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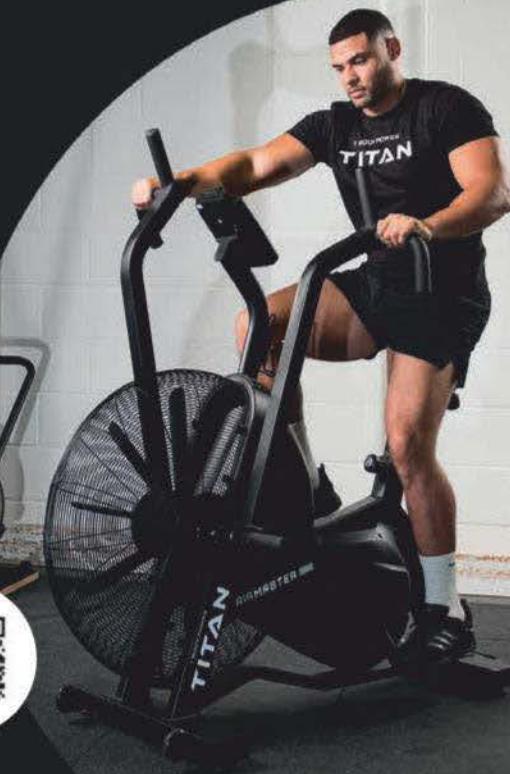
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EDITOR'S LETTER

ISSUE 307 NOVEMBER 2025



By the time this issue comes out, I will have been at the helm of this illustrious title for a whole year. And what a year that has been. In the last 12 months, I have interviewed sporting icons (such as Eliud Kipchoge, Sir Mo Farah, Ali Brownlee and Daniel Dubois); I have travelled the world to see what fitness means to other nations; and I've worked out with some of the world's best personal trainers. These are memories that will stay with me forever. And yet, while my world has changed, what hasn't is my ability to stay injury-free. In fact, I would say that 2025 has been my most annus horribilis. When it comes to injury, you name it, I've had it. Six weeks off with patella tendonitis; two Grade 2 calf tears; and a constant ITB insertion problem: building consistency has been something of a problem. And yet, a chance conversation with an old running colleague reminded me of while I still

want to try. "Does the fire still burn?" he said. And my answer was an emphatic yes. And being editor of this excellent publication is one of my main motivators. I want to be able to walk the walk and talk the talk until, well frankly, until I absolutely can't. This month's issue is packed full of information and features that should prove motivation to keep anyone and everyone on the right path to fitness, better nutrition and a healthier body and mind. Let's hope the next year is just as exciting - and less injury-ridden!

David Castle, managing editor

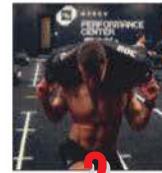
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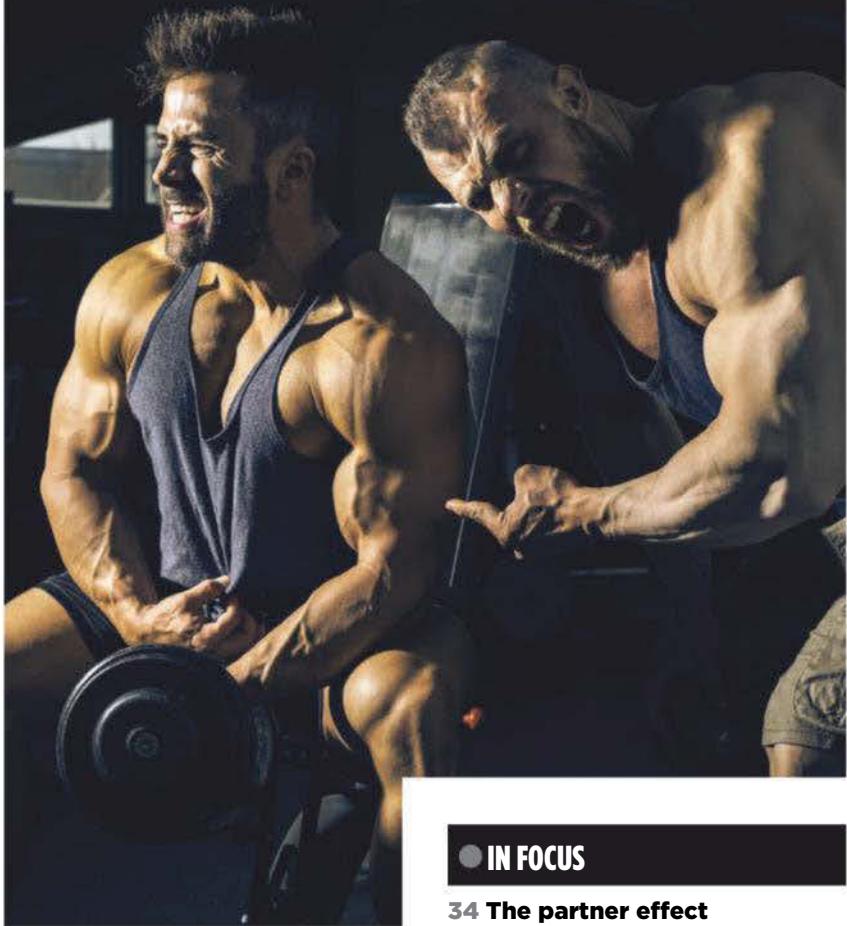
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James didn't slow down, and you don't have to either.

Lifelong runner James Pardey (54) relies on Turmeric+ to keep doing what he loves.

James has been running since childhood, but as the years passed, he started to wonder if his best days were behind him.

'I thought, crumbs, maybe my running days are over.' He tried Turmeric+, a supplement using a patented formula that makes turmeric's key active ingredient – curcumin – 30x more absorbable than standard turmeric.

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by athletes, and trusted by thousands of subscribers.

At first, James noticed no effect. But when he stopped taking it, the difference was clear. 'I was like, whoa! I hadn't realised it was making a difference.'

James took a subscription and hasn't missed a day since, 'I feel fantastic. I'm hammering 10-mile runs three times a week. It's transformative. As far as I'm concerned, I'll be taking it for the rest of my life.'



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UPDATES



WEIGHT LOSS IS ALL IN THE BRAIN

Unless, like astronauts Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams, you've been stuck in outer space for a while, you'll be well aware of the impact on the weight loss market of GLP-1 drugs such as Ozempic, Wegovy and Mounjaro. Many of us know of someone who has achieved incredible results after signing up for the miracle jab but unfortunately, there are two potential problems that could prevent a speedy shred. Firstly, GLP-1 drugs that target brain neurons to control appetite can cause side effects such as nausea and vomiting which led to 70% of patients stopping the treatment within a year. However, a team at Syracuse University has identified a different brain target, so-called support cells, finding that aiming a molecule named tridecaneuropeptide (TDN) at them, offers weight loss without causing gastrointestinal issues. Human trials of this new approach to suppressing appetite are scheduled to begin in 2026. As for the second potential problem, the drugs don't just reduce fat but also muscle, lowering basal metabolic rate and resulting in serious weight gain when the jabs cease. However, our mission at MF is to ensure you're equipped with the knowledge, motivation and inspiration to build muscle, making this a moot point.

WHAT'S APP-ENING



Global data and business intelligence specialist, Statista, reports that the total number of downloads of health and fitness apps is currently sitting at close to 4 billion. Since this seems to indicate that a hell of a lot of people have turned to tech in order to help them to achieve their shape-up goals, then surely that can only be a good thing...or is it?

A study published in *Psychology of Sport and*

Exercise discovered that using diet apps is associated with increased levels of disordered eating, body dissatisfaction and compulsory exercise, when compared to subjects who used a fitness app or didn't bother with either. We're not suggesting you don't adopt digital support for your nutrition plan, rather, keep basic food and workout diaries and occasionally review them to ensure you're not slipping into any unhealthy behaviours.



WHERE AM I

Orienteering is like *Mastermind* for runners, in which competitors navigate a course of checkpoints using a detailed map and compass, deciding on the best route between them with the aim of completing the course as quickly as possible. New research suggests that whatever your age or fitness level, this is a hugely effective vehicle for improving your physical and cognitive capabilities.

A team, led by Taipei Medical University in Taiwan, conducted a meta-analysis of over 1000 studies and found a raft of evidence to support a positive impact on several fitness markers plus both memory and spatial awareness.

If you fancy giving it a try, check out <https://www.britishorienteering.org.uk/>

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WALK FASTER LIVE LONGER

New research at the University of Chicago Medical Centre has established that increasing speed by just 14 steps per minute significantly enhances the health benefits of walking. Daniel Rubin MD, who headed up the study, suggested this is a simple but truly effective strategy for improving current health and independence as we age.

The research team created Walk Test, a smartphone app to help monitor pace, although this isn't yet available to the public. However, for a DIY option, a basic metronome app can help you to establish your regular walking pace and so enable you to up your cadence by the required amount. So, if you've got longevity in your sights, stop scrolling and start strolling!



HIGHWAY TO HELL (AND OTHER SONGS CYCLISTS LOVE!)

Australian rock legends AC/DC top the list of the songs that cyclists have on their indoor cycling playlists, with a whopping three songs in the top 10 list topped by all-time classic, Thunderstruck.

A recent study of Spotify playlists, conducted by the cycling training app JOIN, has revealed the songs and tracks that people are most likely to add to their cycling playlists.

The analysis, performed using Playlist Miner and SongBPM, examined a total of 13,344 playlists across 18 search terms and keywords, encompassing a dataset of 3,252,027 songs to assign a popularity score to each.

Thunderstruck was the number one listed-to-song, achieving a popularity score of 23.56. Other AC/DC classic included Highway to Hell and Back in Black.

The second biggest hit was **Prada** by Cassö

achieving a score of 18.94. Prada was also found to rank at the top when examining the indoor cycling playlists.

The third most popular and common song to appear on people's cycling playlists in 2025 was by David Guetta.

Using a ratio of 2:1 when it comes to Beats Per Minute (BPM) and Rotations Per Minute (RPM), many instructors aim to use music to help riders maintain the ideal cadence and rhythm to achieve their overall class goals.

Analysing global playlists on Spotify suggests that this could be something riders are also creating, alongside instructors uploading their playlists, with the average Beats Per Minute (BPM) of the top 100 cycling playlist songs being 127.98 BPM.

But, for now, AC/DC are the gods of rock – and indoor cycling!

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EXPRESS TRAIN

As Chaucer famously said: "Time waits for no man." So how useful would it be to shave time off your workout without compromising your gains?

Follow our tips below and you could complete your standard one-hour gym session in only half that time - and so free yourself for more (or should that be 'less') pressing engagements. No need to tamper with your watch - simply get on board our high-speed train to quicker results!

1. Use your journey to the gym as your warm-up.

Time saved: 5 minutes

Could you cycle or run instead of driving? Gradually increase your pace along the way, ensuring you arrive with the first bead of sweat on your brow and ready to workout. Not only will you avoid having to search for a parking space (so saving a few more vital seconds) but you can feel good about doing your bit to protect the environment. If you usually hit the gym directly from work, slip your trainers on as soon as you clock-off, ensure the rest of your kit is in a backpack rather than a sports bag and power-walk all, or at least some, of the way there.

2. Drop the stretch before your workout

Time saved: 4 minutes

The key to reducing your risk of injury when exercising is to ensure your core body temperature is raised, hence the term 'warm-up'. Beginning your session by stretching cold muscles is a very bad idea (think Blu Tack); instead start with movements that incorporate large muscle groups and can be



incrementally increased in intensity. Dr David A Lally, an Exercise Physiologist at the University of Hawaii, studied 1543 runners in the Honolulu Marathon and discovered that those who stretched before the race actually suffered a greater incidence of injury than runners who simply focused on mobilising the joints and getting warm.

3. Change your 20 minutes of continuous pace cardio to sprint intervals

Time saved: 10 minutes

Research shows that replacing a steady state cardio session with alternating periods of 8 seconds sprint and 12 seconds gentle pace for only half the time can lead to a boost in the activity of fat-burning enzymes and can result in increased amount of weight lost when compared to the constant tempo. What's great about this is that it can be applied to the treadmill, the cycle, the cross trainer, the pool and even a punch bag.

4. Think PHA

Time saved: 3 minutes

PHA, or peripheral heart action training, refers to the technique of alternating between upper and lower body exercises during your workout. Since muscles need oxygen in the blood to fuel their contractions, this requires the cardiovascular system to work much harder through the session due to having to constantly shunt the blood from one area of the body to another. By adopting this ploy, then, you will actually burn more calories than if you approach the order of exercises in a random fashion. More importantly, according to Dr Len Kravitz, Associate Professor of Exercise Science at the University of New Mexico, since the upper

▲ Swap static stretching for full-body dynamic movements



▲ Only do one set of each strength exercise

▼ Swap your drive to the gym for a cycle



body can relax while the legs work and vice-versa you can do away with rests between exercises.

5. Only do 1 set of each strength exercise then move on

Time saved: 5 minutes

Whilst it's popular to perform 3 sets of a particular exercise, this will not necessarily lead to better results. A 10-week study at the YMCA gym in Quincy, Massachusetts, showed that performing strength training 3 times per week produced similar positive changes to the body whether following 1, 2 or 3 set protocols. The key to kickstarting shape and strength changes is to ensure you reach momentary muscular fatigue, this will indicate you are causing damage to the muscle cells and as a result they will absorb protein and come back stronger. Once the tears in the muscle fibre are created, there's no point in repeating, so just 1 set, max effort.

6. Train smart by planning your routine in advance

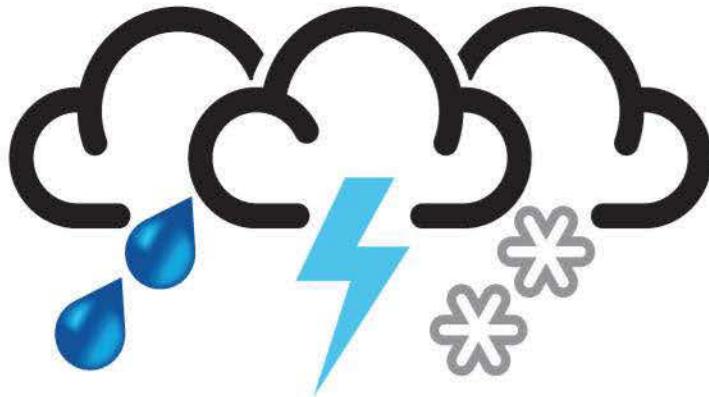
Time saved: 3 minutes

By knowing where everything is in your gym and plotting a logical route around it you can avoid those, 'What shall I do next...', moments and having to drag your backside from one end of the place to the other every few minutes. More importantly, opt for free weights exercises rather than fixed machines as then you will not have to wait for someone to finish at your next station before you can get on.

Choosing barbell squats or dumbbell lunges means you'll never again be stood waiting for a stranger to vacate the leg press machine. Similarly, swap the chest press machine for press ups on a Bosu board. ☀



Try sprint repeats to save time



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After a brief general warm-up to raise your body temperature, aim to complete 2-3 rounds of the circuit below, ideally 3-4 times per week. The routine is designed to alternate between strength and cardio options, so stick to the given order for optimum benefits

Circle squat

- Stand with your feet wide apart, toes pointing slightly outwards and legs straight, holding a weighted ball in both hands, down in front of the body. Your arms are straight but not locked out at the elbow.
- Slowly side squat to your right by bending your right knee only, simultaneously shifting the ball to your right side, keeping your arms almost extended straight. Ensure your hips, chest and shoulders remain facing square to the front, keeping your heels in constant contact with the floor.
- Press through your right heel to straighten your right leg, returning to the start position with both legs straight, but continue your arms moving in a semi-circular motion to your right side, so the ball is now directly above your head.
- Without pausing, begin to squat down to your left side by bending your left knee, lowering the ball to your left side also, so it continues its circular trajectory. The deep abdominals must be engaged to protect your lower back, so concentrate on drawing your navel towards your spine.
- Complete the exercise by contracting your left thigh to extend your left leg, at the same time lowering the ball down to the centre line of your body, to complete its circle.
- For the next repetition, reverse the direction of

the movement, making a circle to your left side first.

-To advance the exercise, hold a heavier load in your hands, sink deeper into the side squat on each leg and slow the tempo.

• Target 12 repetitions.

Power skate

- Start by standing on your right leg with your knee bent, slight forward hinge at your hips and both hands placed low to your right side.
- Contract your quads and hams quickly on your right leg and press through your foot to straighten your leg and explode into a sideways leap, your foot leaving the floor, also swinging your arms up and across to your left side.
- Land softly on your left

foot by keeping your ankle flexible and immediately bending your left knee into a single leg squat when your foot touches down.

• Continue to squat down by bending your left knee and let your arms travel to a position low down on your left side, ready to help propel you up and across on the next jump.

• Imagine your left leg is now a spring, as you bend your knee and lower down it squeezes together, then release it and power up into the next repetition, up and across to return to your right leg and begin the cycle again.

• Although using your arms to help generate height and distance on the leaps, try to keep your shoulders and neck relaxed, with your abdominals pulled in tight.

• To give more of a challenge, leap over a low object or mark tramlines on the floor to aim for on the lateral jump.

• Target 20 repetitions.



Imagine your left leg is now a spring, as you bend your knee and lower down, it squeezes together, then release it and power up into the next repetition, up and across to return to your right leg

• Your upper body will lean forwards slightly but ensure your abdominals are pulled in tight.

• Now add further realism by keeping your feet fixed but slowly shifting your hips as far as you can to the left and then to the right.

• Keep your arms moving also, simply lifting your imaginary poles up and down a small distance, in tempo with the bounce of your legs.

• Progress the exercise by holding light dumbbells in your hands.

• Target 1-2 minutes.

Shift

• Stand on a Bosu, wobble board with your feet apart (at home you can place a short, sturdy plank over a solid cylinder for the same effect).

• Press down your right foot and bend your left leg as it raises, then switching over, press down with your left and lift your right. The aim, then, is to shift your weight from one leg to the other and back, repeatedly.

• Engage your core muscles by concentrating on pulling in your tummy and waist, also lifting up your pelvic floor. This will help to stabilise the trunk, ensuring your lower body carries the workload.

• Try to maintain a long spine, by keeping your head up with your shoulders and hips as still as possible but pump your arms as if running.

• To increase your speed and therefore improve your fitness more quickly, try to stay on your toes rather than your heels.

• Increase the intensity by holding light dumbbells.

• Target 4mins, consisting of 8 repetitions of 20secs fast followed by 10secs slow. ☺



MIRROR, MIRROR ON THE WALL...

Are you happy with how you look?
Or is your perception different to reality?
You might have Muscle Dysmorphia

What do you see when you look in the mirror? Are you satisfied, happy even, with what you see or do you see imperfection, a body that is too small, too skinny, insufficiently muscular or not sculpted to a specific degree? Is your perception of inadequacy becoming a preoccupation for you, driving obsessive attitudes towards your training and diet? And, if you were to take a selfie, would close friends or family agree with your perception of the reflection? If any bells are ringing reading this you maybe one of an



increasing number of men struggling with a condition called Muscle Dysmorphia, a type of Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD) often termed by the media as "bigorexia".

On the surface, the indicators of Muscle Dysmorphia may appear as the signs of a healthy lifestyle involving regular training and careful nutrition. But at the heart of this condition is a cruel irony that, often for those suffering, the more training they do the more insecurity they feel - and the more hench they look, the greater the anxiety grows around body image.

“

When we are consumed by compulsive behaviours, we develop blind spots in our self-awareness

So how worried should we be about something that at face value seems to result in greater focus on exercise and the food we eat? Well, when our approach to a healthy diet and fitness becomes entangled with poor self-image and low self-worth, it can lead to obsessive behaviours with risks that are far reaching for our mental wellbeing.

Men who identify as having Muscle Dysmorphia often find that the combination of training with planning and preparing their food overtakes their life completely. This can lead to self-marginalisation, avoiding social events in favour of a workout or to prevent dietary slip-ups. This can create a very isolated and lonely place to exist.

The preoccupation with achieving the perfect body can impact physical health with overtraining causing injury, taking supplements in high doses resulting in health issues and for some resorting to substance abuse, whether that's steroids to build bulk or cocaine to energise an extra gym session. And when the training and nutrition just isn't sufficient, some men may turn to cosmetic surgery for the next level of physical enhancement.

As ever, self-awareness is crucial in dealing with Muscle Dysmorphia and spotting the signs can be the first step to seeking the support we need.

Specific behaviours and characteristics of Muscle Dysmorphia to look out for are:

- Concern about appearance and on your mind for more than 1 hour/day
- Interfering in important areas of life - except training & diet
- Excessive time and over-exertion in weightlifting to increase muscle mass
- Preoccupation and panicking if

unable to attend a workout

- Overtraining or training when injured
- Disordered eating - e.g. using special diets or excessive protein supplements
- Steroid abuse and other substance misuse
- Distress if exposed and feeling the need to camouflage the body
- Compulsively comparing and checking one's physique
- Prioritising one's schedule over all else or interference in relationships and ability to work
- Frustration that no matter how much progress is made it still isn't enough

If any of the above strikes a chord with you it might be worth checking in with yourself and reflecting on whether Muscle Dysmorphia is something you might be struggling with. It can also be helpful to ask a close friend, partner or family member if they recognise any of these in you as, when we are consumed by compulsive behaviours, we can develop blind spots in our self-awareness and resort to denial that anything is wrong.

And if you are worried about your preoccupation with one or more perceived defects or flaws in your physical appearance and how this is affecting you, then talking to somebody about how you're doing can be a good place to begin in finding help.

If you feel able to, please do share your experiences of this topic with me - we won't print anything you don't want us to but to have some open conversation about Muscle Dysmorphia could be helpful and enable others struggling in seeking support, or at the very least to not feel alone.



About Dom. Before qualifying as a Counsellor, I worked in a creative sector for both large corporates and my own business. After the Covid lockdown, I set up a local running group to provide peer-to-peer mental health support. This inspired my training to become a qualified counsellor. I am passionate about taking a holistic approach to wellbeing and how our physical, mental and emotional health are all connected. dommcmurraycounselling.com

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**TO DEAL WITH
THE SAME TEAM
FOR SO LONG IS
PRETTY WILD BUT
WE’VE ACHIEVED
SOME AMAZING
RESULTS
TOGETHER**

Formula E and Jaguar TCS Racing driver Mitch Evans is one of the fittest guys on the track. He talks results, fitness and making waves in a fast-growing sport





Mitch Evans has been with Jaguar TCS Racing since their debut season. The lightning-fast New Zealander has come close to championship glory in the past four years. He started his motorsport career in karts at the age of six and won the NZ Grand Prix at the age of 16.

Mentored by seasoned racer Mark Webber, the young Evans went on to win the 2012 GP3 title. Moving to GP2 in 2013 and at aged just 18, while still a rookie, he became the youngest driver in GP2 history to stand on the podium after finishing third in Sepang, Malaysia. He began his all-electric racing career in 2016 ahead of Panasonic Jaguar Racing's debut season, with the New Zealand driver's first season marked by a fine fourth-place finish in Mexico.

Men's Fitness caught up with him before the final race of the season to talk results, Formula E and fitness.

Men's Fitness: How has this season gone for you?

Mitch Evans: I started the season well in Sao Paulo back in December, winning that race. But then a hit a seven-month period where I've not scored a single point, which is very unusual. So, it's been a really painful season for me. Hopefully Berlin is a turning point, to get some points on the board for the team was huge. But personally to get a win - my second of the year - was great. Conditions were really tough but we executed the race strategy really well. Hopefully we can continue this momentum and build a really strong foundation for the 2026 season.

Men's Fitness: How will you and the team reflect and build for 2026?

ME: In terms of the results we've achieved this year, it's not been purely based on performance. We've had some technical issues when we've been in decent positions on the track. But, compared to the last two seasons, we've not quite headed the way that we would have liked. I think we've also had just tremendous bad luck this year and, in any sport, you need a little bit of luck to go your way. So, we need to just keep evolving and finding the right performance window for our new car.

MF: How do you keep motivated to push for wins when things are not firing on the track?

ME: It's been tough. It's the first time in a long time that I've been in this position. I've had a few really strong seasons, and I've just missed out on the title on a number of occasions, which is frustrating but also motivating. All of which has made this season more unexpected. Your focus shifts quickly from winning the championship to

finding a way to get out of the situation. I wouldn't want to do it every season, but I think sometimes, you can go down a certain path and you can either let it get to you - or it can be the motivation to get yourself back to the top.

MF: Your entry into motor racing was fairly conventional - karting, GP3, GP2 - and yet you chose Formula E as your career. What was your motivation for this?

ME: My goal ever since I was young was to drive in Formula One. Once I started driving in GP2 I was fully focused on making that next step. I was meant to be testing Formula One that season but, unfortunately, like a lot of other drivers, politics gets in the way. After a good season in GP2 in 2013, 2014 was my best shot to get there but I missed my chance getting the testing and the rest, as they say, is history.

MF: You've almost completed 10 years in Formula E and the sport is growing exponentially. How do you see the sport evolving and can it rival Formula One?

ME: My management got a call for Jaguar in 2016 saying they were going back into motorsport with Formula E. I was at a crossroads in my life



▼ Mitch started training at a young age which has helped him long-term





“

I think the racing is very exciting, wheel-to-wheel combat

and it was an interesting opportunity. A big manufacturer like Jaguar going into electric vehicles was a big incentive and I thought 'well, this could be the future'. I've been with the team since its inception although it wasn't until season five when I got my first win. To deal with the same team for so long is pretty wild but we've achieved some amazing results together. The only thing that's missing is the drivers World Championship, but we've got pretty much everything else. It's been an amazing journey.

MF: What do you think has changed in the public's perception of the sport?

ME: At the start, a lot of people were on the fence. It was new technology, a new way of racing. Motorsport has traditionally been noisy, very noisy! But it brought in a whole new audience. And the interest continues to grow. I think there a number of factors behind that. Obviously the cars are getting a lot faster, the technology is cutting-edge, but also the level of the drivers is arguably the best in the world, or very close to being the best in the world. Ultimately, I think the racing is very exciting, wheel-to-wheel combat.

MF: Fitness is an important factor to remain competitive. Have you always followed a fairly structured fitness regime?

ME: I've been training since I was 11-years-old. I got into fitness early because I knew the importance of it, and I always wanted to be ahead of the game. I've narrowed it down to what works for me. So I'm very much into my cardio – running is my thing because it's so accessible and easy. I've also done quite a bit of cycling in the last few years. I used to do a lot more strength work when I was in GP2 – there is no power steering, which requires a lot from the arms and the neck. There is also no power

▲ When Mitch gets into the car, his goal is to be as fresh as possible

steering in Formula E which means the steering is extremely heavy. So, I focus on full body work, with particular attention to the arms because of the lack of power steering.

MF: How do you maintain intensity and fitness levels over such a long season?

ME: At the start of the off season, I tend to try and enjoy myself for a few weeks. I'll try not to think about racing or training at all as the season is so intense. We start private testing in September and October and official testing is in November and first race in December. I want to be in good condition for that first race, and, once the season starts, I just try and do some maintenance. The most important thing is, once I get in the car, I want to be as fresh as possible, so I tend not to do too much in the week leading up to a race. Some other drivers train throughout the week, but for me, it's very important to sleep right to make sure I'm performing well and to optimise my performance on race day.

MF: What's the best piece of fitness advice you've ever been given?

ME: One thing that I was obsessed with when I was younger, whether I was running, in the gym or swimming, was that I had to be doing personal bests all the time. And I actually ended up getting chronic fatigue from that because I just burnt myself out. I – wrongly – thought that every time I was doing exercise, I had to be on the limit. I realised that building a base by exercising for longer with a lower heart-rate was far more beneficial. So my advice would be - not every session has to be flat out. ☺

► Mitch's advice would be that not everything has to be flat out!



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DO DIET DRINKS AFFECT APPETITE, ENERGY OR RECOVERY?



Looking to enhance your focus before a session while keeping your calories in check? Dietitian Dr Paul McArdle, RD MBDA, from the British Soft Drinks Association, explains how

You train hard. Your drinks should work just as hard. Hydration, energy and recovery can all depend on what you put in your bottle. Here's how diet drinks (sweetened, 'zero' or very low calorie) can help you meet your goals, focused and ready to recover.

Liquid calories add up fast, so a big advantage of diet drinks is calorie control. Research shows that replacing full sugar drinks with low-calorie versions helps reduce overall energy intake and supports your weight management goals.

Compared with water or sugar-sweetened drinks, diet drinks can help with fat loss, which is

▼ Diet drinks can still have a place in your training routine



helpful if your goal is lean muscle definition without compromising strength. It's also good to know there's no strong evidence that non-sugar sweeteners increase your appetite or cravings for sugar.

Enhanced focus

Diet drinks don't provide carbs like a sports drink, but they can still have a place in your training routine. Caffeinated diet drinks or sugar-free energy drinks can give you the mental boost of caffeine without the sugar. This means you can enhance alertness, focus, and perceived effort in the gym, while keeping your calorie budget in check.

That's especially valuable if you train in the evening or outside competition settings where rapid glycogen replacement isn't a priority - but keep a check on your overall caffeine intake.

Recovery starts with fluids. Diet drinks are mostly water, and research shows that non-sugar sweeteners don't impair fluid absorption, so they'll hydrate you about the same as water. The flavoured options can also encourage you to drink more fluids, helping keep you hydrated. And when energy restriction is part of your training plan, choosing diet versions helps you maintain hydration without compromising your calorie deficit.

Diet drinks aren't a silver bullet, but nor are they the villain they're sometimes made out to be. When used appropriately, they can help reduce sugar intake, support your body composition goals, and some offer caffeine for performance, while contributing to hydration.

EXPERT - TESTED PRODUCTS

PERFECT FIT



Suunto Race 2

£429 . suunto.com/en

COULD IT BE A CONTENDER?

With its good looks and cheaper price tag,
the Suunto Race 2 is getting closer to
competing with the big-hitting Garmins ➤

 Suunto spent a few years misfiring. Its sports watches struggled to match the innovation of Garmin, or the affordable staying power and reliability of newcomers COROS. Then came the Suunto Race and the Suunto Race S – two watches that put them firmly back among the best fitness watches. Now the new Suunto Race 2 is another step on the route to redemption.

The Suunto Race 2's hero updates are mainly about hardware, with a bigger, brighter display, better GPS battery life, faster processing and a new optical heart rate sensor aiming to flush out some accuracy gremlins. But there's a smattering of feature updates, too. Though those will trickle down to its older stablemates.

The Suunto Race 2 comes in one 49mm case size and two flavours. I tested the more wallet-friendly stainless steel model at £429. But there's a £100 pricier (and lighter) titanium at £529. Both notably cheaper than the Garmin Forerunner 970 (£629).

It packs a 1.5-inch sapphire crystal protected AMOLED touchscreen. That's geek speak for a big, vibrant, sharp colour display with extra scratch resistance. It kicks out 2,000 nits – that's Apple Watch Series 11 bright – and was easy to read in all lights.

You master your Race 2 via a combination of the touchscreen, three-button controls and a digital crown which scrolls and acts as another button. It's all nicely responsive and happily snappy.

Though the less-intuitive Suunto user interface still takes some learning.

The Suunto Race 2 battery life is impressive for a bigger AMOLED. On paper, it claims up to 18 days in smartwatch mode; an impressive 55 hours in max accuracy all systems dual frequency GPS mode, 65 hours in all systems GPS and a whopping 200 hours in power saving mode.

The charging dock is vastly improved, too. Unlike predecessor pucks where the watch easily slipped off some sloppy magnets, the Race 2



locks in place. The braided cable is also a nice durability touch.

When it comes to personalization, there's some customisation of the watch face and you can choose which widgets you pin (from a limited list) for quick access but you can't quite make this watch your own the way you can with the latest Garmins.

Other key details: you get 32GB of offline map storage and the Race 2 is water rated to 100m.

Oh, and the majority of the tracking and training firepower is also

Well built and robust, the Suunto Race 2 looks great if a little heavy

**Pros:**

- Great max-accuracy GPS battery life
- Bigger, brighter display
- Dual frequency GPS, offline maps and routing

Cons:

- Lacks smartwatch smarts
- No offline music
- More complicated training insights



on the Suunto Race, so there's no need to upgrade unless you really want the boosted battery, bigger screen, improved optical and other hardware upgrades. If you're a first-time buyer, it's worth paying the extra for those.

Suunto Race 2 features

The Suunto Race 2 packs more than 100 sport modes with running, cycling, swimming and triathlon well covered. The suite of training, recovery, health and daily activity tools is fairly comprehensive. Not quite as broad and deep as you'll find on Garmin but more than enough for most.

Runners get all the important mid-run readouts along with some handy extras like running power and a 'ghost runner' pacer to keep you on target. Swimmers can record indoor and outdoor with auto lapping for the pool, heart rate from the wrist and SWOLF swim stroke efficiency scores. Cyclists get all the mid-ride essentials and can link in pods and power metres. There's also multisport mode for easy transitions for the swim-bike-runners.

Suunto training insights are plentiful with things like training effect, training load handily broken down by sport, along with recovery time estimates, lactate threshold estimates and VO2 max fitness benchmarking.

However, these are all based on Training Peaks and it's significantly more acronym heavy – and harder to decipher – than Garmin and Polar rivals. Suunto could do with making this a bit easier to penetrate.

The Suunto Race 2 navigation smarts are also comprehensive with offline colour maps, route planning via Komoot, Strava, or Suunto's own app. Those routes include elevation profiles, off-course alerts (though it won't



re-route you if you veer far off course, it'll only help you retrace your step) and things like estimate time of arrival based on what lies up ahead.

Beyond workouts, there's the usual suspects: activity tracking, sleep tracking with heart rate variability and blood oxygen levels. Plus a daily resource levels readout – a spin on Garmin's Body Battery that estimates how much juice you (not your watch) has to handle whatever comes next.

When it comes to smartwatch smarts, it's all rather basic. No rival for an Apple Watch or the top-tier Garmins like the Forerunner 970. You can read but not respond to smartphone notifications – complete with emojis and get weather updates. But music is limited to controls for a connected smartphone. There's no offline Spotify. You don't get any of the mic/speaker and voice tools of the Garmin Forerunner or contactless payments either.

Suunto Race 2 performance

The Suunto Race 2 looks great. It's well built and robust, if a little on the heavy side compared to the 20g lighter Forerunner 970 but in my training, I found it easy to wear 24-7 thanks to the thinner casing. Though I'm not a huge fan of the pin-strap fastening that made it harder to adjust the fit. Give me a nylon band any day.

When it comes to accuracy, I put the Suunto Race 2 up against the Garmin Forerunner 970 and the HRM600 chest strap to test the optical

sensors and the GPS.

While the heart rate performance is improved over the Suunto Race, I still had runs and rides where the Race 2 glitched badly. It's fine once it settles but really struggled with stops and restarts.

On GPS, I found it matched the Garmin Forerunner 970 and the top-tier Garmin Fenix 8 Pro on distances. If you dig into the tracks in detail, the Suunto largely matches the Forerunner 970 but suffers the odd wobble. But then so does the 970. And ultimately in practice it's questionable if you'd even notice.

Battery life was excellent. In my tests the overnight burn was around 2-3%. That's among the most frugal. Meanwhile a 3-hr run in max accuracy GPS burned 6%. That's a burn rate of just short of 2% per hour. For comparison the Garmin Forerunner 970 was closer to 3% per hour. So, you should get around 55 hours GPS tracking on a single charge.

I'd estimate around 10 days general usage with around 8 hours GPS and heart rate workouts thrown in. ☺

Words: Kieran Alger | Photography: Suunto



▲ Suunto training insights are plentiful

MF verdict

★★★★★
The Race 2 is Suunto's best sports watch for a long time with excellent battery life for a killer bright AMOLED, solid accuracy and a strong suite of training insights. However, it's missing smarts like offline music that'd make a more serious rival to the Garmin Forerunner 970.

DRESS TO IMPRESS

Workout gear to perform your best - and look your best. These are the gym apparel brands to kit yourself out in.

While you may be content with throwing on the nearest, cleanest set of clothes to get to the gym for a shoulders day or a cardio session you've been putting off, you should be as serious about the garments you whip on as you are about your training.

Fortunately, there are plenty of brands dedicated to putting kit on you that's packed

with high performance fabrics and technology designed to be a better fit for the workout job.

Whether you need to make sure you can move freely in all directions, you want a snug fit you don't need to fiddle with mid-session or just need something that doesn't leave you dripping in sweat when you've hit that last rep, these are the brands to fulfil your training kit needs.

The performance option: Castore

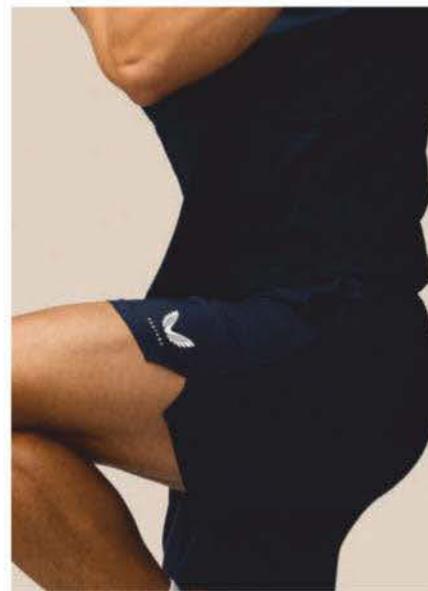
From £32-£90

castore.com/collections

If it's good enough for England's best cricketers, rugby players and athletes like Adam Peaty when he's not going for a dip, that tells you all you need to know about Castore's pretty extensive training range.

Made up of t-shirts, long sleeve tops and shorts, this kit is a good match for workouts that are more varied and explosive. Castore uses technologies like AerTek to effectively wick away sweat and its ProTek to provide strong resistance against moisture when you take the training time outside.

The training tops aren't overly restrictive to make them ideal for upper body workouts, and in general opt for a not overly technical fit to make it a collection that can handle pretty much any workout you can throw at it.



Signature item:
Adapt Training Top



The value option: H&M Move

From £9.99-£74.99
www2.hm.com/en_gb

For those that don't want to spend big yet also don't want to scrimp on performance, the Swedish high street fashion brand's Move range goes from strength to strength since it entered the fitness apparel space in 2022.

The Move line has you covered from head to toe. That includes the super comfortable and supportive sports socks that are ideal for most gym days outside of treadmill runs. Its boxy tees feature a mixture of natural fabrics and are made for those that favour a more relaxed fit.

Its DryMove technology is in place to fend off sweat and features throughout the line. Like the rest of H&M's clothing range, it also looks great and will give everything you need in one shop without breaking the bank.

The style option: Represent

From £15-£220
uk.representclo.com

The Manchester-born brand makes the kind of gym-friendly clothing you'll also want to wear on your rest days and after the lifting is done.

Its 24/7 line features everything from tanks to its signature training shorts that strike a good balance between performance and making you look the part. The tops offer an oversized fit, focusing on fabrics that don't weigh heavy, all while offering some welcome stretch from all directions so they don't impede movement.

It's a line that screams hybrid training and is always on top of the seasonal shades to make sure you're standing out for the right reasons. You'll have to spend big to add items to your wardrobe, but we think they'll be worth the money.



Signature item:
24/7 Training Short



Signature item:
Strato Tech Tee
and Kore Short



The style comfort: Vuori

From £15-£240
vuoriclothing.co.uk

Another brand that looks good enough to keep on when you leave the gym, Vuori's training collection favours a generally more relaxed approach to fit and has something that works for high impact workouts and when comfort is priority.

It goes big on colour options for pretty much every item. Vuori also uses fabrics that promise to dry quickly and do the very same when it's time to wick away sweat. Its signature Kore Short lets you pick from lined or unlined designs and is available in a range of lengths to suit even the pickiest.

Vuori recently signed up British number one tennis star Jack Draper to step on court and train its gear, giving it that athlete approval that should make it fit for the rest of us mere gym-loving mortals.



Signature item:
Novea Training T-Shirt



The ethical option: BAM Clothing

From £16-£90
bambooclothing.co.uk

BAM Clothing takes a more planet-friendly approach to its training line that will cover you for bootcamp classes and when you need to slow things down for a strength and conditioning session.

Each item features a heavy hit of sustainably-sourced fabrics, including organic cotton and bamboo viscose to provide a soft and clingy fit. BAM's sweat shorts provide ample comfort while training tops keep seams to a minimum to prevent any unwelcome chafing.

This is the type of training kit that feels high quality when you put it on and is also versatile enough to handle most workouts or when you need something to lounge about in..

The fighting option: Champion

From £35-£48
championstore.com

Another iconic 90s athleisure brand that's making a comeback, Champion recently launched its Combat line that's made for when you want to step in the ring and start throwing jabs.

There's t-shirts, long sleeve tops, shorts and leggings all with compression at the heart of the entire collection. They cling close and support key muscle groups that need it the most. Champion also uses C-Dry quick dry fabric to get a better grip on sweat and also wants to make sure you're not getting too hot in the heat of the battle with the bag or a sparring partner.

Enlisting heavyweight UFC fighter Tom Aspinall and super-lightweight boxing champion Katie Taylor to wear it means some of the best combat athletes in the business have made sure it can really go the distance. 



Words: Mike Sawh | Photography: Various brands



THE PARTNER EFFECT

Why training in tandem can supercharge your performance

Words: Joe Phelan



When you train alone, it's easy to cut corners. A shorter rest here, a skipped set there. We've all done it. But bring a workout partner into the mix and everything changes.

The difference is both simple and scientifically proven. The moment someone else is there, our psychology shifts. We instinctively push harder, driven by a potent mix of accountability, friendly rivalry, and a desire not to be the one who quits first.

This dynamic is so powerful that psychologists have given it a name: the Köhler effect. It describes the remarkable ability of a group to motivate its members, especially when you're trying to keep pace with someone slightly ahead of you. It's a secret ingredient that can turn a good workout into a great one, pushing you beyond limits you'd normally set for yourself.

Better together

Sports psychologists have long studied social facilitation – the phenomenon where people perform better when they know they're being observed or evaluated. It could help explain how sprinters are able to find an extra burst in front of a crowd, or why you might instinctively kick it up a gear when someone's watching you bench.

"Studies have demonstrated that the mere presence of another human being in a training environment enhances performance," explains Kim Dawson, Professor of Sport and Exercise Psychology at Wilfrid Laurier University, Canada. "All individuals turn the dial up when they are being evaluated or perceive they are being evaluated by others in the environment."

First observed in team tasks, the Köhler effect describes how, when your contribution is essential to the group's success, you're likely to work harder to avoid being the weak link. It has been observed that this is especially true if your partner is slightly more capable than you are. In gym terms, it might mean you're able

to hold a plank for longer, grind out an extra rep, or keep pace on a run you'd otherwise slow down on.

A related influence is behavioural contagion. Research published in the *Journal of Social Sciences* found that people unconsciously align their exercise behaviours with those around them. A 2016 study in *Obesity* went even further, showing that overweight individuals lost more weight when they spent more time with fitter friends. This suggests that over time, we don't just push ourselves harder in isolated moments – we gradually adopt healthier habits by being around people who model them.

Paul Davis, Professor of Psychology at Umeå University, Sweden, explains there's also a motivation boost that comes from remembering positive experiences with your training partner.

"Positive rivalry can drive us to dig deeper and push harder to beat – or at least keep pace with –

“

Positive rivalry can drive us to dig deeper and push harder to beat – or at least keep pace with – others

others. As seen at the Olympics or in iconic tennis rivalries like the ongoing battle between Sinner and Alcaraz, a respectful competitor or training partner can help unlock more of our potential than we might have thought possible." In other words, if you associate workouts with laughter, shared struggle, and mutual achievement, you're far more likely to look forward to the next one.

The psychological payoff

Beyond the immediate performance amplification, training with a partner also delivers a range of mental benefits that can make the difference between sticking with a programme and quietly letting it slide.

Accountability is, as we all know, a powerful motivator. That 6 a.m. alarm for a hill sprint is much harder to ignore when you know someone's waiting for you. And, studies have found, this effect is even more pronounced when your training partner is also your romantic partner. In fact, research shows that couples who exercise together are not just more likely to start a fitness program, but are significantly better at sticking with it over the long term.

Another key factor is interpersonal emotion regulation – the process of bolstering each other's positive emotions during and after training. Davis explains that partners can help maintain a more enjoyable mood, which not only makes the current workout feel



▲ Studies have demonstrated that the mere presence of another human being in a training environment enhances performance



if you associate workouts with laughter, shared struggle, and mutual achievement, you're far more likely to look forward to the next one.

better, but also means you'll want to do it again (and again).

"Typically, training with others is beneficial for an individual's enjoyment and motivation to exercise," Davis says. "These benefits come through interpersonal emotion regulation – boosting each other's positive emotions, as well as fostering accountability and a sense of connection with others."

Building on this, Dawson highlights the importance of healthy cooperation over destructive competition.

"While competition among friends can motivate some individuals, it can also have the opposite effect if one person is always the successor. This means pushing each other to meet your respective goals without demoralising them. It requires empathy, understanding, good communication, and a mutual awareness of what motivation means in terms of the outcome."

What makes a great training partner?

Of course, not all partnerships are created equal. As with every relationship, there needs to be mutual respect, understanding, and clear communication to make the connection work. Compatibility is crucial.

A poorly matched partner can be much more of a hindrance than a help. Mismatched goals can breed resentment, while a hyper-competitive or careless partner might offer unsafe encouragement, pushing

you towards injury rather than a personal best. Even on a practical level, constant scheduling conflicts or a lack of reliability can make the partnership a source of stress. A pairing that is demotivating or unreliable can be actively counterproductive, derailing your progress faster than going it alone.

Dawson stresses the importance of teaming up with someone at a similar level and life stage to avoid demotivation through unfair comparisons. "If you select someone who is different in terms of age, ability, stage of life etc, social comparison can easily be demotivating."

A selfish partner might set a pace that suits only their goals, ignoring how it impacts you, while an effective one will adapt, communicate, and find ways to push you without compromising safety.

Davis highlights the importance of balancing trust with challenge in a training partnership.

"Psychological safety is essential for individual flourishing. That doesn't mean being comfortable all the time – it means receiving the right balance of challenge and support. Good training partnerships act as a critical friend: they ask difficult questions and help their partner manage the discomfort that comes with physical and psychological growth."

However, it's vital to remember that social support is inherently personal. One person might need you physically present to keep them going; another might thrive with

FIVE STEPS TO HARNESSING THE PARTNER EFFECT

Once you've found a good match, there are ways to maximise the benefits.

SET SHARED (BUT PERSONAL) GOALS

You might both be training for the same event, or just aiming to improve your general fitness, but be sure that each person has targets that reflect their own needs and abilities.

COMMUNICATE OPENLY

Be upfront about preferred intensity, pace, rest breaks, and feedback style. Misunderstandings can derail even the best partnerships. However, leave some room to challenge each other. Pushing just beyond your comfort zone is where gains happen.

MIX COOPERATION WITH FRIENDLY COMPETITION

Throw in the occasional challenge – fastest 500m row, most push-ups in two minutes – but don't let every session turn into a battle. Even professional athletes don't try to break records every day; balance pushing hard with working together to build consistency and progress.

LEVERAGE GROUP DYNAMICS

Adding one or two others can bring fresh energy and variety while still preserving a sense of accountability. Plus, training with a small group lets you learn from each other, whether it's new techniques, routes, or training tips.

STAY CONNECTED

Shared workout logs, leaderboards, and fitness apps can reinforce commitment and create extra motivation between sessions.

occasional check-ins and shared progress updates. Some benefit from mentorship, others from humour, and some from practical help like splitting costs for races or equipment.

"You need to find out what each person needs," Dawson says. "One might just want to talk about their run, while another may need mentorship from an athlete with more experience. Someone else might require social encouragement to build confidence. To support someone effectively, ask them how you can help them succeed, and then follow through."

Beyond the gym

Some partnerships evolve into lifelong friendships. Others develop into something more. For Dawson, what started as a shared commitment to running eventually led to a lifelong partnership both on and off the road.

"My husband was my training partner first. We got to know each other and fell in love running those kilometres! Great friendships and life long affiliations can be made through

running groups."

Beyond physical gains, training partnerships can significantly improve mental wellbeing by easing loneliness and fostering a sense of connection. As Davis explains, feeling valued by someone else, and knowing your efforts matter to them, can be a powerful source of motivation and resilience.

"Quality relationships can help us remember our motivation. This can

reinforce that we matter to others, and are part of something bigger than ourselves. A sense of connection can be key to staying motivated and sticking with exercise, especially when enthusiasm wanes. Sharing the journey with someone else can make going the extra mile feel less solitary."

The smartest training plan, the best equipment, and a fancy gym membership are all valuable tools. But without consistency and drive, they won't prevent a plateau. That's where a good training partner can become your greatest asset, keeping you on track in ways you might not even realise.

The benefits are both clear and scientifically supported. Whether it's the subtle performance boost you get from being watched, the motivation to adopt healthier habits, or simply the emotional lift of shared effort, the right person beside you helps you lift more, run faster, and go further.

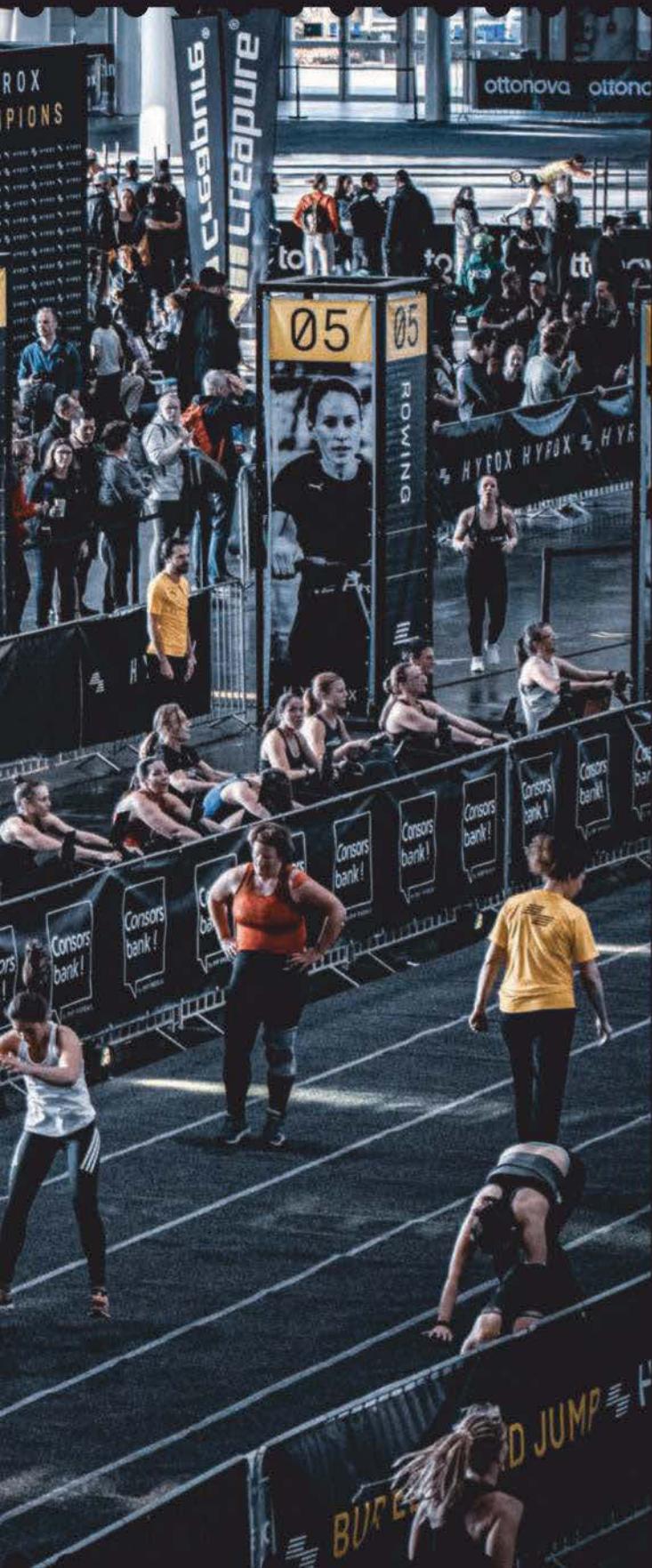
So, before you grind it out alone, remember the science: call a friend. Your future self will thank you for it. 

Beyond physical gains, training partnerships can significantly improve mental wellbeing by easing loneliness and fostering a sense of connection

Training with a partner also delivers a range of mental benefits







ARE YOU HYROX READY?

With over 1,500 affiliated clubs delivering HYROX-centric workouts across the UK, there have never been more ways to train for this iconic fitness race. But which one will help you master it? **Sam Rider** put the best in-person and digital options to the test

If you've never before shovelled a 152kg weighted sled across a 50-metre length of astroturf, you'd be forgiven for feeling rather trepidatious about tackling your first HYROX.

Until now, access to such strength training artillery has been hard to come by. But as the world series of fitness racing has enjoyed rocket ship growth – with a record 40,000 athletes expected to descend on Excel London in December – gyms and studios up and down the land are retooling their floorplans to help Brits get race ready.

I'm one of them. With a couple of doubles events under my belt, I'm gearing up for my first solo experience. To do it justice, and to ensure I can progress past the much-feared sled push and pull stations, I will most definitely need to train for it.

But, how? Until the rumoured HYROX Performance Centers come online – penciled for Liverpool, Manchester and Dublin in late 2025 – the various methods to train for it remain fragmented. So, if you have a HYROX on the horizon, what's the best way to get up to speed?

Head of Training at HYROX 365 David Magida insists on three things. "Start early, stay consistent and, above all, build your running mileage," he tells Men's Fitness. The best way to tick off all three is by joining a local HYROX gym – ideally one with a run club. "You'll get a lot more out of those workouts with other people than you will by yourself."

Heeding Magida's advice, I sought out the best in-person and digital options, weighing up their overall strengths and weaknesses, then scored each for accessibility, strength, endurance, technique and teamwork.

Hopefully this non-exhaustive list (which was actually rather exhausting to compile) will help you identify the best ways to train for your next race – while helping you bank a PB in the process. Good luck.



Third Space [Best for Technique]

This high-end London gym chain has gone all-in on HYROX. An official partner, all 13 of its clubs offer HYROX classes with approved kit and programming, but only its ultra exclusive Canary Wharf site boasts a space dedicated to the sport. Opened in July, it features a six-lane sled track flanked by SkiErgs, Concept2 rowers, Assault Runner treadmills and a stunning wall ball station that automatically tallies every rep that hits the target.

Its timetable includes HYROX Train, Run, Power, Engine and a 90-minute simulation. I join an hour-long Engine class – in week two of a 14-week block – which sees me cycling through each station for 45 seconds at a moderate pace, then 15 seconds full throttle, for four rounds. Meanwhile, master trainer Chris Stanton sprinkles in sets of burpees at regular intervals for good measure.

The intensity is flat out. Long spells on the runner, rower and SkiErg mimic the demands of race day and the purpose-built arena is the closest thing I've encountered to the real deal. That certainly helps get the juices flowing. The only downside, I feel, is that the class is working in silos, rather than in pairs, so it

lacks a bit of camaraderie and competition.

Accessibility - 1/5

Abundant options across the capital but nothing outside the M25. Plus, it'll cost ya. Single club membership starts at £240 per month, plus a £100 joining fee.

Strength - 5/5

HYROX Power classes will help build race-worthy brawn with structured programming, while a membership will also allow you to address any weaknesses in your armoury.

Endurance - 4/5

Third Space's Assault Runners are the closest thing you'll find to the feeling of running rings round the track. The only thing lacking is fellow racers to swerve.

Technique - 5/5

Stanton provided detailed tutorials and practical coaching cues throughout. Given Third Space's exalted standards you know you're in safe hands.

Teamwork - 3/5

Felt remiss not to get us working in pairs to replicate the shared burden of a doubles HYROX race. Instead, it became a bit of a solitary slog to the finish line.

Total = 18/25

► Intensity is flat out at Third Space

FIIT [Best for Accessibility]

An early adopter, digital fitness platform FIIT first launched HYROX Ready training plans back in August 2022. Split across two four-week blocks, workouts mix metcons, strength and endurance classes with recovery routines and race simulations.

For most, all you need is a pair of dumbbells, making them infinitely more accessible than some in-person options, and by using the FIIT tracker or syncing your device up to compatible cardio machines you can measure progress by counting reps, distance covered or calories burned.

Having used FIIT for my two previous encounters with HYROX, I know it's a reliable option. Its structured programming takes all the guesswork out of plotting your route to the start line, and the company has recently added four HYROX classes with guest trainer David Magida, underscoring its commitment to delivering a best-in-class digital experience.

Accessibility - 5/5

Membership runs from £89.99 for the first year or £14.99 for the first month, which isn't a bad pay-off to have your full HYROX training plan in your pocket.

Strength - 5/5

While cardio heavy, FIIT's HYROX plans include several core routines and full-body strength workouts that will help lay down solid foundations when it's time to tackle the sled.

Endurance - 3/5

You'll need access to a treadmill or rower but its programme doesn't incorporate any SkiErg routines, which could leave you a tad undercooked on race day.

Technique - 3/5

Technique will always be limited for one-way digital training solutions without a coach in the room critiquing your form. The rep tracking can also be quite hit and miss.

Teamwork - 2/5

As engaging and charismatic as FIIT's coaches can be on screen, ultimately you're only ever training solo. Better to train with your doubles partner in-person ahead of the main event.

Total = 18/25



► FIIT is a best-in-class digital experience

Runna [Best for Endurance]

For all the hype around the sled and hoopla over going 100 wall balls unbroken, it's easy to forget that HYROX is first and foremost a running workout. Most of it is running – and most of said running is performed heavily compromised.

Since launching in 2021 and being snapped up by Strava earlier this year, Runna has firmly established itself as the leading running coach app in the business, offering personalised training plans, guided audio-led runs and extensive data tracking.

Lately it's also started providing tailored 8K plans for HYROX races, which you can build into your training schedule from 16 weeks out. These include a mix of easy and long runs, intervals, tempo sessions and time trials – the kind of comprehensive, structured approach to building an aerobic base that I've long overlooked.

Accessibility - 5/5

No gym required. All you need is a pair of kicks and somewhere to run. Membership starts at £15.99 per month or £99.99 per year.

Strength - 2/5

I was able to fold tailored strength workouts into my plan but these felt rather running-specific, rather than intentionally designed for HYROX.

Endurance - 5/5

The clue's in the name. Runna will make you a better runner – faster, more consistent and more efficient, meaning there's more left in the tank when it comes to each workout station.

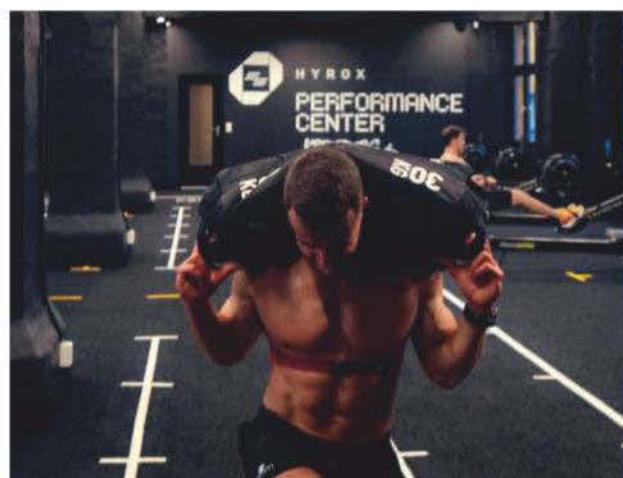
Technique - 3/5

The app is bursting with tips and tricks for improved running form, but less so for coaching cues on farmer's carries or burpee broad jumps. Nor on how to run with extra heavy legs.

Teamwork - 2/5

While Runna boasts an active community online and at its many in-person events, it's not designed to unite you with fellow HYROX racers.

Total = 17/25



Teamwork is a key focus

Milo and the Bull [Best for Teamwork]

This independent fitness studio gets what makes HYROX competitions special: teamwork. The 45-minute class I join at their Clapham Junction site in southwest London has me buddying up with another member in a YGIG (you go, I go) format, cycling through sprints on the rower and SkiErg, shoves on the sled, and reps on reps of burpees, weighted lunges and wallballs.

While my partner works, I'm expected to 'rest' in an isometric plank, squat or farmer's walk hold. The class is punctuated every six minutes by a 200m synchro run round the block. It's slightly chaotic, but in a workable way, neatly replicating the melee of the roxzone as you're expected to navigate your way from station to station under mental and physical fatigue. Everyone finishes the class with broad smiles on their faces and high-fives for their partners.

Accessibility - 2/5

Limited to London. All three of Milo and the Bull's sites are south of the river, in Clapham Junction,

Peckham and, its flagship, London Bridge.

Strength - 3/5

My class prioritised cardio over muscle but the studio offers pure strength workouts, programmed in 12-week blocks, and open gym so you can work on any weaknesses.

Endurance - 3/5

Marked up for including the rower, SkiErg and synchronised bouts of road running; marked down for that running being limited to the 200m section of road outside the studio.

Technique - 4/5

Head trainer Adam Knowles provided detailed demonstrations and critical feedback throughout that kept me pushing, pulling and straining to the finish line.

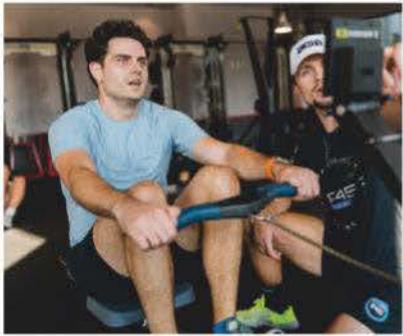
Teamwork - 5/5

Makes the dream work. If you have a doubles race coming up or you just want to recreate the buzz of race day with a perfect stranger, these classes will scratch that itch.

Total = 17/25

Classes that will scratch that itch

▼ Work on not running out of puff on the rower



F45 [Best for Strength]

The most ubiquitous in-person option, there are currently 56 F45 sites in the UK, from Glasgow West End to Brighton Central. Though none in Northern Ireland as it stands. Its 12 signature HYROX classes are a slight variation on the franchise's well-worn HIIT formula, incorporating everything you'd encounter on race day from farmer's walks to sled pulls.

In the Oxford Circus class I'm parachuted into, I'm paired with another member and propelled from a standing start into bouts of all-out effort. Screens display correct technique and a timer counts us down to each rest period. Working sets descend from 90 seconds to 60 and then 30, with a blink-and-you'll-miss-it 10-second breather between each.

It's virtually non-stop from the fast and furious instructor-led intro to the cool down, and I'm clinging on for most of the rounds. Of all the classes I tested, F45's HYROX iteration kicked my ass the most, incinerating 658 calories from start to finish.

Accessibility - 4/5

While most F45 sites skew toward the capital, there's likely to be a site



▼ There are so many options now to get HYROX-ready

The Verdict

After a few weeks of trial and error, I find myself gravitating back to my old reliable FIIT app for sheer convenience and familiarity. I'm keen to line up a HYROX Power class in Third Space's luxe training centre and test out a full simulation at Milo and the Bull's more spacious London Bridge site, but I'd rather reserve these sessions for later in my training block when I need to sharpen my skills for the race itself.

In the meantime, I plan to broaden my strength foundations using FIIT's structured HYROX Ready 1 and 2 training plans, while dipping into Runna's 8K programme to pad out my aerobic capacity.

That approach, Magida later tells me, should pay dividends in the long run - like it did for the American when he qualified for the HYROX Elite 15 World Championships. "The number one thing that helped me get to that level was focusing on my running," the 2023 HYROX North America champion reveals. "That meant starting with mileage, building volume, and recognising that that [success] was the culmination of three years of consistent training that came through with a perfect day one time. That's how hard it is to be great at that level."

While most won't be expecting to hit the same lofty heights, getting a good run up to London with FIIT and Runna on your side should at least give you the confidence to attack the race with everything you've got.

within commutable distance if you're craving a hands-on simulation of race day.

Strength - 5/5

The session I sampled was closer to a race-day simulation but F45's supplementary resistance day workouts on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays will crank up your power.

Endurance - 2/5

Treadmills are conspicuously absent. Instead the running leg is covered by a couple laps of the block and a stint on a stationary Wattbike.

Technique - 3/5

Head trainer Joe Williams does his best to correct and challenge me throughout the class, but it's hard to get his undivided attention with so much going on.

Teamwork - 5/5

Working in pairs while rotating around the room provides someone to beat, if you welcome competition, or cajole you if - like me - you run out of puff mid SkiErg.

Total = 19/25

DAVID MAGIDA'S WINNING FORMULA

Hit your peak potential with the HYROX 365 coach's race-week blueprint

Synchronise Watches

Identify your race start time, then shift your training schedule around early in the week so you can practise exercising during the same workout window.

Keep Your Powder Dry

With seven days to go, the hay is in the barn. The hard work is done – but you can still get hurt – so your last big workout should be no more than a week or 10 days out.

Fuel Your Engine

Practise your refuelling strategy. Identify a routine for what to eat and drink the night before and the morning of your workouts. Don't chop and change last minute.

Maintain Intensity, Dial Down The Volume

If I'm racing on Sunday, I'll do my last track session on the Wednesday. I'll cut the volume in half but keep the intensity high to remind my body of the effort level it needs to hit.

Time Your Entrance

I prefer to get to the venue around two hours before the race. Any earlier and you can drain all your energy and adrenaline. Stay off your feet where you can.

Grease The Wheels

With 90-minutes to go, I'll do an easy 15-minute run, then head to the warm-up zone to mobilise and practise each station at a slightly harder intensity than race pace.

Ease Into The Weekend

Two to three days out I'll do a couple of easy runs and use bodyweight exercises to keep the muscles ticking over without risking making them sore.

Race Your Own Race

It's easy to get swept up in all the excitement. At the European Champs I blew up. I over ran, over skied, felt my back and suffered the rest of the way. Do your thing. Run your race.





GET FIT LIKE A FILM STAR

What do Chris Hemsworth, Hugh Jackman and, most recently, Sacha Baron Cohen have in common? They are all in the kind of shape that wouldn't look out of place on Muscle Beach. So, is there such a thing as a Hollywood body? And what does that mean not just for film stars but us mere mortals?

When Men's Fitness put a jacked-looking Sacha Baron Cohen on its front cover for the August issue, the whole world took notice. News outlets from all over the world wanted to find out how the man who famously rocked a mankini as Borat could have got himself in such stellar shape - and, more importantly, why?

The one thing that Hollywood stars share is that modern adage - cash rich, time poor. In fact, this could equally be extended to all of us. As a reader of Men's Fitness, you'll be patently aware of the number of workouts and sessions that have a time-limit on them; it

seems that we're all trying to cram our exercise in.

But there's a lot that can be achieved in a short space of time. "I now believe that just 20 to 30 minutes of movement a day can make a real difference," says Baron Cohen. "And it's something anyone can fit into their routine, especially celebrities with personal assistants to do all the boring stuff like shopping and attending friends' funerals," he jokes.

Enter celebrity trainer Alfonso Moretti, the man behind the scenes who has shaped Hollywood royalty and Fortune 500 execs alike. His minimalist, brutally effective methods



Train with the stars at the Dogpound in West Hollywood

and, ultimately, how they look. They have very little free time and expect that if they're working 17-hour days on set, my workouts and program better be worth their time."

What does he expect from his clients? "I won't accept anything less than 100% commitment," he confides. "I'm often waking up at 2, 3 or 4am to train clients in different time zones. I've reached a point in my career where I care more about my clients' success than I do about clout. I put all my energy into each client's programme and I expect the same level of dedication."

A trip to (West) Hollywood

Certainly, walking around West Hollywood you get the feeling that it's not just the film stars that are heeding Alfonso's words: the results are right there in front of your eyes. It is definitely home (well close) to the bold and the beautiful. Located at the base of the Hollywood Hills and adjacent to Beverly Hills, the city of West Hollywood is just 4.9 square kilometres in size and has a population of 36,000. And yet, it has more day and wellness spas than you can shake a stick at and a vibe that oozes health and fitness.

for Baron Cohen would soon become the key to one of the most surprising body transformations in showbiz.

Alfonso, aka The Angry Trainer, has a well-established reputation for transforming physiques to nigh on impossible deadlines, using a no-nonsense, gimmick-free approach to training and nutrition – something that we can all learn from.

What do celebrities want when they engage his services? "Results," says Alfonso, categorically. "Everyone wants the same thing: results. The difference between celebrities and us mortals is that their job and career can often hinge on the success of their exercise and nutrition programs

Hollywood has to offer is much more subtle than that. Yes, there is wellness in there but it's a vibe that says positive wellbeing than overtly over-produced. Save that for Beverly Hills – the West Hollywood people are cooler than that.

"People label everything now," says Alfonso, when asked about the typical Hollywood body. "What most people are referring to is when celebrities get healthier and fitter by eating better and exercising. With so many people falling into the obese category, it seems anyone of normal body weight is considered thin and Hollywood-esque."

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE OUTSIDE TO GET FIT IN WEST HOLLYWOOD

How to see West Hollywood (and get fit at the same time!)

1) Take a bike tour

Much of West Hollywood is pretty flat, certainly if you head along Santa Monica Boulevard, the major street running through the city of West Hollywood. Known as a cultural and LGBTQ+ hub, featuring rainbow



See the sights on a bike – and get fit at the same time!

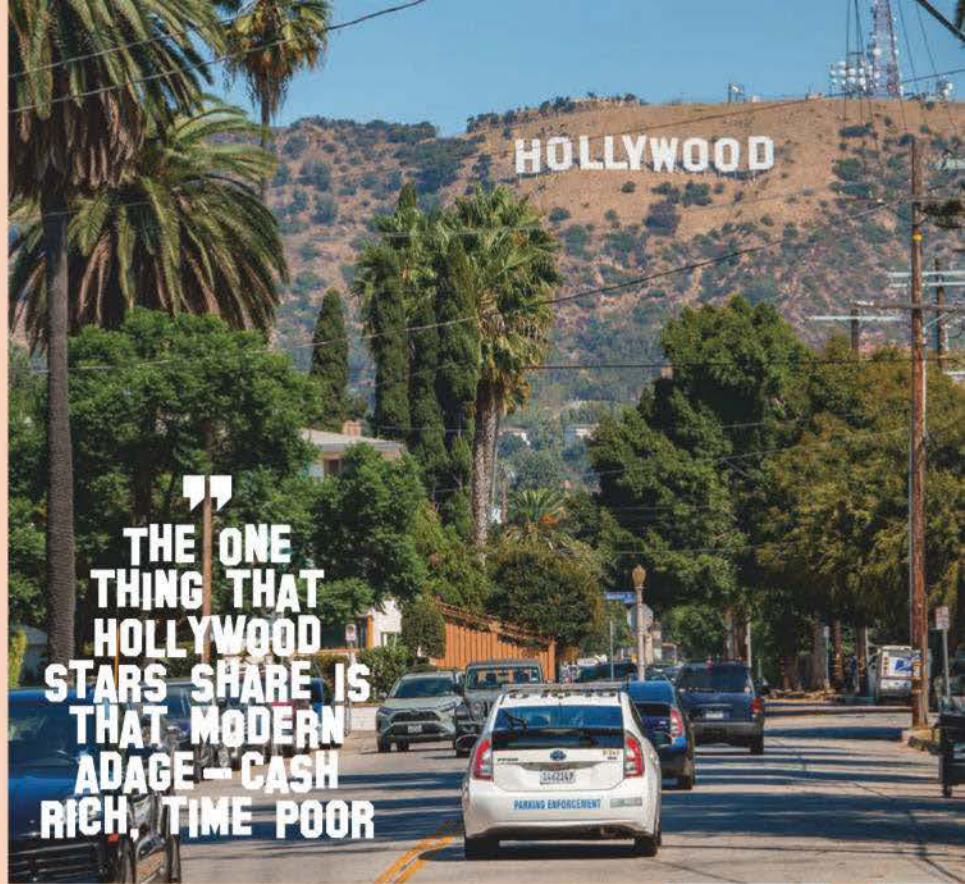


This is what a five-figure per year gym looks like!

crosswalks, diverse nightlife, public art, and iconic restaurants and bars, it's perfectly accessible on a bike: you've just got to get used to the multiple traffic lights and cycling on the other side of the road! Bikes and Hikes LA Tours (bikesandhikesla.com/) specialises in outdoor Los Angeles tours for guests of all ages. Founded by Danny Roman, it's bold claim to be "the top outdoor adventure company in Los Angeles" seems to be spot on. You can choose between a regular bike and an e-bike (the latter is a good choice if you head along Sunset Strip as it's pretty lumpy, although if you want a good workout, use leg power). Bikes and Hikes offers a wealth of tours; they are all informative and packed full of trivia; and are a fantastic way to see the area.

2) Take a walk

Walking around West Hollywood is fascinating, especially if you're a fan of music. The area is literally teeming with history, from the Viper Room, the nightclub and music venue on Sunset Strip, once owned by Johnny Depp and where River Phoenix fatally overdosed; to the legendary Rainbow Bar and Grill, a monument to the golden age of rock and roll, and a place where legends were made and celebrated. Both of these musical

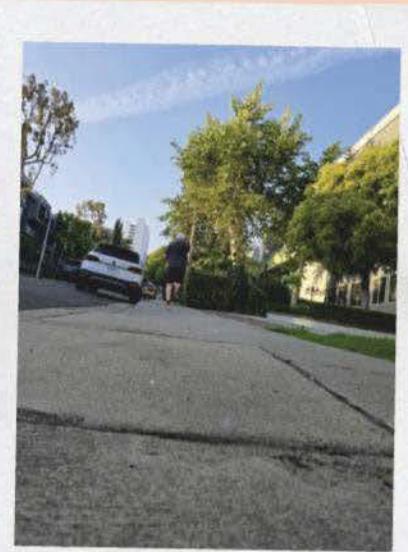


haunts are on the Rock and Walk Tour of Sunset Strip, brainchild of the charismatic host Jon D'Amico, former bass guitarist of LA bands Stalag 15 and Slick Fifty and stage manager for monsters of rock such as Guns & Roses, Alice in Chains and Eagles of Death Metal. "I created this Rock 'n Roll Walking Tour (rocknwalktours.com/) in 2017 to give my guests from around the world a fun and

memorable way to explore the history of a legendary rock 'n roll playground," says Jon, whose stories and fascinating titbits shared with him by celebrity sources and local historians are passed on to anyone taking the tour. Be warned: you may be sworn to secrecy on some of the juicier celeb stories!

3) Try running

This is easier said than done. I got my kit on and ventured down what is the incredibly steep hill of North Olive Drive to Santa Monica Boulevard at the bottom. It is always amazing to run in a new place and a great way to see a city. But, whereas in the UK, you can take your life in your hands and cross the road seemingly anywhere, in the US 'jaywalking' is illegal, so waiting for the crossings to go green seems to take an eternity. On more than one occasion, I incurred the wrath of an irate motorist as I looked the wrong way crossing the road. Still, I was in my running kit so I think I got a pass. I went for an out-and-back route (jetlag was feeling very real) so it was with some trepidation that I ventured back to North Olive Drive and the dreaded hill back to The Mondrian, my 'home' for this trip. The pictures don't do it justice: as they say in the US "that's one steep mother".



Hill training in West Hollywood

PLACES TO EAT

There are some excellent restaurants and eateries in West Hollywood. Cuisine is varied and delicious, with excellent quality ingredients and impeccable service.

Ladyhawk at Kimpton La Peer (ladyhawkrestaurant.com)

Sunset Tower (sunsettowerhotel.com)

Sunset Marquis Cavatina Restaurant (sunsetmarquis.com)

Casa Madera at The Mondrian (mondrianhotels.com/los-angeles)

Merois at Pendry West Hollywood (wolfgangpuck.com/restaurants/merois-west-hollywood)

Great White (greatwhite.cafe)

1 Kitchen at 1 Hotel (1hotels.com/west-hollywood)

The EDITION (editionhotels.com/weho)



The call of the gym

Of course, you don't have to be outside to get fit in Hollywood. Some of the biggest stars can be seen in gyms in West Hollywood, although many, like Mark Wahlberg, have purpose-built gyms in their Hollywood homes. The star of Daddy's Home and The Other Guys once spent \$2 million building a state-of-the-art gym in a former aircraft hangar at his home in Beverly Hills.

Kitted out with myriad free weights, weight machines and punchbags, and larger than many

commercial gyms, it also had a mezzanine for the cardio machines. There was even a full-size boxing ring. All essential when you consider the action movies for which he has been required to bulk up.

But you don't need to spend millions to get Hollywood results. One of the hottest gyms in West Hollywood is the Dogpound, an uber-cool fitness space much beloved by Taylor Swift and Hugh Jackman. OK, so it's not cheap – memberships start from \$8,000 a year up to eye-watering amounts (if you didn't think that was eye-watering enough!).

The man behind the Dogpound – so-called because in the early days his clients would always bring their pups along with them to train – is Kirk Myers. Having been 300lbs as a high school student, Kirk radically changed his life after twice suffering from congestive heart failure.

He opened the first Dogpound (thedogpound.com) in New York with a second location in West Hollywood in 2019. Don't expect to find yourself running alongside your favourite popstar though – all sessions are appointment only and training programmes are highly tailored to each individual's needs. There's a waiting list to join and a single PT workout will set you back anywhere from \$200 to \$500 depending on your trainer, while a session with gloriously-tattooed Myers is rumoured to cost up to \$1,000!

My colleagues and I were put through a private session by one of the in-house trainers, an incredibly flexible woman whose musculature made me feel like I needed to work out more. It was an excellently-balanced hour, with elements of yoga, strength work and a bit of cardio. You can totally see why it's the preferred gym of Hollywood A-listers: discreet, hip, packed with modern equipment and with a roster of personal trainers guaranteed to put you through your paces.

Get the lifestyle

Spas, treatments, infusions and defying the ageing process: this is the newest mantra in West Hollywood. You could have an



Try as they might, this merry bunch couldn't pull off rock star chic

amazing facial treatment at Bamford Wellness Spa (hotels.com/west-hollywood/do/bamford-wellness-spa), where the clinician will pamper you and try to stem the tides of time.

Or, you could opt for a more 21st century alternative and try Next Health (next-health.com/), which styles itself as a "health optimisation and longevity centre" and offers everything from vitamin injections to personalised testing, cryotherapy and IV Therapy. Anti-ageing treatments have captured the zeitgeist with evangelists like Bryan Johnson extolling the virtues of everything from olive oil to blood plasma swaps.

Whereas in the UK, people pop out for a lunch at Nando's, here in West Hollywood it might be an IV shot of Niagen IV, a cell replacement therapy that will set you back \$2,400 or it might be a quick blast in the cryotherapy chamber to speed up recovery. Whatever you want, Next Health has it.

It's something that Alfonso has seen grow in recent years. "I can tell you with certainty that more non-celebrities are using drips, infusion and vitamin therapies," he says. "In the bubble of the world, everyone wants to look young, both in body and face. There comes a point, though, where we all have to accept that we just get older!"

www.visitwesthollywood.com



“

Over-washing with harsh soaps or strong exfoliating skincare products strips the skin barrier, causing dryness and irritation

IS YOUR **GROOMING** ROUTINE SABOTAGING YOUR GAINS?

Look good, feel good right? Well, yes...and no. Your grooming regimen might be affecting your skin, your hormones and even your gym recovery

Words: Lucy Gornall

You've splashed out on supplements, recovery tools, a gym membership and a range of at-home workout essentials to help you hit PBs, optimise your health and look your best.

But have you ever considered the impact that your grooming routine might be having on your wellbeing? Yup, the very thing that makes you feel fresh and sharp might be messing with your skin, hormones and even gym recovery. It's time to rethink these grooming habits...

Too hot to handle

A hot, steaming shower after a heavy leg day might be your secret antidote to speedy muscle recovery, but next time you're subjecting yourself to a fiery wash, consider turning the temperature down a touch.

Not only can too hot water strip your skin of natural oils and leave you dry, itchy and uncomfortable but prolonged exposure, such as baths, hot tubs, long hot showers and saunas, can affect your male hormones, in particular testosterone, which is made predominantly in the testes.

As testosterone is the key player in your muscle growth, bone strength, libido and sperm production, it makes sense to protect it. "Testosterone also boosts confidence, focus and mood. Healthy testosterone keeps men strong, lean and motivated," says Dr Utku Donmez a GMC-registered Medical Doctor at Promeds Clinic.

"The testes function best at a slightly cooler temperature than the rest of the body, and even a small increase -about 2 to 4 °C- in scrotal temperature can reduce both sperm production and testosterone output," says Dr Donmez.

Past research has even found that frequent wet heat exposure (such as regular post-gym hot tub use) can lead to temporary infertility by lowering sperm production and movement.

"Overheating the testicles hampers the sperm-making cells, which need cooler conditions to produce healthy sperm. But, these effects are often reversible once the heat exposure is reduced or stopped," adds Dr Donmez.

An occasional hot soak is OK but don't make it a habit.

Keep baths to a maximum of 10 minutes long and aim for a comfortable temperature of around 35 to 40 °C, rather than maximum heat.

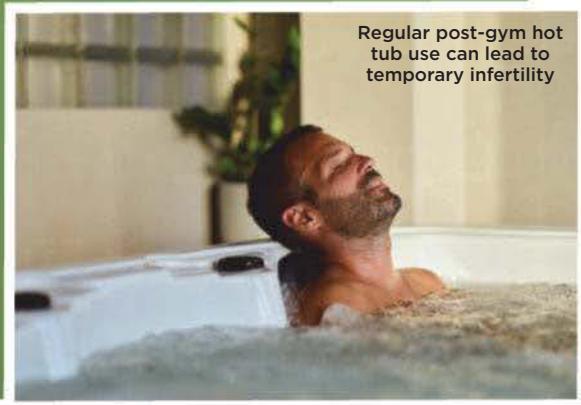
"This level of warmth relaxes muscles and improves circulation without overheating your core or your groin. It can also improve sleep quality by helping your body cool down afterward," explains Dr Donmez.

Over-washing

Nothing beats the feeling of a good sweat sesh. But that workout glow can be a double-edge sword for your skin especially if you let it sit for too long.

"Sweat leaves salt, oil and bacteria on the skin. If it's not

Regular post-gym hot tub use can lead to temporary infertility



washed off, this can clog pores and trigger acne or folliculitis (infected hair follicles also known as gym acne)," says Dr Ed Robinson a Cosmetic Aesthetics Doctor at Dr Ed Robinson Aesthetics Clinic.

In fact, sweat creates a warm, damp environment on your skin where bacteria and fungi thrive. If you don't rinse off, this can lead to body acne, rashes or fungal overgrowths such as ringworm or athlete's foot.

But don't scrub away your sweat excessively. "Over-washing with harsh soaps or strong exfoliating skincare products strips the skin barrier, causing dryness and irritation," adds Dr Robinson.

A gentle, pH-balanced cleanser post-workout is the best middle ground followed by a moisturiser to help restore skin's hydration. Try Cetaphil for gentle cleansers.

No time to shower? At least change out of your sweaty kit into something fresh. "Wipe down exposed skin with a clean damp towel or cleansing wipe. This prevents that bacteria-laden sweat from lingering on your skin and clogging pores," says Dr Donmez.

Oh, and don't forget your feet. "Dry between toes and use antifungal powders if needed to reduce the chances of athlete's foot and nail infections which can sideline training," adds Dr Robinson. After all, do you really want to miss

The products in your bathroom cabinet can play havoc with your hormones



your next gym session thanks to a nasty skin infection?

Smooth moves

If you're a cyclist, swimmer or bodybuilder, then hair removal might be top of your agenda, and if you're the proud owner of a beard, you're probably no stranger to grooming, trimming and shaping either.

"Hair removal isn't inherently dangerous, but it

does make your skin slightly more vulnerable to irritation and infection if you're not careful," says Dr Donmez.

In fact, a study in the Clinical Infectious Diseases journal found that footballers who shaved their bodies were six times more likely to develop MRSA, a type of skin infection, than those who didn't. "Shaving - especially with a razor - can irritate the skin's barrier. If bacteria are present on the skin or

equipment, they have an easier entry. Ingrown hairs are another common issue; these can cause red, inflamed bumps, sometimes with pus if it gets infected," warns Dr Donmez.

Avoid sore skin by shaving after a warm shower so that hair and skin is softer; shave in the direction of hair growth; and replace disposable razors every five to seven uses.

Post shave, apply an alcohol-free, soothing aftershave or moisturiser to calm your skin. "Time your hair removal so you have at least a few hours before your next workout; this also allows your skin time to recover," says Dr Donmez.

Waxing? Avoid hot showers, saunas and heavy workouts for 24 hours after de-fuzzing.

Product overload

From creams and lotions to

But don't scrub away your sweat excessively



sprays and gels, the products in your cabinet could contain endocrine-disrupting chemicals, which can mimic, block or interfere with your body's own hormones. Disruption to homes can impact everything from muscle growth and fat loss to energy, sleep and fertility.

Even the smallest disruptions to hormones can make training less effective, slow recovery and cause fatigue.

Dr Donmez says that parabens and phthalates in particular, chemicals often found in personal care products, could be problematic. Parabens are preservatives which stop mould and bacteria growing while phthalates are chemicals that help scents to last longer.

"Some phthalates, used in plastics and fragrances, can reduce testosterone production in animal models and have been linked to lower testosterone and sperm counts in exposed rodents. Rodent studies on parabens, found that high doses of certain parabens could lower male rats' testosterone levels and impair sperm production," says Dr Donmez.

As for humans? "Some correlations have been observed which indicate that these chemicals could impact male reproductive health, decreasing testosterone or sperm quality," according to Dr Donmez.

"Men with higher levels of phthalate metabolites in their urine have been found in some studies to have slightly lower blood testosterone than those with lower exposure."

A 2017 study of men at a fertility clinic also showed that the men with

higher urinary paraben concentrations had lower sperm motility and more abnormal sperm; they also had slightly lower testosterone levels on average.

Hormonal effects may be subtle and slow however Dr Donmez says it can't hurt to minimise your exposure to known endocrine disruptors, especially if you're training seriously and want to optimise everything. "Think of it as removing a possible small negative, even if it's not proven to be a big factor. Because, let's be clear, you won't suddenly lose strength because of your shampoo."

There are plenty of paraben-free product lines now but scan ingredients lists to avoid parabens, often listed as methylparaben, propylparaben and butylparaben. Look for products labeled 'phthalate-free' or unscented products too. "Be mindful of triclosan too, an antibacterial

once common in soaps and deodorants. It's been shown to have some hormone-disrupting effects and even impact muscle function in animal studies," adds Dr Donmez.

"Some men also prefer to avoid chemical UV filters such as oxybenzone in sunscreens due to mild hormonal activity; if you're concerned, use mineral-based sunscreens which don't have those properties."

The bottom line

Ultimately, grooming doesn't have to derail your health but being aware of the link between what you put on (and do to) your body can help you optimise your daily performance.

"Smart grooming is part of a



▲ Shaving your face or body - especially with a razor - can irritate the skin's barrier

healthy training lifestyle," says Dr Donmez. "Use heat in moderation because while it's great for muscles, you need to protect your skin and fertility; keep your skin clean but not over-stripped; be mindful with hair removal; and avoid chemicals that might mess with your hormones."



“ MY WORKOUT IS MY ANCHOR

Global DJ and former pro bodybuilder...
Joel Corry talks fame and fitness

Interview: David Castle | Photography: Christopher Bailey



► Whipping up the crowd on yet another global tour

With seven platinum UK records, five BRIT nominations and over a decade of club and festival shows all over the world under his belt, Joel Corry is one of the most recognisable names in contemporary dance music. He has headlined tours all over the world and collaborated with some of the biggest names in music – Charli XCX, David Guetta and RAYE to name just a few.

Before hitting the big time with his music, he was a pro bodybuilder winning competitions and earning sponsorship deals. As the pictures in this feature show, he's still in incredible shape. But his fitness programme is much more relaxed nowadays and is a more stabilising force in his life. We caught up with Joel to find out how he combines a global touring schedule with staying in shape and just why working out is the balancing act to maintain positive mental health.

Men's Fitness: You released your latest single Phases a couple of months ago. What does that mean for you in terms of supporting it?

Joel Corry: When a single comes out, the work never stops. You have the whole process of making the record and then pre-promotion, and then you get into the campaign with radio promotion (Joel was in Lisbon when we caught up with him), which is a global gig. And if the single is successful, the campaign can last for at least a couple of months, after which the whole process starts again with the next one.

MF: How do you manage your fitness regime against the background of such a busy schedule?
JC: I always make my fitness a huge priority, and I



“Find the fitness that works for you - and it won't feel like a chore. You'll enjoy it - and you'll get the results”

will get up at the crack of dawn to find the nearest gym and get that workout in usually before I catch an early flight because I need to tick that box mentally. And it honestly helps me perform so much better. Obviously, there's a big physical benefit from keeping up my fitness regime, but the mental benefits are huge for me as well. My workout is my anchor. You're never more than an Uber ride away from the nearest gym, no matter where you are in the world. I always just make time for it.

MF: You've talked a lot in the past about your relationship with your body. How has that changed as you've got older?

JC: When I was in my early 20s and doing fitness competitions, I was 100% all in on getting ready for those competitions. I think doing the preparations for those shows changed me mentally. It almost rewired my thinking and that competition-ready lifestyle has carried through to my life as a touring DJ. The way I go about my diet and my training - and I still almost live that kind of bodybuilding lifestyle, even though I'm doing something completely different. That discipline has really helped me in the music industry - to have a goal in mind and work towards it every single day in my life. But I think anyone that's ever competed in bodybuilding competitions will have some kind of body dysmorphia.

MF: It takes a certain mindset to be that disciplined: in essence the mindset of a professional athlete. Do you think the learnings are transferable?

JC: It's a positive thing for me - a way of keeping myself accountable and staying in shape. And it helps drive me and gets me up in the morning to get to the gym. And obviously I'm performing in front of crowds every day, and I want to look my best. It's also become part of my brand. People know me as Joel Corry, the shredded DJ and that keeps me accountable. A lot of people come to see my DJ set and then want to talk to me about my training. I remain super passionate about it.

MF: The word 'obsessive' has come up in previous interviews. Do you recognise that as a character trait in yourself? And how do you use the positive elements of that to work for you?

JC: I have got that about myself 100%. I am quite obsessive. I'm able to focus really hard on saying when I want to achieve something or work towards a goal, but whatever that is inside me has made me successful in my life. At some points it's been crazy, because I could never switch off. But the flip side of that is when I've got a goal in mind and I'm almost fixated on getting something done, I will work and work and



work until I feel like that's achieved. It's a gift and a curse.

MF: How do you view that whole bodybuilding world, now that you've pivoted into global DJ superstar?

JC: I don't think it was healthy. I'm proud of what I achieved in it and the competitions I won. But DJing and music was always my number one goal and I knew that I couldn't do both. I had to step back from the fitness competitions and refocus on what was really my goal in life, which was to be a global touring DJ, to have collaborations and go all in on my music. I had to have that tunnel vision with my music, in the way I had tunnel vision with

► **Joel's fitness advice is - there are no excuses**

► **The mental benefits of working out make Joel a better DJ**

my fitness competitions. Fitness for me now is a hobby, a lifestyle, and I enjoy staying healthy and staying in shape. But my focus is 100% all in on my music.

MF: How strict are you with your nutrition now? And how easy is that to maintain when you're touring all over the world?

JC: Really, I do the best I can which starts with making time for the gym. In terms of nutrition, it's a myth that people say you can't eat well on tour because you can. It's just about making the right decisions. And I know what I should and shouldn't eat. I'm not counting calories, but I know when I'm eating too much. I like to enjoy myself. I'm in Lisbon right now. We went out for a lovely meal last night, tried the local food and the dishes they had on offer. I don't restrict myself so that I can't have a treat or a cheat meal here and there. I just don't overdo it. But I'm in the gym every day, so I'm always active, so I can allow myself to have

I will work and work and work until I feel like something's achieved. It's a gift and a curse.



nice food and try different cultures wherever I go in the world.

MF: What would your three 'go-to' exercises be?

JC: I'd say the first thing that comes to mind is chest incline dumbbell press. I just love that exercise. Next would be wide grip pull-ups. You can't beat them for building a good back. I try to do pull-ups three times a week. Even if I'm not training back, I'll just chuck them in the end of a session. And it's something you can do anywhere as well. And it's an obvious answer, but third would be squats. You can't beat standard squats for building leg muscles.

MF: You've talked a lot about the solitary life of a DJ. Is that nature of life as a DJ quite isolated?

JC: I do have a very small inner circle. In terms of music, there's a few people that I really trust. So, if I'm working on something and I want to get some feedback, there's a few people that I know I'd send it to. And they'll give me honest criticism. As far as my team and friendship circle goes, I think over the years, I had to really isolate myself because of how much focus and commitment I had to put in to making this goal happen. And a sacrifice of that is probably a lot of social time. And, over the years, maybe my friendship circle was cut down a lot. But this is how I operate. I've never been a hugely social person either. I'm very focused on what I'm doing. I have the people that are close to me, that know me really well, that I trust, and that's all I need.

MF: How much a part does fitness play in maintaining positive mental health?

JC: If I don't do it, I am not the same person. That's why it's so important for me to make sure I get that workout in. And it's the anchor for my whole day. From that moment onwards, it's like that's when my day begins and I'm Joel. When I have to skip those workouts because I'm traveling or there's simply not enough time, I really feel it mentally. The mental benefit I get from my training now far outweighs the physical: it makes me a better DJ, it makes me a better producer and it just makes me a better person.

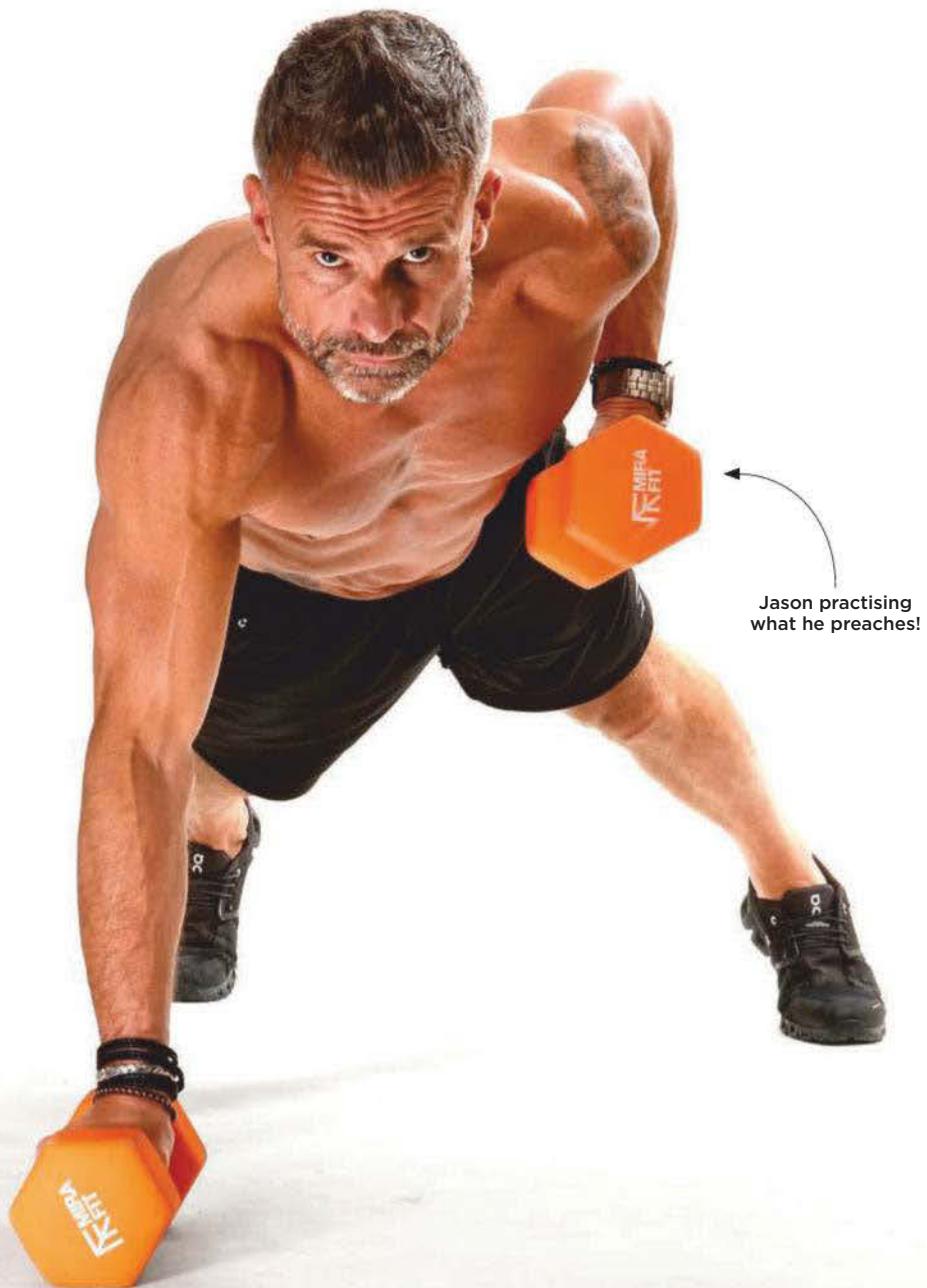
MF: What's the best piece of fitness advice you've ever been given?

JC: There are no excuses. I'm very much like 'where there's a will there's a way'. When I'm in a hotel room and I'm tired and jet-lagged, and I'm thinking that the last thing I want to do is a workout, I will still drag my ass to that gym. I know once I get through it, I will feel so much better. Don't make excuses, get it done. It's also important to find the fitness that works for you - and it won't feel like a chore. You'll enjoy and you'll get the results. ☺

HOW TO FUEL

your midlife comeback

Want to kickstart your fitness programme? **Jason Smith**, owner of Fit in Midlife, explains how to eat, train and recover for maximum results in your second act



In my last article, Getting Fit in Your 50s (MF September), I shared why midlife is the perfect time to take your health and fitness seriously, and what to expect when you get back to regular workouts.

This article is a practical guide to what to eat, how to train, and how to recover to get the best results in your 50s and beyond.

Because in midlife, it's not just about working hard, it's about working smart.

If you've already started to build momentum, this will help you accelerate. If you've yet to start, consider this your roadmap.

How to fuel your midlife comeback

Midlife is not the time for crash diets or fads. It's time to eat with purpose. To fuel recovery, stabilise hormones, and support lean muscle.

1. Prioritise Protein and Carbs

- Protein is essential for muscle repair, metabolism, and hormonal health. Aim for 1.5-2g of protein per kg of target body weight daily.
- Carbohydrates are not your enemy. Focus on complex carbs like oats, rice, veggies, fruit, and whole grains — and consume them an hour before workouts for best effect.

► Try to cut your alcohol intake down



2. Limit the Effects of Alcohol

- Alcohol reduces sleep quality, lowers testosterone, increases fat storage, and slows recovery.
- One or two drinks a week is manageable. More than that, and it becomes counterproductive. Believe me I know. I maintain that cutting out alcohol was the single biggest thing that impacted my fitness and health.

3. Nutrition for Vegetarians and Vegans

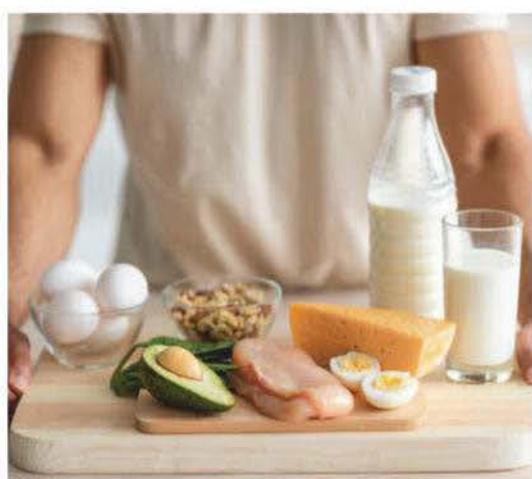
- Focus on protein, iron, B12, and Omega-3s.
- Combine complementary proteins (e.g., beans + rice) and consider supplements to fill any gaps.

4. Intermittent Fasting (IF):

I practice IF when I am cutting body fat. It accelerates my results but also leaves me feeling and thinking sharper. But be careful. IF can limit muscle gain and cause low energy if you under-eat

How to train for a lean and strong midlife body

Once we reach midlife, we must consider how our body has changed. Unless you have maintained a consistent fitness regime, everything from your metabolism to hormone production slows down. Muscles, bones and joints are weaker. The key is to train hard



▼ Protein is essential for muscle repair, metabolism, and hormonal health

by training smart, combining strength training with cardio in a hybrid approach to maximise results.

When strength training, leave your ego at the door. It's impractical to try and lift the weights you used in your teens or twenties. Instead focus how you perform each exercise. Keep the tempo controlled (especially the eccentric movement) as you move through a full range of motion with each rep. You need a weight that enables you to complete all the sets and reps but makes the final 2 or 3 reps of each set challenging but doable without loss of form. I encourage going to form failure on the final set.

My workout plan below is exactly how I worked out after a 30-year break. It combines traditional strength training with supersets, mobility and cardio.

Mobility has a separate focus but remember to warm up before and stretch or foam roll after every workout.



Try adding yoga into the mix

1. Weekly Workout Plan for Men Over 50

Monday

Leg Strength (30-40 mins)

Tuesday

LISS Cardio - Walk, Run, Cycle, Row, Elliptical or Swim (20-45 mins)

Wednesday

Upper Body Strength (30-40 mins)

Thursday

Interval Cardio (20-30 mins)

Friday

Full Body Strength (30-40 mins)

Saturday

Mobility / Yoga (10-15 mins)

Sunday

Rest, Walk, Recover



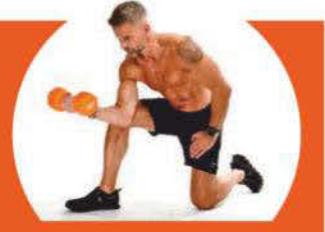
2. My Leg Strength Workout

Warm-Up (5-10 mins): Dynamic mobility + 1-2 warm-up sets with light weight. 3 sets each.

- Squat (Goblet or Barbell) - 8-12 reps
- Leg Press - 8-12 reps
- Leg Curl - 10-12 reps
- Leg Extension - 10-12 reps
- Alternating Lunges - 10 reps per leg

Finisher - 2-3 sets

- Dumbbell Step Ups - (12 - 16 Reps)



TRAINING SMART STRENGTH TRAINING AFTER 50

Compound Movements

Focus on compound moves that work multiple muscle groups through multiple joints. This will not only increase your time efficiency, it will also maximise your muscle gains and increase your workout heart rate.

Progressive Overload

In midlife, it's not just about adding more weight. Increase reps or sets first. Then change the way you move the weights with pause reps to increase the challenge before adding more weight to the bar.

Sets & Reps

3-4 sets of 8-12 reps is optimal.

Rest for 60-90 seconds between sets, but remember, there is no rest between exercises in Supersets and Giant Sets until you have completed all the exercises contained.

Prioritise form, range and tempo. If you can't maintain form for every set, lighten the load.

Fuel right. Train smart. Recover well.

You don't need to starve yourself or become a bodybuilder. Just develop a commitment to follow through with your nutrition and training. Consistency beats intensity. Start now, adjust as needed, and you'll be amazed at how quickly your body responds.



You don't need to starve yourself or become a pro bodybuilder



3. My Upper Body Strength Workout

Warm-Up (5-10 mins): Dynamic mobility + 1-2 warm-up sets with light weight. 3 sets each.

Superset 1

- Dumbbell Bench Press – 8-12 reps
- Single Arm Row – 8-12 reps per side

Superset 2

- Incline Bench Press – 8-12 reps
- Chest Supported Dumbbell Row - 8-12 reps

Superset 3

- Dumbbell Shoulder Press – 8-12 reps
- Lat Pull Down - 8-12 reps

Finisher – 2-3 sets

- Press Ups – AMRAP - Go to failure on each set



4. My Full Body Strength Workout

Warm-Up 5-10 mins.

Dynamic mobility + 1-2 warm-up sets with light weight. 3 sets each.

Giant Set 1

- Dumbbell Goblet Squat – 8-12 reps
- Dumbbell Bench Press – 8-12 reps
- Single Arm Row – 8-12 reps per side
- Alternating Lunges - 10 reps per leg

Giant Set 2

- Dumbbell Split Squat – 10 reps per leg
- Dumbbell Shoulder Press – 8-12 reps
- Lat Pull Down – 8-12 reps per side
- Incline Bench Bicep Curls - 10 reps per leg

Finisher – 2-3 sets

- Walking Lunges – 10 reps per leg. ⚡



ABOUT JASON

Jason Smith is a 55-year-old personal trainer and owner of Fit in Midlife. He specialises in helping midlife men improve their physique, health and fitness. Jason started working out at 50. Within months he lost 25kg in weight, cut body fat from 28% to 10% and built significant muscle mass. Jason coaches clients in person and online and can be found at [@fitinmidlife](https://www.instagram.com/fitinmidlife) on Instagram, TikTok and Facebook.



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GET FIT IN THE KITCHEN

FUEL

SAY GOODBYE TO JUNK FOOD – IF YOU CAN REMEMBER!

New study shows that eating heart-healthy foods can benefit the whole body

At Men's Fitness, we like to think we bring you enough sensible fuelling advice for you to make the right food choices – especially if you're looking to make fitness gains or build muscle.

Our recipes are packed full of nutritious ingredients and the right combination of protein and carbs to fuel your day – and your fitness.

Should you be tempted to stray (and we're not saying you need to be a monk!), just remember everything in moderation. Why? Well, scientists have discovered that eating junk food can scramble your brain in just four days!

A new study from UNC School of Medicine researchers, published in *Neuron*, reveals a unique look at how junk food rewires the brain's memory hub – leading to risk of cognitive dysfunction.

Within just four days, neurons in the hippocampus became overactive, impairing memory. Restoring glucose calmed the neurons, showing that interventions like fasting or dietary shifts can restore brain health.

The discovery also showed that a protein called PKM2, which controls how brain cells use energy, plays a key role in this problem.

"We knew that diet and metabolism could affect brain health, but we didn't expect to find such a specific and vulnerable group of brain cells," said UNC's Juan Song, PhD, principal investigator.

"What surprised us most was how quickly these cells changed their activity in response to reduced glucose availability, and how this shift alone was enough to impair memory." So, next time you reach for the burger and fries, think twice – while you still can!



Nutritionist HACKS

From replenishing minerals to upping your omega-3s, four nutritionists reveal their top diet tips for active people



Meet the nutritionist Adrienne Benjamin

Benjamin is a nutritional therapist and health coach, with a particular interest in the roles of mental health and stress on physical health and vitality. Having worked with ProVen Biotics (provenbiotics.uk) for more than 10 years, she is also interested in how the gut microbiome influences health.

Add prebiotic vegetables

A healthy diet that includes a wide variety of vegetables helps provide fibre to support consistent motility and stool formation. Prebiotic vegetables, in particular (including onions, garlic and leeks), provide insoluble fibre to feed the bacteria in the microbiome. These bacteria form a key part of the mucous membrane lining the gut, helping to prevent stress-related digestive issues. The bacteria themselves can also be found in foods such as sauerkraut, kefir and live natural yoghurt, as well as in supplement form.

Eat regular meals

Sustaining a regular and intense exercise programme relies on consistent energy levels, so it's important to focus on key

macronutrients and ensure each meal and snack contains a balance of protein, fat and complex carbohydrates. I recommend people eat three well-balanced meals each day and leave around five hours between them for the body to fully digest the food.

This will vary depending on the level of exercise undertaken each day, as the more active the individual, the more likely they are to rely on snacks to sustain energy levels. It's important that you find a balance between grazing continuously – which can have a negative impact on digestion – and fuelling the body with nutritionally dense and filling snacks.

Replenish lost water

Fluid intake is key to maintaining

My top three supplements

Probiotics: A high-strength, research-backed probiotic supports microbiome balance and overall gut health. Try ProVen Biotics For Adults - 25 Billion (£17.95 for 30 capsules, provenbiotics.uk).

Protein powder: When exercising regularly, a high-quality protein powder helps to support cell turnover and muscle function. Try The Organic Protein Co Pure Organic Whey Protein (£24, theorganicproteincompany.co.uk).

Minerals: I recommend specific mineral forms known as cell or tissue salts, which include micro-doses of minerals in a readily absorbable format. Try Schuessler Combination 12 Tissue Salts (£9.95, schuesslertissuesalts.uk).

hydration and electrolyte balance, particularly during intense exercise where the body loses fluid through sweat. Our bodies are 70 per cent water by volume and more than 90 per cent water by molecule count, so ensuring we replace lost fluids is vital. Sweat also includes minerals, such as sodium, chloride, potassium and magnesium, which are required for a huge number of functions and pathways in the body, from maintaining water balance and regulating blood pressure and blood sugar levels to promoting optimal muscle, bone and nerve function. It's therefore super important to drink adequate water, and take steps to replace lost minerals.



Meet the nutritionist

Dr Sarah Brewer

Dr Brewer is a GP, medical nutritionist and author of more than 70 health books. With a passion for combining modern science with ancient wisdom, she is also the co-founder of Aeons (aeons.co.uk), a wellness brand rooted in her dedication to reconnecting with the timeless benefits of natural remedies.

Pick protein and omega-3s

To support muscle recovery and energy levels, focus on getting enough protein and omega-3 fatty acids in your diet. Protein helps repair muscles after training, while omega-3s from oily fish such as salmon and sardines can enhance brain function and mood regulation. This is particularly important during the colder months when shorter days and chillier weather can take a toll on motivation and energy levels.

Take a dip for mind and body

Wild swimming, even in colder months, is an excellent way to build strength, stay active and practise mindfulness. Cold-water immersion can help you stay in the moment, promoting a meditative focus on

breathing. If you choose to swim during winter, acclimatise gradually by swimming regularly, dress warmly in neoprene gear and limit your time in the water to a minute per degree of water temperature. Always warm up safely afterwards with dry clothes, movement to generate heat and a hot cup of something to warm you up inside. Try Aeons Nature's Gift Bone Broth (£69.95, aeons.co.uk).

Boost recovery with magnesium

Magnesium plays a crucial role in muscle relaxation, in turn reducing cramping, and supporting heart health. Incorporate magnesium-rich foods such as nuts, seeds, leafy greens and wholegrains into your meals. For an extra recovery boost, try a soak in a magnesium bath to

ease tension and promote better sleep after a demanding workout or training session.

Stay warm with smart nutrition

If your workouts take you outdoors during the colder months, remember that your body may require more energy to stay warm. Opt for nutrient-dense meals with plenty of healthy fats, wholegrains and lean proteins to keep your energy reserves topped up. Incorporating warming foods such as soups or broths can also be a comforting and nutritious way to stay energised in colder weather.

My typical daily diet

Breakfast: Greek yoghurt topped with fresh berries and a handful of pecans, plus a shot of apple cider vinegar mixed with honey and warm water.

Lunch: Spiralised courgette with a handful of fresh rocket or baby spinach, plus cherry tomatoes or roasted vegetables, all tossed with pesto and drizzled with Aeons Ancient Roots Olive Oil (£49.95, aeons.co.uk). A handful of toasted pine nuts or a sprinkling of grated Parmesan completes the dish.

Dinner: A lighter meal such as a spinach, macadamia and pomegranate salad paired with grilled salmon, which makes a meal that is rich in protein, vitamins, healthy fats and antioxidants.





Meet the nutritionist

Lynsey Vaughan

Vaughan is an associate nutritionist at Higher Nature (highernature.com). Passionate about the power of nutrition to improve quality of life, she has a special interest in gut and thyroid health and autoimmunity, and is an expert in formulating supplements with integrity for meaningful impact.



Keep a food diary

This may be a chore but try keeping an honest food diary and log your intake with an app such as Cronometer for a few days or a week. Doing this temporarily can give you some great insights and a much better understanding of how you are currently fuelling your body. It will also give an indication of how balanced your diet is or which areas you may need to take steps towards improving.

Focus on wholefoods

Fuel your body with energy and calories from wholefoods instead of getting sucked in by clever marketing. So many ultra-processed

foods and drinks are now geared at active people trying to 'hit their protein goals', when you can often get a better amount of protein per calorie from more cost-effective wholefoods. These will also offer superior nutrient density and richer sources of fibre or phytonutrients to support your gut and wider health.

Get clued up on nutrient profiles

Becoming familiar with the nutrient profiles of foods means that you are better equipped to choose more nourishing options. My current go-to combination for a zero-effort and balanced snack is a small handful of mixed nuts with a low-fat Babybel and an apple or some blueberries.

My top three supplements

Omega-3: A great multi-tasker that helps to build healthy cells and support the heart, brain, vision, skin and hair. Try Higher Nature Super Potency Omega-3 (£21.95, highernature.com)

Vitamin D: Suboptimal levels can hinder your energy, immunity, bones, brain health and more, so if you only take one thing, let it be this – especially during winter.

Magnesium: This multi-tasking mineral is required for cellular energy production and muscle relaxation. It also helps the body activate vitamin D. It's helped me hugely for low energy, muscle tension and insomnia.

This offers a delicious and nutritious combination of healthy fats, protein, fibre, micronutrients, phytonutrients, carbohydrates and polyphenols.

Always be prepared

Embrace the practice of leaving the house with a wholesome 'emergency' snack and bottle of water. This has saved me so much money and hanger! It also prevents you from purchasing ultra-processed convenience foods while out and about.



Meet the nutritionist

Aliza Marogy

Marogy is an award-winning supplement formulator, registered nutritional therapist and founder of Inessa (inessawellness.com). After being diagnosed with a lifelong autoimmune condition, she regained her own health through a combination of diet and nutraceuticals before retraining as a nutritional therapist to help others.

Rehydrate with electrolytes

When people think of hydration, they often think only of water. But whilst regularly sipping water is essential during training, if you're particularly active, then being mindful of electrolyte intake is important, too. Electrolytes help replenish salts and minerals lost through intensive exercise, and are essential for the normal function of our cells and organs. Key electrolytes include potassium (found in dark green leafy vegetables, avocados, sweet potatoes and lentils), sodium and magnesium (found in wholegrains, greens, nuts, seeds and chocolate). You can also incorporate coconut water daily or try an inexpensive electrolyte supplement such as Dioralyte, found readily in pharmacies.

Eat more protein

Protein is high in amino acids which are the building blocks of muscle. In addition to boosting athletic performance and strength, it also plays a role in weight and blood sugar balance. If you're regularly training, consider including protein at every meal to help with muscle repair and speedy recovery. This is especially important as you get older. Good sources include fish, poultry, tofu, cheese, yoghurt, lentils, chickpeas, seeds and nuts. Plus, protein is filling, so a protein-rich meal will keep you feeling satisfied for longer.

Fight inflammation with fatty acids

Post-exercise, inflammation is a normal and healthy process. However, when inflammation is

ongoing (for example if you're regularly engaging in strenuous exercise) your recovery may be impaired. Delayed onset muscle soreness (DOMS) is the pain and stiffness experienced after strenuous exercise, thought to be caused by micro-trauma to the muscle tissue. Taking omega-3 has been shown to reduce DOMS and improve joint mobility.

If you're not vegetarian or vegan, tuck into oily fish such as sardines, herring, mackerel, trout and salmon. Alternatively, add flax and chia seeds, avocados and walnuts to your diet, or try taking an algae-based vegan omega-3 supplement. ☀

My top three supplements

Magnesium: Magnesium plays a key role in more than 300 enzymatic reactions in the body, yet many of us don't get enough through our diet alone. Magnesium threonate and glycinate are the best forms for supporting good sleep.

Omega-3: Regular dietary omega-3 intake is important for everyone, but if you're training a lot, then you may benefit from supplementing your diet with a high-dose omega-3 supplement to manage exercise-induced inflammation and promote speedier recovery.

Multivitamin and mineral with CoQ10:

If you're deficient in any important micronutrients, a quality multivitamin and mineral product can help fill the gap and put a spring in your step. CoQ10 is vital for energy production and neutralising free radicals. Try Inessa Advanced Multivitamin (£29.99, inessawellness.com).



Vibrant VEGGIES

Fight off winter sluggishness with these energising and protein-packed plant-based meals from Christina Soteriou

Chef and content creator Christina Soteriou is on a mission to make eating plants exciting. Research encourages us to eat 30 plants a week and move away from ultra-processed foods – but in our busy lives, this can be tough.

In her new cookbook, *Big Veg Energy*, Soteriou is determined to make healthy eating easy and joyful, never a chore. With influences

from her Cypriot roots, each nourishing and vibrant dish is packed with protein and nutrients to give you a plant-based boost – whether you're a long-time vegan or simply looking to up your veggie intake.

From warming ragus to roasted squashes, we've picked our favourite veg-tastic recipes to brighten up your meal plans this winter. benefits of a protein-rich, healthy diet.

Pulled Aubergine Ragu with Hummus Mashed Potato

Putting hummus in your mashed potatoes adds protein, creaminess and a different layer of flavour. Plus, it's a great way to use up leftover hummus. And there's nothing better to pile on to your mash than a rich, saucy ragu.

SERVES 4

READY IN 1 hour 25 minutes

Ingredients

For the ragu:

- 30g dried mushrooms (wild, oyster, porcini or a mix)
- 3 medium aubergines
- 1 carrot
- 1 onion
- 1 celery stick
- 4 garlic cloves
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- 3 tbsp tomato purée
- 1 tbsp balsamic vinegar
- 125ml red wine
- 1 vegetable stock cube (gluten-free if needed)
- 3 tbsp nutritional yeast
- 400ml passata
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper

For the hummus mash:

- 1.25kg potatoes
- 350g hummus (shop-bought or homemade)
- 1 tbsp olive oil

For the walnut parm:

- 35g walnuts
- 1 tbsp nutritional yeast
- ¼ tsp garlic powder
- ¼-½ tsp flaky sea salt

METHOD

1. In a bowl, pour 300ml of boiling water over the dried mushrooms, then set aside to soak.
2. Pre-heat the oven to 210°C/190°C fan.
3. Pierce the aubergines all over with a fork. Arrange on a baking tray and roast for 45–55 minutes (depending on their size). Alternatively, you can cook them on a gas hob by placing them over the flame for 15–20 minutes, turning frequently with metal tongs, until they are evenly charred. They are done when the skin is wrinkly and they are very soft, almost collapsing in on themselves.
4. When the aubergines are cooked, set them aside to cool, covered with a plate or lid. Once cool, carefully peel them (the skin should come off very easily), then use your fingers or a fork to pull the flesh into long, thick strips.
5. While the aubergines are cooling, peel and finely dice the carrot and onion. Finely dice the celery and mince the garlic. Heat the olive oil in a saucepan over a medium heat. Add the onion, carrot, garlic and celery and season with plenty of salt and pepper. Sauté for 10–15 minutes until softened, but not brown.
6. Add the tomato purée, balsamic vinegar and wine, and let it cook off for a few minutes until the wine has reduced. Then add the mushrooms, along with their soaking water, taking care not to add any grit that may have gathered at the bottom of the bowl. Add the stock cube, nutritional yeast and passata, and stir to combine.
7. Bring to the boil, then reduce the heat to low and simmer, stirring occasionally, for 15–20 minutes. If it's looking dry, add a splash of water.
8. Add the aubergines to the sauce and stir gently. Cook for another few minutes in order to combine the flavours, and season very well with salt and pepper.
9. Meanwhile, bring a large saucepan of well-salted water to the boil. Peel the potatoes and cut them into chunks. Once the water has come to the boil, add the potatoes and cook for 12–15 minutes or until just cooked. Drain and leave to steam dry for a few minutes in the colander.
10. Return the potatoes to the empty saucepan. Add the hummus and use a potato masher or a fork to mash them until smooth. Season well with salt and pepper and stir in the olive oil to give it some extra creaminess.
11. To make the walnut parm, lightly toast the walnuts in a dry frying pan over a medium heat for 3–5 minutes. Add them to a small blender or finely chop by hand. Blitz or stir through the rest of the ingredients.
12. To serve, spoon a generous amount of hummus mash into a bowl, then load with the pulled aubergine ragu and top with the walnut parm. Enjoy.



Spiced Roasted Squash with Pomegranate Molasses & Pistachios

When squash is in season, there are so many delicious things to do with it, but serving it with dates, tahini and tangy pomegranate molasses creates a perfect medley of textures and flavours that complement each other so well. Serve this with couscous, bulgar wheat, freekeh, rice or any other whole grain if you like. If you can't find pomegranate molasses, you can use balsamic glaze instead.



SERVES 2-4
READY IN 45 minutes

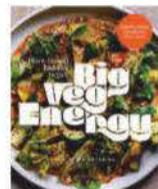
INGREDIENTS

- 1 large butternut squash (about 1.5kg)
- 2 x 400g cans chickpeas
- 4 tbsp cumin seeds
- 2 tbsp fennel seeds
- 2 tbsp yellow mustard seeds
- 2 tbsp coriander seeds
- 2 tbsp smoked paprika
- 2 tbsp sesame seeds
- 1 tbsp flaky sea salt, plus extra to serve
- 4 tbsp olive oil, plus extra to serve
- 35g pistachios

- Handful of flat-leaf parsley
- 3-4 medjool dates
- 4 tbsp tahini
- 2 tbsp pomegranate molasses
- Zest and juice of 1 lemon

METHOD

1. Pre-heat the oven to 220°C/200°C fan.
2. Halve the squash lengthways (no need to peel). Scoop out the seeds and then quarter each half lengthways, so you have eight long pieces. Cut each piece into 2-3cm chunks.
3. Drain and rinse the chickpeas and pat them dry with a clean tea towel, removing any skins that come loose.
4. Add the squash chunks and chickpeas to a large baking tray (use two trays if it looks overcrowded – they need space to cook or they will become mushy).
5. Lightly grind all the spices using a pestle and mortar or spice grinder, keeping some intact. You could even leave them all intact if you like; this will give a chunky texture and pops of flavour. Add the spices to a bowl and mix in the sesame seeds, salt and olive oil.
6. Tip the spice mix into the tray(s) with the chickpeas and squash, and mix very well, making sure everything is evenly coated. Bake, uncovered, for 20 minutes, then toss and bake for another 15-18 minutes until the chickpeas are slightly crispy and the squash is tender inside and starting to crisp at the edges.
7. Meanwhile, roughly chop the pistachios and parsley. Remove the stones from the dates and tear them into large pieces.
8. Once the squash is cooked, remove from the oven and scatter over the pistachios and dates, then return to the oven for another 2-3 minutes.
9. Drizzle over the tahini and pomegranate molasses, along with some more olive oil, and sprinkle with salt. Add the lemon zest and juice, and scatter over the parsley to finish, then serve.



Extracted from
Big Veg Energy by
Christina Soteriou
(Ebury Press, £26)

Whipped Pea, Artichoke & Za'atar with New Potatoes

This whipped pea and artichoke combination makes a great base for the warm potato salad. Another protein-packed, balanced meal that's great for meal prep

SERVES 2-4
READY IN 30 minutes

INGREDIENTS

- 700g new potatoes
- 150g asparagus spears
- 100g jarred marinated artichokes
- 35g rocket
- 100g frozen peas, defrosted
- 1 tsp Dijon mustard
- Juice of $\frac{1}{2}$ lemon
- 1 tbsp olive oil, plus extra for drizzling
- 2 tbsp za'atar
- 2 tbsp toasted sesame seeds (optional)
- 8-12 mint leaves
- 100g vegan feta (gluten-free and nut-free, if needed) or tofu - see tip below
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper

For the whipped pea and artichoke purée:

- 300g frozen peas, defrosted
- 100g jarred marinated artichokes, plus 2-3 tbsp of their oil
- 3 tbsp lemon juice
- 1 tsp Dijon mustard

TIP: If using tofu in place of vegan feta, crumble a handful in a bowl and squeeze over some lemon juice, plenty of salt and nutritional yeast. Mix well and leave to marinate until you are ready to serve.

METHOD

1. Bring a large saucepan of salted water to the boil. Add the potatoes and boil for around 15 minutes, or until just cooked through. Take care not to overcook; they should be firm but just soft enough to poke your fork through without resistance.
2. While the potatoes are cooking, add the asparagus spears to the saucepan for 2 minutes, then remove them with tongs and place them in a colander. Rinse under cold running water to stop them cooking, then set aside.
3. When the potatoes are done, drain them and set them aside in a colander to steam dry.
4. To make the whipped pea and artichoke purée, blend all the ingredients in a small food processor (which will give you a chunky texture) or a blender (if you prefer a smooth texture). Season to taste with plenty of



salt and pepper.

5. Cut the potatoes into bite-sized pieces. Cut the asparagus spears into 3cm pieces. Thinly slice the artichoke pieces.
6. Combine the potatoes, asparagus, artichokes, rocket and peas in a large bowl. Add the Dijon mustard, lemon juice and olive oil. Toss to combine,

and season well to taste.

7. To assemble, spoon plenty of the whipped pea mixture onto a plate. Top with the potatoes and vegetables, then drizzle with a little more olive oil, and sprinkle over the za'atar and sesame seeds, if using. Tear over the mint leaves and crumble on the vegan feta or tofu, then serve. ☀

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YOUR BLUEPRINT FOR SUCCESS

TRAINER



BE A REAL-LIFE BENJAMIN BUTTON

» New research suggests that exercise may not just make us feel younger — it could actually slow or even reverse the body's molecular clock. By looking at DNA markers of ageing, scientists found that structured exercise like aerobic and strength training has stronger anti-ageing effects than casual activity.

Epigenetic ageing refers to changes in the body's DNA that reflect how quickly a person is ageing at the molecular level.

The research also examined which organs benefit most from exercise. While skeletal muscle has

been a central focus, new evidence shows that regular physical training may also slow ageing in the heart, liver, fat tissue, and even the gut.

In addition, Olympic athletes were found to have slower epigenetic ageing than non-athletes, suggesting that long-term, intensive physical activity may have lasting anti-ageing effects.

Overall, the findings support the growing recognition that maintaining physical fitness is not only essential for daily health but may also serve as one of the most effective tools for slowing the body's internal ageing process.



HARDER THAN YOU THINK?

Rate of perceived exertion (RPE) training can enhance your workouts.
Sarah Haselwood discovers how it works and just why it's so effective

Reps, sets, percentages and strength training often go hand in hand. Reps and percentages are a common way to monitor performance during a workout and can help you develop and increase your load. However, another option may be more suitable for you. Rate of perceived exertion (RPE) training uses a scale-based method to help you decide your ability on any given day. It could be precisely what you're looking for.

Move over percentages

One popular way to choose how heavy to lift during your workouts is by using a percentage of your maximum lift, known as your one-rep max. For example, if you see a percentage like 75% next to a set of exercises in your training plan, it means you're lifting a weight that's 75% of your maximum strength for a single lift.

However, sometimes you might see a number between zero and ten instead: the mighty RPE. This number helps you determine how much weight to lift based on how difficult the weight feels to you at that moment, rather than adhering to a specific, pre-calculated amount.

RPE or Borg?

RPE training allows you to measure the intensity at which you perform the exercise. Although this is a subjective measure, it lets you decide how hard to push yourself.

Michael Baah, a celebrity strength coach, says: "RPE is one of the most underused yet powerful tools in training. It is not about ditching data or percentages, but about learning to autoregulate based on how your body feels that day."

The Borg scale is similar,

but it focuses on an activity range from 6 to 20, with 6 indicating no exertion and 20 indicating maximum effort and heart rate.

"Think of RPE as your body's built-in performance tracker," advises Baah. "Forget obsessing over percentages and wearables, the scale forces you to develop awareness, self-regulation, and discipline, which is what separates long-term progress from quick burnouts."

RPE measurement

To measure your RPE, use a scale from zero to 10, where zero to four represents low effort and 10 represents maximum effort. The scale below can be used as a guide and will differ for everyone depending on goals and fitness levels:

0 to 4 - Low effort or weight that can be used easily, for an extended duration. This is helpful if you're a beginner to the exercise or restarting after an injury or a break.



▲ For beginners, RPE helps build body awareness and reduces the intimidation factor of chasing numbers

● **5** - The weight or intensity used as a warm-up. It will increase your heart rate, but not enough to cause you to become out of breath.

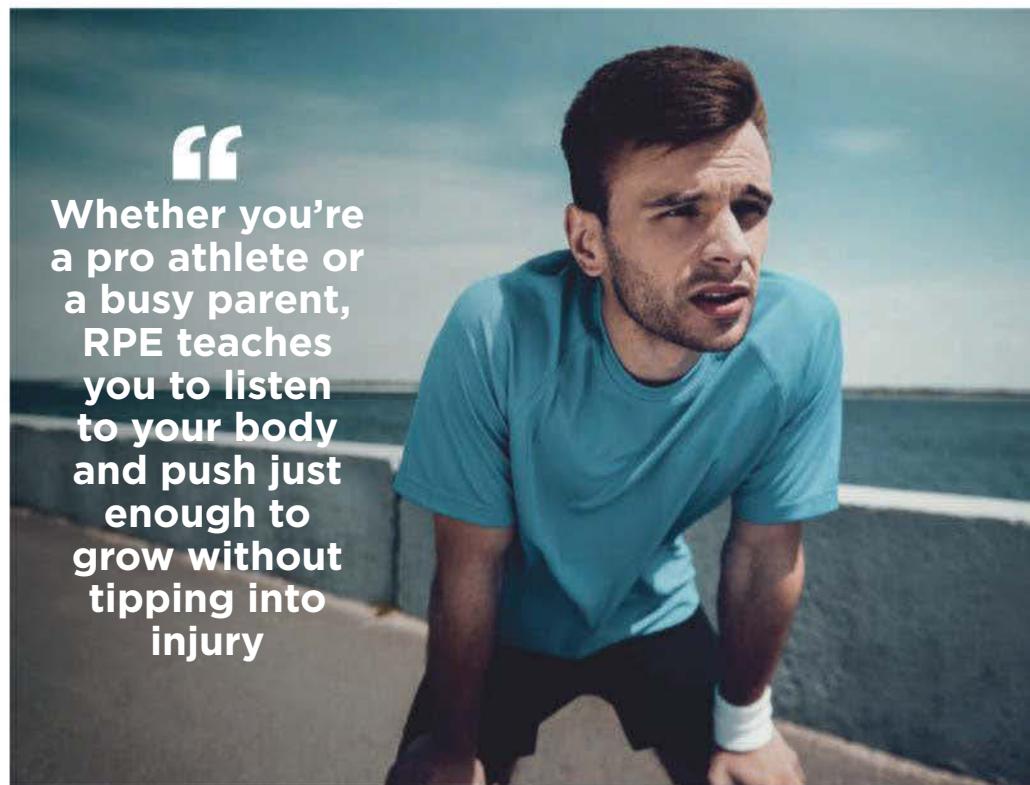
● **6-7** - A hard level for your body, which causes your heart rate to increase, making you breathe faster and harder.

● **8-9** - Working at a very hard level of activity that you can continue without stopping.

● **10** - Working at maximum effort. For example, a short burst of effort that you cannot retain for long.

▼ RPE can also be applied to cardio exercises like running

James Teagle, Coach at Scientific Triathlon and a



professional triathlete sponsored by Zone3, describes the RPE scale as "a simple way of measuring how hard exercise feels". He adds: "Instead of relying on heart rate, GPS, or power, you rate the effort yourself on a scale. Whatever the scale, the principle is the same: the higher the number, the harder the effort."

Be honest

As this method is subjective, it requires experience and practice. And honesty, because otherwise there's the potential to cruise through your session.

For instance, if you're new to strength training or specifically lifting, you won't have the experience of doing challenging weights. Therefore, you won't have the expertise to know how much constitutes a 5 or 8, etc, on the RPE scale. With more practice, your perception will become sharper.

"For beginners, it helps build body awareness and reduces the intimidation factor of chasing numbers," advises Baah. "They quickly learn the difference between 'easy', 'moderate', and 'hard' effort in a safe way."

He adds: "For experienced lifters, RPE allows progression without overtraining. On fitness forums, lifters often debate fixed percentages versus RPE, and the consensus is clear: RPE keeps you moving forward without tipping into burnout."

Reliable feedback

One of the benefits of using RPE for training is that you can



For experienced lifters,
RPE allows progression
without overtraining

use it to adapt to how you're feeling on any given day. For instance, if you're feeling tired or sluggish, you can reduce the number on the scale you work at. Similarly, if your body and

mind indicate that you have ample energy and motivation, you can use the RPE scale to increase the intensity of your workout.

Teagle says: "The beauty of RPE is that it's simple, free, and works across all sports: swim, bike, or run. It's also a reliable fallback when technology fails. GPS can cut out in tunnels, heart rate data can be distorted in the heat, and power meters sometimes stop working."

He believes that being able to juggle effort by feel is invaluable, and he cites the example of Belgian professional cyclist and Olympic gold medallist Remco

“

Instead of relying on heart rate, GPS, or power, you rate the effort yourself on a scale. Whatever the scale, the principle is the same: the higher the number, the harder the effort



Photography: Shutterstock

Evenepoel at the 2024 World Championships time trial. He explains: "When Evenepoel's power meter failed just before the start, he was forced to ride the entire race on feel alone and still won the world title."

RPE beyond strength training

While RPE is typically used with weights and resistance training, it can also be applied to cardio exercises. Whether you're lifting, running, cycling, or engaging in other fitness activities, Teagle agrees that the method requires practice. "Beginners often misjudge intensity, pushing too hard or holding back too much,

because they don't yet know what different efforts feel like. With training and experience, though, athletes learn to dial it in. Many seasoned runners, for example, can hit their 10K pace almost perfectly by feel."

He adds: "With so much data available on smartwatches and training devices, it's tempting to rely only on numbers to judge effort. But sometimes we need to fall back on feel. Running up hills, battling a headwind, or swimming without being able to check your watch are all situations where Rate of Perceived Exertion (RPE) comes into play."

Using RPE

Baah advises: "A weight that feels like a moderate RPE 7 one week could feel like a near-maximal RPE 9 the next, and that feedback is far more accurate than blindly sticking to pre-written percentages."

If you're ready to try RPE training, you don't need to base your schedule on your one-rep max; instead, simplify the program so it gradually challenges you over time. For example, for any given exercise (depending on fitness level):

- **Week 1** - 3 sets at RPE 6
- **Week 2** - 4 sets at RPE 6
- **Week 3** - 5 sets at RPE 6
- **Week 4** - 3 sets at RPE 7

The key here is to listen to your body, especially during the warm-up. On the day, does the RPE feel achievable? Remember that what you did in the past may not be achievable in the moment due to various factors. If that's the case, scale

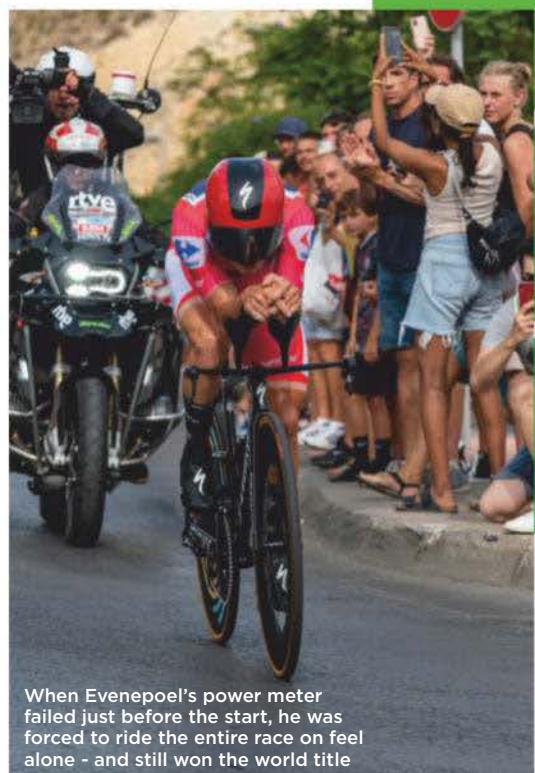
back. The RPE method allows flexibility.

Train smarter

Using the RPE scale also encourages mental concentration, as you need to assess how the reps feel and potentially adapt accordingly.

Baah says: "RPE is the simplest way to train smarter. A load that feels like a 7 one week might feel like a 9 the next, depending on factors such as sleep, stress, or recovery. By training to perceived exertion rather than chasing fixed numbers, you progress consistently without burning out."

Ultimately, says Baah, RPE gives you control and "builds awareness, resilience, and discipline, qualities that extend far beyond the gym". "RPE levels the playing field," he says, "whether you're a pro athlete or a busy parent, it teaches you to listen to your body and push just enough to grow without tipping into injury."



When Evenepoel's power meter failed just before the start, he was forced to ride the entire race on feel alone - and still won the world title

WORK IN PROGRESS

Progressive overload is the principle of increasing demands to continue to see gains, but if you don't have heavier weights at your disposal there are other tactics you can employ, as **Luke Worthington** explains

Being smarter in order to create progressive overload and strength gains, rather than simply adding more plates to a bar, helps mitigate risks while keeping the rewards. One such method is by simply slowing a movement down. Exercising more control over the weight, particularly during the lowering phase, will create

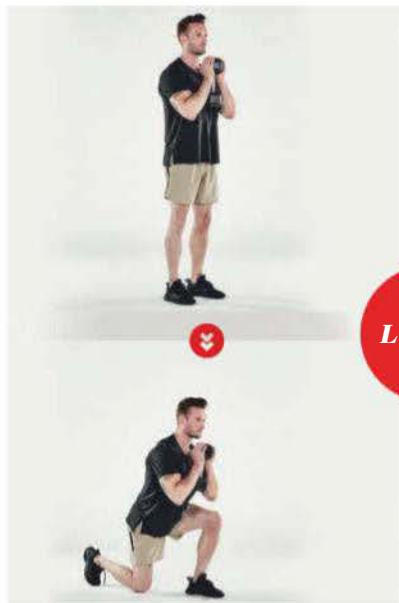
more of a challenge and has been shown to elicit strength gains. The principle of progression in each of these exercises, however, is mechanical rather than load-based, so in each instance you will be creating more mechanical work, without needing to add more weight. "Within the same category of movement, it's possible to progress

the mechanics of certain exercises," explains Worthington. "Generally, we do this by removing points of contact, so for example a chest-supported row becomes a single-arm row, becomes a three-point row. Similarly, a half-kneeling overhead press becomes a seated overhead press, becomes a standing overhead press."

BEGINNER REVERSE LUNGE

Coach's comment: Stepping backwards and keeping the weight over the front foot makes this a hip-dominant lunge, with minimal stress through the knee.

- Stand holding either a kettlebell or dumbbell.
- To maintain balance, keep your gaze fixed on a spot on the floor just in front of you.
- Now lift one leg behind you and drop both knees into a lunge, until the back knee almost touches the floor.
- Drive through your front heel to return to standing, then repeat on the other side.



INTERMEDIATE FORWARD LUNGE

Coach's comment: The forward lunge requires deceleration and force absorption as you step forward, a change of direction, and then a propulsive force back the way you came. This makes it harder, and with more load shared between the hip and the knee.

- Stand tall, holding a dumbbell or kettlebell – or, to make it harder, with a barbell resting across your upper back.
- Point your elbows behind you to retract your shoulder blades, and keep your back upright and core braced throughout.
- Take a big step forward, lower your body until both knees are bent at 90 degrees, then push off your front foot to return to the start position.



ADVANCED LATERAL LUNGE

Coach's comment: Moving sideways requires three-dimensional core control, as well as challenging the hip abductors and adductors. You also need to manage decelerating and change of direction.

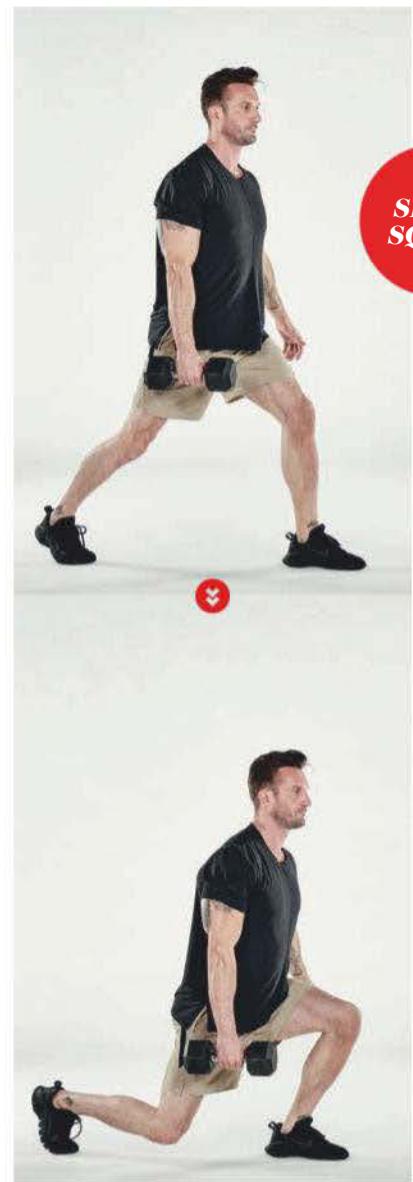
- Begin with bodyweight, but you can progress to holding a weight in both hands.
- Stand with your feet parallel facing forward and hip-width apart.
- Slowly step to the left, keeping both feet facing forward. Once your left foot is firmly on the floor, bend at the hips, pushing them backwards while simultaneously shifting your weight towards the left foot.
- Continue shifting your weight over the left foot until your left knee is aligned directly over the second toe of your left foot.
- Exhale and push off firmly with your left leg, returning your body to the starting position. Repeat the movement for the opposite side.



BEGINNER STATIC SPLIT SQUAT

Coach's comment: Two feet on the same level allows weight to be shared between both legs and keeps the range of motion manageable.

- From standing, step one leg back. Keep that heel off the floor, to start.
- Shift your weight onto your front leg and keep your torso upright as you lower, bending your legs until they form 90-degree angles, with your back knee hovering just above the floor.
- Squeeze your glutes and drive through your front foot to return to the starting position.



INTERMEDIATE BULGARIAN SPLIT SQUAT

Coach's comment: Raising the rear foot shifts the weight forwards over the front leg, increasing the mechanical workload.

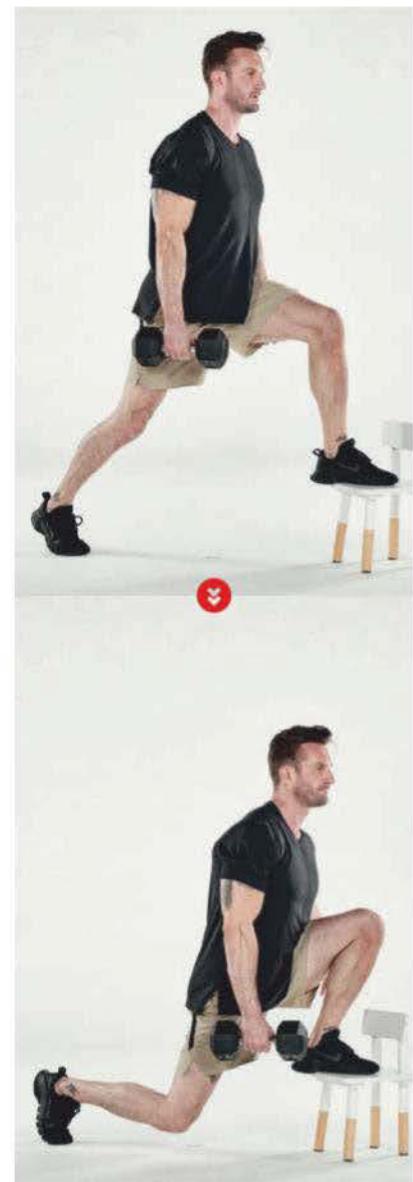
- Stand in front of a bench, with either one weight, two weights or – for more advanced lifters – a barbell across your back.
- Get into a forward lunge position with your torso upright, core braced and hips square to your body, and elevate your back foot so it rests on the bench.
- Lower until your front thigh is almost horizontal, keeping your knee in line with your foot. Don't let your front knee travel beyond your toes.
- Drive up through your front heel back to the starting position, again keeping your movements measured.



ADVANCED FRONT-FOOT ELEVATED SPLIT SQUAT

Coach's comment: Elevating the front foot means the working leg now has to move through a greater range of motion – performing greater mechanical work at the same load.

- Place one foot on the bench, with the back foot a comfortable distance behind.
- Initiate the movement by bending both knees forward until your front calf almost touches your hamstring.
- Come back to the starting position while maintaining a good posture (hips forward, chest up).



BEGINNER

HANDS-ELEVATED PRESS-UP 

Coach's comment: Elevating the hands means you're in effect bringing the floor closer to you and shifting the centre of gravity more towards the feet than the shoulders, meaning less mechanical work is performed.

- Place your hands on a bench, with your feet on the floor.
- Keep your elbows tucked in and your core braced as you lower your chest to the bench.
- Press back up through the heels of your hands.



PRESS-UP

INTERMEDIATE
FLOOR PRESS-UP 

Coach's comment: Weight is now distributed more evenly between the feet and the shoulders in what we recognise as the classic press-up.

- Position your hands underneath your chest: in the press-up position, you should be able to draw a straight line from your nipple to your thumbnail.
- Your body should form a straight line from the top of your head to your heels – think straight-arm plank, with an extra movement.
- Stay 'tight' throughout: clench your glutes and tighten your abs, as if you're about to take a punch to the stomach.
- 'Screw' the heels of your hands into the floor. Doing so will stabilise your shoulder joints and give you more strength for each rep.



ADVANCED

FEET-ELEVATED PRESS-UP 

Coach's comment: The higher you elevate the feet, the more the centre of gravity moves towards and over the shoulders, meaning greater mechanical work is performed without adding any external load.

- Assume a press-up position, with feet elevated on a chair or similar object behind you.
- Keep your hands underneath your chest and don't let your hips sink – maintain the same straight line as you would with a regular press-up.
- Lower until your upper chest touches the floor, then press back up.



BEGINNER

CHEST-SUPPORTED ROW

Coach's comment: Supporting the chest on an incline bench gives the most external feedback, where the body should be in space, requiring less proprioceptive control and with minimal shear force on top of the spine.

- Using a neutral grip, lean into an incline bench.
- Take a dumbbell in one hand with a neutral grip, beginning with the arm straight. This will be your starting position.
- Retract the shoulder blade and flex the elbow to row the dumbbell to your side – aim for your hip, rather than your ribs.
- Pause at the top of the motion, then return to the starting position.



DUMBBELL ROW

INTERMEDIATE

SINGLE-ARM ROW

Coach's comment: Supporting one hand and one knee gives more of a challenge to the core musculature – particularly the obliques – to resist rotation.

- Set up with one knee resting on a bench and the other foot on the floor, leaning forwards slightly and holding a dumbbell in one hand.
- Maintain a neutral spine.
- Row the dumbbell until your thumb touches your armpit, then lower.



ADVANCED

THREE-POINT ROW

Coach's comment: Having just one hand giving support requires the most proprioceptive control, giving quite a substantial challenge to the core. However, that also presents a greater shear force through the spine, meaning that although it is a higher reward choice, it also comes with the highest risk.

- Stand behind an incline bench. Hold a dumbbell in your left hand and place your right hand on the bench.
- Slide your shoulder blade back, then drive your elbow to the ceiling, pulling the weight up to your rib cage.
- Pause at the top, and lower the weight back down to the starting position.



BEGINNER

**HALF-KNEELING SINGLE-ARM
OVERHEAD PRESS** 

Coach's comment: Bringing the body closer to the ground, and having more points of contact, gives the greatest stability and feedback where the body should be positioned. A half-kneeling position has one hip in flexion and one hip in extension. This 'split' position means that the pelvis tends to sit naturally in a neutral position and keeps pressure out of the lower back.

- Assume a half-kneeling position with the knee under your hip, toes tucked and ribcage down.
- Curl the dumbbell into position on your shoulders and ensure your spine is still braced in a neutral position.
- Once the dumbbell is in place, rotate your palms so they are facing forward.
- Take a deep breath, then press the dumbbell overhead by extending the elbow.
- Slowly lower the dumbbell back to the starting position.



INTERMEDIATE

SEATED SINGLE-ARM OVERHEAD PRESS 

Coach's comment: A seated position keeps some external feedback where you should be positioned, but having both hips in flexion (knees in front of you) means you have to work through the core to maintain a neutral pelvis and protect the lumbar spine.

- Sit with your back against the upright part of a bench, holding a dumbbell on your shoulder.
- Press it slowly overhead, allowing your arms to rotate naturally.
- Pause at the top, then lower under control.

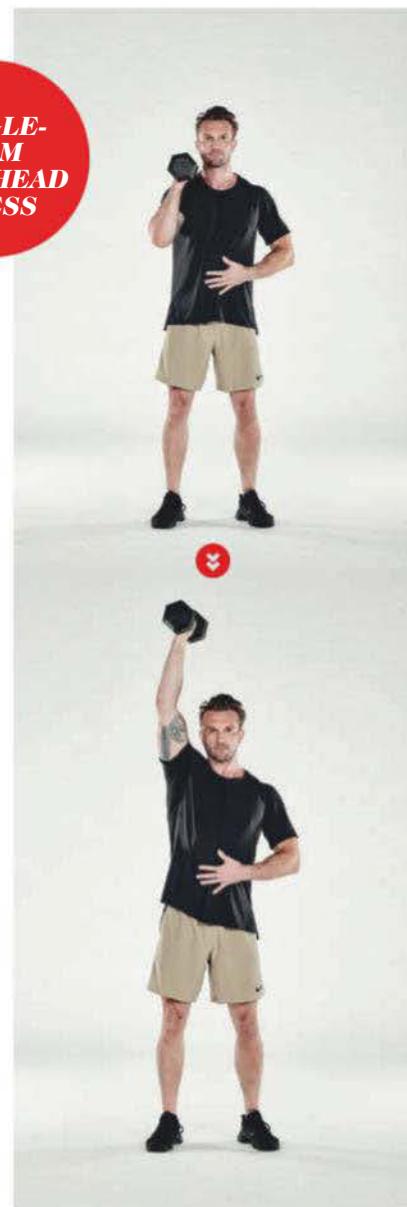


ADVANCED

SINGLE-ARM OVERHEAD PRESS 

Coach's comment: Standing requires the most work to be performed through the core to maintain stability, and also has minimal external feedback on body position. This makes it a challenging movement in terms of skill and motor control – a higher reward choice, but also the highest risk.

- Stand tall with your chest up and your core braced, holding a dumbbell at shoulder height.
- Press it overhead, aiming to bring your upper arm to your ear, then lower under control.

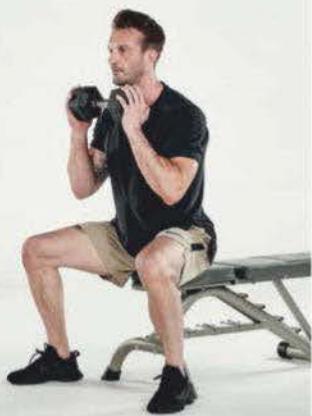


**SINGLE-
ARM
OVERHEAD
PRESS**

BEGINNER BOX SQUAT TO BENCH

Coach's comment: Squatting to a box, bench or seat gives an external reference point to aim for, making it a lower skill demand. The box also means range of motion is self-limiting. This is typically the safest way to start squatting, as even if you lose your balance, you just end up sitting down.

- Whatever weight you're using, stand upright just in front of the bench.
- Now hinge at the hips and keep your back straight to lower with control.
- Once your bum touches the bench, drive through your heels to return to standing.

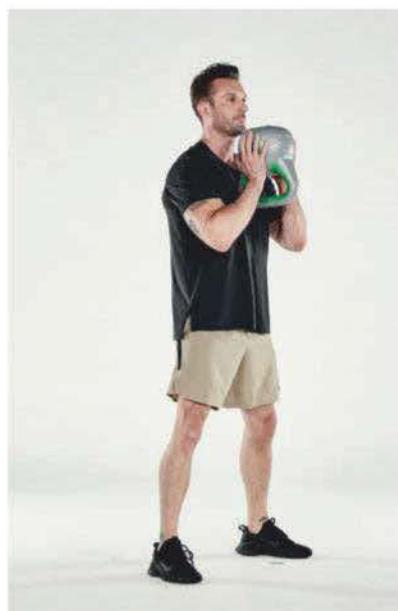


Photography: Eddie Macdonald

INTERMEDIATE GOBLET SQUAT

Coach's comment: Holding a load in front of you encourages core activation, allows you to load a squat pattern, but also naturally keeps you in an upright position with minimal shear force through the spine.

- Stand holding a weight in both hands.
- Brace your abs and hinge at the hips to lower into the squat.
- Descend until your quads are at least parallel to the floor, then drive through your heels to return to standing.



ADVANCED BACK SQUAT

Coach's comment: A back squat allows more load to be added to the squat and potentially therefore much higher strength gains. However, having the load behind you requires a forward lean to keep the centre of gravity over the feet and retain your balance. This forward lean means the load will have a shear action across the spine, so as well as a technical challenge, there is a risk associated with this movement.

- You can do the back squat as pictured, with a weight plate held behind your head, but the classic – and the way that will allow for far more load – is to position a barbell across your upper back.
- Keep your spine in alignment by looking at a spot on the floor about two metres in front of you, then sit back and down, as if you're aiming for a chair.
- Descend until your hip crease is below your knee.
- Keep your weight on your heels as you drive back up. 



SQUAT



CENTRE STAGE

A strong core is fundamental to both exercise performance and real-world movement, but if you're sick of repetitive abs circuits this full-body session will work your middle while bringing every other muscle group to the fore

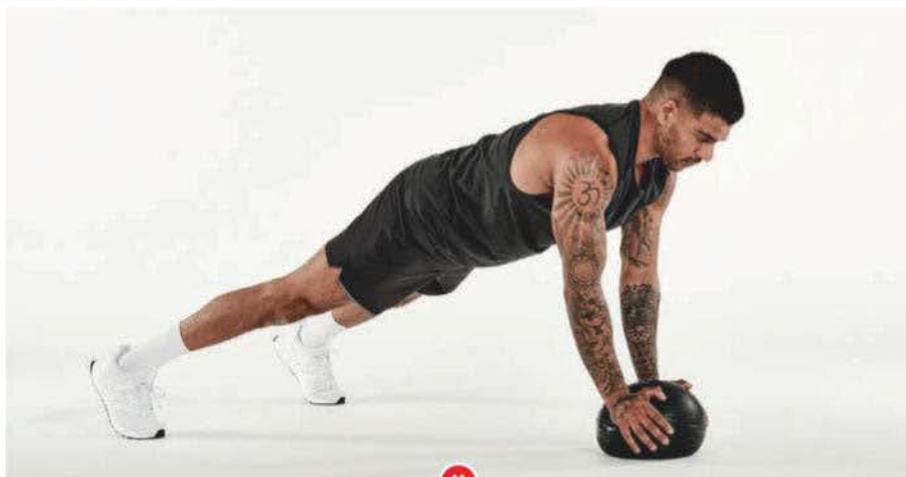
While there are few conventional abs exercises here (sit-ups notwithstanding), each move will force your core to stay strong and stable – and a strong core has carry-over benefits for just about everything you do in the gym and day-to-day life. And unlike traditional abs work, this workout will give every other major muscle group in your body – from your pecs to your quads – plenty to do.



1. GORILLA PRESS-UP

Reps: 5 **Rest:** 15 secs **Sets:** 5

- Start in the top press-up position.
- Slowly lower to the ground, then explode up as fast as possible and bring your hands off the floor to slap them against your chest.
- Put your hands back out to land and go into the next rep.



2. MEDICINE BALL PRESS-UP

Reps: 8-10 **Rest:** 30 secs
Sets: 4

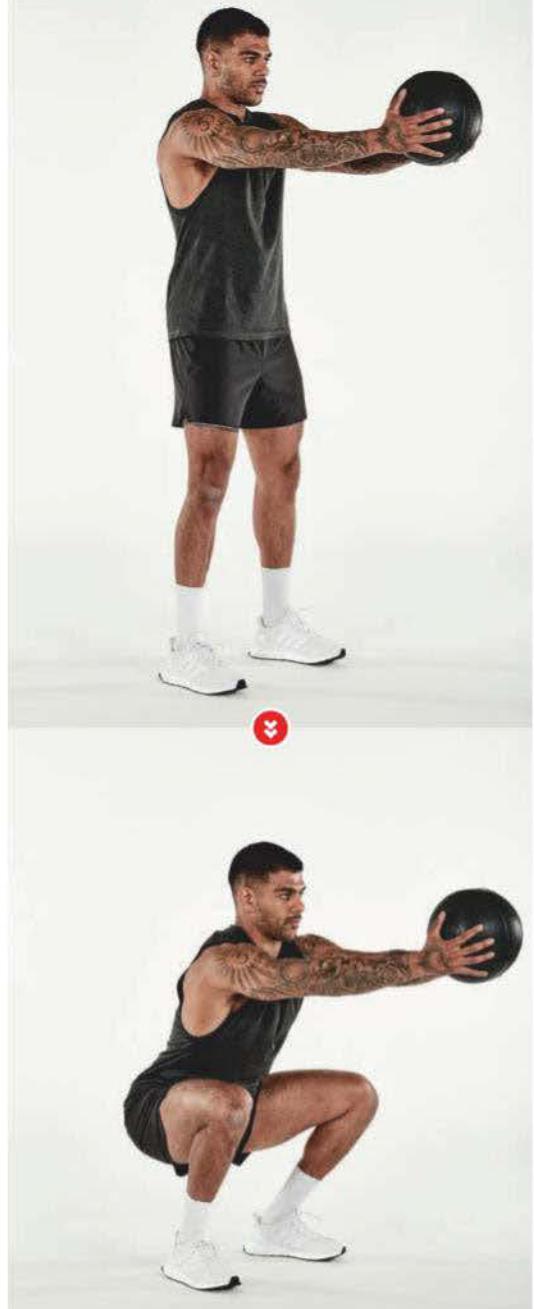
- Start in the top press-up position.
- Slowly lower to the ground, then explode up as fast as possible and bring your hands off the floor to slap them against your chest.
- Put your hands back out to land and go into the next rep.



3a. WEIGHT PLATE BULGARIAN SPLIT SQUAT

Reps: 10 each side
Rest: Straight into 3b

- Hold the plate to your chest and place one foot on a bench behind you.
- Bend your front leg to lower into a split squat, keeping your chest up and front knee in line with your toes.
- Drive back up through your front foot to return to the start. hands off the floor to slap them against your chest.
- Put your hands back out to land and go into the next rep.



3b. STRAIGHT-ARM MEDICINE BALL SQUAT

Reps: 10 **Rest:** 60 secs, then repeat 3a **Sets:** 4

- Stand with feet hip-width apart, and hold a medicine ball in front of your chest with straight arms.
- Tense your quads, glutes and core.
- Sit back into a squat, lowering as deep as you can get with perfect form, keeping arms extended.
- Pause for a count of one at the bottom, then drive back to standing.

4a. PLATE CARRY 

Time: 30 secs **Rest:** Straight into 4b

- Hold a heavy weight plate (or two) to your chest.
- Keeping your core strong and body upright, walk forwards.
- Walk in figures of eight if space is tight.

**4b. MEDICINE BALL SLAM** 

Time: 30 secs **Rest:** 90 secs, then repeat 4a
Sets: 5

- Hold a medicine ball in two hands and stand with feet shoulder-width apart.
- Raise the ball high above your head, rising up on to the balls of your feet. Contract your core as you powerfully slam the ball into the floor in front of you.
- Catch the ball as it bounces up and continue into the next rep.

5a. STRAIGHT-LEG SIT-UP

Reps: 8-10

Rest: Straight into 5b

- Lie on the floor with your feet together and fingers at your temples.
- Squeeze your core to press your lower back into the floor.
- Keeping your core braced, contract your abs to raise your upper body, maintaining straight legs throughout.



5b. SINGLE-LEG EXTENDED

DRAGON FLAG

Reps: 6 each side

Rest: 60 secs, then repeat 5a

Sets: 4

- Lie with your back flat on a bench.
- Bring both knees into your chest and raise them up to the ceiling.
- Now extend one leg up and out in front of you – that leg should create a straight line from ankle to knee to hip to shoulder.
- Lower very slowly (the slower the better).
- Alternate legs each rep. 

MIRROR MUSCLES

This arms and abs workout focuses on the glory muscles – but that's not to say it's easy

Of course, any strength training programme worth its salt should focus primarily on the big, compound lifts, which recruit maximum muscle and yield optimal results across the board. However, if you want to build bigger arms and stronger abs, you're also going to need to get specific.

In this session, the first superset

will primarily target your back and biceps, but your chest, core and triceps will receive some supplementary benefits. The second set is a little easier as it involves fewer muscles, but it will really zone in on your arms. The final superset works your often overlooked lower abs, before finishing with some back extensions to strengthen your lower back.

If you've got a simple pull-up bar and a pair of dumbbells at home, this workout can be easily replicated away from the gym. Simply swap the medicine ball press-ups for regular press-ups, the EZ bar curls for dumbbell concentration curls, and the Swiss ball exercises for regular dumbbell triceps extensions and dumbbell deadlifts.



SUPERSET 1



1a. CHIN-UP

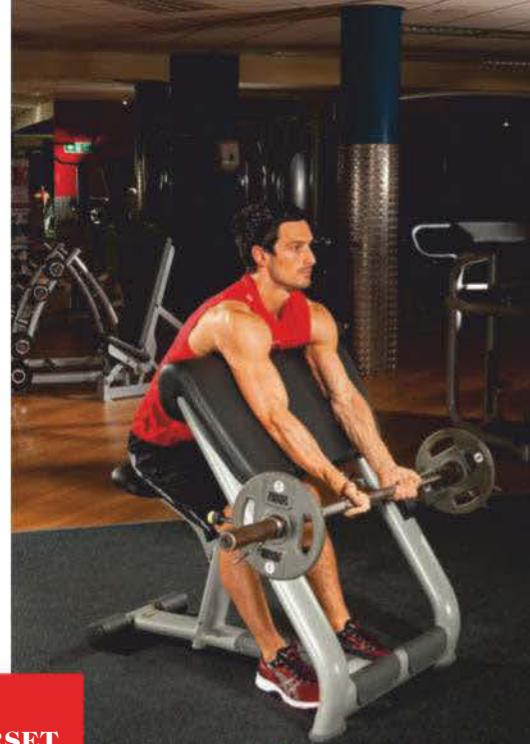
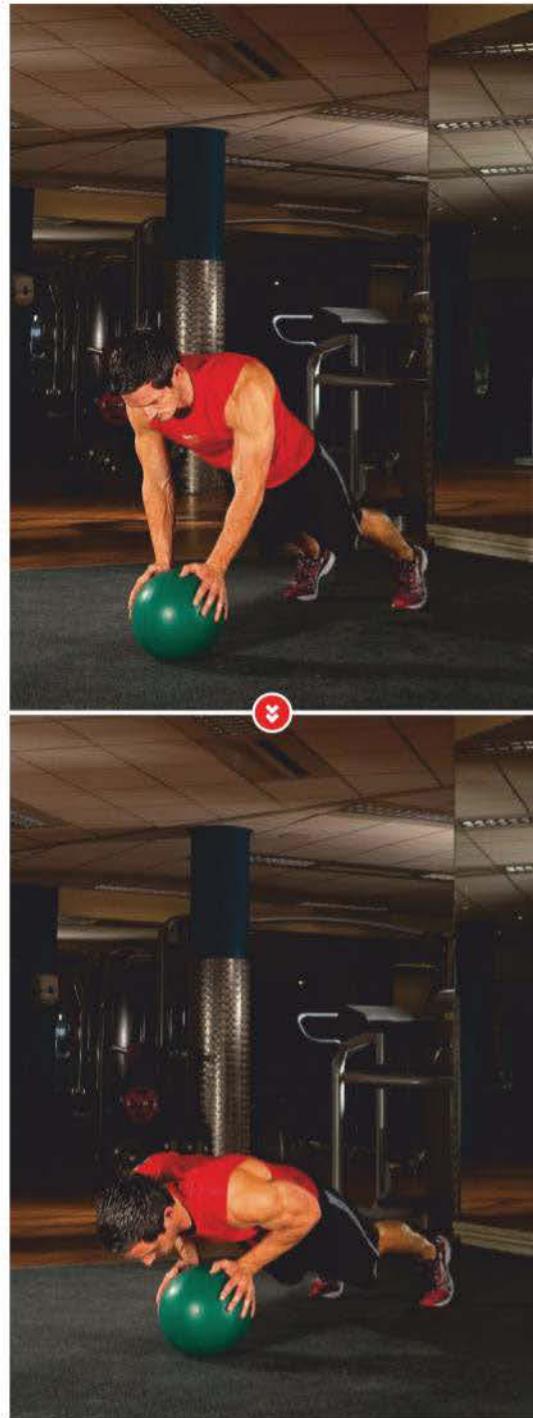
Reps: 5 Rest: Straight into 1b Sets: 5

- Hang from a bar with your hands shoulder-width apart, underhand grip.
- Maintain a natural arch in your back – don't hunch forwards – and don't let your legs swing.
- Curl yourself up the bar, leading with your chest and focusing on pulling with your biceps.
- Once your chin is above your hands, slowly lower yourself back to the start.

1b. MEDICINE BALL PRESS-UP

Reps: 10 Rest: 60 secs, then repeat 1a Sets: 5

- Start in a press-up position but with your hands either side of a medicine ball, rather than flat on the floor.
- Keeping your body in a straight line from head to heels, lower your chest until it touches the ball before powering back up strongly.



SUPERSET 2



2a. EZ BAR PREACHER CURL

Reps: 8 Rest: Straight into 2b Sets: 3

- Sit at a preacher bench and hold an EZ-bar with an underhand grip. Keeping your torso against the bench, slowly curl the bar up towards your face.
- At the top, squeeze your biceps muscles before slowly returning the bar back down.

**SUPERSET
2****2b. SWISS BALL DUMBBELL TRICEPS EXTENSION** **Reps: 10 Rest: 60 secs, then repeat 2a Sets: 3**

- Lie with your upper back on a gym ball, holding a dumbbell in each hand directly above your chest.
- Keeping your elbows pointing to the ceiling, slowly lower the weights down to the side of your head.
- Slowly return to the start.

SUPERSET

3



3a. HANGING LEG RAISE

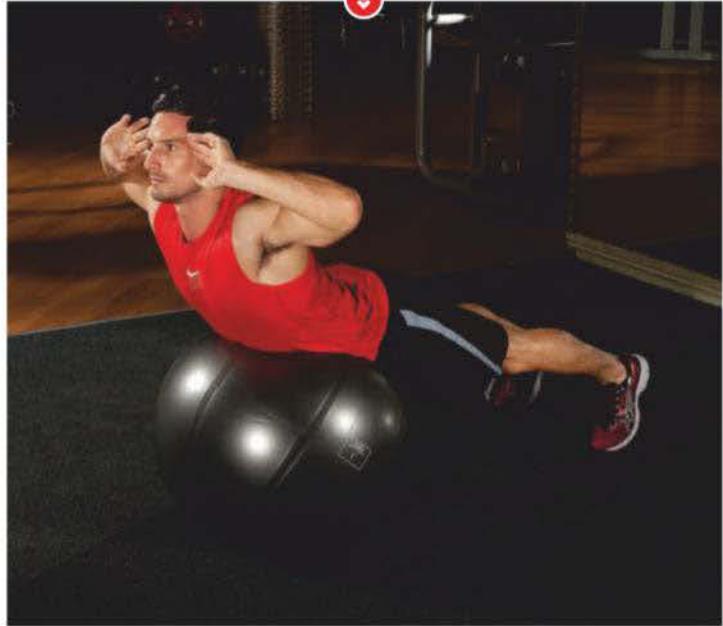
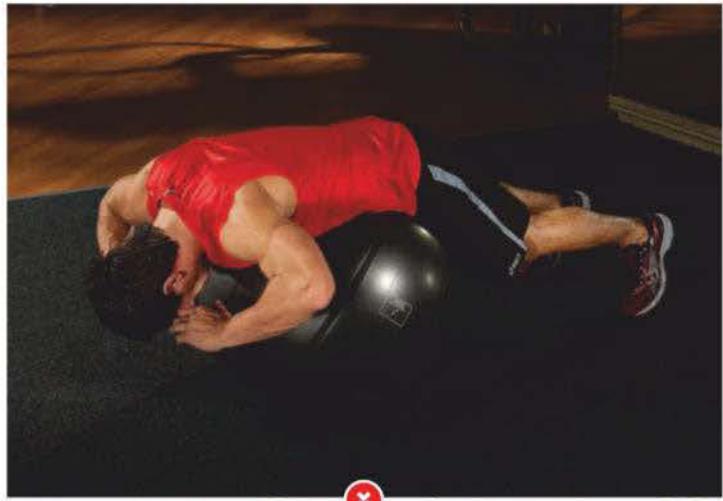
Reps: 10 Rest: Straight into 3b Sets: 3

- Hang from a pull-up bar or handles.
- Keeping your legs straight and, without swinging, use your abs to raise your legs in front of you until parallel to the floor.
- Lower slowly back to the start.

3b. SWISS BALL BACK EXTENSION

Reps: 10 Rest: 60 secs, then repeat 3a Sets: 3

- Lie face down on a gym ball with your feet shoulder-width apart and your hands at your temples.
- Engage your core and lift your head and chest off the ball.
- Lower slowly back to the start and repeat. 





Isn't it time to
turn to indoor
cycling?

IT'S COLD OUTSIDE...

Can you improve your cycling fitness in six weeks without leaving the house? **Frank Bauer** takes the Rouvy app for a spin to find out

Now the weather is on the turn, the nights are getting darker, earlier, and motivation to brave the elements starts to wane, many of us look to indoor alternatives to keep our cardio fitness in tune.

There has been a huge growth in indoor cycling apps and one of the newest kids on the block is Rouvy, which positions itself as "the world's most realistic cycling app".

Other apps focus on 'gamifying' indoor cycling and creating a virtual world; Rouvy focuses on high-quality video and augmented reality to transport riders to real-world global locations.

I was invited to try out Rouvy for myself with a simple, if not easy, brief: complete 2 training sessions per week for 6 weeks and see if you can improve your cycling fitness. To help make sure that the sessions were as effective as possible, they were to be selected from the workout files of Lidl Trek, one of the world's best cycling teams, and the process was to be overseen by their Head of Performance, Mattias Reck.

To implement the training sessions, I used the cycling app Rouvy, which, with a home trainer and an internet connection, allows you to ride with others on thousands of courses curated from around

the world using real life footage.

In addition, Rouvy provides the opportunity to race or ride virtual events, complete challenges, follow training plans, such as Lidl Trek's, or just execute a workout. Although I've used several other cycling apps over the years, I had never used Rouvy, but it's very easy to set-up and I was up and running in minutes.

First things first

To set a baseline measurement and allow the training sessions to be tailored specifically to my current level of fitness, I completed Rouvy's FTP Ramp Test. FTP (functional threshold

power) is an estimation of the highest average power that you can hold for an hour. Within the cycling world it is commonly used as a proxy for fitness (although in reality it only measures one aspect).

For the test, you simply choose a route from Rouvy's vast library, quite possibly one that you believe will distract you from the upcoming pain for the longest, press start, and then pedal. The Rouvy app leads you in gently with a 5-minute warm-up and then proceeds to increase the resistance every minute in even steps until you reach the point that you can't maintain target power anymore.

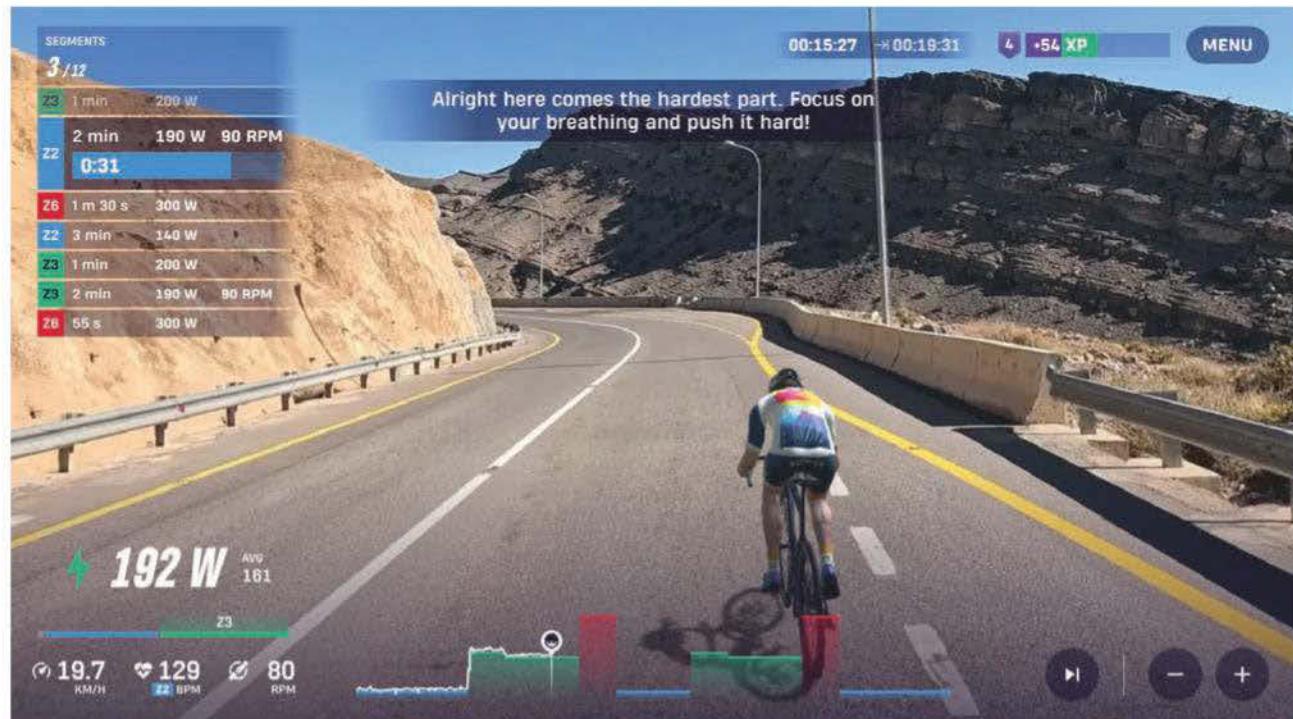
Once you're spent, it calculates your FTP based on a percentage of your best one-minute average power. There are other ways of measuring FTP, but the ramp

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For the test, you simply choose a route from Rouvy's vast library, quite possibly one that you believe will distract you from the upcoming pain for the longest



Frank enjoys the heat in his mancave



test has the particular advantages of being: relatively short, the whole process including warm-up and down can be completed in around 30 minutes; doesn't require pacing, which can be particularly difficult to judge, especially if you're fairly new to cycling; and the window of pain is much shorter, which means you're probably more likely to repeat the experience in order to keep track of how your fitness is developing.

Building a plan

After completing the test, I then had a brief discussion with Mattias filling him in on

my recent training history, leading to his matter-of-fact assertion via text that 'you can train hard from day 1 :-)'. This was not the emoji I would have used.

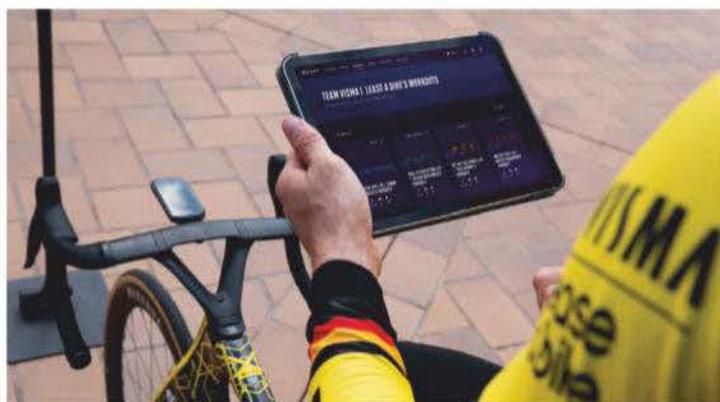
I have followed cycling training plans most years for at least the last 10, and these have almost exclusively followed the traditional approach of building a solid aerobic base before adding interval sessions and harder efforts to improve speed and punch. Mattias assessed that with the very limited time frame we were working to, we needed to approach things differently and instead follow a reverse

▲ Enjoy the motivational messages as you red-line

periodisation with a focus on HIT sessions. This is a commonly used method and introduces shorter, higher intensity workouts early in the training plan. His guidance being the sessions should be done not necessarily after a rest day, but when fresh and well recovered.

So, week 1, session 1: VO2 max 30-15 intervals, alarmingly titled 'PROPER VO2 MAX SESSION' by Mattias Reck'. I'm fairly certain that Einstein's assertion in his theory of relativity that time passes at different rates for observers in different frames of reference came to him after a particularly gruelling VO2 interval session. Where 30 seconds of effort quickly becomes enough time to circumnavigate the earth, on foot, and 15 seconds of recovery disappears before you've had time to take a drink.

When they're pitched correctly - and this is where conducting an initial FTP test comes into play - you find that you settle into a rhythm of having just enough to complete the effort and then just enough



► Improve your cycling fitness like the pros

recovery to start the next. Mattias's session consists of 4 sets of 11 repetitions of 30 seconds hard, 15 seconds easy. The beauty of doing this sort of session on Rouvy is that the resistance is automatically adjusted for you, so all you have to do is keep pedalling at the target power. The initial two weeks entailed solely these workouts.

Safety first

Another benefit of riding on one of the many virtual routes on Rouvy, as opposed to the open road, is that you don't have to share the space with traffic and you're very unlikely to crash. The same cannot be said when out riding in early March, on a damp morning in the UK. With the roads greasy from some light rain, and my approach to a roundabout being a little over eager, largely due to my wish to get off a busy A road, I managed to lose my front wheel and slide across the tarmac on my hip and elbow.

Fortunately, nothing was broken on either me or my bike. Much of my kit was ruined: bib-tights, overshoes, long sleeve jersey and rain jacket all ripped. I also suffered significant road rash to my hip and elbow, the scars from which are still evident some seven months later. On the plus side, however, and despite the discomfort, I was still able to ride and so could continue with the training into the third week.

Mattias prescribed sticking with a 30-15 workout for the first session of the week before moving on to more specific FTP/threshold training. This consisted of two sets of five repetitions of 3 minutes slightly above threshold followed by 1 minute easy (3-1s). By this stage, being only 3 weeks into the challenge, I already felt stronger, particularly on the short 3-minute threshold intervals and was able to



▲ Avatars make you feel like you're bunch riding

increase the resistance slightly on the fly from within the workout on the Rouvy app. If nothing else, Mattias's simple approach proved to me that you don't really need any complex sessions to improve your base fitness.

I continued with these threshold sessions in the fourth week before changing things up slightly for the final two weeks with workouts combining low VO2 and threshold work. The first of these involved 4 sets of 8 minutes at threshold but with 3 x 30 second efforts at VO2 max interspersed throughout each block. The second workout took the 3-1s from weeks 3 and 4 and increased each effort to 3.5 minutes while at the same time reducing the recovery to 30 seconds.

With the 6 weeks of training over, it was now a case of having a couple of easy days before undertaking another

FTP Ramp Test. The results of undertaking two sessions per week on Rouvy under the guidance of Mattias were pretty conclusive: my FTP improved by 12% over the period, undoubtedly helped by the fact that my cycling fitness was relatively low coming into the programme, but nevertheless, a significant improvement.

If I had to raise one shortcoming of my experience on Rouvy, it'd be that I didn't encounter other riders on the platform while I was doing the workouts. Instead, Rouvy generates other avatars so that you feel like you're riding in a small bunch. I imagine that as the platform becomes more popular, this will change, and the more popular routes should be increasingly populated with other riders.

However, having access to workouts that have been prepared by one of the world's best coaches, Lidl Trek have achieved over 40 professional victories so far in 2025 alone, gives you a degree of confidence that your hard efforts are going to produce results, and being able to do this while immersed in real life routes through the Rouvy app is a great way of improving your cycling fitness. ☺

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If nothing else, Mattias's simple approach proved to me that you don't really need any complex sessions to improve your base fitness





REAL LIFE FITNESS

This month Ollie explains why it pays to do functional exercises with movements that mirror everyday activities

▲ Exercises that mimic daily activities can be useful

If there is something I am a huge advocate of it's training that translates across the real world. While bench pressing or doing curls may help you look good, it's not going to help you carry your kids to bed, get all the shopping out of the car or hike up a hill.

Sure, there may be some crossover. But there's also an argument that doing gym exercises that mimic real-life movements — sometimes called functional training — makes a lot of sense because it prepares your body for the kinds of physical tasks you actually face day-to-day. For example:

- A deadlift mimics picking up a heavy box from the floor
- A farmer's carry mirrors carrying shopping bags
- A squat with overhead press looks like lifting your child up

Try swapping out machines and isolation exercises and swap in multi-joint compound movements that challenge you in multiple ways and planes of movement. Not only will you get stronger using these but you will be more useful (and probably get in the shape you want anyway).

Here are a few reasons why it's beneficial:

1. Improved practical strength

Instead of just building isolated muscle strength (like a biceps curl), functional exercises develop the ability of multiple muscles and joints to work together — similar to when you lift shopping bags, bend down to pick something up, or carry a child upstairs.

2. Injury prevention

Real-life activities rarely involve a single,



Photography: Shutterstock

controlled motion. They're often dynamic, unbalanced, or repetitive. Training with movements that resemble those activities strengthens stabilising muscles, improves joint mobility and reduces the risk of hurting yourself outside the gym.

3. Better balance & co-ordination

Exercises that replicate daily tasks challenge your core and balance. For example, lunges and single-leg movements prepare you for uneven terrain or carrying loads on one side of your body.

Try this real-life circuit!

Below is a strength circuit that will help you to build up a well-rounded, functional yet aesthetic physique.

Sled push (40m)

Mimics: Pushing open heavy doors, mowing the lawn
Improves leg strength and engages arms, glutes and back muscles



Russian twists

(2 x 10 with a medicine ball)

Mimics: Turning to put a bag in the car, swinging around while holding a child. Improves torso strength and injury prevention.



Suitcase deadlift x 5 into a farmers carry

(40m - repeat on both sides)

Mimics: Carrying shopping bags, luggage, or kids. Builds grip strength, core stability, and posture.

Spiderman press ups x 20m

Mimics: Pushing open a heavy door, bracing with arms when you fall. Engages chest, arms, and core.

Complete as many rounds as possible in a 25-minute time frame. Add a short warm up/mobility at the start and some core at the end and you will have a sweaty yet full body workout that will help you be useful while also being in great shape.

4. Time efficiency & relevance

Instead of training for movements you never actually do in real life, you're practising strength, endurance, and flexibility in ways you'll directly use — making the workout more rewarding and practical.

5. Quality of life

Ultimately, the goal of fitness isn't just performance in the gym but making everyday life easier — being able to move groceries, play with kids, do housework, or travel without strain.

About the author

 **Ollie McCarthy** is a running and strength & conditioning coach. His personal training programme - The McCarthy Method - helps people improve their fitness, strength, and conditioning. It is based on a holistic approach to health and wellbeing, and includes mobility, strength, and conditioning work, as well as nutrition advice. [@olliewmccarthy](http://olliewmccarthy)

BACK TO LIFE

Lifting, sitting or just daily chores – all can have an impact on spinal health. This month's mobility flow brings your back, back to life

This back-focused release session from pliability's is designed to restore mobility through the thoracic and lumbar spine while reducing stiffness and promoting postural awareness. Whether you're decompressing from heavy lifting, long hours sitting, or just looking to improve spinal health, this short sequence targets key areas along the back chain with calm, restorative poses.

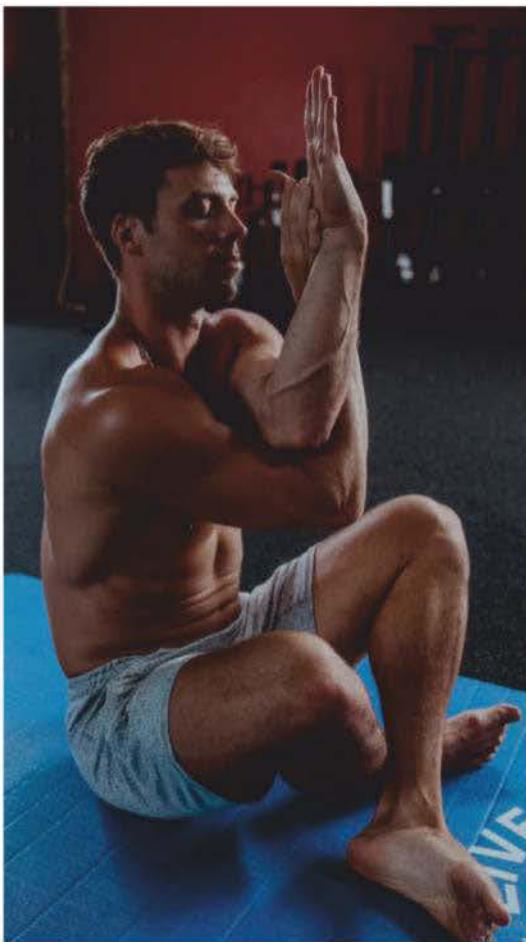
Delivered in pliability's Quick Release format, this session can be used as a warm-up, cool-down, or standalone recovery tool to enhance spinal mobility and ease muscular tension.



1. BEAR POSE

This pose targets Upper back, shoulders and lats

- Begin in a standing position, hinge at your hips, pushing them back while softening your knees
- Keep pushing your back flat and chest down, stretch your arms up, in line with your head
- Bring your hands together, and point your fingers up, palms out
- Hold this position, breathing deeply and feeling your spine lengthen
- Hold for 60-90 seconds, allowing gravity to do the work.



2. SADDLE EAGLE

This pose stretches the upper back, shoulders, and traps while improving thoracic spine mobility and releasing tension between the shoulder blades.

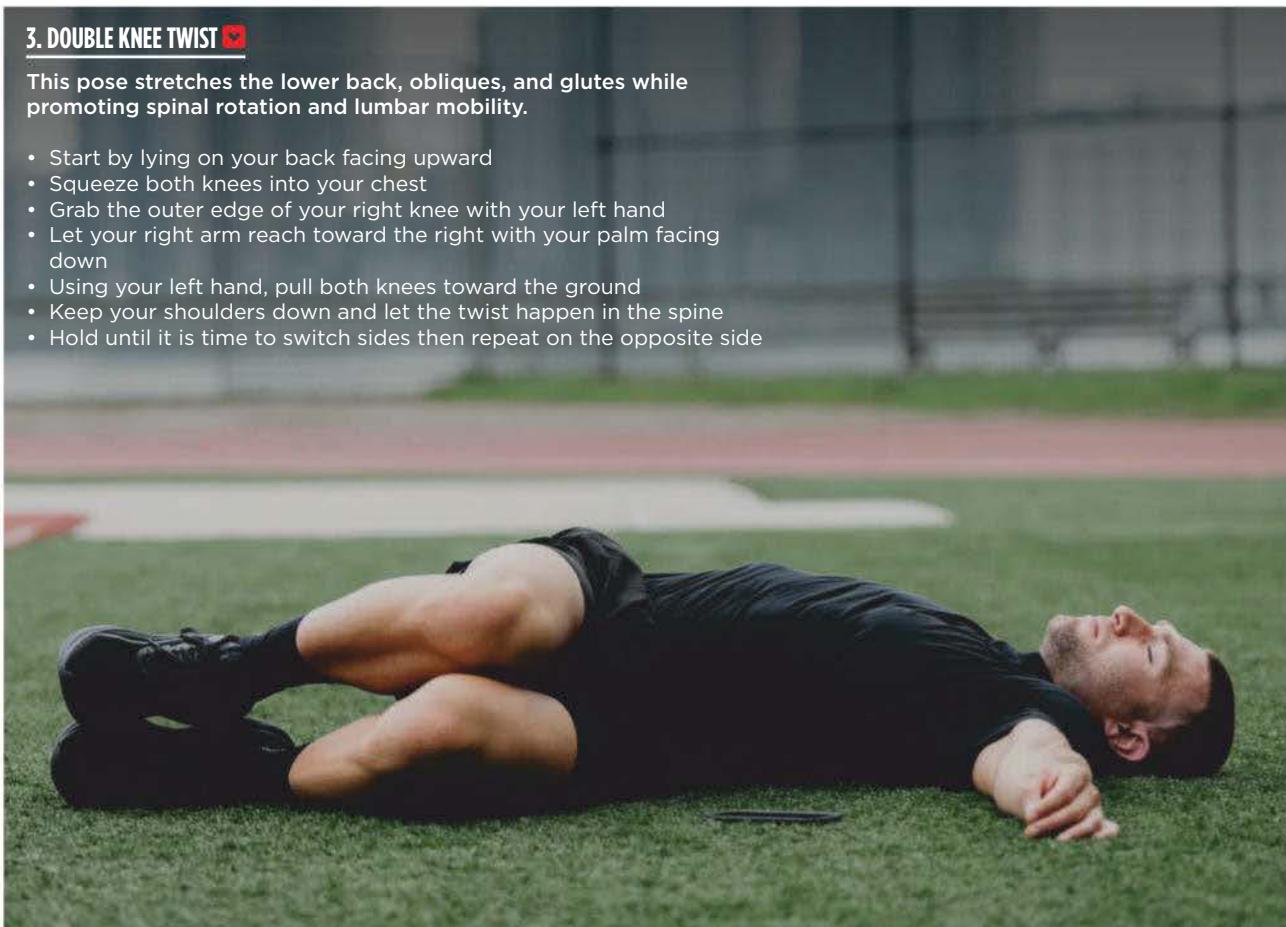
- Start on your hands and knees
- Spread your knees wide and bring your toes together
- Sit on your feet with your spine tall
- Cross your right arm under your left arm and bend your elbows to bring your hands in front of your face
- If possible, clasp your hands together
- Keep your hands above eye level
- Hold for 45-60 seconds, then switch arms.

3. DOUBLE KNEE TWIST

This pose stretches the lower back, obliques, and glutes while promoting spinal rotation and lumbar mobility.

- Start by lying on your back facing upward
- Squeeze both knees into your chest
- Grab the outer edge of your right knee with your left hand
- Let your right arm reach toward the right with your palm facing down
- Using your left hand, pull both knees toward the ground
- Keep your shoulders down and let the twist happen in the spine
- Hold until it is time to switch sides then repeat on the opposite side

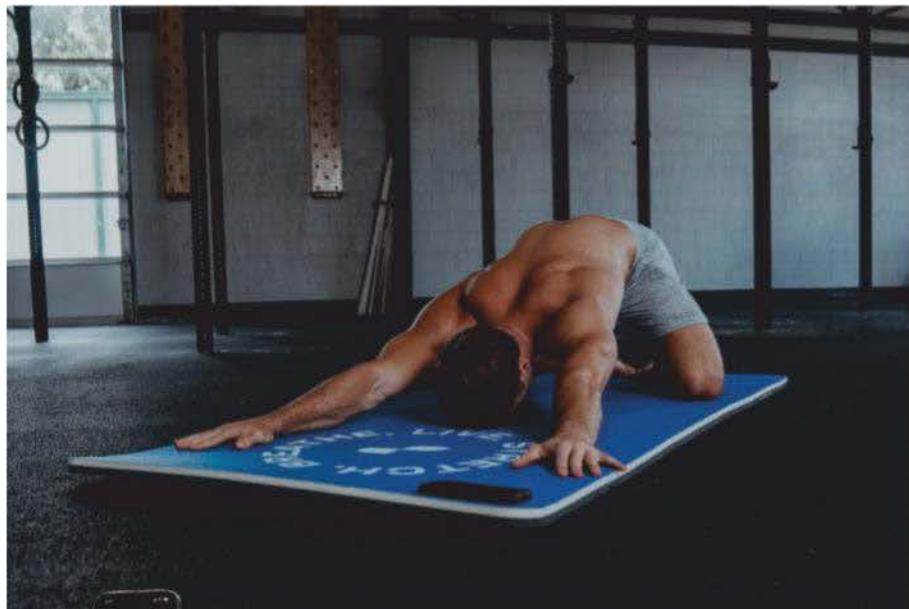
Photography: pliability.com



4. CHILD POSE

This pose stretches the spine, hips, and lower back while encouraging full-body relaxation and decompressing the posterior chain.

- Start from your hands and knees
- Sit your butt back toward your feet and let your forehead come to the ground
- Walk both hands out in front of your palms facing the ground
- Soften your breath and your body to release tension with each exhale. 



The pliability app is available to download now on iOS, Android and any web browser. Videos can be watched on-demand, streamed to any screen, or downloaded for offline use. All users get a 7-day free trial before a flat rate of £16.95 per month £169.95 annually. Dive deeper at pliability.com





MY FITNESS LIFE

Reece Prescod...sub 10-second 100m sprinter-turned motivational personal trainer

MF: What does an 'average' day look like for you now?

RP: My days start early - 4 am, coffee in hand, ready to train clients in Central London. Mornings are packed with one-on-one or small group sessions, helping people hit their goals, whether it's getting stronger or feeling better in their own skin. By 3pm, I'm either at my academy coaching kids, working on their speed or confidence, or with private clients pushing for top performance. Evenings are usually speed school with athletes. It's a full day, but I really love it.

MF: You used to be judged on performance: now it's on other people's results. Which do you prefer and why?

RP: I love coaching way more. When it was just me, a bad day or a rough track session could throw things off, and you can't control that. Now, I'm the one setting the stage - building

plans, tweaking sessions, making sure my clients and kids have what they need to succeed. Seeing a client transform their body or a kid light up because they ran faster - that hits deeper than any personal win. It's about making a real difference.

MF: What would you say your best athletic performance was?

RP: Two moments stand out. Running 6.49 in the 60m and then there's the silver at the 2018 European Championships, followed by a 9.93 PB. Those races were proof of years of work paying off. I tell my kids at the academy about those days to show them what's possible when you stay focused and put in the effort.

MF: And the one you're most proud of (and why?)

RP: The 9.93 and the world bronze at the World Relay Championships - that's the one I hold closest. It wasn't just the time; it was the grind, the

pressure, and coming through when it counted. I share that with my young athletes to fire them up, to show them that hard work can take you to places you didn't think possible.

MF: How do you see technology changing in the fitness space?

RP: The fitness world is evolving fast, and technology's a big part of it. Tools like Whoop and Oura rings give clients real-time insights into their performance and recovery, which is huge for tailoring programs. Run clubs and fitness challenges are popping up, bringing people together. As an EMS-certified trainer, I blend cutting-edge tech like electrical muscle stimulation with proven strength methods to deliver results that stand out. For my clients, it's about precision and efficiency; for my kids, it's about using tech to make training fun and keep them engaged in a supportive environment.

MF: What's the best piece of fitness advice you've been given?

RP: Mix it up, stay consistent, and take care of the basics. A good program needs variety - strength, speed, mobility - and you've got to show up at least 80% of the time. Sleep, nutrition, and recovery are non-negotiable.

But the real game-changer? Keep a positive mindset and stay committed to growing. I pass this on to my clients and especially my kids at the academy, teaching them to love the process and see fitness as a way to build confidence and character.



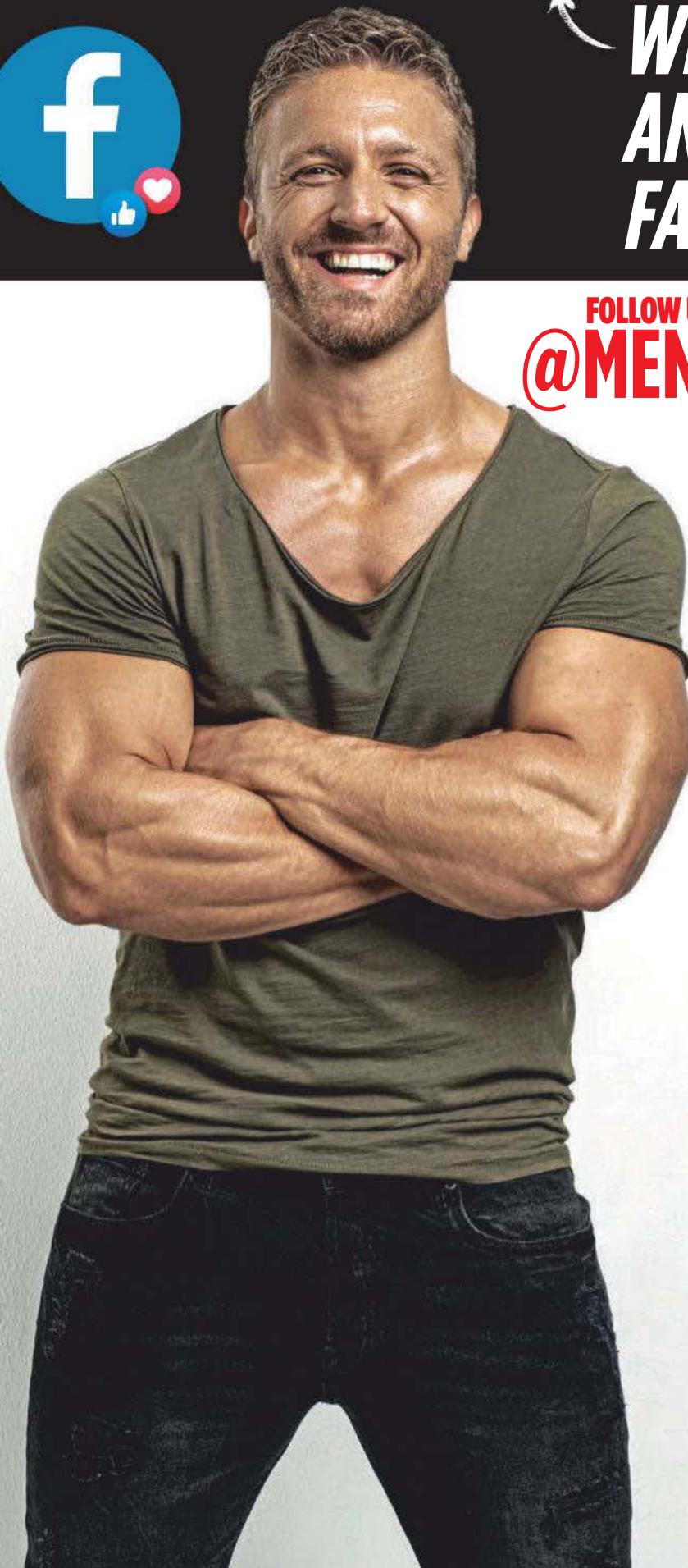
Reece is now watching his clients set their own personal bests

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