

Wizard of Fitness

Training so effective it's like Magic!



Intensity Techniques

The benefits of strength training come when demand is sufficient to stimulate change / adaptation. Light weights do not somehow magically “tone” the body. Heavy weight training only makes you bulky if you don’t do cardio and eat intelligently to lower your bodyfat. It is not easy to increase lean mass, but that is exactly what we need to do for all the health improvements that come with lifting weights. You have to force the body to change (you may have noticed). These Intensity Techniques give you an array of options to keep improving and achieve your musculoskeletal potential. Then you will also keep your metabolism at its most active, helping you to burn fat and get the best muscular definition possible—whether that is to be more lean, cut, ripped, or shredded—getting in great shape is a product of intensity. And these techniques can even make your training more fun and interesting.

CONTENTS

Assisted Reps	2
Partial Reps	2
Mid-rep Stop and Go	2
Blending Angles	2
Drop Sets	3
Slow and Super Slow	3
Fast Reps	3
High Reps (aka “repping out”)	3
Zig Zags	3
Rest Pause	4
Heavy Supports	4
Negatives	4

Assisted Reps

The most straightforward way to go beyond primary muscle fatigue is to utilize a spotter and get some help; sometimes called “forced reps”. This usually consists of being unable to complete the positive phase but you can still lower the weight with control on your own. The spotter should only provide enough help to keep the weight moving at a normal controlled speed. Exerciser and spotter should communicate as much as is necessary to ensure safe and effective assistance.

Sometimes when doing single arm, or single leg, exercises you can also use the other limb to give yourself a spot; such as with the classic Concentration Curl. The other arm is right there to give yourself a hand and finish getting the rep up, whereby you can take the hand away and control the negative yourself (as above). On the other hand, you could use the free arm to push down on the negative for ultra-overload. Help the concentric, intensify the eccentric.

Partial Reps

Partials are normally done in the finishing segment of the range of motion to focus on the peak contraction and flexing the muscle at that point very actively, but they can also be performed at the bottom or middle of the exercise. Another use of this technique is to break up the exercise into different sections of the range, such as working the top third of the range for a few partial reps, then the middle, then the bottom—followed by a few full range reps, and then maybe repeating that pattern. 21s and Crazy Eights are old-school examples of this.

At the end of a set, when full range of motion is no longer possible you can usually perform quite a few short movements at the end of the rep. This technique can be used post-failure to extend the working duration.

Isometric Holds

This technique is an extension of Partial Reps. Stopping at different points along the range of motion will add control, difficulty and therefore intensity to any exercise. Hitting the breaks on the negative a couple times on the way down is especially effective. On the positive it can usually only be done when the weight is more intermediate than maximal. Holds can be performed for longer as strength develops. A 5 count hold is solid. Going to 10 count holds is on the high end of the spectrum.

When working with a client I may call out, or training partners can add a reaction training effect, stop and go, or like in the children’s game “Red light. Green light.”

Blending Angles

This technique consists of changing the angle of the working muscles against the direction of the force on the fly, either so that the focal point of the load changes to different points in the range of motion, or so that adjacent muscle fibers are brought into the line of contraction, and then the angle can be blended back and forth, perhaps several times. An example of the first application is to slowly transition from Front Raise to Lateral Raise, hitting every point in between. An example of the second application would be slowly transition from a palm down position on the Front Raise to palms up, hitting every angle of rotation between the two. These can be combined for the ultimate muscle fiber recruitment.

This technique allows you to use a weight you might only be able to do for a few reps with good form in the one position, but you work your way to the fresher, adjacent muscle fibers you can keep pumping out the reps, resulting in a combination of heavy load (3 rep max) and long duration, as you hit each angle and then work your way back and forth.

Drop Sets

Upon reaching muscle fatigue, the weight is quickly reduced to about sixty percent and the set is continued (preferably in less than 3 seconds), and muscle fatigue is experienced again. This may be repeated a third and even a fourth time. When the weight is decreased, or dropped, you can get a few more good reps with strict form before losing full range as the the muscle fatigues again.

Slow and Super Slow

Performing exercises more slowly adds intensity, requires a great deal of control, and is good form (by definition). When weight is allowed to build up momentum it often results in jerky movement, yanking at the joints, and postural distortion. Slowing down the negative phase of the rep to 10 seconds is entry level. Slow positive of 10 seconds and negative of 20 - 30 seconds is in the realm of Super Slow, which might extend even further if desired.

This is potentially very meditative, like tai chi with weights.

Fast Reps

After establishing the control of slow reps, and resulting increased joint integrity, performing reps more quickly than normal can be employed for developing explosive power, especially for athletic application. The faster a weight is moved the more force is required. The negative phase might be around 1 second and the positive half a second or less. Plyometric push-ups are an example.

High Reps (aka “repping out”)

Pushing the range of repetitions way up into the double digits will develop specific sub-cellular elements, such as capillary supply, glycogen stores, myoglobin, and neurological factors that can add to the endurance potential across the spectrum of demands on the muscle. This is an example of “holistic hypertrophy”. It makes sense for the all-around athlete and general fitness enthusiast to train the muscles across the entire range of conditioning potential. “Hundreds” (100 repetitions) has been recommended as the ultimate pump for many years.

Zig Zags

Reps are performed with a little side to side movement along the normal pathway, deviating from a straight line. Not to be conflated with Blending Angle Reps where the limb might be slowly rotated rep to rep; with Zig Zags it is usually a quickly little back and forth lateral to the direction of the range of motion. This technique is mainly applicable with upper body exercises using free weights.

Rest Pause

This technique consists of putting the weight down for a second or two (such as in the Deadlift), or resting in the locked out position (such as in the Squat or Bench Press), or lowering the weights to your sides (such as in Bicep Curls), taking breath and then continuing—allowing the muscle only the briefest moment of recovery needed to execute another repetition. This should only be done when the weight is so heavy that another rep is not possible without the rest pause.

Heavy Supports

At the end of the set, when no more reps can be performed, even after Forced Reps and Partials, the can usually still be held in a locked out position, thereby keeping a load on the musculoskeletal structure and neurological system, driving the signal for hypertrophy to much deeper levels.

Negatives

Probably the most effective way to increase lean mass is to overload the negative phase of the rep, but since it is stronger than the positive phase it can be difficult to achieve. A spotter, or two, might be required to help the exerciser get the point where the lower of the weight is no longer possible with good form—negative failure. When one arm or leg is working, the other can help on the positive and then make the working muscles lower the weight without assistance, such as in a Calf Raise where one foot is lifted off the standing surface for the negative, functionally doubling the load.

Clock Counted Reps

Use the second hand on the clock to count your reps. Get yourself set on the 12 and then hit the top of your range of motion as the second hand hits each number. This could be done with a slow, strick 3 count down and 2 count up, or by resting a little at one end of the rep, or the other, or both. A rep range of 8-12 now takes you 40 seconds to a full minute of keeping the muscle fibers firing, producing great endurance that translates to heavier weight for normal speed, which are about half the duration of this technique.

As it says in the Upanishads of ancient India, *“Life is an every burning fire. Feed that fire!”*