

[IMAGE]

Don't Fear the Weights

By Dr. Perry Nickelston

With the popularity of stability balls, bands and resistance tubing, many people tend to forget that lifting free weights is a fundamental tool for increasing lean muscle and burning body fat. And no, you won't end up looking like a hulking, muscle-bound body-builder - unless that's your goal, of course - if you do it right. Here's a simple program for using weights to your advantage.

In this day and age of fancy gym equipment, group exercise classes, and late night infomercial, in-home workout gadgets, it's easy to lose sight of one of the most effective forms of exercise available: free weights. There are misconceptions about weight training that prevent people from truly understanding the value it provides in shaping your body, developing lean muscle, and improving athletic and day-to-day performance. Women are especially prone to neglecting this form of effective training for fear of getting "too muscular" or looking "too bulky." This is unfortunate, because when done correctly, weight training is a great way to make a noticeable difference in how your body feels, looks and performs.

It all comes down to developing lean muscle and burning unwanted body fat. Hands down, the quickest way to accomplish this is with weight training. Why? Because muscle is anabolic, meaning your body needs calories to sustain it. The more muscle you have, the faster your metabolism work and the more body fat you burn. You look and feel better. Now that sounds like a win-win to me.

Designing a Program That's Right for You

weights - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark The key to effective weight-lifting is learning how to design an effective program based on your fitness level and goals. Once you have an end target in mind, you can formulate a road map for getting there safely while enjoying the process. Some fundamental questions to ask yourself prior to beginning a weight training program include the following:

- *How many days per week can I realistically exercise?* Three days minimum is suggested, preferably with a day of rest in between each exercise day.
- *How much time can I allocate to work out per exercise session?* Twenty minutes is ideal for most people, up to a maximum of 45 minutes.

- *Am I trying to build size or simply tone muscle?* A quicker, lighter pace is more for toning, while a heavier, slower pace generally builds muscle size and strength.
- *Do I have more than 10 pounds of body fat to lose?* Do higher reps at a quicker pace to maximize fat loss.
- *How much experience do I have with weight training?* Be careful not to over-exercise. Progress slowly; remember, if you get hurt, you won't be able to exercise at all!

The answers to these questions will determine the amount, tempo and frequency of your training program. Here's a sample free-weight program to get you started. Make sure you talk to your doctor before beginning the program, particularly if you have a health condition that could limit the types and/or duration of exercises you perform, or if you need assistance figuring out how to perform any exercises. Remember, think safety first.

It's also important to know the "lingo" in the world of free-weight training so when you're told to do three sets of 10 reps of an exercise, emphasizing the concentric phase," you know what the heck that means. Review the list of terms on the facing page before starting your program, and always make sure you can lift the weight safely and without excessive effort/straining for the desired number of repetitions. (You may need to experiment with different weights in the beginning until you find the weight you can handle.)

A Sample Full-Body Routine

The following routine should be performed on Monday - Wednesday - Friday, with a complete day of rest in between. As you advance, you can add some cardio on your "off" days to keep your metabolism up and fat burning at a premium. These exercises should be "giant-setted" (see glossary), meaning that you should do one set of *each* exercise one after the other, with only minimal rest to set up the next exercise, change weights, etc. Only after you've completed the entire "giant set" of all exercises for all body parts should you rest for a minute or two. Then repeat the giant set a second time. This workout consists of two sets of 12-15 reps of each of the following exercises:

Chest

Incline Dumbbell Presses: Angle an exercise bench at approximately 45 degrees. Take two dumbbells and lie on your back. Starting at chest level, press the dumbbells over your chest and lightly touch them together at the top. Keep your head resting on the bench, lower weight to starting position and repeat for desired

repetitions.

Dumbbell Flat Fly: Lie flat on an exercise bench and take two dumbbells into starting position (pressed above the chest with your palms facing each other). Slowly lower the weights to either side as if you are hugging a tree, keeping a slight bend in your elbow. Be careful not to go too low with the weight or you will stress the shoulder joints. Return to chest level and repeat.

Back

Dumbbell Rows: Take two dumbbells and stand with feet just outside shoulder width. Hinge your hips backward and lean forward toward your toes with a slight bend in your knees. Pull the dumbbells up to your sides with palms facing each other. Lower and repeat. Keep your head up and maintain a slight arch in your lower back. Resist the temptation to round your shoulders forward.

Pull-Ups: Take an overhand grip on a pull-up bar. Pull your body weight up until your chin reaches the bar. Lower down until your arms are fully extended. Repeat. This is an exercise where a workout partner is helpful for assisted reps, especially when you're first starting out.

Shoulders

Dumbbell Shoulder Presses: Sit on an exercise bench with your back supported. Press the dumbbells overhead from the shoulders. For added variation, rotate your palms to face each other during the movement. Be sure to keep your elbows back.

Upright Rows: Grasp a straight bar with a close overhand grip and pull upward from hip level to above the collar bone. Repeat.

Arms (Biceps and Triceps)

Seated Dumbbell Biceps Curls: Using two dumbbells, curl weight from your side up to chest level. Be sure to keep your elbows perpendicular to the floor and tight by your side to isolate the muscles and prevent swinging.

Rope Curls: Standing in front of a cable weight machine, grip the exercise rope and curl upward. Grip the rope with palms facing each other.

Dumbbell Triceps Extensions: Lie on your back with two dumbbells and palms facing each other, arms extended toward the ceiling. Slowly bend your elbows, keeping them close together, until the dumbbells reach ear level, and then return to starting position.

Dumbbell Kickbacks: Standing and bent over slightly at the waist, hold dumbbells with palms facing each other. Start with elbows bent and extend your arms backward, stopping just short of locking the elbows, and then return to starting position. Be careful not to swing with momentum; slow and isolated movements with lower weight are best.

Legs

Dumbbell Squats: Stand shoulder-width apart grasping two dumbbells by your sides. Squat as deep as you can, keeping your head up and shoulders pulled back. If you lean forward and your heels come off the ground, place a ½ to 1-inch support under your heels. This tilts your pelvis, which prevents you from leaning too far forward and keeps the heels stationary.

Dumbbell Reverse Lunges: Stand with feet together and dumbbells by your side. Step backward with one leg into a lunge position until your front thigh is parallel to the ground. Return to starting position and repeat with opposite side/leg.

Leg Curls: Lying face-down on a leg curl machine, hook your ankles under the support bar, being careful not to place it too far up the calf. Curl your legs, bringing your heels to your buttocks. Slowly control movement down to starting position.

Not only can weight training make a significant positive change in your physical appearance and overall health, but it also can elevate your self-esteem and confidence. For better or worse, in this day and age, body image is one of the leading factors in how people view their own self-worth. What's more, weight training can have enormous overall impact on improving the quality of your life. It instills dedication, commitment, sacrifice and goal setting. So enjoy the journey to a new and improved you. And take a moment every now and then to glance in the mirror and admire your accomplishment. It's a good thing!

Words to Know: Weight-Training Lingo

Compound Training: Targeting multiple muscle groups with a particular exercise. For example, barbell squats work the legs and the upper body (back, core muscles).

Concentric Phase: Done as the muscle extends or relaxes; "concentric strength" is the weight that can be lowered under control. For example, the "down" phase of a barbell curl.

Drop Sets: Drop sets are performed by following a set with another set with less weight, and usually less reps. This is done for the last two sets of an exercise.

Eccentric Phase: Done as the muscle contracts; "eccentric strength" is the weight that can be lifted working against gravity. For example, the "up" phase of a barbell curl.

Giant Sets: A giant set consists of performing different exercises for two or more body parts; for example, biceps barbell curls followed by triceps extensions. There is minimal rest in between the exercises, but rest in between sets can be from 1-2 minutes.

Isolation Training: Targeting one specific muscle group with a particular exercise; for example, biceps curls to isolate the biceps muscle.

woman workout at gym - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark **Rep:** A rep is a movement within an exercise. It contains a concentric (positive) phase and an eccentric (negative) phase. Example: 12 reps means you would complete a movement 12 times, then take a break, and then repeat. Generally speaking; higher reps (12-15 or higher) increase muscle tone, mid-range (8-12) build muscle size, and lower-end (3-8) develop strength.

Rep Out: *Rep out* is a term used in working out to say: Perform the same exercise (with the same weight) until you are unable to do any more reps.

Sets: Sets are the amount of reps grouped together in one session. For example, if you are doing two sets of 12 reps, that means you would complete a movement 12 times, take a break, and then do 12 more repetitions.

Super sets: Super-setting consist of performing different exercises for one body part with minimal or no rest; for example, shoulder presses followed immediately by lateral dumbbell raises. There is minimal rest between the exercises, but rest between sets can be from 1-2 minutes. (*Note:* As discussed in "Maximize Your Workout" (November 2009 issue), while super sets can be performed using weights for both exercises, they can also be done using body-weight only for the second exercise.)

Five Tips for Weight-Training Success

1. Resist the temptation to do more than your body can safely handle, or you risk overtraining. Weight training breaks your muscles down and adequate rest between sessions is a must for recovery and regeneration. If your body is not improving with weight training, the most likely cause is overtraining. Four days per week is the recommended maximum amount of training to ensure results.
2. Never hold your breath while straining to lift a weight. Exhale during the eccentric phase and inhale during the concentric motion. This ensures proper technique and decreased chance of injury.
3. Keep a smooth motion during the lift with no jerking or swinging motions. Decrease the amount of weight and lift slower with good technique. Your muscles will be more stimulated for faster results.
4. Change your workout routine every 4-6 weeks. Your body has an amazing ability to adapt to its environment. It's called *homeostasis*, and it can be the one challenge to overcoming the dreaded "plateau." If you plateau, your body stops improving and you have difficulty gaining muscle and losing fat. And that's exactly what you *don't* want.
5. Train with a workout partner. Having another person to hold you accountable to a regular exercise routine and assist with intense lifts can make a big difference. Setting goals for both of you can help sustain the motivation and commitment to succeed.

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