



## Workout Routines to Build Muscle

*"If you're working out in front of a mirror and watching your muscles grow, your ego has reached a point where it is now eating itself. That's why I believe there should be a psychiatrist at every health club, so that when they see you doing this, they will take you away for a little chat." – Lewis Black*

**Most people don't understand how to train in order to achieve visually appealing muscle gains.**

I used to be the same way. When I first started working out in college, I didn't know what I was doing. I just followed the lead of my friends since they were more experienced than me when it came to weightlifting. The type of workouts I performed were similar to what 90% of the guys in the gym were doing, so I assumed that there was nothing wrong with them and that they were the right workout routines to build muscle. In truth, it wasn't a terrible routine, but there was one big problem. There was no direction. It was like setting out on a road trip by simply driving in the general direction of the intended destination.



**I was too focused on increasing my numbers on each exercise without giving any thought to how I was lifting.**

Almost exclusively, I would do three sets of ten repetitions for each exercise. Why? Because this is what everyone else was doing and I didn't know any better. Once I was able to do ten reps at a certain weight, I'd increase the weight. In a sense this was good because my workouts were progressing. However, I was too focused on trying to lift more weight. It quickly turned into a numbers game with my friends and me constantly trying to one-up each other. While I did put on quite a bit of muscle, the growth was very gradual and I never got ripped.

Now, I know that the reason why I gained a lot of soft, puffy muscle with limited definition is that this is exactly what the 3x10 routine is designed to do. For harder more defined muscles, I should have focused more on lower reps, such as a 5x5 routine which is what I do now. A high rep routine is great for building mass provided there is limited rest in between sets: a concept is known as cumulative fatigue. This is the most effective way to build mass quickly, but it needs to be done with lower weight. I learned this from Rusty Moore's [muscle building course](#). Of course, with my ego, I never wanted to lift lighter weights than I knew I was capable of, so I never benefited from this. Instead, my muscle growth was much slower and I would often plateau.

**Another factor that was insignificant to me at the time was the amount of rest I would take between sets.**

I used to workout with my friend so on chest day, for example, we would go through and do our normal bench press routine. I would do my set and he would spot me. Then I would rest for a couple of minutes and we'd shoot the breeze. Then, he'd do



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his set while I spotted him. You see where this is going. It would be common for me to take as much as five to seven minutes in between sets. Once again, my ego was at work here. I did realize that it was pretty ridiculous that it would take so long for us to complete our chest workout, but I felt that if I didn't take enough rest in between sets, my numbers wouldn't be as impressive.

There are a couple of problems with taking too much rest in between sets. First, you spend way more time working out than you need to. Sometimes, I would find myself in the gym for over an hour and I wouldn't even feel really tired afterwards. Another problem is that when you take a lot of rest in between sets, you limit the cardiovascular benefits of your workout. These days, I prefer to do intense circuit workouts during my weight training sessions so that I can build muscle and burn fat at the same time. You can't do this if you are lollygagging around the gym for over an hour. The only time you should take more rest in between sets is when you are training in the very low rep range and trying to harden your muscles instead of build mass. And even then, I think anything more than a couple of minutes is too long.



**Finally, the last thing preventing me from getting the results I wanted had more to do with my workout habits than my actual routine.**

Specifically, I would eat before and after my workouts. I bought into the conventional wisdom that I should eat a couple of hours before my workout so that I would have enough energy to workout and then I should rush to consume a massive quantity of protein immediately after my workout or my muscles would disintegrate. Many times, the massive quantity of protein was combined with a flood of carbs and fat in a ridiculously unhealthy 2,000 calorie meal. I actually thought I was doing myself a favor by "feeding my muscles." Crazy, I know!

Today, I do things differently. I believe that if you are shooting for a lean, defined look, you cannot focus on muscle gain alone. You also need to concentrate on fat loss. By going into every workout in a fasted state, I force my body to burn stored fat as energy instead of food. If this is your goal, I recommend not eating anything for at least four hours prior to working out. Further, my energy levels during my workout do not suffer at all. I also try not to eat anything for a couple of hours after working out so that I maximize the fat burned during post-exercise oxygen consumption. This is more commonly known as the "afterburn" effect and is more pronounced after higher intensity workouts. This is another reason I advocate brief, intense circuit training workouts followed by high intensity interval training cardio rather than a prolonged, leisurely gym session.

Now that I have learned the correct way to train for a lean athletic build, I know that the number of repetitions, amount of rest between sets, and eating around workouts all impact the end result.

**So why did I train like a robot before?**

I simply didn't know any better. Fast forward a few years. My methods have changed drastically, but so have my results. I may not have as much mass as I did back in my college days, but my appearance is much better because the muscle that I do have is denser from low rep training. I have also targeted specific tactics to maximize fat burning during my workouts. This has helped to lower my body fat percentage and create a more defined look. Anyone can get the puffy bodybuilder look by following the meathead routine and eating a lot. But most people would much rather have a lean, toned Hollywood look. This is when muscle gains are truly impressive. In order to achieve this, you need to step away from conventional wisdom, learn the proper workout routines to build muscle, and don't let your ego get the better of you!