

What are the Most Effective Repetition Brackets To Use?

This article is in response to a question that an old friend asked me recently as he intended to start training and didn't know where to start. After giving him advice I thought it made sense this as I am sure if he is asking it, a lot of you are thinking it.

It is a complex subject and upon understanding it you will improve your rate of success in your exercise programmes improves dramatically. This is especially the case if you have been following one of the generic programmes written in a magazine or copying a friend's which has been written for them by their trainer. To be honest with you, this will probably create more questions as it is impossible to say what is best for someone without assessing them first.

To keep such a vast subject concise I will try and keep each point short and exact.

- How many repetitions you use controls the training effect (including how fast you see that effect and what result you will achieve from your programme)
- You may use a different rep bracket when training for strength than training for hypertrophy or fat loss as you will want to target different hormone production.
- Rep brackets vary from person to person. Your muscle fibre makeup means that training in certain repetition zones will improve how fast you build muscle and lose fat in comparison to training in other zones. An example of this would be a very fast twitch muscle, if you consistently train with high reps on this muscle you aren't going to activate the muscle fibres (high-threshold motor units) that only contract with very high loads and are therefore not going to fulfil their potential.
- Muscle fibre makeup is therefore also muscle group specific. A lot of people lack hamstring development because they are training it in an incorrect repetition bracket. The part of the hamstring that bends the knee (short-head of biceps femoris) is much more fast twitch than all of the long muscles of the hamstring which extend the hip exercises such as a deadlift and therefore should be trained with lower reps. If your routine includes leg curls above the 8 repetition mark it is probably time to reevaluate how you are training or who you are training with.

To summarise, this is one of the hardest topics to give an exact answer and you should be very cautious when someone advises you of a 'perfect' universal repetition bracket (look in popular programmes where everything is 8-10 or 12-15 reps). This demonstrates lack of extensive knowledge on the subject which in turn will short-change your results if you follow it.

To appropriately select reps for a programme your trainer should have an idea on the fibre makeup of your body, know the goal of your training programme and know your exercise history. Other factors will impact upon how they should select it but these are crucial facts to find out via fibre type assessments and appropriate screening prior to exercise.