Weight training: Do I need to change my workout to see results? [1]

Dear Alice,

I've been told that every two to three weeks, I need to change my weight training routine or else my body will become too accustomed to it and I will stop seeing results. Is it really necessary for me to change my entire routine, or do I only need to increase weight and/or repetitions?

Answer

Dear Reader,

The body does adapt to weight lifting, so you won't see results if you continue with the same routine. After weeks or months of training, the same exercises that once exhausted you may seem almost effortless. To experience continued improvement in fitness, you need to challenge your body by making your workouts progressively harder in one way or another.

Although people change at different rates, it's generally recommended that people make a few alterations in their program every four to eight weeks for continued results. You don't need to transform your entire workout, but modifying your routine slightly will help keep your muscles challenged. Here are some basic training variables to take into consideration when you're changing your workout, but only change one variable at a time:

- Frequency

  This refers to the number of times you work a muscle per week; two to three times per week is optimal. Muscles need rest between workouts, so leave at least 24 to 48 hours between training the same muscle.

- Resistance

  This refers to the weight used to perform the exercise, which may be in pounds or kilograms. The weight will affect the number of repetitions and the number of sets you're able to do. Beginners should use weights that allow them to do 12 to 15 repetitions and one to two sets of each activity. Use trial and error to find the appropriate resistance level: decrease the weight if you can only lift it a few times; increase the weight if you can easily lift it sixteen times or more. If/When you're upping the amount of resistance you use, do not increase it by more
than five percent per week.

- Repetitions

Also called "reps," this term refers to one complete action of an exercise. The heavier the weight, the fewer the number of repetitions you need to perform. Beginners should start with one to two sets of 12 to 15 repetitions. The last repetition should be somewhat difficult to finish? again, change the weight you use if this number of reps is too easy or hard.

- Training Sets

These are a pre-determined number of repetitions of a specific activity. Beginners start with one to two sets of each exercise and increase the number of sets as they become stronger.

- Rest and Recovery

This refers to the amount of time between sets and between training sessions. As you increase resistance, you'll need longer periods of rest, so your muscles can recover. Rest for at least 30 seconds between sets and for 24 to 48 hours between training sessions for the same muscle group.

- Training Method

As you become stronger, you may progress to more advanced variations of activities for each muscle group. Performing such exercises stresses the muscle(s) in slightly different ways.

For even more variety, try throwing some of the following suggestions into the mix:

- Work a different combination of muscle groups each day? i.e., back and biceps one day; chest, shoulders, and triceps one day; and legs and abdominals one day.
- Do a total body workout two or three times a week.
- Change the order in which you perform exercises (although larger muscles should be trained first).
- Increase (or decrease) the number of activities for each muscle group.
- Vary the type of exercises you do? i.e., progress to more advanced activities; use free weights; and/or vary the machines you use.

Keep in mind that if you increase resistance, you need to decrease repetitions and increase recovery time between exercises. If you add more sets, you'll need to decrease the number of repetitions. It may help to work with a Certified Personal Trainer to create a schedule you can work with over a period of months, tailored to your needs, abilities, and fitness goals.

Alice!

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