

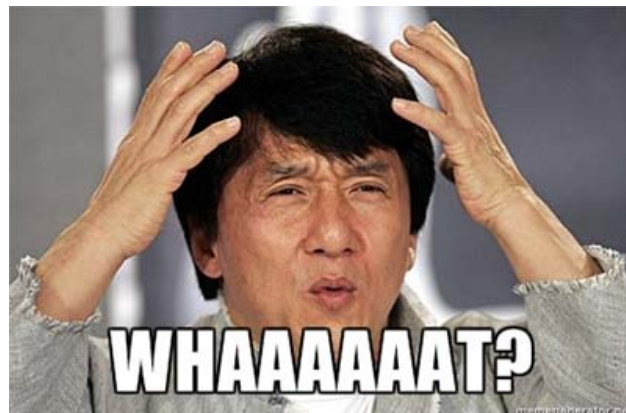
The Muscle Confusion Edition

If you go up and down a ladder a bunch of times, you'll get some exercise from that, but if you climb a rock wall, you're gonna get a lot more. The idea is to work on your strengths and weaknesses, and that's what muscle confusion does. Muscle confusion is a plateau-buster because you're constantly challenging different aspects of your fitness.

—Tony Horton, of *P90X* fame

FMP Colleagues and Wellness Enthusiasts,

If you've ever watched late night TV, you've inevitably seen those ads for P90X and heard the program's affable trainer, Tony Horton, talk about "muscle confusion." But what is it? And do you have to buy a "program" to get the benefits of muscle confusion?



There are a lot of misunderstandings out there about muscle confusion--you'll find entire blogs devoted to debunking this phrase that has become so closely associated with

Beachbody's P90X fitness juggernaut--which has sold over 3 million copies and grossed more than \$500 million in sales. Here's what you need to know to understand muscle confusion and introduce it into your fitness routine:

1. **"Muscle confusion" really is rooted in fitness science.** The basic science marketed as "muscle confusion" comes from [research a PhD from Romania, Tudor Bompa, began in the 1960s](#). Remember all those Soviet weightlifters who dominated the Olympics every four years? Yeah--that was Tudor's handiwork. He called it "periodization," a system "[that emphasized variable loads for optimal performance](#)." They would vary their workouts, and introduce new ways of working the same (and companion) muscles.
2. **Muscle confusion is more than mere "cross training"**. There certainly is an element of cross-training in programs aiming at introducing muscle confusion, but it's more than that. It is great to add variety to your workouts--to take a brisk walk one day, followed by a weight-lifting session in the gym the next day, and a Zumba class the third day (I'm like the old Yellow Pages--I "never stop selling")--but muscle confusion also varies the intensity and the recovery periods, and introduces plans to tackle the same muscles in different ways.
3. **Muscle confusion seeks to expose your weaknesses.** One of the great things about programs that tip their hat to the muscle confusion concept is that you'll find many ways to find your weaknesses--muscle that still need to be developed, coordination or stability issues, etc.

If you *like* the idea of a ready-made "fitness program in a box," there are several that include muscle confusion: besides the obvious choice, [Beachbody's P90X](#) (and the more recent [P90X2](#)), a [US News and World Report article](#) also mentions [Final Phase Fat Loss](#) and [Turbulence Training](#). Locally, the [CrossFit gyms](#) are all about programs that include a component of muscle confusion, and of course virtually [all of the local fitness clubs](#) will tailor a program for you that includes muscle confusion (whether they call it that or not)--including our own [Fitness Education Center](#).

But you can certainly do your own research and design your own "muscle confusion" program. As [one fitness blogger \(and a doctor\)](#) puts it:

To me, muscle confusion is not only about implementing variety in your workouts, but is even more about discovering major weaknesses in your muscles, exposing coordination issues with them, and then hammering out a routine to get these weaknesses and uncoordinated movements removed, or improved, as quickly as possible.