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Diversity in Training

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There are many dedicated health and fitness practitioners in the world today. If you are reading this article, chances are that you are one of them. So I would like to share with you one of the biggest secrets in obtaining the kind of fitness results you are looking for; and conversely one of the biggest hindrances to getting those results. As you've probably guessed from the name of this article the "big secret" that actually shouldn't be a secret at all, is diversity in your exercise routine, and the big hindrance, is a rut in your routine, being too rigid in your exercising patterns will actually stagnate or plateau your results.

Now you may be thinking "James, I've read your articles in the past, and I've even seen your personal schedule that you posted in your [Balance in Exercising](#) article. That seems pretty rigid to me." And you're right, it does *seem* rigid, however if you look closely you will see that the only thing rigid about my schedules are the timeframes that my exercises occur. My schedule is basically just that, a schedule. The key way in which I diversify my training is not so much radical changes in time since I already have morning, noon and evening time-slots for training, but I diversify the actual exercises themselves. To put it plainly, I don't do the same exercises every time.

I've seen a lot of people make the very common and understandable mistake of, for example, on their upper-body days, doing the exact same routine, at the same weight level for exactly the same number of repetitions, the same number of sets and the exact same resting times... all in the name of dedication.

Please let me be perfectly clear, I do not doubt the dedication of these people at all – I've seen their dedication first-hand in many cases – what I am trying to point-out is that with such a rigid routine, they saw results, up to a point, and then stopped seeing results quite suddenly. This is not because they weren't training as hard as before... on the contrary they maintained a dedication to training that was very admirable. The problem was the rigidity of their training regime had caused them to reach a plateau in their results, and they couldn't figure out why. Well I am going to tell you why this happens and how to effectively diversify your training to avoid this problem, and how to get out of the "rigidity rut" if you are already experiencing this issue.

Why rigidity hurts

Some of you are undoubtedly wondering why a unbending training regime is so bad. The simple answer is that over time your body learns from your actions and develops patterns based on those actions. In short, your muscles have adapted to your rigid routine and because you are in better shape than you were when you started, your routine is no longer

challenging for your body and therefore your muscles do not have to work as hard, curtailing your fitness results.

You might think that this sounds ridiculous and unbelievable, so if you do, I offer this experiment: Take a twenty pound (nine kilograms) dumbbell and curl it 30 times every other day for two months not varying anything about the way you curl it. Keep a record of how difficult it is each time you do it. I can guarantee you that by the end of the two month period, it will no longer be challenging for you, and whatever gains you may have been seeing will have stopped.

This is because your muscles (in this case your biceps) have become not only stronger, but totally accustomed to your one exercise and are no longer being effectively exercised. Now if you have performed the above experiment, try this... Reverse your grip on the dumbbell so that you are holding it with your palm facing down (as you would a briefcase), and curl it 30 times. Could you make it through? Most people can't. Why not? It's the same muscle, but it is being worked differently. It's that diversification that keeps your muscles working at their fullest and promotes continuous progress.

Next we will cover ways to diversify your exercise routines to get this knowledge working in all the areas of training.

Let's diversify!

One of the best ways to diversify an existing workout is the way shown above, change your grip on the weights. You should have a reliable spotter and ideally a training professional with you when you try this to avoid serious injury with some exercises, but if not, please use good judgment. Do not try to lift something heavy with an awkward grip over your head or chest or behind your back for example.

My most favorite of all ways to diversify my training is with *supersets*. A superset is basically combining two or more exercises into a single exercise set with no rest in-between. Usually I choose exercises that complement each other and work the same area or muscle group, but it is not required to do so.

By using supersets you not only save some time during your training, you will find that it allows you to keep a higher pace, making the experience more energetic and fun, and you will achieve superior muscle-burn by eliminating the rest periods.

Combine cardio with other exercise. This is a simple but yet very effective way to spice things up. Right after your cardio, go right into another exercise (not weights if it's the same muscle group though!). Then when you are done with that go back and do another round of cardio. Usually I will combine 20 minutes of walking (a very hard exercise for me) with an additional 25 to 30 minutes on a heavy-bag and then another round of walking, no rest in-between anything. This is a surprisingly effective variation. However I only recommend this for those of you who already have achieved a certain level of

cardio-vascular endurance to avoid potentially serious injury or cardiac arrest. Consult your healthcare professional!

Conclusion

So we've seen here some simple ways to spice up a dull and old exercise routine and how to get out of the "rigidity rut" and begin making progress again. Remember that training should be fun, and if you aren't looking forward to it, then it's time for a change. You will not make any progress if you are simply drudging through just to get it over with.

James