

The Crucial Missing Ingredient in Your Workout

In this week's post, I thought I'd discuss something that will enhance your workouts while simultaneously decreasing your risk of injury.

For most of us, exercise can only compose a small part of our day, say an hour before work or 30 minutes during our lunch break. As such, we get into the gym and, understandably, devote all our precious time and attention to the weights (or to your preferred form of cardio if you're giving the dumbbells a break!). While weightlifting is undeniably important, it needs to be supplemented with the following activity to ensure you're getting the most out of your training. The missing ingredient is ...

A Specific Warmup

When I visit different gyms, I often see people warm up for a few minutes by jogging on the treadmill, cycling on the recumbent bike, or rowing on the ergometer. When they get off their machine of choice, it is easy to see by their red faces and sweaty clothes that, technically, they're "warmed up." A general warmup such as what I've just mentioned is an excellent way to *begin* your warmup, but it shouldn't be the only thing you do before jumping into your main routine.

My friend, Michael Prince, owner and trainer at 360 Fitness in my hometown of Tyler, Texas, taught me years ago that our muscles *and our joints* need to be specifically prepared for whatever exercises await them. Our muscles and joints are like rubber bands. If they're cold, they'll snap, but if they're nice and warm, they'll be resilient, responsive, and flexible. Movements like arm circles and arm swings are a great way to warm up the shoulders, whereas front-to-back leg swings and

cross-the-body leg swings while holding onto something stable is recommended for warming up the hips.

After you've warmed up your shoulders and/or hips—depending on what you're training—it's time to move on to movements that more closely resemble what you'll be doing in your workout. For example, if you're planning to work out your chest with exercises such as the dumbbell bench press or cable flies, doing a set of 20 push-ups, whether regular, incline, or knee push-ups, is a terrific way to activate your pectoral muscles, as well as your stabilizing core muscles around your lower back and abdomen.

If you're working out your back, doing a set of light dumbbell rows followed by a set of assisted pull-ups will wake up the pulling muscles you want properly engaged during heavier sets.

You get the idea! Just jumping into your workout after hopping off the treadmill not only prohibits your muscles from gradually acclimating, if you will, to the loads that will yield strength gains and muscle hypertrophy, but it also increases your risk of injury. Below you will find a specific warmup from my most recent chest workout. As a general warmup, I did five minutes of steady-state rowing on the ergometer, which got my blood pumping and body warm! This will give you an idea of the amount of time and number of exercises that should *precede* your main workout. If you'd like more warmup ideas, please tweet me @dandersontyler!

NOTE: Each of the following movements can be easily modified to suit your personal fitness level. Use a weight at which you can safely perform the given number of repetitions.

Specific Warmup

- 30 small arm circles, forward and reverse
- 30 medium arm circles, forward and reverse
- 30 arm swings
- 20 PVC pass-throughs

- 10 PVC around-the-worlds each direction
- 20 incline push-ups (do regular push-ups if incline push-ups are too easy)
- 15 side dumbbell raises with 7-pound dumbbells
- 15 front dumbbell raises with 7-pound dumbbells
- 15 overhead dumbbell presses with 7-pound dumbbells
- 50 flat bench dumbbell presses with 7-pound dumbbells

After that, I did two warmup sets of my first exercise, which happened to be flat bench dumbbell presses. I did one set of 15 repetitions with 20 pounds, one set of 12 with 25 pounds, and then began my first working set of 12 reps with 35 pounds.

Exercise Instructions, in the order listed above

Arm Circles

1. Stand in a neutral position with feet hip-width apart. Your arms should be straight out to the sides so your body forms a "T."
2. Begin making slow circles in a forward motion with your arms, then gradually make larger ones and complete the given number of repetitions. Do 30 small-to-medium-sized circles, then 30 medium-to-large-sized circles.

Arm Swings

1. Stand with feet comfortably apart, knees slightly bent, arms at shoulder level.
2. Stretch arms straight out to the side and back behind you, contracting shoulder blades together. Then, bring them all the way across the torso, gradually speeding up and increasing the range of motion.

PVC Pass-Throughs

1. Hold a PVC pipe or broomstick, and stand with feet shoulder-width apart.
2. Hold the PVC with a wide grip at your waist, palms facing to the rear.

3. Keeping your arms locked out, bring the PVC overhead and down to your lower back.
4. Return the PVC to the starting position by passing it back over your head.
5. Try to bring your hands closer together after few repetitions as your chest and shoulders open up. If you have to bend your elbows, your hands are too close together.

PVC Around-the-Worlds

1. Hold a PVC pipe or broomstick, and stand with feet shoulder-width apart.
2. Hold the PVC with a wide grip. The movement is like the pass-through exercise, except you're moving one shoulder through at a time. Think of punching your right hand down to the floor as your left hand comes up over your ear, moving all the way to the back. Follow with the right hand punching the left hand down to the floor.
3. Switch directions, leading with the left hand, and repeat for the given number of repetitions.

Incline Push-Ups

1. Place hands on a bench or plyometric box. Spread your hands so that they are slightly wider than the width of your shoulders. Feet are slightly apart, legs straight with weight in your toes.
2. Bend your arms as your body slowly lowers to the bench or box. Make sure your entire body is straight by keeping your navel pulled in towards your spine.
3. Concentrate on your chest muscles as you push your body back up to the starting position.

Side Lateral Raises

1. Stand with feet shoulder-width apart, dumbbells resting at your sides. Your knees and elbows should be slightly bent, bellybutton pulled in.

2. Keeping a slight bend in the elbows, raise upper arms to your sides until elbows are at shoulder height. Maintain elbows' height at above or equal to your wrists.
3. Lower and repeat for the given number of repetitions.

Front Dumbbell Raises

1. Stand with feet shoulder-width apart, dumbbells resting on the tops of your thighs.
2. Your knees and elbows should be slightly bent, bellybutton pulled in.
3. Keeping a slight bend in the elbows, raise your arms to the front of your body until the dumbbells are level with your eyes.
4. Lower and repeat for the given number of repetitions.

Overhead Dumbbell Presses

1. Stand with feet shoulder-width apart, and lift dumbbells the sides of your shoulders, palms facing out. Your knees should be slightly bent, bellybutton pulled in.
2. On an exhale, press the dumbbells over your head until elbows are locked out.
3. Lower and repeat for the given number of repetitions.

Flat Bench Dumbbell Presses

1. Lying on your back on a bench, hold a light pair of dumbbells directly above your chest with your arms fully extended.
2. Pull your shoulder blades together, slightly stick out your chest, and point your palms forward.
3. Slowly lower both dumbbells to the sides of your chest. Pause, then press the dumbbells back to the starting position. Repeat for the given number of repetitions.

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