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6 “THIS-OR-THAT” FITNESS QUESTIONS ANSWERED BY CANYON RANCH

August 2018 – “I’m going to work out.” That seems like a simple enough statement. Throw your sneakers on, head out to your favorite running trail or your local gym and break a sweat. Just moving your body is a win. In a way, exercising really can be that straightforward. Of course, if you want to make sure that you’re approaching fitness in a way that gives you the *most* benefit, you may come to some common crossroads that leave you stumped as to what choices are the best to make.

If you’re new to exercising, or even if you’re a vet, let us help guide you through some common “this or that” scenarios you—like many of the guests we work with—may encounter, so you can quickly (and confidently) make wise workout decisions.



1. Cardio or strength-training first?

It actually doesn’t matter much. You will build muscle and burn calories from both types of workouts regardless of the order in which you do them. That said, if you find one type of exercise especially tiring—for a lot of people, that is cardio (endurance) training—and it leaves you too fatigued to continue with the rest of your routine, try the less-taxing part of your workout first so you still have something left in the tank when you continue.

Similarly, if you’re less motivated to strength train but don’t mind getting on the stationary bike with your favorite tunes, consider getting your free weight session out of the way first so you have something to look forward to.



2. Upper- or lower-body strength training?

There is no need to choose between legs-and-rear and arms-and-back on a single strength day. You can incorporate *all* muscle groups into your routine without risking injury, as long as you don’t overdo the amount of weight/resistance or the number of sets and reps. In fact, total-body workouts are a great use of limited time (check out this [20-minute total-body strength workout](#)), since you’ll get in the maximum amount of muscle-building.

Just be sure to take time—about one to two days—between workouts to allow your muscles to recover. If you do prefer to focus on one area of the body, however, remember to switch areas the next time you

strength train and consider a variety of challenging exercises like these [mix-and-match upper-body](#) and [lower-body moves](#).



3. Water or sports drink?

Water is always first choice when it comes to staying hydrated and although you may be gulping it down before and after exercise, it's important to be mindful of how much you're drinking *during* your workout too.

If you're exercising for less than an hour, three to eight ounces of water every 15 to 20 minutes should suffice; but if you tend to sweat a lot or the workout warrants it, drink more. If you do feel like you need more than H₂O (especially during sessions lasting two hours or longer), consider fruit, nuts or whole-food grain-based energy bars.



4. Fitness machines or body weight training?

Not to answer a question with a question, but which challenges you more? If, for instance, doing push-ups and pull-ups is plenty tough, then using your body weight alone could be more than enough to build strength.

Some beginners find bodyweight-only exercises like squats, planks and others preferable simply because there's no need for equipment and you can do them anywhere. Machines, however, allow you to test your muscles with more weight than your body can provide (when you're ready for that).

But the truth is that both weight machines and bodyweight exercises (not to mention tools like free weights and resistance bands) can be adjusted and modified to suit any fitness level and provide a challenging workout.



5. Stretch before or after my workout?

There's no clear bottom line on this one, but the evidence points to *static stretching*—in which you hold a stretch for a short period of time, such as folding forward to stretch your hamstrings—as more effective and safer *after* you've exercised, when your muscles are warmed up.

On the other hand, *dynamic stretching*—in which you actively simulate what your body will do during your workout (leg swings and butt kicks are good examples)—is a good way to prepare your muscles and joints

for the exercise to come. Do what feels good to you; try a little of each before *and* after your workout and see how your body responds.



6. Eat before or after my workout?

There's an expression: "food is fuel." That link is probably most obvious when you're exercising regularly. If you're working out for less than an hour and a half and you're eating every few hours, your body is likely to have what it needs.

But if you're exercising first thing in the morning (when your blood sugar levels are low) or your stomach is rumbling, have something small—half a banana, a handful of dry nuts—10 to 15 minutes before you get moving. For 90-minute-plus sessions, eat something more substantial three to four hours before you train: Try oatmeal with milk or a turkey sandwich with fruit, for example. You may also need to eat a carb-rich snack *during* lengthier exercise, like a whole-food grain-based energy bar. When you're done, replenish the glycogen stores you depleted.

Choose snacks containing a mix of carbs and protein like a peanut butter sandwich or yogurt, which will help repair muscle tissue. Also, don't forget to replenish lost fluids by drinking water.

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