

4 Free Weight Exercises for the Upper Body

By Beth Shaw

In my book, YogaLean, "Lean Consciousness" is a state of mind that will help propel you toward weight loss and sustain your ideal weight when you get there. Achieving it, however is not only about a regular yoga and meditation practice. You must venture beyond the gentle, peaceful realm of poses, meditation, and breathing to do exercise that challenges your stamina and refines and builds your strength.

Cardio exercises and weight training are essential in burning fat and keeping our muscles strong and toned. Yoga then helps us stretch, center, balance, and provide focus. When you combine cardio, weight training, and yoga, you create the perfect trinity package of true mind/body/spirit fitness that keeps us in Lean Consciousness.

Muscle mass naturally diminishes with age, so anyone over the age of 30 really needs to start weight training. Weight training on a regular basis reduces the risk of injury, increases body confidence, and helps strengthen your body as a whole. It burns fat, creates definition, increases lean muscle mass, and burns calories more efficiently. It also increases metabolism by keeping more lean muscle tissue engaged and working.

I recommend at least two or three sessions of weight training a week. If you are consistent, you will see results!

A common question is this: "Should I do free weights or machines? Which is better at building muscle?" The answer: both will build muscle, but free weights (dumbbells, barbells, cables) are better at doing it than specialized weight training machines. When we lift free weights, it takes greater effort and more muscle involvement to stabilize the weights.



The effort of stabilizing the weights also gives the smaller "accessory muscles" a workout, along with the primary muscle doing most of the work. Even lifting the dumbbells off the floor or the barbells off the rack will require a wide range of balance and stabilizing muscle to work.

Free weights are better at stimulating muscles, and more muscle stimulus means faster results! They also allow you to be more creative, as long as you are aware of proper form and body mechanics. Muscles love spontaneity - as does life! Not to mention, free weights are cheaper and easier to store in your home.

Here are 4 of my favorite free weight exercises for the upper body.

1. Rows with Bench:

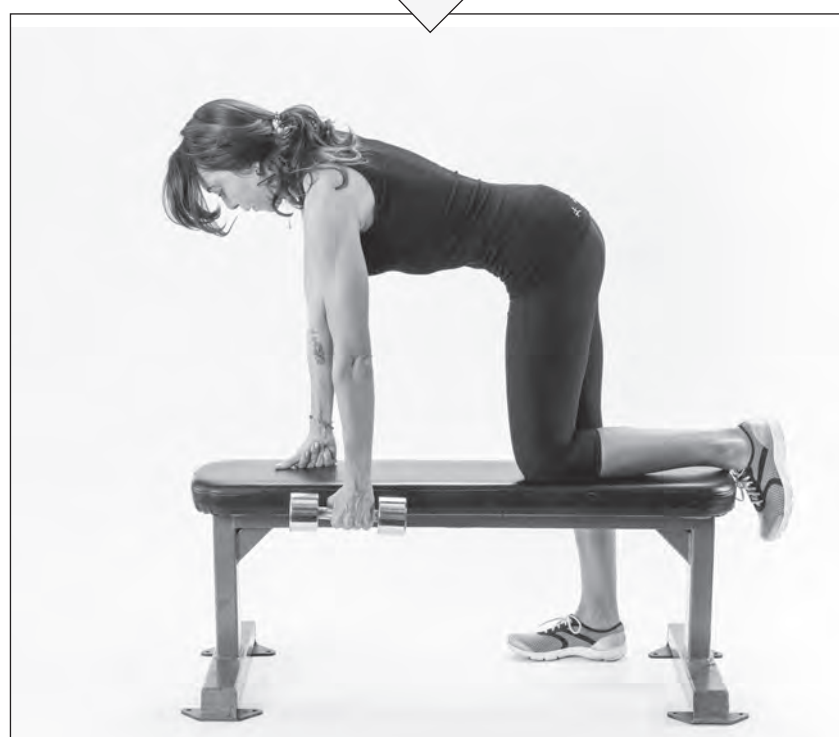
This exercise targets the rear delts, the rhomboids, and the entire core.

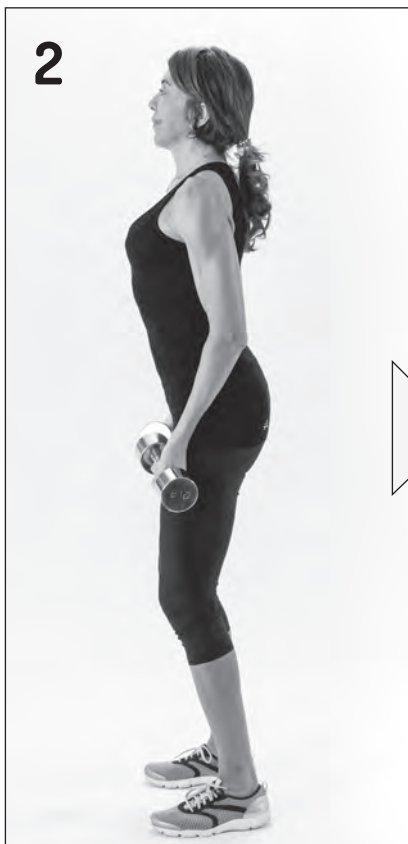
- Place one hand and the opposite knee on the bench for stability. Hold a dumbbell in the other hand.
- Engage all the muscles of the core.
- Bring weight down past the bench and then pull it up so that your elbow and wrist are in the same line.
- Repeat 12-15 times with a weight that starts to fatigue you around the 10th rep.
- Switch to the other side, placing opposite hand and knee on bench. Do 4 sets of 12-15 reps.

2. Shoulders/Biceps Push Press with Biceps Curl

This exercise will target your legs, arms, and shoulders.

- Stand with your feet hip-distance apart, holding a dumbbell in each hand with your palms facing toward your body.
- Inhale and bend your knees and flex your hips as if you are sitting in a chair. Exhale as you come up from the





chair position. Bend your elbows to your shoulders, continue moving the weight up and over your head until you are standing upright with your arms over your head.

- Your arms should be in line with your shoulders, avoid locking your elbows or your knees.
- Slowly bring your arms back down to your shoulders as you bend your elbows (as if you are hammering nails) and sit back into the chair position as your arms straighten and are at the sides of your body. This should be one fluid movement, from seated to standing.
- Do 4 sets of 12-15 reps.

3. Arm and Shoulders – V Lift
This exercise has the added benefit of working the core.

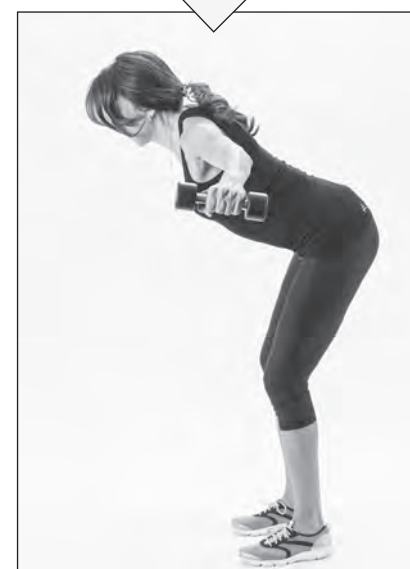
- Stand with your feet hip-distance apart, holding a light dumbbell in each hand. Bend your knees as if to sit in a chair and then bend forward from your hips (hip hinge) until your back is parallel with the ceiling. Keep your head in line with your spine.
- Let your arms hang straight down toward the floor in line with your shoulders.
- Keep your elbows straight. With your thumbs facing up, lift the

weights up and out to the corners of the room as if to make the shape of the letter V.

- Hold your abdominals in very tight and only raise your arms to shoulder height without swinging the weights. Slowly lower the weights and repeat.
- Do 4 sets of 12-15 reps.

Triceps Kick Back
This exercise works triceps to help tighten flabby backs of the arms.

- Hold a dumbbell in your right hand. Move your left leg forward about two feet in front of your right leg; place your left hand on your thigh for support.
- Bend forward at the hips (hip hinge). Start with a 90-degree angle, elbow bent, and extend to 180 degrees (a straight arm), keeping your abdominals firm.
- Bend your right elbow so that your upper arm is parallel to the floor, your elbow is at a 90-degree angle, and your palm is facing in to the body. Imagine keeping your elbow glued to your waist.
- Exhale and straighten your arm behind you until your elbow is straight but not fully extended.
- Inhale and slowly lower the weight back to the start position. Keep your upper arms still the entire time, moving your forearm only.
- Do 4 sets of 12-15 reps.



4. Rest and Recovery

To give your muscles time to recover, rest one or two days between exercising each specific muscle group. I find that I usually get sore 24-48hrs after a workout. I love the soreness that comes from a good weight training session; for me, soreness means something happened, and it hurts so good.

One of the joys of weight training, and one that's heavily used in the principles of YogaLea, is that one's body weight can be used to improve the body, just as yoga does. The body truly is an incredible thing!

