

# INTENSITY TECHNIQUES FOR HARD GAINERS



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## **Intensity Techniques**

What's that? Just doing heavy weights to failure is below your superhuman abilities? Well, I've got some fun stuff in store for you. Intensity techniques are great for the hard-gainer and the superhuman alike. They are like adding rocket fuel to a Ferrari. These are some of my favorite techniques. Give them a try but don't overuse them. These techniques are best if only used sporadically because they can quickly lead to over-training.

## **Rep Tempo Changes**

Perhaps my favorite variation in training. Just by varying the tempo at which you perform your repetitions, you can achieve an entirely different effect. For example, if you regularly train with a positive-pause-negative-pause movement at a 2-0-4-0 second clip, why not go 2-1-2-1 the next week? You will be able to handle significantly heavier weights and you'll achieve a different training effect with your muscles. Conversely, if you regularly train at a brisk clip (such as 2-1-2-1), try going tremendously slower - like 4-2-6-2. You may have to cut back on the weights, but the sensation will be entirely different. Some people find that actually slowing down reps to this extent is much more brutal than heavier weights at faster clips. There is also a great deal of evidence showing that if you increase in the time that a muscle is under tension, you can bring into play different types of muscle fibers. Hence, your overall development is improved. I really like this technique and use it every workout.

## **Negatives**

Evidence supporting negative-only training is quite interesting. Tom Laputka, a former football player and Nautilus guinea pig, jumped up to doing sets of 700 pounds in Nautilus Pullovers by ONLY using negative techniques. 700 lbs. is hard to argue with folks. The machine only has a capacity of about 300 pounds, so Laputka had to get TWO 200 lb. riders to sit on top of the machine while he performed them! Interesting stuff.

HIT pioneer Arthur Jones believes that negative strength is approximately 40% more than what you can use for concentric reps. So if you can do 100 lbs. for 10 reps normally (i.e. positive and negative), you can do approximately 140 lbs. for 10 reps doing just negatives. Use approximately 10-15 seconds to lower the weight. You will find that during the first few negative reps, you will be able to control the descent. After a certain point, however, you will find it quite difficult to stop the downward descent. It goes without saying that you shouldn't even say the word "negative" in the weight room unless you've got a training partner who knows what he's doing. If you lose control of that weight - man, you just cannot pick up any girls / guys with a barbell implanted permanently in your chest. ("This? Oh, just an old army wound. Umm...yeah. The bad guys ran out of guns so they sent their

bodybuilders after us!" ) Make sure that your partner can take control of the weight at any time. In addition, you should be doing no work during the positive portion of the repetition. You're going to have enough work just lowering it, let your partner(s) raise the weight up. That's how negatives work.

### **Pre-Exhaust**

This technique is incredible. If you have a problem smoking your larger muscle groups, give this one a shot. Where Pre-Exhaust comes in handy is when you have a compound movement that involves a larger, stronger muscle and a weaker, smaller muscle. What typically happens in these compound movements is that the smaller, weaker muscle gives out before the larger muscle becomes fatigued. Consequently, you don't get as good a workout as you want to. Examples of where this situation comes into play? The bench press is a good one. For most people, their triceps and anterior deltoids give out before their chest does. So how does one get around this?

Well, the concept of pre-exhaust involves working the stronger muscle with an isolation movement before doing the compound movement. The key idea is that you want to make a "dent" in the larger muscle's ability. When you go and do that compound movement, the odds are a little more even, and the larger, partially fatigued muscle fails at around the same time as the smaller, fresh muscle. You may forsake a little poundage in the compound movement, but trust me, you're going to smoke that bigger muscle like you never have before. Taking the aforementioned bench press examples, you might try doing a set of incline flyes to failure and then grinding out the reps in the bench.

I had a lot of trouble killing my lats until I applied pre-exhaust. I can't think of working lats anymore without pre-exhaust. Since the biceps are involved with most lat movements, they typically tire before the lats do. I do a set of heavy Nautilus Pullovers (awesome exercise) to failure, and then without resting, go and grind out a set of dumbbell rows. The Nautilus machine is outstanding for getting a total lat workout. Because it doesn't involve the biceps, I can take a huge chunk out of my lats, then go to dumbbell rows and finish them off.

A key point in using this technique effectively is to minimize rest time between the two movements. If you wait too long, the body will start regenerating spent ATP from phosphocreatine stores in the muscle. Consequently, your energy levels will start to return. You want to figuratively punch your muscle in its face before it gets the chance to get up off the ground.

## **One-and-a-Quarters**

Here's a great technique that I came across just a short while ago. I tried it once and man...let me say this much...My partner tossed his lunch in the parking lot after we were done! Does that scare you? Good!

This technique applies to squats, but I suppose that it could be used anywhere. The primary intent is to improve the lower range of movement for a compound exercise. Say you have trouble powering out of the bottom for squats. Here's how you'd apply one-and-a-quarters.

Drop the weight about 50 lbs. from your normal weight (in compound movements). Trust me on this one. The weight you have on the bar, although considerably lighter, is going to feel like a thousand pounds. Now here's how you do 'em. Go down to the bottom position, pause, go up one quarter of the way, pause, go back all the way down, pause, go all the way up, pause. That's just one rep! Try getting 6 of these, and I'll pin an award on your weight belt. Me and my training partner were both munching on carpet after this one. I'll tell you this much - I'm not going to use this technique again until spring rolls around here in Ohio...when we can open up the windows in the gym! Stale, re-circulated, warm gym air + killer intensity technique = buckets and buckets of barf! You can't look too cool if you barf all over the squat rack. Then again, who cares?

Great technique! It really makes you work your rear end off. I can see its application in other lifts as well. The bench press sounds like an interesting place to use this.

## **Static Contractions**

The data I've read regarding this training format is so intriguing I really want to try them soon. A recent study showed that these were just as effective as conventional training at increasing strength. The difference? It takes about 2 minutes to perform an entire static contraction workout! Interested? Good!

The way you perform static contractions is as follows: You are going to perform just one rep of one set for each exercise. From the looks of what the results are, you won't be able to handle any more. Pick a weight that is considerably heavier than the weight you use for conventional reps. Get your training partner to help you get it into the strongest range of motion. Typically, this will be 3-4 inches below lockout. So for bench press, your partner would help you ease it off the racks, and then you'd drop the weight just a few inches below lockout, with a slight bend in your elbows. Now the aim of the set is to be able to hold the weight in that position for 15 seconds. If you chose the weight appropriately, that last 3-5 seconds should be absolutely brutal. The weight should start coming down at that point. Make sure that your training partner is alert at this point - you are using considerably heavier poundages and you don't want to lose control of them. After you drop, that's it! You're done for that exercise. So if you did a 5-6 exercises per workout using static

contractions, you'd spend about a minute and a half working out! (Of course, that doesn't take into account changing weights, etc.) From what I have read about this technique, it is amazingly effective and worth giving a shot. You have to be careful with this one though. Overusing the technique will send you spiraling into an over-trained state. They're that intense. The people who received the best results (gains of 10 lbs. or more in bodyweight) on a static contraction program were working out maybe once or twice a week.

### **Total Failure**

If you aren't training to total failure, then you aren't working at all. This technique I believe in using every workout. You have to be careful though - your recovery period has to suit the intensity of your workouts. If you decide to drive yourself beyond "normal concentric failure" using "total failure" techniques, you had better be ready to give your muscles all the time they need to repair and grow. That's between 7 to 10 days or rest for myself, personally.

Real simple. There are three basic types of strength: 1] Concentric (positive, or raising the weight) 2] Static (holding the weight in the strongest range of motion) 3] Eccentric (negative, or lowering the weight). That is also the order of the weakest to strongest ranges of motion. How can you reach failure in all three respects? After you can no longer push the weight up by your own force, you will have reached concentric failure. Get your training partner to HELP you up with the weight through the positive range of motion. Then, you can take two approaches. The first one (which I use every time I workout) is to lower the weight as slowly as possible. Me and my partner really like pushing each other in the gym - so when I get to this point, he'll call out a number. Whichever number he calls out, that's how long I'll take to lower the weight. Sometimes if we feel like beating up on each other, we'll call out numbers above ten. Try it out! When you reach the bottom, get your partner to help you get the weight back up and do it again (if you can). After you reach concentric failure, you will typically be able to do a maximum of 3-4 forced reps in this fashion.

The other option to take at this point is this: After reaching concentric failure, get your partner to help you get the weight back up. Once it's up there, drop a couple inches below lockout. Hold the weight in the strongest range of motion as long as possible. Aim for 15-20 seconds. When you can no longer hold it up there, lower it as slowly as possible. Aim for a minimum of 5 seconds for the negative portion. You shouldn't be able to do as many reps using this method as you could with the previous.

## **Hand-Offs**

I love this technique for forearms. Grab a barbell that you and your partner think that you can get 10 reps of behind-the-back-wrist-curls with. Go ahead and grind 'em out to failure. When you're done, hand that sucker off to your partner before you collapse to the ground. When he's done - get off the ground, soldier! It's your turn again! Keep going until you both eat carpet. It's as simple as that. Use sparingly.

## **Bodyweight Calf Raises**

Whether you do these by themselves or after a heavy set to failure of weighted calf raises, they're a killer. Kick your shoes off, find a step (preferably with something to hold onto), stand on the edge and start grinding. Aim for 100 at least. I'm not joking at all! If you set your mind to it and fight through the pain, you will be able to approach two hundred. Your calves will balloon up with so much lactic acid you'll be walking funny for a week! No joke. Typically when I do these I'll be SORE for 5-8 days. If you decide to do a set of these after weighted calf raises, don't aim to do as many reps. You shouldn't be able to - you've already smoked your calves with the weighted raises. You gotta be careful with these - don't neglect form (i.e. start bouncing at the bottom) and don't use these too often (at the most, 2x a month). You don't want to over-train, or worse, get tendinitis in your Achilles tendon.

Another fun technique (that is, if you are masochistic) is to do these hand-offs-style with your training partner. Keep trading back and forth until you guys have to crawl out the weight room on your hands and knees. When one guy reaches failure, the other guy checks in, and so forth.

## **Conclusion**

All of these techniques can be effective for blasting through growth plateaus, but use them sparingly so you don't over-train.