

## Back to Basics: Rachel Cosgrove

Rachel Cosgrove has really run the gamut in the fitness world. She's completed a full Ironman, set an American record in powerlifting with a 297.6 lb deadlift, qualified for the Fitness America National Championships. She's coached athletes getting ready for triathlons, completed a Physiology degree and snatched a US Olympic Weightlifting cert. She is a co-owner of Results Fitness in California, featured in Men's Health as one of the top ten gyms in the US. Cosgrove put her years of varied experiences and training together in an accessible, informative book for women: *The Female Body Breakthrough: The Revolutionary Strength-Training Plan for Losing Fat and Getting the Body You Want*.

*In your book, the entire first month was mostly corrective exercises.*

Yeah, I took all of the usual imbalances I see with women, which is usually anterior pelvic tilt, usually they don't know how to switch on their butt, what we call gluteal amnesia, so we need to get their brain to say okay but we need to wake up. Because that's one of the main reasons why ACL tears happen is because most females don't know how to switch on their glutes and then their knee collapses in and then they end up pronating and then they end up with a tear or a knee injury. So really getting their butt to wake up, stretching out their hip flexors, and then you could get their hips in the right position but also engaging their core and getting that switched on as well. And then pulling the shoulders back, improving their posture, really getting that set up so that when you get into the second phase you have a strong base to build on, you're not going to get injured, you've corrected all the imbalances and now all the right muscles are working.

*When I started it, I thought it was too easy, but after I was done with it, I noticed I was moving a lot better. And I was kind of surprised by that, by how much of a difference it made.*

It's true, a lot of people are like that when we're starting out, they say, "Oh, this is too easy, I've been working out a long time and I don't need to do bodyweight stuff." And I say, "Oh just do it, just do what I tell you to do." I benefit from going back and doing bodyweight work and just kind of going back to basics. It's not always about lifting more weight and doing more challenging exercises but really about making sure your base strength is where it should be and you're in balance, really.

For coaches, it's really important. Don't be afraid to go back to basics with your clients. When someone walks into our gym, I don't care how much experience they have; I don't care how much they've been working out or what they've been doing. I'm still going to go back to the basics and start there because then I can build on top of that. It's always a good idea to start with the basics. Don't ever think that going back to basics is not going to be necessary no matter where you are in your program; even people that have been training for a while. It's always good to go back and work on your range of motion, work on your nervous system firing the right muscles and telling your butt to work and your back muscles to work and getting your hips in the right place and getting your core engaged and just getting everything waking up to where it's supposed to be. Because we tend to compensate. As you start doing more challenging routines you tend to compensate somewhere, wherever you're strongest at and whatever your weakness is, you'll compensate for that and end up doing something that keeps strengthening your strength and keeps your weakness your weakness.

*Do you see a lot of ACL tears in women?*

I don't. We usually get to work with people and get them strong before that happens, and that's the goal, prevention and getting their joints so they're

strong so they're not going to have these injuries. But there is a large incidence of ACL tears in female athletes, and so we use unilateral exercises, getting them on one leg, and just thinking about strengthening the muscles around each joint; enabling the joints to handle whatever might come at them with the sports they play

Most female athletes never are taught how to really put a demand on their body to increase their strength to build really bulletproof joints so that they're less likely to get injured. And that's the goal, to build the strong joints so injuries don't happen.

*What do you think are the best injury-preventative exercises for female athletes?*

Depending on where they're at, you always want to progress or regress depending on where the athlete is, giving them exercises that are challenging for them but they can actually do properly and with full range of motion. For example, if my goal is for the athlete to be able to do a single-leg squat, which is a great exercise but a very difficult exercise... A lot of times we get female athletes that come in and I'm amazed at how weak they are when they come in. We've had volleyball players and soccer players we've asked to do a push-up and there's no way they can do it. Or even a lunge; a lot of them have a hard time with that. It's kind of amazing how we're sending these athletes out to the field who really aren't ready for the sport because their bodies aren't strong enough. Single-leg squats, lunges, reverse lunges... I've been using the Val slide, which is a tool that Valerie Waters came up with which you put on your back foot and it slides you into a lunge which has more weight on the front leg, and then you drive up through that front leg, so that's a great exercise. But basically starting from where they are and then progressing them. With a lunge, you have to give them some support so they can get a full range of motion initially, like maybe holding on to a TRX or using a band or something like that. As they get stronger they can do it without that support and then they can do it with their body weight and then holding dumbbells and eventually barbells and then you're adding a step to increase the range of motion. Getting them to where they're strong, their bodies strong, their joints are strong and they're ready to handle whatever motion they might get into with their sport.

*How do you coach women differently than you coach men?*

I think because women do have more of an anterior pelvic tilt, exercises like, say, a hip-thigh extension are great for females. Really just improving their posture; women tend to wear high heels so they end up having tight ankles and that works up the chain and causes other problems. The other thing about young women is if they do develop earlier, like their chest, you'll see women who end up with slumped forward shoulders because they're self-conscious, so they end up with bad posture because of it. So you'll want to work on strengthening their back muscles and pulling their posture up so they're standing up nice and tall.

## The Fit Female Credo

1. Act as if you are a fit female.
2. Get out of your comfort zone.
3. Fuel your body to be fabulous!
4. Train hard or go home.
5. Get hooked on feeling fit, not a number on the scale.
6. Be an early riser.
7. Make rest and relaxation a priority.
8. Obstacles will arise – anticipate them!
9. Keep a journal or a blog.
10. Eliminate the negative people and surround yourself with positive people.
11. Think about your thoughts.
12. Attitude is everything.
13. Manage your stress.
14. Put an end to body bashing and instead celebrate your strengths.
15. Don't rely on will power. Have strategies.
16. Stop rationalizing and making excuses.

But it's more an emotional aspect I think. Most women have never really learned how to push themselves and really don't know what they're capable of, whereas men tend to be on the other side of it where they think they're capable of more than they're probably capable of. So it's a matter of realizing what they're capable of and learning how to demand that of themselves and not being afraid to push themselves harder than they have before to get their body to change and to build that strength and to see themselves transform into what they want to look like. And believing in themselves. I think women are harder on themselves than men are. In general I think probably more men need to lift less weight and more women need to lift more weight.

*What else are you working on right now that you want people to know about?*

I am working on a trainer's guide to my book which should be out in the next few months. It's basically

a behind the scenes guide to the Female Body Breakthrough and what I do as a coach, triggers, little things I look for. It's a guide for coaches and physical trainers who have been getting their clients to buy the book because it's friendly, it's something out there for women to grasp a hold of and learn from a women's point of view about how to change their bodies. So for coaches, I'll have the guide available too.

And I do have a website, [thefemalebodybreakthrough.com](http://thefemalebodybreakthrough.com); that's a membership site. It has free video coaching for anyone who does get the book; they can go on there and fill in their names and e-mail addresses and then I have three months of video coaching. I arrive in your inbox every four days with a video coaching you through the book and getting you started.