



Ask The Trainer | Question # 2

Why Am I Not Making Progress? (Five Reasons Why)

It can be frustrating when we feel like we are putting in the effort to exercise and make healthy choices, but we are not seeing the results we're looking for. Are there reasons why progress is not being made that we are just not aware of? What is keeping us from seeing the progress we desire?

The five reasons why we may not be seeing progress are:

1. Doing the same workout routine without progression
2. Not focusing on nutritional habits
3. Not getting enough sleep
4. Poor stress management
5. Not moving enough throughout the day

Waiting for progress to occur can be frustrating, but by knowing what could be holding us back, we can put in the work to see the progress we've been looking for. In this article, I'll also discuss how we can measure our progress to really see if what we're doing is working.

Five Reasons Why We Could Not Be Seeing Progress

1. Doing the same workout routine without progression

If we continue to do the same workout routine every time we exercise, the routine will eventually stop being effective unless we progress some aspect of the workout (more sets, reps, weight, or a more challenging movement).

The reason for this is that our bodies only adapt and make changes when the workout we are doing challenges us in a new way. This forces our bodies to adapt to keep up with what we are asking of them.

If we do the same thing over and over, then our bodies no longer need to change to keep up and we stop making progress. We should be changing our workout plan every 4-8 weeks, to keep challenging our bodies and make noticeable progress.

2. Not focusing on nutritional habits

If we're crushing it in the gym, but we are not putting in the effort to support this hard work with our nutritional habits, then we may be sabotaging our efforts – especially if we're measuring our progress with body composition changes (weight, measurements, how clothes fit, etc.).

If we want to fill out our frame with muscle mass, but we are not eating enough calories throughout the day, then we will not see the progress we are looking for – no matter how much we lift in the gym. The same is true for those who want to lose weight – if we are eating more calories than we are burning throughout the day, then we will not see the body composition changes that we are looking for, despite putting in the effort with our workouts.

Another important factor that we could be neglecting, besides how much food we are eating, is the amount of protein we are consuming throughout the day. If we're trying to get stronger and look fitter but we are not eating enough protein throughout the day, then we are limiting our body's ability to build muscle.

3. Not getting enough sleep

If we're not getting enough sleep at night, then our bodies aren't recovering properly, and not only will we be more fatigued, but it can also affect our hormones.

[Studies show](#) that sleep needs to be prioritized in order to gain and/or maintain muscle mass. The reason for this is that inadequate sleep can affect muscle growth by limiting the secretions of anabolic hormones (hormones that build muscle), and increasing the secretion amounts of catabolic hormones (hormones that break down muscle), which ultimately limits our ability to increase and/or maintain muscle mass.

Loss of sleep can also cause increases in fat mass by messing with hormones that control our hunger signals, which can cause us to consume more calories than we typically would. It can also decrease our daily movements resulting in more sedentary behavior because of overall fatigue.

The general recommendation is for adults to get 7 to 9 hours of sleep per night; however, [it has been suggested](#) that athletes may need more sleep (9-10 hours) than the average individual, to recover optimally.

4. Poor stress management

If we are stressed and we do not have healthy coping mechanisms in place, then we are more likely to stray from our normal eating and exercise patterns. For some people, these deviations from normal could be to emotionally eat and under-exercise, while others may undereat and overexercise. Everyone is different in the ways they tend to cope with stress, but none of these scenarios are helpful in seeing the healthy progress we desire.

Instead, we should find ways of dealing with our stress by identifying the cause and doing what we can to resolve the issue if possible, or at least assessing what it is we truly need in that moment to accept it. If we don't deal with the root of the problem and instead try to ignore it with unhealthy relationships with food and exercise, then we will not see progress.

When we are stressed, we should ask ourselves what it is we need in the moment – perhaps it is comfort, relaxation, entertainment, or companionship. We can then choose what activities would fulfill this requirement that are not food-related or creating an unhealthy relationship with exercise.

5. Not moving enough throughout the day

Oftentimes, we are not seeing progress because we are not moving enough throughout the day, despite getting a workout in.

Getting 10,000 steps a day is a popular recommendation that came about because [studies found](#) that, active individuals were averaging 6,000 steps/day from daily activities (without exercise) and approximately 4,000 steps from 30 mins of exercise, so public health made the recommendation of 10,000 steps as a target for people to become more physically fit.

10,000 isn't a magic number by any means, but it's easier to give people a goal rather than simply telling them to *move more*. For this reason, I think it's worth using 10,000 steps (or whatever number of steps is challenging, but realistic for you) as a guideline – whether it be for increased caloric expenditure or simply better health.

This is important because most individuals feel that if they are getting a workout in, they are being active enough to stay healthy and/or lose weight. But if we train for 1 hour a day, and then sit for the other 23 hours, does that really balance out?

How To Monitor If You're Making Progress Or Not

We can monitor our progress in different ways:

- Bodyweight
- Measurements
- How clothes are fitting
- Progress pictures
- More strength/endurance
- Changes in resting heart rate

Measuring Progress in Body Composition

Body composition progress is commonly measured by tracking weight changes on the scale; while this is a valid measure of progress, it does not always tell the whole story when it comes to body composition changes. This is because we could weigh the exact same but look completely different because of body re-composition that can occur, especially with strength training.

For this reason, I prefer monitoring changes in measurements (typically the middle of the chest, the smallest part of our waist, the widest part of our hips, and the widest part of our thigh), how we fit into our clothes, and by taking progress pictures. These measurements help us to realize changes that have occurred, even if we haven't made progress on the scale.

Measuring Progress in our Level of Fitness

We can measure progress in our fitness level by monitoring changes in how easy or difficult an exercise or activity feels, compared to how it felt previously. We can also measure progress objectively by evaluating changes in how much weight we can lift, how many reps we can do at a given weight, how fast we can run a certain distance, how far we can swim without stopping for a break, and many more.

Another measure of progress in our level of fitness are changes in our resting heart rate. This can be monitored with a fitness tracker like a FitBit or Apple Watch, or we can do it manually by laying down for at least 5 minutes and measuring our heart rate by finding our pulse and counting how many times our heart beats in one minute. A decrease in our resting heart rate is a positive indicator for an increased level of fitness.

Keeping track of changes in our body composition and our level of fitness is important, because sometimes progress is only realized by looking back at where we started.

Final Thoughts

Although we often think that progress is just made in the gym, in reality to see progress we need to be putting in effort with our nutrition, sleep, and personal life. It is important to monitor for more than one measure of progress (not just the weight on the scale), as we could be surprised at how far we have come in other aspects of our health and fitness that we hadn't realized.

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Self-described fitness superpower: Super strength, because lifting heavy things is pretty neat!