



Resistance Training Selection for Muscle Growth:

What exercises should you do if you are looking to grow a muscle?

SUMMARY

There are so many resistance training exercises that you can do for muscle growth, but what should you do? It really does not matter what resistance exercise you do as long as the exercise targets the muscle that you wish to develop. Some exercises are better than others at doing so. Your muscle does not know what exercise it is doing, but it feels and responds to the tension, time under tension, and especially momentary fatigue. Isolation exercises are really good at fatiguing individual muscles, while compound exercises fatigue multiple muscles and it may not fatigue the muscle you want to develop as much as isolation exercises would (what are compound exercises?). That is why many body builders favorite exercises are selectorized machines or single joint exercises (like curls). Another important point is that you work muscle with resistance that takes it close to muscle to failure with reps and multiple sets that can be anywhere from 1 to 20, but I highly recommend 6-12 with sets of 3 to 4. So as long as you applying resistance and getting the muscle to fatigue you are the right track to growth. Therefore, if you are looking to build a muscle use one or two isolation exercises that targets that muscle combined with a compound exercise that work the muscle you are wishing to grow and do that two or three sessions per week. For example do two different biceps curls with a compound exercise like rows or pulldowns if you wish to grow your biceps. That being said, for a well rounded program do not forget to do primary motions exercise for overall fitness development.

MORE DETAILS:

There was a train of general fitness thought that you train each body part. Although as mentioned above each body part should be trained in isolation, especially if you are looking to tone or body build, it is also important to perform primary movements, which require multiple body parts (also known as compound exercises). I as well as many fitness authorities suggest to focus on primary movement patterns that emphasize strength, muscular balance, and injury prevention and then add isolation exercises that work specific body parts for muscle growth. We can move in a variety of different ways, but not every movement needs to be trained under a heavy load. Rather we should focus on strengthening a few specific, primary, multi-joint movements that can improve general physical performance across a wide variety of activities.

Why is variety good for muscle growth? A common tenant in exercise science is that perpetual muscular adaptation and growth is the introduction of unfamiliar stimuli through varied exercises. That is why I recommend that your workouts utilize variety such as basic machines (leg extensions and curls are terrific at isolating and building muscle) , barbells, dumbbells, kettlebells, suspension trainers, bands, cable systems, and of course your own bodyweight. These tools offer movement options and training styles while remaining constant in their availability and function from fitness center to fitness center. Learning to use these standard pieces of equipment will provide you with the best training foundation to scale your workouts as you progress in ability. By using several exercises rather than just one, you target different regions of a muscle, leading to more complete development of a muscle group.

How about the competitive lifts and muscle growth? When it comes to muscle growth you do not have to focus on exercises that are more sport or functional specific like the competitive lifts (power lifting and Olympic lifting), although, the squat, deadlift, and bench press (powerlifts) are all great at building both strength and muscle. Rather when it comes to muscle building work the areas you wish to develop to momentary muscular failure (MMF) or within a couple of repetitions of MMF with a variety of exercises that isolate or semi-isolate the muscle that you wish to grow. As mentioned your muscles responds to load and time under tension not the exercise you are doing. In other words you can build muscle using a variety of exercises as long as you stimulate the muscle to failure that is where you apply a load of stress greater than what your body or muscles had previously adapted too. You can do that through isolation exercises (like weight machines or free weights) or compound exercises (powerlifts) or a combination of the two such as squat to shoulder presses or squat to bicep curls. A major key with exercise selection for muscle growth is that you should only do exercises that you can do safely with good form. I have a progression program of novice, intermediate, and advanced exercises that are based on testing ([see our user guide to test yourself and for exercise list](#)) to make sure of it.