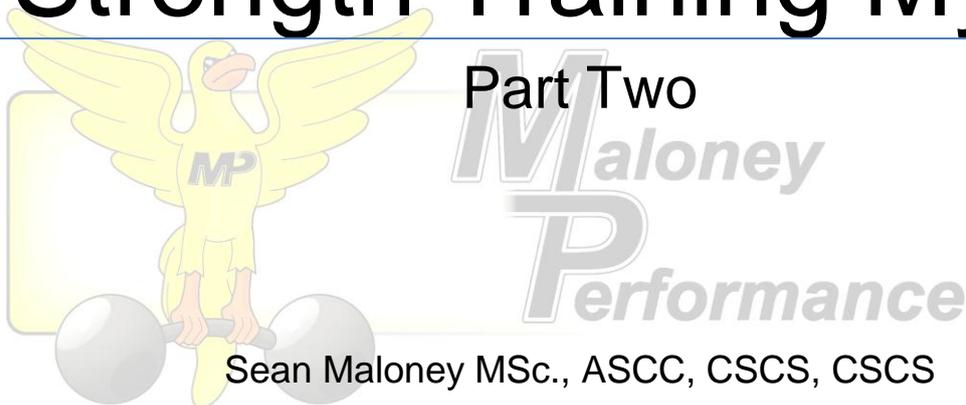




# Strength Training Myths

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Part Two



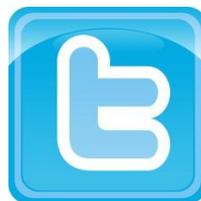
Sean Maloney MSc., ASCC, CSCS, CSCS

[Maloney Performance](#)

[sean@maloneyperformance.com](mailto:sean@maloneyperformance.com)



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# Strength Training Myths

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In the first part of this series we outlined that 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 compound exercises in the  $\leq 6$  repetition range. Fears about 'bulking-up' are unfounded, particularly in this repetition range.

## Myth 6: Machines are as good as free weights

We live in a three dimensional world, putting relativity aside, and our training should reflect this. Resistance machines force you to work in a fixed plane of motion and therefore eliminate the need to stabilise the weight. A solely machine-based training programme feeds muscle imbalances by making the prime movers stronger but not the stabilisers. As we are all too aware, exacerbating muscle imbalances increases the risk of injury.

Besides being a safer long-term option, free weights also offer the following benefits over machines:

- Have a greater transfer to running performance
- Recruit more muscle fibres
- Improve posture
- Promote superior and more functional increases in bone density
- Promote superior benefits to hormonal balance

Free-weight exercises will longer to learn than machine exercises, but are well worth the investment.

## Myth 7: Strength training makes you inflexible

Nope, in fact the opposite is true. Strength training performed through a full range of motion will increase flexibility and, perhaps surprisingly, has been shown to be superior to traditional static stretching methods. Flexibility is often limited by the brain

perceiving that a muscle is not strong enough to cope with a certain level of stretch. By getting the muscle strong throughout a full range of motion we can condition the body to know that it is able to cope with increasing levels of stretch.

Case studies from the Olympic Games have shown that Olympic weightlifters, surely the athletes who spend the most amount of time training with weights, are trumped only by gymnasts in the flexibility stakes. Know that weights make you more flexible if you use them correctly.

## Myth 8: You must train to failure

'No pain, no gain' - I'm sure we've all heard the expression. You need to push your body to the limit every single session and work until you break. Sadly, training to failure regularly is taxing on the nervous system and will be counterproductive in the long run. Instead of simply pounding yourself in the gym, be sure to focus on the following:

- Execute every repetition with maximal intensity and focus
- Focus on the quality, not quantity of repetitions
- Keep 1-2 reps 'in the bank' on each set
- Keep sessions brief - 45-60 minutes is more than ample

A good strength session should see you leaving the gym feeling better than when you arrived.

## Myth 9: Strength training is dangerous

I guess this all depends of your definition of dangerous. What is clear, however, is that weight training is safer than running. Injury rates associated with recreational weight training average between 1-3 injuries per 1000 hours of participation. It is suggested that half of these gym-related injuries can be categorised as overuse and may therefore be prevented given proper programming. Instances of injury associated with running fall in the range of 3-12 per 1000 hours depending on the research study you read.

So, why should running be more dangerous than strength training? The answer lies in the forces acting on the body. For arguments sake, let's say you average 1000 strides per mile. Now let's say that you create a ground reaction force equivalent to twice your bodyweight every time you hit the ground. Over a 5 mile run you'd put forces that equate to 10,000 times your own bodyweight through your body. If you've accumulated anything close to 1% of that during a strength training session you're definitely doing it wrong!

## Myth 10: Strength training makes you slow

Power is the ability to express force quickly - we can define this as force x velocity. What strength training seeks to accomplish is to increase the total amount of force that you can produce and make the force half of this equation as big as possible. Strength training therefore gives you the potential to get faster and more powerful, regardless of your strength training background. In addition, athletes that are inexperienced with appropriate strength training, this would include the vast majority of recreational and competitive runners, will also experience improvements in the velocity side of the equation due to beneficial adaptations in the nervous system. A double whammy for the improvement of your running speed.

## Summary

Strength training is one of the safest forms of recreational exercise and, when performed correctly, will help you become quicker and more flexible. Training with free weights is more effective than training with machines and runners would be advised to avoid training to failure.