

Overcoming Plateaus in Your Workout

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Strength training is a form of exercise that uses various forms of resistance, usually weights in an attempt to strengthen and condition the musculoskeletal system. Physiologically the benefits of weight training are well documented. These include an increase in muscle size and strength, an increase in tendon and bone strength, as well as an improved overall body metabolism.

Even with these well-known benefits, there is a large attrition rate among those who begin strength-training programs. There are many reasons for this, however one of the main reasons is that people become bored with their current workout programs. Many people go to the gym everyday and perform the same exercises the same way over and over again. What this leads to is disinterest in the program, and an abrupt stop to the improvements in your musculoskeletal system. If this sounds like you, don't give up. Remember that workout plateaus are a normal process. Think of it as your body telling you to make some changes in your current program so you can continue seeing results. The following are some tips to help you make some easy changes in your workouts to overcome your workout plateau.

Change the Method of Performing the Exercise

The first way to avoid a plateau is simply to do the exercises you enjoy doing but change the way you perform them or change the equipment. For example, if the bench press is part of your program and you use the bar every time, try using dumbbells the next time you do this exercise. Another way to vary this exercise using dumbbells would be to alternate arms using one at a time instead of pressing with both arms at the same time. This simple tip can be applied to any exercise in your workout. Consider those where you use the bar and use dumbbells and vice versa. Also, remember to incorporate the cable version of exercises in your workouts.

Try New Exercises

Research shows that the human neuromuscular system adapts to repeated movement patterns. What this means is that by performing the same exercises every time we no longer stimulate the body. Again, if the bench press is part of your workout, try doing an incline or decline bench press. This will vary the angle of load through the chest that will require different muscle fiber recruitment patterns. This will "shock" the chest and promote further overall chest strength and development.

Vary Your Exercise Order

Every once in a while it is a good idea to change the order you perform your workouts. You can change within a muscle group or you can change your overall workout schedule. For example, on a shoulder workout day, if you normally perform overhead presses, lateral raises, front raises and bent over rows, by always doing the overhead press first you never allow your rear deltoids to be trained when they are "fresh" because the exercise that trains them is last in your workout. Also, if you normally do shoulders on Monday, try doing them on Wednesday.

Vary the Number of Sets or Repetitions to be Performed

Another method to incorporate into your workout is to vary the number of sets or repetitions of each exercise. For example if you have been training using multiple sets then try using only one or two. Conversely if you normally perform only one or two sets try adding a couple to each exercise. Again, this will overcome the neuromuscular adaptation that is built into our bodies. For example, if you normally can do 10 repetitions with 60 lbs, perhaps doing 12 repetitions with 50 lbs might get you over your current hump. In addition if you have reached a plateau doing 8 repetitions at 100 lbs try doing 6 repetitions at 110 lbs. Keep in mind that the number of sets and repetitions is governed by your ultimate goals of your workout. Those building endurance would not want to minimize repetitions and maximize the weight lifted.

Understanding and implementing the tips above will help you to avoid workout plateaus and can get you out of that exercise "rut" that so many people fall into. Just as including workouts into your all too busy schedule was an adjustment so to is getting into the habit of continually changing your routine. Once you learn how to incorporate the techniques you will be well on the road to the endless benefits of strength training.