



Fighting Fit

Fitness Gym and Martial Arts Academy

How Hard Should You Be Working To See Benefits In The Gym?

If you find yourself frequently attending the gym, spending your scheduled 40 minutes on the machines, week after week, yet still find yourself experiencing no results, your training intensity might be at fault. Training intensity refers to how hard you train i.e. how much effort you put into your session. The harder you work, the more intense your session. In this environment, intensity can also be defined as the amount of stress you place on your body during your workouts. When working out at the gym for goals such as improved fitness and fat loss, your intensity level must fulfil two key criteria: It must be challenging, yet sustainable.

1. Challenging

The intensity that you choose to exercise at must be challenging if any benefits are to be observed. The body adapts when stress is placed upon it, but only if that stress is severe enough to instigate a change. If your body is already able to handle the stress you place upon it when exercising, it will have no reason to adapt or change. Only when your body is stressed beyond its current ability to handle a certain amount of stress will it adapt and alter to handle the newly imposed stress level.

2. Sustainable

The exercise intensity must be sustainable so that the exercise can be maintained over a period of time, both in the short term (i.e. your gym session) and the long term (i.e. months / years). If you work so hard that you collapse after 5 minutes on the treadmill clutching your chest and gasping for air, chances are you'll not have achieved too much in the way of benefits... ;) In the same vein, working at an intensity that you are able to maintain over the short term but will eventually burn you out after only a couple of weeks, will also not achieve much. Therefore, the intensity at which you exercise must be sustainable so that you can continue to exercise regularly, over an extended period of time.

When we combine these two factors then, it can be concluded that we need to exercise at an intensity level that is challenging but sustainable. So how do we determine an intensity level that fulfils both criteria?

Methods of determining exercise intensity

1. One of the easiest ways to determine if we're working hard enough to observe benefits from exercise is to use certain physical signs that accompany intense, sustainable exercise. Physically, you should experience a light sweat within 5 to 10 minutes, and experience an



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increase in breathing rate to a point where you are slightly out of breath, yet still able to talk and hold a conversation. If you tick all of these boxes, then you can be pretty sure that you are stressing your body enough to stimulate a positive adaptation, whilst still being able to maintain it over an extended period of time.

2. Another method is to use what's known as the Rate of Perceived Exertion (RPE) scale. This scale ranges from **0** to **10**: **0** represents a state of complete rest i.e. lying in bed, sleeping **10** represents maximal, very, very, very hard work.

Between these two extremes lies varying degrees of effort, increasing from 1 through to 9. When training for fat loss and general fitness benefits, aim to workout at an RPE between 6 and 8 out of 10. To determine where you fit on the scale, merely ask yourself "how hard am I working at the moment out of 10?" If you answer "6", "7" or "8" then you know you're working at a sufficient intensity. The thing about the RPE scale is that it is self-regulating, meaning that it naturally adjusts as your fitness improves. The pace that was before an "8" will soon become a "5" or "6" as your fitness improves, forcing you to push yourself harder in order to meet your RPE target. The one drawback that exists however is that it requires your complete, honest judgement if it is to work.

3. A third method, and by far the most accurate, is to use your heart rate (HR) to determine how hard you're working. To obtain benefits, it is necessary to work in a zone between 65% and 85% of your maximal heart rate (MHR). When you know these figures, you can use either the built in monitors on the cardio equipment or special chest straps to read your HR and tell you how fast your heart is beating. Your goal is then to keep your HR within the 65% to 85% MHR training zone. (Note: If you would like to know your max. HR and the corresponding percentages to determine your training zone, just ask any member of the Fighting Fit team to work it out for you. With a bit of luck they'll get it right ;) and you will then be able to use the HR monitors on the cardio equipment to ensure you're working hard enough).

To conclude, ensure you work at the appropriate intensity to achieve optimum results from your time spent in the gym. Work at a level that is challenging yet sustainable, work up a sweat, but continue to gab to your gym buddy about the latest Eastenders story line. Sweat benefits are called sweat benefits for a reason - you have to sweat to get them, but that doesn't necessarily mean you have to miss out on the latest gossip too!