

TECHNIQUE

The Classic Curl

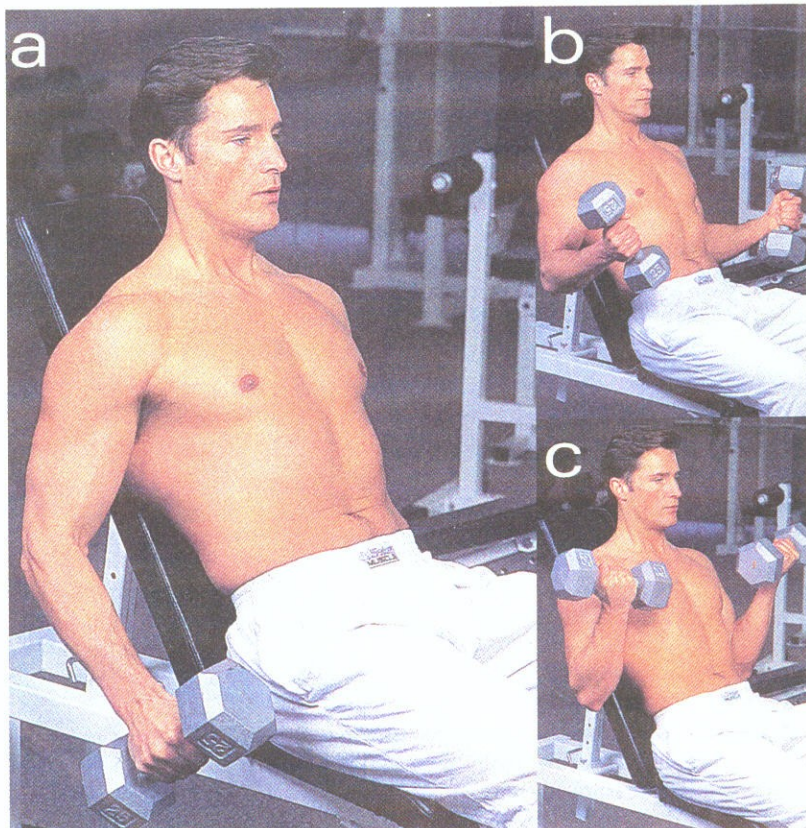
Who doesn't know what the biceps is? Every boy has flexed his biceps and wondered when it was going to start growing, and many a girl has put up with a brother who teased her about her skinny upper arms. (Maybe that's why Linda Hamilton's character in "Terminator 2" struck some deep chords.)

But there's more to this important muscle group than making a nice flex. The most active biceps muscle, the biceps brachii, actually plays the primary role in rotating your forearm outward, so your thumbs point away from your body. This muscle lies on top of a large, deep muscle, the brachialis, which is in charge of flexing the forearm, a slightly less common activity in your everyday life.

The biceps brachii isn't a silent partner when you flex your arm, however, and neither is the brachioradialis, the forearm muscle that lies on the outside of your forearm near your elbow when you face your palms up. That's why a simple dumbbell curl is the single most effective upper-arm muscle builder. Here's the right way to perform it:

1 Sit straddling a weight bench with the back of the bench set at a 60-degree angle. By leaning back this way, you hyperextend your upper arms slightly, stretching the biceps where it meets the shoulder and the elbow, and create a more challenging exercise.

2 With weights in hand and your palms facing each other, smoothly curl your forearms toward your upper arms, keeping the upper arms stationary [*photo a*].



3 As your palms pass by your hips, start to rotate your forearms outward as you continue to flex your forearms toward your upper arms [*photo b*]. This rotation has two benefits: It engages the biceps brachii, and it takes stress off your wrist by allowing the various muscles of the forearm to assume in turn the burden of gripping the dumbbell.

4 Continue to curl your forearms toward your upper arms until they touch the upper arms [*photo c*].

REGIMEN

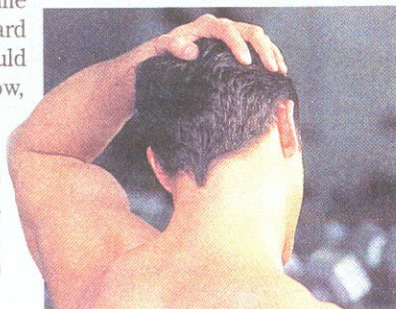
One for the
Workplace

It's the end of the day and your neck aches, with sharp pains in your shoulder muscles to boot. Maybe your fingers or arms are tingly, too. Here's a stretch that might make a huge improvement.

Sit in a chair—ideally one without arm rests—and grasp the seat with one hand. Sit up straight, extending that arm

as much as possible. Grasp the top of your head with the other hand and—before applying any pressure with that hand—simultaneously rotate your head toward that side while lowering your head toward your shoulder. This should be done in one slow, smooth motion.

Neck pain can become shoulder, arm, and hand pain. This stretch is an effective remedy.



Stop the rotation and bending when you feel a comfortable pull in the neck muscles that stretch from your head into the thick part of your

shoulder. Hold this position for 30 seconds, applying gentle pressure with your hand, and slowly return to the starting position. Repeat on the other side, and do each side two to three times. Do this routine four times a day.

This stretch will loosen many of the muscles that move your shoulders and bend and rotate the neck. In addition, it can relieve pressure on some of the nerves that activate the arm, finger, and upper-torso muscles.—G.G.

5 Slowly lower the dumbbells, reversing the process of points 2 and 3. Complete this segment more slowly than the lifting segment, using four counts to two for the lifting segment.

As easy and effective as the curl is, there are plenty of inefficient and downright risky ways to do it. Here are some things to watch out for:

1 Don't swing the weight up in a jerky motion, with help from the rest of your body. Sure, you're lifting the weight—but not with your biceps, and you can strain your back in the process.

2 Don't do "preacher curls": These maneuvers—performed on a special bench with your arms resting at a 45-degree angle downward—sometimes are just too taxing. This exercise puts your arms in a vulnerable position; the biceps itself is not fully stretched, while gravity threatens to hyperextend your arm at the elbow joint. The result is too little leverage when you need it most and increased susceptibility to tearing one of the biceps muscles or injuring ligaments in the elbow.

3 Don't overdo barbell curls with a straight bar. These, along with the dumbbell curl and the reverse-grip curl with an EZ-bar, are staples of biceps training, but they can be hard on your wrists. Your wrists are rotated outward throughout the exercise—more so as the lift progresses—and this puts pressure on the ligaments. Eliminate them if your workouts leave your wrists sore.

4 Don't do mega-biceps workouts. Since most back exercises—such as the lat pulldown, pull-up, and bent-over row—also train the biceps and the rest of the forearm flexors, no more than two biceps exercises are necessary each workout—*Gerald Greenspan, M.S., founder, Columbus (Ohio) Fitness Consultants*

MOTIVATION

On Trainer Time

It's no secret that many exercisers hire personal trainers to infuse them with the elusive quality of self-discipline. There's no shame in that: Not everyone is born with the urge to exercise hard each and every day. However, while we're all working hard to develop good work habits, are our trainers living up to their obligation for the same?

"It's very important for you to be happy with yourself and motivated as a trainer—only then will your students be," says Gina Bastone, 30, a Toronto fitness trainer for 15 years. "If you're loyal to yourself and your training, your students will notice it and follow suit."

Your trainer should motivate you by being a fitness role model, but there are other, more mundane ways to reinforce the lesson, too. Punctuality, for one. "Your trainer must be on time for you," Bastone says, "because your time is money, and because every minute of exercise is beneficial." What's more, punctuality sends the message that exercise is vitally important for life.

—Manuel Selvoin

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