

# RECOVERY!

**"Your exercise success depends on it."**

**By Rick Sullivan**

Motivation! Intensity! Discipline! These are all integral components to an effective and rewarding workout experience. Yet all of these powerful elements of success can be undermined if recovery is ignored.

I certainly know what it is like to have an unbounded enthusiasm toward exercise. I love to train! I would go to the gym 7 days a week and workout for hours on end if it would foster greater results. Unfortunately, such exercise addiction will merely lead to over-training. It just seems ludicrous - how can too much exercise be bad for you? Yet over-training is real, and it will undermine all the positive benefits exercise can have. This was a hard pill for me to swallow. After all, I wanted to be in the gym for hours, pounding out rep after rep, it was exhilarating, it was my drug of choice.

Herein lies the sad reality of the situation; either I abstain from my compulsive exercise habits or forgo the physical (and ultimately mental) benefits that exercise has to offer. Reducing the volume and frequency of my exercise was a painful proposition. Ingrained in my subconscious was the almost universal belief that more is better. If a little is good then more must be better, right? Wrong! "All things in moderation, nothing in excess" as the ancient Greek proverb goes. Boy, that's a tough principle to live by in this day and age. On the other hand, spending much gut wrenching hours in the gym only to sabotage my progress was not a very palatable alternative. There was no logical alternative other than to cut back on my exercising.

I gradually weaned myself from my more is better approach despite my withdrawal pains. I began by cutting back on

the sets until eventually I was down to one set per exercise (albeit, I was still doing too many exercises.). I then proceeded to reduce my total number of exercise sessions from five times per week down to three. At this point I began to experience the positive impact of added recovery time. I experienced increases in strength, muscularity, and energy. Simultaneously I found I no longer had the multitude of lingering joint pain that used to be the by-product of my workouts. I was feeling great!

My old paradigm was to pummel myself with a bunch of worthless "security" sets to stimulate new progress (which, by the way, never worked.). My newfound results gave me the insight and, more importantly, the confidence to reduce the amount of exercise to achieve greater gains. Every time I reduced the workout volume there was a corresponding increase in strength and muscle. I currently perform five to eight exercises per workout (one set to failure), that takes me approximately 20 minutes once every three to four days. I don't know what to do with all this free time I now have.

The principles of over-training are not new to me. Emotionally I did not want to accept that less exercising was better, however, intellectually I knew less would be more. Simply look at what exercise is doing to the body. Exercise temporarily weakens the body. Every single repetition inroads your body's momentary level of strength. The harder you work the greater the momentary depletion of your muscles physical capacity. If recovery was not a critical component of any exercise program then logically you should be able to go on forever. Rather than becoming weaker with every proceeding repetition you should be getting stronger.

I am not suggesting that this temporary depletion of strength is bad, in fact, it is a requirement of productive exercise. The paradox is how do you exercise the muscle with the brutal intensity necessary to produce truly exceptional results without wiping out your body's reserves simultaneously? The answer is keeping it brief! Train briefly (limit your total number exercise sets) and infrequently (limit the number of days you exercise). Your workout should be focused on thoroughly stimulating your musculo-skeletal system, not spending hours in the gym.

Hans Selye, the father of stress physiology (the study of how the body responds to stress) has given the following definition to disease:

***Disease***-the failure of the adaptive mechanisms of an organism to adequately counteract the stimuli or stresses to which it is subject, resulting in a disturbance in function and/or structure of any part, organ or system of the body.

The body is sufficiently competent at handling a certain degree of stress and may indeed become stronger as a result. However, according to Selye, during the stress response (for our purposes the response to exercise) energy is mobilized and delivered to the tissues that need them, at which time any long term building and repair projects are deferred until after the crisis.

Over-training is a disease of sorts and will eventually prevent all progress. Moreover, it will insidiously infect your motivation and enthusiasm, resulting in complete exercise disaster. The shining light is the fact that over-training is a choice. So make the decision to train smart and keep it brief. Allow your body to recover from the exhausting effects of the exercise. Any exercise that is over and beyond the minimum amount necessary to produce the maximum benefit is too much. It compromises the long term building process and, at best will slow you down, at worst

will cause a complete reversal of all progress and set the stage for future ailments.

I have found that 2-3 weekly workouts of 6-9 exercises are an effective starting point for those new to high intensity strength training. This training regimen may not seem like enough, but if you are training hard (intensely not voluminous) any more exercise will become counterproductive. Respect your recovery ability and your body will grow stronger and more muscular.

As your strength begins to skyrocket, and it will, your body will require less total exercise and more recovery time between workouts. Greater levels of strength will cause deeper muscular inroad (penetration) and therefore require less total exercise.

This seemingly low volume of exercise can be excruciating. Every exercise must be taken to momentary muscular failure. Within the parameters of safety and good form, every single exercise must be taken to the point where no further repetitions can be performed despite your best effort. If you have the drive and determination to push it to the limit and follow these guidelines you'll be amazed at what added recovery can do.

Remember the muscles grow at rest. Over-training is the single biggest reason most exercising individuals do not achieve the results they have the potential to achieve. Over-training is exercise suicide! If you want to get big, strong, and lean DO NOT spend your life in the gym. Good luck!

**EVOLVE EXERCISE**

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