



TAKE TEN

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SHAREABLE RESOURCE

by Charles Fountaine, Ph.D., FACSM

Ten Ways to Implement the Principle of Progressive Overload When Resistance Training

1 BE LIKE MILO. Rooted in the mythology of Greek wrestler Milo of Croton who hoisted a calf overhead and proceeded to carry it each day as it grew into a full-sized bull, the slow yet steady increase in load is perhaps the most well-known tenet of progressive overload. In resistance training, increasing the load is synonymous with increasing the weight or resistance used on a specific exercise.

2 ONE MORE REP. Increasing the number of repetitions performed when holding the load constant is another very common way of implementing progressive overload. For example, a rep range (e.g., 12 to 15 reps) for a given exercise may be assigned, and the individual would keep the load constant as they try to complete additional reps each workout. Once an individual can reach the top of the rep range, they can then increase the load and will work toward the top end of the rep range once more.

3 TURN UP THE VOLUME. Increasing the number of sets performed for a given exercise, muscle group, or movement pattern is an excellent option for individuals to consider as they progress from novice to intermediate status. Additional work sets performed on a given training day or spread out throughout the training week increase the overall training volume.

4 FREQUENT FLYER. Increasing the frequency of how many times a week a muscle group or movement pattern is trained is another valuable option to implement progressive overload. Utilizing additional training days throughout the week also allows an individual to spread out training volume, which could reduce the length of an individual training session.

5 IT'S ABOUT TIME. Training density refers to the amount of work performed per unit of time. For example, if an individual was previously using 120 sec rest between all sets, if all variables were held constant, but the rest periods were reduced to 100 sec, the training density would have increased, as more work was performed per unit of time.

6 I FEEL THE NEED FOR SPEED. Manipulating the speed at which repetitions are performed can be an additional option to consider. Whereas many individuals may naturally gravitate toward a 1-second eccentric phase coupled with a 1-second concentric phase, implementing a dedicated period of training to a 3-second eccentric phase, a 2-second isometric pause at the midpoint of a lift, or an explosive concentric phase performed with maximal velocity can all be very novel stimuli to experiment with.

7 TURN IT UP TO 11. Increasing the intensity of effort on the performance of sets can be an intriguing option to consider. Whereas an individual could choose to end a set once a predetermined number of reps has been achieved, the option to extend the set to a point of momentary failure where no further concentric reps can be performed can be a very appealing option for individuals short on time or working with single-set protocols.

8 ONCE MORE, WITH FEELING. The implementation of autoregulation to monitor training intensity of effort allows an individual to adjust that day's training load based on the perception of difficulty. A modified rate of perceived exertion (RPE) scale based on the concept of reps in reserve (RIR) is an emerging option for individuals considering autoregulation. Using this scale, a maximal effort at RPE 10 is equivalent to a RIR of 0, meaning no additional reps or load could be performed. Subsequently, RPE 9 = RIR 1, meaning one additional rep could be performed, etc. Progressive overload could then be implemented by increasing RPE/RIR over successive workouts.

9 THE SPICE OF LIFE. A variety of exercise choices for a given muscle group or movement pattern not only provides options to keep a workout from getting monotonous but also can be a means of progression. For example, the dumbbell goblet squat and barbell back squat are similar lower body exercises that use the squat movement pattern but lend themselves to markedly different loading strategies and progressions.

10 CAPTAIN'S LOG: STARDATE 2022. The act of keeping a training log is often overlooked as a simple yet invaluable tool to help monitor training data over time. Whether a notebook, an app on a phone, or a spreadsheet on a laptop, consistent record keeping allows the individual to be organized, monitor progress, and not rely on the pitfalls of memory from week to week.

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