



Stuck in a Workout Rut?

Learn how to get
past a fitness plateau

by *Liz Pecek Seuffer*

For months, you've been hitting the gym and seeing results. But you're not progressing anymore.

What happened?

It could be a fitness plateau.

Unless you regularly update your exercise program, you'll most likely experience a plateau at some time, according to the American Council on Exercise's Web site.

A fitness plateau is when you've stopped seeing results from your exercise program, according to National Strength and Conditioning Association education programs coordinator Shane Dornier.

"Your body's a lazy machine," Dornier said. "It only does what it needs to do. If you're constantly bench-pressing 135 pounds every week, then it's going to adapt to that."

If you've hit a plateau, you may notice that you fatigue easier, are no longer able to add weight or have become disengaged with exercise, said Brian Schiff, a personal trainer, author and physical therapist who co-owns The Fitness Edge in Columbus and Dublin.

Schiff said a lot of The Fitness Edge's personal training clients, especially women, have encountered plateaus.

Recreational exercisers are creatures of habit, he said.

"A lot of people will find a routine and they tend to do the same thing over and over again," Schiff said. "The body

Get F.I.T.T.

will accommodate pretty quickly to that."

Amber Moffett, of Westerville, said she's experienced several plateaus. Moffett works out five to six days a week, training once a week with Schiff at The Fitness Edge in Dublin. She said she's worked with him for approximately three years.

Most of the time, she said, "You get into a groove and you forget to work a little bit harder."

When experiencing a plateau, Moffett said she's noticed a decrease in her performance, regression in how much weight she could lift and sometimes weight gain.

"If you don't get through that plateau, or if you don't give yourself enough time to get over the hump, it can get so frustrating," Moffett said.

Like Moffett, anybody can experience a fitness plateau. The longer you train, Domer said, the more susceptible you are.

People who just started training and do the same workout all the time might see good results, Domer said, adding that it could take four to six months before they hit a fitness plateau.

"Anyone's going to see improvements right off the bat," Domer said. "But later in your program, the more susceptible you are."

In addition to a repetitive exercise program, factors outside the gym, including a lack of sleep and not getting proper nutrition, can also lead to a fitness plateau, according to Domer. Overtraining can also lead to it.

If you've hit a plateau due to overtraining, Domer said you might want to consider taking a week off.

"That's what athletes do," he said.

Variation is the key to avoiding a fitness plateau, according to Domer.

He suggests varying exercises, intensity, total volume, days you work out and exercise orders.

"There's lots of different ways that you can trick your body into getting better," Domer said. "Your body isn't going to improve anymore unless you give it a challenge."

Schiff recommends that you change your exercise program at least every 12 weeks. People who've worked out for a while may want to change their exercise programs every four to six weeks, he said.

Once you've started doing different exercises, Domer said, you may notice soreness as your body tries to adapt to your new workout.

He estimated that it will take a few weeks to see drastic improvements.

Depending on what your altered exercise program consists of, Domer said you'll feel like you're getting stronger or are able to lift more weight, can ride a bike longer or run faster for longer periods of time, etc.

"Once you start doing that new thing, you'll immediately start seeing new results," Domer said. ■

The following are components of the F.I.T.T. Principle:

Frequency

how frequently you work out

Intensity

how hard you work out

Time

how long you work out

Type

what exercise(s) you do.

To continue challenging your body, you can change one or more of the above components of the F.I.T.T. Principle when your body adjusts to your current exercise program.

For example, you can add a day of exercise (frequency), incorporate some speed walking or jogging into your workout (intensity), lengthen your workout sessions (time) or do a different exercise (type).

Source: "Basic principles of exercise," exercise.about.com

