

Have you ever wondered what would happen if the sculptor chiselled themselves instead of marble or clay?

Bodybuilding is more than just a sport or art form.

Bodybuilders live for their bodies, as an artist lives for their craft. They are one and the same.

Physique sports are more than just lifting weights: this is not powerlifting.

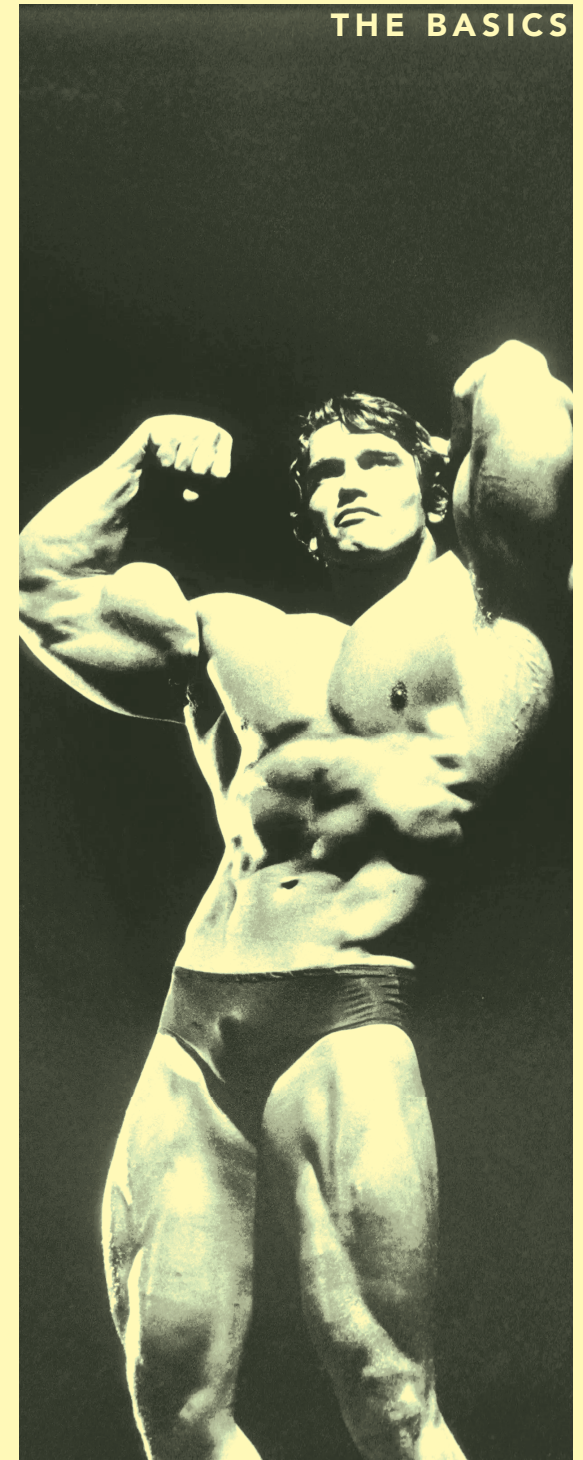
Every day of the year has been programmed as part of a training block — It's a lifestyle: on-point nutrition, optimized training, prioritized recovery and isolation.

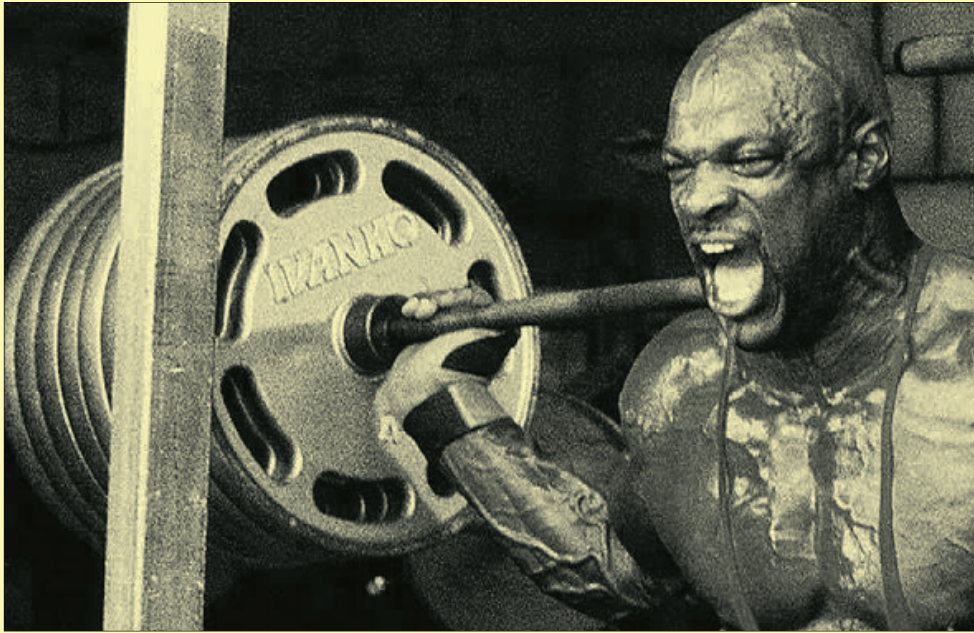
Every meal, every hour of sleep, every rep.

Bodybuilding happens when you become your ultimate project; and nothing else matters remotely as much.

BUILDING SCULPTED

THE BASICS





Ronnie Coleman, 8x Mr Olympia Winner, squatting a suprahuman amount of weight.

Generally, bodybuilding refers to the practice of “progressive resistance training to build, control and develop one’s muscles via hypertrophy”. In other words: training to grow one’s muscles to fit a specific physique or shape.

Yes, that’s right. If you, yes, you, have ever gone to the gym in order to grow a particular muscle of yours (most likely, either chest, biceps or glutes, let’s not pretend), you bodybuilt to

some degree, it may appear.

But, chances are that you haven’t, really. And that is because the nature of bodybuilding isn’t necessarily conducive to recreation.

Point being, those who practice bodybuilding simply know you cannot do it part-time. In any other sport, you can casually play a match of it. Who hasn’t shot hoops with their friends during recess, or on the weekend?

Bodybuilding simply does not work that way.



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The only exception to this rule is Women's Fitness. In the right hand page, you will see a picture of 2025 Olympia Champion for this division: Michelle Fredua-Mensah. The difference between this division and the rest, as you can see, is that although top-level competitors are both shredded and muscular; this particular category

does not have a standard physique proportion to abide by, as they don't solely give points for physicality. Fitness Olympians have two routines: a posing routine

(a bodybuilding standard) and an acrobatic routine

(see still in the horizontal photo), where athletes get to showcase their gymnastic, acrobatic and dance skills.

This is the only instance in competitive bodybuilding where active athletic performance is evaluated.

Active athletic performance is a tremendous part of bodybuilding, despite not

being evaluated on stage for the rest of the divisions. The lack of this evaluation is the main struggle competitive bodybuilding has had to face for as long as it has been

an industry as it is the main argument people use to question it. Is bodybuilding a sport? A beauty pageant?

I like to tackle this question in the following fashion:

Bodybuilding is a year-around effort. Nobody can sit down, televise, stream or even accurately follow (maybe me, but I am obsessed), the constant act of bodybuilding in real time. Therefore,

it would be unrealistic to expect to a performance of its execution when it is done long-term. Bodybuilding isn't just "lifting weights". That alone can be programmed in an infinite amount of ways. It's that, in addition to everything else that follows, and I've briefly covered in this book. Hence, competitive bodybuilding is the evaluation of the results of its practice.



Let's go back to the definition: "training to build (...) one's muscles via hypertrophy".

Hypertrophy refers to the size increase of any tissue in the body, but the term most often refers to it when it comes to muscle.

Growth doesn't happen overnight, unless you are a teenager in a growth spur (and even then it's debatable, it's a matter of time perspective).

Growth happens progressively, at turtle speed.

And, as you can already deduce, so does the process of bodybuilding.

Hypertrophy: the physiological process behind muscle growth

Recreation: activity done for enjoyment when one is not working.

Stimulus: an event that triggers a reaction, in bodybuilding, an event that signals muscles to start hypertrophying.

Hypertrophy is triggered by resistance training, but it doesn't end there.

Muscle growth requires proper stimulus (proper load, adequate rep-range, enough volume), proper nutrition (macronutrient and caloric surplus) and rest (sleep, non-training days) to happen.

I think you get the idea: You train, you eat, and you sleep for bodybuilding.

Wait, have I ever seen that written on a shirt somewhere?

But bodybuilding isn't just about building muscle! It's also about revealing it. As we have learned, growing muscle takes proper nutrition, which involves a caloric surplus...

When a person wants to build muscle they need to eat more energy than they spend, hence having leftover to add lean tissue on their frame. However, science has not yet come to a clear consensus on the exact caloric surplus needed to put on lean tissue exclusively. Meaning that — as far as we know — with any

surplus, eventually comes fat gain. *Gasp* ...Oh, no!

And thus we encounter: Bulking and cutting. Bulking is performed when one aims to build muscle. So yes, bulking is a hypertrophy-oriented phase, meaning, muscle gain is prioritized. However, as we have also established, with such comes the inevitable fat gain, or "getting too soft" in bodybuilding lingo.

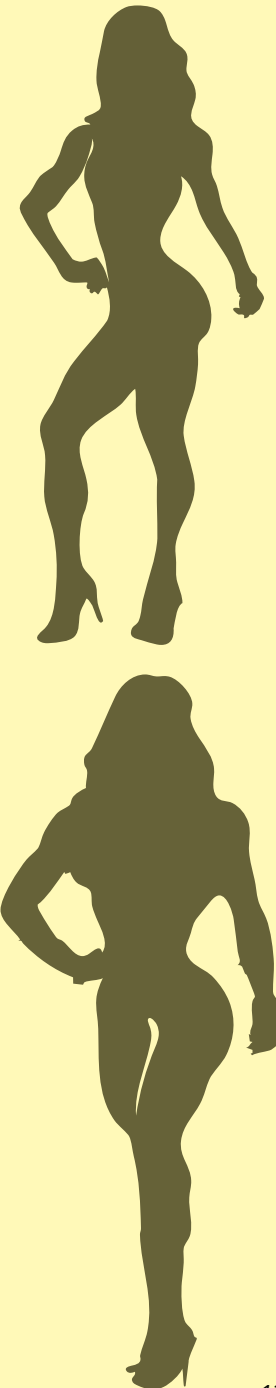
But bodybuilders are shredded you may think. Well, yes, they are, because after they're done building their muscles they often lose the fat. This is called "cutting". In competitive bodybuilding, this phase is called "Prep".



See? I told you I saw someone wearing it.

becomes quite apparent, especially when order from smallest to biggest in proportion. All these athletes, despite looking different from one another are considered bodybuilders. And that is simply because they train focusing on hypertrophy at different extents to fit an aesthetic goal, shaping their decisions in terms of programming, training, recovery (natural or assisted), and nutrition.

Obviously, the way a fit model athlete trains, is in no way shape or form similar to the way an open bodybuilder trains - this is the low hanging fruit as these are the two opposite ends of the bodybuilding spectrum. Still, the same is true for all the divisions in respect to one another. For instance, Bikini and Wellness athletes both train with focus on the lower half of the body. However, Bikini focus solely on the glutes and hamstrings, while Wellness focuses on the entirety of the leg (except for the calves). Additionally, Bikini favors an overall hourglass shape, making it of interest for athletes to also develop the latissimus dorsi (to taper in the waist into an "S" curve) and to develop the deltoids (to match the width of the glute from the side pose) While, wellness don't need to worry about deltoids as much as judges favor a "bottom heavy" physique.



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So now that you know how it all (mostly) works. What do we do with it? Well, it's up to the sculptor.

Your body, your rules.

Technically, you don't have to abide by any "guidelines" you can just decide to grow you body in the proportions you want — or not. See if I care. Bodybuilders though, especially competitive ones, do abide by certain "physique criterias" depending on the division in which they want to compete.

Bodybuilding has different categories for each sex. For males they have Men's Physique, Men's Classic Physique, 212 bodybuilding, and Open Bodybuilding. For females they have even more: Fit Model, Bikini, Wellness, Figure, Fitness*, Physique and Bodybuilding. All of these divisions, (except for Fitness, but we will talk about that one at the end) have specific aesthetic criteria that distinguish them from one another in the look that they seek.

In the previous spread, photographs of high-level competitors of each division (except fitness) were included, and this is with the purpose of illustrating the different proportion and posing criteria each division has. Once all lined up next to each other, the differences and the progression between them



Andreas Münzer, Austrian Pro, looking absolutely shredded. Rest in peace (1964-1993)

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Some people see this pattern of dieting and think of "yo-yo dieting". And although it is a close concept, it doesn't cover the entire picture. Bodybuilders aren't simply gaining and losing weight repeatedly. They do so with a purpose: to change their body composition.

It seems like it would be common sense; but most people seem to ignore that everyone has different ratios and size of muscle, organs, bone and water (lean body mass) and fat (adipose tissue). This ratio is called Body Composition. This is why two people can weigh the same, but look completely different and have different levels of fitness.

Bodybuilders diet and train with the aim of changing their body composition so that it contains more muscle.

In fact, they want to maximize how much they can weigh while being lean: a 6'2 male weighing 200lbs of 80% lean body mass and 20% fat looks different, than at 90% lean and 10% fat; the latter looks etched, muscular and defined, while the prior looks just as big in overall size, but with less muscularity and definition. With the bulking and cutting dieting pattern, bodybuilders are able to get from point A to point B. To most people, this seems unfathomable as most individuals want weight loss.



Women's Wellness Division



Women's Physique Division



Women's Bodybuilding



Men's 212 Bodybuilding



Men's Open Bodybuilding



Fit Model Division



Women's Bikini Division



Women's Figure Division



Men's Physique Division



Men's Classic Physique

To illustrate this point, here's a visual body fat chart curated by user self-reports and forum feedback.

Please note that this is simply a reference based on visual estimations.

The only way to accurately measure body composition is via DEXA scan or MRI.



~6% bodyfat. CBUM, 2024.
Six-time Classic Physique
Olympia Champion.



~10%-12% bodyfat.
Reddit User @junosalt.



~15% bodyfat. Reddit User
@CommunicationBig8798



~18-20% bodyfat. Reddit
User @[deleted].



~25-28% bodyfat. Reddit
User @TheDIYEd.



30-33% bodyfat. 2023.
User @throwaway89208920.

Alli Prince, American Professional Bikini Bodybuilder, on her first IFBB Pro Debut



Alli was 10% body fat in this photo, according to a DEXA scan taken six days before this photograph was taken. Source: "Guess My Body Fat % | Full Day Of Eating Depleting Diet" published Aug 1, 2025 on YouTube by Alli Prince). Congrats, Alli! <3

As stated previously, visually gauging body fat percentages isn't an accurate body composition evaluation marker on its own. Though, in android body fat patterns, most of the adipose tissue is stored on the midsection (over the abdominals and lower back), with the rest of the body staying relatively lean. Therefore, the leanness and abdominal muscle visibility can be a reliable visual marker for body composition in individuals with this body fat pattern.

With gynoid body fat distribution, on the other hand, visual estimates become trickier, as the adipose tissue is stored throughout a larger area: primarily the buttocks and legs, with the arms and chest following, and overall less fat being stored on the midsection. This particular reason makes it very hard to source visuals to reference these body parts at different stages of leanness, as people are less comfortable showing them.

Despite each pattern being dominant on either sex, it is important to note that these patterns can be observed across sexes due to a variety of reasons, such as hormonal imbalances, reproductive conditions and other genetic factors.

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