

High Intensity Strength Training

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"Hard, Brief, and Infrequent"

By Rick Sullivan

Few would argue the impact strength training could have on developing a strong, lean, well-conditioned physique. However, the slipshod, all to familiar approach to strength training can leave much to be desired.

Unlike the cardiovascular portion of a typical conditioning program, brevity and intensity dictate the efficacy and ultimate success of your strength training efforts. Unfortunately quite the opposite tends to be commonplace. Trainees are spending too much time hoisting weights around without achieving the levels of exercise intensity necessary to produce maximum muscular strength and development.

Muscular strength is the foundation from which all other exercise benefits can occur. Despite what many believe strength levels can be dramatically improved in a very short period of time. The reasons these dramatic results are rarely witnessed are two. First, most trainees rarely exert the effort required to deeply stimulate their muscular systems. Secondly, the long, drawn out, sub-maximal work they are engaged in merely serves to overtax their recovery ability and wreak havoc on their central nervous system.

Trying to make an exercise as challenging for the muscles as possible is what intensity is all about. While almost every expert will agree that the intensity of exercise is in direct proportion with the muscular hypertrophy that will follow there seems to be very few who actually understand what truly intense exercise is. As Arthur Jones, the father of high intensity exercise put it, "If you're not willing to work hard - brutally hard - forget it". Those first few repetitions are merely preparation for the last most difficult repetitions; they're a warm-up of sorts and will do very little in the area strength improvements. It is not until you get deeper into the set that you begin to recruit those muscle fibers that are responsible for increased muscle strength and growth.

The most meaningful repetition of the exercise set is that very last one that you cannot

complete despite your best efforts. Most people never reach the last possible repetition. They just can't seem to find the drive and determination to push it to the limit. It's painful and requires a tremendous amount of discipline. Yet if your goal is to achieve the best shape of your life you must take your muscles where they've never gone before. You must travel well beyond the confines of your comfort zone. In order for your muscles to grow they must be forced to adapt to greater amounts of stimulus (intensity) than they have been subject to previously. If you have the guts and courage to commit to the arduous task of regular high intensity training your glory will be incredible strength and muscle development.

Once you choose to take on the challenge of high intensity strength training you must also acknowledge and respect your bodies limited recovery ability. Your body will require sufficient recovery time from this demanding effort. Remember that as you begin to work more intensely and get stronger you will be making a deeper inroad into your biochemical (recovery) reserves. You must allow your body time to recover and grow stronger. Quite often an advanced trainee will require 72 to 96 hours of recovery between workouts (minimum 48 hours).

It is also vital that you don't allow your workout to degenerate into some marathon weight training session. How long could you run at maximum speed? Not very long! Your workouts are the same. You can't work at maximum intensity for long periods of time; the two are mutually exclusive. If you're exercising at the highest level of intensity your workout shouldn't last more than 20-30 minutes.

Incorporate high intensity strength training into your workouts, keep it *brief* and *infrequent* and your reward will be a body that looks fantastic and feels even better. And if find yourself reaching a plateau down the road try cutting back on the volume and frequency of exercise while increasing the intensity. Less is more!

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