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presents

Body Mind Connection

Can You Think Your Way to Muscle Strength and Keen Agility?

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Body Mind Connection

Exercising muscle "in your mind" will never replace the effectiveness of muscle training through real exercise. However, mentally envisioning your own athletic and physical improvement may reap enormous benefits.

One of these potential benefits is improved strength training.

One recent academic study looked at many weightlifters' actual brain patterns and found that patterns activated when a weightlifter lifted hundreds of pounds was similarly activated when the lifter only imagined lifting the same amount of weight..

Further, several other studies have shown weightlifters who visualize exercising a specific muscle every day will increase the actual strength of that muscle by about half as much as individuals who actually performed the matching physical exercise everyday.

1) One such study, by the Cleveland Clinic Foundation, found when comparing people who went to the gym with people who carried out virtual workouts in their heads, there was a 30% muscle increase in the group who went to the gym. Meanwhile, participants who conducted solely "mental weight training," increased muscle strength by 13.5%.. Also interesting to note, this reported strength increase remained in effect for at least three months following the mental training.

2) A similar study published in the journal "Physical Therapy" measured improvement of subjects working on ankle strength. Those physically performing the exercises improved their strength by 25%. Even more impressive, those doing only the mental practice, increased their lower-leg strength by an amazing 17%! Of course, a control group who performed neither mental or physical exercise, showed no increases in strength.

3) Numerous other research studies reflect similar results showing definite substantial strength increase from sheer mentalization exercises. These other studies also reviewed athletes using the "combination" of physical and mental workouts. Combining the two practices, consistently worked best of all...

Another benefit of virtual workouts is "enhanced performance."

Professional athletes have been mentally downloading peak performance "technique" into muscle memory for many decades. Mental preview of imagined peak performance has helped perfect many a golf swing and improved many a baseball batter's batting average.

It is this same mind-body memory connection to our muscles that has also allowed quadriplegics and amputees to use thought to remotely move robotic arms or to control a computer cursor.

Virtual workouts, by isolating specific muscles, can also be used to break through muscle building and performance plateaus

The use of the mind to voluntarily control specific muscles to contract or relax at will was first made popular by a famous weightlifter a hundred years ago. This man, Maxick had been a sickly child. Maxick, the boy, needed to rebuild his strength and stamina. But, his childhood doctors forbade him to exercise with weights. So he had to come up with a way of strength training without weights. He thus developed the ability to control the contraction and relaxation of any muscle at will and hypothesized this to be the number one determining factor in gaining muscle growth, strength and ability in sport--Maxick believed that unless you possess the ability to control your muscles at will, muscular growth and strength will plateau. This belief seemed to be supported by the numerous people Maxick trained in later life.

The actual theory Maxick put forward suggests that because muscles come in antagonistic pairs, one can inadvertently hinder the performance of the other because of unnecessary muscular contraction when activity is being performed. By learning to relax muscles that are not needed to perform a task, you can then focus all your attention on the actual muscle required and therefore greatly improve your overall performance.

(Note - the ability to mentally contract and relax individual muscles deeply effects how quickly an amputee can recover daily life limb function via external artificial means. Amputees suffering from phantom limb syndrome, through the mind-body connection, can often rid themselves of phantom pain by using a mirrored box to get a mirror reflection of their good limb. Once the amputee relaxes the good limb, the amputee's brain, seeing an arm or leg relax where an arm or leg should be, is tricked into thinking it has relaxed the muscles in the missing limb. This release from phantom contractions also frees the amputee to be able to then thought train his or her brain to use external robotic devices.)

This same isolation technique can potentially control non-voluntary muscle systems and even enhance the "spiritual" quality of one's life.

Maxick performed an abdominal feat that Eastern scholars have long since maintained has positive benefit for the usually non-voluntary muscles of the digestive system Maxick had the complete ability to isolate his abs and this was probably the one physical feat that made him internationally legendary. This exercise was taught by Indian yogis for centuries, but it's extremely hard to find anyone in the West who knows or teaches it. In Yoga, this kind of control is called *nauli*.

Nauli is foremost of the Hatha Yoga practices. It has been said that nauli is one of the fastest ways to gain spiritual advancement, even possibly enlightenment, while simultaneously forging a steely midsection.



Maxick (1882 -1 961)

What are some ways to develop mental control over individual muscles?

Picture yourself in your own body, not outside of your body watching yourself. Imagine you are weight lifting. With closed eyes, feel the equipment in your hands. Create a vision of what you see when performing a particular exercise. Imagine inputs from all your senses as you go through the exercise. Think about how your muscles feel as you perform your exercise. Perform the motion slowly. Be aware of each muscle that is involved.. How does the muscle feel through each stage of the lift. Feel the body part you're working by deliberately contracting it as you lift, concentrating on making the intended muscle do the work You can't use momentum, and you can't relax in the negative [lowering] phase of the exercise.

With super-slow reps, you won't be focused on the object you're moving but on the muscle you're working. Take a full five seconds to lower a weight and another full five seconds to lift it It's about squeezing the muscle and exerting complete control over every inch of the movement."

You will find that the more you perform visualization training the better you will become at it. Imagine successfully using more weight or doing more reps than you ever have before. You will also find that you don't have the same mental roadblocks to performance that you once had now that you have successfully performed an exercise so many times in your head.

If you program your subconscious with a mental image of yourself as a more muscular person, through persistence your mind will accept this and aid your body to conform to this mental image. We are indeed imagination's best seed.

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