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RECOVERY: THE FORGOTTEN COMPONENT TO GETTING STRONGER AND MORE FIT.

Recovery is a part of exercise that people don't talk much about. Sometimes we take it for granted, concentrating only on the exercises and programs we need to follow. The reality is that strength training to get stronger and using cardio machines to improve aerobic capacity is only the first step to getting a training-effect (improvement) from exercise. The next and equally important step is recovering from that exercise.

I want to explain briefly about what's called training-effect to provide some background for recovery. Training effect is probably the biggest reason that we exercise and it's what you hope happens after you do cardio or bicep curls. You get better, you improve at what you worked at, or get whatever result your looking for. Here's the part we tend to forget. In order to get a training effect to occur, we must do more than just exercise, we must recover.

After we go through a series of exercises, the muscles that we trained are broken down and energy systems are depleted. After consuming some good nutrients our body has some fuel to help recover from exercise. With rest and quality sleep, we give our body

the chance to repair the damaged tissues and replenish our energy stores. This can take anywhere from 8 hours to 5 days depending on your fitness level and the intensity in which you trained. The training-effect is the benefit you get from training, but only after adequate recovery has taken place. The three main components necessary to have a training effect are to exercise hard enough to challenge your muscles and cardiovascular system, eat good healthy meals, and repair damage to the muscles. Without all 3 parts in place, you truly put yourself at a disadvantage for making improvements.

Overtraining is something that can hinder your ability to recover from exercise. If you work out so hard that you can't recover with good nutrition and adequate rest, you may need to lower your training volume or your training intensity. Training volume is the total number of pounds you lifted multiplied by the repetitions and sets you did. Training intensity is the effort you put into doing your workout whether it's one set or the entire workout. If you train at a high intensity most days of the week you may want to increase your rest time or calories consumed if you find that you aren't recov-

ering. Drinking plenty of water also helps.

Because exercise seems like the hardest part, we tend to get focused on it and forget about the other components. When you consider the fact that resistance exercise (like bench press) only breaks down your muscles, it becomes clear that there is a need to recover from that break down in order to improve. The best way to recover from muscle break down is to get the highest quality nutrition into your body and rest long enough for your body to repair the damage and adapt to the training stimulus you put on it (i.e. bench press).

If we concentrate more on recovery, we set our selves up for getting the most out of our training. Concentrating on recovery means planning healthy meals and plenty of rest (research indicates 7½ to 8½ hours is ideal for most people) and then acting on that plan. Just as you wouldn't expect to get great results from not exercising, but eating healthy, and getting lots of sleep, you can't expect to get great results from exercise when you don't eat healthy or rest enough. I can't stress it enough, recovery is not just important, it's crucial.

THE POWER OF MEASURING PROGRESS

It can be frustrating when you work extremely hard to get the body you want when you don't see much progress. I completely understand this, it can be difficult and it's more difficult for some people than others. That is, it can take longer, or feel like it's impossible. When people start an exercise program they expect to see results. If you look in the mirror and don't see much difference it's easy to say "forget this, it's not working" and quit trying. Often times you will not be able to see changes in body right away. For instance, it takes about eight or nine weeks of a hypertrophy (muscle size) program to have measurable muscle growth. Starting your exercise program with baseline measurements gives you real evidence of changes in your body. Evidence can be seen on paper and serves as proof of progress which should motivate you to continue your exercise plan. Without measurements in every category such as fitness level, upper and lower body strength, flexibility and body fat it's hard to tell what's working and what's not. I hear many people say things like "I've been work-

ing out hard but I'm just not losing any weight", or "I've been doing lots of cardio and I've lost some weight but I haven't been getting the muscle definition I thought I would". Sometimes there is simply a part of the program that is missing or neglected, i.e. nutrition, recovery or exercise intensity. Other times, people are making progress but get frustrated because they don't see it in the mirror. The problem is that they don't have a system to tell how much stronger they have gotten, how much better their balance is, how much fitter they are, or how much body fat they've lost. If you don't measure something at the start you can't accurately tell if it's gotten better. If you have something to look back at and you've been consistent, you will no doubt have quality information to use to make yourself better. You can then think critically to find solutions to your exercise problems, or keep things going that you know are working.

One thing that baffles me is that some people actually rely only on a scale to detect differences in their body. It would be very frustrating to work as

hard as you could and think you weren't making any progress. You might drive yourself crazy, and end up with a negative view of exercise and saying things like "what's wrong with me"? If you had gained five pounds of muscle and lost five pounds of fat the scale would say you weigh the same.

Trading in your body for a new one takes a lot of work, planning and change and that's the thing people are most resistant to. Sometimes our own body change is not as obvious to us. That's why it's crucial to take accurate measurements of your body composition, circumference, weight and fitness level before you embark on a journey to change your body. Those measurements give you powerful feedback as to where you've lost fat, where you haven't and how much you lost. Pre and mid program measurements on exercise tests can also give you a good idea of how strong you have gotten and how fit you have become since you began your fitness quest. You have put a lot of effort into getting healthier, now it's time to see if it's working.

SEPTEMBER HEALTHY RECIPE

ANGEL HAIR PASTA WITH SHRIMP AND SPINACH

Ingredients:

8 ounces uncooked angel hair pasta
1 1/2 pounds peeled and deveined large shrimp
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon black pepper
2 tablespoons olive oil
1/4 cup finely chopped shallots
1/2 cup fat-free, less-sodium chicken broth
2 tablespoons lemon juice
6 cups coarsely chopped spinach

Cook pasta according to package directions, omitting salt and fat. Drain. While pasta cooks, sprinkle shrimp with salt and pepper. Heat oil in a large non-stick skillet over medium-high heat. Add shallots; sauté 30 seconds. Add shrimp; sauté 3 minutes. Remove shrimp mixture from pan. Add chicken broth and lemon juice to pan, scraping pan to loosen browned bits. Add cooked pasta, shrimp, spinach, and capers, and heat 1 minute or until spinach wilts, stirring frequently.

4 servings (serving size: 1 1/2 cups)

Yield:

Nutritional Information: CALORIES 473(21% from fat); FAT 10.8g (sat 1.6g, mono 5.5g, poly 2.1g); PROTEIN 44.1g; CHOLESTEROL 259mg; CALCIUM 151mg; SODIUM 652mg; FIBER 2.7g; IRON 7.8mg; CARBOHYDRATE 48.1g

Source: Robyn Webb, *Cooking Light*, 2003

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