

A man with a beard and tattoos is shown from the back, lifting two large black dumbbells. He is wearing a black tank top. The background is a blurred gym setting with red and yellow equipment.

THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO GROWING BIG SHOULDERS

MAPS FITNESS PRODUCTS



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Aesthetics: a set of principles concerned with the nature and appreciation of beauty. There are many reasons people are motivated to workout. Health, mobility, strength, athletic performance and even for the enjoyment of movement. However, one of the main motivators expressed by the clients I have trained revolves around wanting to LOOK better. People are seeking out better aesthetics. The term “beauty is in the eye of the beholder” is true, however when we are talking about the beauty of the human body there are some general objective constants. Throughout the world there are certain standards of beauty in the male and in the female body that seem to be consistent and are supported by scientific study. Women around the world, in all kinds of different cultures tend to find men with narrow hips, wide shoulders and lean musculature attractive. Men from around the world find women with a hip to waist ratio of around 0.7 to be most attractive regardless of overall size or weight.

The reasons we find certain traits in the human body consistently attractive is because they are correlated with better health and fertility. Women with the magic 0.7 hip to waist ratio have been shown to have higher fertility rates and higher odds of successful childbirth. Men with narrow hips and wide shoulders tend to have higher levels of testosterone (which comes in handy for defense) and have been shown to have healthier sperm counts. In other words, we find certain things attractive because they signify HEALTH.

Between men and women there are a couple crossover traits that are universally considered aesthetic. Relatively lean body fat levels are one of them. Another one is the appearance of well-developed and sculpted shoulders. This may seem obvious for men...a man with built delts looks strong and strong men are typically considered more attractive. This is also true for women. Think about all of the "fit and attractive" women that both men AND women consider aesthetic. Demi Moore from the movie GI Jane. Cameron Diaz. Linda Hamilton from Terminator 2: Judgment Day. All of those women were appreciated for their physical aesthetics by both men and women and all of those women had (some still have) AMAZING delts. The shoulder muscles are one of the few muscles that both male and female clients will tell me they want to BUILD.

The shoulder muscles are also prized in all stage presentation sports for both men and women. Bodybuilding, physique, fitness, figure and bikini... all of them highly value well developed delts and its almost impossible to win a high-level competition with lagging shoulder muscles. Basically, if you want to LOOK good and your main goal is aesthetics then you should focus on BUILDING your delts regardless of whether you are a man or a woman.

That all being said the delts can be one of the hardest muscles to develop in the upper body. Their biomechanical actions in the body are poorly understood by many and popular shoulder exercises are performed in ineffective ways. On top of this, people tend to choose the least effective exercises when they train their shoulders-they overwork the front delts and under work the rear delts. In addition, people stay stuck in a set and rep range that lost its ability to stimulate change a long time ago.





Let's talk about the functions or actions of the deltoid muscles. The muscles of the shoulders combined with the shoulder joint allow it to move through a remarkable range of motion, making it one of the most mobile joints of the human body. There are many muscles of the upper body that exert action of the shoulder joint, but for this guide we will focus on the three main "heads" of the deltoids. These three heads are the most visible part of the shoulder and the part that contributes most to the aesthetics of the shoulder. The front head of the deltoid is the meaty front part of the shoulder. The main action of the front deltoid is to lift the arm out in front of the body (example: a front raise), to extend the upper arm above your head (example: a shoulder press) or to horizontally bring the upper arm closer to the midline of the body (example: a bench press). The side head of the deltoid is the meaty part of the side of your shoulder. Its main action is to bring your arms out to your sides away from your body (example: a lateral raise). The rear head of the deltoid is the back of the shoulder. Its main action is to horizontally bring the upper arms from the mid line of the body away from the mid line (example: the rear raise) or to help the arms in certain rowing type movements. Those heads have other functions as well, but for the sake of this guide-which is concerned with aesthetics-we will focus on the actions listed above.

Due to the extreme mobility of the shoulder joint and the muscles that operate the shoulder joint, it's no wonder the shoulder is one of the most injured area of the human body. It's also one reason why some people have such a hard time developing amazing looking delts. In this guide I am going to list 3 main factors that you **MUST** consider when embarking on a shoulder building journey. Follow the advice I give below for rapid acceleration of your progress. Ignore the advice I give below and you will likely suffer the boring and frustrating state of non-progress that so many people are stuck in.



FACTOR ONE

NOT UNDERSTANDING BASIC FUNCTION

One of the things I love MOST about the human body is also simultaneously one of the most frustrating. The human body does not understand muscles, it understands MOVEMENT. In other words when you are doing an overhead press or a lateral raise for your shoulders to work your delts, your body isn't thinking "ok let's connect and work the delts cause we want them to build." Its simply thinking "lift arms overhead" (as in the case of the overhead press) or "lift arms out to the sides" (as in the case of the lateral raise).

Ever find yourself wanting to come up on your toes on the last rep of a hard set of overhead presses? Its super common, I used to see clients do it all the time. You might be thinking "why in the hell does my body want to get on its toes when I am trying to work my shoulders and upper body in an overhead press??" It's because YOUR BODY ONLY UNDERSTANDS MOVEMENT. It thinks you are trying to lift something overhead as high as you can, and when your shoulders and arms get tired (like at the end of a set of overhead presses) it uses other muscles and movements to complete the task. "You wanna get this high above your head? Ok, but your shoulders are tired, let's use the ankles to get you on your toes to help out."

This is the main reason why cheating on exercise form exists in the first place. It's because our bodies are trying their damndest to help us out!! Most people don't understand this and end up cheating in big or small ways when they lift and the result is underdeveloped target muscles.

One of the BEST shoulder exercise categories for the deltoid muscles are all of the variations of raises. Front, side and rear raises hit all the major muscles of the deltoids. When these moves are done properly and combined with compound movements they are EXCELLENT muscle developers.

The problem with raises is that MOST people do them wrong. They work their traps when they front raise and lateral raise and they work their mid backs when the rear raise.

Here is the deal, the three deltoid muscles we are talking about have VERY little action at the shoulder blade. Shrug your shoulders or pinch them back...you are not using the deltoids to any real degree. When you do a shoulder raise keep this in mind as all raise variations will inevitably promote some type of shoulder blade shrugging or retracting (pinching back).

When you do a lateral raise DO NOT shrug the shoulders, or at least be aware of MINIMIZING this movement. Keep them flat as bring the arms out to the sides and you will feel your side delts working much HARDER. When you do a rear raise keep the shoulder blades rolled forward and prevent them from pinching back and your rear delts will do most of the work. When you front raise keep the shoulders flat and steady for more front delt activation.

Here are some videos for reference:

BRING UP LAGGING REAR DELTS

LATERAL RAISE FOR MUSCLE GROWTH

BUILD YOUR SIDE DELTS



FACTOR TWO

NEGLECTING THE REAR DELTS

Every time I am paid to review someone's workout routine I can count on seeing a few common mistakes. One of them is the overreliance on overhead pressing (which works the front delts) with some lateral raises sprinkled in (for the side delts) and an almost complete neglect for exercises that work the rear delts. Its HILARIOUS!! What if I told you that the rear delt is the one that is most responsible for that "round" shoulder look? Its true!! The best and most attractive shoulder muscles ...have a round, well-developed, and balanced look which comes from total development. The rear delts also give the illusion of round shoulders when you are looked at from behind or from the side.

In the case of the shoulders the front delts get a LOT of work. Every single overhead press variation hits the front delts hard. All horizontal type presses like bench presses and incline presses also hit the front delts hard. Slightly educated lifters will typically also include lateral raises and their variations because having "wide shoulders" is desired to give the illusion of a smaller waist. Only the MOST educated lifters place special focus on the rear delts. Unfortunately, there aren't that many very educated lifters.

Due to the fact that the front delts get so much work with every type of press and the fact that lateral raises are usually added into shoulder workouts (if anything is added at all) I can safely assume your rear delts are terribly underdeveloped.

For those of you interested in shoulder aesthetics I recommend starting with rear delts in the beginning of your workout before you do any other shoulder exercise. Prioritize them and BUILD them for amazing round looking shoulders. Rear raises are an excellent choice but so are certain row variations. One in particular is a rear delt BLASTER of a movement.

Here it is, and it's one of my favorites:

BUILD YOUR REAR DELTS



FACTOR THREE

NEGLECTING DIFFERENT REP RANGES

People LOVE doing what they are good at and hate doing what they aren't good at. I am also guilty of this. If I asked you what rep range you prefer to work in, I bet you my bottom dollar you would have a clear number range. Some people love the low reps (1-5), other people love the moderate rep range (8-12) and other love the high rep range (15-20).

In head to head comparisons studies consistently show that the moderate rep ranges build the most muscle. This is quite well known in the muscle building community. What isn't as well known is that the difference is SMALL and that ALL rep ranges also build muscle. Every single range done with resistance will build muscle...this is a fact. Another fact is that if you stay in a rep range for too long THEY ALL STOP WORKING. This may be why your shoulder progress has slowed down so much or has stopped all together.

Your body is an adaptation machine and it adapts best and fastest to NEW STIMULUS. This is why strength and muscle gains come so fast for beginners. Its not unheard of for a beginner to add 100lbs to their main lifts within the first year of training but its absolutely unheard of for an experienced lifter.

Your body simply does not respond as fast if you've been working out for a while. When you compound this with staying in the SAME REP RANGE for months on end, your body just stops changing. Its "used" to the stress of what you are doing and feels it's no longer necessary to adapt.

One of the most effective ways to manipulate the body into progressing consistently is to PHASE REP RANGES. Change it up!!! Even more important is to change rep ranges BEFORE your body has hit a plateau. In my 20 years of experience as a trainer I have found that the ideal length of time to stay in a rep range before switching out for most people is three weeks. Stay in a rep range for 3 weeks, get good at it and then move to another one for 3 weeks. This method has almost ALWAYS gotten my clients excellent results. Here is an example of how I would phase someone's workout:

WEEKS 1-3

LOW REPS

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WEEKS 4-6

MODERATE REPS

—

WEEKS 7-9

HIGH REPS

If you are missing any one of the above factors in your shoulder training you are building and shaping at a MUCH slower rate than you could be. Take my advice and apply the three factors above and watch as your shoulders respond with more muscle, shape and aesthetics.





SAL DI STEFANO

Sal was 14 years old when he touched his first weight and from that moment he was hooked. Growing up asthmatic, frequently sick and painfully skinny, Sal saw weightlifting as a way to change his body and his self-image. In the beginning, Sal's body responded quickly to his training but then his gains slowed and then stopped altogether. Not one to give up easily, he began reading every muscle building publication he could get his hands on to find ways to bust through his plateau. He read Arnold's Encyclopedia of Bodybuilding, Mentzer's Heavy Duty, Kubrick's Dinosaur Training, and every muscle magazine he could find; Weider's Muscle and Fitness, Flex, Iron Man and even Muscle Media 2000. Each time he read about a new technique or methodology he would test it out in the gym. At age 18 his passion for the art and science of resistance training was so consuming that he decided to make it his profession and become a personal trainer. By 19 he was managing health clubs and by 22 he owned his own gym. After 17 years as a personal trainer he has dedicated himself to bringing science and TRUTH to the fitness industry.