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The Real Deal: Active Rest*Jeffrey Thayer**archive article, added 04/08/2008*

If your idea of active rest is sleep walking you're probably missing a lot of chances to make your workouts more efficient. Observing the standard 60-minute workout you might witness fifteen minutes of actual work. I say 'might' because it's probably less.

How you choose to rest between sets can seriously impact your workout, and not all rest is created equal. To really boost your productivity and results, incorporating 'active rest' should be seen as one of many workout components to manipulate.



Adding abdominal exercises between sets is a great way to have an 'active rest.'

My favorite way to use this 'rest' time productively is to actively and dynamically stretch the muscles in such a way to decrease soreness and aid recovery and muscle control. I find this also speeds progress, increasing strength gains.

Another favorite technique of mine is to spend the time between sets working the abdominal muscles. A few dozen crunches, reverse crunches, sit-ups, or oblique twists will keep you moving while allowing your primary muscles to recover. This little trick can seriously increase your productivity and get you through your workout faster.

For circuit training and sports based routines I often recommend sprinkling a few high output callisthenic moves between resistance sets. Good ole' exercises like jumping jacks, switches, squat thrusts, or jump rope can allow the heart rate to fall considerably from the main exertion of weight training but still allow moderate cardio pulmonary recovery training. This practice also offers the very positive effect of training to maintain focus and composure between bouts of higher exertion. A useful parallel for this would be coping with fatigue between serves of a contentious tennis match.

A more advanced and often overlooked technique for actively resting is to simply not rest. This is accomplished with supersets. By alternating two exercises that stress non-conflicting muscle groups you essentially rest one muscle group while working a second.

All of these tactics work to improve your output during a single training session. If you leave your down time to the water cooler your planned 90-second rest interval can easily become five minutes. If you're jumping rope for your active rest and you accidentally go five minutes - all the better. Also, because you're constantly working, you're much less likely to be held up or disturbed with chatty friends or workout partners.

Faster muscle recuperation, better cardio recovery, better circulation, better muscle control, and focus for sports performance and decreased muscle soreness, not to mention cutting your workout time way down. It's amazing what 'active rest' can do for your workouts. It can also help to keep things interesting and add a new twist for you to experiment with, definitely better than sleep walking around the gym.

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