

## **OVER DOING IT IN THE GYM? ABSOLUTELY!**

Too often it happens that a well meaning fitness zealot makes a resolution to get in shape and then goes overboard on the first day. The good intentions of the daily workout are put aside as the bottle of pain killers is consumed in an attempt to numb the pain of the first few days' torture. Is this the best way to incorporate an active lifestyle into a daily routine? Most likely not. While it is important to get your behind off the couch, it's equally important to become aware of your limitations. Unfortunately, many don't find out about these until it's too late. When it comes to exercise, a little goes a long way in the beginning. Moderation and realistic expectations are probably the most important things to keep in mind. Starting off slowly is a good way to keep the ball rolling in terms of adding movement into a sedentary life.

### **What about muscle soreness? Is it a good thing or something I should avoid at all costs?**

Most will experience what's called 'delayed onset muscle soreness' (DOMS) after starting something new. This is caused by the eccentric contraction or forceful contraction of muscles while lengthening. Microscopic muscle tears occur and the amount of soreness depends on the intensity of the work done to the muscle. This is a common and necessary response to weight training in particular as muscles become stronger and develop stamina. Soreness peaks within the first two days of exercise and subsides after a few days. This is not an indication that you should quit exercising. In fact, getting back into the gym will ease the pain of the soreness. DOMS should not be confused with a muscle strain or tear. This occurs while you are exercising and can be described as acute, unilateral pain, swelling and bruising.

### **Will the pain ever end?**

If you are diligent in maintaining a fitness regime for a while, often you'll feel more energized and perhaps even notice some changes in body composition. This is all good. Then it happens: the plateau. It is motivating to keep going with a routine when you are noticing changes in either strength or body composition, but these will not continue with the initial program. If you are headed for the gym and are set up on a beginner-type routine, it doesn't make sense that any progress will be made after about six weeks. Many people, especially women, are reluctant to push themselves beyond anything more than a beginner level routine. They get discouraged because they make little to no progress and quit altogether. Most women fear that if they lift anything more than the weight of soup cans they will get 'too big'. The truth is that it is imperative that lots of weight be heaved and at best a minimal amount of muscle may be developed if the correct nutritional and rest requirements are met. Women just do not have the hormones necessary to become Arnold Schwarzenegger-like. Pictures in muscle magazines are not realistic; in most cases these women are chemically enhanced. No one will wake up one morning and look in the mirror to find that they've suddenly developed eighteen inch biceps and veins in their foreheads. The point is: moderation is good in the beginning, but there comes a time when you really have to 'overdo it'. Once a regular fitness routine is established, if you are to continue to make gains in the gym, you really have to push yourself. The body is designed to meet the challenges it's presented with, therefore, new

challenges need to be offered continually. DOMS is a fact of life for anyone who strives to continue to make progress. There may not be the intensity of the soreness as when you first started out, but a little soreness is to be expected.

### **Make it go away!**

There are ways to alleviate DMOS. Following is a list of ways to make those muscles ache a little less even when you are pushing yourself to the limit:

- Warm up the muscles thoroughly.
- Cool down the muscles after exercise.
- Do stretching between sets.
- Increase intensity of exercise slowly over time.
- Get back into the gym. Even if you are sore, doing some light cardiovascular work on a bike or treadmill will usually loosen up muscles as blood is delivered to the aching areas.
- Avoid intense training of the sore muscles before hitting them hard with another workout.
- Non steroidal anti-inflammatory medications (such as ibuprofen) will reduce soreness temporarily but will not speed healing.

### **How do I keep in the pain zone?**

As previously mentioned, it's necessary to increase the intensity of your program slowly. This can be achieved through a change in routine. The following suggests the progress you could make in terms of program development in order to keep those results coming:

- Full body workout - This type of program should include exercises that hit all the major muscle groups in one session. You could start off by doing this kind of workout three times a week. Some cardiovascular work could be incorporated in a separate session on a day that weights are not done. Examples of exercises could include things like: bench press, shoulder press, rowing movements, leg press, hamstring curls, bicep curls, triceps extensions, and of course some ab work.
- Upper and lower body workouts – This type of workout will split the body into two sessions. By splitting the workout into two sessions, you can up the intensity and number of sets you do. You should alternate upper/lower body on alternate days and perhaps increase weight training sessions to four in a week. Again, cardiovascular conditioning needs to be included at some point as well.
- Three workout split – This type of program could be done on a 'day on-day off' basis. Pushing exercises for the chest, shoulders and triceps could be done on day one. Pulling exercises for the back and biceps could be done on day two. Then on the third day, you could work the leg muscles. Cardiovascular work would be worked in on alternate days.

There are as many program combinations as there are people in the gym. Contacting a reliable personal trainer to develop an individualized routine is important for each person. If you are to spend time in the gym, you should get the most out of the investment in time and effort. Accept that delayed onset muscle soreness is not an indication that you are doing something wrong; it could be more of a measure that you are challenging your body to new levels of fitness.

Shawna Kaminski

(Shawna is a long time personal trainer and teacher. She can help you develop the program you need. Check out how she's helping many with their fitness goals at: <http://members.shaw.ca/shawna.kaminski> . She does one-on-one personal training or she can work with you online by going to the 'online training' page on her website. )