

Back



IT'S TIME TO PAY MORE ATTENTION TO YOUR BACK

A lot of people don't like to train their backs because they can't really see the muscles being worked. It's an "out-of-sight, out-of-mind" thing.

But the back is the key area you can train to significantly change the proportions of your entire body, so people notice even when you're fully clothed. A well-developed back is at

least as visible under your clothes as a strong chest, and definitely more visible under most clothes than say, your biceps. Strong lats (the large muscles of the back or "latissimus dorsi") help create that classic V-shape; the wider your back and shoulders, the smaller your waist appears.

Another good reason to devote serious attention to the muscles behind you is

that they greatly assist with developing the muscles in front. Want maximum results from squatting, curling or pressing exercises? All of these require a strong back. Back strength also promotes proper body mechanics (and prevents injury) as you bend, twist and lift throughout the day.

With all this in mind, isn't it time to pay a little more attention to your back?

1 pull-ups

This is a very versatile exercise, and one which you can do anywhere you can find a straight bar that will hold your weight. Because of the difficulty of the exercise, and the fact that the weight can't be reduced, it's best to perform this exercise first in your workout.



TIP YOU CAN VARY...
the position and width of your grip to target different muscles in your back.

TIP IF YOU CAN'T...
yet perform many reps of this exercise on your own, enlist the help of a spotter.



Starting Position: Reach up and grab the bar with a firm overhand grip. Your hands should be roughly twice your shoulder width apart. Straighten your arms and let your body hang from the bar. Bend your knees and cross your feet at the ankles.



The Exercise: Slowly pull your body up to the bar so that the top of your chest nearly touches the bar and your chin is over the bar. Try to keep your body straight, without arching or "swinging." As you move upwards, focus on pulling your elbows down at an angle toward your rib cage. Once your lats have completely contracted at the top, slowly lower your body to the starting position.

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2 wide-grip lat pulldown

This is a classic machine exercise with many shaping and strengthening benefits. By simply changing the width and position of your grip, you can target different muscles in your back, especially those which are underused in other exercises.



START/FINISH

Starting Position: Start with your legs positioned snugly under the kneepads of a pulldown machine. Your feet should be flat on the floor. Grasp the wide bar firmly with an overhand grip. Your hands should be almost twice your shoulder width apart.



MID-POINT

The Exercise: Pull the bar down on top of your chest, arching your back slightly. Focus on keeping your elbows directly below the bar. Pause briefly with the bar in position right on top of your collarbone. Slowly raise the bar back to the starting position.



TIP DON'T LEAN BACK ...

too far and pull the weight down using your body weight.

TIP DON'T PULL ...

the bar down behind your neck. Doing so can place excess stress on the weaker muscles in your shoulders, while taking the work off your back.

“Attitudes are contagious...
is yours worth catching?”

3 one-arm dumbbell rows

This is a great exercise for isolating the muscles of your upper and middle back.



Starting Position: Begin with your right foot flat on the floor and your left knee resting on a flat bench. Then lean forward so that you're supporting the weight of your upper body with your left arm on the bench. Your back should be flat, almost parallel with the floor. Reach down and pick up a dumbbell with your right hand. Your left arm should be locked at the elbow so it will support the weight of your upper body. Before starting, look straight ahead instead of at the floor in order to keep your back straight.

The Exercise: Tighten your abs to keep your body from turning to the side as you lift the dumbbell. Concentrate on pulling your elbow back as far as it can go. The dumbbell should end up roughly parallel with your torso. After you've "rowed" the dumbbell up as far as you can, slowly lower it to the starting position. Complete the planned number of reps for your right arm, then follow the same instructions for your left.



TIP A COMMON MISTAKE...
is to pull the weight up to your shoulder while turning your body slightly to the side. The dumbbell should actually be "rowed" until it's just about even with your rib cage on the side.

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4 seated cable rows

This is another great exercise because it adds thickness and strength to the entire back.

Starting Position: Sit down at a low-pulley rowing machine with your feet flat against the footrests and your knees slightly bent. Bending only at the waist, lean forward and grasp the pulley handles in front of you. Your palms should be facing each other.

The Exercise: Keeping your back flat and looking forward, slowly draw the handles to your stomach while simultaneously leaning back at the waist until your torso is perpendicular to the floor. The handles should reach your stomach just as your upper body reaches the upright position. Pause, then slowly lean forward from the waist while extending your arms in front of you until you return to the starting position.



TIP TO ISOLATE YOUR LATS...

even more, try keeping your back in the same position throughout the exercise. Instead of bending forward during the eccentric phase, keep your back perpendicular to the floor and slowly extend your arms straight in front of you. Then draw the pulleys to your stomach for another rep.



TIP KEEP YOUR KNEES...

bent. Straightening them allows you to push yourself (and the weight) backward, letting you hoist more weight, but essentially cheating your back out of doing the work.



“Champions never look at what they are going through, only at what they’re going to do!”

5 back extensions

This exercise targets the lower back. You can often feel the benefits without using much weight at all. To do this exercise, you’ll need a hyperextension bench, which basically consists of a wide pad to rest your upper legs on and a padded “railing” to keep your legs locked securely in place.

Starting Position: Lie face down on the bench, tucking your ankles securely under the footpads. Then lean your upper body forward to make sure the wide pad is properly adjusted for your body. Your upper thighs should lie flat across the wide pad, leaving enough room for you to bend at the waist without any restriction. Once you have adjusted the bench, return to an upright position with your body in a straight line. Cross your arms in front of you; or, for added resistance, place your hands lightly along the sides of your head.

The Exercise: Slowly bend forward at the waist as far as you comfortably can while keeping your back flat. Do not round your back. Slowly raise your torso until your legs and upper body form a straight line again.



TIP IF YOUR OWN BODY ...

weight isn't much of a workout, try holding a weight plate flat across your chest and folding your arms securely around it.



TIP DON'T ARCH YOUR BACK...

while raising your torso, or lift your torso beyond the straight line formed by the rest of your body. If you do, you're putting excessive stress on your lower back muscles.

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6 straight-arm pulldowns

This is a great exercise to finish off your back workout because it works the back without involving the biceps.

Starting Position: Stand in front of a lat pulldown bar with your arms outstretched towards the bar. Place your palms flat on the bar and pull it down to shoulder level.

The Exercise: Keeping your elbows slightly bent and your wrists “locked,” pull the bar down towards your body in an arcing motion. Once you’ve contracted the lats fully and the bar has touched or come close to your thighs, slowly allow the bar to come back up to the starting position.

TIP A WORD OF WARNING...

you won't be able to use much weight on this exercise; the leverage isn't on your side. Don't worry, though—in this case, light weight does not equate with small lats.

