



Free Weights vs Machines

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Both beginners and more experienced personal training clients often ask about the effectiveness of free weights compared to exercise machines. There are advantages and disadvantages to both that need to be weighed against individual circumstances and training goals.

Free weights, such as dumbbells, usually have a small bar with weights on either end. Exercise machines usually have an immobile frame with a single path of motion where resistance is created by the use of pulleys, attachments, or bendable rods.

The following factors should be taken into account when determining the kind of strength training best for you:

- **Skill Level:** Machines require less skill, which can make them preferable for an unsupervised beginner. Adjusting the weight to your level is often as simple as moving a pin. For a beginner, there's a higher chance of losing control with free weights and causing injury. Dumbbells can also be more time consuming if you need to adjust or change the weight being used.
- **Versatility:** Free weights offer more versatility in your workout. Most machines only allow movement along a predetermined path. Furthermore, they are constructed to fit the body of the average sized individual. In contrast, there are thousands of different exercises you can do with just a few dumbbells, and they are compatible with every body.

- **Functionality:** The resistance curve offered in a strength machines do not simulate real life movement as well as free weights. Therefore free weights provide more functional carryover, giving you better fitness for real life activities.
- **Training Benefits:** If you are a bodybuilder looking to maximize muscle size, machines can be more effective in isolating and overloading a muscle group. If your training goals are fat loss, strength development, sport performance, or injury prevention, free weights are a better choice because they work a wider range of muscles, and trains the muscles to work as a team, which can lead to greater athletic ability, strength development, and injury proofing.
- **Cost and Convenience:** If you are on a budget or have limited space, dumbbells are the better choice. Because machines are highly specific to the muscle groups they isolate, it takes a lot of machines to facilitate a full body workout. Not only are machines many times more expensive than dumbbells, it can be costly if they break down and require maintenance.

- While both exercise and dumbbells have their advantages and disadvantages, I encourage clients to base their decision largely on personal preference. You will be much more likely to workout if you enjoy the equipment you are using.
- If you have no preference and are just starting out, I would recommend purchasing a set of dumbbells and an exercise bench. Then invest the money saved in a personal trainer who will show you how to use the dumbbells effectively.

