

Tone and Strengthen Your Back and Arms (Summer Shape-Up Week 5)

By Lisa Schilling RN

This week we are looking at the back, biceps and triceps. Your back is used for most daily functions. It can be difficult to isolate and often this fact leads people to overlook it. Balanced back strength will reduce injury and increase your coordination. It is essential to good posture. A strong back compliments your abdominals and work together to form your body's natural brace of support. Keep in mind that most back exercises involve a rowing motion of some kind.

Exercise #1) Lawn Mowers or a One Arm Row-You will stand next to a chair and bend so that your left hand is touching the chair seat. Extend your right arm straight down while holding a dumbbell—palm to body. Your arms are parallel to each other. Pull your right elbow back and up as if starting a lawn mower. You will feel the shoulder blade rise. Lower to the starting position.

Exercise #2) Seated Dumbbell Row. Sit up straight in your chair. Raise arms out in front of you and parallel to the floor. Roll your shoulders back and pull ribcage up which arches the back. Maintain this upright posture. Slowly pull the dumbbells into your rib cage. Keep elbows up and parallel to the floor. Pause and feel the squeeze across the back. (Think of squeezing shoulder blades together) Push the dumbbells back to the starting position.

Exercise #3) Bent-Over Row-Sit in your chair and bend forward. Take a dumbbell in each hand and let your arms hang down at your sides. Pull arms up with palms facing in. Your elbows bow out slightly and the dumbbells stay close to your body. Shoulder blades come close together. Pause and feel the squeeze in the upper back. Watch form, relax your neck and don't let your posture sag. Return to the start.

Exercise #4) Bent-Over Flies. Sit in your chair and bend forward. Take a dumbbell in each hand and let your arms hang down at your sides. Your palms face

each other at knee level. Raise arms up and away from your body until parallel with shoulders. Keep elbows soft and extend them almost fully at shoulder level. Pause and feel that squeeze in the upper back. Return to the start.

Your biceps are located in the front of the upper arm. Biceps are the muscle group that most think of when you say "Make a muscle." Men spend time on this area because of its growth potential (due to their hormonal make-up). Women need to train this area in order to balance the triceps muscle and further define the arms. Women will not "bulk up" due to lack of the male hormones that allow that. Increased arm strength is important when performing daily functions and as a person ages. It keeps bones strong and joints flexible. The basic push up that was described in week one is also great for biceps. Most people can use **heavier weight** for biceps and triceps.

Exercise #5) The Classic Curl and several variations of the curl work the bicep. Sit in a chair or stand. Extend your arm along your side. Hold a dumbbell in your hand with palm up and fully bend your elbow. This exercise involves movement in the elbow joint only. The upper arm does not move. Return to the start by extending the arm. These can be done bilaterally, in alternating splits or one arm at a time. You can also do the same motion using a barbell or a broom. Hammer curls can be done by turning the palms in facing the body instead of up.

Your triceps are located in the back of the upper arm. This area responds quickly to exercise and promotes balance and strength. Toned arms define your body and reveal a fit and sculpted shape. This is the area that keeps on waving, long after you stopped!

Exercise #6) A classic arm-flab toner is the Dumbbell Kickback. You will sit in a chair holding a dumbbell in your hand. Lean forward slightly with your back flat, but not arched. Bend elbow until your forearm is parallel with the ground (a runner's stance). Press the dumbbell back by extending the

elbow fully. The KEY to this exercise and all triceps work is that the upper arm (shoulder to elbow) does not move. All motion takes place at the elbow. Pause and feel the squeeze in the back of the arm. Slowly return to the starting position.

Exercise #7) Dips are your most versatile option. Sit on the edge of a chair. Place your hands beside your hips on the front corner edges. Slide feet forward. The farther out your feet, the more difficult this is. Slide your bottom off the chair and dip down. You should feel the work in the back of the arms and don't cheat with your legs. Use only your arms to raise and lower. Rise back up by straightening the arms.

These basic exercises can be done at home and require no equipment. Dumbbells can be used but are not necessary, especially for beginners. Always stretch before and after exercise to allow for better range of motion and to prevent injury.

