

## **Build Your Pyramid**

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Pyramid sets are an effective tool for adding both bulk and lean muscle to one's frame. While pyramid sets are most popular among those lifting for purely aesthetic reasons, such as bodybuilders, they can also be manipulated to successfully train muscle endurance in athletes. Traditionally, pyramid sets consist of starting at a low weight for a high number of reps for any given exercise and then, over the course of the workout, proceeding to decrease the number of reps for each set while increasing the amount of weight moved until you work your way down to double- or single-rep sets. I would like to add a twist to this traditional format and explain how you can not only achieve more volume in a shorter period of time, but you can use pyramid training for any and every muscle group.

First of all, instead of using a pyramid set template for one lift at a time, try pairing two exercises together that work like muscle groups and performing pyramid sets by alternating back and forth between the two exercises. Secondly, instead of switching the weight between sets as the reps change, pick a weight that is difficult for you to hit for your highest rep count and stick with that weight. You shouldn't be failing on the final rep, but you should feel like you only have a rep or two left in the tank. Third, have one exercise start on the high end of the pyramid and the other exercise start on the low end. Finally, after both exercises work their way to the opposing ends of the pyramid, have them turn around and work their way back.

An example of this exercise scheme would be to pair an incline barbell bench press with a dumbbell flat bench for somebody who is trying to add mass to his or her frame. For this example, the reps are going to move by 2's and the highest rep count will be twelve. Depending on what your goals are you can alter both the rep limit and how much the reps move by; for endurance you would have a higher limit as well as rep movement per set, while for strength you would have a lower rep limit and rep movement per set. For both exercises in this example you would choose a weight that you could rep out about fourteen times. Pick one exercise to start with, say the barbell incline press, and hit that for twelve reps, then immediately move to dumbbell flat bench and hit two reps. Rest 10 to 30 seconds, then hit the incline press for 10, followed by four on the flat bench. Then it's back to incline for eight and flat bench for six. Catch the pattern? Eventually you'll get to two on the incline press and twelve on the flat bench. After this, rest 90 to 120 seconds and then start again, this time beginning with two on the incline press and twelve on the flat bench, working your way back until both exercises are at the same reps as when you began.

Depending on how strictly you adhere to the rest times, this workout will take ten to fifteen minutes, and you will have gotten in a TON of volume in that time. In fact, you will probably have done more real work in that ten to fifteen minutes than most people do in their entire workout. If you are pressed for time but still want to get a lot of reps in, I would highly suggest throwing in pyramid sets.

Pyramid sets can be very effective for working muscle groups other than the chest too. For the back you can pair lat pulldowns and a row variation. For the legs you could do hamstring curls with lunges, dumbbell step ups with cable pull-throughs or dumbbell swings, or, if you are feeling really hyped, you could pair a back squat with a front squat. This type of training can also add the much-desired size to your arms that you have been working so hard for. You could pair cable pressdowns with hammer presses for your triceps, and incline dumbbell curls with a narrow-grip barbell curl for your biceps. You could pair a seated dumbbell shoulder press with a dumbbell lateral raise for your shoulders, too. For your abs you could do something like cable crunches with hanging toe touches. Obviously there are an infinite number of pairings you could do, but these are just a few examples.

One last twist I would like to provide you with is to keep the reps the same throughout, say anywhere from six to ten, but alternate the weight each set. This would be really good as a finisher, especially for arms. You could start at fifteen pound dumbbells and curl them six times, then move up to twenties, then twenty-fives, and so on until you fail to hit six reps without resting in between each set. Then you would immediately drop the weight and work your way back down the weight rack until you get back to the fifteens you started at.

So whether you are only able to spend twenty to thirty minutes at the gym a few times each week, you are trying to add mass to your frame, or you are trying to develop muscle endurance for athletics, consider switching up your current training regimen to include pyramid sets. The workouts are intense and taxing and you will be getting a very large bang for your workout buck.

Get big or die tryin'.

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