



DOES YOUR WORKOUT GET YOU DOWN?

Not everyone gets that feelgood buzz when they hit the gym. Rosie Mullender looks at why your training might be making you feel low, and how to transform it into a high

I was in the gym change room when I realised I wasn't like everyone else there. Two women were exchanging small talk and as one of them headed to her class, she called out, "Enjoy your workout!" Who on earth enjoys their workout? I thought. To me, it's the same as saying, "Enjoy the dentist!" But for those women and many others, exercise brings on a state of bliss, thanks to a release of endorphins in the brain.

"Endorphins interact with your brain receptors to reduce your perception of pain, and can often trigger a positive feeling in your mind and body post-exercise," accredited exercise physiologist Beth Sheehan, at Exercise & Sports Science Australia says. "In people with depression or mental health conditions, exercise is often used within treatment to assist with improving mood."

So what does it mean if you don't feel the mental benefits?

"We're all different, with different needs," says Niels Eék, a psychologist and co-founder of personal development app Remente. It's just a matter of figuring out how you're different and tailoring a workout to suit.

Here are five key reasons you might not be getting that high, and how to turn things around.

YOU'RE OVERDOING IT

When it comes to healthy habits such as exercise, it's tempting to think there's no such thing as too much. But a study conducted at Columbia University in the US found that overdoing it can actually have a negative impact on your mental health.

"Between 2.5 hours and 7.5 hours is the optimal weekly dose of exercise," Eék says. "If people worked out more than this, their symptoms of depression and anxiety increased sharply."

How intensely

you exercise can also affect your endorphin rush or lack of one. "There's a misconception that high-intensity exercise and working out to the point of exhaustion is how endorphins are released, but this isn't the case,"

Sheehan explains. "Exhaustion causes your endorphin levels to drop, so you could find yourself lacking motivation."

GET THE RUSH: Starting gradually and making sure you don't push yourself too hard are key to keeping fit and staying happy at the same time. See your doctor before starting any new regimen.

YOU'VE SET UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

Wanting to improve is great, but data from the University of Toronto in Canada reveals that what we think we can achieve and what we're actually capable of achieving don't always match up – and when we don't reach those unrealistic goals, it can make us feel low.

So, while expecting to shape a Kim Kardashian-esque butt after six weeks of squatting might be an admirable aim, it could actually be counterproductive.

"As with everything, you need to manage your expectations and know your limits," Eék says. "If you're suffering from 'false hope syndrome' and aren't succeeding in your goal, you might need to focus on something else – something you're more likely to accomplish."

Sheehan agrees: "Finding smaller, achievable milestones enables you to work at an appropriate pace, as well as giving you a feeling of success while you achieve them."

GET THE RUSH: "Visit essa.org.au to find a qualified exercise professional to assist you in achieving goals that are relevant to you and your body," Sheehan says. "And stick to 'SMART' goals – ie, those that are: specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound."

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YOUR WORKOUT DOESN'T MATCH YOUR PERSONALITY

Depending on your outlook, pounding it out on the treadmill can make you feel as if you're flying – or seem a bit futile. Whatever you're doing, if you're not enjoying yourself, it might be time to try something new to catch that high.

"Finding an exercise that works for you is important, whether it's low- or high-impact classes or a combination of both," Eék explains. "Some people prefer to get me-time while exercising, because doing things alone allows for reflection and there's no direct social pressure. For others, exercising by themselves can make them feel lonely. It's easier to feel motivated when other people are involved, and they can provide motivation."

And research from Santa Clara University in the US shows that being healthy is catching – other people's behaviour rubs off on us, making working out together a great option.

GET THE RUSH: "I'd advise trying different workouts to find out what suits you best," Eék says. "It might even differ from week to week." Eventually, you should find out what gives you the best exercise buzz. There really is something out there for everyone.

YOU'RE COMPARING YOURSELF TO OTHERS

If you feel great about your body, wearing Lycra in a room lined with mirrors isn't a problem – but if you're quite self-conscious, it can be a nightmare. Research from Marquette University in Canada has revealed that concerns about body image can stop us wanting to work out, and if you feel insecure about your body, an hour surrounded by those who are further along in their fitness journey can be intimidating.

"All of us feel unhappy with the way we look at some point, and these thoughts are normal when they're only fleeting, and they can be worked on," Eék says. "But if they're uncontrollable, you could have body dysmorphic disorder (BDD), which prevents you from seeing yourself as you are."

"A BDD diagnosis can be treated with cognitive behavioural therapy, during which a therapist can introduce you to coping techniques and methods."

GET THE RUSH: "Make a rule to not check the mirror more than three times while at the gym, and don't step on the scales more than once a week," Eék advises. And if you suspect you may be suffering from BDD, see your doctor right away.

YOUR WORRIES ARE OVERWHELMING YOU

Exercise has been proven to relieve stress and improve mood, but too many worries can be overwhelming – no matter what workout you're doing.

"If you notice that exercising isn't helping you and you suspect your bad mood is due to factors other than exercise, I'd advise you to seek professional help," Eék says. "It's always better to be proactive than reactive and seek help in time."

GET THE RUSH: If you're generally stressed or anxious and negative thoughts are intruding even during a workout, it's worth paying your doctor a visit to work out what's going on.

EAT RIGHT FOR A WORKOUT HIGH

Perfect your energy before, during and after to really feel the difference



BEFORE

1 x carb and protein snack, such as a tub of yoghurt, 30-180 minutes before your workout.



DURING

250ml of water for every 30-45 minutes of exercise.



AFTER

1 x carb and protein snack, such as a chicken sandwich, 20 minutes after working out.