BENKO MANAGEMENT · HEALTH SERIES · BOOK 3



Train Less, Grow More

High-intensity training for busy people

Marcel Benko

BENKO MANAGEMENT

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IMPORTANT

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Talk to your doctor before making major changes to your diet, exercise, fasting or supplement routine, especially if you have a health condition, take medication, or are pregnant or breastfeeding. You are responsible for how you use the information in this book.

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PREFACE

Train Less, Grow More

With this book I'm finishing my short health series. If you've read the first two, you know that eating well, living in a clean environment and taking care of your mind will take you far, but not all the way to the peak you're looking for.

Movement and training are just as important as eating well or thinking well, maybe even more so.

We've all been told that to get fit, you need to spend hours in the gym every day, buy protein products and eat five times a day. What if I told you that simply isn't true? What if I told you that you don't need to exhaust yourself for hours, or buy heavily marketed supplements just to get through the day?

In this book I'll show you the approach that changed my body and my life: brief, intense training, done rarely, with plenty of rest. It starts with a story, because you need to know where it comes from.

CHAPTER I

The Forgotten Bodybuilder

In 1978, a bodybuilder named Mike Mentzer won the IFBB Mr. Universe title with a perfect score of 300 out of 300, the first perfect score in the history of the competition.

It was one of the most famous moments in bodybuilding, and his physique at that show is still considered one of the most complete and best-conditioned ever seen on stage. I know what you're thinking: steroids. Bodybuilding at that level wasn't natural then and isn't now. But that's not my point. My point is *how* he trained.

At a time when champions trained for hours, twice a day, five or six days a week, Mentzer became famous for the opposite: very short, very intense workouts with lots of rest in between. He called his method **Heavy Duty**. His core idea was simple and shocked the bodybuilding world: to trigger muscle growth, you don't need many sets. You need one set, taken all the way to muscular failure.

Muscular failure means the point where you cannot complete one more repetition with good form, no matter how hard you try. For example, you curl a barbell until you cannot lift it even once more with your absolute maximum effort. Then you stop. No more reps, no more sets.

That got my attention. Like most people, I don't have time to train for two hours twice a day. My work takes up most of my time, and when I started training I was still single. I can't imagine how a busy professional with a family, a side business or community work would manage. I was looking for a program that would take the least time and still give the same results, or better.

Mentzer was also an unusually thoughtful athlete. He studied pre-med at university and liked to explain his training with logic and science, not tradition.

THE 1980 MR. OLYMPIA

In 1980, Mentzer competed in the Mr. Olympia, the most important title in the sport. That same year, Arnold Schwarzenegger, already a six-time Mr. Olympia, came out of retirement and entered the competition at the last minute. Arnold won his seventh title.

It became one of the most controversial results in bodybuilding history. Many competitors and fans felt Arnold was not in his best shape and that others deserved to win. Mentzer finished fifth and was deeply disappointed. He felt the judging was unfair, and he never competed again.

And think about the message that sent: whose training would people follow? The seven-time champion with hours in the gym every day, or the man who walked away?

A LEGACY THAT LIVED ON

Mentzer stepped away from the stage, but his ideas didn't disappear. He went on to coach and write about high-intensity training, and in the 1990s Dorian Yates won six consecutive Mr. Olympia titles using brief, intense, low-volume training inspired by Mentzer's principles.

Today, Mentzer's approach is followed by many people who, like me, want results without living in the gym.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Mike Mentzer showed that brief, intense training can build an exceptional physique.
- His core idea: one set per exercise, taken to true muscular failure, then rest.
- His approach lives on, and it fits busy people perfectly.

TRY THIS TODAY

Search for one of Mike Mentzer's interviews and listen to him explain his logic in his own words.

CHAPTER II

The Science Behind It

In this chapter I'll explain why high-intensity training works, the approach I'm a big believer in.

As a species, humans survived thousands of years of life-threatening situations by adapting. When the body faces an extreme demand, it responds by becoming stronger so it can handle that demand next time.

That's how muscle grows. When you reach true muscular failure, when you can't do even one more pull-up, your body doesn't know whether you're in a gym or hanging off a cliff. It only knows that it just met a demand it could barely handle, and that next time it needs to be stronger. That's the signal your muscles need to grow. After that signal, more sets don't add much. Now it's time to eat well and rest.

Research supports the heart of this idea. Studies show that training close to failure is what drives strength and muscle gains, and that even one hard set per exercise produces real results, especially for beginners and people with limited time. Doing more sets can add somewhat more growth, but each extra set adds less than the one before, and the extra time and fatigue often aren't worth it for a busy person.

> Two conditions must be met to grow muscle: **train hard and intensely, but briefly,** and **rest long enough to recover.**

If one or both conditions aren't met, you won't grow, no matter how much more you train, how much more you eat or how many supplements you take.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Muscle grows as an adaptation to a demand your body can barely meet.
- Intensity, not volume, is the trigger. One hard set to failure is enough to start growth.
- Growth happens during rest, not during the workout.

TRY THIS TODAY

Think about your last workout. How many sets did you take to true failure, where you could not do one more rep?

CHAPTER III

Obstacles to Overcome

Your biggest enemy is your brain.

Many times, when you put the weight down because you think you can't do more, it isn't your muscle that has failed. It's your brain trying to protect you. Your brain is wired to look for shortcuts and avoid stress and discomfort. That's not a bad thing; that same "laziness" drove humans to invent everything that makes life easier today. But when it comes to building muscle, it's a burden.

There are two mental stops that make you quit before true muscular failure.

1. The number in your head. You decide your set will be 10 reps. You do 10, you're happy you reached your goal, and you stop, because you're planning another set of 10. That's not muscular failure. You just wasted your time.

2. "Brain failure." You think you've reached failure, but it's your brain, not your muscle, telling you: danger, stop, that's enough. I call this brain failure, and it usually comes a few reps before real muscular failure. To grow, you have to learn to push past it, while keeping your form clean.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Don't count to a target. Count until you can't do another rep with good form.
- "Brain failure" comes before muscle failure. Learn to recognize it and push past it.
- Intensity is a mental skill as much as a physical one.

TRY THIS TODAY

On your next set, don't decide the number of reps in advance. Keep going until the bar truly stops moving.

CHAPTER IV

The Biggest Misconception

The biggest myth in bodybuilding, in my opinion, is that the stronger you get, the more you can train. It's the opposite.

The stronger you get, the heavier the weights you lift, and the more stress you put on your muscles and your whole body. So you need *more* time to recover, not less.

Here's an example. You start curling a 10 kg bar and reach failure at the 9th rep. You need three days to recover. Six months later, you curl 30 kg for 9 reps. You've put your muscles under roughly three times the load, and you've exhausted yourself much more to get there. So you need more than three days to recover.

> The stronger you get, the longer you need to recover, so **you train less, not more.**

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- As you get stronger, each workout costs your body more.
- Your rest periods must grow as your strength grows.
- Stalled progress often means "rest more," not "train more."

TRY THIS TODAY

If you've stopped making progress, take a full extra week off, then test yourself again.

CHAPTER V

The Program

By now you get the idea, so let's get to the fun part: the program. This is Mike Mentzer's Heavy Duty routine as I learned it, described in my own words, followed by how I adapted it to my body.

TRAIN SAFELY

Training to failure with heavy weights is powerful, but it needs respect.

- **Warm up** with a light set or two before each working set.
- **Learn proper form first.** If you're new to an exercise, practice it with light weights, or book a session with a coach.
- **Stop at failure with good form,** not when your form breaks down.
- **Use safety bars** on the Smith machine or squat rack, or train with a spotter, especially on presses and squats.
- **Keep breathing.** Don't hold your breath through the whole set.

> Very intense training sharply raises blood pressure during each set. If you have heart problems, high blood pressure, a hernia, or joint or back problems, or if you're pregnant, talk to your doctor before starting this program. If you've never trained before, start with the 20 / 20 / 20 routine from my first book for a few months.

THE BASICS

Every working set is taken to true muscular failure. The program has four training days that cover all your main muscles, each followed by three days of rest.

Day 1 · Chest and back

Chest, exercise 1: pec deck, 6 to 10 reps to failure.

Chest, exercise 2: incline press, ideally on a Smith machine; a barbell or dumbbells also work. Here you go heavy: just **1 to 3 reps** to failure. Use a fairly close grip, hands slightly closer than shoulder width, and flare your elbows back toward your ears; you'll feel the stress go straight to your chest. Contrary to popular opinion, a wide grip is not the best way to build your chest.



Pec deck



Incline press

Back, exercise 1: close-grip, palms-up pulldown, 6 to 10 reps.

Back, exercise 2: deadlift, 6 to 10 reps. If you have lower-back problems, do shrugs instead.



Palms-up pulldown



Deadlift

That's all for Day 1: just four sets. Then rest for three days. You don't need to count the hours exactly; train whenever it suits you on the fourth day.

Day 2 · Legs and abs

Leg extensions to failure, followed immediately, with no rest, by the **leg press** to failure. This back-to-back pairing is called a superset. If you don't have a leg press, do squats.

Then take a short break: drink some water and walk around for a minute to catch your breath. Finish your legs with **standing calf raises** to failure, and then one-legged calf raises.

After a few minutes' rest, do one set of **abs** to failure, 12 to 15 reps.



Leg extension



Leg press



Standing calf raise

Day 3 · Shoulders, biceps and triceps

Shoulders, exercise 1: dumbbell lateral raises (side raises), 6 to 10 reps.

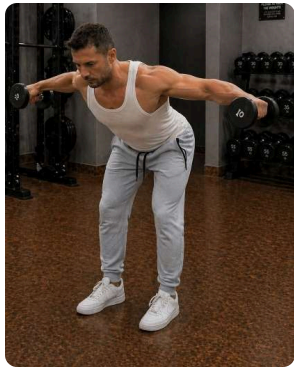
Shoulders, exercise 2: rear delts, either bent-over dumbbell laterals or sitting backward on the pec deck, 6 to 10 reps.



Lateral raise



Reverse pec deck



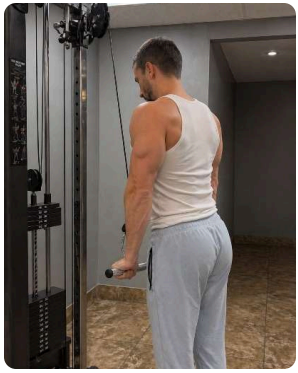
Bent-over lateral

Biceps: barbell curls, 6 to 10 reps. I prefer a straight bar to an EZ bar, because I feel it works the biceps more fully.

Triceps: pushdowns with a straight bar or a V-bar (I don't use a rope), 6 to 10 reps, followed immediately by **dips** between parallel bars, 3 to 5 reps to failure.



Barbell curl



Triceps pushdown



Dips

Day 4 · Legs and abs

Yes, legs again, this time in a different way.

Leg extensions with a static hold. Use about 15 kg more than last time. Lift the weight once, until your legs are fully straight, and hold that position. The weight should be heavy enough that you can only hold it

for about 10 to 25 seconds. When you can't hold it any longer, don't let it drop: lower it slowly and under control. Keep your hips firmly on the seat, even when your thighs are burning.

Then go immediately to **squats**, on the Smith machine or with free weights, for 12 to 15 reps. I avoid the hack squat, which I find puts too much stress on the knees and lower back.

Rest for a couple of minutes, drink some water, and finish with a set of **standing calf raises**. Then one set of **abs** to failure.



Squat



Abs

No forearm exercises. Your forearms already work hard in pulldowns, curls, deadlifts and every exercise where you grip a weight.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Four training days, three rest days after each. One set per exercise, to failure.
- Warm up, keep perfect form and use safety bars or a spotter.
- The whole program is about 15 working sets every 16 days.

TRY THIS TODAY

Write down the four training days in your calendar, with three rest days after each.

CHAPTER VI

The Routine and How I Progressed

To recap: Day 1, three days of rest, Day 2, three days of rest, Day 3, three days of rest, Day 4, three days of rest, and then the cycle starts again with Day 1.

You might be thinking: "Only four workouts in 16 days? That can't work." I asked myself the same question, but I wanted to find out for myself. It works.

As I gained muscle and got stronger with each cycle, I eventually had to add rest days. After one year, I was so much stronger that I needed six days of rest between workouts: I was training once a week, which means each muscle group was trained about once a month. After two years, I reached the point where I train only once every ten days, and I'm not losing strength or muscle. Crazy, isn't it?

Think once a week isn't enough? You'll see when you reach the point where the weights and the effort exhaust you after a single set. When I train properly, I'm sore for four to five days; after legs or deadlifts, for six. How could I train again while I'm still sore? You might think you can train a different body part in the meantime, but your body works as one system. Intense training draws on resources your whole body shares, and you need to restore them before you train again.

MY STORY

As I write this, I'm two years and four months into this program. I was never a gym rat. I've always been more into sports, but none of my sports turned into a career that would pay the bills. I needed something to stay healthy, and an exceptional physique was always my dream. It's in my nature to want to be unique and the best version of myself, while staying healthy.

At some point, everyone reaches their genetic limit: the most muscle their body can naturally build. You'll get there too, sooner or later. The only way to go beyond it is steroids, and I'm absolutely against them. Taking steroids is one of the worst things you can do to your health. If that's the path you choose, this book is not for you.

Stay patient and consistent, and over a couple of years you can build a physique you're proud of, naturally.

TRACK EVERYTHING

The best way to track your progress is with a spreadsheet; that's what I use. I write down every exercise, the weight and the reps. And I can see every time I failed to get one more rep than in the previous cycle.

When that happens, it tells me I didn't meet one of the two conditions: either I didn't train hard enough, or I didn't rest enough. The first thing to try is more rest: take a longer break and restart where you stopped. If you rest for two weeks, eat well and still don't progress, you're not training intensely enough. You're not pushing your muscles past the limit that triggers growth, and in my experience that gets harder as the weights get heavier.

> You can download my free training tracker next to this book on my website: benkomanagement.pages.dev.

This program is for everyone, men and women. Because of natural physical differences, many women build strength and muscle more easily in the glutes and legs than in the upper body.

MY MODIFICATIONS

1. Deadlifts get their own day. My weights reached the point where, after the pec deck (100 kg × 10), incline press (100 kg × 3) and pulldowns (100 kg × 8), I was simply too exhausted to deadlift properly. So my four-day routine became five days: deadlift is now Day 2, on its own, and the rest of the days follow.

2. Abs get their own day. On leg days I train only legs. After squats I simply have no energy left for abs, so I train abs on a separate day between training days, and nothing else.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Add rest days as you get stronger: from three, to six, to more.
- Write down every set. If you stop progressing, rest more first.
- Stay natural. Your genetic limit is further away than you think.

TRY THIS TODAY

Download the training tracker and enter your first workout.

CHAPTER VII

Nutrition for Muscle

Let's talk about food. As I said at the start, you don't need to eat five or six times a day to build muscle, or spend thousands of dollars on supplements.

The fitness industry wants you to believe that you need huge amounts of protein to build muscle. Yes, you need protein to repair muscle after a hard workout, but not in the amounts you're being sold. Muscle is about 75% water and only about 20% protein. Your body can only use so much protein to build muscle; beyond that, extra protein is simply burned for energy or stored. Forcing down 200 g a day mainly helps the companies selling protein powder. What you need is a well-balanced diet.

MENTZER'S RECOMMENDATION

Mike Mentzer recommended a diet built mostly on carbohydrates, roughly:

~60–65%	~20–25%	~15%
carbohydrates	protein	fat

His reasoning: your muscles store carbohydrate as glycogen, and each gram of glycogen binds about three grams of water. On a high-intensity program, eating too few carbohydrates drains that glycogen, the water leaves with it, and your muscles look and feel flat. That's why he warned against low-carb diets for anyone training hard.

WHAT I DO

I follow the spirit of Mentzer's advice rather than exact percentages, and I eat the way I describe in my second book, *How, What and When to Eat*:

- Two meals a day, with about eight hours between them, and nothing in between.
- Plenty of natural carbohydrates: potatoes, legumes, whole grains, vegetables and fruit.
- Protein mainly from eggs every day, goat milk and legumes, with beef once a week and fish once a week.
- Healthy fats every day from olive oil and avocado. I eat more fat than Mentzer recommended, and it works well for me.
- No protein powders, no supplements.

Even though I eat far less protein than the industry recommends, I keep building and maintaining muscle. Eating more protein didn't make a difference for me. That said, everybody is different; if you're older or not making progress, adding more protein from real food is a sensible thing to try.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- You don't need six meals a day or protein powder to build muscle.
- Natural carbohydrates fuel high-intensity training and keep your muscles full.
- Eat real food, enough protein for you, and healthy fats.

TRY THIS TODAY

On your next training day, make sure both meals include a good portion of natural carbohydrates.

CHAPTER VIII

Negatives: The Forgotten Half of Every Rep

I follow this program on my own. I've never found a training partner who could train at the times I do, and as I said, this program is for busy professionals whose time is limited.

Training alone means I can't safely push past failure, which is why safety features matter. Most Smith machines and squat racks have safety bars, so the weight can't fall on you. What they can't do is help you with the negative part of a rep.

Every repetition has three parts: the **positive** (lifting the weight), the **static** (holding it) and the **negative** (lowering it). You're stronger in each phase than the one before: you can hold more than you can lift, and you can lower more than you can hold. Try it with a pull-up: even if you can't do a single one, you can jump up and hold yourself at the top. When you can't hold any longer, you won't drop suddenly; you can still lower yourself slowly.

That's why the negative phase is so valuable, and why it shouldn't be neglected. Research shows that slow, controlled negatives are especially effective for building strength and muscle. When you reach failure in the positive phase, your muscles still have strength left for the negative.

If you have a training partner, help each other with negatives: your partner helps you lift the weight, and you lower it slowly on your own, for 3 to 5 seconds.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Every rep has three phases: lift, hold and lower.
- You're strongest in the negative. Lower every rep slowly and under control.
- Train with a partner for assisted negatives, or use safety bars when alone.

TRY THIS TODAY

Do one slow negative pull-up: jump to the top and lower yourself over 5 seconds.

CONCLUSION

Why I Wrote This Series

When I started this program, I was as skeptical as you probably are. But I don't like to simply believe or disbelieve things. I like to try them and find out for myself.

What could I lose? Nothing. And if it worked, it was exactly what I was looking for: a way to build a physique and still save time and money. I like to do many different things in life, and that's only possible with good health, time and money. I definitely didn't want to spend hours in the gym, waste money on unnecessary supplements and miss out on everything else life has to offer. This program fits my life.

For the last two years I've been telling my parents and close friends about it, and I'm sure my parents are tired of hearing it. I'm still amazed that it works. I'm stronger and healthier, my mental health has improved, I carry myself like I can achieve anything, and, last but not least, I look good and feel good about it.

It's a shame more people don't know about this, and that so much of the fitness world is driven by profit rather than people's health. That's why I wrote this series, and especially this last book. My biggest wish is to spread this message and help people be healthy and happy. If I can convince just one person to eat healthy, train healthy and think healthy, I've already won.

One last thing: be skeptical of fitness influencers whose main goal is to sell you a product, a program or a membership. Real results come from simple principles, patience and consistency, not from what's being sold to you.

I wish you all the best in your training. Enjoy the journey and be patient. Don't compare yourself to others, don't worry about what people think of you, and the results will come.

Marcel Benko

PRINT ME

The Training Cycle at a Glance

One set per exercise, every set to failure. Warm up first.

DAY	EXERCISES	REPS
Day 1 Chest & back	Pec deck Incline press (close grip) Palms-up pulldown Deadlift (or shrugs)	6–10 1–3 6–10 6–10
Rest 3 days		
Day 2 Legs & abs	Leg extension + leg press (superset) Standing calf raise, one-legged calf raise Abs	6–10 + failure failure 12–15
Rest 3 days		
Day 3 Shoulders & arms	Lateral raise Rear delts (bent-over or reverse pec deck) Barbell curl Triceps pushdown + dips (superset)	6–10 6–10 6–10 6–10 + 3–5
Rest 3 days		
Day 4 Legs & abs	Leg extension, static hold Squat (straight after) Standing calf raise Abs	hold 10–25 s 12–15 failure failure
Rest 3 days, then start again with Day 1		

As you get stronger, add rest days. My path: 3 rest days at the start, 6 after one year, about 9 after two years. My version also gives deadlifts and abs their own days.

MEET MARCEL

About the Author

MB

Marcel Benko is a General Manager with more than 12 years of experience in the automotive industry and the founder of Benko Management. He leads a business of around 200 people, and he believes none of it would be possible without the health habits described in this book.

At 39, his blood work reads the same as it did nearly 20 years ago: no health issues and no daily pills. He coaches people on nutrition, exercise and healthy daily routines, based on what he has tested on himself for almost two decades.

Want a plan made for you?

After a personal consultation, I prepare a tailor-made diet, workout program and daily routine that fit your life, your goals and your schedule.

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