



Don't Count: Listen

Counting repetitions, or weight you can lift or how fast you can run are great ways to measure progress. The best athletes in the world measure every aspect of their performance. And, it pays off with trophies.

But you and I, most likely, are not world class athletes. We are simply trying to get into good shape so we can maintain an active life for years to come and avoid illnesses associated with aging.



Measuring our workouts comes with risks. We risk allowing reps, weight or time to dominate our workouts and, sooner or later, they will push us into burnout or an injury. I have done this 1000 times, maybe more.

I did this recently during sprint training. It was a cold day but I had done my warmup exercises and a few easy sprints. Overall it was turning out to be a good workout, but not great. I did not have that

ready-to-go feeling you get when you are fully warmed up. The sun was going down, so I decided to time a 50M sprint anyway. Not full speed, but with a bit of a push to get the feeling of running fast. The run felt good but my time was slower than I had hoped. After a short rest, I decided to do another run, but this time faster. I was only fast for the first 20M. Then I pulled my left hamstring and had to stop immediately. I could barely walk and cursed myself for my stupidity.

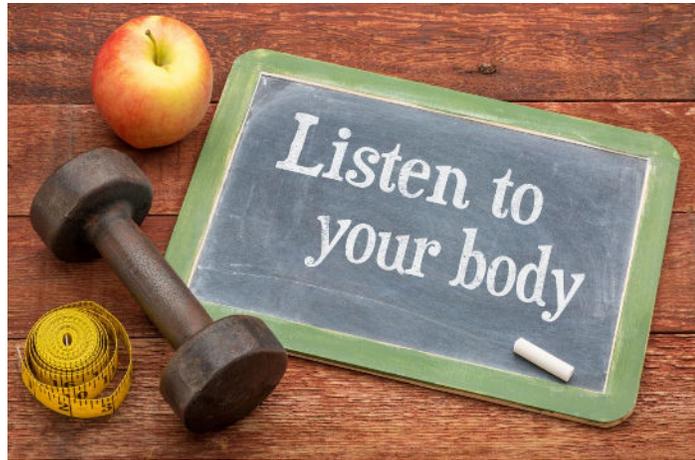
Two weeks later, after Rest, Icing, Compression, Elevation (RICE) and a lot of gentle stretching and warmups, my hamstring was ready for sprint training. But, I was behind where I was just a few weeks earlier.

What if I had put the stopwatch in my pocket and simply run a few more moderate sprints? I probably would have avoided the pain and the setback in my training. Being too driven by metrics can be detrimental to your journey to better fitness.

It turns out that there are others exploring this territory. Physical therapists advocate the importance of listening to your body.

At **OrthoRehab** in Minnesota the physical therapists encourage all their patients to start listening.

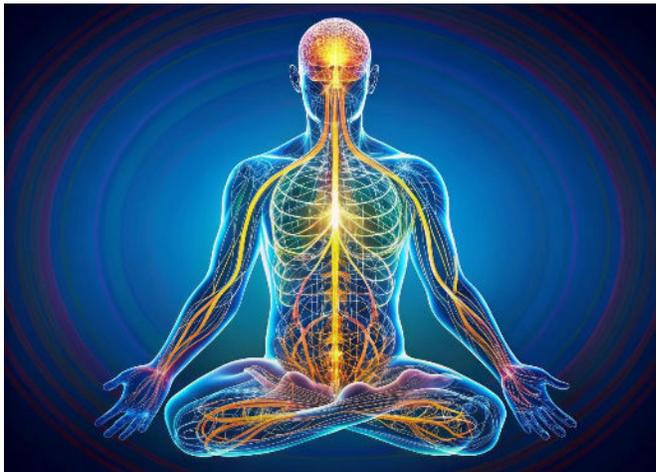
“One of things we try to teach every patient throughout their physical therapy sessions is the importance of listening to their bodies during athletic activity and exercise.” ([The importance of listening to your body during exercise](#))



At **Peake Physical Therapy**, in Maryland

“We believe that “listening to your body” can help you recover faster, prevent injuries, and improve performance.” ([How to listen to your body.](#))

The fitness products company, **Peloton**, reminds us that listening to your body may take some training to get the full benefits. They recommend finding your baseline so you can compare how you feel when you are exercising to your baseline. This practice can also tell you when you need to rest and recover. ([What does it mean to listen to your body?](#))



I am surprised that there is little actual research on questions like “Does guiding your workout by listening to your body improve performance or reduce injuries?”

Fortunately, there is lots of research on the underlying neurobiology. The ability to sense what is going on inside your body is called **interoception**. The senses of sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell help us perceive the world around us. Interoception helps us understand

what is going on inside our bodies.

W. G. Chen and colleagues, at the National Institutes of Health, published a comprehensive review of the research on interoception and provide this definition.

“Interoception refers to the representation of the internal world and includes the processes by which an organism senses, interprets, integrates, and regulates signals from within itself.” (1)

They note that our understanding of interoception has expanded dramatically in the last few decades driven by modern high resolution digital scanning technology. We have learned that interoception includes mechanical, chemical and electrophysiological

components that sense internal organs and also regulate them. *Interoception is a bidirectional system.*

With that in mind, I have been experimenting with doing workouts without counting everything possible. Instead I focus on listening to my body. I begin by asking if I have any pain-points that I need to adjust for? How is my energy level?

I had gotten into the habit of using my smart watch to track my heart rate during workouts. But, the other day I went to the gym and left my watch at home. Having no way to check my heart rate during my workout, I had to rely on my breathing to tell me when I was ready for my next set of exercises. It was easier than I expected.

When I do an exercise, I go until it gets hard or my breathing gets elevated. For resistance exercises I stop when I have about 2 more reps “in the tank.” Then I know I have worked hard enough to get a fitness benefit. For aerobic exercises, I ask myself if I can talk but not sing because I am breathing hard. If the answer is yes, then I know I am in the good training zone.

Working out like this felt like going for a hike without relying on my GPS. It felt more natural and enjoyable.

For **your next workout**, try starting with a brief scan of your body, head to toe, to see if there is any pain or weakness you should pay attention to. Also, get a sense of your energy level. Then try using your breathing to guide how hard you push yourself.

Let's Get Moving!

1. Chen, W. G. et al. (2021). The Emerging Science of Interoception: Sensing, Integrating, Interpreting, and Regulating Signals within the Self. *Trends Neurosci.* 44(1): 3–16.

Fun Fact



Dick Van Dyke

Dick Van Dyke entertained millions of us from the 1960s to the early 2000s. He starred in TV shows like The Dick Van Dyke Show, the New Dick Van Dyke Show and Diagnosis: Murder and movies like Mary Poppins and Chitty Chitty Bang Bang. He is known for his positive energy and physical comedy.

On December 13, 2025, Dick celebrated his 100th birthday.

How did he do it? Dick's answer is exercise. Dick still works out three days a week. His routine includes strength training for upper and lower body, stretching and yoga. ([Dick's Secret to a Long Life](#))

Dick has written a book about how to live to be 100. Check it out here ([100 Rules for Living to 100](#))

Happy Birthday Dick, from all of us!

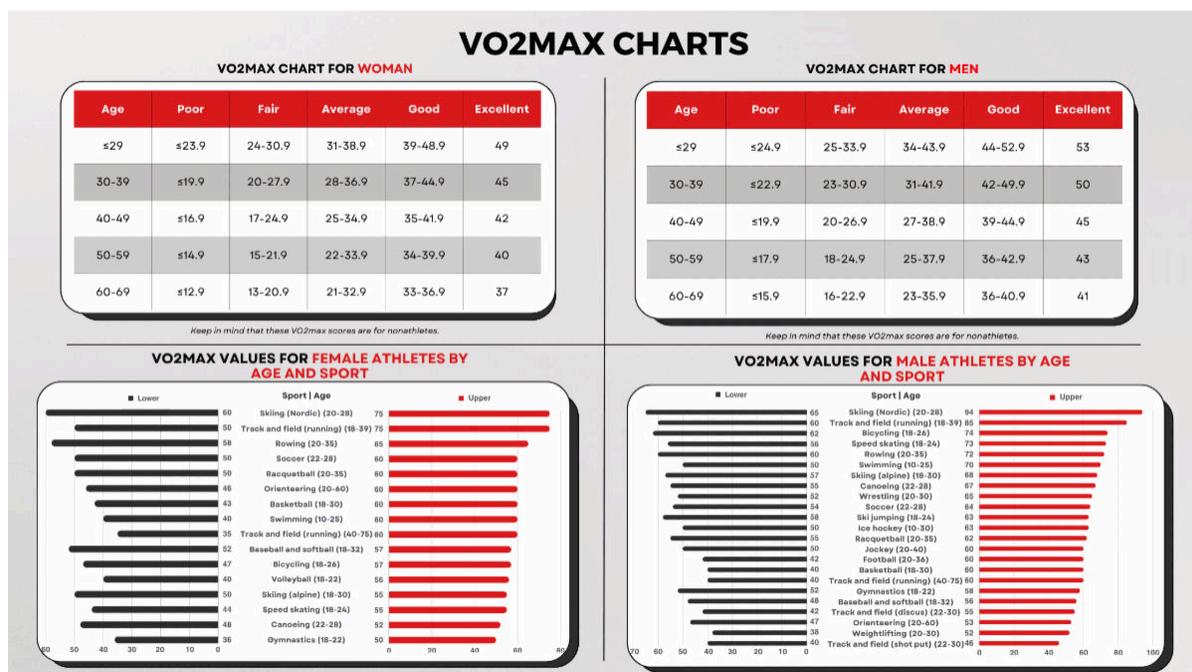


Personal Note: Complaint Dept.

The other day I was at the gym on a tread mill. There was a display that showed the recommended heart rates for people in their 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s and 60s. For a split second I thought, "Gee, at 80, maybe I am not supposed to be on this tread mill." But, I just kept jogging and pretended that I was 67.

It's irritating to have to fake your age. I did that in college and it didn't work out well.

Later that day I looked for standards for fitness for people in their 80s, like me. Standards for VO2 max, the gold standard for aerobic fitness, show a similar bias toward young people.



It's almost like we older folks don't exist. Maybe younger people don't see us because we are so far out in front of them

Hey guys! We are still here - out front. Try to keep up!

P.S. For a more balanced perspective check this article in the journal Circulation [VO2Max and Aging](#).

Explore [Train4Life.live](#) to learn more about exercises you can do to have a more active and healthy life.

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December 2025 - Rusty Warren

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