

**In search of more vitality, enthusiasm and energy?
Wonder why even your workouts are feeling sort of blah?
You could be suffering from a subtle (or chronic) passion deficit.**

By CAT THOMPSON

DO YOU FREQUENTLY HEAD TO THE GYM ready for a great workout only to find yourself watching the clock and forcing yourself through the motions? Or, even worse, do you get up in the dark, dreading your workout, and then tumble back into bed for “just five more minutes”? When was the last time you smiled through your entire workout, loving what you were doing and how you were feeling?

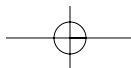
Your answers to those questions may depend in part on your level of passion. But what is passion, really?

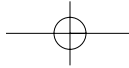
Passion is our ability to feel strongly, and more importantly, to feel strongly in a given moment. Passion feeds our bodies. We thrive on it. It fills us with fire and vitality, keeping us young, healthy and eager to meet the challenges of our lives. The more passion we feel, the more energy we have. The more energy we have, the easier it is to participate enthusiastically in all areas of our lives.

There is a great deal of physiological and psychological research suggesting that regularly repressing or denying your feelings costs you physical energy. When you are unable to feel strong feelings, or you force yourself not to feel them, your passion dissipates. The energy required to hold down feelings has to come from somewhere, and the more you are holding back your feelings, the less energy and authentic enthusiasm you will have for everything else — workouts, socializing, hobbies and relationships.

GOING, GOING, GONE

Where is all your emotional energy going? Most people spend the majority of their time in work environments, and while we may not think of them that way, many workplaces are in fact hotbeds of emotional passion. Stress, conflicts and time crunches put us into crisis mode. Tempers ▷





flare, blame and resentment fly around. Company dramas hook our attention and our emotions get engaged with juicy office gossip. Unfortunately, these things can also drain our reservoirs of passion, which then become unavailable for anything else.

Often people use the gym as a place to vent their stress and frustration. While exercise can help us recuperate energy and our sense of well-being, pounding down the treadmill or heaving big weights in order to “blow-off” or “burn through” feelings without fully processing them can eventually cause a backlash.

The first symptom of ignored, unexpressed emotion may be less available energy for your workout, or a sense that what was once fun and energizing has become tedious and habitual. Without passion in your workout, it can feel like just another block of time in your day planner — another item waiting to be crossed off. That can set up a nasty chain reaction, because if you force yourself through your workout while ignoring the important messages your body is sending, you are essentially sending your system an even stronger message: “I don’t care how you feel.” Your body is likely to respond by making even less energy available.

Naturally, there are lots of other reasons you might not feel energized to work out (e.g., a heavy meal, lack of sleep or inadequate recovery from a recent exercise routine). But on the whole, we are sometimes too quick to accept “practical,” superficial explanations, particularly when we’d rather ignore a deeper, emotional message.

GETTING IT BACK

Passion is created when you commit to doing the things that make you happy. If you like to work out but don’t have the time due to job or family responsibilities, your body sees that you are determined to put your own happiness last. It will be very hard for your body to reward you with energy and passion if it is always being used for someone else.

A commitment to being in your body — emotionally and physically — is really a commitment to a relationship. Just like any other relationship, if you make your body promises that are never kept, it will withdraw its energy and stop being a devoted partner. Likewise, if you sign up your body for something without having your emotions on board, your body won’t be able to follow through.



IN SEARCH OF LOST PASSION

Perhaps you are getting up in the morning feeling as though you didn’t sleep at all, or dreading things you’ve committed to doing. If you find yourself reluctant to complete your responsibilities, you can bet that you and your body have some serious mutual resentment going on.

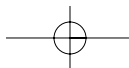
If you have lost your passion for your workouts (or your life in general), ask yourself a few questions to see where your energy might be going instead.

- Are you feeling fear about something?
- Are you angry with someone?
- Are you withholding your emotional energy from a relationship?
- Are you blaming someone for something that has happened in your life?
- Are you compromising yourself or your integrity in some way?
- Are you being honest and authentic with yourself and others?

All Passioned Up and Nowhere to Go?

OKAY, YOU’VE GOT YOUR PASSION BACK! Here are some great things to do when you are energized and raring to go: bike, run, lift, hike, dance, do a creative or home-improvement project, sing along with the radio at the top of your lungs, turn on tunes and rearrange the furniture, massage your own body top-to-bottom, walk around smiling at people, play tag or another outdoor game with a child.

You may also want to ask a pal or spouse to join in the fun. But while it can be exhilarating to share the feeling, think twice before you call anyone — they could end up bringing you down. You might also be surprised at what happens when you keep this energetic gold to yourself!





Passion Backlash

EXERCISE DOES WONDERS for your energy level, but in some cases it can have a surprising, opposite effect. Emotional trauma is stored in the body. If you have not exercised for a long period of time, or have not exercised intensely, you may have unresolved emotional issues locked in your muscles. When you begin to exercise and break a sweat, those intense feelings can release in a rush of grief, fear, anger or despair. This can cause a backlash against the exercise, forcing you to quit before you ever reach the point of energetic return.

Be aware that if you are beginning a new workout schedule or a new form of exercise, you may experience some strong feelings — feelings that may seem inexplicable and unrelated to anything happening in your life.

If you are feeling blocked or discouraged, spend some time writing down what you are feeling. You may find yourself saying things like “I feel so fat, I feel so lazy, I hate how I look, I’ll never lose this weight, I hate getting old,” etc. Once these feelings are out of your energetic body and on paper, they are ready to release from the muscles. The next time you go to workout, you may find yourself with more energy. Continue with this process, asking your body questions and listening to its answers, and your workout will pay you back with renewed vigor and vitality.

Self-honesty is critical to evolving both emotional and physical patterns. If you are in the habit of blaming others for your experiences, you will lose much of your passionate energy in the struggle to make others “wrong” so you can be “right.” When passionate energy is used in this way, it is no longer available to envision and create a more joyous life.

Feeling your feelings and owning them leads to increased power and energy. This process begins with self-honesty and taking responsibility for changing the things in your life you don’t agree to.

If you are interested in where your passionate energy is being spent, try keeping a passion checkbook for a week or so. Make a list of things that you do or that happen to you each day that you feel strongly about. List each item as a debit or a deposit, assigning each a dollar amount commensurate with the amount of emotional energy it involved. Debit items would include investing your energy in things like gossiping with malice, making judgments about others, feeling taken for granted, withholding your approval or participation in group projects, or anything you do that makes you dislike yourself. Deposits would be moments or events in which you were joyfully helpful, enthusiastically participating, or doing anything that feeds you with energy. This could be working out, dancing, working on a hobby, playing, having a great team experience in your office, or any number of things that make you feel good about yourself.

At the end of the week, see how your checkbook balances out. Are you investing your passion in joyful things? Are you wasting it by directing it at others with blame or resentment? Are your emotions caught up in something you read in the paper or saw on the news? If you can pull your passion out of other people’s dramas and use that energy for yourself, you will be well on the road to creating a life of power and passion. Your body will reward you with more intense energy. You will find yourself waking up refreshed and excited to participate in the day.

Focusing on blame and resentment will always cost you. Focusing on changing your life to follow your authentic interests and desires will repay you richly.

TURNING UP YOUR EMOTIONAL DIAL

Our feelings are all regulated by the same emotional dial. This dial can be set at low or high or somewhere in between, but the intensity can’t be set differently for individual emotions.

It’s unrealistic to ask yourself to feel high levels of passion in certain areas of your life (being in love, working out, succeeding at your job) and not feel strongly in others (conflicts, family issues, fears). Passion is the ability to feel strongly about everything.

If you choose to run your life in the middle of the road, refusing to feel strong feelings, be prepared to have a middle-of-the-road body. You cannot expect an amazing physique if your life is consistently run on the low end of your emotional dial. Your face and body will reflect your level of enthusiasm and passion.

One other thing: Working out at the gym (even if it brings you joy) should not be a compensation for boredom or dissatisfaction in the rest of your life. If you find that your only enthusiasm is for your workout, look at your life and make some changes. Find your bliss. Follow your joy. Commit to being passionate about life. □