

BODYBUILDING MUSINGS BY PHIL

SUPPLEMENT HYPE

Browse through the pages of any muscle magazine and notice the proliferation of supplement ads, taking up most of the contents. Many of the ads make seemingly outrageous claims based on testimonials and questionable research. Often the products are endorsed by a professional bodybuilder attributing value to the products in enhancing their physique. Remember when reading the claims, that without the revenue produced by the ads, there would be no magazine.

When it comes to product claims based on scientific research, the source is the key. Was the research funded and manipulated by the product manufacturer? Rather look for independent, unbiased research studies preferably on humans. Studies performed on rodents do not necessarily extrapolate to humans.

Read labels carefully. Notice amounts of the key, active ingredients sans the fluff. Unfortunately many supplements list a proprietary blend without indicating actual amounts: gram, mg. or mcg. Are the certifications listed which attest to the quality of the product? Has the product been manufactured by a reputable laboratory?

Modern supplements are vastly superior to the powdered milk, poor quality protein powders, and desiccated liver supplements of a generation ago. I look forward to experimenting with new products whose claims are validated by unbiased research. I usually will evaluate a new product for about a month to determine its ergogenic value.

Most supplements are not cheap, often costing fifty dollars or more for a month's supply. I have wasted thousands of dollars over the years on products which failed to match their advertised claims. Let the buyer beware. Do your research and choose wisely to avoid wasting money and time.

THE MUSCLE BEACH EXPERIENCE

The famous and storied Muscle Beach is where much of the modern fitness movement began. There are three annual events at Muscle Beach in Venice, California, which coincide with the three summer holidays. The contests are promoted by Joe Wheatley of the Los Angeles Recreation and Parks Department. This year, 2009, marked the 75th anniversary of the beginning of Muscle Beach.

The tradition of Muscle Beach began in Santa Monica during the mid 1930's with impromptu performances from acrobats and Hollywood stuntmen attracting throngs of weekend beach crowds. The venue shifted south to Venice in the mid 1960's. The weight pen of Venice Beach has been a Mecca for musclemen since Arnold's arrival in the late 1960's. I vividly remember meeting Arnold in 1969 shortly after his arrival in America. We conversed briefly while he was sunning himself on the beach accompanied by several of his Gold's Gym buddies.

This year's edition of the Mr. and Ms. Muscle Beach had a record of one hundred men and women competitors from teens to 60's and 70's! The contest encouraged a bonding and camaraderie among competitors. There was also a rapport and recognition from the beach public, unique to this outdoor event. The contestants prepared by oiling and pumping up in the famous outdoor weight pen, recently enlarged and upgraded with new equipment. The pen is adjacent to the boardwalk where sightseers photographed and intermingled with contestants.

The Muscle Beach contests are always well covered by the bodybuilding media with photo and video coverage from Bodybuilding.com and Ironman magazine. The prejudging commenced at 10:00am with the main event beginning about 1:30pm. The Muscle Beach contests begin with Hall of Fame presentations to one or more of the Muscle Beach pioneer standouts from bygone eras, thus recognizing and preserving the history.

Bleachers face the stage where the competitors presented their posing routines. The bleachers were packed and the competitors were well received with applause for their efforts. I was fortunate enough to win my class in this contest. I have participated in many contests over the years, and the Muscle Beach contest was definitely the most rewarding and fun. The atmosphere of sun, sand, and muscle on a warm summer afternoon epitomizes what bodybuilding is about. If you ever have the opportunity to attend or compete in a Muscle Beach event, do not hesitate to do so.

BEGINNING A RESISTANCE WORKOUT PROGRAM

So you're ready to start working out? Foremost make sure you are medically healthy enough to begin a strenuous exercise program, almost all reputable clubs will suggest first checking with your physician. Most health clubs/gyms offer their members an initial orientation with a personal trainer. The trainer will show you how to use the equipment and set up the various machines for your frame and height. You may want to consider purchasing several sessions with a trainer prior to venturing out on your own.

Commercial gyms are filled with specialized machines designed to work individual muscle groups. Machines are valuable for beginners and those with injuries because they remove the balance factor from the exercise equation, allowing the trainee to focus on correct exercise performance and form. After a month or so of conditioning, most beginners are ready to incorporate cables, free weights (aka, barbells and dumbbells) into their routine. The aforementioned are excellent tools to take a trainee to the next level of strength and development.

Cables effectively keep the target muscles under tension. Time under tension is one of the key components in developing firm, strong muscles. Barbells and particularly dumbbells not only work the target muscles, but also the stabilizing muscles which assist and support the target muscles through the full range of motion. The balance factor now comes into play. You will obtain superior strength and development results using cables, barbells, and dumbbells rather than machines alone.

If you don't have the option of purchasing a gym membership, consider working out at home in your garage, basement or empty room. A solid adjustable incline bench, an adjustable barbell, a few sets of dumbbells and perhaps a set of rubber cables will enable you to work the major muscle groups effectively. There are many available books and videos which can guide you on proper performance and use of basic equipment.

Three workouts per week, every other day are about right for most beginners. Work your muscle groups: starting from largest and ending with the smaller muscles. Focusing on leg, chest and back development will expedite overall size and strength gains. Concentrate on perfecting your exercise form, feeling each movement throughout the range of motion in the target muscle. Perform 2 or 3 sets of each exercise with a 10 to 15 repetition range. Allow a minute or two to recover between sets. Strive to work at a fast tempo, minimizing rest between sets without sacrificing form. Practice smooth fluid movements with slow (3 to 4 second) controlled repetitions. Do not swing, bounce, or jerk the weights. Make the muscles do the work, not motion or gravity.

As you become stronger be sure to do a light warm-up set before going heavy on each new muscle group. Try to become stronger gradually by coaxing rather than forcing your muscles along. Train don't strain. As the sets and reps become easier add weight. 2.5 lbs. weight increases on upper body movements and 5 lbs. on lower body exercises are about right.

Stick with your program and gradually condition and coax your muscles along. Keep your workouts under an hour. Many beginners make the mistake of adding more and more to their routines. People tend to copy others they see working out in the gym. Substitute and change exercise movements from time to time rather than adding more. After six months of regular workouts you will be amazed at what you have accomplished. I have seen many clients more than double their strength with accompanying development within this timeframe. Best of luck and train smart!

DEVELOPING AN AESTHETIC PHYSIQUE

When striving to develop an aesthetic, shapely physique, it is essential to set your standards by assessing your strengths and weaknesses. This can be accomplished through the mirror and photos. This will enable you to structure a workout routine that prioritizes weak areas for improvement.

What components make a physique stand out aesthetically? Well, starting from the top of the body, shoulders. "Shoulders make the man" as in wide and well developed. The front (anterior) deltoids are usually over worked and over developed compared to the medial (side) and posterior (rear) deltoids. The front deltoid is easily over developed due to the assistance and stabilization it provides during many upper body exercises. Therefore it is imperative to work the medial and posterior deltoid heads directly to create balance and prevent a slope shouldered appearance.

The Deltoid/Pectoral Tie In should be developed also, creating a pleasing, aesthetic line along the outside of the pectoral muscles. Flyes and leaning forward bar dips are two exercises that stress this area.

A small defined waist will enhance wide shoulders and add to the coveted "V-shaped" tapered torso look. Include upper and lower abdominal work regularly in your routine. To get the abs to "pop out", use heavy resistance and lower reps. Oblique muscles should be toned using a long stick for high repetitions of bar twists. Avoid doing side bends with dumbbells, as these will develop your oblique muscles and make your waist appear thicker thus detracting from your taper.

Full and detailed quadriceps will bring out your natural thigh shape. Hamstring development is necessary to create leg balance from the side and rear. Select both mass and isolation exercises when creating your thigh routine. Calves are often neglected but should be developed proportionately in balance with the thighs. Work both the soleus and gastrocnemius muscles of the calves by performing standing and seated calf raises.

Finally develop your back--upper, middle, and lower. This is a must for developing a V taper. Many individuals over-train their chests to the neglect and detriment of their backs. A weak back increases the chance of injury. Since you cannot see your back in the mirror, learn to train it by "feel." Contract and squeeze the muscles when working your back.

By emphasizing the above mentioned areas, you will be well on your way to developing an aesthetic, proportionate, balanced physique. Remember assess your weaknesses and work these areas first or near the beginning of your workout when your energy and focus are at their peak.

SHOULDER INJURIES

Shoulder injuries--from dull aches to sharp and often chronic pain--are all too common among bodybuilders. Over the years I have encountered countless weight trainees of all ages complaining about shoulder pain, predominantly rotator cuff issues.

Unfortunately I have experienced my share of the seemingly inevitable shoulder, rotator cuff pain and at times have had to compromise or curtail my training as a result. The shoulders are involved in almost all upper body movements so it is difficult to train around a shoulder injury if any upper body work is

involved. I have been able to rehabilitate and overcome my many shoulder injuries (both are currently pain-free) by applying some common sense strategies. I have accomplished this even after over forty years of mostly hardcore bodybuilding training. Prevention is of course always preferable to rehabilitation of an existing injury. Shoulder pain can easily become chronic. Once a serious strain or tear occurs the area becomes vulnerable to further injury. Let's look at what steps to take for prevention.

The shoulder is a ball and socket joint which makes it both mobile and also overly vulnerable to injury. Overuse of the supraspinatus tendon and poor lifting techniques are usually the cause of injury. The rotator cuffs (supraspinatus, supraspinatus tendon, infraspinatus, teres minor) are relatively small "weak link" muscles beneath the larger deltoid muscles. The anterior (front) deltoids often become overworked due to their involvement in most upper body exercises. Thus the anterior deltoid becomes overdeveloped in comparison to the medial (side) deltoid and the posterior (rear) deltoid. These two areas must be worked directly to attain balanced shoulder development. Also exercises to strengthen the underlying rotator cuff muscles should be included in one's workout.

Proper warm-up is imperative for preventing injury, when performing heavy upper body exercises. A quick way to traumatize your shoulders is to lift too heavy too soon sans proper warm-up. When doing bench presses, lat pull downs, rowing, shoulder presses, triceps and biceps work, always do a light set or two of at least fifteen reps to prime the target muscle and create some heat and blood flow.

Use strict form when performing deltoid exercises without bouncing or jerking the weight. Strive for smooth, controlled repetitions throughout the range of motion. Using a neutral (palms facing) grip is a more natural hand position and will often eliminate shoulder discomfort and pain during pressing movements. The neutral grip has allowed me to perform dumbbell and machine presses and lat pull downs pain free. Stretching the shoulders after weight training is another effective strategy to keep them flexible and injury free.

I have found MSM (methylsulfonyl-methane) to be useful in nourishing joint cartilage. I use between 2000mg and 4000mg. per day. It has helped me eliminate tendonitis in the shoulders and elbows.

Remember: *A*lways take the time to warm-up and use correct form to prevent a debilitating shoulder injury.