

Smart exercise that preserves both sanity and fitness.

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B KINETIC FITNESS

BUILDING A POWERFUL BODY AND LIFE
ONE REP AT A TIME

Hi again!

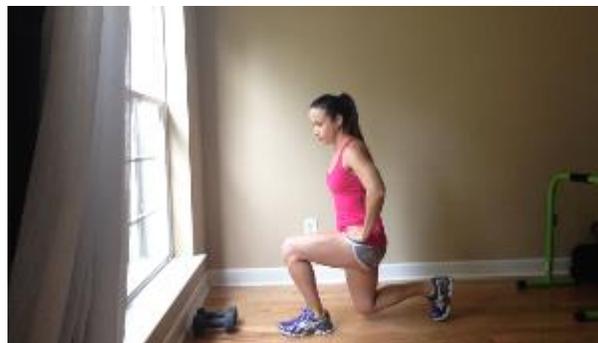
How is your week going? It's hard to believe that it's already June. :-O

It can definitely be a little tougher to stick to a workout routine and healthy eating this time of year. I know that I struggle with this sometimes, especially during stressful times and life transitions, like the big move I made from Nashville to Austin recently. It was certainly a good change, but stressful nonetheless. At any rate, it made for a challenge in the exercise department. I'm sure you can relate.

We're up to Part 3 of this 4-part series on thriving in spite of the obstacles thrown in our way by this thing we call Life. It's time to talk smart exercise. If you missed Parts 1 and 2, you can [click here](#) and get caught up.

When it comes to staying fit during times full of stress and devoid of free time, **maintenance** is the name of the game (same as mentioned in the previous email with nutrition --- sensing a theme here?). This doesn't mean keeping to your normal workout schedule; rather, it means working smarter and more efficiently in order to preserve muscle, stamina, strength, and energy with your sanity intact.

Exercise (along with sound nutrition) seems to be one of the first things to fall by the wayside when we are crunched for time and under enormous amounts of stress. Though understandable, this is unfortunate, as regular physical activity can help offset the effects of stress on the mind and body. Although it seems paradoxical, expending physical energy the right way in the right amounts can produce even more energy, provided that adequate recovery occurs in tandem.



And by "the right way," I mean exercising **smarter**, not harder. When under immense stress, the body's ability to recover is impaired, so it will take longer to recover from the same stimulus as before. This necessitates a downshift in both intensity and frequency of our workouts. For example, if you normally train 5-6 days a week, it would make sense to shift to a schedule of 3-4. Or maybe you go from 3-4 days a week to 2 days per week. This also sets expectations at a manageable level while giving you some wiggle room for the unexpected. (Need some ideas for short, effective workouts? Take a look at my Fast Fit series by [clicking here](#)).

Sleep and mood can also be affected when excess stress is a factor. When you are trying to get through a difficult time, you need all the energy you can muster. Accept that this is not the time to try to set PRs (personal records) or go

balls-to-the-wall. We need to do just enough to maintain strength, stamina, and body composition to some degree and let the chips fall where they may. This means just a few strength training sessions per week and lots of easy leisure walking (or biking or swimming or whatever else you enjoy).



Remember, above all else, what your goal and priority is right now — maintain your physique and fitness (through the minimum effective dose) and to manage stress.

And don't let what you **can't** do stop you from what you **can** do. Can't get to the gym to lift for an hour? Can you fit in a few sets of bodyweight squats and push-ups? Can't go for a 3-mile run or walk? Can you do ten minutes? Five minutes?

Sometimes it's more about keeping the momentum going than about getting a significant training response. And those reps and sets here and there begin to really add up over time.

Back when I coached high school soccer, one of the girls once questioned me

about why we were even bothering with conditioning work during the week of playoffs. She reasoned that it wasn't really doing any good; they weren't going to get any fitter in those few short days. And she was totally right. But the purpose of those sprints at the end of training wasn't for the fitness aspect as she had assumed. They were primarily to continue building mental toughness, learning how to push through discomfort, and to leave everything on the field when it really mattered. To find that last gear when they thought they had nothing left.

And that's what we're trying to accomplish here — to continue building our own mental toughness and staying in the mindset of self-care instead of merely survival. We all know how difficult it is to get back in the swing of things after an interruption. It takes much more work to get something going than it does to keep it going.



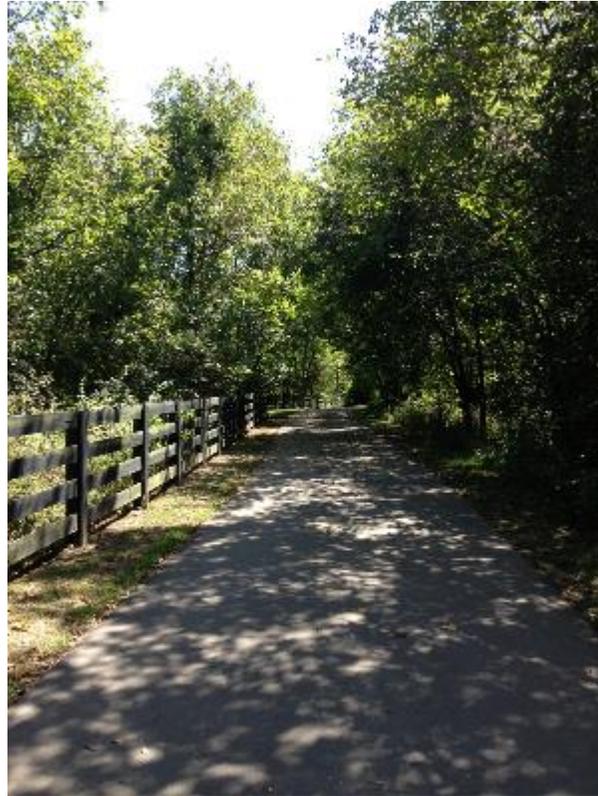
One caveat: If your life situation requires a lot of physical labor, such as moving, your goal should be to simply do what you can, when you can, and lower the intensity and volume (sets x reps x weight) even more. Going for leisure walks may be the very best thing you can do right now. In addition to burning some calories, the most important effect it has is on stress levels and mental clarity. It's

not slacking off or being lazy at all. It's aiding in both mental and physical recovery, which is sorely need during this time.

Most of all --- listen to your body. Take your cue from how it feels and then train (or not train) accordingly. Tight muscles, sore, dead legs? Not-so-great sleep last night? Hours of packing or work earlier in the day? But how do we know if we should really take the day off or if we're just feeling lazy and unmotivated?

One way is by knowing your resting heart rate baseline and comparing it to any particular day in question. Sit or lie down for a few minutes, and then count your heart beats for 15 seconds. Multiply that number by 4 to get your beats per minute (BPM). If it's 7 or more beats higher than your normal average, skip the workout and do something restorative, like a bath, massage, leisure walk, or gentle yoga. This is an indication that your body has not yet recovered from the various stresses it's been exposed to (physical and mental). The last thing you need to do is add more stress (in the form of a workout) on top of that.

Frequent (even daily) leisure walks --- even just 5 or 10 minutes --- can work wonders for stress management. Aim for a speed of 3 mph or below, or an intensity level of 3-4 out of 10 (slightly raised heart rate, able to hold a conversation easily). This stress-busting effect is optimized by spending that time outside in nature. Focus on taking deep, slow breaths and soaking in your surroundings.



Yoga is another effective recovery practice. Stick with the more gentle and restorative versions, such as Hatha, avoiding the more strenuous hot yoga, Ashtanga, Bikram, Vinyasa, and power yoga. The goal is to feel rejuvenated, not beat up and sore.

No time for a yoga class or DVD? Try one of my favorite ways to recharge: Sit in front of an empty section of wall with your butt a few inches away and your legs straight up the wall. Place a small pillow or rolled up towel under the low back for support. Spend just a few minutes taking slow, deep breaths, and visualize a serene setting, like a waves lapping against a beach on a sunny day or a relaxing moment during a vacation you once took to take your mind off your current troubles.

As an lifelong athlete and gym rat, I know how difficult it can be to slow things down with my workouts, let alone my crazy active brain. My ADHD brain doesn't allow relaxation to come easily at all. It just doesn't shut off when stress is driving me up the wall. I feel your pain more than you know.

So I totally understand that going hard in the gym or hitting the pavement can feel cathartic and really good in the moment. But it can backfire big time by keeping stress hormones elevated and breaking the body down too much, to the point where recovery is severely compromised. This leaves us with even less stored energy and resources to call upon during the remaining 23 hours of the day. No bueno.

If you simply must let it all out, try to keep it to once per week and around 20 minutes or less. Include a long, easy warm-up and cool down. And try to do it on a day when you will have plenty of rest afterwards as well as the next day. Be mindful and smart about it.

So, in summary:

- Downshift volume, frequency, and intensity of workouts.
- Take more rest between sets and exercises than usual.
- Sprinkle in R & R activities, such as leisure walking, yoga, and massage, throughout the week.
- Do what you can to keep the momentum going, even it's just a few minutes of activity here and there.
- Listen to your body. It knows what's best for you. :-)

There you go, enough tips to get you through the most time-pressed and stressful

of times. Again, the biggest take away here is to listen to your body and work smarter, not harder. Exercise is a stress, albeit a good one (most of the time), and it must be applied judiciously followed by adequate recovery. When in doubt, go for a leisurely walk. Your body and spirit will thank you.

As always, I'd love to hear from you. What strategies do you employ when time and motivation are an issue? Share your tips over on the [B Kinetic Fitness Facebook page](#).

And don't miss the final email in this series --- Stress & Energy Management. Exciting stuff. ;-)

Yours in Strength,

Becky

PS... Have a loved one or friend struggling to fit in a healthy lifestyle amid the daily stresses of life? Please forward this email to them to get them started on the right path. Thanks for sharing!