

# SLIM GYM

Getting in shape is one of the most popular New Year's resolutions and the hardest to stick to. Hop off the elliptical machine, put down that smoothie, and change your body for good.



It happens every January: Inspired by weight-loss resolutions, women start showing up at the gym day after day. Six weeks of red-faced exertion later, they cry uncle (and sometimes actually cry) when the needle on the scale and the notch on their belt hasn't budged. Many quit, wondering, What's the point? And so the cycle goes. According to many trainers, there are common missteps that add up to a lot of frustration. But simply identifying these saboteurs and adopting the workout habits of the fittest women in the gym can bring the results you want. Lean women do workout smarter and more frequently-and they don't waste a minute of gym time. Of course, they're also not diving into a bowl of spaghetti Bolognese washed down with three glasses of Barolo after finishing a tough evening workout. It's rare that very thin women look that way because of exercise alone, they modify their diets and stick to a healthy eating plan in addition to burning as many calories as they can in the hour they have at the gym. Follow their lead (and skip your morning vanilla chai latte), and you'll soon feel as if you're moving forward when you're at the gym even when you're Spinning your wheels.



As with love affairs, timing is everything at the gym. So rather than dividing their gym sessions into two parts – the puffing, sweaty, red-faced half and the weights half – the leanest women switch between the two every few minutes. That means between weight training, they jog in place, jump rope, or do jumping jacks. “Exercising this way, keeps your heart rate up for your whole workout and doubles the calorie burn,” says Valerie Waters, a personal trainer in Los Angeles who works with Jennifer Garner.

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### THEY GET OFF ON THE RIGHT FOOT

Many women think their workout begins when they start to sweat, but the toned women at the gym tip the odds in their favor before they lace up their sneakers. First, they eat something. Fit people recognize that their body needs fuel to work hard and maintain its energy levels. Which is not to say you need to carb-load like you're headed for Everest base camp. Eat a banana or a handful of dried fruit and nuts, or drink a small protein shake basically, choose something healthy that's about 100 calories. Toned women also get ready quickly, so many people cut into their workout by wasting 15 minutes getting ready. Finally, these women leave their BlackBerries and magazines in the locker room, because if you're emailing or reading, you're not working hard enough to lose weight.

### THEY HIT THE TREADMILL

You may have noticed that the gym's treadmill bank is a congregation of perfect bodies. Of all the machines at the gym, the treadmill is most likely to result in weight loss because it works more muscles and keeps your heart rate elevated, both of which burn fat. Trainers say it's harder to get the same results on an elliptical machine or recumbent bike because they're much easier on the body. Plus, they're self propelled, so if you stop concentrating, you slow down. If you jack up the intensity and maintain a challenging pace for the entire workout, you will get results – just not as quickly. And while the numbers on the scale don't lie, the numbers on all of the cardio machines do. Don't trust calorie counters, it's a rough estimate and unreliable. A better strategy is to pay attention to your breathing and heart rate. If you can just barely carry on a conversation and you stay in that state for about 45 minutes-then you're working hard enough to lose weight.

### THEY FOCUS ON REPS, NOT WEIGHT

It sounds contradictory to load on weight to lose it-and it is. These days, most women at the gym have been told that creating lean tissue will allow them to burn calories at twice the rate. And they're in the weight room trying to achieve just that. Some get too muscular when what they want is to be toned. To blame: the old-school technique of lifting really heavyweights and pausing between sets. It used to be standard practice for everyone to train like a bodybuilder. The focus now is on lots of reps, not heavy iron, you want to strain the muscle, not cause it to tear and then repair so that it becomes larger and more pronounced. To get lean, choose a weight that becomes truly challenging to lift only during the final two or three reps in a set of 20-and keep a medium pace. Relying on your body's own resistance works too. Look around the room, and you'll see toned women doing dips on a bench, holding the plank position to work their abdominals, or doing hamstring curls on a fit ball. As long as you're feeling a burn and varying the exercises often enough, your own weight can be enough to build lean muscle and shape the body.

### THEY TRAIN ON CIRCUIT

As with love affairs, timing is everything at the gym. So rather than dividing their gym sessions into two parts – the puffing, sweaty, red-faced half and the weights half – the leanest women switch between the two every few minutes. That means between weight training, they jog in place, jump rope, or do jumping jacks. “Exercising this way, keeps your heart rate up for your whole workout and doubles the calorie burn,” says Valerie Waters, a personal trainer in Los Angeles who works with Jennifer Garner. “And because each muscle group has time to recover, the next set can be as strong as the last.” Since moving from quickly from one exercise to the next is the key to interval training, you can't make up a routine as you go along. It's not enough to know how to use the machines – you need a plan so there's no excuse to stop and ponder your next move. Have a trainer design program for you –this service is free– and update it every six weeks, or take a circuit-training class. As soon as the circuit gets easy, change it again because that's the sign you're no longer working out hard enough.

## MISSED MANNERS

Emily Post didn't include a chapter on gym etiquette in her 1922 best-seller. So we asked experts to guide us through the issues that aren't tacked up on the wall of the women's locker room.

**Q: If you see an acquaintance working out at the gym, is it OK to stop by and chat?**

**A:** It depends. If she's wearing headphones or out of breath, stay away. “That means she really doesn't want to be disturbed,” says L.A. trainer Valerie Waters. If she's between sets, a quick hello is fine. “But keep in mind that most people want to finish their workout and leave,” Waters says.

**Q: How much nakedness is appropriate in the locker room?**

**A:** Some exposure is to be expected, but it's not a private bathroom. This is not an opportunity to display the benefits of your workout. Which means always wearing a towel to walk around and never blow-drying your hair in your birthday suit. If you run into an acquaintance when one or both of you is undressed, maintain eye contact, say a brief hello, and move on.

**Q: How do you handle it when someone has gone beyond the posted time limit on a cardio machine you are waiting to use?**

**A:** First, give them a polite hint. Glance at your watch a few times, and if that doesn't get the point across, motion to them if they're wearing headphones, and then smile and say, Hi, I'd like to use this machine when you're done – are your 30 minutes almost up? If they ignore you, request help from a floor supervisor – it's his job to enforce these rules.

**Q: In a class, if someone is making too much noise or standing where you always stand, can you say something?**

**A:** It's impossible to say something without embarrassing or offending that person, instead, ask the instructor to mention the issue to that person before the next class. This will prevent confrontations (like the one last summer when a man assaulted a grunter in a New York City Spinning class). As for claiming real estate in the studio, “it's not OK,” Waters says. “Get there early if you want a specific spot.”