

How Women Can Get the Most Out of Their Workouts

Many women shy away from lifting free weights in fear of gaining too much mass and looking like a man. When I say free weights, I don't mean the rubber coated-hot pink- 2 ½ pound-dumbbells that came with your Richard Simmons tape. I mean iron actually deserving of lifting. I have yet to witness a women morph into Arnold simply by lifting heavier weights. If her diet is within reason and she isn't using alternative measures, women simply lack the genetic make-up to gain muscle like men. (Men have MUCH higher testosterone levels than women.) I have weight trained for more than 10 years, and I have never weighed more than 120 pounds at 5'2". Even in the past two years when I started lifting really heavy, I never gained enough muscle to look masculine.

Compare a typical aerobics class patron and a female that consistently works out in the free weight area of the gym (if you can find one). You will notice a significant difference. The free weight lifter has shapely shoulders, a narrow waist, toned legs, and a firm butt. The aerobics lady may be slim, but tends to have flabby arms, loose legs, and a saggy butt. Many would agree that they prefer to have the physique of the female that works out with free weights to the aerobic fan. So why do women still fear serious weight lifting?

I rarely train at the gym anymore...since I discovered the kettlebell world. But when I did go regularly, it was always the same scene: women aimlessly plodding along on treadmills or elliptical trainers. The last time I went to the gym with a friend, (for moral support), I was disappointed by the efforts of most people in the "cardio room." The woman next to me had the treadmill incline as high as possible and, while clutching the rail, waddled her way through half an hour plus at 2mph. What a waste of time. She would have gotten more of a "workout" on her walk over to McDonald's.

A few women are brave enough to move over to the weight room after their cardio session. But even then, those few hardly break a sweat. Their three year old could push more weight than they do on the machines. Why are these women wasting their time? They complain about being overweight and out of shape and when they decide to do something about it, they're sabotaging their success. They get discouraged because they aren't seeing fast enough results.

They're not really committed to putting in the work that forces them to break a sweat. They find excuses... "This is just the weight my body is comfortable at," "Everyone in my family is heavy," "It's uncomfortable to workout." Of course its hard work and you are going to be uncomfortable at first. Your body has been in dormancy for years!

Many women are just confused about what to do at the gym. So for those of you that are confused and those that are serious about really making solid changes faster than any amount of miles on the treadmill: **Mimic what you do in your daily life.** When in your life are you able to pick something, or someone, up from the same angle as the bicep curl machine? When do we sit and extend our feet forward, as in the leg extension machine, to use our legs? Never! In real life we use our entire body to lift something from the ground, and we never isolate the bicep to pull something toward us. We use our entire body to move loads and move our bodies. It does not make sense to train differently than how we move in real life.

Here are three lifts everyone should incorporate into their workouts:

1. Squats
2. Deadlifts
3. Presses

That's it. Spend no more than half an hour on these three lifts for one month and I challenge you to *not* notice a positive change in your physique. Scrap the triceps extensions. Forget about the leg curls, the biceps curls, the shoulder raises, the abductor and adductor machines. Do not do any "isolation" work. I don't care if you think you have to sit on the silly thigh master machines to target your inner and outer thighs. They are a waste of time. Your time is valuable. Spend it with your family instead of wasting it at the gym.

Squats, deadlifts, and presses strengthen the joints as well as the muscles and won't leave you bulky no matter how much you lift. These three exercises are the cornerstone of my workouts. They focus on women's trouble areas: hips, butt, thighs, "core," and upper arms. **Three exercises for under thirty minutes, three to five times a week.** It's that simple. Don't over-complicate it.

- What is a **squat**? Basically, anything involving pushing with the lower body, is a squat.

For example: The Dumbbell Front Squat –

1. Hold a ten pound dumbbell in each hand at chest height, as close to your upper body as possible, without putting pressure on your breasts.
2. Stand with your feet shoulder width apart.
3. Visualize a wall directly in front of your face. Or, stand facing a wall, about half a foot from it. (This will prevent you from falling forward. It is self-correcting to squat in front of a wall.)
4. Begin the movement by reaching your hips/butt backwards as though you are trying to sit on a bench placed behind you. (You can place a bench or chair about half a foot behind you for safety and accuracy.)
5. As you reach back with your hips, you should feel the back of your upper legs stretching and your butt widening.
6. Remain on your heels at all times! Never let the knees float out over the toes.
7. Keep your knees behind your toes!
8. Your knees should never bow inward, either. If you are feeling pressure or pain in your knees, they are caving in and/or are reaching beyond your toes.
9. Drive through the heels and return to the starting, standing position and repeat.

- What is a **deadlift**? Essentially, anything done while pulling with the lower body, is a deadlift.

For example: The Sumo-deadlift-

1. With two hands, hold one 25 pound dumbbell, by the plates so that the handle is vertical to the ground, directly under your groin, in between your legs.

2. Stand with your feet wider than shoulder width, like a sumo wrestler, toes pointing slightly outward.
3. Keep your knees open! Do not let the knees bow inward at any point!
4. Keep your upper body tall as in the squat, when you were facing a wall.
5. Reach the hips backward as you did in the squat, to the bench behind you.
6. Do not let your knees go past your toes at any point during the movement.
7. Drive through your heels and return to the standing position. This is where you may be tempted to lean forward during the movement, DO NOT! Stay tall and upright on your drive back to the starting/standing position.

*The body movement in the deadlift and squat may *look* similar...it is the weight distribution and primary movers that vary between the two lifts.

- What is a **press**? A press is basically any drill done while pushing with the upper body

For example: The Military Press-

1. Stand with your feet shoulder width apart and a ten pound dumbbell in each hand.
2. Raise the dumbbells to shoulder height so that your chest is open, your upper arms are parallel to the ground, and your forearms are vertical. (Your position should resemble a football field-goal post.)
3. Press the bells straight up to the ceiling.
4. Keep your shoulders down and away from your ears throughout the entire movement. This will make the shoulder track properly and prevent injury.
5. At the overhead top position, lock-out the elbows. (This will strengthen your joints.)
6. Keep the wrist straight throughout the entire movement. Do not let them bend backwards!
7. Follow the same path down as you did on the way up.
8. You can also perform this move using only one arm at a time, instead of both at the same time.

Perform three to five sets of 5-10 repetitions of these three basic exercises three to five times a week. So your workout would look like this on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday:

Front Squat: 3 sets x 10 reps. With two 10 pound dumbbells
 Sumo Deadlift: 3 sets x 10 reps. With one 25 pound dumbbell
 Military Press: 3 sets x 10 reps. With two 10 pound dumbbells

You will find out, that although these are not fast movements, your heart still gets one heck of a workout. You will probably get more cardiovascular benefit from squatting and deadlifting than you ever have on the treadmill or elliptical trainer.

Length of time spent in the gym does not equate to quality of time spent in the gym. Change your mid-set to quality over quantity and you will reap far better benefits in a shorter period of time, than you ever did doing hundreds of reps on hundreds of

machines. Furthermore, there is hard evidence proving that those not already strong actually suffer more injuries from machine work than those lifting free weights. Machine lifters lack tendon and ligament strength- the true definers of strength. With weak tendons and ligaments, there is no amount of muscle size or strength that will hold your joints up under real world stress and pressure.

If you are not training hard and lifting heavy, you are kidding yourself and wasting your time. Get the most out of your training. Train like you mean it.



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