

The Frequency Factor

By Michael Lipowski, CFP

One of the age-old questions, that has been asked throughout gyms for as long as anyone can remember has been, *how many days a week should I workout?* Too complicated things further comes the follow-up question, *how should I split my workouts?* In either case, what is essentially being questioned is an individual's training frequency. As it pertains to exercise, *frequency* is the rate at which workout sessions are occurring.

In my opinion this is the most overrated and over-exaggerated fundamental principle of exercise. By that I mean this is the variable that people most heavily focus their attention on. It's amazing how many individuals are caught up in having to be at the gym on a daily basis. As if missing a workout or even two or three is going to result in losing everything they gained. This mind-set often has negative consequences and can severely hinder your development. There are of course those at the other end of the spectrum who do not exercise nearly enough which as we know also has negative consequences. However much of our discussion here will focus on those individuals previously mentioned.

The reason why we go to the gym is to help us get in shape and look better, right? Wrong! We go to the gym as a means of starting a chain of events that will eventually result in us getting in shape and looking better. Take a moment to read that statement again or as many times as is needed for it to completely sink in. The reason why it is so important to see exercise *this* way is because many people have a distorted view of exercise and how it works to make us more fit.

Many trainees believe that if they simply show-up at the gym and perform the workouts, they will accomplish all they've set out to achieve. More often than not any results that are achieved through this mechanism are usually very small and/or short lived and the individual never fully realizes his/her potential. Very often people fail to change the way their bodies look even though they frequent the gym 5, 6 sometimes 7 times a week! Despite not achieving the physical changes they desire or further improving their level of fitness they not only continue to train frequently but may also increase the amount of exercise they perform in those workouts, ala the *more is better* mentality. Predictably this does not work either and their level of frustration grows with each passing week.

But do not assume that—based on my statements above—anyone who has the same or

similar profile to the one I described, can in no way see results. Some people achieve fitness success *despite* a 'less-than-ideal' training regimen. This however is usually because the person possesses superior genetic ability.

For others this amount of exercise may not be a detriment because of a lack of activity outside of the gym (i.e. sedentary job) or because the demands of their daily workouts are so insignificant (in which case they will not see results no matter how many days a week they workout). But for the majority—the genetically average—an excessive amount of exercise can and will have negative consequences.

There exists a special relationship between all the principles of exercise, but the success of your training program greatly depends on the relationship between 3 in particular. They are intensity, volume, and of course frequency. This interaction among these three components is detailed in PURE PHYSIQUE: "How to Maximize Fat-loss and Muscular Development". When these three components are applied and balanced properly through training, performance and physical development will improve dramatically. When frequency is not properly balanced in conjunction with intensity and volume the demands of the training program will exceed what can be tolerated by the individual resulting in a decrease in exercise performance, muscle loss, slowing of fat-loss, decreased strength and endurance, and overall physical regression.

Ideally we should only be training frequently enough to ensure that we are not overtraining or undertraining, the results of which (mentioned above) are the same if you do either.

The overall goal of any exercise program should be to perform the least amount of exercise necessary to produce an optimum response. Exercise should be intense, brief and infrequent. As stated in The Nautilus Book, by Ellington Darden, "You can perform brief and infrequent high-intensity exercise or long and frequent low-intensity workouts. But you cannot perform long and frequent exercise involving a high intensity of work. That will result only in total exhaustion." (p. 76)

As we've already covered, anything above what is necessary is superfluous and will ultimately result in diminishing returns. In laymen's terms this would translate to working out harder, working out longer, working out more, and having little or nothing to show for it. Training frequency should be reflective of what is an ideal period of rest following a bout of exercise, as per individual needs.

For some this may be training 3 times a week, every other day, for others it may be training once every 4-6 days, for others it might mean keeping to their current schedule but lowering the overall demands. The options and combinations are infinite, but it is up to you to discover the appropriate training frequency based upon your training

intensity and volume, goals, needs, rate of recovery, and preferences. Don't forget, going to the gym is a means of starting a chain of events that will eventually result in us getting in shape and looking better, so make smart choices about what you do and how often you do it.

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***Not sure if you can handle the psychological aspects of reducing your training frequency? Read Working Hard at Working Smart in the "Psychology/Motivation" section of our articles.**