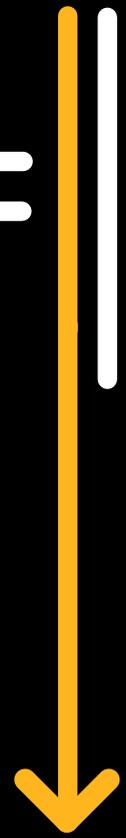




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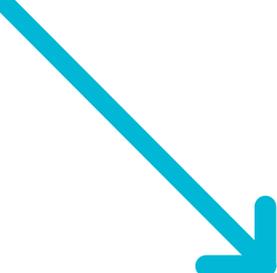
PUSH



**TRUTH BOMB: THE QUALITY OF EXERCISE MINUTES
MATTERS MORE THAN THE QUANTITY. REALLY!**

BY ASHLEY MATEO

THE
LIMIT



Sometimes (okay, *a lot* of times) just showing up for a workout or putting one foot in front of the other feels like a victory. But if your fitness ambitions are bigger than just getting an endorphin boost, remember these three words: *Effort changes everything.*

Ultimately, “intensity is what drives transformation,” says Matt Harber, director of Ball State’s Clinical Exercise Physiology Laboratory. “In order to change, you have to move the body outside of its comfort zone.” And you can’t get complacent. To continue to see gains, you need to keep pushing the envelope—whether you’re a newbie or an OG exerciser. That could mean upping your workout minutes, sure, but in a world where jam-packed schedules make carving out additional time about as likely as finding a forgotten \$20 in your leggings pocket, dialing up the intensity is a more feasible (and, dare we say, fun?) way to stay fit.

If this all seems a little, well, intense, just know that it’s not as hard as it sounds: “Exercising at more than a 60 percent effort level is considered high intensity,” says Harber. Essentially, getting beyond easy—whatever that means for you—is what it’s all about. Here, a plan for hitting fast-forward on your goals.

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So level with me: Why should I want to up my intensity?

It’s key to unleashing your full potential fitnesswise, yes, but a growing body of research indicates its importance from a physiological standpoint too. “We now have landmark studies spanning decades that show people who are able to achieve 75 minutes of vigorous exercise or 150 minutes of moderate per week had a lower risk for conditions like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and even cancer,” says Heather Milton, CSCS, an exercise physiologist and clinical specialist at the New York University Langone Health Sports Performance Center. What’s more: Ramping up your effort improves heart and lung function, according to a recent study published in the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*.

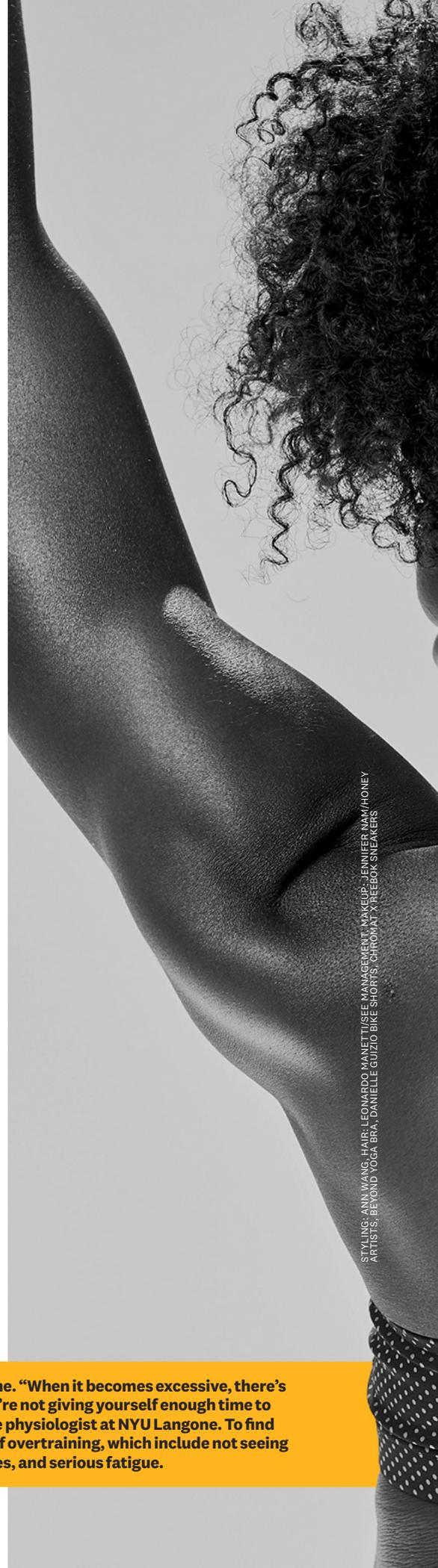
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How do I know if I’m working hard enough?

Check your wrist. Increasingly, smart watches and fitness trackers are logging intensity data much like they do your steps. Case in point: Fitbit just released its first device—the Fitbit Charge 4 (\$150, fitbit.com)—that tells you how hard you’re going and for how long in real time; it also stores intel on its app so you can monitor progress. “We’re able to highlight the importance of impactful activity,” says Megan Lluncor, Fitbit product marketing manager. To be clear, more athlete-specific devices from Garmin and Polar offer intensity feedback as well (and have for years), which is clutch for super-sporty feats like triathlon or Half Ironman training. So consider the concept officially here to stay, for all. Hooray!

THE TIPPING POINT

Disclaimer: Intensity is fab, yes, but that doesn’t mean you should go all out all the time. “When it becomes excessive, there’s an increased risk for injury,” says exercise physiologist Heather Milton. Basically, you’re not giving yourself enough time to recover. The threshold varies from person to person, says Rondel King, CSCS, exercise physiologist at NYU Langone. To find your limits, you’ll want to keep tabs on how you feel during a workout. Look for signs of overtraining, which include not seeing any gains despite putting in work (i.e., plateauing), major mood swings, sleep struggles, and serious fatigue.



STYLING: ANI WANG, HAIR: LEONARDO MANETTI/SEE MANAGEMENT, MAKEUP: JENNIFER NAM/HONEY ARTISTS, BEYOND YOGA BRA, DANIELLE GUIZIO BIKE SHORTS, CHROMAT X FREEBOX SNEAKERS



225

minutes of vigorous exercise per week cuts your mortality risk by a whopping 39 percent compared with people who don't exercise at all.

Source: ROM



Okay, but what if my watch isn't super smart?

While investing in a brainiac tracker might be the easiest way to measure intensity, it's def not the only option. There are two free methods so familiar you might overlook their awesomeness. Don't! They can give their techie counterparts some competition—and your wallet a rest day (even it needs one sometimes, no?).

1. TALK TEST

The more effort an activity requires, the more it affects your heart rate and breathing, which is why the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends speaking while exercising as a way to gauge how hard you're working out. Can you keep up a convo with your fitness buddy while breaking a sweat? You're likely operating at a moderate intensity level. Too winded to get out more than a word or two? We see you, high intensity!

2. RATING OF PERCEIVED EXERTION

Another way to tell how hard you're working is by ranking your effort level on a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being no exertion and 10 being your personal HAM zone. RPE intensity levels are broken down into the buckets below.

Easy (1-3)

You can talk normally and breathe naturally, and you feel very comfortable.

Moderate (4-6)

You can speak in spurts and your breathing is becoming more labored (i.e., you're within your comfort zone, but working).

Vigorous (7-9)

You can barely talk and you're breathing heavily (you're outside your comfort zone).

Max Effort (10)

You're at your physical limit or past it, gasping for breath, and can't talk.



REVERSE LUNGE

Stand with feet under hips and hands on waist. Take a big step backward with right foot and lower until both legs are bent 90 degrees. Press through left heel to reverse motion and return to start. Repeat on opposite side. That's 1 rep. Do 12.



WALKING LUNGE

Stand with feet together and hands in front of chest. Take a big step forward with right foot and lower until both legs are bent 90 degrees (back heel high). Push through right foot to stand, bringing left foot forward to meet right. Step left foot forward and repeat. That's 1 rep. Do 12. Short on space? Turn around and double back.



TAP INTO STRONG

We teamed up with Betina Gozo, certified functional strength coach and *Women's Health* Advisory Board member, to design a strength-training program that shows you how to easily turn up the intensity with a total-body workout. She offers two fab options for each exercise in this five-move circuit, so you can make it ⚡️ **tough** (moderate) or ⚡️⚡️⚡️ **turbocharged** (vigorous). Perform each move (whichever option you choose), then continue to the next without stopping. When you've completed the full circuit, start over again from the top and repeat twice, for a total of three sets. (Feel free to mix up the difficulty as you go!) Do moderate- to high-intensity sessions like this two times per week.

KAT WIRSHING (EXERCISE MOVES), STYLING: ANN WANG, HAIR: CEE RUZIELLE, MAKEUP: JENNIFER NAM USING MAC COSMETICS AT HONEY ARTISTS, NO KA 'OI TOP, BRA, AND LEGGINGS, NEW BALANCE SNEAKERS, NEWGATE WATCH, ADINA'S JEWELS EARRINGS



ALTERNATING LEG DROPS

Lie faceup with legs together and lifted, feet over hips, and arms at sides pressed into floor. Engage abs and slowly lower right leg, keeping back flat against floor. Reverse movement to return to start. Repeat on left side. That's 1 rep. Do 12.



LEG LIFT ▶

Lie faceup with arms at sides, legs together and lifted toward ceiling, feet directly over hips. Engage abs, press arms into floor, and slowly lower legs as far as possible, keeping back flat against floor. Reverse move to return to start. That's 1 rep. Do 12.



LATERAL SQUAT

Stand with feet much wider than shoulders and hands in front of chest. Without moving feet, shift weight into right foot, then push butt back; bend right leg, keeping left leg straight, and lower down until right thigh is parallel to floor. Reverse motion to return to start and repeat on the opposite side. That's 1 rep. Do 12.



LATERAL LUNGE ▶

Stand with feet under hips and hands together in front of chest. Take a big step to the right with right foot, then push butt back; bend right leg while keeping left straight, and lower until right thigh is parallel to floor. Reverse movement to return to start. That's 1 rep. Do 12.



A nonstop circuit ups the intensity even more by adding cardio.



BODY-WEIGHT GOOD MORNING

Stand with feet under hips, soft bend in knees, and hands behind head, elbows wide. Hinge at hips and slowly lower chest until torso is parallel to floor. Then, with control, reverse movement to return to start. That's 1 rep. Do 12.



▼ SINGLE-LEG HINGES

Stand with feet together, knees softly bent, left arm out to side, right palm on quad. Shift weight onto right foot and slowly hinge at hips, tilting chest forward, raising left leg back, reaching down with right arm, until torso and leg are parallel to floor. Return to start. That's 1 rep. Do 12. Switch sides; repeat.



MODIFIED SIDE PLANK

Lie on right side with left hip, knee, and foot on top of right, feet flexed, legs bent, heels even with butt, upper body propped on right forearm (elbow under shoulder). Engage abs and raise hips to form a straight line from knees to shoulders. Hold for 30 seconds.



▼ SIDE PLANK

Lie on right side with legs together and extended, left foot on top of right, feet flexed, upper body propped on right forearm (elbow under shoulder), and left hand on hip. Engage abs and raise hips to form a straight line from heels to head. Hold for 30 seconds.



\$2,500

That's how much per year people who do at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise five times a week save in health-care costs, on average, compared with those who don't.

Source: Journal of the American Heart Association