

**Lifting for Ladies: It's good for your bones, your body,
and it won't make you look masculine.**

**Ladies, lifting
Heavy Won't
Make You
"BULK UP"**



It's a sad scene when you walk into most gyms and see almost all the weights taken up by guys and the majority of cardio equipment claimed by the women. If you've never noticed, check it out next time; it's invariably the case. As a personal trainer, I know how vital it is for my fellow ladies to lift heavy. In addition to simply staying strong, heavy lifting is one of the only ways to increase bone density. We all know that women are at the highest risk of osteoporosis as time goes on. Taking calcium supplements is still good, but nothing, nothing makes bones stronger like lifting weights. In fact, there is a specific biological process that makes your body lay down more bone material in response to the kind of stress that we only get from heavy resistance training (see footnote below for more info).

So ladies, if you feel like it might be a good idea to reduce your chances of shattering your hip or arm when you fall down because you're having way too much fun at your 70th birthday party, then you might consider adding some weights into your workout.

Many, if not all, of my female clients (and female friends who ask me) are so afraid of “bulking up” like a man if they lift weights that they just stay away from it altogether. But fear not!

I know Ethel Merman did a bang-up job singing “Anything you can do I can do better” to Ray Middleton, but when it comes to building muscle, that’s just not true.

No testosterone, no bulk



“No testosterone” is a bit of an overstatement, but it gets my point across.

Testosterone and human growth hormone are the two major hormones involved in building muscle. Everyone has them both, but men have way more testosterone than women. In general, women have about 15-20% less concentration of testosterone in their body than men do. Without that extra testosterone, we ladies simply can’t (yes I mean can’t, as in we are biologically unable to) build the big muscles like guys. It’s science, so stop worrying.

Sports scientists have known for a long time that it is possible to manipulate (to an extent) the body’s hormonal response with different kinds of training protocols. For instance, a heavy training protocol increases serum testosterone concentration.

But wait (say the ladies)! You said that we need to lift heavy, and that we can’t get bulky like guys because we don’t have as much testosterone - and now you’re telling us that heavy lifting increases testosterone!

Yes, T levels will increase in both genders following a heavy resistance training session, but females are unable to build the type of muscle men do simply because of our genetic make up. Males utilize their main sex hormone (Testosterone) to repair and build bigger muscles. Females can't grow new muscle tissue to the same degree, since we have lower levels of testosterone and higher levels of estrogen and progesterone.

Personally, I do the same exercises and rep ranges as my fiancé most days. I lift heavy and push myself day in and day out - but I will NEVER be able to get as big as him.

But...female bodybuilders!

Even after I explain this, some of my female clients are still worried, so I'll ask them "What does looking like a man look like to you?" They usually proceed to go on the internet or some social media platform and point out pictures of women who, in their opinion, are very muscular and resemble a male's body type. Most of these examples are usually of "unnatural" professional female bodybuilders who use some sort of performance enhancing substance to achieve that level of masculinity.

To become a professional woman bodybuilder, many have to take anabolic androgenic steroids, testosterone, and other ergogenic aids to even achieve such a body worthy of that title. As a female, and using additional testosterone and anabolic steroids, you are supplementing your body with more of the primary male sex hormones and chemically enhanced substances, which have been proven by research to increase muscle mass and strength at a much faster pace than can be naturally achieved. So yes, some women choose to become more masculine and use chemicals and male hormones.....but that degree of muscularity in women doesn't come by just lifting heavy weights.

You can't "tone" any kind of muscle

The word that most women use to describe their fitness goals is "toning." They say "I want to tone up my arms" or "make my stomach more tone." Muscle tone, also known as muscle tonus or residual muscle tension, is an unconscious low level contraction of your muscles while they are at rest. Essentially, muscle tone is what makes your muscles still feel somewhat firm while you are resting and not intentionally tensing them.

We have to bring to their attention that there is no such thing as “toning” a muscle or a specific area of the body. No one can change the shape of their muscles; that’s determined by genetics. When women say they want to “tone” something up, what they are actually saying is that they want to lose some body fat, build some muscle, and get tighter and firmer.

Any personal trainer knows that the major key to achieving a tight, lean, firm physique, is sound nutritional practices. A six-pack is made in the kitchen, not in the gym, so to speak. Furthermore, in order to build muscle, resistance training loads need to be heavy, rest periods between 60-90 seconds, and the rep range for each exercise around 6-12.

Using light weights and performing higher reps will not benefit anyone if their goal is to gain muscle and strength. That type of training is good for increasing muscle endurance and Type I (or “slow-twitch”) muscle fibers, but it’s not useful to build more muscle and get stronger.

Lifting heavy makes you look the opposite of masculine

Don’t think that just because you lift heavy and workout hard that you’ll end up looking like a professional woman bodybuilder, because 99.9% of the time, you won’t. Remaining a natural athlete while utilizing a very healthy, nutrient-dense diet, proper supplementation, proper exercise programs and recovery techniques will help you achieve a lean, firm, tight, athletic body. Chances are this will leave you with increased confidence, cognitive clarity, elevated mood, attractive curves, and a new outlook in the weight room!

Earlier in the article, when I say “lifting heavy”, I’m referring to keeping your reps in the 6-10 range, reaching muscular failure (unable to perform another complete repetition) by the final rep of the set. Also, when lifting heavy resistance and keeping reps lower, rest periods need to be increased, to fully regenerate ATP to it’s highest potential. When lifting a lighter resistance for more reps, say around 40-50% of your 1-rep max for 20 reps, rest periods can be kept to around 20-30 seconds. When lifting upward towards 75-90% of your 1RM, rest periods need to be extended to 2-5 minutes or your strength will be heavily compromised during the next set attempt.



About Beverly Paquin

Beverly Paquin, RN, CSN, is an ISSA Certified Personal trainer and Vice President of Hov Hustle Fitness. She is the youngest female to ever run a marathon in all fifty states and accomplished the world record at age 22. Beverly is a health coach and always seeking new ways to learn about exercise science, sports nutrition, and healthy living. She is currently back in school to obtain her Bachelor's of Science in Nursing.