

THE GYM DICTIONARY

**RPE, RIR, ROM...?
say *WHAT?!*
let's decode all that 'gym
speak', shall we??**



TAKE GOOD CARE FITNESS

HEY. HI. HELLO.

Have you heard folks talking in the gym and it sounds like they are speaking a different language?! All the terms and acronyms can leave you like... say, WHAT?!

I'm not sure Google translate will work in this scenario...so I'm going to help you DECODE!!

In this guide you'll find 42 of the most common gym terms and their definitions - Think of it as your "gym lingo" cheat sheet ☺

Happy learning 🧐



photo by Ryan Haywood

TRAINING / WORKOUT VOCAB

REPS

Short for repetitions. One complete movement of an exercise from start to finish. For example, one squat down and back up equals one rep.

SETS

A group of consecutive reps performed without rest. For example, doing 10 squats in a row is one set of 10 reps.

LOAD / WEIGHT

The amount of resistance you're using during an exercise. This could be the weight of dumbbells, barbell plates, machine settings, or even your own body weight.

TEMPO

The speed at which you perform each phase of an exercise. Often written like 3-1-1 (3 secs lowering, 1 sec pause, 1 sec lifting). Controlling tempo increases difficulty and time under tension.

REST / REST PERIOD

The break you take between sets or exercises to allow your muscles to recover. Rest periods typically range from 30 seconds to 3+ minutes depending on your workout goals.

ACTIVE RECOVERY

Light, low-intensity movement on rest days or between hard workouts. Examples include walking, stretching, yoga, or easy cycling. Helps your body recover without complete inactivity.

PROGRAM TERMS

VOLUME

The total amount of work you do in a workout or over time, typically calculated as $\text{sets} \times \text{reps} \times \text{weight}$. Higher volume generally means more total work and can lead to more muscle growth.

FREQUENCY

How often you train a specific muscle group or perform workouts per week. For example, training legs twice per week means you have a leg training frequency of two.

TIME UNDER TENSION

The total amount of time a muscle is working during a set. Slowing down your reps increases time under tension, which can help build muscle by keeping it engaged longer.

PROGRESSIVE OVERLOAD

Gradually increasing the difficulty of work over time by adding weight, reps, sets, or intensity. The key principle for getting stronger/building muscle, keep challenging your body as it adapts.

DELOAD

A planned week or period where you intentionally reduce training intensity, volume, or weight. Gives your body time to fully recover and helps prevent burnout, injury, and plateaus.

SPLIT

How you divide up your training throughout the week by muscle groups or movement patterns. Ex: upper/lower or push/pull/legs or full body.

MOVEMENT LINGO

COMPOUND MOVEMENT

An exercise that works multiple muscle groups and joints at the same time. Examples: squats, deadlifts, bench press, and rows. These are the most efficient for building overall strength.

ISOLATION MOVEMENT

An exercise that targets one specific muscle group or joint. Examples include bicep curls, leg extensions, and lateral raises. Used to focus on individual muscles after compound work.

CONCENTRIC

The lifting or shortening phase of an exercise where the muscle contracts. For example, the upward motion of a bicep curl or pushing up during a bench press.

ECCENTRIC

The lowering phase of an exercise where the muscle lengthens under tension: lowering the weight in a bicep curl or descending in a squat. Where you're strongest and where muscle damage occurs.

ROM - RANGE OF MOTION

The full movement path of an exercise from start to finish. Full ROM means moving through the complete range, while partial ROM is stopping short.

UNILATERAL / BILATERAL

Unilateral: working one side of the body at a time (single-leg squats or one-arm rows). Bilateral: working both sides together (like regular squats or barbell rows).

SET / CIRCUIT TYPES

CIRCUIT

A series of different exercises performed back-to-back with minimal rest between them. After completing all exercises, you rest and repeat the circuit. Great for combining strength and cardio while keeping your heart rate elevated.

SUPERSET

Performing two exercises back-to-back without rest between them. Often pairs opposing muscle groups (like biceps and triceps) or the same muscle group for added intensity.

AMRAP - AS MANY REPS (OR ROUNDS) AS POSSIBLE

A workout format where you perform as many reps or rounds of exercises as you can within a set time period. Pushes you to work at maximum effort.

EMOM - EVERY MINUTE ON THE MINUTE

A workout format where you perform a set number of reps at the start of each minute, then rest for whatever time remains. When the next minute starts, you go again.

DROP SET

Performing an exercise to failure, immediately reducing the weight, and continuing for more reps. You can drop the weight multiple times in one set. Increases intensity and muscle fatigue for growth.

PYRAMID SET

A training method where you gradually increase weight and decrease reps with each set (ascending pyramid), or decrease weight and increase reps (descending pyramid).

ACRONYMS (MOSTLY)

1 REP MAX / 1RM

The maximum amount of weight you can lift for one complete rep with proper form. Used to measure your absolute strength and calculate training percentages. For example, if your 1RM squat is 200 pounds, you might train at 80% of that (160 pounds).

PR / PB - PERSONAL RECORD / PERSONAL BEST

The best you've ever performed on a specific exercise or workout. Could be your heaviest weight, most reps, fastest time, or longest distance.

FAILURE / TRAINING TO FAILURE

Performing reps until you physically cannot complete another one with proper form. Your muscles are fully fatigued and can't do any more work.

RPE - RATE OF PERCEIVED EXERTION

A scale (usually 1-10) that measures how hard an exercise or set feels. For example, RPE 7 means you could do about 3 more reps, while RPE 10 means absolute maximum effort.

RIR - REPS IN RESERVE

How many more reps you could have done before failure. For example, stopping at RIR 2 means you could have done 2 more reps. Another way to measure intensity besides RPE.

HR - HEARTRATE

The number of times your heart beats per minute. Used to monitor exercise intensity, especially during cardio. Different training zones correspond to different heart rate ranges.

TRAINING FOCUS

HYPERTROPHY

Training focused on building muscle size and mass. Typically involves moderate weights (60-80% of 1RM) with higher reps (8-12) and shorter rest periods. The goal is muscle growth rather than pure strength.

MAXIMUM STRENGTH

Training focused on lifting the heaviest weight. Typically involves very heavy weights (85-100% of 1RM) with low reps (1-5) and longer rests. The goal is increasing what you lift, not muscle size.

MUSCLE ENDURANCE

Training focused on how long your muscles can work before fatigue. Typically involves lighter weights with high reps (15+) and shorter rests. Builds your ability to perform repeated movements.

POWER

The ability to generate maximum force as quickly as possible. Combines strength and speed. Examples include explosive jumps, medicine ball throws, and Olympic lifts.

PLYOMETRICS

Explosive jumping exercises that train your muscles to produce maximum force quickly. Examples include box jumps and jump squats. Builds power and speed, while improving coordination.

CALISTHENICS

Exercises that use your own body weight as resistance rather than external weights. Examples include push-ups, pull-ups, and squats. Great for building functional strength, mobility, and control.

GYM CULTURE

GAINS

Slang for progress or improvement in muscle size, strength, or fitness. "Making gains" means you're getting results from your training. Can refer to muscle growth, strength increases, or overall physical development.

PUMP

The temporary swelling and tightness in your muscles during or after a workout, caused by increased blood flow. Makes your muscles look and feel bigger temporarily.

WORKING IN

Sharing a piece of equipment with another person by alternating sets. You perform a set while they rest, then switch. Common gym etiquette when equipment is limited.

RERACK

Putting weights, dumbbells, or plates back in their proper place after you're done using them. Essential gym etiquette that keeps the space organized and safe. **Always rerack your weights!**

SPOT / SPOTTER

A person who assists and watches you during an exercise, especially with heavy weights. They are ready to help if you struggle, and can provide a little assistance to complete tough reps.

NEWBIE GAINS

The rapid strength and muscle growth that beginners experience when they first start training. New lifters see faster progress because their bodies are adapting to an entirely new stimulus.



Thank you!

I created this resource because one of the biggest pieces of my mission at Take Good Care Fitness is to help **makes movement accessible and safe** for any and *all* humans who wish to move their body - whether that be at the TGCF studio, in our virtual space, in your living room, or at your local gym!

Feeling self conscious about elements of stepping into a gym that *aren't* movement or program related is **SO** real - *I see you!*

I hope The Gym Dictionary helps you confidently 'talk the talk' while you *strongly* 'walk the walk' at the gym!



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