



The New Rules of Lifting for Women: Lift Like a Man, Look Like a Goddess

By Lou Schuler, Cassandra Forsythe M.S., Alwyn Cosgrove

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In *The New Rules of Lifting for Women*, authors Lou Schuler, Cassandra Forsythe and Alwyn Cosgrove present a comprehensive strength, conditioning and nutrition plan destined to revolutionize the way women work out. All the latest studies prove that strength training, not aerobics, provides the key to losing fat and building a fit, strong body. This book refutes the misconception that women will "bulk up" if they lift heavy weights. Nonsense! It's tough enough for men to pack on muscle, and they have much more of the hormone necessary to build muscle: natural testosterone. Muscles need to be strengthened to achieve a lean, healthy look. Properly conditioned muscles increase metabolism and promote weight loss -- it's that simple. The program demands that women put down the "Barbie" weights, step away from the treadmill and begin a strength and conditioning regime for the natural athlete in every woman. *The New Rules of Lifting for Women* will change the way women see fitness, nutrition and their own bodies.

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Editorial Review

Review

Lou Schuler has finally written a training book for me, and for all women. His expert advice, no-nonsense plans, and sense of humor are reassuring, motivating, and entertaining. I am starting the program tomorrow!
- Susan Kleiner, Ph.D., author of "Power Eating" and "The Good Mood Diet"

The workouts in this book are unique, challenging, and extremely effective...be prepared to get into the best shape of your life!

-Valerie Waters, celebrity trainer

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About the Author

Lou Schuler is a National Magazine Award-winning journalist, a certified strength and conditioning specialist, the author of popular diet and strength-training books, and a dedicated blogger. He has written and edited Men's Fitness, Men's Health, Men's Health Muscle, Men's Journal, and other magazines. Alwyn Cosgrove is co-owner, with his wife Rachel, of Results Fitness in Newhall, California. He is a professional member of the National Academy of Sports Medicine and the American College of Sports Medicine, among other organizations, and is a frequent contributor to a variety of magazines, including Men's Health and Men's Fitness. Cassandra Forsythe, M.S., is a doctoral student at the University of Connecticut, studying exercise science and nutrition. She is an expert consultant for fitness and nutrition media, including Men's Health, Fitness Rx for Her, and Fitness Rx for Him.

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Why Should a Woman Lift Like a Man?

If you've ever watched a man working out in a gym, you can be forgiven for not immediately recognizing the bountiful lessons he has to offer. Instead, if you observed anything, it was probably one or more of these:

- poor form
- overly optimistic weight selection, resulting in even poorer form
- odd, guttural noises, usually uttered while lifting too much weight with poor form
- a sudden inability to lift those weights after 8 to 12 repetitions (done with good or bad form), resulting in a pile of iron on the floor and an empty slot on the rack where those weights belong
- a curious attraction to the bench press, which not only results in all of the aforementioned problems, but also is performed with a dedication and zeal that leave no time for exercises designed to work the muscles he can't see in a mirror
- an even more curious lack of awareness that other people can see the muscles that don't show up in his mirror

So what in the world can you learn from the average meathead in your local health club? A lot. I won't pretend that men do anything better than women in the weight room. But I think they understand a few concepts that women tend to ignore.

These are by far the most important of all the new rules I'll list in this book.

NEW RULE #1 • The purpose of lifting weights is to build muscle

Weight-training advice for women revolves around what I call the three dirty words: toning, shaping, and sculpting. "Tone," short for "tonus," has a specific meaning in exercise science: it's the firmness of any given muscle when you aren't deliberately flexing it. Tonus improves when you train with weights, but it's not anything you can see.

The way "toning" is used in books and magazines catering to women, and then by women themselves, it means "make your muscles look better without making them bigger." The idea is that there are specific types of workouts—usually involving lots of repetitions with light weights—that will help you achieve this.

But that's not a realistic or healthy way to look at your muscles. If the weights are unchallenging, your muscles won't grow. If your muscles don't grow, they won't look any better than they do now, even if you could somehow strip off whatever fat sits on top of them.

This is such an important point that I'll repeat it:

With or without excess fat, your body simply will not look healthy and fit without well-trained muscle tissue.

"Shaping" offers a different but equally unlikely promise. Muscles can't be "shaped." Their shape is determined by your genetics. You can make them bigger or smaller, and if you're a talented and dedicated bodybuilder you can change their size in proportion to the size of nearby muscles. In other words, you can certainly reshape your body by making some things bigger and other things smaller. But you can't change the shape of individual muscles.

"Sculpting" is the most meaningful of the three words. It implies a combination of muscle growth and fat loss that leaves the lifter's physique looking . . . well, *sculpted*.

But you can't "sculpt" muscles you haven't yet built.

NEW RULE #2 • Muscle is hard to build

When I started lifting weights, back when I was a ridiculously weak and scrawny thirteen-year-old boy who dreaded the humiliation of removing his shirt at the local swimming pool, I dreamed of having muscles roughly the size of the muscles I have now. If you had told me I'd someday be a fairly solid 185-pounder, thanks to the weights, I would've said, "I'm in!"

But if you'd added the caveat that it would take more than three decades to reach that size, I might've had some reservations.

I've never once walked into the gym thinking, "Today I'm going to try to not get too big." For most guys, when we're talking about muscles, there's no such thing as "too big." Those of us who train drug-free celebrate each pound of muscle we add, and every millimeter of upper-arm girth. Some guys even obsess over the circumference of their necks. Why? Because we know that *it's really hard to put on muscle size, it never happens by accident, and every bit of it is a sign of success against all odds.* And that's with all the hormonal advantages that nature gives to men.

Meanwhile, women, naturally deprived of the amounts of testosterone that would make muscle-building a more straightforward pursuit, worry endlessly about adding so much muscle that they'll turn into the type of shemale you rarely encounter outside *The Howard Stern Show*.

So this brings me to the fourth dirty word: "bulky." As in, "I don't want to get too bulky."

I'll say this as simply as I can:

Unless you're an extreme genetic outlier, you can't get too bulky.

Your body won't allow it. If you put on 10 pounds of muscle in Alwyn's six month program, you'll be at the top of the class. And if you don't take off at least 10 pounds of fat with the combination of Alwyn's workouts and Cassandra's nutrition plans, I'll be surprised. The most likely outcome, assuming you're willing to work hard, is that you'll come away with a small net loss in body weight, but a dramatic difference in the way your body looks in the mirror and the way your clothes fit. Your tops should be a little tighter, especially in the shoulders, and your trousers a bit roomier, particularly around the waist.

What you don't have to worry about is getting too big. I've been lifting weights longer than many of you have been alive, and I'm still waiting for that moment when I look in the mirror and say, "Damn it, I'm just too big!"

NEW RULE #3 • Results come from hard work

This is a somewhat redundant rule, given that I mentioned hard work in the previous one. But here's something I've observed over my many years of hanging around in gyms: A woman who's willing to work like a galley slave in Spinning class, twist herself into Gordian knots in the yoga studio, and build enough core strength with Pilates to prop up a skyscraper will walk into the weight room, pick up the pastel-colored Barbie weights, and do the exact opposite of what will give her the results she wants.

I'll tell a story that illustrates what I mean:

As I was writing this chapter, I observed a woman at my gym doing two exercises in combination. The first was triceps kickbacks, a simple and useless exercise in which you lean over a bench, hold your upper arm parallel to the floor, and straighten your elbow while holding a very light weight. The second was one-arm rows, in which you lean over a bench with your upper arm perpendicular to the floor, and row the weight up to the side of your abdomen.

A rowing exercise involves far more muscles, including the lats and trapezius, the big, strong muscles of the upper back. Plus, since it's a multijoint exercise, the muscles that bend the elbow, such as the biceps, are also involved. And in addition to all that, the leverage on a one-arm row is perfect for lifting relatively heavy weights—you have one foot on the floor, and the opposite knee and hand braced on the bench. There's no stress on your lower back, and it's not unusual to see serious bodybuilders doing this exercise with a dumbbell weighing 100 pounds or more.

The kickback, meanwhile, is an awkward exercise, with relatively poor leverage. The only movement is at the elbow joint, which is not designed to move heavy weights at that angle. Even a beginner would probably be able to use three or four times as much weight on a row versus a kickback.

This woman was using 6-pound dumbbells for the kickbacks . . . and 7-pound weights for the rows.

I asked a trainer at the gym if he'd seen what I'd just seen. He shook his head sadly, and said that the toughest part of his job was getting women to use weights heavy enough to make their time in the gym worthwhile.

So even if a woman understands the first two rules in this chapter—that the object of lifting is to build muscle, and that muscle is hard to build—the idea that she truly needs to challenge herself in the weight room may not get through.

NEW RULE #4 • Hard work includes lifting heavier weights

It's not enough to progress from lifting the Barbie 'bells fifteen times to lifting them twenty times. It may be an accomplishment—that is, the result of purposeful and exhausting work—but it's not going to make muscles bigger. Muscles grow for a variety of reasons, but the main one is strength. If you force them to get stronger, they will get bigger. If you start lifting 100 pounds five times, but train your body to lift 150 pounds five times, you're going to end up with bigger muscles. But if you start off lifting 50 pounds ten times, and progress to lifting the same 50 pounds fifteen times, all you've done is increase the endurance of the muscles, which by itself will not make them bigger.

NEW RULE #5 • From time to time, you have to break some of the old rules

You'll rarely see a woman lifting weights with bad form in a gym. And you'll almost always see at least one man slinging iron around with technique so miserably wrong you want to dial 9 and 1 on your cell phone just to save time when the inevitable spine-buckling accident occurs.

In between the extremes, you'll see lots of guys pushing themselves out to the edge of acceptable form to get an extra repetition in their final set of an exercise, or to hit a new personal record on a lift. If nothing else, you'll probably see guys lift at a variety of speeds, perhaps shifting into a faster gear near the end of a set to help them complete more repetitions. The more experienced a male lifter is, the more he learns to trust his own body and his own instincts. (Alas, inexperienced lifters often feel the same way, even if their instincts haven't yet earned that trust.)

But you'll rarely see a woman deviate from the textbook description of the exercise. And when it comes to the tempo of her lifts, she performs them like clockwork, even if it means she has to use unchallenging weights to make such precision possible. I'd never advocate lifting with bad form. But there's more to strength training than coloring inside the lines.

Part of the problem is fear. When women are introduced to the weight room, they're taught that there's only one way to perform each exercise, and that small adjustments to accommodate individual biomechanics will

put her in the ER. If anybody tries to instill such fear in a man, the sound magically stops before it reaches his eardrums.

To make things worse, women are sometimes presented with cautions that have little basis in the real world, creating fear of injury when the actual risk is nonexistent.

For example, in the book *Body for Life for Women*, the author offers this instruction for a simple shoulder press: “Press the weights up until your arms are almost straight (with your elbows just short of locked).” Since the author is Pamela Peeke, M.D., and not some garden-variety personal trainer or celebrity who decided to expand her investment portfolio by writing a workout book, you’d assume the antielbow-straightening precaution has a basis in science. That is, straightening your arms at the elbow joints must be bad for you.

It’s not.

In all my years of writing about strength training, and in all my months of studying for my credentials as a trainer, I’ve never come across any suggestion of injury risk from this simple movement. More to the point, elbows are *supposed* to lock. It’s called “straightening your arms.” The triceps muscles are designed to straighten your elbows until they reach that locked position. If you don’t lock, you don’t work your triceps through their full range of motion, which means you don’t get the full benefits of the elbow-straightening exercise you’re performing.

My issue here isn’t with the idea that people should exercise with caution, and I’m not arguing for more reckless abandon in the weight room. What I am saying is that your body has natural movement patterns, which support a range of variations. Maybe all strength-training precautions can be reduced to these two sentences: *If it’s what your body was designed to do, it’s probably not bad form. And if the exercise requires you to do something unnatural, you should think twice before doing it.*

How to Feel Like a Natural Woman

I realize that the word “natural” isn’t always helpful in early twenty-first-century America, where humans spend much of the day sitting at desks or driving cars, two actions that no one would argue our bodies evolved to perform. To me, a “natural” position or movement is one you would assume or perform in an athletic activity.

Picture yourself playing volleyball, getting ready to return the other team’s serve. Your feet are parallel to each other, perhaps shoulder-width apart, with toes pointed forward. Your knees are bent slightly. (You’d never play any sport with stiff knees; you’d be virtually immobile.) Your lower back is arched slightly. Your shoulders are square, and your midsection’s tight. That’s what a human body looks like when it’s ready for physical action, whether that action is a game, a hunt, or a wrestling match.

Now picture a typical woman standing at the cable station in a typical gym, getting ready to perform triceps extensions. (In case you’re new to lifting, the extension is an elbow-straightening exercise, usually done with a straight bar attached to the cable.) Her feet are together, her knees are locked, her lower back is flat, and her shoulders are hunched up toward her ears. In other words, she’s in the opposite of an athletic position, despite the fact she’s about to do an exercise that, in theory, will make her body more athletic.

NEW RULE #6 • No workout will make you taller

Workout advice for women is riddled with allusions to making muscles “longer.” I started noticing it a few years ago at the front end of the Pilates craze. In fact, I was on a panel at a conference with an editor from a

women's magazine who, in discussing fitness trends, said that women didn't want to build "bulky" muscles; instead, they wanted "long, lean muscles, like a dancer's," and they could get these muscles from Pilates.

I started laughing (not my most gracious moment, I admit), and wondered if I should start telling my readers at *Men's Health* that our workouts could make them taller. The poor woman looked stunned; I don't think it had occurred to her that her pro-Pilates sentiments were nothing more than propaganda.

The reality is this: muscles, as aforementioned, have a genetically predetermined shape. If you train and feed a muscle so that it grows, you can't choose whether the muscle becomes "bulky" or "long and lean, like a dancer's," any more than you can choose your own height. I won't claim men are inherently reality-based—I've gotten e-mails from more than one guy asking how he can get "ripped abs, like Brad Pitt" (my answer: "For starters, you'll need his parents")—but I've never had anyone ask me how he can make his muscles "longer." It just doesn't occur to guys to think of their bodies as being that malleable.

That said, I think both genders fall for the entirely fallacious notion that by doing a particular person's workout, they can have a physique like that person. Anyone in the business of publishing bodybuilding magazines will tell you that the surest way to sell more copies than usual is to slap a black-and-white picture of Arnold Schwarzenegger on the cover, and promise Schwarzeneggerian results with the workout routine inside. For some reason, it never occurs to anyone that Arnold was the only guy in the history of bodybuilding who ever looked like Arnold. Logically, that suggests a one-of-a-kind quirk in Schwarzenegger's genetic code, something that allowed him to achieve unique physical proportions that were simply unattainable by anyone else. Same goes for whichever model or actress is on the cover of *Shape* or *Fitness* or *Self* this month. You can use their "Exclusive Stay-Slim Workout Secrets!" from now till doomsday, but there's not a chance in a million you'll emerge with a belly, shank, or rump like that celebrity unless your genetics allow it.

Another idea I'd like to dispel, while I'm at it:

Let's say you accept the impossibility of developing a celebrity's proportions without being a clone of that celebrity. Chances are, you still believe that you can achieve a "type" of physique if you train like people who have that type. Magazines feed this notion, rarely stated in so many words, by showing tall, lean models doing workouts that promise readers a long, lean physique.

Of course, this makes perfect sense from the magazines' point of view. They aren't going to sell many copies if they show short, chunky women in their workout features. But you have to understand that the models doing the workouts are just that. They were cast by the photo editors specifically because they already have what the feature promises. If the exercises in the feature are unique, you can bet the model is doing them for the first time. She had that body when she walked in the door of the photo studio, and she'll still have it when she walks out. That's why she's a model. An obvious point? Okay. But raise your hand if you believe that running will make you look like a runner. If your hand isn't in the air, you're probably not being honest with yourself. Don't you believe that running makes you lose weight, and that successful runners are skinny because they run? Isn't that why you, or people you know, turn to endurance exercise as the first step in a weight-loss program? I'm not going to tackle the myths and realities of long-distance locomotion until Chapter 3, and I won't for a second argue that women are more susceptible to the seductive strains of "Build a Dancer's Body!" than men are to the testosterone-soaked dream of "Build Arms Like Arnold's!"

But if we don't start this relationship with a firm grasp of the reality of our undertaking, it's just not going to work. And if it doesn't work, you'll go right back to toning, shaping, and sculpting, not to mention living in fear of being bulky. Even worse, if things really go bad, I may have to go back to writing articles about Brad Pitt's abs. Nobody wants that.

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