



Five Common Mistakes Men Make in the Gym

May 2007.

Article by Marek Doyle, www.blueprintfitness.co.uk

Without wishing to generalise, most men and women share one overall aim; to achieve a leaner, more 'desirable' body. However, due to differences in caveman genetics and physical differences in the final product sought, it is only logical that there be differences in the way that men and women use the gym. But this brings with it different mistakes and inefficiencies, the most popular of which are:

1. Working too hard

This is an epidemic amongst younger men. Spawned from a combination of dedication, motivation and impatience, this is powered by the idea that that the harder you work, the quicker you will achieve the results. In some areas, this remains true, although for intense work like weight training you simply have to give your body the rest it requires. Hard work alone is not enough - it must be smart work. This especially applies to those young men who struggle to gain weight. My article on overtraining covers this in more depth.

2. Believing what your read in the health magazines

Dont believe everything you read. A standard cover headline shouts "100 ways to burn fat fast", but in reality this means 100 old ideas to consume less calories. Whilst the magazines can be a good read, they do not have the answers; even if they did, giving it to you would mean you wouldn't need to buy the magazine next month! The columns that introduce powdered custard as a 'surprising superfood' (because it has more calcium than bread, etc) are just nonsense! Perhaps this is why the 8-week before/after features are so ridiculously slanted, whereby the pasty guy standing with poor posture and a side light suddenly becomes tanned, upright and benefits from downlighting in a contrived attempt to bring out more definition!

Next time you read a review for a protein blend that provided 'incredible results' for the staff, turn the page for that brand's double-page ad. These magazines survive purely through the advertising revenue from supplement companies, so they will never publish anything that may upset any of their sponsors. Therefore you will never find a balanced review on any supplements. And whilst the workouts offered can be useful for ideas, the 3-hour routines are simply too long for any athlete.

3. Impatiently turning to extra supplements before dealing with the basics.

Just like tradesman, some performance-enhancing supplements are great. Others are ok, some are horrifically bad. But in any case, these products are best used to tweak your results when you have established a strong base of fitness and a physique to match - putting a turbo on an old 1.1 Fiesta may make it go faster, but if changing the filters was all that was required, what was the point?

Vitamins, minerals and whey protein are the only supplements need until you really, genuinely, truly know you are working at or near the top of your potential. This applies to

fat-burners, workout stimulants, and anabolic agents; if you haven't gained any muscle or lost any fat in the last year, ask yourself why - is your lifestyle and nutrition what it could be?

4. One-dimensional training

Generally, we are all born as fully-functioning, injury-free and flexible individuals. Most gym users, particularly those involved in regular weight training, cannot say the same of themselves. Anyone who has had a deep sports massage or used a foam roller on their IT bands (the outside of the thigh) will almost certainly testify to this.

It doesn't always have to be Chest Day! It is very important, with resistance workouts, to give equal focus to exercises that push and pull, or tightness on one side of the body will occur, causing posture problems. If you are training your abs, train your back! And, even better, spend a session working on real core function and flexibility/posture - in the long run, you'll be glad you did, and not just when you feel like delivering a spinning headkick outside the pub!

5. Ignoring injuries

Yes, it's not gonna kill you - but that doesn't mean you have to train with it. It can be frustrating to have to break your training regime when you are feeling motivated, but the majority of long-term niggles can often be traced back to minor damage that was not given enough time to heal. Pain is your body's alarm system, listen to it!

Marek is a personal trainer, nutritional therapist and allergist operating in Kensington, Chelsea, West London and Basingstoke. He is the director of Blueprint Fitness, www.blueprintfitness.co.uk