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Influence of Resistance Exercise in Rehabilitation

Before World War II, most of the information available on resistance exercise was found in mail-order courses and in the books and magazines in the field, many of which were commercially slanted. This type of empirical information, while often wholly honest and basically correct, was largely ignored by the medical profession and the physical education community. Following World War II, however, a series of medical experiments were carried out on resistance training and its applicability to rehabilitation. The results of these experiments, some of which were performed by Dr. Thomas L. DeLorme, an orthopedist, were an important step in revolutionizing the thinking of both doctors and physical education specialists concerning resistance exercise. As a result of his work and writing, Dr. DeLorme made the term "progressive resistance" famous.

As Dr. DeLorme's work became increasingly well-known, the use of progressive resistance exercise techniques for rehabilitative and adaptive measures expanded. Now, pre-operative, post-operative, chronic orthopedic, asthmatic, cardiac, postural, post-polio, neurological, general coordination and post-injury cases utilize this type of therapy.

Resistance Exercise and Athletics

For a variety of reasons, it was widely believed during the first half of this century that weightlifting would make a person “musclebound.” Coaches and physical educators told athletes to avoid it at all costs. Even though articles appeared from time to time in lifting magazines arguing otherwise, the belief persisted. However, a few athletes who were either too stubborn to follow the teachings of their coaches, or sufficiently far-sighted to see the error in these teachings, continued to mix lifting and sports with beneficial results. As the results accumulated, a few physical educators and doctors began to see a pattern emerging from the eclectic hodge-podge of information on the subject by the late 1940s. This interest by professionals marked a turning point in the history of athletic conditioning as quality research began, and minds began to change. A study published by Edward Chui in the Research Quarterly in 1950, for instance, concluded that a program of weight training seemed to increase athletic power to a greater extent than did a regular program of fitness training.

Another historically significant study, published by Zorbas and Karpovich in 1951 in the Research Quarterly, widened the wedge that would eventually split the knotty mass of myth and misinformation that existed in this area. The study, which was quite thorough, resulted in statistics which indicated that lifeters were not slower than an average person, but faster. It should be added that a 1950s book, Weight Training and Athletics by Karpovich and Murray, had a profound effect on the willingness of coaches and physical educators to abandon the myth of the muscle bound athlete.

Pearl, Bill. Getting StrongerBolinas, CA, Shelter Publications, 1986 pg. 429-431