Gain Muscle Fast: With the Muscle Express Train

Take this simple self-test to uncover the secret to instant gains.

When it comes to building a better body, every guy is looking for an edge. And while some men might opt for a 'roid trip to an underground pharmacy, the rest of us want a safer, smarter shortcut to more muscle. And I've found your advantage: fast-twitch muscle training. It's the X factor that'll help you pack on new muscle, add strength, and even burn more fat.

But before I reveal the secret, let's make one thing clear: Nothing can help you increase the quantity of your fast-twitch fibers. That was determined at birth.

This leaves you with a choice: Pray that you won the genetic lottery, or find the best way to make your fast-twitch fibers bigger. Follow this two-step approach, and you'll build more muscle than you ever thought possible.

Listen to the Professionals: After all, they are the experts. If you are looking for guidance on lifting or any other fitness regimens, check out Men's Health Personal Trainer. There are fitness and kinesiology experts on hand to provide instruction and advice.

Test Your Fast-Twitch Fibers

You can activate your fast-twitch fibers two ways—by lifting heavier weights or by lifting lighter weights very quickly. Take this test to determine your fast-twitch ratio. The result will tell you how you need to lift in order to see the fastest improvement.

Step 1:

Test your 1-rep max on the bench press. Using a spotter, perform a barbell bench press. Start with half of your estimated 1-rep max, or 1RM (the amount of weight you think you can press only once). Do 5 or 6 reps with perfect technique. Now add 10% more weight but subtract 1 rep.

Rest 2 minutes. Repeat this pattern until you do 1 rep with about 90% of your estimated 1RM. Rest 3 to 5 minutes, and try your estimated max. If you achieve it, then that's your true 1RM. If you fail, then use the 90% weight; if it's too easy, add 10% to your estimated 1RM. Then rest 5 minutes.

Step 2:

Select a weight that's 45 percent of your 1-rep max. (So if your max is 225 pounds, you'll start with about 100 pounds.) Try to perform 5 reps in 5 seconds.

Step 3:

If you succeed, rest 1 to 2 minutes and then repeat the test, this time using 5 to 10 percent more weight. Keep adding 5 to 10 percent until you can no longer complete 5 reps in 5 seconds.

Step 4:

Calculate your fast-twitch ratio: Simply divide the heaviest weight you could lift in 5 seconds by your 1-rep max. If you lifted 135 pounds in 5 seconds and your max is 225, your ratio would be 60 percent.

—BY BILL HARTMAN, P.T.

Building Muscle Without Heavy Weights

Weight training at a lower intensity but with more repetitions may be as effective for building muscle as lifting heavy weights says a new opinion piece in Applied Physiology, Nutrition, and Metabolism.

"The perspective provided in this review highlights that other resistance protocols, beyond the often discussed high-intensity training, can be effective in stimulating a muscle building response that may translate into bigger muscles after resistance training," says lead author Nicholas Burd. "These findings have important implications from a public health standpoint because skeletal muscle mass is a large contributor to daily energy expenditure and it assists in weight management. Additionally, skeletal muscle mass, because of its overall size, is the primary site of blood sugar disposal and thus will likely play a role in reducing the risk for development of type II diabetes."

The authors from McMaster University conducted a series of experiments that manipulated various resistance exercise variables (e.g., intensity, volume, and muscle time under tension). They found that high-intensity muscle contractions derived from lifting heavy loads were not the only drivers of exercise-induced muscle development. In resistance-trained young men a lower workout intensity and a higher volume of repetitions of resistance exercise, performed until failure, was equally effective in stimulating muscle proteins as a heavy workout intensity at lower repetition rates. An additional benefit of the low-intensity workout is that the higher repetitions required to achieve fatigue will also be beneficial for sustaining the muscle building response for days.

—TONY STARK