

Mix It Up, Pumping Up Your Workout at the Gym

Staying motivated is always a challenge. If you have access to a gym, it is helpful to mix up your routine from time to time. Some people want to do something different every time they step foot in a gym, others feel more comfortable using 2-3 machines and that's it. This article will hopefully give you some basics on using new machines, and tips on ways to step up your game if you are already familiar with these machines.

I advocate for mixing up your routine, because, when you do, it sort of confuses your body and it has to work harder to compensate. This means you burn more fat. If you go to the gym regularly, you may or may not be using more than the treadmill and some weights. Consider incorporating equipment like a rowing machine, a stair climber, or elliptical into your regular routine.

Rowing Machine

Rowing machines are amazing because they provide a full-body workout. When you sit down secure the foot holds and set the resistance low, to 2-3. Keep your back erect and core engaged as your knees are bent and hold onto the handle. Start by pulling back on the handle, then push with your feet to extend your legs (keep knees bent slightly) and, leaning back, keeping your arms strong as you pull the bar up to your chest. Stay there for a moment, then bring your body back, first with your feet, then your arms following. Then do another and another, working your way up to 20 reps in a minute, or more! Keep your focus on your form, and keep all your muscles as tight as possible. You can challenge yourself to do more each minute, and then start to increase the resistance.

Rowing machines burn an impactful ~250 calories in 30 minutes. You work your arms, legs, back, and core muscles all while

getting in some cardio. If you are a slightly competitive person, you can keep challenging yourself to do more by the minute. And love the sweat it brings! Added benefit to rowing is that it is a non-weight bearing exercise, which is really helpful to those suffering with arthritis, or stiff joints.

Elliptical

The Elliptical machine is popular at most gyms because it a low impact exercise. You benefit from the movement of running, but your joints aren't slammed the same as when you are running. It is a versatile machine, as you can go forward or backward, you can use your legs and arms, or only your legs, and it is perceived to be easier than running on the treadmill. If you want to use the Elliptical machine for cardio, then work to increase your strides per minute on the machine's screen – you should be aiming to get to about 150 strides per minute if you want to break a sweat.

If you are looking more for toning your thighs, press more forcefully with your heels to work your hamstrings and glutes, and press more forcefully with your toes to tone your quads and the front of your thighs. Your core can get an extra workout if you go hands free and only use your feet to move the machine. Be sure that you top half is not twisting from side to side. You can help yourself stay steady by keeping your hands on your waist. Once you get the hang of the Elliptical, you can intensify your workout by pushing fast for 60 second intervals throughout your workout. Be sure to add a warm up and cool down to the interval.

Stair Climber

Doesn't really take a scientist to figure out that this machine is a great way to build lower-body strength! Anyone who has walked up 2 or more flights of stairs knows that climbing stairs is not for slouches. The great thing about a Stair Climber is that your leg muscles can get really strong. You are working your glutes, quads, calves, and hamstrings. To

get the best results, keep your core engaged, and your spine erect. Keeping your body weight as an active force directly above your legs ensures that they work even harder to keep climbing to... um, nowhere?! If you have to use the handrails, only use them to keep yourself erect, and don't hunch over or you'll miss the full exercise.

Like with the Elliptical, you can target specific muscle groups by switching up how you place your feet on the stairs. If you want to target your quads, push off with the ball of your foot. If you are aiming to target the glutes and hamstrings, put more weight on your heels as you step up.

Because the Stair Climber engages your largest muscles, if you keep up pushing those very active muscles, you end up increasing your metabolism, and you lose weight that much more quickly. Heart pumping cardio plus lower body strength training equals burning more calories while you are working out *and* after you leave the gym, than just a cardio workout alone.

It is pretty obvious how you can take this exercise to the next level. Just increase how fast you climb the stairs. Go from slow climb to normal step to sprinting. In terms of variations, this is where it gets fun: step up to the side, double step up, or going backwards! If you can find some entertainment in the exercise, your time on it will go that much faster, and you'll be closer to reaping the benefits of increased calorie burn in your sleep.

Some fitness machines offer a fantastically complicated option of selections on a digital interface. Most machines have a "manual workout" mode. If you feel overwhelmed by what to enter, just hit the manual button, and find an up or down arrow to increase (and decrease!) your workout intensity. As you use these machines more often, you will discover various

built in workout programs such as Fat Burning, Speed Intervals, Calorie Goal, Heart Rate Zone Trainer. You can try a new program each time you use the machine to discover which is your favorite. If you've already got a routine on one of these machines, please share below what makes it exciting for you!