

Benefits of Isometric Exercise

Toned and shaped muscles are a statement of good health and personality. For that, one needs to follow a stringent workout regime involving special exercises to strengthen the different muscles and joints in the body. This article discusses one such exercise – the isometric exercise – popularized by the muscle man Charles Atlas in the 1930s. Combination of two words – ‘iso’ meaning same and ‘metric’ referring to distance – it is meant for strengthening individual joint angles and corresponding muscles.

Isometric Exercise is typically performed as an anaerobic exercise (does not need increased oxygen production) because it is done only for a few seconds that involves static contraction of muscles. That is, in this exercise, the muscle length remains the same even if it is been tensed by pressing against a static body such as a wall, building or an opposing pair of muscles. In fact, this is the procedure – press the relevant muscle with force against any unmoving object for few seconds and repeat the procedure 10 to 15 times. The biggest plus with this type of exercise is that one can do it without the aid of any equipment and anybody can do it as the whole procedure does not include even a single complex step. It is just about pushing against an immovable object or holding a weight for some duration!

Some ways to perform Isometric Exercise

- I) Pick up a 15 pound weight and perform a bicep curl. Half way between the repetitions, hold it stationary for say, 10 sec. Here, the length of your biceps remains the same even if a force is being applied.
- II) Push hard against a cement wall. Repeat it 10-15 times, each time ensuring that the muscle contraction is the maximum.
- III) Then there is the maximum duration isometric workout, where one has to push, pull or hold a weight as long as possible or until his/her muscles almost gives in.

In I & III, the weight can be gradually increased as the muscle strength starts to build. But don't overdo it.

Things to consider while performing Isometric Exercise

- a) Even though people in their 90s can perform isometric exercises safely, this routine is not advisable for people with high blood pressure or heart ailments for isometric

workouts pumps up the blood pressure and metabolic rates. Hence, people with such troubles are strongly advised against trying isometric exercises without getting clearance from their physicians.

- b) Isometric exercise – done in one position – increases the strength of the corresponding joint angle only. Hence for strengthening other joint positions as well, one needs to repeat the procedure in the respective angles or positions.

Where isometric exercise is used?

Isometric exercises are prescribed as part of injury rehabilitation programs and in physiotherapy as in this mode of exercise, the intensity can be adjusted at will. It is also found to be effective in shortening and toning facial muscles.

Advantages of Isometric Exercise

- Aids in building muscle strength meanwhile burning excess fat.
- Slows muscle erosion and enhances the tone and shape of muscles.
- Helps to improve bone density.
- Long sessions of isometric exercise are found to improve digestion and lower cholesterol levels.

Tail Piece: Isometric exercises alone are ineffective. It must ideally form a part of a whole range of programs in one's workout schedule. Also take care not to injure the joints by holding the weights for too long.