



Gentlemen, Slow it Down!

Over the past five years as a personal trainer and close to 15 years as a gym-goer, I have observed some very interesting things in the gym. When it comes to lack of exercise technique and improper lifting form, it is the male gym members that are almost always the culprits. Women are typically more reluctant to take that first nerve racking step into the weight room, yet most of them implement good lifting techniques almost immediately.

Men, I don't mean to pick on you. After all, I am a man and I have been in your shoes before. Prior to becoming a personal trainer, I also used to grab the 45lb dumbbells and perform the ever popular "heave and lean" biceps curl. For those of you not familiar, the heave and lean biceps curl involves selecting dumbbells about 10 -15lbs heavier than you can actually lift. Once you have the dumbbells in hand, you powerfully thrust your hips forward as you lean back and towards the side that you are curling, effectively taking as much load as possible off of your biceps muscles. This is an interesting strategy considering that the target muscle of the biceps curl is, believe it or not, the biceps!

So, why do us men choose add heaving, leaning, arching, and thrusting to our exercises? The answer actually lies in our genetics, and in particular, in the part of our subconscious referred to by the medical community as the "Man Ego". When lifting weights, it is this "Man Ego" that takes over your body, picks up way too heavy of weights, and looks for the path of **LEAST RESISTANCE**. Let's curl those 45lb dumbbells by any means necessary!

Most men actually lift weights in order to get "buff" (increase their lean body mass). The fact is, when looking to increase lean body mass, we should always look for the path of **MOST RESISTANCE**. If you want to get that muscle to grow, throw as much tension as you can on it, and don't take the tension away from that muscle by cheating. Yes, the load we use for each exercise is important. If you choose a load that is too light, you won't recruit enough muscle fibres to force that muscle to change and grow. More important than the load, however, is that the load is thrown squarely on the muscle(s) that you are trying to work in that specific exercise. Simply put, **TECHNIQUE** is more important than **LOAD**.

Let's get back to the example of the biceps curl. If you want to get your biceps to grow and take on the majority of the load of the exercise, then try performing the curls standing against a wall. Choose dumbbells at least 10lbs lighter than you would typically use. Place a small bend in your knees and lean against the wall. Keep your palms open (facing forward). Keep your elbows, shoulder blades, and butt glued to the wall as you perform the curls. Take the arms through a full range of motion. All the way up, and all the way down!

So, Gentleman, here is my challenge to you. Try implementing these 3 essential principles of muscle growth into your workouts:

1) Technique/ Posture

- do not use momentum as a way to lift the weights. Avoid excessive swinging and arching. Sit, and/or, stand tall. No slouching.

2) Full range of motion

- try to go all the way through the range of motion in each one of your exercises. All the way up, and all the way down!

3) Time Under Tension (3-0-2 tempo)

- In most instances, keeping your muscles under tension for a longer period of time will result in increased muscle gain. For exercises that you are familiar with, reduce your 8-12 rep weight by 30%. Perform 3 sets of 8-12 reps per exercise with a 60-90 sec. rest in between each set. Lift the weights at a 3-0-2 second tempo. This means: **take 3 FULL seconds to control the weight and 2 FULL seconds to lift the weight for each and every rep. Take 0 seconds in between, meaning do not pause at any point during the lift. Continual tension!**

*** To use the example of the bench press, you would take 3 seconds to lower the weight down to your chest, and 2 seconds to lift the weight back up, with no pausing at any point in the movement.

I am confident that if you follow the 3 above-mentioned principles, you will keep that "Man Ego" in check. No, you won't be "lifting" as heavy of weights, but you will gain more muscle and look good. The only thing that the "Man Ego" likes more than being strong is lookin' good!

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