



One Month to Muscles

Want to get stronger, but don't know where to start? This head-to-toe program from expert trainer Rachel Cosgrove will have you lifting smarter, feeling stronger and sporting more defined muscles — in just four weeks.

By Andrew Heffernan / January - February 2012

What's the key to getting in shape? "Having a plan," says Rachel Cosgrove, CSCS, co-owner of Results Fitness in Santa Clarita, Calif., and author of *The Female Body Breakthrough: The Revolutionary Strength-Training Program for Losing Fat and Getting the Body You Want* (Rodale, 2009). "Don't just go into the gym and wing it."

Winging it, unfortunately, is exactly what most people do. They wander around the gym, scope things out, and eventually settle on some version of what they normally do: seated exercises; cardio machines. If they lift weights at all, it's often using the same weights they've always used — week after week, month after month.



The outcome is usually less than stellar.

Not, however, for Cosgrove's clients. Fast, impressive results are the rule rather than the exception, and winging it is never an option: "Everyone I train is on a plan that's part of an overarching training philosophy," says Cosgrove.

The cornerstone of that training philosophy? Strength. It doesn't matter whether the client wants to lose fat, perform better, or just look and feel great, Cosgrove makes building strength and muscle a priority for both male and female clients — and she delivers in record time.

Don't just take our word for it: What follows is a monthlong, head-to-toe muscle-building plan that Cosgrove created exclusively for *Experience Life*. She calls it a beginner's program, but if you work hard and heavy, even a gym vet will find it challenging. You'll know exactly what to do from the moment you set foot in the gym to the moment you leave. Not only will you be leaner, stronger and more defined, you'll also have fun, stay safe and feel great. So stick a copy of this article in your gym bag, and make Cosgrove's program your road map to more muscles.

The Plan

1) **Pick your frequency.** Do the A and B workouts two, three or four times a week, based on the following:

- **2 times a week:** Good for those who haven't strength-trained before or have an exceptionally busy schedule. Alternate workouts on nonconsecutive days.
- **3 times a week:** Good for those who are active, healthy and want to see faster results. Again, alternate A and B workouts, but don't always do the same workout the same day of the week. In the first week, for example, you'll do Workout A twice (Monday and Friday, for instance) and Workout B once (on, say, Wednesday); the following week you'll reverse the pattern and do Workout A once (Wednesday) and Workout B twice (Monday and Friday). Perform workouts on consecutive or nonconsecutive days, but never more than two days in a row.
- **4 times a week:** Assuming you're eating well and resting enough, this approach can yield great results. Alternate A and B workouts on consecutive or nonconsecutive days, but never more than two days in a row.

2) **Bounce back.** In addition to A and B, Cosgrove also suggests that you do the optional Recovery workout on some or all of your off days. This do-anywhere mini-workout will keep your blood flowing, loosen connective tissue and activate postural muscles.

3) **Group up.** When an exercise is marked with a number and a letter, such as "1A," "1B" or "1C," it's part of a compound set of exercises. Perform one set of the first exercise, rest as indicated, then do a set of the second exercise. Rest again, then continue until you've done all sets in that grouping. (When an exercise is marked with a number only, do straight sets, where you do a set, rest, and repeat that exercise.)

4) Move weight. You will progress from lighter weights for higher reps to heavier weights for lower reps. “Lighter” doesn’t mean “easier,” however: All sets should be challenging, and at each set’s end, *you should feel like you can do no more than two additional reps.* Use these parameters for the strength portions of Workouts A and B:

- **Week 1:** Two sets of 12 reps, 45 sec. rest between sets.
- **Week 2:** Three sets of eight reps, 60 sec. rest between sets, using more weight than in Week 1.
- **Week 3:** Three sets of 12 reps, 60 sec. rest, using the same weight you used in Week 2.
- **Week 4:** Four sets of eight reps, 60 sec. rest between sets, using more weight than in Week 3.

Dynamic Warm-Up

Perform as a circuit before each workout (A, B or Recovery), completing one to three rounds of 10 reps of each exercise.

1A: Squat to Stand



- Standing with feet shoulder-width apart, bend forward at your hips, keeping your legs straight, and reach toward the floor.
- Keeping your feet flat on the floor and your hands reaching downward, drop into a full squat position, knees outside your arms.
- Hands still reaching toward the floor and feet flat, extend your spine, look directly forward, and draw your shoulders back as far as possible.
- From this position, raise both arms into a “Y” position over your head.
- Keeping your arms extended overhead, rise out of the squat position.

1B:Reverse Lunge With Rotation



- Standing with feet shoulder-width apart, raise your arms to shoulder height and place your palms together in front of your chest, thumbs up.
- Take a long step backward with your right foot and lower your right knee until it's an inch or two off the floor.
- Keeping your arms straight, palms together at shoulder height, and torso erect, rotate your arms and upper body as far as possible to the left.
- Rotate your upper body back to the center position and return to the starting position. Repeat the movement, alternating sides each rep.

1C: Lateral Lunge



- Starting from a standing position, step directly sideways with your left foot, placing it roughly two shoulder widths from your right foot.
- With your right leg straight and your back in its natural arch, lunge deeply to your left, bending your left knee to about 90 degrees, allowing your torso to bend forward if necessary.
- Reverse the movement, returning to a standing position. Alternate legs each rep.

Workout A

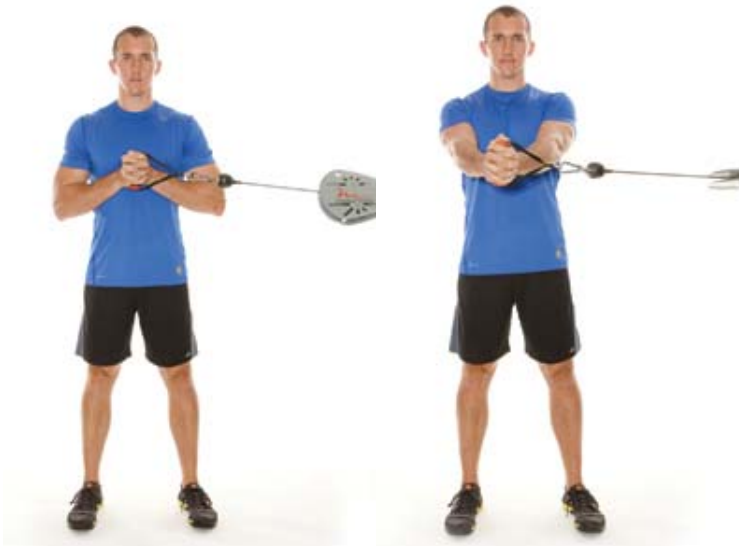
Core: Perform two sets of 10 reps of each exercise at a moderate tempo, resting 45 seconds after each set.

1A: Plank With Alternating Leg Extension



- Assume a plank position, weight supported on your feet and forearms, body forming a straight line from head to heels.
- Maintaining this position, lift your left foot off the floor, keeping your leg straight and the toes of your left foot pointing toward the floor.
- Slowly lower your left leg and repeat with the other leg, alternating sides with each rep.

1B: Anti-Rotation Press With Cable Machine or Exercise Band



- Set the pulley on a cable machine to chest height (you could also attach one end of an exercise band at shoulder height to something sturdy). Interlock the fingers of both hands around the handle, walk back several feet from the machine to create tension on the cable, and turn your left side toward the machine.
- Assume an athletic stance (with knees slightly bent) and hold the handle against your torso at sternum height.
- Maintaining an upright posture and keeping the handle vertical, slowly extend your arms straight out from your body.
- Slowly reverse the movement. Complete all reps, then perform with your right side toward the machine.

Power: Perform two sets of 10 reps, resting 45 seconds between sets.

2: Medicine-Ball Floor Slam



- Holding a moderately weighted medicine ball, assume an athletic stance and raise the ball directly overhead, arms straight, simultaneously extending your legs fully and rising onto the balls of your feet.
- Forcefully reverse the movement, slamming the ball down onto the floor as hard as possible. Catch the ball as it rebounds off the floor and repeat.

Strength: Perform the sets and reps of each move, varying week to week, as indicated in the dynamic warm-up.

3A: Kettlebell or Dumbbell Front Split Squat



- Holding one moderate-to-heavy kettlebell or dumbbell in a front rack position, take a long step forward with your left foot. This is your starting position.
- Keeping your back in its natural arch, your torso upright and your eyes looking straight ahead, slowly bend both knees.
- When your left knee is an inch or two from the floor, reverse the movement and return to the starting position. Continue for all reps, then repeat with your right foot forward.

3B: Inverted Suspension Row



- Stand facing the anchor point of a suspension trainer with your feet shoulder-width apart, holding the handles, palms facing each other.
- Keeping your body straight and your shoulders down, lean away from the anchor point, positioning your feet so your body forms about a 45-degree angle with the floor.
- Pull yourself toward the handles, keeping your elbows close to your sides and retracting your shoulder blades.
- Lower yourself under control. Repeat.

4A: Barbell or Dumbbell Romanian Dead Lift



- Take an overhand grip on either a barbell or two moderate-to-heavy dumbbells.
- Assume an athletic stance, feet at roughly shoulder width, eyes looking forward, back in its natural arch, shoulders pulled back slightly. Allow the barbell or dumbbells to hang down comfortably at roughly the height of your mid-thigh. This is your starting position.
- Keeping your legs relatively straight, hinge forward at the hips, keeping the barbell or dumbbells close to your legs. You should feel a deep stretch in your hamstrings.
- When you can't descend farther without losing the arch in your back, reverse the movement and return to a standing position. Repeat.

4B: Standing Single Arm Overhead Dumbbell Press



- Holding a moderate-to-heavy dumbbell in your right hand at shoulder height, slowly press it overhead until your elbow is straight.
- Reverse the movement. Complete all reps, then repeat the exercise with the dumbbell in your left hand.

Workout B

Core: Perform two sets of 10 reps of the following exercises, using a moderate tempo, alternating sets, and resting 45 seconds between sets.

1A: Forward Ball Roll-Out



- Kneel with your forearms on a Swiss ball in front of you. (The larger the ball, the easier the movement.)
- Lean into the ball, rolling it forward, and straighten your hips so your body forms a line from your knees to the top of your head, as if performing a plank exercise. Make sure not to hyperextend your lower back.
- When your arms are almost fully extended, slowly reverse the movement, pulling the ball back to the starting position. Repeat.

1B: Swiss-Ball Hip Extension



- Lying on your back with your feet elevated on a Swiss ball, place your arms out to your sides, hands on the floor.
- Keeping your feet hip-width apart and your legs straight, press down through your heels, squeezing your glutes hard and lifting your hips in the air as high as possible. Your body should form a straight line from shoulder to heel.
- Slowly bending at your hips, lower them to the floor. Repeat.

Power: Perform two sets of 10 reps, resting 45 seconds between sets.

2: Medicine-Ball Side Toss



- Holding a moderately weighted medicine ball in both hands, stand about 6 feet from a sturdy wall with your left shoulder pointing toward the wall.
- Assuming an athletic posture, wind up for your toss by rotating your arms and shoulders as far as possible to the right.
- Turn your torso and arms forcefully toward the wall, hurling the ball against the wall as fast and powerfully as possible. Catch the ball on the rebound, and immediately repeat the move to complete all reps. Repeat with your right shoulder toward the wall.

Strength: Perform the sets and reps, varying week to week, as indicated in the plan above.

3A: Conventional Dead Lift



- With your feet shoulder-width apart, bend at your knees and hip joints and take a firm overhand grip on a barbell with your arms just outside your knees. Roll the barbell backward until it touches your shins. Raise your hips so your torso forms about a 45-degree angle with the floor.
- Keeping your back in its natural arch, your arms straight and your feet flat on the floor, push through your heels and drive your hips forward until you are in a fully upright position. Keep the bar as close as possible to your body throughout the entire lift.
- Reverse the movement, keeping your back straight and lowering the bar under control. Repeat.

3B: Incline Suspension Pushup



- Assume a pushup position, leaning into the suspension-trainer handles with straight arms so your body forms a 45-degree angle to the floor.
- Keeping your body straight, bend your elbows and lower your body as deeply as you comfortably can, squeezing your shoulder blades together at the bottom of the movement.
- Push yourself back up to the start position and repeat.

4A: Assisted Single-Leg Squat



- Facing the anchor point, hold the handles of the suspension trainer with your arms slightly bent. Shift your weight onto your right foot and hold your left foot a few inches off the floor in front of you.
- Keeping your eyes on the anchor point, your back in its natural arch and your right knee aligned with your foot, bend your right knee, lowering yourself as far as possible toward the floor.
- Pushing through the heel of the right foot, return to standing. Continue for all reps, then perform reps on the other leg.

4B: Three-Point Dumbbell Row



- Take an overhand grip on a heavy dumbbell with your right hand, and face a sturdy bench. Bend forward, hinging at the hip joints until your torso is roughly parallel with the floor, bracing your left hand on the bench. Allow the dumbbell to hang straight down.
- Keeping your back in its natural arch, pull the dumbbell straight up until it touches the side of your torso, allowing your right shoulder to rotate up and back.
- Continue for all reps, then repeat the movement with the dumbbell in your left hand.

Results-Boosting Recovery Workout

Myofascial Release: Roll out the major muscle groups — calves, hamstrings, quads, IT bands (sides of thighs), glutes, upper back, lats, shoulders and chest — using a foam roller, stick or massage ball. Spend up to one minute on areas that are particularly tender or tight.

Perform the following circuit of movements two or three times, spending 45 seconds on each movement and 15 seconds transitioning to the next:

1A: Alternating Bird Dog



- From your hands and knees, extend your right arm forward and up, thumb pointing toward the ceiling, simultaneously extending your left leg behind you.
- Slowly return to the starting position, and alternate sides for 45 seconds.

1B: Hip-Flexor Stretch



- Take a long step forward with your left foot and drop your right knee to the floor.
- Keeping your torso upright, your hips and shoulders square, and your hands behind your head, shift your weight forward until you feel a gentle stretch in the front of your right hip.
- Raise your right arm overhead and hold for 45 seconds. Switch sides next round.

1C: Wall Slides



- Stand with your back against a wall. Keeping your shoulder blades, glutes, arms, the back of your head and the backs of your hands in contact with the wall, raise your arms overhead into a “Y” position with your arms and the backs of your hands touching the wall.
- Slowly lower your arms until your hands are near your shoulders. Repeat for 45 seconds.

1D: Hip Bridge



- Lie on your back with your knees bent, feet flat, arms outstretched with palms up. Pushing through your heels, lift your hips until your body is a flat line from knee to neck, keeping your core tight and squeezing your glutes at the top of the movement.
- Slowly lower your hips back to the floor and repeat for 45 seconds.

1E: Alternating Reach for the Sky



- Stand with feet shoulder-width apart and bend at the hips until your torso is near parallel to the floor. Extend your arms straight out to your sides, palms down.
- Keeping your torso parallel to the floor and arms fully extended, slowly rotate your shoulders and head to the left until your right hand is close to the floor and your left hand is reaching toward the ceiling. Reverse the movement and keep alternating sides for 45 seconds.

1F: Seated 90/90 Stretch



- Sitting on the floor, bend both legs to 90 degrees, your left in front of you and your right off to the side.
- Extend your spine, arch your lower back slightly, and press your left knee down toward the floor until you feel a gentle stretch in your left hip. Hold for 45 seconds, and switch sides on the next round.