



How do I gauge my progress?

Chart your fitness and make the most of your training with these expert self-assessment tips

The Panel



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Question 1
What are the most important tests to assess your physical condition?

Recording changes in your waist size is the easiest way to calculate body fat. This is linked to blood pressure, circulation, cholesterol and levels of testosterone, so it's a good gauge of health.

Measuring your body fat percentage or waist size is the best way to assess your progress when you're losing weight because the scales don't measure fat levels alone.

Your body composition - or your ratio of fat to lean mass - is a better indicator of good health than just measuring your weight or body mass index.

Question 2
What are the best ways to gauge my progress?

Note your score for a 1RM deadlift every few weeks. It's intense but easy to track. The aim is to lift 5-10kg more each time you go for a new PB. Training with a PT is the best way to ensure progress.

Compare your scores for regular tests, such as 1RMs and sprint times. Record and monitor these over time, even if they're negative, to help you recognise if you need to change your training.

Set a goal and a deadline and keep a log. Choose a goal (power, endurance, flexibility) and pick a test that assesses those components. So for upper-body strength, record your pull-up max.

Question 3
How can I tell if I'm overtraining?

Tiredness and demotivation can be indicators of overdoing it. But you may not need to pack in your training - addressing your nutrition, sleep issues or stress levels could solve the problem.

If your records show progress is slowing you might be overtraining. Instead of a harder workout, have a de-load week to give the muscles time to repair and prepare for the increase in intensity.

Sluggishness, joint pain and slowed progress are symptoms, as are having a constant cold, insomnia and even depression. Don't train for a week and lower your intensity when you resume.

Gym gear explained

Foam roller

These cylindrical pieces of kit are used for myofascial release - or, to put it in simpler terms, getting rid of muscle knots. The best method is to roll one along a muscle until you find a painful spot, then keep pressure on it for 30-60 seconds. You can use them before or after a workout and they're a great way of preventing muscle imbalances and staying flexible.



Routine change-up

Rack pull

Has your deadlift hit a sticking point? Try rack pulls. Set up the bar in a powerlifting rack just above knee height, then lift it as you would for a deadlift but through a hugely reduced range of motion. Some trainers advocate doing this with more weight than you can handle on the deadlift, but this puts a huge amount of pressure on your back. Instead, try four sets of six to eight reps with 80% of your deadlift max.

