



Ricardo Riskalla is one of Australia's leading Fitness and Health experts. Contacting Ricardo is the first step to living a healthy lifestyle.

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EXPERT BODY SCULPT

WE ROUNDED UP THE TRAINERS RENOWNED FOR CREATING THE STRONGEST ABS, BUTT, THIGHS AND BACKS IN THE BUSINESS – AND IN RECORD TIME.

WORDS: KATELYN SWALLOW

It's true that everyone's genetics are different; as is everyone's vision of what the 'ideal' body part looks like. But no matter your goal aesthetic or body type, there *are* rep ranges, exercises and training techniques that will get you to your personal best most efficiently – and they often differ depending on the body part you are hitting. How you train for lean, shapely legs is very different from the exercises you would opt for to build a shredded chick-pack, for example. The trick is to find *your* sense of the perfect body 'blueprint' – the body that would make *you* feel happy and confident – and work toward it with the help of science.

BLUEPRINT

LEAN LEGS

THE VISION

While women often hit the squat rack in search of the perfect set of pins, celebrity trainer and sports scientist Rudy Mawer (rudymawer.com) says that prioritising fat loss is key to revealing the muscle definition beneath. This is due partly to females having a hormonal predisposition – we are looking at you oestrogen – to store more body fat on the legs and hips when compared to males.

“The good news is that with leg training and a solid diet, you can achieve this [fat loss and tone] pretty quickly. Leg training is highly metabolic, helping you create a large calorie expenditure to burn body fat and also add lean muscle tone,” says Mawer.

“For women, stubborn fat around the legs and hips is a major complaint. All this means is that you may need to get two to three per cent leaner than you maybe thought in order to lose that last bit of stubborn fat.

“Due to hormonal and gender differences, you will generally lean out much quicker through your abdominals and upper body; so, while you may think you are lean enough or can’t lose more fat, you probably just need two to four more weeks for the fat to come from the legs.”

In other words, fat tends to drop off in tiers – first from the stomach then upper body then legs – which makes sense considering the abundance of alpha receptors found in the lower body, which dictate how fatty acids are mobilised from the fat cells.

Beyond fat loss issues, the tendency for the quads and lower back to take the load first during compound lifts and everyday life – well before the hamstrings and glutes – means women often also complain their posterior chain is underdeveloped.

Beyond improving how you look in a mini skirt, training legs provides a host of long-term and short-term health and weight loss benefits, including quickening the pace of overall fat loss. Being the largest muscle group of the body, hitting the squat rack provides plenty of metabolic bang for your buck – including excess post-oxygen consumption (EPOC), so you continue to burn fat for up to 36 hours post-workout, as long as the intensity of your workout remains high. Think high-rep, circuits, drop sets and supersets.

“Just like comparing the fuel requirements of a small car versus a truck, or a two-bedroom house versus a six-bedroom mansion, the bigger the muscle, the more ATP energy it requires,” says Mawer.

“This means you get lots of great metabolic and fat loss benefits in just one leg workout versus, say, an arm

or chest workout. The most obvious is simply more calories burned, helping you lose fat faster and also providing you with a larger calorie window to enjoy your diet.

“Additionally, you benefit from improvements in insulin sensitivity, which helps metabolise and digest carbohydrates better; again, this is due to a large muscle group and a greater requirement to restore glycogen into the muscle.”

Improvements in muscular endurance, strength and power not only improve your capabilities as an athlete, but also enhance how your body moves at the most basic level – meaning your general health and key lifts improve while your risk of injury is reduced.

“Leg training is key for optimal biomechanics, improving core, hip and leg alignment. These days, with a sedentary lifestyle and hours spent sitting on a chair, our body’s biomechanics usually take a beating. So the extra leg work will help with that too,” says Mawer.

“As we age, we face the possibility of loss of function; for example, capability of taking the stairs, decreased bone density, osteoarthritis risk or even losing the ability to walk independently. All of these can be majorly prevented or reduced with regular, heavy resistance training.”

KEY FEATURES

Key muscle groups of the legs include the quads, hamstrings and glutes. Most people will have a particular section of their legs that engages more easily and therefore grows more quickly. Ensure your weekly training program hits lagging muscles with higher volume (sets or number of workouts), suggests Mawer.

“If your quads are overdeveloped but you lack glute or hamstring growth, then simply do two to three workouts on those areas for every one quad-dominant workout,” he says.

THE PLAN

If defined legs are your primary goal, Mawer suggests hitting them three days a week as part of a split-body (one to two muscle groups worked per training session) resistance plan. Not a priority but still want them to be shapely? Stick to two leg sessions per week.

“That seems to be the sweet spot to producing an optimal balance between volume per workout, recovery and reduced injury risk,” says Mawer.

MAWER ON HOW TO DO THE SPLITS

THE SIMPLE VERSION:

- Monday:** Legs
- Tuesday:** Upper Body and Abs
- Wednesday:** Legs
- Thursday:** Upper Body and Abs
- Friday:** Legs
- Weekend:** Rest/Cardio/HIIT

OR

TRY A MORE COMPLEX SPLIT:

Example Split	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
Push - Pull - Lower	Chest, Shoulders, Triceps	Bicep, Biceps	Legs	Chest, Shoulders, Triceps	Bicep, Biceps	Legs	Rest
Upper - Lower	Upper	Lower	Rest	Upper	Lower	Rest	Abs/Cardio or Repeat as a 6-day split
Full Body	Full Body	Full Body	Rest/Cardio	Full Body	Full Body	Rest/Cardio	Full Body
Leg-focused Extra Volume	Hamstring/Glute	Quads	Upper	Rest	Hamstring/Glute	Quads	Upper



PHOTOGRAPHY: DO YOU EVEN ACTIVEWEAR

“I generally believe that a higher frequency training split – where you hit multiple muscles per workout and therefore multiple times per week – is superior for 99 per cent of people. This is based on scientific evidence showing that the muscle protein synthesis response (a key cellular response letting us grow new muscle) only lasts for about 16 hours after a workout if we have been training for a few years,” says Mawer.

“This means, after you train legs on a Monday, they won’t keep growing all week until next Monday. In fact, for most people, they are likely done with any growth by Wednesday.”

Evidence also suggests that higher volume, less frequent splits don’t eventuate in the same level of growth.

“After a certain amount of sets or volume, say six to 12 sets, your body has sufficient stimulus to grow. This makes less sets per workout for each muscle, but more muscle groups per workout, a sensible and obvious choice versus the classic bodybuilding split, where they train one muscle a day but do 20-plus sets,” says Mawer.

Rep ranges should focus on hitting fatigue or failure, so the body is forced to adapt. While common hypertrophy folk law says rep ranges between six to 20 are the most efficient, Mawer suggests

using a mix of rep ranges so you benefit from strength, power and muscular endurance improvements.

FOR EXAMPLE:

Warm-up / Activation Exercises

Exercise 1 – Heavy, 6-10 reps

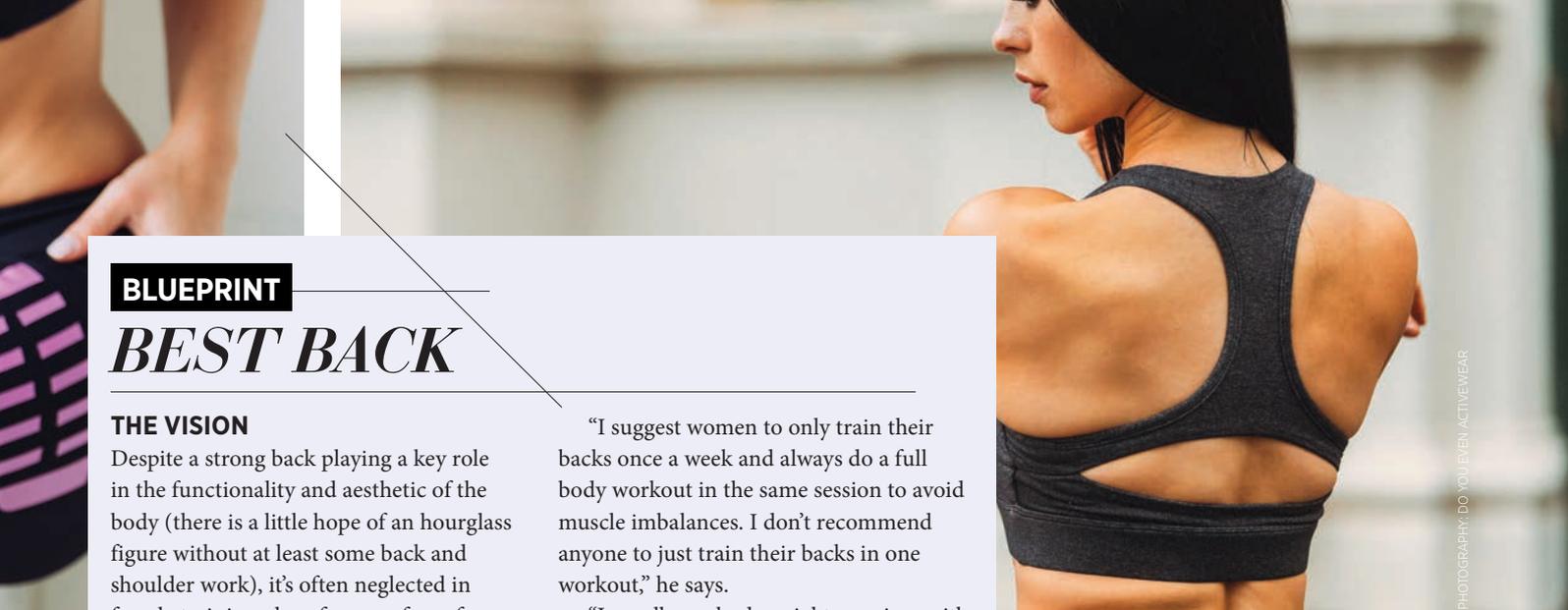
Exercise 2 – Moderate-Heavy, 9-12 reps

Exercise 3 – Higher Rep, 12-20 reps or superset/drop set

“This way you get a blend of all three and also plenty of high rep work to boost your metabolism and calorie expenditure,” says Mawer.

Beyond your high-energy key lifts such as the squat and deadlift, incorporate bench hip extensions, banded dumbbell Romanian deadlifts and walking dumbbell lunges for further activation and sculpting power. High-intensity interval training (HIIT) may enhance fat loss: try five to 10 bike sprints; 30 seconds on, 60 seconds’ rest.

“HIIT exercises have been shown to boost your metabolism by up to four to five times longer than regular exercise. Some studies show they can even help you add smaller amounts of muscle to your legs compared to regular cardio,” adds Mawer.



BLUEPRINT

BEST BACK

THE VISION

Despite a strong back playing a key role in the functionality and aesthetic of the body (there is a little hope of an hourglass figure without at least some back and shoulder work), it's often neglected in female training plans for pure fear of creating bulk.

"Most women want a toned back that is not overly muscly and doesn't affect the whole body proportions. An overworked back can cause the loss of a waistline, so I try to avoid this in all of my clients," says master trainer Ricardo Riskalla (rawfit.com.au), who has specialised in the shaping of models' and actors' bodies to deadline for the past two decades.

"Women that swim a lot often complain of an overly broad and muscular back. Back fat is also a common complaint, especially when it hangs over a female's bra or clothing. In my opinion, most excess back fat has to do with imbalances in your diet, including excess sodium and stress."

One of the largest group of muscles in the body and a structural focal point, a strong back is also vital to proper posture, plays a part in breathing and helps protect vital organs.

KEY FEATURES

The main muscles on the back include the trapezius, latissimus dorsi, rhomboids and erector spinae – best worked all together for added calorie burn and total body balance. Think multi-joint and multi-muscle movements such as the deadlift.

"Compound exercises prevent muscle injuries and create a more harmonious result," says Riskalla.

THE PLAN

For a toned and lean back, Riskalla says both full-body training sessions and a well-managed diet are key. Ditch the split body training and instead work your back muscles into your full body sessions.

"I suggest women to only train their backs once a week and always do a full body workout in the same session to avoid muscle imbalances. I don't recommend anyone to just train their backs in one workout," he says.

"I usually use body weight exercises, with my favourites being supinated chinups."

Given the strength needed to complete such exercises, work your rep range up weekly using steady progressions; start with five sets of two reps followed by a body weight movement, such as the squat, performed for one minute to enhance fat loss. More advanced, pitch for three sets of 20 reps, alternating with one minute of squats.

Working in Pilates exercises along with core work will also increase your chances of creating an hourglass figure that ties in at the waist. Riskalla's favourite pose combinations include the bowl yoga pose (held for five minutes) followed by the alternating cat and cow poses (held for five minutes); or for the less advanced the locust pose (held anywhere between five to eight minutes) followed by the Pilates saw (held for five minutes).

"It is very important to always look at the body as a whole. Exercises such as push-ups and sit-ups are great to counterbalance the effects of a back workout and create more body harmony," says Riskalla.

"Additionally, waist exercises are great for developing a more hourglass figure. Exercises such as standing up hip rotations – for 10 minutes each side, three times a week – will do the trick."

Beyond reducing overall body fat, stubborn back fat can be reduced through limiting sodium (aka. salt and sodium-based additives) and managing stress. Think daily walking, meditation, yoga and breathing sessions.

"In most cases, a series of deep breaths three times a day can help the body to reduce cortisol production and so stress," says Riskalla.

BLUEPRINT

BUILDING BOOTY

THE VISION

While glutes were formerly slotted into 'lower body' workout without considerable thought, the rise of Kim Kardashian and similar celebrity peaches has seen the booty workout adopted with new vigour. Creating a rounded, perky and usually larger booty is all the rage. This means not only effectively overloading the muscle group to stimulate muscle hypertrophy and increase its size and tone, but also reducing body fat to a level where the gains shine through.

"The biggest and most common problem I see with glutes is that people can't actually engage the muscle properly. If the muscle isn't getting engaged then there can't be any stimulation created within the muscle and you can't experience any adaptation," says trainer Stephen Arnold from Muscle Genetica (musclegenetica.com).

"With a large proportion of the population working in 'sit down' jobs nowadays, this problem is becoming increasingly common. When we sit, our body weight pushes the glutes into the chair, creating what's called 'soft massage' and gently turns the muscle off.

"With the muscle being under 'soft massage' for eight hours per day, surrounding muscles tend to take the load in the gym, often resulting a very sore lower back."

KEY FEATURES

Creating a rounded perky booty relies on training all areas of the glute muscle, namely

the gluteus maximus, medius and minimus muscle. Hitting the glute-hammy tie-in – as the name suggests, the place where your glute meets your hamstring – is also key to creating a more rounded shape.

THE PLAN

Considering the glutes are notoriously lazy, activation pre-workout is key. Think exercises such as banded clams, which enhance the mind-muscle connection and directly target the glutes.

“Activation is more important than load, time under tension and volume. If you can feel your glute muscles contracting and getting hard, then you’re good to go. If you are still struggling to create that connection, I would suggest finding a good trainer to help you, attend a Pilates or reformer Pilates session, or visit a good physio. It can take a bit of time to create these connections but it’ll be worth it in the long run,” says Arnold.

Once the glutes are activated effectively, Arnold suggests combining cycles of key compound lifts such as the deadlift and squat to ensure the muscle is overloaded, with single-muscle movements that isolate the glutes. Often crowned the glute king, Bret Contreras used EMG technology (which notes how much muscle activity occurs when you move) to discover that banded hip thrusters, glute bridges and cable pull throughs are the most effective at isolating and engaging the glute muscles. And with higher engagement comes greater gains.

“When looking for hypertrophy, you need to create time under tension to further create metabolic stress and signal anabolic pathways. Four to five sets at eight to 12 reps while keeping

the muscle under as much tension as possible – so working to a 2,2,2,2 tempo or even a 3,1,3,2 tempo – is great for the isolation movements,” says Arnold.

“Tempo refers to how long you spend at each part of the movement: the eccentric, the pause at the end, the concentric and time at the top before you begin to move again.”

For the bigger lifts, Arnold suggests sticking to three to four sets at four to eight reps, working to a 2,1,X,0 (two seconds eccentric, one second pause at bottom of lift, explode through concentric, don’t pause at top of lift) tempo.

“Faster tempos and using a lower rep range maximises the benefits of these lifts. You can use the squat and deadlift for lighter, slower and higher reps, by all means, but you will need to utilise progressive overload in some degree for optimal results,” he says.

Choose five to eight exercises per training session to support maximum glute stimulation. And remember, isolate, activate, fatigue and progress.

As for the stubborn fat so often found around the glutes and lower body in females? Arnold says it’s all about consistency: in diet, in lifestyle choices and in training.

“First of all, we need to create an energy deficit. Without an energy deficit, fat loss can’t occur. Secondly, ensure all hormones are in check, you have good life balance and good gut health, low stress and quality sleep. You have to be healthy to be lean,” says Arnold.

“The glutes do have less blood flow, so reducing fat stores can take a bit more time than other areas. But if there’s no dysfunction, just be persistent and consistent and the fat will reduce.”

BLUEPRINT

ABS

THE VISION

Fat loss is key to what the majority of women want in a stomach: one that is ‘flat’ or lean, with a little definition and no love handles.

“The most common complaints I receive are from new mums who have a flabby stomach or saggy skin after giving birth, or from individuals who have gained weight and now have a ‘pot belly,’” says director of Soul Centre Yoga & Pilates Studio Libby Wever (soulcentre.com.au)

“Beyond aesthetics, core conditioning also improves posture, which contributes to a trimmer appearance, and improves flexibility and balance. Moreover, developing core muscle strength can boost the effectiveness of workouts and reduce the risk of injuries that sideline our efforts to stay in shape. It also protects your back, which is very important to maintain.”

KEY FEATURES

Your core is actually a highly complex set of muscles, encompassing the pelvic floor muscles, transversus abdominis, multifidus, internal and external obliques, and the rectus abdominis. Minor core muscles include the latissimus dorsi, gluteus maximus and trapezius.

“The transverse abdominal muscles, which wrap from the sides of the lower back around to the front, are well-coordinated core muscles that stabilise the spine and help create a firm base of support for virtually all movement,” says Wever.

THE PLAN

From an aesthetic point of view, there is little point smashing out the crunches if your obliques are hidden by layers of fat. That said, like any muscle, the abs still need to be worked for proper function and image once the fat does come off.

“Exercises that strengthen abdominal and other core muscles should be part of an overall fitness plan that includes regular moderate-intensity aerobic exercise, such as brisk walking 30 minutes per day, most days of the week. Strength training two to three times a week designed to work the core (think Pilates and compound lifts) will also help,” says Wever.

Given the abs are notoriously resistant to fatigue and contain predominantly of slow-twitch (endurance) muscle fibres, they usually respond best to higher volume training. Think upward of 12 reps, for multiple sets.

“Performing basic movements such as sit-ups, crunches, leg lifts, squats and lunges – 12 reps by three sets – as well as holding a full-body plank for two minutes will help to engage and strengthen the core, aiding in your performance across other sports and activities, such as running or swimming,” adds Wever. ■

