
Training 101: At Home Or At The Gym

Barbell Curls (Close Grip):

First, choose a standard straight barbell, or an EZ-Curl barbell. The EZ-Curl bar will alleviate some strain on the wrists which may accompany this exercise. Stand with your feet about shoulder width apart and your knees slightly bent, holding the bar with a palms under grip. In a controlled manner, curl the barbell up to shoulder height. Keep your elbows stationary near your sides. Hold the bar at the top for about half a second and then lower it slowly. Repeat the curl for eight to ten repetitions. As long as it does not hurt your wrists, keep at it.

There are several ways to hold a barbell. A wide grip that puts more work on the inner biceps head; a standard shoulder width grip that everybody usually does; and a narrower grip that work your biceps more, and also your brachialis and brachioradialis. The brachialis muscle lies just below the biceps and aids in just about any elbow flexion movements (like curls). When it is well developed, it will add to your arm size and shape.

Barbell Curls (Standing):

Standing barbell curls build your biceps, the body's showiest muscle. Start by holding the loaded bar at your waist and curl it to your chest. For full effect, keep your elbows still and squeeze the biceps at the height of the contraction. Use a weight belt or stand against a wall to keep your back straight. Do not forget to breathe. Exhale with the effort.

Barbell Shrug:

Stand erect with your feet approx shoulder width and your spine in its neutral (slightly arched) position. Look directly forward, keeping your shoulders back and your chest out. Grasp a barbell overhand with your hands slightly wider than shoulder width, arms extended so that the bar rests against your thighs. Inhale and raise your shoulders as high as possible, exhaling as you reach the top. Don't bend your elbows as you raise your shoulders. After reaching the uppermost position, hold for 1-2 seconds to maximize the contraction before dropping your shoulders under control to the start position. Be sure to maintain good posture as you execute the shrug: Keep your shoulders back as much as possible and your chest out as you raise your shoulders.

Bench Crunch:

Lie on the floor on your back, with your feet up on a bench or against a wall for support. (Hands are usually placed at the temples, but placing them on your hips helps make the exercise easier). Lift your head and shoulders up toward your knees while flexing your abs hard and crunching them. Keep your body stationary from the waist down. This exercise works the upper abs.

Bench Presses (Barbell):

Lie flat on a bench with your feet flat on the floor. Grip a barbell slightly wider than shoulder width. Lift the bar off the rack and extend your arms fully above your chest. Lower the bar slowly until it touches you mid-chest. Press the bar back to the starting point. Remember to inhale while lowering the bar and exhale while pressing the bar up. Remember, keep your feet on the floor. Do not arch your back. Lower the bar slowly so it does not bounce off your chest. Always train with a partner or spotter in case you get caught with too heavy a weight. Beginner bodybuilders should do 1 or 2 sets, 8 to 10 reps. Advanced bodybuilders can do more.

Cable Rows (One Arm) with a Twist:

Use the lower cable attachment. Place your left foot straight forward and your right foot back 2-3 feet at approximately a 45 degree angle to your left foot. Place your left hand on your left knee. Grasp the lower cable handle with your right hand. Extend your arm completely. Your palm should be facing downward. Now, pull the weight into your midsection as far as you can. You should end up just above your hipbone. Here is the twist - as you pull the weight into your waist, twist your hand so that your palm is facing upward at the completion of the rep. Lower the weight slowly, resisting as the handle returns to the start.

Calf Raise (Standing):

Stand on a calf-raise machine with your shoulders under the pads. Place the balls of your feet on the foot platform so that your heels are free to move through a full range of motion. Keep your toes pointed straight or slightly out to the sides. Straighten your legs completely and extend your body so that your feet, hips and shoulders are in alignment. Lower your heels at a moderate speed until you feel a strong stretch in your Achilles tendon and calf muscles. As you reach the bottom position, inhale slightly more than usual and hold your breath as you push off vigorously to rise as high as possible. Hold the top position for up to two seconds to ensure maximum muscle contraction. Relax slightly, lower your heels under control and exhale.

Don't pause in the bottom position unless you are trying to increase your ankle flexibility. Don't bend your knees. Don't bounce in the bottom position.

Calf Raise (Hack Machine):

Adjust the shoulder pads on the hack machine to allow you to stand straight facing into the machine. Place the balls of your feet on the upper edge of the floor plate, approximately shoulder width apart. Lower your heels to full extension, stretching out your calves completely. Press the weight back up by contracting the calves as hard as possible. Flex hard and feel the muscle 'bite'. Lower the weight down to full extension and repeat.

Calf Raise (Leg Press):

Sit in an incline leg press machine with your glutes and lower back in firm contact with the seat pads. Place the balls of your feet a comfortable width apart at the bottom edge of the resistance platform so that your heels are free to move. Keep your toes pointed straight or slight tilt out. Your legs should be straight or very slightly bent but never locked. Grip the machines side handles to stabilize your upper body after your release the platform. Inhale and hold your breath as you extend your feet at a slow to moderate rate of speed through an approximate 30-45 degree range of motion. Hold the fully extended position for 1-2 seconds to maximize the contraction. Exhale as your return under control till you feel a slight stretch in your calves. Pause momentarily and then repeat. To prevent your feet from slipping, wear shoes with good traction and be sure the surface of the resistance platform is not slippery. The balls of your feet should stay in firm contact at all times.

Clean & Jerk:

Stand over a barbell so that your heels are directly under it, feet shoulder width apart. Bend at your knees and waist to reach down and grasp it with an overhand grip, hands slightly wider than shoulder width apart. Keep your back arched as you push down through your heels to begin pulling the bar up. As the bar passes your torso, elevate your traps and bend your wrists back and move your elbows forward. Then press the bar explosively overhead to full extension, pushing off the balls of your feet so that your heels come off the floor slightly. Reverse the movement and repeat.

Crunches:

Your target zone is the Upper Abdominals. Lie on the floor – you can put your lower legs up on a bench if you prefer – with your knees bent and pointing to the ceiling. This position ensures that your lower back is flat against the floor. Place your hands behind your head and curl your upper torso forward, bringing your rib cage toward your pelvis until you feel a contraction in your abs. Pause for the contraction and slowly return to the starting position. Exhale on the contraction – this breathing advice applies to all abdominal exercises.

Curls: Reverse Preacher Curls:

Take a shoulder width overhand grip on a five foot straight bar. Lean over a preacher bench with the top edge of the pad under your armpits and your upper arms hanging down along the pad and slowly straighten your arms. Use forearm and upper arm strength to move the barbell in an arc from the starting position up to a point just beneath your chin. Lower it back to the starting position in a count of four. Inhale as you lower the weight and exhale as you raise it. This exercise helps to stress the forearm supinators, brachialis and biceps.

Curls: Seated Dumbbell Curls:

The basic purpose of the seated dumbbell curl is to build size and mass in the biceps muscles. Sit on a bench with a back support, arms extended down and a dumbbell in each hand. Start with your palms facing inward. Curl one arm (either one) towards your shoulder in an arc. While you are curling upward, your palm should twist so that it first faces out and then faces you at completion of the curl. During the motion, keep your upper arm and body as motionless as possible. There will be some movement, but avoid swinging the dumbbell up. Make the biceps work. Lower the weight slowly and repeat the movement with the other arm.

Deadlifts:

Deadlifts, when performed correctly are an incredible overall power exercise that involve more muscles than any other exercise you will come across. They also directly strengthen the lower back muscles. Train with control and form. Too much weight and improper form while performing the deadlift can cause the muscles in the lower back to shorten quickly, causing the ligaments to loosen and the muscles to take on 100% of the weight. This can result in severe pain and muscle spasm. Keep your back flat and straight, your head up and start the lift with your legs and glutes driving the bar up. Use your arms as hooks to hold the bar - do not lift with them. Exhale as you ascend with the weight. Keep your knees over your toes when you bend to grip the bar. Keep the bar as close to your body as possible throughout the lift for maximum strength.

Deadlifts: Romanian Style:

This is a power tool of the Olympic weightlifters. It is the drill for huge hamstrings. Start by locking out a conventional deadlift with a lightweight. Use the 'clean', double overhand, palms toward the body, grip. Do not use a belt. Stand upright with a barbell in your hands and your body weight centered on your heels. Look up and inhale so you are staring at the ceiling. Arch your back tightly and slowly force your glutes as far back as possible. We lower the weight by pushing the butt back, not (as in stiff leg deadlifting) by standing erect and bending forward to lower the weight. This is the critical difference. The shoulders, more or less, stay over the ankles throughout the lift: the opposite of a stiff legged deadlift, in which the shoulders move forward, out over the toes. As you lower Romanian style, pull back with the hip flexors, the antagonistic muscles of the glutes and hamstrings.

As you are descending, your knees will unlock somewhat. Good! Be sure to keep your shins vertical throughout. Most of the movement will take place at the hip joint, some at the knee and none at the back! Keep jackknifing at the hips until you cannot get any more depth without losing your arch or bending your knees excessively. Stop and reverse to lockout. For most bodybuilders, this level will be no lower than the kneecap.

Keep the bar very close, both on the up and down; don't let it swing forward and rock you on your toes. Once you have reached the bottom position, reverse the movement by squeezing an imaginary coin with your glutes and digging your heels into the floor.

Deadlifts: Stiff Legged:

Place a barbell on the floor and stand behind it with your shins touching the bar. Bend over, take a shoulder width overgrip on the bar and stand erect. Your arms should be straight and at your sides, with the bar resting across your upper thighs. That is the starting position. Stiffen your legs, leaving just the slightest bend at the knees, and keep them that way throughout the set. Slowly bend at the waist and lower the barbell until the plates touch the floor, then slowly stand erect again to return to the starting position. Exhale as you bend over and inhale as you return to the starting position.

For a variation on the basic exercise, you can perform stiff legged deadlifts with two dumbbells instead of a barbell.

Dumbbell Lunges (side):

If we take a normal forward-stepping lunge and convert it to a sidestepping lunge, it will turn from a good thigh exercise (although there are better quadriceps mass builders) to a great adductor exercise. Grab a light dumbbell in each hand and stand upright. Your feet should be together. It is helpful if you stand in front of a full length mirror. One leg will act as an anchor. With the other leg, step directly out to the side in a line that runs laterally through both shoulders. Keep the toes on both feet pointing forward. Make sure that as you step to the side that your trunk maintains its upright position. Do not look down at the floor while you are lunging or you will soon find more that your feet are on the floor (the mirror forces you to keep your head and eyes up).

The foot of your lunging leg should contact the floor in a position that is at least 18 inches wider than your shoulder, but try for more as you get used to the exercise. Bend the knee of the lunging leg and lower your body towards the floor by continuing the bend this knee. Keep the knee straight on the anchor or support leg.

You should not keep the dumbbell adjacent to your anchor leg, otherwise it will collide with this leg as you drop into the lowest position. Instead, place the dumbbell behind (posterior) to your back and hanging directly below the shoulder. This will keep your shoulder back and prevent you from falling forward with the weight. The dumbbell should be approximately mid-body, but in direct line with your shoulder when you are in the down position. The dumbbell on the lunge side can hang straight down from your shoulder throughout the upward and downward movements of your torso without becoming problematic.

Let the foot of your anchor leg roll towards its medial (big toe) side as you lower your body (don't try to keep the sole of your foot on the floor as you lower the body). In contrast, the sole of the lunging leg should be flat on the floor as you lower your torso. You should feel a stretch in the adductor muscles of the anchor leg during the lowering of the body to the floor. Make the stretch (and therefore the descent of your body) slow and controlled. Never bounce into any stretch, particularly with resistance, unless you would like to invite injury rather than prevent it.

Your lunging leg should now have a bent knee of 90 degrees (or less in its lowest position). Next, push your body upward with a moderate steady thrust until you have returned to the original standing position. Avoid pushing up with the straight anchor leg, since that is too ballistic for the muscle to handle in a stretched position. You can repeat this procedure also with the other leg.

Dumbbell Presses (Incline):

Set an incline bench at an angle no greater than 30 degrees. With a dumbbell in each hand, lie back on the incline bench. Swing the dumbbells up and hold them at shoulder height, palms facing forward. Press the dumbbells straight up directly above your shoulders. Lower them slowly to the start position. Remember to breathe properly, exhaling as you exert pressure and inhaling when you lower the weights. Remember to keep your feet on the floor at all times. Control the weights, raising and lowering them slowly without letting them hit at the top. Focus on the muscles being used.

Dumbbell Pullovers:

Lie across a bench with only your shoulders on the padded surface and your feet flat on the floor. Grasp a dumbbell with both hands, palms against the inside of the top plate. Hold the dumbbell at arm's length (with your elbows slightly bent) over your chest. Inhale deeply while simultaneously lowering the dumbbell behind your head in a smooth arc. While lowering the dumbbell, drop your hips toward the floor to increase the stretch. Keep your hips low until the weight is returned slowly to the start position. Use a weight that will allow you to perform 15 to 20 reps. Beginners should try 1 or 2 sets while advanced lifters perform 3 - 4 sets. If you did not feel a tremendous stretching sensation through the ribcage, your probably didn't drop your hips down all the way or take a deep breath. You'll know what we mean when it happens.

Dumbbell Rowing:

Lean on a bench with your left hand and left knee. Your back should be parallel to the floor. Grab a dumbbell with your right hand at arm's length. Keeping your head level with your back, pull the dumbbell up into your lower rib cage area, palm facing toward your body. Hold there for a 2-count while you flex the back muscle tightly. Lower the weight slowly back to full extension.

Dumbbell Triceps Extensions (Lying):

Basic purpose of the lying dumbbell triceps extensions is to develop the overall triceps with director focus on the outer triceps muscles. Lie flat on a bench, head even with the end. Feet can be flat on the floor or up on the bench, whichever suits you. Hold two dumbbells extended overhead, palms facing each other, as if you were about to start dumbbell flies. From this position, lower the dumbbells back towards your head by bending your elbows. Your upper arms should stay fixed. The dumbbells will descend past the sides of your head until your triceps are fully stretched. Your upper arms will slant towards your head slightly. Now press the dumbbells back up in an arc (keeping your arms slanted back) until your elbows lock out. Flex your triceps hard. Repeat the movement. Focus on the muscles being worked. Work the muscles, not the exercise. In other words, don't feel the exercise being worked. The dumbbells are only a means to an end. By keeping your upper arms slanted slightly back toward the head, you maintain constant tension on the triceps muscles. If you bring the upper arms perpendicular to the floor, you reduce stress on the muscle, this losing the full effectiveness of the exercise. Control the weight. Perform slow, deliberate reps. Avoid going too fast and getting into a rhythm. Stop at the top and flex hard. Lower to full stretch, pause momentarily to help control the movement and then press back up. Avoid using dumbbells that are too heavy and cause loose, sloppy form. This will reduce the effectiveness of the exercise on the triceps muscles. It will bring on other muscles into play, perhaps causing injury.

Flyes (Incline):

Set an incline bench at a 5-10 degree angle. With a pair of dumbbells in your hands, lie back. Extend the dumbbells over your head, palms facing together. Lower the weights out and down in an arc while keeping your arms slightly bent. Go as low as is comfortable, then bring the weights back up through the same arc to the starting point. Pretend you're hugging somebody. Remember, keep the dumbbells in a wide arc, do not press them up from bottom position. Don't smash the weight together at the top. Use smooth, controlled reps. Concentrate on squeezing your chest muscles as you bring the weights together.

Isolation Exercises:

Defined as exercises which involve only one muscle and one joint . These are different from the many exercises which are multi-joint in nature and typically involve several different muscles and are referred to as Structural exercises.

Laterals (Side):

Your target zone are the Side Delts. Stand with two dumbbells at your sides, with your palms facing in towards your thighs. With your elbows slightly bent, slowly raise the dumbbells away from your sides; as the dumbbells reach shoulder height, make sure your little fingers are level with or higher than your thumbs. Lift the dumbbells up to about shoulder height, but no higher than that; pause at the top for a contraction and then return to the starting position.

Leg Curls:

Your target zone with leg curls are your hamstrings, also known as your leg biceps. Lie prone (face down) on the bench of a leg curl machine and hook your heels under the support pads. Keeping your body flat against the bench, raise your heels toward your butt until you can't lift the weight any farther. Lower the weight slowly to the starting position and repeat. Don't rush through the exercise; feel the hamstrings contracting and stretching as you lift and lower the weight.

Leg Extensions:

Your target zone are your thighs (Quadriceps). Sit on a leg extension machine and place the tops of your feet under the foot pads. With your lower back firmly against the seat, slowly lift your lower legs until your knee joint reach the locked position. Pause for a contraction, then slowly return to the starting position. Leg extensions, ideal for isolating the quads, are an effective warm up for the squats that follow

Leg Tuck (Seated):

Sit on a bench sideways, grasping the edges for support. With knees bent, raise your legs slightly and then straighten them, leaning backward as balance requires. Now lift your knees up toward your chest, keeping your lower leg pointed downward, and flex your abs really hard. Keep continuous tension on the abs throughout this movement. This exercise works both upper and lower abs.

Lunges (Smith Machine):

The basic purpose of lunges on the Smith Machine is to develop and separate the muscles in the thigh and shape the muscles in the glutes. Step into the Smith machine and place the bar across your shoulders / traps as you would to squat. Put your right foot two feet in front of you. Stretch your left leg back as far as you can with little or not weight on it. Lower with the weight until your thigh is parallel with the floor and your left knee almost touches the floor. Now drive the weight back up using your right leg only, pushing hard from the heel. Finish your set with one leg and then repeat with the other.

Military Presses (Seated):

Your target zone are the Front Delts. Your supporting and secondary muscles are your side and rear delts, triceps and traps. Sit on a bench with your back supported. With a wide grip – four to five inches past shoulder width – hold the bar at upper chest level. With your elbows back (don't let them move in front of your hands), press the weight directly overhead. Lock out at the top – your arms should be straight – and slowly lower the bar to the starting position.

Power Snatch:

Bend at your waist and knees to grasp either dumbbells or a barbell on the floor with an overhand grip. Straighten your torso and lift the weight as if performing an upright row; rather than stopping at the top, raise the weight overhead in one continuous motion by rolling your wrists back and 'throwing' the bar or dumbbells overhead. Reverse the movement to return to the start position.

Pulley Rows (Seated):

Attach a V-handle to a low cable pulley machine and sit on the machine with your feet braced against the footrest or metal plate. Keeping your knees slightly bent, grasp the V-handle with your palms facing each other. Your trunk should be perpendicular to the floor and your arms outstretched, making the cable taut. Your trunk must remain stationary throughout the movement to ensure that you involve the correct muscles. Pull the handle toward your chest, moving your elbows back and close to your sides as far as possible. Try to squeeze your elbows together behind you at the contraction, then slowly let your arms return to the starting position. Exhale as you pull the cable forward; inhale as you return to the starting position.

Pull-Up:

One of the most overlooked exercises in bodybuilding. An excellent exercise in developing the lats and lower-trap fibers, and stresses the biceps quite well, too. Grasp the bar with an overhand grip, hands about 10 inches apart. From an extended position, pull yourself high until your elbows are close to your ribs. As you pull up, lean back by arching your back in an attempt to bring your face next to the bar as opposed to under it. Breathe in deeply as you begin the movement and exhale forcefully once you're through the sticking point.

Pulldowns (Reverse Grip):

Stand in front of a high pulley with your feet shoulder width apart. Grasp the pulley handle with one hand using a reverse grip and stand back, bending slightly at your hips. Hold the handle so that your upper arm and elbow are vertical and slightly in front of your body with a 90 degree bend in your elbow. Slowly push down on the handle until your arm is fully extended and behind you, then slowly return it to the starting position. Repeat for the required number of reps, then switch arms and perform the same number of reps.

Pushups (Flat Floor):

Lying facedown on the floor, place your palms next to your chest a little wider than shoulder width apart. Keeping your body straight, lift up until you are supported on your hands and the balls of your feet. Press up until your arms are extended, then lower your body. Remember, keep your body straight and back flat.

Pushups (Off A Counter):

Position yourself in front of a counter, with your hands resting on the edge about shoulder width apart. Move your feet back so your body is positioned at a 45-55 degree angle. Now perform 'Pushoffs' as you would flat floor pushups.

Pushups (With Feet Elevated):

This is the same routine as a Flat Floor Pushup, except you put your feet elevated on a bed or chair.

Situps (Frog style):

Lie on your back on the floor, hands at the sides of your head. Bring your knees up while keeping your feet flat on the floor. Let each knee fall out to the side, down to the floor, or as far as your flexibility allows. Once you have assumed the 'frog' position, lift your shoulders only up off the floor as high as possible while crunching the abdominal muscles. Your legs remain steady and still throughout the exercise. This works the upper abs.

Situps (Knees in the Air):

Lie on the floor with your knees bent and feet crossed in the air. Place your hands at the sides of your head and sit up, forcing your head toward your knees, while keeping your legs and feet as stationary and steady as possible. Really try to crunch your abs at the top of the movement. Lower yourself back to the starting position slowly. (Placing your hands on your lower abdomen will make this exercise easier). This exercise works both upper and lower abs.

Split Jump:

Holding a pair of dumbbells, stand as if you are about to descend into a lunge; one foot extended in front, the other extended back, torso upright. Jump off your front leg and switch your legs in midair so that you land in the opposite lunge position. Repeat for the desired number of reps.

Squat Jump:

Stand with your feet shoulder width apart and toes pointed slightly outward, with a bar resting across your shoulders and traps. Descend into a squat until your thighs are parallel to the floor. Explode upward; as your hips and knees approach full extension, jump off the balls of your feet. Upon landing, move immediately into another squat. Look straight ahead and keep your torso and neck muscles tight throughout.

Squat: Wave Squat:

In one continuous motion, descend into a quarter squat with a barbell resting across your traps and drive back up through your heels. As you stand up, push up off the balls of your feet.

Squats (Barbell):

Start by placing the barbell on your upper back and while standing with your feet slightly wider than your shoulders. Check your balance to make sure your feet remain flat on the ground. Now squat down slowly until your upper thighs are about parallel to the floor. If your legs and knees are not quite warmed up yet, do your first few squats a little less deeply. At first, you will feel like you need to lean forward to keep your balance. This can be altered by leaning your head back and keeping your lower back straight. Maintain your body weight on your heels and mid-foot. Resist going up on your toes to maintain balance. Do approximately 10 to 12 reps on your first set to make sure you are getting the movement down. The lower spine must remain straight and inflexible. Barbell

Squats build the muscles of the frontal thigh (Quadriceps) and the posterior hip region (Glutials). You will also feel the effect on the muscles of the lower back and the Hamstrings.

Stretching:

It is always a good idea to warm up and stretch before working a muscle group. A good stretch for the pec muscles uses a doorway. Step through the doorway, reaching back with both arms. Hold the doorway on either side, as shown, then stick your chest out. Hold for 10 -15 seconds, relax, the repeat 2-3 times. Try to stretch a little further each time.

Structural Exercises:

Defined as exercises which are multi-joint in nature and typically involve several different muscles. These are different from the many exercises which involve only one muscle and one joint and are referred to as Isolation exercises. Some examples of the primary structural exercises include the squat variations (back, front, split), lunge, deadlift, shoulder press, bench press and rowing variations (upright, bent-over, seated). Other structural exercises that are important for power development include the Olympic lifts, which are the snatch and clean and jerk, and parts of these lifts (hang pulls).

Triceps Pushdowns:

Your target zone is your Triceps. Stand in front of a triceps pushdown machine and grasp the bar with an overhand grip, slightly less than shoulder width. Tuck your elbows into your sides, bend slightly forward at the waist and position the bar at upper chest level. Relying only on your lower arms to move the weight, push the bar down to arm's length and squeeze your triceps. Slowly return to the starting position and repeat.