

Quick Beginning Bodybuilding Guide complements of:

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Starting a bodybuilding program can be a daunting experience. You visit your local gym only to see intimidating, big armed men and lean, muscular women training with a serious attitude. You look around and are dazed by the expansive array of equipment. How does it all work? Even the vocabulary seems like a foreign language: spotting, pyramid training, gastrocnemius, reps, periodication.

Whew! Would it help if we reminded you that even Arnold Schwarzenegger, perhaps the greatest bodybuilder of all time, had a first day in the gym? If fact, we all did!

Getting Started

Great - you've decided to try bodybuilding. Perhaps you want to build mass, tighten up your midsection or slim down; those are all possible with strength training. Whatever your reason (and you should definitely write down your goals for starting and your realistic expectations of what you hope to achieve in the short and long term), you should follow a clearly defined program.

Don't expect us to provide you with any so-called success; let's state for the record right now that some training methods are smarter and better than others, but nothing resembles a secret. Our role here is to teach and guide you through your first three months so that you can take your training to the next level and design a personal routine that meets your needs.

Is there one program that's right for everyone? No. Did you really expect that one routine would serve the needs of the female college basketball player who wants to make a more dominating presence on the court, the 45 year old businessman looking to firm his body and improve his health, and the young man interested in competitive bodybuilding? Every person who trains has different motivations, desires and genetic potential, and each must make his or her own adjustments in putting together a particular program. It's really not so difficult. But before you get started, here are some points you'll want to consider.

1. **Get a physician's release** if you are over 40 or have had any sort of previous injury or impairment.
2. **Be realistic but positive.** Assess your current condition and where you want to be in three months, one year and five years. Keep focused on your goals and know you'll achieve them.
3. **Commit yourself to three months** before making any judgements about whether it's working or not. The truth is, you're probably a bit impatient, and sculpting your physique takes time. Changes take place incrementally, but three months is long enough to notice some significant changes in strength and size. Persistence and dedication are characteristics that all successful bodybuilders have in common. Do you?

Designing Your Exercise Program

Before getting into your program, you need to develop an understanding of how and why you're building your exercise routine. Although we've gone ahead and designed a program for you, just about everything in it can be changed depending on your particular circumstances. Your primary objective here, as a beginner, is to build a solid foundation - and not just any training program will take you there in an efficient manner. Study the following points to better understand your bodybuilding program.

Bodypart Training

Bodybuilders group exercises by bodypart and train one muscle group at a time. Working one area with 1-3 exercises ensures that you train it thoroughly. Experience says that this type of training is the most efficient for bodybuilding. (Circuit training, on the other hand, allows you to do movements for different bodyparts back to back with no rest in between).

Every major muscle group should be developed to prevent muscle imbalance and the risk of injury. The major muscle groups include legs (quadriceps, hamstrings, calves, glutes), chest, shoulders, back (Trapezius, lats, erectors), abdominals and arms (biceps, triceps).

Exercises

You can choose from any number of movements that target a particular muscle group, but beginners should stick with the basics to develop a solid foundation. The first exercise you do for a given bodypart should be a compound movement. (A compound or multijoint movement, unlike an isolation exercise, has movement at two or more joints and thus brings in a greater number of assisting muscle groups. Note: Some bodyparts like biceps, triceps and calves can be worked with pre-dominantly isolation exercises.)

Some basic movements can be done in a number of ways; for example, you can do a bench press with a barbell, with dumbbells or on a machine. Eventually, you'll learn how to do them all and use them in your training arsenal.

Two similar exercises can target a muscle differently. For example, the bench press is a good exercise for most of the chest, but the incline press (essentially a bench press done on an incline bench) works the upper pectorals more effectively. When you put exercises together to form a routine, you'll want to include those movements that hit the same muscle in different ways. That's why you normally include 2-3 exercises when you work each bodypart.

Weights

During the first couple of training sessions, you'll want to go pretty light just to get a feel for how to do the movement correctly. After you feel comfortable with the form, begin adding weight.

Even an experienced lifter should always do his first set as a warm-up with practically no weight to flush to target muscle and connective tissue with blood. On the second set, add a couple of small plates and do the exercise again. Was it still easy? If so, and assuming you used good form, add more weight. If you struggled to reach 12 repetitions, add just a little bit of weight. (Adding weight on successive sets is called pyramid training and is one of the safest ways to train.)

Continue adding weight until it becomes tough to complete 8-12 reps. Your goal is to train in the range where you reach muscular failure at 8-12 reps. Once you find a challenging weight, stick with it. So you'll become stronger and be able to increase the number of reps. Once you can do 12, it's time to increase your training poundage by about 10%. At this heavier weight, you won't be able to do 12 reps, but with time you'll once again be able to. Keep working in this fashion.

The principle behind this type of training is known as overload. It states that for improvements to occur, you must impose a demand on your muscles greater than what they're accustomed to (for bodybuilding purposes, about two-thirds of your maximal strength). Your muscles compensate for this strain on the cellular level by adding protein to grow thicker and stronger. At that point, the same load is no longer sufficient to induce further changes, more load must be added. That is, you must progressively add training stimulus to make continued improvements.

Keep track of your training poundage by recording your weights, sets and reps in a training log alongside a list of your exercises.

Some bodybuilders swing and heave, cheating for the sake of pushing heavier weights. Remember, the name of the game here is not weightlifting, but rather bodybuilding.

Sets

A set is a combination of any number of reps of a single exercise. As a beginner, you'll normally want to do 1-2 light warm up sets of each movement (especially the first movement for a given bodypart) before doing 1-3 heavier sets. That equals 2-4 total sets per exercise.

Reps

A rep is a single execution of one exercise. If you do a set of 10 bicep curls consecutively, that's 10 reps. During your first week or two, keep the weights very light so that you can complete about 15 reps in good form. This is a change for you to practice good form while you work on your neuromuscular coordination and learn the proper 'feel' for the movement. Developing that feel will become even more critical later on because it will tell you if an exercise is working.

After that initial break-in period, to build size and strength you want to do 8-12 reps per set (after your warm-up set of 15 reps, which you should do at the start of each exercise). Use a weight that allows you to do the recommended number of reps and still reach muscle failure.

Muscle failure means that you cannot do any more reps with good form. If you can't do eight strict reps, the weight's too heavy. If you can do more than 12, the weight's too light. Adjust the weight for your next set. (Note: The numbers eight and twelve are not arbitrarily derived. Exercise scientists have conducted numerous tests and have found that working with a weight about 70% of your one-rep maximum produces the fastest results. Most bodybuilders can lift about 70% of their one-repetition maximum 8-12 times).

Though you don't have to train to muscle failure to grow, you need to come pretty close. Bodybuilders call this intensity. How do you know if you're close to working at 100% intensity? Simple: If you can do another rep with good form, do it! If you can do still another, do it.

After you build your base, you may want to experiment with a program that alternates periods of high reps (which build muscle endurance) to medium reps (builds muscle mass) with low reps (builds strength and power) and back up again. This is called cycling. The idea here is to progress to a higher level of strength each cycle. (Note: Advanced strength athletes like powerlifters use slightly different training methods, most notably the number of reps, that do bodybuilders. You'll get stronger as you build muscle, but training to maximize strength isn't identical to the type of training that maximizes mass.)

Proper Form

We'll say this again and again, but it's far better to use a weight that allows you to perform the movement correctly than to cheat with a heavy weight that will, sooner or later, result in an injury.

Speed of Movement

Use a smooth, controlled motion during all phases of the lift. This deliberate rep speed produces the greatest results for bodybuilding purposes. Super-fast reps with ballistic movements and jerking can be harmful to muscles and connective tissues, while slow training accomplishes very little. In general, most bodybuilders use a formula that approximates a two-second positive contraction (raising the weight), a momentary squeeze of the muscle at the point of peak contraction, and a two-second negative contraction (lowering of the weight).

Breathing

Most people don't think much about breathing until they begin lifting weights, but it should still come naturally. Start each set with a deep inhalation and exhale as you push through the most difficult part of the lift. Inhale at the top (or the easiest portion of the lift) and exhale as you push.

Rest between Sets

In general, rest as long as it takes for you to feel recovered from your previous set. That normally ranges from 45-90 seconds. Larger muscle groups take a bit longer to recover; smaller muscle groups clear low pH levels and are ready to go more quickly. Don't fall into the all too common mistake of talking with your buddies for 3-4 minutes between sets, during which time your muscle can become cold. This is counterproductive and lengthens the time you spend in the gym.

If you want to emphasize strength, take a little longer rest between sets. On the other hand, less rest means you won't be able to lift as heavy, but you'll be stressing your endurance. Of note: How much you can lift on a given set and the number of reps you do are directly related to the length of your rest period.

Use a Full Range of Motion

Use a full range of motion in your exercise movements. You want to work each target muscle through its natural range of motion for complete development and to prevent injury.

Training Frequency

Say you train your entire body on Monday. Should you do it again on Tuesday, or wait until Wednesday? The answer is that your body requires a minimum of 48 hours to fully recover after exercise, sometimes even longer. Physiological processes at the cellular level require rest and nutrients before you can train that same muscle group again. A good rule of thumb: If you're even slightly sore, you're not ready to train that bodypart again.

If you're an advanced bodybuilder and split up your workout into, for example, one day for upper body and another for lower body, you can train on consecutive days as long as you don't repeat the same workout. As a beginner, you don't want to go more than 96 hours (four days) without training the same muscle group again. Timing too infrequently results in submaximal gains.

The answer for the beginner, then, is to train every 2-3 days (or three times a week). A Monday - Wednesday - Friday (or similar) schedule is ideal.

Training Duration

If you follow the exercises, sets, reps and rest prescription, you should complete your resistance training in about an hour. Never mind those two hour plus sessions; who could possibly maintain the high level of intensity and mental fortitude of a marathon training session? What matters is the quality of your workout measured by the intensity you create, not the length of time you spend in the gym. Remember that.

For more detailed information on Beginning Bodybuilding, try
An Amazing New E-Book Called,
"NoBull Bodybuilding"

Here is some of the CRITICAL INFORMATION EVERYBODY MUST KNOW BEFORE THEY START, which you will learn inside the NoBull e-book:

The truth about how long it really takes to gain muscle mass and lose body fat (not the fairy tales you read about in the magazines and supplement ads)

How to avoid embarrassing yourself and looking like a "dork" the first time you work out in a gym: Instead of feeling intimidated or nervous, you'll be able to walk into the gym like you own the place (or... if you prefer to stay at home... you'll discover what equipment to buy and how to get started on a shoestring budget)

The facts about genetics and your ultimate potential for muscle mass or leanness: Discover the truth about genetic potential and whether you will ever have a chance to look like a bodybuilder or fitness model (don't worry... it's mostly good news... but there is a catch... and you do have to be realistic... If you start with unrealistic expectations, you're going to lose motivation and sabotage yourself)

What results you can expect if you're starting after the age of 40 (there are a few things you'll have to do differently than those youngsters - mess this up and you'll get hurt, overtrained or hormonally depleted)

Why steroids and performance enhancing drugs are totally unnecessary... IF you understand the facts about hormonally friendly training, nutrition and supplementation (these are safe and natural methods that work for permanent gains... if you take drugs you may look great now, but what about a few years from now?)

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