

A man in a black cap and dark clothing is performing a squat in a gym. He is holding a barbell with a large black weight plate that has 'GETRXP' and '25' written on it. The background is a dark gym setting with a green artificial turf floor.

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO LEG MUSCLE DEVELOPMENT

MAPS FITNESS PRODUCTS



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A big muscular upper body is FAR more of a common sight than big strong muscular legs...this is hardly a debate. In fact it's unfortunately common to see men with big and strong upper bodies WITH skinny and weak legs.

Why is this? It may be because training the legs is damn hard...a heavy set of squats will tax your system, give you the wobbles and cause you to sweat profusely far faster and more consistently than almost any other exercise. Even seemingly easy leg exercises like leg extensions hurt more and are more feared than many upper body exercises.

It also may be because legs are not a "show" muscle. When someone says to you "show me your muscle" it's the bicep you display. When someone says, "how strong are you" we instinctively give him or her our bench press numbers. This is hilarious when you consider the fact that having a strong squat tells you a LOT more about someone's strength than their bench press numbers do. Legs are also easily covered and hidden with long pants...out of sight out of mind.

We also incorrectly think the opposite sex isn't attracted and that they don't care about leg development. Nothing could be further from the truth!! Ask any woman and they will tell you that its very UNATTRACTIVE when a man

has a developed upper body with an undeveloped lower body. Women also rank the glutes as one of the muscles they are most attracted to in a man.

Legs can also be incredibly stubborn when it comes to muscle development. Especially for taller lifters. Although genetics play a role in this in my experience it has MORE to do with bad exercise programming, poor ranges of motion and bad exercise selection.

If you want a balanced attractive physique and you want real world manly STRENGTH and size in your legs this article is for you. If you do workout your legs consistently and are frustrated with your lack of progress this article is also for you. Below I will list the top 3 factors that you need to consider with your leg training and I will explain how NOT paying attention to these 3 factors is killing your leg development progress.

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FACTOR ONE

POOR RANGE OF MOTION - BECOME MORE MOBILE

The lower body is extremely dynamic and under healthy circumstances can perform a wide range of movements. From sitting in a squat to hinging at the hips to rotating the legs the lower body in humans EVOLVED for lots of movement with large ranges of motion.

Stop reading this article and try sitting in a perfect squat. Literally sit down at the bottom. Are your heels elevated? Do your feet pronate (turn in)? Does your tail bone tuck under you? If you are saying yes to any of these statements you don't have the full capacity of mobility that your body can provide. This HURTS your progress in the gym tremendously.

Studies are quite conclusive when it comes to range of motion and muscle growth. The greater the range of motion within a rep (within safe mobility of the individual and within reason) the more muscle fibers are activated and the more muscle you build. Stopping reps short or training with reps that are not within your full potential rob you of muscle growth. A half squat or a half lunge won't build nearly as much muscle as full reps will and bodybuilder coaches and experienced trainers know this through experience.

"So basically just go down as low as I can in all my leg exercises right?" WRONG. Pushing yourself to go beyond where you possess good control is a recipe for disaster. You have mastery of the ranges of motion that you always train in and any outside ranges become unstable. So what do you do? WORK ON FUNCTIONAL MOBILITY.

On your off days in between leg workouts focus on flexibility and even more importantly focus on control within new ranges of flexibility. Doing this will give you the capacity to train with fuller reps and will contribute to a muscle building signal that is louder and more intense for the body.

Training to get fuller ranges of motion with control can be broken down into three parts...get a larger passive range of motion, connect to that new range of motion and then work with that new range of motion through movement. I will use the hamstrings as an example to demonstrate this technique. Do this properly and you will gain new and controlled ranges of motion in as little as one week.

Start with a basic hamstring stretch on the ground. Sit with your legs together straight out in front of you and reach for your feet. Once you have hit an intense but comfortable limit hold that position for 30-60 seconds. In that short period of time it is likely that you TEMPORARILY gained a couple inches in passive range of motion. This is because the static stretch told the body to "relax" its protect signal to the hamstrings which then allowed them to stretch a bit more.

Now that you have a new range of motion you need to "connect" to it, otherwise it's worthless to you. Get back in that same stretch and this time while you hold the stretch flex your hamstrings for 3 seconds and then flex your quads for 3 seconds. Repeat this process for 1 minute. Now you have told the body that it's "safe" to connect and activate your muscles in that new range of motion.

Finally, you want to incorporate that new and connected range of motion to actual movement. Stand up tall and reach down for your toes...once the hamstrings stretch come back up to a tall position and repeat. Do 10-25 reps of these and do them slow and controlled.

Do this for all of the tight muscles in your lower body that may be preventing you from doing full range of motion in your exercises and in a short time you will find yourself going deeper with more control with your exercises which will result in faster muscle development.

FACTOR TWO

NOT TRAINING FREQUENTLY ENOUGH

Somewhere along the lines of muscle building it became common knowledge that it was ideal to hammer a muscle group once a week so that it could “rest, recover and grow” for a whole week before you hit it again. There is some truth to this...when you hit a muscle you do create damage and this damage is one of the major signals that tells the body to adapt by getting stronger and bigger. HOWEVER, there is a major flaw in this method...if you think that recovery from damage equals muscle growth you would be terribly mistaken. How many times have you gotten your legs crippling sore with a crazy leg workout yet your legs stubbornly still didn't respond? Soreness is an indicator of damage, which shows you that you did in fact damage your leg muscles yet you didn't build more muscle. What gives?

RECOVERY DOES NOT EQUAL ADAPTATION. This is key. What you are after is adaptation...you want your body to try to

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ADAPT to your training by improving. This is what adaptation is. Recovery on the other hand is simply healing...big difference. Breaking muscle down and recovering without adaptation is where you are likely at now and it's a trap. In fact it's so common I coined the term “muscle breakdown/recovery trap.”

Although recovery and adaptation can and do occur many times simultaneously (which is why people get them confused) they aren't the same thing.

Studies show that the actual muscle building adaptation process starts to happen right after your workout and it PEAKS at 48-72 hours after exercise only to decline sharply right after. In fact in as little as 4 days that muscle building signal is gone EVEN IF YOU ARE STILL SORE. How do we remedy this? By increasing the FREQUENCY of training. I know what you are thinking...“I can barely muster the energy to hammer my legs with 15 sets of exercises once a week, how can I possibly do this again in a couple days?” YOU WON'T. I

said increase frequency NOT your total volume. We can't just hammer the legs with triple the volume as before. You are limited by your recovery ability and you would find yourself burnt out within a couple weeks.

The way to increase frequency is to simply DIVIDE your total volume by three and to triple the frequency of training. In other words instead of doing 15 sets of leg exercises once a week do 5 sets of leg exercises three days a week. Same total volume with triple the frequency which means you can get that adaptation signal to peak right before it drops keeping your legs in the muscle building zone all week long. If your skeptical don't take my word for it...many studies have been done on this exact thing and all of them show that more frequency with the same volume is vastly superior.

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FACTOR THREE

NOT DOING THE BEST EXERCISES

“The squat is the king of all exercises.” This is a common statement because it's true (for most people). NO EXERCISE will pack on total muscle on your legs like good old-fashioned barbell squats. This exercise is heralded by strength coaches, natural bodybuilders and experienced trainers alike. Get good at squatting and you will inevitably build lots of muscle on your legs.

Squatting is a fundamental human movement...right up there with walking and throwing. It's something we evolved to be able to do. The reason so many people in western societies have trouble squatting is because NO ONE SQUATS anymore. Anthropologists agree that humans likely used the squat to rest, poop, work and give birth. It's a fundamental movement which means the body can get really good at it and has a capacity to respond well to it. Machine exercises don't even come close. If you aren't squatting you are missing out big time when it comes to lower body development.

There are other lower body exercises that are right up there with squats. The Bulgarian split squat, lunges, front squats, deadlifts, good mornings and heavy hip thrusts should also be staples. In fact if all you did were the exercises I just listed you would have all of your bases covered. Drop the machine exercises, stop the isolation leg extensions and leg curls and focus on the big effective movements above and you will see a visible difference in muscle mass in a short time.

If you incorporate the factors I just listed along with good exercise programming and solid nutrition you will be blown away by the progress you make. Bigger and more powerful legs are within your reach...just put in the RIGHT work and watch your body respond.



SAL DI STEFANO

Sal was 14 years old when he touched his first weight and from that moment he was hooked. Growing up asthmatic, frequently sick and painfully skinny, Sal saw weightlifting as a way to change his body and his self-image. In the beginning, Sal's body responded quickly to his training but then his gains slowed and then stopped altogether. Not one to give up easily, he began reading every muscle building publication he could get his hands on to find ways to bust through his plateau. He read Arnold's Encyclopedia of Bodybuilding, Mentzer's Heavy Duty, Kubrick's Dinosaur Training, and every muscle magazine he could find; Weider's Muscle and Fitness, Flex, Iron Man and even Muscle Media 2000. Each time he read about a new technique or methodology he would test it out in the gym. At age 18 his passion for the art and science of resistance training was so consuming that he decided to make it his profession and become a personal trainer. By 19 he was managing health clubs and by 22 he owned his own gym. After 17 years as a personal trainer he has dedicated himself to bringing science and TRUTH to the fitness industry.