

## Ask the professional: Dangerous Exercise Practices

Well it's that time of year again, when a large percentage will make the resolution to get fit and healthy. For many that means getting back to the gym, and while this is one of the most important lifestyle choice that can be made, it is imperative to be aware that initiating an exercise program is not without the risk of injury. As a dedicated proponent of healthy living, I make a concentrated effort to 'practice what I preach' when it comes to physical activity and I can often be found at the gym weight lifting. Although an excellent exercise technique to increase strength and help control a healthy weight, it is important to remember that 'form' is of the utmost importance when lifting. Not only should you lift a weight that you can control (listen up gentlemen!) for both the concentric muscle contraction (when the muscle works from a lengthened to shortened position), but also the eccentric muscle contraction (when the muscle works from a shortened to lengthened position), it is also imperative that you do not recruit extra muscle groups when weight lifting, instead you should concentrate on selectively targeting the muscle that is working. Not only will you get better 'gains' in terms of increased strength and often increased muscle mass when lifting with the proper form, but you will also decrease the risk of injury. For example, when doing a bicep curl (the bicep is the muscle on the front of the upper arm which causes the elbow to bend), the only part of the body that should move is the elbow. If you find that the upper body is moving as well, then the weight is more than likely too heavy and you should drop the weight down until you can perform a curl without causing extraneous body movements. The following are dangerous exercises that I commonly see in the gym;

Upright Row: This exercise is performed standing with the hands grasping the weight in front of the body, with the hands facing inwards and the arms straight, then bending the elbows and raising the bar to chin level. The problem with this exercise is the amount of stress it places on the shoulders and the amount of shoulder impingement that is caused on the rotator cuff. A safer technique that will still target the shoulder is the front or side shoulder raise to a maximum of 90 degrees.

Military Press: This exercise is generally performed sitting with the weight held behind the head and hands facing forward. The weight is then lifted up and down behind the head. The problem with this exercise is the amount of stress it places on the neck and the amount of compression it places on the shoulders. A safer technique is a shoulder press in front of the body, however people with a pre-existing shoulder problem should be careful performing this exercise as well as it can aggravate shoulder pain.

Squats/Lunges/Leg Press with the knees bent too deeply: When doing any kind of leg exercise where the knees are bending, it is important to bend the knees to a maximum of 90 degrees and to keep the knees in line with the ankles and feet. The problem with bending the knees too far and allowing them to travel in front of the feet is the amount of stress that is placed through the joint. By keeping everything aligned the amount of compression going through the joint is decreased.

Back extensions: Although this exercise is not usually a problem if performed properly, many people extend back too far causing their spine to go into hyperextension which increases the amount of compressive force within the spine. A safer alternative is to only extend back far enough to create a straight body line, keeping the spine aligned.

For more information on safe and effective exercise practices please contact:

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