

Building Strength Fast by Going Slow

Don't have time to exercise? This workout is for you

After dentist Steven Kafko, 53, had surgery on two vertebrae in his neck, doctors told him he would have to avoid strenuous activity for the rest of his life--and definitely no weight-lifting. But after reviewing the slow-motion strength training offered at New York's InForm Fitness, "my neurosurgeon is thrilled that I'm doing this, because it is so safe and effective," says Kafko. In three months, he says, he has gained 1 1/2 inches in his chest and lost 1 1/2 inches in his waist.

And here's the best part: The routine takes only 20 minutes, once or twice a week--and you don't even break a sweat, so there's no need to shower and change. Some clients, including Kafko, work out in their business clothes. Compare that with the hour or so, three or four times a week, of a regular machine or free-weight workout, plus locker-room time.

By moving weight at a snail's pace, you eliminate momentum, thereby forcing the muscle to do all the work. Then, when the muscle reaches the point of exhaustion, instead of stopping, as you would in standard regimens, you keep trying for at least five more excruciating seconds. Slo-mo trainers don't care how many reps you do. The point is to get to muscle failure--and then hang in there a bit longer than you think you can. It's those last seconds of effort that trigger the workout's extraordinary results.

A special breathing technique makes it possible to hang in there: You drop your jaw, relax your tongue, and pant like a dog. This prevents gritting and clenching in the jaw, neck, and throat. As the intensity of the exercise increases, you just pant faster.

Originally developed in the '80s by Ken Hutchins, a Florida trainer who trademarked the name SuperSlow in 1992, the workout uses machines not found in regular gyms. If you do reps this slowly on standard Nautilus or Cybex gear, you'll get stuck at the point where you have the least leverage and jerk ahead at the point where leverage shifts in your favor. Slo-mo machines, either retrofitted Nautilus or specially designed gear now offered by several manufacturers, compensate for variations in leverage to allow smooth, controlled effort throughout the entire range of motion.

A typical workout takes you through four to six machines, engaging both the upper and lower body and rotating among the equipment over the course of a few weeks to vary the demands placed on the muscles. You might start on the leg press, which engages the glutes, hips, legs--the entire lower body, really. Next, you might do the pulldown or pullover to get the entire upper body--chest, arms, and shoulders. Then you would move on to machines that target more specific areas, such as inner and outer thighs.

Along with the smoother equipment, the other big plus of doing this at a specialized facility is the care the trainers take in adjusting each machine to fit your frame, which prevents injury. On some machines, after making adjustments to the seat and back, trainer Alvin Rodriguez straps Kafko in tightly, asks him to wiggle back as far as he can, and tightens the strap even more. Then, from an array of bolsters and pads in various shapes and sizes, he chooses several that he wedges in at Kafko's sides, behind his neck, or behind his lower back. Now, no matter how intense the exercise gets, nothing that isn't supposed to move can move.

Nationwide, a single session costs from \$50 to \$90, but the rate drops if you buy a series. To find a trainer, check the directory at [.superslow.com](http://superslow.com).

Even with all this personal attention, your total time investment--from walking in to walking out--is under 30 minutes. The walking out part is a little shaky. But by next week, that shakiness will have turned to steel.

By Aleta Davies