

## SWEAT EQUITY:

### Fashionable Tech Gymwear Fosters Resolve

Like a New Year's Day headache, holiday weight gain often inspires remorse and resolute vows to reel in excessive behavior. But unlike a night of spirit-filled fun, whose recuperation can hopefully be measured in mere hours, the unwanted pounds entail a much longer recovery, involving diet restrictions and much time at the gym. Cursed cookies and cocktails.

One good thing in all this is there are some great new activewear options available. In fact, since activewear has inspired sportswear so much this season, it might be difficult to judge whether a man in new track pants and a sleeveless tee is trendy, or has simply "outgrown" his old gym wear.

At Modell's Sporting Goods, there is a specific section for true sportswear featuring jeans and shirts. But, says one merchandiser, "there's a lot of sportswear that could sell in the activewear area."

Mike May, spokesperson for the Sporting Goods Manufacturing Association, says, "I think, without a doubt, active sports apparel and the high-tech fabrics are influencing apparel as a whole." Indeed, "the line is clearly blurring between activewear, athletic apparel and sportswear," says Kathryn Gordy Novakovic, director of product trend analysis for Cotton Incorporated. "Over the last few years, the breadth of color and style that's worked its way into tech apparel is very strong. And it's one of the main reasons that the activewear business has done so well."

A majority of men (55%) have purchased apparel with performance features such as moisture wicking or control, anti-microbial or waterproofing, according to Cotton Incorporated's Lifestyle Monitor™. About 20% of those purchases have been for athletic bottoms, 11% have been for tees, polos or golf shirts, and 9% have been for sweat apparel such as shorts or jogging suits.

No doubt much of this apparel is being put to use at one of the nation's athletic clubs: May says gym memberships have increased every year since 1990, from 20.7 million to an expected 42-to-43 million for 2006. A traditional surge takes place in January (when those New Year's resolutions are fresh). And May says men gravitate toward free weights, resistance machines, and rowing equipment. Which is why interest is growing in apparel with performance characteristics.

Harry Arnett, brand manager of Russell Athletic®, says the newest product provides multiple advantages.

"It's a huge benefit when apparel not only has performance characteristics but looks great, too," he says. "So, for our cotton-based products, we've focused on moisture management and fashion. Pro Cotton is much more of the traditional cotton-based T-shirt that consumers like because of the soft hand, but it also has wicking capabilities. Consumers want more performance features, even in cotton-based products."

He adds that Russell's Dri-Power® fleece is the only cotton-based performance fleece on the market, "so wearers get all that warmth and comfort they'd expect from cotton, as well as moisture management. It's a nice combination."

When comparing athletic apparel items that have the same price, style and performance features, the Monitor finds 71% of men prefer cotton over nylon (17%) and polyester (11%). Joe, a 39-year-old New Jersey police lieutenant who maintains his workouts at the station gym, says he prefers his cotton-rich ensembles.

"I like cotton because it's just softer, and if it's one of the shirts that pulls away sweat, even better," he



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#### PRIMARY REASON PURCHASED MOST RECENT PERFORMANCE APPAREL

Performance feature(s)	28%
Comfortable/fit	15%
Style/color	12%
Price	6%

says. "I've bought high-tech compression stuff, but it feels too tight. I know it's supposed to, but I just don't care for it."

May says comfort plays a strong role in a man's interest in maintaining his exercise program. "High-tech jerseys leave you feeling a lot cooler, so you perform better, get better results, and stay with the activity. It lends itself to more positives than at first sight. To the naked eye it looks no different than it did 30 years ago, but it's all in how it's woven and made."



The Monitor finds that the primary reasons men purchase performance apparel is for the performance features (28%), followed by comfort/fit (15%) and style/ color (12%).

Overall, the men's activewear category grew 19.3% in 2006, while dollar sales rose 22.2%, according to NPD Fashionworld's AccuPanel for the nine-month period from January to September. Men paid 2.5% more for activewear this year versus last (\$15.36 vs. \$14.99, respectively).

In terms of product categories, NPD found men purchased mostly knit shirts (39.7%) and shorts (35.8%), followed by sweat apparel (16.1%). Cotton comprised 57% of all apparel purchased for active sport by men. And the majority (58.6%) of knit shirts purchased were 100% cotton.

Russell will expand its Dri Power performance fleece program in 2007, augmenting it with ventilation to make it much more of an athletic piece as well as fashion wear, Arnett says. And some stylish new fashion lines will target a more youthful market with cotton-rich product that has performance characteristics.

And Champion® will continue to expand tech offerings that include its Double Dry cotton.

Of course, despite the growth in performance activewear, the majority of men still appreciate old school, 100% cotton.

Champion's Don Burton, director of marketing, says the company continues to see solid growth in its jersey program.

"This includes our classic Champion 100% cotton tees, tanks, short and pants, which perform well year-in and year-out," he says.

Keith, a 36-year-old father of two, says, "I actually like sweating through my cotton shirts because then I know I've had a great workout."

Burton says he's not surprised. "Many athletes measure their performance in 'sweat equity.' A lot of men prefer soft, comfortable cotton tees and shorts -- authentic activewear without a lot of extra bells and whistles."

*This story is one in a series of articles based on findings from Cotton Incorporated's Lifestyle Monitor™*

*tracking research. Each story will focus on a specific topic as it relates to the American men's wear consumer and his attitudes and behavior regarding clothing, appearance, fashion, fiber selection and many other timely, relevant subjects.*

