The Best Type of Exercise

Arthur Jones

Just what is best type of exercise?

The "best" for what purpose? Properly conducted exercise is capable of producing a number of worthwhile results…(1) increased cardiovascular ability, or "condition"…(2) increased strength…(3) increased flexibility, or range of movement…(4) increased speed of movement…(5) increased muscular mass…(6) reduced fatty tissue…(7) improved circulation…

Additionally, for reasons directly related to several of the above factors…exercise can greatly reduce the chances of injury.

So the choice if a type of exercise must be based upon the desired results.

In later chapters, we will cover every known type of exercise in great detail, step by step, point by point, in very simple terms.

But in the meantime, a clear understanding must be established regarding certain basic points that are involved in any type of exercise. First…we must define the terms, and establish certain guidelines common to all types of exercise.

As mentioned above, exercise can greatly reduce the chances of injury…but exercise is also capable of causing injury. So the best type of exercise is the type that is most likely to prevent injury…and least likely to cause injury.

Jerky movements are directly responsible for a very high percentage of injuries caused by exercise…and jerky movements are of absolute no value for the purpose of developing strength. So exercise performed for the purposes of increasing strength should always be smooth. Sudden movements and rapid accelerations should be avoided.

In later chapters covering exact styles of performance, you will be informed that movements should be "as fast as possible in good form" in many exercises. But many people overlook the most important part of that sentence…IN GOOD FORM.

Or they fail to realize that "as fast as possible" may be, in fact, quite slow. And in most cases, if the resistance is as heavy as it should be, FASTEST POSSIBLE MOVEMENTS will be QUITE SLOW.

Sudden, jerky movements greatly increase the forces involved in exercise…adding nothing to the exercise except the danger of injury.

So it should be clearly understood right from the start that the form, or style of performance, is one of the most important factors in exercise. Without good form, there is little or nothing of value left in exercise.

The sport of Olympic weightlifting is based on sudden movements, so in that case we have an exception…but that is the only exception. All other athletes should avoid any sort of sudden movements during their strength-training programs.

So careful observation of proper form will produce best results in the way of increasing strength, and will go a long way in the direction of avoiding injury.

And for the purpose of preventing injury, an exercise should involve stretching in the extended positions of the muscles being worked. Such stretching will also produce the benefit of greatly increased flexibility…which flexibility will in itself go a long way towards preventing injury.

So the best type of exercise is one that involves full-range movement…movements that starts form a fully extended "pre-stretched" position and continues to a fully contracted position.

Anything less than a full-range movement will provide exercise for only part of a muscle…and will do little or nothing in the way of improving flexibility. Proper exercise, truly full-range exercise, will increase the range of movement of any athlete…in any sport. Increasing his strength, increasing his flexibility, increasing his speed…and greatly reducing his chances of injury. In a later chapter, we will cover the requirements for a truly "full range" exercise in great detail…but for the moment, it is necessary only to be aware that full-range movement is an important factor in any type of exercise.

Finally…the best type of exercise for any purpose is Progressive exercise.

But just what is progressive exercise?

An exercise is progressive only if it exposes the athlete to constantly increasing workloads…the intensity of effort OR the amount of training must be increased in proportion to increasing ability. As an athlete becomes stronger, he must work harder, OR more…BUT NOT BOTH.

For the purpose of increasing cardiovascular ability, the amount of training must be increased…up to a point, to a point, to a point far beyond the starting level of ability. But in this case, the intensity of training must NOT be raised to rapidly…nor too high. If an athlete is running for the purpose of improving his cardiovascular stamina, his results will be related almost directly to the amount of running…within reasonable limits.

But if he runs as fast as possible, thus involving maximum intensity…then it will simply be impossible to run as much as he should.

In general terms, there are two styles of training…(1)…"steady-state" or aerobic exercise…and (2) "non-steady-state" or anaerobic exercise.

But a great deal of confusion exists in regard to these actually very simple points…confusion that I will attempt to eliminate, here and now.

A particular exercise can only be performed in one of two possible ways….either way, but not both ways at the same time. Walking at a pace that could be maintained for hours is steady-state exercise. But running at a pace that can be maintained only briefly is non-steady-state exercise.

BUT…and this is a very important point that seems to be generally misunderstood…it is easy possible to arrange a training program in such a manner that an athlete produces the potential benefits of both styles of training.

Steady-state training is necessary for cardiovascular benefits…and non-steady-state exercise is required for meaningful strength increases…but you can produce both results from the same training program.

Three paragraphs above, I state that…" a PARTICULAR exercise can only be performed in one of two possible ways"…and that remains true. BUT…it is easy possible, highly desirable, to arrange the training schedule in such a way that the MUSCLES are being worked in a non-steady-state fashion while the HEART and LUNGS are being worked in a steady-state fashion.

Strength training is usually performed in spurts…a very brief but very hard exercise is followed by a rest period. And conditioning training is usually performed at a much lower intensity, but for a much longer period of time…at a pace that will permit at least several minutes of steady exercise.

As a result of these widely practiced styles of training, many people have assumed that nothing else is possible, but in fact, there is no slightest reason why both styles cannot be combined into the same training schedule. At least in the training of active athletes…with Olympic weightlifters again being the only important exception.

Steady-state training will NEVER produce much in the way of meaningful strength increases…but non-steady-state training will do little or nothing for cardiovascular ability. However…a particular muscle can be worked to a point of momentary failure in a very brief period of time, in a non-steady-state fashion…and then another muscle can be worked immediately.

If the program is properly outlined, every major muscular group in the body can be worked in a non-steady-state fashion…while training the system as a whole in a steady-state fashion.

This is not merely a theory…it works. Works far better than any other style of training that we have ever tried…and we have tried everything we ever heard of that seemed to offer even the possibility of worthwhile results, and quite a number of things that were obviously of no possible value.

In later chapters, exact training schedules will be outlined for athletes in almost all sports…but in all cases, certain points are basic to any type of worthwhile exercise. In the next few chapters, we will take the most important points one by one…until and unless these points are clearly understood, no real understanding of the value of exercise is even possible.