When it comes to weight training, which gives you a bigger fitness benefit: Completing three sets on one machine before moving to the next one in the circuit, or moving from machine to machine after one set and completing the circuit three times? -Karen T., Vienna

The short answer is it depends. To get the best growth and development in a muscle group, you should do three sets of a weight-training exercise with an appropriate amount of rest between sets. The goal is to reach muscle fatigue/failure by the end of a set with a weight setting that is heavy enough to challenge you, but not so heavy that it compromises good form. As a general rule:

1. 8-12 repetitions around 45 – 60 seconds rest.
2. 15 and higher repetitions 30 seconds rest.
3. Below 8 repetitions you’ll need more recovery so you can lift the next set so maybe 2-3 minutes.

You can also make your workout more efficient by “super setting,” or using two different weight-training machines consecutively to allow an appropriate amount of time between sets for both muscle groups. For example, you could do a set on the leg extension machine and then immediately switch to a machine that works another muscle group, like arms, and alternate back and forth until you get to three sets on each machine. Not only does this give each muscle group the appropriate amount of time to rest between sets, it keeps your heart rate up, burns more calories and saves you time at the gym!

Laurie Strickland is an accomplished former body builder and certified personal trainer. Got a question for the trainer, email Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov and write Ask the Trainer in the subject line.