

UPPER BODY TRAINING

There is more to a bikini body than great legs and glutes

By Michelle Brannan

We all know most women want firm glutes and a great set of legs but there seems to be so much emphasis on lower body training now that the upper body is in danger of being neglected. I know I was guilty of this when I started training.

Skipping upper body workouts can make you look bottom heavy, untrained or flabby up top. By contrast, a trained upper body in conjunction with a firm lower half balances your physique.

I think women steer clear of training their upper bodies through fear of looking manly. I often hear females say 'I want to tone up but I don't want muscle', particularly if they're new to weight training.

This is a misleading statement because there is no such thing as 'toning up'. We basically have body fat, muscle, skin and bone structure.

To get that 'toned' look you need to gradually lose body fat so the skin sits tighter on the muscle. As well as dieting to achieve this, you should incorporate a resistance-training programme to firm and shape your muscles. That is where 'tone' comes from.

It takes time and consistency to achieve this look. How much muscle you build and how much body fat you lose will determine how toned you look but remember: most women cannot increase muscle mass significantly, especially in their upper bodies, so don't worry about getting 'bulky' or 'manly'.

My advice therefore is if you want toned-looking arms and back then get weight training.

BENEFITS OF UPPER BODY TRAINING

- Better overall appearance
- Better posture and proportion
- Increased strength to carry out everyday tasks
- Wider shoulders create the illusion of a smaller waist and a curvier look

Most women only have to train upper body twice a week to get a bikini body. The two sessions should focus on different muscle groups. Here are three typical splits you can choose from:

Split 1

- A Chest and back
- B Shoulders and arms

Split 2

- A Back and arms
- B Chest and shoulders

Split 3

- A Back and shoulders
- B Chest and arms

SEXY BACK

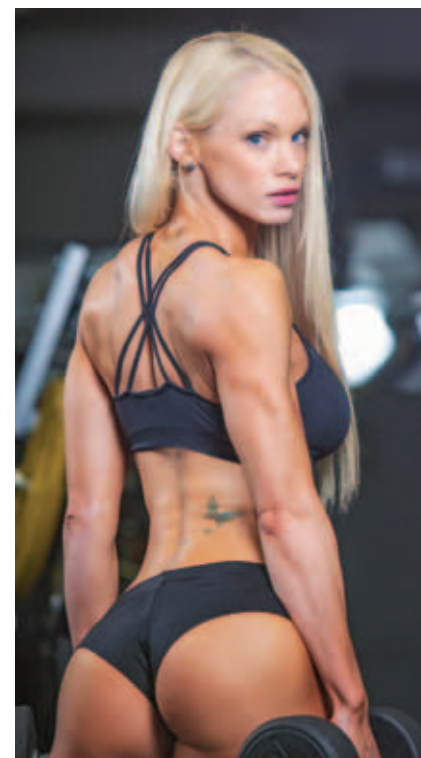
Think carefully about your choice of exercises and don't just copy what men do. You probably don't want huge trapezius muscles so steer clear of shoulder shrugs and upright barbell rows.

But you probably do want nicely developed shoulders and a shapely back so do lots of exercises that work these muscle groups.

Strong is the new skinny and few things look sexier on a woman than a well-toned back. It looks great in a backless dress or vest.

Try these exercises for a great back:

- 4 x 12 wide-grip lat pulldown
- 4 x 12 overhand wide-grip seated row
- 4 x 12 standing lat pulldown
- 4 x 12 single-arm dumbbell row
- 4 x 12 rear delt machine



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PERFECT SHOULDERS

Shoulder training is extremely important for women. Adding a shoulder cap or side delt and getting some width in your shoulders helps to create the illusion of a smaller waist, which makes you look more feminine.

The deltoids create the rounded look to the shoulder: they consist of the anterior deltoid (front), posterior deltoid (rear) and lateral deltoid (side).

Rear delts are commonly trained with back and front delts are often trained with chest as some of the muscle functions overlap.

Try this to cap your shoulders:

- 4 x 12 Standing side lateral raise with cables
- 4 x 12 Lean away lateral raise
- 4 x 12 Seated shoulder press machine
- 4 x 12 Incline bench prone dumbbell lateral raise or rear delt machine
- 4 x 12 Cable front raise

SHOULD YOU TRAIN CHEST?

This is a common question among new and experienced female lifters.

The answer is yes, of course you should. Training your pectoral or chest muscles will help to keep your body balanced if you are training your back and shoulders.

You ideally want to incorporate an equal number of push and pull exercises to avoid becoming overly dominant in any area. This will help your posture and prevent injuries.

I generally recommend women train their pectoral muscles with dumbbells for a greater range of motion or with a machine if they want to add more weight.

Try this pectoral workout for a firm chest:

- 4 x 12 Chest press machine
- 4 x 12 Incline dumbbell chest press
- 4 x 12 Incline dumbbell chest flye
- 4 x 12 Flat bench pullover
- 4 x 12 Standing cable chest flye

STRONG ARMS

Most women don't want bulging biceps with veins but some shape in the arms looks a lot better than bingo wings. I usually recommend super-setting biceps and triceps exercises together to save time, burn off fat and develop some shape in the arms.

Try this arms workout:

Superset 1

- 4 x 12 Incline seated dumbbell biceps curl
- 4 x 12 Cable triceps kickback

Superset 2

- 4 x 12 Triceps rope pushdown
- 4 x 12 Bicep rope biceps curl

Superset 3

- 4 x 12 Triceps dip on dip assist or bench
- 4 x 12 Seated dumbbell hammer curl **M&F**

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is a British IFBB pro bikini fitness competitor. She won the 2012 British Grand Prix, competed at the 2013 Bikini Olympia and runs a training team called Showgirl Fitness. For more information visit showgirlfitness.com.



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