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6 Advantages of Free Weights Over Exercise Machines

By Jon Gestl

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Meet Sarah.

About a year ago, Sarah saw an infomercial about a "multi-unit" workout machine. The announcer called it a "revolutionary" piece of equipment, claiming that people would see results in "just 2-4 weeks". It exercised all major body parts and the female model shown using the machine said it "was safer and more effective than free weights."

Intimidated by gyms her whole life, Sarah knew having her own home gym would be the key to her finally getting into shape. She had heard that machines were safer than free weights. Besides, the machine came with "easy to follow video instructions". The price was steep, but as Sarah imagined changing her body, she got her credit card and grabbed the phone.

On the day of delivery, Sarah was surprised to see it took up twice the space she was told it would, limiting space in her already cramped den. Excited to get started, she popped in the video, and hopped on the machine. Sarah soon found that she, at 5'3", was too small to fit on the machine for some of the exercises. She continued on anyway, trying to ignore the fact that her lower back and knees were starting to hurt a little.

Sarah used her new revolutionary machine exactly three more times. For the last six months, it has been her unofficial clothes hanger.

What happened? Sarah thought she was buying a machine that would be very easy to operate and be a safe alternative to free-weights. Unfortunately, Sarah and many others are misguided by heavily marketed hype by machine developers. When it comes to effectiveness, particularly for the beginning exerciser, free-weights (i.e., dumbbells) rate much higher than expensive machines in terms of:

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1. **Cost.** Three or four sets of dumbbells would have cost Sarah less than 10 times the amount she spent on her machine. As she gets stronger, she would have to buy more, though even a full set would not set her back nearly as much as the machine did.
2. **Space.** Dumbbells take up far less space than most of the exercise equipment sold on infomercials. You can easily place them in a closet, out of sight under the bed, or in a corner. There are even dumbbells you can adjust (i.e., PowerBlock) that allow you to adjust the poundage on one set, eliminating the need for single-poundage dumbbells.
3. **Variety.** Most machines are designed as one-dimensional. Even the most extensive multi-unit machines will allow exercisers to perform only a limited number of movements in a restricted range of motion. Free-weights can be used in ranges of motion based on the exerciser, not a machine. Use free weights along with benches or Swiss Balls and you have multitude of exercise options.
4. **Suitability.** Sarah couldn't use her "multi-usage" machine for certain exercises because the machine was too big. This is not an uncommon problem. Even though most machines have adjustable seats, arm pads, and lever arms, there are limitations to their range and some may not fit the very small or very large person. However, if you can grab a dumbbell, you can use it.
5. **Functionality.** Exercising with free-weights increases the likelihood that the effects of the exercise will cross over into real-world situations. Think about it. How often during the day do you lie in a diagonal supine position and push weight up like you would on a machine leg press? Probably never. But how often are you required to do activities that are biomechanically identical to the squat? Sitting, getting in and out of a car, crouching down to pick something up...all the time! Properly using free weights will increase the functionality of an exercise to real-world situations.
6. **Safety.** It seems counterintuitive to consider free-weights as safer than machines. Most of us have heard (somewhere..) that we could get hurt with dumbbells and that machines were "safer." Maybe just the idea of someone doing a huge bench press lends itself to imagining the likelihood that one might lose control of the same amount of weight if they ever attempted it.

Safety during exercise is more about proper form, technique, concentration and control rather than exercise apparatus. Someone can get hurt on a machine just as easily as with a dumbbell if incorrect form is used. As always, if you don't know how to do something, find someone (i.e., a reputable trainer) to show you how.

Safety as a result of exercise is a long-term issue. It is not necessary for the body to stabilize itself or the weight during movements on most machines, because the weight apparatus is fixed. Key stabilizer muscles are then never given the chance to get stronger. Free-weights allow the exerciser to utilize core muscles and allow multi-plane movement that forces the exerciser to strengthen stabilizer musculature, which support joints. Over the long-term, free weights are superior to machines for building a stronger, more functional body.

You don't need to spend a fortune on a piece of exercise equipment that you'll never end up using and

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won't suit your needs. A few sets of dumbbells are effective, intelligent alternatives to buying equipment, especially for those setting up their own in-home gym or workout area.

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Grunting: The Dreaded Free Weight Room

By The Icon Diet Reader

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I am new to the world of the gym. Having resolved to make my health and fitness a priority, spending time at the gym is becoming a staple in my weekly routine. While I find that I am getting well acquainted with different exercises and exercise machines, there is one area of the gym that I fear to tread.

Behind a partial wall, tucked to the rear of the building, away from the cardio machines, spinning rooms and yoga mats, is the free weight room. When I work the weight machines I am a stones throw from the free weight room, not close enough to really see what goes on in there, but definitely close enough to hear what goes on in there.

They say if you sit long enough in one place, the whole world will pass you by. This may be true, but if you sit long enough near the free weight room, you see a whole other world of gym patron pass you by. Into this mysterious room disappear giant men, their poor t-shirts barely able to contain their burly mass, arms propped out by massive lats; Amazon women with bodies of iron and physique most men would sell their mothers for. They disappear behind the wall and for a good while they vanish. All that remains is their grunting.

From the free weight room issues forth a chorus of hissing and grunting that would put any tennis player to shame. Now being a novice in the gym, I can only assume the grunting issues forth under the Herculean effort needed to heft such tremendous weights. On my side of the wall, the weight machine side, we are a quiet lot. The only break in the peace is the occasional clang of a poorly executed rep. In fact, on my side of the gym we are so quiet, that no one even notices when we come and go. We are like gym ninjas - stealthy and quiet. I would like to think that we choose to leave the grunting to the giants on the other side of the wall. Of course, really this is totally untrue. I choose to leave the grunting to the giants on the other side of the wall because I am totally ignorant of free weights.

Talking to a friend of mine who swears that while he loves to use free weights, not all of his kind, are grunTERS. He does however, insist that free weights are an excellent way to expand your work out. If

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done correctly, free weights allow you to work a wide range of muscles through a full range of motion, unhampered by any physical limitation often present in a machine. Further, lifting free weights forces your body to develop its stabilizers. These muscles help with balance and support. Another key component of free weights is that there is no size restrictions. That is, you have to be able to 'fit' a weight machine. If not, you cannot use it. Free weights are, according to my friend, an essential aspect of any weight training regime.

I still sit near the free weight room to see the goings and comings of the gym giants, but I have made an appointment with a personal trainer to get introduced to the world of free weights. According to my trainer, good form while using free weights is vital for safety. Injury is possible if not used correctly. I look forward to my first foray into the unknown. I am excited to see what lies behind the wall. My trainer assures me that somewhere behind the wall, there are normal people like myself all taking advantage of free weights. More importantly, grunting is not a prerequisite. Apparently, there are free weight ninjas too.

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package to help people lose weight quickly,

naturally and effectively. Visit the site by going to...<http://www.zizzoo.com/guides/loseweight/index.php>

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