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Registration information on page 13



INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- From the President's Desk
- Cop 2 Cop Partnerships: The Real Backup for Success
- 100th Anniversary Commemorative Publication Preview

The Split Routine

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A method of weight training that has been popularized by bodybuilders and competitive weightlifters is known as the "split routine." When using a split routine, the body is divided – or "split" – into different parts that are trained on different days.

There are many possibilities for a split routine. One example would be to split the muscles such that the hips, legs and mid-section are trained on Monday and Thursday; the chest, shoulders and triceps on Tuesday and Friday; and the upper back, biceps and forearms on Wednesday and Saturday. So in this split routine, each muscle would be trained twice per week during six workouts.

In order for any workout to be effective, it must encourage progressive overload and provide adequate recovery. It's the latter area in which split routines often fall short.

If a split routine is designed correctly, a person will not train the same muscles two days in a row. However, carbohydrates are the principal fuel during intense exercise and it takes a minimum of 24 hours for your body to reestablish its stockpiles following a grueling workout. So if you trained your hips, legs and mid-section on Monday with a desirable level of intensity, you exhausted much of your carbohydrate stores. Even if you train your chest, shoulders and triceps on Tuesday, your body may not have had enough time to fully replenish those carbohydrate stores.

Look at it this way: Even though you train only part of your body in a workout, you still stress your entire anaerobic energy pathways (which provide metabolic support for your efforts). Your energy systems don't recover in parts; they recover as a whole.

By doing fewer bouts of weight training per week, you'll have more days of "free time." This is an important consideration for police chiefs who must juggle a wide range of professional responsibilities with their personal and social lives.

If you prefer to use a split routine, make sure that you group your muscles based on their functions and relationships with other muscles. For instance, your triceps and shoulders are used to train your chest; your biceps and forearms are used to train your upper back. Since these muscles have related functions, they should be trained together.

Something else to consider is that from a performance perspective, split routines don't make much sense because they're not specific to the muscular involvement in most physical activities. When you use a split routine, you train different muscles on different days. But think about it: A selective use of muscles almost never happens during physical activity. Rather, you're required to integrate all of your muscles at once.

Bottom line: Split routines can be an effective means of training but only when structured the right way.

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