

Let's Deal With Toning Once and For All

By Krista Brittan

"Toning" is a word created by the mainstream fitness industry to attract women to lifting weights. Women always say "I just want to get toned" and "I don't want to get big and bulky, just more toned". How do you get toned? By lifting weights; seriously lifting weights. Not doing a few easy sets of 10-20 reps with pink plastic dumbbells.

Have you noticed that you have been lifting 3-8 lb. weights for years now and don't look much more "toned"? The method is virtually the same for everyone, whether you want to get big, strong and muscular or sleek and toned. Lift to your true potential, progressively and consistently and you will add muscle and reduce body fat. The result will be looking more muscular and "toned".

All "toning" is, is gaining lean muscle mass. But, for some reason women are afraid of that and think they are going to look like the incredible hulk. The word was made up just for women who have these fears. Hey, if throwing in the word "toned" here and there gets women into the gym to lift some weights, great, I am not complaining about that. But, wise up. It is a marketing scheme and a brilliant one.

Tons and tons of women are signing up at their local gyms to get "toned", but no one is really giving them the information they need to achieve their goals. They are not telling women that they may need to start at the 3 lb. pink weights as a beginner, but they will not be staying with them for very long. The next week it will likely be 5 lb., then 8, then 10, 12, 15, 20.

Ladies, **YOU NEED TO PROGRESS**. If you stay using the same weights, the same exercises, the same reps your body will not change. Why would it? You are not challenging it, not making it work any harder than it is used to working. You are boring the hell out of it and soon yourself. That is why most women do not last in a new workout regime for more than 8 weeks: Boredom, failure to see any results, feeling awkward and uncomfortable, overwhelmed by information overload or too much too quick.

SLOW PROGRESS IS THE BEST PROGRESS. So you now know that in order to get truly "toned" (AKA: to add muscle and decrease your body fat) you need to continually challenge your body and progressively give it larger loads to handle.

Yet, on the other hand, you do not want to go from 5 lb. to 20 lb. in a week. If one week you do lying chest presses with 8 lb. dumbbells and it was not a difficult task to accomplish your desired reps and sets, next week guess what? You move up to the next level, a small increment, to 10 lb. You may say to yourself, "This is a breeze still. I can handle way more weight". Be patient, you don't want to peak too soon or hurt yourself by making big jumps.

For example, if you quickly jump up to 20 lb. in a week or two, by the next week you are going to max out at 25 lb....meaning you cannot perform the desired number of

repetitions or sets (3 sets of 10 perhaps); 20 lb. will be your max. But, if you gradually go up in small increments each week (5, 8, 10, 12, 15, 20, 25, 30) you may find you are able to lift more weight in the long run and avoid injury. Your body will better benefit from taking this approach also. (We are talking about beginners here. If you are an experienced lifter you will know to start at a weight that is not killer, yet a challenge.)

KEEP IT SIMPLE. Often times women who want to get "toned" will overwhelm their bodies with a variant of exercises, reps, sets, and no consistency in their workouts. I refer to that approach as the "wandering workout". One week they may go the gym 4x a week. Day 1 may consist of a step aerobics class. The next day the wandering workout woman may include some upper body exercises, whatever they feel like. A few days later they will do a "toning class" and hit the treadmill afterwards for a 40-minute jog. Finally, finishing off on Day 4 concentrating on their lower body, usually leg lifts, hamstring curls extensions and maybe some calf raises. The next week it will be an entirely different regiment.

Yes, variation is key to preventing boredom, but this haphazard approach to training will only confuse the body as to what you want it to achieve.

In terms of cardiovascular training, sure mix it up. Three times a week for about 20-40 minutes; do whatever you want to raise your heart rate. I do not recommend high impact aerobics, but hiking, cycling indoors or out, walking, jogging, cross-country skiing, other cardiovascular machines...whatever you like. But, when it comes to strength training or weight lifting, keep it simple and follow a blueprint for a prescribed period of time (approx. 12 weeks).

Choose key compound exercises to perform 2 days a week (Sun/Wed, Mon/Thu). It is wise to perform a warm up set of the exercise to prepare the body and then one working set to start. Each week try to top what you did in that exercise the week before by either performing additional reps within the set or adding a bit of weight. Make sure you have included an exercise for each major muscle group (legs, hips, back, chest, shoulders, abs). As you become more experienced you may choose to add some support work or exercises that isolate smaller muscle groups and will help with your compound exercises (biceps, tricep, rotator cuffs, deltoids, calves, forearms). But, as a beginner these are not necessary and will only overwhelm you and give you "information overload" syndrome. (Check out WST Training and Training Consultation for more specific information on a quality workout program for your goals and objectives)

By performing your basic exercises every week, progressively adding resistance and increasingly challenging your body, over time you will add muscle mass, decrease body fat and VOILA you will look more "toned" (AKA: you will be more muscular and leaner).

FUEL YOUR BODY. Lastly, if you truly want to be "toned" (AKA: more muscular) it is important to take a good look at your diet. Get 4-6 quality meals a day. Eliminate the crap you put into your mouth on a regular basis, but treat yourself once a week. Pick a day on

the weekend to indulge in your favorites and get back to business the rest of the week. You deserve the occasional treat.

Don't starve yourself. Eat! In order to get "toned" (AKA: increase your muscle mass) you need to feed your body with the stuff it needs to make that muscle. Starving yourself will only result in a temporarily skinnier version of you. For example if you are pear shaped, by restricting calories to an unhealthy level you will just be a smaller pear. You will not change the shape of your body. And, it will not last.

Your body is a survivor and will eventually do whatever it has to, in order to make up for those missed calories. This is why we feel an uncontrollable urge to binge when we deprive ourselves for too long. And, talk about lack of energy! It's hard to work out when you feel like a slug and just want to crawl under your rock. Also, illness is your best friend when you starve yourself. Food has essential nutrients that help keep your immune system strong and fight off viruses and infections.

So, regarding this "toning" thing. You've been had ladies...the wool pulled over your eyes...sucked in, scammed, fooled, tricked, downright deceived by clever marketing tactics within the mainstream fitness industry. But, not to worry, if the desire to be "toned" has peaked your curiosity about fitness, great! But, let's enter reality now. "Toned" simply means you will be adding muscle or increasing your lean muscle mass and at the same time decreasing body fat.

Don't be afraid of the word muscle. You will not get big and bulky by lifting weights properly, progressively and consistently. The odds are WAYYYY against you. Will you get "toned"? Yes, if you do it right.

So, the next time you hear another female say "I don't want to get big and bulky, just more toned", perhaps you can educate them about the ongoing "toning" scam.

Natural Strength says it best...."NO TONE, NO CHROME, JUST HARD WORK!"