

Chain Yourself to a Bigger, Badder Body!

The Benefit of Variable-Resistance Workouts and Why Chain Training Should Be in Your Future

By Marty Tuley

Inventors and engineers have designed exercise machines that place an increasing amount of stress or resistance on the targeted muscles throughout the range of motion of an exercise, a concept known as variable resistance. This concept is what Arthur Jones applied in the 1970s and 1980s to his line of Nautilus exercise equipment, which uses large, uniquely shaped cams to vary the resistance. Variable resistance was a factor of strength-training exercise that would later form part of the bedrock of the High Intensity Training (HIT) philosophy developed by his disciples.

Chain Training: The Missing Link

Over the past several decades the concept of variable resistance has been incorporated many times in the design of new equipment. I remember reading in the mid-1980s an article about exercise machines that used water to achieve the same objective as variable resistance. The article pictured them being used by Casey Viator, one of Arthur Jones's first students, who used variations of HIT throughout a successful bodybuilding career. Variable-

resistance training has even been facilitated with hydraulics and compressed air. Indeed to some degree all modern weight machines afford variable resistance. However, even with all this expensive technology, engineering and design of machines, a simple, cheap and extremely effective way to use variable resistance on almost any free-weight exercise is still available and requires only a trip to your local hardware store. Let me show you how to *chain* yourself to a bigger, badder body!

Why use chains to vary the resistance? Chains allow you to maximize the workload applied to a targeted muscle by continuing to add resistance throughout the concentric portion of a repetition. As you get closer to completing the repetition, the more that resistance is applied. More and more length of chain is drawn from the floor, thereby creating more resistance at the top, or end, of the range of motion.

Using chains in resistance training is nothing new. In fact early strongmen were renowned for their application of chains during training and in strength displays. However, for approximately the past 20 years, training with chains seems to have been used only by powerlifters and Olympic weightlifters.

Enter Louie Simmons, powerlifting legend and guru who is the owner of the famed Westside Barbell Club in Columbus, Ohio. This powerlifting gym is a throwback to the era when gyms improved a person's fitness. Westside also seems to turn out strongmen (and strongwomen) at the rate that Keebler turns out cookies – just look at the following numbers found at www.westside-barbell.com that show who, at the time of writing, the club has produced:

Club Stats

- 25 world and national champions
- 39 members lifting a total of 2,000 or more pounds
- 46 members benching 550 pounds or more
- 28 members benching 600 pounds or more
- 11 members benching 700 pounds or more
- 37 members squatting 800 pounds or more
- 14 members squatting 900 pounds or more
- 4 members squatting more than 1000 pounds
- 10 members deadlifting 800 pounds or more

Westside Barbell Club

- Chain Yourself

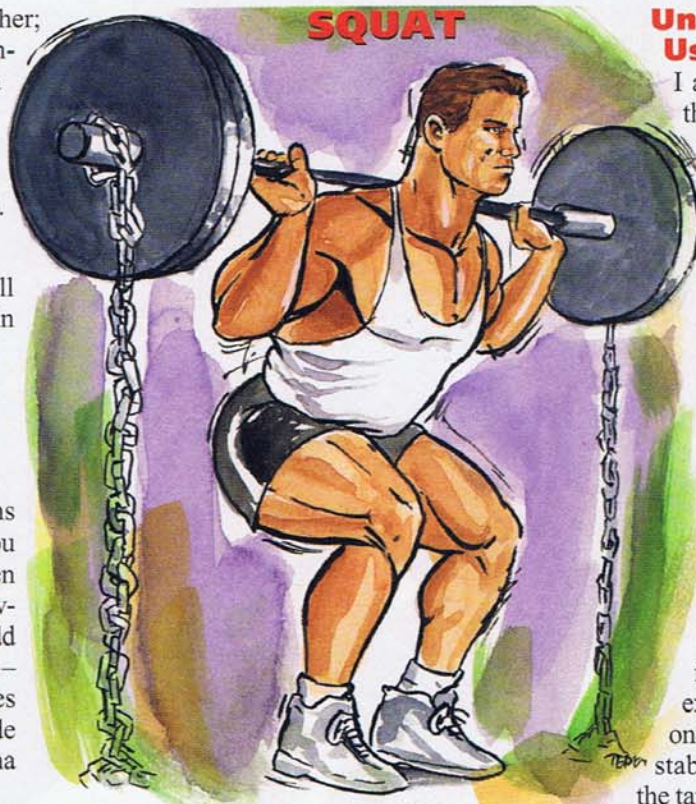
Simmons isn't just a master teacher; he's been a student of his own principles for decades and is the only man more than 50 years of age to squat 920 and total 2,100 pounds. When Louie Simmons talks about strength training, suffice it to say people listen.

The Ties That Bind

Following is a list of supplies you will need to start incorporating chains in your workout.

- two 2' sections of 1/4" chain
- two 2" diameter steel rings
- six clasp hooks
- four 5' sections of 5/8" chain

Each 5' section of 5/8" chain weighs 18 pounds. With four such sections you can add 72 pounds to an exercise when all the chain is lifted from the floor. However, the amount of chain you could add to an exercise is considerably greater - I guess lifting enormous poundages just depends on your particular shade of green and the amount of gamma radiation you've been exposed to.



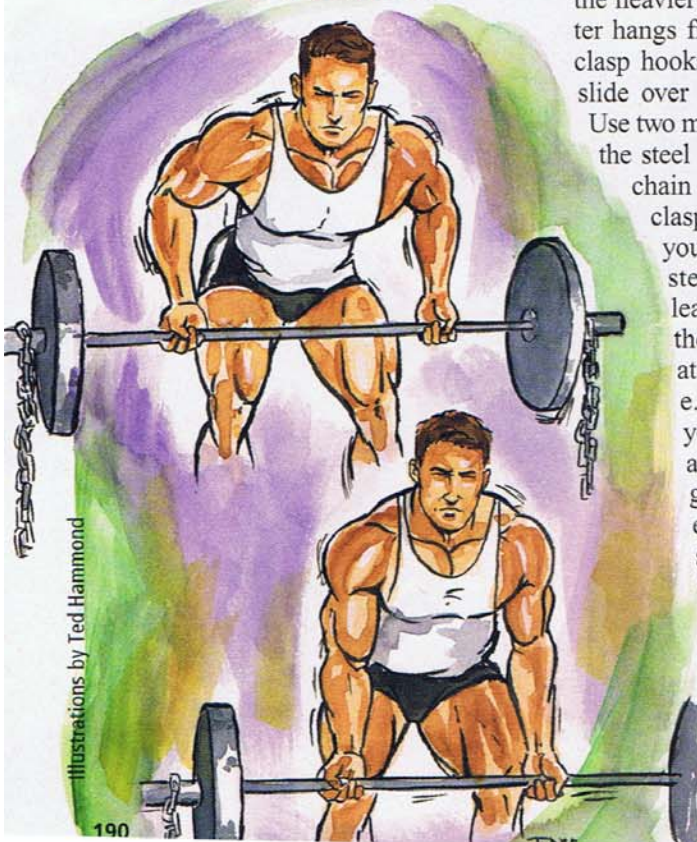
Unfettered Growth Using Chains

I am a big proponent of using the pre-exhaustion technique in weight training and, specifically, in chain training. I believe chain training can prove particularly beneficial when used in conjunction with pre-exhaustion, the technique first conceived in 1960 by this magazine's publisher, Robert Kennedy. Pre-exhaustion concerns the use of an isolation exercise, such as the triceps pressdown, followed by a compound exercise for the same muscle group, e.g. the close-grip bench press. By beginning a workout for a particular muscle group with an isolation exercise you can pre-exhaust specific muscles. A second, compound exercise recruits stabilizer muscles, which assist the targeted primary muscle in completing each rep. The addition of chains challenges the primary muscle involved that much more by forcing it to recruit and use a maximum amount of motor units throughout the exercise. That is, the exercise will get harder as you near and reach lockout, as opposed to easier, which is often the case with many free-weight exercises.

Use your imagination when using chains in your training. You could incorporate them in almost any free-weight exercise. The obvious choices are the bench press and the squat, but you could use chains on barbell curls, lying triceps extensions, barbell rows, military presses, incline presses, decline presses, 90-degree preacher curls, close-grip bench presses, and many Smith-machine exercises. Do you want a great way to quickly follow up a heavy set of laterals? Grab the ends of each 5/8" chain and continue your laterals to failure. Here's another great application: Throw one or more of the 5/8" chains around your waist before doing bench dips for the triceps.

You shouldn't use chains on every set of every exercise in every workout. A prerequisite for using chains is the ability to train smart, as muscle and brain recruit-

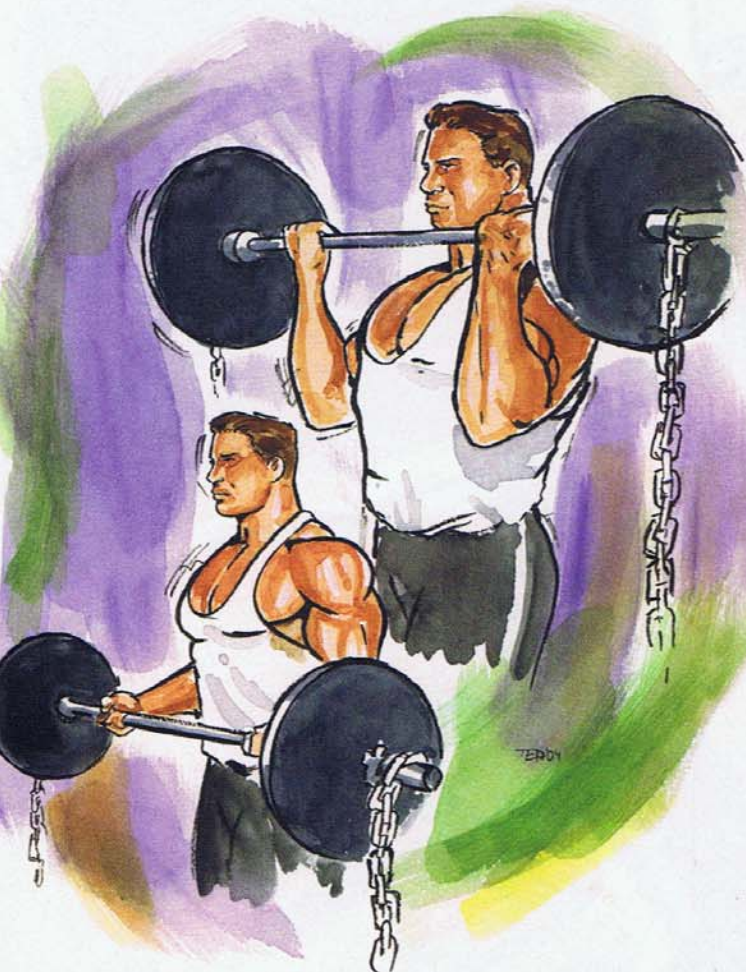
REVERSE-GRIP BARBELL ROW



Your 1/4" chain serves as your leader chain. It allows you to optimize the use of the heavier chain by making sure the latter hangs freely. You will use two of the clasp hooks to form two loops that will slide over the ends of an Olympic bar.

Use two more of the clasp hooks to attach the steel rings to the ends of your 1/4" chain sections. Use your remaining clasp hooks to attach two or four of your 5/8" chain sections to the steel rings. I like to adjust the leader chains so as to have all of the heavier chains on the ground at the start of the concentric rep, e.g. when the bar is resting on your chest in the bench press, and the whole chains off the ground at lockout. On most exercises, with the exception of squats and barbell curls, you won't lift all five feet of your heavy chain at lockout. When this is the case you can double the chains up for more resistance, as doing so will mean no part of the chains will remain on the floor.

STANDING BARBELL CURL



Chain Couplings

Below are some examples of chain-training workouts for specific bodyparts. Although chain training may seem somewhat unorthodox, it can be of real benefit to the bodybuilder, powerlifter, gym rat and all-around athlete. This type of training is an excellent vehicle for the application of variable resistance and, unlike variable-resistance machines, still preserves the qualities and feel of free-weight exercises. Chain training also looks cool.

Try These Chain Workouts For Size!

Biceps

Barbell preacher curl: 3 x 8-10
Standing barbell curl: 3 x 4-7 (with chains)
Lying cable curl: 2 x 12

Chest

Cable crossover: 3 x 8-10
Bench press: 4 x 4-7 (with chains)
Incline dumbbell press: 3 x 10

Back

Wide-grip straight-arm pulldown: 2 x 12
Reverse-grip barbell row: 4 x 4-7 (with chains)
Medium-grip chinup: 4 x 10

Quads

Leg extension: 3 x 12
Squat: 4 x 4-7 (with chains)
Leg press or hack squat: 3 x 10

Leave home for your next workout a bit earlier than normal and visit your local hardware store first. Chain training isn't a fad but is, rather, a proven and viable method for packing on muscle mass that will give you a bigger, badder body. ❖❖

ment should go hand in hand. Ronnie Coleman, Dorian Yates and Lee Haney are intelligent men who first listened, learned and then applied. Use your brain when you train. My advice on chain training follows:

1. Incorporate chains mostly on compound exercises.
2. Use chains in conjunction with pre-exhaustion.
3. When working a particular bodypart, use chains on only one exercise for that muscle group.
4. Train heavy using strict form and a low-to-moderate repetition range of 4 to 7 reps.
5. Use chains to train two bodyparts only in one full-body workout rotation. For example, if you work your entire body ever five days, choose two bodyparts only to which you will apply chain training. In your next rotation choose two different bodyparts.
6. Take a hiatus from chain training of two to four weeks every 12 to 15 weeks.

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