



THE  
**COMPLETE GUIDE**  
TO

# BETTER ARMS

**ADAM POEHLMANN**

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# INTRODUCTION

The majority of us workout because we want to look better and feel better, but let's be honest, most of us are heavily focused on what we look like. For years we have used exercise in many different forms to shape and mold our bodies. This is one of the main reasons I was so fascinated with weight training when I first got into fitness.

Weight training allows us to shape and sculpt all the different parts of our body. If we want our shoulders to stand out, we simply do more work on our shoulders while we are in the gym. If we feel that our calves are too big (this is definitely not me) in comparison to other body parts, we simply give our calves a break while we focus on those other lagging body parts.

The ability to nearly transform your body is something special, and it's something we have used for quite some time to highlight parts of our body that others might see as impressive. You know exactly what I'm talking about. Those that take the time to train and sculpt their body are doing it for themselves and others. Guys want all the ladies to be impressed with their sleeve-busting biceps. Similarly, ladies want all that fat to come off their tricep so they can be the one in the friend group with the toned and defined arms. Lucky for you, the arms are going to be our focus in this guide.

Over the years, tons of different methods have been used to build, shape, sculpt, tone, define, and lean out the arms. Those wanting to tone up and lean down have been performing high reps with teenie tiny weights for as long as they can remember. Those wanting to jump up two shirt sizes due to their arm growth have curled as many pounds as possible with horrible form in the hopes that their arms will be an eighth of an inch thicker when they wake up. Few have succeeded, and many have failed. Why?

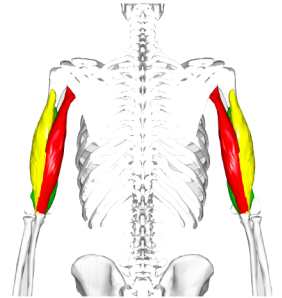
Although it would be very useful to apply the first google result while searching "how to shape my arms" to your training routine, it just isn't that simple. You see, you are a unique individual. You are unlike any other, and your body responds well to some things and poorly to others. Therefore, it's important to discuss the many factors that play a role in building, shaping, and sculpting your arms in order to figure out what may work well for you and where you're at in your health and fitness journey.



# BETTER ARMS: WHAT'RE THEY'RE MADE OF AND WHAT THEY DO

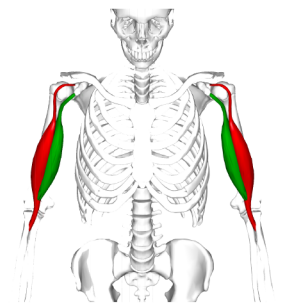
Before diving deep into the training principles that work and have stood the test of time, we need to go over the anatomy of the arms. Let's begin with the triceps.

The tricep is the muscle that is most forgotten when it comes to changing the size, shape, and appearance of the arms. Although many people like to focus primarily on the bicep, the tricep is actually the bigger muscle of the two. Any changes in muscle development of the tricep will appear more due to the simple fact that it takes up more space and has more muscle fibers than the bicep.



The tricep is located on the back of the upper arm. It has three heads (hence the “tri” in “tricep”) and is responsible for extension of elbow joint. In other words, the tricep is in charge of straightening your arm. When you do push-ups, although your chest and shoulders are working, your tricep is the muscle responsible for getting your arm into a straighter position. The tricep is also the antagonist to the bicep.

The bicep is located on the front of the upper arm. It has two heads (hence the “bi” in “bicep”) and is responsible for flexion of the elbow joint. In other words, the bicep is in charge of bending your arm. When you do a pull-up, although your back and rear shoulders are helping you pull yourself up, the bicep is the muscle that helps your arms get into a bent position as you get closer to the bar.



## THE PITFALLS OF ARM TRAINING

Although I thoroughly enjoy working in the health and fitness space, the industry is usually looking for money instead of what is best for the customer. For example, the fitness industry is the home of genius marketing that has influenced many into making a choice that is not best for them.

Don't get me wrong, I'm all about free markets with little restriction, but because I love it so much, I understand that it's my job as a consumer to understand more than is expected of me, and you should too!

Clever marketing takes place in the way we are influenced to train, especially when it comes to building better arms. Why do you think most women train with lighter weights for higher reps? Believe it or not, it's not because heavy weights make women bulky. It's because the fitness industry told us that heavy weights make women bulky. Next thing you know,



three-pound weights are coated in pink and female consumers are lining up to get them. Point is, we need to be more aware of things like this. One of the ways we can become more aware is by understanding what it really takes to build better arms.

One of my favorite things to tell my clients is that although they cannot spot reduce, they can spot produce. Another myth in fitness is that we can burn body fat in certain areas by doing exercises for that area. For example, if I want to lose lower belly fat, I would just do crunches all day until my abs are diced. Unfortunately it doesn't work that way. The good news is, however, we can spot produce, meaning we can use weight training to build and shape the way our arms look. But how?

You may be sitting there thinking, well, that's nice and all, but I have too much fat on my arms for anything to show, anyway. That's ok! You know why? Well, because the time you put in training your arms will still change the way your arms look, and because I have an [ebook for free](#) that will help you with that! Ok, my shameless plug is over.

You see, muscle is what is under everything that we can see. It's under our fat which is under our skin. Although you may not be able to see it, muscle is there. You have muscle! All you need to do is make that muscle pop more than it does now.

Question is, how exactly does that happen? Well, to make muscle pop, it needs to be more apparent. That happens by losing more body fat, building more lean muscle, or a combination of both. Most people go straight to wanting to lose more fat, but that may not always be the best decision. Here's why.

We all know how challenging fat loss can be. What's even worse is if you reach your fat loss goal, but your body just doesn't show the way you expected it to. Believe it or not, this is common! Too many people spend too little time building muscle before spending extra time on the fat loss. Let's think in terms of abs for a minute. For the longest time I wanted to have a six pack. I wanted to be able to take my shirt off and feel confident with my body. So, I spent so much time trying to lose more and more fat. I was successful, but my abs just didn't show like I wanted them to. It wasn't until after getting into fitness that I realized my abs didn't have enough muscle to even pop at moderate body fat percentages. Once I came to that realization, I went back at it and spent time building my abs like I would any other muscle group. Now, my abs pop even if I'm not at my leanest! The same should be applied to your arms. Building lean muscle must be a priority in order to make those arms have the look that you want. I always tell my clients that a decent amount of muscle with some body fat pops far more than a little amount of muscle with hardly any body fat. Are you with me?

Now that you know building muscle in those arms is a priority, let's talk about how you make that happen.

# BETTER ARMS: WHAT IT TAKES

Before I go on, I must make one thing clear. I'm not talking about an absurd amount of muscle. I'm not saying that you need to build massive arms. Even a slight increase in lean muscle can make a very big difference in the appearance of your arms.

Now that we're on the same page, let's move forward.

The most common way your muscles grow is through muscle hypertrophy. Don't worry about the word, it's just a fancy term that represents the increase in muscle fiber size. Muscle fiber size increases when a signal is being sent to the body that demands muscles to get stronger. That signal is resistance training/weight lifting. When you lift weights, your body is receiving a message that says "Hey, muscles! You need to grow and get stronger so lifting these heavy weights isn't so challenging!"

Here is where we really need to make sure we're on the same page. Lifting weights isn't all the same. You see, your body will receive a different signal depending on how you're lifting those weights. Lifting weights that are on the lighter side will tell your body to do something different than lifting weights on the heavier side. One will tell your biceps and triceps to get stronger, and the other will not. So which one does?

If we were to look at a summary of the research articles that have been written on how to build muscle, it would tell you that performing 8-12 reps will yield the most amount of change. Simple, right? We can just go to the gym and lift 8-12 reps and call it good. Well, not really. There is more that goes to it. Other factors that play a role are the amount of weight you're lifting in that range, how long you're resting in between sets, and the tempo at which you complete those reps. After years of training people in the gym and online, I've learned what tweaks to make in order to get the most amount of change. Let's start with the amount of weight you're lifting.

Most people may tell you that getting results means pushing yourself to the absolute limits and reaching failure every single time. This isn't quite the case. Sure, you definitely shouldn't be lollygagging, but you don't need to obliterate yourself every time you lift, as your body needs to be able to recover in time for the next workout. Using a weight that allows you to hit your rep target within 1-2 reps short of failure is right where you want to be. Let's go through an example. If you are doing bicep curls for 10 reps, that means you need to use a weight that allows you to reach 10 reps, knowing you would reach failure at 11 or 12 reps if you tried. If you reach 10 reps and you know you could've completed 13, the weight is far too light. If you are trying to reach 10 and you are only able to complete 8, the weight is too heavy. Again, using a weight that allows you to hit your rep target within 1-2 reps of total failure is the sweet spot.

Not only is the weight you choose important, but so is the amount of time you take in between sets. This is by far the biggest mistake I see when people are trying to shape and sculpt their body. They race from one set to the next, one exercise after another, turning their weight training workout into a cardio circuit. The appropriate amount of time to take in between sets when trying to improve your lean muscle is anywhere from 60 seconds to 2 minutes. I usually recommend anywhere between 60-90 seconds between sets.

Speaking of doing things too quickly, I'm willing to bet you know someone at the gym that turns his or her set into the most important race of their life. It's no longer about properly lifting the weights according to their goals. All of a sudden it turns into completing 12 reps as fast as humanly possible. This is another mistake I see. Many don't know or understand this, so remember it well and you will have an advantage. The number of reps really isn't what matters, it's actually the time spent under the tension of the weight. We simply use reps to measure or count the time under tension. After all, it's far easier to assess and measure 10 tricep dips, than doing tricep dips for 22 seconds. Having said that, the speed at which we complete the reps matters and plays a role in shaping our arms. I recommend spending 2-4 seconds on the concentric (muscle squeezing) part of the movement, and 2-4 seconds on the eccentric (muscle lengthening) part of the movement with a slight pause in between. So if you were doing tricep rope extensions, that would be 2-4 seconds while extending your arms and bringing the rope down, and 2-4 seconds slowly letting the rope back up. Tempo is key.

To sum up what we just went over, factors that play a role in proper weight training are your reps, the weight you use for those reps, the time you spend in between sets, and the tempo at which you complete your reps. Use a weight that allows you to reach your rep target with 1-2 reps left in the tank. Generally, perform 8-12 reps. Rest 60-90 seconds in between sets. Perform the muscle squeezing and muscle lengthening portions of the rep for 2-4 seconds each.

I must also say that the above recommendations are general recommendations, especially the reps. Your body will respond most to whatever it is not used to. For example, although it's not within the general range that I recommended, someone that has been doing 10-12 reps for quite some time may benefit from doing 6-8 reps for a little while. Take time to figure out what your body responds best to, and make sure you're changing things up every 4-6 weeks.

Now that you understand the intricacies of your weight training workout, it's time to talk about what exercises may be beneficial for shaping better arms.

As I touched on earlier, the movements that send the loudest signal are the ones that can apply the most amount of tension to your muscles. Those movements happen to be compound (multi-joint) movements. Think about your legs for a second. Doing a squat will apply

more tension and send a louder signal to your quads than leg extensions will because other joints and muscles can assist with the overall load. This means that multi-joint movements should be the meat and potatoes of your routine. Great compound movements for the biceps are reverse grip pull-ups, reverse grip pulldowns, and reverse grip rows. Great compound movements for the triceps are dips, narrow grip bench press, and narrow stance push-ups.

Does this mean that single-joint movements are ineffective and therefore a waste of time? Absolutely not. Over the years I've come to learn that a majority of people respond best to multi-joint movements because they send the loudest signal, and simply because they're not doing them enough. If building better arms is a goal of yours, it would still be wise to incorporate single-joint isolation movements into your routine. Isolation simply means that you are isolating the bicep or the tricep. For example. Preacher curls isolate the bicep, and overhead tricep extensions isolate the tricep. Single-joint movements like these can help you create a better connection with your muscles and allow you to send a signal to those muscles only. Quality single-joint movements for the biceps include standard curls, spider curls, and preacher curls. Quality single-joint movements for the triceps include rope extensions, overhead extensions, and skullcrushers.

Again, the exercises that are best for you are most likely the ones that you haven't been doing. If your workouts have consisted mostly of multi-joint movements, throw some curls and extensions in. If your workouts have consisted mostly of isolation movements, throw some multi-joint movements in.

I know that this is a lot of information to take in, and it can be a bear to apply it all. So I'd like to take some of the work away and create a sample workout for you. Here is an example arm workout I would create for a client that wanted to build better arms. Again, this is to supplement and add to a solid training plan that incorporates the whole body. This is not meant to replace your full body strength routines.



# SAMPLE ARM WORKOUT

## Reverse Grip Pull-Up

Sets: 3-4

Reps: 6-8

Tempo: 2-4 seconds for both muscle squeezing and muscle lengthening

Rest: 60-90 seconds

## Barbell Curl

Sets: 3-4

Reps: 8-12

Tempo: 2-4 seconds for both muscle squeezing and muscle lengthening

Rest: 60-90 seconds

## Spider Curl

Sets: 3-4

Reps: 8-12

Tempo: 2-4 seconds for both muscle squeezing and muscle lengthening

Rest: 60-90 seconds

## Dips

Sets: 3-4

Reps: 6-8

Tempo: 2-4 seconds for both muscle squeezing and muscle lengthening

Rest: 60-90 seconds

## Skull Crushers

Sets: 3-4

Reps: 8-12

Tempo: 2-4 seconds for both muscle squeezing and muscle lengthening

Rest: 60-90 seconds

## Rope Extensions

Sets: 3-4

Reps: 8-12

Tempo: 2-4 seconds for both muscle squeezing and muscle lengthening

Rest: 60-90 seconds

# SAMPLE WORKOUT ROUTINE

For good measure, here is how you can incorporate a workout like this into your weekly routine.

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
FULL BODY	ARMS	FULL BODY	ARMS	FULL BODY	ACTIVE RECOVERY	ACTIVE RECOVERY

Note that your arm training may need to be less intense on full body workout days to make sure you don't compromise recovery from your specific arm workouts.

And there you have it. Incorporate these principles into your routine, and you'll be on your way to better arms.

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# ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Adam Poehlmann is a fitness and nutrition coach based in Fort Collins, Colorado. After hanging up the baseball cleats, he found a strong interest in the human body and how it performs. Since then, Adam has been transforming lives through fitness and nutrition in a fun and encouraging atmosphere. As an ACE CPT and Fitness Nutrition Specialist, he is constantly moved to help people improve in all walks of life.



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