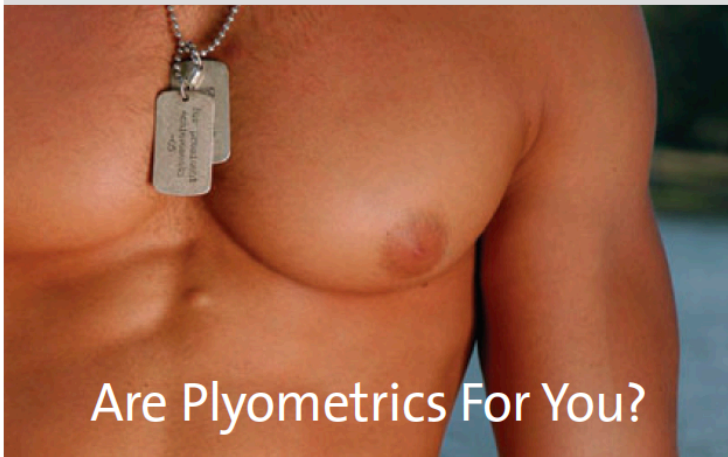


IN+SHAPE

BY TERRI WEST



Are Plyometrics For You?

We've all heard the term "plyometrics" used in the fitness world. But what exactly is this form of exercise, and is it for everyone?

Plyometrics are exercises consisting of explosive movements, examples of which are lateral box jumps, push-ups in which the hands leave the ground upon resistance, side throws using an exercise ball and split squat jumps. Plyometric training intensifies an athlete's power output without necessarily increasing their maximum strength. Plyometrics are used to increase the speed or force of muscular contractions, often with the goal of maximizing the height of a jump or speed of a kick or power of a throw. Hence, plyometrics are highly used in sports-specific training for persons accustomed to strenuous effort.

For the typical gym member, however, plyometrics can be challenging without proper flexibility and core strength training. On the other hand, you don't have to be an elite athlete to incorporate plyometrics into your workout routine either. Basketball players use plyometrics as part of their seasonal training to prepare them for swift and powerful movements on the basketball court. The same is true of football and tennis players because of their explosive movements as a result of anaerobic, rather than aerobic, output. Personal trainers of the non-athletic client have started a trend in gyms around the country using this method of training, and it is now equivalent in popularity to the "Jane Fonda Workout" of the '80s.

This fast-growing training technique is not for everyone. I see trainers in the gym who often don't correctly incorporate plyometrics into their clients' training programs, frequently using dumbbells and other free weights instead of relying on the body's own weight. Not everyone has the necessary agility, stamina and flexibility to endure certain exercises. Not everyone has the knees and ankles to balance on a Bosu ball, a strong spine necessary to sit on a sta-

bility ball or the core abdominal strength necessary to perform oblique twists. I've seen elderly clients trained to do a one-armed plank combined with push-ups, but because older clients have brittle bones and weaker spines, this obviously is not the best form of exercise for them. On the contrary, traditional resistance and flexibility training would be a better option.

The physique of a plyometrics-trained person compared to a person doing a typical resistance training program is more toned and muscular due to the contraction of fast-twitch muscle fibers. To illustrate: A distance runner is not as muscular as a sprinter because of a sprinter's explosive movements, occurring without the use of oxygen. A distance runner, on the other hand, uses slow-twitch muscle fibers, which do not develop as prominently because they are using aerobic activity. That is, occurring with the use of oxygen or requiring oxygen.

As with any form of physical fitness, injury can occur, and because plyometric training involves a lot of free motion, as opposed to weight training, the muscles and joints involved are subject to impact areas of the body not normally used. I cannot stress enough the importance of a warm-up and short stretch session before doing plyometrics.

Whether you want to improve your vertical jump, increase speed or gain power for football, basketball, volleyball, soccer, tennis, baseball, wrestling or an intense workout program, plyometrics training is a hot trend that is taking the fitness world by storm!

Terri West is a certified fitness trainer, accredited by the International Sports Sciences Association and has competed in natural bodybuilding contests. She is on the board of BodyScope Institute in Newport Beach where she treats sports injury rehabilitation clients. For more information, or to schedule a consultation, visit terriwest.com or e-mail trrwtst@yahoo.com.

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