

CRAFTING A

# CLASSIC★PHYSIQUE

VOLUME 3: SUPERIOR BACK



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## BACK TO THE CLASSICS

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The classic era was a time without tricks, gimmicks, and without decades of sports science and experience passed down from the trenches. So how did they achieve the physiques that we still look at today as iconic and ideal? First, they had fun in the gym. Take a look at any old footage and you'll see that these guys loved training. I feel that some of that has died and there is less heart in the sport. Do me a favor and the next time you step in the gym, have some fun! Enjoy your workout, learn to love the pain, and get a little competitive. If you don't, the workout I'm going to share with you in this book is going to be miserable for you. It's grueling and relentless, because the second thing they did in the classic era was train hard, and for a long time.

We're going to keep our back training fairly simple with basic, hardcore movements, but with a few secret weapons that will elicit some explosive growth, detail, and strength. The first thing we should talk about is the difference between going heavy and being cocky. There are too many stories out there of people trying to handle too much weight in the pursuit of muscle and ending up small and injured. We'll go over a few tricks for how to get the best muscle contractions from every rep, but the most basic rule here is that you should be able to pull the weight without any momentum or jerking movements. If you can't pull the weight into a contracted position and hold it for a half a second, you're going to heavy.



The next thing you'll need to really nail down in your head is the anatomy of the back, and your own back's appearance. You can choose to add some volume to exercises of this training program to better suit your individual need. So for instance, if you have no traps, you may consider adding a few extra sets of shrugs per week to increase your overall weekly training volume. Otherwise, stick to this program and see your body morph.

## ANATOMY OF A SUPERIOR BACK

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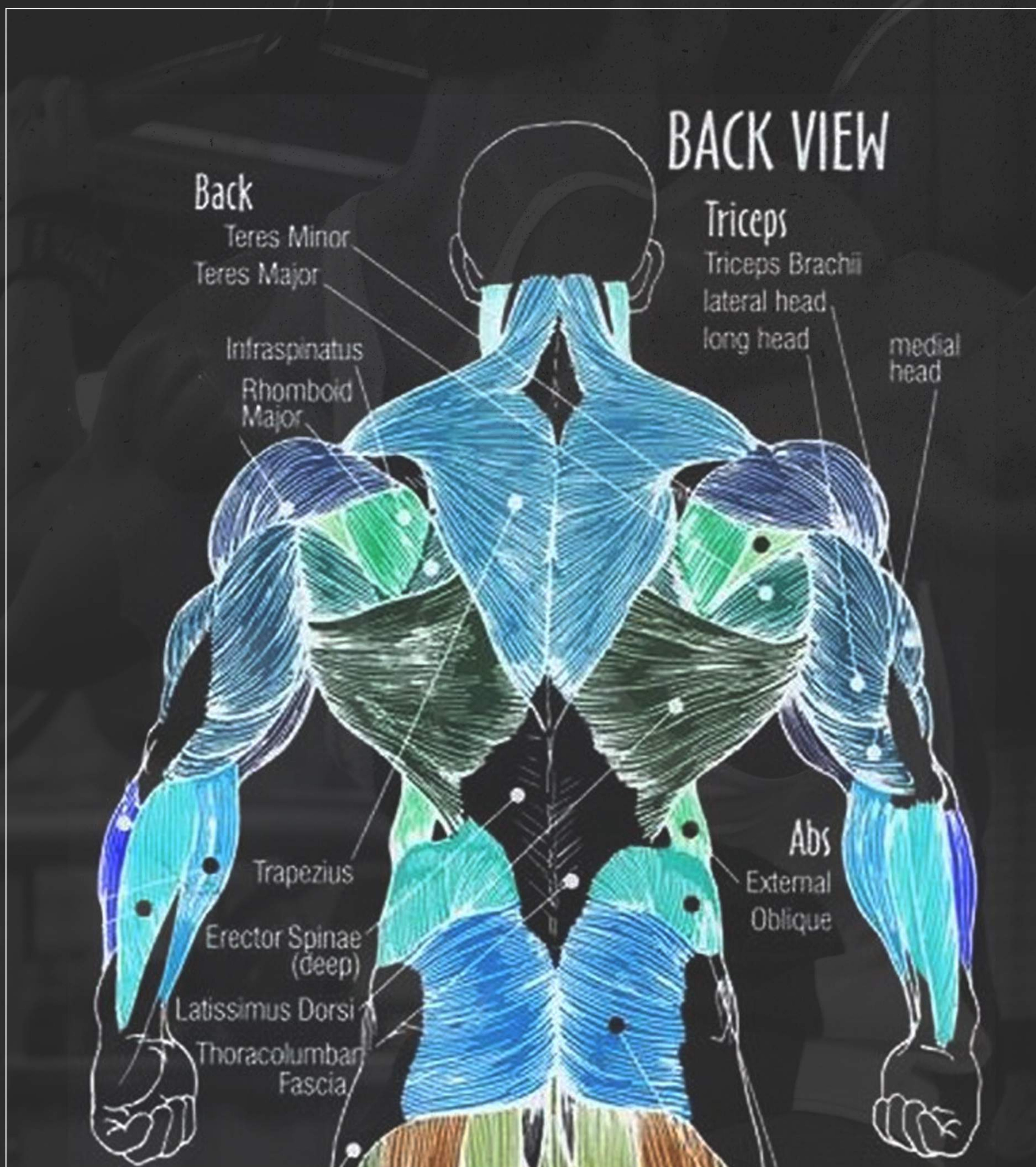
The Classic Physique is about balance and achieving the most impressive look for your individual genetic make-up. To accomplish this goal, you should know the basic anatomy of the back, each muscle's function, and a mental and biomechanical cue to activate it. For the most part, we'll be fairly general because many of the small muscles of your back will be forced to activate with a few movement cues, and it is counter productive to try to somehow do direct work for them. Remember, we're going basic here to build slabs of muscle in the right places to achieve the best looking back.

Typically, I find that people either struggle to attain one of two things. The first type of back lacks a significant amount of width in their lats and teres major, especially in the lower lats. The other problem people have is that they can't seem to gain thickness in their middle back in the traps, infraspinatus, and rhomboid major.

We're going to talk a little anatomy and address these two problems individually before we go on to the program. Everyone can learn from these techniques, and even if it isn't necessarily a weakness of yours you can still make great improvements.



## BACK MUSCLE ANATOMY

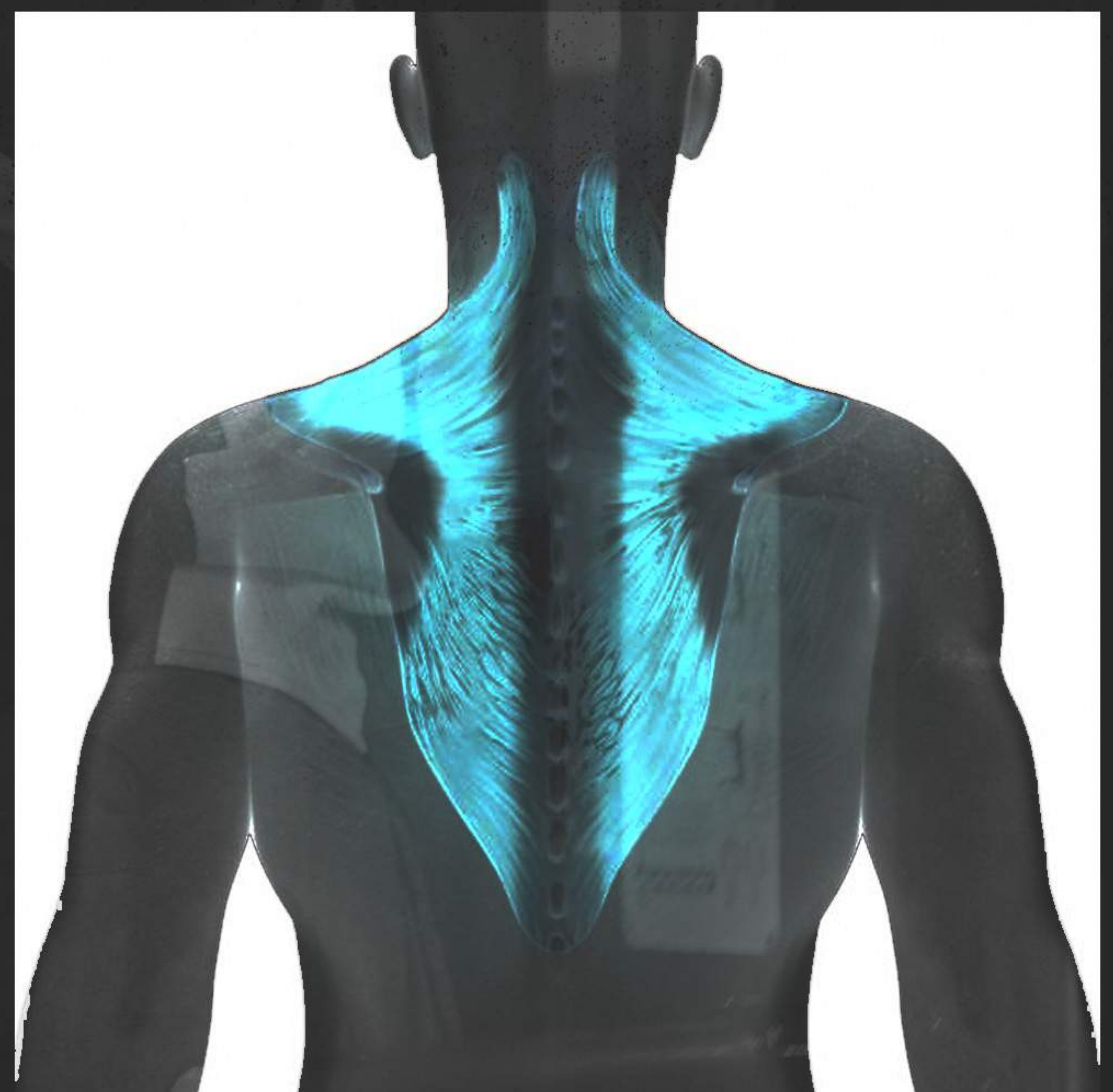


# ANATOMY OF A SUPERIOR BACK

## — TRAPS

The primary function of the traps is to support the head, neck, and shoulders. The Traps elevate, depress, rotate, and retract the scapula. This is the “master” muscle of the back. Even though most people just think of it as the pads of muscle on either side of your neck, it is very important to strengthen it in a functional way. The traps attach at the base of the skull, inserts at the top of the “Christmas tree” of your lower back.

One of the most important reasons for making sure you have a well-developed trapezius is that it holds your scapula in a retracted position, which is very important for proper posture, especially while lifting. If you don't have good upper back strength, you run a real risk of ending up with herniated vertebrae in your upper back or neck, especially if you cannot maintain your posture under the stress of heavy lifts like a deadlift.



## — INFRASPINATUS

The Infraspinatus is a thick sheet of muscle that is a major part of the rotator cuff of the shoulder. Its function is to externally rotate the humerus and stabilize the shoulder joint. It lays under the trap and only a small part of it is showing, but it adds a dimension of detail that is important for showing any



# ANATOMY OF A SUPERIOR BACK

## — INFRASPINATUS (CONTINUED)

crisp back pose, much like the Teres major and Minor. It also plays a huge role in maintaining functional shoulders and avoiding injury. Any movement with an external rotation coupled with a pulling movement will target this muscle. Face-pulls, Y-pulls, and banded/cable external rotation will help appropriately build it.

## — TERES MAJOR/MINOR

The teres major is a small but important muscle that helps the lats pull the arms downward into a retracted position. It attaches on the humerus and the outside of the scapula and is best activated by overhead pulling movements. While the Teres Major is relatively small, it provides the top of the “cobra” shape of the back with proper development and makes a big contribution to a balanced and impressive back appearance.

The teres minor is a muscle of the rotator cuff and functions to externally rotate the shoulder as well, and will be stimulated with pulling movements from overhead.



# ANATOMY OF A SUPERIOR BACK

## LATS

Everyone wants big, draping lats, but in order to achieve that kind of look, you need to intimately understand the function of the lats in order for you to visualize the contraction for a good mind-muscle connection and also to help you with exercise choice based on your strengths and weaknesses.

It originates at the hipbone and sacrum, your tail bone and at the bottom three ribs. It inserts under your armpit. It is the biggest muscle of your back and therefore can take a beating, and needs to be highly stimulated in order to make significant growth. The lats allow for extension of the arm, as in a pullover; horizontal adduction, as in a pull up; and internal rotation of the shoulder. So, at most any angle, a pulling movement will engage the lats to some degree. It then becomes crucial for you to manipulate your exercise choice and technique to reap the full benefits and elicit optimal lat engagement.

The best way to understand lat engagement is by looking at your arm position in relation to your torso. The simple rule is: arms tucked to your sides will better activate the lower lats, while more flared arms will activate the upper portion of the lats, along with the traps and teres major. The width of your grip is less important than it seems, and mostly effects your range of motion and the amount of resistance you are capable of using.

## THE SUPERIOR MINDSET

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Back training can sometimes be difficult both for beginners as well as intermediate and advanced lifters because you can't see the muscle group as you're training it. I look at this as a great advantage because you have to work on your level of connection you have to the muscles of your back. This is why it is important to study the anatomy of the back. I like to think of it as almost meditation – really focusing on activating each muscle for it's specialized function.

For all rowing movements, there is one mental cue that can have a big impact on your back development. First, look at your arms as tools to hold onto the weight for resistance. You're not pulling the weight with your arm, you're gripping the weight so that your back can move it. You're going to break up the pulling movement into two separate steps.

### — STEP 1:

Without bending your arms, start with a scapular retraction. It's a small movement like a shrug that will ensure that you're starting the movement with back activation, and prevent you from pulling with your biceps first. To simplify – Start the exercise by keeping your arms straight and pulling with your back.





# THE SUPERIOR MINDSET

## STEP 2:

This is where the arms come in. Once you've initiated the movement by flexing your back to pull the weight, pull back with your elbows back as far as you can to allow the muscles of your back to fully shorten.

This is the most basic and effective execution of all back exercises. You'll have to take a step back in terms of the pace of each rep, which will also help you get more out of your workout. You may also need to decrease the load you're using at first, until you get used to performing each rep in two parts – this approach is going to uncover a weaknesses you may not have realized you had because you were using too much bicep or momentum. Be patient and don't jump up in weight too fast.



## CLASSIC TRAINING APPROACH

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Now that we have the anatomy of the back and proper execution covered, let's get into the training program. I am going to lay out a training plan that is generalized for basic, hardcore back development. If you are having specific problems and need personalized coaching, I do take online training clients where I'll get in depth with your unique problems and challenges not only in back training, but strength, size, and conditioning overall.

We are going to train back twice a week for optimal muscle stimulation and sufficient recovery. The back is a very large muscle group that needs to take a real beating in order to grow, but therefore also needs plenty of time to recover. Try to space out your back days equidistant from one another throughout your training split. For example, Tuesday and Friday are pretty evenly spaced throughout your training week, so these might be good days to put your brutal training days.

Each of the two training sessions will be completely different, not only in exercise selection, but in training style and rep and set range. We're going to vary the stimulus we put on the muscle so that we are hitting all muscle fiber types, training for strength, muscular hypertrophy, and muscular endurance, so that as your performance improves in a balanced, synergistic way for continued improvements over time.

We're going to approach our back training in a top-down or bottom-to-top fashion, depending on your biggest weakness. Using the old, tried-and-true priority principle, if you have a weak upper back, start your training there. If you have very weak lower lats, you'll start your training there. So, use this program as a flexible guide that can be tailored to your needs simply by adjusting the order of the exercises.

# THE CLASSIC BACK PROGRAM

## DAY 1

On day 1, we're going to focus our efforts on perfect form, squeezing the muscle into a full contraction and maintaining tension throughout the entire range of motion. This is a higher volume workout with high reps and sets with a moderate load. Don't try to go too heavy on this day – instead focus on controlling the resistance at a moderate tempo. Don't just get your set over with, really feel it. Let it burn and let your muscles fill with blood. Check the exercise library for proper execution and exercise tips.

Exercise	Sets	Reps	Rest
Reverse Grip Shrugs ( behind back, smith)	4	15	30 sec
Neutral Grip low row, Sitting on dumbbell	4	12	30 sec
Reverse grip barbell row	4	12	30 sec
Wide neutral grip pull-down	4	12	30 sec
Cable Pull-over w/ rope	4	12	30 sec
Bent-over cable row w/ rope	5	20	30 sec



# THE CLASSIC BACK PROGRAM

## DAY 2

This is our heavy day. Nothing but old-school brutality. Keep your form strict, heavy, and savage. You should go into the gym hyped up and ready to pull some heavy weight. You should hit the last rep feeling like it's the last one you could execute properly before your form breaks down. If you can't do the exercise with good form, back off the weight a bit until you can. Remember that a "good" rep is one that you can hold for a split second at the top, and control on the way down. Check the exercise library for proper execution and exercise tips.



Exercise	Sets	Reps	Rest
Dumbbell Shrug	4	6	30 sec
Dumbbell Row	4	6	60 sec
Dumbbell Pull-over	4	8	45 sec
Pull- Up (weighted if needed)	4	6	45 sec
T-Bar Row strip set	3	4 drops, 12 reps	45 sec

# THE CLASSIC EXERCISE LIBRARY

## REVERSE SHRUGS

Stand in front of a smith machine so that the bar is behind you.

Place your supinated hands about shoulder width apart on the bar.

Un-rack it and shrug, focusing on pinching your shoulder blades together while you contract. This will ensure that you'll add a thick pad of muscle to your upper back.

You may have to flex your glutes to create a free bar path; otherwise the bar may hit your body on every rep.



# THE CLASSIC EXERCISE LIBRARY

## NEUTRAL GRIP LOW ROW (SITTING ON DUMBBELL)

The purpose of sitting on the dumbbell is to change the angle of resistance, and therefore allow you to pull into a different part of your back than a standard low row. Pull the handle into your stomach directly below the sternum. This will help you fill out your lower traps and upper lats. Keep your elbows at a 45° angle to your torso.



## THE CLASSIC EXERCISE LIBRARY

## — REVERSE GRIP BARBELL ROW

With an underhand grip, hold a barbell with your hands slightly wider than your shoulders. Bend at the hips until the bar is at knee-height and pull into your waist. Your elbows should be closely tucked in to your sides and you can use the mental cue of trying to touch your elbows together behind your back.



## THE CLASSIC EXERCISE LIBRARY

**WIDE NEUTRAL GRIP PULL-DOWN**

Pull the handle down to the middle of your chest and keep your hands under your elbows at all times. This will help keep tension on the back, especially during the end of the rep, where the biceps have a tendency to take over. Allow the weight to pull your hands to the top of the movement under control to put the muscles of your back in a fully stretched position under tension.





# THE CLASSIC EXERCISE LIBRARY

## CABLE PULL-OVER

Using the rope attachment, take a large step back and bend slightly at the hips. Bring your arms over your head. In the starting position the cable should be at the same angle as your upper body so that there is zero tension being generated on the chest or back. Push your palms down and stand up straight, bringing your feet as far back behind your body as you can and hold for a half a second.



# THE CLASSIC EXERCISE LIBRARY

## BENT-OVER CABLE ROW W/ ROPE

The benefit to this exercise is in the amazing range of motion you can achieve. You want to go light enough on this movement that you can bring your hands almost behind your back in the most contracted position and hold it for a 1 count. You can be very flexible in terms of muscle activation by elevating or tucking your elbows.



## DUMBBELL SHRUG

Raise your shoulders to your ears. Hold at the top for a 1 count. Go heavy. Repeat. That's it. Just make sure you keep your scapula slightly retracted, just like you would for any other exercise.



## THE CLASSIC EXERCISE LIBRARY

## — DUMBBELL ROW

Contrary to the standard execution of this exercise, it can be more effective to pull with the arm of your front foot. When you use this form, you are stabilizing your hips so that you limit the twisting motion of your torso, which can allow you to contract the lats. Keep your elbow comfortably tucked to your side so that your arm makes about a 45° degree angle with your torso.



## THE CLASSIC EXERCISE LIBRARY



## — DUMBBELL PULL-OVER

The biggest tip I have for you on this one is to keep your hips up. This will keep your body rigid and stable. Lower the dumbbell with your arms comfortably bent until you feel a stretch in your pecs and tension on your lats. Pull the dumbbell all the way over your chest and repeat.



# THE CLASSIC EXERCISE LIBRARY

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## — PULL-UP (WEIGHTED IF NEEDED)

Take a wide, but comfortable grip on a pull-up bar. Let your body hang, stretching your lats. Flex your glutes – this will tilt your body back slightly, putting you in an advantageous position to pull. Pull with your elbows in front of your body and with your hands directly under your elbows. Pull yourself up as far as you can and then lower yourself down to the starting position in a controlled fashion.



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# THE CLASSIC EXERCISE LIBRARY

## T-BAR ROW STRIP SET

You can either use an Olympic bar or a T-Bar row machine for these. I choose a barbell most of the time and I oftentimes use 25lb plates to improve the range of motion. The T-bar row is NOT a barbell row and the bar path is restricted into a very limited plane of motion. Position yourself so that you're pulling into your stomach with your chest over you're the plates.

