

Training When You're Over 40 – Use More Wisdom and Less Energy

Training when over 40 years of age? Yes, I'm very qualified to write on this subject...and have been for years. When I was in my twenties I did almost everything wrong in the gym. I did too many exercises for each muscle group, I did too many reps, too many sets and I virtually never had clear goals for each workout.

Youth can afford to make such mistakes. But as we age it behoves us to get more bang for the buck when we do weightlifting. We need maximum results with minimum time invested. And it's not just because we lead busy lives and can't spend hours in the gym. It's because every workout represents a certain amount of wear and tear on the body and there is no good reason to deplete ourselves by performing more exercise than necessary to achieve our goals.

Warm Up

Fifteen years ago I used to jump right into an intense workout and hoist a hundred kilos without the slightest warm up. That's pretty dumb in your twenties but it's downright dangerous later in life. A proper warm up increases blood circulation to the muscles, elevates respiration to improve oxygen absorption, and improves viscosity in the joints.

Before you start your weight lifting workout do 10 to 20 minutes of brisk walking on the treadmill or use a stationary bike, stair stepper or other aerobic machine. Then before you perform each lift, do a few reps with about half of the weight you'll be shooting for that day. For example, if your goal is 8 reps with 115 kilograms, warm up with 8 to 12 reps with 60 kilos. If you're doing static training and are shooting for a 5 second hold with 182 kils, do your warm up reps for 5 seconds with 90 kilos or so.

Fewer Exercises

One of the biggest mistakes you'll see in the gym is people who do way too many exercises for each muscle group. This is not necessary. Muscles grow through an adaptive response to the intensity at which they are forced to work. Intensity is measured by the amount of work done in a certain time. You will actually achieve better results in less time if you perform one very high intensity exercise per muscle group. For example, some people will work their chest by doing 3 sets of cable crossovers followed by 3 sets on the pec dec and finally 3 sets on the bench press. There are many studies which now show that more than 90% of trainees will actually receive better results by performing one set all-out, super high intensity bench presses of either 8 reps or 5 to 10 seconds of a static hold.

This is great news to everyone but it is particularly good for those of us who are over forty because performing multiple sets of multiple exercises is very depleting, and it is just not necessary!

Fewer Workouts

The three biggest lies in strength training are "Monday, Wednesday and Friday"!! Fixed strength training schedules don't work for very long. The goal of every workout should be to increase the intensity of work done compared to your previous workout. As intensity increases your body needs more time to recover (especially as we get older!) so workouts have to be spaced further apart. This is more good news to everyone except the exercise addict.

When you begin a strength training program you might be able to work out for a couple of weeks on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, provided your body can fully recover with just one day off. But as you get stronger and start hoisting some really heavy iron, you WILL need more time to recover. So by the time you are in your third or fourth week you will need to cut back to train on Mondays and Thursdays. Two weeks later you more than likely will only be able to see increases in your strength and intensity if you train only one day per week. Depending on your intensity you could even need 10-15 days off between workouts.

Truly advanced trainers now lift weights once every six weeks and they still see improvements in every exercise on every workout.

The truth is you can achieve optimum results by working out with precisely engineered workouts that contain clear goals as frequently as you get a haircut. That's very welcome news to those of us who just want results and don't use the gym as a social gathering place.

Muscle Equals Youth

Have you ever seen two people who were both 60 years old but one of them looks 70 and the other looks 45? Age can't be measured by the calendar alone. There are several well established "bio markers of aging" that are used to give more accuracy to the assessment of physical age. Guess what? The amount of muscle your body contains is one of the principle bio markers of aging. The more muscle you have, the younger you are. Another bio marker of aging is bone density. Guess what the number one method is of increasing bone density? Heavy, weight bearing exercise!

Those of us over forty years of age can greatly slow down (and in many cases reverse) aging processes by performing rational, efficient strength training that increases muscle mass and bone density. The really great news is that it can be done without hours of exercise performed week after week. Less wear and tear on the body, fewer workouts and increased youth!! It's great to finally be 'old and wise'!!

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