

ARE YOU HAVING FUN YET?

One of the key predictors of whether you'll work out again isn't how many calories you burned. It's how much fun you had.

Choosing a workout that you don't dread sounds obvious, but not everyone gives herself permission to do it, as you know if you've ever slogged through a long run when you would rather be doing Zumba.

"There are now several studies showing that the amount of pleasure or displeasure someone reports during a bout of physical activity can predict the amount of activity performed three, six, or even 12 months later," says **Panteleimon Ekkekakis**, Ph.D., an associate professor in the department of kinesiology at Iowa State University, in Ames, who has studied what makes people stick to working out. What can make a workout a little more fun? Try these tricks.

Get out of the gym. If nothing at the gym excites you, consider doing something challenging but within reach, like a hike, or something a little offbeat, like tap dancing or canoeing.

No matter what you choose, focus on the pleasant feeling you have during exercise, which is what really brings you back for more, says **Ekkekakis**.

Choose your own intensity. When researchers in **Ekkekakis's** lab asked people to change their workout intensity every five minutes, they gradually made their workouts harder, until they reached a comfortable intensity, and reported feeling better during and after the activity. But when the researchers secretly pushed them to go 10 percent faster, they felt progressively worse. So putting yourself—rather than an expensive trainer—in control is key.

Let music help. Tunes can help you work out a little longer and make exercise feel easier when you're at a comfortably challenging pace. But no playlist will turn you into an Olympic hopeful: Research has shown that when you push to 80 to 90 percent of your maximum intensity, music doesn't have the same effect.

psychologists, these goals should be SMART—specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely—and they should build on one another. For example, if you've fallen into a sedentary lifestyle, a SMART goal would be to go for a 10-minute walk four days a week to start creating a routine. When you hit that goal, up the ante to 15-minute walks. "The right goals let you taste success, which motivates you to keep going," says Cleere. On days that you're not sure you can stick to your goal, take at least one step. For instance, put on your clothes and go to the gym; you don't even have to work out. When you get there, chances are that you'll do something, if not a whole routine. According to experts, even elite athletes say that the workouts they didn't want to do were the best ones that they ever did, because they proved that a person can overcome her own inertia.

THE OBSTACLE I'M NOT SEEING RESULTS.

HOW TO OVERCOME IT: Just because you're not getting visibly firmer or smaller doesn't mean that changes aren't happening. Instead of relying on a scale or the fit of your jeans, gauge your progress in a different way.

PLAN OF ATTACK: Try these three alternative ways to measure results.

Do a strength and cardio assessment every six weeks. Take a strength move that you've been working on, like push-ups, and see how many you can do in a minute, or record how fast you can walk or run a mile. The next time that you check in, you'll be amazed at your leaps-and-bounds improvement. "After six weeks of regular strength training, you can expect to be at least 5 to 10 percent stronger," says McCall, "in some cases up to 15 percent stronger. And if you are consistent with cardio, you can generally see about a 5 percent improvement weekly, meaning you can go a little harder or farther than you could the week before."

Keep a record of your workouts. A visual representation of your commitment can strengthen your resolve on days when you're feeling wishy-washy, whether you chronicle every detail (*ran four miles in 40 minutes; cranked intensity when P!nk raised a glass to me*) or just draw a star on your planner on days when you get it done. "Seeing all those stars is pretty fulfilling," says Cleere. And if you fall off for a spell, don't assume that you're doomed, she says: "Figure out what went wrong. Were you overscheduled? Not feeling well? Not interested in the workout? Then adjust accordingly." Cleere had one client who began by putting X's on a calendar to mark workouts, and she loved seeing more X's each week. After a few months, the client realized that including notes about sleep, food, and her emotions helped her see how those things affected the workouts. "She developed an awareness of what got in the way and what strengthened her motivation," says Cleere. "She finally felt that she was in control and was able to see the connection between her workouts, lifestyle, and energy levels."

List the changes. At the beginning of each week, write down a few ways that last week's workouts made you feel better. Maybe you're sleeping more soundly, you have more patience, or you're more productive at work. Maybe you're just feeling more positive overall. "Writing the benefits down reinforces how important they are," says Dieffenbach. And on days when you're wavering about working out, that long list of great feelings can help you overcome any internal resistance, get out there, and do it. ■