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Publisher's Letter

by John Balik

Separating the Men From the Boys

No pain, no gain. That's the bodybuilding mantra because the key factor in making a workout productive is intensity, and intensity causes pain. Being able to tolerate the pain is what separates the men from the boys and a good workout from a great one.

"No pain no gain" is generally misinterpreted by the public in a negative context—as it relates to injury. Anyone who has trained for a while has probably experienced that twinge that says, "Stop now!" When it happens to you, never try to train through or around it; simply ice it ASAP. "Good" pain that stimulates growth is different. Good pain is there to tell us we are in the growth zone. Without the microdamage from an intense workout, there would be no gain. The recovery stage from the damage is where growth actually occurs, so that fleeting pain is a good measure of how far you are into the growth zone.

Since the mind controls the body, the ability to tolerate pain is a psychological process. In a very real sense the intense workout not only teaches your muscle to be stronger but also strengthens your will. When your biceps burn so fiercely that it feels as if they're shouting at you to stop, but you go on, you feel a sense of control that can be earned in no other way. The workout has the potential to strengthen more than your muscles. In modern life, where it's usually not necessary to be physically dominating, mental strength is much more useful.

The interesting thing is how having more strength and muscle makes you feel—how you see yourself. Everyone experiences daily (or even hourly!) stresses, and how you cope with them is a function of your mental and physical strength. The workout refills a reservoir of resilience: the ability to take the inevitable hits—like a great boxer—but then shake off the damage and keep fighting. The workout has the potential to enhance your life in general. I consider my workout a 45-minute vacation from stress. It's immeasurably more effective at combating stress than any other way I could use the time. The workout is true re-creation.

The workout is the foundation for growth, but nothing can be built to its highest quality if you don't have the right materials. Discussing the nutritional elements that are fundamental to recovery is outside of the scope of this editorial. For an in-depth analysis of supplement support that's especially relevant for older trainees, see Steve Holman's "MidLife-Muscle Supplement Guide" on page 270. For more insight into stress, see Jerry Brainum's "Workout Stress Test" on page 210. **IM**



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