

WHAT'S HOT IN 2021?

From virtual fitness to low-intensity training and outdoor workouts – we bring you the lowdown on the hot new fitness trends for the new year

The pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on our daily routines, jobs, mental health and fitness habits in 2020.

The restrictions introduced to cope with the global pandemic may have even changed the way we exercise in 2021... and possibly also for good.

In previous years, fitness trend forecasts – all based on the latest consumer research and industry innovations – have been a bit faddy, featuring new twists on basic fitness principles. This year, things are different, with predictions all deeply rooted in practical solutions that will help people get fit and stay healthy in a safe, convenient way that fits in with their new lifestyles. Read on to discover the workouts and products you'll be using to smash your goals over the next 12 months!



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VIRTUAL FITNESS

Before the pandemic, gyms were already experimenting with the world of online fitness as a way to bolster their members’ in-club experiences. Yet the closure of gyms during lockdown dramatically accelerated those plans. You’d now struggle to find a gym, boutique studio or personal trainer that doesn’t offer on-demand classes, live workouts or remote coaching.

As fitness fans and newbies to exercise quickly discovered during lockdown, virtual fitness is convenient, flexible, relatively inexpensive, offers huge variety and even allows you access to exclusive VIP trainers. The increased competition for your custom in the digital landscape – coupled with the development of new technologies – also means the world of online exercise will rapidly continue to evolve in 2021, making it cheaper, easier, more connected and more exciting for you to use.

For example, live-streaming platform, LIVENow recently introduced the option for you to train with friends in your own private, virtual studio when you choose the ‘watch together’ facility (classes are free until January 31st; live-now.com). You can also newly stream workouts from leading fitness app Fiit (fiit.tv) through Amazon Fire TV devices and on Sky TV while linking the workouts to over 25 fitness trackers including MyZone, Fitbit, and Apple and Samsung watches. London-based fitness boutique gym The Refinery E9 has just launched a fully customisable Avatar-led fitness instructor called AL-FI, created with motion capture, 3D and augmented-reality technology (refinewithalfi.com), to guide you through yoga, HIIT and meditation sessions while appearing as if it’s actually there with you in your own space!

WEARABLE TECH

Wearable tech has come out on top in the American College of Sport Medicine’s (ACSM) Worldwide Survey of Fitness Trends for the last two years. Fitness trackers, smart watches, heart rate monitors and GPS devices will continue to be massive, especially as the data they provide can help remote coaches give us regular feedback. ‘Fitness tracking devices and smart technology provide an in-depth look at your physical activity, and have been proven to help keep wearers on track with their fitness goals,’ says Steven Virtue from health club chain Total Fitness (totalfitness.co.uk). Wearables can also help us stay connected and competitive, with devices such as the Myzone MZ-3 Heart Rate Monitor and app (myzone.org) allowing us to upload results and compare our efforts with friends.



WORDS: JO EBSWORTH



OUTDOOR WORKOUTS

According to new research from fitness booking service ClassPass ([classpass.com](https://www.classpass.com)), there was a 400 per cent increase in the number of outdoor classes offered by gyms and studios in 2020. One such launch came from fitness provider F45 Training ([f45training.co.uk](https://www.f45training.co.uk)), which created the 45-minute outdoor HIIT workout F45 Track, in response to a survey that showed 52 per cent of its members missed group training. 'We expect interest in outdoor training to continue to be huge in 2021, as it appeals to those who want to return to their group exercise classes but are still a little nervous about being in enclosed spaces,' says Nathan Mago, Chief Athletic Officer at F45 Training. 'Outdoor sessions provide a safe place for people to adhere to social distancing rules and they also get to enjoy a range of benefits, including a refreshing and revitalising approach to fitness.' Our need to socially distance is clearly changing the way we commute too, with figures from the Department of Transport revealing that more people are cycling and walking to work than ever before. Many of us have discovered the joy of exercising outside, as well as the mental health benefits, whether we're hiking in the countryside, walking with the family, or taking up a new sport. We should expect to see a big spike in wilderness activities this year, such as kayaking, open water swimming and rock climbing, as people venture out of their comfort zones and try new things following a year of restrictions.

'We should expect to see a big spike in wilderness activities this year, such as kayaking'

AUDIO WORKOUTS

Following workouts on small screens can be tricky. And for some workouts, such as running and swimming, viewing a screen is virtually impossible. Step forward audio workouts, which provide you with a coach or PT in your ear to guide you through any kind of activity, and provide a workout buddy at a time when many of us are having to exercise alone. Between March and June in 2020, 858,000 people downloaded the free Couch to 5K app that provides a series of audio workouts to guide you through training – a 92 per cent increase compared to 2019 – and other audio platforms are experiencing a big increase too, including WithU (£7.99 a month; [withutraining.com](https://www.withutraining.com)), an audio service offering more than 30 tailored programmes and 1000+ workouts set to music tracks with synchronised tempos for maximum motivation – including yoga, strength training, cycling, running and HIIT – all created by leading coaches, Team GB athletes and former Olympians. Other audio platforms to check out include OpenFit ([openfit.com](https://www.openfit.com)), which offers a schedule of live audio workouts, including walking, running and yoga, and the number one audio fitness app Auro ([auro.fit](https://www.auro.fit)), which provides workouts and training plans across 11 categories, including rowing and strength training.



LOW-IMPACT WORKOUTS

HIIT will remain popular this year, but we will see a bigger shift towards slower types of exercise, such as LISS (low-impact steady state) workouts. It seems that some of us are becoming more aware of the potential negative effects that high-intensity training can have on our bodies. 'HIIT workouts are more likely to result in injury and, when done too much, can actually prevent muscle recovery, leading to physical and mental burnout,' says Rhea Sheedy, founder of online Barre workout platform Ballet Fusion (balletfusion.co.uk). 'But conditioning classes, such as slower-paced ballet fitness, Pilates and yoga, are seeing a real surge in popularity because they benefit both the body and mind, with incorporated breathing techniques, stretching and detoxification, as well as improving our mobility and posture.'



MIND/BODY TRAINING

Combining physical training with mental relaxation to unwind is becoming increasingly popular. Yoga was the top digital workout in 2020, according to ClassPass. 'It's easy to feel overwhelmed, especially when, as an individual, you have very little control over the situation,' says Fi Clark, Head of Yoga at FLY LDN (flyldn.co.uk). 'People often get hooked on yoga for the mental benefits of having a breath-lead practice that helps to temporarily shut out the noise, promote peace of mind and leave you feeling calm. Getting away from your desk and stretching helps to ease tension around the neck and shoulders and lubricate joints to ensure you stay supple and agile.' Mindfulness will also dominate the fitness world this year, and you'll soon be learning how to incorporate it into running, swimming, weight-training and dance sessions, as well as in your everyday movements.

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The best of the rest



HOME GYMS

Home gyms will no longer only be for the rich and famous. With the threat of restrictions still looming, many fitness fans will ditch costly gym memberships and instead invest their money into kitting out garages and spare rooms with the latest at-home exercise equipment, of which sales are already at record highs.



FITNESS FOR ALL

Research from Sport England shows that women, older people, people from BAME backgrounds and those from lower socio-economic groups still face many barriers to getting fit. The emergence of charitable enterprises such as London-based gym The Bridge (thebridge-uk.org) will help tackle these issues.



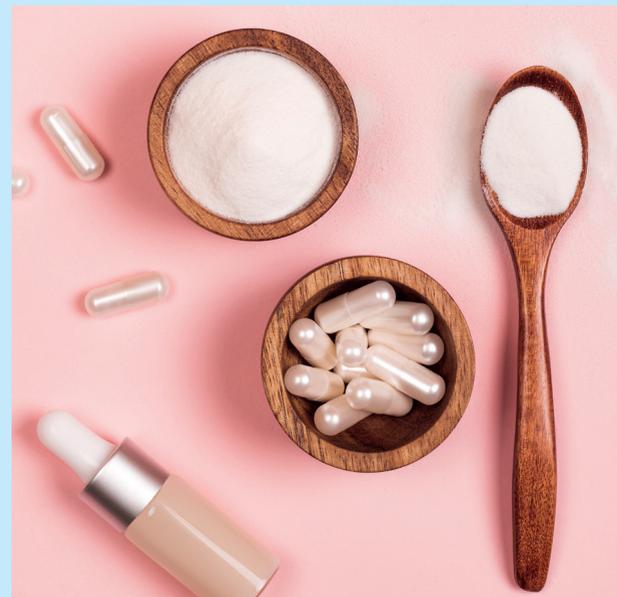
POST-COVID PLANS

We still have much to learn about the virus and the various ways it can affect the body, but we do know that exercise should be introduced slowly after contracting the virus, especially as it is a respiratory disease. We predict an increase in trainers offering Covid-specific fitness courses, to safely reintroduce you to exercise when you are fully recovered.



COLLAGEN

Collagen is destined to replace CBD as the wonder supplement of 2021, as people discover its many fitness benefits, including strengthened bones, cartilage, joints and muscles; improved sleep; and improved digestive health. Expect to see it added to everything drinkable, including protein shakes, hot chocolate and even gin! **WF**



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