



# Addition by Subtraction

## 10 overrated muscle-building strategies, and 15 ways to replace them

By: Mark Anders

### Standard crunches

Abs are all about body fat. Once you get your percentage into single digits, try doing planks (work up to holding the position for 2 to 3 minutes) and Swiss-ball crunches (start with 10 reps and work up to 30 to 40). "Both are better than the standard crunch for bringing out your abs," says Tom Seabourne, Ph.D., C.S.C.S., an exercise physiologist and sports psychologist at Northeast Texas Community College in Mount Pleasant.



### Protein

Too much of a good thing can be, well, a bad thing. "Your body can use only so much protein, and then some of it is just converted into fat instead of going to your muscles," says Mike Bracko, Ph.D., C.S.C.S., an exercise physiologist at the Institute of Hockey Research in Calgary, Alberta. He recommends consuming no more than 0.5 to 1 gram of protein per pound of your body weight each day.

### Calf Raises

"Squats work all those tiny muscles in and around the calves, so you don't need to use calf-raise machines," says Seabourne. He recommends doing three sets of eight to 12 squats with heel raises. Lower your body with your feet flat on the floor until your thighs are parallel to the floor. Pause, then stand back up and rise onto the balls of your feet.

### Jogging

If you're devoting too much time to cardiovascular workouts, it could be compromising your muscle development. When you jog, you use mostly slow-twitch muscle fibers, and the constant pounding seems to have a shrinking effect on your upper-body muscles. It's best to do sprints for your cardio at a track or football field. On a treadmill, after a light 3-minute warmup jog, sprint for 30 seconds, then rest for a minute, and repeat this sequence for 10 minutes.

### Curls

"Curls are a waste of time because they isolate a muscle group that's the size of an orange," says Juan Carlos Santana, M.Ed., C.S.C.S., director of the Institute of Human Performance in Boca Raton, Florida. Instead, work larger muscle groups with pulling exercises such as lat pulldowns and rows, both of which also work your biceps. Then do two or three sets of 12 to 15 repetitions of either barbell curls or standing dumbbell curls, says Santana.

### Workout Streaks

"I've observed that when people finally take a day off in their weekly strength programs, they start to get stronger and bigger," says Seabourne. That's because muscles grow during rest. Two days a week of strength training per muscle group is all you need.

### Rest Between Sets

"Less rest time can sometimes increase the amount of testosterone your body is producing," says Bracko. Try supersets--performing two exercises back to back without rest. For instance, do a set of bench presses immediately followed by a set of seated cable rows. Then rest for 90 to 180 seconds.

**Leg Extensions**

Switch to body-weight lunges instead. Leg extensions isolate only your quads, while lunges work your quadriceps and butt and force you to stabilize your abs, lower back, and hips.

**Bench Presses**

Do more pushups, which build core musculature and upper-body strength. Santana recommends limiting your bench presses to three to five sets per week and incorporating six to 12 sets of pushups, including three-point pushups and those in which you wear a weighted body vest, elevate your feet, or hold a medicine ball between your hands.

**Chest Stretches Between Sets of Bench Presses**

For up to 15 minutes following a static stretch, your muscles and tendons stay stretched and are temporarily weakened, says Bracko. "A doorway stretch done between sets of bench presses actually makes your muscles weaker, so you won't be able to lift as much," Bracko says. Save it for afterward, during your cooldown.