



→ Dynamic stretching raises your core temperature and warms up your body.

How Bad Are Your Shape-Up Sins?

You skipped stretching, skimped on water, slammed a sugary smoothie. Are these mini workout “offenses” really a huge deal? The answers may surprise you.

By **AMY SCHLINGER**

→ **SOME FITNESS HABITS ARE OBVIOUSLY TERRIBLE.** (Pigging out on pizza every night? Never exercising? We know the verdict.) But others—such as cutting corners on your cooldown—are much trickier to judge. You may receive mixed messages about whether these suboptimal moves actually obstruct your progress. No worries: We consulted top experts for the complete story on what you can get away with—and what you should rethink, stat (spoiler alert: smoothies!).

1. You didn't stretch—not before, not after

The verdict: It's OK. No need to fret if you have a get-in-get-out gym session once in a while. Just don't neglect stretching multiple times per week, advises Kelvin Gary, a personal trainer and the owner of Body Space Fitness in New York City. Proper dynamic stretching before the workout activates your muscles so you can perform efficiently and reduce your risk of injury, he says. Stretching afterward helps relax your muscles and jump-start the recovery process, he adds. Only have time for one or the other? Prioritize the warm-up: Try jogging butt-kicks to loosen up your quadriceps and slow walking lunges to activate your glutes and hamstrings. Gary recommends doing 8 to 12 reps of each.

2. You don't drink water during your workouts

The verdict: Bad move! You're likely not staying hydrated, especially if your workouts tend to be super sweaty (cycling, running, high-intensity interval training, even swimming). Drinking water helps you maintain your energy and stamina, says Leslie Bonci, RD, founder of the nutrition consulting company Active Eating Advice. “Fluid can help deliver fuel to your muscles, and the way water travels in and out

of the cells of your body has an impact on muscles' contracting and relaxing,” she explains. “Water also dictates the flow of electrolytes and helps keep your body temperature from dropping too low or going too high.” Here's how to hydrate: Take in 20 ounces of fluid one hour before strenuous exercise and up to 20 ounces during routines in which you're working up a sweat, recommends Bonci.

3. You always reward yourself with a post-workout smoothie

The verdict: That's a no-no. If you're regularly buying a blended treat after Pilates or yoga, you're probably overeating. Store-bought smoothies are often sugar and calorie bombs, says Torey Armul, RD, spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. "Most of these drinks can be 400 or 500 calories, and many people aren't burning that in a workout," she says. Limit smoothies to after particularly strenuous workouts that are an hour long or more, says Armul. It's best to whip them up at home, where you have total control over the ingredients. Aim for an equal ratio of veggies to fruit (one to two servings of each), and include a protein (like a tablespoon of nut butter or a scoop of whey powder).

4. You blew off the gym for a week

The verdict: Don't sweat it. There's no reason to beat yourself up, says Rob Sulaver, a certified strength and conditioning specialist and the founder of Bandana Training. You won't suddenly be unable to lift a dumbbell because you skipped a few days. Just don't allow one week to turn into two, then three. "The two-week mark is a milestone in detraining or losing aerobic development," says Sulaver. "And at about four weeks off, you'll start to notice a decrease in strength and muscle mass." Even if you can't get to the gym consistently (carpools, office happy hours—we get it), try to carve out 10 or 15 minutes to breeze through a living room workout or online video. (Go to health.com/hiit for a no-gym, high-intensity routine that does the job in 10 minutes.)

Pro tip: Go for the gulp

→ Take large swigs when you down water. "The bigger the gulp, the faster it gets out of the stomach and to your muscles," says Bonci. "Sipping takes the water longer, so you might feel uncomfortable while it's sitting in your stomach."

5. You grab fast food one night

The verdict: No biggie! If your clean-eating streak just went out the drive-through window, you can relax: "One bad meal isn't going to undo 15 good meals you've had over the past days," says Jennifer McDaniel, a registered dietitian in St. Louis. A perfect diet isn't the goal; some research shows that by deeming certain foods forbidden, you only end up craving, then eating, them more. Plus, a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Psychology* suggests that planning specific cheat days—in scientific terms, hedonic deviations—may make you more likely to stick to your diet. So, go ahead, have that burger—and fries, too. Adds McDaniel, "Be present, eat slowly and enjoy every bite so you can jump right back in the saddle after."

How to Come Back from a Gym Hiatus

Whether an injury, illness or overbooked social life is to blame, having to revert to square one at the gym is a drag. Trainer Rob Sulaver shares tips for starting over safely.

→ ACCEPT WHERE YOU'RE AT

Don't try to pick up where you left off just because you think you should be in better shape (a recipe for injury). "You're starting over, so you have to expect that you'll be weaker and slower," says Sulaver. "Be kind to yourself and to your body and you'll eventually get back to where you were."

→ REVISIT THE BASICS

A good rule of thumb: Start with about 10 percent less than the weight you previously used, and rest after a couple of sets—then see how you feel and adjust accordingly. "If you were using 25-pound weights for four sets at your peak, you might try slightly over 22 pounds—or, if that's unavailable, whatever is the next lightest—for two or three sets the first week back," suggests Sulaver.

→ MAP OUT YOUR PLAN

Do so not only in your head but also on paper (or in your phone). "By scheduling your workouts and knowing exactly what you're going to do when you get to the gym, you'll be more efficient and less likely to blow it off altogether," says Sulaver. The more specific you are—weight, sets, reps, cardio, weekly goals—the better your rebound will go.



A slower comeback is still a comeback!