

HOW TO BUILD MUSCLE WITHOUT WEIGHTS

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Hey Paul why would anyone want to workout without weights? Everyone knows that using weights and machines is the fastest most efficient way to gain size and strength. While this is true, there are many reasons why someone would want to, or even be forced to train for a while without the benefit of using weights. Someone working long hours trying to support his family may not have the time to get to a commercial gym, and may not have the extra space or money to set up a good home gym. Also, someone who has to travel quite often for business might prefer getting a good workout in his or her hotel room rather than wandering the streets of South America asking "Donde esta el gymo?".

Let's face it there are times (vacations, etc.) when all of us can't easily get to a gym. There are also many trainees (beginners or athletes training for boxing, baseball or some other sport) who aren't trying to get a lot of muscular bulk but want the type of strength, endurance and definition that calisthenic exercise offers. These exercises can also be preformed anytime, anywhere and you can do them over your entire life to keep fit.

The idea behind this course is - If for some reason you do workout without weights, what is the most efficient and result producing way to do it? You can use these exercises in many ways: To build muscle, to maintain muscle you already have, in combination with your weight training to add variety and a change of pace, as a warm-up or pump-up routine, to ease back into training after a layoff or injury, etc., etc.

Very early in my training career I started thinking about how to make calisthenics more result producing. The original reason was to help out one of my best friends at the time, who also happened to be the person that inspired me to start training by seeing the great progress he was making. Let's call him Joe, mostly because that was his name, I believe he prefers to be called Joseph these days but back then he was still good old Joe.

Anyway, one day Joe's father forbid him to workout with weights anymore, he gave Joe some reasons for this decision but I think the real reason was that he didn't like the idea that his 15 year old son was getting a little too big and strong to be easily controlled and he better do something about it before he gets any bigger. The funny part was that his father didn't object to him doing push-ups or other freehand exercises, only weight training was forbidden, I'm sure he figured that at best Joe would be able to maintain the muscle he had but he wouldn't get any bigger. Joe was very distraught by the situation, convinced that his muscles were doomed to waste away to nothing, but I was sure there was some way to make those exercise more intense and maybe he could even gain some size. I came up with some ideas and tried to tell Joe about them but he didn't seem too interested, his attitude was like "Hey, I know more about training then this guy, I'm the one who got him started. And

besides I don't have time to listen to this I'm too busy feeling sorry for myself and performing satanic rituals to curse my dad-".

Joe never used my ideas but I did many times over the years, whenever I used calisthenics, and always got good results. I got even more ideas, a few years back, after reading the famous "Dynamic-Tension Course" by Charles Atlas. I found an old comic book and decided to write to the address and see if the course was still available, much to my delight it was and I ordered it. I ordered it mostly as a collectors piece and novelty item, like owning a part of American pop culture. Who could forget those great advertisements like, "The insult that made a man out of 'Mac'.", "Who else wants a He-Man body?" or "In just 7 days, I can make you a Man.", I was also curious as to what was this Dynamic-Tension method exactly. I have always believed that - Only a fool thinks he knows everything and that a wise man never stops learning., so there was a possibility that I could find some good information in this "old, outdated course". I read the course and found it quite interesting, I was slightly disappointed to find out that Dynamic-Tension is really just some calisthenics and some isometric exercises. And while I'm sure they would do a lot for 198 lb weaklings", what can they do for someone who's already fairly big and strong? This got me thinking again about the same thing, how can these exercises be made more intense. Since then I came up with a few more ideas and now it's time to end the history lesson and share them with you.

THE TECHNIQUES

(1) The first technique is to just do the exercises in the traditional manner, I know you can do 60, 80 even 100 reps but that's the idea, grind out as many reps as you can this will build up your endurance and give your muscles a change of pace. And while this most likely won't give you any extra size right away, when you go back to weight training with heavy weights and lower reps you may be surprised that you are now gaining faster than before. A few years ago some top bodybuilders were talking about a technique they called "100's", they reduced the weight and did literally 100 reps on all their exercises, they claimed it brought about certain physiological changes that made the muscles more responsive to later heavier training. It's worth a try, especially if you're going to be doing calisthenics anyway.

(2) Another way to get more results from these exercises is, right after a set flex hard the muscles just worked, flex as hard as you can and hold for at least a count of 10. Arnold talked extensively about "Posing as exercise" and the use of "Iso-Tension"(Iso means - Equal; the same, and Tension means - To tighten; stiffen; contract. So Iso-Tension is simply contacting the muscles and holding in the same place - no movement.) he said that it really gives the body a more chiseled look, reaches areas that training misses and will make muscular contractions while training more intense, and more isolated. All good reasons to try this technique.

A better variation of this is to flex the muscles you are working first, get them good and tired and then do the exercise, thus Pre-Fatiguing them. For example flex the chest or triceps muscles as hard as you can, then

immediately do a set of push-ups. Feels different doesn't it? It's a lot harder and produces much better results.

(3) Another technique is to reduce the rest time between exercises, let's say you start with 60 seconds after a while cut it down to 45 then 30, then 15, etc. How about no rest between sets, a whole cycle of calisthenics all done nonstop that makes it way more intense.

Also try it this way - do one set, let's say of chin-ups, go until the muscles are really tired or even to total failure wait only a few seconds and then do another set. How many reps did you do on your second set? Only 4 or 5 I bet, that's about what you'd do if you were doing some heavy pull-downs. You should see some growth from this style. Make it even more intense by increasing the reps on the first set and by decreasing the rest time before the second set, this is using the Rest-Pause method without weights.

(4) Why not simply add some weight, just because it's not metal disks doesn't matter your body can't tell the difference. Put some heavy books on your back and do push-ups, or even your 8 year old son, he likes to play horsey. Get your wife or girlfriend (but not both at the same time, that could be trouble) to sit on your shoulders while you do squats. Do donkey calf raises, get creative there's always a way to add some more resistance.

(5) How about using only one limb at a time, like doing one legged squats, one arm chin-ups, one arm push-ups, etc.. It takes some balance but it definitely makes it harder and puts on more muscle.

(6) Slow-Motion training is becoming popular again, try taking a full 12 seconds for the positive phase and 6 seconds for the negative phase of each rep. Don't lock out in the top position and don't rest in the bottom position, change smoothly from the positive to the negative. This is using Slow Continuous Tension, how many chin-up can you do this way? Not many I bet, it's intense.

(7) This last technique is based on what I thought Dynamic-Tension was before I read the course, Dynamic means - Dealing with motion, and we know from before that Tension is simply contraction. Therefore true Dynamic-Tension would be flexing the muscles hard while also moving, martial artists use a form of this to increase punching power.

Let's try to use this applied to our freehand workout, do your push-ups nice and slow while flexing hard your pectorals, shoulders, triceps, biceps and even your lats and forearms. When doing chin-ups flex hard your lats, shoulders, biceps, triceps and even chest and forearms. Do deep knee bends and flex hard your quadriceps, hamstrings, glutes, hips and even calves. Keep the tension hard and steady, it will take some practice to do it all together, but the incredible pump and muscle growth you will get from it will be well worth your while.

SOME SUGGESTED EXERCISES

Deep Knee bends - Builds thighs, glutes, hips and great for lung power and endurance. With your feet about shoulder width apart, grab on to the edge of a sink (or something that will give you support) and while looking up slowly bend your knees and lower until your butt is just about touching the floor. Slowly stand up again using only your legs to lift you, keep your heels on the floor and do as many as you can. For variation you can place your feet wider or closer together, or do them one leg at a time.

Calf Raises - Do them on steps, put your toes on the edge of a step and hold on to the hand rail for balance, lower your heels to get a good stretch, then raise up on your toes as high as you can, lower and repeat for as many as you can. For variation try them in the squatted down position, one leg of a time or donkey style.

Chin-ups or Pull-ups - For building back, shoulders, and biceps. Grab a bar with an under hand grip and hang down getting a good stretch in the lats, Pull up until your chest hits the bars, lower and repeat for as many. These can be easily be done in a park, school yard or on a doorway chin bar. Also try with an overhand grip, with one arm at a time, or even on monkey bars using a parallel grip (palms facing each other).

Push-ups - For building chest, shoulders and triceps. Lie face down on the floor hands about shoulder width apart keep your palms turned inward slightly, push-up until your arms are straight, lower and repeat for reps. To make it more difficult elevate your feet. Also, try different hand placements (closer together or farther apart). They can also be done between chairs, this was the favorite exercise of Charles Atlas. Another variation is Dips between parallel bars.

Handstand push-ups - Great for shoulders and arms. Get into a handstand next to a wall, put your toes against the wall for balance, lower yourself until the top of your head touches the ground, push back up and repeat for many reps. Try both close and wide hand Placements.

Crunches - For firming abdominal and reducing stomach. Lie on your back with your legs bent and your heels close to your butt, put your chin on your chest and your hands behind your head. Raise your head up crunching your abs hard (you should only go about 1/3 of the way as compared to traditional sit-ups) lower and repeat for lots of reps.

Hyper -Extentions - For strengthening your lower back. Place a chair near a bed, while lying face down with your hips on the chair and your lower legs shoved between the mattress and box spring, put your hands behind your head and bend forward at the waist as far as you can, raise back up until your back is straight and repeat for reps.

Grip Exercise - To build forearms and hand strength. Use a store bought pocket hand gripper, or a hard rubber ball that fits in your hand, squeeze as hard as you can, relax and repeat for many reps. Also try just the thumb and one finger at a time, exercise each finger this way.

FINAL WORDS

Always use proper form while exercising, remember - it's safety first. It is also recommended to stretch before and after your workout. Give these ideas a try, and never again have bully's kick sand in your face.

Good Training!

Paul Becker