

8 Fitness Questions Personal Trainers Get Asked the Most



Answered by Fitness
Expert, Kansas City's
own Scott Smith



Confused about what's fact and fiction when it comes to fitness? You're not alone!

It seems like every time someone learns that I own a professional training business, they have a question they want to ask me. It doesn't matter whether it's a new personal training client ...a new friend ... or a casual acquaintance, the questions keep coming.

I've been in the fitness industry for many years now, so I've been asked thousands of questions. Bottom-line, though, there are a few that I keep getting asked over and over again.

In this guide, I've gathered 8 questions that I get asked most often and I've provided a detailed answer for each.

Do you have a question not included here? Feel free to email me at Scott@BodySmithKC.com or call me at 1-785-331-7766

Thanks!

**Scott Smith, Fitness Expert and
Owner of BodySmith Personal Training**

8 Questions I Get Asked Most Often

~ Scott Smith, Fitness Expert and Owner of BodySmith Personal Training

QUESTION 1: Which exercises are best for me?

When in doubt, the best exercise you can choose to improve your health is the one you enjoy doing the most.

I could go on and on about “muscle confusion,” “periodization,” “circuit training vs. split training” and blah, blah, blah. I appreciate the science behind choosing specific exercises to help get an edge and improve/speed results; however, for most people working out on their own, one of the biggest obstacles to even getting to the gym (or working out wherever for that matter) is not knowing what they are gonna do when they get there.

My advice to those who feel lost or overwhelmed with all the cool choices out there (CrossFit, P90X, Kettle Bell, Zumba, etc.) is to choose whatever actually gets you excited to do ANYTHING other than the alternative, NOTHING.

When you follow BodySmith Personal Training on Facebook and YouTube, we'll introduce you to tons of exercises, showing you how they benefit your body and how to do each move correctly. Don't be afraid to try new things so you don't get bored with your workouts.

And, remember, don't make it so complicated that you won't do it. An great exercise that you'll never do is not a great exercise for you!

Note: If you want to know which “lifts” I consider to be the most important for creating a lean body, visit www.BodySmithKC.com and download my free guide, *Scott's Top Ten Lifts You Need to Know*.

QUESTION 2: I'm a woman - won't lifting heavy weights make me bulky? I don't want that!

It's one of the top questions fitness professionals get asked: "Won't lifting heavy weights make me look bulky?" The answer is "NO! NO! NO!"

Simply lifting "heavy" weights or working with "low rep ranges" will not make you bulky. There's more to it than that.

But first off, why *should* you lift heavy (relative to your fitness level of course) weights in the first place? Because higher intensity or higher loads offer some of the best adaptations exercise has to offer. Including...

- Increased bone density
- Increased muscle recruitment (strength/force)
- Increased power (rate and strength/force combined)
- Increased metabolic rate
- Increased core stabilization requirements
- Increased confidence
- Increased muscle tone
- Increased energy through optimal hormone responses
- It's fun! (No kidding ... it really is!)

"Ok, but I don't want to get bulky remember? You're saying I can still lift heavy and not get bigger."

If you want to look like you have pencils for arms and legs, then weight training may not be for you. If you want to have shape to your body ... defined arms, small waist, a nice butt and toned legs ... then at some point you are going to have to throw some weights around. And to be honest, your genetics will determine what type of shape you ultimately can achieve.

Most of us do not have the genetic potential to get bulky without the following three factors in place.

1. Energy Surplus: You have to consume a considerable amount more calories than you expend on a daily basis. And alcohol doesn't count. We are talking about nutrient dense foods (loaded with protein, fiber, vitamins, minerals, and phytonutrients). That's not an easy thing to do on a regular basis. If you are someone who does not want to get "bigger," then DO NOT eat more than you burn off and we can assure you that you will NEVER get bulky.

2. High Training Intensity AND Volume: It's not just enough to do heavy compound lifts. It requires a substantial amount of training volume as well (sets, reps, and workout frequency). And to get to the level of volume we're talking about takes years of practice. Doing 3 sets of heavy deadlifts once every other week is not enough to demand your body to grow substantially.

3. Hormones: We are talking primarily about the anabolic hormone **testosterone** here. Men and women both have it, but guys in MUCH higher quantities. And even then it's often not enough for guys to be competitive in the sports and body-building worlds. One of the biggest differences between the average fitness enthusiast and the professional athlete / body-builder is the use of different substances to drastically alter hormone balances in order to train / recover better and subsequently synthesize those "unnatural", "bulging muscles."

Solely lifting heavy and eating right do not achieve the physiques you often associate with being "grossly bulky."

So please do not fear working with challenging weights in those dreaded 1-6 "rep" ranges. Sure, take your time perfecting your technique doing those lifts at lower loads for higher reputations but don't associate lifting light dumb bells 30 times with getting "cut."

What we know to be true is that a combination of heavy, medium, and light weights worked in a variety of set and rep ranges signal the best adaptations that we mentioned earlier.

Now, anyone reading this who still thinks they'll get bulky the minute they start lifting (temporary swelling aside), we insist you message us today at Scott@BodySmithKC.com, because you are a lucky, lottery winning genetic anomaly that we need to study and clone. And we are very jealous of you.

QUESTION 3: How much cardio should I be doing for optimal results?

Most people think that doing hours upon hours of cardio is the key to getting healthy and losing weight. That's not quite right. Actually, it's the intensity of your cardio not the length of it that will make the most difference.

When engaging in cardiovascular/aerobic exercise, it is in your best interest to workout at a higher intensity level for 30 minutes vs. a lower intensity level for 60 minutes.

“But what about the “fat burning” zone Scott?” Great question! The lower the intensity level the higher the % of fuel comes from fat, but this is misleading. Your body fat levels will ultimately be determined by your total caloric balance. If you take in more calories than you burn, you will gain weight. If you take in less calories than you burn, you will lose weight. Research has shown that higher intensity exercise (even over shorter time intervals) will increase your metabolism (and thus calorie burn) for longer periods after your workout is complete.

That means if you can run for 20 minutes instead of walk for 40, you will still be burning calories at a faster clip for hours and hours after your workout. Not to mention, I just can't stand doing cardio for longer than 30 minutes and I'm always looking to save time. Doing high intensity cardio three times a week for even just 20 minutes will have massive positive effects on your heart and lung health as well body composition.

Of course, any cardio at any level is better than no exercise at all. So, if you're just starting out, keep the intensity where you're comfortable and gradually increase it over time.

QUESTION 4: What's the best way to handle a setback?

I hate to break this to you, but you are not perfect. And on top of that, life is too unpredictable and complicated to expect your workout routine and diet to be perfect ALL THE TIME. What you really want is to live a healthy lifestyle most of the time ... expecting perfection is counterproductive.

Structure and holding the line to your game plan is important, but I always tell my clients that inevitably at some point they are going to face a setback. This could mean missing one workout or an entire month due to injury, work, laziness, or family emergencies. This could mean a busy social calendar that challenges your diet or a moment of weakness that leads to a binge.

In order to create a new habit and be healthy it takes the ability to be okay with slipping up but not okay with giving up. If you are a perfectionist, often your expectations of what needs to be in place to even give it your best shot are unrealistic to sustain, so you may find yourself quitting before trying.

Ever think these thoughts? "I missed Monday and Tuesday's workout so I might as well just get back on track next week and skip the rest of the week." "I'm traveling too much this month so I will start back up on a diet next month." "My legs hurt, so instead of getting an upper body workout in, I will choose to do nothing."

The key to being successful at anything, let alone your fitness goals, is not being a victim of your situation. Forgive yourself for being human and choose to get back on track when things don't go well. The sooner you decide that a slip-up or setback isn't a reason to trash your commitment to living healthy and fit, the sooner you'll get back on track.

QUESTION 5: I have a history of setting fitness goals and then giving up. What can I do to change?

Goal setting is a very important first step toward increasing our chances of getting what we want out of life, but without a game plan, a goal is only a wish. To take it one step further, a game plan that you are not disciplined enough to follow through on will remain only a dream. I see so many, including myself, take the time to address the first two steps, but fail to take decisive action or stay committed to seeing the plan through.

Everyone needs accountability. Everyone. Professional athletes are some of the most disciplined folks on the planet, but the great ones are not too proud to employ a trainer to ensure they not only have a successful plan, but execute it at the highest level.

So here's my advice on how to stay on track: Share your goals with at least three people, and be specific as possible. This does not have to apply solely to a fitness related goal but any goal in life.

Now, hiring your own personal trainer is a great accountability tool (and I'd love to be your personal trainer), but you would be surprised what simply sharing your goals with a small number of others will do to keep you motivated.

When you put something out there like that, it's only instinctive to not want to disappoint. We all take pride in actually doing what we say we are going to do, and when you have other people following up and asking about your progress, you may find yourself making better decisions in between those conversations to ensure a positive update. And while this is not about not wanting to disappoint others, it is about keeping your priorities on the radar.

This week, I have already told three of my clients that I have been logging my food and re-structuring my diet so I can get down to 6% body fat by the third week of December for a photo shoot. And now I just told you, too. That's how I stay accountable to my goals!

QUESTION 6: How do I stay motivated?

I've worked with clients for nearly ten years now, and I've worked with thousands of people. I can see when people are motivated and when they're not.

Most people who begin a new fitness or health effort are motivated at the beginning, then the motivation wanes. I find the secret to staying motivated is to know what kills motivation. It's been my experience that there are four big motivation killers out there. Here they are, along with what you can do to make sure they don't win:

1. Fear of Failure

For all the perfectionists struggling with procrastination, it's actually pretty straightforward what the underlying road block here is: the crushing weight of expectations, the proverbial gun to the head mentality.

How many times have you been defeated before even taking on a task or challenge because of the overwhelming unknown of whether or not it's going to be executed to your (or someone else's) high level of expectations?

I can justify putting off just about any chore or task by telling myself that I don't have the time or resources to get it done right.

This mindset leaves me feeling paralyzed. I have found that it's better (more often than not) to take the jump, regardless of whether or not circumstances are optimal. Regardless of whether or not rejection is a possible outcome. Regardless of whether or not other people will appreciate or understand your actions.

I'm not saying you shouldn't put your best foot forward, but you do have to realize that at some point you'll need to start taking steps forward.

Even though missing the mark is uncomfortable at times, most happy and successful people that I've interviewed or read about have all gotten okay with taking shot after shot until they finally hit their target.

2. Lack of Clear Goals

We can mitigate the overwhelming fear of failure by focusing on rewarding, enjoyable, and achievable goals.

Now, ultimately, living out a productive, inspired, and motivated life requires us to make choices. We simply can't have it all. But sometimes we get so caught up comparing our own situation to that of others (what others have and where others are in life) that we sabotage any chance we have of making the choices we really need to make to get to where we really want to be.

And worse, whenever we feel that our hand is forced in our journey, our intrinsic motivation is killed. Dreaming about what *you* want and then actually believing that you can achieve it (even during times of adversity) is the only way to really find motivation from within.

While big picture goals are important in order to understand where it is that you ultimately want to go, overcoming inertia (remember that heavy weight of expectation?) and making movement by knocking out a smaller plan of attack is a perfectly viable option when you are moving at zero miles per hour.

Whether it is by creating your to-do list and schedule the night before or creating a flow chart of how to get from point A to B, it's remarkably more fun, effective, and rewarding to create and implement daily strategies to get what you want out of life.

Without more tangible realizations of your dreams, wants, and goals (no matter how big or small) you are going to struggle knowing where to start.

3. Ignoring Your Health

As a personal trainer, this is more my area of expertise and yet I still struggle to follow my own advice at times. And much like depression, physical neglect will rob you of feeling pleasure for any activity.

One of the biggest battles I have on a regular basis is getting enough sleep. If I consume caffeine too late in the day, or decide to reflect on life at 10pm, there is a good chance I'm going to toss and turn till 2am, leaving me with little time to mentally rest and physically heal by the time my 5:30am training rolls around.

The entire next two days I will be tired, so I choose to consume even more caffeine to stay peppy for clients, thus creating a vicious cycle and yet all the while wondering why I'm so lethargic!

Poor hydration, lack of exercise, and large amounts of insulin in the body (primarily from overconsumption of carbohydrates) will also leave you riding the motivation roller coaster (with mostly drops) thus killing self-esteem, leading to depression, and in turn creating a whole new vicious cycle of negative thoughts and negative energy levels.

You need to stop the cycle at some point. Recognize this and get off this ride immediately!

4. Loss of Core Identity

How can you possibly handle any of the above three challenges effectively, let alone find the intrinsic motivation to even try, if you do not know in your heart who you are? Or more importantly, *who do you want to be?*

I'll never forget my first counseling session as an "adult" and how shocking it was to fail to articulate an answer to the above questions.

It took (and still takes) a lot of work to uncover and stay true to my answers.

If there has been one best practice I would advise anyone to perform it would be journaling. There's rarely a moment after being truly honest and fair with myself that I haven't been able to dial up some immediate intrinsic motivation and be okay with "doing me."

Because for me, having a stronger sense of self, combined with re-committing to loving, humble, and honorable principles has kept my world from collapsing when something doesn't go my way.

This is such an empowering feeling and makes risk taking so much more exciting, goal planning more identity congruent, and proactive health care a worthy and top priority.

All four of these productivity and happiness assassins seem to work together in an effort to kill my momentum. Sometimes they still win. But more and more these days I realize that I'm in control over them. It's been the battle of my life, and it may be yours. But our lives are worth fighting for.

QUESTION 7: I want to embrace a healthy lifestyle , but I have trouble really believing that it's even possible. Any advice for how to make the mental shift?

Just recently, I had a session with a client who told me that she didn't want to just change her body, she knew she had to change her lifestyle. To a trainer, this is a great thing to hear!.

I have had countless consults with prospective clients who either don't understand or choose to ignore the reality that legit, sustainable, lasting results require a change in behaviors that need to be consistent (through discipline and moderation) throughout a lifetime. So of course it is refreshing to know that I was working with someone who acknowledges the incredible and consistent work required to make changes. And, I'm delighted to hear that you, too, understand that making a commitment to a fit and healthy lifestyle is really the smartest decision you can make ... even if you're not quite sure how to do it just yet.

There's an important lesson you can learn from my conversation with my client ... the point at which I knew she finally "got it."

"I have to consciously think about and plan what I eat and how I'll move my body each day. I understand now that THAT'S what the lifestyle is. An active daily awareness of what I need to do to be happy and healthier."

And she was so right. It's not like you wake up one day and just love eating spinach all the time. It's not as if doing heavy back squats becomes particularly enjoyable (although you may learn to appreciate the challenge). It's not as if after putting in the work, on one magical day you are able to roll out of bed at 5am with a smile on your face because it's time to run in 40 degree weather and finally know in your heart that you have arrived ... you have a new lifestyle.

I have hope that we are moving past the “magic bullet” mindset and are realizing the sacrifices it takes to balance the limited resources we have (time, money, energy, relationships); and to allocate those resources accordingly to the upkeep of the one vessel that allows us to do everything else.

I’m sure it looks a little different for everyone, but your new healthier “lifestyle” probably includes a heightened focus on consuming nutritious foods in moderation, drinking more water, getting more quality sleep, and of course exercising regularly in a way that strengthens your heart, lungs, and muscles all while including the needed recovery time to heal, grow, and prevent injury.

It means doing the best you can each day ... having high standards. It does not mean you’ll be perfect each day, only that you’ll try.

The reality is this: You are going to fail, probably multiple times.

You will not always be at a place in your life where you are on point with your diet or exercise to the level you or others expect you to be. But it’s all good. Failing and trying again, failing and trying again, failing and trying again IS what the REAL lifestyle is.

The key here is TRY AGAIN. Always be willing to try again!

Being willing to take two steps forward right after getting knocked back one. When you stop trying is when you know you have dumped the idea that healthy living is beyond your grasp ... which is simply NEVER true. Be persistent in your resolution to never give up. And this brings me to my closing point: that this intangible thing we call a “lifestyle” is really just the manifestation of the identity we choose to assume: Someone who has the personal honor to never give up on themselves.

QUESTION 8: I'm starving myself and I'm not losing weight. What do I do?

Adopting new diets to lose weight has become an American obsession. An obsession we utilize to combat our obsession with food and saving energy.

Those diets often work in the short-term, but inevitably stall out as does our motivation to stay the course. Why is that? And how can we break the cycle and have more sustained success?

I propose the “Zig-Zag” approach. This is not a gimmick. This is not to be confused with “Yo-Yo” dieting! The Zig-Zag approach is how many professional fitness experts eat year round (as is my habit) in order to maintain low body fat levels.

There are three goals to this dietary approach:

1. Lower body fat mass
2. Increase lean mass
3. Be consistent for AS LONG AS IT TAKES to reach your goal

“Yea, we’ve all been told that Scott. So how come it’s not working for me?”

You’ve been in too large of a caloric deficit, for too long, or too many times, or all of the above. It’s really hard to build, let alone maintain muscle mass when you are starving yourself. After time, you will sacrifice these precious calorie-burning factories and lower your metabolic rate to the point where even a 1200 calorie diet will fail to reduce your body weight further.

Furthermore, long periods of caloric deficit can increase stress hormones which force your body into holding on to body fat stores for dear life. Compound this with the fact that your body will not have sufficient energy for effective workouts and your mental state will lead to “burnout” symptoms.

It’s not hard to see why pure calorie restriction is not a viable long-term strategy. You have not been periodically doing resistance training in a caloric surplus. Here’s where it all comes together.

When I have a weight-loss client who is frustrated with a plateau in their progress, they are always surprised (and slightly terrified I'm sure) when my response is "Looks like it's time to eat more and lift heavy things."

We have basically reached a crossroads and have two options:

1. Restrict your caloric intake further, or
2. Increase your calorie intake and training intensity.

I like option two better. The catch is that means a weight-loss goal takes longer to reach due to the fact that we need to gain a little bit of muscle back in order to lose a lot of fat later on.

And this process repeats itself until the goal is finally reached. It takes patience and discipline which don't sound appealing when compared to bullshit infomercials promising a quick fix. But it really does work!

So here's a four-step way to do it:

Step One: You need to know how many calories it takes to maintain your current weight. There are apps that can estimate this for you, but for greater accuracy, you should log your food and compare that number to your weight changes until you find this state of equilibrium. Sorry, this does take some work on your end, but you will learn a ton. Try using www.myfitnesspal.com to track your calories.

Step Two: View your diet as a two-phase (Zig and Zag) attack. Spend two months with the goal to reduce body fat and preserve muscle. Reduce your caloric intake by 500 calories per day for 5 days of the week. Seek to take in your normal intake on the other two days. Workout your hardest on your two normal caloric intake days.

Step Three: Spend one month with the goal to increase your muscle mass and reset your metabolism. Increase your calories by 300 kcal over your maintenance number for 5 days a week (your maintenance number might have lowered a bit during your two-month deficit). Increase your workout intensity these 5 days while in a caloric surplus

Step Four: Repeat steps Two and Three until you hit your goal.

Don't worry, you DON'T have to log your food year round, but it does take some effort on your part to figure out the initial numbers in order to make this system work.

If you are consistent and honest with your food logging, you will quickly get calibrated, and in time, be able to run this system without always having to plug everything in. (Though it is a good idea to do a food log from time to time to refocus and make sure your metabolic needs have not changed).

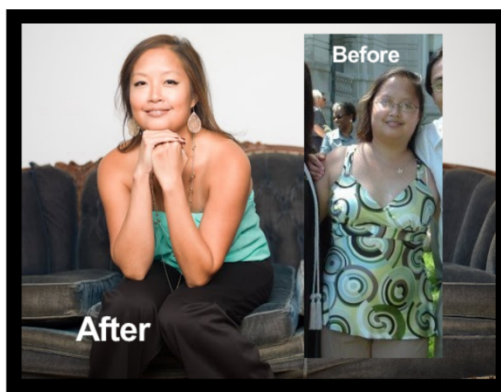
The hardest part is not the food tracking, but rather the discipline to repeat the cycle until you hit your target. You have to really commit to the paradigm shift that your results are not solely based on the scale (body weight) because for one-third of the year you are actually going to be gaining a little weight back (mostly muscle, which is denser than fat and burns more calories than fat!)... intentionally.

This is not a two steps forward, one step back thing either. If you truly do your best to cycle your focus in this “zig-zag” manner, it is my belief that you will have a psychological edge in lifelong moderation and take three steps forward every time.

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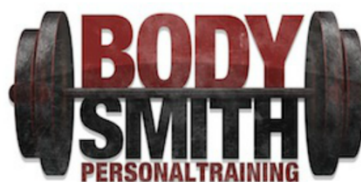
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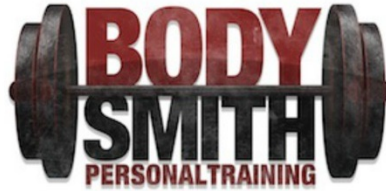
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For a limited time, we're doing some special consultations, including:

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For more information or to book your consultation, email me at Scott@BodySmithKC.com or call 1-785-331-7766.



P.S. These have been extremely popular, and we only have a handful of open spaces available. So hurry to reserve your consultation now before all the spots are gone.