

Getting Started

TO A DEDICATED bodybuilder, the time spent training in the gym is the high point of his day. He's always thinking about his next workout, planning what he is going to do. As soon as he finishes one training session he is immediately looking forward to the next. So while I am a great believer in learning all you can about bodybuilding programs and technique, at a certain point you just have to get into the gym and get started. As the famous ad slogan says, "Just do it."

If you are just getting started in bodybuilding, remember the old saying, "The longest journey begins with a single step." The more you know the better, but you don't have to master every bit of information in this encyclopedia before you begin your own workouts. What counts most when you're getting started is energy and enthusiasm. A student in medical school is not expected to perform open-heart surgery on her first day and a beginning pilot is not required to fly combat missions in an F-14 Tomcat like an experienced "Top Gun." When you climb Mount Everest you start at the bottom, not the top. Life is a process that involves continual learning and bodybuilding is no exception.

Most young bodybuilders have no trouble motivating themselves to start. They are like I was—so anxious to get going that they'll stand outside the door almost before the sun comes up waiting for the gym to open. But being enthusiastic doesn't mean you begin training without a plan. The thing to do right at the start is to set a clear goal for yourself. Why do you want to train with weights? When I was a beginner, the only reason anyone worked out in the gym was for bodybuilding, powerlifting, or Olympic weightlifting. These are still important reasons to pump iron, but nowadays people train for all sorts of other reasons as well:

- to improve their ability at a variety of sports;
- to become stronger for physically demanding jobs;
- to better overall health and fitness;
- to help gain or lose weight;
- to create a harder, more attractive body;
- to follow a physical rehabilitation program.

Setting these kinds of goals helps to determine where you should train, how often and how hard, what kind of training partner to have, and what famous bodybuilders to use as models. Remember, you can always alter your training goals later on. Many champion bodybuilders began working out with weights without any intention of becoming physique stars—to gain size and strength for sports like football, for example, or because they got out of school, were no longer playing sports, and just wanted a way to stay in good shape.

I recommend that before you begin, have photographs taken that show your physique from all four sides. Write down all your important measurements—neck, chest, biceps, forearms, wrists, waist, thighs, and calves—as well as your weight. This way you can always check back to find out what kind of progress you have made. Incidentally, if you are embarrassed to have body photos taken because you don't like your body very much, that is all the more indication of how much bodybuilding can do for you. We all want to look good on the beach, to stand naked in front of a mirror and be pleased with what we see—and, of course, have others be pleased with what they see when they look at us! Why not look good out of clothes as well as in them? You certainly don't want to take off your clothes and, as my friends "Hans and Franz" would say, set off a "flabberlanch."

As we discussed, you need to find a place to train that suits your goals. Additionally, you have to master the basic bodybuilding exercises in this book. Keep in mind that your first task is to create a solid, quality muscle structure. Advanced bodybuilders are concerned with improving muscle shape, achieving separation, and tying in various muscle groups—none of which need concern the beginner.

When I was starting out, I found it very important to find somebody on whom to model myself. A businessman training for fitness would be wasting his time trying to create a physique to rival Shawn Ray's; a serious bodybuilder with a frame and proportions like Dorian Yates's shouldn't spend his time studying physique photos of Flex Wheeler, and a bodybuilder six feet tall or more should probably not use a shorter competitor like Lee Priest as a role model. And if you are training to create a lean, muscular physique of the type you see so often nowadays with young actors or male fashion models, it wouldn't be very appropriate to tape a photo of a "no-neck" super-heavyweight powerlifter to your refrigerator door, would it?

In my case, it was Reg Park, with his great size and muscularity. I would put up photos of Reg all over the walls, then study them endlessly, picturing in my mind how that kind of development would look on my own frame. So much of bodybuilding is mental that you have to have a clear idea of what you want to be and where you are going if you want to achieve extraordinary results.

Too many young bodybuilders try to run before they learn to walk. They copy my routine or pattern their workout on some other champion's example, and end up doing exercises that are inappropriate to their stage of development. However, if after six months or so of training the idea of competing begins to appeal to you, start to work toward that goal: Learn your body, what makes it grow, its strengths and weaknesses; create a picture in your mind of what you eventually want to look like.

When I talk about sticking to the fundamentals, I don't mean doing anything less than a real bodybuilding program—whether you are training for competition or not. Remember, the exercise programs in this book are for *every body*. I only mean that you should limit your training to those exercises and methods that build the most mass in the shortest time, and then go on later, after you have achieved a certain degree of basic development, to carefully sculpt and shape that mass into championship quality. Again, even if you have no intention of becoming a competition bodybuilder, if you are only training for health and fitness, there is never any reason to waste time by training in any but the most effective and efficient way possible.

You build a basic structure, learn how to train correctly, acquire a knowledge of diet and nutrition, and then just give the body time to grow. In a year, maybe a little less or a little more, you will begin to see radical changes in your physique and will have enough experience to begin to develop an individualized training program based on your own instincts of what is right or wrong for your particular body.

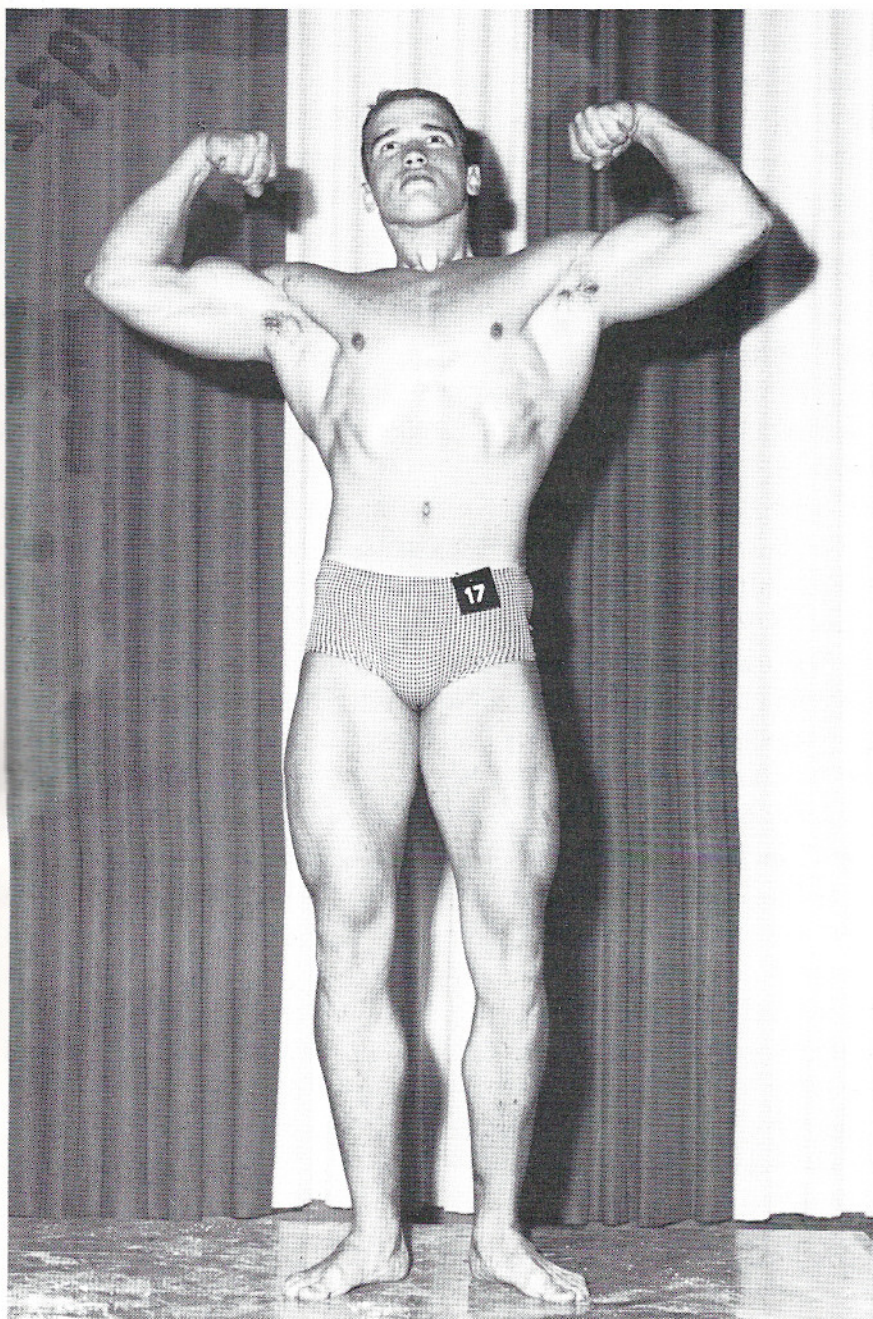
And just as you write down your physical measurements and keep track of your development with photos, I would recommend that you keep a *training diary*. Write out a training program that is appropriate to your goals, noting how many sets of each movement you do and with how much weight, so that anytime in the future you can check back to find out how much you have really done and compare that with the actual progress you have made.

You should also learn to keep track of your eating habits, how many protein drinks you had during any given week, how long you dieted, and what kind of diet you followed. All of this will allow you, perhaps five years down the line, when memory no longer recalls these facts, to be certain exactly what you did or did not do in pursuing your bodybuilding development.

FAST AND SLOW DEVELOPERS

Some people believe that developing muscle happens slowly but surely over time, so the longer you train, the bigger you get. That's why they will frequently ask a bodybuilder, "How long have you been training?" Or, "How long will it take me to get that big?" The way they see it, one bodybuilder is bigger than another simply because he or she has been training longer. But the reality is that not everybody gains muscle at the same rate and not everyone has the talent to create the same level of development.

Your individual genetics have a lot to do with how your body will respond to training. For example, I started training at fifteen, and photos taken after only a year reveal the beginnings of the physique that won me



Me at sixteen

seven Mr. Olympia titles. Every month or two I gained $\frac{1}{2}$ inch on my arms, so people told me right away, "You should be a bodybuilder." Casey Viator turned from powerlifting to bodybuilding at an early age and at nineteen became the first and only teenage Mr. America. Look at photos of Mr. Olympia Lee Haney at nineteen or twenty years of age and he already had a mature physique. Texas police officer and bodybuilder Ronnie Coleman won the World Amateur Bodybuilding Championships title only two years after he began serious physique training.

But not all successful bodybuilders were early bloomers. Frank Zane was good enough to win his share of victories in the sixties, but it wasn't until the seventies that he achieved the perfection of development that allowed him to be victorious in three Mr. Olympia competitions. Female bodybuilder Yolanda Hughes broke through and won her first pro show—the Ms. International that I promote every year in Columbus—after twelve years of amateur and pro competition. The problem for slow developers like this is that they don't get the immediate success, the positive feedback, that helps so much to keep you motivated. But bodybuilding is like the race between the hare and the tortoise: Ultimately, determination and endurance over a long period of time can win out over a quick start and headlong sprint for the finish line.

You should also be careful about being discouraged by comparing yourself to somebody who is a so-called overnight success. Nowadays, when you see a great young bodybuilder of, say, twenty-four or twenty-five, it is quite probable that he has been training since the age of twelve or thirteen, and if he started entering contests as a teenager could be the veteran of eight or nine years of competition. In golf, when Tiger Woods broke through and won the Masters tournament in his early twenties, a lot of people talked about how quickly he became a champion, forgetting that he had been practicing golf since he was a preschooler, and by the time he became a teenager had already hit hundreds of thousands of practice shots.

But I also remember seeing Tiger Woods *lose* a play-off to a golfer who was a late bloomer and had never won a pro tournament until his thirties. Winning that event was a matter of who shot the lowest score, not which golfer was the youngest or had had the earliest success. Victory was a matter of who put the ball in the hole with the fewest strokes, not who was the most famous or had the biggest reputation.

Remember, it is not how quickly you develop that will finally make the difference, but *how far you are able to go*. The judges don't look at competitors onstage and say, "That contestant has been training for eight years but the other one is better because he's only been training for three!" No, all that counts is how good you get, and you can't make your body develop any faster than your own biological makeup will allow.

But it is possible to develop *more slowly* than your biology would allow, simply by not believing that rapid gains are possible and not training to

develop as far and as fast as you can. I remember watching Franco Columbu train for two years with only moderate gains. Then he saw me win the NABBA Mr. Universe and he suddenly decided that he too wanted to win that title. After that, he trained really hard for two or three hours a day and began to make unbelievable gains in a very short time. His mind believed he could develop a fantastic physique, create gigantic muscles, and be up on-stage holding the championship trophy in his hands, so his body responded.

FREE WEIGHTS VS. MACHINES—A MATTER OF GRAVITY

For a beginning bodybuilder, the majority of training should be done with free weights. We live in a technological age, and the exercise machines being designed and manufactured today are better than ever. But your muscles were designed by evolution to overcome the pull of gravity rather than to work against machine resistance, so the biggest gains you will make in building size and strength will come from pumping iron—using a barbell and dumbbells—rather than by exercising on machines.

Moreover, most of the really good bodybuilders I know have also been powerlifters—a subject I will explore in more detail later. Forcing the body to lift against gravity, to coordinate and balance masses of iron, gives it a structure and quality that high-repetition, relatively light training alone does not provide. Additionally, a report in the *Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research* indicates that testosterone production is increased when you do large-muscle-group, free-weight exercises in which you use and coordinate a number of major muscle groups at the same time, like the Squat, Deadlift, and exercises you see performed less often today like the Power Clean. Testosterone production is not similarly increased by isolation free-weight exercises—or training on machines. Testosterone is anabolic, and with more testosterone in your system you get stronger and can build larger muscles more easily.

But bodybuilding is about sculpting the muscles as well as making them big and strong. Free weights give the experienced bodybuilder the freedom to isolate certain muscles and to work the body in any number of creative ways. They also enable people of different heights, weights, and physical proportions—long-armed, short-armed, long-legged, short-legged, etc.—to get a complete workout, while many machines seem to be designed only to satisfy those who represent the “average” customer of a commercial health spa.

Again, let me emphasize that I am not against machines. Joe Gold, who is a master craftsman when it comes to building exercise equipment, has filled World Gym with many useful machines and devices. Nowadays, when I go to different gyms and use a variety of different machines I find them to be marvels of technology. We’ve been through air- and water-

resistance machines, and are now back to a more basic design, but a hundred times better than ever before. The people at companies like Cybex and Hammerstrength, as well as the other top manufacturers, work extremely hard to create machines that work well and feel good to use. Gone are the days when somebody would just weld some pieces of metal together and expect people to use a machine that didn't operate smoothly, that hit the end stops before moving through a full range of motion, was awkward to use, and always had something wrong.

I use a lot of machines in my own workouts. It is obviously impossible to get full thigh development, for example, without a Leg Extension or Leg Curl machine or to fully isolate the inner chest without using a pec deck or cables. And it is possible to shock the body into accelerated growth if you occasionally use a machine or circuit of machines you are not used to in place of your normal free-weight exercise for that body part. But I believe that a good bodybuilding program should include no more than 30 to 40 percent training (at most!) with machines. Certainly, a Curl gets better results done with dumbbells or a barbell because of the way you can isolate and stimulate the biceps, but it would be hard to really work the lats without a Lat Pulldown machine or to do Triceps Pressdowns without cables.

Also, when you think about it, machines keep the resistance working along one plane only, meaning that the muscle has to do things the machine's way or not at all. With no need to balance and control the resistance, you end up with less muscle. But the whole idea of bodybuilding and strength training is to use *as much* muscle as possible, so this is no real advantage at all! It is true that a muscle doesn't "know" what kind of resistance it is working to overcome. In that sense resistance is resistance. But the muscle does indeed react differently if it is constantly subjected to resistance that comes from varying angles and different directions as opposed to resistance that is always along a predictable line. And Franco tells me that in his chiropractic practice most of the muscle strains and joint injuries he sees come about as the result of using machines that put unnatural stresses on the body, that lock you into too rigid a position.

Muscle was developed to work against the pull of gravity. If we lived on the moon, we'd need only one-sixth the amount of muscle we need on earth, with its greater gravity. On Jupiter, we'd have to be built like elephants to move at all! Lifting something gives us the experience of "heavy." Pushing a weight along a track is not the same thing. Neither is pressing against a stationary wall—you're encountering a lot of resistance, but it isn't "heavy." And that means your muscles are not responding as fully as they are capable of doing.

If you are training somewhere that does not have the free weights you need for your workout, and there is nothing you can do about it, use whatever you have in order to accomplish your training! The bottom line is to get that workout, no matter how you have to do it. Whatever works, works—and, as a bodybuilder, that's all you need to worry about.

SHOES

The importance of shoes in training is simply to stabilize your feet and improve your balance. In that regard, all shoes are not created equal. Many running shoes are made so soft and light—great if you plan to run ten miles or so—that they don't give you much support. But support is not always what you want. Competitive powerlifters doing Deadlifts generally wear very thin slippers because being even a fraction of an inch lower can make the difference between success and failure lifting a huge poundage off the ground.

You can also find athletic shoes that are thick-soled, solid, and with good arch support. I've seen bodybuilders work out wearing hiking boots, combat boots, and a wide variety of other footwear. Remember how much pressure is borne by the feet when you are doing exercises like heavy Squats, and how hard that can be on the arches. So choose the appropriate shoe for whatever kind of workout you have planned.

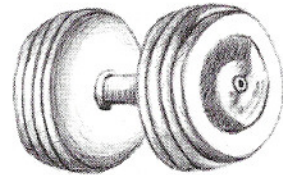
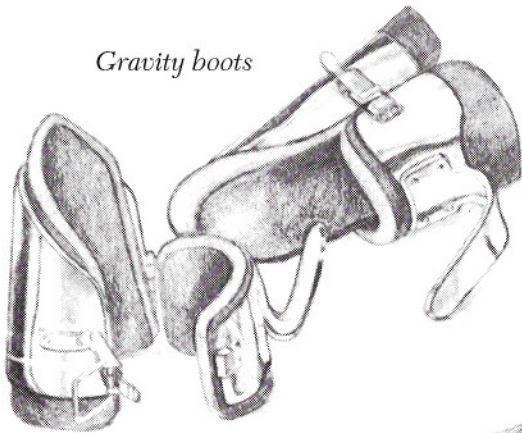
GLOVES

Many good bodybuilders wear gloves while training to protect their hands. Others use pieces of rubber cut from inner tubes to improve their grip. This is okay, but I have always trained barehanded and used chalk whenever my grip felt too slippery. Powerlifters work with enormous amounts of weight and don't use any of these aids. If you have particularly sensitive skin, or if you are a chiropractor, concert pianist, or in some other profession which requires that you take special care of your hands, by all means wear gloves. However, I recommend most bodybuilders simply grip the weights with bare hands and let them toughen up and develop calluses. Don't worry about sponges, gloves, and other aids.

STRAPS

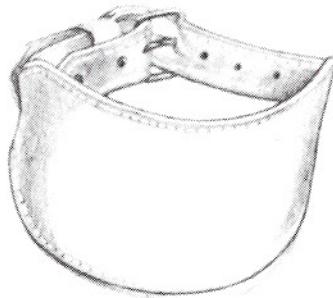
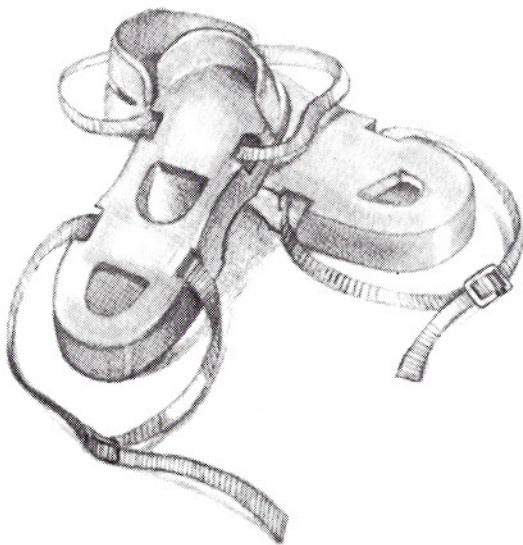
Straps are fastened around your wrist and then twisted around a bar to effectively strengthen your grip, although my personal feeling is that using aids like these keep hand strength from fully developing naturally. Straps are used because with bare hands it is often difficult to hold on to a weight that will really challenge your back in a heavy workout. However, champion powerlifters don't use straps, and they lift enormous amounts. Franco and I have always lifted heavy weights without the use of straps. If you lift without straps, your grip will gradually strengthen. If you continually use straps, you may never develop this kind of strength. However,

Gravity boots

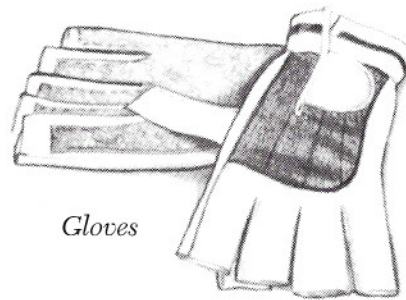


Barbells and dumbbells

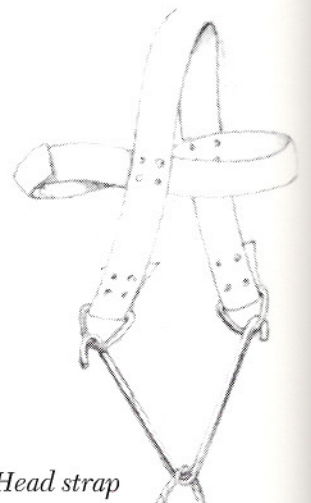
Strap-on foot weights



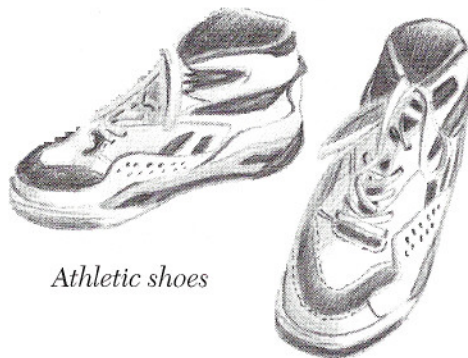
Belt



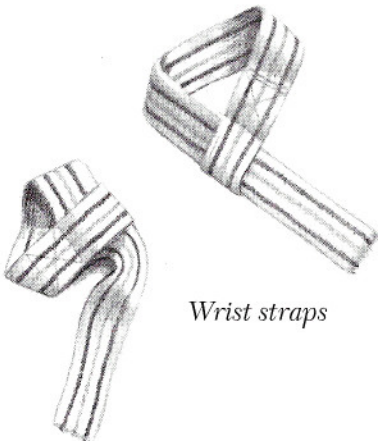
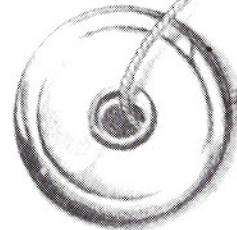
Gloves



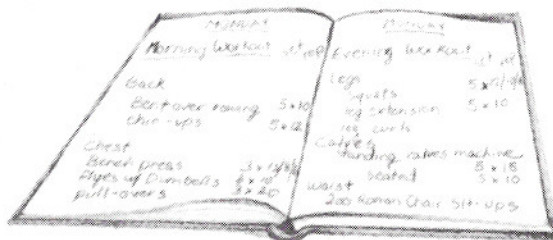
Head strap



Athletic shoes



Wrist straps



Training diary

MORNING	EVENING
Morning Workout 1st set	Evening Workout 1st set
Back	Legs
Bar over rowing 5x10	squats 5x10
Chin-ups 5x10	leg extension 5x10
	leg curls
	Calves
Chest	Handing sales machine
Bench press 3x10	shoulder 5x10
Raises of Dumbbells 4x10	waist 5x10
pull-overs 5x10	200 Roman Chair 5th up

whether or not to use straps in your workouts is mostly a matter of personal preference.

BELTS

The purpose of wearing a heavy belt is supposed to be to support the muscles of the lower back when you are lifting very heavy weights. The waist belt was originally used by weightlifters doing heavy Overhead Presses. However, belts are often considered necessary by those doing heavy Squats, pressing heavy weight, or doing heavy standing Calf Raises.

Research in the past few years has indicated that weight belts may not protect the spine to the degree it was once thought, although they probably help stabilize the upper body by increasing pressure in the abdominal cavity. However, in my opinion too many bodybuilders wear belts too much of the time they are in the gym, which has the effect of binding the lower back muscles and preventing them from developing the strength they ought to have. This is a high price to pay for an illusory feeling of security. So I recommend you use a belt only when you feel you really need one, for very heavy lifts, and not as a kind of bodybuilding fashion accessory.

WRAPS

Wraps are used to support weak or injured joints and muscles. You will occasionally see a bodybuilder who has wrapped one or both elbows due to some physical problem. More commonly, wraps are used around the knees when doing very heavy Squats, or around the elbows when doing heavy Bench Presses. But wraps aren't something you need to use every day. Unless you have an injury or joint problem (for which you should seek medical attention), you will not need to wrap your knees until you have progressed to the point where you are using very heavy weights. Ace bandages are most frequently used, wrapped firmly, but not too tightly, around the area. Remember that whenever you wrap an area tight enough to give it additional support, you are also limiting its flexibility of movement.

HEAD STRAPS

A few years ago it was common for bodybuilders to use a kind of harness that fits around the head to which you can attach a dumbbell or weight plate so you can do progressive-resistance exercises for the neck. The "Barbarian Twins," David and Peter Paul, used to amaze people at Gold's Gym with the enormous amount of weight they could train their necks

with—and sometimes they even attached the head strap to a car and pulled the vehicle across the parking lot.

This type of exercise seems to have fallen out of fashion, but maybe that's a mistake. If you feel your neck is too small, by all means find a way to train it. Indeed, some companies now make machines for this purpose. However, a complete workout routine tends to build the neck muscles along with everything else, so don't waste your time with these exercises unless you really see a need for them. In other words, if it ain't broke, don't fix it.

GRAVITY BOOTS

Here's another piece of equipment that used to be common but is seen much less often these days. Gravity boots enable you to hang upside down and stretch out the spine. Those who advocate using this device point to the fact that our bodies are constantly being compressed by the force of gravity—the spine is compressed, the internal organs are pulled earthward. As a result, over a lifetime, most of us are an inch or two shorter at age sixty than at age twenty-five. Stretching out the spine by hanging upside down and taking the strain off the internal organs is supposed to help counteract this process, and I can tell you that it feels very relaxing.

However, hanging upside down has no direct effect on building up your body, and it does tend to put a lot of strain on the lower back, so this remains an adjunct to training rather than a fundamental part of bodybuilding. If you use gravity boots, start out by hanging for only short periods—no more than a minute or so—until you get used to the unusual sensation of being upside down. Then gradually increase your suspension periods a little at a time as you feel necessary. Better, check out one of the bench-type gravity devices that let you keep your knees bent and take some of the strain off the lower back.

RUBBER SUITS

The primary use a competition bodybuilder would have for these suits would be to help lose water weight just before a contest. However, wearing a suit like this on a hot day when you are training hard could lead to hyperthermia, a dangerous increase in body temperature, and bodybuilders have ended up in the hospital or worse due to dehydration, so I don't really recommend this type of device. Keep in mind that any water loss due to the use of a rubber suit is only temporary.

TRAINING DIARY

Explorers use maps, sea captains rely on charts, astronauts navigate by the stars, and bodybuilders keep track of where they are and where they are going by keeping a training diary.

When I began to train, I wrote everything down—training routines, sets and reps, diet, everything. And I kept this up right through my 1980 Mr. Olympia victory. I would come into the gym and put a line on the wall in chalk for every set I intended to do. I would always do five sets of each movement. So, for example, the marks /////////////// on my chest day would stand for five sets of Bench Presses and five sets of Dumbbell Flys. I would reach up and cross each line as I did the set. So when I finished Benches the marks would look like XXXXX//, and I would never think to myself, Should I do three sets today, or four? I always knew it was five and just went ahead and did them. Watching those marks march across the wall as I did my workout gave me a tremendous sense of satisfaction and accomplishment. They were like an invading army crushing all opposition in its path. This visual feedback helped me to keep my training goals clearly in mind, and reinforced my determination to push myself to the limit in every workout.

Totally by instinct, I stumbled onto a concept widely accepted by educators and psychologists: Human beings work best and learn best when they are given the right kind of feedback. Knowing that you have accomplished something is one thing; seeing what you have accomplished is another. It makes your accomplishment all the more real and exciting, and therefore motivates you to try even harder the next time.

Feedback also lets you know when you are not on the right track. Memory can play tricks on you, but the information in the pages of a training diary is right there for you to see. If you are suddenly getting good results, you can look back to see what kind of exercise program and diet regimen helped you. If you begin to develop problems—your progress slows or you seem to be losing strength—you can check your records to try to determine where you might be making your mistake.

Continuing to keep a training diary over long periods helped my development tremendously. I would sit down at the beginning of the month and outline my program for the next thirty days—what days I would work out, what body parts I would train, and what exercises I would do. After a while, if a body part was lagging behind somewhat in development or I decided that certain muscles needed more training than I had been giving them, I would make an adjustment in my thirty-day plan and add the necessary exercises.

I would try various supplements to see what seemed to make a difference to how I looked and felt, and I would write all this down. Was I feeling full of energy or tired and fatigued? I would make note of this and then

later go back through my diary to see how I could account for the differences in how I felt between one day and the next. I kept track of the days I canceled a training session, or when I had a particularly good workout.

I also kept a careful record of my body weight and would take measurements every month—neck, shoulder width, biceps (hanging and flexed), forearms, waist (standing relaxed and hitting a vacuum), and so forth—so that I could make comparisons of how much I had progressed from one period to another.

So be sure to keep a training diary. Write down your entire program; make note of sets, reps, and weights; record your physical measurements, and take periodic photographs of your physique to keep track of your development. This way you will always know what your training program is supposed to be, and can always look back and check to see how you were training in the past and what kind of success that program brought you.

BODYBUILDING AND THE VERY YOUNG

I don't like to see very young children lifting weights. Their bodies are too unformed, their bones still too soft, to stand up to the stresses of weight training. I have seen boys five to nine years of age, pushed into working with weights too young by their parents, profiled on television as supposed bodybuilders. And a very young girl of about sixty pounds who "lifted" (that is, barely moved) some 400 pounds on a Hack Squat machine. I hope none of these children were injured by these activities because I don't believe this kind of exercise or physical stress is appropriate for the very young with their immature, vulnerable bodies.

Preteen training, in my opinion, should rely on lots of athletic activities to develop all of the body's physical potentials, with the emphasis on calisthenics or gymnastic exercises rather than weight training—exercises that use body-weight resistance such as Push-Ups instead of Bench Presses, Knee Bends instead of Squats, and so on.

Once the body begins to mature, weight training can begin. I began at fifteen, but this doesn't mean that every fifteen- or sixteen-year-old has to decide whether he wants to pursue competition bodybuilding right from the start. It takes a few months, maybe a year, simply to learn the exercises and begin to understand the experience of training. Still, it is important during this phase to use light weights and keep reps relatively high. The sooner you make up your mind to pursue serious training, the better chance you have of going all the way.

STARTING LATE

“Am I too old to begin bodybuilding?” I am frequently asked. “You are too old not to!” is usually my reply. As we get older the muscle structure tends to atrophy at a faster and faster rate. The ideal remedy for this is bodybuilding.

But when it comes to competition, there are obviously disadvantages to starting very late. Certainly, there have been bodybuilders who started much later in life and gone on to become great competitors—Ed Corney, the master poser of my day, for example. But, generally, your chances of becoming a Mr. Universe or a pro champion diminish with a late start. But starting late in bodybuilding is not the same as in other sports. Many champions didn't begin training until their early twenties and went on to become amateur and professional champions within the next ten years. However, these successful late starters are usually already competitive athletes who are simply switching sports. Their bodies are pretrained by years and years of other types of sports training. World Amateur Champion Ronnie Coleman is an example of this. And Franco Columbu, who started out as a boxer and then a powerlifter, didn't switch to training for bodybuilding until he was well into his twenties.

Not only can you start relatively late in bodybuilding, but you can continue to compete long past the point where most athletes (golfers being the most obvious exception) have retired. Of course, a bodybuilder in his forties is not going to be able to get the kind of shape he could a few years earlier. There is wear and tear on the muscles, a gradual hormonal change, shortening of the muscles—and the fact that an older competitor generally has more in his life to deal with, distractions and responsibilities (family, children, business interests) than does a younger man just starting out, so it is much harder to dedicate himself 100 percent to his training and diet programs.

Masters bodybuilding competitions are now widely available to competitors in their forties, fifties, and up. Former top professionals are even vying for titles at the Arnold Classic and Masters Mr. Olympia. And it's amazing how hard, muscular, and in-shape many of the champions of the past are able to look.

BODYBUILDING AND THE ELDERLY

As I said earlier, one of the primary manifestations of aging is the gradual deterioration of muscle mass. But recent research has proved that muscle doesn't have to atrophy with age to the degree we always believed. In fact, muscle mass can be *increased* to a surprising degree with proper training

even in those of advanced age. In short, recent scientific studies indicate that bodybuilding can be a fountain of youth.

Of course, the older you are the more careful you have to be when you start bodybuilding. "Consult a doctor" is not just a pro forma disclaimer when it comes to somebody in her sixties or seventies. Consult a doctor, find a good trainer, take every precaution. Learn proper technique. Get into training slowly. When you're older, injuries take longer to heal, so do everything you can to avoid any problems.

But the results can be spectacular. A return to more youthful levels of strength. A more youthful body. Energy, mobility, and an increased quality of life. Confidence and independence. Remember, much of what we consider to be inevitable aspects of aging are really just signs of underuse and neglect. You don't have to lose muscle or bone mass as you grow older; you can keep what you have and even build more of it.

MAKING THE TRANSITION

Making the transition from training for health and fitness to training for competition is largely an evolution of consciousness: You begin to appreciate certain potentials of your body that you were not previously aware of and slowly your attitude toward training begins to change and you have to make a decision—which way are you going to go? Are you going to keep this just a small part of your life, or will it gradually become the centerpiece of your existence?

I decided almost immediately that I wanted to be Mr. Universe. Franco competed for a while as a powerlifter before making that decision. Mike Katz was a professional football player, the late Carlos Rodriguez a rodeo rider. You can decide early or late, but if you find yourself caught up in training, looking forward almost obsessively to your workouts in the gym, relishing every new plane and angle revealed as your physique grows and develops, this may be a decision that you, too, will have to make. To get your feet wet, there are many local amateur contests to enter. There you can try competition and decide whether or not the rigors involved are to your liking.

There is so much more money in professional bodybuilding now than when I started that many athletes who might have concentrated on sports are deciding on a career in bodybuilding. But there are more and more opportunities on the amateur level as well, and many bodybuilders continue to train and compete while pursuing careers as doctors, lawyers, chiropractors, or businessmen.

Most bodybuilders are highly competitive individuals, but others are in the sport primarily for the meaning it gives their lives, regardless of whether or not they ever achieve a victory. Bodybuilding is more than a sport, it is also a way of life. It is an entire philosophy of how to live, a value

system that gives specific answers to questions that concern so many of us these days—questions of what is worth doing and what value to give to excellence and achievement. It is a way of pursuing self-worth and personal validation, of finding satisfaction in your ability to set goals for yourself and working to reach them.

Of course, not everyone who takes up bodybuilding on a competitive level has the same experience, but no one goes very far in this sport without realizing the deeper meaning of physique.

COMPETITION

I always intended to do many things with my life besides compete in bodybuilding contests, but there is no aspect of my life that will not be influenced by or will not benefit from my having had the heady experience of competition. Bodybuilding *training*, I believe, is for everyone, but few are suited for the demands of competition. If the idea appeals to you even in the slightest, I urge you to give it some consideration. If you can share even a small part of what bodybuilding has given me, I know you will never regret your decision to try competition.

Just remember one thing—if you really take it seriously, bodybuilding competition will take over your life. It will determine where and how you live, what you eat, who your friends are, the course of your marriage. Sure, you can compete on a local level without giving yourself over totally to the demands of the competition lifestyle—still live somewhat of a “normal” life—but the further you go in bodybuilding the more it will consume you.

This is not so unusual. Think of the commitment it takes to train for the Olympics. The practice and dedication it takes to become a champion in tennis or golf. The demands of training to run a marathon. Success in any of these sports takes a degree of focus and concentration most people can hardly imagine. It takes sacrifice to get to the top. And bodybuilding is no exception.