



Time-Efficient Hypertrophy

by Joel Marion

New job. New baby. New girlfriend.

Busy season. Moving. Longer commutes.

More work. More Responsibility. Less free time.

Life getting a little too hectic?

There are any number of instances in which life becomes more hectic, and the first thing that gets axed from the schedule is usually gym time. We've all been there, and perhaps you find yourself going through one or more of the above "life situations" even as you read this. So to you I'll ask the following question — a question I've asked every client of mine who has ever come to me in a similar situation:



Got a half hour?

Sure you've got a half hour. Virtually anyone can find a spare half hour somewhere in their schedule. But what the hell are you supposed to accomplish in a half hour, right?

Answer: Provided you have the right set up — *all that you need to*.

In just a minute, I'm going to unveil for you a hypertrophy program that's sure to cut your gym time in *half* while still allowing you to make *optimal* gains in size and strength; in fact, the only thing you'll have to do without is wasted time.

The Need for Something Better

Before we talk about the reasoning behind the setup of the program or the actual program itself, I'd like to first take a look at a couple of often-proposed methods for the busy individual and why they aren't really solving the problem.

Circuit Training

Somewhere along the line, someone decided to set up a bunch of machines and run through them as fast as possible for a time-efficient workout. The idea was to trade time for intensity (intensity as in exertion, not percentage of one-rep max) and get huge and strong in half the time.

While the time-intensity trade off works quite well with regards to cardiovascular exercise and the desired adaptations of said training, applying the principle to weight training fails miserably. Swapping time for intensity during a resistance training session causes the load being used to suffer greatly and such loads fail to adequately stimulate muscle tissue to grow and/or get stronger.



Simply put, gains in size and strength as a result of circuit training are close to nil. Sure, it saves time, but when time is saved at the expense of performance and progress, the approach is a far cry from efficient. Remember, in order for a method to be efficient, the training effect must not be compromised, and circuit training doesn't even come close to meeting that criterion.

The Two-day-a-week Full Body Routine

I guess the fact that it's only two days a week makes this approach an attention-grabber for the time-pressed trainee, but when being asked to block out a minimum of an hour and half from your schedule to perform a grueling full-body workout on said days, the set-up loses a bit of its initial appeal.

Let's face it, the last thing anybody wants to do when already facing more than their share of life's demands is a full-body workout. Couple that with the fact that you probably don't have the required time for such a session on even one day a week and you see why this approach isn't doing a whole lot for individuals with time constraints.

The ideal session in this instance is one that is short and has the trainee leaving the gym feeling fresh and revitalized, not tired and run down — something the

Time-Efficient Hypertrophy routine gives you that the two-day-a-week full body routine does not.

Getting Down to Business

Now that we've established a need, let's talk about how we are going to optimally fulfill that need. Below are a few ways to cut down workout time without sacrificing results, all of which have been implemented into *Time-Efficient Hypertrophy*:

— Use Compound Movements Exclusively

This is probably nothing new to anyone reading *T-Nation*, but it's worth mentioning anyway. Compound movements allow gym-goers to work multiple muscle groups with a single exercise and thus are a very efficient way to train.

Take for example the bench press, which works the chest, triceps, and anterior deltoids. Five sets of 10 repetitions of the bench press at a tempo of 31X with 90 seconds rest between sets will take approximately 13 minutes. In order to duplicate the training effect of this movement by working each muscle individually, we'd have to perform 5 sets of 10 repetitions of flyes; followed by 5 sets of 10 repetitions of overhead extensions; followed by 5 sets of 10 repetitions of front raises. That would total 30 minutes, which is three times as long.

While isolation movements have their place, we don't have time to waste on them when only having a half-hour to get in and out of the gym. Therefore, any time-efficient training program should avoid their use and be comprised of solely compound movements.

— Utilize an Overlapping Split

Overlapping splits, or splits that are set up in such a way that muscle groups are sometimes stimulated repeatedly within a short period of time (i.e. performing dips on Monday and then dumbbell bench press, which also works the triceps to a degree, on Wednesday), have been frowned upon by many (mostly those who have very limited knowledge of the body's recovery abilities) in the bodybuilding community for years. However, their use in general, and particularly in this situation, is invaluable.

Stimulating muscle tissue in both primary and secondary fashions throughout the week increases recovery through the shuttling of nutrient rich blood to recovering muscles and also allows individuals to stimulate all muscle groups with a high weekly volume without having to spend a great deal of time conducting any one session.

This will be very evident when you see the set-up of Time-Efficient Hypertrophy.

— Work While You Rest

If you're performing straight sets, you're wasting valuable time, in addition to missing out on the benefits of antagonistic superseting. When possible, pair muscle groups that perform opposite actions together in the same workout and alternate back and forth between them, i.e. biceps and triceps (pairing hams and quads together in the same workout is not a good idea, however, as alternating back and forth between two big-time movements such as the deadlift and the squat will take a toll on the load you are able to use for each).

This way, instead of sitting around waiting for your rest period to expire, you're getting the jump on another part of your workout. Not only that, but according to research, alternating back and forth between opposing muscle groups may increase performance as well.

Under normal circumstances, antagonists (muscles that perform actions opposing those of the working muscles) limit force production of the agonists (working muscles) by co-contracting during any movement in which the agonists are at work. However, when alternating back and forth between opposing muscle groups, antagonists will be fatigued from the previous set and will be unable to contract fully. Save time; increase performance.

Now that's efficient.

The Time-Efficient Hypertrophy Program

Here it is, in all its time-efficient glory (rep schemes and parameters are provided below):

Monday (Chest/Back)

A1) 30-degree Incline Dumbbell Bench Press

A2) Supinated-grip Pull-ups

(Note: Alternate back and forth between movement one and movement two resting between sets as indicated. The same instruction applies to all exercise combinations that follow, too.)

Tuesday (Quad-dominant Legs/Calves)

A1) Moderate-stance Back Squat

A2) Calf-press in Leg Press

Wednesday (Arms)

- A1) Dips
- A2) Incline Biceps Curls

Thursday (Hip-dominant Legs/Shoulders)

- A1) Deadlift
- A2) Standing Dumbbell Military Press

Friday (Full-body Recovery)

- A1) Bench Press
- A2) Bent-over Rows
- A3) Leg Extensions
- A4) Leg Curls

Rep Schemes/Training Parameters

Odd Weeks (M-Th): 5x8-10

Load: 10RM
Rest between sets: 60 seconds

Increase load by 5-10 lbs when you're able to perform more than 10 repetitions on your first set.

Even Weeks (M-Th): 10x5

Load: 7RM
Rest between sets: 60 seconds

Increase load by 5-10 lbs when you're able to perform 5 repetitions on all sets.

Friday Sessions: 1x50

Load: a weight in which you fail somewhere between 40 and 60 repetitions.

Rest between sets of this recovery session isn't specific — simply casually move on to the next exercise after the completion of the previous movement.

While the program is 5 days a week, no session lasts longer than one half hour. Monday through Thursday sessions on odd weeks (5x10) last approximately 22 minutes and those on even-weeks (10x5) last 28 minutes. Friday recovery sessions are about 14 minutes in duration.

Some suggestions of when to perform this workout include:

- a) First thing in the morning (just wake up earlier).
- b) On your lunch break (work out and eat lunch — your workout shake — at the same time)
- c) Immediately after work before heading home to settle down
- d) For college students, first thing in the morning, between classes, or after classes

Given that the sessions are so short, there shouldn't be a problem finding time to conduct them. The key is to get them in whenever you can fit them in; be conscious of your schedule for the next day and plan for the following day's session the night before.

Bringing Things to Light

As you can see, we're using compound movements exclusively (with the exception of the Friday recovery workout) and have set things up in an overlapping fashion (as opposed to the ever-so-popular push/pull fashion).

As mentioned previously this allows us to stimulate all muscle groups with a high weekly volume without ever having to spend a great deal of time on any one session. For example, in the above program, triceps are stimulated on Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, resulting in a huge weekly volume for said muscle group (and subsequently provoking a huge growth stimulus), but still no session lasts longer than 30 minutes.

We're also significantly reducing rest time by alternating back and forth between the prescribed exercises instead of performing "straight sets".

The Friday recovery workout is extremely short, a great way to unwind into the weekend while shuttling blood to the muscle tissue you've been beating up on all week.

Additionally, the varied rep schemes cover all the bases, stimulating growth on both the sarcoplasmic and myofibrillar levels, increasing myogenic muscle tone through the proliferation of said myofibrils, and stroking the nervous system for gains in strength and increases in neurogenic muscle tone.

Finally, the frequent workouts stimulate "feel good" endorphins on a daily basis to help relieve the stresses of the many other things busy individuals may be involved in. At the same time, each session is short enough to avoid the draining

effect that longer sessions will undoubtedly have on an already stressed individual's central nervous system.

In short (no pun intended), the program's frequent but brief workouts are exactly what the busy need and will lead to more energy and greater productivity in the other areas of their life.

Conclusion

No doubt about it, there will always be times where things get hectic and free time becomes limited; that's the nature of the life of any productive citizen. However, that doesn't mean that during those times you have to neglect one of your most prized possessions — your own body.

Hopefully you'll find the workout to be the ideal solution for the busy individual: optimal results, less time, more energy, greater productivity.

So the next time life gets crazy and you think about putting your physique goals on the backburner because of it, ask yourself: Got a half hour?