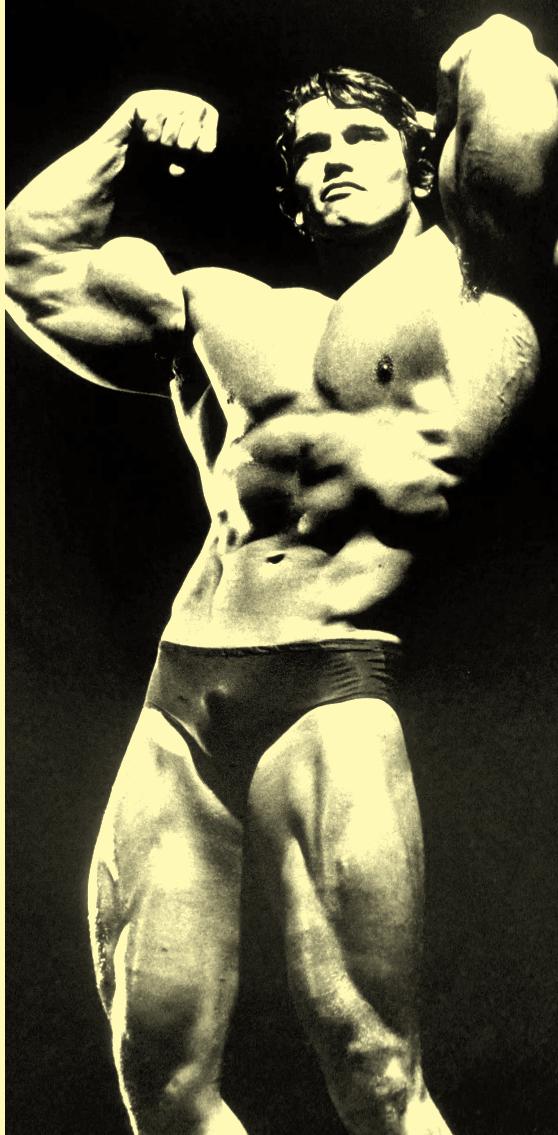
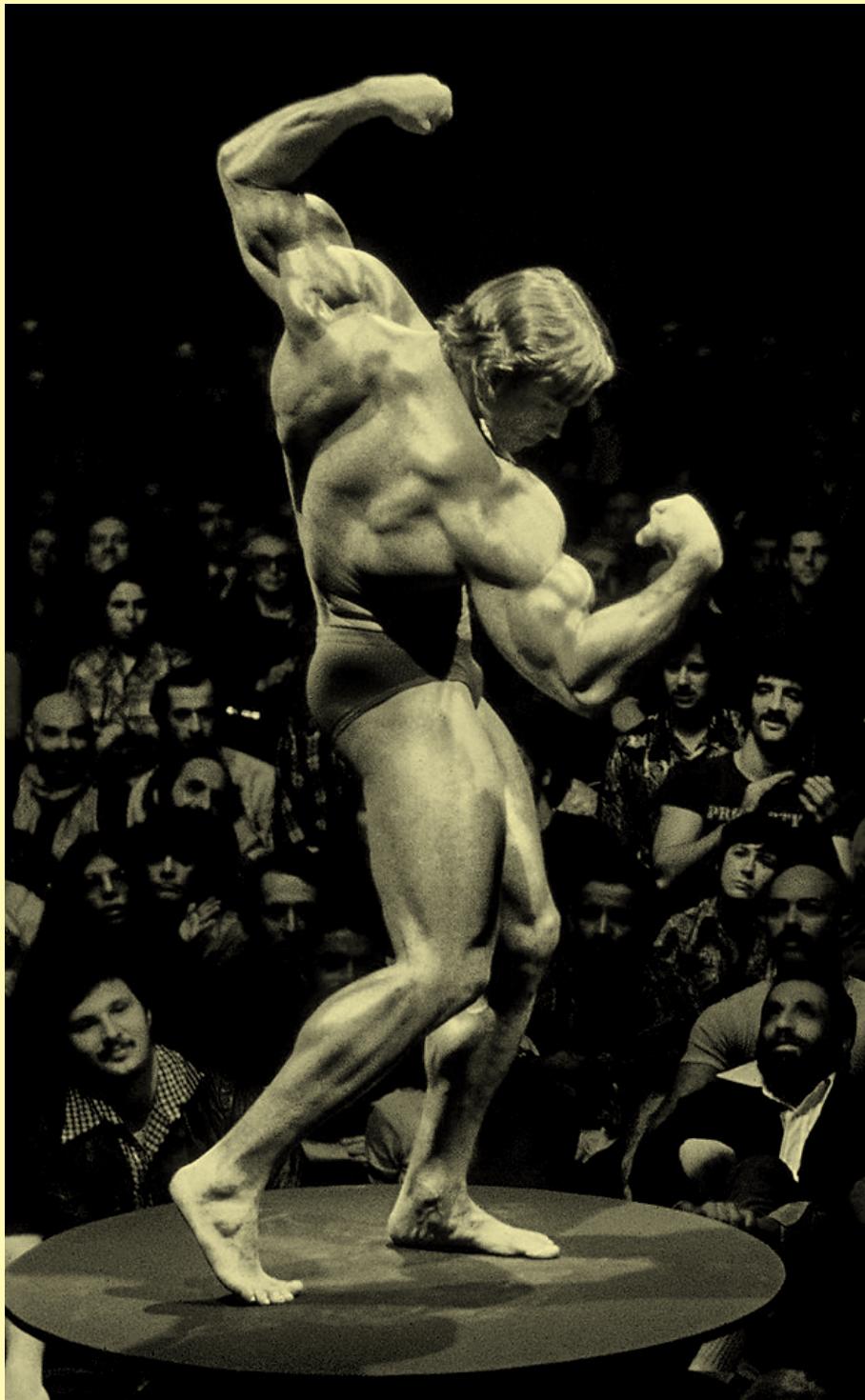


THE BASICS





Building Bodies Book I The Basics

By
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This booklet attempts to explain the practice of bodybuilding, and its competitive evaluation to the most simple of terms. It is a guide towards those who are unfamiliar with the sport; a quick glance into the intricacies of the world of competitive bodybuilding.

Do not take the information within these pages as nutritional or medical advice; or as an evaluation directed toward how you should treat or see your own physique. The terminology and optics are aligned with those espoused in bodybuilding and not that of normal life.

All the information has been sourced and distilled by my own very biased opinion. If anything, read these pages with curiosity, and a critical eye. Remember that body and mind are connected, and never separate. Enjoy!



Ronnie Coleman, 8x Mr Olympia Winner, squatting a supra-human amount of

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 body built 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.

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.



See? I told you I saw someone wearing it.

Hypertrophy is triggered by resistance training, but it doesn't end there. Muscle growth requires proper stimulus, proper nutrition (macro-nutrient and caloric surplus) and rest (sleep, non-training days) to happen. I think you get the idea: You eat, you sleep, and you train for bodybuilding. Have I ever seen that 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" or "prep" for builders in preparation for a bodybuilding show where they need to drop body fat.



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

Nutrition: the process of obtaining the food necessary for health and growth, that includes: calories, protein, carbohydrates and fats.

Caloric Surplus/Deficit: A caloric surplus occurs when you consume more calories than your body burns, the opposite is a deficit.

Bulking: a phase in bodybuilding training where the athlete consumes a caloric surplus and trains higher volume to add muscle mass to their frame.

Cutting: a phase in bodybuilding training during a caloric deficit to promote the loss of excess fat.

Shredded: having a very low body fat percentage.

Soft: in bodybuilding, stepping out of the "athletic" body fat percentage range.

Prep: short for "Contest Preparation".

Yo-yo dieting:

Gaining and losing weight in a circular fashion without body composition improvement.

Body Composition:

The ratio of lean tissue and adipose tissue in a person's body.

Lean Mass:

The amount of bone, organs, muscle, glycogen stores, subcutaneous water in a person's body.

Adipose Tissue:

commonly known as body fat, is found throughout the body, including under the skin (subcutaneous fat), around internal organs (visceral fat), and within bone marrow.

Body fat Percentage:

The amount of adipose tissue (fat) in someone's body. If someone has 10% body fat, that means they're 90% lean.

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 lean mass and adipose tissue. This ratio is called Body Composition. This is why two people can be the same height and weight while looking very different.

Bodybuilders diet and train with the aim of changing their body composition so that it contains more muscle and less fat, hence looking leaner (shredded). 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 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 focus on weight loss.

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

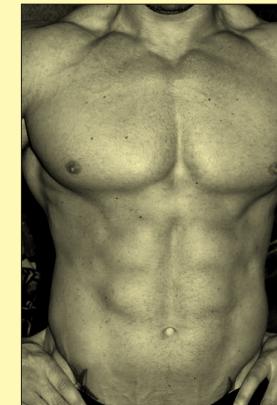
(Yes, these people put their torsos out there for a check)

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

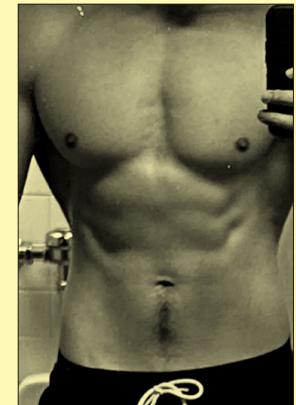
The only way to accurately measure body composition is via DEXA scan or MRI.



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



~10%-12% body fat. Reddit User @junosalt.



~15% body fat. Reddit User @CommunicationBig8798



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



~25-28% body fat. Reddit User @TheDIYEd.



30-33% body fat. 2023. User @throwaway89208920.



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

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, (testosterone dominant) the abdominal muscle visibility can be a reliable visual marker for body composition in individuals with this body fat pattern in most cases.

For gynoid body fat distribution (estrogen dominant), on the other hand, visual estimates become trickier, as the adipose tissue is stored throughout a larger area, such as the buttocks and chest. 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 those body parts.

It's also very important to note that either sex has different essential body fat ratios for correct vital, hormonal and reproductive function. 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. Bodybuilding often requires getting close to the lower limits.

Android Body Fat

Pattern: Predominant in males; a pattern in which the system stores most body fat around the midsection. This makes it harder for males to see their abdominals at higher body fat quantities.

Gynoid Body Fat

Pattern: Predominant in females; a pattern in which the system stores most body fat primarily on the hips, buttocks, thighs, chest and arms. This is the reason why females can often see abdominal definition at higher body fat percentages, while retaining stubborn fat on the arms and legs.

Essential body fat:

Essential body fat refers to the necessary fat that the body needs to function properly. It is stored in vital organs, such as the brain, heart, kidneys, and muscles. For males, essential body fat ranges from 2-5%, for females, it ranges from 10-13%.

IFBB: International Federation of Bodybuilding. This is the most popular Bodybuilding League: the Olympia Qualifier.

NPC: The National Physique Committee (NPC International as well). This the IFBB's amateur league.

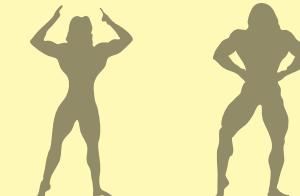
212: This refers to 212 men's bodybuilding's weight cap. Competitors in this division cannot exceed 212 lbs. Yes they have their own division. They are special.

S-Curve: bikini bodybuilding physique goal: to be able to create the look of an "S" from the latissimus dorsi, to the end of the gluteus maximus.

So now that you know how it all (mostly) works. What do we do with it? Your body, your rules. Technically, you don't have to abide by any "guidelines" you can just decide to grow your body in the proportions you want. Competitive bodybuilders abide by certain "physique criteria" depending on the division in which they compete, which also depends on the league that regulates them.

The most popular league in competitive bodybuilding is the IFBB and its amateur league, the NPC. These organizations determine the proportions, height and weight classes, conditioning and posing guidelines for an even physique examination on stage. In the IFBB, bodybuilding has different categories for each sex.

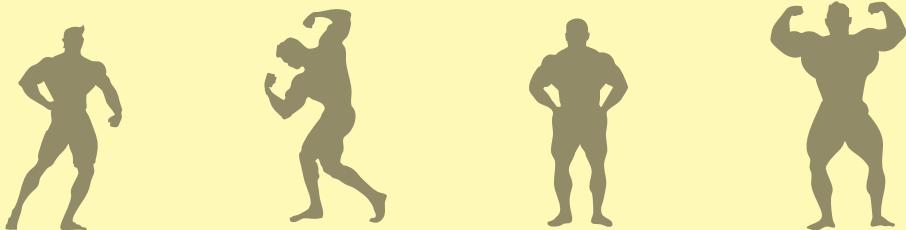
For males they have Men's Physique, Men's Classic Physique, 212 bodybuilding, and Open Bodybuilding. For females they have even more: Fit Model, Bikini, Wellness, Figure, Fitness, Physique and Bodybuilding.



All of these divisions, (except for Fitness) have specific aesthetic criteria that distinguish them from one another in the look that they want their athletes to build for. Obviously, the way a fit model athlete trains, is in no way 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.

The same is true for all the divisions in respect to one another, where more subtle but still noticeable changes occur. For example, there's a clear difference between women's wellness and bikini. Wellness seeks an hourglass and leg-dominant shape. Leg dominance requires to grow all the leg muscles — excluding calves, and the "hourglass" requirement, developing the deltoids to match the width of the hips have create an advantage as it makes the silhouette more symmetric. Bikini, on the other hand, focuses on what is called an "S" curve. This means that bikini athletes focus on they have from waist to glute, with shoulders and the rest of the leg muscles having less of a priority.

In the next two pages, photographs of high-level competitors of each division are 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 becomes quite apparent, especially when order from smallest to biggest in proportion and frame.





Fit Model Division



Women's Bikini Division



Women's Figure Division



Women's Wellness Division



Women's Physique Division



Women's Bodybuilding



Men's Physique Division



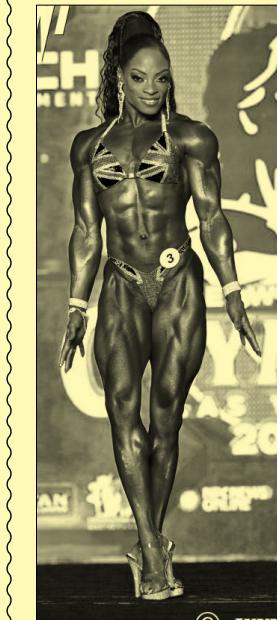
Men's Classic Physique



Men's 212 Bodybuilding



Men's Open Bodybuilding



Women's Fitness Division:

I have highlighted this category as its evaluation is not based solely on aesthetics. Athletes need to both showcase a lean and muscular physique, but there are no specific proportion guidelines by the NPC or IFBB. Women's Fitness has two parts: physique judging (1/3 of the score) and an acrobatics routine (2/3 of the score). This is the only division that prioritizes on-stage athletic performance for scoring.

The only exception to this rule is Women's Fitness. In the right hand page, you will see pictures of 2025 Olympia Champion for this division: Michelle Fredua-Mensah. The difference between this division and the rest 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 and an acrobatic routine (see in next page), 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 one of the main struggles 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 competitive bodybuilding a sport?

This is my answer: Bodybuilding is a lifetime effort. Nobody can sit down, televise, stream or even accurately follow the constant act of bodybuilding in real time. Therefore, it would be unrealistic to expect its performance on stage when it requires a significantly longer amount of time. 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, all of which I've briefly covered in this book. Hence, competitive bodybuilding is the evaluation of the results of its practice, instead of its live performance.



Michelle Fredua-Mensah, Fitness Olympia 2025 winner.

Let's address the Elephant in the room.

What is a sport? "Sport" is commonly defined as: "an activity involving physical exertion and skill in which an individual or team competes against another or others for entertainment". Going by this definition, then, competitive bodybuilding is not a sport (except for the Fitness division). What is a pageant? According to Google: "a public entertainment consisting of a procession of people in elaborate, colorful costumes, or an outdoor performance of a historical scene", and in American English it specifically refers to a "beauty contest". Although bodybuilders are barely clothed, their bikinis often have rhinestones and the trunks are made with fabrics that react to light (open bodybuilding trunks). So the contest itself is closer to a pageant than to a sports championship.

It also is important to note that although a competitive physique is built through hypertrophy training and nutrition, the "look" isn't necessarily achieved solely through those means. Androgenic Anabolic Steroids are this subculture's "secret" hiding in plain sight. Everyone knows, everyone talks about it, unofficially, but they do. They are needed at the professional level simply to allow the body to facilitate the hormones necessary to grow that amount of muscle in such little time and beyond the average human anabolic potential. The only reason for this dynamic is their illegality. It is obvious that the physiques displayed at the Olympia Level (including Bikini competitors) are chemically enhanced, otherwise those proportions wouldn't be reached at all, anabolically or not. Even if anabolics aren't used, competitors resort to other compounds just to get that lean: stimulants like Ephedrine

(raises metabolic rate at rest), appetite suppressants like Semaglutide (appetite suppressant, GLP-1 agonist, Ozempic — we all know this one) and Retatrutide (Peptide LY3437943), which is a triple actor causing hunger suppression, metabolic regulation and energy expenditure increase (basically Ozempic "on steroids", ironically); Clenbuterol (another bronchodilator and metabolic enhancer) and a series of diuretics. This is not training. This is chemical enhancement. These are some compounds that, when misused, can be fatal (especially diuretics and metabolic enhancers). And this is just the surface.

Beyond pharmacology, some bodybuilders resort to aesthetic procedures such as breast and calf implants and Synthol (oil) injections to target-enhance "lacking" body parts. They also employ the use of hyaluronic acid fillers to actively battle the gaunt look derived from their extreme leanness. Even in natural bodybuilding, in tested federations, the body fat levels these people are expected to reach are incredibly close to essential, without hormonal replacement therapy, both natural and enhanced competitors (especially females) have a hard time bouncing back from hormonal issues derived from this extreme dieting. Bodybuilding seeks an extreme look, a "package" as they call it. An unnatural one. And only those who are dedicated and devoted enough to this "endeavor" are willing to undergo all the hardships and risks that reaching that look takes. In their defense, yes, they are athletes. But they are reduced to bodies: their bodies are their craft. A craft they deem worthy devoting their whole lives to.

If you are interested in bodybuilding, be skeptical; do your own research and always remember: you are your body, yes, but you are also more than that: a mind, a soul.

Have you ever wondered what would happen if the sculptor chiseled 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 power-lifting.

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.

olenka
janus

