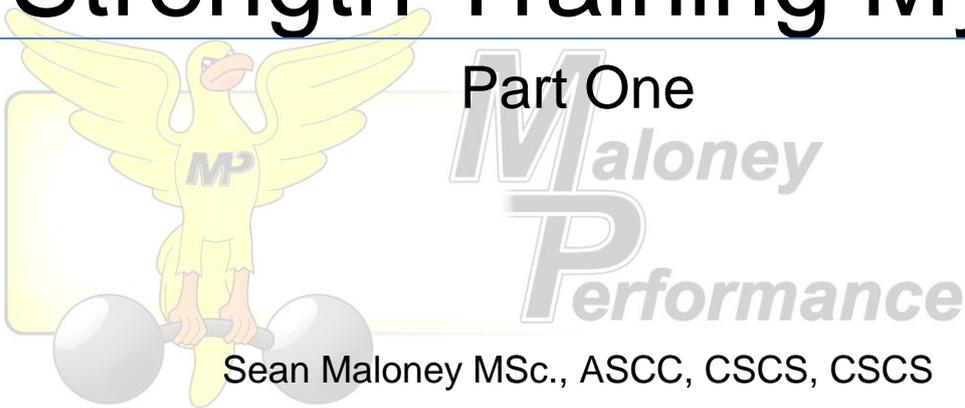




Strength Training Myths

Part One



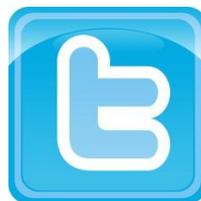
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Strength Training Myths

Too many individuals avoid strength training because of the myths associated with lifting weights. These mistaken ideas are not just passed from person to person, but are also perpetuated by what are thought to be reliable sources of information such as professional health care practitioners, the mainstream media and even some fitness 'professionals'. This two-part article will seek to challenge some of the misconceptions that stand of the way of people performing strength training.

Myth 1: I don't need to strength train

Hopefully last month's article highlighted why it's crucial for runners in particular, but there are so many general health benefits that are also associated with strength training. Here is just a selection:

- Improve balance and coordination
- Boost energy levels and mood
- Improve hormonal balance
- Improve insulin sensitivity
- Protect bone health and muscle mass
- Increase resting metabolism

Ignoring strength training is ignoring your health, please don't make that mistake.

Myth 2: Strength training makes you big and bulky

Whilst this is the number one reason why many females fear picking up weights, the fact is that these concerns lack any substance whatsoever. Jess Ennis, Katherine Grainger, Victoria Pendleton; these athletes all lift heavy weights at least twice a week and have avoided turning into Arnold Schwarzenegger. Females can't naturally produce the quantity of the muscle building hormones that are required to 'bulk-up'.

Irrespective of gender, it's actually pretty difficult to put on muscle mass. There are three key factors you have to consider:

- Training

Training for muscle generally requires using moderate weights, moderate to high repetitions (8-20 reps) and short rest periods (<2mins). This helps elevate muscle building hormones and damages the muscle fibres as much as possible. Using heavy weights, low repetitions (≤ 6 reps) and longer rest intervals (2-5mins) will therefore minimise the risk of muscle gain.

- Eating

Building muscle requires an awful lot of energy and therefore an awful lot of calories. Reaching the level of calorific excess that would be required to build muscle mass is pretty hard to do by accident, stick to standard guidelines for endurance runners and you'll not have to worry.

- Recovery

Because of the energy required to build muscle it's also important to minimise the energy that you expend outside of the gym. It is for this reason that any athlete running more than twice a week will find it nigh-on impossible to gain muscle mass.

Myth 3: No pain, no gain

A session should not be judged by how sore it makes you; it gives absolutely no indication of its effectiveness. Training is to be judged on the quality of the work performed and whether a progressive overload (we'll talk about this in a minute) has been achieved. Soreness would only really be expected after the following circumstances:

- Performing unfamiliar exercises, particularly those that emphasise the eccentric component
- Pronounced increases in the load or volume or training

Myth 4: Use light weights and more repetitions for shape and tone

Often dubbed 'the pink dumbbell effect' given its presence in many a female lifestyle magazine, this couldn't be much further from the truth. Light weights serve no functional purpose and infer none of the health or performance benefits associated with actual 'strength' training. Here are some general guidelines to follow:

- For strength gains - 1-6 reps
- For structural gains - 5-12 reps

This is everything you'll need for a successful programme.

Myth 5: I can get strong by doing Pilates

Don't get me wrong, I like Pilates a lot and use its concepts with many of my athletes, however, it is not a valid modality for strength training. Firstly, to get stronger we must progressively overload the body by gradually increasing the intensity of an exercise. Once you master a bodyweight exercise there isn't really anywhere to go and you'll quickly observe a 'ceiling effect'. Secondly, whilst Pilates is good way of teaching correct breathing and hip/torso movement control, it doesn't provide an effective stimulus for anything else. Put simply, you can't use enough muscle during the exercises for them to be an effective stimulus.

Whilst Pilates can have an important role in preventing and rehabilitating certain types of injury in certain individuals, its input into the holistic conditioning programme is small. Spending anything more than 5 minutes a few times a week doing these types of activities is wholly unnecessary.

Summary

Strength training should form an integral component of any individual's training regime given the significant benefits to health and performance. The goal of strength training is to progressively overload the body by gradually increasing resistance, not to make you as sore as possible. This should be achieved by performing multi-joint free-weight exercises (more on this in part-two) in the ≤ 6 repetition range. Fears about 'bulking-up' are unfounded, particularly in this repetition range.