

MH TECH AWARDS! KILLER GEAR FOR YOUR KITCHEN, GYM, AND OFFICE

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Men's Health

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MH

BODY

VITALITY STARTS HERE ▶

APP
SOLUTE
MUSCLE

A new generation of fitness apps do more than make you sweat. They deliver community, coaching, and gamification to drive you to **STRENGTH, MUSCLE, and POSITIVE VIBES.**

BY ANDREW HEFFERNAN, C.S.C.S.

FOR YEARS, YOUR PHONE was more a gym distraction than a gym tool, a gateway to texting rabbit holes and fantasy-football check-ins and the occasional #gains selfie. But now that touch display is ready to be something else. Now your phone is ready to push you to sweat more and build muscle faster. ▶

Why? Because the pandemic hit the light-speed button on the development of fitness apps. The new ones do more than make you sweat; these apps deliver motivation, inspiration, and accountability. All of this progress was much needed this year, since fitness mainstays were again in flux. Gyms struggled to stay open (again), and critical gym gear was in short supply (again). For much of the year, you could count on just a few sweat options: yourself and the right app (and *Men's Health*, of course).

The best fitness apps are now optimized for our pending postpandemic lifestyle, letting you replicate the gym experience you've always wanted, no matter your equipment or your location. A decade ago, a fitness app was just a collection of move names, sets, and reps. But today's best virtual platforms also feature in-depth coaching, bringing a trainer or group-class atmosphere into your living room.

That's why even gym chains, which once viewed virtual fitness as a rival, are getting in on the action. Life Time started offering virtual training sessions over Zoom and FaceTime earlier this year, and it has more than 150 on-demand workouts on its app. And trainers like celeb muscle sculptor Don Saladino and the no-nonsense Bobby Maximus have found new life on apps.

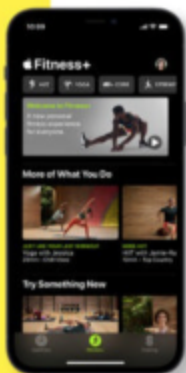
"For a long time, I stayed away from a lot of apps," says Maximus. "The biggest reason I decided to do an app was it gave me the ability to reach the most people. In real life, I'm not scalable. An app helps."

An app is also with you constantly—even when you're not in the gym. It can assist you with everything from diet to sleep to mental focus. So it can help keep you on track when temptation strikes, whether you're loitering in the cookie aisle or binge-watching *Yellowstone*, says nutritionist and trainer Angelo Poli. "Training in person, people think it's all about the workout," says Poli, who sold his gym last year to focus on coaching his clients through his own app, MetPro. "The app tells them it's equally about everything they're doing outside the gym: food, sleep, stress."

It's encouragement, instruction, and inspiration, all at the press of a button. But to get the most out of these fitness apps, you'll want to check out these tips.

UNDERSTAND THE APP-MOSPHERE

2021'S APP EXPLOSION has yielded a multitude of choices. Not sure which one's for you? Start with these four categories of apps, each of which is designed for a different training goal.

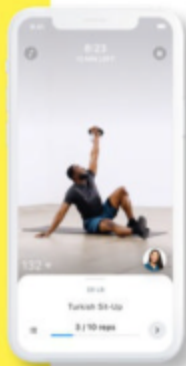


➔ For Team Sweaters

The fitness-app experience used to be solitary—just you and your phone. But a handful of apps let you work out alongside friends, enticing group fitness fans.

BEST OPTION: Apple Fitness+. You can now call a bunch of friends (up to 32) on FaceTime (or in a group chat), then immediately jump into any Apple workout or meditation session. Fitness+ replicates group fitness competitiveness, too: When somebody closes an Activity ring, you'll get a notification.

Price: \$10 per month, or \$80 per year

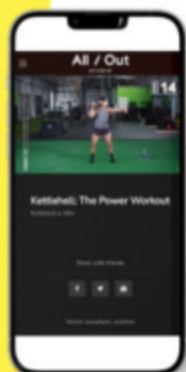


➔ For Customized Coaching

Sure, you could do the same workout as everyone else. But if you have a nuanced fitness goal (think: mastering a pullup), you'll need more one-on-one attention.

BEST OPTION: Future, which lends an Apple Watch to every member for easy metrics tracking and connects you to a trainer who sends you custom workouts, complete with videos for each move. Do the workout, then check in with your trainer, who's available to talk about everything from workouts to nutrition to why you didn't feel yesterday's biceps curl.

Price: \$149 per month

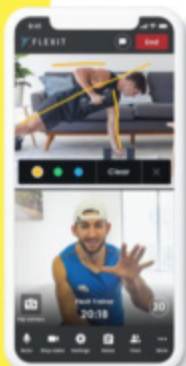


➔ For Fitness Videos on Your Phone

From Richard Simmons to Tae Bo, classic follow-along videos defined 1990s home fitness. Three decades later, the format still delivers fat-blasting goodness on a host of platforms.

BEST OPTION: The best part about **All Out Studio** isn't that it's our own app (although that never hurts). The more important thing is how it evolves follow-along videos, organizing workouts from the likes of Don Saladino, kettlebell master Eric Leija, and *MH* fitness director Ebenezer Samuel into programs built for your long-term fitness goals.

Price: \$15 per month



➔ For a Real-Time Form Check

The issue with most apps: Nobody's actually watching your form. So you can round your back on your deadlifts or rush through your child's-pose cooldown.

BEST OPTION: FlexIt, which connects you directly to a trainer for a live one-on-one session. This means you have somebody watching your every move via a FaceTime-like interface that's tailored for training. And when your form is off, your trainer can screenshot a frame of your move and telestrate the corrections to you instantly.

Price: From \$75 per workout session



AVOID THE SOLO SWEAT!

APPS STILL STRUGGLE TO REPLICATE A SENSE OF COMMUNITY, LEAVING YOU WITH NO ONE TO COMMISERATE WITH AFTER A BRUTAL WOD. BUILD YOUR OWN VIRTUAL COMMUNITY WITH THIS ADVICE FROM PELOTON INSTRUCTOR ADRIAN WILLIAMS.

- 1. CHAT AWAY!** Apps like Ladder and Apple Fitness+ have chat functions. Use them, says Williams: "There is a way to support individuals there for the same purpose as you."
- 2. BE HONEST.** The gym struggle is real. Don't be afraid to say it. Williams recalls a user "saving" a tough pushup till "next week." "Those comments make me smile," he says.
- 3. ACTIVELY RECRUIT.** Can't make virtual friends? Ask longtime training buddies to join your app. "Tell your friends and start doing it together!" says Williams. "Nothing feels better."

MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR VIRTUAL TRAINER

VIRTUAL WORKOUTS can bring a trainer into your living room, but that trainer still needs plenty of help. "I can only see what you let me see on the screen," says *MH* fitness director Ebenezer Samuel, C.S.C.S. Get around that challenge (and others) with these tips.

❑ CREATE A "GYM SPACE"

DON'T TRAIN in the same space that you work or relax in, says veteran trainer Lauren Kanski, NASM. Set a corner apart in your room (a yoga mat could do the trick), so your training space feels unique. "It'll help you mentally escape," says Kanski.

❑ HEADPHONE IT IN

WHENEVER POSSIBLE, wear Bluetooth headphones, says Daniel Giordano, C.S.C.S., head physical therapist at Bespoke Treatments. This lets you move around during your session, and even if you move far from your screen, you'll always hear your trainer's cues.

❑ SKIP YOUR CLOSE-UP

YOUR TRAINER will want a full-body view of each exercise; that can't happen if you place your phone on the ground. Buy a cheap tripod, says Don Saladino, who's virtually trained Ryan Reynolds and Billy Crudup, or lay your laptop or phone on a table or chair.

❑ BRING THE GYM HOME

IF YOU'RE investing in an app subscription, invest in basic gym tools, too. This will keep the workouts fun. "It won't be motivating to stick to a plan with a makeshift broomstick," says Kanski. Start with a pair of 20-pound dumbbells or a medium-strength resistance band.

MUSCLE UP WITH INSTAGRAM

Follow these two rules to transform IG, which is full of workouts, into a free fitness app.

FOCUS ON INITIALS

AHOST of trainers regularly post free workouts on Instagram. But many of the workouts in your IG feed won't help you build muscle or strength. "There's so much free content," says Samuel, "but free and good aren't the same." Separate "influencers" from trainers by looking for certifications. Stick with trainers who have C.S.C.S., NASM, or NSCA-CPT after their names.

BUILD A PLAN WITH SAVES

MANY GYMGOERS choose a different workout every day. "Instagram is packed with variety," says Samuel, "so you might think every workout needs to include new exercises." Instead of picking random workouts, make use of Instagram's underutilized save icon. Choose three to five workouts at a time, and hit the save icon on the bottom right of the post. For four to six weeks, do those workouts exclusively. "This will allow you to progress in those workouts," says Samuel, "instead of trying too many new moves." Yes, this may seem repetitive. It's also a surefire path to strength.