



Beaverdale

24/7 X-Press Newsletter

Fitness

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Pilates

Q & A: I want to tone, but I don't want to bulk up. How should I lift weights?

A commonly asked question, especially from our female members, is that they want to tone up but don't want to bulk up and want to know how to use the weight equipment in such a way that they won't get bulky. First, bulk is defined as muscle mass. Bodybuilders develop a lot of muscle mass and are considered bulky. Most non-bodybuilders don't want all that muscle mass but want to be toned and trim and have strength to do their daily activities.

There are many good reasons to do weight training. One is so you don't lose muscle mass. As we age, we tend to lose muscle tissue if we don't keep using it and this reduces our metabolism. How many times have you heard someone say that their metabolism has slowed down and they gain weight more easily and can get it off as easily? Well, a large part of this is due to reduced muscle mass. Muscle is metabolically active tissue. So doing weight training will help maintain and even build muscle mass. It's possible to add muscle mass even as we age. Second, weight training is important to help you to be able to continue to do all the activities you enjoy, as you get older. When older people become frail, what this really means is they have lost most of their muscle mass and are not able to do normal daily activities. Weight training can counteract this. Third, weight training stimulates the bones to get stronger and can fight loss of bone density. So here are three reasons why you should be doing weight training.

So, how can you do weight training without worrying about gaining so much muscle mass that you get bulky? Well, to be honest, it really shouldn't be a concern. Gaining bulk is not an easy task for most people. Unless you are genetically gifted in this regard, you probably won't notice much increase in your muscle mass. Some folks are naturally more muscular (you know who you are) and may tend to add muscle mass more quickly. But those of you who are of a more slender build can weight train all day and probably not gain much mass. To gain muscle mass, (called 'hypertrophy'), you need to do a few things right. First, you need to lift weight **a lot**. By a lot, I mean a couple hours a day, 3-4 days a week. This is what bodybuilders do. They work the same muscles with several different exercises, and do lots of reps and sets. If you come in and go through your strength routine 2-3 days a week for 30-60 minutes, you don't have to worry about getting bulky. Secondly, you need to eat a lot of food to gain muscle mass. Gaining muscle mass is similar in this regard to gaining fat. The only way to add muscle is to be in a calorie surplus mode so your body has energy to use for building tissue, and has excess protein to use in forming new tissue. So, if you have the combination of massive training which stimulates the muscle to grow, and an increase in your food consumption, you will increase your odds of gaining muscle mass. But that's not what you want, so here's what you can do to gain the benefits of weight training without the risk of bulking up.

First, minimize the amount of time you weight train. Work each major muscle group with one exercise and not in multiple ways. For example, you could do chest presses, bench presses, pushups and chest flys which will really work your chest (pectoral) muscles. But if you just choose one of these, you can work the muscle and gain the benefit without gaining bulk. With about 8 to 12 exercises, you can work all the major muscles groups. A standard weight workout should only take 30-45 minutes.

Second, minimize the number of reps and sets you do. Training volume is the number of pounds you lift multiplied by the number of times you lift it. If you only lift 8-10 reps, and 2-3 sets per muscle group, you won't have to worry about bulking up.

Third, lift heavier weights and lift them fewer times. If you use a weight that you can only lift 6-8 times, this maximizes your strength but doesn't create a lot of bulk or hypertrophy. Likewise, lifting a lighter weight 15 times or more will build strength endurance but won't add bulk. The best range for gaining muscle mass is the 8-12 rep range, and then do multiple sets. By the way, the heavier the weight you lift, the more good it does for your bone density as well. Just be careful about lifting what you are capable of and make sure you have a good base of lifting weights with more reps and lighter weight before jumping to higher weights.

Fourth, don't overeat after weight training. Eat normally and adequate protein within an hour or two after a workout so you will get the strength benefits, but don't overdo it.

If you would like some help in determining what exercises you should be doing and how many reps and sets, you might consider signing up for a personal training session to get your workout customized for your specific needs and goals.

Quick Fit Tip of the Month: Exercise is very habit-forming. So is not exercising. If you get into a habit where exercise is a regular part of your routine, you will be much more likely to do it and keep doing it. But, if you get out of the habit, it becomes more difficult to get yourself to exercise. Therefore, make exercise a regular part of your weekly schedule and stay on schedule.

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