



Weight Training Systems

When training with weights it is important to realise that there are many different training systems that are purported as being beneficial for one thing or another. Some of these systems work, some don't, and others you probably currently use without knowing it. Described below is a description of some of the more common weight training systems you may have heard of or will hear of if you involved in weight training for an extended period of time. Reading popular fitness magazines will also expose you to different training systems, and sometimes they get it right but sometimes they provide suggestions based on mere anecdotal evidence. Before you listen to any person's advice you should ask appropriate questions about the theory behind their suggestions and make an informed assessment of your own. This may simply involve asking them to explain more fully why something does or doesn't work, if they are unable to provide you with logical reasoning i.e., more than, "I train this way and it works for me", then you have every right to question the advice.

Single set systems: A good system for beginners and those with limited time available for training. Many people may currently employ this training system when doing circuits. Also useful for athletes in a maintenance phase of training as it allows more body parts to be trained in a limited time. Although there is mixed research findings it is mostly accepted that a multiple set system is superior for strength, power, and hypertrophy, however.

Drop sets: Sometimes called multi-poundage involves dropping the weight down throughout the progression of the sets. Often a fairly high load used i.e., 4-5 RM load. An RM load refers to the 'repetition maximum' weight you can lift for a set number of reps, so a 4-5 RM load is the maximum load you can lift 4-5 times only. Performing a drop set system entails the lifter completing a set at 4-5 RM and then decreasing the load and performing another set at the 4-5 RM which will now be less than before due to fatigue. This is completed for several sets and often used by bodybuilders for hypertrophy.

Pyramiding: This is a system that is very commonly used, and you may currently be using this system. Pyramiding involves increasing or decreasing the reps while simultaneously decreasing or increasing the load being lifted. Perhaps more common is the increasing pyramid where the repetitions



start high, around 8 reps, and decrease to only a few reps over 5 or 6 sets. With each decrease in the repetitions the load is increased starting at a moderately heavy load increasing to a high load by the end of the exercise. This system is often used by powerlifters and those interested in increasing their 1RM strength. Strictly speaking the pyramid system requires the lifter to work both up the pyramid (light to heavy load, high to low reps) and then back down the pyramid. More often though only 'half-pyramids' are performed and usually this is going up the pyramid. Very early variations of systems similar to the ascending half-pyramid (the Delorme regime) and the descending half-pyramid (the Oxford system) have both shown improvements when evaluated by researchers.

Superpump: This is a system used extensively by bodybuilders and those wishing to increase their muscle size. It is borne out of the idea that 15 to 18 sets are required by advanced bodybuilders to achieve the results they are after. The 15 to 18 sets are made up from about 3 different exercises. Importantly, all repetitions are performed with strict form and each body part is trained 2 to 3 times per week. It has been suggested that although this system may be beneficial for smaller muscle groups like the deltoids, biceps, etc. larger body parts such as the back and legs may fatigue the lifter too much so that subsequent sets and exercises will be compromised and not performed at an intensity high enough to elicit a response.

Cheating: Though not strictly a system, cheating is an advanced technique that can be effectively used by lifters with appropriate experience and conditioning. The basic theory behind cheating revolves around forcing the muscles to lift a heavier load than they could with strict form; it is thought that the increased load is the stimulus necessary to spur muscle development. Some people will wrongly use cheating when starting a program. When you cheat while performing an exercise you are going to put stresses onto structures that are not normally used when performing an exercise with correct technique. For this reason cheating should only be performed by advanced lifters, whose joint structures, tendons, and muscles are adequately conditioned so that they can withstand the extra stresses that will be placed on them. Commonly cheating is used at the end of a set to perform a few extra repetitions beyond what would be normally performed if correct technique was maintained. This will force the muscles to be used nearer to their maximum and force development as a result of this stimulus. Cheating may also be used for a complete set to help move past a sticking point of a particular exercise. To use



bicep curls as an example; anyone who has performed this exercise will know that the hardest part of the exercise is when the arm is fully extended. Consequently, if correct technique is maintained then a lighter weight must be used to get past this sticking point, and as a result the stronger part of the movement will not be stressed as much, in this situation cheating helps to overcome this sticking point, by slightly rocking the torso, to move the weight into the stronger part of the movement so that the muscle can be overloaded to stimulate growth. Research evidence shows that when used, cheating can be safely performed to achieve increases in muscular strength by advanced lifters.

These are just some systems that can be useful for those involved in resistance training. Remember though that your training goals should drive your program design and where possible advice from an experienced trainer should be sought. An excellent resource for information about designing training programs, including a thorough description of the above systems and more is Fleck, S.J. & Kraemer, W.J. (1997). *Designing Resistance Training Programs* (2nd ed.). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Hopefully this article has given you tips and motivated you to keep training or to get training.

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See you,

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