

# START Fitness™

## THE UGLY TRUTH ABOUT GYM WORKOUTS

By Stephanie Weichert



I have wanted to talk about the ugly truth about the gym for quite some time now. Yesterday was a prime example of why. Truth be told, nearly every trip to the gym for me is a good reason to talk about what is happening at the gym and why it needs to be addressed.

I was sitting on the stationary bicycle putting in one of my obligatory “cardio days,” which generally consists of a 20- to 25-mile ride. It is ferociously boring, and it is all I can do to keep myself seated on that square foot of plastic. As a result of my insipid 3,600 seconds on the bike (and you thought I live for the gym!), I have begun talking to people and have found that many people carry misperceptions of how to spend their precious moments at the gym. Here are two myths that I have relegated.

### Myth #1—Showing up at the gym qualifies as a workout.

I used to train this guy (let’s call him Bruce). I would give Bruce the ultimate kick-rear-end workout two times a week. Bruce always showed up on time, and Bruce always gave it 100%. Bruce seemed to be eating well, but *he wasn’t losing the weight!* As his diligent trainer, this lack of weight loss used to boggle my mind. The problem wasn’t the days Bruce was working out with me; it was the days he was coming to the gym on his own! I asked him what he did that week by himself, and more often than not, he would say 20 minutes on the treadmill. He would argue that 20 minutes was better than nothing. GIVE ME A BREAK, will you? His goal was to lose 30 lbs.! If you put your gym clothes on, got in your car, made it all the way to the gym, and actually began exercising, don’t you think you could muster even just ten more minutes, maybe even twenty more minutes?

Consider how long you will be sitting on your backside later on that day. Consider what you will eat (or what you did eat). If your job requires you to be very sedentary, make sure to give your body the exercise it needs to sustain and

### My example week

**Monday >>** 90 min of Bikram Yoga\*

**Tuesday >>** 50-60 minutes of moderate to intense pedaling on a stationary indoor bike (I usually ride 20-25 miles), followed by 10 minutes of stretching

**Wednesday >>** day of rest (I generally have meetings on Wednesdays)

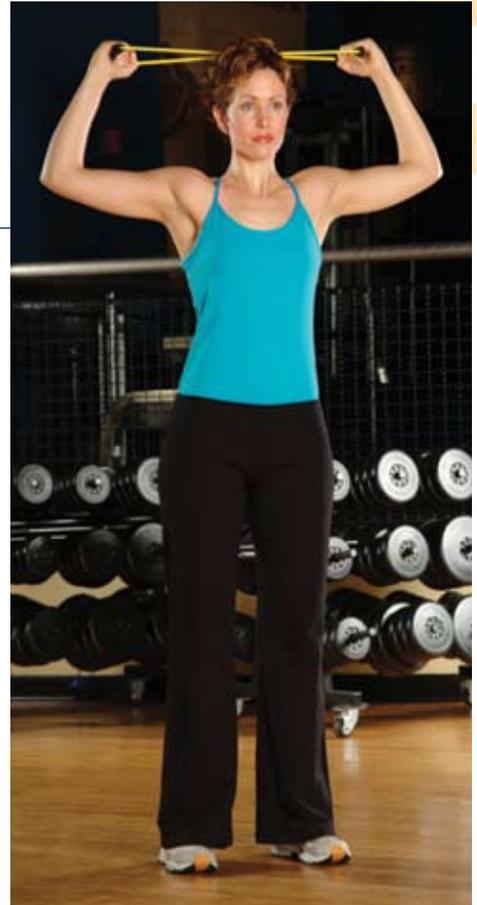
**Thursday >>** 50-60 minutes of lifting weights and tubing drills, followed by 10 minutes of stretching

**Friday >>** 90 minutes of Bikram Yoga OR 50-60 minutes on the stationary bike and a 10-minute stretch

**Saturday >>** Day of rest (hanging out with my favorite SSG)

**Sunday >>** 50-60 minutes of lifting weights and tubing drills with 10-minute stretch

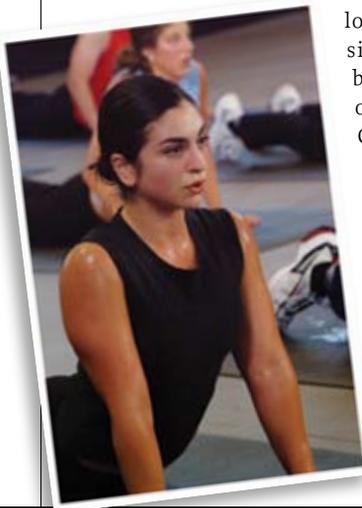
\*More about Bikram Yoga at [www.bikramyoga.com](http://www.bikramyoga.com)



### Myth #2—You will lose belly fat by doing crunches.

So, yesterday while at the gym, I was talking to (let’s call him Bill). Bill and I began to talk about his daily routine. His gym routine is a dream for sure. What I liked about his trip to the gym was that sitting in the sauna was considered part of the workout (see myth number one). His goal was to maintain optimal health for basketball. His workout consisted of 20 minutes (I will have to point you back to number one again) on the elliptical trainer, 15 minutes lifting weights for the same targeted muscle groups, 10 minutes in the sauna, and a few minutes in the pool followed up by sitting in the Jacuzzi. Are you jealous yet?

My point about his exercise routine is that everything he was doing was good, but he wasn’t maximizing his time in the gym



to be in reasonably good health. The American Heart Association (see: [www.justmove.org](http://www.justmove.org)) has this to say about exercise: “If you want to exceed a moderate level of fitness, you need to exercise three or four times a week for 30 to 60 minutes at 50–80 percent of your maximum capacity.”

Don’t get me wrong: I am not saying 20 minutes of exercise is bad (if you are new to fitness or are really limited for time on that particular day); I am only saying that if you can do 20, you can probably do a little more.



**I look at my week of diet and exercise like a menu at a restaurant: what I ate that day versus the amount of exercise I will be doing (input versus output).** —Stephanie Weichert

effectively. It is what I call spot training. Unfortunately, no matter how many crunches you do, your belly fat will not melt away. What you might get is a really great eight pack underneath a layer of belly fat.

**BILL'S WORKOUT**

*Cardio: 30–35 minutes total*

*Elliptical Trainer: 20 minutes*

*Swimming: 10–15 minutes (relaxed pace)*

**Problem?** The exercises have about a 10-minute rest in between, and the swimming pace is slow which is not considered working at 50–80% of his maximum ability.

*Weights: 15 minutes total*

*Cardio for legs*

*Bench press for chest*

*Crunches for abs ("so he won't hurt his back.")*

**Problem?** Bill is neglecting the rest of his body. Additionally, he thinks he will build leg muscle by maintaining a low to moderate level of cardiovascular exercise.

Be careful when your workout routine consists solely of a few specific exercises. You can lift your way into an imbalance in your body. Bill was right: strong abs will protect your back to some degree. However, if he isn't doing lower back exercises, the front and back sides of Bill aren't equally as strong, which can lead to problems down the road. Again, I am not saying a quick weight workout is bad. No, you don't have to work your entire body every time you go to the gym. But if you are doing only very specific muscle groups repetitively, then you might wind up with

some very strong parts and other weaker parts, which may lead to injury or pain.

I look at my week of diet and exercise like a menu at a restaurant: what I ate that day versus the amount of exercise I will be doing (input versus output). Then I look at the week to balance my workout days with rest days and adjust my eating accordingly. On any given week, I generally workout 4–5 times per week. I have just started adding in Bikram yoga for flexibility and strength in those muscle groups I don't normally target while at the gym. Warning statement: Beginners should be very careful when starting a new exercise routine because you are at the greatest risk for injury should you push weak muscles and connective tissue past what they are capable of doing.

I vary from week to week. Sometimes I will lift weights 2–3 times per week and other weeks I will do more cardio. I try to keep my workouts and weeks slightly different so my body doesn't get used to the workouts and I stay challenged. During the winter, I focus on strength; and during the summer, I focus on my cardiovascular training. During the summer months, I will add swimming and SGT Ken's fitness class to my weekly routine.



**NOTE:**

We would like to thank those of you who emailed and telephoned us concerning what type of socks that should have been worn with the Improved Physical Fitness Uniform. START Fitness™ is a small business based in San Francisco that strives to assist people from all over the world to reach their fitness goals. Your comments are very important to us. Please continue to show our staff that you are reading every detail of our articles. Your comments help us to identify what we need to improve on and where we are meeting our goals. HOOAH!

—SSG Ken Weichert

ILLUSTRATION BY SEAMAS GALLAGHER, NICOLE STYVESTER

Warning: Always seek the advice and guidance of a qualified health provider with any questions or concerns you may have prior to commencing a fitness program. This article should not be relied on or substituted for professional medical diagnosis or treatment. The exercises presented are for suggestion only. Participate at your own risk. Stop if you feel faint or shortness of breath.