Trainer’s Bench

It’s About Time

May 1, 2007 By Jeffrey Gross

I can’t figure out when to exercise. I have to schedule workouts around mealtimes—which aren’t negotiable, because my twice-a-day combo is best taken with food. Should I lift on a full or empty stomach? Morning, noon or night?

—Father Time

Dear Dad,
Ask a hundred experts this question and you’ll get a hundred different replies. But I think I can find the right answer for you. First, ask yourself: Are you a morning person or a night person? Is your energy level higher at certain times of day? Then factor in my general guidelines, which apply to all varieties of exercise regimen:

Menu planner
I don’t suggest working out on an empty stomach, which can overstress your immune system—a particularly bad thing for those with HIV. An empty stomach may also leave you with little energy for a complete, vigorous routine. So eat a little—but not so much that you feel stuffed. It’s hard for your body to digest excess food (especially protein), and eating too much will
slow you down.

Carbohydrates provide the fuel for your workout, so about 20 minutes before starting your exercise, eat a small high-carb meal. Try orange juice, yogurt and fruit, a bagel with light cream cheese, or a Quaker Oatmeal Breakfast Square (one of my favorites). Within about 15 minutes of finishing your exercise, replenish the fuel you’ve burned by eating a high-carb snack. The body absorbs liquid nutrients most quickly, so I suggest a sports drink such as Endurox R4 or Clif Shot. About an hour later, eat a regular, balanced meal that includes protein. This will help repair stressed muscles, offering them more building material.

Booking agent
I prefer morning workouts, which can jump-start your day. When you work out, your body produces endorphins (biochemicals that are natural painkillers), lifting your mood and energy level. That helps you tackle the day more effectively—and with an upbeat attitude. An afternoon workout is fine too. In fact, if you hit a mid-afternoon slump, some lively exercise can pick you up. But I advise against choosing the late evening. You may be too tired then for optimal performance, and the resulting energy rush can be a real drag when you’re trying to get to sleep.

Now that you have some of the tools, hammer away, constructing an exercise schedule to support your health. Whatever you choose, the key to success is consistency. So stick with it, and your results will come in on time.

Jeffrey Gross is a certified fitness trainer based in Chicago. To suggest a topic for this column, e-mail trainer@poz.com.

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