**5 Tips to Better Arms**

1. Train Your Triceps
2. Expand beyond single-joint movements for Biceps
3. Time Under Tension
4. Partial Reps
5. High Reps
6. **Train Your Triceps**

Now depending on your experience in the gym and knowledge of human anatomy, you may or may not have guessed that your Triceps are named so for a reason; the muscle has three muscular heads. Similarly so, the biceps are named so for the fact that the muscle has two muscular heads. Simple math with reveal that 3>2 and therefore is a key concept in obtaining bigger and stronger arms! This is the simplest answer, but let us dive into exactly how this should be done! The triceps function to both extend the elbow and move your arm down towards the body. As mentioned the triceps are comprised of three heads; the medial, the long, and the lateral head. Each head of the triceps can be optimally trained through manipulation in elbows position and angle.

**Lateral head (outer head):**

Optimal elbow position: Stationary and tucked to your side

Optimal Exercises: Rope Triceps Extensions, Dumbbell Kickbacks, Triceps Dips

**Long head (the back/inner head):**

Optimal elbow position: Overhead or any position allowing a full stretch of the Triceps

Optimal Exercises: Overhead Triceps Extensions, Lying Triceps Extensions, Close-grip bench press

**Medial head (the inner/middle head):**

Optimal elbow position: Overhead or in front of the body

Optimal Exercises: Seated Triceps Extensions, Overhead Triceps Extensions, Close-grip bench press

\*While the list of exercises will target the specific head, it is important to understand that the triceps is one muscle and each head will be affected to a degree when working through each exercise.

\*The listed exercises are great to target each head, but are NOT the only exercises to do so.

1. **Expand Beyond Single-joint Movements for Biceps**

Now that we have given the triceps their due-respect, let’s talk about the front of our arms, the biceps. The biceps function opposite to that of the triceps in flexion of the elbow and in minor roles of assisting the shoulder in moving the arm forward, upward and outward. This means that the biceps function at two separate joints; the elbow and the shoulder. If you were to walk into any gym and ask a gym-goer for an exercise to work your biceps, I am willing to bet they will direct you to some variation of a bicep curl. While the bicep curl is inevitably a great bicep exercise, it will limit your ambitious dreams of having sleeve-busting arms. Why? Because the bicep curl is a single-joint movement (elbow) that inhibits us with relatively light workloads. This is where we introduce the idea of the utilization of compound movements to overload the biceps.

Now, it is important to understand that the biceps is a secondary muscle to almost any exercise that targets the muscles of the back. If you don’t believe me, look at a gymnast and tell me they don’t have impressive biceps. I doubt many are sitting doing countless biceps curls! While they maybe secondary, by intentionally manipulating back workouts in your method of pulling, you can stress the biceps while utilizing a much heavier workload than you could through a standard bicep curl.

Examples of Compound Exercises for the Biceps:

-Medium-grip pronated (overhand) and supinated (underhand) Pullups/Pulldowns

 \*remain upright and allow for a full stretch of the bicep by coming all the way down on the pull up or allowing the weight to return all the way up on pulldowns

-Pronated and Supinated seated cable rows

 \*we are not focusing on the back so focus staying upright, if not slightly forward, and pull with your biceps

-Supinated Bent-over Barbell Rows

 \*hold and squeeze at the end of the concentric portion allowing complete control of the weight

1. **Time Under Tension (TUT)**

Time under tension refers to the time that you are performing a movement that induces metabolic stress to the muscle throughout a set while maintaining a continued cadences that negates lock out time. For example, two sets of equal tempo close-grip bench press with one at 10 reps while the other achieving 20 reps, would yield different TUT’s. The 20 reps set would obviously be longer. Understanding this simple concept can allot for more advanced training strategies other than just moving the weight from point A to point B.

TUT can be manipulated to induce larger effects of hypertrophy and muscular swelling which in turn will localize more hormone and nutrient-rich blood to the muscle being worked. Additionally, TUT allows for more specialized control in training Type 1 and Type 2 muscle fibers. Type 1 muscle fibers, or slow-twitch fibers, are slower fatiguing and less force-producing in comparison to powerful fast-twitch Type 2 muscle fibers.

Next time you are performing a biceps or triceps workout, forget the amount of reps you are aiming for and set a timer on your phone/watch! Give different times like 30, 45, 60, or even 90 seconds of continued tension a try and feel the burn, while watching the pump!

1. **Partial Reps**

As the name implies, partial reps are segments of a full range of motion (ROM) for a given exercise. For example, in a dumbbell bicep curl, you could curl from the starting point to a 90 degree angle, and return back to the starting point. Comparatively you could also start from 90 degrees and reach your peak contraction while returning back to 90 degrees and controlling the weight back up to the peak contraction.

Training in partial ranges is an awesome way to break plateaus and overall increase volume in your training regiment, with the caveat that you equally, if not more, train full ROM. Think about it, if you want to push yourself and curl around 90% 1RM, you would likely get 2-3 reps in. With partial reps you can achieve more reps at a 90% RPE in which you can then follow with a lighter weight and perform full ROM or just neglected range of motion. Overall volume has been increased, while maintaining the integrity of a complete contraction. Partial reps do an amazing job at training the lengthen (not fully contracted) and shortened (contracted) fibers, which in turn lead to more mechanical stress, metabolic stress, and muscle damage—all good things!

1. **High Reps**

While a very important topic, I plan to keep this section short as it is common sense and has been covered throughout the first four keys. If you ask a powerlifter how to get better arms, they may tell you to lift heavier weights. If you ask a bodybuilder how to get better arms, they may tell you to lift within the 8-12 rep range. While both groups are not wrong, training in ranges that exceed 15, 20, and even 30 reps DO have their place and CAN produce some amazing results.

First off, it is extremely important to know that by doing higher reps you will not “tone” anything. You will not lose gains. And it is not pointless. While I encourage a heavier workload be implemented in you routine triceps training due to their predominately fast twitch muscle fiber composition, high rep ranges are extremely beneficial at times. The biceps are comprised of slow twitch muscle fibers more so than triceps, allowing for even more benefits in training high rep ranges. One final important factor when training with high volume sets, 30-50% 1RM, is that you should always aim to near failure. So in efforts to hit a 30 rep set, make sure that you are pushing yourself on those last few reps, maintaining that mind-muscle connection.