

Shoulder Shaping

MICHELLE BRANNAN on how to improve your aesthetics by targeting the delts.

SHOULDER TRAINING is a fundamental part of creating a bikini body. Nicely sculpted shoulders give the illusion of a smaller waist and help to create a better overall aesthetic balance between the upper and lower body.

Some women avoid upper body training because they don't want to look manly. But shoulder workouts can make you look fit and toned rather than bulky, as well as develop strength. Let me explain how.

The deltoids are made up of three muscles:

- **Posterior deltoid, or rear delt.**
- **Lateral deltoid, or side delt.**
- **Anterior deltoid, or front delt.**

You need to work all three of these to develop well-rounded shoulders. They're small muscles and do not need excessively heavy loads for optimal results. In fact, heavy training can be counter-productive because it can cause injuries due to the complex nature of the shoulder joint. It is far better to isolate the muscles using light-to-moderate weights and correct form.

THE SHOULDER TRAP

To sculpt a feminine shape, you need to be careful not to work the upper trapezius muscles. Big traps detract from aesthetics so you should avoid certain exercises, particularly upright rows and shrugs, and pay close attention to technique.

For example, it is common for the upper trapezius to take over when you're doing a lateral raise due to incorrect form, using a weight that is too heavy, poor recruitment patterns and posture or a combination of all of these factors. Over time, this can result in large traps and under-developed side delts, which give an unattractive shape, particularly in a female.

To ensure you don't engage the upper traps

- ▶ **Correct your posture:** learn how to pull your shoulder blades down and hold this position before you start training, if you have problems with this or roll your shoulders upwards or forwards, you might want to visit a physiotherapist for advice. You may find you have an imbalance or weakness that is impacting your

range of movement or tightness that is pulling your shoulders forward.

- ▶ **Reduce the weight and think about the movement.**
- ▶ **Try using a back rest.** This will stop you swinging your body.
- ▶ **Do more isolation and supported exercises,** such as incline bench lateral raises.

- ▶ **Look in the mirror whilst training.** Checking your form is a great way to ensure you are doing the exercise properly.

As a general rule, I recommend devoting one full training session to shoulders each week and supplement this with additional lateral work once or twice a week. If your shoulders are

weak, you could even consider training them twice a week and doing supplementary side delt exercises.

KEY EXERCISES

Side Delts

Seated Dumbbell Lateral Raises

These are the foundation to well sculpted shoulders. I always try to incorporate lots of different varieties

of lateral raises into all bikini body plans. Sit on a bench with your knees bent at 90-degree angles and hold a dumbbell in each hand. Then raise your arms up and out the side, with your thumbs pointing downwards, keeping your arms relatively straight but do not lock the elbows. Your hands should elevate to just above shoulder height but not higher than



SEATED DUMBBELL LATERAL RAISES



LEAN AWAY LATERAL RAISES

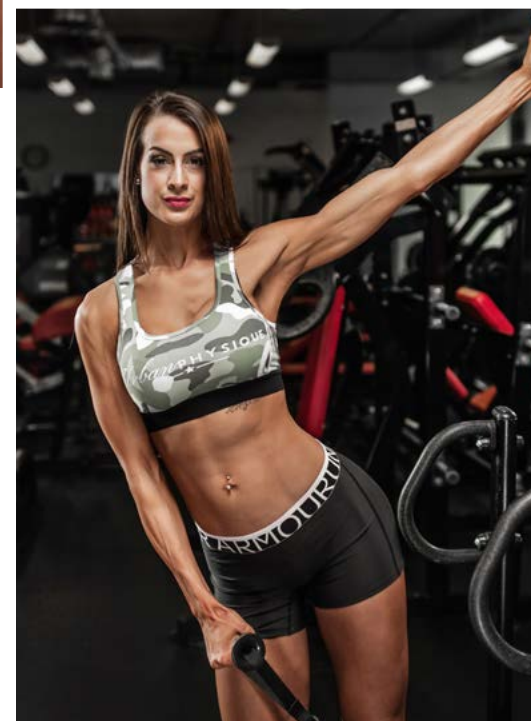
your head and they should be held slightly in front of your body. Doing this exercise seated with a back rest is a good way of ensuring good form. You can do it standing but make sure you have nailed your form first.

Lean Away Lateral Raises

Stand with a dumbbell in one hand and hold onto a fixed pole or cable machine with the other. Lean slightly away from where you are holding so your body is on a slight angle then raise the free arm up and out to the side. Do not lock the elbows. Repeat with the other hand. This exercise uses the weight of the dumbbell and gravity to work the side delts.

SAMPLE SHOULDER TRAINING ROUTINE

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS
SIMPLE SETS		
Single arm cable lateral raises	7	10
Machine shoulder press	5	10
SUPERSET		
Seated rear delt flye machine	5	10
Seated dumbbell lateral raises	5	10
SIMPLE SETS		
Single arm cable front raises	5	10
Single arm lateral raises on incline bench	4	10



SHOULDER PRESS

Cable Lateral Raises

This is a similar action to dumbbell lateral raises but you use a cable machine and usually perform it standing. Lower the cable to the floor then select the weight and grasp the handle. Ensure you stand straight with good posture and bring the cable up and out to the side, following the same instruction points for seated dumbbell lateral raises.

Front Delts

Front raises

These can be done with dumbbells, a barbell, a weight plate or a cable, using one hand or two. You can also vary your hand position from supinated, semi-supinated and pronated for variation. For the standard version, stand with a dumbbell in each hand, feet shoulder with apart. Engage your core and, keeping your arms relatively straight but without locking the elbow, lift one arm at a time in front of you to approximately head height and return the weight to your side.

Shoulder Press

This is a good all round exercise that works mainly the front delt but also uses the other shoulder muscles as well as the triceps, latissimus dorsi and biceps. The press can be executed on a machine, which most gyms have or you can use dumbbells. For the dumbbell version, sit on a bench with a back support. Hold a dumbbell in each hand and raise your arms either side of your face until there is a 90 degree bend at the elbow. Lift the dumbbells over your head and lower down again.

Chest press

Many women avoid training chest but the chest press is useful for working the front delts as well as the pecs. You can do them lying on a bench or using a chest press machine.

Rear Delts

Incline dumbbell raises

Incline a weights bench to about a 30-degree angle and place some dumbbell alongside it. Lie face down and do the same movement as a lateral raise. Keep the weight reasonably light and squeeze at the top of the movement. Ensure your traps are not working.

The rear delts are often the trickiest of the shoulder muscles to target. A rear delt flye machine is another good exercise; you're supported and can only really use the muscles intended. You can also work the rear delts using cables.



ABOUT MICHELLE

Michelle Brannan is an IFBB bikini pro. She also runs a coaching team called Showgirl Fitness and the online training subscription resource BodySculpt Pro. michellebrannan.com.