Three Exercise Variations of Common Exercises

A good workout program is often based on the principle of progressive overload, increasing repetitions and resistance to a few select exercises, rather than constantly experimenting with new exercises. Although having a wide variety of exercise variations is not necessary to improve your physique, a little bit of variation always helps to break up the monotony of working out. Sometimes. experimenting with different exercise variations may lead to finding better exercises than the current ones in your program! Here is a list of three exercise variations of exercises that you are likely doing right now and might want to try for your next workout:

1. **Static Dumbbell Press**

The static dumbbell press is like the conventional dumbbell press, but as the name implies there is an isometric portion of the lift. To perform this exercise, grab a pair of dumbbells that are 10-20lbs lighter than your 10-rep max and lie on a bench. Have one of your arms bent to 90^0, this arm will remain static, while your other arm performs the full range of motion of a dumbbell press. The static position allows constant tension on the chest throughout the exercise allowing a different stimulus for your chest. After performing five repetitions on the non-static arm switch arms, the working arm now remains static while the static arm performs the movement. Finish the set with five repetitions of bilateral dumbbell press to end the set.

2. **Lu Raises**

Named after two-time Olympic weightlifting champion Lu Xiaojun, Lu raises are similar to a lateral raise, as they both target the deltoids and have a similar movement path. Unlike lateral raises, Lu raises target a wider portion of the deltoids and require a greater range of motion. Although originally used as an accessory movement to increase overhead stability during the Olympic lifts, Lu raises are an excellent exercise for muscle hypertrophy.

Although originally performed with barbell plates, Lu raises can also be performed with dumbbells. To perform the exercise, first lean your body forward slightly by hinging with your hips, then extend your hips and bring the weights out to the side of your body like a lateral raise. Instead of stopping at parallel like a lateral raise, once you reach parallel, continue raising the weights by internally rotate your shoulders and bring your arms up until they are straight above you. Slowly return the weight down back to the starting position following the same concentric path.

*Caution: Lu raises require a wide range of motion for the shoulders and are not advisable for individuals with a history of shoulder injuries or individuals that lack shoulder mobility.

3. Bulgarian Split Squat/Single Leg Squat

The Bulgarian split squat, also known as the single leg squat, is a unilateral variation of a squat. Although you may already be aware of this exercise, most individuals are still not programing this exercise correctly in their program. Many individuals perform the split squat with either their bodyweight or with light resistance. Although this may be effective for certain exercise programs, the main benefit of the split squat is the ability to overload the legs unilaterally with a substantially higher load. In other words, you should be performing the split squat with heavy weights! On average, an individual should be able to split squat at least half of their conventional barbell squat weight. Performing the split squat like this allows great stimulus for both leg strength and hypertrophy. In addition, the split squat also has extremely high carryover to improving athletic performances, as most athletic moments are performed unilaterally, such as making a cut in football.

Starting Position

You can do the Bulgarian split squat with either two dumbbells held at your sides, one dumbbell in a goblet position, or with a barbell on the back. To perform the exercise, stand 2-3 feet away from a bench then extend one foot back onto the bench, with the ankle on the edge of the bench. A wider stance will allow for greater glute activation, while a narrower stance allows greater quad activation. Slowly lower your back knee down to the ground while flexing your front leg to a 90^0 angle. Once a 90^0 angle is reached with your front knee, push with your lead foot and leg back up to the starting position. During the exercise make sure you maintain a straight back with a slight lean forward in the bottom position and have your lead foot always planted on the ground.

Ending Position