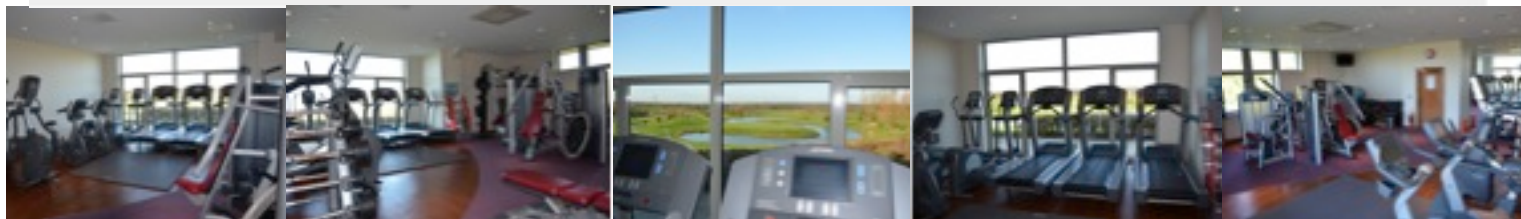


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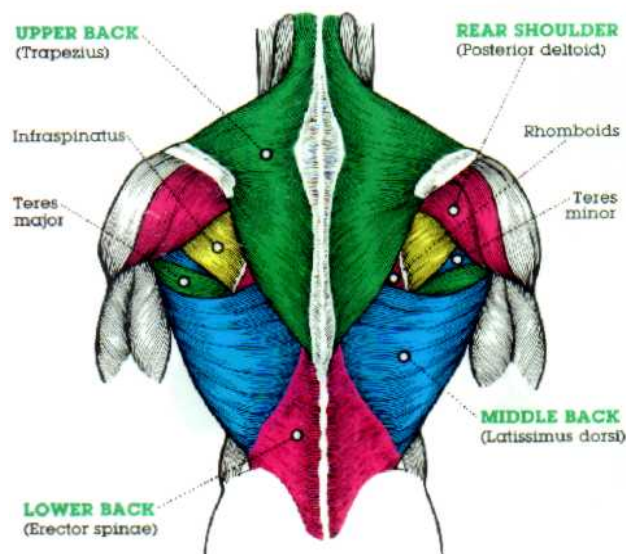


## Muscle Focus: Back

Luke Barden, February 2014

The back is made up of three main muscles: The Erector Spinae, Latissimus Dorsi (lats) and the Trapezius (traps).

Although there are different sections to the muscles (such as the upper, mid, and lower traps), and other muscles in the back (the rhomboids & QL) I will focus on the three above. (the rotator cuff - Teres Major, Minor, Sartorius, Infraspinatus - will be covered in the shoulders)



### Erector Spinae

Made up of a bundle of muscles and tendons, the erector spinae primarily extends the vertebral column.

To work the erector spinae, you can either use isometric or concentric contractions. That is, to hold the spine straight against a force (isometric - such as remaining upright in a deadlift) or contracting the muscle (concentric - hyperextensions) Very effective exercises include deadlifts, squats, bent over rows and pullups.

### Latissimus Dorsi

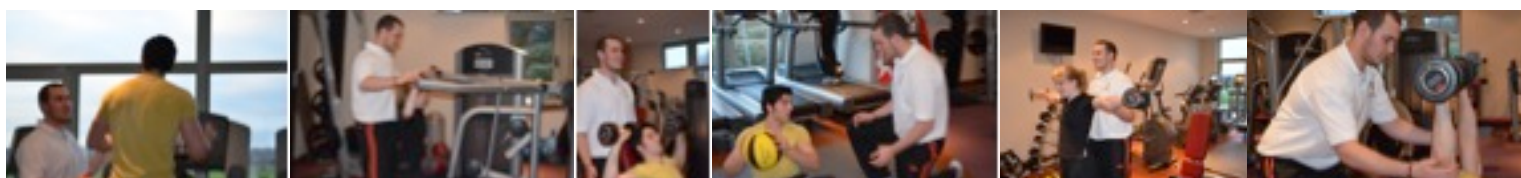
The latissimus dorsi is the broadest muscle in the body, and is responsible for extension, adduction, flexion from an extended position and internal rotation of the shoulder joint. It also aids in extension and lateral flexion of the spine (lumbar).

To work the lats directly, do pulling movements. Very effective exercises include pull-ups, lat pull-downs, bent over rows and seated rows. Although the muscle is very strong, and will allow you to lift heavy weights quickly, correct technique should always take precedence over heavier weight. A lighter weight will also allow you to pull the shoulder blades together at the peak of the exercises, effectively working the rhomboids as well.

### Trapezius

The trapezius ranges from the neck, to the back of the shoulders, and down to the mid spine. Its functions are to move the scapulae, and support the arm.

To work the traps, perform cleans (particulatly hanging cleans) shrugs or farmers walks.





## Training the back

I have mentioned exercises that train each muscle above, and now will explain a bit about training the back.

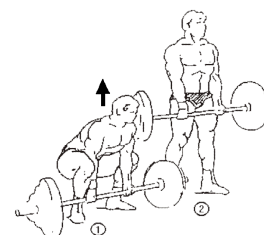
Compound movements work best with developing muscles. They allow you to work multiple muscles over multiple joints, i.e. erector spinae and the lats, worked through the sacroiliac joint, the spine and the shoulders for bent over rows. They also allow you to get stronger quickly, therefore improving the connections between all the muscles and their ability to work together.

Some quick pointers on two key back exercises:

### Deadlifts

Deadlifts are one of the key exercises to learn, but correct technique is essential, with vital points being:

- Keep the back as straight as possible throughout the movement, do not arch!
- Keep the foot flat to the floor, drive through the heels.
- Keep the head upright & chest out, do not face the floor.

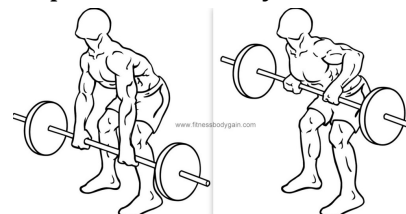


Grasp the bar and pull firmly, to allow all the muscles to tense, before fully exerting your strength into lifting the bar. Aim to push the floor away, as apposed to pull the bar up. Keep your chest up, and tense your core throughout.

### Bent over rows

Much less weight will be used with bent over rows, and it is important to hold your posture throughout.

- Ensure you always keep your spine neutral
- You want your upper-body as close to parallel as you can.
- Try and squeeze your shoulder blades together at the top, as you pull the bar to your belly button.



Bent over rows are a great exercise for both widening the lats and adding depth. Although they can only be done with a bar, the rowing movement can also be done with dumbbells for a bigger stretch in the extended part of the movement.

There are many variables with both exercises, but those are the basic two techniques. Once you have grasped them, you can try others, but I would advise keeping these in the regular core of your back workouts.

