

Training For Your Body Type

No matter what type of body build we have -- tall and slender, short and curvy, or somewhere in between -- we can structure a specialized training program that will give us maximum results.

Have you ever wondered if, with the same time commitment and coaching, you could achieve success similar to that of an Olympic athlete or professional body builder? If we take away all the external factors that give champions a competitive edge, are they just like us? In most cases, the answer is “no”. Champions usually have internal factors (i.e., inherited genetic gifts) such as towering height, extraordinary lung capacity, and hyper-mobile joints that put them in classes all their own.

Genetics can be a blessing, but it's not the final word. Even though most successful athletes start with a genetic advantage, they still have to work hard to become champions. For those of us with average genes, there is hope if we work “smart” and hard. We must make the best of what we've got.

In the gym, we see those lucky women who do little more than lift a few weights every couple of days and have a tight/toned physique. We also see women who work out religiously and have little to show for it. This is because they're not working “smart”, not because they are less genetically gifted. We all have a genetic blueprint that dictates our body type. But, this doesn't mean that we can't mold that body. We can enhance our workout program and speed our progress in the gym by manipulating training variables based on our body type. Our goals will also determine our most efficient workout program. If we are overweight and want to lose body fat while still building muscle, our resistance training program will differ from someone's who is thin and trying to fill out their physique.

Body types are divided into three categories: ectomorph, endomorph, and mesomorph. An ectomorph is naturally lean with a fast metabolism. While this body type doesn't gain fat easily, muscle is also hard to gain. An endomorph gains weight easily and has a hard time losing body fat. Endomorphs typically have a large bone structure and a slower metabolism. A mesomorph has a relatively easy time building muscle and keeping body fat to a desirable level. Most of us are actually a combination of these body types to some degree.

The guidelines of checking with our doctor before starting an exercise program (especially if we have a health condition) and starting with a 5-10-minute warm-up that includes light, dynamic stretching of the muscle groups we plan to work, apply to all of us. Below is an overview of training protocols for each body type.

The slender woman: The Ectomorph

The best way for an ectomorph to build and shape her muscles is to lift weights

that are heavy enough to almost reach failure within each set. Sets should be limited to 2 or 3 per body part and the rep ranges per set should be low (6-10). Pyramiding -- increasing the weight while decreasing the reps with each set -- works well. An ectomorph should change some part of her workout weekly to add variety and new challenges. Freshening a workout can involve changing the exercise order, doing different exercises, or doing advanced training techniques such as forced reps or negatives.

To speed up muscle building, ectomorphs should keep the intensity and frequency of their cardio training on the low end. Three days of cardio per week for 30 minutes at a moderate intensity (60%-75% of their maximum heart rate) is best.

The muscular woman: The Mesomorph

Female mesomorphs will build a great physique by doing a variety of compound and single joint exercises; and alternating light and heavy weight training days. They should choose weights that are heavy enough to reach near failure within each set. Rep ranges per set should be high for legs (15-20) and medium (8-12) for other body parts. On light weight training days, a mesomorph should choose a weight that allows her to complete reps toward the higher end of the range. On heavy days, she should choose a weight that allows her to complete reps toward the lower end of the range.

To stay lean and improve her heart health, a mesomorph should do 30 minutes of cardio 3-4 times per week at a moderate intensity (65%-75% of their maximum heart rate).

The curvy woman: The Endomorph

Female endomorphs tend to stay away from weight training for fear of getting even bigger. But, without resistance training with weights that are heavy enough to reach near failure within each set their muscle mass will decrease, thus slowing their metabolism and lowering the number of calories they burn each day. Endomorphs benefit most from fast paced circuit and superset workouts that contain multi-joint exercises. These weight training workouts burn lots of calories due to their aerobic effect. Endomorphs should train their entire body at least 3 times per week, use a high number of reps and sets, and change their routine frequently. An ideal circuit workout would have these women working at a heart rate between 60% and 75% of their maximum and moving from exercise to exercise quickly. They would complete the circuit 2-3 times doing 12-15 reps of each exercise.

Cardio is important for endomorphs. But, because of their larger size and the fact that excess weight can be hard on joints and soft tissues, their sessions should be long and frequent as opposed to high in intensity. Endomorphs should consider elevating their heart rates by walking inclines instead of running. Cardio 4-5 days per week, alternating between 30 minute interval sessions and 45-60

minute lower intensity sessions at 60%-70% of their maximum heart rate, is ideal for heart health and calorie burn.

In Summary: Our workouts should always have direction. We should have a well thought out program that works with our body type to help us achieve the look and feel (e.g., healthy, full of energy, strong yet flexible) we desire.

Reference: MusclevelandFitnessHers.com 2009