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Published by:

Alain Gonzalez

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Growth Sparking Principle #1

Periodize Using Optimal Rep Ranges

Have you ever found yourself asking the question “What is the best rep range for gaining size?”?

If you answered “yes”, then I would like you to step back for a minute while we look at the bigger picture.

By now it is probably common knowledge to you that a rep range of 6 -12 is pretty standard for increased hypertrophy (muscle size). However, it’s worth mentioning that the hypertrophy that is induced by said rep range (6 -12) is known as sarcoplasmic hypertrophy and is responsible for increasing the muscle cell size, allowing it to hold more water, glycogen, etc (which is the goal if you want to build size).

Is 6-12 the best rep range for gaining size?

The answer is, NO...

Training across all intensity levels is the most optimal for all natural trainees

You see, in order to build muscle at an optimal rate, we must induce both mechanical and metabolic stress. We need muscle damage as well as progressive overload. And we need good old fashion volume.

Stimulus	Rep Range
Mechanical Stress	1-5
Hypertrophy	6-12
Metabolic Stress	15-20

If you would like to maximize muscle damage, include negatives (slow and controlled eccentric) in your training program.

Training Volume: the number of muscles worked, exercises, sets and reps during a single session.

Progressive Overload: the muscles are overloaded by attempting to lift at least as much weight as they are capable. They respond by growing larger and stronger. This procedure is repeated with progressively heavier weights as the practitioner gains strength and endurance.

Benefits of Training in a Higher Rep Range (15-20)

Training in a high rep range that causes metabolic stress (15-20) will increase the lactate threshold. What does this mean to you? Simple, better recovery between sets and the ability to sustain a higher working weight for a longer period of time during lower rep range training.

Benefits of Training in a Lower Rep Range (1-5)

Training in a lower rep range that causes mechanical stress (1-5) will make it much easier to increase strength, strengthen joints, ligaments, and tendons, and spill over into your hypertrophy training. Simply put, increasing your strength in a low rep range will allow you to increase the amount of weight you put on the bar while training in a higher rep range (progressive overload).

Myofibrillar Hypertrophy

Myofibrillar Hypertrophy is induced by training with a higher intensity (1-5) and is responsible for muscle density. Muscle density through high intensity strength training is a result of certain fast twitch muscle fibers increasing in size (yes, the size of the actual fiber will increase). Failing to train in this rep range (1-6) will not allow you to build that solid, dense, long-lasting muscle mass in certain areas of your physique.

What Is The Best Rep Range for Size?

All of Them!



Growth Sparking Principle #2

Train to Success NOT Failure



Have you ever found yourself asking the question “Should I train to failure?”?

Before I answer the question, let me quickly explain exactly what failure is.

Muscular Failure: Repeating an exercise to the point where a repetition fails due to inadequate muscular strength.

That’s right! The meaning of “training to failure” is actually taking your set to a point where you cannot finish a repetition. But let’s be honest, if this is failure, then 99% of gym goers never actually train to muscular failure (if you go according to the definition).

So...the simple answer is, HELL NO!

BUT WAIT!

Let’s talk about the more practical train-to-failure method.

From this point forward, when I mention failure, I will be referring to training to a point where your form breaks down and bar speed slows down dramatically. If a rep takes more than 5 seconds to complete, you have successfully failed (pun intended).

So should you EVER train to failure?

Yes and no...what I mean is, you should only aim for what I like to call, performance failure.

This simply means that you should always stop your set at the point where you cannot perform another repetition **with absolutely perfect form**. If your form breaks down on a rep, you have gone too far. To

most people, when lifting in the 3-5 rep range (heavy), this is simply translated to something like, stop with 2 reps left in the tank.

To simplify this, I'll give you this (very elementary) chart.

Rep Range	Reps Short of Failure
3-5	2
8-10	1

To explain briefly, if you are training heavy, you should always stop with a couple of reps left in the tank. If you are training with a moderate weight, training a little closer to failure is totally fine...as long as you are not training to a point where form breaks down.

Why should I stop so early?

I'll try to explain this as easily as I can for the sake of not overcomplicating things. When we train in the gym, our main focus should be our performance; pushing our body, slowly, and increasing our total workload without completely taxing our CNS. If our CNS is fatigued, then our performance suffers and the rest of our efforts are in vein.

If, on the other hand, we avoid failure, then we remain potentiated and the level of performance increases. I'll give you a very basic example of how this is so...

Let's say you walk into the gym and you are aiming to push 225 lbs on the bench for 3 sets, here is what it might look like for someone who is training to failure.

Bench Press: To Failure
Set # 1 - 225 lbs x 8
Set #2 - 225 lbs x 5
Set #3 - 225 lbs x 3
Total Workload: 3,600 lbs

In this example, the trainee went to failure on the first set. This single set has significantly fatigued his CNS and thus his second set suffered. Since he is still training to failure and did so in order to reach those 5 reps, he is further taxing his CNS. I think by now you can understand why he was only able to push for 3 reps on the last set. I think it would also be worth mentioning that any exercises he performs after the bench press will suffer as well.

On the other end of the spectrum, we have a trainee who is aiming to push 225 lbs on the bench for 3 sets, but will not train to failure.

Bench Press: Short of Failure
Set #1 - 225 lbs x 6
Set #2 - 225 lbs x 6
Set #3 - 225 lbs x 5-6
Total Workload: 3825-4050

In this example, the trainee was still potentiated after his first set, thus his second set did not suffer. Now, after two pretty intense sets he may not be as potentiated, but certainly not fatigued.



Pushing 1-2 More Reps Not a Big Deal? You Might Be Missing the Point

Now I know what you're thinking, this guy only pushed 1-2 more reps than the other guy. Although this is true, you are missing the point. Example #1 has completely fatigued and the rest of his entire workout will progressively get worse and worse. Example #2 is still potentiated and thus can remain training at a better level of performance for his entire workout.

Is it EVER ok to train to failure?

The simple answer is, yes...training to failure 1-2 times per week might not hurt you in the long run. Also, when training with a lighter load (less intensity), training to failure is not too taxing on the CNS. So for example, if your training routine includes a light-day where you train 15-20 reps, this might be a good time to train to failure.

Don't Train to Failure...Train to Success!

In short, avoid training to a point where your form breaks down and causes your performance to suffer. Aim for slow, progressive, workload increases without burning yourself out. If you train to failure too often, you'll find yourself stuck in the gym and unable to increase your workload, thus making progress impossible.

Growth Sparking Principle #3

Know When to Hit the Brakes

Most natural trainees are under the impression that if they train “too hard”, they will over-train and magically lose all of their hard earned muscle. This myth of over-training was initially (in my opinion) created in order to sell more supplements. Unfortunately, this theory has become extremely popular and has yielded fear into the hearts of the fitness community. This fabricated belief that training hard will cause you to lose muscle is responsible for trainees being afraid of exceeding the 60 minute mark in the gym, fail to train with enough intensity, and refuse to train with the appropriate frequency.

On the other hand, anyone who completely disregards the fact that “too much” can be harmful is going to find it extremely hard to push themselves past their sticking points. You see, although the likelihood of someone overtraining a muscle is damn near nonexistent, pushing your central nervous system to a point passed over-reaching can certainly be detrimental to your success in fitness. This is typically the case for any trainee who refuses to “back off” and allow their body to supercompensate from the high stress of frequent intensity training.



Back Off Periods

Back Off Periods AKA Deload: A planned reduction in volume and/or intensity, usually for one cycle (or microcycle) of your training split, whose purpose is to allow the body to dissipate accumulated fatigue, allow a full recovery, and prepare you for progress.

The Benefits of Deloading

- The repairing of ligaments, tendons, and joints.
- Recovery of the CNS (Central Nervous System).
 - Reduces the risk of overtraining.
 - Mental Break
- To prepare for greater progress.

Failing to Deload

If you are anything like me, you absolutely love pushing your body in the gym, all the time. Unfortunately, there will come a time where progress will either come to a complete stop and we can no longer add weight to the bar for progressive overload or our performance regresses. These are both good signs that we are overreaching. If we push our body to the point where the CNS becomes over-trained, the de-load/recovery phase could take much longer.

Other Signs of Under-Recovery (Needing to deload)

- Lifts are not increasing (and potentially decreasing)
- Feeling tired and unmotivated to train
- Achy joints and tendons
- High frequency training for a long period of time without a de-load

When to Deload

A de-load should take place before any of these symptoms show up. In fact, my advice is that you include a regularly scheduled de-load into your training. On the other hand, if these signs come up before your scheduled deload, start your recovery phase immediately.

How should I de-load?

- Same workout routine (sets & reps) but decrease workload by 50-60%.
- Same workload, but but decrease volume (sets x reps) to 50-60% of your normal amount. For example: If you are doing 5 x 4 (on a regular training day), then 5 x 2 would be your de-load volume.
 - Decrease workload (intensity) and volume. (Options 1 and 2)
 - Use light weight and focus on refining your form and technique.



De-load Success!

If done correctly, you should be able to make strength and performance increases, regularly, with a reduced risk of injury. It will also serve as a mental and physical break that will preemptively address any recovery issues you may have.

Growth Sparking Principle #4

Training Frequency

Training Frequency: The number of times per week for training a muscle group.



When it comes to natural bodybuilding, frequency is one of the key factors for new muscle growth. Without adequate frequency, we are leaving a lot of room for growth on the table. Despite what the workout routines in bodybuilding magazines might suggest, breaking your workouts down into one training session per week, per muscle, is not going to produce optimal results. This is simply due to two major factors. These are also the two reasons why higher frequency training (if done correctly) is far superior to the modern, over emphasized, body part split.

Muscle Protein Synthesis

Muscle Protein Synthesis is critical to the body's ongoing growth, repair, and maintenance of its skeletal muscle.

Proteins: the compounds comprised of amino acids—the building blocks of tissue formation within the body. The synthesis of protein is the method by which muscle is built.

In any trainee, the muscle protein synthesis is related to how the muscles are being exercised. Other than the ongoing repair and maintenance of existing muscle tissues that may be damaged through the course of daily living, new muscle will not be created without muscular activity (weight training). This is a prerequisite of meaningful muscle development, built on protein synthesis.

Growth Sparking Principle #5

Going Back to the Basics

Despite the boat loads of different advanced techniques that we have been exposed to, there are a few very basic principles that we often over-look due to their simplicity. However, 9x out of 10, ignoring these very basic points could be costing you a lot of time and a lot of muscle mass. Now, I think it is worth mentioning that this may not be the case for every trainee, but anyone who is ignoring any of these points that I am about to mention is setting themselves up for complete failure.

Back to the Basic – Item #1 – Are You Eating Enough?

If you are not calculating your caloric intake and you are not gaining weight, I can assure you, 100% without a doubt, you are not eating enough.

What I have found is that, most people who believe they are consuming enough calories are doing 1 of 2 things.

1. Over-eating on some days and then under-eating on others. (Ultimately this will keep you at a maintenance level and thus not allow you to put on any mass)
2. Eating large amounts of food when they actually do sit down to eat and thus assume they are eating enough based on that.

If you are not gaining weigh/mass/muscle, I challenge you to start calculating your daily nutrient intake. I can guarantee that you are not eating enough on a consistent basis. This is the reason that you are either remaining the same weight, week after week, or fluctuating around the same weight for a long period of time.



START CALCULATING YOUR INTAKE!

Back to the Basic – Item #2 – Reassessing Your Nutritional Needs

If you are already calculating your calories and still unable to put on any size, it simply means that it's time to reassess your nutritional needs. You see, after consuming a specific amount of calories in a particular macronutrient ratio, our metabolism adapts. If you've consistently gained weight consuming 3000 calories per day and are now finding it impossible to gain any more weight on the same caloric intake, then it is time that you increase the calories.

I would recommend increasing your caloric intake by 100-200 calories per day, in the form of carbohydrates. Following the new macronutrient intake, over time, will ensure that you are now eating above maintenance (in a surplus) and thus will yield weight gain.



Warning: A bigger caloric surplus does not mean more muscle! Increase your calories, slightly, when necessary in order to ensure you are not packing on any unnecessary fat in the process.

Back to the Basic – Item #3 – Log Your Workouts

Most people would argue that they do not need to log their workouts in order to build muscle, and this is true. Logging your workouts is not necessary...unless you're not growing. You see, in the beginning, not tracking your workouts and still building a substantial amount of muscle is common. This is simply due to the fact that practically everything you do in the gym is new stimulus and thus causes your body to grow. However, at some point or another, these "newbie" gains will stop and a more calculated approach may be needed.



The key to continuous growth is constant progression. Every day that we walk into the gym, we should have one simple goal in mind. That goal is to outperform your last performance. If you are training day in and day out without any clue of your total workload or intensity, your chances of putting enough strain on the given muscle to stimulate new growth is like hitting the lottery. Not to mention, your body will adapt to the strain and find no need to get bigger or stronger to handle the workload. This will undoubtedly result in you becoming a victim of the treacherous plateau.

Start Tracking Your Workouts!

About the Author



Alain Gonzalez is a personal trainer, former mixed martial arts competitor, free lance writer and fitness consultant who has dedicated his life to helping others meet their fitness goals.

His transformation has been featured in articles on websites all over the internet and has given hope to countless trainees all over the world.

He is the founder of www.MuscleMonsters.com, a fitness site dedicated to helping skinny guys and gals build muscle and stay lean, and is the author of "[Bony to Brawny](#)" – The skinny guy's secret to explosive muscle gains revealed.