

Barbell Complexes: They're not that complex

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Barbell complexes are one of the most versatile, yet misunderstood tools within the fitness industry. Issues that often arise regarding their implementation include: the amount of load to be used, how many repetitions, how many sets, what exercises should be performed, and how frequently should they be implemented in one's training program.

What are barbell complexes?

Barbell complexes are comprised of a series of different movements performed continuously with no rest with a barbell. They usually consist of Olympic lifts and their variants, compound exercises such as squats, deadlifts, and rows, and isolation exercises such as curls.

Figuring out the numbers

For beginners who have not yet mastered each movement, barbell complexes are not appropriate. Novice lifters should seek out the instruction of a qualified coach or trainer to learn how to properly execute each lift. For intermediate and advanced trainees, barbell complexes should be performed with a weight that the trainee can curl a loaded barbell for 8 to 12 strict repetitions. Though this load may seem light, it should be noted that barbell complexes are not meant to develop maximal strength, instead they get the body warmed up for the heavier lifts that lie ahead in one's training session. For warm-ups, each movement should be performed as a precursor to the lifts that are to be done during the training session and performed between 3 to 6 repetitions throughout a handful of sets. For trainees who have perfected each movement, higher set-repetition schemes can be used for conditioning purposes.

Complex examples

A barbell complex could start off with movements which are more explosive, such as Olympic lifts and their variants progressing to compound strength exercises and lastly isolation strength exercises. An example of this would include, a barbell power clean performed for five repetitions, followed by a barbell front squat for five repetitions, followed by a barbell military press for five repetitions, followed by a barbell upright row or barbell shrug for five repetitions, concluding with a barbell curl for five repetitions.

Frequency

Often the most pressing issue is how to fit them into one's program. Barbell complexes can be done frequently, perhaps prior to every workout as a warm-up or done as a conditioning circuit following each training session. How frequently barbell complexes are performed within one's training program largely rely on an individual's goals and training experience. Exercise selection may depend on which exercises might be performed later in the workout or the trainee's mastery of each movement.

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