

## ***REPS, SETS AND WEIGHTS HOW MUCH, HOW OFTEN***

This is quite often another source of confusion among people taking up resistance training for the first time. How often should I work out? How much weight should I use? What exercises should I do? What are reps and sets and what affect do they have on achieving my goals?

Lets take these questions one at a time. As far as the question how often should I work out, well that depends on many variables. How much time do you have to commit? A good exercise program can be accomplished in one hour three times per week. As you try to fit an exercise program into a busy life, you need to ask yourself: "How important is my health?" The implications to your health of not exercising are evident everyday to all of us. You only need to look around at our obese, sedentary population to realize that there are serious health problems, whether they are immediate or later occurring to our aging population. A commitment of one hour, three times per week will go a long way to maintaining a healthy life free of disease and disuse disorders.

But back to the question – how often? As I mentioned that depends on your time and motivation. A good rule of thumb is to allow one full day between resistance training days. For example, a Monday, Wednesday & Friday is a popular combination of training days. Depending on your time and other activities, resistance training is a quick and easy method to improve lean body mass and reducing body fat along with improving your cardiovascular system.

The second question regarding how much weight to use is a difficult question to answer in a concise manner. Your goal in any fitness program is to increase lean body mass and reduce body fat. In order to accomplish this you must stimulate the muscle to grow. This is done by adding resistance to the muscle through a full range of motion. Muscle fibers respond by contracting during the movement. Your goal is to recruit as many muscle fibers as possible. The more muscle fibers recruited, the more the muscle reacts to the stress and the stronger it will become. A side benefit of this muscle fiber recruitment is calorie consumption. The muscle requires calories in order to fuel the contractions. If you have more muscle fibers being recruited, this means more calories are required. The more calories your muscles require, the more calories will be burned during the exercise session as well as for 4-5 hours after the exercise session has finished.

The weight used during any particular exercise is very individual. Large muscle groups (legs, back, chest) will require heavier weights than smaller muscle groups (shoulders, arms). The numbers of repetitions and sets you are performing will also determine the weight used. Reps and sets will be discussed later in this article.

The weight should be enough to stimulate the muscle but not so heavy that you are not able to perform the required number of repetitions in good form. You must pick a weight that is comfortable but not too easy. You are not merely going through the motions. You will want to feel the muscle working. A personal trainer will be able to guide you through this component of your training.

Another confusing aspect for most people, is when and if I should increase the weight. You most definitely will be increasing the weights as you progress in your exercise program. Muscles only respond to an increase in stimulus, therefore if you do not increase the weights as you progress, eventually the muscle will stop responding and you will see little or no progress toward your fitness goals. It is at this point where a lot of people, not seeing any change in their body or any progression toward their goals, will stop training out of frustration.

Two common words heard in resistance training circles, are reps and sets. What are they and how do they affect my training? A rep stands for repetitions and it is the number of times you perform the movement. For example, if you were performing squats (knee bends) the movement from standing to squatting down and standing back up constitutes one repetition. If you performed this movement 10 times you would be doing one set of 10 repetitions.

There are many combinations of reps and sets that may be used and this is determined by your fitness goals, your fitness level when you are starting a resistance training program and the progress you make as you continue your exercise program. Nothing is static. Your program should be evaluated on a regular basis and changes made accordingly. Again, a personal trainer is an expert in determining the right combination for you and should be available on an on-going basis to make adjustments as needed.