



I LOST IT AT THE CLUB TIP #8

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Breaking Through a Fitness Plateau

Inevitably, it happens to us all – the dreaded fitness plateau. Whether you’re an Olympic-level athlete, a weekend fitness warrior, or just starting out you’re bound to encounter periods when progress eludes you. How do you know when you’ve plateaued? Simple – you have plateaued when you stop seeing positive results from your fitness program.

During a plateau your motivation drops and you become frustrated and disappointed. Working harder during a plateau not only doesn’t help you “break through”, but it often creates more frustration. You may feel confused about how to proceed with your fitness program. When you reach a plateau, it’s important to determine the cause so that you can work SMARTER, not HARDER.

A fitness plateau can occur if your fitness program lacks variety. Fitness gains occur when you systematically increase a workload (faster, heavier, longer, etc.) and follow that with rest. Your body is infinitely adaptable and will begin to adjust to your training after 6-8 weeks if you don’t add variety. Cross-training is the best method for dealing with a lack of variety. You can cross-train by varying different types of exercises into your fitness program. Good examples of cross-training exercise include: swimming, walking, cycling, climbing, rowing, dancing, hiking, kickboxing, etc.

Another source of plateau is lack of proper rest. If you progressively work harder and fail to get enough rest, the body will begin to stay in a perpetual state of fatigue. Your body doesn’t get stronger during a workout, it actually gets

stronger during the period of rest following the workout. Make sure you get enough sleep each night. Most Americans need 7-9 hours of sleep each night, but usually only get 5-6 hours of good quality sleep.

Poor attitude and motivation can be both a source and result of a plateau. The challenging thing about dealing with poor motivation is that it tends to become a self-fulfilling prophesy of worry, uncertainty, and doubt. If you want to add excitement back into your fitness program, then perhaps you might change some environmental aspect – workout to music, with friends, alone, in a new place, on a new trail, on a new piece of gym equipment, in a new outfit, etc. A very specific fitness goal can also help you stay focused. If a goal or environmental change doesn't help, then consider changing to another sport or exercise type. Fitness is supposed to be fun!

Weak nutrition can also create a plateau in your fitness program. As old fashioned as it sounds, make sure you eat well-balanced meals. A diet of coffee, hamburgers, and frozen dinners is not adequate. Fruits, vegetables, whole grains, vitamins, nuts, and dairy products are all building blocks of a sound nutritional program. Eating smaller, more frequent meals is better than eating three or fewer large meals. It is generally not wise to exercise right after you eat, but make sure your “tank” isn't empty either. Remember, fat burns in a carbohydrate flame.

Recognizing the cause of a plateau can help you determine the best way to break through. You'll fail to see fitness gains if you don't add variety. Be willing to try new sports through cross-training. If you don't get enough rest, your body will get “stale” and fail to respond to training. Make sure you alternate hard/easy workouts and get enough sleep. Poor motivation can leave you in a “funk” and cause you to give up on your program. Pick a combination of sports that you enjoy and you'll be more likely to stick with the program. Don't forget to eat well. Get enough sleep, eat properly, cross-train and you'll be able to break through any fitness plateau!

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