

X FILES

Muscle-Building Excerpts From IRON MAN's Online E-zine

by Steve Holman and Jonathan Lawson

It's one of **IRON MAN's** most popular features, and it's not even published in the magazine. It's the weekly **IM e-zine** that's delivered directly to your e-mail box free—once you sign up (it's easy and there's absolutely no charge; see the editor's note at the end of this feature). Each issue offers insightful commentary, and the authors often dissect new research or analyze how the champs train. They explain

exactly how to use the information to make your hardcore muscle-building workouts more efficient—and effective—than ever. In fact, that's the entire purpose of the online newsletter—to get you bigger faster with quick blasts of useful info.

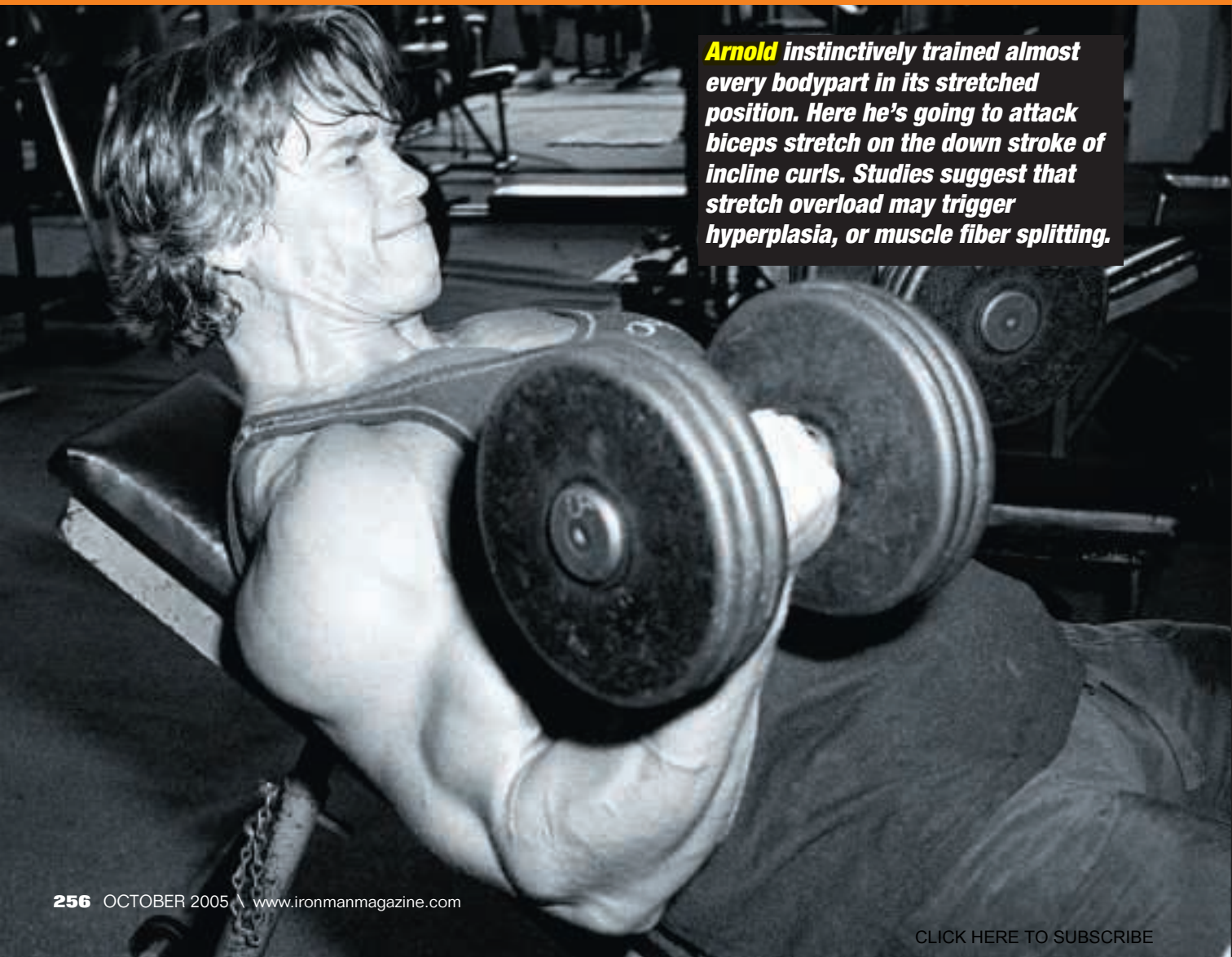
To find out what it's all about, check out the excerpt below. If you like it and you want more, you'll find past issues at www.X-Rep.com.

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—the Editors

Arnold and X Reps

Reading about the workouts **Arnold** did back in the '60s and '70s is inspiring and very enlightening



Arnold instinctively trained almost every bodypart in its stretched position. Here he's going to attack biceps stretch on the down stroke of incline curls. Studies suggest that stretch overload may trigger hyperplasia, or muscle fiber splitting.

from a mass-building standpoint. For example, who knew **Arnold** used **X Reps**? Well, not **X Reps** as we've defined them—power partials on a compound exercise at the end of a set—but he often did end-of-set partials on isolation movements. He called them burns, usually doing them at the top of, say, preacher curls, where he could flex and feel the target muscle contracting after full-range reps.

While top-position **X Reps** on isolation movements do have their place (as we discuss in *The Ultimate Mass Workout* e-book), it may not be the best position for spurring the most muscle gain. Why? The contracted position of most isolation exercises is the weakest point on the stroke—for example, the top of a leg extension. For best anabolic reactions you want to overload the strongest point—where the muscle can produce the most force. The top of a leg extension is where the muscle produces the least force, which is why you can only get the weight halfway up on your last rep—the weakest part of the stroke flakes out first.

So why is the contracted position the weakest point? According to scientists, muscle fibers bunch up at the fully flexed point and have a difficult time functioning properly, or generating power. The spot at which fibers can function best and generate the most power is usually near the turnaround, where you move from the negative phase of the rep to the positive. That's the point at which the target muscle is semistretched and power packed. On preachers it's near the bottom of the stroke, not the top.

Not to chastise **Arnold**. He did what worked for him, and even we follow his lead and use **X Reps** in the weakest position for a unique anabolic stress on some exercises, like the top of a concentration curl. But while **Arnold** did favor contraction, we believe that it was his unshakable emphasis on the target muscle's stretch and semistretched positions that was the real key to what set his physique apart from other bodybuilders of his era—and why his size and symmetry in his prime are impressive even by today's outlandish standards. His



Biceps curls with a slight cheat hit the biceps' max-force point, right below the middle of the stroke. That sweet spot is where maximum fiber activation occurs.

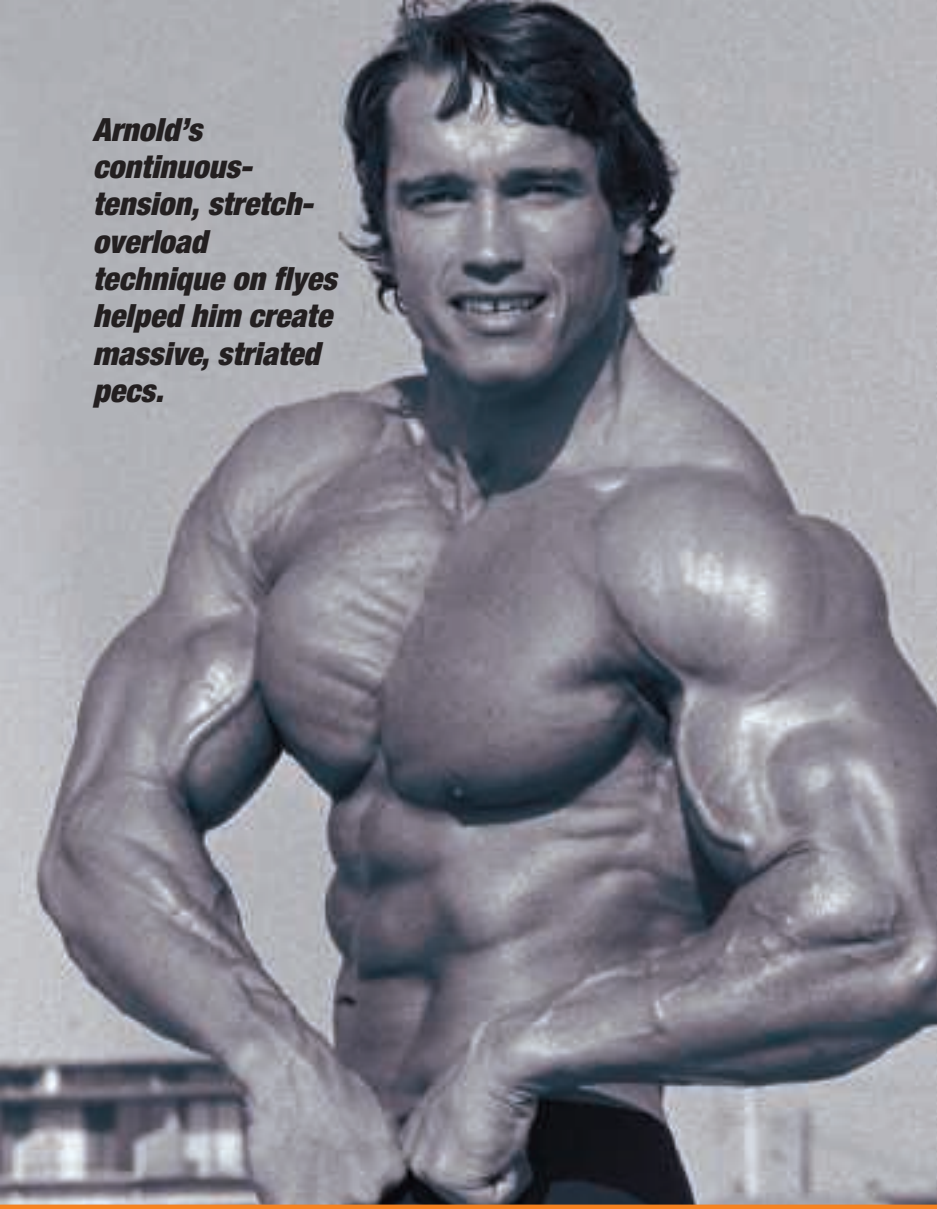
physique was ahead of its time, and his attention to stretch-position overload had a lot to do with it.

Take his delt routine, for example. One of **Arnold's** favorite shoulder exercises was incline one-arm lateral raises. He'd sit sideways on a low incline bench, lean against it with his shoulder and do laterals with his outside arm. That's a unique movement because the working arm moves across the front of the torso through the bottom of the stroke, which creates delt

stretch, something most bodybuilders don't get (how often do you see anyone doing that exercise?). In fact, it stretches the rear and medial heads to a great degree. You can really feel the muscle fibers in those two segments twitching—and if you're lean, you can see it happening.

Did **Arnold** realize that incline one-arm laterals overload the side-delt head near its fully stretched position, providing tremendous mass stimulation? Maybe. His use

Arnold's continuous-tension, stretch-overload technique on flyes helped him create massive, striated pecs.



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of that exercise—and cable laterals, another stretch-position delt move—sure made it look as if he did. Perhaps he had an inkling that his arm had to move across his torso for the medial-delt head to lengthen for max-force production. Or maybe he just did the delt exercises that felt right to him. Either way, the result was that overloading the stretch position helped him craft that aircraft carrier look for which he was famous.

How about his biceps? He had outrageous peaks, but was it because of his attention to peak contraction? Maybe, to a degree, but keep in mind that he almost always used incline curls, which train the biceps in their full-stretch position, and he also sang the praises of cheat barbell curls.

Cheat curls overload the semistretched position of your

biceps, the point where your arms are slightly bent and in front of your torso. That's the X-treme power-generation point. Think about it: Because he was able to use a heavier weight—more than he could use for strict reps—he had to lean back and heave the weight. That explosive action with a slight backward lean creates the most force right when the arms are beginning to bend—just above the straight-arm position. So the most overload on cheat curls occurs smack at the biceps' semistretched position, with less resistance through the rest of the stroke.

Now, we're not saying that cheat curls are safe. **Arnold's** use of them was another case of a genetically superior bodybuilder using explosive reps to accelerate growth; however, cheat curls do produce the desired result—overload of the

semistretched position. A better, safer solution is to do preacher curls, with **X Reps** at the end of the set near the bottom of the range. Yes, near the bottom. We know that sounds strange, but science verifies: That's where you can generate the most force and, therefore, the most size stimulation. It's an incredibly effective biceps builder if you do the **X Reps** correctly and can grind through the burn. (If you want to do top-position **X Reps** to flex the biceps—the way **Arnold** did—add them to a set *after* the one that includes bottom-range **X Reps**. It's best to max out the strongest position early so there's less fatigue and maximum power output.)

Another example of **Arnold's** using stretch overload and **X Reps** is his chest workout. One of his favorite pec movements was dumbbell flyes, but he had a certain way of doing them—only moving through the bottom third of the stroke. He stopped the dumbbells when they were about three feet apart on every rep. Why? He said the short stroke kept tension on his pecs, which is true, but it also placed the most overload on his pecs when they were elongated, or stretched. Those partial flyes were really just slightly exaggerated **X Reps** on a stretch-position pec exercise—and no doubt one of the big reasons **Arnold's** pecs were so full and striated.

Arnold instinctively knew to train every muscle near the stretch position for the fullest, most complete development possible. If you're looking for the fastest mass gains imaginable, don't neglect that key position. In fact, we've found that overloading it with **X Reps** can make each set two to four times more effective at building mass so you don't waste precious recovery time—and reserves—doing set after inefficient set. **X Reps** can cut your workout time significantly while increasing your size and strength.

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