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The dark side of pecs: Why training only your 'mirror muscles' is a bad idea

By Stuart Marsh | 8 days ago



A great set of pecs needs an equally impressive back. (Image) iStock

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Every man who steps foot into the gym wants to build a barrel chest that screams masculinity and power – but training your pecs too often can actually be harmful.

"If you only train one body part, and avoid all other muscle groups, muscle imbalance will occur and the chances of getting a muscle, tendon or other injury increases," Riskalla Riskalla, master personal trainer and owner of [Rawfit](#), tells Coach.

"It is always important to exercise all muscles in the body."

The heavier you go, the potential for imbalance increases

If you go to the gym to train only the muscles you can see in the mirror – like your chest, as well as your arms and abs – you could be asking for injury.

If you keep things light with bodyweight movements like push-ups and pull-ups, you're unlikely to do any damage. But if you spend every day pumping up with heavy weights, you're asking for trouble.

"If you're training arms and chest everyday with high repetition and no weights at all, there is no negative effect on the body," advises Riskalla.

"Problems usually happen when a session with heavy weights is performed over and over without change, on the same muscle group."

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Avoid the hunchback look

You may have the arms and chest of an Adonis, but if you aren't spending at least an equal amount of time on the muscles you can't see in the mirror, your shoulders may be "caving in" on you.

As Riskalla explains, what happens when you train the front of your body too much is that your back (including your traps, lats and spinal erectors) becomes proportionately weaker.

Your strong front pulling forward on your weak back may lead to a hunched-over posture, which doesn't exactly scream "look at my incredible body!" to the world.

"To create better posture and a more harmonious body, I always work with my clients to achieve balance on both the front and the back of their bodies," says Riskalla.

"A great exercise program should address these imbalances and work all the muscles in the body."

Many experts recommend that people with an imbalance should work towards achieving a 2:1 ratio, where for every chest exercise you do, you do two back exercises. This might mean if you bench press twice a week, you'll also have to do pull-ups twice a week *and* something like barbell rows twice a week.

For somebody without any imbalances, this ratio may be closer to 1:1, but it's best to get yourself checked out by a knowledgeable PT or physio before diagnosing yourself (or writing up your own program).

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Less arms and chest, more rest days

For Riskalla, one problem he sees with the chest-and-arms-everyday crowd isn't so much that they're creating muscle imbalances, but that they're hardly taking rest days.

Day after day they're in the gym working on their guns, but devoting every ounce of sweat you have into building a pair of sleeve-ripping can crushers without taking any rest is likely to wear out your joints faster than you can hit a no-flex selfie.

"Rest days are so important for muscle recovery, development and also to avoid excess stress in the body," recommends Riskalla.

"In the long run results would be diminished, and the excess of heavy exercises in the arms and chest could create an injury and muscle imbalance."

Riskalla recommends dedicating one to two days a week to allowing your body to rest, and also mixing up your training in "blocks" to keep your motivation high and avoid falling into a rut.

"It's important to make sure you're not doing the exact same exercise routine every day," says Riskalla.

"The body needs different stimulus to create change and it also makes your training interesting and fresh. Remember that motivation is also created when you add diversity into your training."

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