



The Science of Health, Nutrition and Fitness

'Massing' the Biceps. The Three Key Exercises

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When you ask most people, which muscle they train the most; which muscle they admire the most, the usual answer is the biceps. A 'set of guns' is sought after as they are showpiece visible muscles that denote strength and athletic prowess. There are many exercises that may be used in biceps development. In this small article we will identify the three greatest mass builders (in the authors opinion) and the rationale behind their choice.

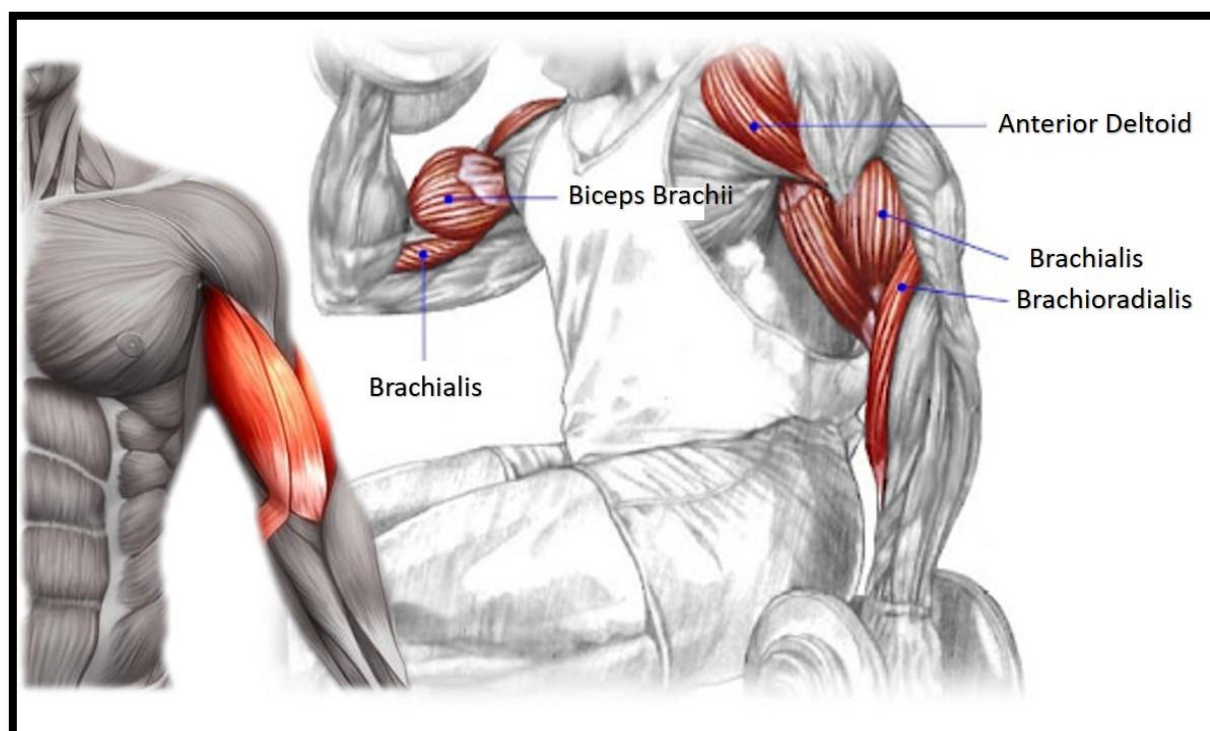
Before we address the exercises and routines a rudimentary observation of the biceps brachii anatomy will be provided.

Anatomy of the Biceps

The biceps brachii, as its name suggests is a two headed muscle that extends down the anterior portion of the upper arm as described from the anatomical position.

Tendinous Attachment

The biceps is attached to the shoulder joint in two places by the proximal biceps tendon. The long head (outer head) attaches to the shoulder region at the supraglenoid tubercle of the scapula. The short head (inside head) attaches at the coracoid process of the scapula. Distally the biceps form a single muscle belly and attach via the distal bicep's tendon to the periosteum of the superior portion of the radius bone; the upper frontal aspect of the forearm.



Functions of the Biceps Brachii

The biceps brachii is primarily a flexor of the forearm. When the muscle contracts the hand is drawn towards the anterior shoulder region. The biceps muscle has several assistant muscles located around it, that support in its function.

Brachialis

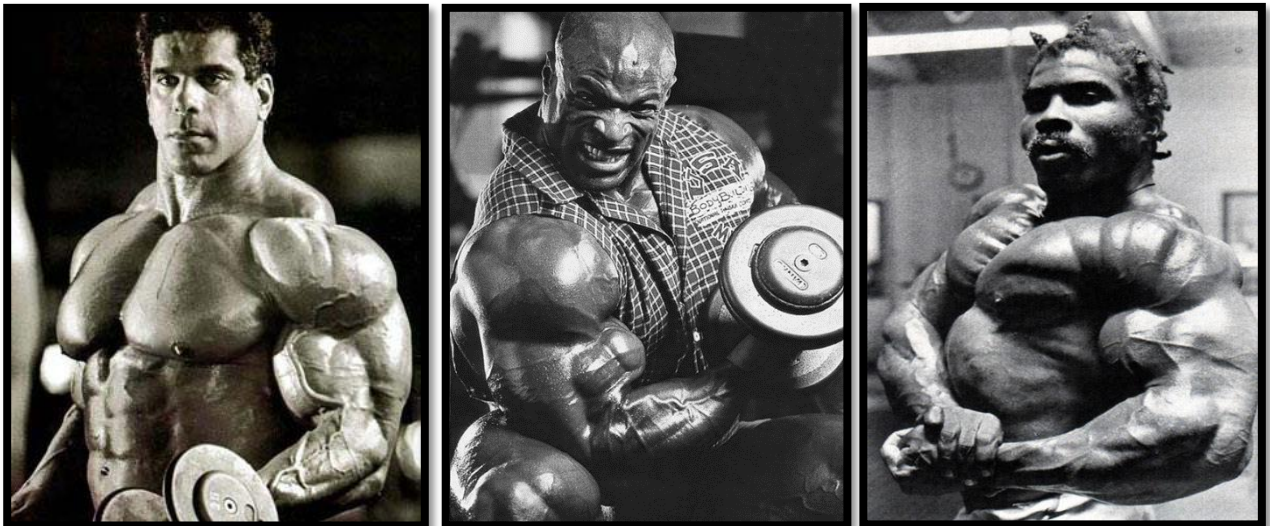
The brachialis muscle is located in the upper arm. It is located underneath the biceps muscle. Its primary function is elbow flexion.

Brachioradialis

The brachioradialis muscle extends from the lower part of the humerus down to the bottom of the radius. Its primary function is flexion. However, the brachioradialis muscle also assists in the movement processes of supination and pronation.

Biceps Shape

The shape of the biceps muscles is dictated by several factors. Muscle fibre distribution, muscle belly commencement and upper and lower insertion areas may all affect the actual biceps shape. When designing your biceps training program, you should endeavour to achieve growth of all the forearm flexor muscles.



Differing Bicep Shapes of Lou Ferrigno, Ronnie Coleman and Robbie Robinson

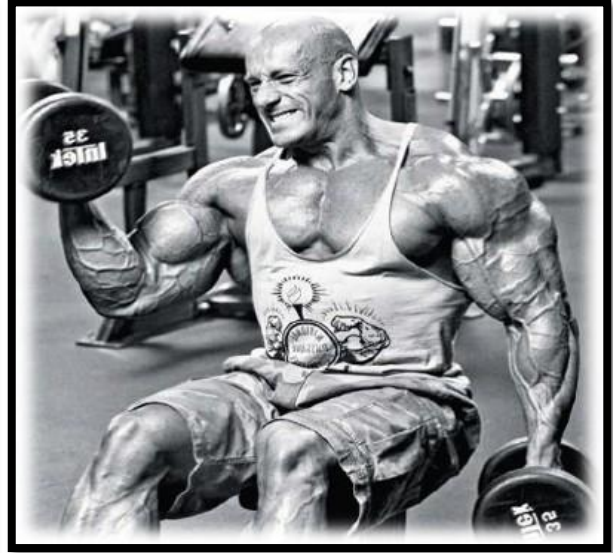
With our anatomical preamble completed let us now detail the four exercises that I personally consider fundamental techniques that should be employed in any biceps program.

The Biceps Barbell Curl (Straight Bar)

The biceps barbell curl is the main exercise that should be employed in a biceps program. Not only does it allow heavy weights to be used; but it also focuses the stimulus on both the short and long head of the biceps brachii. I stress that this exercise is the straight bar method and not the EZ bar version which throws the stress onto the inside short head of the biceps.



Arnold utilised the straight barbell curl as one of his arm mass builders.

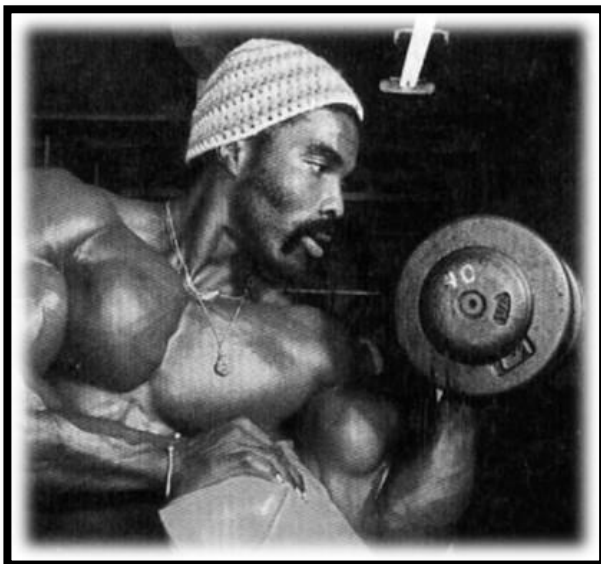


The seated dumbbell curl allows greater lower back stability and greater weights due to the stabilised position.

Alternate Dumbbell Curls

The alternate dumbbell curl exercise is another technique where fairly heavy weights can be employed. Performed seated or standing this exercise focuses the stresses on both of the heads. As the exercise involves active supination and passive pronation the brachioradialis muscles also becomes involved. So, this exercise encourages all round biceps development.

EZ Barbell/ Dumbbell Preacher Curls



Robbie Robinson had some of the best biceps peaks and often employed isolation type exercises to achieve them.

This exercise allows greater isolation of the biceps muscle during the contraction phase. The negative phase of the lift can also be performed under far greater control to increase the stimulus on the biceps. This exercise also allows 'hyper' contraction of the biceps at the upper limit of the movement. This enhanced contraction ability can enhance the bicep muscle 'peaks'; creating a perception of even greater muscle size. Performed either with dumbbells or barbells the exercise can be manipulated to create various different stresses on the biceps area.

That is my choices for the three best biceps mass exercises. A simple routine comprised of just three of these exercises will certainly improve biceps size and shape; with the correct application of progressive overload. We will discuss program design and implementation in further articles.