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How to get big biceps and triceps

Big biceps signal to the world that you’ve put in some serious sweat equity at the gym. The biceps are a small muscle, but to grow them takes time, knowledge, and intellectual programming. Also, your biceps flex your elbow — which, when you think about it, is a pretty important job. Otherwise, how would you curl that beer (ahem, protein shake) to your lips or pick your kid up? The biceps don’t just look good; they serve a real function. The good news for you is training the biceps is pretty simple — you curl, curl, and curl some more. That said, certain exercises get the job done better than others. To help you figure out which is best for you, we’ve culled the eight best biceps exercises onto one list along with some more info on the muscle itself and how to incorporate biceps training into your routine. **Best Biceps Exercises [Related: Don’t forget these 10 commandments of biceps training]** The barbell curl is a classic biceps-builder. When done correctly, this exercise targets the biceps and can add serious size and strength to the entire muscle. You can curl more weight with the barbell curl compared to other curl variations as you’re lifting a singular implement with both hands. It’s also very easy to do. Simply load up a barbell, hold it in both hands, and lift it up towards your chin. Rinse and repeat. **Benefits of the Barbell Curl** It’s simple and effective. The barbell curl offers a small learning curve, making it perfect for beginners, and more advanced lifters will still benefit from the basic mechanics. You’ll build stronger biceps more quickly as you’re able to load your biceps with more weight. **How to Do the Barbell Curl** Grab a barbell with an underhand grip, slightly wider than the shoulders. With the chest up and shoulder blades pulled tightly together, expose the front of your biceps by pulling the shoulders back into the socket. The elbows should reside under the shoulder joint, or slightly in front by the ribs. Curl the barbell up using the biceps, making sure to not let the torso lean forward, shoulder collapse forward, or the elbows slide backward to the side of the body (they should stay slightly in front of the shoulders). The chin-up is a bodyweight exercise that can induce serious muscle growth of the biceps (and back) with nothing but a pull-up bar. If you have a door-mounted pull-up bar in your home gym, then that’s all you need to bang out sets of chin-ups. Since the lifter is pulling their own bodyweight, the biceps are usually exposed to loads heavier than what one can lift with a barbell. However, lifters may often perform these incorrectly, engaging their shoulder and grip muscles. **Benefits of the Chin-Up** To do a chin-up, you only need access to a pull-up bar, making it one of the more accessible movements on this list. The chin-up has you lift your entire bodyweight, taxing the biceps with more weight than one can usually curl. Your grip and shoulders will also gain some strength. **How to Do the Chin-Up** Hang from a bar with palms facing you and the hands about shoulder-width apart, or slightly wider. From a dead hang, squeeze your shoulder blades together and pull your body up, making sure to not let the body fold inwards (so many people do this) until your chin is at or above the bar. Curling on a preacher bench lengthens the exercise’s range of motion. As a result, the biceps will be under tension for a longer period of time, which usually equates to more muscle growth. Using an ez-bar, which turns the hands inwards, makes the move more comfortable on the wrists and shifts the angle of the exercise to target different muscle fibers in the biceps. **Benefits of the EZ-Bar Preacher Curl** Using the preacher bench creates a longer range of motion and therefore creates more muscular tension for more biceps growth. Using an ez-bar is more comfortable on the wrists. **How to Do the EZ-Bar Preacher Curl** Sit down on a preacher bench and rest the back of triceps on the pad. Set your body in the same position as the standard barbell biceps curl (chest up, shoulders back, and elbows slightly forward). Grasp the ez-bar handle on the inner angled pieces. This will place your hands slightly narrower than shoulder-width and on a semi-supinated angle. With the body locked in place, curl the bar upwards as you flex the biceps, briefly pausing at the top of the curl to flex the biceps. Lower the weight under control. The hammer curl has the lifter curl dumbbells with their palms facing each other. This neutral wrist position is more comfortable and allows the lifter to hoist more weight, as we’re generally stronger with a palms-facing position. This move also targets the biceps brachialis and brachioradialis (outer biceps and forearm) for more arm thickness. **Benefits of the Hammer Curl** The wrist neutral position is more comfortable. You can lift more weight with the hammer curl. The hammer curl targets the inner biceps muscle and the forearm to build denser arms. **How to Do the Hammer Curl** Hold a dumbbell in each hand while standing. Turn your wrists so that they’re facing each other. Keep your arms tucked in at your sides and flex your elbows to curl the dumbbells up towards your shoulders. Lower them back down with control. To perform the incline dumbbell curl, the lifter needs to lay back onto an incline gym bench. This achieves two things: First, it takes the momentum out of the equation so that the lifter can’t cheat the weight up. Secondly, curling with lengthened, extended arms creates a longer range of motion, which ultimately makes this curl variation more effective. **Benefits of the Incline Dumbbell Curl** The incline dumbbell curl eliminates momentum, forcing the lifter to maintain strict curling form. Lifting with extended arms increases the exercise’s range of motion for more muscular tension. **How to Do the Incline Dumbbell Curl** Lay back on an incline bench, angled at about 60 degrees, with a dumbbell in each hand. Let your arms hang so they’re fully extended. Without moving your shoulders, curl the weight up to your shoulders. Hold the top of the movement for about a second, and then slowly lower the dumbbells with control. You’re right to think of this movement as a traditional back exercise. It is. That said, similar to the chin-up, this bent-over row variation involves the biceps to a great degree. You can manage more weight on the barbell compared to other biceps exercises. Also, you’ll build up your biceps in conjunction with your back muscles for more overall muscularity. **Benefits of the Reverse-Grip Bent-Over Row** The reverse-grip bent-over row targets your back muscles in addition to your biceps. You can lift more weight compared to other biceps moves. **How to Do the Reverse-Grip Bent-Over Row** Grab a barbell with an underhand grip that is about shoulder-width apart. Assume the proper bent over row position, with the back flat and chest up. Row the barbell to the stomach. Pull with both the back and the arms, lowering the weight under control and repeating for reps. When you curl a dumbbell or barbell, the movement is hardest at the midpoint of the lift since the weight is furthest from the body. However, cables keep tension on the muscle throughout the movement, as the weight stack you’re lifting is suspended throughout. This adds more tension to the muscle for more growth. You can also attach different handles to a cable machine’s pulley to attack your biceps from different angles. **mrbigphoto/Shutterstock** **Benefits of the Cable Curl** Curling with a cable loads the biceps with constant tension throughout the movement. You can target your biceps from different angles by using different handles on the cable machine. **How to Do the Cable Curl** Attach the desired handle to the pulley of a cable machine set to the lowest height. Grab the handle in both hands and take a few steps back so that there’s constant tension on the cable (the weight stack should be elevated the entire time). Curl the bar up to your chest and then slowly lower it back down. The concentration curl is all about feeling your biceps work. You sit down on a bench, rest your elbow on the inside of your thigh, and curl a dumbbell from full extension to contraction. By working on-arm at a time you’re doing more work, and so you’re burning more calories, and are allowing your weaker arm to play catch up. Also, the isolated curling position really lets you hone in on your biceps as you curl a light dumbbell. **Benefits of the Concentration Curl** The ability to focus more intently on your biceps. More calories burned as you’re working one side of your body at a time, which effectively doubles the number of sets you’re doing. By focusing on one arm at a time, your weaker side will get stronger. **How to Do the Concentration Curl** Sit on a bench with the feet wide to allow your arm to hang in the middle, with your elbow resting on the inside of the thigh. With a dumbbell in hand, slowly curl the dumbbell upward at a controlled tempo, concentrating on contracting the biceps to move the load. At the top of the movement, flex as hard as you can, then slowly lower the load. The key is to not lose tension on the biceps at any point in the range of motion. **About the Biceps Muscle** The biceps are technically called biceps brachii, which is Latin for “two-headed muscle of the arm.” The biceps attach across two joints — the elbow and the shoulder. Its core function is to flex the elbow and turn the wrist. **Iulian Valentin/Shutterstock** The biceps are a small muscle, but they serve a pivotal function when you really think about it. Anything you pick something up or get press something overhead, you’re flexing your elbow (and therefore your biceps) to some degree. Think about the last time you loaded a suitcase into an overhead compartment. To get your luggage overhead, you probably curled it to your chest before pressing it up. Small but mighty — that’s the biceps for you. Aesthetically, the biceps are a coveted muscle. When someone asks you to make a muscle, you don’t roll up your pant leg and flex your calf or pull down your shirt collar to show off your traps — you flex your biceps. Many lifters desire that classic biceps peak, which is when the muscle juts upwards. Unfortunately, whether you have a more distinguished biceps peak or not is determined by genetics, but you can grow the area which will translate to a larger peak to some degree. **How to Train Your Biceps** As for how often to train your biceps, you want to aim to get in about 10 to 14 sets per week. If you’re a gym newbie, start with eight sets per week. Again, the biceps are a small muscle with a singular function, and so they don’t require a hefty amount of work to spark growth. **Srdjan Randjelovi/Shutterstock** We suggest training your biceps with your triceps together as they’re antagonistic muscle (your biceps flex the elbow and your triceps extend the elbow). You can also save your biceps training for after your back workout or, if you follow a push, pull, legs split, after your pulling day. Since your biceps are recruited in most upper-body pulling movements, it makes sense to tack them onto that day since they’ll already be a bit fatigued. **More Biceps Training Tips** Now that you’ve learned about the best biceps exercise, you may want to step up your biceps training even more. Check out these other helpful and informative articles on curling and biceps exercises. **Feature image by mrbigphoto/Shutterstock** For many people, the size of their arms is directly proportional to their self-esteem. Arms are one of the first muscle groups people focus on when they start working out. Even though arms are such a popular muscle group, only a few people have shirt ripping guns. While it may seem like a daunting task to get those bulging biceps and horseshoe-shaped triceps, knowing exactly what to do to challenge your muscles to see growth is imperative in actually achieving that. Let’s take a look at some compound exercises for arms to really work those muscles into something you will love. Whether it be a compound bicep exercise or a compound tricep exercise, your entire arm will start to see great definition and something you can be proud of. **Benefits Of Strong Arms** Aside from the obvious benefit of a ripped aesthetic, strong arms play an important role in both sport specific and functional movements. The ability to provide stability to those vulnerable joints like your shoulders and elbows is something we shouldn’t take for granted. Also, by working those arms, you will start to see increased grip strength (1) as a results of those exercises you are performing. This will greatly increase the output you do during training for those results during performance. **What Are Compound Exercises?** Compound exercises are multi-joint movements which help in building size and strength and can increase your volume and intensity for all exercises (2). Isolation exercises (involving single joint), on the other hand, help in building muscle definition and separation. If you’re just starting out or have hit a plateau, compound exercises will help take your gains to the next level. By performing compound exercises, you will work multiple muscles with just one exercise to save time while also building better mind-muscle connection. For those looking to shed some weight, by working more muscle groups, you are burning more calories, thus leading to a decrease in weight for a more shredded aesthetic. **Compound Tricep Exercises** **Close Grip Bench Press** Majority of the people have weaker triceps as compared to their biceps. This is why we like starting our workouts with triceps. Close grip bench press is one of the best exercises to build size and strength in your triceps. Make sure you maintain a full range of motion while performing this exercise. Your triceps consist of three heads; lateral, medial and long. You need to train them equally to ensure an overall growth. The close grip bench press works the medial and lateral triceps heads. **Barbell Skullcrushers** Overhead movements like the barbell skull crushers work the long head of your triceps. The long head is the hardest to develop as only a few exercises target it. If you haven’t done this exercise in the past, ask for a spot from someone at your gym. Lie on a flat bench with your arms stretched outwards while holding a barbell. Keep your elbows fixed at a position as your lower the barbell so it is a couple of inches away from your forehead. Return to the starting position and squeeze your triceps at the top of the movement. **Dips** You don’t always need to use additional weights to build muscle. Bodyweight dips are a great exercise to add mass to your triceps. If the bodyweight variation feels too easy, feel free to add resistance by using weights. You don’t need to lift heavy weight to build muscle mass in your arms. Pumping blood into the muscle by performing higher reps and following a full range of motion will do the trick. Your chest should be parallel to your hands at the bottom of the movement and your elbows should be locked out at the top of the movement. **Compound Bicep Exercises** **Barbell Curls** Bicep curls are one of the most effective bicep building exercises. Take a five-minute rest after you finish your triceps workout so the blood leaves your triceps. Muscle pumps occur when blood enters your target muscle group. Use an Olympic barbell for the barbell curls. **Maintain a strict form** as you curl the barbell. Don’t swing your back or use momentum to lift the weights. Using improper form can lead to an injury. **Alternate Dumbbell Curls** Alternate dumbbell curls are a textbook bicep exercise. This exercise helps you in establishing a mind-muscle connection with your biceps as you’re targeting one bicep at a time. Maintain a full range of motion and avoid using momentum. Pause and squeeze your biceps at the top of the movement. Stand with the dumbbells at your sides with your palms facing each other. Your palms should be supinated at the top of the movement. **Underhand Pull-Ups** Underhand pull-ups are the ultimate bicep finisher. This exercise is incredibly effective as you lift your entire bodyweight using your biceps. If you can’t perform bodyweight pull-ups, use an assisted pull-up machine or a spotter. By the end of this exercise, your pythons will be filled with lactic acid. Holding the pull-up bar with a wide grip will focus on your inner biceps and a narrow grip will work your outer biceps. **Compound Exercises For Arms** These exercises above will greatly influence your arm growth so you start to see some real muscle definition and shredded arms you want most. To help with increase energy and muscle pumps, look towards using a great pre-workout supplement to really provide for a solid workout. On top of that, check out a high-quality protein supplement in order to advance muscle growth and help with recovery so you bounce back faster for that next workout. **Exercises** **Sets** **Reps** **Close Grip Bench Press** 3 12 **Barbell Skullcrushers** 3 12 **Dips** 3 20 **Barbell Curls** 3 12 **Alternate Dumbbell Curls** 3 15 **Underhand Pull-Ups** 3 20 **Wrap Up** For those looking get those shredded arms, compound exercises are where you want to look. These will work multiple muscle groups while also giving you the edge when it comes to burning calories and saving time in the gym. Whether it be a compound bicep exercise or a compound tricep exercise, knowing which compound exercises for arms to perform will prove to be worthwhile for those gains. Give these exercises a try and be confident in showing off those absolutely shredded arms. Let us know what you think in the comments below. Also, be sure to follow **Generation Iron** on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. *Images courtesy of Envato References **Lee, Julia-Ann; Sechachalam, Sreedharan** (2016). “The Effect of Wrist Position on Grip Endurance and Grip Strength”. (source) **Mangine, Gerald T.; Hoffman, Jay R.; Gonzalez, Adam M.; Townsend, Jeremy R.; et al.** (2015). “The effect of training volume and intensity on improvements in muscular strength and size in resistance-trained men”. (source)

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