The Joy of Sweating

THERE ARE A TON OF VERY GOOD, SCIENCE-BACKED REASONS TO START DOING WORKOUTS YOU ACTUALLY LOVE...LIKE, RIGHT NOW.

By Jordan Galloway

About a year ago, I had an a-ha moment that totally shifted my perspective on exercising. That sounds a wee bit extra, I know, but after years of working hard at the gym, I started to feel I wasn't playing hard enough (read: having enough fun) to balance out all the effort I was putting in. I just felt... burned out, TBH, and uninspired by my regular routine. Can you relate?

So I began thinking about the last time getting sweaty felt carefree, and my mind quickly cued up images of me playing sports—shooting hoops, running relays, spiking volleyballs. From there, it went to the endless hours I'd spent outside as a kid jumping rope, roller-skating, riding my bike, and climbing trees. (Yes, I had to dig deep!)

All those flashbacks sparked serious joy for me, and when I explained this to Keoshia Worthy, PhD, a clinical psychologist at Columbia University who specializes in performance, she wasn't surprised. "We encode these pleasurable moments, the times that we experienced happiness," she says. She told me that our brains essentially possess an *air quotes* emotional muscle memory. Those warm-and-fuzzy mems sit in our subconscious under the endless lists of to-dos that float closer to the surface, and we can tap into their residual good vibes by engaging in activities that elicit similar positive feelings. Better still: "Doing this increases our ability to feel happiness," says Worthy—kind of like how doing cardio amps up our capacity to consume larger volumes of oxygen.

For me, just-for-kicks exercise includes jumping on a mini trampoline (which science says is as good at burning energy as biking—another activity that turns me into a heart-eye emoji), doing HIIT workouts in water (easier on the knees, and research also finds that humans are happier in or around H_2O), and flailing through at-home dance workouts...because why not? Nobody is watching except my cat, and I'm already used to her judging me. The result is that I'm still getting all the physical benefits of regular exercise, but with an added boost of mental awesomeness you only get if you capital-L love what you're doing.

"Incorporating pleasure into a workout sharpens your concentration, and you'll be more likely to experience flow, which is when everything just clicks," says Worthy. Not sure how to make it happen? NBD...it's easier than ya might think.

WH editors and friends delight in different kinds of sweat

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Pleasure Principles

To inspire your own pursuit of happiness, follow this advice from pros who know how to have a good time.

1 HACK YOUR BRAIN

"What's cool about our mind is that we can trick it," says Worthy. "So we can think positive thoughts, say affirmations, or reflect on the last time we worked out and how good it felt." That'll release dopamine (a.k.a. the happiness hormone). Yep, just *telling* yourself that you love working out—whether you do or not— is enough to jumpstart those chemicals that make your bod feel better.

2 DRESS THE PART

Maybe that's pulling a swimsuit on over your leggings for Jane Fonda workouts (something an unnamed editor I know has been doing) or just choosing activewear you think is cute. "It may sound silly, but throwing on a wig to work out has brought me so much joy during these really weird times," says Javi Perez, cofounder of the fitness studio Social Club, which hosts "wig parties"—Instagram Live dance cardio classes where hairpieces are encouraged. "It feels like a special event, not just your usual workout."

3 BUST A MOVE

It'll be easier to find a state of flow if you can unclog any mental blocks by getting out of your head. Fastest way to do this? "Jump up and down and shake out your hands and feet to release anything that's weighing you down or making you feel stuck," says yoga teacher Beth Cooke, an instructor at Obé Fitness. Did somebody say "dance break"?