

Getting Tone but NOT Big for Female Trainees

By Brian Copeland, RKC

My female clients always say the same thing to me; “I don’t want to get big and bulky.” Well... you probably couldn’t even if you wanted to! In this article I am going to cover some basic concepts to getting tone and healthy without getting big or bulky.

Concept 1 – Hormones:

Women by nature are lower in the hormone testosterone; this is the hormone that is responsible for the image of oversized men with large heads, no necks, hairy backs and bad tempers. It is in fact the hormone that helps people build muscle; that is why many professional athletes take legal or illegal substances to increase their testosterone level beyond natural levels.

Ladies, if professional athletes have to increase their level of testosterone to get “big” then as long as you don’t take steroids you will be fine. You just don’t produce enough of the hormone to get manly looking; in fact if you put any muscle on it will only improve your hourglass figure.

As international strength and conditioning coach Mike Mahler says, “Getting too big is like having too much money; it isn’t going to happen!”

Concept 2 – Body Fat Level:

High body fat is almost always the culprit in looking bulky or big. In reality a woman who puts on muscle and loses some body fat will look leaner; here is why. Muscle weighs twice as much as fat per volume. That means if your right butt cheek weighed 4 lbs from fat but your left one weighed 4 lbs from muscle, your left one would be half the size!!!

Putting on muscle and dropping the fat is the fast track to looking thin. Now remember, women do not gain a lot of muscle so you will probably replace the 4 lb right butt cheek with a 1 or 2 lb butt cheek. Just make sure to replace both cheeks at the same time ok! ;-)

Now what about too low of body fat? Have you ever seen a female professional bodybuilder who has veins on her stomach? That is because her body fat is super low, as low as 3%. Now I’m a pretty lean guy with a six-pack and I’m over twice that level of body fat to give you an idea. It is completely not natural for a woman or a man to be that lean. To get that lean those professional bodybuilders (there is that word ‘professional’ again) must work SUPER hard and eat SUPER strict and take TONS of supplements.

So to summarize, if you don't want to look like a man, lower your body fat to a feminine level (*when you think you look good*), increase muscle as much as you can and don't worry about dropping to a bodybuilder level of body fat because most people aren't disciplined enough to even come close to that level.

Concept 3 – Strength Training:

There are plenty of good intentioned but uninformed people who are more than willing to offer quick and easy advice about fitness, unfortunately they almost never know what they are talking about. Even worse are the countless articles written in women's magazines by self proclaimed fitness experts who will tell you what you want to hear in order to sell the magazine. Things like, "Walk Your Way To Skinny" or "The 2-Minute Per Day Fitness Program To Getting A Lean And Sexy Body." WOW, sign me up! That easy huh? Well, in reality anything in life worth pursuing requires some work. There are no free lunches folks!

Conversely an interesting fact is that getting a lean and sexy body does not have to take a lot of time and it does not have to hurt when you do it. If you are attending spinning classes for 2 hours a day or doing countless fire hydrants to make your buns firm then I'm here to tell you stop wasting your time! There is a better, more effective, faster way!

There are two types of training that should be considered for the non-athlete who wants to improve the way their body looks, cardio training and strength training.

Many women are scared of strength training because they associate it with big bulky muscles. We have already covered why women will not get big and bulky so let's cover what real strength training is, what it is not and what it will do for you.

What it is:

- Training with fairly heavy weight or a fairly challenging exercise
- If you can lift it more than 7 times, it is too easy (light)
- Exercises that use as many muscles at once as possible
- Brief, intense and over with very quickly

What it is not:

- Training with light easy weights or exercises that don't really challenge you
- If you can lift it more than 10 times, it is way to easy to do you any good (there are exceptions to this rule but that is for another topic)
- Isolation exercises like dumbbell curls or thigh machines
- Long, drawn out, exhausting workouts leaving you feeling like crap

What real strength training will do for you:

- Create muscle tone
- Make you healthier and... stronger of course
- Prevent injuries and teach to you lift heavy or awkward object without hurting yourself

- Make daily life activities easier to perform. Such as picking up the baby's car seat, with the baby in it, picking up groceries out of your trunk, etc.

Pavel Tsatsouline, an internationally sought after strength and conditioning coach says, "Strength and tone training are the same thing." If you want to get strong, use heavy weight but don't do a lot of set or reps. Sets and reps will tear down the muscle and will cause the body to go into survival repair mode. In order to survive your next brutal workout it will replace your old muscle with more muscle! Lifting heavy weight a few times and then going home will make you stronger and more tone without adding any bulk.

Why am I having trouble getting buns of steel?

The glutes have a lot of strength and leverage. When you see a powerlifter squat or deadlift a bar bending load, it is the incredibly strong glutes that do most of the lifting. When you do butt squeezes, fire hydrants or any other silly moves popular in muscle sculpting classes you are not even coming close to the potential of your glutes' strength. If you were not challenging the glutes why would they get more tone?

If you are 'feeling the burn' and think that you are accomplishing something, all you are experiencing is a build-up of lactic acid in the muscles and does nothing for the tone of your muscles.

Don't believe me? In the Guinness Book of World Records look up a picture of 'Captain American' who holds the world record for the most consecutive number of sit-ups, about 25,000! This dude sure must have felt the burn more than anyone but he does not even have a six-pack to show for it, even at his low level of body fat!

Concept 4 – Cardio Training:

The final concept I'll talk about is cardio training. I won't spend much time here but in summation, 20-30 minutes of cardio max is what the doctor ordered, literally! Dr. Al Sears the Director of The Center for Health and Wellness in south Florida who has helped over 15,000 patients overcome heart disease and loose weight says those long cardio sessions such as marathon running is incredibly bad for your health. The constant pounding on your joints is bad for your feet, ankles, knees, hips and lower back.

It also decreases the muscle mass and of the heart itself which in turn makes the heart more susceptible to heart attacks. The heart will beat until the day you die, no pun intended. You do not need to train it to beat longer; you need to train it to handle more brief intense stress. Have you ever seen a movie where bad news is delivered to someone and they grasp their heart, and then keel over from a heart attack. Well, that is what you need to strengthen your heart to do, keep beating when sudden intense spikes in the heart's output is demanded.

Dr. Sears recommends brief and intense interval style training to strengthen the heart. A way to accomplish this is with High Octane Cardio. 1-minute of moderate cardio exercise followed immediately by 30 seconds of intense cardio, followed by a 1-minute rest. Then repeat the 1-minute moderate followed by the 30 second intense, rest again and repeat.

As always consult a doctor before beginning any type of training program, especially if you have any pre-existing health conditions which may put you at risk.

There are many creative, quick and fun ways to get a lean sexy body; to learn more or if you are ready to make real progress, contact me for some personal program designs. If you feel guilty forking out a little dough, then consider that my services generally cost less than you spend eating out for lunch in a 2-week period or having that Starbucks coffee and pastry every day.

What do you have to loose except a couple pounds of body fat and a lot of bad lifting habits?

Brian Copeland is a Denver, Colorado based strength and conditioning coach, personal trainer and Certified Russian Kettlebell Instructor. Brian specializes in functional strength and athletic training, conditioning for martial artists, kettlebell lifting, fat loss and muscle gain. Brian has also rehabilitated several severe lower back injuries, including his own, through the use of "proper" strength and flexibility training.

Brian is available for private and group lessons and personal program design. If you are tired of not seeing results contact Brian, he will design a personalized program based on YOUR goals, YOUR time and YOUR lifestyle.

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