

Physically**FIT**

There are many reasons why we choose one form of exercise over another. It may be we're just looking for a quick way to drop those last five pounds. Maybe we choose something for fun - a round of tennis can be as entertaining as a round of drinks for some. Or it may simply be for convenience. Whether we choose the gym around the corner or decide to jog around the block, it makes sense that the more convenient it is, the more likely we are to do it.

Then there's always the issue of the climate in which we live. Indirectly, it helps us to make our choice when we aren't fortunate enough to wake up to sunny skies everyday. It sounds much more appealing stepping outdoors on one of those warm summer days as opposed to shoveling out that front door for that morning walk. Instead we head to the nearest gym or dust off the treadmill in the basement for our fitness fix. What many people don't realize is that there can be added benefit to moving that workout outdoors even when the temperature is downright chilly.

Besides such obvious reasons like space never being an issue outdoors, or that the only loud music you hear will be coming from your own iPod, it can actually impact the results of your workout. There are many scientific studies that support the benefits of an outdoor fitness routine. Exercising outdoors enables you to burn more calories and fat and increase your level of fitness faster than indoor exercise. In an effort to maintain the body's core temperature during those cooler outdoor workouts, it requires more energy. This results in an increase in your caloric burn somewhere between 10 and 40 percent.

By moving your workout outdoors, we continuously change the environment or more specifically the terrain on which we train. The body adapts very quickly to workouts,

Why You Should Move That Workout Outdoors

By Laurie Washington, M.S.

so a change in something as basic as your running surface (think grass versus pavement or snow versus sand) can challenge your body to work harder. Without continuing to challenge the body, it will become more efficient and will require less energy (calories) to complete that workout.

Although being efficient in everyday life is usually a good thing, for our workouts it may not be a goal for which we strive. This is one area where more work is actually a good thing. We should exercise at a level that causes us to leave our comfort zone. This is referred to as the overload principle. A small change to our daily workout can impose demands on our body that result in great increases in strength. After all, who doesn't want that?

While we may routinely recognize some of the added benefits to an outdoor workout such as fresh air or sunshine that helps your body generate Vitamin D, there are also the not-so-recognizable things that should motivate us as well. When it seems much harder to get yourself going without the aid of that exercise tape or those weight machines, just draw on your inner athlete and get yourself moving out the door.

When you train outdoors whether it's with a group or on your own always remember a few important things. In cooler weather we tend not to sweat as noticeably but you should always drink plenty of water to avoid dehydration. Dress in breathable layers wearing fabrics that wick away the sweat and keep you dry. About half of your body heat is lost through your head so always wear a hat and preferably gloves to protect those extremities. Wear reflective clothing when necessary and the appropriate foot gear for traction depending on the terrain. Most importantly, always warm up prior to your workout.

It may take a little bit more when the mercury drops but this is when the muscles are most susceptible to pulls and strains. Remember, it's not only important to be smart about our workouts but also to be safe. If you haven't tried an outdoor workout yet, lace up those cross trainers and head out the door. Who says you need to wait for summer?



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