

A Weekly Shot of News and Notes

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IF IT HURTS, STOP. Not only is "No pain, no gain" one of the most annoying slogans to come out of the fitness movement, new research suggests it's wrong.

In a study conducted at Iowa State University, pain or displeasure was the most accurate indicator that a person had crossed a threshold believed to be the optimum level of exercise.

"As astonishingly simple as it sounds, perhaps the most appropriate level of exercise intensity for health-oriented exercise is the intensity that does not feel unpleasant," lead author **Panteleimon Ekkekakis** said.

Most Americans could benefit from more physical activity, but **Ekkekakis** said that most people are not very good at estimating how hard they are exercising. Often they do less or more than what is recommended, he said, either missing out on benefits or giving up due to pain.

There is a specific level of exercise intensity that seems to be appropriate for a wide variety of people, **Ekkekakis** said. This intensity corresponds to the level of the transition from aerobic to anaerobic metabolism-- when the body switches over from burning fuel from aerobic (with oxygen) to anaerobic (without oxygen) sources.

In two groups of 30 students who underwent exercise testing, feelings of pleasure and displeasure were more accurate than heart rate and other measures at determining the aerobic-anaerobic transition, the researchers report in the February issue of the journal Preventive Medicine.

For people who are just starting an exercise program, particularly those who are overweight, the intensity that corresponds to their transition may be very low, "perhaps not faster than a stroll," **Ekkekakis** said. "It is important that they stick to the intensity that feels comfortable rather than trying to match cultural expectations of what exercise should look like or feel like to be effective."