

# Don't Be Gym Stupid



By: Andy Chasse

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*What You're Doing Wrong And How To  
Fix It*

Andy Chasse'

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Take a look at 10 of the biggest things you're doing wrong as they relate to exercise and fitness. With each point comes a set of helpful hints and tips.

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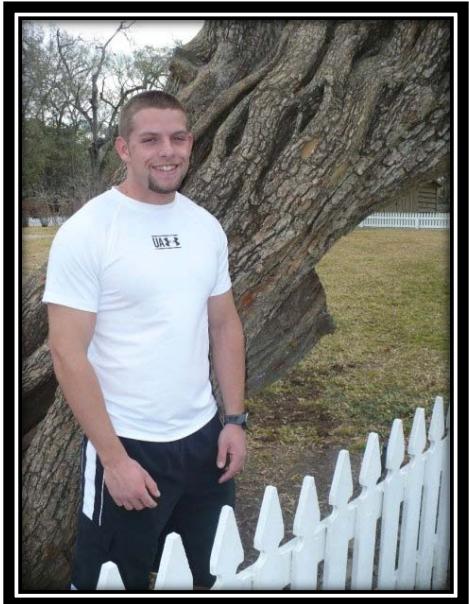
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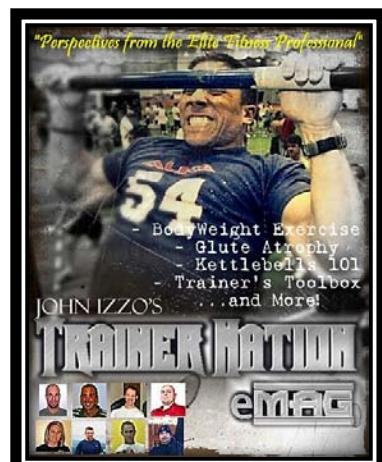


**Andy Chasse'** is a Certified Personal Trainer through the National Academy of Sports Medicine (NASM) and a competitive powerlifter. He has trained at L.A. Fitness and Gold's Gym, and presently trains at the SHSU Rec Center. He is currently a student at Sam Houston State University pursuing a degree in Kinesiology with a minor in Business.

After realizing that track and field wasn't his thing, he lifted casually for a couple of years and then made the dive into Powerlifting. Andy has been involved competitively with the WABDL and USAPL for 3 years as a 165 lifter and has competed

at the state and national level as a part of the Sam Houston State University powerlifting team.

As well as the above, Andy is a published writer. He has written multiple articles for Bodybuilding.com, EduBook, Brotherspeak Magazine, and is featured in John Izzo's e-mag *Trainer Nation*. *Trainer Nation* is a free publication available to anyone and everyone containing training advice from various fitness experts. In addition, he maintains the up-to-date blog, [Breaking The Continuum](#). Andy also publishes a monthly fitness newsletter for the Sam Houston Recreational Sports department, which will soon be available online.



## Introduction

# What Exactly IS Gym Stupid?

This concept was originally inspired by a set of articles I wrote for Bodybuilding.com entitled *Don't Be Gym Stupid*. Sound at all familiar? While the same points have been recycled here, a wealth of additional information has been provided for each.

Look, I'm not gonna lie - I see a lot of stupid stuff in the gym. Hold on - let me rephrase that - I see a lot of stupid stuff in *gyms*. Honestly, it doesn't even matter what city or state I'm in or what gym I'm lifting at. The average gym enthusiast just doesn't seem to have a clue what they're doing. Here's the funny thing - it's not just the younger lifters. The youth population is commonly stereotyped due to its interesting and often frustrating gym antics. However, the 20 and up crowd are just as likely to make the same mistakes as the teenagers. The point is - weightlifting enthusiasts of all ages fall into the category of what I like to call *gym stupid*.

Although it pains me to relive these terrible gym memories, I'm willing to take you on a walk through *the glorious land of Gym Stupid*.

## Visualize With Me...

*You walk into the gym and the first thing that draws your attention is a group of teenagers, maybe high school age, gathered around a bench cheering for this little guy, who you're sure can't be more than maybe 130 or 140 pounds, pressing up 225 for reps. Pretty beastly, right? Sure, until you break down his form. To give you an idea of just how bad it is, you see him literally thrusting his pelvis into the air after each rep. At this point you're not sure if he's actually picturing himself having a sloppy one night stand at a cheap motel, or if that's just how he benches. But let's move on; I'm a little sick to my stomach now.*

*So you're starting your workout. You're progressing through your sets at a pretty good pace. But something occurs to you after your 3<sup>rd</sup> set of supinated grip seated rows - the guy next to you has done like 18 sets of curls. Sure, he switches up his grip every time, but 18 sets? You just shake your head and keep to your own business. That is until you move on to your 6x3 heavy front squats. You finish the first set no problem, but suddenly you hear a very high-pitch voice coming from behind you. At first you think it must be some really hot treadmill chick that noticed you from cardio land, but as you turn around you're received by a little kid who's even tinier than the pelvis thruster. He advises you, very meekly of course, not to do squats because you will more than likely get a hernia.*

Had enough yet? I hope so, because I sure have! The above example is more or less the definition of *Gym Stupid*. Because it pains me so to constantly experience the above scenario, I have put together a few of the most important factors to progressing and growing in the gym. Here's the catch, though - I'm not gonna tell you what *to* do; Rather, what you will find in here is a list of what *not* to do. Telling you what to do isn't my job. I'll leave that to your mother and girlfriend – that's their territory. I'm just looking out for your body's best training interests. And my own mental state, of course.

In this guide I will list ten points relating to exercise that you avoid as best you can. These points will not only reflect activity seen in the gym itself, but will also include common practices that should be corrected quickly.

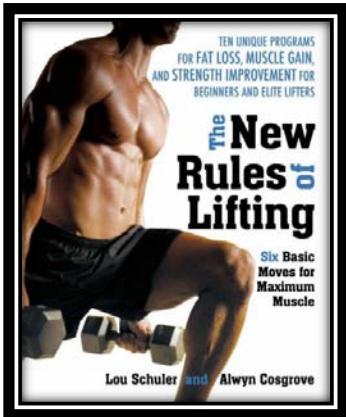
# 1. Do NOT Open Your Mouth When You Can Open Your Ears.

You might think you have something really important to say, or some sort of super rare knowledge to share, but let me break this down for you - you don't.

Well, at least the strong majority of the gym population doesn't. There are great deals of people out there who are way smarter than you that you need to be listening to. These people might include strength and conditioning coaches such as Vern Gambetta and Eric Cressey, personal trainers such as John Izzo and Alwyn Cosgrove, or authors such as Lou Schuler.

Each of the above individuals has contributed a plethora of quality information to the world of exercise. That being said, the reading material below should get you started. Search the internet and your local book store for further reading. Apart from reading, make an effort to be more sociable in the gym. Don't let the big old badass lifters intimidate you – throughout my experiences, I have found that most of those types actually enjoy helping others.

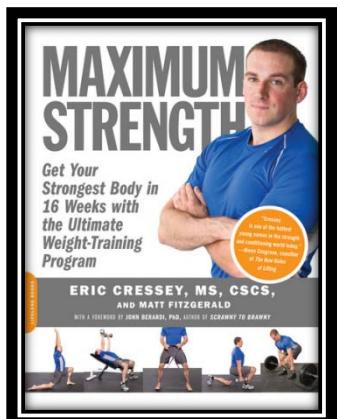
The take home point - always remember to open up your damn eyes and ears and you might actually learn a thing or two.



## The New Rules of Lifting

By Lou Schuler and Alwyn Cosgrove

This book is a great resource whether you're a beginning lifter who has no idea what in the hell three sets of ten means or an elite level beast. The simplicity of it is amazing - the programs are based on a number of simple, yet effective and proven concepts. The "new rules" are so extremely refreshing. Schuler takes old concepts and brings them a new, blinding light. And Cosgrove's programs...creative and inspired, to say the very least. In addition, all of the programs' movements are completely outlined; each movement even has its own dedicated chapter!



## Maximum Strength

By Eric Cressey

Maximum Strength is DEFINITELY a worthwhile read. The writing isn't exactly the quality that I normally get from his articles and blog, but I still enjoyed it. It just felt very...informative; as opposed to the conversational writing style I am used to reading from him. Regardless of writing quality, I took a load of exercises - weight bearing and mobility type - to use for myself and my clients. Cressey makes use of a number of different set/rep schemes, including stage training and clusters. The phases are well-planned out and creative.

## 2. Do NOT Hop Onto The Low-Fat Bandwagon.

**Just don't do it. Saturated, monounsaturated, and polyunsaturated fats should all have a reserved spot in your diet.**

Yes, saturated fats and trans fats need to be severely limited due to health risks, although there's nothing wrong with chowing down on some beef here and there.

What about the others, though? Why deny yourself the benefits of healthy fats - decreased cancer risk, decreased heart disease risk, decreased cholesterol...I can go on all day here, folks - when they are just so great?

Get your monounsaturated fats (Omega-3's) in the form of nuts, avocados, natural peanut butter, and various vegetable oils. Fix up a cold avocado salad for a little variation from your typical eating. Mix a little peanut butter up with some Cool Whip and cocoa powder for a low-calorie treat.

Polyunsaturated omega-3's may be found in fish, flax seeds, and walnuts. Omega-6's, on the other hand, are found commonly in grains, eggs, and poultry. The typical American diet is rarely lacking omega-6's, however. Pack yourself a bag of walnuts in the morning and snack on them throughout the day and you will be good to go.

### 3. Do NOT Skip Out On Core Work.

Your core controls everything.  
Remember that all movement is  
initiated from the core.

So what exactly makes up *the core*? The core, in the simplest of definitions, is a series of muscles and muscle complexes that work to stabilize the spine, pelvis, and shoulder girdle. These muscles work together to form a solid base of support, which allows us to perform the movements that are required on a daily basis.

You must understand that the core works to stabilize you at all times - regardless of the situation. You could be mowing the lawn, bending down to pick up a fallen pen, or even scratching your ass. The core doesn't discriminate. Without some degree of core strength, performing all of the above listed movements would be total hell.

A variety of direct abdominal and lower back work a few times per week goes a great distance when it comes to strengthening the body as a whole. It is important, however, to use a multitude of different exercises to train the abdominal region. Let's take a look at a few possibilities.

Keep in mind that these are just that – possibilities. There are countless abdominal exercises out there, each of which is effective in its own way. Be sure to vary your abdominal exercise selection often – don't be afraid to switch your routine up every three or four weeks. Without this variation, you will be subject to stagnation and the all too well-known plateau.

## • Dragon flag



○ To perform a dragon flag, begin with your back flat on a bench. Your butt should be at the very bottom end of the bench, but not quite hanging over. Straighten your legs as if you were about to perform a set of leg raises. Keeping the rest of the body stabilized, raise your legs straight up into the air. When perpendicular to the bench, perform a reverse crunch. Allow your legs to drop back down to the starting position and repeat.

## • Wood Chop



○ With your feet shoulder-width apart, stand perpendicular to the machine. Grab the cable at shoulder level with both hands, arms completely straight. Begin twisting your upper body toward the floor. The arms should remain straight

throughout the movement. You should NOT be twisting at your lower back. The movement will finish with your hands at the hip level, opposite the shoulder in which you initiated the movement.

## • Plank



○ Begin face down on the ground resting on your forearms. This resembles the push-up position exactly – except you're not on your hands. Hold this position, keeping the entire body tight and stabilized. Begin with 20 to 30 seconds and raise it as necessary.

## • Pull-Through



- This is a little known exercise outside of the powerlifting world that strengthens not only the abdominals, but also the lower back and hamstrings. Set up directly in front of a cable

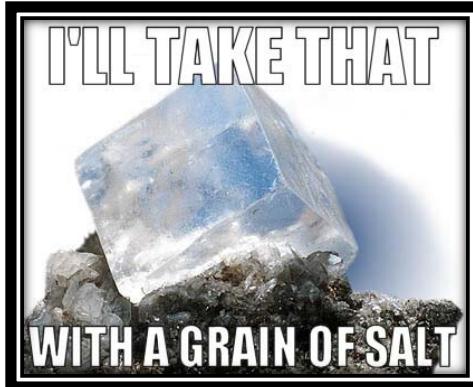
machine. You should be facing away from the machine. Hook a rope attachment onto the cable and lock it into the lowest possible position. Take a few steps away from the machine and move into a deep squat position. With both hands, grip the cable through your legs. Remaining tight and low, slowly bring your body to a locked-out position by pulling the cable up and through the gap between your legs.

## 4. Do NOT Think You're Above Skepticism.

This might sound  
a little off-beat  
coming from a  
writer, but just  
hear me out for  
a minute.

Don't believe everything you read. Please, for the love of all that is good and right in this world - don't do it. Don't get me wrong - there is a boatload of well-researched information out there, both online and offline, provided by reputable sources. However, there's also a lot of garbage to be found in the exact same places. In fact, garbage fills up most of the information available in this industry.

While one guy might say something negative about so-and-so, another is very likely lecture the exact opposite. As you read and research exercise and fitness, you will probably come across this exact situation – that's why it is of the utmost importance that you take everything with a grain of salt. One tiny bit of



misinformation might factor into the injury you so inconveniently receive right before that big bench press competition with your boss. That promotion is riding on a win, remember?

Stick to material written by the experts in the field. Newcomers have some great things to say – but not all of them and not always. Don't take chances with your body and your health. If you

read something that causes even a hint of skepticism, double-check it against a different source.

## 5. Do NOT Assume You Are Smarter Than Your Body.

*I hate to break it to you buddy - you're not. Your body is beyond smart - it's like a freakin' 23<sup>rd</sup> century robot.*

Okay, I admit, that was a little corny. Your body isn't quite that smart, but it's definitely up there. Unfortunately, very few gym enthusiasts realize this. Much too often is the intelligence of the body in all of its glory underestimated. And so begins the downfall.

Let's run through an example real quick - say you have a pair of abnormally weak glutes. One fine summer afternoon, you decide to head out to the track to run some short

sprints. After a thorough warm-up chock full of mobility work and foam rolling, you're ready to go. You step up to the line, slip in a little crotch itch for good luck, and then proceed to assume the position. You blast through the start and everything is looking good – from your outside perspective, that is. On the inside,

your body is shooting signals all over the place to accommodate this complex movement. Your system realizes the glutes are weak and unable to perform properly in the triple extension necessary to carry out a sprint. It quickly sends a signal to the hamstrings letting them know that they need to pick up the slack because the glutes can't keep up.

Are you still with me? Okay, so because the glutes are only working at 80%, the hamstrings are now working at 120%. What exactly does this mean? Well, when a muscle lengthens it becomes tight - think about performing a set of static stretches. Static stretching requires you to hold a specific tightened position for a number of seconds. But about ten yards later, a sharp pain flies through the lower rear portion of your thigh and you collapse to the ground. You have just been taken through the process leading up to the lovely injury known as a strained hamstring.

The point of this example is not to discourage you from running sprints. In fact, I would like you to do quite the opposite. But you must understand that your body is smart. It knows exactly when and how to compensate for individual muscle weakness, tightness, and failure. In short – your body considers everything you don't. You must address each and every weakness you possess in order to avoid muscle imbalance that will eventually lead to injury.



## 6. Do NOT Neglect The Bottom Half.

The other half, so to speak.  
The poor red-headed  
stepchild that everyone loves  
to hate.

And before you ask, no - you can't bench with your legs. Where I'm from, we call that the squat! Too many people, particularly the younger guys, focus all of their efforts on upper body work and completely ignore the lower body. This is the complete opposite of optimal practice.

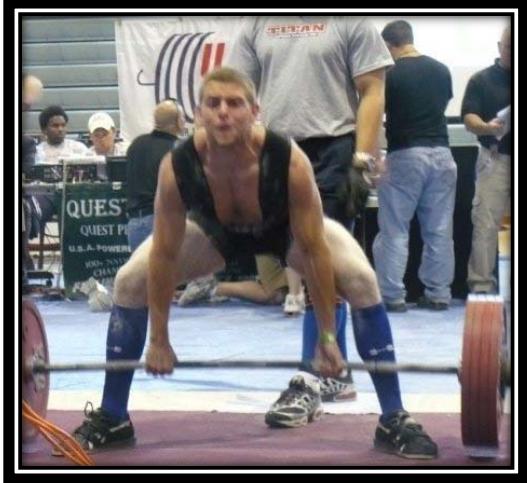
If you didn't quite catch the previous point, balance is a key factor in preventing injury. Without proper balance, a problem will surely arise sooner or later – likely sooner. Learn to love the squat, deadlift, and lunge, as well as all of their variations. Wait a minute, you're telling me you aren't familiar with these? Get familiar – quickly.

Although there are tens upon tens of pivotal exercises, the squat is definitely one of the most important when it comes to lower body work. The squat is a well-

known compound exercise that requires joint movement at the hip, knee, and ankle. Although the glutes actually function as the main mover in the squat, the quadriceps are an important synergist, or helper. In the squat, the hips flex as the butt moves towards the ground and the knees extend as the butt ascends from that bottom position. As stated above, the quadriceps are



responsible for both of these functions. Utilize the close-stance squat to place greater stress on the quadriceps. The wide-stance variation draws more of the hamstrings into the motion. While this is certainly beneficial, the exercise below will take care of hamstring activity.



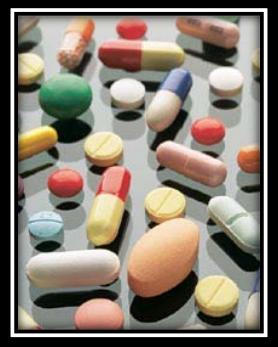
The number one lower body exercise counterpart to the squat is the deadlift. Specifically, the wide-stance deadlift. This is a very tough movement on both the hips and hamstrings. Be sure your technique is spot on before performing the deadlift at a high intensity. Rather than being placed on the upper back, the bar will now be placed on the floor. The lifter will then proceed to raise it from the ground to a full lockout. A full lockout simply means that the lifter must pull the shoulders back in the straightened position.

## 7. Do NOT Work Through Pain.

*I know – you don't want to wimp out. All of your friends will see and call you terrible names. Well, suck it up.*

First and foremost, we must address the fact that pain is not just random. If you're feeling serious pain anywhere in your body, something is wrong and needs to be fixed as soon as possible. Failure to do so will likely lead to increased pain and a number of additional, more complex problems that you will be so generously rewarded with the joy of fixing.

If you do continue to work through the pain, you can be sure that you will soon be a driver on the long and arduous road of rehab – and that's all there is to it. I pushed through some horrible shoulder pain back in high school and ended up with a very badly strained rotator cuff. Rehabbing the rotator cuff is a painful and time consuming experience – it's not fun. Wanna know what's even worse? I didn't learn from that experience. It took a couple more minor injuries for me to finally understand this simple concept. Don't make the same mistake I did.



One of the easiest ways to prevent injury is to target the most commonly problematic areas. A few of these areas are the shoulder, hip, lower back, and ankle. Use the exercises below to assist in the prevention of any big-time problems in the future.

- **Rotator Cuff**

- Perform Cuban Raises to target the infraspinatus. This is the most easily and often injured muscle of the four rotator cuff muscles.

- **Hip**

- Bulgarian Split Squats are a great exercise for building hip strength. This lunge variation features a raised and stabilized rear leg.

- **Lumbar Spine**

- Reverse Hyperextensions are a solid selection for the lower back that also targets the hamstrings. Use these in conjunction with the more popular glute-ham raises.

- **Ankle**

- Dorsiflexion movements, or movements that require upward flexing of the ankle, provide a great deal of additional mobility over a short period of time.

## 8. Do NOT Deny Yourself The Pleasures Of Breakfast.

You know how you  
always hear that  
breakfast is the  
most important  
meal of the day?  
Yeah, well, your  
mom is right.

Just this once, trust me when I tell you that your momma is most definitely correct. A healthy morning meal – both high in protein and carbohydrates – certainly goes a long way towards brightening your day both physically and mentally. With no morning meal, what energy are you running off of? Very little – that's for sure.

Besides, bacon and eggs is definitely the breakfast of champions. You do wanna be a champion, don't you? Fix yourself a quick and healthy breakfast burrito each morning. Here are a few variations to keep you out of boredom's destructive path.

### • The Pizza Burrito

- 3 eggs
- 1 medium-sized tortilla
- A handful of pepperoni
- Mozzarella cheese, shredded

- **Classic Mexican Burrito**

- 3 eggs
- 1 medium-sized tortilla
- Fiesta blend or jalapeño jack cheese, shredded
- Avocado, sliced
- Salsa
- 1 jalapeño or cayenne pepper

Basic – but good alternatives to the norm. I think it's safe to say that we could all use a change of pace every now and then.

And for all you coffee drinkers out there – fear not. Caffeine has proved its effectiveness and benefits time and time again in a number of reputable studies. Are you interested in...

- Increased metabolic processing?
- Heightened sense of alertness?
- Sizable decrease in risk for a number of diseases?

These are just a few of the positives that caffeine provides. Don't be afraid to grab a cup of joe on a few of those early mornings – you will doing your body a generous favor. Not a fan of coffee by itself? Try spicing it up a little!

- **Coffee Protein Shake**

- 12-16oz coffee
- 1 scoop vanilla whey protein
- 1 tbsp sugar-free caramel syrup
- 1 tbsp cocoa powder

Note – Don't mess around with a poor choice of vanilla. It will massively dominate the flavor, so choose outside of the brands you can find at Wal-mart.

## 9. Do NOT Think Goals Are Just For Idealists.

Goals provide more motivation than a stadium full of some of the best-looking cheerleaders in the world.

Alright – that may be a tiny bit of a stretch – but you get what I'm saying, right? Goals may prove useful to anyone and everyone, especially those who must constantly see some kind of improvement in their chosen activity.

It is important to develop goals for every aspect of your life. Although it may seem a little stupid at first, it won't be a while down the road when you are able to look back on your progress and see how far you have come. Accomplishing even the smallest of goals will likely net a pretty wonderful feeling.

Be sure to set goals for your individual workouts, too. Let's say next Tuesday I'm supposed to bench. I hit 225x5 this week, so next week I want to hit 230x5. It's as easy as that. Write out a goal statement to keep track of these goals. This goal statement should address the following.



- **What is your goal?**
  - Let's say you want to squat 405 for one repetition.
- **Why do you want to achieve this goal?**
  - It's one of the standard benchmarks of strength.

- **What do you plan on doing to achieve this goal?**
  - Heavy squats in the range of one to three repetitions, supplemented by assistance work including stiff-leg deadlifts and glute-ham raises.
- **What is the timeframe you have set to achieve this goal?**
  - Because your current one rep-max squat is sitting around 385, six solid weeks of training should reward you with the 20 extra pounds you're looking for.

Keep a little binder full of these goal statements if you're the organizational type. This will allow you a visual look at the progress you have made.

## 10. Do NOT Ignore Structure.

*Anatomy isn't just for  
geeky lab scientists.*

Again, we're coming back to the fact that your body is extraordinarily smart. Like a robot, remember? If you don't understand the structure of your

body, how are you going to know what is needed to fix your imbalances and progress your training? You're not.

Don't think I'm telling you to go out and spend \$200 on some 700-page anatomy book or take a college-level anatomy and physiology class – I'm not. Even if I was, I don't think anyone would take me seriously. However, I will definitely advise some internet browsing. Both bodybuilding.com and exrx.net provide some very solid information on a wide range of exercise and fitness subjects.

You're gonna want to get familiar with each of the major muscles and their functions. If I ask what muscle plays main mover in the close-stance squat, you should be able to tell me the answer - the glutes. That was a gimme question because I gave you the answer up top! In addition, it definitely wouldn't hurt to understand more complex areas such as the ankle, knee, hip, and shoulder. Hint – these are the exact problem areas I described earlier. Just remember to peruse with a hint caution – as I ranted about in the #4, not everything you read is true.