Fitness

Building & Maintaining Muscle

Everyone talks about toning, shaping, putting on muscle and getting stronger these days; all the latter have everything to do with one factor: building muscle.

The muscle building process is relatively simple to understand. If you are able to understand these processes and properly apply them, you will see your body take on a fantastic new shape and you will be much more metabolically active! Particularly for males who are trying to reverse the aging process, building muscle is key! Don’t stop reading ladies ... Building muscle is essential for you as well to tone, build overall strength and create a shapely figure.

The whole process begins when the existing muscles in the body are placed under unaccustomed physical stress, such as when they lift more weight than they are comfortable lifting. This can be lifting a bag of groceries or heavy dumbbells. Your body does not know the object itself. Rather, it knows the force the object produces on the muscles! When muscles are asked to do more work than they are accustomed to, they suffer minor ruptures. You’ll feel these micro-tears as muscle soreness. These mini-injuries are repaired while the body rests. The resulting muscle is slightly larger than before and better able to handle the stress that caused the initial tears.

Building muscle extends FAR beyond your time spent in the gym. The repair process is of utmost importance. Eating the proper mix of protein and carbohydrates to properly repair these muscle tears is a must. Rest in the form of quality, sound sleep is mandatory. You cannot expect stellar results breaking down your muscle and then not supplying your body with adequate fuel in the form of food. Choose good quality digestible proteins such as lean meats and “good” carbohydrates in the form of complex carbs. Brown rice, sweet potatoes or yams are excellent.

Someone looking to build muscle maximizes the muscle building process by continuously escalating the stress level placed on muscle groups. This is accomplished by increasing the amount of weight, the repetitions of the exercises and/or changing the type of exercise used on a specific muscle, causing new micro-tears, building the muscle more and more. I like to call it “keeping it fresh.” The body has an amazing ability to adjust and adapt. You want to avoid this by creating new and unique ways to keep your body and “muscles” guessing.

Nutritional Plan for Muscle Building

As briefly mentioned above, muscle growth requires a specific nutritional plan as well. Let me go a little more in-depth: There are three macronutrients that you’ll need in correct proportions to fuel muscle growth. Carbohydrates, proteins and fats will deliver the nutritional payload your muscles call for.

Carbohydrates provide the fuel to get you through your workouts. Slow digesting, low glycemic index (GI) carbohydrates, most fruit and vegetables (excluding white potatoes, corn and peas), whole grains, basmati rice, brown rice pasta, and sweet potatoes are favored because they don’t cause a spike in blood sugar like high glycemic carbs will. A sharp spike in blood sugar causes an increase in insulin production which makes it more likely that food energy would be stored as fat, not used as energy. Post weight training workout meals, however, often contain some quickly digested carbs in order to replace glycogen in the muscles and promote protein synthesis. You want to be sure and get this essential meal in within your one hour “window of opportunity” following the workout. Your insulin is elevated. Thus, when you ingest the protein and carbs it shuffles the amino acids from the protein and the glycogen from the carbohydrates to the muscle for proper recovery and muscle repair.
Protein is the building block of muscle creation. For some, protein is almost one-third of their calories for the day. Good quality protein sources include poultry, beef, egg whites, protein powders made from whey added to meals or used as meal replacements in shakes, and nuts.

You need approximately two tablespoons of dietary fat each day. Approved sources of fat for the muscle builder are the unsaturated kind which is liquid at room temperature and is found in coconut and olive oils, nuts, seeds and avocados.

The missing components here are rest and recuperation. You’ve placed your body under great stress and it needs rest. The specific muscles you’ve worked on need to recuperate and shouldn’t be exercised again until they properly recover. For most people that means at least 48 hours should elapse between workouts of the same muscles. It is recommended to track your progress, workouts, and additional notes on muscle soreness in some sort of journal. This will help you to see patterns, what your weight progression is as well as general notes on your sleeping patterns, stress, etc. If you want to keep track of your progress a lot more accurately consider getting your body fat composition analysis done. This is simple test that reveals the composition of your lean body mass, your body fat mass and its subsequent body fat percentile. This is an excellent way to keep detailed track of your progress. Depending on your adherence every two to four weeks this is recommended.

Your progress in the gym will be greatly enhanced by understanding the basics of the muscle building process. The good old 80/20 rule applies here. What you do inside the gym accounts for 20% of the work while the other 80% comes from what you do outside of the gym. Eat frequently, eat clean, eat in conjunction to your workouts (making sure you take in the proper pre and post workout meals) and then rest and recuperate.

Here’s to you and your journey of building muscle!

**ALEX POPTODOROV**

Owner of AAP Fitness, a private personal training studio in New Tampa, along with his wife Ashley. Alex is NASM-CPT, NSCA-CPT certified trainer and APEX certified nutritional counselor. Alex has 14 years of experience in the health and fitness industry. His clientele includes mainstream public looking to get fit and healthy to competitive athletes looking to improve performance. Alex himself is a competitive NPC Bodybuilder, AAPL Powerlifter and USAW Olympic weightlifting coach and Olympic lifting competitor. He spends much of his time researching the latest health and fitness trends as well as nutritional and sports specific supplementation. For more information on the services provided please visit www.aapfitness.com

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**HOW TO CHOOSE THE PROPER BICYCLE**

By Jeff Slokum

There are many different types and styles of bicycles. You will need to decide on the type of biking you will be predominantly doing in order to help you narrow down your choices. Below are just some of the types of bicycles available on the market today.

The first bicycle we will mention here are what are considered by some to be comfort bicycles. These are the type used by most weekend recreational bike riders. They usually have a comfortable shock-absorbing seat and shock absorbing front forks and wide pedals.

Another type of bike which is a bit more rugged than the comfort bike is a trail bike or light duty mountain bike. These bikes can take a bit more rough stuff than the bikes mentioned above but are not meant for serious mountain biking.

Touring bicycles are for those who go long distances and faster than recreational bike riders. These bikes are built for riding on the pavement. They are light weight bikes with more shock absorbeny than comfort bikes.

Cruiser bikes are heavier than the comfort bikes with fatter tires. They are good for the road, or riding in the sand.

A true mountain bike has a stronger frame and components than any other bike as they are intended for off road and rugged terrain. The tires on a mountain bike are knobby and wide for more shock support. The seat and handlebars are positioned to allow for the rider to lean over while maneuvering the bike.

Recumbent bicycles are becoming very popular with older riders and those who have some limits in physical ability. The rider reclines while pedaling in a feet forward position. The seat is much more comfortable than on any other bicycle. Recumbent bikes sit low to the ground and have multiple gears.

Talk with family and friends who own bikes to get their opinion on what may be the best investment for you. If you don’t think that you’ll stick with bike riding long term and if you don’t plan to do more than weekend riding you don’t need to spend a fortune. Visit several bicycles shops and talk with the pros before making a decision. You can get many years of enjoyment if you choose the right bike for you.
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