

## What are the critical exercise routine success factors?

The 'Rule Of 3' Meets Pareto's '80/20'--And You Get Fit Faster As A Result! Everybody likes simple lists. Everybody likes Rules Of Thumb. And as far as I can tell, everyone wants tighter abs and more energy. So, naturally, we all look for the "best" diets and the "best" training routines to bring us closer to that six-pack...ideally, in the least amount of time possible... ..Oh yeah--and we don't want to think too hard either! The Old Way: Counting calories? Fuh-ged-a-bow-dit! Getting a body fat measurement each week? No way! Calculating our new "estimated 1-rep max" for 27 different exercises? Puh-leeze. So what's the solution? Well, if you don't mind limiting our example to exercise for the moment, I think I have a few things that can help you in your endless search for the most efficient use of your fitness time... (which is like, what? about 45 minutes a day 3-4 times a week if you're lucky?) ...It's OK--you're human! I do this stuff for a living, and I don't spend much more time than that myself. Introducing: "The Rule Of 3-80/20 (Principle)" Any activity of importance (like exercise) can be broken down into three, and only three Critical Success Factors. Furthermore, one of these critical success factors should account for 80% of your efforts. And the other two, on average, just 10% of your time, energy, and effort (that is, of course, if you actually want to get anything done). Thus sayeth The Fitness Sage (that's me). And you should listen to me when it comes to getting things done, because I have a Masters Degree \*and\* ADD! (attention deficit disorder). Without principles like the above, I would be hocking blackmarket Pi-Tae-Boga-Lates tapes to out-of-work actors in LA... Yeah, so I'm ripping off the Pareto Principle and the Rule Of 3--but you'll forgive me real quick when you see how this applies to your exercise routine. Now that I've circumnavigated my point a few times, here it is real simple, in 3 (surprise, surprise) easy steps: The Three Critical Exercise Routine Success Factors 1. Consistent Progression: Needs 80% of your time and attention. 2. Sufficient Intensity: Needs 15% of your time and attention. 3. Intelligent Evolution: Needs 5% of your time and attention. Simple huh? But maybe you need some clarification, so here goes... Consistent Progression Explained: There are really just 3-4 workout parameters that even matter to the average Jane or Joe who wants a good body and excellent health: Rest Period, Load, Reps-Per-Set, and Total # Of Sets. So your job is to simply pick one of these, hold all the rest constant, and improve your chosen workout parameter from week-to-week, workout-to-workout until you can no longer do so (just remember to hold everything else constant! especially total workout duration). When you can't improve on your chosen parameter, pick a different one and repeat. That's it. It really is that simple. Tools needed: 1 pocket-sized notebook and a stopwatch. Of course, you might want some proven, superior methods to "improve on your chosen parameter." At the bottom of this article, you'll get your wish! But first... Sufficient Intensity Explained: Make sure you're doing resistance training folks. Not aerobics. Not LSD (long slow distance cardio). Or any other fitness fad that makes your lungs burn more than your muscles. If you're consistently getting 20+ reps on all your exercises, then you need to choose more difficult exercises. Period. Cardio and aerobics have health benefits no doubt, but if you're really looking for "bang-for-your-fitness-buck", and you're short on time, then stick with resistance training. It's the only kind of exercise that builds muscle and boosts your metabolism permanently--not just during your workout. Shoot for exercises that are so difficult, you can only perform between 1 and 15 reps. This could be weightlifting (if you lack the creativity and sophistication of a "Tao Of Functional Fitness" devotee who relies solely on portable exercise equipment--like Fitness Bands--and their own bodyweight), but it doesn't have to be. If you know how to manipulate leverage, even bodyweight only exercises can be made difficult enough. Why just 15% of your time worrying about this? Because all you have to do is make sure most of your exercise (excluding a proper warmup of course) falls within this rep range. Not exactly rocket-science. Nuff said. Intelligent Evolution: This is just another term for "periodization" or "cyclic training." Basically it means that you need a strategy for changing your exercise routine over the long haul as you get stronger and closer to realizing your goals. Most of the time the Consistent Progression rule takes care of this, hence the paltry 5% of your noggin that's required to intelligently evolve. But over the long haul, you sometimes need to dramatically change your workout protocol. There's not space here to explore all the ins-and-outs of doing this, but a simplified recommendation would be to cycle between phases where you focus on increasing the Average Load you handle during your workouts, and phases where you're more concerned with the Amount Of Work Per Unit Time you perform (i.e. "Strength" vs. "Density"). Conclusion Consistent Progression (80%) + Sufficient Intensity (15%) + Intelligent Evolution (5%). Find an exercise routine that gives you that, and you're on to something!

## About the Author

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