

SO you've been sticking faithfully to your exercise routine for months now. In the beginning, the results were there for all to see. You felt trimmer, healthier, and your motivation levels were zooming. But a couple of months down the line, you notice that your weight loss is not so evident, the centimetres don't seem to melt away as they did earlier. You just aren't getting the same results anymore.

Why? Maybe because you stuck to the same routine for too long, and your body was beginning to get immune to it. Perhaps the answer lies in cross training and it's time to play around with your exercise routine.

Cross training enables you to exercise smarter, not harder. The

aerobics, strength training, racquet games, yoga, swimming, cross country running, and so on. This rotation could be over different days or during one session.

How does this help? Let me explain. Over a period of time, the body tends to adapt to an activity by becoming more energy efficient. Now this is fine if you're an athlete and your goal is to run faster, for example. But if you're exercising for fat control, increased efficiency means that you won't lose as much fat from exercise. Unfortunately (for weight-watchers), the more you do one activity, the more efficient you get. In fact, by performing just one activity all the time, you can decrease your caloric output by almost 25 per cent! This is due to increased muscle efficiency, in

Psychological advantages

Nothing kills an exercise routine as fast as monotony.

Different kinds of activities will not only decrease your boredom but will also add variety, variation and punch to your workouts.

Cross training also helps increase your self confidence by proving to yourself that you're capable of taking on a variety of physical activities successfully.

The basics

It's important to keep the following in mind when planning your programme:

*** Alternate high-impact with low-impact activities**

If you're doing high-impact aerobics or running one day, then try doing low-impact aerobics or

CROSS IT OUT

Not getting the same results from your fitness programme anymore? Perhaps you need to change your routine, include some cross training, says NAWAZ MODI

trick is not necessarily to spend three hours each day working out, but to get the same results by better programme designing in a shorter time frame. This is where cross training comes in, allowing you to get better results per unit of time.

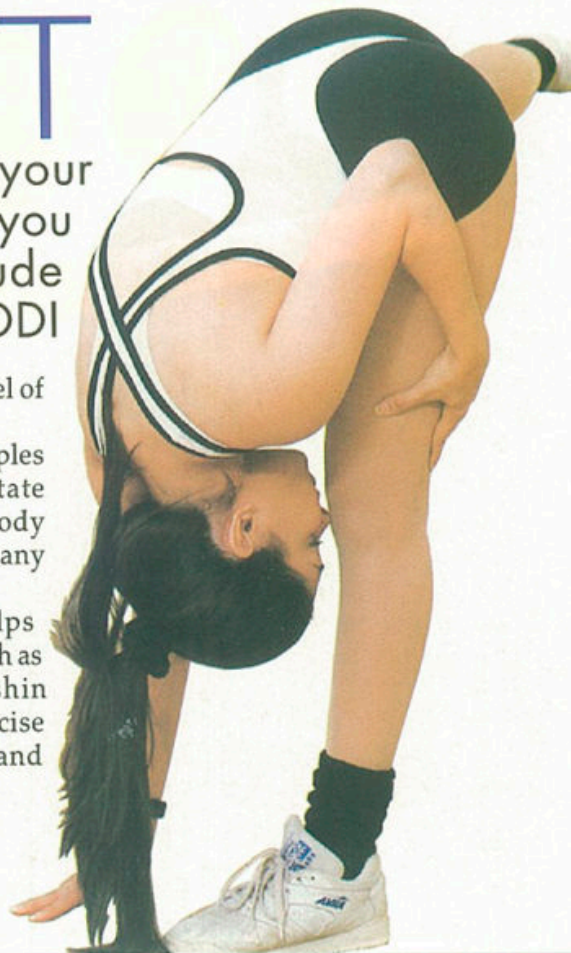
Turn it around

Cross training involves the rotation of several different fitness activities such as

addition to an increased level of coordination in the activity.

So one of the basic principles of cross training is to rotate activities enough so the body does not get overly used to any one activity.

Cross training also helps alleviate overuse injuries such as achilles tendinitis and shin splints by dispersing exercise stress to different joints and muscle groups.



stair-climbing the next. This allows the joints and muscles to recover for the next intense session. If you're over 40, try changing the ratio from 1:1 to 1:2. It's important for older participants to reduce the impact in their physical activities.

*** Alternate energy-system activities**

For instance, alternate aerobics and step classes with strength training. Consistent energy-based activities (cardiovascular activities, sprint-based workouts) will not give muscles, tendons and ligaments the support they need to make exercise injury-free. Strength training is imperative, not only to increase your ability in sports, but to help maintain lean body mass which helps to maintain weight loss. Of course, strength training also greatly enhances one's visual appeal.

*** Overload!**

Overloading is the principle of

placing sufficient demand on the body to build or improve stamina. Once the body reaches a plateau, one must 'overload' to further improve, and to avoid stagnating. So the intensity or difficulty of an exercise should be changed at every third or fourth workout in the same class or with the same exercise machine. Take a different class if you like aerobics; organised classes usually indicate various intensity levels. Challenge your body to make different adaptations to the same exercise.

Other ways of overloading can be to increase the frequency of exercise and/or the length of each session.

*** Start slowly**

When switching to a new activity, work out at a lower intensity than you normally do. For instance, if you normally swim but decide it's time to take on an aerobics class, don't start off on 'Killerobics'. Take on

something a little gentler.

Engaging in this new activity for a shorter period than usual is also a good idea. This allows your body and its systems time to adjust to it, while reducing the potential for injury.

Starting out too vigorously could have you ending up with muscle soreness, aching joints, injuries and a massive and unwarranted overload on your cardiovascular system.

*** Every three months, take a break by performing completely different activities**

If your usual routine is to work out thrice a week, try swimming, a racquet game, or cycling for a week to 10 days. You will come back to your favorite activities with renewed vigour and zeal. Also, you'll avoid physical staleness and get more out of your exercise regimen, while substantially reducing your risk of injury. After all, variety is the spice of life!