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What's a hybrid athlete?

by Ashley Mateo

Let's find out the meaning of this expression and the right approach to training.

Scroll through fitness social media these days, and you'll see the term "**hybrid athlete**" more and more often: Influencer Nick Bare, for example, documents his body building routine alongside marathon training, while ultrarunner and personal trainer Lucy Haldon sells running, strength, and hybrid coaching programs.

It's a pretty self-explanatory label: instead of single-mindedly focusing on endurance feats or racking up big weight room PRs, **athletes are taking a two-sided approach**. That might not sound ground-breaking, but for a long time, it was thought that aerobic exercise cancels out strength gains—however, a systematic review on hybrid training published in 2021 in the journal *Sports Medicine* determined that "concurrent aerobic and strength training does not interfere with the development of maximal strength and muscle hypertrophy compared with strength training alone."

Frankly, everyone should consider themselves a "hybrid athlete." **Fitness isn't an either/or**: The World Health Organization recommends that adults do up to **150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity, 75 minutes of vigorous aerobic activity a week**, or some combination of the two, plus **muscle-strengthening activities** involve all major muscle groups on two or more days a week. But people out two to four times that amount — about 300 to 599 minutes each week — saw more health benefits, including a longer life span, according to a study published in 2022 in the journal *Circulation*.

Elite athletes—or any regular person training for a marathon or a bodybuilding competition—may prioritize one type of activity over the other because they're looking to eke out every possible performance edge. But the average exerciser benefits from optimizing their **cardiovascular system** and **building muscle**, especially if their main goal is health and longevity.

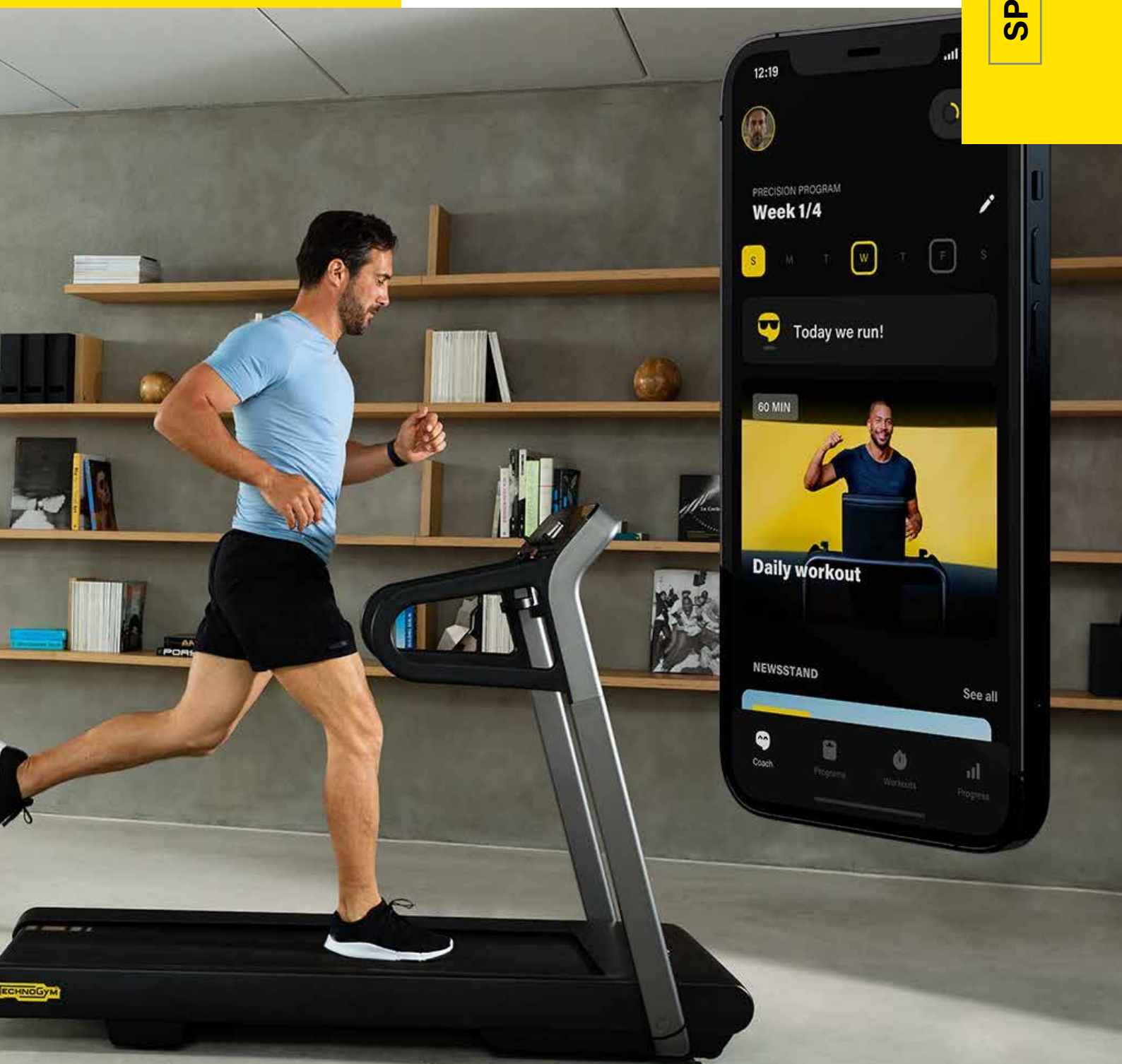
Combined training (when aerobic and resistance exercises are performed consecutively in a single session) produced the **greatest improvements** on cardiometabolic factors—including blood pressure, blood lipids, blood sugar, body composition, and cardiorespiratory fitness—followed by hybrid training (when aerobic and strength-based exercises are done at various levels of intensity during a single session), according to a 2022 study published in 2022 in *Circulation: Cardiovascular Quality and Outcomes*. (These two types of training were compared to continuous endurance training, high-intensity interval training, and resistance training.)

It's not just about health, though; combining both strength and endurance within a training program does lead to **performance benefits**. This type of concurrent strength and endurance training increases maximal strength and endurance capacity in females, according to a November 2023 systematic review published in *Sports Medicine*, although it may blunt lower-body strength adaptations in males. Plus, six weeks of simultaneous strength and endurance training resulted in positive changes in terms of reduction in body fat and an increase in the study participants' muscle mass, 2022 research published in the *Journal of Positive School Psychology* determined.

The truth is, **the human body craves variety**—and training across multiple intensities, loads, and distances can improve physical outputs, resilience, and protection against injury, according to a 2016 study *British Journal of Sports Medicine*.

Hybrid training can be interpreted in a couple of different ways: for some athletes, it's about setting up your weekly programming to alternate between aerobic days and strength training days; for others, it's about combining both of those in a single session (think: compound lifts followed by sprints or burpees).





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Whatever your preferred approach, the Technogym App can take the guesswork out of your personal gym time. You can opt in to on-demand, trainer-led Sessions for strength training (using body weight of specific training) or cardio; follow self-guided video Routines that target specific muscle groups or elicit certain cardiovascular responses; or pair multi-week strength and cardio Programs.

The key with hybrid training is to make sure you're not overdoing it. If you're new to this type of programming, you should start with four days of training (two aerobic and two strength); and once that feels manageable, you can gradually introduce more volume—but you should still aim to include at least one full rest day per week.

General guidelines suggest waiting at least 24 to 48 hours before training the same muscle group, a 2018 study published in *Frontiers in Physiology* determined, and most coaches recommend keeping your hard days hard and easy days easy—meaning, if you're going to do a track workout on Tuesday, you might also want to make Tuesday leg day. Your intensity throughout the week can fluctuate as well; if Tuesday is super intense, Wednesday could be an easy active recovery day (where you aim keep the intensity to 30 to 60 percent of your maximum heart rate, according to a review published in 2019 in the *Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research*), and Thursday a medium intensity day, and so on.

It's all about **allowing your body proper time to recover between efforts**. Exercise is stress—good stress, in that it breaks down your muscles and forces your body to adapt, repairing those muscles so they'll be stronger the next time you work out. But that rebuilding process can only happen when you're not further taxing your body. If you don't give yourself the break you need between sessions, you're not going to see gains—and you might eventually start to see the effects of overtraining, which can include performance plateaus, excessive fatigue and soreness, a lack of motivation, mood issues, trouble sleeping, illness, recurrent injuries, and more.

Being a hybrid athlete isn't a free pass to go hard all the time—if anything, it requires being even more in tune with your body to make sure you're challenging yourself when you need to and taking a step back when it's appropriate. If you can find that balance, then you're more likely to reap the rewards from this two-pronged approach to training.



