

STAMP IT OUT!

Your everyday habits could be wrecking your workouts. Never fear, we've found simple solutions to six little slip-ups

Good news: getting the most out of your workout is easier than you think. It doesn't involve pushing yourself to the point of puking or lifting weights so heavy you end up in a heap on the floor. In fact, it could be as simple as tweaking a few things you do *outside* of the gym. Sort these quibbles and you'll be on the road to results in no time.

THE HABIT: WEARING HEELS EVERY DAY

THE PROBLEM: Those killer stilettos may make your legs look great, but they are definitely no gym buddy. 'If you lift the heel, as you do when wearing high shoes, you reduce the distance between the heel and the back of the knee, shortening the calf muscles and causing tightness,' explains physiotherapist Tim Allardyce (mphfitness.com). 'This affects the power generated from the leg and can affect running, placing unnecessary strain on your ankle, foot and knee. It also impacts the range of mobility in your ankle, so when performing a move such as a squat, it can encourage you to use incorrect form, like lifting your heels, as the calf muscles are not long enough.'

THE FIX: 'Stretch! The simplest way is to stand with your feet on the edge of a step and drop your heels.'

THE HABIT: STAYING SEATED

THE PROBLEM: 'When you're sitting, your hips are effectively held in flexion, and remaining like this for too long will cause the hip flexors to shorten,' explains Tim. 'This not only puts strain on your lower back, but can also cause muscle weakness and imbalances. Your hamstrings become weak and

your glutes become underactive as the hip flexors become over-dominant, so you may not be hitting the right muscles in many of your lower-body exercises.'

THE FIX: 'Stretching is key, and one of the best is a kneeling lunge. Kneel on the floor with one leg in front and lean your body forward.'

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THE HABIT: SLOUCHING OVER YOUR COMPUTER

THE PROBLEM: 'Working an office job usually means sitting all day, which tends to lead to bad posture,' says Tim. 'And most of us use computer screens that are too low, so your neck drops forwards and you slouch. Over time, the fatigue in your neck and upper back causes your chest to tighten. During exercise this puts strain on your lower back, neck and shoulders, but it can make it harder to breathe deeply, too.'

THE FIX: **Don't worry, you don't have to quit your job! Just make some small changes. 'Get a workplace assessment, use a chair with good lumbar support, and take regular desk breaks,' says Tim. 'You can also stretch your chest muscles by grabbing a door frame, keeping your elbow at 90 degrees and leaning forward.'**

THE HABIT: OVERDOING THE TYPING

THE PROBLEM: 'Your wrists are made of lots of small bones, which offer dexterity, but prolonged typing can cause repetitive strain in the wrist and forearm,' Tim says. 'This leads to stiffness and can reduce your range of movement, create weakness and make weight-bearing exercises painful, as well as making it harder to grip.'

THE FIX: **'If you have to sit at a desk and type all day long, try not to go home and use a laptop,' Tim tips. 'You could also try contrast bathing: simply place your hands in hot water for two minutes, cold water for two minutes and hot water again for two more minutes. This helps to reduce any inflammation and pain.'**

THE HABIT: CUTTING CORNERS

THE PROBLEM: Squeezing workouts into a busy schedule is an art form, but if your time-saving techniques involve skipping a warm-up, you're only shortchanging your session. 'Warming up helps your circulatory system pump oxygen to the working muscles before you exercise,' explains personal trainer Dave Fletcher (theodysseyway.co.uk). 'Not only will skipping the warm-up increase your risk of injury, as cold muscles don't absorb shock as well as warm ones, it will also hold back your performance. Improving the nerve-to-muscle pathways with a warm-up really boosts strength, fitness and power.'

THE FIX: **Look for creative ways to get warm. 'Rather than taking 10 minutes out at the start of a workout to warm up, make the warm-up part of the workout by using dynamic exercises that are functional and mimic the activities of the session to come,' says Dave. 'That way, some of your work will already be done.'**

THE HABIT: KEEPING YOUR SHOES ON

THE PROBLEM: If you never give your feet a chance to feel the earth without a rubber sole in between, you could literally be walking towards injury. 'Wearing shoes effectively stabilises your feet, making the small muscles redundant and weak,' explains Tim. 'This weakness can cause overpronation when walking or running, which can lead to problems like runners' knee, hip pain and Achilles tendinopathy.'

THE FIX: **Walk around barefoot whenever you can. 'It can help to develop muscle strength in the arches of the foot,' says Tim. 'You can also try balance exercises. It's as easy as standing on one leg with your eyes shut, trying to stay balanced for a minute.'**

3 WAYS TO WAKE UP YOUR BUTT

Sitting down can lead to a severe case of lazy ass! Give your glutes a little kick up the, er, behind, with these moves



SINGLE-LEG BRIDGE

Technique

- Lie on the floor with your feet close to your bottom.
- Point one leg to the ceiling then push your hips up as high as you can and squeeze your bottom.
- Return to the start and repeat the exercise, then change legs.

ALL-FOURS KICKBACK

Technique

- Start on your hands and knees, on a mat, with a dumbbell wedged behind your left knee.
- Raise your left leg up behind you.
- Return to the start position and repeat, then change legs.



KETTLEBELL SWING

Technique

- Hold a kettlebell in both hands. Bend at your hips and knees, allowing the kettlebell to drop between your legs.
- Quickly straighten up, thrusting your hips forward and squeezing your bottom to swing the kettlebell up and out to eye level.
- Let it swing back down and go straight into another rep.

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