How can I develop muscle symmetry? [1]

Dear Alice,

My right leg is more developed than my left leg. My right leg is one inch bigger in circumference. How do I go about developing the muscles in my left leg so that they are symmetrical?

Thanks so much.

Answer

Dear Reader,

While your concern about wanting both legs to be of equal symmetry is understandable, it is actually quite normal to have one leg with a larger circumference. In fact, this is common with any opposing appendages (i.e., biceps and triceps making up the upper arms, forearms, and calves). Many people have one part of the right arm or leg one quarter of an inch to over one inch bigger or smaller than their left in circumference. And often even feet are ½-a-size different from one another.

That said, there are ways of making your legs more similar in size, even if the upper or lower portion of your right leg is larger than the left. In order to achieve hypertrophy (muscle growth), you will need to train your legs, just as as you need to with all parts of your body. This strength training could include lifting weights at least three days a week at 60 to 85 percent of your leg's one-repetition maximum (i.e., the most a person can lift at one time). You may find it works to do three sets of 8 to 12 repetitions for these leg lifts, but working with a personal trainer would be your best bet to get a workout tailored to your needs.

In order to have the left leg catch up in size and circumference with the right, you'll need to work only the left leg for an additional set or two, doing each exercise that you had completed for both legs earlier in your workout. Examples of exercises to complete for both legs that you can also do with just your left are (please see the Related Q&As below for the descriptions of these activities):

- leg press
- leg curl
- leg extension
- squat
- standing and seated calf raise

Again, a personal trainer or exercise physiologist will be your best partner in helping your left
leg become roughly equal in circumference to your right. Research suggests that the reason individuals benefit from working with trainers so much is that the trainers encourage their clients in using and tolerating greater training loads. As a result, the clients elicit greater gains than exercisers who simply push themselves to complete their full workout regimen on their own.

If you cannot afford a trainer at a gym, you may contemplate using an online personal trainer. This alternative offers a certified personal trainer to craft a workout regimen and communicate adjustments while monitoring your progress via e-mail. These services are often much less expensive than working with a personal trainer in person, but the disadvantage is that you will not have the personal attention of the trainer to ensure that you are consistently performing the exercises most efficiently, effectively, and safely. You may wish to begin with a trainer for at least a few sessions. This will allow you to observe and practice proper form for the variety of exercises you will include in your training regimen.

You can use this resource for additional info:

"What are the benefits of varying your workout routine?" on the American Council on Exercise web site [2]

While boosting the muscle mass of your left leg, continue to work the right leg so that it does not atrophy or lose strength and flexibility. Your leg’s circumference won’t increase dramatically overnight, or even over the course of a week. As with any training or workout regimen, with time, hard work, and determination, you can move toward equalizing the circumference of your legs. Best of luck achieving balance in your legs, your workout routines, and your life.

Alice!
Category:
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