

Five Muscle Building Rules

By Richard J. Wolff, RD, LDN

Ask anyone and they will tell you that muscle matters! Experts agree muscle keeps you strong, active, and healthy. In 2009, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services released new Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans. The guidelines, which are the most scientifically-based of their kind, make specific recommendations about muscle-strengthening exercises and expand extensively on the benefits of strength training.

Other experts also weigh in on the benefit of muscle. According to Miriam Nelson, Ph.D., director of the Center for Physical Activity and Nutrition at Tufts University, all Americans should incorporate muscle-strengthening activities into their lifestyle.

With all the talk about muscle Americans are finally beginning to pump iron. However, the vast majority of workouts leave a lot to be desired. Completing a productive strength workout is easier said than done. Many things can, and do, go wrong along the way. Fortunately, there are some easy wins when it comes to building muscle. Applying these *Five Muscle Building Rules* will help you avoid common mistakes in your next workout.

Rule 1: Rest Your Muscles

Unlike cardio-respiratory activity, resistance exercise (e.g., strength training) is beneficial only when combined with adequate rest. The biggest mistake people make is strength training too often. Numerous studies show that inadequate rest interferes with the muscle building process. According to Wayne Westcott, exercise science professor at Quincy College, “it takes longer to build muscle than you’ve been taught ¹.” Working out too soon disrupts the recovery process and prevents the formation of new muscle proteins.

A study by the National Strength and Conditioning Association shows that it takes up to 4 days to build new muscle proteins following a strength workout. The American College of Sports Medicine recommends a 2 to 4 day rest period between full-body strength workouts ². Data from over 25,000 MEDFITNESS workouts present similar results. Resting 3 to 4 days between workouts generates

greater improvements in muscular fitness than resting 2 to 3 days³. In other words, two workouts per week will generate greater strength gains than three workouts per week.

Rule 2: Slow Down

The second biggest mistake people make when lifting weights is going too fast! Lifting the weight too quickly introduces momentum and reduces muscle tension. Less muscle tension results in fewer muscle fibers being utilized during exercise. Stimulating fewer muscle fibers limits strength gains and reduces results. Thus, the safest, most efficient way to increase muscle tension is to slow down! Lifting weights slowly increases muscle tension, stimulates more muscle fibers, and leads to greater gains in muscular fitness.

A study by Australian researchers found slow strength training to be effective with middle-aged women⁴. In the study, women who lifted weights slowly experienced significantly greater results than women who lifted weights in the traditional, accelerated fashion. The women with the least amount of muscle at the beginning of the study also experienced the greatest improvement. This research suggests that strength training, done slowly, can help maintain muscle mass and strength as people age.

At MEDFITNESS, we capitalize on the benefits of slow strength training by using our trademarked MEDFITNESS clocks. A MEDFITNESS clock is strategically placed in front of every exercise machine, allowing members to monitor their speed throughout the exercise. Watching the clock helps members to stay slow and maximize benefits.

Rule 3: Focus on the Last Repetition

The third biggest mistake people make when lifting weights is lowering the weight too fast, especially on the last repetition. As tempting as it may be, you cheat yourself by not focusing on that last repetition. It is widely accepted that the negative phase of every repetition (when lowering the weight) produces most of the strength building stimulus. Therefore, going fast on the last repetition reduces the strength building stimulus of the entire set!

To get the most out of every exercise, commit to quality. This means staying slow no matter how fatigued you become! This kind of focus ensures maximum strength gains!

Rule 4: Keep Your Workout Short

Another muscle building mistake is the belief long workouts produce better results. This is a common, but misguided, idea. Increasing exercise intensity (working harder) is what produces better results. Think of your workout from a quality versus quantity standpoint. Do you want longer workouts (quantity) or better results (quality)?

Research confirms that people work harder when workouts are short. Common sense tells us it is easier to push ourselves in a short workout than a long workout. To maximize results, keep strength training workouts short (less than 30 minutes) and intensity high.

Rule 5: Eat after Your Workout

The last mistake people make is not eating after a workout. Muscles are very receptive to the muscle building effect of protein immediately following a workout. Eating after working out can accelerate the formation of new muscle proteins.

In one study individuals who consumed a protein and carbohydrate drink following their strength workout built significantly more muscle than those who ate nothing¹. The best time to consume protein is immediately following your workout. About 15 grams of protein will support the formation of new muscle proteins.

To avoid overdoing calories, stick with low-fat options (fewer than 5 grams of fat per serving). Some high-protein, low-fat foods to consider are: low-fat milk, plain, low-fat yogurt, fruit smoothie shakes made with a meal replacement or protein powder, sports nutrition bars, low-fat cheese, lean beef, poultry or fish, cottage cheese, eggs, egg substitutes, and veggie burgers.

Get Help Building Muscle

The MEDFITNESS Workout builds muscle safely and efficiently. To experience our remarkable workout, schedule a *Free Trial Workout* by calling (630) 762-1784. Get additional information at www.medfitnessprogram.com.

About the Author

Richard Wolff is the president of MEDFITNESS. He is a Registered Dietitian and Licensed Nutritionist. Richard currently serves on the Nutrition Advisory Board at Northern Illinois University. He has written for the *United States Weightlifting Federation* and *Nautilus, America's Fitness Magazine*. His continuing education seminars are accredited by the American College of Sports Medicine and the National Strength and Conditioning Association.

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