

The Discomfort ZONE

Can making our lives just that little bit harder propel us towards our goals? *H&W* investigates what happens when modern life gets too comfortable

So you've signed up to a new fitness app, ordered your next health food subscription box and you're also using your smart-watch to track your sleep – but how are you feeling? Fulfilled? If the answer is no, then it could be because you've managed to get into a bit of a rut. The fitness and wellness industry is now worth £5 billion in the UK alone and it's growing year on year. But, despite the recipe books promising to transform the way you live and the workout plans claiming to make you your strongest, leanest, healthiest self yet, it's not uncommon to feel that none of it is really working for you. To find out more, we asked the experts if opting out of our favourite commodities could be key to helping us reach our goals in both fitness and everyday life.

LOG OFF

"It's in our evolutionarily make-up to thrive when uncomfortable," says Charlene Gisèle, a primal health coach who specialises in guiding her clients toward positive lifestyle and behaviour choices (charlenegisele.com). "I've learnt that being in a state of constant comfort can be just as harmful to our health as feeling discomfort – we need adversity to strengthen us." Is there something to be said then, for ditching a mapped programme and deleting the apps reminding us that today isn't actually Thursday, but 'leg day'? "Apps can be good, as they can inspire us to get outdoors and think about our health," says Charlene. "But they can inadvertently put you into a mindset where you become obsessive, which I don't believe to be healthy."

How does the thought of deleting your favourite health app make you feel? Worried, or indifferent? If you're in the middle of a

training programme such as Couch To 5k, then it might not be the best time to go solo, but if you notice you're downloading app after app and finding that you're unable to stick to any plan, then that's a sure sign that neither your body or your brain are feeling stimulated by the choices you're making.

TWEAK YOUR ROUTINE

Our bodies are quick to catch on when we're not pushing ourselves hard enough (ever reached a plateau before?). But so are our brains, as Dr Tara Swart, neuroscientist and author of *The Source – Open Your Mind Change Your Life* explains: "If we never take risks and just stay in limbo, we stagnate and become more and more demotivated. People that build up their risk appetite become more successful, as they are more likely to grasp new opportunities. This has the knock-on effect of the person becoming more resilient, because if one of those risks doesn't work out, it's seen as a learning opportunity in itself. Taking healthy risks that lead to good outcomes demonstrates to our brain that this is a rewarding thing to do. Continually expanding our horizons builds trust in ourselves and this correlates to more oxytocin flourishing in our brain-body system, making us feel warm and connected." Examples of healthy risks include swapping your usual hatha yoga class for something

more fast-paced or driving to a sandy beach and running there instead of doing your normal lap around your local park. "Over the years I have tried many different pursuits – bouldering, dance, trail running, powerlifting – all because they looked fun," says PT Hollie Grant (pilatespt.co.uk). "The fear of trying something new is always worse than the actual doing. This is why I believe fitness is so important for women – if we feel strong and capable, we are unstoppable."

PUSH YOURSELF (GENTLY)

Stepping outside your comfort zone might make you feel a little uneasy, but it's important to push past that, as PT Stephanie Williams (@stef_fit) explains: "I have a love and hate relationship with running, so I try to make it as fun as possible. I'll incorporate short bursts of sprints throughout the run, then slow down to a jog. Going slow isn't something I love, so adding in a sprint or jumping lunges makes it more fun and I'm still pushing myself out of my comfort zone. Trying new exercises and making new routines is the best way to push yourself. Similar to most things in life, the more you do something, the better you become." Of course, there are ways you can push yourself other than adding in an extra rep or set. "Try going out into nature in an unconventionally comfortable setting, for example, go wild swimming when it's cold rather than waiting for a sunny day," says Charlene. "The same goes for the heat, wind and rain – just try being with the elements rather than avoiding them. That way, you can push your body to do what it's naturally designed to do best: thrive and respond to different exposures. Pushing yourself that extra mile is a combination of ditching what isn't working for you, going back to basics and then challenging yourself to do something new or better." **H&W**



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