

NEW YEAR'S FITNESS GOALS:
24 PIECES OF ADVICE THAT WORK



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Pieces of Advice That Work**

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Would you look at that?

It's the new year which means that a lot of people will be making their New Year's resolutions and fitness goals in the next couple of weeks.

And that's not necessarily a bad thing.

What's bad is that pretty much everyone will give up by the end of January and revert to their old behaviors.

This got me thinking: *"I was once there myself. Hopelessly making New Year's resolutions and enthusiastically embarking on yet another weight loss journey... for about three weeks. Why not put together some of the lessons I've learned along the way and share them?"*

And thus, this article was born.

In no particular order, here are the 24 best tips that will help you make lasting changes in your habits and achieve your fitness goals.

1. Fitness Goals Killer: The Survivorship Bias

My first encounter with the survivorship bias occurred back during my teenage years. Like most 17-year-olds, I too wanted 'ripped abs' and 'toned arms.' I looked up to fitness models, actors, and athletes with the physique I aspired to have.

I made countless Google searches along the lines of:

"Brad Pitt workout plan." and "What's Cristiano Ronaldo's diet like?"

I quickly found out that there was no shortage of survivorship biases in the online media. Of course, I didn't realize that at the time. I diligently followed whatever diet plan or training program I could get my hands on. And I would stick with it for a good two or three weeks before giving up.

Survivorship bias refers to our tendency to only focus on the success stories, or the winners in a particular area. And in the case of fitness, with a specific diet or training plan. We try to emulate them and learn from them while completely ignoring the countless people who didn't succeed.

The internet is littered with these videos and news articles everywhere:

"The LeBron James off-season training."

"The big booty workout you must follow for a luscious behind."

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“Follow the Usain Bolt training program to sprint like an Olympic gold medalist.”

... Sure I will.

Or, one of my favorite ones:

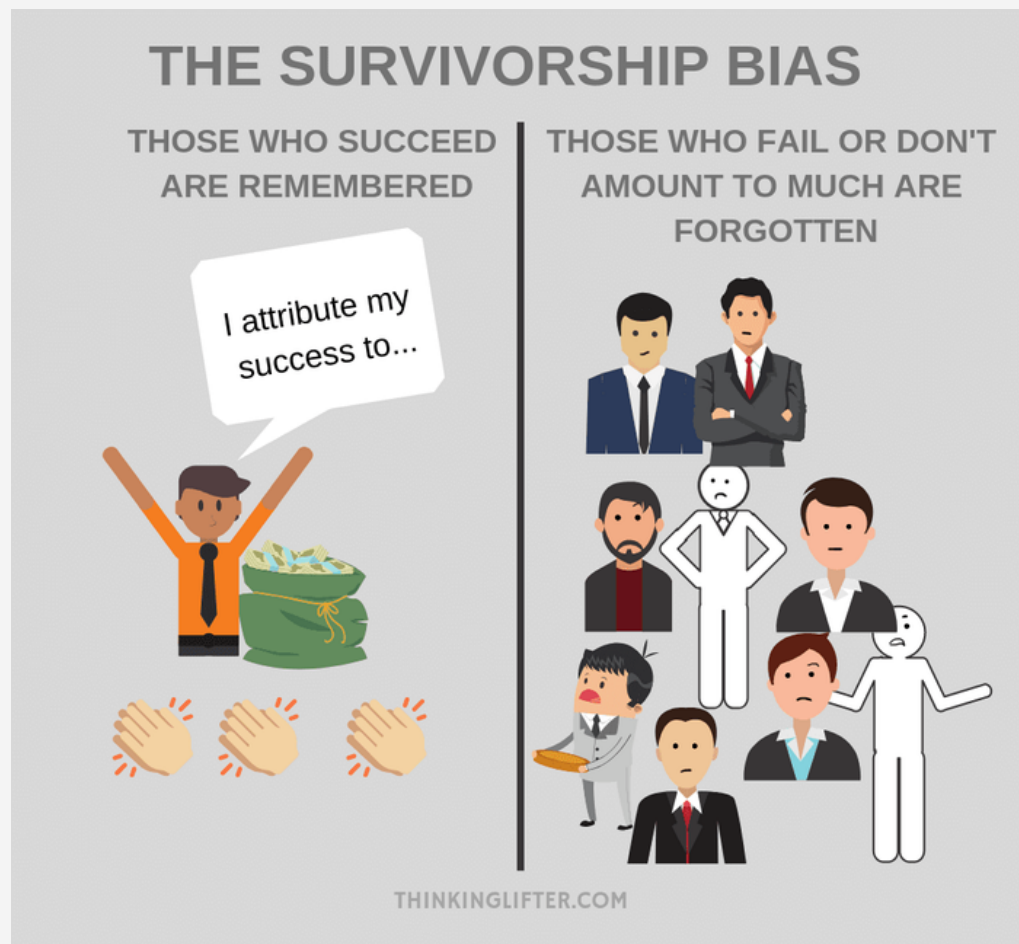
“Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, and Richard Branson all dropped out of school and look at them now. They’re all billionaires and some of the best-known people on earth. This goes to prove you that you don’t need formal education to be successful. You need to stop wasting your time in the classroom and take action.”

Sure, buddy. You could very well become a billionaire without much formal education. But do you think that these people succeeded because they dropped out of school, or in spite of it?

For every Gates, Zuckerberg or Branson, there are thousands of people who dropped out and failed miserably. For every LeBron James, there are thousands of teens and twenty-somethings who’ll never play in the NBA.

The winners are remembered while the losers are forgotten. Therefore, we can’t know for sure if something works just because a successful person attributes their achievements to it.

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2. Screw Genetics

Genetic potential is a sore spot for many people out there so I tend to steer clear from the subject as much as I can. However, I feel like this needs to be said because too many people blame their lack of results on genetics.

Yes, **we all come in different shapes and sizes**. Some people are more genetically gifted than others and there's nothing you can do about that.

- Some men are 6'10," and some are 5'3".
- Some guys can walk around pretty lean with clearly defined abs and have never had to diet a day in their lives. Some struggle to get below 12% body fat.
- Some subjects in studies gain a ton of strength and muscle while others, on the same protocol, gain very little or nothing at all.

So, what can we do about it? Well, there are two main options:

We can bitch and moan about it, or we can bust our asses and see what our genetic potential really is.

Are you going to become the next greatest bodybuilder? Maybe not, but who cares? Are you going to look like your favorite fitness model or actor? Who knows. You never truly know where your limits lie until you put in the years, sweat, and blood into it. The only real failure is never to try.

You might discover that you're much more genetically blessed than you previously thought. But even if you don't, you'll still look better; you'll be stronger, healthier, and more confident. That alone is reason enough.

3. You Absolutely Can (and Most Likely Should) Get Stronger While Losing Weight

Prevailing wisdom claims that fat loss comes with strength loss. The idea behind this notion comes mainly from the understanding that as we diet down and get leaner, we also lose some muscle mass.

And while I tend to agree about the muscle loss to some degree, I don't believe that it is as significant for most people who diet slowly and don't drop below 10-12% body fat. And that's for experienced lifters with decent muscular development. De-trained and new lifters can expect to **gain muscle while losing fat (one, two, three, four)**.

But muscle mass aside, other factors also contribute to strength gains such as neuromuscular adaptations. Most people don't realize just how important neuromuscular efficiency is for strength.

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To demonstrate how significant it is, allow me to show you three examples of it:

- Naim Süleymanoğlu clean and jerked 190 kilos (~419 pounds) and snatched 152.5 kilos (~336 pounds) at a body weight of just 62 kilos (~136 pounds) **in the 1988 Olympics**.
- **Lei Liu bench presses 226 kilos** (~498 pounds) at a body weight of 67.5 kilos (~149 pounds). Oh, and without leg drive and a minor arch in his back.
- And most recently, **Tao Wenli front squatted 197 kilos** (~435 pounds) at a body weight of 55 kilos (~121 pounds) with impeccable technique.

Mind = Blown.

I don't know about you, but I'm pretty sure now that I haven't reached more than 0.000003% of my neuromuscular capacity.

Neural capacity is what allows a single person to lift a car off a trapped child when the need arises. Last time I checked, none of us can do that on a whim. Therefore our biggest roadblock isn't the lack of muscular development, but the lack of neuromuscular efficiency.

To improve our neuromuscular efficiency, the best thing we can do is practice. Getting stronger with particular lifts, like many things, is a skill that needs to be practiced.

- Lift heavy weight (75-80%+ of your 1RM) in the lower rep ranges of 1-4 with proper form. Specificity is critical.
- Practice the lifts you want to improve two to four times per week. Practicing more often leads to quicker adaptations.
- Don't train to failure, especially if you're losing fat. Always leave some repetitions in the tank.

When eating in a caloric deficit, recovery will be impaired so it's important to control your volume and allocate most of it to practice the main exercises you want to improve.

More deads, squats, bench, chin-ups, and overhead presses. Fewer bicep curls, tricep extensions, and calf raises.

4. Shape Your Environment

Our environment is a mighty force that drives our behaviors and habits much more than we think. When most people fail to make a lasting change, they often pin the blame to a lack of willpower or discipline.

They start eating better but are unable to stick with it for longer than three weeks. Same goes for exercising, reading, stretching, meditating, or any other positive behavior you can think of. They quickly reason that it's the lack of willpower that's tripping them up.

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And while I'm all for willpower, how we shape our environment often dictates how we act and what habits we adopt.

If you are new to fitness or want to get more serious and start making better progress, you need to take a look at your environment and ask yourself, "Is my current environment a positive influence on my fitness goals or not?"

For example, you might have read about the importance of getting your 8 hours of sleep every night. But does your environment support that? Do you keep the TV out of your bedroom? Is your mattress nice and soft? How about the pillow? Is your room dark, quiet, and cool?

You see, how we shape the environment of our bedrooms can have a significant effect on our sleep quality and quantity.

How about your work productivity? If you work from a computer with internet access, have you installed a software that blocks certain websites from distracting you?

How about your nutrition? If you want to lose some weight and become healthier, are you supporting the goal with the environment? Is your kitchen filled with whole, nutritious foods? Or are there sweets, sodas, and other trigger foods everywhere, just waiting for you to notice them?

With a bit of thought, you can design an environment that seemingly automates good behaviors while making bad ones more difficult to do.

For example, I've taken the TV out of my bedroom and instead keep a book on my nightstand. This makes the act of watching TV before bed much more difficult and the act of reading for half an hour much easier.

I've also placed a yoga mat on the floor which I use for meditation and stretching every morning. Again, environment.

To ensure I eat mostly whole foods, I keep my kitchen filled with fruits, veggies, grains, meats, dairy, and nuts. I rarely have any junk food around. This makes the act of eating healthier much easier. If I were to leave a bag of cookies on the kitchen table, I would be much more likely to snack on them instead of an apple or a kiwi.

5. Keep the Goldilocks Rule in Mind

One of the biggest reasons why habits fail is because we challenge ourselves too much before we are ready. As humans, we all love a good challenge, but only if it falls within a manageable zone of difficulty.

In the case of lifting, someone new to the gym would thrive on just the right amount of difficulty. Not more and not less.

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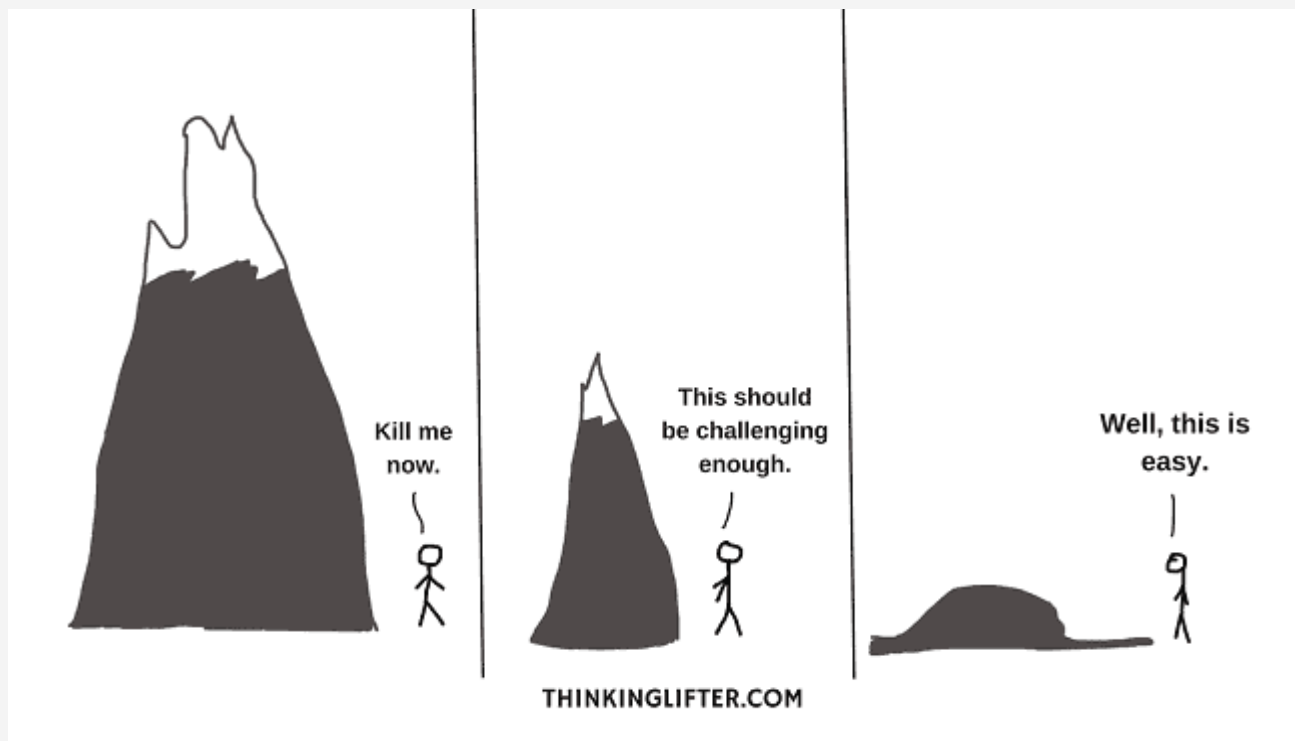


If I took up a new client and tried to teach them a dozen complex exercises in our first session together, they would most likely call me crazy and never come back to me. On the other hand, if I only showed them how to do a dumbbell bicep curl for 50 minutes straight, they would be yawning out of boredom after ten minutes or so.

But, if I took the person in and showed them just a few exercises, spending the right amount of time on each, they would feel appropriately challenged and thus way more invested and motivated.

The Goldilocks rule states that we humans enjoy working on tasks that are just challenging enough for our current abilities. Tasks that are too easy quickly bore us. Conversely, tasks that are too difficult quickly overwhelm us.

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I'm sure you have experienced this phenomenon in your own life:

Perhaps you tried something that was too difficult or too easy for you and you quickly gave up. Or maybe you tried to make radical changes in your behaviors or habits too quickly and soon found yourself burned out.

If you want to make lifting a habit, you must keep the Goldilocks rule in mind. Each session should be challenging enough, but not too much for your current capacity. Stimulate, don't annihilate.

Similarly, if you currently hit the gym zero times per week, nothing good will come out of dedicating yourself to training six days per week. Start with just enough to challenge yourself and slowly build upon that as the months and years pass.

The long-distance runner who bangs out 5 miles every day probably started with 1/10th of that. The writer who consistently puts thousands of words on paper probably started with a hundred per day. The jacked bodybuilder who lifts six days per week was probably a skinny twig once and only hit the gym two to three times a week.

Strive to challenge yourself and grow, but do so in a smart way and always keep the Goldilocks rule in mind.

6. If Nothing Changes, Nothing is Going to Change

One of the biggest hurdles **gym beginners** need to overcome is dealing with the soreness that follows. If you've taken some time off the gym and then started training again, you know how true this is. It's not so much the workout that challenges you, but the days that follow.

After my first ever leg workout, I had a hard time using my legs for an entire week. I don't remember the workout itself, just the agony that followed.

Sure enough, I did the workout in the following week and was less sore afterward. With each week that passed, soreness lessened. Fast-forward a few years and I am currently squatting five to six times per week (Big thanks to Greg Nuckols for putting together the **Bulgarian Manual**). My legs haven't been sore in months.

This is the repeated bout effect. The more consistently you do something, the **less of an impact it has on you**. In other words, your body responds to the same stimulus less with each passing bout.

When someone new to the gym comes to me with the question of, "How to deal with soreness?", I usually respond by telling them to stay consistent with their training and the soreness will go away soon enough.

The repeated bout effect is also the reason why many good coaches out there recommend **introductory weeks** for new training cycles. That way, the body has time to gradually adapt to the training before the cycle begins, so the lifter doesn't feel overwhelmed by training stress and soreness.

But the repeated bout effect doesn't apply to soreness alone. This is where the principle of progressive overload comes to play:

For a muscle to grow, strength to improve, performance to increase, or for any similar improvement to occur, the human body must be forced to adapt to a tension that is above and beyond what it has experienced before.

In other words, you might **gain some muscle and strength** if you squat 135 pounds of 5x5. But eventually, you'll need to increase the load on the bar, the sets, or the repetitions to keep pushing your body, forcing it to adapt. Doing the same (135x5x5) will have less of an effect with each passing workout until it no longer does anything for you.

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This is where a lot of gym bros trip up. They never focus on progressing, yet always wonder why they're not gaining any new muscle.

Me: *"So, what do your numbers look like these days?"*

Gym bro: *"Well, I can bench 225 for a single, my squat is 335, and I deadlift 385."*

Me: *"Okay then. How did these numbers look a year ago?"*

Gym bro: *"Pretty much the same, lol. But my problem is that I can't gain muscle."*

In other words, you need to stay conscious of your progress (or lack thereof). What got you here won't push you forward. If nothing changes, nothing is going to change.

This is not to say that you need to progress from week to week. Nor does it say that you need to feel soreness in the muscles to tell that you've had a good workout. It just means that you can't do the same thing forever and expect to keep growing.

7. Recovery is Non-Negotiable

In the previous tip, I mentioned that I currently squat five to six days per week. I also bench that often. I deadlift once a week and work on my pull-ups three times per week. There's also a bit of accessory work for my "beach muscles" here and there.

To someone new to the gym, that would sound crazy. But I didn't get to that point in two days.

When I first started applying the Bulgarian Manual, I would squat and bench three times per week. Before that, I was doing these lifts twice per week. As the weeks passed, I slowly raised the frequency to four, five, and eventually six times.

I knew that had I jumped to that frequency immediately, I would have probably injured myself and would have been sore constantly. But because I eased into it, I gave my body enough time to acclimate.

I also place a lot of priority on my recovery - sleep, food, relaxation, and mobility work. I would not be able to sustain this pace if I didn't.

I make sure to eat plenty of food, I get my sleep in every night, I **warm-up well before lifting**, and I do mobility work every morning as I get up. All of these things, when put together, allow me to recover well and hit the gym consistently.

If I were to start sleeping less, start eating less, stop warming-up well, or stop doing my mobility work, I would instantly notice a drop in my rate of recovery. And as the time passes, my performance would slowly drop, and so would my gains.

So, what's the practical application here?

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First off, ease into new training programs. If you're currently used to training three times per week, don't just jump into a six-day plan. Work up to it.

Secondly, put a priority on recovery and don't ignore any of its components, no matter how useless you might think they are.

Recovery is non-negotiable. You can either make time for it now and progress well or make time for injury and time off later. The choice is yours.

8. Track Your Training Progress and Food Intake

Objectively speaking, there are a lot of aspects of our lives that we can't track well. Am I mentally tougher today than I was a month ago? Am I a better friend? Am I doing better work? But when it comes to the gym, we most certainly can track the facts.

It baffles me how many people out there put in hundreds of hours at the gym, but never take the five minutes needed to log their workouts.

The old saying, "You can't improve what you don't measure." holds a lot of truth. Before I started tracking my workouts and food intake, I never knew how well (or bad) I was doing. Was I stronger than before? Had I gained muscle? Who the hell knows, I didn't know where I was a week, month, or year before that.

Once I started logging my workouts, I could no longer hide from myself. Am I stronger than I was last month? Yes, I've put 10 pounds on my bench, 20 pounds on my squat, and 30 pounds on my deadlift.

Have I gained muscle mass? Apparently yes. My arms, chest, shoulders, and thighs are bigger, yet I weigh 4 pounds less.

Conversely, there have been times where looking back at old measurements and workouts didn't reveal any significant improvement. This immediately gave me a kick in the butt to make a change, start putting in more effort, and force progress.

But had I stayed oblivious, I would have plateaued for a long time.

Tracking your progress keeps you honest. You can't hide from yourself or claim that you've achieved something when black on white says you haven't. But that's a good thing because it makes you re-evaluate everything and it helps you understand yourself better.

Further readings:

⇒ [Screw the 'Perfect Diet' \(This is How You Get Sustained Results\)](#)

⇒ [Hacking the Workout Journal: How to Track Your Workouts in the Simplest, Most Effective Way Possible](#)

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9. Leverage the Power of Positive Thinking

A while back, I published a guide on [fixing the skinny fat look](#). The majority of comments and emails I received were positive and hopeful. There were, however, those emails from people who were determined that the information I shared wouldn't work for them.

They didn't doubt the validity of the information so much as they questioned their ability to use it to their advantage. Excuses such as:

"I'm too busy.", "I have the worst genetics." and "My body can't tolerate dieting. I'm just too hungry all the time." were the main objections.

I did my best to help these people out and assure them that their excuses are just that, excuses. Some began to agree with me, some never wrote back, and some were determined that they are just screwed, no matter what. The common trend among these replies was self-doubt.

Even though the replies were different, they all came from the same place - *"I don't believe in myself."*

We all write narratives in our minds about who we feel we are, what we think we are capable of, and why we are where we are in life. But it's important what these narratives are. If we don't believe in ourselves and our abilities, we'll be limited no matter our circumstances, genetic potential, and opportunities.

What I've come to understand over the years is that the biggest difference between those who succeed and those who fail (be it with fitness, finances, health, or something else) doesn't have that much to do with luck, intelligence, opportunities, or resources. It has to do with the beliefs they hold and how they approach challenges.

Successful people believe in themselves and are determined to find solutions to each obstacle. Unsuccessful people find an obstacle for every solution and would rather play the victim in life.

You have to be willing to believe in your abilities and to trust that you can make a lasting change with enough hard work and consistency.

Sure, all of us experience moments of self-doubt and uncertainty. And all of us fail from time to time. But we have to trust that if we keep pushing forward, we'll make it work and reach our goals.

When I first started going to the gym, I knew nothing about proper training, [nutrition](#), or fat loss. But I trusted that I'd figure it out.

When I took up my first client at the local gym, I didn't know much about coaching. But I trusted that I'd find a way to make it work.

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When I started this blog, I had no idea how the whole thing worked. But, again, I trusted that I'd figure it out.

I believed in myself and my ability to figure it out. It has worked for me time and time again and has contributed significantly to where I am today. Not starting capital, luck or friends in high places. A simple belief in myself.

10. Process Matters Much More Than Goals

Much has been written on goal setting as a means of achieving excellent results in fitness, health, and life. It's no secret that if we want to accomplish anything, we need direction and focus. And fitness goals serve as guiding stars.

At some point, we all find ourselves setting goals for what we want to achieve. It's the prevailing theme at the start of each year, after all.

But, what I've found over the years is that while setting a specific goal tends to spike my **motivation** for a day or two, it's not nearly as crucial for success as I thought. I've always set goals for my blog, coaching practice, training, and finances, but I slowly realized that my day-to-day actions were much more critical for success.

And it's not that I never went back to review my goals and my progress on them, but I found that not obsessing over the result has been much more beneficial for me.

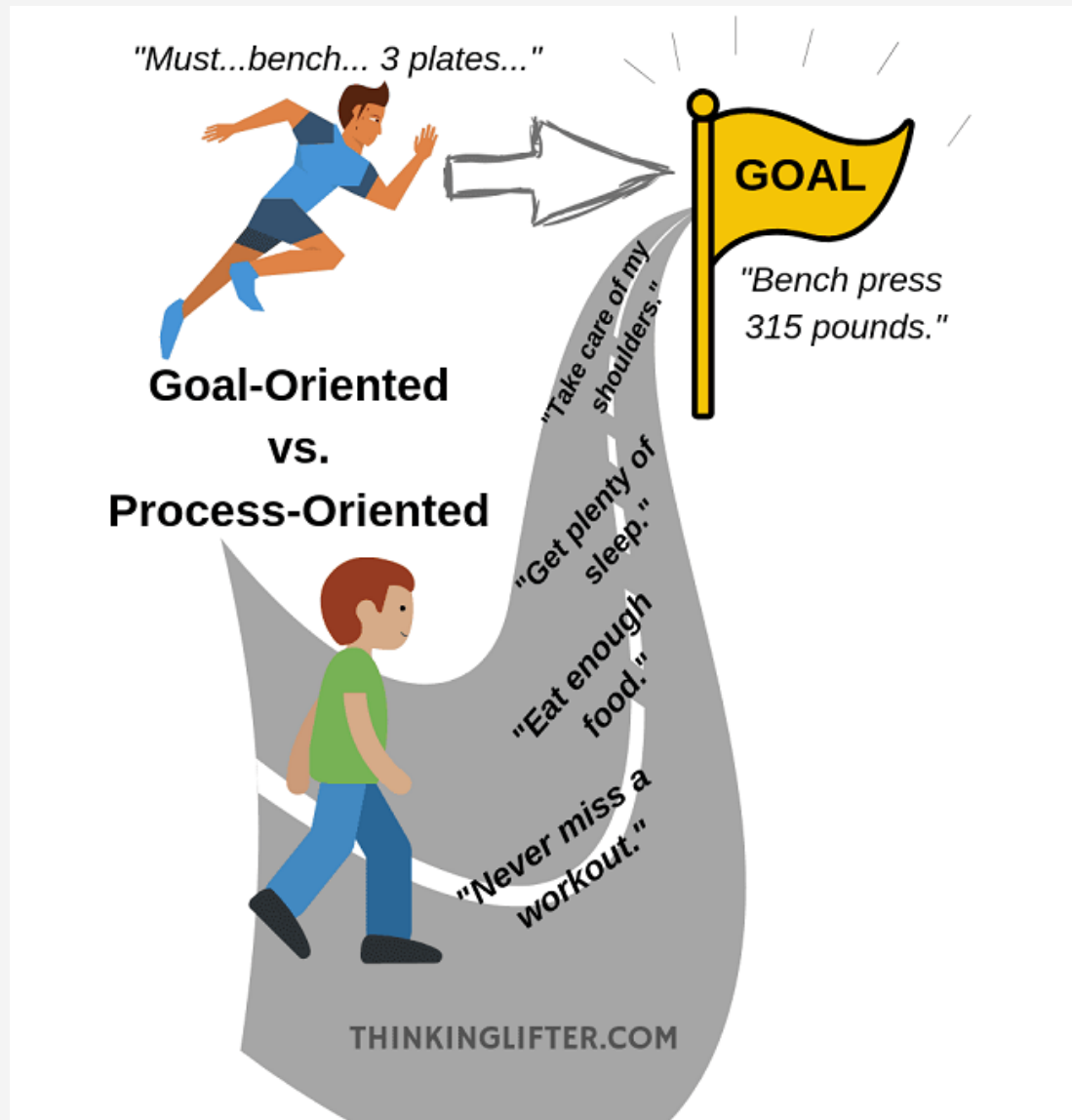
You might set a goal of losing five pounds, squatting a hundred kilos, or running a six-minute mile, but what daily actions will you follow to achieve any of these?

- You might set a goal to squat or deadlift 315 pounds by the end of the year. But your process will be to do each workout as planned, stretch daily, and eat enough food.
- You might set a goal to lose 20 pounds by May or June. But your process will be to consistently lift weights, eat in a caloric deficit, and **get enough protein**.
- Outside the gym, you might set a goal to save up \$5,000 by the end of the year. But your process will be to stick to a budget, cut unnecessary costs, and put money aside each month.

As I said earlier, having goals isn't a bad thing. Knowing what you want to achieve is important. But focus much more on the processes and day-to-day actions and much less on your fitness goals. You'll find yourself much happier, and you'll learn to enjoy the journey for what it is.

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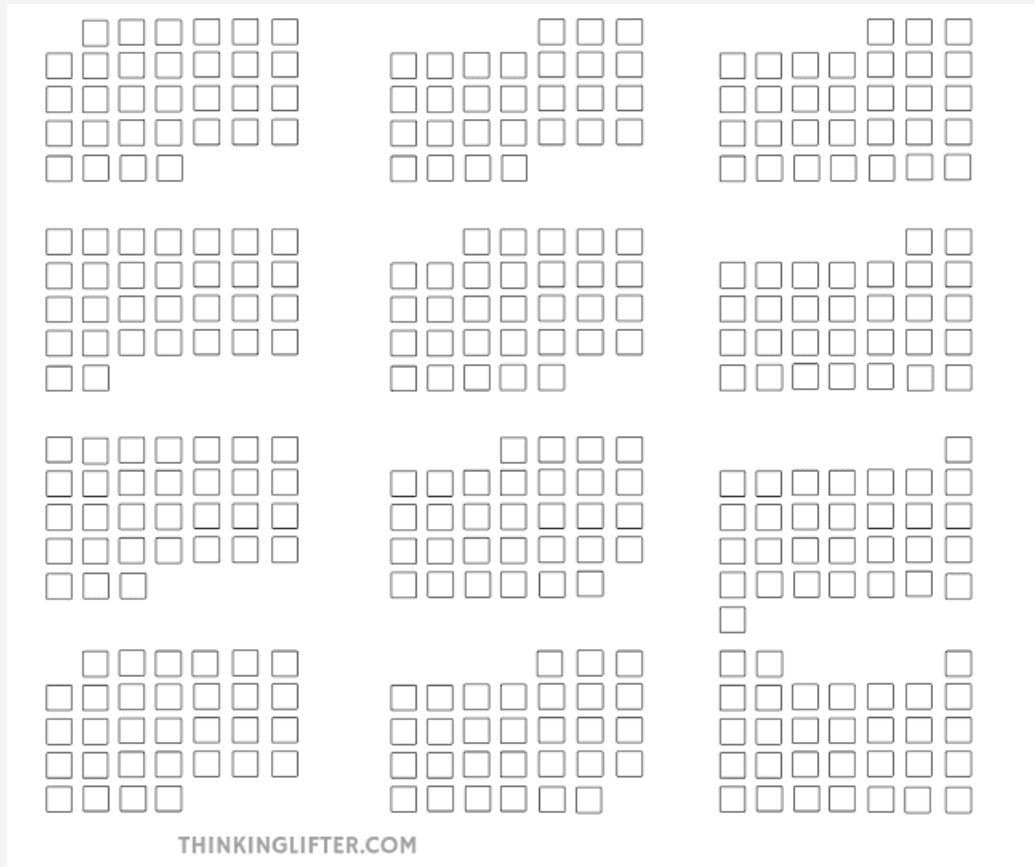
11. Bad Workouts are Part of the Package

Over the years in the gym, I've learned something about training - bad workouts happen. And while I wish I had the right answer for why they occur, I don't. Various factors affect our daily readiness, and sometimes you feel tired for no apparent reason.

I think the best answer I can give you is this:

Bad workouts are the price you have to pay for consistency. If you have enough workouts throughout the year, some are bound to be bad, and that's okay.

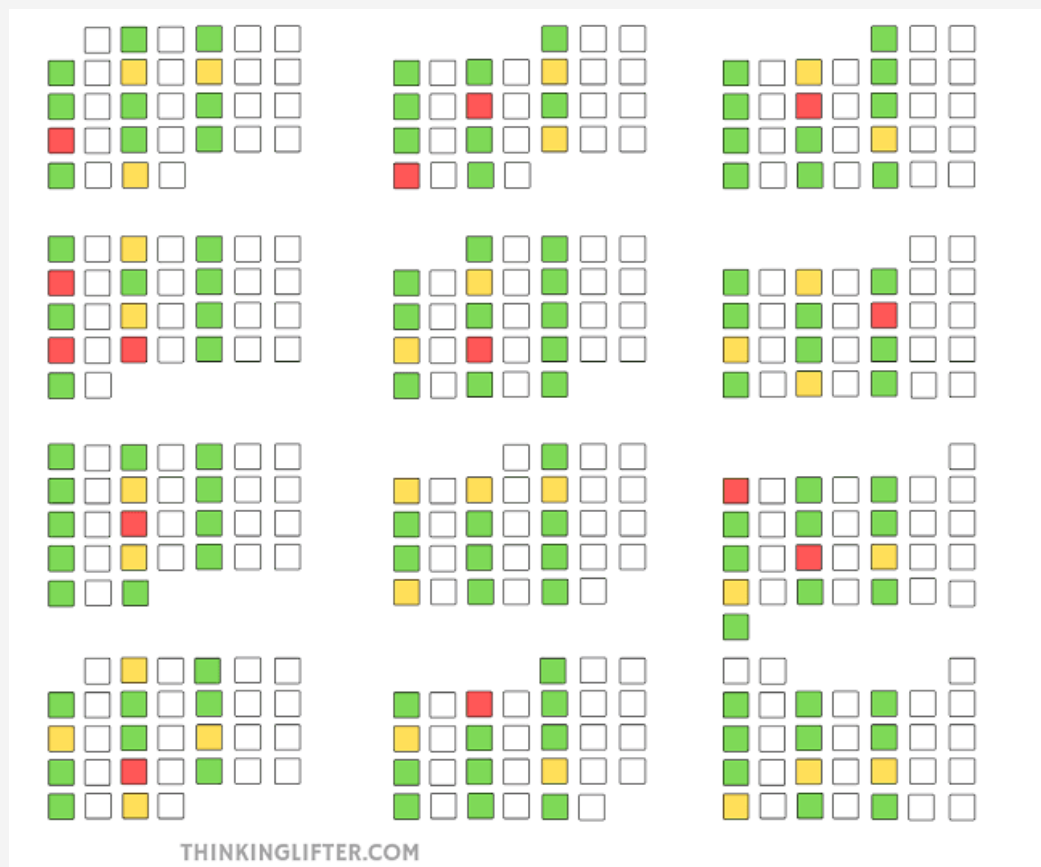
Let me illustrate it for you. The below graph represents a year of your life:



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The colored boxes represent all of the workouts you have within that year. Greens are for your good workouts, yellows are for your 'meh' (neither great not bad) workouts, and reds are for your bad workouts.



Under normal circumstances when you allow yourself to recover well, you'll have a few bad workouts and a few 'meh' workouts. But the majority will be good. Over the course of a year, that doesn't look as bad.

With that said, here are some reasons why your last workout might have sucked:

- You didn't get enough sleep. Yes, sometimes even a single night of poor sleep can screw you hard.
- Not enough calories. Some folks can train fasted and they'll be okay. More power to them. But the majority of people need some fuel in the tank if they want to optimize their performance at the gym.
- Not enough water. Mild dehydration can cause all sorts of adverse effects - headaches, lack of motivation, lack of focus, and general fatigue. Drink up.
- You trained at a different time than usual. Over time, **your body gets used to training at a particular time of the day** (say, the evening). And if you happen to train at a different time (say, noon), you could feel a bit 'out of it.'

What's most important is that you put your best foot forward and walk in the gym with confidence. A bad workout doesn't mean anything in the grand scheme of things. Don't dwell on it.

12. Master This One Quality for Great Success

If there is one quality that greatly determines our success in work, finances, health, and fitness, it is delayed gratification.

Back in the 1960s, professor Walter Mischel and his colleagues from Stanford University began a series of tests. These psychological experiments were done on 92 children between the ages of three and five.

In their now famous **Marshmallow Experiment**, the researchers revealed that delayed gratification is an essential quality that can predict later success in life.

During these tests, each child was placed in a private room, and a marshmallow was placed on the table in front of them. The researchers told each child that they would leave the room and if the child didn't eat the marshmallow while they were away, then it would be rewarded another one.

The researchers left the room for 15 minutes. During that time, some of the children jumped immediately and ate the marshmallow, some managed to restrain themselves for a bit but eventually gave in to the temptation. A few of them managed to control themselves for the full 15 minutes.

As the years passed and these kids grew up, follow-up studies were conducted, measuring each child's progress in different areas. The researchers found that the kids who were able to delay gratification during the initial tests now did better at school, had better social skills, responded better to stress, and generally did better in other areas of their lives.

Here are the follow-up studies published in **1988**, **1989**, and **1990**.

Of course, this is an oversimplified breakdown of the study and I highly recommend reading the **full text**. However, I do want to make one thing clear:

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I understand that adherence, habit formation and reaching success in fitness, health, and life is much more complicated. A few studies can't reveal everything. But they do give us valuable insight into the power of delayed gratification and I'm sure you've experienced it for yourself.

Small daily successes are often built on delayed gratification. Hitting a workout before getting back home for dinner after a long work day. Stretching for 10 minutes before going to bed. Skipping junk food when you're out in favor of a nutritious meal at home.

Over time, these small, seemingly insignificant acts of delayed gratification snowball into huge, dramatic improvements.

- One workout doesn't change much. But over the course of a year, that could be ten extra pounds of muscle.
- Stretching once won't do much for you, but over a year, that could be the difference between great flexibility and stagnation.
- One healthy meal won't do much, but again, stretch that over a year, and you could be much healthier and leaner.

Hat tip to [James Clear](#) for the idea.

13. Consistency Beats Intensity and Perfection Every Time

Most folks have an all or nothing mindset when it comes to making positive changes. They either commit 100% to the process or not at all. If they cannot have absolute perfection and great intensity, they might as well quit.

You can see this everywhere:

- You forced yourself to follow a diet religiously and even though the last 30 days were great, you had one cookie today and now feel like you blew it.
- You committed yourself to a grueling, six-day/week training program. Even though you've been very consistent for a while, you had to miss that one workout and now feel like it's all gone to waste.
- You started reading every day and had been consistent for over a month. But you missed one day and now feel like a worthless sack of crap.

These things happen because we tend to confuse consistency with perfection. And also because we tend to confuse incredible intensity with great results.

First off, being consistent is not the same as being perfect. And trying to be perfect is probably holding you back. That's because you're not [creating a buffer](#) for mistakes you could make, or emergencies that could show up in your life. We are human and we can't be perfect all the time, even if that is our job.

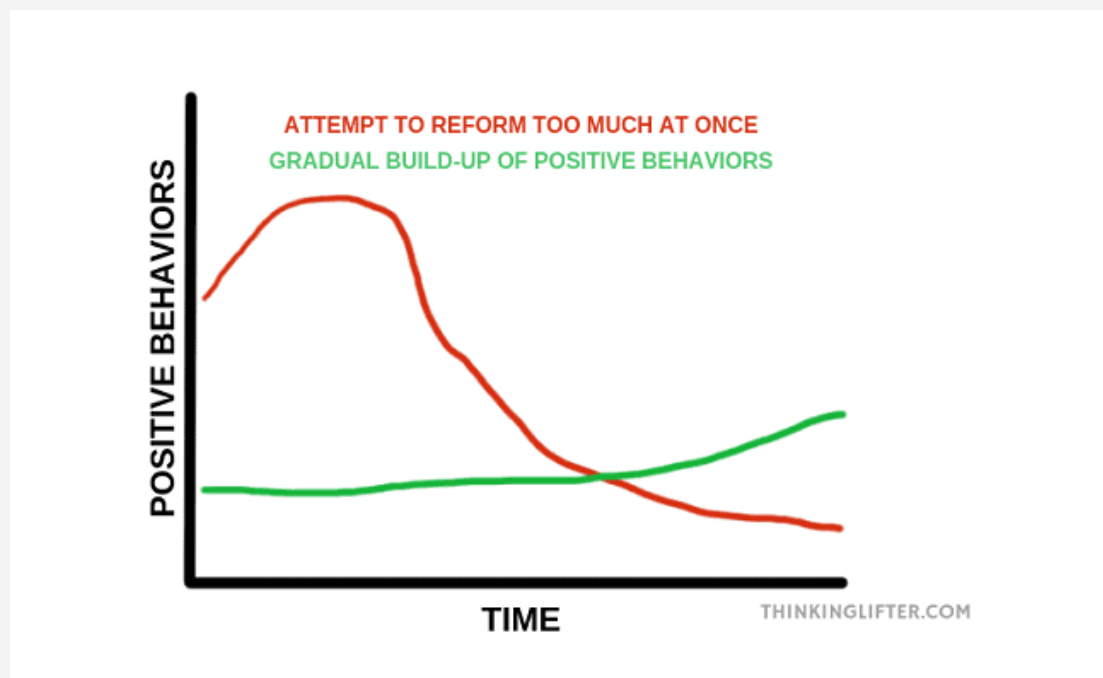
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Secondly, consistent effort (even on a smaller scale) is ultimately going to deliver much better results than going all-out for a month or two and then giving up.

- Instead of following a rigorous diet for a month (intensity and perfection), dedicate yourself to eating in a **reasonable caloric deficit** and focus on consistency. You won't lose 10 pounds in a month, but who cares? You'll gain momentum and you'll lose a lot more weight in the long run.
- Instead of doing a grueling training program that you know you have no business touching (intensity and perfection), dedicate yourself to hit the gym three days per week. Stretch that over a year, and you'll have 156 workouts (consistency).
- You missed one day of reading because something happened? Big whoop. Get back on track and keep up the momentum. Be consistent, but don't be afraid if you miss a day (perfection).

As Newton's first law states, "Objects in motion tend to stay in motion." and it applies to our behaviors, as well. Be consistent, expect the occasional slip-up, but keep moving forward.



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14. Steer Clear from Confirmation Bias

Much like the Survivorship Bias, confirmation bias can also cripple our critical thinking and lead to misguided beliefs and actions.

Confirmation bias refers to our tendency to seek information that validates our current beliefs and understandings while completely ignoring or trying to disprove statements that contradict our beliefs.

This is especially true in the fitness industry:

Person A believes that the ketogenic diet is the best thing on the planet and consistently looks up information related to how keto is superior for fat loss, why ketones are a better energy source, and how eliminating carbs from their diet improves their health. Thus, person A hammers in their beliefs even further.

Person B, on the other hand, believes that keto is terrible and instead looks at studies that show the ketogenic diet not delivering benefits, why ketones are not a good source of energy, and how the keto flu is the worst thing a human being can experience. Thus, person B solidifies their beliefs about the ketogenic diet.

Meanwhile, the truth could be somewhere in the middle. But these two individuals don't care about that. They want information that confirms their current beliefs.

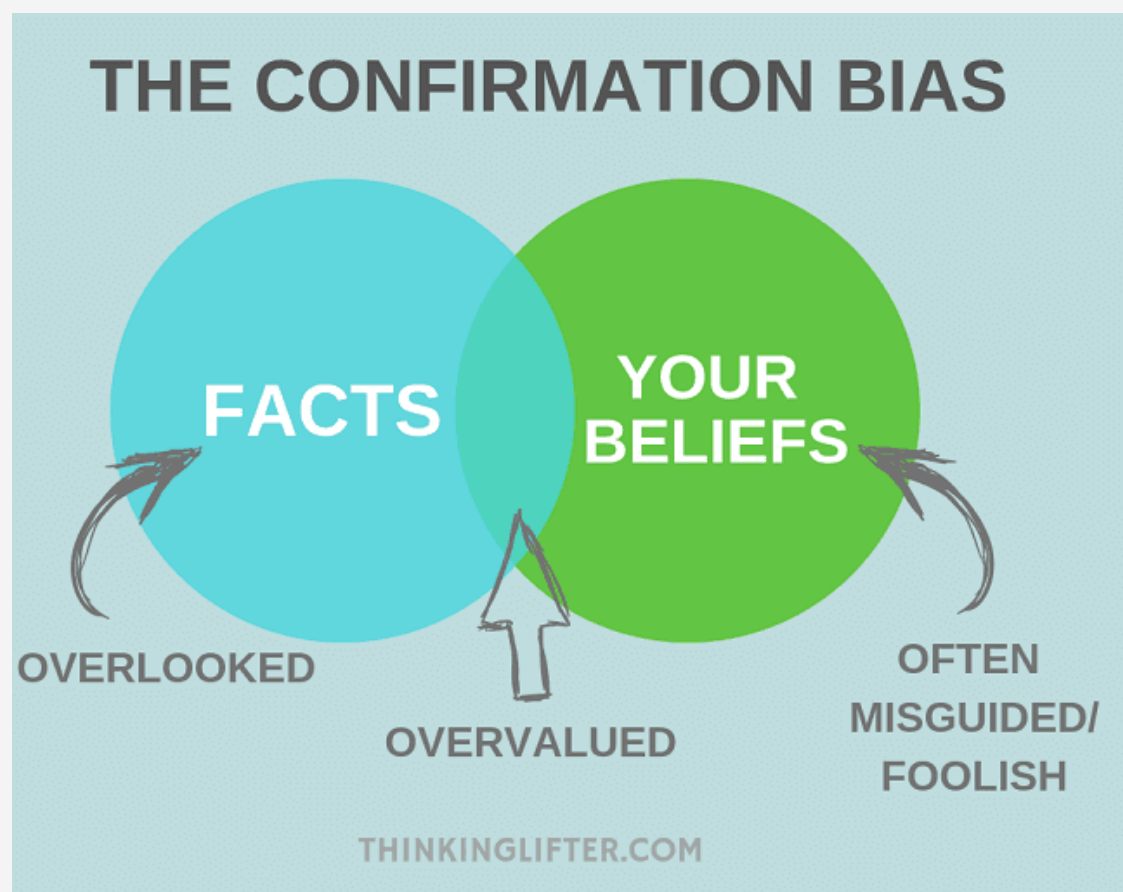
"Gosh darn it! I have a slow metabolism." - a person who consistently looks up information on hormonal imbalances and illnesses while completely disregarding information on exercising correctly and eating better.

The same goes for virtually any other diet, supplement, or training program.

If you think about it for a moment, you'll realize that the confirmation bias extends far beyond fitness. Sports fans argue for hours on how their team is the best and read articles and news only if they confirm their beliefs. Car guys swear by one brand and claim it's the best out there. Any other car is a piece of junk not worth looking at.

It's human nature, I guess. We tend to form certain beliefs on different topics and only seek out information that confirms that. In other words, we don't want new information; we want to validate what we currently believe.

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15. Make Sleep a Priority

I'll be the first to admit that sleep is about as exciting as watching grass grow. But given the fact that we spend about 1/3 of our lives sleeping, it's critical to educate ourselves on the subject.

With that said, I do understand the incredible importance of getting a full night of sleep regularly and always preach of its importance.

Tons of research has shown that lack of sleep leads to increased hunger, decreased ability to burn fat, decreased athletic performance, less muscle growth, impaired recovery, attention lapses, brain fog, general fatigue, irritability, and more ([one](#), [two](#), [three](#), [four](#), [five](#)).

The first thing you need to understand is that **sleep debt** is quite real and is a cumulative issue. In other words, the longer you go on less sleep, the more severe the symptoms get and the less productive, healthy, and clear-minded you become.

Sleeping for six hours per night for two weeks straight **has the same effect** on your mental and physical capabilities as staying up for 48 hours straight.

Further, subjects in studies couldn't accurately gauge their performance drop and were under the impression that it wasn't that severe. In other words, sleep deprivation makes us poor judges of our condition. We might think that our physical and mental performance is staying the same, but it could slowly be deteriorating.

So, how much sleep do we need?

This is difficult to answer and there is no 'one-shoe-fits-all' solution. Some people need much less sleep than others so you need to find it out for yourself. Your sleep needs are going to increase if you train hard and are under more stress.

A good starting point is to aim for seven to eight hours per night and adjust accordingly. If you consistently feel beat up when you wake up in the morning, try going to bed a little earlier.

16. Beware The 'One-Shoe-Fits-All'/Perfect Solution Scam

In the gym, very few things are absolute. There are a lot of ways to **get stronger**, to build muscle, and to lose fat. What matters is the context. To make matters worse, there is a lot of information out there. Sifting through it all and separating the good from the bad can be very difficult.

First off, always be skeptical when someone tries to sell you a 'perfect solution' to your problem, especially if there's a real price tag attached to it. There are a lot of fitness gurus and sleazy marketers out there looking to make a few quick bucks.

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But to hook buyers in, they need to present their 'solution' as one of a kind and as something that's never been seen before. This is why the market is swarmed with crappy information such as "Never eat these foods if *<insert desirable result>*" and "Six dangerous exercises you should never do," often packaged with their 'perfect' or 'best' routine for 'chiseled abs,' or 'big guns.'

Secondly, even if the information is good, you always need to analyze its usefulness for you, individually. As we went over in the point about genetics, we are all different. And to complicate things even more, we all have different life circumstances.

For example, Person A is a dude in his late thirties and has an extremely stressful job and a newborn child at home. He needs to worry about a thousand things every day, and his stress is through the roof. He's also limited on sleep and relaxation.

Person B is a college student in his late teens who doesn't work and has all the time in the world right now. He has very little to worry about on a day-to-day basis. He also sleeps 8-9 hours per night.

These two individuals have radically different life situations, stress levels, and ages. Person A has a different ability to recover from person B and thus would probably benefit from a moderately-challenging training program. Person B, on the other hand, could probably go with a much more demanding program because he can dedicate a lot more time and energy into it.

This doesn't mean that the particular program is terrible, it just means that it's not suited for Person A and his impaired recovery. Again, context matters. So, when consuming information on the internet, always think about how useful and applicable it is for you.

17. Stop Program Hopping

There is a lot of hype surrounding programs, **supplements**, and diets. There's always somebody touting the idea of a new and better way to do things. And there are a lot of people who happily jump from one thing to the next, always looking for a better way to do things — the better program to get stronger, the better supplement to build muscle, or the better diet to lose fat.

And there's the problem - the shiny object syndrome. We tend to undervalue what we already have in favor of what we could attain.

You're following a decent program and you're seeing results from it, but suddenly see an Instagram post or a Youtube video of someone selling their new and better way of lifting. They promise great results in half the time. Naively, you go with that.

Some time passes and you see someone else selling THEIR better-better way of lifting because, damn, we have a lot of that going around, don't we? So, you hop again, on the newer, shinier program.

On and on you go.

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The problem is, you never feel satisfied with your training. Even worse, you never feel like you're making any progress because you're always jumping from one training style to the next and from exercise to exercise. This is the perfect recipe for unfulfilling training and loads of wasted time.

Instead, do more of what already works. Tunnel vision. Direct your focus to a program, put in the work and only make changes when it stops delivering any results.

Of course, this is a boring solution. It certainly doesn't sell shitty PDFs and overpriced training programs. But it's what is going to deliver much better results both in the gym and outside of it.

18. Embrace the Power of Slow Gains

Most of you guys are from the US, so it's fair to assume that some of you have seen the Grand Canyon in person. Maybe you flew above it or took a trip there over the weekend. I haven't seen it, but it's on my to-do list.

This natural wonder is nearly three hundred miles long, up to eighteen miles wide and reaches up to a mile deep into the earth. Truly magnificent.

Geologists suggest that the Colorado River first established its course through the Canyon six million years ago and has been deepening and widening the trench ever since. The Grand Canyon, in all its beauty and magnitude, is the result from water flowing along the ground for so long.

As the old saying goes, *"A river cuts through rock, not because of its power, but because of its persistence."*

You don't need millions of years to see the results of your persistence. In fact, you need far less time. But you need to embrace the power of slow gains.

We live in a society where instant gratification is the norm. Ordered an item from Amazon? You'll have it tomorrow. Need some information or entertainment? All it takes is a few mouse clicks. Want the newest BMW 5-series, but don't have the money? No problem, you can lease it today.

We want amazing results, and we want them yesterday. We are impatient, and we frown upon slow progress. But think about it for a moment:

Start training consistently and pick an exercise you want to improve. Depending on your experience, start adding a pound each week (if you're more experienced) or two pounds (if you're a beginner). Simple enough, right? Most people could do that.

But here's the thing: Most people don't have the patience for that. They want to get strong quickly. But in the pursuit of quick gains, most people stall fast and never get anywhere. Or worse, they get injured.

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Now, if you were a beginner and started squatting this week, you might only be able to lift 90 pounds for five sets of 5. But if you add two pounds each week, you'll be squatting 190 pounds within a year. Not bad, right?

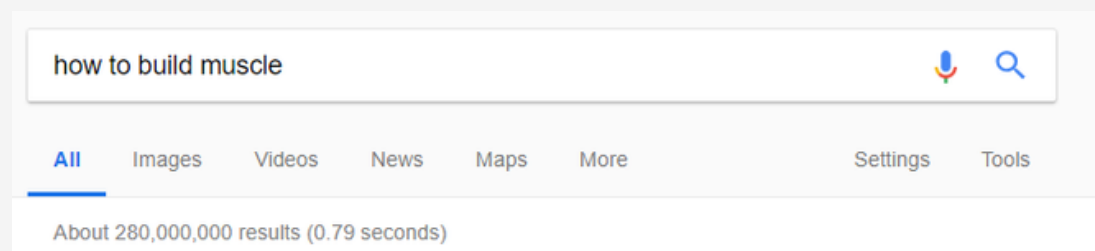
Start adding a pound each week from then on, and you'll be increasing your squat by fifty pounds each year. It's simple enough, right? But how many people do you know who are adding fifty pounds to their lifts each year?

Granted, **linear progression** is not the only way to build strength, and you won't make progress forever. But it teaches you to embrace slow gains because they sure as hell add up.

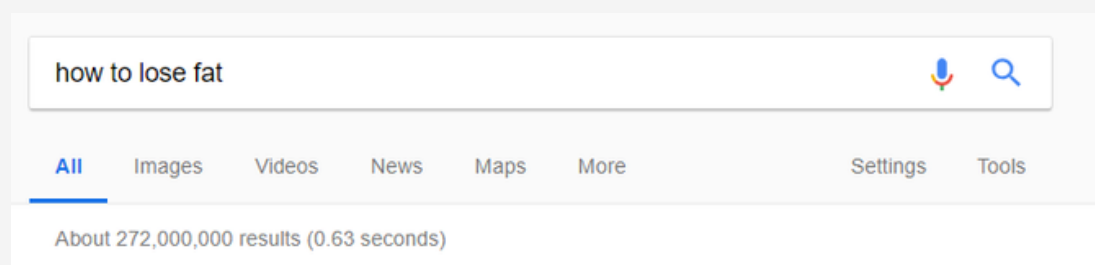
19. Working With a Coach Can be Very Beneficial

You could go ahead and figure it all for yourself. There's plenty of free information out there, and you will eventually piece it all together.

A casual search for "how to build muscle" on Google will net you about 280 million results:



How to lose fat? 272 million results:



But, there's one thing that you need to understand: In your efforts to figure out everything for yourself, you will waste a considerable amount of money and, more importantly, time.

That's because it's not as simple as "eat less, move more" or "eat big, train hard" when it comes to changing your physique for the better. If it were that simple, everyone would be jacked, strong, and lean.

As you dive into the process for yourself, a lot of questions creep up. Questions you may not necessarily know how to answer. With coaching, you are getting the knowledge, experience, and expertise to answer all questions.

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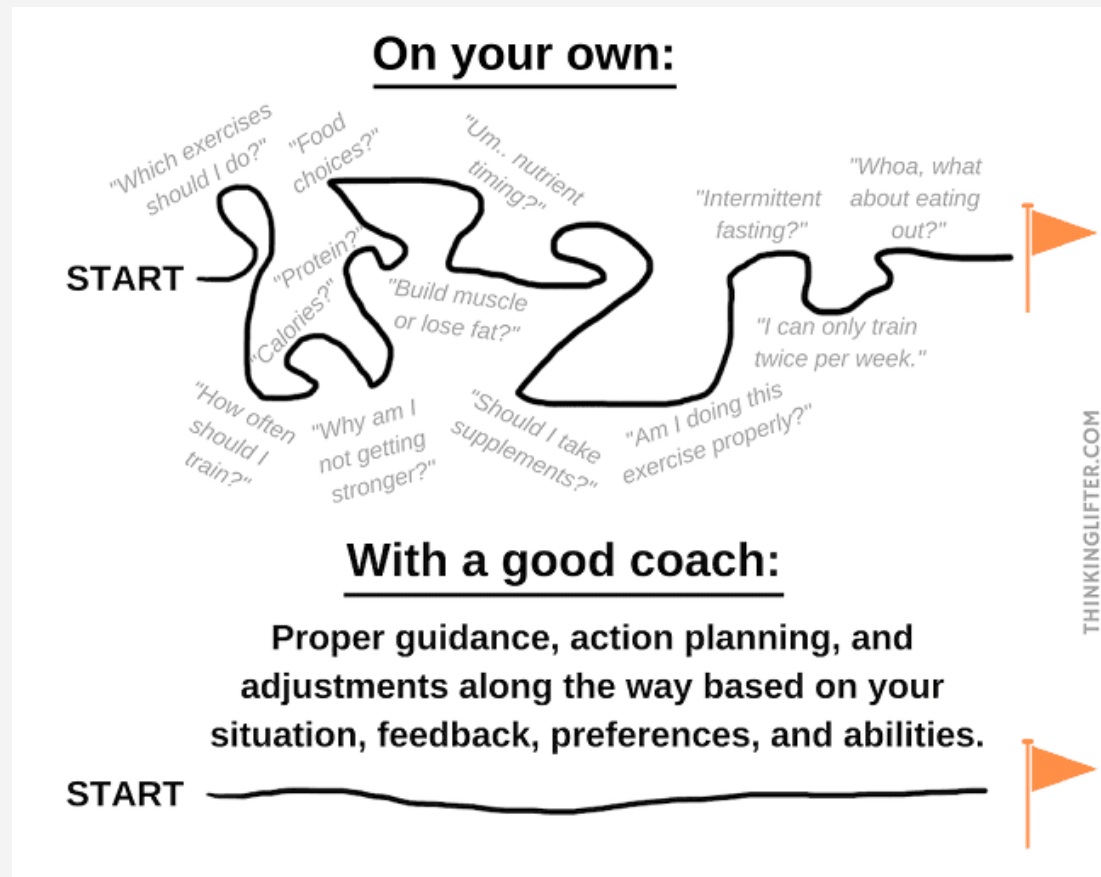


A competent coach can, at the very least, help you with proper programming and execution of the different exercises. More importantly, a good coach realizes that we are all different and no single thing works for everyone — your injury history, experience in the gym, goals, and ability to train all matter.

They can help you by tweaking different aspects of training until results start coming in. This is why subjective feedback and guidance are important.

And lastly, a good coach can help you become a self-sufficient athlete which is something every lifter should aspire to become.

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20. Stay Hydrated

Water is essential for training performance and gains, much more than most people realize. It makes up **nearly 60% of the human body** (with muscles being 75-80% water) and is involved in pretty much every bodily process, including protein synthesis and muscle growth.

Water plays a vital role in the transportation of nutrients toward cells, but it also carries away toxins and other waste products. Unlike some nutrients (such as fats and carbs), water cannot be stored in the body, and we must replenish it daily.

When it comes to lifting, the human body is put under physical stress. Muscle, connective tissue, bones, and joints all need to respond and adapt. Meaning, the body needs to begin the process of repairing itself after physical activity. Water makes all of that possible, and without it, we wouldn't be able to recover, build muscle, or.. you know.. live.

Proper hydration is also critical for athletic performance. Numerous studies have shown that **as little as 2% dehydration can cause a drop in performance**.

I don't want to dive deeper into the various processes behind hydration. Frankly, I don't understand them that well myself and I would probably bore you to death if I did. Just know that water is critical for our health, longevity, performance, and progress in the gym.

With that said, I'll keep the recommendations simple: 3 liters for men and 2 liters for women, daily.

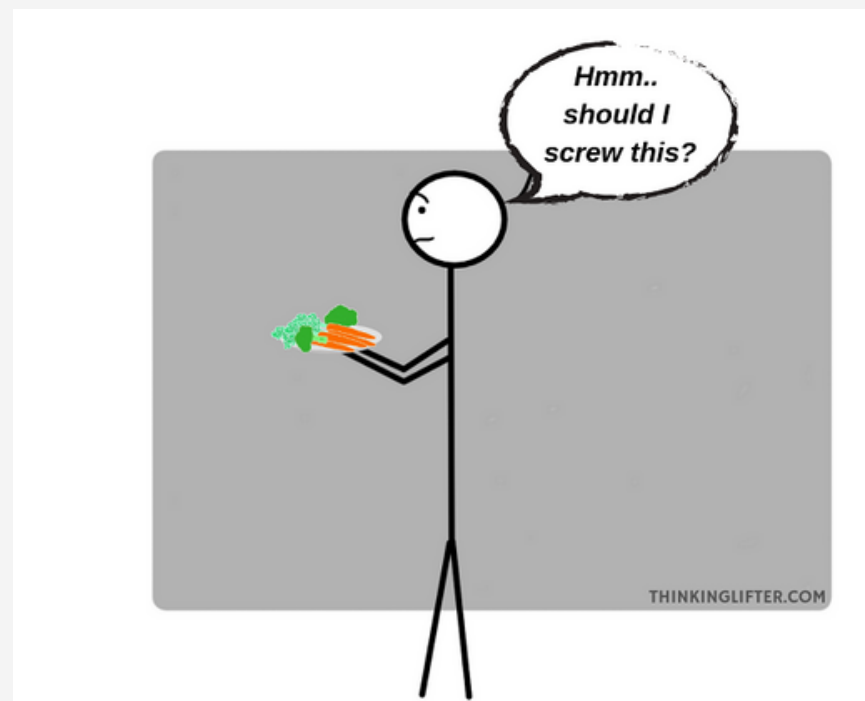
More or less water could be needed depending on your bodyweight, activity level, how much you sweat, how warm it is where you live, and how old you are. But these are good starting points for most folks.

21. Improve Your Nutritional Habits Gradually... and Screw Diets

Every time I see someone going on a restrictive diet or nutrition plan, I pretty much know how it's going to end:

Motivation is high so eating like a ninety-year-old vegan woman is not too bad. Plus, shedding a few pounds of scale weight helps.

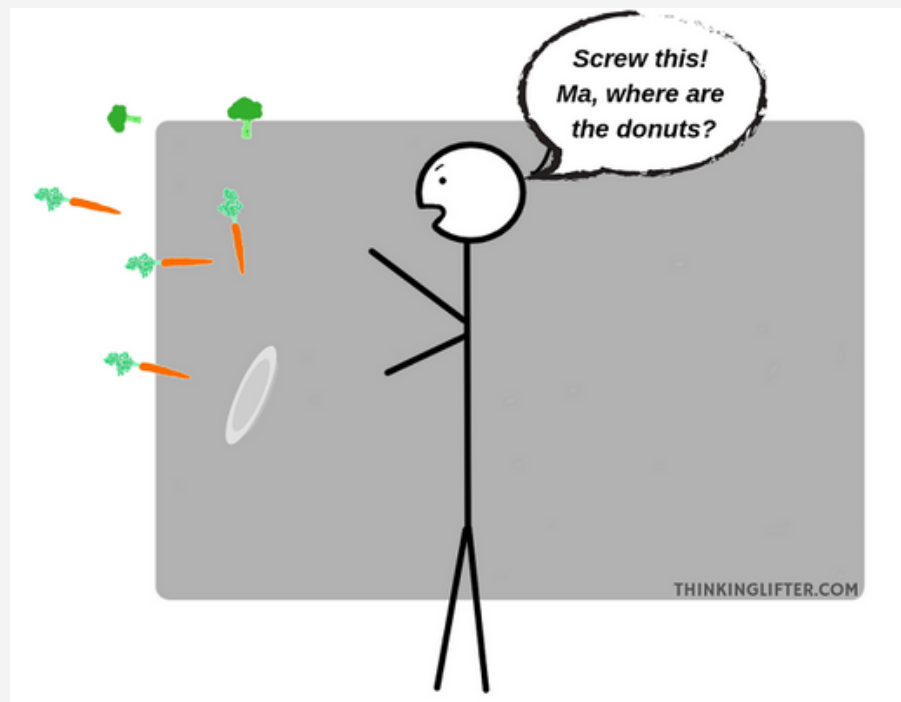
But then, inevitably, the hunger catches up to them, and they start craving all of the foods they used to eat on a daily basis just a couple of weeks back. I like to call this the "Should I screw this?" moment.



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How long the person sticks to the diet after that point is entirely up to them. A week or two is my best guess. Then we arrive at the “Screw this!” moment.



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Binge eating, gaining all the weight back, and feeling bloated and disgusted are soon to follow. This is the problem with diets, and more specifically, radical change. We previously covered the Goldilocks rule, and it's at play with our nutritional habits, as well.

As with any new behavior, you need to challenge yourself just enough to stay engaged, see progress, and keep going.

- Choose three or four wholesome foods to include to your grocery list. As time goes on, add a new item here and there.
- Make just one of your daily meals healthier. Choose whole, nutritious foods and avoid junk. Also, count the calories for that meal. Over time, you can work on improving your remaining meals.
- **Try fasting**. Consuming fewer, bigger meals could help you adhere to lower caloric intake and a healthier diet. Start with a 14-hour fast and slowly work your way up to 16-20 hours.
- If you're eating out every night, start eating at home once or twice per week.
- If you drink a lot of sugary soda, start tracking your intake and consciously cut back a bit each week.

Stop chasing the perfect diet and instead spend that mental energy on gradually improving your eating habits. It's much more sustainable and effective.

22. Don't Compare Yourself to Others (Especially on Social Media)

A couple of years back, I stumbled upon a video on Youtube from a young dude who had a stunning physique. And when I say stunning, I mean it. He had terrific proportions, great muscular development, and low levels of body fat. He was also pretty strong. He benched in the 300s, squatted in the 400s, and deadlifted nearly 600 pounds.

I hopped onto his Instagram page and saw dozens of perfectly angled shots of his incredible physique. Then I thought to myself, *"Why can't I look like this guy?"* I also thought to myself, *"Get off Instagram right now, dumb ass."*

(I won't mention the dude's name here because I don't want you to go and compare YOURself to him.)

Comparing yourself to other people is dangerous and counterproductive. This goes double for doing so on social media.

You see, a lot of people these days have body image issues precisely because they keep comparing themselves to others. There are plenty of fitness models on social media who are ripped 365 days of the year and have dozens of perfect shots. When an average person compares themselves to the model, they quickly lose confidence in their body and progress.

First off, remember that what you see on social media are the **highlights**. The person probably took a hundred selfies before the one you're looking at. Secondly, you don't know what's it like behind the scenes - there are a lot of frauds who photoshop their photos, and there's a lot of steroid use.

So, the next time you're scrolling through Instagram and feeling bad about yourself, stop and realize that these people get paid to look a certain way and what you see in the photos isn't necessarily real.

I would recommend spending less time on social media in general, but since most people won't do that, at least use your critical thinking skills and realize that what you're seeing there is a carefully constructed image of that person.

Focus on your own thing and be proud of your work (this is where tracking your progress helps). Trust me; you'll be much happier and more satisfied with yourself.

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23. Mostly Avoid Training to Failure

Training to failure means to lift a weight to a point where your muscles can no longer produce enough force to move the weight with good form and a full range of motion.

There are a ton of mixed feelings among people. Some deem it the holy grail of muscle growth and strength gain. You get the most out of your training in the short term, say during a workout, or a single set.

Others consider it an unnecessary part of training. You fatigue yourself more and limit the total volume you can do.

Now, there are no black and white answers here, but **research** hasn't been able to show any significant benefits in favor of training to failure. What is important to look at is the fact that training to failure could lead to form breakdown, especially in newer lifters.

Don't believe me? Head to the nearest gym and spot a bro doing bicep curls. You'll probably see them leaning back and using their entire body to curl the weight soon after.

Training to failure could also negatively impact recovery and sabotage your performance on subsequent sets, exercises, and even workouts. A **study from 2017** supports this idea. In it, the group that trained to failure took longer to recover and had much higher levels of fatigue.

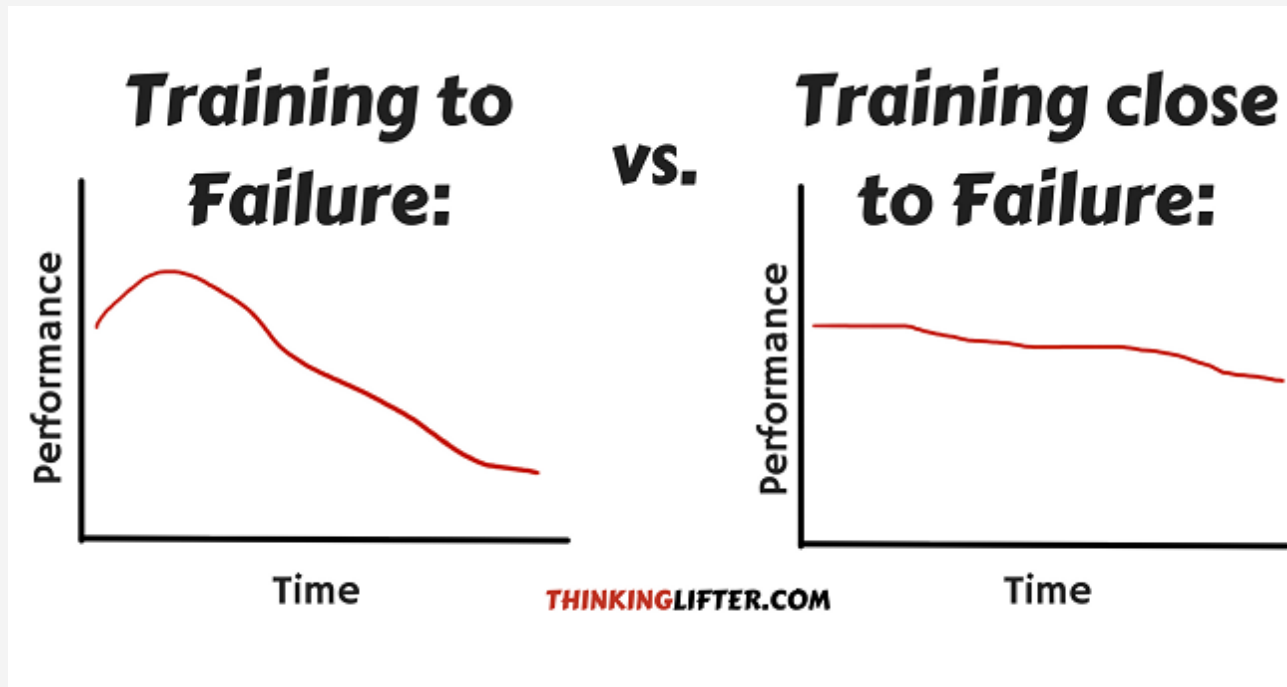
There are three significant issues with using training to failure as a sustainable strategy to cause overload to your body:

1. A lot of people (mostly **beginners**) take it too literally. They're led to believe that the only acceptable way to leave the gym is to crawl out of it. Anything less is a waste of a workout.
2. Training to failure is also very taxing, mentally. Pushing yourself to the maximum once or twice in a given workout is achievable and sustainable. But pushing yourself 15+ times? Not so much. Really, who would want to train that way? I'd probably break in half after a week or so.
3. Training to failure leads to technique breakdown. For some exercises, that's not a big deal. But for movements like the deadlift, squat, bench press, and overhead press? You better believe that you'll be very injured very fast.

Now, although training to failure seems like a sound strategy to some, consider how that one set taken to failure is going to impact the rest of your workout. And how that incredibly demanding workout is going to affect the rest of your training week.

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For most people, especially newer lifters, leaving one to four repetitions in the tank is going to be a much better strategy most of the time. This is going to help control fatigue, allow you to maintain proper technique, but also stimulate your muscles to grow and strengthen.

24. It's Never as Easy as We Want It To Be... Do It Anyway

I guarantee that if you start lifting and make it a habit, there will be days where you feel like giving up. You won't always be motivated or excited, and some workouts will feel much more difficult than others. But if you push through the temporary discomfort and stay consistent, you'll find yourself much more disciplined in the long term.

If you want to get healthier, look better, and be stronger, you'll have to embrace some discomfort. Do it.

As cliché as it might sound, learning to be consistent, even when you don't feel like it is a valuable trait that is going to benefit you, not just in the gym.

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