

This year, it's really time to HIIT the gym

Exercise. Short, intense workouts, functional training among top fitness trends

Whether you're an avid exerciser or seeking to amp up your routine, fitness professionals are pointing to short, intense workouts and back-to-basics strengthening sessions among the hot trends to help you break a sweat in 2015.

For individuals seeking a challenging workout that is shorter in duration and free of tire-flipping and fire-walking, high-intensity interval training (HIIT) may be a viable option.

Characterized by intense bursts of exercise followed by brief rest periods, HIIT topped the list in canfitpro's first annual fitness trends survey, which polled nearly 2,000 fitness professionals.

Ranking second was functional fitness, described as exercise using movements to prepare individuals "for the activities of daily life."

"Doing a squat with a bar-

bell across your back is a very functional movement because we do squats all day long, whether it's getting in and out of a car or sitting down on the toilet or getting out of an office chair," said Rod Macdonald, vice-president of canfitpro, whose organization bills itself as the largest provider of education in the Canadian fitness industry.

South of the border, the American College of Sports Medicine ranked HIIT second on its 2015 fitness trends survey, with body weight training — like pushups and pull-ups — topping its list.

Macdonald said he isn't surprised to see HIIT topping the Canadian list.

"High-intensity interval training allows the fitness professional to integrate a lot of effective work in a very short period of time which is also appealing obviously to the participant ... who maybe doesn't have a lot of time, or on certain days doesn't have a lot of time and they still want to get a great workout."

Macdonald said individuals just starting off with an exer-

cise program should work with a certified fitness professional and be screened for any underlying health issues beforehand. But if they're in good condition, HIIT is OK provided they're supervised and go through a full warm-up and cool-down, he added.

Vancouver-based fitness instructor Amanda Vogel said in the HIIT class she leads, some participants will opt to go "really hard" in intervals while others adopt a more moderate pace. "We're all working together within the framework of what everyone is able to do," said Vogel. "I still think there's a lot of benefit to that because one, they're moving, which is really important, and anything people are going to enjoy that's going to get people moving in the right direction of consistent exercise is going to be beneficial."

Rhonda Roberts Smid of TAB Fitness in Toronto said it's important for people who take on more physically intensive classes to realize they may not necessarily be getting a better workout, and is a proponent of adopting a more moderate

approach — particularly for novices.

"I think when you do something that's very aggressive immediately — because your body is super sore and you see the beauty muscles shining right away — you think 'Yeah, this class is definitely giving me what I need.'"

"But underneath all of those beauty muscles is the foundation. And when that is weak it tends to break down quickly, and that is why people are getting injured in a lot of these more intense classes.

"My suggestion to people always is slow turtle. If you're new to working out don't throw yourself into the (Tough) Mudder or a half-marathon."

Regardless of which type of workout they prefer, Macdonald said it's important that everyone exercises and adopts a regimen best suited to them.

"If somebody's going to go to the gym and they wouldn't have otherwise and they're going to do something that's moderate or even low-intensity, I would rather that they do that than not go to the gym at all."

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Rhonda Roberts Smid, founder and instructor at TAB Fitness, is pictured in her Toronto studio. THE CANADIAN PRESS

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