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1000% BURN, 0% BULK

Pumped up fitness model. Pared down supermodel. Do we really have to choose between strong and skinny? Here the pros reveal intricate training tactics geared to getting the best of both worlds. (Sliding into coloured skinnies one minute, working micro shorts the next.)

Words: Jasmine Phull

Dear hardcore trainers: we have a bone to pick (which shouldn't be that hard, since you have less body fat than a greyhound in a liposuction clinic). You know how you promised we wouldn't get bulky (in fact, you laughed as you told us we didn't have a 10th of the testosterone blokes have)? Yeah, well, what do you call this (for the tape, we're pointing to a quadricep that looks suspiciously like what a math teacher might call an 'arc').

According to Sydney PT Timo Topp, promises made by the fitness industry aren't fiction, but they often ignore certain (important) details. Like the fact that we women can gain muscle – and quickly.

"I'm sure plenty of girls have hit the weights and ended up getting bigger. This is actually quite a common phenomenon," Topp says.

Apparently you figured we'd work that out when we tried (and failed) to get our skinnies over our thighs. Presumably we'd also get a telepathic message that this, too, would pass.

"After a short period of unwanted expansion, you start to shrink. The reality

is when you work on developing lean muscles you will get smaller, have less body fat and be toned," Topp says.

But here's where we think the communication's breaking down: the definition of 'bulky' is fluid – it's both contextual and highly personal. And beyond the preferences of fitness competitors versus others, there is also physiological nuance, which means that some of us gain muscle definition just looking at light weights.

Sydney master trainer Ricardo Riskalla catches our drift.

"I would recommend anyone with this issue to watch their protein intake, in other words to reduce their protein intake and only do high repetition, no weights leg exercises," says Riskalla, who's trained fashion models and fine-tuned the formula to fit size 6 skinnies.

"I prohibit my female clients to use any weights more than five kilos when exercising their legs," he says.

If you've inherited the mesomorph body type defined by fast-twitch, or type 2, muscle fibre dominance, certain types of training may lead to more muscle development than we might like. Red flag: fast sprint time but finished the 10km in the recovery car.

Exercise physiologist Pia Batten, of Melbourne's Kieser Training, concedes that strength training can cause greater muscle gain in mesos. "When it comes to an increase in the muscle cross sectional area, type 2 fibres

develop slightly more specific tension than type I thus leading to an increase in muscle size," she says. She suggests substituting the oft-prescribed squat machines with activities that build longer, leaner muscles – think dancing, Pilates and stretching.

"Different mesomorphs will find their upper or lower limb strength to be out of proportion," she advises. "Become aware of your own strengths and weaknesses."

So finding middle ground between the kind of definition figure competitors call 'condition' and Australia's Next Top Model-size limbs is an exercise in calculated, targeted training.

What, then, is the best strategy?

Given the breadth of body types and individual objectives for working out, you need to get to know how your body responds to both exercise and food. Practise the correct methodology, and your lean body mass (sounds so much less scary than muscle, dontcha think?) will match your aesthetic goals and optimise health markers like blood pressure and bone density. Fact is, whether you want it to show or not, you want as much lean body mass as you can muster.

"Muscle mass is one of the top biomarkers for health and longevity over and above cardio fitness," says personal trainer and sports therapist Joslyn Rule.

What can be prescribed as a blanket rule is avoiding doing what bodybuilders do. To experience substantial hypertrophy – or muscle

growth – you'd have to spend some solid hours at the mercy of heavy-duty machinery.

A few sessions a week, split between body parts, ain't going to cut it. Especially if you're not chowing down on the strict schedule of macronutrients bodybuilders use to make them look like Popeye.

Instead, Rule recommends taking a leaf from the book of powerlifters.

As a trainer with a background in sports therapy, she recommends mimicking powerlifters' pre-comp workout: lift at about 80 per cent of the maximum weight you can bear for one repetition. "If the maximum weight you can back squat is 50kg, a workout would be something like five sets of five reps at 40kg," explains Rule. Your load must be extremely challenging in order to help increase neuromuscular adaptation (fitness nerd lingo for the brain's ability to control and activate a higher percentage of muscle).

But even if you are prone to more muscle growth than the next barbell junkie, it's a bit like a capped phone plan. Sure, you might be on the \$79 cap plan rather than the \$59, but ultimately you're going to hit a ceiling. And fat: for women it's going to be low. (Think of your body as the phone company barring your calls or slowing your downloads to dial-up speed.) And here's why you won't suddenly find yourself in a flap about newfound guns.

Batten, who has an MA in exercise rehabilitation, says current research suggests that in the first eight to 20 weeks of a strength program, "a portion of the vigour gained from training is due purely to neural adaptations and not hypertrophy or muscle enlargement." Regular, consistent low rep training with heavy weights will, over time, engage the 'whole team' of motor neuron units and in turn get more work out of the muscle you do have.

At an amateur level, if the brain sends out the signal for a basic bicep curl, it may activate approximately half of the motor neurons. With committed training, however, you can eventually tap into the dormant muscle fibres. Batten affirms that motor neurons contracting "at their near maximum tension" will lead to improvement in muscle conditioning. Not bulk.

ANTI-BULK INSURANCE

Between identifying your body type and training to account for both it and your goals, and the slow burn described by Batten, there's no need to fear losing control of your shape.

If you're shunning strength exercise altogether for fear of bulk, you can get the benefits of weight bearing – think maintaining calorie-burning muscle rather than losing a percentage each year after age 30 – in less foreboding ways. Batten suggests substituting machines with dancing, Pilates and stretching, all of which build longer, leaner muscles.



BEST BODY » MOVE IT

Having trained her fair share of newbies, Rule knows just about everything about the way untrained bodies respond to training and recommends “large compound lifts at least twice a week”.

Large compound lifts include deadlifts, squats, rows and presses. For an anti-bulk protocol, she suggests lifting heavier weights with fewer reps (8 to 12 on average) and working until you are fatigued. “It is more effective at increasing your metabolism and burning fat, thereby helping you reach your toning goals.”

The strategy’s backed by 2010 research that found subjects lifting lighter weights built as much muscle as those lifting heavier weights.

The weights work, Rule says, should be complemented by at least one or two HIIT cardio sessions.

Regular steady-state cardio, or long-distance, endurance work, can lead to catabolism – or muscle breakdown. And HIIT comes with a built-in leanness guarantee. It is fast and furious with minimal resistance – think cycling sprints in a gear that feels as though your bike’s made of olive oil – meaning low load on muscles. It’s also incredibly efficient, lasting no more than 30 minutes. Rule suggests three to 10 reps of exhausting exercises (say, 30-second sprints), broken up with medium-level exercises, before ending with a substantial cool-down period. The great news is that after a short burst of adrenalin-pumping HIIT, your “basal metabolic rate (BMR) is elevated for between 12 hours and three days afterwards, therefore burning more calories and increasing your energy expenditure,” explains Batten.

However, no workout will do what you want it to do (or come with a warranty that it won’t do what you’d rather it didn’t) without a matched diet. Thanks to myths and snippets of science taken out of context, this part can be tricky. For instance, the link between protein and muscle building may make you think you can simply skip recovery protein to minimise bulk. In reality, your post-workout protein is only going to inhibit muscle breakdown, which occurs as your body attempts to repair itself. Likewise, pre-workout carbs are often glossed over in a bid to burn more fat, but lacking ready fuel (‘glycogen’) can instead push your body to seek usable energy by breaking down muscle tissue for glucose. Quick reminder: less muscle equals lower metabolic rate.

Rule instructs clients to eat 0.8 to one gram of protein per pound of body weight per day to maximise muscle protein synthesis. “This should come from high quality sourced meat (ideally grass fed) and fish, as well as eggs, dairy and protein shakes.” She warns against fasted training, saying it can mess with your hormones.

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How to GET INTO YOUR SKINNY JEANS WITHOUT BULKING UP

By Timo Topp

SO YOU WANT TO GET INTO YOUR SKINNY JEANS AND LOOK HOT IN YOUR BIKINI THIS SUMMER. PUT US DOWN FOR TWO. BUT WHAT’S THE BEST WAY TO GO ABOUT IT WITHOUT ‘BULKING UP’?



WEIGHTS

Most girls will hit the cardio and go on a diet to get in shape and stay away from the weights to avoid ‘bulking up’. However, others realise the importance of weight training to build lean, metabolically-active muscle. But I’m sure plenty of girls have hit the weights and ended up getting bigger! What you need to bear in mind is that after a short period of unwanted expansion you start to shrink. Look at any female athlete, other than javelin or shot put throwers, and they are lean, toned and slight – not bulky. The reality is when you work on developing lean muscles you will get smaller, have less body fat and appear toned.

RESISTANCE TRAINING

Doing weights does not just mean dumbbells and barbells. It includes other means of challenging muscles such as body weight exercises such as Pilates, yoga, light resistance from exercise bands or TRX, or kettlebell exercises. ‘Functional exercise’ is currently adopted by most personal trainers as the best way to train for fitness and fat loss. It involves multi-dimensional, complex whole body movements such as squat presses, swings, TRX exercises and classic body weight exercises such as push-ups and burpees. The exercises are whole body based with a big emphasis on core work. With these exercises, resistance is dispersed to challenge the whole body as opposed to localised areas such as chest or legs, which is what happens with traditional gym weight programs. The advantage is that they are great for toning up without building muscle.

CARDIO

Long-distance runners are thin, which seems like evidence that hours of cardio will help you to burn calories and lose weight. However, the difference between long-distance runners and athletes is that the former don’t look quite as healthy. They are often gaunt and carry an underweight look about them. Sure, cardio is important, but it is not the solution on its own.

DIETING

Most people looking to lose weight will ‘go on’ a diet. And it’s true that you must create a

caloric deficit to lose weight. But just as one training methodology can’t be a magic bullet, diet alone is not the answer. What about the people who have lost weight with diet alone? Have you seen them without clothes? They’re often slim, but out of shape. When you reduce calories, you also need to do resistance training, which will help maintain the muscle you do have and ensure that any weight lost is fat. And don’t go crazy cutting out food types and groups; reduce energy dense complex carbs in favour of more salads and vegetables and more protein. An easy way to curb calories is to significantly cut down (or preferably eliminate) alcohol and sugary drinks, and large milk-based coffees. Liquid calories are the easiest to over consume and paring them back can create a potent deficit without leaving you hungry!

KEEP ACTIVE

In addition to exercise and eating well, you need to keep active with lots of walking. A few workouts will barely compensate for 10 hours sitting on your butt at work. Daily activity is overlooked and important, so employ all those strategies you have read before: walk to work, get out at lunch time for a walk, walk to get your lunch, get off the bus one stop early, use stairs, walk up escalators.

SO HERE IT IS IN POINT FORM:

- Devise or enlist a nutrition professional to devise a healthy eating plan with no junk or snack food and minimal alcohol. Eat balanced meals every four to five hours. Increase vegetables and salads, reduce complex carb servings and have protein with all meals. Drink lots of water and significantly reduce all other liquid calories.
- Three to four times a week, do moderate cardio at a level of seven to eight on a scale of perceived exertion for 45 minutes.
- Two to three times a week, do resistance conditioning workouts including functional exercise, whole body movements, some weights, TRX and kettlebells.
- Keep active every day with walking. Sticking with a plan like this for six to eight weeks will definitely help you slim down, firm up and look fabulous! ■

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