

TECHNIQUE

Get Pulled Over

You've probably begun to get in shape for summer, so it's high time for some new exercises to spice up your program. Try the lat pullover. This exercise recruits various commonly trained upper-body muscles while strengthening your midsection—and let's face it: Most exercisers detest exercises specifically designed to train the midsection.

The lat pullover is performed using elastic tubing secured to the top edge of a door or with the high pulley cable of an exercise machine. If you're using elastic tubing (or a band), a lower-resistance version is recommended so that the tubing's resistance does not increase excessively from the starting to the ending position of the exercise.

First, secure the middle of the tubing to the top of a closed door using a special attachment designed specifically for this purpose. (Most tubing manufacturers offer this attachment.) You may be tempted to simply throw the middle portion of the tubing over the top of the door and then secure it by closing the door, but don't do that; the tubing is liable to snap unexpectedly during the exercise. Not only will this ruin a perfectly good piece of exercise equipment, you also run the risk of injury. If the tubing breaks, it will snap back and hit you.

Once you've secured the equipment with the special attachment, grab one handle in each hand. (If your tubing doesn't have handles, loop each end of the tubing around the mid-portion of each hand.) Stand with your knees slightly bent and your feet even, approximately shoulder-width apart [figure 1a]. At the starting position, your hands should be touching, and the elastic tubing should be providing moderate resistance. Keep in mind that the resistance will increase as the tubing is stretched during the exercise. Your torso should be rotated forward, roughly 30 degrees from vertical, approximately parallel to the elastic tubing. This is accomplished by sticking your butt out slightly and rotating your hips forward while maintaining a flat lower back.

At the start of the movement, your arms should be at or above your head, almost in line with your torso. Maintaining your elbows in a slightly bent position while simultaneously contracting your midsection muscles, smoothly pull your arms down and out in an inverted V-shaped motion until your hands touch the tops of your thighs [1b]. You should maintain a tight midsection during this movement, but be sure to avoid the natural tendency to hold your breath. Remember instead to blow out while you are pulling your arms down and out.

Allow your arms to smoothly return to the starting position along the same V-shaped path, slowly counting to four while you do it. Remember to keep your elbows slightly bent and to breathe in during this portion of the exercise. The rigid position of your

legs and torso should be maintained throughout the entire exercise.

The exercise is performed similarly using the high pulley cable, except the arms move in a parallel path rather than a V-shaped motion. First, secure a W-shaped curling-bar attachment to the high pulley cable. As opposed to a straight bar attachment, the curling bar attachment allows the exerciser to maintain a more ergonomically correct wrist position during this exercise. This minimizes potentially injurious stresses on your wrists. Grab the bar with an overhand grip so that each hand is positioned where there is the greatest bend in the bar (i.e., the outer edge of each hand approximately two inches from the end of the bar). Your body positions and the movements in the exercise should be the same as described for those using resistance tubing.

This exercise is typically classified as a back or lat (latissimus dorsi) exercise, but it targets many other muscles: the lower chest, technically referred to as the sternal portion of the pectoralis major; muscles that rotate the shoulder blades down and back, such as the rhomboids and middle trapezius; muscles that extend the arm, including the triceps, teres major, and posterior deltoid; and forearm muscles, especially the wrist flexors, which are the muscles responsible for curling your palms toward your forearms.

Another benefit of this exercise is the static (isometric) contraction of the midsection and leg muscles that you use to maintain proper body alignment. This enables your midsection muscles—abs, obliques, and lower back—and your leg muscles to get a workout, and that promotes the development of "dynamic stability," which refers to the training of specific areas of the body to maintain a stable base of support while other parts of the body move. Dynamic stability is necessary for both the performance of everyday physical tasks and of more involved athletic activity.

Both approaches to the lat pullover have advantages. Tubing is fairly inexpensive and compact, so it provides an excellent workout option for those on a limited budget or who travel a lot. Resistance is provided throughout the range of motion regardless of how quickly or slowly you move. A weight stack with a high pulley cable apparatus provides resistance throughout the exercise's range of motion, and that more closely matches your body's abilities. It also makes it easy to quantify the amount of resistance used during the exercise.

Incorporate this exercise into your back or upper-body workout program. As with other exercises, performing two sessions (two or three sets per session) of this exercise per week is optimal. During one session, train with increased resistance and fewer repetitions (8 to 10 reps per set) and the next session use less weight and increased repetitions (14 to 16 reps per set). Whenever possible, perform this exercise while viewing yourself in a mirror so you can ensure proper form and body position.—Gerald Greenspan, M.S.E., P.T., founder, Columbus (Ohio) Fitness Consultants

