

A man and a woman are performing plank exercises in a gym. The man, in the foreground, is wearing a teal tank top and is leaning on a grey and blue stability ball. The woman, in the background, is wearing a pink tank top and is leaning on a blue stability ball. They are both looking towards the camera with a focused expression. The gym background shows various pieces of equipment and bright lighting.

the
gym.
find your fit

MUSCLE BUILDING GUIDE

Helping you begin your journey to finding your fit

YOUR 6-STEP GUIDE TO BUILDING MUSCLE



Congratulations are in order: Why?

Because you've chosen to focus more time and energy on you by signing up to our programme. That puts you one step closer to achieving your health and fitness goals - and that's something worth celebrating.

ABOUT THE PROGRAMME

You're reading this because you want to change your behaviour and your body. To do this, you need to understand how your habits support your current behaviour and then change those habits.

Over the next six weeks, we'll go through our 6-step muscle-building roadmap that will make good behaviours a routine part of your lifestyle and help you reach your short- and long-term goals.



THE SIX STEPS TO BUILDING MUSCLE:



STEP 1 - An introduction to muscle growth



STEP 2 - Nutrition



STEP 3 - Progressing your training



STEP 4 - The importance of rest



STEP 5 - Hydration and fluid intake



STEP 6 - Goal-setting and tracking

To get the most out of this programme, we advise that you focus on one step at a time so that each step becomes a habit before moving onto the next. To help with this, we'll be sending you an email each week with a summary of the step and some additional information to help you achieve it.

By the end of the six weeks, not only will you feel better, you'll also have a better understanding of how to achieve your goals moving forward.

And don't forget, if you'd like a more tailored plan, you can always book a session with one of our personal trainers.

There's no time like the present to get started, so start familiarising yourself with step one and, together, we'll start your journey to a fitter you.

WEEK ONE

AN INTRODUCTION TO MUSCLE GROWTH

INSTRUCTIONS AND ADVICE

The first step is simple - it's time to get moving and start lifting. It doesn't matter what your starting point is or how small the changes are that you make, the aim of this week is familiarising yourself with weight training and increasing your daily activity levels.

By improving both your weight training and your overall activity levels, this programme delivers two main benefits:

An improvement of your appearance -

Women who gain muscle mass while remaining relatively lean look tighter, firmer and more toned. Men who gain muscle mass while remaining lean look stronger, larger and more athletic.

An improvement of your health -

Being more active accelerates fat loss and reduces the risk of contracting a range of conditions, including heart disease, strokes and type 2 diabetes. It also improves your self-esteem, reduces symptoms of depression and anxiety, and improves your ability to perform everyday tasks with ease.

HOW TO ACHIEVE MUSCLE GROWTH?

There are no shortcuts to building muscle, but if you follow these pointers you'll soon start to see the difference:

Train hard -

Training focused on improving muscular strength and endurance: weight training, bodyweight training, medicine balls, kettle bells, some forms of yoga.

Eat well -

Striking the right balance of macro and micronutrients to maintain the right calorie balance and aid muscle growth and recovery.

Think about the heart -

Steady-state moderate cardio, encouraging more blood flow to the muscle and thus better recovery.

Stretch more -

Physical exercise in which a specific muscle, tendon or muscle group is deliberately flexed or stretched to improve the muscle's elasticity and achieve muscle tone.

WEEKLY EXERCISE GUIDELINE:

- 3 hours of resistance training
- 10 - 15 minutes of stretching before and after exercising
- 1 - 1.5 hours of moderate steady-state cardio training

One of the main steps towards building muscle is learning how to incorporate resistance training into your weekly routine. We'll start with small changes so that you're properly prepared for weightlifting and become more confident as you go.

SOME WEIGHTLIFTING DOS

Start slow

Making minor amendments to your daily routine cultivates positive habits. If you start gradually, so that you barely notice the change, you'll be more likely to introduce weight increases over time without it ever feeling daunting.

Control the weight

Never use a weight so heavy that you need momentum to lift it. A simple gauge: make sure you can pause for at least one second before lifting a weight to keep your lift controlled.

Posture

An easy way to tell if you're performing exercises correctly is by checking your posture. The correct starting position for most exercises is shoulders back, chest out, standing (or sitting) tall and with your abs tight. Good posture means good form.

Be ready to ache a little

It's likely you'll experience some level of delayed onset muscle soreness (DOMS) in your muscles between 12 and 72 hours after a workout.

If you're no longer experiencing DOMS, it doesn't mean it's time to change your training - it just means you're more used to your regime. Muscles respond to the demands we put on them - ask your muscles to lift more and they'll respond by getting stronger.

BUT WHAT IF I FIND THE FREE-WEIGHTS AREA INTIMIDATING?

Trying something new is often daunting. But remember, everyone in the free-weights area was a beginner at one point.

Here are some tips for going into the Free-weights area for the first time.

Go in with a plan

Wandering around and being unsure of what to do can be disheartening. So, go in knowing what equipment you want to use and head straight for it.

Have a plan B

If you want to start with a bench press but it's taken, simply start with another exercise from the programme. Just remember: the bigger muscle groups come first.

'Work in' with people

If all the equipment is busy, ask someone if you can 'work in' with them, which means you using the equipment during their rest between sets.

Still unsure?

Then just ask one of our friendly staff to point you in the right direction.



YOUR STARTING ROUTINE

To get you started below you'll find two starting routines. The first concentrates on hypertrophy - increasing the size of your skeletal muscle. The second is about maximising strength whilst building muscle.

HYPERTROPHY

EXERCISE	SETS/REPS	NOTES
Warm up and stretch	10 min on any cardio machine	
Squats	3x10-15	
Reverse lunges	3x10-15	
Seated row	3x10-15	
Incline dumbbell press	3x10-15	
Lateral shoulder rise	3x10-15	
Rope pull down	3x10-15	
Swills ball AB crunch	3xfailure	
Cool down and stretch	10 min on any cardio machine	

STRENGTH AND HYPERTROPHY

EXERCISE	SETS/REPS	NOTES
Warm up and stretch	10 min on any cardio machine	
Deadlifts	3x6-8	
Leg press	3x6-8	
Flat chest press	3x6-8	
Assisted pull ups	3x6-8	
Reverse Fly	3x10	
Bicep curls	3x10	
Knee raises	3xfailure	
Cool down and stretch	10 min on any cardio machine	

TIP

All of these exercises can be found on YouTube if you would like some help knowing how to complete them. Alternatively, feel free to ask one of our trainers when in the gym.

WEEK TWO NUTRITION

The next focus is understanding the relationship between Food and muscle building. Here are some simple rules:

Muscles respond to calories

That means most calorie-restricting diets won't really help towards reaching your goal, as your muscles will have insufficient fuel to keep going or recover.

Give your muscles proteins

Protein is an essential nutrient that helps build tissue, cells and muscle, and helps produce hormones and antibodies. Everyone needs protein in their diet, especially those looking to build muscle, who also need to factor protein intake into their training routine at specific times to maximise its muscle-building benefits.

Carb up

Consider carbohydrate as fuel for the body. Lifters need carbs to build muscle, perform well and feel great. Not all carbs are good for you, though - scroll down for a range of nutrient-dense "Power Foods" that will boost your training regime.

Fats don't make you fat

Or at least the right types of fat don't. Fat is an essential macronutrient involved in keeping hormone levels in check and regulating blood-glucose levels and insulin response. Dietary fat is also calorie-dense and so helps build muscle.

Working out your calories

The more physical activity you do, the more calories you'll need so that you don't experience a calorie deficit and start to lose muscle instead of growing it.

An easy way to work out how many calories you need to build muscle is to multiply your weight in pounds by 15-17.5 kcal. This is an estimate calculation providing that you exercise 3-4 times a week following the routines in the Muscle Building programme. If you would like a more in-depth assessment and support with your nutrition plan

then please speak to one of our expert personal trainers. You can also look out for a TDEE (Total daily energy expenditure) calculator online and ensure you consume 10-15% more calories than your average expenditure.

Create 'better lifts' eating habits

The better your eating habits, the better you lift. With that in mind, pace out your meals evenly and try not to skip any. Plan to have a meal approximately 1.5 hours before training and a meal within 45 minutes afterwards. Oh, and don't scrimp on breakfast - a good morning meal gives a real kick to your metabolism.

Striking the right balance

Food is energy and when you want to build muscle you need to consider your "energy balance" - the relationship between "energy in" (food calories taken in through food and drink) and "energy out" (calories going out as energy requirements).

But it's called a "balance" for a reason. Too much "energy in" (through overfeeding or under-exercising) and the body stores this excess energy as fat, leading to the wrong kind of weight gain.

Whilst too much "energy out" (through underfeeding or over-exercising) can lead to a decline in metabolism and physical performance, a decrease in muscle and bone mass, a reduction in thyroid function and testosterone levels, and reduced concentration.

Your muscle-building diet requires a positive calorie balance. The aim is to stimulate the body to have enough calories to take you through the day, maximise your workout and rebuild the muscles after training.

SUMMING UP YOUR NUTRITION

- **Eat Five meals a day** - including breakfast
- **Eat soon after working out** - a meal comprising approximately 30g protein and 30g high GI carbohydrates
- **Protein shakes and supplements are fine** - just remember to include them towards your calorie goal
- **Don't avoid Fats** - they are the most calorie-dense macronutrients (9 calories per gram)

TASK

Every couple of days over the next two weeks, try to add something new and healthy to your diet and say goodbye to at least two eating habits you know are slowing your progress.

POWER FOODS

- | | | | |
|--|------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| • Lean red meat | (Protein) | • Whole oats | (Carb) |
| • Salmon | (Protein) | • Raw mixed nuts (unsalted) | (Fat) |
| • Eggs | (Protein) | • Avocados | (Fat) |
| • Chicken / Turkey | (Protein) | • Omega 3 Fish oil | (Fat/supplement) |
| • Spirulina | (Protein) | • Olive oil | (Fat) |
| • Spinach | (Vegetable/carb) | • Coconut oil | (Fat) |
| • Cruciferous veg | (Vegetable/carb) | • Green tea | (Teas) |
| <small>(cauliflower, cabbage, bok choy, broccoli, sprouts)</small> | | • Green drinks | (Vegetable concentrate / supplement) |
| • Mixed berries | (Fruit /carb) | • Curcumin / Turmeric | (Spice) |
| • Orange | (Fruit /carb) | • Cinnamon | (Spice) |
| • Mixed beans / peas | (Carb/protein) | • Garlic | (Spice) |
| • Quinoa | (Carb) | | |



WEEK THREE PROGRESSING YOUR TRAINING

Having set your initial pace and explained the Fundamentals of muscle building, it's now time to take your training up a notch. When it comes to muscle building there are a few workout variables you can change to get more from your workout.

- **Increase the weight being lifted** - If you're currently lifting 50kg on an exercise, try and lift 55kg next time
- **Increase the number of reps** - If you're lifting 50kg on an exercise for three sets of eight reps, next time try three sets of nine reps with that same weight
- **Increase the number of sets** - If you're lifting 50kg on an exercise for three sets of eight reps, next time try four sets of eight reps with that same weight
- **Increase the amount of work being done in a given time** - If you're currently resting three minutes between sets, try lifting the same weight for the same amount of sets and reps but reducing the resting time by 30 seconds
- **Increase the exercise difficulty** - If you're currently doing split squats/static lunges, you can graduate to a more challenging version of the same exercise, such as walking lunges or Bulgarian split squats



SPLIT-TRAINING ROUTINE 1

For the next few weeks, focus on split training rather than full-body workouts, starting with an upper/lower body split, and then proceed to training separate muscle groups on different days.

Here are two upper/lower body routines to work through at the gym. Both routines have the same exercises, however we have offered two options for your cardio training – in the morning or straight after your work out. The best one for you will depend on your free time.

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
A.M	A.M	A.M	A.M	A.M	Rest	Rest
Cardio 20 mins	Rest	Cardio 20 mins	Cardio 20 mins	Rest		
P.M	P.M	P.M	P.M	P.M		
Upper	Lower	Rest	Upper	Lower		
Bench press 4 x 8-10	Squats 4 x 8-10		Lat pull down 4 x 8-10	Deadlifts 4 x 8		
Incline dumbbell press 4 x 8-10	Leg press 4 x 8-10		Single arm row 4 x 8-10	Dumbbell romanian deadlifts 4 x 10-12		
Bent over barbell row 4 x 8-10	Walking lunges (Dumbbell or barbell) 4 x 10 each direction		Overhead barbell press 4 x 8-10 Dumbbell arnold press 4 x 8-10	Single leg deadlifts 4 x 10 each side		
Seated row machine (wide grip) 4 x 8-10	Hipthrusts (barbell) 4 x 8-10		Shoulder triset (complete 3 times with 1:30 rest between circuits): Dumbbell press light x 10 Front raise x 15 Lat raise x 15	Hamstring curl 4 x 10-12		
Pec fly superset with rear delt fly 4 x 8-10 each	Leg extensions 4 x 10-12 Plank 4 x 1:00		Dumbbell tricep extension 4 x 8-10	Hanging leg raises 4 x 10-20 (depending on ability)		
EZ bar skullcrushers 4 x 10-12			Hammer curls 4 x 8-10	Farmer's walks 4 x length of weights area and back		
Dumbbell bicep curls 4 x 10-12						

SPLIT-TRAINING ROUTINE 2

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
Upper	Lower	Rest	Upper	Lower	Rest	Rest
Bench press 4 x 8-10	Squats 4 x 8-10		Lat pull down 4 x 8-10	Deadlifts 4 x 8		
Incline dumbbell press 4 x 8-10	Leg press 4 x 8-10		Single arm row 4 x 8-10	Dumbbell romanian deadlifts 4 x 10-12		
Bent over barbell row 4 x 8-10	Walking lunges (Dumbbell or barbell) 4 x 10 each direction		Overhead barbell press 4 x 8-10 Dumbbell Arnold press 4 x 8-10	Single leg deadlifts 4 x 10 each side		
Seated row machine (wide grip) 4 x 8-10	Hipthrusts (barbell) 4 x 8-10		Shoulder triset (complete 3 times with 1:30 rest between circuits): Dumbbell press light x 10 Front raise x 15 Lat raise x 15	Hamstring curl 4 x 10-12		
Pec fly superset with rear delt fly 4 x 8-10 each	Leg extensions 4 x 10-12		Dumbbell tricep extension 4 X 8-10	Hanging leg raises 4 x 10-20 (depending on ability)		
EZ bar skullcrushers 4 x 10-12	Plank 4 x 1:00		Hammer curls 4 x 8-10	Farmer's walks 4 x length of weights area and back		
Dumbbell bicep Curls 4 x 10-12						
Cardio 20 mins			Cardio 20 mins			

HIGH-INTENSITY INTERVAL TRAINING (HIIT)

Want to challenge yourself a little bit more? Then HIIT is a great way to improve your total fitness. HIIT describes any workout that alternates periods of very intense activity and periods of rest or low-intensity activity. For example, performing 200m sprints with two minutes of rest in between sets.

It's ideal for those looking to build muscle without getting too big, or if you want to keep your fitness up while maintaining the muscle you have and burning a few extra calories.

So, can HIIT be done alongside a muscle-building programme? Definitely.

Check your local gym's class timetable - something like a circuits or Origin class will add a great kick to your routine.

DON'T FORGET TO CARDIO

If muscle building is your aim, there's no doubt most of your time should be spent in the weights area. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't consider a bit of cardio from time to time.

Contrary to some opinions, doing the right kind of cardio in the right way and at the right time won't hurt your muscle gain – and it might actually help you build.

We recommend performing 20 to 30 minutes of LISS (low-intensity steady state) cardio two to three times a week, operating at no more than 60-70% of your maximum heart rate.



WEEK FOUR

THE IMPORTANCE OF REST

Well done for getting so far into your muscle-building programme. So far, you will have lifted some weights, started to change your eating habits and experienced your first DOMS.

And, as a reward, we think a bit of rest is in order.

WHY IS REST IMPORTANT?

Simple: to give the body time to build muscle tissue. Which means rest is just as crucial to your efforts as the physical training.

Rest and sleep is one of the most important aspects of building muscle weight. If you don't get enough sleep each night, you're neglecting a very important part of your programme that could completely erase all of your muscle-building efforts in the gym.

How much sleep you need depends on your daily activity level, the intensity of your workouts, the quality of your diet and even the amount of stress in your life. Recent studies have shown that getting fewer than six hours of sleep each night can seriously affect your coordination, reaction time, judgement, overall health and, crucially, your body's ability to build muscle.

HOW TO GET THE BEST REST

Aim for at least 8 hours of sleep at night - Lack of sleep results in decreased energy levels and increased catabolic (muscle-destroying) hormones. While we sleep, we go in and out of the "sleep cycle", a very important time during which the body releases the growth hormone.

Avoid late exercising - Choose activities that will help your heart rate slow down and unwind from the long day. Allow two to three hours between exercising and going to bed.

Don't eat before bed - Your body stays awake to digest your food so don't give it work to do before bedtime. You should particularly avoid carbs, which spike your energy levels. If you need a snack before bed, go for something high in protein and easy to digest.

Don't work before bed - Every stress factor causes our bodies to produce cortisol, the "stress hormone". Prolonged and elevated levels of cortisol can lead to the breakdown of proteins and muscle wasting.

Don't train the same muscle group consecutively - Muscles need 48 to 72 hours to repair, so don't be tempted to overwork them. Most importantly, look for signs that the body needs a break, like muscle or joint soreness and impaired physical performance. Be sure to recognise the difference between pain and soreness, and most of all don't be afraid to take some time off - you should have rest days every week that are totally training-free.

WEEK FIVE HYDRATION AND FLUID INTAKE

Around 60% of our body is comprised of water - a figure that's even higher when it comes to our organs (our livers, for example, are nearly 95% water). As a result, water plays a crucial role in building muscle.

Water shuttles nutrients throughout our body and helps rid it of toxins. It helps digest and get the goodness from vitamins. It regulates our body temperature. It lubricates joints, aids digestion and promotes healthy skin. Essentially, water plays a role in every chemical reaction within our cells.

Drinking water reduces water retention

When your body doesn't get enough water, it holds onto what it has. This is a simple survival mechanism, where your body holds onto and stores what it doesn't think it will get in the future.

Once you start drinking more water, your body recognises that it's getting a steady external supply and starts letting go of the water weight it's been holding. Water retention in your waist, face and ankles is released because there's no longer a reason for your body to store it. The result? You look leaner and your muscle tone will become more defined.

Water makes you a more efficient muscle builder

In order to move and flex your muscles, you need water, so if your body is dehydrated then your muscles will be deprived of electrolytes and will cramp up. Muscles are controlled by nerves, so without a proper water intake and electrolyte balance, muscle strength will be adversely affected. It's essential, therefore, that you stay hydrated if you want to build muscle.

How much water should you drink?

According to the British Dietetic Association guidelines, an average adult should consume 2.5L of water daily. This intake may be increased during periods of hot weather and physical activity.

You may not be thirsty at first, but as your body starts to let the water it's been holding onto go, you'll be thirsty more often.

TASK

For the next week, we want you to build good hydrating habits. Get yourself a water bottle you can carry and focus on getting through at least 2.5L per day - preferably 3L. Over the next couple of weeks, you'll notice drinking regularly becomes more natural and you'll find yourself wanting water more frequently.



WEEK SIX

GOAL-SETTING AND TRACKING

You now have all the required tools and steps to start building muscle and improving your overall health and well-being - decreasing your risk of ailments and illness and helping your mind function better. We hope you're feeling the positive effects already.

The next step is to start setting goals and tracking your progress. Setting goals helps you:

- Create a positive mindset and prioritise your time and energy
- Be committed. Having definable goals makes you accountable so that you feel obliged to act
- Break down big ambitions into achievable, trackable steps. Keep your goals attainable and the sense of reward will be much greater.

Getting SMART

But how to create a goal that is appropriate for you? First of all, set a vision statement for yourself: a dress or trouser size you want to attain; to be beach-body-ready for your next holiday and beyond; to live a more energetic life. However big or small, write your vision statement down and put it in a place you will regularly see it.

With that in place, it's time to work on the goals to get you there - and to do this means setting SMART goals that are:

S - SPECIFIC: Your goal should be well-defined and clear to a stranger if you told them.

M - MEASURABLE: Choose a goal you can measure. Weight, for example, is measurable, and using FitQuest you can also measure Body Composition, including Muscle Mass.

A - ACTION-ORIENTATED: You must set out clear actions that will see you achieve your goal. Use the steps in the guide for inspiration.

R - REALISTIC: It has to be achievable within your desired timeframe. It's better to start small and over-deliver than set big goals that you'll struggle to achieve. Be sure to consider other commitments, such as work, family and social life, and plan your goals accordingly.

T - TIME-BASED: There has to be a timeframe or you'll never know if you've succeeded.

A good SMART goal:

My goal is to put on 2kg of muscle this month and a further 2kg next month. I'll track my progress using FitQuest and will do the following:

- Complete my training routines at least three times this week
- Add "Power Foods" to my diet and increase the amount of good calories I'm eating
- Keep fit by doing cardio or HIIT once or twice a week
- Increase my fluid intake to 3L a day
- Sleep for eight hours every working day of the week

Some not-so-SMART goals:

- **My goal is to put on muscle.**

This is too woolly and non-specific. How much muscle would you like to gain? What is your desired look? How much time do you have?

- **I'm going on holiday next month and want to increase the size of my biceps by 4 cm.**

This isn't realistic, is too focused on one muscle group and has no clear and trackable action plan.



A BIG THANK YOU FROM THE GYM GROUP

We want to thank you for deciding to make a change in your life - a decision that is not always easy - and for choosing to follow our 6-Step muscle-building guide to achieve your aims.

Once you have completed all six steps, you'll be well on the way to becoming a fitter and happier you. It takes motivation, dedication and a little organisation, but with your determination and our support we know that, together, we'll find your fit.

And, of course, if you need any further support don't hesitate to email, call, drop in to one of our gyms or contact us on social media.

All the very best,

Your Gym Group Team