

Do you have 90 minutes a week?

If your answer to this question is YES, then you have sufficient time to reach your maximum potential for strength, fitness, and physique.

Adapted from www.agelessathletes.com

Believe me, I'm not making this up. Everything we know about exercise science supports this statement. There's no catch! I've written a lot about training routines that take 90 minutes a week [45 minutes per session]. But, I'm not sure the message has been as clear as it should be. Here's what we know.

Multiple sets of an exercise are really no better than doing one good set. There are about 55 scientific studies on this topic and only 3 show any slight benefit of multiple sets. 53 show the results are the same. You get just as much improvement doing one set per movement as two, three, or for that matter any number of sets. If you're doing multiple sets, stop. You'll save yourself a great deal of time and toil AND still make progress toward your training goals.

For larger and more complex muscle groups such as thighs, upper-back, chest, and shoulders, a good exercise prescription is one set each of a compound movement and an isolation movement. For example, for thighs you can do a squat or leg press and a leg extension. For smaller or simpler muscle groups such as traps, biceps, or calves, you can do one movement. If you REALLY think you must do more, for a couple of muscle groups you can do one set each of three different movements. So, your maximum number of sets per muscle group is three and your minimum is one.

The ideal training frequency for each muscle group is twice per week. But, there are important qualifications.

Most weight training routines have a lot of overlapping exercises so that muscle groups receive more exercise than what they are 'supposed to get' from movements directed specifically toward them. For example, when you target your shoulders and chest your triceps get worked 'accidentally'. So, with overlap you are providing a good deal of stimulation on multiple occasions. As a result, you may not be able to recover well enough to do justice to training different muscle groups twice per week. In that case, train muscle groups once per week. It's better to do fewer great workouts than to struggle through more frequent mediocre workouts. The mediocre workouts don't do anything but take recovery time away from training. Many people will find that training muscle groups once per week is the ticket. Hard to believe, but it's true. You can use one to three sets per week per muscle group and improve. You see everything really revolves around being able to progress a little bit at a time while maintaining great exercise form with high intensity. Nothing else seems to matter. This is the essence of progressive resistance training.

Now keep in mind that everyone responds to training differently. \Virtually all of these differences are the result of genetic factors. Some people are genetically programmed to develop strength and muscles. Some people have very good leverage for some movements. And, some people are able to recruit a high percentage of muscle fibres and are often far fitter/stronger than they look. Knowing how much genetics influence your results is liberating. You can't change your genetics, so just go out and see what you can do. There's no magical routine. Just training

longer or more frequently won't make any difference either. So, do the simplest science-based routine. You may think that you are "genetically-limited", but you may surprise yourself. I'm frequently asked, "don't you need different routines to maximize strength, or lean muscle mass, or get very cut and defined?" The answer is "no". If you get stronger, you'll get bigger and as you get bigger muscles (and thus better shape), you'll be able to use more resistance. When you can use more resistance for 5, 10, 15, or 20 repetitions, the amount of resistance you can use for one repetition will proportionally increase. Likewise, if you use specific movements that are the usual barometer of strength such as the deadlift, squat, or bench press or their machine equivalents, you'll get as strong as you're going to be in these traditional movements.

Can you get really defined using the same training routine? Of course you can. Being defined means having a low percent body fat and has virtually everything to do with the number of calories you consume in a decent healthy diet and your genetics. Getting defined has almost nothing to do with a specific training routine! Getting defined doesn't involve eating lots of supplements either. Nothing is required except a healthy diet. If you need to gain weight, you slightly increase calories. If you want to lose body fat, you slightly decrease calories. For an example of eating real food instead of using supplements, ask our instructors for material to study.

The workout routines given in **Victoria Road Fitness (VRF) & FitnessLand** are all good examples of workouts that take minimum time, producing optimal results. If you count up the time it takes to do the typical weight training routine used in VRF & FitnessLand, you see that it takes about 70 minutes per week. So, we still have 20 minutes left. That's our time for cardiovascular training.

The notion, especially for cardiovascular training, is that you need to be spending a lot of time to get fit. It's just not true. Gaining and maintaining fitness is similar in many ways to gaining and maintaining strength. It's training intensely and following a prescription that counts. How long you train isn't the key. Frequency of training is important for cardiovascular training but an ideal frequency is only twice per week. You won't gain much more by training three times per week. The Graded Exercise Protocol or "GXP" takes 10 minutes to do and really fits the bill. It's very prescriptive but very simple to do on almost any cardiovascular training piece/machines.

That's it. That's the whole deal. If you've got 90 minutes per week, you can maximize your strength, fitness, and physique. For those of you who still have questions or don't believe this approach can work, here are some commonly asked questions.

Q: This kind of routine doesn't expend many calories. Isn't that a problem?

A: The best strategy for controlling your weight and body fat is to watch what you eat, not to use exercise to burn calories. But, as many of us get older and become more sedentary, there is something to be said for introducing more physical activity to our daily lives. Notice I said "physical activity"; not exercise or training. Physical activity can mean almost any recreational and leisure activity including walking, gardening, playing with the kids and some sports. It certainly can be fun and will enhance your health. The idea is to keep it part of your life style and not make it into more training. Adding physical activity will burn calories.

Q: I can recover pretty well so that training muscle groups once per week is just too little. But, I can't recover well enough to train muscle groups twice week. What's the solution?

A: You can set up almost any kind of whole body routine or split routine so that you actually train muscle groups three times in two weeks. That can be absolutely ideal.

Q: When I'm very busy, I stick to training muscle groups once per week. When I'm not that busy and can rest more, I'll often train muscle groups three times in two weeks. If I'm only doing one to three movements per muscle group, how can I get any variety?

A: Variety is often overrated. Exercise movements get very interesting when you actually improve on them. It's a sure antidote for boredom. But, you can introduce enough variety into your routine by simply varying some key movements each workout. For example, one week do the squat for one of your two thigh movements and the next week do the leg press, returning the following week to the squat. You can also use the same exercise movements but change their order in a routine.

Recommendations by VRF and FitnessLand

Yes, we subscribe to the above philosophy. However, the individual needs of trainees need to be addressed when considering the number of minutes devoted to fitness training. 90 minutes (45 minutes twice-a-week), may or may not be the ideal for you. It may most likely be the ideal, but there are other factors involved. For example, if you can only weight train once a week, it would have to be less than 90 minutes a week. Or if you are, say, 40% bodyfat percentage, adding low intensity exercise (e.g., brisk walking) for an extra 60 minutes per day 5-7 days a week may be a good idea, if you have the time and the energy.

The bottom line is that we believe you should use this "90 minute thing" as a base. Modify it, improve it, and apply it!