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Do Dancers Rule the Fitness World?

Dancing with the Stars began a new season last night, and once again Paula asserted that dancers have the best bodies: great musculature and shape without being unnaturally bulky. She wondered if dancing was the equivalent of exercising at high reps with low weight as opposed to typical weightlifting that emphasizes systematically increasing weight when a specific number of repetitions are met. I do as my wife commands, so this week I'm looking into the difference in results between high reps at low weight and fewer reps at high weight.

Let's look at fewer reps at a higher weight. The purposes of this approach are two-fold: to increase strength and to increase muscle size. By definition, strength means the maximal amount of weight a person can lift. Muscle size is obvious; the muscle visually looks larger.

In order to accomplish either, weight has to be moderate to heavy with the appropriate number of repetitions. For strength that would be 4–8 reps; for size it might be 10–12 reps.

For strength, the focus is on increasing the amount of weight. For size, the focus is on trying to do several exercises that hit more parts of a single muscle. An example would be doing bicep curls standing with the arms perpendicular to the floor, then on an inclined bench with the arms at a 45-degree angle to the body instead of perpendicular, then twisting the arms out with curls using a dumbbell, and many more.

The result is an increase in strength and size. That doesn't appear to be what happens to dancers, does it? We'll cover low weight with high reps on Thursday.

What are you prepared to do today?

Dr. Chet



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