

WHY SO INTENSE?

What is *intensity*? Webster defines it as the “extreme degree of anything”. It’s the opposite of moderation- something that should be avoided at all costs by the tried and true members of the gym community. But how do you maintain intensity in any workout after the initial weeks of pain and gain? I’ve mentioned before that in order to keep making progress in any fitness regime, you have to keep challenging your body and keep things changing. In this article, I’ll be making some suggestions on how you can use the same exercises in a different ‘format’ to increase the intensity of any workout.

Supersets

This is a term used when a lifter does two exercises in a row without any rest period in between. Opposing muscle groups can be trained in this manner. For example, chest and back, biceps and triceps or quadriceps and hamstrings could be trained with supersets. This format decreases rest times. The lifter is working each muscle to near failure then switching muscles and going to near failure again with a minimal amount of rest. With larger muscle groups this can also be a cardiovascular workout.

Another way to use supersets is to pre-fatigue a larger muscle with an isolation movement, such as the leg extension, and then go to a compound movement, such as the hack squat. In this way, the quadriceps are trained at a greater intensity because during the second movement, secondary movers such as the hamstrings and gluts can help out.

Tri Sets

This is a similar format to the superset idea; however, you do three movements as opposed to two movements. This becomes a cardiovascular workout as can be imagined when you are going from one exercise to the next without any rest. It’s best to work one muscle group in this manner. For example, you could do a set of dead lifts, followed by a set of T-Bar rows directly followed by a pull down movement. If you were to do two tri-sets for back, this is an intense and quick workout.

Drop Sets

A drop set is when a lifter starts off with a heavier weight and then gradually reduces the weight through out the set. For example, on leg extensions, you may start off with 100 lbs. for 10 reps, then 70 lbs. for 10 reps. The idea in this format is to keep the weight moving, no matter what the weight is, increasing ‘time under tension’ for the muscle group. Any muscle group can be trained in this manner, but it is often the most effective when you are training on a weight stack whereby you can easily pull and reinsert a pin as opposed to stopping for any length of time to take weights off a barbell.

Rep Tempo

Altering the rate at which one lifts and lowers the weight can add variety to a workout as well. In most forms of training it is important to control the weight during the

eccentric contraction, (lowering the weight or lengthening the muscle). Most will use a 4/4 rep tempo without even realizing it. This means you lift the weight to a count of four and then lower it to the same count. Instead, you could try a 2/6 count, meaning that you could lift the weight to a two count and then lower the weight to a six count. Rep tempo is one factor many lifters don't even consider, but it's worth experimenting with.

Cardiovascular Variety

It's imperative that a cardiovascular component be considered for overall fitness. Usually, unless one is a competitive runner or cyclist, one often will jump on a bike or treadmill at the end of a weight lifting session to put in some time. This will address cardiovascular fitness to a certain point. The heart and lungs need to be trained as does any other muscle and will soon adapt to the same routine. As well, it's very easy to get bored with the same 20-30 minutes pedaling away.

Before discussing how you can change things up, it's important to know what the initial intensity should be in the first place. Many believe that *low* intensity is the best way to *burn fat* when doing cardio work. Let's figure out what *low intensity* actually is. To determine what your fat burning zone is, you need to do the following equation:

Lower end: $220 - (\text{your age}) \times 0.55$

Upper end: $220 - (\text{your age}) \times 0.70$

The result of this equation is what your heart rate should be maintained at for one minute. If you are working within these ranges, you generally use a higher fat ratio as an energy source. It's even more effective to do this cardio work when blood sugar levels are low. Best results are achieved when you do this format at least three times a week for a minimum of 20 minutes.

To achieve more of a cardiovascular workout, you need to increase the intensity of the work and move into the cardiovascular training zone. To determine this, do the following equation:

Lower end: $220 - (\text{your age}) \times 0.70$

Upper end $220 - (\text{your age}) \times 0.85$

The result of this equation is what your heart rate should be maintained at for one minute. If a person is working within these ranges, they generally use higher ratios of glycogen (stored sugar) as an energy source. The benefit of this type of training is that in the end, more overall calories are actually burned and studies show that there is a raise in metabolic rate even after the exercise is done, burning even more calories. As well, your heart as a muscle becomes more fit and can tolerate increasing levels of work (burning more calories etc.). If you are interested in fat burning then, it is best to use a combination of both lower and higher intensity training.

How is this achieved? It is best to do a minimum three minute warm up on any cardio equipment that you prefer. After that, a person can constantly be changing the level, grade or RPM's while monitoring heart rate. Changing from working at 55% of maximum heart rate (the lower end of the fat burning zone) to 85% of the maximum heart rate (the upper end of the cardiovascular zone) will help overall fitness, burn more calories and alleviate boredom as well.

The body is extremely adaptable and you must constantly think of ways to 'outsmart' it. The body's goal is to adapt to work and become more efficient. The goal of the person working out is to raise the demands put on the body so that the body is constantly challenged and must adapt through increased fitness levels. Hopefully these ideas will enable you to outwit nature and move you to a higher fitness stratum.

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