



Don't Call Us SuperSlow

By Pete Cerqua

Sometimes it seems like you can hardly pick up the paper or turn on the TV these days without seeing or reading some item about slow methods of strength training. Which is all to the good. Being noticed definitely beats being ignored.

But sound bites and features do not always get it right. Most of the publicity for the techniques known as Slow Burn and The Power of Ten fails to point out that both these methods are actually versions of a protocol called SuperSlow™, which has been around for about twenty years now.

90-Second Fitness also calls for moving slowly, so we have that much in common with SuperSlow and its imitators. But a lot of what we do is different, and we think the differences are crucial.

Our biggest disagreement might well be called philosophical. SuperSlow sets are done to “failure.” The goal of a SuperSlow set is not to complete any predetermined number of repetitions or to work for a preset length of time, but to cause the exercised muscle to fail. In other words, each set is supposed to end with an uncompleted repetition. The trainee, unable to move the weight or the movement arm, is then urged to “keep trying” for an additional ten seconds or so. This extra effort is meant to produce the maximum “inroad,” or temporary reduction in the muscle’s strength. Ken Hutchins, the founder of SuperSlow, is quite eloquent on this point, insisting that completing a rep is the only “apparent goal” of an exercise, the “real goal” being to induce failure in the muscle.

90-Second Fitness, in contrast, pursues success rather than failure. We set positive goals—clearly defined, challenging yet attainable. We do not believe that an instruction to “do this exercise until you can’t do it anymore” is productive, nor do we agree that maximum inroad necessarily means maximum progress.

This essential difference is reflective in the application of all the various 90-Second Fitness protocols:

- Our sets are defined in advance; you know how many reps to do and you know your target time;
- At any given weight, strength is commensurate with the number of seconds under contraction; weekly progress can therefore be measured precisely;
- No set is meant to last longer than 90 seconds;
- Though each set is shorter, the actual load being borne (weight multiplied by time under load) is greater, another factor that promotes maximum effort while avoiding boring (and unproductive) sets lasting more than 3 minutes (10 reps at 10 seconds up and 10 seconds down);

- Rep speed is even slower and therefore more challenging;
- Instinctive efforts to find ways of extending the set or manipulating the weight are encouraged rather than hunted down and banished;
- 90-Second Fitness is easier to learn than SuperSlow™.

Beyond these specific differences, 90-Second Fitness is far more flexible and less sectarian than SuperSlow. 90-Second Fitness is a method, not a rigid prescription. Its variety of protocols allows it to be shaped to different personalities, styles, and even goals and needs, whereas SuperSlow is ostentatiously and explicitly “one size fits all”. Advocates of SuperSlow, beginning with Ken Hutchins himself, argue strenuously for what they call “the need for non-variation in exercise.”

Finally, SuperSlow is overtly hostile to all other forms of exercise, which in SuperSlow terminology do not even qualify as an exercise at all: aerobics, Pilates and all other physical activities are characterized as “recreation” yielding no benefits while entailing at least some risk. Our attitude is completely different. We encourage an active lifestyle. We do not tell you not to do karate or Pilates or yoga or running. What we do say is that whatever else you are doing, you will do it better if you are stronger. 90-Second Fitness will make you stronger, and that will help your karate, Pilates, or whatever form of movement you enjoy. But since none of these other activities directly builds lean muscle tissue, none of them can produce the benefits of strength training. In other words, strength training is essential; all the rest is elective. And 90-Second Fitness, we believe, is the most effective form of strength training.

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