

# PEAK SPEAK- February 2007

## **Welcome to our newsletter!**

*In PEAK SPEAK you'll find general fitness info, workout ideas, nutrition tips, and news about our health club.*

*Feel free to forward email or printed copies of our newsletters to anyone you think might find the content interesting.*

*We'll keep past issues available on our web site.*

*If you have any questions about the content, or ideas for features, please see Joe or Pete.*

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## **Note to our readers:**

*Last month's edition of Peak Speak included an article titled "How to Avoid Injuries While Shoveling Snow". The day we published it (first week in January), the record-breaking temperature reached 72 degrees! Since we're bound to get some winter weather at some point (we think!), we suggest you take a look at the January issue, which is available on our web site and at the gym.*

## **In this edition:**

- **The Importance of Proper Form: Examples**
  - **The Biceps Curl**
  - **The Lat Pull-Down**
  
- **What is Fitness?**
  - **Is Your Workout Program Addressing All the Components of Fitness?**

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## *The Importance of Proper Form*

Weight training can be a tremendously valuable component of your exercise regimen. In addition to toning your body by adding lean muscle mass, proper weight training also helps strengthen your skeletal system and provides substantial cardiovascular benefit as well. HOWEVER, improper form can not only reduce the benefit to target muscle groups, but it can also lead to injury.

Unfortunately, much of the poor form we see is caused by two major factors:

- The lack of proper training in the use of weights, and
- The use of excessive weight which causes people to compensate by swinging the weight or otherwise “cheating”(\*) in the movement.

(\*) For any exercise, when you use your body weight and/or momentum rather than the targeted muscles to lift, pull or push the weight, it’s called “Cheating”.

*Remember, when you “cheat” during an exercise, you’re cheating yourself out of the benefit and potentially risking injury.*

### **So, what IS proper form?**

We’ll address some specific exercises below, but first, some basic guidelines:

- 1)Understand the exercise, and what muscle(s) are TARGETED.
- 2)Ensure that the target muscles are worked UNDER CONTROL through the entire range of motion.
- 3)Maintain balance and stability throughout the movement.
- 4)Focus on using the TARGETED muscles to move the weight. Do NOT swing the weights, use momentum or shift your body weight to move the weight. This is probably the most common mistake we see in all weight training movements.

Using these guidelines will help you ensure you’re using proper form.

### **REMEMBER:**

***Improper form reduces the benefit of the exercise to the target muscle groups, AND can lead to injury by creating imbalance and stress on unintended muscles.***

Let’s look at some basic exercises in which improper form is most common: the biceps curl and the lateral pull-down.

## *The Importance of Proper Form*

### The Biceps Curl

Virtually everyone who works out does some form of this exercise, and a startling percentage of those people are risking injury and minimizing benefit by using poor form.

#### **Keep in mind that the curl really consists of TWO movements:**

The Flexion of the arm at the elbow joint, which acts as a hinge AND the Extension of the arm (again at the elbow joint) back to its relaxed position.

#### A few examples of poor form:

- Swinging the weight by bending at the waist and/or arching the back.
- Jerky movements: that is, not moving the weight smoothly under control.
- “Half curls”, meaning the weight is lifted by flexing the arm, but then dropped rapidly back to starting position.
- Engaging other muscles by moving the elbows up or out during the movement

Let's use the FOUR guidelines above to illustrate proper form:

- 1)Understand the exercise and the muscles targeted.

As everyone knows, the biceps curl is meant to target the biceps (the muscles in the front of the upper arm). The function of these muscles is to flex the arm upward at the elbow joint, so naturally the objective of the biceps curl is to put resistance (stress) on these muscles as they flex the arm upward at that joint and then return the arm to its relaxed position. The elbow is therefore to be locked in position close to the body, where it can best be used as a hinge.

- 2)Ensure that the target muscles are worked under control through the entire range of motion.

The “range of motion” of the biceps is the contraction (flexion) caused by flexing the arm upward at the elbow joint when you raise the weight THROUGH the “unflexing” or extension of the arm at the elbow joint when you lower the weight. So, when performing a curl, the weight should therefore be raised AND lowered slowly and under control- NEVER jerked up or dropped down at the end of a rep.

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## *The Importance of Proper Form*

### Biceps Curl- Continued

3) Maintain balance and stability throughout the movement.

Feet should be approximately shoulder width apart, with knees slightly bent. Feet may be parallel or staggered, depending on personal preference. Back is kept straight and stable throughout the movement. Do NOT bend forward or backward at the waist.

4) Focus on using the targeted muscles to move the weight.

The muscles in the legs and core should only be used to provide stability and control. The whole purpose of this exercise is to work the biceps by flexing and “unflexing” the arm at the elbow “hinge”. That flexion and extension of the arms at the elbow should be the only movement. Again, swaying or bending at the waist is to be avoided. Using unrelated muscles to help with the weight is called “cheating”, and doing this for the sake of using more weight does not work the biceps as well as using less weight with strict form.

#### **Summary:**

Proper form in the biceps curl includes a stable base, a straight back, and elbows (“hinges”) locked in place at the sides. No swinging, no leaning, no jerking. Just a smooth, controlled movement in the upward (flexion) movement AND the downward (extension) movement.

### The Lat Pull Down

This movement is designed to target the latissimus dorsi (“lats”), the large muscles on either side of the back just below the shoulder blades. These muscles are used when the arms are engaged in pulling weight toward the body.

The exercise is performed on a cable/pulley system, and is started by sitting in a fixed position facing the weight machine, with a slight backward lean (10-15 degrees). The movement involves reaching up and pulling the bar down to the chest and then slowly returning it to the starting position.

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## *The Importance of Proper Form*

### The Lat Pull Down (continued)

**Like the curl, there are really TWO movements involved:**

The Flexion of the lats when the weight is pulled in to the chest, AND the Extension of the lats when the weight is returned to starting position.

A few examples of poor form:

- Pulling the weight down by reclining your body, thereby using your body weight to pull the weight to your chest.
- Allowing momentum lift you from the seat, again causing you to use your body weight to pull the weight down.
- Jerky movements: that is, not moving the weight smoothly under control.
- “Half reps”, meaning the weight is pulled in to the chest, but then allowed to return to starting position without applying slow, controlled resistance.

In most cases, these poor techniques are caused by the use of too much weight, which results in the lifter compensating by using body weight and/or momentum-in effect ruining the exercise. The basic rule is, if you need to use your body weight to move it, it's too heavy.

If you take a look at the guidelines defined above, you can easily determine the proper form and technique for this movement. Remember, it's meant to target the lats, so focus on using those muscles.

Proper lat pull-down form involves a stable posture (no reclining or swinging), a slight lean away from the machine (10-15 degrees), and a smooth controlled movement of the bar to AND from the chest.

**Remember:**

As with all weight training exercises, you will get much better results by using strict form with the appropriate weight than you will be adding weight and “cheating”.

***And, as always, if you have any questions about proper form for any exercise please see Pete or Joe.***

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## What is Fitness?

Experts generally define fitness as being composed of FIVE components:

1. Cardio Respiratory Endurance  
Generally recognized as the most important indicator of fitness, this is the ability of the heart, lungs and muscles to efficiently sustain moderately strenuous activity for extended periods of time.
2. Body Composition  
This is the measurement of the percentage of body weight that is made up of fat. The ideal range is approximately 12-20% for men and 18-30% for women, but a realistic target is dependent upon many factors. The real key to this fitness component is that as you add lean muscle tissue you raise your metabolism (and therefore burn more calories, even when resting!).
- 3) Muscular Strength  
The ability to exert and/or resist force.
- 4) Muscular Endurance  
The ability to repeat exertion/resistance movements over and over for an extended period.
- 5) Flexibility  
Often overlooked, this is the ability to move joints easily through their full range of motion. Muscles can become short and tight, thereby causing imbalance that triggers compensation that can lead to injuries. Increasing flexibility by lengthening muscles helps to maintain balance and stability, lessening stress on joints, muscles, tendons and ligaments.

*To improve and maintain overall fitness, your exercise program must address ALL FIVE of the Components of Fitness. Too many of us focus exclusively on one or two of these areas, which limits the overall health and fitness improvements that can come with a holistic, well-rounded program.*

***How well-rounded is YOUR fitness program?***