



Natural Bodybuilding Book Excerpt

10 Sets of 10

| How I Added Inches of Quad Mass
in Only Seven Weeks

by John Hansen • Photography by Michael Neveux

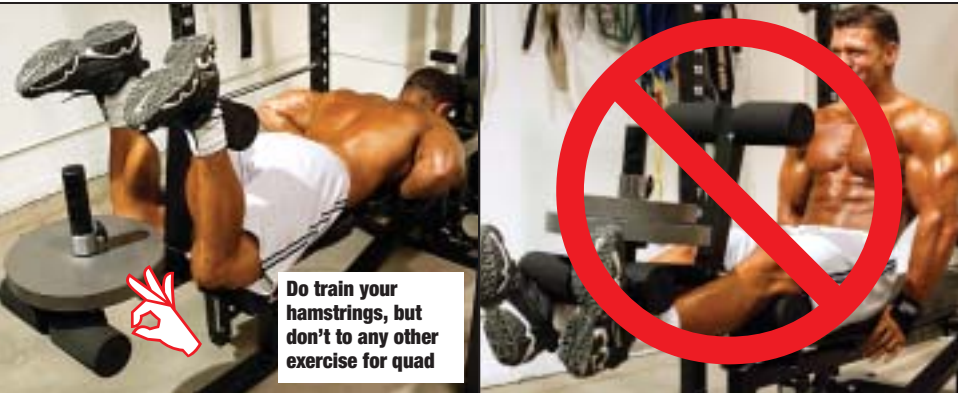
Training intensity and volume are believed to be inversely related. If the intensity of a workout goes up, training volume must simultaneously fall. As **Mike Mentzer** repeatedly preached in his sermons on training intensity, "You can train hard or you can train long, but you can't do both."

However, despite the prevailing attitude about intensity and duration, it is possible to make a workout more intense by adding more volume. More sets can equate to more work for a muscle. More work can be interpreted as greater intensity, even though each set is not taken to absolute failure.

One popular training method for increasing intensity by adding volume is called **10 sets of 10**. You use one exercise (preferably a heavy, basic exercise such as squats, bench presses, etc.) and perform **10 sets with 10** repetitions in each set.

Obviously, the volume of the rest of the workout for the bodypart must be cut down, or overtraining will result. If you normally do four or five sets of squats and decide to double that amount, reduce—or eliminate—the number of sets for the rest of your leg workout to adjust for the extra workload.

10 Sets of 10



Do train your hamstrings, but don't to any other exercise for quad

Model: Jonathan Lawson

The intensity of the workout will come from the total workload imposed on the muscles and not from the intensity of each set. If each set were taken to failure, it would be impossible to perform all 10 sets without reducing the resistance or the number of reps. Each set must be worked hard but within limits. Total failure is not necessary and will, in fact, prevent you from finishing the workout.

If you're going to use the 10-sets-of-10 training method, here are some guidelines. First, choose the right weight. The poundage should be moderately heavy but not so heavy that you will reach failure before doing all 10 sets. Since you will be performing **10 sets of 10** repetitions, a weight that barely allows you to do 10 reps is obviously going to be too heavy. You'd never be able to complete more than two or three sets before the reps began to go down or the muscles completely failed.

Since there is no exact formula for determining the correct weight, you'll just have to use your best judgment. Choose a weight with which it would be relatively easy to perform 10 repetitions. The weight shouldn't be extremely light but one that you can easily handle and still feel the muscles working. If, for example, you normally use 315 pounds for 10 reps on squats, you may want to reduce the weight to 275 pounds when attempting to do **10 sets of 10**. Even that may be too heavy. You won't really know for sure until you try.

It should be very difficult to complete all 10 sets. If performed correctly, the last five sets should be progressively more difficult. If you can do all 10 sets without really

struggling on the last few, the weight is too light, and you need to go heavier.

All 10 sets should be done without a spotter. Your goal is to completely exhaust a muscle group by bombing it with both high sets and high reps. The high-volume program will shock the muscles into responding, and it is a great technique for a stubborn bodypart.

My Experience With the 10 Sets Program

I used a program similar to the **10-sets-of-10** routine for my legs. In 1996 I was squatting heavy in an attempt to build up the size of my thighs. Beginning in January, I pushed myself at every workout to use heavier weights on both leg presses and squats. By April of that year my knees started to rebel against the abuse I was putting them through each week.

My quadriceps tendons were becoming progressively inflamed from all the heavy training. At first my knees would ache for two to three days. After another month or two of heavy training, my quadriceps tendon would be inflamed for five days following an intense workout. It got to the point where they would just start to feel good when it was time to work them again. I knew I needed to cut back on the intensity because my knees were getting worse each week; however, I didn't want to stop training my legs heavy because I still wanted to build more size.

An article in a bodybuilding magazine explained the 10-sets routine. The author stated that you do only one exercise per bodypart but 10 sets for that exercise. He

didn't suggest doing 10 reps for each set. Instead, he outlined a more progressive program in which the resistance would be increased each week.

My training partner and I decided to give the routine a try. My knees couldn't stand the prospect of going any heavier anyway, so I thought I would just increase the total workload by adding volume instead of poundage. We decided to use squats as the basic movement for our **10-sets routine**.

We began each leg workout by riding a stationary exercise bike for six minutes to warm up. After the initial warmup my partner and I did two sets on the leg press for 12 to 15 reps. The leg press uses many of the same muscle groups as the squat does, so it's a perfect beginning exercise before moving on to the target exercise.

When we finally began squatting, we did a few warmup sets to get our bodies accustomed to the movement. We used 135 pounds for 12 reps for our first set. On our second set we squatted with 225 pounds for 10 reps. For our final warmup set

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Model: John Hansen

You can use the 10 x 10 routine for other bodyparts too.

Now we were ready to begin the real workout.

We decided that 365 pounds was going to be the weight we would use on our first week of the program. Since we were required to do 10 sets of five repetitions on our first workout, we picked a weight that we could do 10 reps with on the squat and used it for 10 sets of five reps.

Here is the plan we put together for our cycle of 10 sets of squats:

Week 1

365 pounds for 5 reps for 10 sets

Week 2

385 pounds for 4 reps for 10 sets

Week 3

405 pounds for 3 reps for 10 sets

Week 4

385 pounds for 5 reps for 10 sets

Week 5

405 pounds for 4 reps for 10 sets

Week 6

425 pounds for 3 reps for 10 sets

Week 7

405 pounds for 6 reps for 10 sets

That routine was deceptively brutal. When we attempted 365 pounds for 10 sets of five reps on our first week, it seemed at first to be too easy. After all, we were accustomed to using well over 400 pounds during our standard workouts. The 365 pounds was still a warmup weight for us. After several

sets of squats I began to think I'd made a mistake estimating how much weight to use—until we got to the sixth set. The last four or five sets were very tough, as the total workload was beginning to take its toll.

We soon discovered that doing 10 sets of squats with a heavy weight (even if the reps were limited) was extremely hard. It became as much a mental workout as a physical one. After all, the prospect of getting under a heavy barbell 10 consecutive times would break the will of any normal person.

It helped to have a training partner who was going through the same torture I was. Another mental technique I used to make the workout easier to overcome was to bring a piece of paper and a pen with me to the squat rack. Every time my partner and I completed a set, I would draw a line on the piece of paper. That helped me keep track of how many sets I had left. I soon learned to take each set one at a time. Thinking about how tough set number eight was going to be when I was only on the third set was not helpful in getting through this self-imposed torture.

The results were well worth the hard work. I took measurements of my legs before and after starting the 10-sets program to accurately record the results. I was overjoyed to find out that, at the end of the seven-week program, my legs had grown almost two inches. That's an amazing gain, especially in less than two months. So much for the argument that the only way to grow is through more intensity with less volume.

The reason this routine works is that intensity is gradually increased through a progressive workload. The way to determine the total workload lifted in a session is to multiply the weight used by the number of sets performed and multiply that by the number of reps

performed. The formula looks like this:

$$\text{Resistance} \times \text{Sets} \times \text{Reps} = \text{Total Workload}$$

Using the formula for the 10-sets program that I used for my legs, you can see that the workload was gradually increased over the seven-week program. As with the cycling principle, the workload was increased overall but not every week. Instead, the workload was cycled to allow for recuperation so I'd have greater gains at the end of the cycle.

Week 1

365 x 5 reps x 10 sets = 18,250

Week 2

385 x 4 reps x 10 sets = 15,400

Week 3

405 x 3 reps x 10 sets = 12,150

Week 4

385 x 5 reps x 10 sets = 19,250

Week 5

405 x 4 reps x 10 sets = 16,200

Week 6

425 x 3 reps x 10 sets = 12,750

Week 7

405 x 6 reps x 10 sets = 24,300

I have found that using a high-volume approach like this is great for shocking muscles that will not respond to traditional means of training. The leg routine was extremely intense and couldn't be followed continually without risking injury or burn-out. At most this type of high-volume shock program should be used two or three times per year, with several months between programs.

Editor's note:

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