

Fit Facts: Secrets of Successful Strength Training by Diego Schmunis - CPT

Are you getting bored with your strength training program, or not getting the same results you did when you started? It's easy to fall into a weight training rut, doing the same old routine of favorite exercises day in, day out. Unfortunately, too much "same old, same old" can be the enemy of effective physical conditioning. "The key to successful training lies in varying the training stimuli," says William J. Kraemer, PhD, professor of applied physiology at the Pennsylvania State University's Laboratory for Sports Medicine. The most effective way to add variety to your workouts is through periodization, which means making systematic changes to your training at regular intervals. Periodizing your strength workouts can help you avoid plateaus; prevent injury; and make greater gains in strength, power, muscular size and endurance, and athletic performance.

The Right Kinds of Changes

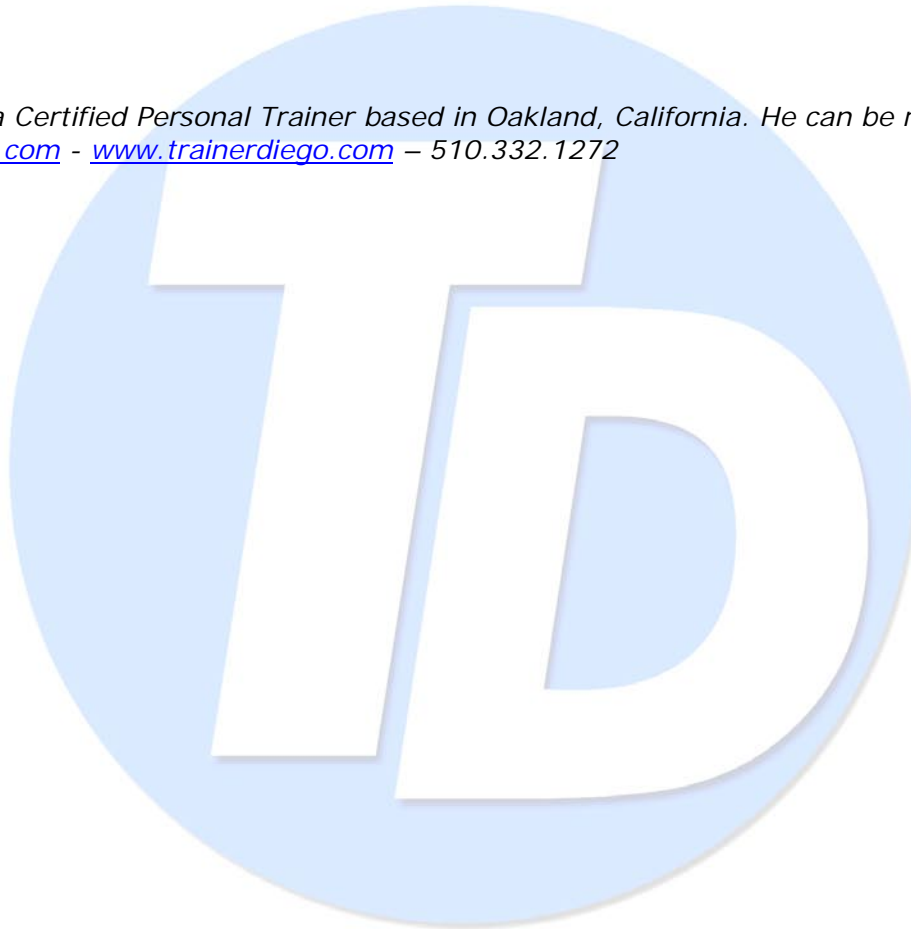
A qualified personal trainer can design a periodized strength training program specifically for your needs, so if at all possible, enlist the services of a professional when developing your program. Kraemer offers the following additional tips to help you succeed:

1. **List Your Goals and Plan to Achieve Them Over Time.** A typical way to plan your program is to set goals for one year and goals to achieve approximately every three months. Fitness assessment tests can help you determine these goals. If you have a variety of goal, you and your trainer will need to decide which to prioritize.
2. **Don't Try Too Much Too Soon.** Before you begin a periodized program, complete four to 12 weeks of basic training. Use this training to develop general conditioning and practice proper form and technique.
3. **Change your Exercises.** Many fitness experts believe you should change your program at least every four to six weeks for maximum effectiveness. The muscle groups to be trained (based on your goals) should determine the type of exercises you perform.
4. **Change the Exercise Order.** Plan the order in which you do your exercises as seriously as you plan the exercises themselves. Try alternating between muscle groups – e.g., doing elbow curls (arms) followed by knee extensions (legs) – or "stacking" all the exercises for one muscle group (i.e. performing them consecutively). A third possibility is to start with the exercises of greatest priority to you and follow them with exercises of lesser importance.
5. **Change the Number of Sets.** Not all exercises require the same number of sets. Prioritizing your goals will help you determine which muscle groups or exercises need the most attention, and which need simply to be maintained.
6. **Vary the Recovery Time.** Your greatest physical gains are made during recovery, when your body makes the adaptations needed to support further physical development. "The length of your rest periods should be based on your training goals, not on how long it takes to talk to a friend or get a drink of water," says Kraemer. Short rest periods (less than a minute) are normally used when the goal is to build local muscular endurance; long rest periods (more than three minutes) are used when the primary goal is to increase strength and power.
7. **Change the Resistance Load.** There is no consensus on what combination of reps and weights will yield the best training results. However, popular combinations include pyramid training (decreasing the number of reps per set as the weight increases, and then increasing the number of reps per set as the weight decreases); half-ascending pyramid training (just the first half of pyramid training); and half-descending pyramid training (just the second half of pyramid training). Note that your genetic makeup plays a large part in determining your ability to lift heavy weights.



8. **Evaluate your Progress Every Four to Eight Weeks.** Keep a detailed record of your workouts, noting exercises performed, number of reps and sets, amount of resistance and length of rest periods. Monitor your results.
9. **Be Flexible With Your Training.** Remember, be prepared to change your workouts to accommodate personal circumstances such as illness, mood, soreness, etc.
10. **Give Purpose to Every Workout.** The more carefully you plan your weight training program, the more meaningful, exciting and effective each session will be.

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