



BICEPS

TRAINING CANON
DECIPHERING THE WORLD'S BEST BICEPS-BUILDING PROGRAMS

by STEVE COLESCOTT

In bodybuilding, biceps are, without a doubt, the favorite bodypart for most of us to train. They tend to respond well to training for 90% of us, due to their strong neural pathways and above average blood supply, which almost guarantee muscle pumps. Not only do they respond well to training, but there is no other muscle that tends to be more showcased by lifters. The *wow factor* of big, shapely arms cannot be overlooked, whether on the beach, on the bodybuilding stage or straining under a well-tailored suit.

For men, arms have always been a marker of masculinity. In part, because they are displayed nine months out of the year (during short-sleeve weather) and are often the first muscles in which we notice growth during puberty (either in ourselves or in our more genetically-gifted classmates). In women, shapely muscular arms have recently come in vogue. Hollywood starlets Linda Hamilton and Angela Basset sported gun-emphasizing tank tops and impressed audiences with their lean, strong looking arms. The new physical female ideal is not just lean, but possesses a body, and in particular, arms with muscularity and definition.

ANATOMY AND FUNCTION

An understanding of the structures and actions of the muscles of the upper arm are important when designing your biceps training program. When we speak of the biceps we generally mean more than just the biceps brachii. Because they tend to work together, the biceps group also includes the brachialis, brachioradialis and pronator teres muscles. The major bone of the upper arm is the humerus (which gives us the term funny bone). There are two bones in the forearm, the radius (the shorter bone on the “pinky side” of your forearm) and the ulna (the main stabilizing bone of the forearm on the “thumb side”). The tendons that attach muscles are referred to as the origin (the tendon closest to spine) and an insertion (the tendon of attachment furthest down the arm).

As its name suggests, the biceps is a two-headed muscle which crosses both the elbow and shoulder joints. Both heads share a common insertion on the tuberosity of the radius (you can feel this thick tendon just beneath the skin on the inside of your elbow). The lateral (“outer” or long) head originates on your shoulder blade (on the supraglenoid tubercle, above the glenoid fossa) and the tendon crosses inside the head of the humerus to emerge at the upper arm. The medial (short or “inner”) biceps head originates on the coracoid process of the scapula (upper shoulder blade) and the upper lip of the glenoid fossa (the cartilage-lined depression of bone that the humerus is placed in the shoulder joint). If your arms are well-developed and you possess low bodyfat levels, you will be able to see the split between the two heads of the biceps. A peaked shape to the biceps comes from placement of the tendons of the two biceps heads.

The brachialis inserts at the top of the forearm bone on your “pinky side” (coronoid process of the ulna) and originates low on your upper arm bone near the elbow (the distal half of the anterior humerus). This places it under the lower part of the biceps muscle. The brachialis is an under-rated muscle which adds considerable size to the arm when developed and is the PRIMARY elbow flexor.

The brachioradialis inserts on the other bone in the forearm on the “thumb side” (the lateral surface of the distal radius, at the styloid process), partway between the elbow and wrist) and originates low on the upper arm bone, near the outer elbow (the distal section of the lateral condyloid ridge of the humerus). The coracobrachialis lies under the biceps but, since it does not cross the elbow joint (it assists the shoulder and back muscles with rowing-type movements), it is not considered part of the biceps (elbow flexor) group.

The muscles of the arms have a unique function in sports movement. While the big muscles of the body (hip flexors, quadriceps, hamstrings, pecs, lats, rhomboids, traps, spinal erectors) drive powerful action,

The muscle groups of the arm (biceps, triceps and forearms) transfer that force into your opponent, the ball or the bat, racquet, club or the instrument of your particular sport.

Biceps derive a great deal of stimulation from their use as a secondary mover. They overlap with pulling exercises, such as chins, pulldowns, lat rows and upright rows. How much emphasis depends on muscle insertions, exercise form and neural excitatory thresholds. Because your biceps derive a fair amount of work during your back training, minimal direct training may be needed. The biceps generally provide lifters with a high level of neural activation (few have trouble “feeling” their arms) and a low level of inroads into recovery ability, which lends themselves well to arm specialization phases.

MUSCLE SHAPING

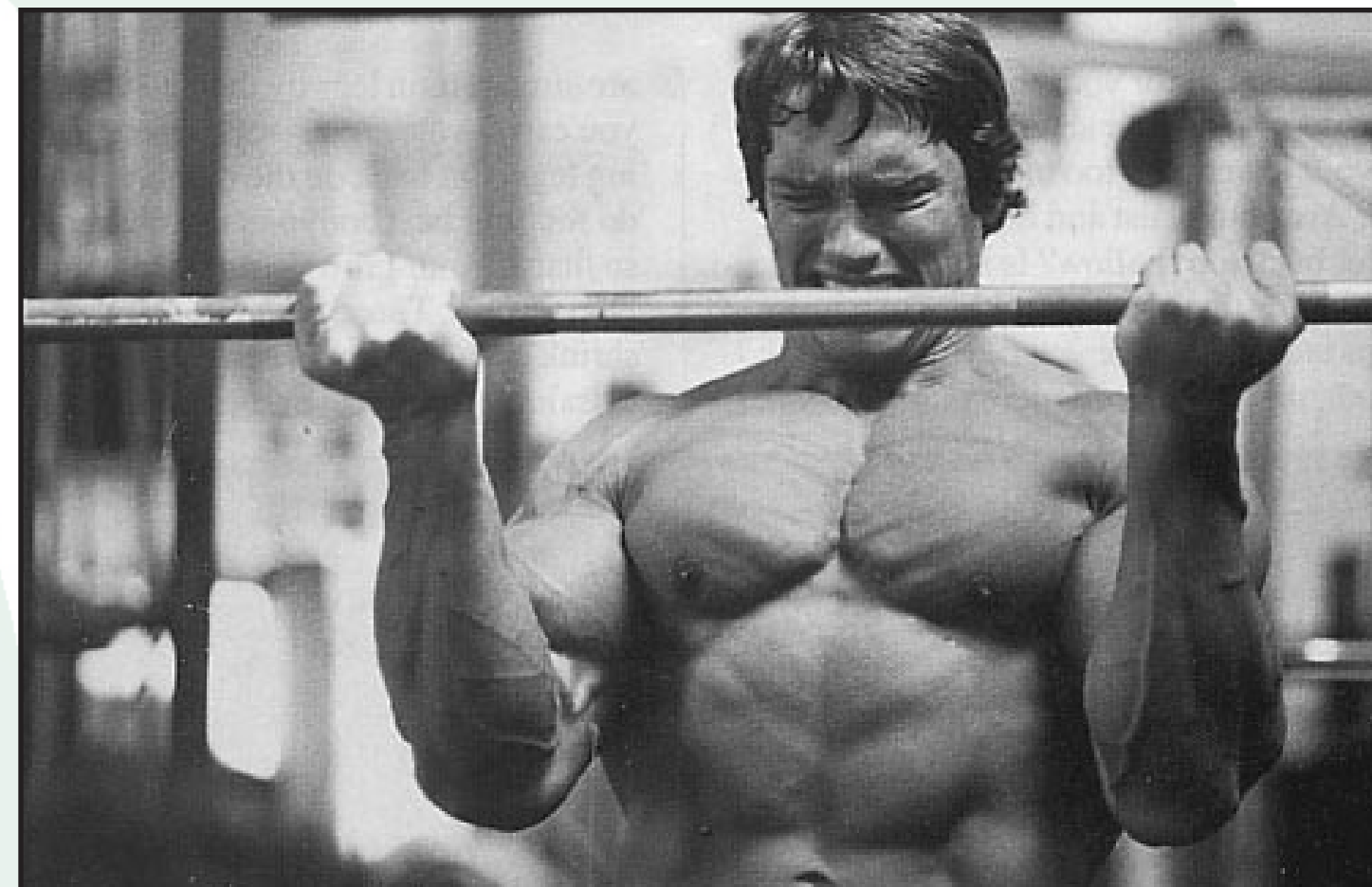
Is muscle shaping possible? This is one of the most controversial topics in bodybuilding. The consensus is split, often based on background. Those with a pure in-the-gym trenches background, particularly the old-timers, firmly believe that muscle shaping is a reality. Those enlightened with collegiate degrees in exercise physiology feel certain that muscle shaping is an an-

cient gym myth; as archaic as kelp tablets and brewer’s yeast. These experts assert that muscle isolation is impossible and muscle fibers contract in an as-needed basis throughout the full length of the functional muscle group.

So, which group is right? Both are partially correct. The scholarly set has valid points. Muscle fibers do contract on an all-or-none basis along their length. Isolation of a particular section of a muscle (lower biceps, for instance) is impossible in a real-life setting. Muscles have an origin point (the attachment closest to the center of the body), belly (central mass of the muscle) and insertion (tendon attachment furthest from the center of the body). When we increase muscle size, we cause growth in fibers along the full length of the muscle, not in a particular section (such as upper biceps, peak or lower biceps).

For example, Preacher (Scott) Curls were commonly prescribed to lengthen biceps, as they were believed to work the lower biceps. Feeling emphasis (stretch) in a particular area does not necessarily mean that area of a muscle group is being worked more than others. We cannot affect muscle length, the origin and insertion points are genetically preset. Nothing short of surgery can change them. If you have “high biceps” like 80s pros Albert Beckles or Franco Columbo, you can build up the muscles of the forearm and brachialis, therefore filling in your gap. Those not possessing full, football-shaped biceps (like Sergio Oliva) tend to have impressive biceps peaks (again Albert Beckles comes to mind). This example serves as a reminder to appreciate what you have and make the best of it.

While it is true that we cannot isolate specific parts of a muscle, we can often place greater emphasis on part of a muscle group through our choice in exercise, grip, range-of-motion, or body position. Lifting with a wide grip (elbows in, your grip wider than your shoulders), places greater emphasis on the medial (inner) biceps. This can be done with Barbell Curls, Scott Curls or Ca-



ble Curls simply be choosing proper hand spacing and elbow placement. It can also be done by replicating that same arc of movement with dumbbells or cables. Incline Dumbbell Curls in which the ‘bells are curled outward shift the emphasis more prominently on the inner biceps head.

Conversely, close-grip curling movements shift emphasis to the lateral (outer) biceps. Two-handed Cable Curls from the low pulley and Scott Curls with the elbows placed wide are good exercises to shift emphasis to the outer biceps head. Also, Alternating Dumbbell Curls in which the weights are curled across and in front of the body place a noticeable emphasis on the outer biceps. The traditional Concentration Curl, in which the lifter is seated with his working arms rested along the inside of his knee, also works this area.

Adjustments to elbows and grip position not only allow you to shift greater emphasis towards one of the biceps heads, but also adds variety to your training. Extreme, awkward angles however can increase strain on the soft tissues of the shoulder, elbow and wrist. For this reason, use these angles periodically for some

of your exercises and never if the exercises cause pain or discomfort in the joints. Intelligently applied, these adjustments can lead to better arm development and less strain from repeated overuse of a single movement pattern.

In addition to grip width and elbow placement, the hand position can shift muscular emphasis. The primary grip positions we have in biceps training are: 1) Supinated or palms-up such as in a curl with a straight barbell, 2) Neutral or palms-facing such as in a hammer curl, or 3) Pronated or palms-down such as in a Reverse Curl. The brachialis is highly activated when you curl with a neutral thumbs-up grip, such as with DB Hammer Curls. The pronator teres receives greater emphasis when you use a palms-down grip, such as with Reverse Curls.

Of course, these are not the only grips we use. When curling with a cambered (E-Z curl) bar, are hands are in a position halfway between supinated and neutral, just as reverse curls with a cambered bar places our hands halfway between a neutral and pronated grip. Dumbbell Curls allow us to supinate [outwardly rotate the thumb] as we curls so the grip changes throughout the

completion of the rep. We do not isolate any of these muscles in an exercise but a general understanding of the biomechanics will help guide you in your exercise selection.

INTENSIFICATION TECHNIQUES

Utilizing specialized training techniques to increase biceps stimulation tends to be remarkably effective. The biceps group is relatively small, with an excellent blood supply and neural activity. As such, giving them an extra jolt of punishment can push past barriers without making huge inroads into the body's overall systemic recovery. Still, use these sparingly. A little bit goes a long way.

PARTIALS. Partial Reps create a very different feel (neurological effect) from traditional full reps, which creates an effective growth-promoting stimulus. They can be incorporated in your program in a number of ways. If your primary goal is biceps strength, partial reps in the Barbell Curl can be performed in a power rack with the pins set at the weak point in the range of motion (almost always the point in the rep where your forearms are parallel to the ground). Set the pins in the rack for a 3-4" range of motion and do 4-6 sets of 3-4 reps for no more than six workouts. You should notice a solid strength gain when you go back to full reps.

Another form of partials that is especially adaptable to biceps (and Barbell Curls) is **Twenty-Ones**. Twenty-Ones involve the use of half-reps. Seven reps are done from the top position to midpoint (forearms parallel to the ground); seven are done from the bottom position to midpoint; and a final seven are done full-range. You can do this technique best with Barbell Curls and Standing Dumbbell Curls. I recommend just two to four sets at the conclusion of your biceps workout due to the high reps.

The final form of partials is **One-and-a-Halves**. As the name suggests, these involve performing a full-range rep followed by a half-rep from the top to midpoint

(which you count as a single repetition). Do One-and-a-Halves for 3-5 sets of 6-8 reps (which, since you are doing counting the one-and-a-half reps as just one rep, will be like doing 9-12 reps) on your final biceps exercise. Reversing the momentum of the weight at the midpoint creates unique neural stimuli that can jumpstart your gains and provides variety in your training.

One can also perform Seated Barbell Curls which, due to the obvious mechanical limitations, becomes a strict curl in which you focus only on the top half of the range-of-motion. This tends to emphasize the biceps brachii while somewhat limiting the involvement of the brachialis when compared to the full-range version of the curl.

While One-and-a-Halves, Twenty-Ones and Partial call for you to change direction mid-rep, in Static Contractions you stop the rep midway in the range-of-motion and "squeeze the muscle" without moving the weight. I recommend pausing at three points of the range of motion, one-quarter of the way down, midway, and three-quarters of the way down for a 30-45 seconds squeeze with the bar not noticeably moving. This works best for two-handed exercises (Barbell Curls, Reverse Curls, and Machine Curls) because it is difficult to pause at the same point with dumbbell exercises. Static Contractions should be incorporated for just one or two sets of 6-10 reps of a single exercise.

Studies show that the eccentric portion of a rep (lowering the weight from a contracted position) is responsible for most of our muscle growth. This makes Accentuated Eccentrics something you should try. This can be done in a number of ways: 1) Slow Negatives can be used for nearly any biceps exercise and work very well with Cheating and Forced Reps. Since we can lower heavier weights than we can lift, the heavier weights used for these techniques are further enhanced by slowly fighting the eccentric portion of the lift. 2) Increased Negatives require that you have a training partner to manually apply added resistance to the bar or dumbbells as you lower the weight. This technique should be used



sparingly (perhaps for just one or two sets of an exercise as a plateau buster). 3) Negative-Only Reps are difficult to safely do for most curling exercises because they would require two spotters to lift the weight to the top position so that the lifter could slowly lower it. It can be done to great effect with an Undergrip Chin-up, since the lifter can jump (or use a step to lift themselves) to the top position and then slowly lower their body (taking 30-45 seconds to reach full extension of the arms). This is best when used as a finishing exercise for a single set of six to ten reps.

The following intensifiers are set extension techniques, which allow you to continue a set beyond the point in which you would typically be unable to continue (the added contractions recruiting more muscle fibers).

Cheating. This is probably the most commonly used technique on this list and also the most widely abused. Proper use of cheating involves subtle movement in other joints to create momentum, allowing the weight to move past the sticking point after the lifter has done as many strict reps as possible. In biceps training, this usually means a slight unlocking of the knees and forward hip thrust to begin the curling movement with added momentum. The key here is to only use cheating minimally. Cheating can be used in two ways; beginners should stick to getting just two or three extra reps at the completion of their last two heavy sets of a basic exercise (Barbell Curls, Dumbbell Curls, Hammer Curls or Reverse Curls). Don't use this technique

on machines or Preacher Curls. Intermediate (four or more months of consistent training) or advanced lifters (a year of consistent training) can do Cheat Curls as a specific exercise, allowing for heavier weights than they would normally be able to use. If done in this manner, begin with one or two lighter non-cheat warm-up sets and then do three to five sets of four to eight reps. With either style, you should make sure to lower the weight slowly and in control (to take advantage of the eccentric contraction with a heavy weight). An experienced eye can pick out a veteran from a novice by their ability to apply just the necessary amount of assistance to cause more punishment to the biceps rather than making the set easier. This can also be said for the next technique.

Forced Reps. If you have a good training partner, they can assist you in pushing a set beyond failure by gently assisting you by applying just a few pounds worth of pressure on the bar (or dumbbells) through the sticking point. Like Cheat Reps, have your partner assist you through just two to three extra reps at the end of your last two sets.

Rest Pause is another form of intensification that simply manipulates rest periods to allow more work to be performed without requiring a training partner or loss of strict form. For biceps training, Rest Pause can be done for the basic movements (particularly Standing Barbell or Dumbbell Curls). After warming-up, choose a weight that can be done in strict form for five to six reps. Once you reach failure, set the weight down for just two or three deep breaths and then try for two to three more reps. Advanced lifters can attempt a second "breather" which should allow for another one to three difficult reps. This should be done for just one to three sets on a single biceps exercise per workout. Rest Pause is best used as a strength move, with the additional rest periods allowing for more forceful contractions.

If you are looking for a lactic acid-inducing, insane pump-causing technique, I would recommend **Drop-Sets** (also known as the "down the rack"). While the Rest Pause

technique uses a 20 to 30-second rest before returning to more reps with the same weight, Drop Sets incorporate almost no rest with a lighter weight. Let's say you normally do Dumbbell Curls with 45-pounders for around eight reps... Start with that weight, once you reach failure, set the weight down on the rack and immediately pick up a pair of 35-pounders. Get as many reps as possible (probably around three to five reps). Beginners should do just a single drop. Intermediates can do a second drop (in this example, 25-pounders for another three to five reps). Advanced lifters can do a third drop and you will be amazed how heavy 15 to 20-pounders will feel at this point. My personal twist on Drop Sets is the Band Jettison Technique, modeled after a similar technique used by writer Dennis Weis on Upright Rows. Basically, I perform Barbell or Dumbbell Curls while also holding elastic tubing or power bands to increase resistance. After reaching failure, I step back so that I no longer am anchoring the elastic band or tube (at the bottom of the rep to keep from getting whipped in the face), and then continue on with as many reps with just the metallic resistance.

The final technique that I use with my training clients for variety is **Timed Sets**. This is an excellent finisher to a biceps workout (since you won't have much left once you have done a set of these). I typically have them curl with dumbbells for 60 seconds, which seems like an eternity. We follow a fast pace but don't count the reps. I count off the time at major intervals and often will have them do twenty seconds curling both 'bells together, the next twenty seconds alternating, and the final twenty curling together. Talk about lactic acid build-up!

There are a variety of supersets that can enhance the training effect. The idea here is to increase work density (more work performed in less time). In biceps training, there are four styles of supersets that are particularly applicable: 1) Pre-exhaust Supersets. By doing an isolation exercise (pretty much any curl), followed immediately by a compound exercise (such as Undergrip

STEVE COLESCOTT

Chins) more reps can be performed after the biceps are fatigued. 2) Post-exhaust Supersets. Studies have shown that following a compound exercise (again, Undergrip Chins) with a more isolated one (such as Machine Curls), brings about excellent muscle fiber recruitment. 3) Antagonist Supersets. There are two benefits to supersetting exercises for opposing muscle groups (such as biceps and triceps): first, more work is done in less time and second, muscle groups recuperate faster when their opposing group is worked. 4) Tri-sets/ Giant Sets should be done with three movements that vary in feel or emphasis such as Incline Dumbbell Curls (elbows behind the body), Standing Barbell Curls (elbows near the sides) and Overhead Cable Curls (elbows lifted high) or exercises utilizing wide, moderate and narrow grips. You can also break up two biceps exercises with a triceps exercise, for the reasons explained earlier.

BODYPART SPLITS

How should we fit biceps into your weekly training routine? The four best splits include:

* **Push/Pull Split.** Following your back training with biceps has the advantage that you require less warm-up sets since biceps have functioned as secondary movers in chin-up, pulldown and rowing exercises. This works best for beginner and intermediate lifters or advanced lifters in phases in which they are following abbreviated routines.

* **Inverse Push/Pull.** By flip-flopping things so that you follow chest training with biceps, you go into biceps training fresh. This is an excellent option if you find that back training is impeding upon your biceps strength.

* **Arms Alone.** In recent years, more and more advanced lifters have gone to once-a-week splits in which a single day's training is devoted to one major body part. Because increased volume is required to stimulate growth, an arm training (biceps and triceps) day allows for higher volume (14+sets). Personally, I recom-

mend training more often. Instead of training biceps once a week for 16 sets, I'd rather train twice weekly for nine to twelve sets. This allows for more growth opportunities and better recuperation (see the next section).

* **Specialization Training.** Specialization training requires increase training frequency. Read the Specialization section in the next section for more details.

DESIGNING BICEPS PROGRAMS

Okay, with all that info you have to be asking yourself, "How do I fit it all together?" Biceps training is not incredibly complex. Now that you know the anatomy, physiology and assorted details behind biceps training, the rationale behind the following programs will make sense and (more importantly) you will understand how to adapt them to your personal needs.

While a wide range of reps is best while trying to build impressive biceps, the 6-12 rep ranges tends to work best. This is the rep range that best stimulates the high-threshold fast-twitch muscle fibers that are responsible for most of the muscular hypertrophy. Using too low of a rep range (1-5 reps), can increase the risk of injury and not provide enough time under tension to stimulate biceps growth. Using too high of a rep range (more than 15 reps), may not adequately stimulate the fast twitch muscle fibers. However, it is wise to occasionally use the lower rep range to increase strength and the higher rep range to stimulate the slow-twitch fibers and to build the capillary beds and the sarco-plasmic factors that are built from "chasing the pump." High reps also have a recuperative effect and can be done on non-biceps training day to stimulate growth and rehab minor injuries. Look at the following training templates as guidelines:



IRON SUBCULTURE



in the freaky (18-22" arm range) need to add closer to twenty-five to thirty lean pounds for each inch of shirt-stretching size they pack on, since more actually mass is required to increase the measurement as the circumference increases (ask your high school algebra teacher to explain).

BEGINNERS

We want to begin the biceps workout with a basic strength exercise like Barbell Curls or Alternate Dumbbell Curls. At this stage in your development, we need general size and strength gains so medium-width grips and arcs of motion are all you need. Strength gains happen fastest for beginners, so don't sacrifice strict form and a slow, controlled negative. The poundages will climb and you will know they were brought on by honest biceps enhancement. The second exercise focuses on the brachialis/ brachioradialis. We will be alternating the two listed exercises each workout. Here's an example:

1. Alternate Dumbbell Curl
Warm-up
3-4 sets of 6-10 reps
2. Dumbbell Hammer Curl or Reverse Curl
2-3 sets of 8-12 reps

Heavy Squats, Deadlifts, Rows and Presses and plenty of good, nutritious food will do more for busting your biceps size plateau than thousands of heavy curls and dozens of hours of triceps work. At this stage the best thing you can do to increase arm size is to get bigger and stronger overall.

It is well-known that increases in bodyweight are also a necessary part of arm growth. Despite our best efforts to circumvent nature, the body's growth mechanisms are programmed to maintain a certain amount of symmetrical growth. In order to put an inch on your biceps measurement the body requires a bodyweight gain of about fifteen pounds. Once you have decent-sized arms (15-18") this number is closer to twenty pounds for each added inch. The rare genetic elite among us

STEVE COLESCOTT

INTERMEDIATES

Don't let the "newbies" from the Beginners group read this section. Read it over three or four times, commit it to memory, and then get out your black Sharpie marker and "reverse highlight" it out of existence before your kid brother (or sister) reads the section.

We told the beginners to keep it strict. In this section we are going to apparently contradict that advice. As an Intermediate level lifter, we are going to start including Cheating and Slow Eccentrics in the last couple sets of our first biceps exercise, which should be a basic strength movement like Barbell Curls or Alternate Dumbbell Curls. You have to have fully mastered strict form to understand properly cheating on a set of curls. Do one to two strict sets (even after your warm-ups) before including cheating sets. Remember: this involves just minimal cheating to make the exercise more difficult. Your biceps don't know how much weight you have loaded up, just how much force they must exert to perform the tasks that you call upon them.

Since you are now able to handle higher training volume, we include a second biceps exercise. This time we increase the rep range slightly and choose a more specialized exercise, targeting a specific bicep emphasis (range of motion, feel or arc-of-movement). Excellent choices here might include Incline Dumbbell Curls, Drag Curls, Scott Curls, any of the various Cable Curls or pretty much any of the exercises listed here that you want to try. I recommend that you switch this exercise often to keep the workouts interesting and your biceps development complete.

1. Barbell Curl

IRON SUBCULTURE

- Warm-up
4 sets of 6-10 reps
2. Incline Dumbbell Curls
3 sets of 8-12 reps
 3. Hammer Curl, Zottman Curl, Reverse Curl
2-3 sets of 8-12 reps

As an intermediate, I recommend that you also include forearm work as this will help with the development and strength increases in the biceps group. Your third exercise also serves as a great warm-up for direct forearm exercises like Wrist Curls.

ADVANCED

Variety reigns supreme in advanced biceps programs. In fact, rather than list one program, I will give multiple examples, although at this stage you will be able to create a multitude of your own. In general, you will be doing 10-14 sets with rep ranges that vary widely depending on the desired effect on that day.

CLASSIC 10X10 ROUTINE

1. Barbell Curl
Warm-up
10 sets of 10 reps

This is a guaranteed size builder that operates under the premise that after a hundred reps your nervous systems will be desperately searching for every last motor unit to help you curl that bar one more rep. Either adjust your hand placing each set to shift emphasis to different elbow flexors or choose a specific grip to target one aspect - a great way to learn (via delayed-onset muscle soreness) how well an exercise targets your intended muscle segment. I recommend short (60 second) rest periods between sets, even if it forces you to decrease poundages on your latter sets.

DOWN-THE-RACK ROUTINE

1. Alternate Dumbbell Curls
Warm-up
4 sets of 6-10/3-4/3-4/1-3 reps*
- B. Reverse Curl

STEVE COLESCOTT

3 sets of 8-12/3-4/1-3 reps*
* in drop set style

This is a fast and tough workout. There may seem to be a remarkably low number of sets for an advanced lifter, but by working down-the-rack (going to failure and then immediately picking up a lighter pair of dumbbells to force out more reps) is like including 3-5 sets in one excruciatingly growth-promoting set. Alternating Dumbbell Curls lend themselves well to this technique because the alternating fashion allows for more reps and the lifter can work his way down the rack with a subtle side-step between each drop in poundage. If your normal curling weight is 45-pound dumbbells for around 8 reps, start at that weight and perform strict reps to failure. Take a deep breath and immediately grab your next lowest set of dumbbells (35s might be a good choice since you need enough of a decrease in weight to make 3-4 reps possible). Then make a second weight drop to immediately begin curling the 25s for as many reps as possible. Gluttons for punishment (and those with good conditioning and tolerance for exercise) can do one more weight drop (possibly to 15s, which will feel impossibly heavy).

Reverse or Hammer Curls work well with drop-sets but two weight drops should be all that are required with either of these since lactic acid build-up will make it difficult to even hold a weight if you push these hard.

The intensity of this technique makes it great for times when you want to get arms done fast (in which case, follow it just as listed). In most cases though, you may want to do drop-sets on either the biceps exercise or the brachialis exercise, not both in the same session. In this case, reduce the number of sets and/or drops and include a second exercise, like this:

1. Alternate Dumbbell Curls
Warm-up
3-4 sets of 6-10/3-4/1-3 reps*
2. Cable Preacher Curls
3 sets of 8-12 reps

IRON SUBCULTURE



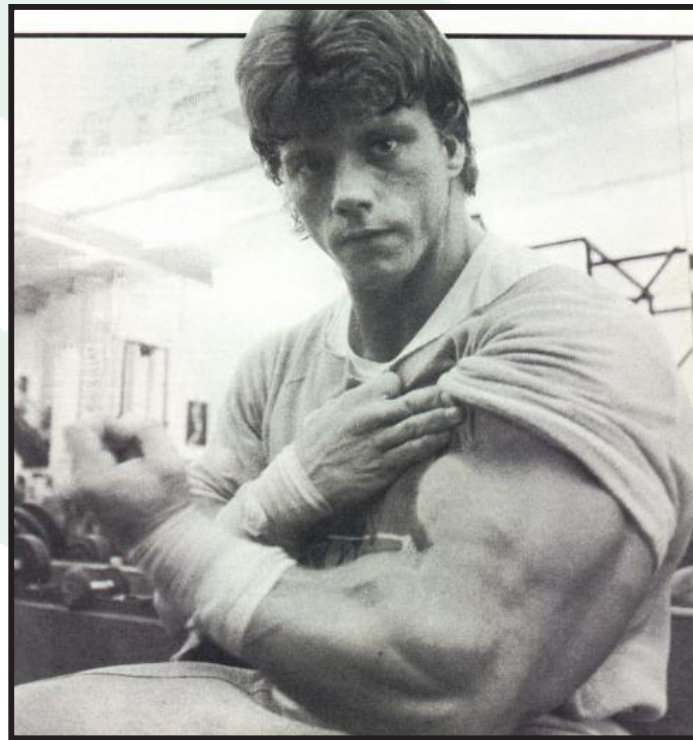
- C. Reverse Curl
3 sets of 8-12 reps
** in drop set style*

VARIED GRIP-WIDTH ROUTINE

1. Incline Dumbbell Curls
Warm-up
4 sets of 6-10 reps
2. Barbell Preacher Curl (wide or narrow)
3-4 sets of 8-12 reps
3. Bent-over Barbell Concentration Curl (elbows wide, close grip)
3 sets of 10-15 reps
4. Zottman Curl
3 sets of 8-12 reps

This routine is designed to vary the arc of motion that you curl the weight. Because of the way in which you are seated on the bench, Incline Dumbbell Curls are, by nature, curled outward from the midline of the body. Warm up well on these before going heavy since they involve a great deal of stretch on the shoulder joint. The Scott (Preacher) Curl Bench allows the lifter to go either for a close-elbow/ wide-grip or a wide-elbow/ narrow-grip, depending on your personal needs. I like the Barbell Concentration Curl (either standing bent-over or seated on the end of a bench) for its ability to comfortably support the lifters elbows on their inner knees when curling with a close-grip. The Zottman Curl is unique in that the lifter curls across the midline of

STEVE COLESCOTT



the body, making it the ultimate close-grip curl and a great lead-in to forearm work.

VARIED ARM POSITION ROUTINE

1. Barbell Drag Curl
Warm-up
4 sets of 6-10 reps
2. Spider Bench Curl (or Preacher Curl on the flat-side of the bench)
3-4 sets of 8-12 reps
3. Overhead Cable Curl (from high cable, curling over forehead to base of skull)
3 sets of 10-15 reps
4. Dumbbell Hammer Curl
3 sets of 8-12 reps

To create natural variety in the workout, choose exercises that work various positions of the upper arm in relations to the spine. The normal position of the biceps in relation to the spine while training biceps ranges from roughly parallel (Hammer Dumbbell Curls) to just short of perpendicular (Scott Curls). Exercises like Drag Curls, Supine Curls and Incline Dumbbell Curls begin with the biceps in a stretched position. Exercises like Overhead Cable Curls (one- or two-handed) work the biceps beginning from a position closer to contracted. There is no special magic to this routine but the eclectic movements may provide new growth stimulus.

IRON SUBCULTURE

ANTAGONIST SUPERSET ROUTINE

- A1. Dumbbell Curl
Warm-up
4 sets of 6-10 reps supersetted with...
- A2. Lying Rolling Dumbbell Triceps Extensions
Warm-up
4 sets of 6-10 reps
- B1. Low-Cable Curls
3 sets of 8-12 reps supersetted with...
- B2. Triceps Pushdowns
3 sets of 8-12 reps
- C1. Undergrip Chin
3 sets of 10-15 reps supersetted with...
- C2. Close-grip Bench
3 sets of 10-15 reps
- D. Reverse Preacher Curl
3 sets of 8-12 reps

We have discussed previously the recuperative benefits of supersetting antagonist body parts. Training biceps and triceps together also has the benefit of providing a wicked muscle pump. In this example, we begin with two basic strength-builders. We are not alternating our Dumbbell Curls since we are employing supersets with the goal of exhausting muscle fibers fast (less of a strength-building emphasis than usual). The triceps exercises are chosen to make use of some of the same equipment (so you are not annoying other gym members by tying up a few different pieces of equipment at once). The final exercise (Reverse Preacher Curl) is not supersetted, although it could be, if you had wished. Use the techniques when they serve you but DON'T arrange the program just to follow a previous pattern.

BICEPS GIANT-SET ROUTINE

- A. Incline Dumbbell Curls
Warm-up
3 sets of 6-10
- B1. Dumbbell Preacher Curls
3 sets of 8-12 supersetted with...
- B2. Undergrip Chins
3 sets of 8-12 reps supersetted with...

STEVE COLESCOTT

- B3. Dumbbell Hammer Curls
3 sets of 8-12 reps

There is something to be said for hitting a body part hard and fast from a variety of angles. Biceps seem to thrive on this. In this example, we begin with straight sets of Incline Dumbbell Curls since we do not want the short rest periods of supersets to limit the heavy weight used on our bread-and-butter strength move. After completing three sets on the Incline, we obliterate what fibers are left with a three exercise superset. The strictness of Preacher Curls acts as a pre-exhaust exercise for Undergrip Chins. The fresh muscles in our back (lats, rhomboids, delts) help us eek out more from our fatigued biceps. Dumbbell Hammer Curls finish off the biceps group by directing emphasis towards the brachialis. Notice that our overall number of sets is decreased to offset the short rest periods employed.

SPECIALIZATION

If you have read my "Double Whammy" article about body part specialization, you know that I am a huge proponent of more frequent training for weak points. To do this, I recommend a high-volume workout followed two days later by a brief but intense "feeder" workout. The Double Whammy protocol increases arm training frequency even further since it recommends arranging your schedule to a five-day (as opposed to a week-long) rotation. When specializing for biceps, I recommend you train biceps and triceps together, as an overall arm specialization program will be far more effective. Read the article on the Beverly website for more details.

While proper bodybuilding nutrition is always important, it is especially important when in a bodypart specialization phase. Top nutrition gurus of the sixties like Rhea H. Blair, Jim Heflin and Vince Gironda recommended repeated feedings of liver and amino acid tablets throughout the day for increases in arm size. For best results, add 3-5 Amino Acids throughout the day in five or more doses to provide a constant feeding of

IRON SUBCULTURE

quality amino acids. To take it a step further, I recommend an aggressive peri-workout glycogen and amino acid feeding protocol on your arm training days. Take 10-15 BCAA capsules and sip a glutamine drink (2-3 scoops in water) during your workout. To top things off, drink a fast protein shake as soon as you get home from the gym. If you are following a reduced-carb diet, time your higher-carb days for the days you do your arm specialization program.

Primary Workout

1. Incline Dumbbell Curl

Warm-up

6 sets of 6-10

2. Wide-grip Barbell Drag Curl:

2-3 sets of 8-12

3. Under-grip Chin

2 sets of max reps

“Feeder” Workout (2 days later):

1. Seated Dumbbell Curl

Warm-up

1 set of 10-15 reps.

2 sets of 6-10/3-4/1-3 reps*

* in drop set style

The second workout not only provides a second hypertrophy-promoting stimulus but it also flushes the biceps with blood and nutrients increasing recuperation and growth. If you are following the amino-rich nutrition protocol above, you will be flooding your muscles with everything they need.

EXERCISES

If I had to choose just one biceps exercise, I would go with the extremely versatile *Dumbbell Curl*. The free movement of dumbbells allows for different elbow and hand positions, arcs of movement and ranges-of-motion to provide dozens of distinct variations.

The *Incline Dumbbell Curl* is a great size builder that places a lot of emphasis on the outer biceps. Set the bench at a 45° angle; focus on supinating the forearm

(palms facing one another at the bottom, pinkie side of the dumbbell twisted inward towards your shoulder at the top) and slowly lowering the weight. Be cautious with your form on this exercise because, although it can pay big dividends in size, it also places stress on the shoulder and elbow joints.

Barbell Curls share a reputation with the two previous exercises as excellent strength and size builders. This exercise can be done with a straight or cambered bar and with various width grips. Become a technician on this exercise.

Unbalanced curls are a very effective method to shock your biceps into new growth. Charles Poliquin is a big advocate of the *One-arm Barbell Curl*. This exercise is done by grabbing an Olympic bar in the center and curling while balancing the bar. A regular 7-foot 45-pound Olympic bar is pretty hard to use at first so some may need to start with a short 5-foot bar (usually around 35-pounds). These can be done either standing or on a Scott Curl bench. Another unbalanced curl is the *Kettlebell/Band Resistance Barbell Curl*. This one was taught to me by powerlifting coach Louie Simmons and is used regularly by his team at Westside Barbell. Instead of loading a bar with traditional plates, he has them attach light kettlebells to the bar with bands (hanging about a foot below the bar). This makes for resistance that “squirms” as you try to curl it. Louie seemed to delight in the fact that I thought the bar with 25-pound kettlebells would be easy. It isn’t. Give this one a try.

The *Imbalanced Dumbbell Curl* is an exercise with an off-center load, either by loading an adjustable dumbbell with more weight on the pinkie side or gripping the handle so that the center of the handle is closer to that side. This creates more tension during the supination aspect of the curl.

The *Preacher (or Scott) Curl* supports the elbows, removing the ability to easily cheat or use body English to complete the reps. My preference is for benches

with the rounded face, like the Body Masters unit, as they cause the elbow to raise as the while staying in contact with the bench, giving you a stronger contraction. Lower the weight slowly and never bounce at the bottom.

If your gym has a special Spider Bench (Nebula makes a great one) try the *Spider Bench Curl*, it braces the arms similar to the Preacher Curl but in a position closer to contraction. You can also duplicate the movement by using the flat (90°) side of the preacher bench, which could be called a *Flat-faced Preacher Curl*.

The *Dumbbell Concentration Curl* works the lateral biceps head, since the weight is curled inward towards the midline of the body. It is a controlled, slow movement that makes a good “finishing” exercise. A similar, but often under-utilized exercise is the *Bent-over Barbell (Concentration) Curl*. Done either standing or seated at the end of a bench, the weight should be curled up to the forehead and held for a pause in the contracted position. Because the elbows are raised to a position perpendicular to the spine (as in the *Spider Bench Curl*), you feel an exaggerated bicep contraction.

In contrast, the *Barbell Drag Curl* places the arm in an enhanced stretch position with your elbows behind the upper body, removing the front delt from the movement. Keeping the elbows back and the bar in contact with the body through the entirety of the exercise.

Along with Incline Dumbbell Curls and Drag Curls, the *Supine DB Curl* also places the arm in a stretched position (at the shoulder joint). These are similar to the Incline Dumbbell Curl but are done lying on a flat bench. Because of the strain on the shoulder joint, use this occasionally for variety and go for feel over poundages.

As biceps exercises go, the *Undergrip Chin* provides a full range-of-motion with significant resistance throughout. Do it with a close grip and don’t be afraid to add weight once your strength allows. Undergrip Chins work well with a variety of intensification tech-

niques: negative-only reps, drop-sets (removing added weight by squirming out of a dipping belt), static contraction pauses, forced reps and super-sets.

Cables allow us to direct the line of resistance in any direction we wish, making them particularly useful in biceps training. The standard is *Standing Low Cable Curl* but the *Overhead Cable Curl* (one or two-handed) allows for an excellent peak contraction effect. The *Seated Cable Curl* is a great finishing exercise. Sit on the floor in front of a low pulley. While resting your elbows on the inside of your knees, curl the weight either to your forehead or lower your head and take it near the base of your skull.

When doing the *Zottman Curl*, curl the dumbbell in front of the body emphasizing the supination by twisting your pinkie-side inward at the top and pronating on the way down.

Reverse Curls (curls performed with the palms facing downward) and *Hammer Curls* (curls performed with the palms facing one another) shift more of the workload to the brachialis and brachioradialis.

Not many biceps machines have a good feel to them, but if your gym has one you like, *Machine Curls* are a great place to do techniques like drop-sets or static contraction pauses. If your biceps machine doesn’t quite fit you, it may still work well for *Reverse Curls* or *One-Arm Curls*.

Well there you have it! If you’ve been involved in bodybuilding for any length of time, you have probably read dozens of biceps training articles. Hopefully this article takes you beyond copying someone’s biceps workout to being able to understand how to create one specifically tailored to your physique and goals.