

10 Steps To Get The Most From Your Exercise Program: Part One

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When I first began thinking about this subject, I initially thought of naming it “The top 10 mistakes made in the gym”. The word mistake carries a very negative emotional component, and fitness should always be a positive experience. My desire is to write an article that empowers you to be the best you can be. A commitment to exercise is a great start, and the following steps will help you obtain a quality workout.

Step 1. Create an exercise program and document your progress. Some people wander around the gym, going from a leg press to a bicep curl. Lacking a plan, the exercises are performed randomly. The problem with this is that it lacks progression. Progression can be defined two ways. One is to

organize the workout, exercising the large muscle groups first, and progressing down to the minor or assister muscle groups.

These minor muscles assist the larger muscle groups with stabilization. When executing a chest press, the bicep and triceps muscles are helping to assist the muscles of the shoulders and chest. Clearly a muscle that is already pre-exhausted will not perform its function with the same efficiency as a rested muscle. Therefore, to get the most from the chest press, the biceps and triceps should be “ready and able” to assist. The second role of progression is creating an exercise program that varies in both intensity and design. If you have been doing 3 sets of 12 repetitions using the same weight, same exercise, for the last year, this is not progression! Incorporate different exercises every 4-6 weeks, change the weight, and vary the sets and repetitions. This is where the documentation comes into play.

Following a written plan and documenting the workout will provide a written record of your progress.

Step 2. Never sacrifice proper form for weight. A common scenario often witnessed, are people lifting weights that are too heavy for them to control properly. This is often seen as swinging the weight, and using limited range of motion to execute the exercise. If your standing barbell bicep curl includes swinging the weight and arching of the back, the amount of weight used is too heavy. The bicep muscle is not being isolated

in a manner that will promote maximum hypertrophy and increases the risk of injury. Performing a squat that does not go through the full range of motion, due to an overly intense weight load, does not achieve the desired effects. This type of exercise execution is commonly referred to as “cheating”. Cheating only encourages inefficient movement patterns, poor posture, and potentially injuries. Professional body builders and Olympic weight lifters do use this type of form, but it is done under controlled conditions, and by professionals. It is not recommended for the average person. Less weight, proper form, complete range of motion, results in less risk of injury and improved strength.

Another misused component is speed. Flying thru an exercise at breakneck speed is essentially an endurance exercise. If a person can perform 3 sets of high repetitions in 3 minutes, they are probably not using enough resistance for muscular hypertrophy. Performing an exercise in poor form and too quick is a recipe for injury. However, if endurance is the goal, 2 sets of 15-20 reps, with low weight maybe more appropriate.

That’s two down and eight to go! If creating a fresh exercise program is your goal, consider either hiring a certified personal trainer or a trip to the book store. Remember, when hiring a personal trainer; ask about their experience and credentials. The ACSM, NSCA, and NASM are 3 of the top certifying agencies that require continuing education and are nationally recognized in the Personal Training industry.

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