

How important is a strong vertical jump to you? Well, even if you're not a basketball player, volleyball player, high-jumper, and you don't participate in a sport that requires leaping ability, you still might want to pay attention to it. Yes, even if you happened to be a sumo wrestler, whose sport requires staying glued to the ground - assessing your jumping ability would still have merit for you!

In practically all the world of sport the vertical leap can be and is frequently used as a measuring tool to assess the ability to display power, explosive strength, and the ability to use your strength. Jumping ability is to athletic development what the ability to accelerate from 0-60 is to street-car racing. You can put a bigger engine in a car, but what it can do with the horsepower it has is evaluated in the race. Unless it can "get it up and go" quickly, that extra horsepower is of no use. In much the same way the vertical jump assesses your "get up and go" and how well you can use the horsepower in your own body.

To give you an idea how effective a tool the simple vertical leap test is for assessing whole body explosiveness, the NFL routinely uses a whole host of tests when evaluating athletes at their NFL combines. They use a bench press test, a 40-yard dash test, various tests of agility, and a vertical jump test. At first glance it might appear that the ability to jump would be the LEAST specific of those tests to a football player. However, the vertical leap is in fact the most effective of those tests in predicting the success of a football player - even better than the 40-yard dash!

Coaches can look at the vertical jump of a player and immediately tell how explosive of an athlete they have on their hands. This explosiveness is key for a football player and has a high carryover to pretty much any sport requiring speed, agility, quickness, and explosive power as most sports do - including sumo wrestling! For these reasons alone it is a good idea to pay attention to your ability to get off the ground. You don't necessarily have to make a specific effort to increase your leaping ability, but rather use it as a barometer of your training effectiveness.

If you're a basketball player I probably don't have to tell you how to measure your vertical but if you don't know how, here's the way to do it.

1. Take a piece of tape or chalk and, standing next to a wall reach your arm up as high as possible while standing flat-footed and either place the tape on the wall at your highest point or make a mark with the chalk.
2. Next, stand next to the wall and jump up as high as possible and place the tape or make a mark on the wall at your highest point. Repeat 3 more times.
3. Take a measuring tape and measure the difference between the low mark and the high mark. This is your vertical jump.

Simple enough! Repeat this test once every 2-3 weeks. You will find in the large majority of cases your vertical jump will directly measure the effectiveness of your training program. The better your vertical jump becomes, the better your sporting speed, agility, and quickness tends to become as well.

The vertical jump test can also be used to assess your state of recovery prior to a weight-training, speed, or even practice session. If you overtrain your nervous system by performing an excessive volume of heavy weight or high-speed training, the fatigue will manifest itself first in your performance in movements requiring high-speed. You might not notice it much, but this type of fatigue will tend to show itself very quickly as a decrease in performance of the vertical jump. If this happens ideally you'll want to cut back slightly on the volume of your training session(s) to recover. One thing you can do is use your vertical jump as a barometer of how much volume and intensity you should use for a training session.

Simply warm up and get a sweat going and then perform a couple of vertical jumps. Compare your jump height to your normal "fresh" jump height and assess the results.

If the height is down 10% or more you should cut the volume in half for that session and cut the training intensity down by 10%. For example, instead of performing 16 total sets with an average load of 80% 1rm you might perform 8 sets with an average load of 70%, stopping each set well shy of failure.

If the height of your vertical jump hasn't increased or decreased simply carry out the training session as planned.

If the height is up 10% or more you can increase the volume by 20% and the intensity by 5%.

One thing to note is if you have recently completed an intense leg training session and have a lot of soreness your performance might temporarily decrease anyway so it's best to use this test either after an upper body workout or when you're experiencing little to no soreness.