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## How to Start Bodybuilding for Women

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By M.L. Rose



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Bodybuilding involves more than just adding muscle mass. Competitive bodybuilders, in particular, strive for strong but chiseled physiques with a low percentage of body fat. Bodybuilding presents a special challenge to women, due in part to their lower levels of testosterone. But a sound, overall program can help you enter the competitive world of bodybuilding or simply emulate the competitive bodybuilder's physique. Even though you won't gain the same results as men, women bodybuilders should train basically the same as their male counterparts.

## Build Strength

As a new bodybuilder, focus on compound exercises that build several muscle groups at once. Bodybuilders must develop muscles across the body, not just the major muscle groups. For example, performing pullups or chinups will help build a stronger back, shoulders and upper arms, but they also work your forearms. Deadlifts strengthen your thighs and glutes, and also your lower back. Other suitable beginner exercises include squats, lunges, pushups, rows, overhead presses, dips and planks. Book a session with a trainer to ensure you're using the correct form. For weighted exercises, use the heaviest weight you can lift five to eight times. Trainer Nia Shanks recommends that beginners do three total-body workouts per week, with at least one rest day between sessions.

## Cardio to Cut Calories

Regular cardio exercise should be a part of your routine to increase your calorie burn and begin trimming fat. But trainer and bodybuilder Tami Bellon recommends doing no more than 45 minutes of steady-pace cardio or 30 minutes of interval training per session, to avoid losing muscle mass. Choose from activities such as running, bike riding, swimming or using an elliptical machine. MuscledStrength.com suggests a cardio routine starting with 10 to 15 minutes of interval training plus 15 to 30 minutes of steady-pace cardio, performed two to four times per week.

## Eat Smart

Eat a diet based on fresh foods -- featuring plenty of vegetables and lean meats -- while avoiding processed foods. Overall, your diet should include about 40 percent protein, 40 percent carbohydrates and 20 percent good fats -- such as the essential fatty acids found in many fish. If your body contains more than 12 percent fat, eat fewer calories that you consume to emphasize losing fat. But once your body fat falls below 12 percent, you'll need to eat more to help gain muscle mass.

## Pour on the Protein

Building muscle requires protein, which your body can't manufacture on its own, so you must consume sufficient protein to support your muscle-building efforts. MuscledStrength.com recommends women involved in strength training consume 1.4 to 2 grams of protein per kilogram of body weight -- or 0.6 to 0.9 grams per pound -- each day. Space your protein intake out across your day, eating foods such as eggs, poultry, lean beef, fish and tofu. You can also drink whey protein shakes.



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## References

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- [Lift Like a Girl: The Women's Beginner Strength Training Guide to Lift Like a Girl & Look Absolutely Awesome](#)
- [Breaking Muscle: The Female Guide to Getting Lean](#)
- [Labrada Nutrition: Introduction to a Bodybuilding Diet](#)
- [Shape: True Life: I'm a Female Bodybuilder](#)

## About the Author

M.L. Rose has worked as a print and online journalist for more than 20 years. He has contributed to a variety of national and local publications, specializing in sports writing. Rose holds a B.A. in communications.



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