

TRAINING GUIDE

The Calf Training Guide

Why calves don't grow for most people and what works.

Calves are notoriously stubborn, and most people train them completely wrong, low volume, poor range of motion, and no progressive overload. This guide covers exactly how to build them.

8 Best Exercises

Weekly
Programming

Progressive
Overload

Do's & Don'ts

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WHY CALVES DON'T RESPOND LIKE OTHER MUSCLES

Your calves are used to constant low-level activity from walking all day, which means they need more volume and frequency than most muscle groups to be pushed into growth. This is why the 'few sets at the end of leg day' approach so often fails.

VOLUME & FREQUENCY

● FREQUENCY

3-4x per week. Calves recover quickly and respond well to higher frequency.

● WEEKLY SETS

12-16 working sets per week, more than most people realise is needed.

● REP RANGE

10-20 reps, with a focus on full range of motion over heavy weight.

THE FOUNDATION RULE

Train both the gastrocnemius (standing raises) and the soleus (seated raises) every week. Most people only do standing raises and wonder why growth stalls.

8 BEST EXERCISES TO BUILD YOUR CALVES

Standing Calf Raise

GASTROCNEMIUS

4 × 12-15

Targets the larger, more visible calf muscle.

Seated Calf Raise

SOLEUS

4 × 15-20

Targets the muscle underneath, often the missing piece for calf size.

Leg Press Calf Raise

GASTROCNEMIUS

3 × 12-15

Allows heavy loading without balance being a limiting factor.

Single-Leg Calf Raise

UNILATERAL

3 × 12-15 ea.

Builds strength and corrects imbalances between each leg.

Donkey Calf Raise

GASTROCNEMIUS

3 × 15-20

The bent-over position increases the stretch at the bottom of the movement.

Calf Raise on a Step

GASTROCNEMIUS

3 × 15-20

A simple, effective option for training calves at home with no equipment.

Jump Rope

CONDITIONING

5-10 mins

Adds useful calf conditioning volume without feeling like traditional training.

Farmer's Walk on Toes

CONDITIONING

3 × 30m

A creative way to add extra calf volume while also building grip and core stability.

HOW TO FIT THIS INTO YOUR WEEK

Calves need more frequency than most muscle groups. Fit them in wherever you can across the week.

2-3 Days Available — Full Body

One standing and one seated calf exercise every single session. Frequency matters more than variety here.

4 Days Available — Upper/Lower

Both lower body days get direct calf work, alternate standing and seated focus between the two days.

5-6 Days Available — Push/Pull/Legs

Calves can be trained on Legs days, and even added as a quick finisher on other days given how fast they recover.

SAMPLE CALF FINISHER (END OF ANY SESSION)

1. Standing Calf Raise — 4 × 15
2. Seated Calf Raise — 3 × 20
3. Single-Leg Calf Raise — 2 × 12 each

PROGRESSIVE OVERLOAD — HOW TO GET STRONGER

Doing the same weight for the same reps forever is why most people stop seeing results. Progress needs to be tracked and deliberate. Use these methods, in this order of priority.

1

Add reps first (double progression)

Work within a rep range, e.g. 8-12. Add a rep each week before adding weight, once you hit the top of the range for all sets, increase the load.

2

Add weight

Once reps are maxed out, add a small amount of weight and drop back to the bottom of your rep range. Repeat the cycle.

3

Add sets

Increase total volume gradually across a training block — e.g. 3 sets in week 1, building to 4-5 sets by week 4.

4

Improve technique and range of motion

Better control and a fuller range at the same weight is genuinely harder and drives more progress than people realise.

5

Manipulate tempo

A slower 3-4 second lowering phase increases time under tension without touching the weight on the bar.

EXAMPLE: 4-WEEK STANDING CALF RAISE PROGRESSION

Week	Target
1	3 × 8 @ moderate working weight
2	3 × 9 @ same weight
3	3 × 10 @ same weight
4	Add weight, reset to 3 × 8, repeat cycle

DO

- ✓ Go through a full range of motion. A deep stretch at the bottom, full extension at the top.
- ✓ Train calves more frequently than other muscles, they respond well to higher frequency work.
- ✓ Include both standing and seated variations to target both calf muscles properly.

DON'T

- ✗ Don't bounce through calf raises, this removes tension and is the single biggest reason calves don't grow.
- ✗ Don't only do standing raises, you're missing half the muscle group without seated work too.
- ✗ Don't give up on calf training after a few weeks, this is a genuinely slow-growing muscle group for most people.

WANT THE FULL SYSTEM, NOT JUST ONE PIECE?

This guide is one piece of the puzzle. The Fit Dad Challenge brings training, nutrition and mindset together into one 6-week programme built around a dad's actual life.

[Join the Fit Dad Challenge — £99](#)