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Definition: "An ergogenic aid is any substance or phenomenon that enhances performance"

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Imagery training makes calf muscles stronger

You can train muscles just by thinking about training. If you take the time to sit and imagine that you are doing, let's say, bench presses with an enormous weight, then your pecs, delts and triceps will automatically become stronger. Dutch researchers in Groningen published results six years ago of a study in which an imagined training routine turned out to be even more effective than really training muscles.

Ok, we admit, there's training and training...



The Dutch researchers studied the effects of imagery training because they were looking for a way to keep muscles strong in people recovering from a serious bone break – a broken ankle, for example. If you cannot exercise for a long period you lose muscle strength and mass. If imagery training can help lessen this, it would be a help.

The researchers did an experiment with students. One group did half an hour of low-intensity calf muscle training five times a week for seven weeks. The subjects had to lie on a mat with their legs stretched out, and then push with their toes against the wall without moving from where they lay. They repeated this fifty times each training session.

The other group of subjects watched a video of someone doing calf raises with a barbell. While watching the subjects had to imagine that they were training their calves like this themselves.

After seven weeks the researchers measured the amount of strength the test subjects were capable of developing in their calves.



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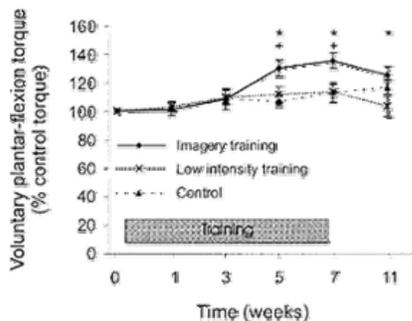


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In the subjects that had done the low-intensity training, the strength of their calf muscles increased by eleven percent. In the subjects who had done imagery training, the calf muscle strength increased by thirty percent. So the imagery training was more effective than the 'real' training.

Imagery training probably works because thinking about exercise teaches the brain how to communicate the message to the muscles. If you've never done serious training, large amounts of your muscle fibres don't react when you start to require new things of them. It's as though they are not wired up to your brain. Imagery training helps the brain to make the connection that's needed.

The Dutch are not the only ones who have discovered this. Researchers at the Cleveland Clinic Foundation in the US published an article five years ago in *Neuropsychologia* describing a study in which test subjects increased the strength in their biceps and little finger muscles by thinking about training. [*Neuropsychologia*. 2004;42(7):944-56.] And the power of mind over body doesn't only make you stronger; it can also make you slimmer. Psychologist Ellen Langer demonstrated two years ago that people can lose a kilogram in a month by thinking more positively about their lifestyle. [*livescience.com* 07 February 2007]

So let's assume that imagery training works.

Perhaps it's a stupid question, but if you work in a gym and spend the whole time looking at people training, are you likely to become over trained?

Sources:
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