

NEW
JERSEY



COPS



**Torch burns on
Guantanamo Bay**

Fitness questions answered

■ BY MATT BRZYCKI

I have paraphrased a recent email exchange from a New Jersey law enforcement officer who is interested in getting better results from his fitness program:

I am a police officer in New Jersey and have been on the job for over eight years. I have devoted myself to working out regularly for almost two years. As I become more active at work, my use of force incidents has increased steadily. My goals are simple: Increase strength (while hopefully adding some muscle) and avoid injuries while working. Here are a few questions:

Q: I want to adhere to a fitness program where I do a total-body workout on Monday, Wednesday and Friday but when should I do cardio? Should I do it on Tuesday and Thursday? Or should I save those days for genuine rest days? I really can't do cardio on my strength-training days because my time in the gym is limited.



Matt Brzycki

A: It's usually better to do cardio (aerobic training) on the same days as strength training but given your circumstances, you'd need to do cardio on the days between strength training. Ideally, those days should be used as recovery but your situation doesn't allow you that option.

Q: Is it okay to start with some light running and add sprinting after a month or two?

A: Yes. Any running that you do in the performance of your job is more likely to be an all-out sprint than a long-distance run. So including sprint work on your cardio days is a good idea. However, it's important to first establish a solid base of aerobic fitness to support the more intense efforts of sprinting. And when you do add sprinting, start with a low volume and increase it gradually over time.

Q: I want to do exercises for my neck and rotator cuff to avoid some really common injuries. If I add them to my total-body workout, am I doing too many exercises?

A: Exercising the neck and rotator cuff to reduce your risk of injury is another good idea. As long as you're making progress in your workouts (in resistance and/or repetitions), you're not doing too many exercises. But if you hit a plateau, it's likely because you're using too much volume. If this occurs, try reducing the volume of your training. Neck training won't take much out of you and, therefore, will have little effect on the remainder of your workout. You can address the rotator cuff within your three weekly workouts when you do exercises for your shoulders. As part of your workout, for example, you could do the upright row and shoulder shrug on Monday, internal and external rotation on Wednesday and the overhead press and lateral raise on Friday.

Q: Can I do abs on my off days or should I keep them in my total-body workouts?

A: You can do abs on the days between your strength training – on the days

that you do cardio – but there's really no need to do extra work for those muscles. Just train your abs near the end of your workouts on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Remember, more isn't necessarily better.

Q: I have always lifted kind of light just so I didn't hurt myself. I completely understand the concept of reaching muscle fatigue and lifting in a slow, deliberate manner. However, I recently tried this kind of workout and found I have to lift heavier weights to achieve muscle fatigue in one set. Is this safe?

A: It will be safe as long as your repetitions are done in a deliberate and controlled manner, you're doing a fairly high number of repetitions in the set (at least six) and you've gradually built up to the point of using heavier weights. If you're still fearful, though, try slowing down the repetition speed even more than usual. Raise the resistance in four seconds and lower it in four seconds, for example. This will force you to use a lighter resistance but still place high demands on your muscles. Also make sure that, over time, you try to improve on the resistance and repetitions that you use. If you're still hesitant about training in this manner, there's nothing inherently wrong with doing more than one set of an exercise to achieve adequate muscle fatigue. Just keep your recovery between sets to a minimum.

THE BOTTOM LINE

These are good questions from a New Jersey cop about strength training and aerobic training. Hopefully, this discussion will help other readers with their fitness program. ♥

Matt Brzycki is the Assistant Director of Campus Recreation, Fitness at Princeton University. A former Marine Drill Instructor, he has authored, co-authored or edited 16 books on strength and fitness, including SWAT Fitness (which is available at www.optacinternational.com).

