



WEIGHTLIFTING 101

It seems that everywhere one looks, one is bombarded with the virtues of getting into a gym and hoisting weights. There's no question as to the health rewards to pursuing this activity, but the question remains: What do I do when I get into the weight room??

Some people will just go to the gym and do what others seem to be doing. Bicep curls are a sure bet. Some of the machines don't look too complicated either. In fact, it's certain that one's feet go in some places and that pin looks like it can change the weights easily enough. No doubt, one will be buff in no time, right? Wrong. Workouts like this are not only nonproductive, they could potentially do harm to an otherwise 'healthy' individual. Strained muscles, poor alignment, poor technique, lack of direction; these are the many reasons people are unable to improve their fitness level in the gym. A prescription is definitely in order.

The best case scenario is to hire a personal trainer. A trainer can set one up on a program and then go through it with a client for a few workouts and then periodically to ensure results. In a perfect world, everyone would have someone to direct them through the labyrinth of machines and torture chambers. Unfortunately, this is not in the budget of most people. Scraping up the cash to join the gym and make the monthly dues is often enough. So what does one do in order to make progress in the weight room? Following are some steps one can take to make the most of one's time and energy and actually get results:

1. Ask for a program with membership.

Most gyms will have one trainer that will put new clients on a beginner program with the purchase of a membership. Be prepared for this by bringing your own notebook. Make copious notes for yourself. It doesn't matter that the trainer calls the exercise 'dumbbell flies', call it whatever you need to in order to remember it. Maybe you can remember 'hug a barrel'. Don't feel rushed or intimidated by the trainer and ask as many questions as you can think of. This may be the only time you have opportunity to get this trainer without paying the hourly fee, so take advantage.

2. Watch the clock.

Your workout should keep you busy for no more than an hour. If you are just starting out, an hour is a big time commitment in the gym. If you take more than an hour, you'll soon find reason to skip the gym to fit in all of life's other commitments. Also, it's very difficult to maintain any sort of intensity over more than 60 minutes.

3. Take a chance.

Most gyms have a variety of cardio equipment. Many people get into the habit of jumping on a bike or treadmill and that's it. The gym should be more than a cardio stop, take the risk to get out on the weight floor to discover other things. One will not reap the benefits of weight lifting by osmosis. Cardio equipment should be used for 10 minutes in the beginning to get warm and then perhaps for 20 minutes at the end for a more intense aerobic workout.

4. Think big.

As a general rule of thumb, it's best to train large body parts first. Try to do multi joint exercises before single joint exercises. For example, an exercise that engages the shoulder and the elbow joint, like a pull down, should be done before one that just engages the elbow joint, like the bicep curl.

5. Full body torture.

Beginners should start with a workout that hits every body part, or a 'full body workout'. This means that the upper and lower body is trained in one session. One should do about three exercises for the large body part, like the chest; next do one or two exercises for smaller body parts, like shoulders and triceps. All together then, one should be doing approximately 12-15 exercises in a workout.

6. PUSH, PULL and LEGS

One should think PUSH, PULL and LEGS, and try to group these exercises accordingly. The pushing exercises work the chest, shoulders and triceps. The pulling exercises work the back, shoulders and biceps. The leg exercises should be working the front (quadriceps) and the back (hamstrings) of the leg, as well as the lower leg (calves). After a few weeks of this full body training, one can break up the body into upper and lower body for workouts. There are a variety of ways to split the body into different training sessions as one becomes more advanced.

7. Go heavy or go home.

Many people will not lift any amount of weight for fear of injury. This is why a personal trainer is so important, especially in the beginning. A trainer will ensure correct form. Once a lifter is certain their form is correct, it is imperative to lift a weight that will challenge the body significantly to make a difference.

8. Sets and reps??

A set is the actual exercise one is doing, and the reps are the number of times the movement is done. For example, the bench press is an exercise, or set, and when one lifts the weight 10 times, this is 10 reps. As a general rule, try to lift the weight between 8-12 times. If the weight is lifted less than eight times, it is likely too heavy for a beginner. If the weight is lifted 12 or more times, the weight is likely too light and should be increased.

9. Variety is the spice of life.

It is easy to get into a comfortable rhythm in the gym, but a workout that is repeated for more than 3 weeks gets stale, boring and will not benefit the exerciser. The body likes to adapt to challenges and then maintain. If you are not challenging your body, it will not grow or develop any more than you demand it too. You must constantly be changing your workout to 'trick' your body. This can be easily done by changing the order of exercises, for example do push, pull legs one day, then do legs, pull, push another. It may feel like an entirely different workout. You could also change from using machines to dumbbells, or use a bar instead of dumbbells for a similar exercise.

10. Cross train.

Everyone is talking cross training, but what the heck is it? Cross training is simply adding variety to your workout by doing different things. Instead of hopping on the elliptical trainer for your cardio training at the end of your weights, perhaps you could jump in the pool. Maybe you could incorporate a spinning class into your sessions once a week or do one of the fitness classes. Weight lifting is important, but alleviating boredom is just as important to ensure that you stay with your program. The best results are achieved by weight training a minimum of three times a week, so on another day, add something different to make your training more interesting.

If you are going to stay with a program it must be enjoyable. Do whatever you have to in order to find what works for you. Some clubs offer circuit training classes, or group classes with elastic bands and dumbbells. These are great alternatives if you just can't enjoy getting onto the gym floor. Another great strategy is to find a training partner with similar goals and schedule as you. This makes you accountable to show up on the days when you just don't 'feel' like training.

Weight training can be the fountain of youth, but like anything, it takes some knowledge to reap it's rewards. A little knowledge can be dangerous, so arm yourself with more than the bare minimum and soon your arms will be as buff as you imagined them to be.

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