

## Muscle Success: Why to Do It?

Call me biased, but I think there are many enjoyable aspects of the training experience at The Perfect Workout. The instructors are personable. The equipment makes training all muscle groups in one workout convenient. The workouts are short and infrequent. Conversely, there is one aspect that many people don't find enjoyable: reaching "muscle success." Muscle success is our term for the point in each exercise when you can no longer move the resistance. Your muscles are momentarily exhausted to the point they are no longer strong enough to push even a fraction of an inch further.

We call it a success because you have thoroughly fatigued the targeted muscles, finished the exercise, and have stimulated positive strength and appearance changes. With that said, thinking of that moment in a positive light is difficult for many, because muscle success is often accompanied by muscular "burning" sensations and an effort level that can make people uneasy.

If we put you through that level of effort, there must be a reason, right? Reaching muscle success provides a number of benefits, including stimulating stronger muscles, greater muscle tone, and improvements in metabolism. Those positive changes are relatively well-known, though, so in this article I'd like to discuss two benefits of muscle success which aren't talked about as often: cardiovascular health and an objective way to track your progress.

A group of researchers assembled a research review for the *Journal of Exercise Physiology*. A review is a paper discussing the results of many studies that examined the same topic. The topic in this review, which looked at 157 studies, focused on the cardiovascular benefits provided by strength training to muscle success.

While strength training in general provides several improvements to the cardiovascular system, the authors noted that many benefits are received or amplified only when training to muscle success. For example, after three months of training, men and women of various ages had enduring improvements in overall blood flow due to muscle success training. Training to complete exhaustion increased artery size in another study. This is positive as larger arteries are less likely to experience a heart attack-causing blockage in the same way that adding lanes to a highway reduces the chances of having a traffic jam. Finally, pushing to muscle success also increases the ability of arteries to expand when blood flow increases, which reduces the stress experienced by artery walls.

Training to muscle success benefits your health in ways that may not occur if you train with lower intensity and don't reach that point. Also, you gain the benefit of an objective assessment of your performance.

If you reach muscle success when lifting 200 pounds in 60 seconds on the leg press, we have measures of your current ability in regards to your leg and hip strength. If you arbitrarily stopped at 60 seconds (sick of feeling "the burn," bored, etc.), the time you lifted for doesn't provide us with any objective information. Who knows how much longer you could have performed the set for? If you train for 70 seconds the following session, we cannot say it's an improvement – you may have been capable of that performance during your previous visit.

As you see, in addition to improvements in strength and appearance, muscle success stimulates greater changes in your cardiovascular system and gives you a way to objectively measure your progress. Therefore, the next time you encounter the discomfort of the last few reps, keep pushing. I promise: the extra effort is worth it.

#### Reference

Steele, J., Fisher, J., McGuff, D., Bruce-Low, S., & Smith, D. (2012). Resistance training to momentary muscular failure improves cardiovascular fitness in humans: a review of acute physiological responses and chronic physiological adaptations. *J Exerc Physiol*, 15, 53-80.