

# FLEX IT

When it comes to fitness and wellbeing in 2020, information is power. The key to unlocking a healthier, stronger, fitter and happier version of yourself lies not in clocking more hours in the gym, but in efficient expert-approved protocols. Remy Rippon discovers the unexpected benefits of working smarter, not harder.

PHOTOGRAPHS JAN WELTERS

STYLIST: HORTENSE MANGA HAIR: JONATHAN CONNELLY MAKE-UP: ALICE GHENDRIH MODEL: CINDY BRUNA  
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## TOP UP

The new way to hit your fitness goals this season is with some clever, time-saving tweaks.

FACE TIME

Summer beauty calls for little more than a punchy swipe of colour on lips.

Tom Ford Lip Color in Foxfire, \$72.



THE 'WHY' OF WORKING OUT

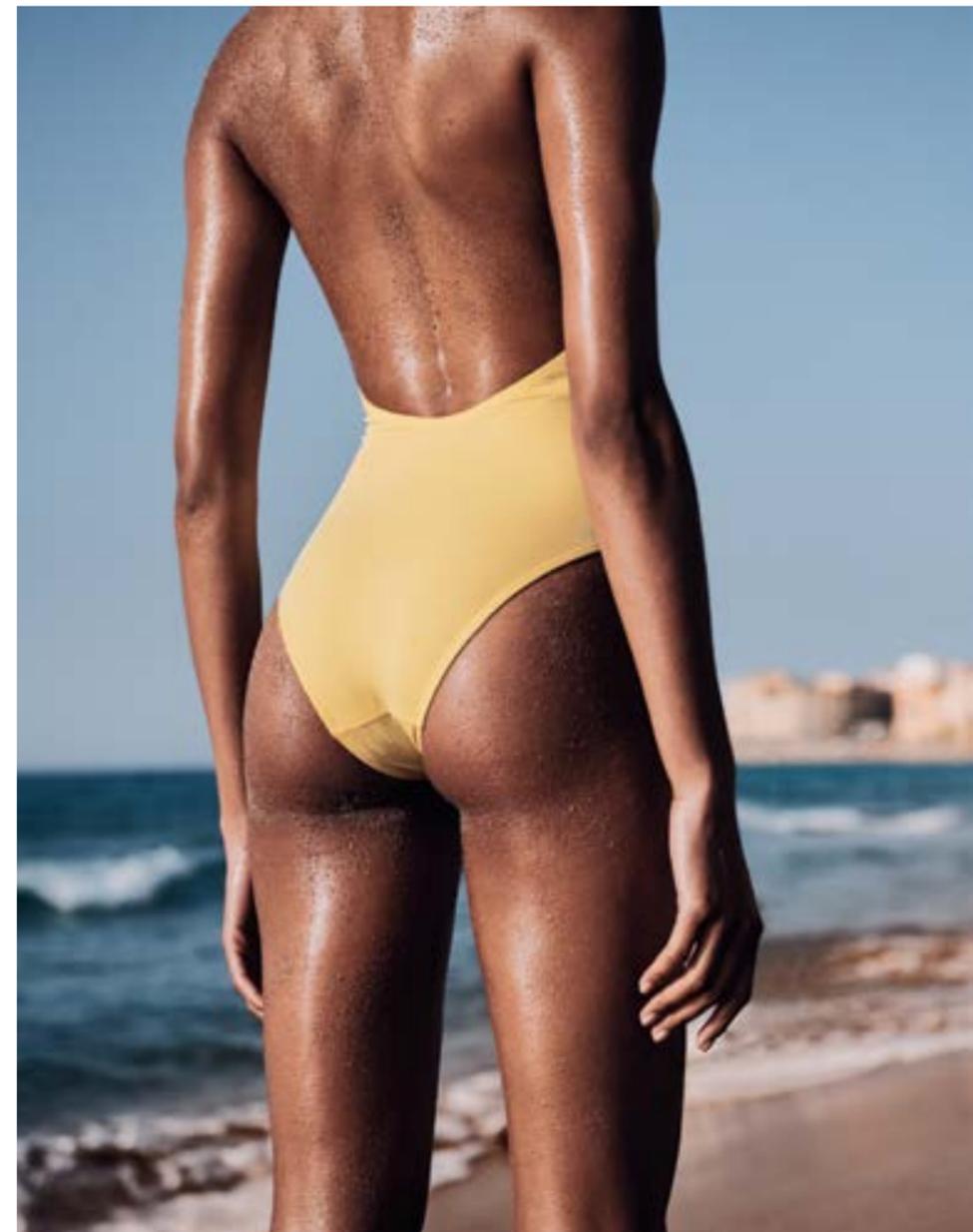
It's a universal truth that goal setting helps us stay focussed. It's the same deal when it comes to our fitness regimen. Long-term goals – to run a marathon, gain muscle, lose weight, increase flexibility – keep us motivated over extended stretches and are neat devices for charting progress over time. But don't discount the power of short-term goal setting, either. Cory George, a spokesperson for fitness phenomenon F45, says applying the 'why' to each session ultimately increases the efficiency of the workout. "Whether it's a mini challenge of completing your first pull-up, performing 20 push-ups in a 30-second interval, or simply maintaining a controlled pace throughout the entire session, these little challenges all help support effective workouts."

THE LONG AND SHORT OF IT

Among the list of revelations to come from a better understanding of how the body responds to exercise is this: being active for longer doesn't necessarily equal a better outcome. "Only a decade or so ago it was common to see women on the treadmill for hours at a time, thinking that more exercise would naturally lead to greater results," says Emma Seibold, founder of dance-derived studios Barre Body and Bende. "What we know now is that our bodies are so adaptable we actually get more out of shorter, interval-based workouts than we do out of long steady-state cardio workouts." For this reason, a host of time-crunching, HIIT-based programs, F45 and Barry's Bootcamp among them, have gained popularity, while the interval format of Seibold's classes helps you to reap greater benefits in a shorter amount of time.

STRESS CAN BLOCK YOUR GOALS

You probably know that exercise is an effective stress-reliever, but have you thought about the impact stress can have on your actual workout? "In the last two decades we discovered that stress is not only a huge contributor to how our minds work, but there is also the effect of the stress hormone cortisol on our hormone profile and the way it contributes to how our body utilises fat as fuel," says Sydney-based personal trainer Ricardo Riskalla. To feel your best inside and out, assess your stress levels pre-workout and dial up or down the pace accordingly. Riskalla says that may mean occasionally swapping out those



intense sessions. "Because any form of exercise is a stressor to the body, if HIIT is prescribed in the wrong way it will increase cortisol levels and impact the results in a negative way in terms of weight loss."

BALANCE IS KEY

If you've ever signed up to a fitness class and found you're losing interest within a month, you'll be well versed on the impact variety has on motivation. Experts now believe limiting your training to one form – whether it's HIIT, jogging, Pilates or swimming – not only leads to boredom, it can cause the body to plateau (read: all the work, none of the benefits). "Focussing on only one style of training can sometimes slow down your progress," notes George. The general rule of thumb? If you're breezing through your workout, it's time to switch it up. Cardio lovers will →

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benefit from swapping in a few resistance sessions a week, while dedicated yogis might enjoy a heart-rate-raising gym class. As Seibold explains: "It's important to work on strength and stability as well as explosive cardiovascular movements for a balanced exercise regimen."

#### MIND AND MUSCLE CONNECTION IS KEY

What if just thinking about a specific muscle during a workout could improve the way it functions? Experts are beginning to recognise mind-muscle connection as a legitimate way to get more from your workout. Put simply, dedicating brainwaves to a specific movement can dial up the strength of that movement. In fact, surprising research published in the *Journal of Neurophysiology* found participants who devoted 'high mental effort' to a specific movement gained strength, while another group that

mindlessly carried out the same movement gained nothing. "Simply working on the mind-muscle connection and maintaining good form can take a workout from average to intense," notes Seibold. To get the most out from your next weight session, remove distractions like phones, loud music or a chatty partner, then (as odd as it may seem) actually imagine your muscles stretching and contracting.

#### IT'S NOT ALWAYS A MEANS TO A SVELTE END

"Short and sharp [workouts] may be the most effective way to reach your fitness goals," says Seibold. "But remember that exercise is amazing for your mental health." While efficiency of movement is helpful for anyone wanting to achieve more in less time, the meditative effects of fitness shouldn't be overlooked. Moving our bodies releases feel-good hormones that decrease stress, increase self-confidence, promote better sleep and even alleviate anxiety. "If going for a long run feels like meditation, or you enjoy the silence of the lap pool or the focus of yoga, then you should absolutely incorporate those things into your routine," she says.

#### FOOD MATTERS IN TRAINING AND RECOVERY

"If I could single out one thing that you can do to maximise both your performance during workouts and the benefits that you reap from them, it would be fuelling yourself properly," says George. Meals loaded with unprocessed fresh fruit and vegetables, and having a healthy balance of protein, fat and complex carbohydrates, not only fuel our bodies during a workout, they aid recovery, too. What's more, we now know that the age-old food equation – calories in versus calories out – isn't so simple. "In the past, people believed that they could burn any calories ingested with a hard training session," explains Riskalla. "But in reality the quality and quantity of our food and its antioxidant content are also very important."

Aside from a nutritious meal plan, there are some other clever ways to speed up recovery. "Straight after exercise, a good dry body skin brush for five minutes followed by a cold shower will increase the body's healing capabilities, stimulate the lymphatic system and is great for the skin and hair," says Riskalla. Likewise, the latest muscle-mending treatments, such as oxygen therapy, ice bathing and infrared saunas, are a welcome add-on to reduce inflammation and fast-track recovery.

#### MIND OVER MATTER

The stress-relieving benefits of exercise are well documented, so choose to move in a way that feels right for you.



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