

Women and Weight Training

By Kent Pegg

More and more women are entering the world of weight training to increase their level of health and fitness and look better. The numerous benefits of strength training are no longer reserved for just men wanting to get “big”.

Women, however, have long been concerned with the possibility of getting big and overly muscular if they begin weight training. The idea of adding weight, even if it's muscle, runs counter to what most women want.

So how can women who don't want to get “big” incorporate weight lifting into their exercise program while still maintaining their lean and fit look? Simple, know your body and train for your body type.

Everyone, men and women alike, can be classified by their body type in regards to how they build muscle and retain fat. The three body classifications are ectomorphs, mesomorphs, and endomorphs.

Ectomorphs are thinly built and have a linear shape. Mesomorphs have muscular bodies and the ability to gain strength or lose fat. Endomorphs tend to have fuller, more rounded figures.

No matter which body type a woman may have, her overall ability to add muscle is still significantly reduced compared to her male counterpart.

This is mostly due to the lower levels of testosterone in women's bodies and the lack of male growth hormone. Without these, women have very finite limits to the amount of muscle they can pack on.

Knowing this, combined with incorporating the right kind of workout for your body type, will help produce the lean, muscular, fit look you desire.

If you fall into the ectomorph classification, you will most likely have a more difficult time building muscle mass. This doesn't mean your strength won't increase, it will. It's just that your muscle size won't increase at the same pace.

To assist with your strength training routine, an ectomorph should focus on lower reps and higher weights. Eight to ten reps per set where your muscles are significantly fatigued during performance of your last few reps will lend to greater muscle development.

Additionally, female ectomorphs may find they need to increase their protein intake and overall caloric intake if they are to be successful at adding muscle and gaining a fitter, fuller looking body.

Mesomorphs will probably have an easier time achieving both a strong physique and an athletic appearance.

Most mesomorphs are able to add muscle when they are lifting and remove fat when they are dieting or paying attention to their nutrition plan. Performing weight lifting sets of around twelve reps will help mesomorphs build and maintain quality muscle without producing significant overall size increase.

Mesomorphs, as well as ectomorphs, should focus on both compound and isolation exercises. The bigger compound exercises like squats, lunges, presses and rows will add some muscle size while isolation exercises like shoulder raises, triceps kickbacks, leg extensions and leg curls will help define their muscles.

Endomorphs are more likely to gain size when on a heavy weight training program and should, therefore, focus on somewhat lighter weights and higher reps. Twelve to fifteen reps per set of a moderate weight will help endomorphs increase their strength without adding too much muscle.

Additionally, an endomorph should probably concentrate less on big, compound movements and more on incorporating isolation exercises into their workout routine.

Endomorphs will also have to focus more attention on reducing body fat if they want to see the visible results of their strength training. Eliminating the overlying layer of fat will help show off those strong muscle underneath.

No matter what type of body a woman may have, weight training will produce many positive results, both in terms of physical strength and appearance.

During my years as a personal fitness and rehab trainer, the majority of my clients have been female. Out of the hundreds of women I have trained, not one has ever been unhappy with her appearance after adding quality muscle to her body.

When muscle is added to the body, it invariably goes on in places that look good, and it actually minimizes the look of what fat may exist.

Fuller, rounded shoulders and better developed lats help minimize the appearance of the waist and provide that “V” shape we desire.

Leg work to build muscles higher in the buttocks, as well as in the hamstrings and quads, helps diminish the areas of the legs which tend to hold more fat.

Physical appearance is often just the creation of an illusion where certain areas are built to help lessen the look of other areas.

A little time spent considering your body type can go a long way toward developing a workout program that’s right for you. Weight training *is* for everyone. Male or female. Endo, ecto, or meso.

The athletic, muscular and toned body you’ve always wanted is more possible than you may have ever expected.

Kent Pegg is a certified personal trainer and the co-owner of the Los Alamos Fitness Center. If you have any questions about the information or exercises in this article you can call him at 662-5232.