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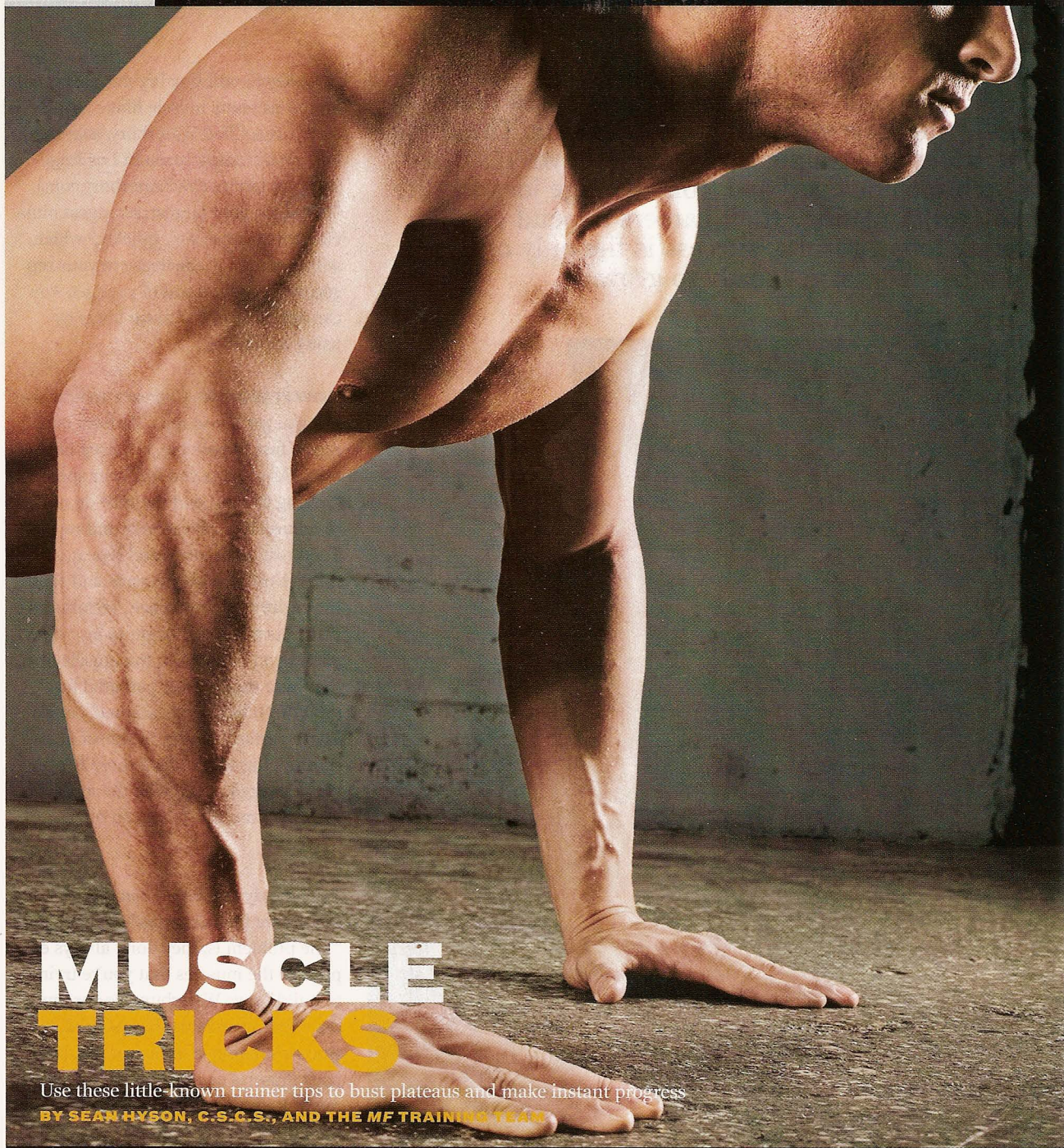
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# MUSCLE TRICKS

Use these little-known trainer tips to bust plateaus and make instant progress

BY SEAN HYSON, C.S.C.S., AND THE MF TRAINING TEAM

**W**E KNOW YOU DON'T come to us every month just to read about which muscles the bench press works or to get tips on how you can avoid becoming "too big"—so we don't insult your intelligence by wasting pages on information you already know or aren't interested in. Rather, we give you what you want: a steady supply of great workouts and advice on new and better ways to break out of training ruts and build more muscle faster than ever. (We leave the filler to the other magazines.) →

PIOTR SIKORA

**T**his article is all about strategy—the best methods for busting plateaus and making new size and strength gains. These are the tricks our trainers use on their own clients—which include everyone from average joes to elite athletes. And since their careers depend on their ability to get results, success is the only option. In other words, get ready to grow.



### TRIPLE SETS

“The key to building big muscles is to recruit as many muscle fibers as possible,” says Chad Waterbury, a strength and conditioning coach in Los Angeles (visit him at [chadwaterbury.com](http://chadwaterbury.com)). “However, your largest, strongest muscle fibers fatigue very quickly,” which is evidenced by a decrease in your rep speed toward the end of your set. You can get more out of those fibers by using triple sets.

**HOW IT WORKS:** Choose a weight that lets you get 10–14 reps. Perform each rep as fast as possible, but keep perfect form. As soon as you feel your speed beginning to slow, end the set—do not go to failure. Rest 30 seconds and repeat. Then rest 30 seconds and repeat once more. Now rest 180 seconds and repeat the entire triple sequence. Terminating your sets when you begin to lose speed allows you to focus on the muscle fibers that have the greatest potential for growth. Once they’re fatigued, continuing to perform the set is almost moot. By stopping to rest until those big fibers are recovered, you’ll reap the most growth stimulus the set can offer.

### 1½ REPS

You already know that compound exercises are the best muscle builders. “The problem is, they don’t always emphasize the muscles that you’re trying to build,” says Waterbury. For example, the chinup works the biceps hard, but since it’s mainly a back exercise, your back muscles can overpower the movement. Rather than doing curls to isolate the biceps, use the 1½-rep method. “This allows you to build up the smaller muscles you want to focus on,” says Waterbury, “while also deriving all the strength-building benefits of compound movements.”

**HOW IT WORKS:** Perform half of a full repetition for a particular exercise. Then return to the starting position and perform a complete rep through the entire range of motion. The half

rep and full rep together count as one full rep. For example, on the chinup, start from the full hang position and pull yourself up halfway. (In this portion of the range of motion, the biceps are working at their max.) Lower yourself back down, and then do a full chinup (in which the lats are the prime movers). On the squat, you would lower yourself into the bottom position, come up halfway, and then go back down and up again to the start position. Perform five sets of 4–6 reps like this twice each week and you'll shatter strength plateaus while stimulating a ton of new growth.

### HEAVY AND FAST SETS

"There are two indisputable ways to build big, strong muscles," says Waterbury—"by lifting heavy and by lifting fast." Trouble is, muscles can't move really heavy loads fast (it takes milliseconds longer to coordinate a muscle action under high tension), and while they can move light loads quickly, light weights aren't stressful enough on muscles to elicit growth. How do you lift heavy and fast in the same set to reap maximum benefits?

**HOW IT WORKS:** Choose a compound exercise for whatever muscle group you're training. For example, if it's a chest workout, you could use the bench press (as opposed to the dumbbell fly). Perform a set with a weight that allows you to get five reps (do not go to failure), rest 10 seconds, and then hit the floor and do as many plyo pushups as you can (explosively push up so that your body rises off the floor and you can clap in midair—see "Pushup 2.0," on page 16). Rest 180 seconds, and then repeat the sequence twice more.

The set of five reps allows you to lift heavy weights, providing plenty of muscular tension. The explosive plyo pushups recruit your biggest and strongest muscle fibers. This combination provides a one-two punch for lightning-fast muscle gains. If you're training legs, do squats followed by body-weight jump squats. "This method also works really well for biceps development," says Waterbury. Perform one set of weighted chinups for five reps, rest 10 seconds, and then do a set of barbell curls as fast as possible with a load you could lift 10–12 times.

