression? And that getting the recommended 150 minutes of weekly activity (even just energetic walking) can cut your risk of heart disease by 25 percent? We've gathered research on the lesser-known payoffs of all types of workouts so you can pat yourself on the back for the perks that you didn't realize you were getting—or tweak your regimen to reap extra rewards!



THE WORKOUT
lifting light weights

ADDED BENEFIT
BUILDS BONE DENSITY

Feel like you're being a bit lazy when you reach for those five-pounders? Let that go. Lighter weights may be more effective than heavy ones at strengthening bones, says a 2015 study published in *The Journal of Sports Medicine and Physical Fitness*. "We're not sure why, but the high-

repetition, low-weight-training approach stimulates osteoblast activity [the laying down of new bone]," explains Bryce Hastings, a study investigator and the head of research at Les Mills International, a fitness company in Auckland, New Zealand. "The latest research on muscle conditioning suggests that it's not the amount of weight used but the level of fatigue a person encounters that generates changes." Adults who did low-weight, high-rep strength-training workouts (in 60-minute classes) two or three times a week for 27 weeks increased bone density 4 percent more in their spines and 8 percent

more in their legs than did a group that did indoor cycling and core building. For postmenopausal women, the gains were even greater, as high as 22 percent (largely because they started with much lower bone density when the study began). **DOING LIGHT RIGHT.** Pick weights just heavy enough that your muscles start to tire at the end of each set. After several weeks, rather than increasing the repetitions, increase the load a pound at a time so that improvements continue.



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THE WORKOUT
a brisk morning walk



ADDED BENEFIT
IMPROVES SLEEP

Start your day with a cardio workout and kiss restless nights good-bye. Researchers asked men and women age 30 to 60 to walk on a treadmill for a half hour, three times a week, at three different set times: 7 A.M., 1 P.M., and 7 P.M. Turns out, when the group did their walk at 7 A.M., they slept better and more efficiently, according to a 2014 study published in *Vascular Health and Risk Management*. What does that mean? "They had longer deep sleep, which is reparative, and less light sleep," says Scott R. Collier, Ph.D., a study investigator and an associate professor of exercise science at Appalachian State University, in Boone, North Carolina. Morning exercise clears out stress hormones, so your day feels less stressful, and that leads to better sleep at night. As a bonus, morning exercise lowered blood pressure by 10 percent. **TIMING IS EVERYTHING.** Keep that morning walk a part of your daily routine. But know that this A.M. magic does not apply to all workouts. For example, strength training improves sleep best if it's done in the afternoon or evening, according to another of Collier's studies, published in *The Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research* in 2015.



THE WORKOUT strength training

ADDED BENEFIT BOOSTS MEMORY

While aerobic exercise is often celebrated for improving memory, strength training also offers a significant power-up. A 2014 study in the journal *Acta Psychologica* found that after men and women did leg extensions (on a machine similar to those at gyms), they were able to recall 60 percent of images they had seen before exercising, versus a 50 percent recall rate for the control group. (This group sat in the machine but had their legs moved for them.) Why?

"Strength training acts like a stressor, which enhances the release of neurotransmitters, like norepinephrine, and hormones, like cortisol, that promote memory storage," says Audrey Duarte, Ph.D., a study coauthor and an associate professor of psychology at the Georgia Institute of Technology, in Atlanta. (Unfortunately, chronic stressors, like an unhappy marriage and unemployment, are harmful to memory.)

THOUGHT-PROVOKING. The American College of Sports Medicine recommends two or three strength-training workouts a week to improve overall memory and cognition.

Learning something new? Exercising immediately before or after a study session may help you better retain the info.

THE WORKOUT cross-training



ADDED BENEFIT HELPS YOU LIVE LONGER

When you plan your week of yoga classes, Pilates, kickboxing, and Spinning, you're probably not thinking much about the caps on the ends of your chromosomes, called telomeres. Telomere shortening is a normal process of aging, but varying your exercise routine can help slow it. Researchers evaluated data from more than 6,000 men and women between the ages of 20 and 84 on their workout habits. For every different activity they reported (say, strength training, running, and cycling to work), their odds of having shortened telomeres decreased. According to a study published in a 2015 issue of *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise*, study participants who did four activities reduced their odds of having the shortest telomere length by 52 percent; those who did three activities, by 29 percent; those who did two activities, by 24 percent; and those who did one activity, by 3 percent.

MORE IS MORE. Why not add at least one more activity to your weekly routine? If yoga is your primary activity, find time for some strength training. If you're a runner, mix it up with some cycling. And if you haven't had time to be active at all lately, let this information motivate you to try different offerings at the gym and fall in love with a few types of movement.

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THE WORKOUT interval cycling

ADDED BENEFIT RELIEVES ARTHRITIC PAIN

A 2015 study published in *European Journal of Applied Physiology* found that when women age 20 to 50 who had either rheumatoid arthritis or juvenile idiopathic arthritis completed two 35-minute indoor-cycling

interval workouts a week for 10 weeks, it reduced markers of pain-inducing inflammation in their blood. They also lost weight and body fat and saw improvements in stamina, which is relevant, since people with rheumatic disease have an increased risk for heart disease. Best part? Unlike corticosteroids or nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, which are often used to treat these conditions, interval training is all natural, with no negative side effects.

BY THE NUMBERS. Model a twice-a-week stationary-bike workout after the one in this study: Push hard for four minutes, then take an active recovery for three minutes. Repeat four times.

In addition to relieving arthritis pain, interval cycling lowered biomarkers of heart disease by 24 percent.