



FREE WEIGHTS VS. MACHINES PART II

As promised in February's newsletter I will continue to discuss the benefits and disadvantages of free weights and machines. Last time I discussed free weights in the most detail, this month machines will take center stage.

In case you were wondering which resistance method is better, or which you should do, I'm not going to tell you. I want you to decide for yourself, or better yet, meet with a qualified trainer who can look at your fitness situation and goals and come to a good conclusion about what is right for you. I will however, tell you what to look for, consider and think about when deciding to use free weights or resistance machines to get your muscles working.

While I can't seem to say enough good things about free weights, one downside is that there is a learning curve that needs to be experienced before someone can use them to their full potential. Resistance training machines have a very small learning curve and therefore can be easier to jump into as a form of resistance training. The learning curve consists mostly of learning how to adjust the settings to make the machine fit your particular body. Just a side note, everyone should have a basic idea of their anatomy and what muscles are used to push, pull, and get out of a chair. I think this is the basic prerequisite to beginning a resistance training exercise. With this information someone can at least know what is going on when they are using the exercise machines.

We know that free weights tend to burn more calories and recruit more muscles to accomplish a task (i.e. working your upper back muscles). Resistance machines like a cybex upper back row machine, make it simpler to get the work done. You can basically sit down, adjust the settings to your body, and perform some rows that target your upper back muscles. The downside here is that the exercise is less functional because it doesn't require the torso muscles to stabilize the spine. If your goal is to do isolate the upper back muscles, mission accomplished.

Another advantage of machines is that you can adjust the amount of weight you are using relatively quickly. An example is the bench press, on a standard bench, you need to put weight plates on each side of the bar and take them off when you are done. On a chest press machine, usually all you need to do is move a pin to the desired resistance and go to town. Keep in mind that the time you save is often offset by the time it takes to adjust the machine to your body.

Perhaps the biggest advantage of machine resistance training is that it's available to the most people. Some people can't lay down on a flat bench to do tricep extensions, but they can sit on an arm extension machine and do some work for their triceps. A seated calf machine allows you to sit and use both calf muscles to lift a stack of weights, if positioned correctly this is relatively simple for the novice exerciser. However, the

downside outweighs the upside to an alternative exercise like the standing calf raise. In the standing calf raise the participant is required to balance, a functional skill that we all need.

One of my favorite things about resistance machines is that you don't have to worry about angles and body positioning as much as you do with free weights. Free weights work to challenge your muscles by gravity and the angle of your joints. For instance the bench press motion works different muscles when you are standing upright versus lying on a bench. The weights want to go straight to the floor. If you are lying down your chest muscles would control the weight, if you are standing, your shoulders would have to support the weights out in front of your body. Once again, with machines you don't need to worry about positioning, you just go to your settings and have fun.

So what's better, free weights or machines? I'm still not going to answer that, but I think you know where I stand, and I hope you have a better idea of what is right for you. The best advice I can give regarding this issue is to learn how to do both and pick what you like the most. Because then you'll do it. The easiest way is to get lessons or personal training sessions from a professional who can teach you how to choose from hundreds of different exercises and enjoy an effective and efficient workout every time.



EXERCISE PSYCHOLOGY = EXERCISE SUCCESS

Recent reports indicate that 33% of Americans are obese, that's one third of our population, and that doesn't even take into account the people who are over fat. The number of unhealthy Americans would jump to an even higher number if those folks were included. Where am I going with this? What's the bottom line? We need to exercise, and eat healthier for the rest of our lives. Nothing is going to change that fact. This month's topic is less about psychology to improve your exercise experience, and more about conceptualizing how important exercise is to us and how we need to think about exercise in order to lead the type of lives we would all like.

I'm going to compare losing weight and having a healthy body to being in debt and spending more money than you have coming in. Wrap your mind around this, when someone makes a decision to lead a healthier life, or to lose weight they need to change their lifestyle. For the rest of their lives! If you want to be a healthy, happy, lean or fit person you may need to make some changes. Changing your diet and exercise habits to accomplish fitness goals, really only works for as long as you are willing keep those healthy habits. If you live like a healthy person for 6 weeks and then go back to your old habits, what do you think is going to happen?

It starts to make more sense when you look at healthy living like healthy budgeting. If you spend more money than you take in, you will be in debt. If you stop spending more than you take in and start saving money, you can begin to pay off your debt. Depending on how much money you owe, it will take you a certain amount of time to get your debt to zero. Once you are debt free, should you go back to spending more than you make? The same rules apply when working toward losing weight or making healthy choices that get you closer to a healthy body.

Whether you are on a 12 week healthy eating and exercise plan to improve your life, or you are on a 12 month savings plan to reduce your debt, you may have to make some initially uncomfortable choices. In both of these hypothetical situations, if you do what you are supposed to and follow the guidelines you will get the desired result. We know it's possible, and we have all seen countless examples of people who have done both on television and maybe in person.

What do you think will happen if the person on the healthy lifestyle plan goes back to their old habits or only does half (i.e. the eat well or exercise consistently, but not both)? What do you think will happen to the person who just got out of debt if they go back to spending more than they bring in? We all know what would happen.

The take home message to wrap your mind around is that if you want to be a healthy person, or a debt free person, you have to live that kind of lifestyle. So my advice is get used to being and living healthy. Once it becomes part of your lifestyle it won't seem as daunting it will just be the way it is.

APRIL HEALTHY RECIPE CHICKEN & SUN-DRIED TOMATO ORZO

INGREDIENTS:

8 ounces orzo, preferably whole-wheat
1 cup water
1/2 cup chopped sun-dried tomatoes (not oil-packed), divided
1 plum tomato, diced
1 clove garlic, peeled
3 teaspoons chopped fresh marjoram, divided
1 tablespoon red-wine vinegar
2 teaspoons plus 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil, divided
4 boneless, skinless chicken breasts, trimmed (1-1 1/4 pounds)
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon freshly ground pepper
1 9-ounce package frozen artichoke hearts, thawed
1/2 cup finely shredded Romano cheese, divided

PREPARATION: 1. Cook orzo in a large saucepan of boiling water until just tender, 8 to 10 minutes or according to package directions. Drain and rinse.

2. Meanwhile, place 1 cup water, 1/4 cup sun-dried tomatoes, plum tomato, garlic, 2 teaspoons marjoram, vinegar and 2 teaspoons oil in a blender. Blend until just a few chunks remain.

3. Season chicken with salt and pepper on both sides. Heat remaining 1 tablespoon oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the chicken and cook, adjusting the heat as necessary to prevent burning, until golden outside and no longer pink in the middle, 3 to 5 minutes per side. Transfer to a plate; tent with foil to keep warm.

4. Pour the tomato sauce into the pan and bring to a boil. Measure out 1/2 cup sauce to a small bowl. Add the remaining 1/4 cup sun-dried tomatoes to the pan along with the orzo, artichoke hearts and 6 tablespoons cheese. Cook, stirring, until heated through, 1 to 2 minutes. Divide among 4 plates.

5. Slice the chicken. Top each portion of pasta with sliced chicken, 2 tablespoons of the reserved tomato sauce and a sprinkling of the remaining cheese and marjoram.

NUTRITIONAL INFORMATION: Per serving: 457 calories; 12 g fat (3 g sat, 6 g mono); 68 mg cholesterol; 54 g carbohydrate; 36 g protein; 10 g fiber; 372 mg sodium; 546 mg potassium.

Nutrition bonus: Folate (34% daily value), Iron (25% dv), Potassium (16% dv) **Source:**

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