

The Importance of Tempo

Tempo is one of the lesser utilised parameters when it comes to training programmes. In short, tempo is described as a breakdown of the time it takes to execute each repetition. This covers both the eccentric and concentric contraction (muscle lengthening under tension and muscle shortening under tension) as well as the transition period (potential pause) between each contraction type.

In all honesty the reason why tempo is not utilised by a higher proportion of trainers comes down to either lack of knowledge or pure laziness. When I see programmes online it is easy to filter those which have been written by someone who knows their science from those which haven't. One of the easiest ways to make this distinction is by looking which programmes incorporate the appropriate use of tempo.

Some of the reasons why it is so important to use tempo;

- Changing the tempo of an exercise can alter which muscle fibres you are using, get this wrong and the exercise may be rendered useless for your training goal.
- It dictates the overall time under tension (TUT) during any given set. If you perform ten back squats in fifteen seconds you are going to get a very different training effect than someone who performs the same number of back squats in sixty seconds. Again, getting this wrong could mean the difference between moving towards your goal and staying stagnant.
- TUT will help dictate the hormonal response from an exercise which if used properly will increase the rate you burn fat and build muscle.
- It helps monitor performance. Athletes can try and make their repetitions quicker so they can facilitate more weight during the set. This may not transfer to a genuine strength increase as you have decreased the TUT for that set so you can use a heavier weight. On the other hand, if you perform the same number of repetitions at a set tempo with a heavier weight there is definitive proof.
- Tempo can be used as a progression tool. Instead of using the typical progressive load increases you can slow down your tempo (to increase the TUT during the set) to overload your body e.g., if your 1RM (one repetition maximum) in the bench press is 100kg you could improve on this by completing single reps with slower tempos. The ability to perform this rep with a slower eccentric phase will heighten your chances of being able to increase the load for your new 1RM.

These are a few reasons why tempo should be incorporated in your weight training workout. If your trainer doesn't use them ask them why not. Very few will be able to answer this legitimately and if this is the case, it may be worth rethinking your choice in PTs.