

WHEN YOUR COMFORT ZONE IS BAD FOR YOU

I just love it when I get everything in my house exactly the way I want it arranged. I enjoy my breakfast at a certain spot at my kitchen table; my two cups of tea always follow my breakfast. *That's* my comfort zone.

However, even though we all like our creature comforts and habits, there's one place we shouldn't be in the comfort zone – the gym.

One of the most important principles of training is the **Principle of Overload**. This states that we won't have any improvements in our strength and endurance *unless* we work our muscles with workload (weights) heavier than we're used to, until we hit fatigue. So if a person uses the same sets of dumbbells or weights on a cable machine for weeks, months or years on end, s/he won't see any improvement except at the beginning.

The next important thing in increasing our workload is to increase weight and intensity gradually as the body adapts to the new stress – this is the **Principle of Progressive Overload**. If you've worked with me, you will realize that your program changes in weight/intensity every two weeks, and within any single week, the volume (reps x sets) will change each session as well. If we went from, say, 8 lb weights to 15 lb weights, that's too much exercise stress and we'd be at serious risk of injury and even tissue damage. That's why we increase the load by one or two pounds every two weeks. If we didn't, the body says, "Oh, I know what's coming – 2 sets of 10 reps with 8 lb weight – same as last month, same as last year, same as next week. I don't have to work very hard here." So there's no improvement.

It's absolutely critical to have enough rest time in between weight training sessions. When we use weights/resistance to work out, our muscles develop microscopic tears in their fibres. During the 48 hour rest period, these tears heal up and develop scar tissue – that's how muscles get stronger and thicker. Without the rest period, we put ourselves at risk of injury.

So while the comfort zone is great for some things, your training shouldn't be part of that zone. Contact a trainer who's using **periodization** while programming for you. Periodization is strategic implementation of different training phases. These phases are exactly what we've discussed above – increasing and decreasing both volume and intensity to get the most benefit out of your workouts. Anything else is just too comfortable!