



BUILD YOUR BEST BODY

WANT A FAST-TRACK TICKET TO DEMORALISATION? REACH FOR THE PERFECT BODY. WANT THE BEST ROUTE TO FITNESS SUCCESS? PERFECT THE BODY YOU'VE GOT... **»»**

GOALS

goals are good. They motivate and inspire us. But they can also do the exact reverse. A case in point: pursuing 'the perfect body'. Because depending on what that is to you – and what your genetic makeup looks like – it can be hugely demoralising.

"It's common for people to ask for results that mimic their idols or friends," says Andy Pilides, director of More Than Muscle. "Everybody is unique and it's far better to try to improve what you have than look like someone else."

To use an analogy, it's like taking a photo of Novak Djokovic to the barber, when you have hair like Rafael Nadal. The language bandied around in fitness circles doesn't help,

either. Body transformations are the prime example. "They're cool if used in the correct way, but can be incredibly misleading," says Pilides. Psychologically the idea of grinding away at the gym, the track, or the court in search of the 'perfect' body is a non-starter, too, according to Chris Shambrook, who has been the psychology consultant for the GB Rowing Team since 1997 (planetk2.com). "It typically positions an unattainable end state as the goal," he says, "so never getting to arrive at that point leaves people disappointed, with a palpable sense of failure that the goal hasn't been reached and/or sufficient progress hasn't been made."

On that haircut analogy, rather than

pointing at a picture and telling a trainer, "Make me look like him," he advises adapting your approach to something like, "I'd like to work with you to see what my version of that physique is," or, "Can we use this picture as a reference to build a programme that will help me change my body shape, so that I'm as happy with it as that person looks with theirs?" It's a subtle shift, but a powerful one.

A word of caution, however: even with a realistic goal to work towards, we need to recognise the work required to get there. "Some clients are crystal clear on what they want," says Dan Roberts, founder and head coach at danrobertsgroup.com. "But even if they have a good goal in mind, often they don't appreciate how long it will take to get there doing it safely and properly."

GO YOUR OWN WAY

All three experts agree that the key, when it comes to embarking on a fitness journey, is making it bespoke. Rather than desperately trying to emulate a particular physique, talent or time, you need to tune in to who you are, and what you want to get out of exercise on a far deeper level – and enjoy the ride. "Maximise



Strength training is a good idea, whatever your body type, but endomorphs in particular are likely to excel at lifting heavy weights

“MAXIMISE WHAT YOU HAVE, ENJOY YOUR UNIQUENESS AND WORK HARD TO IMPROVE IT”

what you have, enjoy your uniqueness and work hard to improve it," says Pilides.

You may assume that means playing to your natural strengths, tapping into what comes easy and amplifying it, but it can actually be the exact reverse. "I've found working on someone's biggest weaknesses and getting excited about doing things they had never thought they'd be into can transform their motivation," says Roberts. "I got an ageing, skinny marathon runner into Olympic lifting once and it totally reignited his passion for fitness."

It's a sentiment Shambrook echoes: "When starting a new fitness regime, it's much more helpful to have a mindset of curiosity and discovery."

When we don't have a specific goal or an event to train for, Roberts suggests the best thing we can do is the opposite of what we like. "Doing what you suck at," he says, "will help your body more than doing more of

what you're good at. Bodybuilders should do yoga, tai chi guys should do MMA, marathon runners should do strongman training and so on. See training as a way of exploring and ultimately expressing what your body can do with variety – not just strength or cardio, but also learning a new athletic skill like balance, mobility, flexibility, endurance, agility and coordination." >>>



A mix of cardio and resistance training will help endomorphs stay in shape

COMPARE AND CONTRAST

You often read that comparison is the devil – think of social media, where we’re bombarded with perfect versions of other people’s lives, achievements or physiques – but according to Shambrook, comparing can be motivating, so long as you do it right. “With every athlete I’ve worked with,” he says, “we’ve focused on the balanced pursuit of becoming the best version of themselves and how to benefit from the fact that there are other athletes around, with specific strengths, that can be a useful reference point to use for personal comparison. This approach means that the competition with yourself, as well as the comparison with others, are both being used to make progress.”

In other words, use fellow athletes as a motivational tool, but not for direct comparison. Work to the best of your capabilities and progress rather than creating a specific, fixed reference point of someone else or one ‘gold standard’. What someone can bench or how fast they can run 26.2 miles should be, says Shambrook, “a source of information, not a source of validation or self-worth, mentally or physically.”

So how can you start to work with, rather than battling against, your body to reach your full potential? Pilides says it’s about “understanding the way you move,

the biomechanics you have and your current training age. That allows you to piece together specific programmes and enhance your capabilities.”

It’s also worth swapping a daunting goal for a mindset that focus on enjoying the process. Working out which somatotype you

Ectomorphs (long and lean)

Your classic ectomorph is a natural long-distance runner. They easily convert carbs into fuel, have speedy metabolisms and, as a result, struggle to bulk up. “Their biggest challenge is gaining size, but on the flip side they will find it easier to stay lean,” says

“ECTOMORPHS OFTEN TRAIN WITH TOO MUCH VOLUME AND EAT NOWHERE NEAR ENOUGH, WHICH STUNTS THEIR MUSCLE GROWTH”

are helps, too. “They are a good clue to how you may respond to training and nutrition,” says Pilides. Before we break those down, Roberts has a final suggestion – three basic must-dos for everyone. “Regardless of your somatotype,” he says, “all men aged 15 to 65 should be able to run 10k, do a handful of pull-ups and touch their toes.” Now for the nitty gritty...

WHAT’S YOUR TYPE?

Identifying your somatotype, while bearing in mind nobody will neatly fit into one category, can really help you tune in to how to work with your body. Here’s an expert breakdown:

Roberts. “Put it this way: Peter Crouch will never be a bodybuilder.”

So if you want to be less, well, Crouch, what can you do? “There is no escaping the fact that you have to lift pretty heavy things on a regular basis,” says Roberts. “Do less cardio, but make it quality cardio, and get used to both eating and lifting a lot. Ectomorphs will always like endurance activities more than power work, so you have to decide if you want to work within your natural body shape to get really great at a particular sport or discipline, or work on your weaknesses to be a more well-rounded athlete.”



Pilides agrees that getting fuelling and volume right is key: “Ectomorphs often train with too much volume and eat nowhere near enough, which stunts their muscle growth. Building up intensity and volume of food in correlation can help them improve their weight and muscle goals.” He recommends keeping cardio and weight training low in volume and high in intensity, while building up calorie intake to build tissue and weight. Mind this common mistake, too: “Training with more volume is often confused as ‘more is better’,” says Pilides, “but ultimately more volume means a greater calorie deficit. Be mindful of output vs input.”

Endomorphs (stocky and strong-framed)

“Think Chris Pratt,” says Roberts. “Endomorphs find it harder to get lean, because their bodies hold on to fat and muscle more naturally.” They tend to have a wide waist and a large bone structure, they’re typically shorter, have strong upper legs and gain muscle easily – although their muscles tend to be less defined.

“The biggest challenge,” says Pilides, “is being prone to putting fat on and constantly having to be aware of the variables associated with managing it. Endomorphs need a

healthy mix. Resistance training helps them build strength, grow tissue and burn calories, while cardio is important for all-round health and fitness, coupled with more calorie expenditure.”

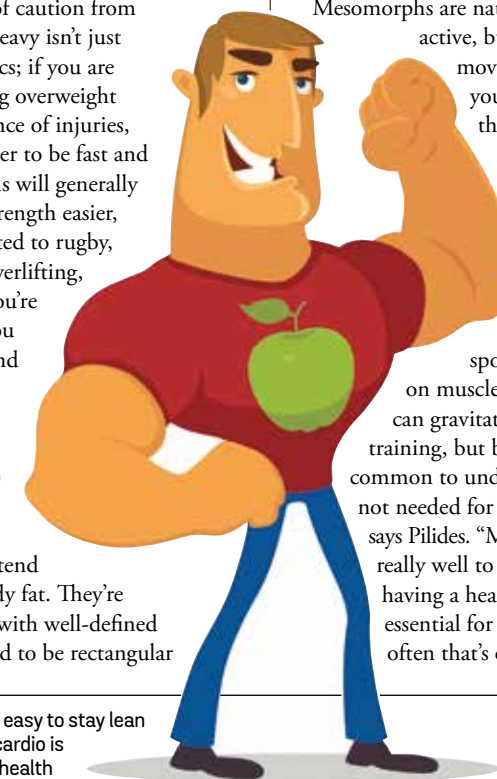
If you’re into a particular sport, however, a word of caution from Roberts: “Being heavy isn’t just about the aesthetics; if you are a sportsman, being overweight increase your chance of injuries, and makes it harder to be fast and agile. Endomorphs will generally find power and strength easier, so they’re well suited to rugby, wrestling and powerlifting, but doing what you’re bad at will give you a more versatile and ‘athletic’ body.”

Mesomorphs (natural athletes)

These guys find it easy to add new muscle and don’t tend to store much body fat. They’re naturally athletic with well-defined muscles. They tend to be rectangular

in shape, average height to tall, with regular metabolisms. “If you have ever heard the words ‘genetically gifted’, they are probably a mesomorph,” says Roberts. “They have many good athletic options, so the only challenge is the risk of overtraining.

Mesomorphs are naturally drawn to being active, but when you love moving and exercising, you need to make sure there is variety in your intensity and muscles being used, regardless of how specific your goal is.” Pilides adds that as well as being active and sporty, because they put on muscle easily mesomorphs can gravitate towards weight training, but balance is key. “It’s common to undervalue cardio as it’s not needed for physique purposes,” says Pilides. “Mesomorphs respond really well to weight training, but having a healthy mix of cardio is essential for heart health, and often that’s overlooked.”



Mesomorphs find it easy to stay lean and muscular, but cardio is still key for general health

TRAIN TO TYPE

ONCE YOU’VE IDENTIFIED YOUR SOMATOTYPE, TRY COACH ANDY PILIDES’S PERSONALISED PLANS

ECTOMORPHS

- Focus on big, compound movements like barbell squats, deadlifts, chin-ups and bench presses that involve multiple muscles and the main muscle groups.
- In terms of reps and sets, periodically transition your reps into higher sets. For example, during weeks one to three, do 3 sets of 8-10. Weeks four to six, do 4 sets of 6-8. Weeks nine to 12, do 5 sets of 4-6.
- Pick loads that make the last 2 reps of your rep bracket difficult.



ENDOMORPHS

- Focus on full-body workouts to help keep the weight off and develop your muscular physique.
- Progressively increasing your weight training can help, and try pairing lower-body exercises with upper-body exercises in circuits back and forth. Have a programme in this format with around 6 to 8 exercises in 3 to 4 pairings. This helps stimulate muscle tissue and keep your heart rate up to increase that calorie burn during your workout, as well as after.



MESOMORPHS

- Train like an athlete, with a mix of cardio, strength and conditioning.
- When it comes to cardio, set targets, do tempo efforts and aim to beat personal bests.
- When doing strength training, add conditioning work at the end, so for example intervals on the watt bike or rower. Look at ways to grow sets and reps (like ectomorphs), but utilising a mixture of higher and lower reps, and choose loads that are challenging over the last 2 reps.



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