

PUSH AND PULL

TECHNIQUES

SHIFT YOUR ATTENTION TO MOVEMENT,
NOT MUSCLES, FOR A BODY THAT
WORKS AS GOOD AS IT LOOKS

BY LEE BOYCE
PHOTOS OF DUANE BRICKHOUSE
BY BRIAN LANDIS



When you're bodybuilding, you have to keep things simple. Building muscle efficiently largely comes down to what works for you as an individual, but most would agree that splitting your workouts into groupings is better for building cosmetic muscle than training in a total-body method.

With that said, if you look a bit deeper into the "functionality" debate, many good coaches in the industry will stress the importance of training the movement, not the muscle. That means keeping the focus on primal movement patterns that we must do every day for proper joint health and mobility. This, too, is of prime importance, and should not be overlooked.



MOVEMENT TRAINING

Combining the best of both worlds would result in simply employing workouts that involve splitting your days into pushes and pulls. There are several benefits to applying this method — the first of which would be time efficiency. You'll be spending less time in the gym each trip, so your nervous system likely won't be as fried, and you'll get more out of a shorter, intense workout geared toward one key group of muscles.

INCREASE THE TENSION

Speaking of intense workouts, focusing on one set of muscles (let's say the pulling muscles) means more time spent under tension for that group, resulting in a higher-volume workout for the muscles in question. That results in more micro-trauma (tissue breakdown) and an increase in sarcoplasmic hypertrophy (a better "pump"). Both of these factors are the most important keys to suc-

cessfully adding size, where weight training is concerned.

PERFECT HARMONY

Finally, all muscles involved in pulling exercises are synergistic — they work together. The same goes for all muscles involved with pushing exercises. It makes the most sense not to "mix and match," since there won't be an even amount of stimulation that goes to the opposing muscles. For example, it's more beneficial to train the chest and triceps (as part of a push day) since they work together. Training the chest and biceps on the same day may leave the triceps undertrained and not completely broken down as a result of the actual workout. On the other hand, when it's the triceps' turn to get hit hard in your workout week, they may not be quite 100 per cent since they did get some stimulation and fatigue from the workout prior. Long story short, it can make things somewhat complicated.

OUR PLAN, YOUR BODY

If you're having trouble thinking of how you'd break things down into a push and pull game, we've got your back. Program one is your "Push Day," targeting the upper-body muscle groups that extend and (surprise, surprise) push the weight away from you, including the pectorals, anterior and

lateral deltoids, and triceps. Program two targets above the waist muscles that pull weight: the biceps, latissimus dorsi and other back muscles, rear deltoids, and the abdominals. Follow each workout as prescribed one to two times per week, taking at least 48 hours of recovery time between by working your lower body on the alternate days.

| Exercises | Sets | Reps |
|----------------------------|------|-------------------|
| DAY 1: PUSH PROGRAM | | |
| Seated Dumbbell Press | 3 | 10-12 |
| Incline Dumbbell Press | 3 | 8-10 |
| Dumbbell Chest Flye | 3 | 10-12 |
| Barbell Skullcrusher | 3 | 10-12 |
| High Cable Crossover | 2 | 12-15 |
| Low Cable Crossover | 2 | 12-15 |
| DAY 2: PULL PROGRAM | | |
| Dumbbell Preacher Curl | 3 | 8-10 (each side) |
| Alternating Incline Curl | 3 | 10 (each side) |
| Seated Lateral Raise | 3-4 | 10-12 |
| Rear-Delt Flye | 3-4 | 10-12 |
| Lat Pulldown | 3 | 10-12 |
| Straight-Armed Pulldown | 3 | 10-12 |
| Bench Crunch | 4 | 15-20 |
| Hanging Knee Raise | 4 | 15-20 (each side) |

DAY ONE / Push Program



1 SEATED DUMBBELL PRESS

START: Sit upright on a bench, feet planted and back straight. Raise your hands, each holding a dumbbell, into a standard shoulder press position with knuckles pointing upward.
EXECUTION: Press the weights toward the ceiling, aiming to have them meet just over your head without touching. Pause for one count, then reverse fluidly.

TIP: Keep your core engaged to provide a stable base for the motion.

2 INCLINE DUMBBELL PRESS

START: Set an incline bench to 30 degrees and sit on it face up with your feet flat on the floor. Grab a dumbbell in each hand and bend your arms, stacking your wrists above your elbows.
EXECUTION: Exhale forcefully as you extend your arms overhead, bringing the dumbbells close; stop just short of locking your elbows. Employ control as you inhale and return to the starting position.
TIP: Bring more of your chest into play by pressing your arms in front of you instead of above you.

3 DUMBBELL CHEST FLYE

START: From a face-up position on a flat bench, hold a weight in each hand out to your sides, keeping your arms fairly straight but with a slight bend in the elbows.
EXECUTION: Close your arms above you by moving only at the shoulders. Pause for one count at the top, then open your arms to complete one rep.
TIP: Watch the arch in your lower back — it should be slight but not excessive.





A

TIP: Try supersetting this move with the low cable crossover to fully fatigue your upper and lower pecs.

5



HIGH CABLE CROSSOVER

START: Stand in the middle of a double cable station with a single handle set high on either side. Stagger your feet and hold one handle in each hand.

EXECUTION: Keeping a bit of a bend in both elbows, flex from the shoulders to meet the handles in front of your lower chest. Hold, resisting the pull of the weight, then slowly return to the starting position.

4

BARBELL SKULLCRUSHER

START: Lie on your back on a flat bench, holding a barbell with a shoulder-width grip directly above your chest.

EXECUTION: Moving only from the elbows, flex your arms to lower the bar toward your forehead. Pause, then extend your arms until the bar is in the starting position.

TIP: The squeeze at the top is the key to this move; ensure you feel it in the back of your arms as you push the bar away from you.

6

LOW CABLE CROSSOVER

START: Adjust the pulleys on a double cable apparatus so they are in the lowest position. Attach D-shaped handles to either side, grab one end in each hand, and step one foot behind you for stability.

EXECUTION: Pull the handles in an arching motion until they are both in front of your upper chest. Move slowly back to the start, fighting against the tension as you move.

TIP: Switch your forward foot in the staggered position with each set to ensure you aren't favouring one side.

B



TIP: The motion should resemble an arc — your shoulders shouldn't shrug up toward your ears to help pull the weight.



1 DUMBBELL PREACHER CURL

START: Position yourself at the preacher curl bench with your armpit tucked tight to the top of the padding. Hold a dumbbell in your working arm, and extend your hand toward the floor.

EXECUTION: Keep contact between your upper arm and the bench as you flex from the elbow to draw your hand toward your shoulder. Stop just short of full flexion, then slowly lower.

TIP: This move is great for defining the peak of your arm — just keep in mind that you may need less weight than with a regular curl.

2 ALTERNATING INCLINE CURL

START: From a face-up position on an incline bench, hold a dumbbell in each hand and straighten your arms toward the floor.

EXECUTION: Flex your right arm to curl the weight. Resist the weight as you extend, focusing on keeping your lower back arch-free. Repeat with your left hand, and alternate throughout your set.

TIP: Fully straighten your arm at the bottom, and try to not swing your upper arm throughout each rep.

3 SEATED LATERAL RAISE

START: Sit on a bench and hold a dumbbell in each hand. Keep your arms at your sides, extended toward the floor.

EXECUTION: Simultaneously raise both weights up and out to the sides until they are aligned with your shoulders or slightly higher. Hold the position at the top for one second, then release and return slowly to the start.

» A study in the *Strength and Conditioning Journal* found that a pronated (overhand) grip resulted in the greatest activation of the lats. Interestingly, grip width wasn't found to have an effect on muscle emphasis.



TIP: Imagine pulling your elbows right into your waist. Maintain a lifted chest with a slight arch in your lower back.

4 REAR-DELT FLYE

START: Sit backward on an incline bench (set to approximately 30 degrees) with your toes on the ground and your chest against the back padding. Extend your hands toward the floor with weights grasped firmly in each.

EXECUTION: Raise your arms up, maintaining a slight bend in your elbows, until they form a straight line. Hold, then smoothly lower back to where you started.

TIP: Move your hands slightly behind you at the top to further engage your back muscles — but don't move any further than your comfort allows.

5 LAT PULLDOWN

START: Sit at the lat-pulldown station and adjust the seat so your legs form 90-degree angles and the padding above your thighs sits flush with your legs. Grab the bar above you with an extremely wide grip.

EXECUTION: Retract your shoulder blades as you pull the bar toward your clavicles; your elbows should be pointing down at the bottom. Extend your arms smoothly to complete your rep.

6 STRAIGHT-ARMED PULLDOWN

START: Stand in front of a high-pulley station with a long bar attached. Grab the bar overhead with a shoulder-width grip, step back, and hinge forward from the hips.

EXECUTION: Pull the bar in a straight motion until it touches the fronts of your thighs. Pause, then raise your arms in a slow, deliberate motion.

TIP: Watch that you don't slam the weights back onto the stack as you reverse. If this occurs, take another step backward.

7

BENCH CRUNCH

START: Lie on your back on a bench with your feet planted on its surface. Touch your fingertips lightly behind your head, and tilt your chin toward the ceiling.

EXECUTION: Empty your lungs as you raise your shoulders from the bench until your chin is pointed toward your knees. Contract your abdominals, pause for a two-second count, then reverse to the start, lowering vertebra by vertebra.

TIP: Doing this move on a bench can help move your focus back to stability.

8



HANGING KNEE RAISE

START: Hold a pull-up bar with a wider than shoulder-width overhand grip. Lift your feet a few inches from the ground and hang with extended arms.

EXECUTION: Slowly flex your hips and bend your knees to raise your legs in front of you, moving your knees to the left at the top to help target your obliques. Stop, reverse to the start without touching your feet to the ground, and repeat, alternating sides. **FORM**

TIP: Don't swing forward and back during your reps — a slow motion will help prevent swinging while recruiting more muscle fibres.

BRING IN THE BOTTOM HALF

The split we've provided for you here takes into account your upper body and abs, which means that you should, for symmetry and functionality's sake, train your lower body during one or two separate workouts each week. However, if you'd rather tackle all of your major muscle groups in two push and pull workouts, we have some suggestions on how to make your days total-body focused.

Add These To Your Pull Days

| | |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| Romanian Deadlift | 3-4 sets / 10 reps |
| Standard Deadlift | 3 sets / 8-10 reps |
| Hamstring Curl | 3 sets / 12 reps |

Add These To Your Push Days

| | |
|------------|--------------------|
| Squat | 3-4 sets / 10 reps |
| Leg Press | 3-4 sets / 10 reps |
| Calf Raise | 4 sets / 15 reps |

