

Exercising When Not Feeling Well: Does Activity Help or Hurt?

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It happens. You're going strong with your exercise program, and then, one day, your energy wanes. It's a sniffle, or perhaps something more. Often it can be difficult to figure out if you should plow ahead or take some time off and rest. Most helpful: listen to your body!

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Kathy Kaehler, a celebrity fitness trainer based in California and author of *Fit and Sexy for Life* (Broadway Books, 2007), says "You're the only one who knows how tired you might be, or if a cold or flu is coming on." Read on for tips from top experts about when it's safe to eek out a workout, and when to throw in the towel.

Red light: Go home and rest.

Condition	Reason to Rest
When you have a temperature of 99.5°F or higher.	Working out when you have a fever can cause your body temperature to rise even higher...potentially leading to heatstroke. Pamela Peeke, MD, author of the bestseller <i>Body for Life for Women</i> , (Rodale Books, 2005) and assistant professor of Medicine

	at the University of Maryland, advises you to stay home—and rest. “When you sleep, your immune system repairs itself,” she explains.
When you have gastrointestinal symptoms such as nausea, vomiting or diarrhea	These symptoms can lead to dehydration. When body fluids are reduced, you can be more prone to muscle cramps and spasms. Best to avoid exercise until your symptoms have completely disappeared, since rehydrating the body can take several days.
When your cold symptoms include chest congestion or tightness, or a hacking cough with mucus	Noah Gentner, PhD, assistant professor of Exercise and Sport Sciences at Ithaca College, says that as a rule, you should avoid exercise any time you are suffering from “below the neck” symptoms. Moreover, your breathing and lung capacity may be diminished, or you may have an infection in your airways—so it’s best to steer clear of the gym.

Yellow light: Proceed with caution.

Condition	Why you might want to take it easy
When you have a headache	Kaehler says sometimes exercise can make a headache disappear. “You have to try to determine where it’s coming from,” she says. Perhaps you missed your normal caffeine fix, or are under more stress than usual. But if you do head for the gym, be cautious, warns Dr. Jack Barnathan, president of New York Strength Peak Performance Consulting: “If your headache is causing you to be lightheaded then be careful. You might not want to be in a place with heavy weights and machines requiring coordination.”
When you have a sore throat	A sore throat may be just that, but it could be the sign of a bacterial strep infection. And since vigorous activity has been shown to reduce immunity, there’s a chance that the infection could spread further down the respiratory tract. Take it easy and exercise moderately.
When you are tired	Determine if your fatigue is due to mental or physical reasons. Why? Because if you’re mentally tired, exercise may be just what you need to invigorate you. “If you’re not beyond exhausted, you can exercise, but alter your expectations,” suggests Peeke. Sometimes, simply showing up and exercising at a lower level will help. Just be sure to remain alert and pay attention so you avoid unnecessary injuries.

Green light: Continue with a moderate workout.

Condition	Why you should grab your water and go
When you have a cold but no fever; with symptoms “above the neck” (runny or stuffy nose, sneezing or sore throat without a persistent or hacking cough)	Research shows that you can put as much effort into a workout when you have a cold as when you are healthy, and that moderate exercise during a rhinovirus-caused cold does not appear to affect symptom severity or duration. Consider exercise as medicine: Moderate exercise during the sniffles may even help you feel better by temporarily relieving nasal congestion. Remember to still gauge how you feel as symptoms can vary on an individual basis; talk to your doctor if you’re unsure.

How will you know when it’s OK to get back to your fitness regimen? Our experts share their top six tips for getting back on the treadmill.

Listen to your doctor.

Peeke says that our bodies need time to readjust properly after an illness. “Don’t be impatient and whack away at the same levels as in the past!” she cautions.

Be kind to your body.

Giving your body a chance to completely recover will reduce the likelihood of injury and relapse.

Eat well.

Ramp up your intake of fresh fruits and veggies

Sleep well.

Remember, your body heals while it rests.

Stay well hydrated.

Water, tea and clear broths are the best choices for restoring proper hydration after an illness.

Start slow.

Kaehler suggests exercising at a lower intensity until your body feels back to normal. What you can do instead: Gentle yoga or Pilates “can be done on your floor, or even your bed,” says Peeke. Just engaging in some gentle stretching can strengthen your body and help to make you feel better. A short walk or some push-ups, lunges or squats at home work wonders to get your circulation flowing again.

Next Steps

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