

AVOID EXCESSIVE EFFORT

"One more rep, one more rep!" No, one less rep is more progress, as [Dellanavich say](#). But, if you're like most people, you may have been led to believe that more effort equals better results. How many times have you been told that you need to "work harder" to get results?

But what if it were not effort but something else that determined your results?

What if I were to tell you that additional effort is not associated to progress? This is one of the most important things you will learn using the Gym Movement Protocol. Rather, results are determined by the quality of questions you ask (of yourself and of your body) and the time you commit to your training.

Some people have a hard time believing that more effort doesn't result in better outcomes. Locally, I only have to point to the success of clients at The Movement Minneapolis to prove them wrong. Our culture, born out of Gym Movement, is to completely eschew effort in training. No one is asked to work hard, and clients know better than to force out one more rep. (We don't do slow, ugly reps.)

Have you ever watched the Olympics? Certainly we can assume that these people are training diligently, given that they are elite athletes at the very top of their game. But have you ever noticed how easy they make things look? Often

times they don't look like they're trying at all. The very best make their movements look **effortless**.

You might wonder why you would want to avoid excessive effort, or why it would be undesirable in training. Here's why: Increased effort comes with a cost, and a high one at that. The vast majority of gym injuries come when someone applies more effort to something that isn't going well. I have worked with many clients with serious back injuries, and I've heard the same theme over and over again from them. When they think back to the time before their injury they often recall a period of time just prior to it where normally easy tasks seemed more difficult. Workouts were miserable, and even things like going up a flight of stairs seemed more taxing. They pushed through with more effort, of course, or they wouldn't be working with me to resolve their back pain. Excessive effort comes with a price tag: more recovery required, more risk of injury, slower long-term progress.

In terms of asking questions, the question is not "How can I work harder to achieve this goal?" A better question might be: "How can I make this easy?" or "How can I make forward progress?" Once mastered at an "easier" level, you can increase the level of difficulty, and repeat the process again and again. In this way, the impossible becomes reality.

As the great poet of our time, Jay-Z, says: *“Difficult takes a day, impossible takes a week.”*

I’ll give you a great example of this in application that I learned from Adam T. Glass in his quest to dominate the famous **Thomas Inch dumbbell**. The Inch dumbbell is a fixed weight — 172 pounds — leaving no way to make it easier by using less weight. Adam learned that simply by “tilting” the bell into the butt of the hand, you can take some weight off the fingers and make it relatively “easier” to lift. After some time of tilting the Inch, Adam was able to lift it level — even going so far as to invent a new feat: lifting the Inch with an empty soda can on each end, thereby proving how perfectly level it is. This is a perfect example of a situation in which no amount of will or determination will allow you to achieve something you’re not capable of — only asking better questions and finding a way to reduce the level of effort will.

There is a continuum of markers that occur as you apply more effort to a movement. In Gym Movement, these are known as the Elements of Effort:

Elements of Effort

- 1. Speed** - Speed decreases as a movement becomes more difficult.
- 2. Tension** - After or concurrent with slowing down, you use more tension to move, or you tense body parts that aren’t related to the movement, like your opposite hand during a dumbbell press.
- 3. Breathing** – A change in breathing pattern occurs, such as holding your breath.
- 4. Alignment** – Next, your body shifts alignment and posture as you reach failure.
- 5. Pain** - You start to feel painful sensation(s) telling you to stop or change direction.
- 6. Damage** - Something finally gives and you are injured.
- 7. Death** - The logical conclusion of pushing your body beyond it’s limits, is death.

You may have noticed this process occurs during your exercise practice. Everything may not always occur in this exact order, but in general it is pretty close, and all the elements of excessive effort are present.

We use a simple rule to know when to call it quits: “Stop before you slow down.” This is the easiest possible way to avoid excessive effort, and all of the negative outcomes that come with it.

Since by this point you’ve been using testing for a few days, you will probably have learned a few things about what tests well and what does not. Now you have another guideline: that you should stop your set before you reach excessive effort.

In doing this, you may notice a few things:

- ⊕ **You are able to do more total work because you stopped your sets sooner and were thus able to do more of them.**
- ⊕ **You feel like you have something left in the tank after your workout. If you are someone who likes to feel completely drained by your workout, I'd like you to consider the possibility that there is a better way.**
- ⊕ **Your testing, or range of motion, actually improves after every set. This is ideal, and why wouldn't it be? Shouldn't every set you do make you better?**
- ⊕ **You recover more quickly, often not feeling like you need any recovery at all, and are able to train more often.**

When you let go of the belief that results are dictated by exertion and that progress is linked to how hard you worked or how much you suffered during a training

session, your progress will go through the roof. Don't take my word for it, though — implement this in your own training and decide for yourself.

Your Experiment

Your instructions: Avoid excessive effort in your training by stopping before you slow down or before anything else changes.

Your question: “Can I make this easy?”

At first, it may seem like you're “not doing enough” when you are finished with a training session and don't feel exhausted. But give it a chance. Let the results speak for themselves. I would like you to note how you feel immediately after, and in the days following training sessions.