

[IMAGE]

5 Ways to Build Muscle Fast

With all the talk these days about losing weight and burning fat, it's easy to forget about the importance of building muscle. Whether you're looking to maximize your metabolism or just look better in front of the mirror, you need muscle to do it. Here are five simple strategies, whether you're looking to stay lean while losing weight or get pumped up and gain a few pounds of muscle:

1. Contain the Cardio: Exercise that gets your heart pumping, particularly in the fat-burning zone, is great if you're looking to slim down and lean out. But too much cardio can burn muscle along with the fat (the classic example is the long-distance runner; they may be lean and in great shape, but they generally can't pack on pounds of muscle). That doesn't mean you should ignore cardiovascular exercise, because it's an important part of a healthy lifestyle. Just limit it to three 30-minute sessions a week and spend the rest of your workout time doing muscle-building exercises (with free weights, balls and bands, or your own body weight).

2. Don't Overdo It: The number-one mistake exercisers make, whether they're trying to build muscle, burn fat, lose weight or do all of the above, is overtrain. You might think that more is better, but in general, it's a recipe for disaster. One or both of two things can happen if you overtrain: you can get injured or you can get burned out. If either happens, you won't be able to - or won't want to - work out, and of course, if you're not working out, it's difficult to build muscle, particularly over time. So work out every other day for a maximum of 45 minutes, and work within the limits of your body. That means if you can only bench press 200 pounds, don't get greedy and try for a 300-lb lift.

muscle building - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark **3. Mix Things Up:** Life is all about mixing things up. Variety is what keeps people from getting complacent and bored. Your muscles operate under a similar principle. Once they get comfortable with how they're being used, they stop growing. The key to continual muscle gains is to mix your workouts up every 4-6 weeks; doing so will keep your muscles engaged in fresh, new ways. Instead of sitting back and getting comfortable with the same old workouts, your muscles will jump to attention and keep working hard. The result: they'll keep growing and you'll keep building muscle.

4. Keep Eating: In the endless pursuit of weight loss, many people incorrectly focus on calorie restriction as the way to lose weight and get lean. Not only will that not particularly work (your body actually needs more calories, especially if you're working out; and too few will shut down your metabolism and store fat), but it also will cost you and chances at muscle growth. The reason is twofold: First, the more you eat, especially a blend of protein, complex carbohydrates and essential fats, the more your metabolism increases. The more effective your metabolism is, the more energy your body expends, even when you're sedentary. Second, if your muscles don't have enough food, they can't grow, pure and simple. Starve them and they'll wither away.

5. Take a Break: Even if you're mixing your muscle-building workouts up, you - and your body - need the occasional rest. In fact, you'll often find that your greatest muscle gains take place when you aren't working out. That's because muscle growth operates on a simple principle: Exercise tears the muscle down, while rest, recovery and proper nourishment builds it back up. If you're always working out, your muscle is always being worked - it never has time to grow. So schedule a few breaks during the year of at least a week; you'll be amazed at the effect it has on your body - and your state of mind. You'll be ready to get back to the gym, and your body will be ready and raring to go!

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