

Curves[®] Includes No Strength Training

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Several in our midst have written articles of late wherein the hydraulic exercise equipment of the *Curves* franchises were condemned. Although I have not read these articles, I concur that such devices are not worthy for exercise. I wish to make one brief point about such equipment: hydraulic-based equipment is, ostensibly, strength-training equipment that more correctly fits into the category of *steady-state activity*.

I peered through the window of a *Curves* studio on my walk to a restaurant one night last week (May 2003). I noted that inside there were six or seven exercise machines arranged in a circle, and that each machine was separated by a square elevated pad appearing to be about 4 x 4 feet. Each pad was used to perform jogging in place or some kind of steady-state activity.

Therefore, what I saw confirmed what I had read and heard of *Curves*—that the program included strength exercises, each interspersed by a steady-state activity. With some reflection the next day, I decided that my confirmation was a confused mistake.

I remembered that there had been no constraint devices on any of the exercise machines. Hydraulic machines are isokinetic—speed-based resistance—and possessing no negative work potential. The common cover-up for this gross resistance deficiency is “double positive.” For example, the arm machine that addressed elbow function provides resistance to the triceps upon extension and then resistance to the biceps upon flexion, thus permitting either structure to rest during its negative phase.

Also, there is no progression of resistance unless the subject attempts to move progressively faster. As this occurs—and with no constraints such as seat belts—the subject thrashes progressively more violently. And although we admit that total isolation is relatively unattainable, any isolation in these machines is a far-fetched notion.

Due to the incontinuity of loading as well as the lack of isolation, muscular failure, if not totally avoided, is certainly deemphasized. In fact, muscular failure is so deemphasized using this equipment as to qualify this type of activity, I believe, as *steady-state activity*.

Of course, a subject might perform these devices to muscular failure. It is also possible to run or bicycle or swim to muscular failure, although doing so would be a largely nonisotatory and inefficient process of inroad. And note, conversely, that a subject can enter a true strength-training device and perform it with a resistance slight enough that little meaningful inroad occurs, thus qualifying as a steady-state activity.

While the *Curves* program *appears* to be a regimen of strength-training exercises interspersed with steady-state activities, in reality, it is comprised of nothing more than steady-state activities interspersed with more steady-state activities.

Any well-versed or educated student of exercise knows that only an activity that stimulates improvement—or stimulates muscular growth—can be classified as true exercise. Steady-state activities do not fall into this category. In fact, not only do they NOT stimulate growth or improvement, they can *produce* only one thing— injury— either now or later.

So, since steady-state activities—more accurately termed “empty exercise”—do not really qualify as *exercise*, in reality,[it turns out that] the Curves program does not offer exercise at all.