



ANABOLIC FINISHERS

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Crushing the final set of an exercise can make or break your workout.

These last sets, or "finisher sets," have always been a staple in bodybuilding because they allow you to get in more reps than a traditional straight set. Plus they leave you feeling good about a job well done.

Studies demonstrate that this anabolic finisher technique (and others) also lead to dramatic fat loss while spending up muscle growth. Plus they leave you feeling good about a job well done.

But before we do that, let's take a quick look at the 3 types of muscle fibres.

The 3 types of fibres

Every fledgling newbie that first shuffles into the gym knows that to get huge you have to focus on the fast-twitch, Type II muscle fibers. These fibers have the greatest ability to hypertrophy and we generally associate them with the biggest, strongest, most badass people in the world.

The thing is, there's plenty of room for growth in the Type I fibers!

Type IIb Fibers: The Strong Boys

These are the fibers we're supposed to target for maximal strength and power. These fibers have large nerve bodies that require a great deal of stimulation in order to contract. That means you'll have to lift something very heavy or very quickly for them to get involved.

These fibers can produce high levels of force, but they have low capillary density and get their energy almost exclusively through anaerobic glycolysis, so they get fatigued very quickly.

We often picture powerlifters, shot putters, and offensive linemen when we think of guys with a large percentage of Type IIb fibers.

Type IIa Fibers: The Fast Boys

These fibers share the same characteristics as their Type IIb brothers but have higher capillary density and are able to use oxygen for energy, making them more fatigue resistant.

Type IIb fibers will convert to Type IIa through resistance training and general conditioning. They adapt to the training by producing greater capillary and mitochondrial density so they can last longer, but can still produce high levels of force and have great hypertrophy potential.

In 2008, Terzis et al. showed that capillary density is linked directly to the endurance capability of muscle tissue, so it makes sense that this would increase in Type II fibers as they are trained.

The body will adapt to whatever stimulus it's under, and this is a perfect example of how that works. These fibers will naturally return to Type IIb status if training stops, which is another example of adaptation.

When we think of Type IIa fibers, we typically picture Olympic lifters, running backs, track sprinters, and baseball players.

Type I Fibers: The Slow Boys

These fatigue resistant fibers generally produce less force than Type II fibers. They're easily excited – meaning they contract quickly under low levels of stimulation – and have much greater capillary and mitochondrial density, which allows them to keep going for a long time.

Type I fibers are generally associated with skinny people doing endurance activities, but this isn't completely true. While they're resistant to fatigue, they still have good hypertrophy properties.

Despite being given a bad rap because they aren't as big and strong as their Type II counterparts, they aren't the wimps many assume them to be.

Eye-Opening Research

In 2003 and 2004, Fry et al. jammed thick, hollow needles into guys' muscle bellies and pulled chunks out. (Now you know what a muscle biopsy is.) They found that elite

Olympic weightlifters and powerlifters had a higher percentage of Type II fibers than non-athletes. No surprise there.

However, he and other researchers also found that elite bodybuilders have about the same fiber type distribution as normal people. One of the biggest differences between the groups was that elite bodybuilders actually have significantly more hypertrophy of the Type I fibers than Olympic lifters and powerlifters.

That means that Arnold, Haney, Yates, and even Ronnie Coleman weren't the Type II machines we all presumed them to be. They just get their Type I fibers bigger than everyone else.

Of course, they also get a ton of hypertrophy in their Type II fibers, but this research showed that most of us – including you – probably have fiber type distribution similar to that of the biggest guys in the world.

You read that right. Researchers have found that elite powerlifters and Olympic lifters generally have a greater percentage of Type II fibers than normal people, but elite bodybuilders have about the same distribution as non-athletes.

This research offers us a very clear message: you can certainly get big by focusing on Type II fibers, but you can develop extraordinary muscle mass by stimulating all the fibers, including Type I's.

How To Grow Type I Fibers to supercharge muscle and blast fat

I'm not suggesting you focus exclusively on the slow-twitch Type I's. Programs using high loads, powerlifting routines, or high-speed movements should comprise the majority of your program.

But to take advantage of the full development of your musculature, try using anabolic finisher sets.

450% More Calories Burned With Anabolic Finisher Sets

One study compared the effect of 20 weeks of HIIT (high intensity interval training) with 20 weeks of ET (endurance training) on young adults. Incredibly, the HIIT group lost 9 times as much fat as the ET group.

Another study compared a traditional weight-training program with a higher intensity resistance-training (HIRT) program. The traditional program consisted of 8 exercises each for 4 sets of 8-12 reps, the last one taken to failure.

The HIRT program consisted of 3 exercises for 3 sets of 6 reps, while an additional set was performed in a rest-pause fashion.

The traditional program took 62 minutes to complete and the total session volume was around 17,000 pounds. However, the HIRT group finished their workout in 32 minutes, lifted only 8,500 pounds, but had a post-caloric burn the next day that was 450% greater than the traditional lifting group.

What these two studies confirm, gloriously, is that taking your last sets to failure through the use of finishers results in dramatic fat loss. And it can be done without necessarily adding more work, just by optimizing your final sets.

Here's How to Do It!

Option 1: Standard Anabolic Finsher Sets

AF sets can be done for either main or assistance exercises and are a great way of grooving solid technique while also pushing your muscular and cardio system to the limit. While the actual pump has been associated with a great workout, it may do more than just make you feel like your skin is bursting.

In 2004, Goto et al. published a paper that examined back-off sets. They had one group perform 5 sets of 5 with 90% of 1RM and another that did the same program but added a high-rep set with 50% of 1RM at the end of the workout.

The AF set group ended up seeing significantly greater improvements in both hypertrophy and strength. While you could argue that the improvements were just a result of increased volume, the fact remains that it worked better than the heavy training alone.

Even if the increased volume was responsible for the improvements, the results were good enough that we should all take notice. The researchers admitted that they weren't sure if it was the combination of heavy and light loads, increased volume, increased blood flow, or the stimulation of both Type I and Type II fibers that were responsible for the improvements. More research will be done to figure this out, but for now it doesn't really matter so long as it works.

Considering what I've already presented about fiber types, the back-off set seems to be a great way to stimulate the Type I fibers at the end of a workout that focused on Type II fibers.

It doesn't take much time, the pump feels incredible, and because it's at the end of your workout, it's a perfectly acceptable time to take a set to complete failure, which might also contribute to additional stimulation of all your fibers.

How to do it: Immediately after you finish your final set of an exercise, strip off 30-50% of the weight and then do as many reps with that weight as you can, aiming for 15-25.

Since you should already be slightly tired from your previous sets, you won't be able to get as many reps with that weight as you would if you were fresh, so in some ways this functions as almost a pre-exhaust technique.

This technique can be applied to almost any exercise with good results because you'll be using less weight and the muscles are already tired so it won't be as taxing on your nervous system as a rest-pause set or a drop set.

Option 2: Anabolic Finishers 50-Rep Challenge Sets

This was also a staple of old-time bodybuilders but it's rarely seen any more, possibly because it's pretty tough.

How to do it: Simply reduce the weight of your last work set by about 30 to 40% – a percentage that would allow you to get about 20 to 25 reps. Upon completion of the 20th or 25th rep, take a 15-second break. Continue gutting out a few more reps to failure and then take another rest-pause of 15 seconds.

Continue in this way until you hit a total of 50 reps. Your rep patterns might end up looking like this: 20, 10, 8, 6, 3, and 3 = 50.

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