



Power Pushups

How to increase your numbers and avoid training to Failure

When I was in Selection, there were deviations from the training schedule from time to time. For anyone who has been there, that sentence normally conjures up memories of a smoke session from hell that you were glad to have lived through. But I tend to remember a few other deviations that dramatically helped me from time to time. Anyone who has been to selection has done pushups to and beyond the point of failure. This is simply a way of life there. But one day, Rich

Brannon came out and led a calisthenics session that was far different from the standard PT until you die session. So what did he do that was so different? He didn't have us train to failure! I had no idea what was going on, other than the fact that I liked not training to failure in pushups. But come Evaluation day, I set a new personal best. I remember wondering about his approach and thinking there must be some sort of connection. Years later I learned about Periodization and Volume, a couple awesome Russian training principals. Rich Brannon was not the only person who apparently understood the value of this training technique. Adam Pope once told me that the best way to build your pushup numbers was to do a set of 20 reps each hour every hour that you were awake. This is increasing the volume of training and it is definitely far more effective at building reps than training to failure.

Volume training works like this. Lets say you are going to do some cal. When it comes time for Pushups you do 3-5 sets to failure or the end of good form. The first set will probably be around 50-70 reps. Set 2-5 will most likely be 30-60 as your fatigue and lactic acid builds up. You get a good pump, you know it is going to hurt, and you feel good about yourself. For simplicity sake, lets say you do 5 sets of 50 reps. That is a total of 250 reps. But, if you get up at 6am and do a set of 20, and then another set of 20 every hour until you go to bed at 10pm, you will have racked up 340 reps with out acute lactic acid build up and reduced ability. You will definitely hurt the next day, but you increased your volume of training by one third! The rule to follow is to choose a number of reps that is nowhere near failure. Personally, I know I can crank out more than 20 reps per hour. 30 is more my style and if we use the same math, that's a whopping 510 reps! So what are the rules for volume training?

Technique #1

- NEVER train to failure!
- Choose a number that is approximately half of your max. If you can do 50 reps before failing, start at 20-25 reps.
- Use perfect form. Remember, perfect practice makes perfect. And only perfect reps count in selection.
- If at the end of the day you feel like you could have done more, add 5 reps the next day. It's OK to add more as long as you are not too close to failure.
- Add 5-10 reps the next week. This will depend on how you feel.
- Once every 2-4 weeks test your self with an all out set. You will be very pleased!

Technique #2

So you don't have the time or discipline for the every hour technique. Try out this **Spetsnaz technique called Ladders**. This works best with a partner.

- Do one rep.
- Come to your knees for the duration of time it would take for a partner to do the same.
- Do 2 reps and rest
- Continue like this (3, rest, 4, rest, 5, rest, 6, rest) until you are with in 2-3 reps of failure. Take 1-3 minutes rest and start at 1 rep again.



- Every time you have to start over again you will be starting a new set. Do as many sets as you can, but do not ever reach failure. Add up your reps to find your rep volume.
- Again, check your progress every 2-4 weeks with an all out set. You will definitely see improvement! As before, do not train to failure!

Technique #3

For those of you who refuse to put down the weights, I have used this program in the past with very good results. There are two versions of it. One involves going to failure or close to it. The other does not. I prefer the one that does not go to failure.

- Load a bar on the Bench Press (NO MACHINES!) with your body weight or just under it (5-15%).
- Do as many reps as you can with good form. Rack the weight and do the same number of incline pushups. If you can't do this on the first set, you have no business lifting weights!
- Rest 1 minute or less and repeat. Do as many sets as possible until you are unable to use good form.

OR

- Load the same weight on the bar but do only half the number of reps. If you failed at 20 reps, do only 6-10 reps and double the number of sets.
- I also like to rest 1 minute, then do the pushups, rest 1 minute and bench again. This helps increase your total reps by reducing acute fatigue.

You can also eliminate the pushups and do as many sets of bench presses as you can with a compressed rest period of 30-45 seconds. I have used each of these when lifting very heavy (read lots of poundage but not many pushups) and a PT test was coming up. Just a couple of these workouts had me back in the 70-90 rep range for 2 minutes. Experiment and see what works for you.

Here are some other ideas that draw from Periodization to enhance or spice up your work out. For those who don't know, periodization is basically understanding waves. For example, if you train for a Max Bench Press, say 300lbs, and you meet that goal, you will not be able to maintain it for long. You will have to back off for a while before you try for 300 again or higher, just like a wave. You build, you peak, you fall, and build again. You can do this many ways in individual exercises, days, weeks, months, etc...

Here are some ideas:

- Alternate reps per set. Bulgarians like to push, recede, push higher, etc... Do this by following this example of rep staggering: 25, 15, 25, 20, 25, 30, 15, 25, etc...
- Stagger the days: Day 1, 25 reps per set; Day 2, 15 reps per set, etc... Play with this.
- Stagger exercises: Day 1, incline pushups; Day 2, bench press.

Play with these ideas and see what works for you. Keep in mind that the body will adapt for 1-1.5 months before you need to change up your work out. Pushing Past 1.5 months will reduce your gains. This is known in bodybuilding as a "Plateau". Enjoy!