

Good Form

Posture, function and free advice

I recently closed my private training studio for the winter. Everything I own is heavy; remember this if a personal trainer ever asks you for any help moving. Moving is not an event many train for. You just have to watch your posture, ease into the movement and stretch throughout the day. A greater level of strength and fitness will better your chances of not getting injured in these cases, but even that's no guarantee with unfamiliar movements and weight. I felt like I had been hit by a truck the day after moving my stuff into a tiny storage closet, and I consider my back to be my best asset.

My training has paid off, though. The day after, I was good to go, and that's precisely why I exercise. I'd rather be out for one day with a mildly sore back than be out for more than two weeks. So even if you have a very physical job, listen up! Physical therapy hurts, and it's very boring. Lifting boxes all day is not replacement for exercise. In fact, it's a bigger reason to exercise regularly.

I'm now back, training my clients until May at Portland's oldest gym, Loprinzi's. Antique pictures of numerous Adonis-like men—and one mildly disturbing picture of a green She-Hulk—line Loprinzi's walls. The owner said he put She-Hulk up for me. The regulars show up in the morning. They're mostly men, some in their 90s, and it's amusing to watch them flex for one another.

The gym is still the most homoerotic environment I've been in, and this gym makes me feel extra gay—some mornings I feel like I'm upstairs at the Eagle, only there's no leather and it's not hot. Am I the only one seeing pink? Am I projecting? Probably a little, but don't worry, boys: What happens here stays here.

In the gym—or anywhere—poor form, bad posture and cheating give unde-

sired workout results. If you're allegedly working your back but wearing out your arm, this is a clue that something isn't right. Continuing to do back exercises improperly will only burn calories at most, and probably not even the equivalent of a Snickers bar. Your body is wise and will only use the minimum muscle needed to perform a given motion.

If you've ever seen group aerobics instructors, you might have noticed their buff forearms. Too many group instructors I know rely on three-pound weights exclusively, and it's setting them up for injury. You must choose appropriate weights for all of your muscle groups, and not just your forearms.

At Loprinzi's, or at almost any gym, you can find some of the worst and most ineffective weightlifting form you can imagine (and closet cases). Don't assume a trainer will correct you—I did that once out of sincere concern and got my head ripped off. (Incidentally, we never saw the guy again.) Here's some free advice based on the most common questions and errors I see:

- You should be able to feel the muscle group you are trying to target.



Dear Ethel
BY MARIA CALLAHAN

- Do not use momentum to "throw" a weight. Keep the tension even throughout the working range.

- Lower slower. This means bring the weight back down toward the earth slowly.

- Lighten the weight 5 percent to 10 percent if you can't perform the exercise.

- Don't do the exercise if it hurts!

- And never, ever "lock out" a joint (hyper-extend).

I'm now going to give you a range of weight most of you should be using for free weights or machines. This is extremely general information, and I am assuming that you are relatively healthy and uninjured. The lighter weights listed will work the

"finer" muscles, also known as stabilizers. This is especially important for legs, as these muscles increase the stability of your knees! (All of these weights are for emphasizing a muscle group—it really isn't possible to isolate a muscle group.)

Starting with large muscle groups first:

- **Legs:** 25 pounds up to your body weight plus 10 percent (using both legs at the same time).

- **Back:** upper and mid back, 40 to 70 pounds (pulling/rowing motion, using both arms); lower back, 20 to 70 pounds.

- **Abs:** body weight

(crunches); 30 to 50 pounds for abs; 50 to 90 pounds for abs/obliques. Do not hold your breath! Your biggest ab muscle is your diaphragm! Work it!

- **Chest:** 25 pounds up to your body weight, using both arms together to push.

- **Biceps:** 5 to 25 pounds each arm. Rotate your wrist to hit those pretty muscles spanning your elbow (brachialis, brachioradialis).

- **Triceps:** 8 to 25 pounds each arm.

- **Shoulders:** Lighter is best! No more than 12 pounds each arm.

If you have any questions or trouble understanding form, come find me, or ask any trainer for assistance. Check out www.exrx.net/Lists/Directory.html for definitions and exercise ideas. And use good form in picking up weights, heavy objects and each other. **10**

Information in this column should not be used in place of advice from a licensed health care professional. If you have a health or fitness question, e-mail DEAR ETHEL at maricallahan@gmail.com or visit www.mariacallahan.net.

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