

## H A R L A N   R I C H A R D S

March 13, 2017

### How Many Push-ups Can You Do?

Push-ups are hard for most people. Being able to do lots of push-ups at one time is not a function of how strong you are, but rather a matter of stamina.

I came across a book a few years ago called "Seven Weeks to 100 Push-ups." I thought it would be great if I could do 100 push-ups in one set so I started following the instructions in the book. I had been doing sets of 50 and never managed to get much beyond that.

I followed the regimen faithfully but it didn't seem like I was accomplishing anything. The first few weeks were too easy. Then about the fifth week the sequences and intervals between sets got so difficult I couldn't do them. I couldn't get through the routine without cheating. After 7 weeks, I couldn't even do a set of 50 push-ups any more. I concluded that the routine must only work for young guys.

I decided to do it my own way. I worked my way back up to 50 push-ups. Next, I began increasing my reps by one or two every week or so and did at least one set every morning. These days, I do sets of 70 push-ups and it pretty much takes all my energy to hit that number. Some days I can get a bit higher but generally I don't try. I'm content to do 70 push-ups in one set. The most I ever did in one set was 85 but that was only one time and I've never reached that number again.

When we have "training day" in Stanley (generally 2 Wednesdays per month), I usually do 10 sets of push-ups: 3 sets with my feet elevated on a chair, 4 sets of normal push-ups and 3 sets with my upper body elevated. I start out doing sets of 70 and when I get too tired for that, the number per set goes down. I always do at least 500 push-ups. Last Wednesday, I did 610 push-ups.

It seems like there is no consensus on what constitutes a push-up (I'm excluding so-called girl's push-ups which some fitness tests permit women to do using their knees rather than their toes to compensate for their weaker upper body strength). I define a push-up as being balanced on your toes and hands, back straight, arms straight, then lowering your body down until your elbows bend at least to a 90° angle (while keeping your back straight) and going back up again. Some purists insist

that your chest must touch the ground while others do what I call "rabbit push-ups" (only flex your arms a few inches). Their movement reminds me of two rabbits having sex - the motion is short and fast. I don't consider rabbit push-ups to be real push-ups, but maybe I'm just being a push-up snob.

Some guys also insist that push-ups must be done slowly. That may work your muscles harder but when you want to reach a certain number of push-ups per set, the slower you go, the harder it is to get there. Slow push-ups seem to work your muscles differently. I think that's what made my 7 week experiment a failure. I usually do fast push-ups and the 7 week system mandated doing slow push-ups.

This blog was prompted by a conversation I had with my daughter the other day where she told me about how many (boy) push-ups my 6 year-old grand daughter could do. She's a tumbler and swimmer and has phenomenal strength for someone her age. I can see her going for the Olympics when she gets older. All my grand children are athletic and healthy and for that I am grateful. And I'm also grateful that at 63 years of age, I can do 70 push-ups in one set.