

Stretching Your Limits

By Michael Lipowski, CFP

No, I'm not talking about loosening up your hamstrings and quads after a 3 mile jog, or moving deep into the bottom range-of-motion when performing chest flyes. I'm talking about stretching the limits of your PERCEIVED capabilities. I highlight "perceived" because for all of us, "perception is reality". Whether you believe you can or you can't you're right!!!

Of course in the gym there are some physical limitations to the things we can do—such as how much weight we can squat or how low we can get our body fat without risking our health—but these are not the type of limits I am talking to you about. When I tell you that you need to stretch yourself, I mean this figuratively and from a psychological perspective (though it could mean having to push yourself physically).

Are you convinced that you are doing *everything* you could possibly do to develop and improve upon your physique? If so then it is time to reverse your thinking because the truth is, *you can always do more*. If you look hard enough I am certain you can pinpoint one or two aspects of your training and/or nutrition that you can improve upon. After singling these things out you then must think about how to make those improvements—what do you need to change or do differently?

If you are stuck in rut and your training is going nowhere and your diet is not allowing you to lose anymore fat or build anymore muscle then it is time for you to stretch yourself. Maybe you need to train a little harder, diet a little harder, but what you can not do is continue plodding along at your current rate and working at the same level. Things will need to get harder if they are going to get better.

If you accept your current condition for what it is and your effort for "as good as it's gonna get" then guess what? You're not going to just stay where you are, you are going to REGRESS! Because if you are not pushing forward then you are moving backwards, there is no such thing as maintaining.

Think about it!

As you continue on the same old tired exercise routine and diet plan simply because, "you can handle it", you are simultaneously aging with each day, week, month and year that passes. You are constantly moving further and further away from the body that once was. Just to "maintain" that condition you need to take your effort up another

notch. If you want to improve on that condition you have to take your effort up another, two or three notches!!!

But this does not mean that you go out tomorrow and push yourself to a level far beyond what you can tolerate for more than a day. Much like eating a candy bar, you will initially experience a surge of energy that will quickly be followed by a crash that will take you well below where you were to begin with. The premise behind stretching is to take the intensity of your workouts up, to run just a little farther or harder, to pay closer attention to what you are eating, how much you are consuming and to cut out the unnecessary snacking and to do just a little bit more today than you did yesterday, and to do it over time. Consistency is key, but what you are doing consistently is even more important. People consistently show up at the gym but are they consistently getting results? Those that do are constantly stretching themselves. Not just by trying to lift heavier weight but by trying to find ways to make the workouts more productive and efficient. Those that don't are either following the same tired routine, performing the same tired exercises or are not stretching themselves in enough areas of their training or nutrition.

So when you tell yourself that you can not be any more strict with your diet, that you can't push another rep out (when physically you can!), that you can't do another minute of cardio, that you can't—you can't—you can't. ...YOU CAN'T! And from all this YOU WON'T improve—or for that matter maintain—your physique and current level of health and fitness. That is what's wonderful about our sport of bodybuilding, or any attempt at physique development. You wear your results. You are a product, not of how hard you *say* you are working or how hard you *think* you are working, you are a product of what you do and how hard and intelligently you do it.

Think you train hard, you can always train harder. Think you eat well, you can always eat better. Think you know what you are doing, you can always learn more. The only thing you really ever need to know is whether or not you are constantly stretching your limits.