



EPISODE 1035

Use These 10 Exercises to Completely Transform Your Body

With Guest Dr. John Rusin

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SHAWN STEVENSON: All exercises are not created equal. If you want the very best exercises for changing your body composition, for improving your performance, whether this is in your sport or in your life, the very best exercises for injury prevention all in one, I've got them here for you today. We have an absolute master class with Dr.

John Rusin, and we're gonna go through the top 10 most high ROI exercises that you can do. ROI being return on investment. All right, and I'm telling you again, this is a master class. I'm so inspired. I'm ready to pick something up right now. All right? I'm so inspired by what I learned today. It's not just about the exercises.

It's also about the knowledge contained within them. There's a certain reason why, and he's gonna unlock all of those mental boxes on why this is so valuable, and also talk about scaling it, right? So progressions, regressions, so that everybody can take advantage of these top 10 high ROI exercises.

Without further ado, let's get to our special guest and topic of the day. Dr. John Rusin is an internationally recognized strength coach and injury prevention expert. With nearly two decades of elite level training experience and advanced degrees in both exercise science and physical therapy, Dr. Rusin has developed performance, regeneration, and aesthetic programs for some of the world's best strength, power, and endurance athletes.

Named a top 50 health and fitness expert by Men's Health Magazine, Dr. Rusin took the methods proven at the highest levels of sport and adapted them specifically for everyday people, making elite level injury prevention, sustainable health, and lifelong physical performance accessible for everyone. Let's dive into this conversation with the incredible Dr. John Rusin. We've got the one and only Dr. John Rusin back in the studio. What's up, man? How you doing?

DR. JOHN RUSIN: It's good to be back here, man. Thanks for having me again.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Of course. Of course. Let's dive right in. Okay. All right? As a superstar strength, performance, injury prevention coach, you've got a huge data set.

You've got a huge laboratory to see this stuff, and there are 10 specific exercises that are incredibly high ROI that we all can be taking advantage of, but most people have no idea about these exercises or they're not utilizing them. I wanna go through these 10 exercises, give them to everybody today so that we can take action.

As a matter of fact, even just- ... getting a preview to this 10 inspired the hell out of me today. So let's jump right in. So what's the first exercise that can give us a huge ROI that most people are not doing?

DR. JOHN RUSIN: So number one on this list, and just to make sure everyone's on the same page here, ROI is not risk of injury.

That's what everyone thinks. I'm talking about return on investment. And return on investment, it needs to be more clearly defined, like what actually is that? It needs to be accessible to a lot of people, it needs to be safe, and it needs to be wildly effective as well. But when it comes down to those three factors, nothing beats the trap bar deadlift in my mind.

I think it's accessible to everybody, it is wildly safe, and it is one of the most effective things that you could possibly do for full body functional strength.

SHAWN STEVENSON: All right. Trap bar deadlift. For those who don't know, 'cause most of us know about deadlift. Yeah. What's the difference between a trap bar deadlift versus a conventional deadlift?

DR. JOHN RUSIN: So they're two different bars. So you think about the straight barbell. You would have to stand behind the barbell or sometimes in front of the barbell in order to deadlift it up off the ground. But the trap bar is a different shape. It's a diamond shape, so you essentially stand in the middle of this specialty bar.

Now, it seems very simple, but by standing in the middle of the bar, you actually put your body directly over its center of mass, and that means that you can reduce the amount of stress on the spine, you can maximize muscular recruitment in the quads, the glutes, and the hamstrings, and you're actually 20% to 30% stronger on the trap bar as compared to the barbell.

So just by switching out the bar and doing a hip hinge dominant deadlift pattern, this is one of the best things that most people have not necessarily done a lot of.

SHAWN STEVENSON: This already just makes it, for me, more, more accessible and also safer for the average person, but also especially with advanced lifters as well.

Because again, there's a lot of value to be found in a conventional deadlift, obviously. Absolutely. But you have to really, really be careful, full of care, and do things the right way. It's a high risk of injury. With the trap bar, I love it because also you can potentially load it more for people who might be kind of novice or intermediate as well.

DR. JOHN RUSIN: Yeah. There's a couple different factors on the bar itself that make it safe and also strong. And where somebody's strong and somebody's safe, that is gonna be a high ROI exercise. The first one is that you have a higher handle on the trap bar that is accessible to people, meaning that it's three to five inches higher relative to a bar off the ground.

And this is just a fun fact. A bar off the ground, standard weight plates, 8.75 inches off the ground. That's the rise on a barbell. But a trap bar can go up to 11 or even 12 inches. Vast majority of people can then get down to that bar out of an elevated height and be able to pull it from a neutral spine position using their hips as the key driver.

So I think that's one of the big factors. The other factor is that it puts your shoulders and your upper body in an advantageous to have huge amount of grip strength, and it also has you in a neutral grip position. While you're in a neutral grip, you actually have more capacity to hold heavier weight, and you also have the capacity to have the shoulders and also the entire shoulder girdle more integrated with the deadlift pattern

SHAWN STEVENSON: You see?

You just unlocked something else for me that I didn't realize, that neutral grip.

DR. JOHN RUSIN: Hmm.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Most of the time when we're picking things off the ground in the real world, it's a neutral grip, right? So this is more kind of, again, that translation into what we do and what we can train for in the real world.

DR. JOHN RUSIN: Yeah.

And you think about the options when you're deadlifting a barbell. So you can either do a double overhand grip, which is really hard because you have to have a huge amount of grip strength in order to hold the bar. So many people don't do that because their grip gives out before their lower body gives out or their hinge gives out.

So they end up mixing their grip. And by mixing the grip, I'm not a huge fan of that because automatically the underhand grip puts a lot of stress through this part of the arm onto the biceps tendon, into the biceps itself. And we do see a higher risk of not only bicep tears, but also just irritation in the elbow and the shoulder with the mixed deadlift grip.

So if we are deadlifting a barbell, usually we'll want our clients to go double overhand, or we'll use things like straps to make sure that the grip is not a limiting factor. But none of that matters when you're in a neutral grip and you have an elevated grip, and the trap bar allows people to just have the limiting factor be their legs and just not their hands.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah. I remember seeing the trap bar for the first time many, many years ago, but this was rare to see at a gym. Now I'm starting to see them as like a normal thing for accessibility in the gym, so I'm really grateful for that. So trap bar deadlifts, take advantage. This is number one on our list. It's no particular order per se, but I wanna move on to number two here, which is the Bulgarian split squat.

Talk about that one.

DR. JOHN RUSIN: It's the number one exercise, not on this list, but that people love to hate, but will still do because it is so devastatingly effective. So Bulgarian split squat is essentially a single leg pattern. You have your back foot elevated on a bench or a box. You have laces down of your shoe into that box, and you're essentially going through a pattern that bends at the hips, bends at the knees, and goes up and down and puts a huge amount of stress strategically into the quads, the glutes, the hamstrings, all simultaneously.

So very strong, but also something that is balance and has a lot of neural capabilities in terms of being able to have the skill of moving on single leg. So this is one that is devastatingly effective because it hits you here with your heart rate. It hits you down at the lower body. And then when one side is over, you have to then go to the other side and get your reps on that side.

So just when you think the torture is over, you got the other side to do. So it's a very interesting lift in the gym because, again, strong, safe, effective, and you have to actually push through up here because of the dual-sided nature.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Oh, this is so good. And also, again, real world, so much of what we do, especially when it comes to performance, athletics One leg.

Very rarely do you have a s- straight double leg push off of anything. It's usually one leg or the other. And so being able to train this, to have that capacity, as you mentioned, just the kinetic chain from our, our, our, our ankle mobility to our, our quads to what's going on with even our hips and our hip flexors, adductors.

Where we position ourselves, where we hold weight potentially can make a huge difference in what we're targeting as well.

DR. JOHN RUSIN: I think just the mechanics of the Bulgarian split squat, interestingly enough, it's very similar to the trap bar deadlift. So it's not a pure squat, and it's also not a pure hinge. So it's not knee dominant nor hip dominant.

It's both together. So when you look at the strongest Bulgarian split squat position, it's gonna have a knees over toes position where you're using your ankle mobility, but you're also loading through your quadriceps. But you're also not gonna have a straight up and down torso. You're gonna have a forward leaning torso, meaning that you're gonna have more of a hip dominance as well.

So that kicks on the glutes as a key driver, but it also kicks on the hamstrings to be a key stabilizer on the back side. And because you're on single leg, you have all that lateral chain stability. So you have the lateral side glutes, the glute med and the glute min, all kicking on because it needs to keep you upright when you're in an asymmetrical stance at the lower body.

So all of these things make it very advantageous, not only for functional strength, but also athletic performance, because a lot of the things that you do in single leg, 85% of our movement lives happen in single leg, especially in sports performance. We have a forward knee, plus a hip hinge, plus asymmetrical single leg.

Mm. That's every sport that I know.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Come on, come on. This This is arguably the best exercise for sports performance. Would you say that?

DR. JOHN RUSIN: I think it's safe, and I think it's highly accessible to put loading on the system for athletes that have a transference into things that would line up with them being faster, stronger, and more injury resilient.

And that's the name of the game for athletics, but it's also the name of the game for guys like you and I that are trying to be healthy and trying to be functional and not lose our physical capacities as we age. I think it's a one for... that's good for everybody.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah. This is great. This is great. And also, again, being able to really load that single leg, if you think about, again, a conventional back squat, which is what I, in high school, high school football. we were doing.

If you think about the progression, if you think about the safety, if you think about the accessibility and being able to train and load when we get older, as we age, and also just, again, for overall performance, this is one of those things for us to look to. If you're not comfortable or maybe you have had an injury with putting a bunch of weight on your back with a barbell-

DR. JOHN RUSIN: Yeah

SHAWN STEVENSON: This is such a great opportunity because you're loading that one leg. It's gonna be less overall weight, but it's not gonna feel like it.

DR. JOHN RUSIN: So let's get into that because it's something called the phenomenon of the bilateral deficit, and that is one of the biggest advantages of any single leg training, including the Bulgarian split squat exercise.

So you will be stronger if you add the loading on your right plus the loading on your left in single leg movements than if you were to put yourself in a bilateral stance like a squat. So one thing that we look for in our sports performance athletes is that we wanna have our body weight, say I weigh 200 pounds, I want a 100-pound dumbbell on the left, 100-pound dumbbell on the right.

I wanna be able to do five reps on the right, then move to five reps on the left, and be able to have that as a total load capacity of 400 total pounds on the system. That is something that is accessible for almost all of our athletes, and even our lifelong athletes, our active agers out there, when they actually get strong, their body composition is on point.

But very rarely are those same people able to barbell back squat 400 pounds for five reps, and that is the power of the bilateral deficit, meaning that we are just simply stronger because we have this leg. It's not only the leg, it's the entire torso and our entire pillar that is still actively engaging.

And we also have the functionality from the stability on the backside leg that is really just feeding us having the stability and the motor control to actually go down through good ranges of motion and actually keep upright without falling down.

SHAWN STEVENSON: This is mind-blowing. I love it. I love it. Now let's talk about loading the exercise in different ways.

One of the things I like to do is put on a weighted vest, plus a kettlebell in one hand or both hands, heavy kettle- kettlebells or dumbbells you can use. What about the position of the weight itself? What if we hold in a rack position, or just should we be holding it... What, what if we're holding one dumbbell?

Is it better to hold it inside or outside?

DR. JOHN RUSIN: This is one of the most common questions I get because we train the Bulgarian split squat so much that it has a lot of attention on it. And they'll see us training it in different ways, and people don't necessarily know the difference between holding it on a contralateral versus an ipsilateral.

So let's go through the three positions that you would hold the dumbbells or kettlebells down to the side. The first one is my favorite. You have dumbbells or kettlebells in both hands, and you train it over that single leg for the Bulgarian split squat. That's gonna have muscular strength and the most amount of strength capacity active.

So that is the one that is if you're gonna train one, go with two at once, and then you'll be good to go. But if you want to start emphasizing different musculature, if you want to start emphasizing different key stabilizers, then you can go one dumbbell or kettlebell at a time. So talking about if your left leg is forward, you have a dumbbell in your right hand.

That's called contralateral load. Mm-hmm. This will be more glute dominant. And it'll be more glute dominant, not only the glute max, which will be the key mover in that Bulgarian variation, but it'll also be lateral chain stabilizers, highly active with the lateral glutes. So if the goal is to grow the glutes, it could be double load, or you want the contralateral load

But if the goal is to have more of a quadriceps emphasis with your Bulgarian split squat, you want to bring it to the same side as your front leg forward. So if your front leg is the left, is forward, you have the dumbbell in your left hand, and it's actually outside your center of mass. Mm. That allows that balance component not to necessarily be there.

We don't have that lateral chain stability component, so we just hammer the quads. But the thing about strength and also muscular hypertrophy is that load matters, and that's a big reason why we still like to put two dumbbells in a hand and load over that working leg with the Bulgarian split squat. So that's load down to the side.

But you can also start to play with load up into something like, called a goblet position. Goblet position is essentially putting a load central in front of your chest. A front rack could be there. You could hold a dumbbell in a goblet position. Anything that actually raises up the load that is further away from the ground, that is gonna be more core emphasized.

And it's gonna be not only more core emphasized, but that is gonna almost automatically force your torso to be in a more vertical position. As soon as your vertical position torso is there, that is gonna make it more knee dominant. So if you want more quadriceps, if you want more forward knee transition over the toes, if you just simply want something that is gonna be more targeted over the knees, then any time that you bring up into a goblet or a front rack position, that is going to be highly advantageous.

But again, that's gonna be a weaker variant because of its relative distance from the ground and your center of mass.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Amazing. Amazing. This is fire. Now, one of the things that might give people apprehension about doing the Bulgarian is maybe... Sorry, I said Bulgarian. Now, one of the things that might give people some apprehension about doing a Bulgarian split squat is the balance factor, which is one of the benefits as well.

But are there any cues that you give your, your clients and your athletes to get them to stabilize? Maybe, like- grounding, pushing that front foot into the ground? Or is there any kinda cue that you can help people with?

DR. JOHN RUSIN: Yeah, the setup is gonna be key for being able to facilitate balance and being able to have that stability factor.

So you never just wanna be, like, searching for your foot position on the front side, or even on the back leg that is reaching for the bench. Almost always, I will position my clients in front of a mirror, and then I will have them strategically in their stance that is marked by a band down on the ground.

So the band is on the ground. It is marking your position for your front foot. And then you're strategically stepping back into the position on your back leg so you know that your distance and your width, and also your stance length, is gonna be advantageous for you to be able to do a complete range of motion, not having to compensate.

But once your stance is set, everyone's stance is gonna be different, so there's not one universal stance that works for everyone. Once your stance is set, I think that you need to remember just the mechanisms of strength training, meaning that we need to breathe, we need to brace, we need to scale tension, and then lower into the position.

Many times, we just go lax. People just kinda have a really weak grip on the dumbbells. You wanna maximize your grip on the dumbbells. What that does is kicks on something called irradiation. Irradiation travels tension all the way up into the shoulder girdle, feeds into the core. That's exactly where we want that stability from.

From the lower body's perspective, we wanna have an active tripedal foot position, meaning that your big toe, your four smaller toes, and your heel are all in contact with that ground. So you wanna grip, and then also create torque into the system on that front leg. And this is the one that is controversial.

If you wanna move some serious weight with the Bulgarian split squat, and you not only wanna move that serious weight, but you want confidence of being able to move it with stability and not having the mechanism of "Oh, shit, I'm gonna fall over," then you wanna be driving your back foot down into the bench.

You wanna actively drive it down into the bench. This is the number one mistake that I see people make, especially coaches that are trying to teach the Bulgarian split squat. They wanna say, "Oh, you're only 100% working with that front side. The back side, just leave it there. It's not doing anything." It's absolutely doing something.

It's still connected to the body. So we gotta think about laces down into that bench, and you wanna be driving actively down into the bench. What that's gonna do is kick on stability from the quads, and also stabilize the pelvis. Where people lack stability and balance in the Bulgarian split squat isn't because their balance sucks on single leg.

It's 'cause they're not using their opposite leg to actually manage the pelvis, and that leads to a lot of perturbations happening and lack of stability happening once they go up and down through the reps. A lack of support, a lack of stability, and a lack of using both legs, as i-counterintuitive as it sounds, is most likely the reason that people either plateau on their Bulgarian split squats or they lose their balance, especially when the weights get heavy.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Amazing. This is so good. All right. I wanna ask you, is this a good idea what I usually do, especially when I'm really loading the, the exercise, and again, you're doing one leg at a time.

DR. JOHN RUSIN: Mm-hmm.

SHAWN STEVENSON: If I'm really doing a heavy set, I'll actually do one leg, then I'll rest, because I'm treating it like it's a full set of exercise.

Yeah. Right? So I'll do my set, maybe rest for a minute before I do my other leg. I don't just go right to it. What do you think about that?

DR. JOHN RUSIN: There's two options. So that is one option, and I think if you are pushing absolute max capacity, especially in traditional strength schemes, so we're thinking like five to eight reps, to absolute failure, meaning that last rep probably took you six or seven seconds to raise up into the last rep of that concentric, maybe take a break, and you probably need one to two minutes there.

Because you're not only training the musculature. Like we said before, you're training that key leg, you're training on the stability factor on the opposite leg, and then more so you're training the core here, and because of that balance component, your vital metrics are gonna skyrocket. So more than anything, you're just gonna be fatigued centrally, and you need to have that central fatigue reduced before you then go back in and get another hard and heavy set.

But I'll be completely honest, I train the Bulgarian one to two times per week the last 15 years myself. I'm relatively strong in this particular lift, not some other ones, but this particular lift, and I do not rest p- between sides. What I choose to do is we always train the non-dominant side first, your weaker side first, because we're not symmetrical beings.

Human beings are not the same right to left. We have size discrepancies, we have strength discrepancies, mobility discrepancies, even structural discrepancies in our bodies right to left, and that's totally fine. Anywhere a 10 to 15% difference right to left is what we can expect. So I know I have those discrepancies as well, so I have a non-dominant side on my left, so I always start my Bulgarian split squats on that left side.

I get that one to failure, knowing very well if I hit a five-rep max on my left, most likely I could probably get six on this side if it was fresh. But I have that central fatigue, and most likely I match right and left sides if I go into my dominant side second. Yeah. But I don't just go straight in. So you'll do five reps, say, on the left non-dominant side.

You'll come back to central line. You'll have both feet on the ground. You'll still have the weights in your hand. One, two, three breaths, probably 15 seconds, just to have your vital metrics not be spiking, just come down the tiniest bit, and then you're able to go in and repeat. I highly recommend that what you're doing is not wrong, but what you're doing for the average person is probably not practical from a times perspective.

'Cause you think about three to five sets of five to eight repetitions. Right. Now you're resting two minutes between sides. You just had 12 to 14 minutes of your training session that you're

resting additionally, on top of probably all the other stuff that you need to do. Your warmups, your primers, your accessory movements, your cool downs.

A lot of people just don't have that additional 12 to 14 minutes. From a practicalities perspective, I like just training them back to back. Right left, or left right into right.

SHAWN STEVENSON: I love it. I love it. Our special guest today knows a thing or 20 about athletic performance and really fueling his body. And one of the things that he utilizes every single day is the powerful electrolytes from LMNT.

Now, here are four specific ways that electrolytes impact your exercise and athletic performance. Number one, optimal muscle function. Electrolytes like sodium and magnesium are essential for nerve signaling, allowing your muscles to contract and relax properly, which prevents cramping and fatigue. Number two, fluid balance and hydration.

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without the artificial colors and the dodgy ingredients, and we're gonna do this in a way that today LMNT is fueling some of the greatest athletes and high performers in the world," including Team USA Weightlifting, NBA and NFL teams, Navy SEALs.

The list goes on and on. And right now, you get to take advantage of the world's number one electrolyte supplement when you go to drinkLMNT.com/model. That's

drinkLMNT.com/model. And not only that, with every electrolyte purchase, you're going to get a free sample pack of their most popular electrolyte flavors. And to top it off, you get to try all this risk-free with their no questions asked refunds if you don't absolutely love the way that it makes you feel. Again, head over to drinkLMNT.com/model right now to take advantage.

My favorite flavors right now, grapefruit is popping. Lemonade, the lemonade salt is incredible, especially if you're doing anything where you're sweating a lot, that lemonade salt hits different. So again, head over there, check them out. DrinkLMNT.com/model, and now back to the show. So number one, there's many ways to skin a cat-

basically is what you're saying. And first of all, that's a terrible thing to say. Sorry. Sorry to all the cats. I'm so sorry. But also keeping this in context for me, so one of the things that I do, I usually go one leg right to the next in my, like my warmup sets. Yeah. Or if I'm just, maybe I'm just doing one kettlebell.

I'm just doing like kind of this accessory work or working up to my working sets, and I'll do two heavy working sets. Yeah. Right? So that's when I'll split up the time.

DR. JOHN RUSIN: Mm-hmm.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And g- again, many different ways to go about this, but I love the practicality of it. And again, most of the time, most sets that I've ever done, I'll go right to the next leg.

So this isn't a black or white thing. This is a paying attention to what your goals are, the structure of your programming, and this is what I love about you too, man. There's so many different ways. You're paying attention to the programming. Yeah. It's not just about, this kind of cookie cutter approach to things, and we'll talk more about that.

But again, what we're starting off here today with are 10 of the most high ROI exercises on the face of the earth- ... that you could possibly do that you're likely not taking advantage of, and also the nuances. That's what we're getting from you. The next one on our list is neutral grip pull-ups. Why neutral grip pull-ups?

DR. JOHN RUSIN: All right, so the neutral grip is threefold. It is the safest position on the shoulder because, again, you're in neutral grip, so you actually open up the shoulder girdle in order to not have a lot of stress that's coming through the front side. So you're actually externally rotating slightly. That opens up some of those gaps, so you can have some slide glide of all those structures in there.

Second thing is that as soon as you go to neutral grip, all of a sudden you have a lot more key musculature at your disposal. It's not only the lats. The pull-up is not a lat exercise. Automatically, the pull-up's gonna be lat plus upper back always. But when you go into the neutral grip, you have the ability to use the biceps and also the forearms.

And then lastly, the neutral grip is very interesting because it allows people that don't necessarily have this complete overhead 100 degrees of range of motion to get into a better position to be able to train a full range of motion and a complete range of motion in the pull-up, just because they have their shoulder blades actually working the way that we want them to, their hand position dictating their shoulder position, and the neutral grip. As crazy as it sounds, because your hands are out in front of the body relative to behind the body in a regular pull-up, you actually have more core recruitment.

It actually puts your core and your pelvis in a better position to be strong.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Mm. I love this already. Okay. Now what about an on-ramp for people? If somebody can't just jump up and grab a neutral grip, pull-up, bar position and do the pull-up, what are some progressions?

DR. JOHN RUSIN: There's two that I'll use predominantly, and I'll mention one that I do not use.

Many people will go and gravitate towards the pull-up machine at the gym. They'll put their knees on a pad, they'll put the selectorized unit in there. They'll put their hands in that position, they'll start doing pull-ups, but that really doesn't show the functionality of what a pull-up actually is.

Because it's high ROI, it means that we're training full body, meaning that it's not just the lats and the upper back moving. We're not just moving the weight. We need to be in open space. We know we need to have the core, and also the pelvis and the lower body really in the whole movement pattern itself.

So that is not one that I recommend, because I see that many people will go into the pull-up machine, and they'll never leave the pull-up machine. You'll be there forever. Ah, yeah. It's like purgatory. But if you want to progress through pull-ups, two options that you can do. You can start at using banded accommodating resistance, meaning that you can go right up on the pull-up bar, you can put your hands into neutral grip or any other grip, and you're gonna have the band that is gonna be supporting your body weight either positioned on your feet or predominantly on your knees if you do a bent-knee variation of the pull-up, which I really like as soon as you start getting load.

So it's not just the hollow body position, but actually bent knee with the knees forward. So that is one that I really like, because it allows us to accommodate the pull-up, meaning that the bottom and the weakest range of motion, the band is gonna be most stretched out, and it's going to assist us out of that bottom weak position.

And it's gonna less and less and less give us assistance as we get to the top, where we're

stronger from a muscular length-tension relationship. So you're able to train the pattern. You're able to do the thing that looks like the thing. You're able to have your core also integrated with it. But the key is that you need to be able to train that consistent enough to be able to make progress with it.

So that's the closest one to the actual skill of doing a pull-up, and that's the closest one because you're actually on the pull-up bar itself. Now, the second one is one that I use with a lot of people that have excess body weight or they're just larger individuals. One of my training partners is 285 pounds, and about 10 months ago, he had the goal of doing a pull-up, and he'd never done a pull-up.

He's benched 500 pounds, he's squatted 700 pounds. Pull-up has always evaded him. So we go in, and we use the second variation that I like for building pull-up capacity. You put a bar in the rack, and that could be a neutral bar if you wanna do neutral grip pull-ups. It could be a barbell if you wanna do chin or regular pull-ups.

And we have the feet down on the ground. And we have it so when you're bent at the hips and bent at the knees, you're through a full range of motion, but then you're using your legs to assist only where you need it. And it's a little bit of a kick of the feet into the ground to assist through that range of motion, and that's more of a constant assistance versus an accommodating resistance with the band.

But that one works extraordinarily well for people, especially ones that are more in tune with their body because they can make it hard automatically with the ranges of motion that they need to make it hard on, and they can get that boost. And more specifically, you can get into the rep schemes and the actual sets and reps that you need to dictate intensity and also volume to progress.

So it's almost like auto-regulating your pull-ups with your feet on the ground. The key is that you just can't cheat every single rep

SHAWN STEVENSON: This is awesome. All right. I wanna add one more in here, see what you think about this. So I was training my son and his friend, who's also his basketball teammate, and my son can do around eight to 10 clean pull-ups now.

And his teammate, we use a band-

DR. JOHN RUSIN: Mm-hmm ...

SHAWN STEVENSON: but he got to a place where he can do two to three clean pull-ups. Yeah. And then I come in and I assist him-

DR. JOHN RUSIN: Yeah ...

SHAWN STEVENSON: with the last few. I'll, grab around his hips and help elevate him, and he gets that additional input, and I'll help just enough so that he can do the reps.

What do you think about that?

DR. JOHN RUSIN: That's great. So that's a manual version of the foot assistance that we were talking about. And the thing that assistance allows you to do is take full advantage with your full body weight over the lowering, the eccentric aspect of the pull-up, and that's really where you're lengthening everything out, out of tension and under load.

So that can get people strong. Anyone who builds muscle or builds strength knows that lowering a little bit slower under constant tension, it keeps people really engaging with the movement, and that throws a lot of blood flow to the area, and also a lot of tension through the area. So that is one thing that can really, really help people.

So many times you're not gonna fail on the lowering, right? That makes no sense. Gravity's at our disposal. You're gonna fail on the raising up in the pull-up or really any other movement. So being able to assist, it's almost like the equivalent of forced reps for a bodybuilder. You can't raise it anymore, somebody assists you, and then you get that eccentric lowering back out, something like a bicep curl.

It's not just for biceps. You can also do it on any other movement pattern. A pull-up is a very good example of that. So those manual boosts help a lot because, using your son's teammate as an example, him just doing one to two reps, it's not gonna do anything for him, 'cause all of a sudden you're training at the highest end, one, 2RM.

That's like a max effort lift. You can't put volume on that. You can't get enough exposure to gain skills, so you gotta get him into a rep scheme that can actually get him exposure. So that's usually the, the fives, eights, or even the eights up into the 15s to get enough accrued volume to get the stimulus that we're after.

So anything that can get you quality reps with good range of motion, with tension and control, and gets you into a rep scheme that lines up with your goal scheme, that is always gonna be advantageous.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Amazing. Yeah, this just reminded me too, this is how my wife... This was like eight years ago, since she's done her pull-up.

She was about that life- ... for a minute, but this is how I helped her to get to her first pull-ups. Because also in the gym that we were at there's a universal gym and the bar is super high, not really accessible for putting a band situation per se easily. So basically sh- she- I would help her.

I would kinda... She'd jump up there and I'd help her even to jump up and grab the- Yep ... the bar, and then I would just assist her in doing pull-ups. And then over time she was able to jump up there and knock a couple out herself, and then I would assist her with the rest of the reps. And so again, it's just very This, this speaks to the, the value of having a training partner- Yeah

as well, and I think we really undervalue that, of having your coach there, somebody ... a trainer or, a gym buddy.

DR. JOHN RUSIN: For sure.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Right? Because those, those last reps, man, that's really where the biggest difference can happen.

DR. JOHN RUSIN: I think even on the pull-up too, a lot of people are focused only on body weight or, getting that first body weight rep or getting that first set of 10.

We go a totally different direction at Pain Free Performance. We wanna treat the pull-up as the same as every other big key performance indicator lift, the same as a trap bar deadlift or a Bulgarian split squat or a bench press, meaning that we wanna go hard and heavy. We wanna actually add load to the pull-up.

And loaded pull-ups are an amazing exercise. Once you get there, you can take off onto a whole new performance trajectory. And it is safe, it's effective. You're training a full complete range of motion. You're training the core. You're training your grip strength. Loaded pull-ups are awesome. I'm gonna humble brag here for a second.

I'm not the strongest or the biggest guy in the world. I'm getting up there in age, but just four days ago, I was able to hit a lifetime PR on my neutral grip pull-up, and I did 152 and a half pounds around my waist in a dip belt, and I got it for a single rep, and that took four years to get up to. And that was something that I never thought I could do.

But it wasn't just practicing more pull-ups, 'cause all of a sudden you show that on Instagram, and people are like, "Whoa, how did you do that? It was a 12-week plan?" It's like, no. This was, this was a lot of different factors in it. The pull-up, you need to be strong, right? You need to have grip strength. You need to have pull strength, but you also need to have core strength and hip stability that can actually facilitate you using the strength that you have at your upper body and your pull pattern.

So a lot of the things that I was working on to get over 150 pounds for the first time was all at the hips and the core. Those were my weak links, and by strengthening those weak links, it actually facilitated two and a half pounds more than I've ever done, even in my 20s. So that was one thing that you always need to look at is that the pull-up is not just for the arms.

It's not just for the back. When you're starting to get into loaded pull-ups or actually training them, like every other exercise and not making them the exception to the rule, it's something that you need to put the pieces together. And many times people fail on pull-ups because of their core and because of their hips.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Mm. Ah, so true. That's so true. W- how much was that PR again?

DR. JOHN RUSIN: 152 and a half pounds. So that's three 45s, and then a 10, and a five, and a two and a half.

SHAWN STEVENSON: That is that's crazy, man. That is crazy. Incredible. Incredible. Over the years, again, somebody that can, I could do, 25 pull-ups, right? And to really get the value out of it and to be more efficient as well, adding that load was super helpful.

So again, h- wearing a weighted vest- Mm-hmm ... or having the, the dip belt. Is it called a dip belt? Yeah. And, having some plates dangling between your legs as well, as well, or back in the day, actually, the first iteration of a weighted pull-up that I did was grabbing a dumbbell with my feet.

DR. JOHN RUSIN: Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: I don't know where I got the idea, but this was, like, I don't know, 20-something years ago.

But, I would get up... actually, the bar, rather than jumping up, I'd just stand on the dumbbell and then just pick it up with my feet-

DR. JOHN RUSIN: Yeah ...

SHAWN STEVENSON: and do a weighted pull-up like that.

DR. JOHN RUSIN: I love the different variations. So any time that you can get your feet straight, your knees straight, that's called a hollow body.

Hollow body is gonna put the most amount of core intensity onto the system. So a hollow body is great for body weight pull-ups, or even if you're playing with "Hey, I wanna add five, 10, 15 pounds on the system," maybe put a kettlebell and you hook it to your foot. Maybe you grab a dumbbell with your feet.

You're able to actually create tension. And the reason that that works for a vast majority of people is you get your adductors involved. You get your glutes involved. Mm. All of a sudden, your adductors and glutes feed stability at your pelvis. That makes your core more stable, and people are able to get really strong off that.

As soon as you get up into the 45, 90, 135 pounds, put that dip belt on and make sure that you're doing a safe setup. That's gonna be key. Getting your hands on the rack, have your feet on the box, step into it with respect. But I think m- vast majority of people do really well putting something between their knees or even putting a dumbbell or a kettlebell between their, their feet.

SHAWN STEVENSON: This makes so much sense. Thank you. Thank you. All right, let's move on to number four here. Romanian deadlifts. What are Romanian deadlifts? How does that differ from what we were talking about earlier?

DR. JOHN RUSIN: Yeah, so a Romanian deadlift starts from a neutral position. So you can think standing upright, that is where you're gonna start your most pure form of the hip hinge.

So a Romanian deadlift is going to be the purest hip translation backwards and also forwards. So you can think about it as a stiff leg deadlift, Romanian deadlift. It is more emphasis on the glutes and the hamstrings, and it has less knee bend associated. Doesn't mean that we're totally stiff. It doesn't mean that we have straight knees.

It just means that the hips are the key driver in this deadlift variation. And the reason that I like it, and I get a lot of flak for saying this, but I do believe that the Romanian deadlift is the best of all hinge variations because we have three things at our disposal. We have the ability

to lengthen the hamstrings at full range of motion, from the top going down to the bottom, and it can be customized range of motion automatically for the accessibility that somebody has with a neutral spine position, and also keeping the tension on the hamstrings and the glutes where we want it.

So that's the first one. From a mobility perspective, awesome for the hamstrings going through a full length. From a muscular targeting perspective, because we have the load in front of our body, we're able to actually get length at the hamstrings at the bottom and a hard flex against load coming back into a neutral position of the glutes at the top.

Hamstring stretch plus glute flex, those work really well for muscular hypertrophy specifically. Mm. Mm-hmm. And then the last one is because we have a more vertical shin angle, the more vertical shin angle means that we're able to practice a more dominant hip hinge. The hip hinge is one of these movement patterns, of all six foundational movement patterns, that people just misuse, abuse, and neglect.

So the RDL teaches them how to use their hips again. It automatically makes them use their hips as opposed to compensating with a forward knee or bending their knee, trying to squat their deadlift, so to say. So all three of those factors make RDLs super awesome. They're strong- They improve mobility, and from a muscular hypertrophy perspective, they far outperform a traditional barbell deadlift.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah. Is this why so many people experience that soreness from this versus everything else?

DR. JOHN RUSIN: Yeah. So when you're starting at a neutral position at the top and your eccentric lowering is the first portion of the RDL, that is where you can get a huge amount of load on the system and start lowering slowly.

So you think about that tension building, building, building, hitting end range of motion. Full and complete range of motion under load is always going to lead to, "Oh, man, I felt that the next day." And that's a good thing because you think about chronic tightness in the human

body, the hamstrings are probably one out of three places that are always the thing that you hear from people.

"Why is your lower back hurt?" "Oh, my hamstrings are tight. I need to stretch them more." Well, maybe, but you al- should be, should be stretching under load, and the RDL is the best way to do that.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Would you recommend one or the other when it comes to dumbbells or kettlebells versus a barbell?

DR. JOHN RUSIN: I like dumbbells specifically because you can place them not directly in front of the body, not to the side of the body, but as you go down, you can actually manipulate your hand position to place the load where you want it.

So we have a dynamic hand position with dumbbells specifically with the RDL. That is my favorite variation. Dumbbells in both hands, RDL from the top down, and being able to, at the stretch of the lower end of the aspect of the range of motion, you have the dumbbells more in front of you, and as you pull up into the top range where you're standing in neutral, you have them more to the side of you.

So you're thinking about having your hands kind of to the side of your kneecaps.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Got it. Got it. Well, speaking of dumbbells, number five on our list here is dumbbell rows. All right. Why is this in this top 10 for ROI?

DR. JOHN RUSIN: Think about the single arm dumbbell row is the Bulgarian split squat of the upper body.

You are unilateral training, one side at a time. You are blasting your core, you're integrating your hips, and you got that same, "Oh, shit," moment when you finish one side and have to move on to the other. But the reason that I like single arm dumbbell rows specifically, or any unilateral row, is because you have the ability to have a dynamic hand position where you're rotating naturally.

You get the lats in the upper back involved, and that is recruited back to the core and the hips, so it's a very integrated pull pattern. And you think about just the functional transference of rowing on a single arm. That's everything that we do in life. We're naturally rowing, rotating, and we're stabilizing with our lower body in an asymmetrical stance.

And it also is gonna be very core intensive. I also like it because it's a key driver of functional hypertrophy. You can get big and strong doing it, and you can also get the transference back to the things that matter, which are being able to keep the core and the hips integrated while you're doing a pull pattern.

So there are times and places where you wanna isolate out the rows, where you wanna have a chest-supported row versus a core-intensive row. But in terms of ROI, what we're talking about today, the more bang for your buck you can get, you can get the upper back and the lats growing. You can get strong and stable.

You can facilitate shoulder health because you're moving through full and complete ranges of motion into neutral and external rotated shoulder positions. That is just gonna train so much in just one simple exercise.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah Would you prefer that we use a bench for this exercise?

DR. JOHN RUSIN: Yeah. So the two ways that I really like to train it is something called a three-point.

So you're gonna have one knee down on the bench, you're gonna have the opposite hand down on the bench as well, you're gonna put your one leg out to the side, and you're gonna be able to row from that. So the three points are gonna be your knee, your hand, and your opposite foot out to the side. So that's the one that I really like because you can feel it instantly right in your lateral core.

So you're gonna feel that tension kick on, and you're like, "Wow, I can really feel this good." And then you can also place your glutes in a position to really stabilize that movement as

well. So very rarely do we have somebody that's not like, "Man, I feel this in my ass, I feel this in my core, and my back just got a huge pump."

That's a win-win-win. The other thing that you can do is, if you want a little bit more hip intensive in terms of the stability, is you can split your stance. You can have your hand down on a bench or a rack or an elevated surface, and you can do a single arm dumbbell row from a split stance position with both feet on the ground as well.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Got it. Amazing. Amazing. All right. This one, thank goodness, is rising more in public, public consciousness. So much value here. Number six on our list here is the farmer's carry. Talk about that one.

DR. JOHN RUSIN: I mean, what's more natural than walking? Walking is the most human movement on Earth, so we might as well walk under load if we wanna get maximal value from it.

So farmers carry, the traditional one is putting two loads in, in your hands, both hands, and walking across space. And you can do this in a m- magnitude of different ways. You can put load on one side of the body versus the other side of the body. You can not only walk forward, you could walk backward. We could walk in circles.

We can walk to the side. We can put load overhand. We could split the load one high, one low. Just being able to carry load through space, that is going to be key because it allows us to kick on everything. We call the loaded carry the full body functional diagnostic because there's nothing that it doesn't train.

It'll train your grip. It'll train your shoulders, your core, your glutes, your ability to balance on single leg as you're walking and having your gait being active. It trains everything, and it also has a full body strength effect with metabolic capacity that can build as well

SHAWN STEVENSON: Now, obviously, and you've seen the evolution of the plank taking over in popular culture.

I love this so much more because f- in a, in a way, if you wanna frame it like this, which is not exactly accurate, but just for people who love planks, it's like a walking plank.

DR. JOHN RUSIN: That's well said.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Right? It's like a walking plank, and in addition, you're really ... Especially, again, if you're doing like a suitcase carry, right?

On ... With one, one side. That activation of the opposite side of your core, your obliques, like so much more is kicking into action. Plus, you're getting this benefit of actually moving your body through space versus just this static position, which there's value there, but I just think you get so much more ROI.

DR. JOHN RUSIN: There's so much popularity of loaded carries today, and I love to see it. Our gym, I see people that are in their 20s, and they're loaded carrying trap bars across the floor with three, 400 pounds on them for 30 seconds. I'm like, "Hell, hell yeah." I see people in their 60s and their 70s carrying dumbbells across the ground and going around the weight equipment, and I'm like, "Man, this is awesome as well."

I see everybody doing carries today because it's become more popular. I see people carrying dumbbells. I see them carrying kettlebells, trap bars, sandbags, you name it, and it is a beautiful thing because when you talk about accessibility, this is a huge accessible movement that we can do. Most everybody walking into the gym can walk, and when we put load onto walking, that means that we can place load onto people's systems that may be in pain, may have movement patterns that are, not really active and not being able to be trained hard and heavy.

So this is a safe and effective way to load almost everybody. From youth athletes, I'm using them with my youth athletes all the time. Teaches them how to coordinate their shoulders, hips to move and reciprocate. And then I'm using them with my active agers, 60s, 70s, and 80s and clients that are moving through, their later years in life, and the ROI is just so high on them.

And the number one way I like to program these is metabolic finishers. So a loaded carry, it's super stressful on the system. It's like, "Hey, we have one ounce of energy left. We're gonna put it into a loaded carry." This is the way that we use it on the tail end of a training session. So say you go through full body or upper, lower day, whatever it may be, there's nothing that a loaded carry for three to five minutes intervals on the tail end of a training day can't help.

I think it's the perfect way to end a training session is that it's hard. Your heart rate's up. Your grip's going. Your shoulders are burning. Your glutes are on fire. Your core is just locked in. And then you know what? L- after we do that, we go lay on the ground, and we recover

SHAWN STEVENSON: Wow. I'm doing this on accident sometimes.

Because, we'll bring some dumbbells or kettlebells to the park- Hmm ... and train at the park, and then we gotta carry that shit back at the very end. And it's just and I start hearing the conversation in my head, "Just sit them down. Just sit them down. Just sit them down." But I'm like, "Just another, you know, 50 feet.

I can make it. I can make it." And a- as you just mentioned, that to be, like, a finisher at the end of your workout, you could add this to, different training days as well, d- whether it's upper body or lower body day.

DR. JOHN RUSIN: So we saw ... This is an interesting story. So we were seeing chalk on the treadmills in the gym, and we're like, "The hell?

Why would there be chalk on the treadmills?" So there's all these dead lifting platforms. There's these beautiful squat racks. We have the power lifting combo racks. We have everything, but the chalk is on the treadmills. The heck? People are actually now doing this for three to five minutes at a time, grabbing two kettlebells, walking on the treadmills to finish off their training days.

Hmm. And I'm like, "You wouldn't have seen that 10 years ago." Yeah. Certainly not 20 years ago. But today, people are seeing the v- the value of just being able to be strong from a GPP's

perspective, a general physical preparations perspective, being able to carry load through space. If they're doing it on the treadmills with chalk, you know they're getting serious, and you know that's part of popular gym culture today.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Wow. Yeah. I saw a CSI moment. Go over to the treadmill. There's some chalk. "Chalk. Hmm. Powder. Baby powder." "Who's, who's, w- what's the story here?" So this is amazing, man. Well, we're gonna move on to number seven here, and this is so incredible. Thank you so much for sharing these insights.

There are a ton of different lunges, forward lunges, lateral lunges, walking lunges. Number seven on this list of high ROI exercises that most people are not taking advantage of is the reverse lunge. Let's talk about that. Why the reverse lunge?

DR. JOHN RUSIN: So the reverse lunge, I always get that question, why? Why not forward lunges?

Forward lunges are great, but they are very high in terms of the motor skill acquisition of being able to step your body through space, decelerate your body moving forward, and putting a huge amount of stress on the knee because you have to hit that brake into the eccentric. So that's something that we progress to, but in terms of ROI, being able to be accessible and safe and heavily loaded for people, moving in the opposite direction is great, and it comes down to being able to have the working leg stay static on the ground the entire time.

If you have the working leg stay static, meaning that you have ground contact, you have more constant tension in the system for the key musculature. Again, for the reverse lunge, it's gonna be a combination of the glutes and the quads and the hamstrings being able to stabilize the backside. We have far more load capacity on the reverse lunge.

We have people mitigate knee stress on the reverse lunge. We have less lower back stress on the reverse lunge, and we have, again, loading capacity that is probably 30-plus percent higher than its forward lunge counterpart. This is one that we start almost everybody at, and

it is their first ability to actually start stepping through space, which can then facilitate strength gains, but also balance and motor control gains that we want people to have, especially as they're moving through things like active aging.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Hmm. Now, what about are we alternating legs? Are we doing one side and then the other side?

DR. JOHN RUSIN: This is a great question. So you have the two options. So you can go alternating, which would be right, left, right, left, stepping backwards, or you have non-alternating. So we will start off, if the gains are muscle and strength emphasis in terms of a goal set, we will train non-alternating.

So we will keep the constant tension on the key working musculature, and we will do, say, 10 reps on the left, and then we'll transition to 10 reps on the right. The times where we start doing alternating, because you have to then reset the tension on the key musculature, is where we're chasing higher end reps games.

So you're thinking 20, 25, 30 reps, or even a time set. You're thinking about wanting to have this be trained with the key musculature. That is when we'll start an alternating fashion. So both of those are really good, but when the goal is lower end reps, higher end load, non-alternating is gonna be preferred.

When the goal is just kicking your ass and just testing your limits, alternating's gonna be really good when you're chasing higher end reps games or just trying to go to pure failure.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Great. Thank you for this context. I love this. Okay, we're gonna move on to number eight here on our list of these 10 high value, high ROI exercises that most people are not taking advantage of.

This next one in a certain demographic has exploded in popularity, but most people I don't think understand the value, and they're definitely not utilizing it. Number eight on the list is the hip thrust.

DR. JOHN RUSIN: Hip thrust. We talked about this last time I was in, the glutes. The glutes are key, not only for the ladies, but for the men.

But being able to have a strong posterior chain, that lines us up for almost improvements on every single type of goal: athletic performance, clearly aesthetics, but also health and longevity. But the hip thrust is a great exercise because we have max loading, we have max control, and in terms of ROI, you have stability from the feet on the ground, you have stability from the back on a bench or an elevated surface, and all that support leads to accessibility for people being able to do it.

So I will say definitively that I have clients that are coming in with lower back pain and injuries being able to be accessible on the hip thrust. I have clients that are coming in trying to step on stage, trying to build their glutes to have a better aesthetic. They're going on to the hip thrust. I have sports performance athletes that need to get bigger, faster, stronger.

They're going into the hip thrust. And I think that we just need to be pushing more volume into the glutes and the posterior chain because there is such a high ROI. Safe, effective, and also accessible for everybody. But man, people love to hate on the hip thrust. People... It's like a camp. Either you're for them or against them.

Whereas I look at them as just another exercise that has the ability to have a positive return on investment, no matter the goal, so it's very well-rounded

SHAWN STEVENSON: Literally. Very well-rounded. Yeah, I see that. I see it. Now, the question is, with this particular movement, and the value that I think is overlooked is the fact that the glutes are the largest kind of single, singular muscle group in the body fiber for fiber.

DR. JOHN RUSIN: Mm-hmm.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And you have so much muscular capacity there, right? Whether we're talking about the metabolic benefits-

DR. JOHN RUSIN: Right ...

SHAWN STEVENSON: or the performance benefits, because so much of our movement, especially explosive movement, heavily relies on our glutes. Talk about that a little bit more.

DR. JOHN RUSIN: Well, the glutes are the thickest muscle in the human body, specifically the glute max, and it has the ability to get bigger and stronger, of course.

But it also ties in everything above and below it. You think about the hips being the intermediary joint of the entire body. Not the spine, but the hips themselves. They are the cross linkages between the entire lower body and the core and the upper body. Being able to train them specifically in different ways is huge because you can have the transference if you go on single leg.

You can have the m- max capacity for strength or muscle mass when you're going double leg. You can manipulate range of motion. You can manipulate foot position, back position, tempo, ranges of motion bar position. But I think the one thing that gets people like, "Eh, I don't wanna hip thrust," anecdotally, I've heard a ton of this, is it just kinda sucks bringing a barbell over, and if you're relatively strong, you're loading this thing up with four, five, six plates per side.

Then you're having to figure out how not to hit the barbell right in your pelvis. Mm. And then you're trying to figure out how the bench doesn't slide behind you. And there's, like, all these different ways that this exercise can theoretically suck. And I'll be the first one to tell you that I don't program a lot of traditional barbell hip thrusts on a bench for this exact reason.

The setup is arduous, and really, the accessibility of being able to do it consistently and safely, it lacks luster. We end up doing a lot of different variations, and there's so many different great pieces of machinery out there. There's hip thrust machines now in almost every single gym.

Thanks to Bret Contreras, right? He is the founder of the hip thrust. He is the creator of the hip thrust, the popular guy, the glute guy, and now he's shown that, hey, this is popular gym culture today.

There's a lot of people that are now innovating machines based on, 15 or 20 years ago, this not even being a thing.

We use a lot of hip thrust machines. If there is a machine in the gym for a client of mine, they're using the hip thrust machine. If there's no machine, we are using a Smith machine. And very rarely are we just putting a normal barbell onto somebody just because of all the variables that kind of make it inaccessible.

And one of the most common ways that I'll use hip thrusts is heavy banded hip thrusts. This is going to be hugely accessible, 'cause all you need is a bench and a band. So we hook them around your waist, we hook them around your heels, whatever you have, and sometimes we even use a mini band around the knees in order to do something called a double banded hip thrust.

So we're able to actually get all the benefits from hip thrusting. Probably if you're using bands instead of 400 pounds of load, you're chasing 50, 75, 100 reps to pure failure, knowing very well that that can build muscle as well. Those are ways that it just makes it more accessible. But it needs to be said that a hip thrust is not just with a barbell.

A hip thrust is the movement itself, and there's many different ways to train it. And I think based on people's capacity to kind of like embrace the suck of a setup, or they just wanna get in and out and get the benefits from that all all-time great movement pattern, there's different ways to train it.

We can't just be so one-minded and "Hey, this is the one way to do this exercise." If only a barbell was accessible with a bench, it probably wouldn't be as great of an exercise as it is today.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Well said. Well said. We're gonna move on to number nine here. Again, this one's gonna come with some explanation, all right?

Loaded pushups. Loaded pushups. Why? Number one, why pushup versus chest press, chest press machine, all these things?

Specifically loaded pushups plus. What does this mean?

DR. JOHN RUSIN: It's personally offensive to a vast majority of people, right? "No bench press? What do you mean, no bench press?" It's because there's an open chain way to push, and there's a closed chain way to push, and I know a vast majority of people out there are already doing a lot of bench press.

So the ability to actually get our hands on the ground versus putting our hands on a bar or even dumbbells for that matter, it totally changes the movement itself. Yeah. So let's go back to why we would be training the pushup in general. By having your hands on the ground, that's called a closed kinematic chain.

A closed kinematic chain means that we have natural abilities of the shoulder blades to be free, to slide, to glide, to dynamically stabilize, and we think about the ability to have a dynamically stabilized shoulder blade as one of the key influences of long-term shoulder health. So if you're not doing pushups every single week in your programming, you're leaving a lot of chance for your long-term shoulder health.

So being able to have your hands on the ground is a superpower, especially if you haven't done it before. But also, just being able to have your hands on the ground comes with limiting factors 'cause somebody does a pushup, usually they'll treat them in one of two ways. They'll use them as a warmup to, before they go in and do something, so they'll just do some sloppy half, half-rep pushups.

Or they'll treat them as like a, "Hey, it's a military test. How many pushups straight can you do?" And it turns into muscular endurance instead of muscular hypertrophy or even muscular strength. I'm a big believer that functional strength is strong under load through a complete range of motion. A normal pushup doesn't qualify in either of those two factors.

So thinking about being able to have a pushup plus, meaning that your hands are elevated on a surface, so you can actually dip the chest closer to the ground while not having the ground limit your range of motion, that is the plus factor in the pushup plus.

So it's actually a complete range of motion, and that could be dictated by what somebody has.

Usually, if you go two to three inches of hands on like yoga blocks, for example, that is a great way to be able to do it. That allows us to do horizontal push pattern, free the shoulder blades, have the hands on the ground from a closed chain perspective, and do a full range of motion. Man, is that a big bang for your buck exercise right there.

And especially for people that have done a lot of push-ups in their life, as soon as you add that additional one, two, three, maybe even four range inches of range of motion, you get your hands on dumbbells, you get your hands on kettlebells, you allow yourself to train at a full range of motion, that not only gets you stronger at length, but that is actually a key muscular hypertrophy driver as well.

Being able to train a position under load, under stretch. Man, that's where the gains are gonna be made. Shoulder health, hypertrophy, strength, and then being able to add load to that, we do in the form of bands around the shoulders, plate around the lower back or the upper back. A little bit goes a long way.

Kind of the same conversation that we're having with pull-ups and push-ups. The tradition of those two, it's oh, they're body weight exercises. They can also be great loaded exercises for actually getting strong as well. So don't just treat the pushup as a basic exercise. Treat it as a full range of motion exercise by elevating the hands, but also add it as a progressive strength exercise with progressive overload still being in play.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Oh, man. This one is really special for me because as time has gone on, I've become less and less of a fan of laying on my back and pushing weight overhead. Because it's just it doesn't translate for me, and I get it. I was, we'll say my heaviest bench press was somewhere around 300 pounds.

I was like 165. Mm-hmm. It's pretty impressive.

DR. JOHN RUSIN: Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: But just the degree, the, the safety as well, but also just the translation. Like, when am I pushing anything off of me laying on my back? Unless I'm a fighter-

DR. JOHN RUSIN: Yeah ...

SHAWN STEVENSON: unless maybe I gotta, move my wife off of me. But now just to see something that's more...

I push myself up off the ground all the time, all the time in the real world. And, or at least, I've, I, I'm a fan of sitting chest press machines as well. But with this being said, the thing that I tend to do the most now, but, and this is before even talking to you today, is to put on a heavy weighted vest and to grab a couple of those pushup handlebars.

DR. JOHN RUSIN: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And I'll do, again, because that allows a greater stretch, so getting me closer to the ground, and I'll do an eccentric really slow on the way down, so maybe five seconds- Yeah ... and then p- kind of exploding up a little bit quicker. One to two seconds up. And man, that will c- woo!

Man, the, the, the input itself, but I wouldn't have thought that that would be as valuable as, benching. Even in the, on a seated chest press machine, I'll put four plates on each side, easy, maybe four, pl- plus a couple 25s. Huge amount of weight, but then I'll turn around and do this pushup, and these smoke me because I'm focusing on this eccentric portion and also, loading the exercise with the weighted vest, and also just the dynamic of the pushup itself.

And so much more my body is g- being called upon to stabilize me. And I just, I, I just lean towards that now. Like I, I'm more attracted to that than these other things.

DR. JOHN RUSIN: I think sometimes people think oh, you're doing pushups. That's such a basic exercise. That's regress. I'm too advanced.

I'm too strong to do that. I need to keep on bench pressing. I'll give an example of just the last couple months, I was working with the world's strongest power lifter, John Hack, and he is an extraordinarily strong, jacked human being right in Madison, Wisconsin. Shout out. But he was struggling with a little bit of his shoulder pain.

And this is somebody that is benching in the high 500s. And the one thing that we started to do with his training was we started putting pushups into his warmup. And then we started doing hands on ground shoulder mobility work, very simple things And he just competed two weeks ago, 584-pound bench press, and then he trained with me three days later, strong and healthy and pain-free at the shoulders in the gym.

And he told me that the one thing that made the biggest of difference is, a lot of the things that he was doing with his hands on the ground, because he'd never had his hands on the ground before.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah.

DR. JOHN RUSIN: So it just begs the question is like, hey, if somebody who's benching almost 600 pounds is able to get his shoulders healthy while putting that amount of stress on the body, and he's seeing the positive improvements from it, it means that it's for everybody.

And it's for everybody because, again, shoulder health is key today. The number one most painful area on the body amongst active people. We need to start doing more to being able to bulletproof and just maintain our shoulder health, and it's not just about doing more corrective exercises or even more stretching.

It's being able to have more exercise variation, especially when it comes to more of the traditional patterns, AKA bench press. I'm not saying not to bench press, but also work in hands-on-the-ground movements as well. Your shoulders will thank you.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Amazing. We're thanking you already. We're at number 10 here on this list of high ROI exercises.

Number 10 is the goblet squat. Talk about that.

DR. JOHN RUSIN: Goblet squat is a killer. It is a killer for so many reasons. It is the best full-body functional squat pattern and exercise that there is. So you place a dumbbell or a kettlebell right in front of the chest, actively squeezing it, actively stabilizing it, actively front racking it, and then you're able to go through your squat pattern off of a bilateral stance at the lower body.

Now, the goblet squat is very special because it facilitates a more natural squat pattern. Because we have a heavy load in front of the body, that allows us to counter that load by sitting our hips back, by shifting our knees forward over the toes, by getting more depth, by keeping a little bit more of a vertical spine position, and being able to have more spine-friendly for reducing the sheer stress on the spine.

So this allows people to simply squat with a higher degree of proficiency. It feels better, it functions better, more depth, better looking reps, and we're able to load the system with it. And I will mention, if you're loading it hard and heavy enough, it is devastatingly effective, especially when taken to failure, and I'm talking about technique and form failure, and that is one that anyone who's ever done our goblet squat challenge will attest to that this will test you no matter how big or strong or how good a squatter you think you are

SHAWN STEVENSON: Amazing.

Amazing. Can you give a brief on what the goblet squat challenge is? How, what, what does the weight look like for that?

DR. JOHN RUSIN: It's very simple. So it's relative to your body weight. So you're gonna take 50% of your body weight and you're gonna take it in a dumbbell. You're gonna front rack it in a goblet position, and you are gonna get as many reps as humanly possible through your full and complete range of motion without resting.

So the goal is to break 25 reps. So that is passing our goblet squat challenge.

World record is 73. It is my colleague and Pain Free Performance master instructor, Clifton Harsky, and he did it at 207 pounds at the time. So not a small guy- Yeah ... being able to do that type of stuff. So the goblet squat challenge, it shows that you're a proficient squatter.

It shows that you can stand up under load. You have fatigue factor in terms of your stability, and you're able to kind of embrace the suck of going through something that is going to be a torture test. And it's not just about holding the weight. It's about stabilizing the weight so your lower body becomes the factor that gets trained and is one that is the limiting factor once you actually get good at it.

SHAWN STEVENSON: This has been an absolute masterclass. The insights here are amazing. Thank you so much. And also, I gotta ask you about this in closing. Programming is so important, and creating the structure of things for yourself, your unique goals.

DR. JOHN RUSIN: Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And you have resources for this. You have an incredible best-selling book that not only is geared towards performance, but also pain-free performance as well.

So can you talk about the importance of programming and also where people can get more information and accessibility?

DR. JOHN RUSIN: Yeah, a lot of these top 10 exercises, they're variations that you're gonna see in 80% of the programs that I write because they are accessible, they are effective, and they're safe.

That's the brand of Pain-Free Performance. We wanna get results, we wanna train hard, we wanna go heavy, but we don't wanna have the repercussions of pain, injuries, and burnout in the process. So a lot of these that you'll see spread throughout all the training programs that I feature, that we continue to release.

The number one place to look at is the Unbreakable Training App, becomeunbreakable.com.

We have 10 plus training teams that are going simultaneously inside of that app and they are ones that are new every single week for people to engage in. But that's the app that I use. That's the app that I use to hit my PRs this last training block with my pull-up and things like that.

And at almost 40, feeling strong and healthy and ready to go. But it's really dependent on being able to have a large emphasis on the big basics that we talked about today, but having a progressive mindset of getting stronger, more mobile, but also staying healthy. Staying in the game and continue to consistently press forward, that's, that's what it's all about.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yes, yes. And in your book as well.

DR. JOHN RUSIN: And Pain-Free Performance is the book. So you can get that on Amazon, and it is a bestseller, and that one is a beast. So it has 60 plus weeks of progressive programming inside of that. So it has programs for bands and body weight all the way up into a five-day functional hypertrophy program, and you can follow along.

And everything is programmed with all the details, but also QR'd with 3,000 videos that you can take advantage of.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Man, you put your heart and soul into that bad boy. We- Along with your family, your wife as well. Yeah. And, you g- you got an incredible team, incredible family. And this is one of the things I admire about you as well.

Your, your, your family has come along with you. Y- the first time that we met, you came to the studio, you brought your son along, and that was just an impactful, wonderful moment-

DR. JOHN RUSIN: Yeah ...

SHAWN STEVENSON: as well. And, I was just talking ab- like I mentioned, I was talking about your son just a couple of days ago with my neighbor because the shoes he was wearing.

And just also just his, his energy and his attitude, you could tell is just by, being around this culture, that you've helped to create, man. It's really remarkable.

DR. JOHN RUSIN: Yeah, being in here last year with the book launch and the tour and all that stuff, the most memorable moment was spending that two hours with you, with Cam in here in the studio.

Since that day, he follows every single thing that you do. He is your number one fan, 11-year-old in Madison, Wisconsin. He's following every single step of the way. But I think that that made such a large impact because as a father, I wanna expose him to people that are chasing their passions, that are doing things outside of the box- Yeah

but are also elevating to a whole different level. Before that moment, I don't think that Cam had exposure to somebody at the top of their game like you have been. And just that ability to show him and open up in his eyes to what's possible when you go in and you do all the right things, you treat people well, but you're also extremely talented at what you do, it was something special for him just to see in the studio.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Thank you, man. I mean, my spirit is full from that. Thank you so much, man. Such a joy. So grateful for you. Looking forward to doing much more The one and only Dr. John Rusin, everybody. Thank you so much for tuning into this episode today. I hope that you got a lot of value out of this. What exercise or exercises did you just get "I've got to implement.

I've got to take advantage of this exercise. What am I doing? Why am I leaving this out?" Because I definitely had an exercise or two that really jumped out at me. I've participated in and utilized all of these exercises that we discussed today at s- various points throughout my life and throughout my career.

But one exercise that really jumped out that I want to take more advantage of that I haven't done in over a year is the trap bar deadlift. I Bs in the trap, Bs, Bs in the trap. Take advantage of that trap bar. Just again, thinking about the center of gravity and being able to really load that exercise

Not only was I doing this for, the trap bar deadlift/kind of intermediate squat variation as well, but also for carries, loading up that bar and then just walking around with that bad boy. And I love the fact that, again, you can make that grip placement lower to the ground, closer to where a barbell would be, or you could flip the trap bar over, and it's an elevated grip.

So again, just really makes it accessible for a lot of people. But truly, all of this was inspiring and, again, very insightful. Learning the why behind a lot of this and also the progressions and regressions so we can make it accessible for everyone. But the most important thing is, are we taking advantage?

Are we taking advantage? Whatever that exercise or exercises was for you in this episode, please share them. If you're listening on Spotify, share a comment. Share your voice. You have the ability now to leave comments on Spotify. Get this conversation going. I appreciate that so much. Or take a screenshot of this episode and share it on social media.

Share it on Instagram. You can tag me, I'm @ShawnModel. Tag Dr. Rusin as well. I know he's very active on Instagram in particular. Or on the tickety-tok, Facebook, X, wherever you wanna share it, just share this information. So powerful, so accessible, and again, most importantly again, we're looking at ROI. ROI, return on investment.

Get more bang for your buck with these 10 exercises. We've got some incredible masterclasses and world-leading experts coming your way very, very soon, so make sure to stay tuned. Take care, have an amazing day, and I'll talk with you soon.