The Ultimate Weight Training Workout Routine

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How To Design An Effective Workout Routine

If you're reading this, it means you want to design a workout routine for yourself. Awesome!

And we're not talking about just any workout routine here. No, we're talking about designing the most effective, most efficient, fastest working, maximum results producing workout routine possible.

You know, the one that will work **best** for you, your body, your experience level, your preferences, your schedule, and of course… your specific weight training goal.

To do this, we're going to walk through all of the crucial steps and components of workout routine design and put every single aspect together as optimally as possible. Here's how…

The 7 Steps of Workout Routine Design

To bring your ideal workout routine to life, we're going to take the following steps:

1. **Figure out your goal and training status.**
   Before you can do anything, you need to decide why you're working out. Meaning, what's your specific goal? Building muscle? Losing fat? Increasing strength? Getting "toned?" Whatever it is, you need to know it beforehand. You also need to know what your training status is… beginner, intermediate or advanced. Many aspects of your workout routine will need to be tailored to your exact goal and experience level in order to be as effective as possible.
2. **Figure out your ideal weight training frequency.**
   Workout frequency refers not only to how often you'll work out, but also how often you'll work out each muscle group, body part and/or movement pattern over the course of a week.
3. **Choose a workout split that fits your ideal frequency AND schedule.**
   Once you've figured out what the ideal workout frequency is for you, the next step is to pick a workout split that not only allows for that ideal workout frequency to be reached, but a workout split that will fit perfectly within your daily/weekly schedule and life.
4. **Figure out your ideal weight training intensity.**
   Workout intensity basically refers to how hard you're going to be working. Meaning, how much weight will you be lifting, how heavy or light is that weight for you, and how many reps will you be able to lift it for?
5. **Figure out your ideal weight training volume.**
   Workout volume refers to the amount of work you'll be doing. As in, how many exercises, sets and reps will you do per muscle group, per workout, and per week?
6. **Choose your exercises and properly implement them.**
   Once you know how much volume you'll be doing, the next step is to select the exercises that are most ideal for you and then properly implement those exercise into your workout routine.
7. **Make sure it works.**
   This final step involves bringing the 6 previous steps together along with the remaining requirements that must be in place in order for it all to work. Specifically, some form of progression and a diet plan that supports your goals.

So, if you're ready to design the workout routine that will produce the results you want as quickly and effectively as possible, it's time to begin. The first step? Choosing your goal…

Fitness Goals – What Is Your Workout & Exercise Goal?

When you decide to create the most effective workout routine possible to reach your specific fitness goal, there is an important question you need to ask yourself first.

That question is… **just what the hell is your specific fitness goal?**

If I had to guess, I'd say these are the most common answers you'd get to this question:

- To build muscle.
- To lose fat.
- To gain weight.
- To lose weight.
- To get "toned."
- To increase strength.
- To improve performance.
- To get "in shape."
- To be healthier.
- To look great naked.
- Any combination of the items on this list.

And those are just the broad answers. Some people may have much more specific fitness goals in mind. For example, build X pounds of muscle, lose X of fat, get a 6 pack, deadlift 400lbs, fit into a certain piece of clothing, and so on and so on and so on.

Whatever your workout/exercise related goal may be, and no matter how broad or specific it may be, the first key step in creating the workout routine that will work best for you is figuring out what your overall fitness goal is right now.

So, what is your current fitness goal?

Based on your answer, certain aspects of your workout routine will need to be set up a certain way to best accommodate that goal.

Since there's a million ways this can go and I'm a big fan of simplifying things as much as possible, we're going to break up all of the possible fitness goals into just 2 groups:

1. Team "Looks"
2. Team "Performance"

Let me show you what they include…

Team "Looks"

The people in this group have the primary goal of **improving the way their body looks**.

They want to **build muscle**, **lose fat**, or **do both**. This group also includes more generic goals like getting "**toned**," or getting a **6 pack**, or **losing weight**/**gaining weight**, or really anything that basically translates into "**I want to look better**."

Granted, there are various differences between the goals I just described, and there are some adjustments that should be made to your workout routine depending on EXACTLY which goal is yours

(don't worry, I'm going to explain all of them).

But, in the most basic sense, anyone whose primary goal is to somehow improve the way their body looks falls into this same top level category.

Team "Performance"

The people in this group have the primary goal of **improving the way their body performs**.

They want to **get stronger**, **get faster**, **get better at a certain sport or activity**, or really anything that basically translates into "**I want to perform better**."

Granted, there are again various differences between the goals I just described, and there are some adjustments that should be made to your workout routine depending on EXACTLY what your goal is.

But, in the most basic sense, anyone whose primary goal is to somehow improve the way their body performs falls into this same top level category.

Team "Looks" vs Team "Performance"

So, did you figure out which group your fitness goal fits into best? Good.

Now is a good time to mention that there is a lot of overlap between the groups. Meaning, training for performance will ultimately lead to more muscle and/or less fat in most cases. And, training for looks will ultimately lead to increased strength and/or improved performance in most cases.

However, it will NOT be in a way that is most optimal for those goals. It would be more of a side effect.

That's why the objective here is to set up a workout routine that is as optimal as possible for your **primary** fitness goal. That needs to be the sole focus even though it may lead to various secondary goals being reached as well.

Meaning, if your goal is "looks" related, you want to only do the things that will maximize *those* results. If your goal is "performance" related, you want to only do the things that will maximize *those* results.

As obvious as that seems, there are plenty of idiots out there on the internet trying to tell you that people on Team Looks should be doing things that work best for Team Performance, and vice-versa.

Why? Because they're either really ignorant, just trying to sell you something, or plain old stupid.

We will avoid that here.

What's next?

Now that you have your exact fitness goal in mind, you're ready to start putting together a workout routine that is aimed at reaching your goal as quickly and effectively as possible.

The next step is to figure out what your training experience level is. Meaning, are you a beginner, intermediate or advanced trainee? Let's find out…

Do You Need A Beginner, Intermediate or Advanced Workout Routine?

Before you can get into the specifics of putting your workout routine together, you need to figure out what your weight training experience level is.

Meaning, would your level of weight training experience be considered:

- Beginner
- Intermediate
- Advanced

The reason this needs to be known beforehand is because there are many differences between the 3 experience levels in terms of what you are capable of doing AND what will work best for you.

What I'm saying is…

- Beginners need to use a beginner workout routine in order to get their best results.
- Intermediates need to use an intermediate workout routine in order to get their best results.
- Advanced trainees need to use an advanced workout routine in order to get their best results.

So, I guess the next logical question is, what the hell are you? A beginner, intermediate or advanced trainee? Let's find out…

Beginners

Beginners (aka newbies, newbs, noobs, etc.) are people who are either completely new or at least somewhat new to consistent intelligent weight training.

Exactly what that means will vary slightly depending on who you ask, but in my opinion, I'd consider a beginner to be anyone who has been **weight training for LESS than 6 months**.

And again, that is **6 *consistent* months of *intelligent* weight training**.

Meaning, I don't care if you've been weight training in some pointlessly inconsistent on-and-off format for the last 20 years. I also don't care if you HAVE been weight training consistently for a long time but you've been doing it in some incorrect and/or absolutely horrible way that caused your results to be nearly or completely nonexistent.

If you haven't been following some kind of intelligently designed weight training workout routine (that actually produced some amount of positive results) for at least the last 6 months consistently, you are most likely a beginner, at least for a short amount of time.

The same goes for anyone who actually *did* weight train consistently and intelligently at some point in their lives, but have since stopped for a significant period of time. In most cases, you are considered a beginner all over again.

Intermediates

Intermediates are the next level up from beginners. If you **HAVE been weight training consistently and intelligently for the last 6 months or more**, then you most likely qualify as (at least) an intermediate trainee.

At this point, intermediates would have *at the very least* already used some type of beginner program

that allowed them to build up **at least some base level of strength and muscle**, **improved your work capacity** and **volume tolerance** to some degree, and **learned** (and damn near **mastered**) **perfect form** on every exercise you've done thus far.

This is the category the **majority of the population** falls into.

Advanced

Advanced trainees are the next level up from intermediates, and would be considered the highest weight training experience level there is.

While beginners and intermediates were classified by a combination of how long they've been weight training and what type of results they've gotten, I classify advanced trainees solely by the results they've gotten.

What I mean is, I'd consider an advanced trainee **anyone who has already gotten the majority of the results they wanted to get** and are **extremely close to reaching their natural genetic potential**.

For some people that can take 3 years, or 5 years, or 8 years, or 10 years. There is really no duration of time that matters here. Whenever your body has improved *almost* as much as it can possibly improve, you are considered advanced.

This is the category **the least number of people** fall into.

I know this is the category everyone likes to think they are in (which is why many people stupidly go straight to the "advanced workout routines"), but in all honesty, if you're reading this, I'd say there is a 95% chance that you are NOT advanced.

Beginner vs Intermediate vs Advanced vs Dumbass

Now comes the point where I'm going to beg you to please be realistic about what your weight training experience level is.

Like I mentioned a second ago, everyone likes to think they are more advanced than they truly are. That's just a recipe for disaster 100% of the time.

Why? Because advanced programs only work well for people who truly are advanced. You wouldn't see an advanced person using a beginner program (for the same reason: beginner programs only work best for beginners), so you shouldn't see it the other way around either.

The truth is, workout routines are designed for specific experience levels for a reason. They take into account everything that does and does not work at that point so that you end up doing everything in the way that is going to work best for you at that exact point in your training experience.

So, if you want results that are *worse* than they should be for you or just *pure crap* altogether, feel free to be a dumbass and use a workout routine that you aren't ready to use yet.

But if you want the best results possible, use a workout routine that is tailor made for your exact training experience level.

What's next?

With all of that out of the way, you're finally ready to begin putting your workout routine together. The next step? Finding your ideal exercise frequency…

Exercise Frequency – How often should you workout per week?

When putting together your workout routine, the first major component you need to figure out is your **exercise frequency**. As in, how often and how many times should you workout per week?

Now, I'll admit… that's a pretty broad question. After all, terms like "exercise frequency" and "workout frequency" can have a ton of different meanings.

But for us though, here's the 3 specific exercise frequencies that we need to care about most:

- **Overall Exercise Frequency:** How often and how many times will we do *any* form of exercise (weight training, cardio, etc.) per week?
- **Weight Training Frequency:** How often and how many times will we weight train per week?
- **Muscle Group/Body Part Frequency:** How often and how many times will we train each muscle group or body part per week?

The main exercise frequency missing from that list is cardio frequency, but seeing as this is a guide to putting together the best *weight training* workout routine possible, cardio is a topic we'll get to in depth at some other time (don't worry, a cardio-specific guide is already on my to-do list).

For now, let's focus on those 3 extremely important frequencies.

Overall Exercise Frequency

So, the first thing we need to decide on is how many times we will workout per week total. This would include weight training workouts, cardio workouts, whatever. It's our overall exercise frequency.

Now, this is the one that can vary the most because it depends on many factors specific to you and your goal (example: a fat person with the primary goal of losing fat may have 4 cardio workouts per week, while a skinny person with the primary goal of building muscle may do no cardio whatsoever).

Because of this, it's impossible to say exactly how often/how many times *everyone* should be working out per week total.

However, there is 1 general rule I can pretty much definitively set in terms of everyone's overall exercise frequency.

And that rule is: **take *at least* 1 full day off per week from *all* forms of exercise.**

That means, *AT THE VERY MOST*, you should be exercising 6 times per week total (and again, this includes weight training, cardio, and any other form of exercise).

I'm setting this rule because I am pretty confident that there is no one reading this that needs to be or would benefit from working out 7 days a week.

In fact, I'd say that there are many people reading this who should set their maximum total exercise frequency at between 3-5 times per week depending on their goal.

Why? Because it's not only NOT necessary for reaching your goal… it's almost always counterproductive.

Weight Training Frequency

While too many individual factors come into play for me to get super specific about overall exercise

frequency, weight training frequency is the opposite. I can get pretty damn specific here.

If it isn't obvious enough, weight training frequency in this case will refer to how often and how many times we weight train per week.

My recommendation is: **the majority of the population should weight train 3-4 times per week, and never more than 2 consecutive days in a row.**

Some people can get away with 5 (although few truly need it), and some people can get by with 2. However, for *most* of the people, *most* of the time, **you'll get your best results with either 3 or 4 total weight training workouts per week**.

This is based on the fact that the majority of the most highly proven and intelligently designed workout programs in existence are all built around doing 3 or 4 weight training workouts per week.

The same goes for having **no more than 2 weight training workouts on back-to-back days**.

These recommendations appear to create the sweet spot in terms of allowing for optimal recovery, and when recovery is at its best, your results will be at their best too.

Muscle Group/Body Part Frequency

And last but definitely not least, we have muscle group/body part frequency.

Out of all the different exercise frequencies, how often and how many times you should train each muscle group or body part per week is by FAR the most discussed, argued, thought about, screwed up, and potentially confusing one of them all.

That's why I think the best way to fully explain it all is by taking a look at the pros and cons of each of the 3 most common muscle group/body part frequencies.

Those 3 frequencies are:

1. Training each muscle group/body part **once per week**.
2. Training each muscle group/body part **twice per week**.
3. Training each muscle group/body part **three times per week**.

Now let's break them down one-by-one and see exactly which frequency will work best for you. First up…

Training Each Muscle Group With A Once Per Week Workout Frequency

One of the three most common weight training frequencies is one in which **each muscle group or body part is trained just once per week**.

For anyone who has spent any time trying to find a workout split and schedule before, this is probably the frequency you are most familiar with seeing.

Whether or not that means a once-per-week frequency is actually what's *best* for you is something we're going to figure out right now.

First, let's take a look at a few common examples of this type of frequency…

Example Split #1

1. **Monday:** Chest & Triceps
2. **Tuesday:** Back & Biceps
3. **Wednesday:** off
4. **Thursday:** Shoulders & Abs
5. **Friday:** Legs
6. **Saturday:** off
7. **Sunday:** off

Example Split #2

1. **Monday:** Chest, Shoulders, Triceps
2. **Tuesday:** off
3. **Wednesday:** Legs & Abs
4. **Thursday:** off
5. **Friday:** Back & Biceps
6. **Saturday:** off
7. **Sunday:** off

As you can see, the example workout splits above (of which there are dozens more) show each muscle group and body part being trained with a frequency of only **once per week**.

This means that each muscle group gets trained just **once every 7th day**, which makes this a pretty **low frequency** form of weight training.

How To Make A Once-Per-Week Training Frequency Work

The key to making a once-per-week training frequency work is ensuring that you provide enough of the right training stimulus during that one weekly workout to actually warrant not training that muscle group again for an entire week.

You see, one of the many pitfalls of training each muscle group just once per week is that you are not training it again for another 7 days. And, it's very easy for your body to **de-train** during this time and lose whatever progress you made during that previous workout.

Think about it. What happens if you stop working out for a while?

You regress, results gradually disappear, and you slowly lose whatever muscle, strength or performance related improvements you've made.

To a lesser degree, that's exactly what can (**and often does**) happen when you wait a full week before training each muscle group again.

You may end up doing enough to stimulate progress and new adaptations during your workout, but then by the time a full week passes, you've already lost those new adaptations and you end up getting nowhere.

So, to make this frequency work, volume (exercises, sets, reps) per muscle group would need to be high enough to allow you to maintain the progress made from workout to workout (which in this case is a full week to week) without actually exceeding your capacity to recover. (More about that here: The Optimal Workout Volume)

The Other Problem With This Frequency

The other big issue with training each muscle group just once per week is that, even if you did do everything perfectly (provided enough of the right training stimulus, maintained all of the new adaptations made over that 7 day break, etc.), **it's still a full week of time being wasted**.

Think about it. Training each muscle group once per week means you'll have 52 potential progress stimulating workouts per year, per muscle group.

In comparison, if you trained with a twice-per-week frequency (more about that soon), you'd have 104 potential progress stimulating workouts per year, per muscle.

Now, with all else being equal, which do you think has the potential to produce better/faster results over the same period of time?

Seems pretty obvious, doesn't it?

The point I'm getting at here is that even if you do everything right with a once-per-week training frequency, it's still pretty tough to look at that week off between training sessions for each muscle group as anything but an **unnecessary waste of time**.

You could have been back in the gym stimulating progress again instead of sitting around waiting for a week to pass.

Not to mention, there's absolutely nothing special or magical about training each muscle group once every 7th day.

It's a totally arbitrary amount of time based on nothing but that fact that we happen to have 7 days in a week. Seriously. It's NOT that it works better or has some kind of benefit, it's just that that's how many days we have in a week, and it's convenient to schedule stuff in this manner.

So, Is A Once-Per-Week Training Frequency Optimal?

Based on everything I just told you, I think you already know the answer. I'll say it anyway…

Training each muscle group once-per-week is the <u>LEAST EFFECTIVE</u> weight training frequency.

There… I said it. And no, it's not just my opinion. It's the opinion of every single qualified expert, trainer and strength coach with half a brain.

Oh, and guess what else? It's not *just* an opinion… it's a fact backed by science and real world results**.**

Literally all research and scientific studies looking at weight training frequency conclusively show that training each muscle just once per week is the *least effective* way to train regardless of your goal or experience level.

Can it work? Sure. Does it work? Sure.

Honestly, as long as you do everything else correctly, *ANY* weight training frequency can work to some degree, including this one.

HOWEVER, this isn't about what works and what doesn't work. This is about what works **best** and what works **worst**.

And, all research, expert opinions and my own firsthand experience shows that training each muscle group just one time per week is just NOT optimal for the majority of the population.

Who Is A Once-Per-Week Frequency <u>BEST</u> Suited For?

Training each muscle group once per week tends to work best for the following people:

- People using steroids/drugs.
- People with above average genetics.
- People whose primary goal at the time is to just **maintain** their current level of muscle and strength rather than improve it any further. In that case, training each muscle group once per week should be perfectly sufficient.
- Advanced trainees looking to specialize certain body parts or muscle groups. They'd train those "specialized" muscle groups with a better, higher frequency, and train everything else once per week for maintenance purposes only.

I'd personally only recommend this workout frequency to the last 2 groups on that list. The first 2 would likely get better results with an improved frequency, just like the rest of us.

Who Is A Once-Per-Week Frequency <u>LEAST</u> Suited For?

Like I said before, a once-per-week training frequency is **NOT ideal for the majority of the population**.

Chances are that includes **you**.

For starters, anyone with a strength/performance type goal should almost always avoid this type of training frequency like the plague. It's typically seen as being borderline useless in that area, especially in comparison to other better training frequencies.

And, while it can work to some degree (assuming everything else is done right) for those of us trying to build muscle, get "toned," or improve the way our bodies look in any capacity, it's just clearly **NOT** what works best.

I don't recommend it at all.

What About Other Weight Training Frequencies?

Good question. Let's take a look at a higher workout frequency and see if that's more ideal for you…

Training Each Muscle Group With A 3 Times Per Week Workout Frequency

Training each muscle group once per week is considered the most common form of low frequency training.

On the other end of that spectrum, we have the concept of **training each muscle group 3 times per week**. This is what is typically considered to be the most common form of high frequency training.

The question is… is this the workout frequency that will work best for you? Let's find out.

To start, let's take a look at the most common example of this weight training frequency…

Example Split

1. **Monday:** Full Body
2. **Tuesday:** off
3. **Wednesday:** Full Body
4. **Thursday:** off
5. **Friday:** Full Body
6. **Saturday:** off
7. **Sunday:** off

Above is an example of the classic 3 day full body split, which is the split most commonly used with this frequency. As you can see, each muscle group and body part is trained **3 times per week**.

This means that each muscle group gets trained **once every 2nd or 3rd day**, which makes this a pretty **high frequency** form of weight training.

This is especially true when compared to the previously mentioned once per week frequency where each muscle group gets trained only once every 7th day.

How To Make A 3-Times-Per-Week Training Frequency Work

The key to making a 3-times-per-week training frequency work is pretty much the opposite of what it takes to make a once-per-week frequency work.

Instead of ensuring that you provide enough of a training stimulus to warrant that full week of rest between training sessions of the same muscle group, your goal here is to provide *just enough* of the right training stimulus during each workout **WITHOUT exceeding that ideal amount**.

If the training stimulus is too high, you won't be able to recover in time for the next workout (which is just 2 or 3 days later with a higher frequency like this).

So, while you must still do enough to provide an effective training stimulus that will cause positive results, you must keep it low enough to avoid impacting your body's ability to recover in time for these more frequent workouts.

Here's How People Screw It Up

And that brings us to one of the common pitfalls of training each muscle group 3 times per week (or

really using any frequency greater than once-per-week).

People incorrectly think they need to take the same amount of volume (exercises, sets, reps) that they were doing or would do once per week, and now start doing it three times per week.

Due to the higher frequency, that's not only NOT going to work… **that's just plain stupid**.

The trick here is to take that total weekly amount of volume and divide it up somewhat evenly over three workouts; not do the same amount of total weekly volume three times per week like an idiot.

The human body (muscles, nervous system, etc.) just can't recover fast enough to make that work.

But, as long as the volume done per workout is low enough to allow for quick recovery yet still high enough to be effective, a weight training frequency like this can (and does) work for many people. (More about that here: The Optimal Workout Volume)

So, Is A 3-Times-Per-Week Training Frequency Optimal?

For *certain* people… **hell yes**. For others, **not so much**. Specifically…

If you are a beginner with *any* goal, a 3-times-per-week training frequency is the MOST EFFECTIVE way to train.

And by beginner, I mean anyone who has been weight training for LESS than 6 months consistently and intelligently. (My full definition of what I consider a "beginner" to be is here: Beginner, Intermediate or Advanced.)

And as usual, this is not just my opinion. It's the opinion of every single qualified expert, trainer and strength coach with half a brain.

In fact, it's actually a fact backed by science and real world results**.**

Literally all research and scientific studies looking at the effects of different weight training frequencies in beginners came to the same conclusion: training each muscle three times per week is the *most effective* way for a beginner to train, regardless of their specific goal.

So, if you're a beginner with any goal (build muscle, lose fat, increase strength, or improve your body in any way), a 3-times-per-week workout frequency is indeed optimal for you.

As for everyone else, let's break it down…

Who Is A 3-Times-Per-Week Frequency BEST Suited For?

Training each muscle group 3 times per week tends to work best for the following people:

- Beginners with any goal.
- Anyone with the primary goal of increasing strength.

It's not a coincidence that every single intelligently designed beginner's program tends to be some version of the classic 3 day full body split that I showed earlier. **This is what has been proven to work best for beginners**.

The higher frequency allows them to improve motor learning at a much quicker rate. It's kind of like a baby learning something for the first time. How would they learn faster… doing something once a week, or doing it three times a week?

And, for all intents and purposes, a beginner is basically a weight training "baby." It's all brand new to

their body, and that means they will be able to soak it all up and progress at a faster rate than non-beginners.

It just so happens that a 3-times-per-week training frequency is the most conducive to allowing this to occur.

In fact, this reason is also a big part of why this frequency is extremely effective for **non-beginners whose primary goal is strength related**.

Meaning, if you're past the beginner's stage and your main goal is getting stronger, a 3-times-per-week frequency is a very proven option for you, too.

This is why many of the most popular strength oriented programs around use this same frequency (along with that same 3 day full body split from before).

Being able to train each important movement as frequently as 3 times per week is a very good environment for consistent strength gains to be made. So if that's your goal, this frequency can definitely be effective.

I highly recommend it in both of these cases.

Who Is A 3-Times-Per-Week Frequency LEAST Suited For?

Honestly, **probably everyone not mentioned above**.

Now, don't misunderstand me here. Training each muscle group 3 times per week **CAN** in fact work for pretty much everyone with any goal and at every experience level.

No doubt about it.

However, what we're talking about now is what works best and what doesn't. For the people I mentioned above (beginners with any goal and anyone mostly interested in strength), this frequency fits the "what works best" description.

For the rest of the population at other experience levels and/or with other goals, it fits the "what doesn't" description.

Yes, it can (and does) work, it's just *usually not* what works best in these cases.

Well Then, What Workout Frequency Is Best In Those Cases?

Damn good question. Let's get straight to the answer…

Training Each Muscle Group With A Twice Per Week Workout Frequency

Weight training frequency can typically be divided up into 3 groups.

First, there's low frequency, which would most often mean training each muscle group just once per week. On the opposite end, we have high frequency training, which most commonly refers to training each muscle group 3 times per week.

The final workout frequency is the one that lies right in the middle of those two extremes: **training each muscle group twice per week**.

The question is… is this the frequency that will work best for you?

To answer that, let's first look at the most common example of this frequency in action:

Example Split

1. **Monday:** Upper Body
2. **Tuesday:** Lower Body
3. **Wednesday:** off
4. **Thursday:** Upper Body
5. **Friday:** Lower Body
6. **Saturday:** off
7. **Sunday:** off

Above is an example of the classic 4 day upper/lower split, which is the split most commonly used with this frequency. As you can see, each muscle group and body part is trained **2 times per week**.

This means that each muscle group gets trained **once every 3rd or 4th day**, which makes this a **moderate frequency** form of weight training.

This is especially true when compared to the previously mentioned once per week frequency where each muscle group gets trained only once every 7th day, and the previously mentioned 3 times per week frequency where each muscle group gets trained every 2nd or 3rd day.

But Wait, There's More!

Before we can continue, there's a very important point that needs to be made first.

You see, because this frequency is in the middle of the other two, there's actually *another* way it can be set up where the frequency STILL remains higher than the first and lower than the second.

It's a frequency where you end up training each muscle group ***about*** two times per week rather than ***exactly*** two times per week like in the example split shown above.

Training Each Muscle Group ***About*** Twice Per Week

Here's some examples of exactly what I mean when I say "about" twice per week…

Example Split #1

Week 1

1. **Monday:** Upper Body
2. **Tuesday:** off
3. **Wednesday:** Lower Body
4. **Thursday:** off
5. **Friday:** Upper Body
6. **Saturday:** off
7. **Sunday:** off

Week 2

1. **Monday:** Lower Body
2. **Tuesday:** off
3. **Wednesday:** Upper Body
4. **Thursday:** off
5. **Friday:** Lower Body
6. **Saturday:** off
7. **Sunday:** off

Example Split #2

Week 1

1. **Monday:** Chest, Shoulders & Triceps
2. **Tuesday:** Back & Biceps
3. **Wednesday:** off
4. **Thursday:** Legs & Abs
5. **Friday:** off
6. **Saturday:** Chest, Shoulders & Triceps
7. **Sunday:** Back & Biceps

Week 2

1. **Monday:** off
2. **Tuesday:** Legs & Abs
3. **Wednesday:** off
4. **Thursday:** Chest, Shoulders & Triceps
5. **Friday:** Back & Biceps
6. **Saturday:** off
7. **Sunday:** Legs & Abs

Split #1 is the classic alternating 3 day upper/lower split, and split #2 is a rotating push/pull/legs split done over a 5 day span.

Both splits provide an example of each muscle group being trained ***about*** twice per week, meaning each muscle group is trained 3 times in 2 weeks.

This means that each muscle group gets trained **once every 4th or 5th day**.

While this is slightly less frequent than the *exact* twice per week frequency I showed you first (where each muscle group is trained every 3rd or 4th day), this is still right smack in the middle of high frequency (once every 2nd or 3rd day) and low frequency (once every 7th day).

For this reason, I (and many others) like to consider any workout frequency where each muscle group is trained somewhere between once every 3rd day (like the original twice-per-week example) and once every 5th day (like the two twice-per-week examples above) a part of the same "moderate frequency" group.

Meaning, if each muscle group is trained **between once every 3rd and 5th day**, I'm classifying it all in this same twice-per-week category from this point on.

Got it? Good.

How To Make A Twice-Per-Week Training Frequency Work

The key to making a training frequency of twice (or *about twice*) per week work is really a combination of what it takes to make the other two frequencies work.

And that is, ensure you provide enough of a training stimulus to be effective, but not enough to cut into recovery.

For that same reason, the pitfalls of this training frequency are a combination of the pitfalls of the other two as well, albeit to a lesser degree. HOWEVER…

Those "CONS" Are Actually A "PRO"

The thing is, because this is a moderate frequency (neither too high nor too low) and because it falls in the middle of the other two extremes, it really kinda cancels out the biggest problems the other two frequencies faced.

Think about it.

With a once-per-week frequency, the main problem is de-training and losing the progress you made during that full week when you're waiting to train each muscle group again (not to mention the time being wasted by waiting that long in the first place).

With a three-times-per-week frequency, the main problem is ensuring you do j*ust enough* to stimulate progress WITHOUT exceeding that ideal amount and negatively impacting your ability to recover.

But, with a frequency of about twice-per-week, you sort of get the best of both worlds while at the same time lessening their biggest drawbacks.

It's frequent without being TOO frequent, yet just infrequent enough to not be TOO infrequent.

So really, it's not too high and it's not too low. It could be just right. Let's see if it is…

So, Is A Twice-Per-Week Training Frequency Optimal?

For *most* of the people, *most* of the times… **YES!** Specifically…

If you are an intermediate or advanced trainee with *any* goal, a training frequency of twice (or *about twice*) per week is the MOST EFFECTIVE way to train.

I consider an intermediate or advanced trainee to be anyone who is past the beginner's stage (more about that here: Beginner, Intermediate or Advanced).

As always, this is not just my opinion. It's the opinion of every single qualified expert, trainer and strength coach with half a brain.

And once again, it's actually fully backed by science and real world results**.**

Literally all research and scientific studies looking at weight training frequency have come to the same conclusion: **training each muscle group about twice per week (between once every 3rd and 5th day) is the most effective way for an intermediate or advanced person to train.**

That means, with the exception of beginners (who will do best with a 3-times-per-week frequency), the majority of the population will get their best results training each muscle group about twice per week.

And yes, that applies to all goals. Let me make that even clearer…

Who Is A Twice-Per-Week Frequency BEST Suited For?

Training each muscle group twice (or *about twice*) per week tends to work best for the following people:

- Most of the population, most of the time.
- Intermediate and advanced trainees who want to build muscle, increase strength, get "toned," lose fat, improve athletic performance, or really do anything that involves improving the way their body looks or performs in virtually any capacity.

It's not a coincidence that the majority of the most proven and intelligently designed weight training programs in existence happen to be built around this training frequency.

It's just what flat out works better than everything else the majority of the time, regardless of goal.

Sure, other frequencies can work if everything else is done right. That's a fact. But again, this is not about what works… this is about *what works best*.

And, scientific research, real world results, most expert recommendations and my own firsthand experience all show that a training frequency where each muscle group gets trained somewhere between once every 3rd day and once every 5th day is what works best most of the time.

Who Is A Twice-Per-Week Frequency LEAST Suited For?

Pretty much just **beginners**.

Is it possible this frequency could work for beginners? Yup, for sure. However, it's just not what will work BEST for them.

Instead, beginners will get their best results with a 3-times-per-week frequency.

What's Next?

Now that you know which weight training frequency is best for you, it's time to pick a workout split that best fits this ideal frequency as well as your schedule and training preference. Here we go…

Workout Schedule – The Best Weekly Weight Training Schedules & Splits

Choosing your overall weekly workout schedule is one of the key aspects of creating the weight training routine that is best for you.

What makes it a little tricky is the fact that there's a lot of ways it can go. The amount of potential workout schedules, splits, and plans to choose from is enough to make your head explode.

However, you can greatly narrow them down to just the handful that are best for you by factoring in 3 key workout schedule requirements. They are:

1. **Your workout schedule must fit your ideal training frequency.**
   The workout split you choose must allow you to reach the weight training frequency that is BEST for your specific goal and experience level. Meaning, do you need a split that allows you to train each muscle group once per week, twice per week, or 3 times per week?
2. **Your workout schedule must fit your personal weekly schedule.**
   How many days can you actually manage to work out per week? 3 times? 4 times? More? Less? Are there specific days you can work out on and specific days you absolutely can't? Do you need to take the weekends off, or are the weekends the days you need to train on?
3. **Your workout schedule must fit your training preferences and needs.**
   Fitting your ideal frequency and personal schedule is what's most important, but at the same time you should also actually enjoy what you're doing and make sure the smaller details suit you and your goal.

Once those 3 factors are taken into account (and the crappier choices have been eliminated), we're only left with a few to choose from.

So, I figure the best thing to do now is go through those few and list what I (and many others) consider to be the best weekly weight training schedules and splits for various goals and experience levels.

You can then pick the one that seems best for you. Sound good? Here we go…

The 3 Day Full Body Split

1. **Monday:** Full Body Workout
2. **Tuesday:** off
3. **Wednesday:** Full Body Workout
4. **Thursday:** off
5. **Friday:** Full Body Workout
6. **Saturday:** off
7. **Sunday:** off

Weekly Schedule: It's 3 total weight training workouts per week (all of which are full body) done in an every-other-day format with 2 consecutive days off at the end.

Weight Training Frequency: Each muscle group/body part is trained to some degree once every 2nd or 3rd day, making this a high frequency split.

Best Suited For: Beginner's with *any* goal, and intermediate or advanced trainees with the primary goal of increasing strength or improving performance.

Additional Details: I discuss this split in detail right here: 3 Day Full Body Split

The 2 Day Full Body Split

1. **Monday:** Full Body Workout
2. **Tuesday:** off
3. **Wednesday:** off
4. **Thursday:** Full Body Workout
5. **Friday:** off
6. **Saturday:** off
7. **Sunday:** off

Weekly Schedule: It's 2 total weight training workouts per week (both of which are full body) ideally done with 2-4 days off in between each workout.

Weight Training Frequency: Each muscle group/body part is trained to some degree once every 3rd to 5th day depending on your specific set up, which makes this a moderate frequency split.

Best Suited For: Anyone who can *only* manage to fit in 2 weight training workouts per week.

Additional Details: I discuss this split in detail right here: 2 Day Full Body Split

The 4 Day Upper/Lower Split

1. **Monday:** Upper Body Workout
2. **Tuesday:** Lower Body Workout
3. **Wednesday:** off
4. **Thursday:** Upper Body Workout
5. **Friday:** Lower Body Workout
6. **Saturday:** off
7. **Sunday:** off

Weekly Schedule: It's 4 total weight training workouts per week (2 upper body and 2 lower body) done with a 2 on/1 off/2 on/2 off format.

Weight Training Frequency: Each muscle group/body part is trained to some degree once every 3rd or 4th day, making this a moderate frequency split.

Best Suited For: Most of the population, most of the time. Specifically, intermediate or advanced trainees with virtually any goal (building muscle, getting "toned," increasing strength, improving performance, etc.).

Additional Details: I discuss this split in detail right here: 4 Day Upper and Lower Body Split

The 3 Day Upper/Lower Split

Week 1

1. **Monday:** Upper Body Workout
2. **Tuesday:** off
3. **Wednesday:** Lower Body Workout
4. **Thursday:** off
5. **Friday:** Upper Body Workout

6. **Saturday:** off
7. **Sunday:** off

Week 2

1. **Monday:** Lower Body Workout
2. **Tuesday:** off
3. **Wednesday:** Upper Body Workout
4. **Thursday:** off
5. **Friday:** Lower Body Workout
6. **Saturday:** off
7. **Sunday:** off

Weekly Schedule: It's 3 total weight training workouts per week done in an every-other-day format with 2 consecutive days off at the end. The workouts alternate between upper and lower body so that you do Upper, Lower, Upper one week, and then Lower, Upper, Lower the next.

Weight Training Frequency: Each muscle group/body part is trained to some degree once every 4th or 5th day, making this a moderate frequency split.

Best Suited For: Most of the population, most of the time. Specifically, intermediate or advanced trainees with virtually any goal (building muscle, getting "toned," increasing strength, improving performance, etc.).

This is just a *slightly* less frequent 3 day version of the 4 day upper/lower split mentioned earlier, so it's still best suited for the same people. The only difference is that this version is more ideal for people who can only train 3 days per week (or would just prefer to) as well as people who prefer the slightly reduced frequency.

Additional Details: I discuss this split in detail right here: 3 Day Upper and Lower Body Split

The Rotating Push/Pull/Legs Split

Week 1

1. **Monday:** Chest, Shoulders & Triceps
2. **Tuesday:** Back & Biceps
3. **Wednesday:** off
4. **Thursday:** Legs & Abs
5. **Friday:** off
6. **Saturday:** Chest, Shoulders & Triceps
7. **Sunday:** Back & Biceps

Week 2

1. **Monday:** off
2. **Tuesday:** Legs & Abs
3. **Wednesday:** off
4. **Thursday:** Chest, Shoulders & Triceps
5. **Friday:** Back & Biceps
6. **Saturday:** off
7. **Sunday:** Legs & Abs

Weekly Schedule: It's either 4 or 5 total weight training workouts per week (it changes from week to week) done with a 2 on/1 off/1 on/1 off format that repeats every 6th day.

This means the days you work out on will change from week to week unlike the previous schedules shown where the workout days always remain fixed and constant. This could be a big problem for many people from a scheduling standpoint.

Weight Training Frequency: Each muscle group/body part is trained once every 5th day, making this a moderate frequency split.

Best Suited For: Intermediate or advanced trainees whose primary goal is "looks" related (building muscle, getting "toned," etc.) AND who also have a very flexible schedule.

Additional Details: I discuss this split in detail right here**:** Push/Pull/Legs Split

The Push/Pull Split

Week 1

1. **Monday:** Chest, Shoulders & Triceps + Quads & Calves
2. **Tuesday:** off
3. **Wednesday:** Back & Biceps + Hamstrings & Abs
4. **Thursday:** off
5. **Friday:** Chest, Shoulders & Triceps + Quads & Calves
6. **Saturday:** off
7. **Sunday:** off

Week 2

1. **Monday:** Back & Biceps + Hamstrings & Abs
2. **Tuesday:** off
3. **Wednesday:** Chest, Shoulders & Triceps + Quads & Calves
4. **Thursday:** off
5. **Friday:** Back & Biceps + Hamstrings & Abs
6. **Saturday:** off
7. **Sunday:** off

Weekly Schedule: It's 3 total weight training workouts per week done in an every-other-day format with 2 consecutive days off at the end. The workouts alternate between "pushing" muscles and "pulling" muscles so that you do Push, Pull, Push one week, and then Pull, Push, Pull the next.

It's basically a 3 day version of the previously mentioned Push/Pull/Legs split, only here the "legs" workout is eliminated. Instead, leg training is also divided up in terms of "push" (quads/calves) and "pull" (hamstrings and usually abs) and then included along with the upper body push and pull workouts.

The only potential issue with this schedule is the overlap between quad and hamstring exercises. Meaning, training hamstrings and then quads with just 1 day in between could potentially be problematic for some people from a recovery standpoint.

Weight Training Frequency: Each muscle group/body part is trained once every 4th or 5th day, making this a moderate frequency split.

Best Suited For: Intermediate or advanced trainees whose primary goal is "looks" related (building muscle, getting "toned," etc.).

My Recommendations

In all honesty, all of the weight training schedules and splits shown above can work to some degree for virtually every goal and experience level assuming everything else is done properly.

However, the goal here isn't to just choose one that works. It's to choose the one that will work **BEST** for you and your exact schedule, preferences, needs, experience level and goal.

So, here are my personal recommendations for which workout schedule I feel would be best for you:

- **For beginners with any goal**, the answer is extremely simple: the 3 day full body split. It is the most proven and recommended workout schedule for beginners, period.
- **For intermediate or advanced trainees whose primary goal is increasing strength or improving performance**, the 4 day upper/lower split or the 3 day full body split are my top choices.
- **For intermediate or advanced trainees whose primary goal is "looks" related (building muscle, getting "toned," etc.)**, the 3 or 4 day upper/lower split is probably my #1 choice most of the time, although the push/pull/legs split is an equally perfect choice if you have a schedule flexible enough to make it work.

Sure, there are various other workout schedules and splits out there that can work for you (some I like, most I hate), but more often than not, these are the ones that have been proven to work best.

What's Next?

Once you've selected a weight training split and set up your overall weekly workout schedule, it's time to actually plan out what you're going to be doing during those workouts.

First up is figuring out what your ideal intensity level is and answering the old "how many reps per set" question. Let's do that…

Weight Training Intensity – How Many Reps Per Set Of An Exercise?

Weight training intensity basically refers to how much weight you will be lifting and how heavy or light that weight is for you on a given exercise.

The lighter the weight/easier it is for you, the lower the intensity. The heavier the weight/harder it is for you, the higher the intensity.

And, all of this intensity stuff is usually predicted by one thing: **how many reps you're doing per set**.

Reps (short for "repetitions") are the number of times you move a weight from point A to point B during a set of an exercise. The lighter the weight, the more reps you will be able to lift it for. The heavier the weight, the fewer reps you'll be able to lift it for.

Obvious, I know. But, as you can see, reps and intensity go hand in hand most of the time. Meaning…

- The more reps you can lift a weight for = the lower your training intensity is.
- The fewer reps you can lift a weight for = the higher your training intensity is.

The reason this is important to us is because certain levels of intensity are more ideal for certain goals than others (due to factors like time under tension, muscle fiber recruitment, etc.).

And this leads to an important question: what weight training intensity is best for your goal?

Or, to put it another way, **how many reps should you do per set of an exercise?** Let's find out…

The Ideal Rep Range For Various Weight Training Goals

Here now are the most commonly used rep ranges along with their primary training effect:

- 1-5 Reps Per Set = Mostly Strength
- 5-8 Reps Per Set = Strength AND Muscle Equally
- 8-10 Reps Per Set = Muscle With Some Strength
- 10-12 Reps Per Set = Muscle With Some Endurance
- 12-15 Reps Per Set = Endurance With Some Muscle
- 15-20 Reps Per Set = Mostly Endurance

So, as you can see:

- **Lower reps** (high intensity) is most ideal for increasing strength.
- **Higher reps** (low intensity) is most ideal for improving muscle endurance.
- **Moderate reps** in the middle of the two (moderate intensity) is most ideal for building muscle and really anything related to improving the way your body looks (rather than performs).

Now, the key word I'm using here is "**ideal**." Just because I didn't put "strength" next to the 10-12 rep range doesn't mean you will never be able to increase strength when doing 10-12 reps of an exercise. That's not true at all.

In fact, each rep range shown is capable of producing some amount of strength, muscle, and endurance results. However, the objective here is to choose the rep range that is most ideal for your specific goal, because that's the one that will work **best** for the results you want.

Oh, and if you're wondering why there is no rep range that is ideal for "tone" or "definition" or "fat

loss" or anything similar, it's because, metabolic training aside (a topic for another day), there really is **no such thing**.

The whole "high reps makes you toned/defined/ripped/lean/etc." concept is pure bullshit. I cover this in more detail in my post about muscle tone.

The take home message is that, from a training intensity standpoint, these goals all fall into the same category as "muscle" on the chart shown above. The same rep ranges are ideal.

Weight Training Intensity Recommendations

So, when it comes to intensity and figuring out how many reps you should do per set, here are the most widely accepted recommendations based on science and real world results…

- If your primary goal is **increasing strength**, then you should mostly train in the lower rep ranges (between **1-8 reps per set**) and therefore at a higher intensity.
- If your primary goal is **building muscle** (or anything related to **improving the way your body looks**), then you should mostly train in the moderate rep ranges (between **5-12 reps per set**) and therefore at a moderate intensity.
- If your primary goal is **improving muscle endurance**, then you should mostly train in the higher rep ranges (between **12-20 reps per set**) and therefore at a lower intensity.

Two Other Intensity Related Factors

Before leaving the subject of weight training intensity, there's actually two other subjects/questions that are directly influenced by what rep range you end up using. They are:

- **Determining How Much Weight To Lift**
  Once you know how many reps you'll be doing per set of an exercise, the next thing you need to determine is how much weight you need to lift for each exercise to end up in that ideal rep range. I explain how to do that here: How Much Weight Should You Lift For Each Exercise?
- **Training To Failure**
  Another topic directly related to training intensity is training to failure (the point where you can't complete another rep). The question is, should you train to that point, or should you end a set before reaching that point? I cover this topic right here: Should You Train To Muscle Failure?

What's Next?

Now that you know how many reps per set is most ideal for your goal, the next thing you need to figure out is how many TOTAL reps, sets and exercises you should do per workout, per week and per muscle group. Let's find out…

Weight Training Volume – How Many Sets, Reps & Exercises?

In weight training, **volume** refers to the amount of work being done.

The "work" will of course come in the form of the exercises you do and how many sets and reps you do for each.

That means volume can be measured in a lot of different ways, the most important of which are:

- How much volume is being done per muscle group/body part both per workout AND per week.
- How much volume is being done per exercise.
- How much total volume is being done per workout.
- How much total volume is being done per week.

The reason this information is so important is because volume is one of the key factors influencing the effectiveness of your workout routine.

What I mean is…

- If you do **too much volume**, you run the risk of hindering (or completely destroying) your body's ability to repair and recover at an ideal rate. And if the repair/recovery process isn't happening at the ideal rate, the results you want probably won't be happening at all.
- If you do **too little volume**, you run the risk of not providing enough of the training stimulus required to signal your body to actually make the changes/improvements you want it to make.

As you can clearly see, the goal here is to find the amount of volume that is high enough to provide the training stimulus needed to get the results you want, yet low enough to avoid negatively affecting your ability to recover.

For the best results possible, we need that optimal middle ground.

So, How Much Volume Is Best For Me?

Now, when trying to figure out how much volume is best for you, some people think "just tell me how many exercises I should do per muscle group/workout/week" and taaadaaa, there's your workout volume.

The thing is, it's a *little* more complicated than that. Here's why…

Exercises Don't Accurately Measure Volume

You see, even if there is an exact number of exercises recommended, the total amount of volume being done can still vary **GREATLY**.

For example, let's say I just said the best volume is 3 exercises per muscle group, and three different people take my advice.

- Person A might do 2 sets for each exercise, for a total of **6** sets altogether.
- Person B might do 3 sets for each exercise, for a total of **9** sets altogether.
- Person C might do 4 sets for each exercise, for a total of **12** sets altogether.

So right there you have three clear examples of how doing the same number of exercises per muscle

group can still lead to very different amounts of volume being done.

For this reason, trying to measure or prescribe volume using exercises is a pretty horrible idea.

Sets Don't Accurately Measure Volume, Either

The next thought then is that **sets** should be used to measure and prescribe volume. Then I could just say to do 6 sets for each muscle group per workout, and you could divide those sets up over however many exercises you want.

Using 6 sets as the example, you could do 3 exercises for 2 sets each, 2 exercises for 3 sets each, 1 exercise for 4 sets and 1 exercise for 2 sets, and so on and so on.

Unlike before, the number of sets being done remains the same either way, which makes sets a *MUCH* better way to measure/prescribe volume than exercises were before.

However, a very similar problem still exists: **how many reps are you doing per set?**

Granted, I've laid out the ideal number of reps you should do per set for your goal, but the total volume being done can still vary by quite a bit.

For example, I said the 5-12 rep range is best for people looking to build muscle/get toned/look good, which is probably most of the people reading this.

Using the same 6-sets-per-muscle example from before…

- Person A might do 6 sets of 6 reps for a total of **36** reps per muscle group, per workout.
- Person B might do 6 sets of 10 reps for a total of **60** reps per muscle group, per workout.

As you can see, that's still a pretty significant difference even with the same ideal rep range (5-12) being used.

For this reason, measuring or prescribing volume in terms sets is still not the best idea. It's a million times better than exercises, but it's still pretty flawed.

So then, what's left? **Reps**!

Reps Are The Most Accurate Measurement Of Volume

If you recommend a certain amount of reps to do per muscle group or per workout or per week, it can be divided up into 1000 different combinations of exercises and sets.

But, in the end… the number of reps being done **always** remains the same.

For this reason, the best way to measure and prescribe weight training volume is by the total amount of reps being done per muscle group, per workout, and per week.

So, What Total Amount Of Reps Is Best For Me?

Now *that's* the question we're looking for. Let's get down to the specifics and answer it…

The Optimal Volume Per Muscle Group, Body Part, Workout & Week

As I've previously explained, weight training volume (the amount of **exercises**, **sets** and **reps** you do) is a key factor influencing the effectiveness of your workout routine.

Meaning, if you want to get the best results possible, you're goal is to use an optimal amount of volume for each body part and muscle group per workout and per week total.

The thing is, there is no exact amount of weight training volume that is absolutely perfect for *everyone*.

Due to individual differences like specific goals, training experience, genetics, volume tolerance, work capacity, recovery capabilities, and more, it's impossible to make one recommendation that suits everyone.

However, there is some good news.

There Is A Volume Range That Is Best For Most People

After 10+ years of obsessive research, firsthand experience and observing a ton of real world results, you start to notice that the most successful workout programs tend to have certain things in common.

In this case, I'm talking about volume. More specifically, the total amount of sets and reps being prescribed per muscle group and body part per workout and per week.

While the workout routines may be very different, the volume recommendations are always surprisingly close and within a certain "range."

As it turns out, science appears to agree with this "range" too.

The majority of the studies I've seen over the years that have looked at workout volume (most notably one by Wernbom et al.) show that there is in fact an amount of sets and reps per body part/muscle group that tends to work better than everything else.

Combine all of that with various other expert recommendations, and you get what I like to call **The Optimal Volume Range**.

The Optimal Volume Range

In the most simple and basic of terms, the optimal volume range for most people is:

- For each bigger muscle group: about **60-120 total reps PER WEEK**.
- For each smaller muscle group: about **30-60 total reps PER WEEK**.

In more specific terms, this breaks down like this:

- **Chest**: 60-120 reps per week.
- **Back**: 60-120 reps per week.
- **Quadriceps**: 60-120 reps per week.
- **Hamstrings**: 60-120 reps per week.
- **Shoulders**: 30-60 reps per week.
- **Biceps**: 30-60 reps per week.
- **Triceps**: 30-60 reps per week.

- **Calves**: 30-60 reps per week.
- **Abs**: 30-60 reps per week.

And there it is… my recommendations for the optimal volume range.

Can more or less volume also work? Yeah, it's certainly possible. However, this is once again NOT about what *can* work. This is all about *what works best*.

And, based on scientific research, real world results, 10+ years of firsthand experience, expert recommendations and the most successful weight training programs in existence, this appears to be **the amount of volume that works best for *most* people**.

Applying The Optimal Volume Range To Your Training Frequency

Now, looking at these recommendations, the first question you probably have is:

Why is it "per week" instead of "per workout?"

Basically, this is the optimal *total weekly* amount of volume you should use for each muscle group and body part.

In order to break it down in terms of what you need to do each workout, you must apply this optimal volume range to your chosen weight training frequency.

Meaning, the exact amount of sets and reps you should do each workout depends on whether you will be training each muscle group/body part once, twice or 3 times per week.

Here's how that would break down…

Training each muscle group once per week.

If you are training each muscle group/body part once-per-week, you would do:

- **60-120** reps for each big muscle group per workout, with **just 1** workout for each muscle group per week.
- **30-60** reps for each small muscle group per workout, with **just 1** workout for each muscle group per week.

With a workout schedule that only trains each muscle group **once per week**, you would need to get that **entire** weekly volume range in during your **1** weekly workout for each muscle group.

(Note, this is the frequency I least often recommend.)

Training each muscle group twice per week.

If you are training each muscle group/body part (about) twice-per-week, you would do:

- **30-60** reps for each big muscle group per workout, with ***about* 2** workouts for each muscle group per week.
- **15-30** reps for each small muscle group per workout, with ***about* 2** workouts for each muscle group per week.

With a workout schedule that trains each muscle group **about twice per week**, you would need to

divide that weekly volume range by **about 2** and split it up evenly over your **2 (or so)** weekly workouts for each muscle group.

(Note, this is the frequency I recommend to most intermediate/advanced trainees.)

Training each muscle group 3 times per week.

If you are training each muscle group three-times-per-week, you would do:

- **20-40** reps for each big muscle group per workout, with **3** workouts for each muscle group per week.
- **10-20** reps for each small muscle group per workout, with **3** workouts for each muscle group per week.

With a workout schedule that trains each muscle group **three times per week**, you would need to divide that weekly volume range by **3** and split it up evenly over your **3** weekly workouts for each muscle group.

(Note, this is the frequency I recommend to all beginners.)

Should You Use The Low, Middle Or High End Of The Volume Range?

The second question you probably have about the optimal volume range is whether you should use the low, middle or high end of it.

This question goes back to what I mentioned earlier about there being no EXACT amount of volume that is perfect for everyone because of various individual differences.

Well, it's those individual differences that will answer this question.

In general and in *most* cases, this is how it breaks down…

- If you are a **beginner** with **ANY goal** (building muscle, increasing strength, losing fat, etc.), then you will do best staying in the lowest end of the volume range.
- If you are an **intermediate** or **advanced** trainee with the primary goal of **building muscle** (**or anything "looks" related**), you should most often stick to the middle-higher end of the volume range. If you happen to have below average genetics and/or a below average ability to recover, then you'd be best served to stay in the lower end of optimal volume range.
- If you are an **intermediate** or **advanced** trainee with the primary goal of **increasing strength**, you should most often stick to low-middle end of the volume range.
- If you are a **beginner**, **intermediate** or **advanced** trainee with the primary goal of **losing fat** and **maintaining muscle** (and **possibly building some**) while you lose that fat, then you would do best sticking to the lower end of the volume range.

Why Is There Less Volume For Smaller Muscle Groups?

A third question you might have about the optimal volume range is why there is less recommended for smaller muscle groups than there is for bigger muscle groups.

This is partly due to the fact that they are smaller and just don't need/benefit from as much volume as larger muscle groups.

However, it's *mostly* due to the fact that those smaller muscle groups already get used pretty hard secondarily while training the bigger muscle groups. Meaning, they already get a ton of **indirect volume**.

For example, most chest exercises also hit the shoulders and triceps quite well, most shoulder exercises also hit the triceps quite well, and most back exercises also hit the biceps quite well.

There is a *very* significant amount of overlap there, and it definitely needs to be accounted for when planning your workout volume.

The optimal volume recommendations already factor this in.

What's Next?

Now that you know what the optimal volume range is for each muscle group and body part on a per workout and per week basis, you're probably also wondering how to break this down into sets and reps per exercise. Well, let's find out…

How Many Sets & Reps Should You Do Per Exercise Each Workout?

At this point you should have a pretty good understanding of why properly planning your weight training volume (the amount of sets, reps and exercises you do) is so important.

And, you should also be familiar with what I consider to be the optimal volume range for most people, which is the total amount of reps you should do for each muscle group per workout and per week.

From here, the next logical step is to break this optimal amount of volume down in terms of how many sets and reps you should do per exercise each workout.

So, let's do just that.

How Many Sets And Reps Should I Do Per Exercise?

Simple. You should do **exactly enough to allow you to fall within the optimal volume range for each muscle group**.

Honestly, as long as that happens, then exactly how you divide your volume up among exercises becomes a little less important.

Of course, that's just the quick and simple answer. You're probably going to want to know the most common and all around proven ways of doing it. So, here we go…

The Most Common Set And Rep Combinations For An Exercise

Below are the most commonly used and prescribed combinations of sets and reps you could do per exercise along with the total amount of volume each one produces.

Also included is the level of intensity each rep range falls into as well as what fitness goal that combination of sets/reps/volume is most ideal for.

- **8 sets x 3 reps = 24 reps**
  High intensity.
  Most ideal for strength related goals.
- **6 sets x 4 reps = 24 reps**
  High intensity.
  Most ideal for strength related goals.
- **3 sets x 5 reps = 15 reps**
  High intensity.
  Most ideal for strength related goals.
- **5 sets x 5 reps = 25 reps**
  High to moderate intensity.
  Most ideal for strength goals, but also suited for building muscle.
- **4 sets x 6 reps = 24 reps**
  High to moderate intensity.
  Equally ideal for increasing strength and building muscle.
- **3 sets x 8 reps = 24 reps**
  Moderate intensity.

Most ideal for building muscle, but also suited for increasing strength.

- **4 sets x 8 reps = 32 reps**
  Moderate intensity.
  Most ideal for building muscle, but also suited for increasing strength.
- **3 sets x 10 reps = 30 reps**
  Moderate intensity.
  Most ideal for building muscle, but also suited for muscular endurance.
- **4 sets x 10 reps = 40 reps**
  Moderate to low intensity.
  Most ideal for building muscle, but also suited for endurance.
- **2 sets x 12 reps = 24 reps**
  Moderate to low intensity.
  Most ideal for building muscle, but also suited for endurance.
- **3 sets x 12 reps = 36 reps**
  Moderate to low intensity.
  Equally ideal for building muscle and improving muscle endurance.
- **2 sets x 15 reps = 30 reps**
  Low intensity. Most ideal for muscle endurance, but also suited for building muscle.
- **2 sets x 20 reps = 40 reps**
  Low intensity. Most ideal for muscle endurance.

As you can see, based on your specific goal and what rep range is most ideal for it, you have quite a few set/rep combinations to choose from for each exercise you do.

As you can also probably tell, there are a few principles these very different combinations have in common. The 2 most worth noting are:

- The fewer reps you are doing per set, the more sets you do. And, the more reps you do per set, the fewer sets you do. While this isn't an absolute rule, it is what should be happening the majority of the time.
- The total volume being done per exercise is pretty similar despite the different amount of sets/reps being used. For example, 10 of the 13 popular combinations shown above produce between 20-36 reps total. The take home message? *Most of the time*, that's probably how much volume you should end up doing per exercise.

How To Put This Information Into Action

Alright, so you now know the most popular and proven combinations of sets and reps that can be used for an exercise.

In order to put this information into action, you need to apply it to your optimal training intensity, volume and frequency.

A Practical Example

Let's take an example person named PersonA.

Let's pretend PersonA is an intermediate or advanced trainee whose primary goal is building muscle (or really anything related to improving the way their body looks rather than performs).

Based on PersonA's experience level and goal, they previously learned:

- Their ideal frequency is to train each muscle group about twice per week.
- Their ideal rep range is 5-12 reps per set.
- Their ideal volume is 30-60 reps per big muscle group per workout (half that for smaller muscle groups), with about 2 workouts per week for each muscle group (since that's their optimal frequency).

Now, based on this, a chest workout for PersonA could potentially break down like this:

- Bench Press: 4 sets of 6 reps (24 total reps)
- Dumbbell Flyes: 2 sets of 12 reps (24 total reps)
- Total Volume Done For Chest During This Workout: 48 reps

In this example, PersonA chose to do 2 exercises. For both exercises, the set/rep combination they picked has them working in their optimal intensity range (which is 5-12 reps per set for this example person).

And, these 2 set/rep combinations also combined to put them right in the middle of their optimal volume range per workout (which in this example was 30-60 reps for bigger muscle groups).

This amount of volume (or whatever amount of volume is optimal for you, your goal, your experience level, and your training frequency) could have been reached just the same using various other set/rep combinations from that list above as well as a different amount of exercises.

This was just one example of how to do it.

(If this was at all confusing, don't worry. It will make perfect sense when you see the sample workout routines later on.)

What's Next?

Now that you know how to apply your optimal amount of volume to the exercises you do, it's time to actually figure out what exercises you're going to be doing. Let's get to it…

Selecting Weight Training Exercises For Your Workout Routine

At this point you should know what weight training frequency is most ideal for you and have selected a workout schedule that suits that frequency.

You should have also figured out how many reps to do per set for your goal, and planned how much volume (total amount of sets, reps and exercises) you're going to do each workout for each muscle group.

With all of that out of the way, the last big step in creating your weight training routine is **exercise selection**.

So, here's a question. Which weight training exercises should you use in your workout routine?

It's really not that complicated of a question, but it's one a lot of people spend a lot of time trying to answer. There's just so many different exercises to choose from, it can make things a little confusing if you don't fully understand what you're looking for.

So, let's clear up all of that confusion right now.

The 4 Different Ways To Categorize Weight Training Exercises

The way I see it, there are 4 different ways weight training exercises can be categorized. And, each different way brings up a whole new set of important details that you will need to know to ensure your workout routine has the best exercise selection possible.

Let's now go through those categories one-by-one and see how each will affect your selection process.

1. Free Weight Exercises, Body Weight Exercises, and Machines

One of the simplest ways to categorize an exercise is by the type of equipment it requires.

Meaning, is it done using free weights, your own body weight, or some type of machine. Depending on your exact goal and weight training experience level, one may be more ideal for you than the other.

2. Compound Exercises and Isolation Exercises

Another simple way to categorize weight training exercises is by how it trains your body.

Specifically, does it target more than 1 major muscle group at a time (compound), or does it target just one muscle group by itself (isolation)?

Once again, depending on your exact goal, one type of exercise is definitely more ideal for you than the other. Plus, the more muscle groups an exercise targets, the more attention you need to pay to how it affects your planned amount of volume/frequency for those additional muscle groups.

3. The Different Movement Patterns

Now here's something a lot of people are going to be unfamiliar with, and it's a big part of the reason why injuries occur so frequently among people who workout regularly.

Selecting weight training exercises based on their specific movement pattern (horizontal push or pull, vertical push or pull, etc.) isn't just useful for the effectiveness of your workout routine, it's a flat out requirement if you want to avoid imbalances and injuries.

4. Body Parts and Muscle Groups

And last but not least, we have the most common way of categorizing weight training exercises, which is simply by which muscle group/body part that exercise targets.

This is unfortunately the only category most people pay any significant attention to (it is useful for obvious reasons), but for the best results possible, it really needs to be used in conjunction with the other 3 I just mentioned.

Let's Begin The Exercise Selection Process…

So, without further ado, let's go through each category in detail and figure out exactly which weight training exercises are best for you, your body, your experience level, and your goal. Let's start here…

Free Weight Exercises vs Body Weight Exercises vs Machines

In the most basic and obvious sense, weight training exercises can fall into 3 different groups based on how they are preformed and what type of equipment is used.

They are:

1. Free Weight Exercises
2. Body Weight Exercises
3. Machines

Despite what anyone else tells you, each type of exercise can serve a useful purpose in literally every workout routine regardless of what your goal is.

However, certain types of exercises are definitely more ideal for certain people based on factors like experience level, training preferences, body type/genetics, and of course, your specific fitness goal.

So, let's go through free weight exercises, body weight exercises and machines and look at some examples of each, find out what their pros and cons are, and see how they compare with each other.

You'll then be able to easily determine which is best (and worst) for you.

Free Weight Exercises

A **free weight exercise** is any exercise where the resistance is provided by a barbell, dumbbells, or any other *free* moving object. Some common examples include any type of barbell or dumbbell press, row, curl, extension, or deadlift.

Basically, if you're moving some sort of weight (like a barbell or dumbbell) from point A to point B, and that weight isn't supported by or attached to anything other than you, it's most likely a free weight exercise.

PROS

- **Completely natural movement.** Allows you to move through a range of motion that is completely natural for your specific body. Nothing is restricted or put into any sort of fixed position that may not be perfect for you body.
- **Uses additional muscles.** Since you are in full control of the weight and stabilizing the entire movement itself, you are therefore recruiting the use of various stabilizer muscles that tend to go unused with machines.
- **Extremely functional.** Free weight exercises allow you to mimic actual movements that you actually do in real life, and in the exact manner you'd actually do them.
- **Ideal for home use.** If you happen to do your weight training at home, a barbell (or dumbbells), some weight and a bench is all you need to be able to perform dozens of different exercises in your house.

CONS

- **Usually harder to learn at first.** Especially when compared to machines (and to a lesser

extent, body weight exercises), it's usually a little harder to learn proper technique as a beginner.
- **Higher *potential* risk of injury**. There is a risk of injury with EVERY type of exercise, but the potential may be a little bit higher with free weights than others.

Body Weight Exercises

A **body weight exercise** is any exercise where the resistance is provided by your own body weight.

Instead of moving a barbell or dumbbell from point A to point B like you would with a free weight exercise, a body weight exercise requires moving your own body from point A to point B. Some common examples include push-ups, pull-ups, chin-ups, and dips.

PROS

- **Completely natural movement.** Allows you to move through a range of motion that is completely natural for your specific body. Nothing is restricted or put into any sort of fixed position that may not be perfect for you body.
- **Uses additional muscles.** Since you are in full control of of the weight (which is your body) and stabilizing the entire movement itself, you are therefore recruiting the use of various stabilizer muscles that tend to go unused with machines.
- **Extremely functional.** Body weight exercises allow you to mimic actual movements that you actually do in real life, and in the exact manner you'd actually do them.

CONS

- **Sometimes too hard/impossible.** For certain people (especially beginners and people who are overweight), body weight exercises like pull-ups and dips are extremely hard and in some cases just impossible to do. With free weights or machines, if it's too heavy, you can just use less weight. With a body weight exercise, you're kinda stuck with your own body weight. (I will mention however that there are ways around this issue to some degree, but that's a topic for another time.)

Machines

A **machine exercise** is any exercise that works on a fixed path with the weight (and usually the entire movement itself) stabilized for you by a machine.

Rather than holding the actual weight that is providing the resistance and moving *it* from point A to point B (like you are with free weight exercises), you are instead holding handles that are in some way attached to some form of weight, and you're moving *that* from point A to point B.

Some common examples include any type of machine press, row, curl, extension, leg extension/curl, and leg press.

PROS

- **Usually easier to learn and do**. Using a machine is usually as simple as sit down, grab the handles and move them in the only direction they are capable of moving. Especially in the case of beginners, this is the easiest form of exercise to learn.
- **Can sometimes be safer**. While you can definitely still get injured using a machine, there is

usually less risk of injury when compared to free weight or body weight exercises.

CONS

- **Unnatural movement path**. A fixed, unnatural movement path forces you into positions that in many cases are not right for many people. At best this can be uncomfortable and make it hard to progress and properly train the target muscle. At worst, it will eventually cause an injury.
- **Least functional type of exercise**. The carryover between machines and movements you actually do in real life is lesser than it is with either free weight or body weight exercises.
- **Does part of the work for you**. While you are definitely still working the target muscle and moving the weight (or in this case, the handles) from point A to point B, the entire movement is being stabilized by the machine itself and therefore preventing you from using various stabilizer muscles.
- **Not ideal for home use**. Machines are the most expensive (by far), take up the most space (by far), and are the least usable (one machine is typically only capable of one exercise, whereas a barbell or dumbbells can be used for dozens).

So, Which Type Of Exercise Is Best For You AND Your Goal?

In *most* cases, *most* of the time, this is how it breaks down based on your specific goal:

Performance Related Goals

If your primary goal is performance related (increasing strength, improving performance, etc.), then the majority of your workout routine should be comprised of free weight and body weight exercises. Machines should usually be kept to a minimum, or possibly none whatsoever.

Looks Related Goals

If your primary goal is looks related (building muscle, losing fat, getting "toned," etc.), then really all 3 types of exercises can serve as suitable choices for your workout routine. In general however, free weight and body weight exercises are the ideal first choice, with certain machines being a perfectly fine secondary option.

Silly Myths

Oh, and before ending this, I figure I should quickly mention the extremely idiotic myth that "free weights are for adding bulk" and "machines are for toning up." That's complete and utter bullshit.

My post about muscle tone explains this in more detail, but the big point is that free weight exercises, body weight exercises and machines are all 100% equal in terms of being for "bulk" or "tone." There is no difference whatsoever.

What's Next?

The next part of the exercise selection process is learning the difference between compound and isolation exercises and determining which is best for you and your goal. Let's go…

Compound Exercises vs Isolation Exercises: Which is best?

A common way of classifying weight training exercises is in terms of how the exercise trains your body and what/how many muscle groups are being used significantly when it's performed.

In this case, there's 2 groups an exercise can fall into:

- Compound Exercises
- Isolation Exercises

Now, a lot of silly (or stupid) people like to make general definitive statements such as "compound exercises rule!" and "isolation exercises suck!"

Unfortunately for them (and the people who listen to them), it's not quite that simple.

The truth is, both compound and isolation exercises can serve a ton of different purposes in a ton of different workout routines based on your goal and your body, and that means the only way to know for sure which type of exercise is best for you is by getting down to the specifics of each.

So, let's do that.

Compound Exercises

A **compound exercise** is any exercise that involves the use of *more than one* major muscle group at a time. Typically, there is one larger muscle group that ends up doing the majority of the work, and then one or more smaller muscle groups that are recruited secondarily.

Here's a list of the most common compound exercises along with the primary and secondary muscle groups each one targets:

- **Flat, Incline or Decline Bench Press** (barbell, dumbbell or machine)
  Primary Muscle Group: Chest
  Secondary Muscle Groups: Shoulders, Triceps
- **Overhead Shoulder Press** (barbell, dumbbell or machine)
  Primary Muscle Group: Shoulders
  Secondary Muscle Group: Triceps
- **Dips** (on parallel bars with slight forward lean)
  Primary Muscle Group: Chest
  Secondary Muscle Groups: Triceps, Shoulders
- **Dips** (on parallel bars with no forward lean)
  Primary Muscle Group: Triceps
  Secondary Muscle Groups: Shoulders, Chest
- **Rows** (barbell, dumbbell, or machine)
  Primary Muscle Group: Back
  Secondary Muscle Group: Biceps
- **Pull-Ups, Chin-Ups, Lat Pull-Downs** (any type of grip)
  Primary Muscle Group: Back
  Secondary Muscle Group: Biceps
- **Deadlifts** (many variations)
  Primary Muscle Group: Posterior Chain (Hamstrings, Glutes, Back, etc.)

Secondary Muscle Groups: Much Of Lower Body, Much Of Upper Body

- **Squats** (many variations)
  Primary Muscle Group: Quads
  Secondary Muscle Groups: Most Of Lower Body (Glutes/Hamstrings), Lower Back

Basically, if an exercise involves pushing, pulling, squatting or deadlifting, it's usually training more than one major muscle group, and that makes it a compound exercise.

And, as you can see from the list above:

- All chest pushing/pressing exercises also use the shoulders and triceps.
- All shoulder pushing/pressing exercises also use the triceps.
- All back pulling/rowing exercises also use the biceps.
- Deadlifts and squats (and split squats, lunges, step ups, leg presses) also use a variety of lower body muscles and, in some cases, the lower and/or upper back.

How Compound Exercises Can Affect Your Planned Frequency, Recovery & Volume

Now, you may be wondering why you should care about what secondary muscle groups get trained during compound exercises. Here's why.

You're using a workout schedule that will allow you to train each muscle group with an optimal frequency, right?

Well, based on the information I just told you, can you see how easy it would be to unknowingly train certain muscle groups more often than you're aiming to as a result of their secondary use during exercises that primarily target other muscles?

Plus, there's also the issue of recovery. For example, you might train chest one day and triceps the next. In reality, you've trained triceps 2 days in a row (because of their secondary usage during chest exercises).

A similar issue can easily arise with pretty much every muscle group there is if you don't plan carefully enough. This is another reason why I consider these the best workout schedules. Each one pairs muscle groups up in a way that avoids any potential problems with frequency/recovery as a result of secondary usage during compound exercises.

The same potential problem can exist for your planned volume per muscle group too. This goes back to what I've mentioned before about smaller muscle groups (like biceps and triceps) needing less direct volume due to how much indirect volume they get during compound exercises.

This is all stuff that needs to be taken into account when creating your workout routine. Luckily, if you've been following along from the beginning, it's all stuff that has already been taken into account.

Isolation Exercises

An **isolation exercise** is any exercise in which *only one* major muscle group is trained by itself. Typically, the movement is done in such a way where usage of all other muscle groups is avoided, which leaves one muscle group isolated and able to do all of the work.

Here's a list of the most common isolation exercises along with the muscle it isolates/trains:

- **Flat, Incline or Decline Flyes** (dumbbell, cable or machine)
  Muscle Group Trained: Chest

- **Lateral Raises or Front Raises** (dumbbell, cable or machine)
  Muscle Group Trained: Shoulders
- **Biceps Curls** (barbell, dumbbell, cable or machine)
  Muscle Group Trained: Biceps
- **Triceps Extensions** (barbell, dumbbell, cable or machine)
  Muscle Group Trained: Triceps
- **Leg Extensions**
  Muscle Group Trained: Quads
- **Leg Curls**
  Muscle Group Trained: Hamstrings
- **Calf Raises**
  Muscle Group Trained: Calves

Basically, if an exercise involves raising, curling or extending, it's usually training just one major muscle group, and that makes it an isolation exercise.

Compound Exercises vs Isolation Exercises

Now that you have a damn good understanding of both types of exercises, it's time to compare them and figure out which is best for you. Here we go…

Round 1: Generally

Compound exercises allow you to engage more muscle groups, which in turn allows you to lift more weight, which in turn allows for faster and more consistent progression, which in turns causes a lot of good stuff to happen that all leads to the results you want to get.

Isolation exercises isolate muscle groups so they are trained by themselves. This means you'll typically be using MUCH lower amounts of weight, which in turn means there won't be anywhere near as much consistent progression, which in turn means the potential for results won't be nearly as high as with compound exercises.

Let me explain that another way. Which do you think has more potential to improve the way your body looks or performs… adding 100lbs to your bench press, or adding 10lbs to your dumbbell flyes??

Obvious, isn't it?

In general, compound exercises allow you to create MUCH more of the right type of training stimulus than isolation exercises can. And for this reason (and many other less important ones), **compound exercises beat isolation exercises** by a fairly large margin for *most* people, *most* of the time.

Round 2: Specifically

But wait, this battle isn't over just yet.

You see, there are **plenty of specific situations when isolation exercises can definitely be of use and serve an important purpose** in your workout routine.

For example, let's say you've already done some bench pressing but still need to get some additional chest volume in. However, at the same time, you don't want (or need) any additional volume for your shoulders and triceps.

Since every compound chest exercise uses the shoulders and triceps secondarily, your best option in

this scenario is to do a chest isolation exercise like dumbbell flyes (rather than another type of press).

In this case the isolation exercise allows you do a second exercise for a muscle group to reach the optimal amount of volume, and it does it in a way that isolates that muscle so that no other secondary muscles are being trained with unwanted volume.

Another similar example is in the case of people who are training primarily for building muscle and have a hard time actually using their chest when bench pressing. This is somewhat common, and it means your triceps and shoulders are taking over and doing most of the work.

Aside from trying to correct this issue as much as they can, how else is this person supposed to properly train their chest? That's right… with an isolation exercise like flyes.

And here's yet another example. Let's say you are doing chest and shoulders in the same workout. You've already done some flat bench pressing and some incline bench pressing, and your triceps (which are used secondarily in both) are pretty much dead at this point.

Does it make sense to do some kind of overhead press for shoulders and therefore use your already very fatigued triceps? In this case, a shoulder isolation exercise like lateral raises might be a better choice for some people.

And let's not forget that isolation exercises are really the only way we can directly train smaller muscle groups like the biceps, triceps and calves without adding additional unnecessary volume to the larger muscle groups.

So really, while compound exercises are the winner of this battle in terms of what tends to be best in general, isolation exercises definitely have a time and place in the workout routines of many people.

Silly Myths

Before ending this with my recommendations, I figured I should probably mention the silly myth that "isolation exercises are for getting toned, lean and defined" and "compound exercises are for building lots of muscle and bulk." Um, no. That's 100% **bullshit**.

This is explained in detail in my muscle tone post, but the big point is that compound and isolation exercises are complete equals in terms of being for "tone" or "bulk" or whatever dumb words are associated with this idiotic myth. It's all nonsense. Ignore it.

My Recommendations

So, what's best for you? Here's what I recommend…

- If your primary goal is **performance** related (increasing strength, improving performance, etc.), then compound exercises should comprise the majority of your workout routine. Isolation exercises should be greatly limited or possibly avoided completely.
- If your primary goal is **looks** related (building muscle, losing fat, getting "toned," etc.), then compound exercises should comprise the majority of your workout routine and get your primary focus. However, a secondary focus on isolation exercises is fine and in some cases, maybe even ideal.
- If you are a **beginner with ANY goal**, then compound exercises should comprise the majority of your workout routine. Isolation exercises should be kept to a minimum or possibly avoided completely.

What's Next?

The next part of the exercise selection process is learning the major weight training movement patterns, the exercises that go along with each, and how to properly implement them. Let's go…

Movement Patterns: Exercises For Horizontal & Vertical Push & Pull, Quad & Hip Dominant, And More

Another one of the many ways of categorizing weight training exercises is in terms of their **movement pattern**.

You see, while there might be hundreds of different exercises in existence, there's really only a few basic movements the human body is capable of doing during an exercise.

For the most part, these movement patterns are:

- Horizontal Push
- Horizontal Pull
- Vertical Push
- Vertical Pull
- Quad Dominant
- Hip/Hamstring Dominant
- Elbow Flexion
- Elbow Extension
- Accessory Movements

Now let's take a look at each and see which exercises fit which movement pattern, how it should affect your exercise selection, and why it all plays a key role in preventing injuries and imbalances.

Horizontal Pushing Exercises

A horizontal pushing exercise is any exercise that involves moving a weight straight out in front of you so that it's going away from your torso horizontally (think bench press).

Specifically, the most common examples of horizontal pushing movements are:

- Bench Press
- Low Incline Bench Press
- Decline Bench Press
- Flat/Incline/Decline Chest Press Machine
- Flat/Incline/Decline Flyes

Horizontal Pulling Exercises

A horizontal pulling exercise is any exercise that involves moving a weight in towards your torso horizontally from straight out in front of you (think rows).

Specifically, the most common examples of horizontal pulling movements are:

- Bent Over Rows
- Seated Cable Rows
- T-Bar Rows
- Chest Supported Machine Rows

Vertical Pushing Exercises

A vertical pushing exercise is any exercise that involves moving a weight up vertically in relation to your torso so that it goes straight over head or at least in that direction (think shoulder press).

Specifically, the most common examples of vertical pushing movements are:

- Standing Overhead Shoulder Press
- Seated Overhead Shoulder Press
- Lateral Raises
- Front Raises
- High Incline Bench Press

Vertical Pulling Exercises

A vertical pulling exercise is any exercise that involves moving a weight down vertically in relation to your torso so that you are pulling down from over head (think lat pull-downs).

Specifically, the most common examples of vertical pulling movements are:

- Pull-Ups
- Chin-Ups
- Lat Pull-Downs

Quad Dominant Exercises

A quad dominant exercise is any exercise where the primary mover is your quadriceps (think squats).

Specifically, the most common examples of quad dominant movements are:

- Squats
- Front Squats
- Split Squats
- Lunges
- Leg Press

Hip/Hamstring Dominant Exercises

A hip/hamstring dominant exercise is any exercise where the primary mover is your hamstrings, glutes, or posterior chain as a whole (think deadlifts).

Specifically, the most common examples of hip/hamstring dominant movements are:

- Deadlifts (all variations)
- Glute-Ham Raises
- Hyperextensions
- Pull-Throughs
- Good-Mornings
- Leg Curls

Elbow Flexion Exercises

An elbow flexion exercise is any exercise that involves moving a weight towards you by flexing at the elbow (think bicep curls).

Specifically, the most common examples of elbow flexion movements are:

- Standing Biceps Curl
- Seated Biceps Curl
- Preacher Curls
- Cable Curls

Elbow Extension Exercises

An elbow extension exercise is any exercise that involves moving a weight away from you by extending at the elbow (think triceps extension).

Specifically, the most common examples of elbow extension movements are:

- Laying Triceps Extension (Skull-Crushers)
- Triceps Cable Press-Downs
- Overhead Triceps Extension

Accessory Movements

The 8 types of exercises described above (**especially the first 6**) are considered the major movement patterns and the ones that should get the most attention. However, there are other minor movement patterns that I like to lump into one general "accessory" type category.

This mostly includes the leftover isolation exercises that don't fit into any of the other categories. For example, calf raises, ab exercises, rotator cuff work, shrugs and things like that.

But Why Should I Care About Movement Patterns?

Now, you may be wondering why the hell anything I just told you is of any importance to you or your workout routine's exercise selection. I have 3 reasons.

For starters, your *overall* weight training program should be comprised of exercises from EVERY movement pattern. If it isn't, it means you're missing something and failing to properly train your entire body.

Second, certain workout schedules and programs are designed in a way where the movement patterns play the largest role in how you select exercises for each workout.

For example, the most generic way of setting up an upper body workout (as part of an upper/lower split) is by combining 1 horizontal push, 1 horizontal pull, 1 vertical push, 1 vertical pull, 1 elbow flexion and 1 elbow extension exercise. And just like that, your upper body workout is good to go.

In the case of a full body split, you might take 1 exercise from every movement pattern category for each workout.

See what I mean? Depending on the exact routine you use, movement patterns could be a key part of the exercise selection process.

Even still, it's the third reason that may be most important of all.

Balancing Opposing Movement Patterns To Prevent Injuries

The third reason you should care about movement patterns is for the purpose of preventing common weight training injuries and imbalances caused by typical crappy exercise selection. Let me explain.

If you "push" more than you "pull," something will almost always eventually go screwy with one (or both) of your shoulders. This is extremely common, as most people (hi guys!) are much more interested with getting a big chest and huge shoulders than they are with getting a big back.

This means there tends to be more of a focus on pushing exercises (chest/shoulders) than there is on pulling exercises (back). And this lack of balance around the shoulder girdle is an **extremely common** cause of shoulder related injuries.

I've personally been there and done that myself, so I know exactly how common (and not fun) it is.

I also now know that the way to prevent it is by balancing the opposing movement patterns. How so? Like this…

- For every **horizontal push**, you should have a **horizontal pull** (and vice-versa).
  (Example: For every bench press, you should have a row.)
- For every **vertical push**, you should have a **vertical pull** (and vice-versa).
  (Example: For every shoulder press, you should have a pull-up or lat pull-down.)
- For every **elbow flexion**, you should have an **elbow extension** (and vice-versa).
  (Example: For every biceps curl, you should have a triceps extension.)

It gets a little trickier with the lower body as there is a lot of overlap between quad dominant and hamstring dominant movements. But, generally speaking, for each quad dominant movement there should usually be a hip/ham dominant movement too.

And not only should the amount of exercises for each opposing movement pattern be equal, but the amount of volume (sets/reps) done should be pretty close (if not *exactly*) the same as well.

This doesn't necessarily always have to balance out during each individual workout if that's not how your program is set up.

For example, if your workout routine is designed in a way where you ARE training opposing movement patterns in the same workout, then the amount of volume and exercises for each should indeed be pretty equal and balanced in that specific workout.

But if your workout routine is designed in a way where you are NOT training opposing movement patterns in the same workout, then the goal is to ensure that the amount of exercises/volume for each ends up being pretty equal and balanced over the course of the week.

Meaning, if you have X sets of bench presses at the end of the week, you should usually have X sets of rows too. Y sets of overhead presses? Then there should be Y sets of pull-ups/pull downs. You get the picture.

There are some rare exceptions to all of the above recommendations, but for *most* people, *most* of the time, here's the moral of this story:

Setting up your weight training routine in a way that ensures there is balance around the joints (shoulder, knee, elbow) and balance between the different movement patterns (horizontal push/pull, vertical push/pull, etc.) is KEY to injury prevention and building a balanced body.

Don’t ignore that.

What’s Next?

At this point there’s really only one remaining way of categorizing weight training exercises, and that’s in terms of the muscle groups/body parts they target. So, let’s get to it…

A List Of The Best Weight Training Exercises For Each Muscle Group

The most common and straight forward way of categorizing weight training exercises is simply in terms what muscle group or body part an exercise targets.

While some explaining was necessary to properly show the difference between free weight exercises, body weight exercises and machines, and compound exercises and isolation exercises, and of course the different weight training movement patterns, very little explaining is needed here.

In fact, all this is going to be is just a big list of exercises for each muscle group with virtually no explanation whatsoever.

So, let's get to it.

In no specific order, here's a list of what are considered to be the best and most often used exercises for each major muscle group…

A List Of The Best Chest Exercises

- Flat Barbell or Dumbbell Bench Press
- Incline Barbell or Dumbbell Bench Press
- Decline Barbell or Dumbbell Bench Press
- Flat Chest Press Machine
- Incline Chest Press Machine
- Decline Chest Press Machine
- Dips (on parallel bars with slight forward lean)
- Push-Ups
- Flat Dumbbell Flyes
- Incline Dumbbell Flyes
- Decline Dumbbell Flyes
- Pec Deck Machine
- Cable Crossovers/Cable Flyes

(Compound chest exercises also target the triceps and shoulders secondarily.)

A List Of The Best Back Exercises

- Pull-Ups
- Chin-Ups
- Lat Pull-Downs
- Bent Over Barbell or Dumbbell Rows
- T-Bar Rows
- Seated Cable Rows
- Chest Supported Barbell or Dumbbell Rows
- Chest Supported Machine Rows
- Inverted Rows
- Barbell, Dumbbell or Machine Shrugs

(Compound back exercises also target the biceps secondarily.)

A List Of The Best Shoulder Exercises

- Seated Overhead Barbell or Dumbbell Press
- Standing Overhead Barbell or Dumbbell Press
- Overhead Machine Press
- Arnold Press
- Barbell, Dumbbell or Machine Upright Rows
- Dumbbell, Cable or Machine Lateral Raises
- Dumbbell, Cable or Machine Front Raises
- Barbell, Dumbbell, or Machine Rear Delt Rows, Raises or Flyes

(Compound shoulder exercises also target the triceps secondarily.)

A List Of The Best Quadriceps Exercises

- Barbell or Dumbbell Squats
- Barbell or Dumbbell Front Squats
- Barbell or Dumbbell Split Squats
- Barbell or Dumbbell Lunges
- Barbell or Dumbbell Step-Ups
- Leg Press
- Machine Squat/Hack Squat
- Leg Extensions

(Compound quad exercises also target a significant portion of the lower body/posterior chain.)

A List Of The Best Hamstring Exercises

- Barbell or Dumbbell Romanian Deadlifts
- Barbell or Dumbbell Straight Leg Deadlifts
- Barbell or Dumbbell Sumo Deadlifts
- Glute-Ham Raises
- Hyperextensions
- Cable Pull-Throughs
- Good-Mornings
- Leg Curls

(Compound hamstring exercises also target a significant portion of the lower body/posterior chain.)

A List Of The Best Biceps Exercises

- Standing Barbell or Dumbbell Curls
- Barbell or Dumbbell Preacher Curls
- Seated Dumbbell Curls
- Incline Dumbbell Curls
- Hammer Curls
- Concentration Curls

- Cable Curls
- Biceps Curl Machine

A List Of The Best Triceps Exercises

- Dips (on parallel bars, elbows close to body, without forward lean)
- Flat Close Grip Bench Press
- Decline Close Grip Bench Press
- Close Grip Push-Ups
- Laying Barbell or Dumbbell Triceps Extensions
- Skull Crushers
- Overhead Barbell or Dumbbell Triceps Extensions
- Cable Press-Downs
- Bench Dips

Additional Notes

So, there you go, a big list of exercises for each muscle group. I eventually plan on writing descriptions of each along with pictures and videos showing proper form at some point in the future, but for now it's just a big list.

And this is in no way meant to be the definitive list of EVERY exercise in existence, by the way. While it is pretty damn comprehensive (especially in terms of what is considered best and most popular), some stuff has been left out.

I mean, for a majority of the exercises mentioned, I could have listed various minor variations of each based on the type of grip (pronated, supinated, neutral), how wide or narrow the grip or stance is, the specific placement of the bench/seat height, and on and on and on.

However, to avoid being unnecessarily repetitive, I decided not to get *THAT* specific. So, if you're looking for additional exercises beyond what's on this list, just know that minor variations (like the ones I just mentioned) can be made to many of them if desired.

Also keep in mind that, in the case of all compound exercises listed above, additional muscle groups are targeted secondarily. (I explain this more here.)

What's Next?

Now that we've gone through the major aspects of the exercise selection process, it's time to go over one last important aspect of determining *exactly* what exercises are best for you. Here we go…

What Are The Best Exercises For My Workout Routine?

When it comes to diet and fitness, people are always obsessed with finding out what works best. You know, like…

- What is the best workout routine?
- What is the best workout schedule?
- What is the best diet plan?
- What are the best exercises?

These questions are all extremely common, and for good reason. If you do what works best, you'll get the best results. Simple as that.

The problem however is that truly answering those questions is never quite as simple. I mean, I could give you the stereotypical answers that people like to throw around as though they are always right, but… they just *aren't* always right.

Due to a ton of individual differences, what's best for one person is not always best for another. And in the case of figuring out what the **best exercises** are for you… this couldn't be more true.

Let me show you what I mean.

Typical Stupid Blanket Statements About Exercises

As I said before, there are certain stereotypical answers you'll almost always get if you asked someone about what exercises are best for you.

The problem is, in almost every case, they are just stupid blanket statements that may be true a lot of the time, but are definitely not true 100% of the time.

Here's the most common examples that come to mind…

"Compound exercises are better than isolation exercises."

Now, in general, I definitely agree with this statement the majority of the time.

However, as I've already explained in Compound Exercises vs Isolation Exercises, there are plenty of situations when an isolation exercise is better than a compound exercise.

"Free weight and body weight exercises are better than machines."

Once again, a lot of the time, I fully agree with this statement. But once again, there are plenty of situations when a machine is equally as good (or maybe even better) than free weight and body weight exercises.

It all depends on factors that are specific to you and your goal.

“Squats are better than leg presses.” “Squats are the best quad exercise.” “You must do squats.”

Listen, I love squats and am fully aware of how effective they are, how often recommended they are, and how they are single-handedly responsible for building some of the biggest, strongest, most impressive looking legs in the world.

HOWEVER, just because that is the case for many people doesn’t make it the case for everyone.

Want an example? How about… me.

You see, due to certain factors specific to my body, squats have never been that great of a quad exercise for me. I don’t know if it’s bone structure, height or leg length, naturally (or just overly) strong hamstrings and glutes, or some issue with flexibility or mobility, but whatever it is… squats have always felt like more of an awkward posterior chain exercise for me rather than the supposed king of the best quad exercises.

In my specific case, squats were never that great at building me big/nice looking legs. And since that is my primary goal, why on earth should I keep squatting when leg presses (along with split squats and lunges), are, for me, much more effective for what I need?

You see, in reality, no one truly NEEDS to squat except people who are involved in competitive powerlifting or some other similar sport where squatting is a requirement.

And with me just being a guy looking to build some nice looking quads, that doesn’t apply. For me, leg presses ARE better than squats at doing what I need them to do.

And guess what? There are a ton of people just like me. And while I will continue to recommend squats in the programs I create and always consider them one of the “in general/most of the time” best exercises, I will always take into account the fact that that’s not the case 100% of the time.

You should to.

“Exercise A is the best exercise for Muscle Group A.”

And this is basically what I just described with squats being the best leg exercise, only with some other exercise and muscle group in their place.

For every exercise that someone thinks is the best (or may actually be the best in most cases), there is almost always someone out there who could prove them wrong.

Here’s an example. Most people consider parallel bar dips to be one of the best triceps exercises. I fully agree. The problem is, dips are an exercise that often bothers people’s shoulders, especially those who have had shoulder issues in the past.

I know this first hand, because I am one of those people. For whatever reason, dips annoy my shoulders. I love them, and really really want to do them, but if I do, I end up with a shoulder problem every single time.

So, are dips the best triceps exercise for me or the thousands of other people who have the same issue? Nope, they aren’t. It’s just another stupid blanket statement.

Want another example? A lot of people consider bent over barbell rows one of the best back exercises.

I agree, unless of course you’ve deadlifted the day before or plan on deadlifting the day after. In that case, the additional stress bent over rows place on your lower back make them a pretty poor choice for

a back exercise. In this case, some type of chest supported machine row would be better.

And speaking of back exercises, **here's another example**. There are a ton of people who complain about being unable to actually use and "feel" their back working during certain types of rows.

In many cases, the person will come across a certain type of row that they ARE able to "feel" their back working on, in which case that specific exercise is the one that's best for them above all the others.

And these are just **a few examples of MANY**.

You could name any of the supposed best exercises for any muscle group, and I can give you a reason why it may not be the best for someone based on their specific goal, body, experience level or preferences.

What's best in general is only best in general. You need to care about what's best specifically for you. The better you do that, the better your results will be.

The Best Exercises For YOU

Well, at this point I've already showed you:

- How to determine if free weight, body weight or machines exercises are more ideal for you.
- How to determine if compound or isolation exercises are more ideal for you.
- The different exercise movement patterns and how to properly implement them with ideal balance.
- A list of exercises for each muscle group that are most often considered the "best."

In addition to that, the best exercise selection really comes down to 3 simple rules.

1. Choose exercises that you can do safely and correctly.
2. Choose exercises that allow you to properly train the target muscle group and/or allow you to achieve your desired training effect.
3. Choose exercises that you can progress at consistently.

When you've done all that, you will have selected the best exercises for your workout routine.

Feel free to use the stereotypical blanket statements and generalities as a starting point, but use all of the factors specific to you as the end point. That's how you'll truly find what's "best."

What's Next?

Now that you know how to select the exercises for your workout routine, it's time to learn how to properly organize them. Let's start here…

Exercise Order – How To Arrange The Exercises In Your Workout

Once you select the weight training exercises you will perform during each of your workouts, the next decision you need to make is what order to perform them in.

As is the case with most aspects of creating an effective weight training routine, exercise order can vary significantly based on factors specific to you and your goal.

Having said that, there are some general rules that tend to apply in the majority of cases. Here now are those rules…

The General Rules Of Exercise Order

For *most* of the people, *most* of the time, proper exercise order can be summed up in one simple sentence:

More demanding exercises should be performed before less demanding exercises.

Here are the most common examples of what that means…

1. **Exercises for bigger muscles should come before exercises for smaller muscles.**
   Examples: Chest or back before shoulders, biceps or triceps. Shoulders before biceps or triceps. Quads or hamstrings before calves or abs.
2. **Compound exercises should come before isolation exercises.**
   Examples: Bench press before dumbbell flyes. Overhead press before lateral raises. Squats before leg extensions. Romanian deadlifts before leg curls.
3. **Free weight/body weight exercises should come before machines.**
   Squats or deadlifts before leg presses. Barbell bench press before incline machine press. Pull-ups before chest supported machine rows.

As I mentioned earlier, there are plenty of times when it might make sense to deviate slightly from these rules based on various individual factors, but in general… these rules should apply in most workout routines.

When More Than 1 Muscle Group Is Trained In The Same Workout

Now, you may be wondering what should happen when you are training more than one muscle group in a workout… as most people will be. In fact, the many people using a full body split or upper/lower split will be training quite a few muscle groups per workout.

As you already learned in rule #1 above, exercises for bigger muscle groups should come before exercises for smaller muscle groups.

This is easy when it comes down to obvious stuff like training chest before triceps or quads before calves, but what about when there's more than one **big** muscle group being trained in the same workout?

Simple… all of the above rules still apply, even if it means you end up having to train each muscle

group out of order.

Meaning, instead of doing all of the exercises for the same muscle group back-to-back and then doing all of the exercises for the next muscle group back-to-back, you might do an exercise for Muscle A, then Muscle B, then Muscle A again.

This is perfectly fine and perfectly normal and SHOULD happen to ensure you are performing your exercises in their optimal order.

Once again, here's a reminder that there are certain instances where it might make sense to stray from these guidelines. However, since I can't predict every possible scenario for every person's specific situation, the best I can do is tell you what guidelines should be followed in *most* cases.

And, in *most* cases, these are the rules of exercise order that should be followed the *majority* of the time.

What's Next?

Now that you know what order you will perform your exercises in during each workout, it's time to figure out how long you should rest between each set of each exercise. Let's do that…

How Long To Rest Between Sets & Exercises – Workout Rest Times

After you've selected the exercises you will perform in each of your workouts and put them in their ideal order, the next important step is to answer the following questions:

- How long should you rest between sets of an exercise?
- How long should you rest between different exercises?

Simply put, if your rest periods are too long or too short, you'll end up sacrificing the results you want to some degree.

The goal is to find that sweet spot right in between resting too much or too little. When you find that, you'll have found your **optimal rest time**.

As it turns out, there's primarily 3 major factors that influence what your ideal rest times should be:

1. What intensity/rep range you are using for a given exercise.
2. How demanding that exercise is on your body as a whole.
3. Your primary goal (building muscle, increasing strength, losing fat, etc.).

Based on these three factors, it's pretty common to see rest time recommendations of anywhere from 0 seconds to 5 minutes between sets and exercises.

Yeah, that's a pretty broad range.

Luckily, this range can be narrowed down greatly by applying each factor to your exact situation. Here's how.

How Your Intensity/Rep Range Influences Rest Times

In my post about weight training intensity, I explained that the fewer reps you can do per set of an exercise, the higher your training intensity is. And, the more reps you can do per set of an exercise, the lower the intensity.

You know, like how only being able to lift a weight for 5 reps means you are training at a fairly high intensity, while being able to lift a weight for 15 reps is a fairly low intensity. Ring a bell? Good.

This all has a direct effect on the amount of rest you need between sets. Here's what I mean…

- The higher the rep range/lower the intensity, the **less rest** you need between sets of that exercise.
- The lower the rep range/higher the intensity, the **more rest** you need between sets of that exercise.

So, for example, if you are doing 6 reps per set of an exercise, you would need more rest between sets than if you were doing 12 reps per set of the same exercise.

Makes perfect sense, doesn't it?

How An Exercise's "Demand" Influences Rest Times

Along with how many reps you're doing per set of an exercise, the exercise itself and how demanding

it is on your body also plays a big role in how long you should rest.

Quite simply:

- The more demanding an exercise is on your body, the **more rest** you need.
- The less demanding an exercise is on your body, the **less rest** you need.

Meaning, exercises for bigger muscle groups like legs, chest and back typically need more rest between sets than exercises for smaller muscle groups like biceps, triceps and calves.

At the same time, more demanding compound exercises like squats, deadlifts, pull-ups, and various presses and rows typically require more rest between sets than less demanding isolation exercises like lateral raises, dumbbell flyes, biceps curls, triceps press-downs, leg extensions or anything similar.

Even if the isolation exercise is for a bigger muscle group, it still needs less rest between sets than a compound exercise for that same muscle group.

Again, it makes perfect sense.

How Your Primary Goal Influences Rest Times

The final major factor influencing rest times is your specific fitness goal.

You see, rest time between sets can be classified 2 different ways, **complete** and **incomplete**, and both have their own pros and cons depending on your goal.

Complete (or near complete) rest times.

This type of rest is **longer** in duration and allows for more recovery of your central nervous system. This means you'll be able to maintain your work capacity better, maximize strength performance and basically be at your strongest from set-to-set and able to lift the most amounts of weight for the most amounts of reps.

However, the amount of fatigue and metabolite accumulation (all of which play a role in fat loss, building muscle, and improving muscular endurance) is typically lower.

Incomplete rest times.

This type of rest is **shorter** in duration and allows for more accumulated fatigued (which is associated with higher increases in growth hormone) along with various metabolic benefits as well.

However, the amount of neural recovery will be lower, and this means your strength and work capacity from set-to-set will be a lot lower as well.

Which type of rest is best for me?

As you can see, there is something good and bad about each, and this is when your primary goal comes into play.

Depending on exactly what your goal is, certain rest times (complete, incomplete, or a combination of both) would be better suited for you than others. Let me show you what I mean…

- **Rest Time Between Sets**: 20-60 seconds
- **Type Of Rest**: Incomplete
- **Most Ideal For**: Muscular endurance, metabolic training/circuit training, burning some

additional calories.

- **Rest Time Between Sets**: 1-2 minutes
- **Type Of Rest**: Incomplete/Complete
- **Most Ideal For**: Building muscle, getting "toned," looking good.

- **Rest Time Between Sets**: 2-3 minutes
- **Type Of Rest**: Complete/Incomplete
- **Most Ideal For**: Building muscle, getting "toned," looking good, increasing strength.

- **Rest Time Between Sets**: 3-5 minutes
- **Type Of Rest**: Complete
- **Most Ideal For**: Strength and muscular power.

As you can see, it doesn't have to be *JUST* incomplete or *JUST* complete rest times. Rest times don't have to be *JUST* real short or *JUST* real long. You can rest somewhere in the middle and get the benefits of both types of rest.

And this of course leads to the almighty question…

So, How Long Should I Rest Between Sets?

Putting all 3 of the factors influencing rest times together, here are my recommendations for exactly how long you should rest between sets based on your goal…

- **For Muscular Endurance And/Or Getting The Benefits Of Metabolic/Circuit Type Training…**
  Resting **20-60 seconds between sets** is probably ideal for you. If the exercise being done is more demanding on the body, rest more towards the higher end of that range. If it's less demanding, rest more towards the lower end.
- **For Increasing Strength And Maximizing Muscular Power…**
  Resting **2-5 minutes between sets** is probably ideal for you. The higher your training intensity is for a given exercise and/or the more demanding it is on your body, the more you should stay towards the higher end of that range. The lower the intensity and/or less demanding it is, the more you should stay towards the lower end of that range.
- **For Building Muscle, Getting "Toned," And Improving How Your Body Looks**…
  Resting **1-3 minutes between sets** is probably ideal for you. The higher your training intensity is for a given exercise and/or the more demanding it is on your body, the more you should stay nearer to the 2-3 minute range. The lower the intensity and/or the less demanding the exercise is, the more you should stay in the 1-2 minute range.

How Long Should I Rest Between Exercises?

Regarding how long to rest between different exercises, it should usually be about as long as you rested between sets of the previous exercise. Meaning, if you rested 3 minutes between sets of Exercise #1, you should rest about 3 minutes before doing your first set of Exercise #2.

I actually tend to be a little less strict when it comes to rest times between exercises, because sometimes you just need a little more time to recover from that last set of the previous exercise as well as time to actually get to and set up at your next exercise.

So, if you end up taking an extra minute or 2 when switching from one exercise to the next, that's usually alright with me unless otherwise instructed.

However, your rest times between sets of each exercise should stay much more strict and consistent.

What's Next?

Well, at this point we've covered the majority of what goes into creating the ideal workout routine. Now it's time to go over the final requirements that can literally make your break the effectiveness of your program. First up…

Progressive Overload – The Key Workout Requirement

Do I have your attention? I mean seriously… do I *really* have your attention?

I ask because I'm about to explain the **single most important factor** in getting positive results from any type of workout or any form of exercise.

Are you listening now? Good.

When trying to create the most effective workout routine possible, your goal is to use the frequency, schedule, intensity, volume, and exercise selection that is as optimal as possible for you and your goal.

If you do that correctly, you are pretty much guaranteed to get the best results you can get.

Unless of course you happen to leave out the one component that matters more than everything else.

It's the component that can turn the most perfect workout program into a useless waste of time and literally make or break your success.

I'm talking about a little something called **progressive overload**, and it is the absolute key to getting the results you want from your workout routine.

What Is Progressive Overload?

The best way I can explain it is by telling you a very important secret.

You see, the human body doesn't care that you have some type of workout/exercise goal in mind. It doesn't care that you want to build muscle, or lose fat, or get toned, or become stronger, or improve performance, or just look great naked.

Your body only knows and cares about 1 thing: keeping you alive and functioning as efficiently as possible. That's your body's only real goal.

And, to ensure it meets this goal, your body is both smart enough and capable enough to do whatever is needed of it in order to adapt to its environment.

And it's this fact that is the basis for all workout/exercise goals to be reached.

What I mean is, the only way your body will ever change or improve the way you want it to is by creating an environment that proves to your body that these changes and improvements **MUST** be made.

Or, to put it another way, **your body will not change or improve unless you force it to**.

No matter how perfect your workout is, muscle will not be built, strength will not be gained, and performance will not improve unless you show your body that these are things that absolutely **NEED** to happen in order for it to survive.

And that right there brings us to something called the progressive overload principle.

The Progressive Overload Principle

The **progressive overload principle** basically states:

In order for a muscle to grow, strength to be gained, performance to increase, or for any similar improvement to occur, the human body must be forced to adapt to a tension that is above and beyond what it has previously experienced.

Go back and read that again. It's pretty important.

And what it means is, if you lift the same weights, for the same number of reps, the same way for the next 20 years… nothing will ever happen. Your body will never change or improve in any way.

You will only maintain your current state.

However, if you increase the demands you are placing on your body by increasing the weight being lifted, lifting the same weight for more reps, or just doing something that increases the demands that your body needs to meet, then your body will have no other choice but to make the necessary changes and improvements that will allow it to adapt to this environment and remain capable of performing these tasks.

And these "changes" and "improvements" and "adaptations" come in the form of **more muscle**, **more strength**, **less fat**, **more tone**, **better performance** and just **the overall results you are looking to get**.

That's what all of these goals are, really… just our body's adaptive response to the demands being placed on it through exercise.

You're basically showing your body that in order for it to survive, in order for it to do what you are forcing it to do, it's going to NEED to make these changes and improvements.

Let me show you exactly what I mean in the specific context of weight training.

An Example of Progressive Overload

Let's pretend that right now you can lift 50lbs on some exercise for 3 sets of 8 reps.

Now, if you continue to lift that same 50lbs for those same 3 sets of 8 reps for the next 20 years… you will not gain ANY new muscle or strength at all. Why? Because there was no progressive overload.

Your body has already adapted to this tension (50lbs for 3 sets of 8 reps) and has already provided you with exactly as much muscle and strength as you need to be able to perform this task on a regular basis.

Because you aren't increasing the demands being placed on your body, you aren't giving your body ANY reason to improve any further.

And, because of that… it won't.

You can do everything else perfectly, but if you fail to provide some form of progressive overload over time, your body will never see any reason to change.

However, if you were to lift 50lbs for 3 sets of 9 reps (instead of 3 sets of 8 reps) on that same exercise, then a reason would finally exist.

Why? Simple. You increased the tension. You increased the demands. You increased the work your body had to do. Instead of doing the same 3 sets of 8 reps with 50lbs, you worked to do 1 additional rep on each of those sets.

And, while it may only seem like a tiny improvement, it's *EXACTLY* what you need to do in order to prove to your body that it needs to improve.

Similarly, if you were to now try to lift 55lbs for 3 sets of 8 reps (an increase of 5lbs)… the exact same type of reason would exist.

You're basically telling your body: "Hey, look at this. The work you have to do has increased, so you better build some more muscle and add some more strength to compensate."

This is progressive overload.

Whether you get just 1 more rep on just 1 set, or add 5lbs to all of your sets… it doesn't matter. Your goal is to somehow beat what you did the previous time.

And as long as you do this as often as you can and cause some form of gradual progression to take place over time, then you are giving your body a reason to continue to change and improve.

As long as that reason is present, results are guaranteed to follow.

At the same time, as soon as that reason stops (or if it never exists in the first place), then your body stops having a reason to continue to improve. No matter how perfectly you are doing everything else, no new positive changes will be made without progressive overload happening.

This Is Why Most People Fail

It's this lack of progressive overload that is easily the #1 reason most of the people who workout look pretty much the same way today as they did when they first started working out.

It's a sad sight to see, and you can see it in every gym in the world.

Men, women, young, old, fat, skinny… they are doing nothing to increase the demands being placed on their body. So, their body has no choice but to remain exactly the same.

This is fine if that's your goal. If you've already reached the point where your body is perfect and it looks and performs exactly how you want it to. No more progressive overload is needed then since you just want to maintain your current condition.

But, until the day you reach that point, your primary focus must be on progressive overload.

Does That Mean I Need To Progress Every Single Workout?

Nope. In fact, doing so would be pretty much impossible, at least for a significant period of time. If we could, everyone would be lifting a million pounds for a million reps on every exercise. That's just not realistic.

However, we should definitely have that mindset and strive to increase the demands being placed on our bodies as often as we possibly can (within the realm of safety and proper form, of course).

Whether that happens every workout, or every other workout, or just once per month or less depends on a ton of individual factors specific to you and your goal.

However, your #1 job is to just make sure it happens.

As long as you're forcing progressive overload to take place in some form over time, then your body will continue to build muscle, increase strength, appear more toned, or improve in whatever way you are trying to get it to improve.

The Moral Of This Story

So, in case you skipped right to this part because you're really lazy, here's the take home message…

If you want to get any degree of positive results from your workout routine, **progressive overload is**

the absolute key.

I don't care who you are, what your goal is, or what type of workout/exercise you're doing. If you want it to work, you must focus on making progressive overload happen.

If you don't, you are guaranteed to fail. If you do, you are guaranteed to succeed. Simple as that.

How Should I Make Progressive Overload Happen?

Now there's a good question. Let's take a look at the most common and effective ways…

Workout Progression: When & How To Progress At Weight Training

As I've previously explained, the #1 key to getting positive results from your workout routine is progressive overload.

Meaning, you must strive to increase the demands being placed on your body in some way over time.

When you fully understand how big of a requirement this is, the next logical question is pretty obvious…

Exactly how and when should this progression take place?

Well, in the specific context of weight training, there's a bunch of ways it can be done, and some are more ideal for certain goals and experience levels than others.

The most common methods of weight training progression that come to mind are:

- **You can increase the weight being lifted.**
  For example, if you are currently lifting 100lbs on some exercise, you can lift 105lbs the next time you perform that exercise.
- **You can increase the number of reps a weight is being lifted for.**
  For example, if you are lifting 100lbs on some exercises for 3 sets of 8 reps, you can do 3 sets of 9 reps with that same weight the next time you perform that exercise.
- **You can increase the number of sets you are lifting a weight for.**
  For example, if you are lifting 100lbs on some exercises for 3 sets of 8 reps, you can do 4 sets of 8 reps with that same weight the next time you perform that exercise.
- **You can increase the amount of work being done in a given time period.**
  For example, if you currently rest 3 minutes between sets of an exercise, you can try lifting the same weight for the same amount of sets and reps, but with only 2 minutes and 30 seconds of rest between sets.
- **You can increase the difficulty of the exercise being performed.**
  For example, if you are currently doing split squats/static lunges, you can move up to a similar but more challenging version of the same exercise such as walking lunges or Bulgarian split squats.

Once again, depending on your exact goal and experience level, some of these methods are more or less ideal for you than others.

However, for *most* of the people, *most* of the time, here's the method of weight training progress that I (and many others) most often use and recommend…

The Typical Weight Training Progression Protocol

In any intelligently designed weight training routine, you will have specific exercises that you are supposed to perform during each workout.

For each exercise, you will have a certain number of sets that you are supposed to do. For each set, you will have a certain number of reps that you are supposed to do.

And obviously, you will also have a certain amount of weight that you will be lifting during each exercise.

Now, the most basic, generic, and common form of weight training progression works like this:

1. Meet the prescribed set and rep goal for the exercise.
2. Increase the weight being lifted for that exercise by the smallest increment possible.
3. Meet the set/rep goal again with this new, slightly heavier weight.
4. Increase the weight being lifted again by the smallest increment possible.
5. Repeat this process over and over again as often as you are capable of making it happen.

Confused? Here's an example…

An Example Of How & When To Progress

Let's say that for one of the exercises in your workout routine (let's call it Exercise XYZ) you are currently lifting 50lbs. Let's also say that your program calls for you to do 3 sets of 8 reps for Exercise XYZ.

Now let's say today you did Exercise XYZ and it went like this:

- **Set #1**: 50lbs – 8 reps
- **Set #2**: 50lbs – 8 reps
- **Set #3**: 50lbs – 8 reps

As you can see, you lifted 50lbs for 3 sets of 8 reps in this example. Since your program calls for you to do 3 sets of 8 reps, this workout was a success.

Since you've reached the prescribed set/rep goal for this exercise, it's now time to increase the weight by the smallest increment possible. So, the next time you perform Exercise XYZ, you should do something like this:

- **Set #1**: 55lbs – 8 reps
- **Set #2**: 55lbs – 8 reps
- **Set #3**: 55lbs – 8 reps

See what happened? Progressive overload took place. You increased the weight you were lifting by 5lbs (which is usually the smallest possible increment) and performed that same prescribed 3 sets of 8 reps with this new slightly heavier weight.

That means this workout was once again a complete success. The next time you perform Exercise XYZ, you'd go up to 60lbs and again attempt 3 sets of 8 reps. You would then continue increasing like this as often as possible over and over again.

The only thing is, *most* people will **NOT** be able to increase this much and/or this consistently from workout to workout (beginners might, but few others will).

In fact, instead of that second successful workout shown above (the 55lbs for 3 sets of 8 reps), many people would have ended up only able to do something like this:

- **Set #1**: 55lbs – 8 reps
- **Set #2**: 55lbs – 7 reps
- **Set #3**: 55lbs – 6 reps

This is completely normal and should still be considered a successful workout (it is still definitely progressive overload). Now, in this case, your goal the next time you perform Exercise XYZ is something like this:

- **Set #1**: 55lbs – 8 reps

- **Set #2**: 55lbs – 8 reps
- **Set #3**: 55lbs – 7 reps

And then the time after that…

- **Set #1**: 55lbs – 8 reps
- **Set #2**: 55lbs – 8 reps
- **Set #3**: 55lbs – 8 reps

And the time after that…

- **Set #1**: 60lbs – 8 reps
- **Set #2**: 60lbs – 7 reps
- **Set #3**: 60lbs – 6 reps

And you would repeat this similar pattern of increasing reps/weight over and over again so that your body continues having a reason to adapt and improve over and over again.

Oh, and in case it isn't obvious enough, if your weight training routine called for 3 sets of 10, 4 sets of 6, 5 sets of 5, 2 sets of 12, or any other combination of sets and reps, you'd still progress virtually the same way as shown in the above example, just with a different number of reps and sets.

Will progression always be this consistent?

Nope, not always. There will definitely be times when you end up repeating the same exact number of sets/reps/weight that you did the previous workout.

Sometimes this might even continue for quite a while with certain exercises (this is especially true the more advanced you get).

There will also be times where, in the above example for instance, you might only get reps of 7, 7, 7, or 7, 6, 6, or 7, 6, 5 in the three sets after going up in weight. Don't worry, it's all perfectly normal.

Just work your ass off to progress in some way as often as you can and beat what you were able to do the previous time. Add 1 rep to every set, add 1 rep to just one set, add 2 reps to one set and 1 rep to another… whatever.

Just work hard to gradually reach your workout routine's prescribed set/rep goal for each exercise. And then, once you do reach it, increase the weight you are lifting for that exercise by the smallest possible increment and repeat this protocol all over again.

This is all part of the process of progressive overload, and it's the only true requirement for getting positive results from your workout routine.

What's Next?

Well, at this point we've covered every major aspect of creating and implementing an effective workout routine. The funny thing is, your workout routine is only half of what's needed to reach your goal. The other half is your diet. Here's what I mean…

How To Create The Perfect Diet Plan For Your Workout Goal

What is an article about creating the perfect diet plan doing on a site called “A Workout Routine” in the middle of a guide to creating the most effective weight training program?

I mean, this is obviously a site geared specifically towards workout related topics, so why the hell am I writing about diet stuff?

Well, I’ll tell you why.

If your diet plan isn’t what it needs to be, your workout routine will fail completely no matter how perfect it is.

That is not an exaggeration. You could be using the single greatest workout program ever created and it will get you absolutely nowhere if you aren’t eating in a way that supports your goals.

What I’m trying to say is, your diet plan is equally as important as your workout routine (if not more so) in terms of getting the results you want to get.

So, what you need to do now is create the diet plan that will work best for you.

As you can imagine, fully explaining how to do that would require its own insanely comprehensive guide.

Until I get around to doing that, here’s the ultimate mini-guide to how to create your perfect diet plan.

Step 1: Calorie Intake

The most common recommendations for your daily calorie intake are:

- If your primary goal is losing fat, you need to create a daily caloric deficit of around 20% below your maintenance level.
- If your primary goal is building muscle (or increasing strength), you need to create a daily caloric surplus of about 250 calories above your maintenance level (about half that for women).

Now let me explain what the hell that actually means.

Calorie Maintenance Level

Every person has a certain number of calories that they need to eat each day in order to maintain their current weight. This is what’s known as your **calorie maintenance level**.

There are a bunch of complicated ways to estimate what your maintenance level is, but the quickest and simplest way is to just multiply your current body weight (in pounds) by 14 and 18.

Somewhere in between those 2 amounts will usually be your daily calorie maintenance level.

If you’re more active and/or think you have a fast metabolism, then you should probably use the higher end of that range. If you’re less active and/or think you have a slow metabolism, then you should probably use the lower end of that range.

If you’re unsure, just pick a number in the middle. We’ll make sure it’s perfectly accurate later on. Don’t worry.

Next, pick your goal…

If Your Primary Goal Is Losing Fat…

In order to lose fat, you must consume **LESS** calories per day than your maintenance level amount. Doing so creates a **caloric deficit**, and this forces your body to start burning your stored body fat for energy.

Meaning, a caloric deficit is a fat loss *requirement*.

As I mentioned before, the most often recommended caloric deficit is about 20% below your maintenance level. So, let's do some basic first grade level math.

For example, if your estimated calorie maintenance level is 2500 calories per day, you'd figure out that 20% of 2500 is 500 (2500 x .20 = 500). Then you'd just subtract that 500 from 2500 and get 2000.

In this example, this person would need to eat 2000 calories per day to lose fat.

If Your Primary Goal Is Building Muscle…

In order to build muscle, you must consume **MORE** calories per day than your maintenance level. Doing so creates a **caloric surplus**, and this provides your body with the calories it needs to actually create new muscle tissue.

Meaning, a caloric surplus is a muscle building *requirement*.

As I mentioned before, the ideal caloric surplus for most guys is about 250 calories above your maintenance level, and around half that for girls. So, let's do some basic first grade level math.

For example, a man with an estimated calorie maintenance level of 2500 calories per day would add 250 or so calories to it and get about 2750.

In this example, this person would need to eat about 2750 calories per day to build muscle at an ideal rate.

Ensuring That Your Calorie Intake Is Correct

Since our calorie intake is based on an estimate, it's possible it can be a little off. Luckily, there's a very simple way to double check it.

Weigh yourself once per week first thing in the morning before you eat or drink anything (or weigh in daily and take the weekly average). Then, just monitor what your weight does from week to week.

- **If your goal is losing fat**, you should end up **losing between 0.5-2lbs per week** (closer to 2lbs if you have a lot of fat to lose, closer to 0.5lbs if you only have a little fat to lose, or somewhere in the middle if you have an average amount to lose). If you are losing weight slower than that or not at all, then reduce your calorie intake by an additional 250 calories. If you are losing weight faster than that, then increase your calorie intake by about 250 calories.
- **If your goal is building muscle (or increasing strength**), you should end up **gaining about 0.5lb per week (or about 2lbs per month)**. And again for women, it should be about half that. If you are consistently gaining weight faster than that, reduce your calorie intake by about 250 calories. If you are gaining weight slower than that or not at all, then increase your calorie intake by about 250 calories.

Basically, just consistently weigh yourself each week and make sure your weight is moving in the right

direction at the optimal rate that I just described.

If is it, perfect! Keep eating that amount of calories each day.

If it isn't, then just adjust your calorie intake in 250 calorie increments until it is. Simple as that.

Step 2: Protein Intake

The most common recommendation for the daily protein intake of healthy adults who are weight training regularly is:

Between 0.8 – 1.5 grams of protein per pound of body weight. An even 1 gram of protein per pound is probably the most common recommendation of all.

So, for example, if you weigh 175lbs, you'd shoot for about 175 grams of protein per day (or a little more if you prefer it).

High protein foods include chicken, fish, turkey, lean meats, eggs/egg whites, milk, protein supplements and to a lesser extent nuts and beans as well.

Step 3: Fat Intake

The most common recommendation for your daily fat intake is:

Fat should account for between 20-30% of your total calorie intake, with an even 25% probably being most common.

For that to make sense, you need to know that 1 gram of fat contains 9 calories.

So, for example, if your ideal calorie intake is 2000 calories per day, you'd first figure out that 25% of 2000 is 500. Then, you'd divide 500 by 9 and figure out that you'd need to eat about 55 grams of fat per day in this example.

Foods high in the "healthy fats" that should account for the majority of your fat intake include fish, fish oil supplements, nuts (peanuts, almonds, walnuts, etc.), seeds, and olive oil.

Step 4: Carb Intake

The most common recommendation for your daily carb intake is:

However many calories are left after a sufficient protein and fat intake have been factored in… those calories should come from carbs.

Don't worry, it's not as confusing as it sounds.

Basically, figure out how many calories your protein and fat intake will account for, and then subtract them from your ideal total calorie intake. However many calories you're left with to reach that ideal total… those calories will all come from carbs.

Confused? It's alright, I'll show you an example in a second.

The majority of your carb intake should come from foods like fruits and vegetables, rice (brown, white, whatever), sweet potatoes, white potatoes (they are not evil), and various beans and whole wheat/whole grain products (unless of course you have issues digesting grains).

An Example Diet Plan

Now let me show you a step by step example of how to put it all together.

Let's pretend we have a guy who weighs **175lbs** and has the primary goal of **building muscle**. Let's also pretend his calorie maintenance level is **2250 calories** (just a completely made up example number).

Here's how he'd create his diet plan…

1. Since he wants to build muscle, he'd need to create a **caloric surplus**. With a maintenance level of 2250 calories, he'd now eat about **2500 calories per day**.
2. Next, he decided to go with an even 1 gram of protein per pound of body weight. Since he weighs 175lbs, that means he'll need to eat about **175 grams of protein per day**. Since 1 gram of protein contains 4 calories, that means his protein intake will account for 700 calories each day (175 x 4 = 700).
3. From there he learned that about 25% of his total calorie intake should come from fat. Since this example person will be eating 2500 calories per day, he first figured out that 25% of 2500 is 625 calories (2500 x 0.25 = 625). Then, since 1 gram of fat contains 9 calories, he figured out that he'd need to eat about 69 grams of fat per day (625 ÷ 9 = 69).
4. At this point he sees that he has 700 calories worth of protein and 625 calories worth of fat, which means a total of 1325 of his daily calorie intake is accounted for (700 + 625 = 1325). But, since he needs to be eating 2500 calories per day, he'd see he has 1175 calories that are not yet accounted for (2500 – 1325 = 1175). So…
5. That means those leftover 1175 calories will come from carbs. Since 1 gram of carbs contains 4 calories, this person would need to eat about 294 grams of carbs per day (1175 ÷ 4 = 294).

And that's it. The most important parts of this example diet plan are done.

This example person figured out they will eat:

- 2500 calories per day
- 175 grams of protein per day
- 69 grams of fat per day
- 294 grams of carbs per day

Once again, these are all just completely made up amounts to show an example of how to set up your diet plan. That's how you'd do it.

And yes, even though the person in the example above had the primary goal of building muscle, the diet would have been set up the exact same way if they had the primary goal of losing fat instead. The only difference is that they would have created a caloric deficit instead of a surplus in step 1.

The process of putting it all together would remain exactly the same.

But What About Everything Else?

Now, you may be wondering about certain other aspects of your diet besides your calorie, protein, fat and carb intake.

The thing is… you shouldn't.

In all honesty, **nothing else is that important**. Everything described above is what will account for 99% of your diet's effectiveness. Everything else is just a minor detail.

All that truly matters diet-wise is ensuring that you eat the right amount of calories each day along with an optimal amount of protein, fat and carbs that ideally come from mostly higher quality sources.

After that, it's all a matter of doing whatever will best allow you to make that happen. What I mean is…

- Eat at whatever times of the day you want.
- Eat as many meals per day as you want.
- Eat whatever combinations of foods and nutrients you want.
- Organize you diet in whatever way is most convenient, enjoyable and sustainable for you.

That's all that matters. Everything else is either extremely insignificant or just a stupid myth that is scientifically proven to not matter at all (like how you must eat 6 smaller meals per day… it's bullshit).

Whatever is best for you, your life, your schedule and your preferences… that's what you should do.

But Seriously, What About Everything Else?

Well, in addition to what I just explained, there's really only a couple of additional tips worth caring about:

- Drink plenty of water each day.
- Surround your workouts with meals (aka your PRE and POST workout meals) that contain a nice amount of protein and carbs.
- Get the majority of your calories from higher quality, nutrient-dense sources. Some junky stuff is fine, but keep it to just a small part of your overall diet.
- Feel free to take a fish oil supplement and a basic multivitamin, use protein powder for convenience purposes, and possibly consider creatine as well.

And… that's it.

That's the ultimate mini-guide to creating the diet plan that will best support your workout routine and overall goal.

What's Next?

Well, at this point we've already covered every major aspect of how to create the workout routine and diet plan that will work best for you. All that's left to do now is put it all together properly and put it into action correctly. To ensure that you do that, let's start here…

Sample Workout Routines – Example Weight Training Workouts

If you've been following the guide to creating The Ultimate Weight Training Workout Routine from the very beginning, then congrats… you just learned a ton!

At this point you've figured out what your exact goal and training experience level is, found out how much frequency, intensity and volume is best for you, chose a workout schedule that is optimal for what you need, selected the exercises that are most ideal for you, learned the importance of progressive overload, and created a diet plan that will perfectly support it all.

So, good luck putting your workout routine together and have a nice life.

Wait… what? What's that you say?

You want **sample workout routines** and **example weight training workouts**?

Oh, ok. You got it!

However, before we get the those sample workouts, there's a few things that need to be said first about the pros and cons of sample workout routines.

Why Sample Workout Routines Are Great

Even though I've done my best to explain exactly how to create the weight training program that will work best for you, it's always possible that you can still screw something up.

As someone who has spent a ton of time on various fitness/training related forums over the last 10+ years, I've seen it happen constantly.

No matter how much high quality information a person is exposed to, it's up to them to actually execute it properly. And needless to say, that execution doesn't always turn out so well.

This seems to be extra true when it comes to designing weight training workouts.

However, that's where pre-made sample workout routines come in.

Assuming the person designing the sample workouts actually knows what they're doing, you end up getting what should be an already proven and extremely effective weight training program 100% of the time.

And that's what makes intelligently designed sample workout routines so great. They eliminate the risks that come with leaving program design in the hands of someone who may not be truly ready to design themselves a program.

The potential for you to accidentally screw something up (big or small) along the way is gone and you're basically guaranteed that your weight training program is set up exactly as it should be.

That's why some of the most widely used and highly successful workout routines in existence are pre-designed sample programs. They are just what works best for *most* people, and this is the #1 reason why I released an entire guide of proven workouts (The Best Workout Routines).

On the other hand…

Why Sample Workout Routines Suck

As I've said over and over again on this site, the key to creating the most effective weight training workout routine possible is doing all of the things that are optimal for you, your goal, your body, your schedule, and your preferences.

And that fact brings us to the only real downside of sample workout routines: they can't possibly take ALL of that into account and be absolutely 100% perfect for EVERY SINGLE PERSON in EVERY SINGLE SITUATION.

Don't get me wrong, it's very possible to write up an example weight training routine that would work amazingly well for the majority of the population with a certain goal… but *everyone*? That's just not possible.

That's a big part of the reason why a lot of very smart people avoid creating example workout routines. They prefer to only work with each person individually and create a program that is tailored to them based on their exact situation and goals.

While that need for individualization tends to be more warranted as you get more advanced and/or your goals become more advanced, it's sometimes needed most in the earliest stages based solely on what you're capable of.

This Is Especially True With Beginners

Even though beginners are the people who are by far the most in need of having someone create a workout routine for them, they are sometimes the group that needs the most individualization.

With intermediate or advanced trainees, everyone is within some sane range and level of fitness and will be capable of doing similar workouts.

But with beginners, you get ALL kinds of people in ALL kinds of different situations and conditions who are NOT all capable of the same exercises, workouts and routines.

For example, should an overweight 50 year old woman who sometimes has trouble getting up a flight of stairs do the exact same sample beginner workout as a fit and athletic 20 year old guy or girl?

They could both be complete weight training beginners and benefit equally from the same routine, but the differences in what they can (and maybe should) be doing can vary big time.

So, while the guidelines, principles and fundamentals of the workouts will always be perfect, sometimes it's the minor details (which usually don't matter) that end up causing problems based on the specific person using the program.

This of course is something I have no control over when designing sample workout routines.

The Solution

And that brings me to my point (I knew I was going to make a point sometime).

The best I (or anyone else) can ever do is lay out sample weight training programs that tend to be most ideal and effective in *MOST* cases and for *MOST* people.

It's then up to you to determine what you are and are not capable of and then adjust as needed using the information I've explained throughout the rest of this site.

Got it? Good.

Now, with that big point out of the way, let's get to what you're probably most interested in seeing…

The Sample Workout Routines That I Recommend

I guess all that's left to do now is show you what I consider to be the best workout routines for most people in most situations.

So, here are the weight training routines that I most often recommend…

- **For Beginners**: Beginner Workouts & Routines
- **For Intermediates or Advanced:** Intermediate and Advanced Workouts & Routines

Beginner Workouts – The Best Workout Routines For Beginners

If you're reading this, then you are probably fairly new to weight training and looking for the best workouts and routines for beginners like yourself.

Good, that's exactly what you should be doing, and I'm going to provide you with a few proven sample beginner workouts at the end of this post.

However, before we get into the actual specifics of those routines, there are a few important things that you need to know about beginner workouts and beginners in general in order for your results to be as positive as possible.

How To Tell If You're A Beginner

First, before you start looking for the best beginner workouts and routines, you need to make sure that you actually are a beginner.

If you are, then a weight training plan that is geared towards beginners is *definitely* what will work best for you and it's *definitely* what you should be using (as opposed to something more advanced, which would be terrible for you at this early training stage).

But if it turns out that you're not a beginner, then you'd be way better off using a program that is geared toward intermediate or advanced trainees.

So, I guess the first question we need to answer is: **What the hell is a beginner?**

As I've previously mentioned (Beginners vs Intermediates vs Advanced), I and most others consider a beginner to be anyone who has been weight training for **LESS than 6 months consistently and intelligently**.

And obviously, anyone about to start a weight training routine for the very first time is a beginner as well.

Once again, that's 6 months of *consistent* and *intelligent* training. I don't care if you've been training inconsistently for the last decade (or just in an incorrect way where your results were nonexistent).

If you haven't been following some sort of intelligently designed weight training routine for the last 6 months, then you are most likely a beginner, at least for a short amount of time.

This also includes people who DID train consistently/intelligently at some point in their life, but stopped for a significant period of time. In most cases, you are considered a beginner all over again.

Now that we know what qualifies a person as a beginner, it's time to go over the proven guidelines that should be met by all workouts and routines designed for beginners.

The General Guidelines Of A Beginner Workout Routine

One thing you'll notice about most beginner workout routines is that they will almost always have a lot in common.

Why? Because there is a very specific list of weight training guidelines that have been proven to work best for beginners. And, any intelligent beginner program aims to meet them all.

These guidelines are:

- Higher frequency (usually 3 times per week).
- Full body split.
- Low volume.
- Primarily comprised of basic compound exercises and very little (or nothing) else.
- Very little exercise variety.
- No advanced methods or techniques.
- A huge focus on consistent progression.

And the reason for these very specific guidelines is because all beginner workouts are typically aimed at reaching the same equally specific goals. Here's what I mean…

The General Goals Of A Beginner Workout Routine

Whether you realize it or not, all beginners essentially have the exact same goals.

Sure, someone might be more interested in losing a significant amount of fat, and someone else might be more interested in gaining a significant amount of muscle. Someone else might just want to get stronger, and someone else might just want to be more fit and healthy.

Those goals are all fine and good, and any intelligently designed beginner program **WILL** make each of them happen. But, they are NOT the true goals of a beginner.

See, the true goals of a beginner generally involve becoming better at weight training so you can then become better at reaching your other weight training related goals (muscle, tone, strength, fat loss, etc.).

What I mean is, all intelligently designed beginner workout routines are created with these specific goals in mind:

- Fastest improvement of motor learning, coordination, and proper form.
- Fastest improvement of work capacity, volume tolerance and recovery.
- Fastest improvement in building up a base level of strength, muscle and endurance.

At the beginner stage, these are the goals that are truly important. In fact, it's reaching these goals as a beginner that makes those other goals (increased muscle, strength, tone, fat loss, improved health/fitness level) begin to happen **rapidly** pretty much as a side effect.

Remember that list of guidelines I mentioned before? Well, they are guidelines because they allow these goals to be reached at their fastest and most consistent rate.

The Best Beginner Workout Routines

Now that you know how to tell if you are indeed a beginner, what guidelines a beginner workout routine should typically meet and what the purpose of those guidelines are, it's time to recommend some routines that take all of the above into account.

So, in no specific order, here are the workout routines that I most often recommend to beginners:

My Beginner Workout Routine

Here are 2 slightly different versions of my own ideal weight training program for beginners with ANY goal.

- The Beginner Weight Training Workout Routine

The Starting Strength Program

Quite possibly the most proven and often recommended beginner routine of them all (especially for people looking to get as strong as possible as fast as possible), you really can't go wrong with Mark Rippetoe's Starting Strength program or any of its variations.

While I highly recommend picking up a copy of the book (Starting Strength (3rd edition)), you can find everything you need to know about the Starting Strength program online for free. Start here:

- Starting Strength Wiki
- Starting Strength FAQ

Practical Programming Novice Program

Here's another of Mark Rippetoe's extremely proven beginner workout routines. This version is slightly different than the original Starting Strength program mentioned above, and I personally think the exercise selection is a bit more ideal for more beginners than Starting Strength is.

It's once again part of a book that I highly recommend getting (Practical Programming for Strength Training), but you can once again find virtually everything you need to know about the program online for free. Start here:

- Practical Programming Novice Program

What's Next?

Well, first you learned how to create the most effective workout routine possible, and then you learned how to create the ideal diet plan to support it.

You've now just been given some recommendations for what I (and most others) consider to be the most highly proven/effective routines for beginners which you can either learn from or, better yet, just use as is.

At this point, there's nothing left to do but bring this guide to its conclusion and pass long some final important information…

Intermediate and Advanced Workouts & Routines

If you're reading this, then you should be past the beginner stage of weight training and in search of the best intermediate or advanced workouts and routines.

If so, then you're in luck. I'm going to provide you with a handful of the most proven and effective intermediate and advanced workout routines for various goals and situations.

However, before we get into the actual specifics of those routines, there are a few important things that you need to know about intermediate/advanced workouts and intermediate/advanced trainees in general to ensure your results are as positive as can be.

How To Tell If You're An intermediate or Advanced Trainee

Before you start looking for intermediate and advanced workouts, the first thing you need to do is make sure that you actually are an intermediate or advanced trainee.

If you are, then these are the types of workout routines that will produce the best possible results for you.

However, if you're not truly at the intermediate or advanced level, then you'd be WAY better off using a program that is geared towards beginners.

In the weight training world, everyone likes to think they are more advanced than they actually are, so they always go looking for the more advanced workouts. Unfortunately, all you end up doing is screwing yourself in the end by using a weight training program that just doesn't work optimally for your specific experience level.

So, the question is: **What the hell is an intermediate or advanced trainee?**

Well, as I've previously mentioned (Beginners vs Intermediates vs Advanced), I consider **intermediates** to be the majority of people who have been weight training both *consistently* and *intelligently* for at least the last 6-12 months.

By this point you would have, at the very least, already been on some type of proper beginner program that allowed you to build up a base level of strength and muscle. You should have also improved your work capacity to some degree and learned proper form on every exercise you've done thus far.

As for **advanced** trainees, I consider them to be anyone who has already gotten the majority of the results they've wanted to get and are fairly close to reaching their natural genetic potential.

So basically, if you are reading this and you are legitimately past the beginner's stage, I'd say there is a 95% chance you are an intermediate, and a 5% chance you are advanced.

Whichever it is (trust me, it's intermediate), you're ready for the next level of weight training workouts and routines. Here's what that "next level" typically entails…

The General Guidelines of an Intermediate/Advanced Workout Routine

Unlike beginners who all typically tend to benefit most from the same type of basic beginner workout

regardless of their specific goals, workouts for intermediate and advanced trainees can vary **GREATLY** depending on exactly what the person is looking to get out of weight training.

For example, a program geared strictly towards strength or performance can look completely different than a program geared strictly towards building muscle and looking good.

For this reason, there really are no true guidelines that should ALWAYS stand for all intermediate/advanced workout routines because there are so many individual variables that come into play.

However, there are a few guidelines that *usually* stand in *most* cases *most* of the time, because they are what *usually* works best at the intermediate and advanced level:

- Moderate frequency. Each muscle group/movement pattern should typically be trained to some degree between once every 3rd and 5th day.
- Moderate volume. Most larger muscle groups should usually get between 60-120 reps per week total, and most smaller muscle groups should usually get about half that.
- A *potential* mix of free weight, body weight and machine exercises as well as a *potential* mix of compound and isolation exercises.
- A *potential* use of more advanced methods and techniques.
- A *potential* higher variety of rep ranges.
- A focus on progression.

The Best Intermediate and Advanced Workouts & Routines

Now that we've gone over the basics of what typically goes into creating an intermediate or advanced workout routine and you've confirmed that you truly are (or are not) an intermediate or advanced trainee, it's time to recommend some workouts for different weight training goals and situations.

So, in no specific order, here are the routines that I most often recommend to intermediate/advanced trainees based on their goal…

Workout Routines For Building Muscle

If your primary goal is building muscle, getting "toned," or improving the way your body looks, these are the programs I recommend:

The Muscle Building Workout Routine

This is the weight training program that I have personally used and recommended most often to intermediate or advanced trainees looking to build muscle or really just improve the way their body looks in any capacity.

The full details are here:

- The Muscle Building Workout Routine

The Best Workout Routines

While The Muscle Building Workout Routine might be one of my favorite and most recommended programs, there are actually quite a few highly effective workouts that I've personally used and designed for others with GREAT success over the last 12+ years for the purpose of building muscle and

looking awesome.

And since so many people have asked for them, I've now put together a completely NEW premium guide containing every single one of those highly proven workouts.

The full details are here:

- The Best Workout Routines

Workout Routines For Improving Strength & Performance

If your primary goal is increasing strength or improving performance, these are the programs I recommend:

Bill Starr's 5×5 (aka Madcow 5×5)

As one of the most proven and highly recommended strength oriented workout routines out there, Bill Starr's 5×5 (also referred to as Madcow 5×5) is pretty much as effective as it gets for getting as strong as possible as fast as possible (as well as gaining all of the muscle that tends to come with those types of strength increases).

The original website that contained the full details of this program disappeared a while ago, but luckily other people saved full versions of it and hosted it themselves. So, you can find everything you need to know about Bill Starr's/Madcow's 5×5 program (and its variations) through a combination of the following:

- http://madcow.hostzi.com/index.htm
- http://www.wackyhq.com/madcow5x5/geocities/5x5_Program/Linear_5x5.htm
- http://startingstrength.wikia.com/wiki/Bill_Starr_5x5

Westside For Skinny Bastards (aka WSFSB)

Joe Defranco's variation of the classic Westside Barbell template is aimed specifically at athletes, especially skinny ones looking to get both stronger and bigger.

You can check out all 3 versions of his program here:

- Westside For Skinny Bastards Version 1
- Westside For Skinny Bastards Version 2
- Westside For Skinny Bastards Version 3

The Texas Method

Mark Rippetoe is probably most famous for his often recommended and highly proven beginner workouts. However, his Texas Method program is the next perfect step up for people looking to move on to a strength-oriented intermediate program.

While I highly recommend getting a copy of his book (Practical Programming for Strength Training), you can find the full details of this program here:

- The Texas Method via The Starting Strength Wiki
- The Texas Method Write Up via BodyBuilding.com Forums

What's Next?

Well, first you learned how to create the most effective workout routine possible, and then you learned how to create the ideal diet plan to support it.

You've now just been given some recommendations for what I consider to be the most highly proven/effective routines for intermediate or advanced trainees which you can either learn from or, better yet, just use as is.

At this point, there's nothing left to do but bring this guide to its conclusion and pass long some final important information…

The Muscle Building Workout Routine

Are you an intermediate or advanced trainee looking to build muscle mass fast? If so, welcome to the program I simply call **The Muscle Building Workout Routine**.

The Muscle Building Workout Routine is the completely **FREE** weight training program that I recommend most often to people looking to build any amount of muscle mass as fast as possible.

This workout routine is designed to work for both men and women, young and old, people looking to build a significant amount of muscle and get "big" or build a small amount of muscle and just get "toned."

Basically, if you're past the beginner's stage and your primary goal is building muscle or improving the way your body looks in virtually any capacity, this program is for you.

Now let's get down to the details…

The Schedule

The Muscle Building Workout Routine uses an upper/lower split, which is the split most often used and recommended by literally every single expert whose opinions I value (as opposed to the drugged up genetic freaks whose opinions are meaningless).

The big reason the upper/lower split gets so much love is because it allows for each muscle group/body part to be trained to some degree **between once every 3rd and 5th day** depending on the specific split variation you choose (more on those in a second).

And, as I've previously explained, this workout frequency of *about*-twice-per-week is what is scientifically proven to work best for building muscle for anyone past the beginner's stage.

So, let's take a look at the 2 most common versions of the upper/lower split…

Upper/Lower Split: 4 Day Version

1. **Monday:** Upper Body A Workout
2. **Tuesday:** Lower Body A Workout
3. **Wednesday:** off
4. **Thursday:** Upper Body B Workout
5. **Friday:** Lower Body B Workout
6. **Saturday:** off
7. **Sunday:** off

In this 4 day version, each muscle group gets trained once every 3rd or 4th day, which is right within the ideal frequency range for building muscle mass at the optimal rate.

While this specific template is probably the most common (people like having weekends off), the exact days you choose really doesn't matter as long as the same 2 on/1 off/2 on/2 off format is kept intact.

Upper/Lower Split: 3 Day Version

Week 1

1. **Monday:** Upper Body A Workout

2. **Tuesday:** off
3. **Wednesday:** Lower Body A Workout
4. **Thursday:** off
5. **Friday:** Upper Body B Workout
6. **Saturday:** off
7. **Sunday:** off

Week 2

1. **Monday:** Lower Body B Workout
2. **Tuesday:** off
3. **Wednesday:** Upper Body A Workout
4. **Thursday:** off
5. **Friday:** Lower Body A Workout
6. **Saturday:** off
7. **Sunday:** off

In this 3 day version, each muscle group gets trained once every 4th or 5th day. While it is just *slightly* less frequent than the 4 day version, it's still perfectly within the ideal frequency range for building muscle mass at the optimal rate.

And once again, while this template is usually the most common, the exact days you choose doesn't matter at all as long as the same 1 on/1 off/1 on/1 off/1 on/2 off format is kept in tact.

Now Select Your Version Of The Upper/Lower Split

So, those are the two scheduling options for The Muscle Building Workout Routine. All you need to do is pick one.

They will both work perfectly, so you honestly can't go wrong with either version. Just pick the one the seems best for you, your preferences and your schedule.

If you need help deciding, check out my more detailed breakdown of both versions here: upper/lower split.

(**NEW:** Two additional versions of the upper/lower split are now included in the expanded version of this routine, which is only available in The Best Workout Routines. One of those new splits is my favorite of all.)

The Workouts

Just like most weight training programs built around the upper/lower split, The Muscle Building Workout Routine divides everything up into 2 different types of workouts.

One will train your entire upper body to some degree (chest, back, shoulders, biceps, and triceps), and one will train your entire lower body to some degree (quads, hamstrings, calves, and abs as well).

You will then do 2 (or *about* 2) of each workout per week depending on exactly which variation of the split you decide to use (again, either will be perfect).

So, let's take a look at the workouts…

The Muscle Building Workout Routine: Upper Body A

1. **Bench Press**
   3 sets of 6-8 reps.
   2-3 minutes rest between sets.
2. **Rows**
   3 sets of 6-8 reps.
   2-3 minutes rest between sets.
3. **Incline Dumbbell Press**
   3 sets of 8-10 reps.
   1-2 minutes rest between sets.
4. **Lat Pull-Downs**
   3 sets of 8-10 reps.
   1-2 minutes rest between sets.
5. **Lateral Raises**
   2 sets of 10-12 reps.
   1 minute rest between sets.
6. **Triceps Press-Downs**
   2 sets of 10-12 reps.
   1 minute rest between sets.
7. **Dumbbell Curls**
   2 sets of 10-12 reps.
   1 minute rest between sets.

The Muscle Building Workout Routine: Lower Body A

1. **Romanian Deadlifts**
   3 sets of 6-8 reps.
   2-3 minutes rest between sets.
2. **Leg Press**
   3 sets of 10-12 reps.
   1-2 minutes rest between sets.
3. **Seated Leg Curls**
   3 sets of 8-10 reps.
   1-2 minutes rest between sets.
4. **Standing Calf Raises**
   4 sets of 6-8 reps.
   1-2 minutes rest between sets.
5. **Abs**
   x sets of 8-15 reps.
   1 minute rest between sets.

The Muscle Building Workout Routine: Upper Body B

1. **Pull-Ups**
   3 sets of 6-8 reps.
   2-3 minutes rest between sets.
2. **Barbell Shoulder Press**
   3 sets of 6-8 reps.

2-3 minutes rest between sets.
3. **Seated Cable Row**
   3 sets of 8-10 reps.
   1-2 minutes rest between sets.
4. **Dumbbell Bench Press**
   3 sets of 8-10 reps.
   1-2 minutes rest between sets.
5. **Dumbbell Flyes**
   2 sets of 10-12 reps.
   1 minute rest between sets.
6. **Barbell Curls**
   2 sets of 10-12 reps.
   1 minute rest between sets.
7. **Skull Crushers**
   2 sets of 10-12 reps.
   1 minute rest between sets.

The Muscle Building Workout Routine: <u>Lower Body B</u>

1. **Squats**
   3 sets of 6-8 reps.
   2-3 minutes rest between sets.
2. **Split Squats**
   3 sets of 8-10 reps.
   1-2 minutes rest between sets.
3. **Laying Leg Curls**
   3 sets of 10-12 reps.
   1-2 minutes rest between sets.
4. **Seated Calf Raises**
   4 sets of 10-12 reps.
   1-2 minutes rest between sets.
5. **Abs**
   x sets of 8-15 reps.
   1 minute rest between sets.

As you can see from the workouts, each one is focused primarily on the most effective compound exercises with just the right amount of secondary focus on isolation exercises as well.

There is also damn near perfect balance among the opposing movement patterns, and the exercises in each workout are ordered in terms of most demanding to least demanding (the exact way it should be).

As you can also see, the intensity/rep ranges and rest intervals between sets for each exercise is exactly what it should be for building muscle, and the volume for each muscle group both per workout and per week total is all perfectly within the optimal volume range for intermediate/advanced trainees looking to build muscle mass.

So, what I'm trying to say is, all of the factors and components that work best for building muscle have been brought together perfectly in one ideal workout routine.

Workout Order & Scheduling

As shown, The Muscle Building Workout Routine contains 4 different workouts. There's 2 upper body workouts (A and B) and 2 lower body workouts (A and B).

In case it isn't obvious enough, they are meant to be done in this order whether you use the 3 or 4 day upper/lower split:

1. Upper Body A
2. Lower Body A
3. Upper Body B
4. Lower Body B

(If this is still confusing, just go back to the upper/lower split options I showed you earlier. I've laid out how you'd schedule the 4 workouts over the course of the week using either version of the split.)

Details, Guidelines and Clarifications

Now to answer any questions you may have, clear up any confusion that may be present, and explain how to make it all work as effectively as possible.

General guidelines of The Muscle Building Workout Routine:

- For each exercise, you should use the same weight each set. Meaning, if it says to do 3 sets of an exercise, you'd use the same weight on all 3 sets. For example…
  Right Way: 100lbs, 100lbs, 100lbs.
  Wrong Way: 95lbs, 100lbs, 105lbs.
  When you are able to lift a given weight for the amount of sets and reps that are prescribed for that exercise, you'd then increase the weight by the smallest possible increment the next time you do that exercise. You'd then repeat this process of progression as often as you can. (I'll explain this in much more detail in a minute.)
- The number of sets listed does NOT include warm up sets. Those are the actual work sets only. Warm up as needed.
- The order the exercises are listed in is the order they are supposed to be done in. Don't change it.
- You are meant to be doing all of the exercises listed for each workout. However, if you come across something your gym doesn't have or something you honestly cannot do due to some preexisting injury (or some other REALLY good reason), do the next closest match instead. (I'll give some suggestions below.)
- The split, frequency, exercise selection, prescribed amount of sets, reps and rest intervals for each exercise, the total amount of volume… it's all for a reason and it is all meant to remain and be done EXACTLY as I have written it. **DO NOT SCREW WITH IT LIKE AN IDIOT.**

Details and clarifications for Upper Body A:

- The Upper Body A workout starts with the **bench press**. This is meant be a flat barbell bench press. I recommend having a spotter if possible. Besides being important for obvious safety reasons, not having one may make you afraid of trying for an additional rep, and this could hinder your progress.
- Up next is a **row**, which basically means some type of horizontal pull (meaning back row exercise). Pretty much any type of back row would be fine here, so pick your favorite. If I had

to make a suggestion, I might go with a chest supported row of some sort because chest supported rowing doesn't require any real lower back stabilization like a bent over barbell row would. And, since you will be deadlifting the next day, this may be a beneficial choice for *some* people. Otherwise, feel free pick any type of horizontal back row you want (chest supported row, any Hammer Strength machine row if your gym has them, a bent over barbell or dumbbell row, t-bar rows, whatever). As long as it's a back row of some sort, it's fine. If you think you'd benefit from not using any lower back the day before doing deadlifts, then stick with something chest supported to give your lower back a break. If not, pick anything.

- For **incline pressing**, I recommend incline dumbbell presses. Technically any type of incline press will do here. Barbell, dumbbell, machine (Hammer Strength makes an incline chest press that I love). But, my first choice recommendation would definitely be for the incline dumbbell press (in which case be sure to set the bench to a 30 degree incline or slightly less, not more).
- For **lat pull downs**, I recommend using an underhand grip (meaning your palms will face you) or a neutral grip (palms face each other… this grip is much less stressful on your elbows/wrists). This is because I'm going to recommend an overhand grip (palms face away from you) during the Upper Body B workout. You'll see. Also, these are to be done in front of your head… never behind the neck.
- For **laterals raises**, you can really do whatever lateral raise you want. With dumbbells (seated or standing, one arm at a time or both together), with cables, with a lateral raise machine if your gym has a decent one. Just pick your favorite.
- For the **triceps exercise**, I recommend cable press downs using pretty much whatever type of handle you like best. I personally prefer the v-bar or rope.
- For the **biceps exercise** on this day, I recommend any type of dumbbell curl (standing, seated, on a preacher bench, whatever). Pick your favorite.

Details and clarifications for Lower Body A:

- The Lower Body A workout begins with the **Romanian deadlift**. I recommend using a double overhand grip as opposed to a mixed grip (which would be one hand over, one hand under).
- For the **leg presses**, you can do these the traditional way (both legs at the same time) or single leg if possible. Also, this is meant to be done in a 45 degree leg press. If your gym doesn't have one, then use whatever leg press they do have.
- For the **leg curls**, some gyms have a few different types of leg curl machines… seated, standing, and laying. You can really pick any one you want.
- Next up is **standing calf raises**. If your gym doesn't have a standing calf raise machine, feel free to do calf presses in the 45 degree leg press.
- For **abs**, do a few sets of whatever you want. Just don't go too crazy… no more than 10 minutes or so. I'm a fan of basic stuff like weighted crunches, hanging leg raises, planks, etc.. Keep it simple.

Details and clarifications for Upper Body B:

- The Upper Body B workout starts with **pull-ups**. Use an overhand grip. If you are unable to do pull-ups, you can do lat pull-downs or some form of assisted pull-up in its place (still using an overhand grip). It's fine. However, you should make it your eventual goal to be able to do pull-ups and actually work towards eventually doing them here. These are still to be done in front of your head… never behind the neck. Also, if you are someone who can already do 3 sets of 6-8 pull ups, then you need to add weight. Search around online for what's called a "pull-up belt" (also called a "dip belt") and buy one. It will allow you to add additional weight to body weight

exercises like pull-ups and dips. It's one of the only training products I fully recommend, and when your own body weight becomes too easy for you, it's a requirement for progressive overload to take place.

- For the **shoulder press**, I recommended doing either seated barbell presses (in front of you, not behind the neck) or seated dumbbell presses, although any sort of overhead press will probably be fine.
- Up next are **seated cable rows**, which would ideally be done with a parallel/neutral grip (palms facing each other). If your gym doesn't have a handle like that, any other grip is fine. If your gym doesn't have a seated cable row altogether for some reason, feel free to do any other similar horizontal back row in its place.
- Up next is the **flat dumbbell bench press**. Nothing more to add here really.
- After that we have **dumbbell flyes**. These are meant to be done on a flat or low incline bench, but if you'd rather do some type of cable fly or use a pec deck machine instead, that's perfectly fine too.
- For the **biceps exercise**, I recommend standing barbell curls with an EZ curl bar (it's much less stressful on your wrists/elbows). You could technically do any other type of curl instead if wanted to, though.
- For the **triceps exercise**, I recommend skull crushers. I recommend doing these with an EZ curl bar (same reason, it's much more comfortable on the wrists/elbows than a straight bar) or with dumbbells (palms facing each other). These can be done on a flat or decline bench. Either is just fine. And again, if preferred, any similar triceps isolation exercise would be perfectly suitable in its place.

Details and clarifications for Lower Body B:

- The Lower Body B workout starts with **squats**. That means barbell back squats, by the way.
- For the **split squats**, feel free to use a barbell or dumbbells. If you've never done any kind of split squat or lunge variation before, I'd recommend starting with dumbbells instead of a barbell. It will be easier (and safer) to learn how to balance yourself properly.
- For the **leg curls**, I'd recommend using a different type of leg curl machine than you used in the Lower Body A workout, assuming your gym actually has more than 1 type of leg curl machine. If your gym only has one kind, do it one leg at a time in the A workout, and both legs together in this workout. Or, if preferred, hyperextensions would be fine here as well.
- Up next is **seated calf raises**. Not much more to add here.
- For **abs**, do a few sets of whatever you want. Just don't go too crazy… no more than 10 minutes or so. I'm a fan of basic stuff like weighted crunches, hanging leg raises, planks, etc.. Keep it simple.

The Method of Progression

As with any intelligent weight training program, the most important aspect of all is **progression**. The Muscle Building Workout Routine is no different.

So, here's how I recommend you progress.

For each exercise, I have prescribed a number of sets to do. You may have noticed that I also prescribed a *range* of reps for each exercise (6-8, 8-10 or 10-12) rather than one exact number.

What this means is, when you are capable of doing all of your prescribed sets for somewhere within that prescribed rep range, that's when you increase the weight by the smallest possible increment the

next time you do that exercise.

If you are unable to reach the set and rep range with a given weight, then your goal is to simply get additional reps in each of your sets until you reach that prescribed set and rep goal.

Still confused? Here's a full example of exactly what I mean…

An Example Of How To Progress

For the bench press in the Upper Body A workout, I prescribed 3 sets of 6-8 reps. Now, let's pretend you currently bench press 100lbs. Your workout may look like this:

- **Set #1:** 100lbs – 8 reps
- **Set #2:** 100lbs – 7 reps
- **Set #3:** 100lbs – 6 reps

In this example, you have successfully reached the prescribed 3 sets of 6-8 reps with whatever weight you were using (100lbs in this example). Congrats. You were able to do between 6 and 8 reps in all of the 3 sets.

This means that the next time you do this Upper Body A workout, you should increase the weight you lift on the bench press by the smallest increment possible (usually 5lbs). This means next time your workout may look like this:

- **Set #1:** 105lbs – 7 reps
- **Set #2:** 105lbs – 6 reps
- **Set #3:** 105lbs – 5 reps

In this example, you increased your bench press by 5lbs. This is good and means progressive overload has occurred. However, in this example you failed to get all 3 sets in the 6-8 rep range.

Don't feel bad, it's perfectly normal and expected to happen. It just means that during your next Upper Body A workout, your goal is to increase in reps instead of weight. So, the next time you bench press it may go like this:

- **Set #1:** 105lbs – 8 reps
- **Set #2:** 105lbs – 7 reps
- **Set #3:** 105lbs – 6 reps

In this example, you were able to successfully add an additional rep to all of your sets. Congrats, progressive overload has occurred once again.

This also means that all of your sets are now in the 6-8 rep range, and this means you can go up to 110lbs the next Upper Body A workout. It may go something like this:

- **Set #1:** 110lbs – 7 reps
- **Set #2:** 110lbs – 5 reps
- **Set #3:** 110lbs – 4 reps

In this example, more progressive overload has occurred as you have gone up 5lbs on your bench press. However, you'll notice that the second and third sets are below your prescribed 6-8 rep range. As you just learned, this is perfectly normal. It just means your goal next time is to try to get additional reps.

So, let's say next time comes around and you get reps of 7, 6, 5. Good job, more progressive overload has been made.

Then, the next workout comes along and you get 8, 6, 5. Congrats again.

And then the next workout comes along and you get 8, 7, 6 or 8, 7, 7 or 8, 6, 6, or 8, 8, 7 or 8, 8, 8 or anything similar.

Perfect… all 3 sets are now within the prescribed 6-8 rep range. You'd then go to 115lbs the next time and repeat this whole process all over again.

Basically, as long as your first set reaches the *top end* of the prescribed rep range (8 in this example) and the other sets are *anywhere* within the range, you should increase the weight being lifted by the smallest possible increment the next time you do that exercise.

And, just in case it needs to be said, this is EXACTLY how you should progress with every exercise and every prescribed set and rep goal. Whether it's 3 sets of 6-8, 3 sets of 8-10, 2 sets of 10-12 or whatever else.

The process of progression should happen just like the above example, with the only difference being that you'd be going for a different set and rep range goal for different exercises.

I will also mention that you will have workouts where you are unable to progress on certain exercises, but are able to progress on others. You'll also have workouts where you may not be able to progress on anything in any way. In some cases this may go on for a while with certain exercises (especially isolation).

Don't worry about it. Don't get pissed off. Don't feel bad. Don't think you had a useless workout. Don't think you need to change anything. You don't. This is normal.

While The Muscle Building Workout Routine is designed to build muscle mass as fast as possible, it's still a slow, gradual process. If we could all add 10lbs to every exercise every workout, we'd all be lifting thousands of pounds by now. It just doesn't work like that.

All you need to do is make it your goal to make some form of progression take place on every exercise as often as you can (while still using perfect form, of course). Whether it's as little as 1 extra rep in 1 set or as much as 5 more pounds on every set, it's all progression just the same.

As long as you are doing this and are gradually progressing in some way over time, the progressive overload principle will be in effect and the results you want will follow.

A Muscle Building Diet Plan Is REQUIRED

No matter how perfectly designed your weight training workout routine is (and The Muscle Building Workout Routine is pretty damn perfectly designed), and no matter how perfectly you execute it, this still only accounts for just half of the muscle building equation.

The other half is your diet.

You **MUST** eat right to support your goal of building muscle. If you don't, this program (and every other program) will fail to work every single time.

The full details of how to properly set up your diet are here: How To Create The Perfect Diet Plan

The NEW Expanded Version Is Here!

You asked, I answered. The ALL NEW expanded edition of this routine is now available! It contains **2 NEW** versions of the upper/lower split (one of which is my favorite of them all) and **5 NEW** versions of the workouts that incorporate new set and rep ranges, new methods, new adjustments and more.

You can now get it all as part of my brand new guide to The Best Workout Routines.

Frequently Asked Questions

Just in case you still have any additional questions about The Muscle Building Workout Routine, here are some additional answers.

How should I warm up?

Everything you need to know about warm up sets (including specific examples using this exact workout routine) can be found here: Warming Up For Weight Training Exercises

What if it all just seems like it's too much for me? Like I need to do a little less or something? What's the best way to do that?

You have 3 choices here.

1. You can reduce frequency. This would *definitely* be my first choice. If you're using the 4 day upper/lower split, just switch to the 3 day version. The slightly lowered frequency/extra day of rest between each workout should GREATLY improve any recovery related issues you may have. If you're already using the 3 day version and it still seems like it's too much for you, see below.
2. You can reduce volume. Change all of the exercises that call for 3 sets of 8-10 to 2 sets of 10 instead. If it STILL feels like it's too much for you, see below.
3. You can remove accessory isolation exercises. For example, remove lateral raises and dumbbell flyes from the upper body workouts.
4. You can do a combination of the 3 choices above.

Appendix A:

Warm Up Sets – Warming Up For Weight Training Exercises

One of the most overlooked aspects of a workout routine is the **warm up**.

In terms of weight training, there's primarily 2 different forms of warming up that people tend to neglect or just screw up altogether:

1. **The General Pre-Workout Warm Up**
   This refers to the overall warm up that takes place before the workout actually begins. For example, this may include cardio/aerobic activity, stretching (statically and/or dynamically), foam rolling and/or various forms of mobility work.
2. **The Specific Pre-Exercise Warm up**
   This refers to the warm up sets being done before the weight training exercises themselves. For example, if you were going to bench press 200lbs, you'd typically do warm up sets using progressively heavier weight as you work your way up to 200lbs.

While both are definitely important for different reasons, today I want to focus specifically on the second item on that list: **warm up sets**.

Let's figure out their purpose and goals, how many sets to do, how much weight to use, and which weight training exercises do and do not actually need warm up sets in the first place.

Why Do I Need To Do Warm Up Sets?

In order to properly understand the purpose of warm up sets, there's a recommendation you need to hear first.

And that is, for the *majority* of the population, the first real *work set* of every exercise you do should always be with your heaviest weight.

What that means is, I recommend that most people either use **straight sets** (where you use the same weight for all of your sets of an exercise), or a **reverse pyramid/descending ramp** (where you start with your heaviest weight and then reduce the weight from set to set).

In either scenario, your first set still ends up being as heavy as you will be going on that specific exercise.

What I don't recommend however is a **traditional pyramid set structure** (where you start with something like 100lbs, then go to 110lbs, then 120lbs, etc.), where you essentially use your real work sets as warm up sets.

There are exceptions of course, but for *most* people, this is a completely idiotic and counterproductive way to train. More about that here: Pyramid Sets vs Reverse Pyramid Training vs Straight Sets

Now back to my point…

Since most of us will always be starting off each exercise with our heaviest working weight, there won't be any lighter work sets leading up to our heavier/heaviest work sets… we will just be jumping right in from the very first set.

For this reason, a proper warm up set sequence is absolutely crucial.

The Goals Of Warm Up Sets

Now, here is where people start to screw things up. They understand the reason for warming up, they just don't understand the goals… and that leads to all sorts of dumb stuff being done.

Specifically, the goals of warm up sets are as follows:

- To allow us to prepare the target muscle(s).
- To allow us to prepare the joints being used.
- To allow us to prepare our central nervous system.
- To allow us to prepare mentally.
- To accomplish all of the above WITHOUT creating unnecessary fatigue.

With all of that in mind, the most common recommendation for optimally accomplishing everything on that list is to:

Perform a series of progressively heavier sets that will get pretty close to our actual working weight, while using fewer and fewer reps as we go to avoid fatiguing ourselves before we even begin.

Most people grasp the "progressively heavier sets" part of that, but they miss the second part about avoiding fatigue.

That's why one of the most common stupid things people do when warming up is perform a bunch of sets of anywhere from 10-20 reps per set.

What they are primarily doing here is just tiring themselves out with warm up sets and creating a ton of unnecessary fatigue (which is why traditional pyramid sets suck for most people) while at the same time doing little to actually accomplish what we are hoping to accomplish by warming up.

I've personally been there and done that myself back in the day, where I basically turned my warm up sequence into a full on workout by doing a bunch of sets of 10-12.

By the time I got to my first actual work set, I was (unknowingly) significantly fatigued and my performance (unknowingly) suffered for it.

The Proper Warm Up Sequence

What eventually happened in my case is that I instinctively started experimenting with my warm up sets to try to find something better, and I ended up coming upon a sequence that I later realized was extremely close to what a lot of experts recommend.

What is that warm up sequence, you ask?

Well, for most of the people, most of the time, it should go something along the lines of this:

1. Start off with 1 VERY light set of 10-15 reps. For this set you'd usually use just the bar (with no weight on it) or some VERY light dumbbells if it was a dumbbell exercise. If it's a machine exercise, you'd put on some equally light and easy/insignificant amount of weight.
2. The next set, do 8 reps using 55-60% of the actual weight you will be using during your actual work sets for this exercise. So, if your first work set was going to be with 200lbs, you'd use 110-120lbs for this set.
3. The next set, do 5 reps using 70-75% of the actual weight you will be using during your actual work sets for this exercise. So again, if your first work set was going to be with 200lbs, you'd use 140-150lbs for this set.
4. The set after that, do 3 reps using 80-85% of the actual weight you will be using during your

actual work sets for this exercise. So once again, if your first work set was going to be with 200lbs, you'd use 160-170lbs for this set.

5. And for your final warm up set, do just 1 rep using 90-95% of the actual weight you will be using during your actual work sets for this exercise. So, using the same example, if your first work set was going to be with 200lbs, you'd use 180-190lbs for this set.
6. You'd then rest for whatever the prescribed amount of rest time is for that exercise, and then begin your first work set.

To make that even clearer, here's a pretty chart…

The Proper Weight Training Warm Up Sequence

Set	Weight	Reps	Rest
#1	Just the bar/very light dumbbells.	10-15	45-60 seconds
#2	**55-60%** of the weight you will be using for this exercise.	8	45-60 seconds
#3	**70-75%** of the weight you will be using for this exercise.	5	45-60 seconds
#4	**80-85%** of the weight you will be using for this exercise.	3	45-60 seconds
#5	**90-95%** of the weight you will be using for this exercise.	1	Full Amount

As you can see, you'd typically take about 45-60 seconds between each warm up set. There's really no special set amount of time, but usually the time it takes to casually change the weight, catch your breath (if it needs to be caught) and get into position will last about 45-60 seconds anyway, so something similar to that would be perfectly sufficient.

Really, as long as you're not rushing or taking forever you'll be fine.

And then, after your final warm up set, you should rest for whatever that exercise's regularly prescribed rest time is, and then begin your first work set.

Why Is This Warm Up Sequence So Ideal?

Because it allows us to accomplish everything that needs to be accomplished. Simple as that.

We get to warm up the muscles and joints being used, and we get to prepare the nervous system for the stress it's about to be under (which basically prevents the first work set from feeling surprisingly heavy).

We also do enough to get a really good feel and groove (both physically and mentally) for the exercise we are about to perform, and we do it all with low reps so we never come close to causing unnecessary fatigue.

Sounds pretty ideal to me.

Is This The *EXACT* Way *EVERYONE* Should *ALWAYS* Warm Up?

While the overall structuring of this warm up sequence is pretty close to ideal in most cases, there are

some notes and exceptions.

Here are the main ones that come to mind:

- **Strength Levels.** The heavier the weight being lifted for a given exercise, the more warm up sets you'll typically need. The opposite is true as well (the lighter the weight, the less warming up you'll need). Meaning, someone bench pressing 275lbs would need more warm up sets than someone bench pressing 135lbs. Or, if you want to look at it from the other point of view, the person bench pressing 135lbs just doesn't need as many warm up sets to work up to their lesser weight.
- **Experience Levels.** This goes hand-in-hand with the first item on this list, but it's worth giving a separate mention. Beginners are typically weaker than intermediate and advanced trainees. Therefore, beginners wouldn't need as many of the heavier warm up sets as someone more advanced would. (So for example, sets #4 and/or #5 in the warm up sequence outlined above might not be as necessary for a beginner.)
- **Rep Range and Training Intensity.** Warm up sets may also need to be adjusted based on the rep range and level of weight training intensity being used. Meaning, if you're bench pressing for 4 sets of 6 reps, you'll be using a heavier weight than you would if you were bench pressing for 3 sets of 12 reps, and more or less warming up may be needed or preferred in comparison.
- **Specific Exercises.** The type of exercise being done might also warrant changes to how you warm up. For example, a harder/more technical exercise like barbell squats might require a more thorough warm up sequence than something like leg presses.

Really, warm up sets are not an exact science where one method is universally perfect for everyone on all weight training exercises and at every level of strength and experience.

Some people benefit from more sets, some from less. Some from heavier weight, some from lighter. Feel free to experiment (if needed) to find exactly what feels best for you.

For the majority of the population however, something *similar* to what I described above is what's most ideal and most often recommend.

Should I Be Warming Up Like This For EVERY Exercise?

Nope, you should NOT warm up like this for every single exercise. It wouldn't be bad… it just wouldn't be needed.

A full warm up sequence like this is only needed when doing the first direct or indirect exercise for a given muscle group or movement pattern during that workout. After that, you are already warmed up for various other exercises that target the same muscle(s) and movement patterns.

So, for example, if you are doing more than 1 chest exercise in a workout, you'd only need to warm up like this on the first chest exercise being done that day. Any chest exercises done after that would require little to no warm up sequence of any kind.

The same applies to the other bigger muscle groups too (back, shoulders, quads, hamstrings).

The exception here is biceps and triceps, which rarely ever need any sort of warm up (unless you're doing an arm-only workout, which is pretty dumb in the first place).

Biceps and/or triceps will almost always (and SHOULD always) be done after more important stuff like chest, back and/or shoulders. And, since chest and shoulder exercises train the triceps secondarily and back exercises train the biceps secondarily, your biceps and triceps are already warmed up sufficiently by the time you get to them.

What's that you say? You're still a little confused about which exercises need warm ups and which don't?

Alright then, here's a complete real world example…

An Example Of Which Weight Training Exercises To Warm Up For

Have you seen The Muscle Building Workout Routine? It's the workout program that I recommend to intermediate/advanced trainees looking to build muscle or improve the way their body looks in any capacity.

Well, here's a full break down of exactly which exercises in this program do and do not need a full warm up sequence:

- In the **Upper Body A** workout, you'd only need to warm up like this for bench press and rows. Incline dumbbell presses (warmed up from benching), lat pull-downs (warmed up from rowing), lateral raises (warmed up from both bench pressing and incline pressing), and the biceps and triceps stuff (warmed up from all of the chest and back work thus far) would not require a warm up sequence anywhere near as thorough as this (or really, none at all).
- In the **Lower Body A** workout, you'd do this warm up sequence for Romanian deadlifts and leg presses, and maybe calves too (or more likely just half of this warm up sequence).
- In the **Upper Body B** workout, you'd only use this warm up sequence for pull-ups and shoulder presses, and *maybe* dumbbell presses as well (or again just half of this warm up sequence). Nothing else.
- In the **Lower Body B** workout, you'd really only need to do this warm up sequence with squats, and maybe just half of this sequence for leg curls and calves.
- However, for all of the exercises that **DON'T** need a full warm up sequence, you can still throw in 1 VERY light set of 5-8 reps just to prepare yourself for the actual movement and get into a good groove. I personally like doing this for certain exercises (usually only compound exercises), but don't seem to need it at all for others (such as most isolation exercises). Just a personal preference. Nothing more than that, though. And make sure it's VERY light and easy if you decide to do it.

Now Go Try It Out

So, that's pretty much everything you need to know about how your warm up set sequence should look for various exercises and why it's so important and beneficial in the first place. In fact, this is the protocol I recommend for the majority of the workouts I've included in The Best Workout Routines premium guide.

If you've been warming up in some other (dumber) way or just barely warming up at all, give this method (or something similar) a try and notice how much better your work sets feel.

For me, it was a big improvement over the silly stuff I was previously doing. It will probably be an equally big improvement for you too.

Try it and see for yourself.

Appendix B:

How To Get A Six Pack & Lose Belly Fat – A Guide To Ab Workouts

Some of us might want to build a little bit of muscle or a lot of muscle, or lose a little fat or a lot of fat, or get stronger, improve performance or something similar. But, there's one thing that damn near all of us have in common…

We all want to **lose our belly fat**, have a **flat stomach**, and get that **perfect six pack**.

The problem is, most people can't seem to do it. Why is that? Are they doing the wrong ab exercises? The wrong ab workouts? Not using the right fat-burning machines? Not training their abs often enough? Not doing enough sets or reps? Not taking the right supplements? Not eating the right foods?

Nope. It's actually none of those things.

The real reason people aren't losing their belly fat and getting that perfect six pack is because they don't actually understand what needs to be done for those things to happen. So, please allow me to fill you in…

How Do You Get A Six Pack?

Are you ready for this? I'm about to reveal the *highly complicated* two step process that will allow you to get the stomach you've been dreaming of having once and for all. Are you ready? Here goes:

1. Lower your body fat percentage.
2. Maybe train your abs a little bit, too.

Taaadaaa! And honestly, #2 may very well be optional for many people.

The truth is, the big super secret key to getting a six pack (or even a two pack, four pack or eight pack for that matter) and getting the flat, lean, toned, sexy, awesome, [insert other similar adjectives here] stomach you're trying to get is, above all else, **a simple matter of just losing some body fat**.

Confused? That's cool. It's time to un-confuse you.

You Already Have A Six Pack… You Just Can't See It Yet

I think the best way to eliminate the majority of the confusion most people have about this stuff is by making a small change to the way we phrase what we're trying to do.

Instead of saying we want to *get* **a six pack**, we should say we want to *uncover* **a six pack**. Because really, that's what needs to happen.

What I mean is, your pretty abs and flat stomach already exist. Seriously, you have it all right now. We all do. The problem is, most of us can't actually see it because it's currently covered by a layer (or many layers) of ugly body fat. In order to see that lean stomach you're trying to see and make your abs become visible, you just need to lose the fat that's sitting on top of it and preventing it from being seen.

When you look at it this way, it's really not that complicated at all, is it?

On the other hand, "*getting* a six pack" seems so mysterious. Who knows what you'll need to do to

"get" it? The special exercises you'll need to do, the crazy workouts you'll need to follow, the fancy machines you'll need to use, the secret methods you'll need to employ.

But to "*uncover* a six pack?" That sounds so simple (because it is). It gets rid of all of the nonsense that confuses and distracts people (e.g. ab workouts, exercises and machines) from understanding that the #1 thing that needs to happen here is you need to lower your body fat percentage and lose the fat that's covering your abs.

The question now is… **just how in the hell do you lose that fat and uncover your six pack?**

The Most Important Part: Losing Belly Fat

How do you lose belly fat? **You create a caloric deficit.** Done. Next question?

Wait, what's that you say? You need me to explain something I've already explained approximately 25 billion times before in a bit more detail? Alright, fine.

Your body has a certain unique amount of calories it requires per day to maintain your current weight. This number is based on everything from your age, height and weight to the thermic effect of food, NEAT (non-exercise activity thermogensis) and more.

This amount of calories is called your **maintenance level**. It's the amount of calories your body burns each day to do everything you need it to do (live, function, digest, move, exercise, etc.). If you consume MORE calories than this amount — meaning more calories than your body actually needed — that left over amount of calories will be stored on your body for later use, typically in the form of body fat. This is called a **caloric surplus**, and it's the one thing that causes people to gain fat.

Now guess what happens when you consume LESS calories than this maintenance level amount? It causes your body to find some alternative fuel source to burn for energy instead. And guess what that alternative fuel source typically is? You guessed it… your own stored body fat.

This is known as a **caloric deficit**, and it is the **ONE SINGLE THING** that **EVER** causes fat to be lost from **ANY** part of the body.

So if you have any amount of fat you want to lose from any part of your body, the only thing you need to do is create a consistent caloric deficit by either eating less calories, burning more calories, or doing some combination of the two. That's all there is to it. That's all that ever works.

If you want a more detailed breakdown of what I just explained, read these: The Truth About Fat Loss and Calories In vs Calories Out

But wait, hold on. I bet I know what certain misinformed people might be thinking now.

The Magical Powers Of Spot Reduction

If you're like most people, you probably think various ab workouts, exercises and fancy machines are all you really need here, because they'll magically burn your belly fat. This is why it's so common to see people doing endless sets of infinite reps of every ab exercise there is.

Why? Because they apparently believe in an interesting concept known as **spot reduction**.

And by "interesting concept" I of course mean **bullshit myth**.

Spot reduction is the "idea" that doing an exercise for a specific body part will in some way burn the fat that is on that body part. So crunches will target belly fat and leg exercises will target leg fat and back exercises will target back fat and chest exercises will target chest fat/man boobs, and on and on and on.

Unfortunately, **this is all complete nonsense**. Spot reduction is nothing more than a silly myth.

In reality, exercises target muscles, not the fat that happens to be sitting on top of those muscles. So while training your abs will certainly train your abs, it's doing nothing about the fat that is covering them. The same goes for every other body part, too.

Then What Are You Supposed To Do?

The human body gains and loses fat in a pattern that is predetermined by our genetics and can't be changed. So if you want to lose fat from a specific body part, you pretty much just need to lose fat, period. At some point, it will come off from the specific spot you want it to… which in this case is your stomach.

And in case you forgot, this means you need to do the one and only thing that causes fat loss: **create a caloric deficit**.

The Least Important Part: Ab Workouts

Once you understand that spot reduction is a myth and that all of the ab workouts and exercises in the world won't do anything useful whatsoever in terms of helping you lose the ugly belly fat that is covering your pretty abs (which again is the big super secret here), you might begin to wonder exactly what role ab workouts play in this six pack equation anyway?

And that's something you should be wondering, because the role is *pretty small*.

How small, you ask? So small that **many people don't do ANY direct ab training whatsoever and still have awesome six packs**. Just lowering their body fat percentage and getting lean enough — possibly combined with various compound exercises like squats, deadlifts, presses, rows, pull-ups, etc. that may train the abs statically to *some* extent — is all they need. No crunches. No leg raises. No nothing.

Do I think that's enough for everyone? Uh, maybe. It's certainly enough for lots of people. But, either way, I wouldn't consider it optimal. Here's why…

Developed Abs vs Underdeveloped Abs

You do occasionally see cases where someone gets lean enough to where they SHOULD be able to see abs, but still can't really see abs… at least not as well as they should be able to at their level of body fat.

Why is this? Because their abs are just **underdeveloped**.

So yes, this sort of thing DOES happen.

Another similar thing that happens is this. Take two people with similar stats/genetics/everything else, and have Person A train their abs directly while Person B does no direct ab work of any kind. Now magically make them the same body fat percentage… something fairly lean. It's highly likely that Person A's abs will look better/be more visible than Person B's to some degree despite everything else being equal.

Now granted, neither of these examples change the fact that being lean is STILL THE KEY FACTOR.

And again, MOST of the time a person claims to be lean enough to see abs but can't see abs, the true culprit is the fact that they're just not actually as lean as they need to be. Like virtually everyone else,

their problem will be solved by losing more belly fat.

But, once that level of leanness HAS been reached, there will be some small differences in appearance based on how developed or underdeveloped a person's abs are.

Direct Ab Training = Recommended

For all of these reasons and more, I think some direct ab training will be beneficial. It will make your abs bigger, stronger and better developed (you know, just like what happens to every other muscle group when you train it correctly) and this will make your six pack look better and "pop" a bit more once you're lean enough for that kind of thing to actually matter.

And on a semi-serious/semi-not serious note, if you're the kind of person who doesn't mind being a little fat but still likes to be able to see a faint outline of their hidden six pack poking through when flexing as hard as they can in perfect lighting, some direct ab training will help with that as well.

Of course, you will still look like crap when unflexed/in worse lighting. Wanna fix that? Lose the fat.

What Ab Exercises & Workouts Are Best?

Speaking strictly from the point of view of having "awesome abs" and a "sexy stomach," I don't really have any recommendations for specific workouts or exercises because I don't really think it's going to matter much.

Which is why my go-to recommendation in the routines I design is simply this: **do about 10 minutes worth of whatever ab training you want twice per week at the end of a workout.**

Yeah, seriously…. that's it. That's all you need, and that's as specific as I feel I need to get. Again, the details really aren't going to matter much in my opinion, so feel free to do whatever you like best.

As for me personally, I tend to keep it pretty basic and typically choose from the usual stuff: various forms of weighted crunches, hanging leg/hip raises, planks, etc.. Nothing fancy. Just about 10 minutes of whatever at the end of a workout twice per week, mostly in the 8-15 rep range.

Simple as that.

And yes, some degree of progressive overload should be taking place during ab training. So depending on the type of exercise being done, you might progress by doing more reps, or adding more weight, or adding more time, or moving on to harder variations. Or, all of the above.

But What About My Lower Abs?

Oh no!!! Not the dreaded lower abs!!! What ever will we do?!?!?

Lose more fat, *that's what*.

You see, a very common problem many people have is that they can see their top 4 "upper abs" just fine, BUT their bottom 2 "lower abs" are nowhere to be found. Sound familiar? I'm sure it does. It's why people tend to focus so much extra on lower ab training.

Those people would be wasting their time of course, as spot reduction remains a myth just the same for the lower abs as it does for the upper abs and every other part of the body.

The actual issue here is that the lower part of your stomach is **the first place body fat gets stored** when you're gaining it and **the last place it gets burned** when you're losing it. That's why you don't

see people complaining that their lower abs are looking awesome, but their upper abs are still covered with fat and hidden.

It's always the other way around.

So the fact that you can see your upper abs but can't see your lower abs means that you might have lost a nice amount of belly fat and you might be quite lean, but you just haven't lost enough fat to be as lean as you're trying to be. Basically, **you're four pack lean, not six pack lean**.

So what's the solution? You simply need to lose a little more fat and get a little bit leaner.

And in case you forgot how to do that, it starts with the word "caloric" and ends with "deficit." All of the lower ab workouts in the world won't help in any meaningful way.

So… How Do You Get A Six Pack?

Get ready, here comes the *highly complicated* summary:

Lower your body fat percentage so you're lean enough for your abs to actually be visible, and much less importantly, train your abs a little bit too.

How To Lose Fat – The TRUTH About Fat Loss

There's a million reasons why people fail to lose fat, but somewhere at the top of that list is just a fundamental lack of understanding of the scientifically proven principals of *how* **to lose fat**.

To show you exactly what I mean, let's start this off with a list of things that DON'T cause fat loss.

Things That <u>DO NOT</u> Cause Fat Loss:

- Eating healthy.
- Eating "clean."
- Eating less carbs.
- Eating less fat.
- Eating less junk food.
- Eating less sugar.
- Eating 6 smaller meals per day/every 3 hours.
- Eating "good" foods instead of "bad" foods.
- Not eating after 7pm.
- Cardio.
- Weight training.
- Building muscle and/or getting stronger.
- And MUCH more.

These are all things that can definitely HELP a person lose fat and can definitely assist in the overall fat loss process. But, in and of themselves, **not a single thing on that list actually causes fat to be lost**.

They never have, and they never will. In fact, not a single one of these things actually *needs* to be done. You can do the complete opposite of every item on that list and still lose fat just fine so long as one specific thing IS being done.

So, what is this "thing?" What actually causes fat loss? Let's find out…

How To Lose Fat: The One Absolute Requirement

Simply put… a **caloric deficit**. That is the scientifically proven "secret" to losing fat. It literally can't happen any other way.

So just what is a caloric deficit? It's what happens when you burn more calories than you consume (or consume less calories than you burn… just another way of saying the same thing).

Basically, every single person has a unique calorie maintenance level. This is the amount of calories that your body requires each day to burn for energy to perform all of the tasks it needs to perform. From intense exercise like cardio and weight training, to simple daily tasks like brushing your teeth and getting dressed, to the various physiological functions needed to keep you alive (like digesting and breathing).

Calories are what our bodies use for energy to do all of these things, and we provide these calories via the foods we eat. As a result, 3 things can happen…

The 3 Calorie Intake Scenarios

1. If we consume the SAME number of calories that our bodies need to burn each day, we will be at our **maintenance level**. Our weight will be maintained because all of the calories we needed were provided. No more, no less.
2. If we exceed this amount and therefore consume MORE calories than our bodies need, all of the left over calories that weren't burned will then be stored on our body in some form for later use. And guess what form it's most often stored in? Yup… body fat! This is known as a **caloric surplus**, and it is the one and only cause of fat gain.
3. But what we're interested in is the opposite of this… a **caloric deficit**. This is what happens when we consume LESS than our maintenance level amount. What happens then is that our bodies are forced to find some other source of energy to burn instead. And guess what that source most often is? Yup… your own stored body fat! And this is the one and only cause of fat loss.

So if you maintain your current weight eating 2500 calories per day (just an example), you will gain weight (mostly in the form of body fat) if you consumed 3000 calories per day. However, you would lose weight (mostly in the form of body fat) if you consumed 2000 calories per day.

This all remains true regardless of what the source of those calories are (carbs, fat, protein, healthy, unhealthy, clean, dirty, processed, unprocessed… whatever) or when/how they were consumed (after 7pm, in 3 large meals, in 6 small meals, every 2 hours, every 5 hours, whatever).

Exercise Can Play A Role, Too

See how it works? These are the proven fundamentals of how to lose fat, and that was a simple example of how to create the required caloric deficit via your diet alone (by *eating less* calories). I mention this because that same deficit could have also been created via exercise (by *burning more* calories).

Meaning, you could have still eaten 2500 calories for the day in the previous example, but then burned an additional 500 through exercise thus creating the same caloric deficit. Both scenarios would effectively cause fat loss, as would a third scenario where you did a combination of both (diet AND

exercise).

But no matter which way you choose to do it, one absolute requirement ALWAYS stands. In order to lose fat, you MUST create a caloric deficit. Nothing else works.

But Then How Do Other Fat Loss Diets Work?

This is the point when various stubborn, misinformed or just annoyingly stupid people like to mention that other diets cause people to lose fat all the time, and those diets have nothing to do with creating a caloric deficit.

I mean, people lose fat on low carb diets, low fat diets, paleo diets, vegan diets, raw food diets, diets that involve eating "clean" instead of "dirty" or not eating after a certain time at night, and countless other types of diets that involve every gimmick, fad and method you can think of *except* the specific task of creating a caloric deficit. But yet, they have all caused people to successfully lose fat.

What the hell? How can that be? If the only requirement for fat loss is a caloric deficit, and all of these diets have nothing to do with a caloric deficit, then how do they work? Obviously I must be wrong about all this calorie stuff, right?

Wrong.

You see, all of these diets and methods just **indirectly cause you to create that caloric deficit**.

What I mean is, any diet that actually causes you to lose fat did so because it caused you to create a caloric deficit. That's a fact. There is literally NOTHING else that could possibly make it happen. This is the most basic proven science of the human body. Calories in vs calories out (aka the law of thermodynamics) is ALWAYS the basis for fat loss (or gain).

These diets and methods might never come right out and admit that or say you just need to eat less calories (partly because it doesn't fit with their gimmick, partly because people don't want to hear that they have to [GASP!] count calories or [GASP!] eat less of them, and partly because it's hard to make money off of something that is simple, obvious and free.)

BUT every successful fat loss diet makes you do it anyway. How? By getting you to do things that *just so happen* to **restrict or reduce your calorie intake**. For example…

- Eating less carbs means you're eating less calories.
- Eating less fat means you're eating less calories.
- Eating less "dirty" junk food means you're eating less calories.
- Eating less processed foods means you're eating less calories.
- Eating less grains means you're eating less calories.
- Not eating after 7pm causes you to eat less calories.
- A raw food diet, vegan diet, paleo diet or any remotely similar diet eliminates many of the foods you were regularly eating, which means you're now eating less calories.

Noticing a trend? In every single case, less calories end up being eaten. And like magic, it causes you to lose fat. But what some people incorrectly think is that it was the reduction in carbs, or fat, or grains, or sugar, or junk food, or processed food, or not eating after 7pm or whatever else that made it happen.

It wasn't**.**

It was the reduction in calories that indirectly came as a result of all of these other things. Sure, these "things" are what caused the deficit to be created, but the deficit itself is what actually caused you to lose fat.

And that's how various fat loss diets/methods work despite not directly making you eat less calories. They just get you to do things that make you eat less calories anyway.

There's A Ton Of Ways To Create Your Deficit… Pick Your Favorite

Now, if you want to create your caloric deficit by using any of these diets and methods, that is perfectly fine by me. If any of these or other manners of eating appeal to you for whatever reason, then I'm all for you using it to reach your fat loss goals.

But if you'd rather just *directly* create your ideal caloric deficit and then get the calories you do consume from a nice balance of protein, fat and carbs comprised solely of foods you actually enjoy eating in a format that is actually convenient and preferable for you, then that's fine by me too.

In fact, it's what I personally do and most often recommend. I explain exactly how to do it (for FREE) right here: The Best Diet Plan

The point I'm making however is that in every single case with every other diet or method, the reason it works is simply because a caloric deficit was present. And if it didn't work, then it's simply because a caloric deficit wasn't present.

There is no other magic or voodoo involved in the actual cause (or lack thereof) of fat loss. It always comes down to calories in vs calories out.

But wait, what's that? You think I'm lying? You think I'm making this all up? You think this is just my opinion or gimmick?

If for whatever reason you still aren't convinced that what I'm saying is true and accurate (likely as a result of years of nutritional brainwashing), then allow me to present some additional proof.

Still Don't Believe Me? Here's Some Proof…

There is such an overwhelming (and seemingly infinite) amount of legitimate evidence showing that everything I've explained thus far is 100% true and accurate that I honestly don't even know where to begin.

So, here now is just a SUPER TINY sample of some of the MANY examples that come to mind…

- *Metabolic and behavioral effects of a high-sucrose diet during weight loss.*
  This study took 2 groups of women and put them on similar hypocaloric diets (meaning below maintenance level so that a caloric deficit was present). The only difference between the diets of the two groups is that **43%** of one group's daily calorie intake came from sucrose (aka table sugar), while just **4%** of the other group's daily calorie intake came from sucrose. Guess what happened? Despite one group eating a VERY high sugar diet and the other group eating a VERY low sugar diet, **they both lost equal amounts of weight and body fat**. Why? Because it's NOT the source of your calories that causes fat loss, it's the presence of a caloric deficit.
- *Increased meal frequency does not promote greater weight loss [...]*
  This study took 16 overweight men and women and split them into 2 groups. They then had each person in each group create the same sized caloric deficit and then consume that same calorie intake every day for 8 weeks. HOWEVER, they had one group eat **3 meals** a day, and the other group eat **6 meals** a day. Guess what happened? **They all lost the same amount of weight**. In fact, the study showed that there was no difference at all in fat loss, appetite control, or anything similar. Why? Because meal frequency doesn't affect your ability to lose fat or gain fat. Calories do.

- *Comparison of isocaloric very low carbohydrate/high saturated fat and high carbohydrate [...]*
  This study took 83 subjects, estimated the daily calorie requirements of each person (aka their maintenance levels), and then created a caloric deficit of 30%. They then divided them up into 3 groups. The first had only **4%** of their total daily calorie intake coming from carbs. The second had **50%** of their total calorie intake coming from carbs. The third had **70%** of their total calorie intake coming from carbs. Guess what happened? Even though some people were eating a VERY LOW carb diet and others were eating a VERY HIGH carb diet… **they all lost the same amount of weight and body fat**. Why? Because low carb or high carb isn't what makes us gain or lose fat. Calories are, regardless of how many of them come from carbs.
- *Similar weight loss with low-energy food combining or balanced diets.*
  This study divided 54 obese patients up into 2 groups, both of which were put on low calorie diets (meaning a caloric deficit was present) and fed similar percentages of protein, fat and carbs. HOWEVER, one group was given a more **balanced** diet comprised of meals that contained protein, fat and carbs, while the second group had their carb and fat calories **separated** so they were not eaten together in the same meal. Guess what happened? **They all lost the same amount of weight and body fat**. Why? Because the manner in which you combine foods, organize your meals and consume your daily calories isn't what causes fat loss. A caloric deficit is.
- *Fat loss depends on energy deficit only, independently of the method for weight loss.*
  This study divided its subjects up into 2 groups, and had them both create the same sized caloric deficit. HOWEVER, the difference between them was the manner in which this deficit was created. One group did it by eating less total calories (diet alone), but the other group did it by eating less total calories AND burning more calories by doing cardio (a combination of diet AND exercise). But again, the total weekly caloric deficit was the same for both groups. Guess what happened? **They all lost the same amount of weight and body fat.** Why? Because a deficit of X calories is a deficit of X calories regardless of whether you burned those calories off via cardio or just didn't eat them in the first place. Fat loss isn't about how you create the deficit, it's just about the deficit itself.
- *The Twinkie Diet*
  You know what? This one is so F-ing fantastic that a quick bullet point just doesn't do it justice. So…

The Twinkie Diet

And finally, here's the holy grail of proof for anyone that's still even remotely skeptical that this whole calorie thing (and by "thing" I mean scientifically proven fact) truly is the singular answer to the almighty "how to lose fat" question.

In 2010, Mark Haub (who is a professor of human nutrition at Kansas State University) wanted to prove the very same thing I've been explaining: that fat loss and fat gain always happen as a result of calories in vs calories out, and that a caloric deficit will ALWAYS cause a person to lose fat no matter what food sources those calories come from.

To do this, Mark took things to a very extreme point-making level that I would never actually recommend, but absolutely love for the purpose of proving that calories are what matter most.

Specifically, **Mark went on a 10-week diet comprised primarily of snack foods**. Twinkies, Little Debbie cakes, Doritos, Oreos, sugary cereals like Corn Pops and other equally crappy foods that are all highly processed, lacking in nutritional value, loaded with sugar and "bad" carbs, high in "bad" fat, contain trans fat, and possess other similar traits that are common among typical "junk food."

But, he also created a caloric deficit.

He went from eating 2600 calories per day (his estimated maintenance level) to eating about 1800 calories per day instead. He just so happened to get the majority of those 1800 daily calories from the most junky foods you can think of.

The purpose? To prove that despite his daily diet being loaded with sugar-filled garbage and junk food, he'd still lose fat just fine because a caloric deficit was present.

The result? He lost 27lbs in 2 months and reduced his body fat percentage from 33.4% to 24.9%.

The conclusion? A caloric deficit is the sole cause of fat loss. Even if those calories come from the shittiest sources known to mankind, fat will STILL be lost. It's not the source or the quality of those foods and the calories they provide… it's the total quantity of it all.

The Opposite Is True, Too

And even though Mark didn't do a reverse version of this "experiment," the opposite would be true, too. Meaning, creating a caloric *surplus*, regardless of the content of those calories, will ALWAYS cause those excess calories to be stored on your body in some form (most often as body fat).

This is equally true whether those calories come from only the healthiest, "cleanest," most natural and nutritious foods on the planet, or the same type of junky garbage eaten in Mark's experiment. What matters is the caloric surplus itself, not the form or manner in which that surplus was provided.

Or, to put it another way, eating too many "healthy" and "clean" foods will make you fat just the same as eating too many "unhealthy" and "dirty" foods will. It's always the "eating too much" part that causes this to happen, not the specific foods that were or were not eaten.

The Example Is Extreme, But Understand Its Point

Yes, what Mark did is a CRAZY extreme example, and NO, I'd **never** recommend anyone try to actually eat like that. I'm all about getting a sufficient amount of protein, fat and carbs primarily from higher quality, natural, nutrient-dense foods you enjoy, and keeping the typical junkier foods to a sane yet enjoyable and sustainable minimum.

What I want you to do however is look at this example for what it is… **clear undeniable proof that fat loss occurs strictly as a result of eating less total calories**.

It doesn't happen as a result of *what* you eat, *when* you eat or *how* you eat. It happens solely as a result of *HOW MUCH* you eat. And if a dude losing fat while practically eating nothing but Twinkies and Oreos still doesn't prove this to you… then you are a lost cause.

Feel free to get together with the others who are just like you (of which there are unfortunately and pathetically plenty), and continue to dispense your horrendously bad diet and exercise advice together while quoting various inaccurate sources of information.

Summing Up Fat Loss

So, for anyone who wanted to know how to lose fat… here's how. Create a caloric deficit. That is ALL that EVER works.

Yes, there are a million other factors and components of your diet and workout that play important roles in successfully, permanently and efficiently getting you to lose fat (while also maintaining lean

muscle mass and being healthy), and a million ways to go about creating that deficit in a way that is as easy, enjoyable and sustainable for you as possible.

Once again, I fully explain how to do all of that right here: The Best Diet Plan

However, the big point I'm getting at is that ALL OF IT is completely irrelevant and useless to your goal of losing fat in the absence of that required caloric deficit.

Anyone who disagrees or claims otherwise is often either wrong or just trying to sell you something that is definitely NOT worth buying. In other words, they should be ignored completely 100% of the time.

Oh… and mocked, too.

Bulk or Cut – Should I Build Muscle or Lose Fat First?

I've previously covered the basics of bulking and cutting the right way and the wrong way. In case you missed it, here's a quick recap…

- A person would "**bulk**" when their primary goal is to **build muscle**.
- A person would "**cut**" when their primary goal is to **lose fat**.
- To do this the right way and get the best results possible, the true goal while bulking is to build muscle *while* keeping fat gains to an absolute minimum. When cutting, the true goal is to lose fat *while* maintaining all of the muscle you've built. If you do it the wrong way like so many people do, you'd gain too much excess body fat while bulking and/or lose too much lean muscle while cutting and basically spin your wheels and get nowhere.
- A person would then alternate between phases of bulking and cutting until they're as lean and muscular as they desire.

Now after hearing all of this, there are always three questions that come to mind.

1. Which phase should I start with? Should I bulk or cut first?
2. How long should each phase last before switching to the other?
3. The hell with these stupid phases, why don't we all just lose fat and build muscle at the same time?

Now those last two questions are really good and I get asked both all the time. The thing is, their answers are a little complicated and will take an entire article of their own to properly explain. As it turns out, I've recently answered #3 over here: How To Lose Fat And Build Muscle At The Same Time. But right here and now, it's the first question that I want to focus on and answer.

Should I Build Muscle or Lose Fat First?

If you're asking this question, then there's one safe assumption I can make about you… you currently have body fat you'd like to lose AND muscle you'd like to gain. Obvious, right?

But I mention it to make sure we understand that if you're just fat and don't really care much about building muscle, you wouldn't be asking this question. You'd just lose fat first because that's the primary (or only) goal you care about. The same goes for if you're already pretty lean/skinny. In that

case, you don't care about losing any more fat… you just want to build muscle.

But if you're asking this question, then you obviously want or need to do both. You just can't figure out which to do first.

And in that case, while there are a few factors to consider when making this decision, there's one that matters more than all of them…

What Is Your Current Body Fat Percentage?

As I mentioned before, the key to doing a "smart" bulk and ending up with something good to show for it in the end is to avoid gaining excess body fat while you build muscle.

Your diet and weight training routine are the key factors in optimizing this muscle:fat gain ratio, but there's actually something else in your control that plays a significant role in this area: your current body fat percentage. Why? Because…

The fatter you are and the higher your body fat percentage gets, the worse your calorie partitioning gets and the more likely your body is to start storing excess calories as fat instead of muscle.

Not to mention, the fatter you are when you start to bulk, the fatter you're going to be when you end it. Aside from just giving yourself a longer "clean up" job to do when you finally cut (which only increases the potential for muscle loss), this also means you're going to spend a nice amount of time during the year unnecessarily looking like crap.

Wow, fun!

For these reasons (and others), starting a bulk (and therefore creating the caloric surplus required for building muscle) when in an already-fat state is just a recipe for disaster.

Instead, the ideal starting point for a muscle building phase is when you are **at least** *somewhat* **lean**. How lean exactly? Well, you don't have to be super ripped with an 8 pack or anything like that (although you certainly can). But, to a certain point, the leaner the better.

- For men, this typically means 10-13% body fat (or less).
- For women, 19-23% body fat (or less).

Starting higher than that can work of course, it's just probably going to yield sub-optimal results.

But No One Actually Knows Their Body Fat Percentage

However, since most people have no idea what their body fat levels truly are and the typical methods for finding it (online calculators and digital body fat scales) mostly suck, the average person won't really know for sure if they are indeed at this "at least somewhat lean" status.

So, here's my advice. Take off some clothes and look in the mirror. Or, take some pictures. Do you look like someone whose #1 goal right now should be losing fat or building muscle?

Use your best unbiased judgment here. Would you consider yourself "at least *somewhat* lean" and ready to start building some muscle, or would you consider yourself in too much of an already fat state to create a caloric surplus and gain the small amount of fat that will almost always accompany even the smartest of smart bulks?

Then, find your answer below….

I'm In An Already Fat State

If you do indeed consider yourself as being in too much of an already fat state, then the **very best thing you can do now is cut first and lose that fat**.

Once you've lost enough fat and reach "at least somewhat lean" status, that's when you should start a full muscle building "bulk" phase and create the caloric surplus you need to build that new muscle. Your results will be WAY better this way, trust me.

That doesn't mean you should hold off on (or stop) weight training until you reach that point of leanness. You should **definitely** still weight train the entire time. It will help a bit with the fat loss, and even more importantly, it's the ONLY WAY you will maintain the muscle and strength you currently have.

I'm At Least Somewhat Lean

In this case, while bulking might be the obvious decision, you can technically start off with whichever phase you want based on what's most important to you right now.

For example, you might want to build more muscle. That might be your #1 long term goal. But if you have some good reason or preference in the short term for getting even leaner than you currently are (some kind of event coming up, curious to see what a six pack looks like, want to start your bulk as lean as possible, etc.), then hey… go for it and then start to bulk right after that.

But if you're lean enough to start bulking and all you really care about is just building more muscle already, then let the bulk begin!

You can focus on getting *extra* lean later on when you actually have some muscle mass to uncover.

Start Right, Do It Smartly, Switch, Repeat

So, here's how it works. Use your current body fat percentage to help you determine if you should bulk or cut first.

Whichever it is, make sure your diet and workout are designed as intelligently as possible so you don't gain excess body fat while you bulk, and you don't lose any muscle mass while you cut. This step is key.

Then, after you've put in enough time, effort and consistency for progress to be made, switch on over to the other phase and do the same. Depending on exactly what your goals are and exactly how much muscle you want to build and how much fat you want/need to lose, you can repeat this process as many times as needed.

When you end up with your ideal "dream" body… you win!

How To Lose Fat Without Losing Muscle – Burn Fat, NOT Muscle

Not too long ago, I covered how to lose fat. The thing is, there's a second important topic that always needs to be covered right along with it. And that is: **how to lose fat WITHOUT losing muscle**.

Wait… what?!?!?! Did I just imply that you can lose your pretty hard-earned lean muscle mass while only trying to lose your ugly body fat??? Yup, I sure did. It's happened to me and countless others plenty of times, and it can definitely happen to you.

To understand why and how this is possible and (more importantly) how to prevent it from happening, you first need to understand an important fact…

Weight Loss vs Fat Loss: It's NOT The Same Thing!

People often say they want to *lose weight*. This is sort of a dumb statement, because "weight" can be a few different things. For example… water, glycogen, muscle or fat. Hell, you can cut off a leg and you'll lose "weight" just fine.

In reality however, what most of us want to lose is fat, NOT muscle.

Now, despite some of the crazy things you may have heard before about how to lose fat, the truth is that there is just one major requirement… **a caloric deficit**.

As I've explained 1000 times before (for example: Calories In vs Calories Out), a caloric deficit is what happens when you consume less calories than your body needs to burn for energy performing all of the tasks it needs to perform over the course of the day (move, breathe, pump blood, digest food, etc.).

When that caloric deficit is present, your body is forced to find some alternative source of energy on your body to burn instead. Ideally, this would ONLY be your ugly stored body fat. However, it can also be your **pretty lean muscle tissue**.

Sure, you might want your body to just burn body fat and not muscle, but your body doesn't really give a crap about what you want. It just knows that in order for it to survive and function under the current conditions, it will need to pull stored energy from somewhere. And that can mean fat, muscle or a combination of both.

Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to do everything you can to improve the fat:muscle loss ratio as much as possible and basically signal your body to maintain ALL of your muscle and ONLY burn body fat. But the question is… how? I thought you'd never ask.

Here now are what I'd consider to be the **8 best ways to lose fat WITHOUT losing muscle**…

1. Eat Enough Protein

A sufficient daily protein intake is the **single most important dietary requirement** for maintaining muscle. It's not meal timing, or supplements, or the exact size of your caloric deficit, or the quality of the foods you eat (more on that nonsense later), or anything else diet related.

Nutritionally speaking, losing fat without losing muscle is all about eating enough protein every day. Numerous studies have proven this to be true. Even in the absence of a proper weight training routine, more of the weight you lose will be body fat rather than muscle mass just as a result of an increased protein intake.

So, the first step of any muscle-preserving diet is always getting your ideal amount of protein for the day. Just what is "ideal?" Well, the good old "1 gram of protein per pound of body weight" recommendation still remains a perfectly fine starting point for most people with this goal in mind. Additional details and specifics are covered here: How Much Protein Per Day

2. Maintain Strength/Intensity/Weight On The Bar

And now here is the **single most important training requirement** for anyone who wants to lose fat without losing muscle. Simply put, the primary training stimulus required for maintaining muscle is maintaining your current levels of strength.

You know how gradually getting stronger (aka the progressive overload principle) is what signals your body to begin the muscle *building* process? Well, on a fat loss diet, just maintaining your current levels of strength (aka intensity, aka the weight on the bar) is what now signals your body to *maintain* muscle.

If that signal goes away, your body's need to keep your pretty muscle tissue around goes away right along with it.

That's why the insanely stupid myth of lifting heavier weights to build muscle but then lifting lighter weights (for higher reps) when you want to lose fat, get lean and get toned is the absolute **WORST** thing you could possibly believe when you're trying to avoid losing muscle. In reality, you lift heavy weight to build muscle, and then lift that same heavy weight if you want to actually maintain that muscle.

If you start purposely lifting lighter weights while in a caloric deficit, your body essentially thinks: "Hmmm, it looks like we only need to lift lighter weights now. I guess all of that muscle I built for the purpose of being able to lift heavy weight is no longer needed. Time to start burning it for energy instead of body fat!"

Not too good, huh? This means that your primary weight training goal is to, at the very least, NOT lose strength. This in turn will allow you to NOT lose muscle.

For example, if you currently bench press 200lbs, your goal throughout the duration of your fat loss phase is to end up bench pressing that same 200lbs (or more if possible) when you're done and all of the fat has been lost. The same goes for every other exercise in your routine.

Sure, you can continue trying to get stronger and continue trying to make progressive overload happen while losing fat. It can and does happen (especially for beginners, who should still be progressing consistently even in a deficit).

But, if you're past the beginner's stage, don't be surprised if it's MUCH harder to do (if not borderline impossible in some cases) and the best you can do is just maintain strength rather than increase it.

This is fine of course, as just maintaining the amount of weight you currently lift on every exercise is the key weight training requirement for losing fat WITHOUT losing muscle.

3. Reduce Weight Training Volume and/or Frequency

A caloric deficit is really an *energy deficit*, and while this is fantastic (and required) for losing any amount of body fat, it kinda sucks for all things training related (recovery, work capacity, volume tolerance, performance, etc.).

What that means is, the workout routine you were (or would be) using with great success to build muscle, increase strength or make whatever other positive improvements to your body under normal circumstances (where there is no deficit present) will often be TOO MUCH for your body to tolerate and optimally recover from in the energy deficient state it is currently in.

And do you know what this scenario will ALWAYS lead to? One in which you're not recovering properly from your workouts? **A loss of strength**.

And do you know what a loss of strength will ALWAYS lead to, especially while in a caloric deficit? **A loss of muscle**.

Like I explained a minute ago (#2 on this list), the key training requirement for maintaining muscle is simply maintaining strength. The problem is, if you're using a workout routine that you aren't properly recovering from, the opposite of this is going to happen.

This is something that I and so many others have learned the hard way. The workout routine that seemed perfect before when those beneficial extra calories were present is now the reason your workouts are getting harder, you're getting weaker, reps are decreasing, weight on the bar needs to be reduced, and your fat loss phase (aka the cutting phase) ends with you having lost way more muscle and strength than you should have.

Been there, done that.

Luckily, It Can Be Prevented

How do you avoid all of this? Simple. By adjusting your weight training program to compensate for the drop in recovery that always comes with being in a caloric deficit. That means reducing training volume (the total amount of sets, reps and/or exercises being done), reducing training frequency (the total amount of workouts being done per week and per muscle group), or a combination of both.

My brand new guide to The Best Workout Routines actually contains the full details of a routine I like to call **The Fat Loss + Muscle Maintenance Solution**, as it incorporates ALL of these adjustments for this very purpose.

It has become my go-to routine for maintaining muscle while I lose fat, and I highly recommend it to anyone looking to do the same. You can download it all right here: The Best Workout Routines

I should also note that the *possible* exception to this are beginners, as they should **ALREADY** be using an intelligently designed *lower volume* beginner routine.

4. Get Pre & Post Workout Nutrition Right… Still

I once read an article on some diet/training website that tried to make the point that pre and post workout nutrition become LESS important when your goal is fat loss rather than muscle growth. I don't remember the exact reasoning for this (if I did, I'd be making fun of it right now), but whatever it was… it couldn't be more wrong.

As mentioned, recovery, work capacity, volume tolerance and overall training performance in general go to crap as a result of being in a caloric deficit. And if you haven't heard, the entire concept of pre and post workout nutrition is practically built around improving these very aspects of training and recovery.

That makes the meals you eat before and after your workouts JUST as important (arguably even more MORE SO) when your goal is losing fat without losing muscle as opposed to just building that muscle in the first place.

As for what to eat during these meals, I cover the full details right here: The PRE & POST Workout Meal

5. Don’t Reduce Calories By TOO Much

As we hopefully all understand by now, in order to lose any amount of body fat, you need to create a caloric deficit (I figure if I repeat it enough times, it will sink in). And that means you’re going to need to reduce your calorie intake below maintenance level so stored body fat can be burned for energy instead.

The thing is, that deficit can be classified as small, moderate or large based on how far below maintenance you go and how much you reduce your daily calorie intake by. Now, while each degree of deficit has its own PROS and CONS (which I explain here: The Caloric Deficit), a moderate deficit of about 20% below maintenance level is what ends up being most ideal in most cases.

That’s why it’s what I most often recommend: How Many Calories Per Day To Lose Weight?

Why not a larger deficit? Why not reduce calories by even more and make fat loss happen even faster? Well, aside from being harder to actually sustain, the other major downside of a large caloric deficit is that it will have the largest negative impact on training and recovery.

And that means that reducing your calorie intake by TOO much will increase the potential for strength and muscle loss. For that reason, I’d recommend most people stick with no more than a moderate deficit. Those who are already quite lean and looking to get REALLY lean may do better with an even smaller deficit

6. Incorporate Calorie/Carb/Nutrient Cycling

I can never decide if I want to refer to it as cycling calories, carbs or nutrients (they sound different but it’s all the same thing), so give me a second while I “*eeny*, *meeny*, *miny*, *moe*” this.

[8 seconds later...]

Alright, calorie cycling it is.

And what it refers to is eating more calories on certain days (typically training days) and less calories on other days (typically rest days). This is done primarily by manipulating carbs and/or fat, as protein is something we want to be high every day… especially when our goal is to lose fat, NOT muscle.

Now, with a more simple and straight forward fat loss diet, you’d consume about the same amount of calories and nutrients every day and be in a similar sized deficit each day of the week.

But with calorie cycling, you’d be in a larger deficit on certain days, but then a smaller deficit (or possibly even NO deficit at all) on the other days. However, at the end of the week, the total amount of calories consumed would still be the same. It’s just the method of getting there (eating less on certain days, more on others) is different.

The theoretical purpose for doing this is to improve everything from recovery to calorie partitioning by providing our bodies with more calories/nutrients when it’s most likely to need and benefit from them (training days), and less calories/nutrients when it isn’t (rest days). This would then potentially allow us to, among other things, better maintain muscle and strength while we lose fat.

Does it actually work? Well, this is something I’ve been experimenting with a lot over the last few years, and I’ve become a HUGE fan of it.

Not just for maintaining muscle while losing fat (which I’ve found it works great for), but also for diet adherence, controlling your appetite, and keeping you happy and satisfied. And on the other side of the goal spectrum, I like it equally well for gaining muscle without gaining excess fat.

It's definitely a subject you'll be hearing a lot more about from me in the future.

7. Take Diet Breaks When Needed

Can we all be honest for a second? Regardless of how you go about making fat loss occur, the simple fact is that it kinda sucks either way. Your body doesn't really like being in a caloric deficit, and as anyone who has ever tried to lose any amount of fat already knows, your mind sure as hell doesn't like it either.

The truth is, there are a ton of physiological and psychological aspects of being in the energy deficient state required for fat loss to take place **that just plain suck**. From the aforementioned drop in recovery and performance to the changes in insulin, leptin, thyroid hormones and overall metabolic rate, the human body (and mind) just run a whole lot better with no deficit present.

And that brings us to the concept of **the diet break**.

The exact definition of what a diet break is will vary based on who you ask, but I think of it as a 1-2 week period where you come out of the deficit and back up to maintenance level for the purpose of briefly allowing all of the things that suck about fat loss to recover and go back normal for a little while.

There are dozens of potential benefits (some physical, some mental) that come from taking diet breaks like this, but the reason I'm mentioning it here are for its performance and recovery related benefits. Why? Because *any* improvement there will help with our goal of maintaining muscle and strength while we lose fat.

The specifics of when and how often a diet break should be taken would require its own article (consider it added to my to-do list), but the basic point is that while people with LESS fat left to lose will generally need/benefit from a diet break more than someone in the early stages of losing a lot of fat, the fact remains that it can be quite beneficial for many reasons… one of which is preserving muscle.

8. Avoid Excessive Amounts Of Cardio (Or Just Don't Do ANY At All)

This all goes back to what I mentioned 100 times already about recovery being reduced as a result of calories being reduced. For this reason, ALL of the exercise you're doing (not just weight training, cardio too) needs to be reduced or adjusted to some extent to compensate for this and help prevent muscle loss. (Once again, for more about adjusting weight training, see The Fat Loss + Muscle Maintenance Solution in The Best Workout Routines.)

Now, weight training obviously still needs to be kept around as it provides the primary signal that tells our bodies to maintain muscle and only burn body fat. But cardio? That's *completely optional*.

And honestly, I feel there is no more overrated and over-given-a-shit-about aspect of fat loss or muscle growth than cardio. Obviously if your goal is endurance or performance related, my opinion would change. But strictly in terms of just improving the way your body looks? I hate cardio.

In fact, I rarely do any myself and my *default* recommendation for most people with body composition related goals is to do little or even NO cardio whatsoever. I'd much rather see people create their deficit via diet alone, use weight training to build/maintain muscle, and use cardio as a last resort tool for when you reach a point where lowering calories any further becomes too difficult and you'd rather burn

those calories off instead.

Here's why…

- HIIT (or really any high intensity cardio) will cut into the recovery of both your nervous system AND muscle fibers almost in the same way an additional weight training workout would.
- Typical steady state cardio (30 minutes of jogging, for example) will also cut into recovery, albeit not as much as HIIT can.
- And excessive amounts of steady state cardio (like 30-60+ minutes of jogging and/or just doing it too frequently) is often viewed as the ultimate killer of muscle.

When you weigh these CONS against the PROS of cardio (it burns some calories… yay!), you begin to realize that it may not be worth doing for the purpose of losing fat… specifically for people whose primary goal is to lose that fat without losing muscle.

Don't get me wrong here… both HIIT and steady state cardio are useful fat loss tools for sure and I'm definitely not against doing them. It's just that, considering cardio is IN NO WAY required for losing fat and that doing it could potentially hurt your ability to maintain muscle (plus it's boring as hell)… I don't really see the point.

Obviously personal preferences and individual differences play an important role here too, but generally speaking… I rarely recommend cardio by default or do much of it myself. And when I do, my first choice is always **30-60 minutes of low intensity walking**. Still burns a nice amount of calories and won't cut into recovery. Win-win.

What About Eating Only Healthy & "Clean" Foods?

After looking over this list of what I'd consider to be the most important/effective ways to maintain muscle while losing fat, some people might be wondering if I forgot to mention one final tip.

The "tip" I'm referring to is to eat healthier, cleaner, natural foods instead of unhealthy, dirty, processed foods. Why? Because doing so will *supposedly* make a significant difference in terms of getting the "weight" you lose to be fat instead of muscle.

As nice as that theory sounds, the truth is that with all else being equal (total calorie and macronutrient intake, strength being maintained, etc.), clean vs dirty, healthy vs unhealthy, processed vs unprocessed really doesn't matter at all in terms of calorie partitioning and whether the "weight" you lose ends up being fat (good) or muscle (bad).

Now obviously in terms of things like overall health, appetite control and diet adherence there are some big differences, which is why I'd always recommend getting most of your calories from higher quality foods rather than junky garbage. **But the common thought that changes in body composition are directly influenced by a food being "clean" or "dirty" is total bullshit**.

So no, while it's still a great idea, it's not an idea that will (in and of itself) improve your ability to maintain muscle while losing fat. Which means, it doesn't belong on this list.

Goodbye Fat, Hello Muscle!

There you have it… the 8 best ways to ensure you lose fat without losing muscle in the process. The first 2 items (sufficient protein intake and maintaining strength) are BY FAR the most important. It just so happens that the majority of the other items on this list are proven to significantly help make those things (specifically strength maintenance) actually happen.

So, if you've ever lost any muscle or strength while trying to lose fat or are just concerned it might happen to you in the future… this is how you can prevent it.

How To Build Muscle And Lose Fat At The Same Time: Can It Be Done?

I get a lot of questions about diet and fitness. No, seriously. I get *A LOT* of questions about diet and fitness. And I've consistently gotten this crazy number of questions for quite a few years now.

During this time, I've noticed that a handful of these questions seem to come up much more frequently than all of the others. And today, I want to answer one that is somewhere at the very top of that list…

How do you build muscle and lose fat at the same time?

In order to answer this one, we need to begin with the big problem that causes people to ask it so often in the first place.

Two Little Facts… One Big Problem

If you're a regular reader of mine, then you already know what I'm about to tell you. But if you're not, please allow me to bring the following two facts to your attention…

- **FACT 1**: Losing fat requires a **caloric deficit**, which means consuming LESS calories than your body needs so that stored body fat is used for energy instead.
- **FACT 2**: Building muscle requires a **caloric surplus**, which means consuming MORE calories than your body needs so that new muscle tissue can be created.

Once you put these two facts side-by-side, you come to a very obvious and confusing problem: **losing fat and building muscle require the complete opposite of each other in terms of calorie intake.**

And it's this realization that leads those of us who want to build muscle AND lose fat (ideally at the exact same time) to wonder just how in the hell we're supposed to make it happen?

In fact, it leads us to wonder if it's actually possible for it to happen at all? Can it even be done?

Well, let's clear it up once and for all, starting with whether it's actually possible…

Can It Be Done?

The answer is: **YES!**

Yup, seriously. It is indeed possible to build muscle and lose fat at the same time. In fact, I've even done it before myself. Anyone who says it can't be done is 100% wrong.

That's the good news.

The bad news however is that it's not exactly something that everyone will be able to make it happen. Meaning, *some* **people can do it… but** *most* **people can't**.

Let's start with those lucky bastards who can…

Who CAN Do Both At The Same Time?

There are primarily 4 groups of people who can do it. In no specific order, they are:

1. Fat Beginners
2. People Regaining Lost Muscle
3. Genetic Freaks
4. Steroid/Drug Users

Now I'm sure #3 and #4 aren't all that surprising. I mean, we all have an equal amount of jealousy and hate towards the people with amazing genetics for a reason, don't we? They can do stuff we can't do, and the stuff we can do they just do better, faster and easier.

And, as I've covered before, steroids and various drugs completely change everything.

So let's ignore those two groups and look at the only two groups most of us will ever have a possibly of falling into: **fat beginners** and **people regaining lost muscle**.

1. Fat Beginners

The untrained state beginners are in when they start working out makes them primed for rapid improvements in virtually every area, especially strength and muscle. Noob gains are just awesome like that.

Now, if you combine this borderline superpower that beginner's possess with an abundance of body fat, you end up with a magical calorie partitioning scenario that gives fatter beginners a short term ability to take calories stored on their body as fat and use them to build new muscle.

Basically, your body burns fat as a fuel source for muscle growth, essentially using your own body fat as your "surplus calories." Like I said, it's pretty damn magical.

Now how "fat" of a "fat beginner" do you need to be exactly to pull this off? I honestly don't know. What I do know is that the fatter you are, the more capable you'll be of doing it… and the better and more significant your results will be. The leaner you are, the less likely you'll be to actually make it happen and the worse/less significant your results will be.

So, if you have just a few pounds of fat to lose, don't get your hopes up too high. But if you have quite a bit of fat on you to lose, you'll most likely have a short term ability to both build muscle and lose fat at the same time.

To do this, create a moderate caloric deficit, get the rest of your diet right (sufficient protein intake, etc.) and use an intelligently designed beginner routine focused on progressive overload (and work your ass off to make it happen).

While you definitely won't be building muscle at the same rate you'll be losing fat (not even close), you'll still be able to make some decent strength and muscle gains while in a deficit.

But keep in mind, this is only a temporary thing. As time passes and you become less fat and less of an untrained beginner (and more muscular, too), you'll lose this superpower and become human again just like the rest of us. Enjoy it while it lasts.

2. People Regaining Lost Muscle

Similar to the fat beginner, there is another group of people who will be able to pull off a similar type of magic. In this case, the magic in question is largely due to the fact that **muscle memory** is very

much real, and very much spectacular.

I've had the unfortunate luck of actually experiencing it first hand, as I once stopped training for about 3-4 months due to injury. I lost a bunch of muscle, AND I gained a little bit of fat along the way. As you can imagine, it sucked.

If there was one "positive" thing that came out of it however, it was getting to see what it's like to return to lifting after a significant break and try to A) lose that fat, B) rebuild the muscle that I had previously built but now lost, and C) do both as fast as F-ing possible.

I don't have the details in front of me, so I don't remember exactly what happened or exactly how it happened. But, without a doubt, I was temporarily losing fat *AND* building muscle.

Each week certain measurements would consistently go up (like my arms) while other measurements went down (like my stomach). Strength came back at beginner speeds, if not faster (and my guess is faster). My weight was all over the place. Some weeks I'd lose, some weeks I'd gain, some weeks I'd maintain.

But in the end, there was less fat and more muscle on my body. And during the early stages, it was clearly happening simultaneously within the same period of time. I expected progress to go well, but it exceeded my expectations.

One of these days I'll do a full breakdown of exactly what happened and what I did to make it happen, along with a complete week-by-week recap of how it all played out. It was pretty interesting, at least to me.

But the point I'm getting at here is that if you've built a decent amount of muscle, but then stopped training for a significant period of time during which some/most/all of that muscle was lost and body fat was gained, you'll be able to rebuild that muscle WHILE losing that fat, at least for a little while. Just like with fat beginners though, this is only a temporary thing. Enjoy it while it lasts.

Who CAN'T Do Both At The Same Time?

For the most part… **everyone else**.

Certainly not at anything even remotely close to an acceptable rate, if any rate at all. I know it sucks to hear that, but it's the truth.

Unless you happen to fall into one of the four groups mentioned above, the likelihood of you being able to build muscle and lose fat at the same time falls somewhere between slim and none. Or, to narrow it down even further, *none and none*.

But wait, what's that you say? What about those who claim it can be done? What about those who claim they've done it themselves? What about those who claim it's totally possible as long as you do it a certain way?

I had a feeling you'd bring that up.

But I've Seen Claims That It Can Be Done!

Yeah, I've seen those claims too. More often than not, it's usually one of four things…

1. Bullshit

Do me a favor. The next time you see some fitness guru claim that "everyone else has it wrong… we

can all build muscle and lose fat at the same time," take a second and let me know what happens next.

I mean, as soon as they are done explaining why it's possible or how it's possible (or more often just hyping the fact that it's supposedly possibly), do they *just so happen* to have some kind of program, book, supplement or product of some kind that you can buy to make it all happen?

Yeah, what a shocking coincidence.

This is probably the most common format you'll see this claim made in… when it's part of the sales pitch/marketing of some shitty product. Like most of the stuff you'll see in the diet and fitness world… it's just good old lies, deception and bullshit put out there to get you to buy something.

You know, just like how you can use this supplement to lose 20lbs of fat in 5 days, or use this program to build 25lbs of muscle in 3 weeks. Whatever it is you need to hear to get your credit card out, someone will gladly be there to claim it. This is no different.

Add in steroid use, muscle memory, or both, and they'll even have the pictures to "prove" their claim. They'll just accidentally forget to mention the steroid use and muscle memory part, of course.

2. Stupidity

Then we have people who aren't really lying like group #1 is, at least not knowingly. Rather, these are the people who have somehow come to believe that this is a perfectly achievable goal for everyone (usually as a result of group #1) and are now out in the world spreading their own stupid misinformation.

Again, this is as common as it gets. I'd estimate that someone says something wrong and stupid about diet and fitness every second of every day while thinking what they're saying is in fact right and smart. But it's not. It's just a nice example of the Dunning-Kruger Effect.

So the next time you see someone claim that we can all build muscle and lose fat at the same time as long as we just "eat clean," or "eat 6 small meals a day to speed up our metabolism," or "avoid carbs after 7PM," or "get our post workout meal *just right*" or whatever else… ignore them.

Like the majority of the diet and fitness advice you'll hear from the average person, it falls somewhere between "not quite accurate" and "dumb as hell."

3. Semantics

Sometimes the claim can actually be 100% legit depending on exactly what the phrase "at the same time" means to you.

Are we literally talking about doing one while simultaneously doing the other? Or, are we just talking about building muscle and losing fat within the same period of time (e.g. 6 weeks, 3 months, 1 year, etc.)?

This seems like a silly point, I know. But, I've seen programs sold that claim they will allow you to build muscle and lose fat at the same time, only to go on to tell you to spend 10 weeks building muscle, then spend 10 weeks losing fat… and taadaaa!

Over the span of those 20 weeks, you've built muscle and lost fat "at the same time." Not quite what you had in mind, was it?

4. The "Recomp"

And last but not least, we have various "recomp" methods.

These recomp (short for recomposition) methods typically involve alternating days of surpluses and deficits over the course of the week. The surpluses are put on training days to support muscle growth, and the deficits are put on rest days to cause fat loss. The goal at the end of the week is to break even and be at maintenance while (supposedly) making small progress in both directions.

So while there will be no real immediate change to your weight or your body, you'll (supposedly) be making slow/tiny improvements in body composition over time. Meaning, less fat and more muscle.

Can this kind of thing work? I lean towards some combination of "maybe, kinda, barely and sometimes."

The problem however is that *if* it does work, it will work so **painfully and unacceptably slow** that it will serve as a huge waste of time and effort for most people looking to build muscle, lose fat or do both**.**

I mean, if you're only looking to make super tiny changes to your body, and you're in absolutely no rush whatsoever to do it, it can *maybe* be an option to consider trying.

But honestly, for the majority of the population, it's not really something I'd recommend at all.

But Then… How Do You Reach Both Goals?

It's pretty simple, actually. You focus on one goal at a time and then alternate between them in a way that doesn't interfere with the other.

Confused? Here's what that means in English…

1. You spend some period of time losing fat and getting lean. During this time, you should most definitely still be weight training intelligently so you can, at the very least, **maintain your current levels of muscle and strength while body fat is lost**. More about that here: How To Lose Fat Without Losing Muscle
2. Then, once you're as lean as you wanted to get (or at least lean enough to go into a surplus), you switch your focus over from fat loss to building muscle. During this time, you should most definitely still be paying close attention to your calorie intake and rate of weight gain, and really just be optimizing your diet and training in general so that you **gain as much muscle as possible while keeping fat gains to an absolute minimum**.
3. Then, depending on exactly what your goals are and exactly how much muscle you want to build and how much fat you want to lose, you'd just keep alternating between goals until you end up with the exact body you're trying get.

So even though you're technically only focusing on one goal at a time, you're never really ignoring the other. Instead, you're always going about that one goal in a way that puts you in an ideal position for reaching the other.

Or, to put it another way, you don't "old school" bulk and cut like an idiot. You do it the right way.

And if you're wondering which goal you should focus on first, the right answer for *most* people *most* of the time is losing fat. More about that here: Should I Build Muscle or Lose Fat First?

Summing It Up

So, there you go. It is indeed possible to build muscle and lose fat at the same time, although there are only a small number of people who will be able to make it happen.

If you're one of the few who can, be sure to take advantage of it and enjoy it while it lasts. You'll be like the rest of us soon enough.

And for those who can't, the worst thing you can do is attempt to anyway. Doing so will almost always result in a lot of wasted time and effort with little or nothing to show for it. Usually nothing.

The ideal solution is to simply attack one goal at a time as intelligently as possible, and then alternate to the other.

In the end, muscle will be built and fat will be lost… just not quite at the same time.

Appendix C:

Muscle Tone – The TRUTH About Toning Up Your Body & How To Get Toned

If you're reading this, then you probably want more muscle tone.

Maybe you want to tone up your legs, or your stomach, or your arms, or your chest, or your back or your shoulders. Hell, maybe you want to tone up your entire body.

Whichever it is, you want to know all about toning. You want to know the best muscle toning exercises, the best body toning workouts, and all of the tips, tricks and secrets of how to get toned.

Sound about right?

If so, then I have a message for you…

Everything You Know About Tone Is Bullshit!

That's right, it's true. You see…

- Nothing **tones** a muscle.
- Nothing **defines** a muscle.
- Nothing makes a muscle **ripped** or **cut** or **slim** or **lean** or **sculpted** or any other equally hilarious adjectives that essentially mean the same damn thing.

For all of that to make sense (and to get to the root of the bullshit), you first need a definition of what these words *truly* mean.

Since they all tend to be used interchangeably and really mean the exact same thing, I'm just going to use "**tone**" (and "**toning**") to refer to this entire group of words. So…

What Is Tone?

Tone: To have some amount of muscle on your body AND then have a low enough body fat percentage so that this muscle can actually be seen.

The more muscle you have and the less fat you have covering it, the more "toned" and "defined" and "ripped" and "cut" you will appear to be. The more fat covering your muscle, the less visible it will be and the less "toned" you will appear.

Go and read that again so it really sinks in.

What this means is, whenever a person says that they want to "tone up," they're actually saying that they want to be able to see their muscle better than they currently do.

And to accomplish that, it will *always* be a matter of doing one of the following:

- Losing the fat that is covering your muscles.
- Building some more muscle.
- A combination of both.

More often than not, **too much fat covering your muscle is the #1 reason a person isn't as toned as**

they would like to be, although just not having enough muscle in the first place (or a little bit of both) is possible as well.

So, that's what "tone" actually is, and you're now WAY ahead of the game for knowing it.

The reason I say that is because most people think tone is this magical thing that happens some magical way using only magical methods and techniques.

However, it's not that at all.

To show you what I mean, let's go over the common silly things that people think help them tone up, but in reality don't do a damn thing.

Things That Will NOT Make Your Body Toned

- Higher reps WILL NOT make you toned.
- Lighter weight WILL NOT make you toned.
- Machines WILL NOT make you toned.
- Supposed "toning exercises" WILL NOT make you toned.
- Magical machines/products/supplements that claim to make you toned (usually for "3 easy payments of $19.95") WILL DEFINITELY NOT make you toned.

Why? Because none of these silly things (myths) directly target the fat covering the muscle you are training.

Why? Because NOTHING directly targets the fat covering the muscle you are training.

Why? Because the idea that you can burn fat from one specific area of your body by doing exercises that target that area is known as spot reduction… and **SPOT REDUCTION IS A BIG STUPID IMPOSSIBLE MYTH THAT CAN NOT ACTUALLY HAPPEN NO MATTER WHAT YOU DO.**

Why? Because the human body is only capable of losing fat from the entire body as a whole. Exactly where on your body you lose fat from first, second, third, etc. is predetermined by your genetics whether you like it or not.

No workout or exercise, no type of workout or exercise, no form of workout or exercise, and no amount of reps, sets, or anything else can change that and actually allow you to burn fat from the exact spot you want to burn it from.

It sucks, but it's true.

Got all that? Good! Now let's answer the big question that's on your mind right now…

So, How Do I Actually Get Toned?

If you've made it this far, then you're probably wondering if "tone" is even possible. Is muscle tone just a myth? Is there no way to actually tone up your body? Will you never be able to get the results you want?

Relax… I have good news. **Tone is definitely real and definitely possible**.

And guess what else? All it takes is just 2 simple things:

1. Build some amount of muscle.
2. Lose enough fat so that the muscle you have (or will build) can actually be seen rather than covered by a layer (or many layers) of fat.

Taaadaaa!

All you need to do is use an intelligently designed weight training routine that will allow you to build muscle (for example, any of the MANY programs included in The Best Workout Routines).

Then, using your diet plan, cardio activity, or a combination of both… lose some fat from your body as a whole. It will eventually come off from the exact spots you want it to and therefore allow you to appear "toned" in those spots.

And that's it.

The fact is, if you don't appear as "toned" as you want to appear, then you either need to build some more muscle (a function of weight training), lose some more fat (a function of diet and/or cardio), or do a combination of both.

Case closed.

And Here's Why Most People Never Get Toned

The problem is, most people believe the stupid myths mentioned earlier, and instead of doing what they need to be doing (losing fat, building muscle, or both), they're wasting time doing a bunch of useless crap that isn't actually helping them get toned (or doing much of anything else, really).

Not only is "light weight for high reps" and other such nonsense NOT directly targeting the fat covering your muscles, it's also NOT providing the type of training stimulus needed to actually build muscle in the first place.

So, neither of the things you truly need to be doing to tone up (losing fat, building muscle) are actually happening in this scenario.

And, while many guys might find themselves in this scenario, the majority of women who weight train are nearly always in this scenario.

It's due to a combination of A) "toning up" usually being the workout goal of most females, and B) the fear of getting too "big and bulky" like a guy (another stupid myth I destroy here: workouts for women) scaring them away from doing the stuff they should be doing.

So, all of these people (men and women) are just wasting time and accomplishing NONE of the things that need to be accomplished in order for a person to truly get toned.

Don't Be One Of These People

So, if you truly want to get toned, don't be like these people. If you already are, then just stop now and fix it. How? Once again…

Muscle + less fat = tone.

That's all it is.

To supply the "muscle" portion of that equation, design yourself a proper weight training program that uses an ideal amount of frequency, intensity and volume, an ideal workout schedule, and proper exercise selection. Then focus on making progressive overload happen as often as possible.

Or, better yet, use one of my already highly proven Best Workout Routines.

Then, for the "less fat" portion of appearing toned… set up your diet plan in a way that will cause fat loss to occur.

That's all that works.

There's no such thing as toning exercises. There is no combination of sets and reps that cause tone. There is no type of weight training workout or method that in and of itself allows you to tone up a specific area of your body or your entire body as a whole.

Tone is just a matter of having some amount of muscle and then having a low enough body fat percentage so that muscle can be seen.

Everything else is bullshit.

Workout Routines For Women – Why Your Weight Training Workouts Suck

Hello ladies… we need to have a very serious talk.

And guys, you should definitely read this too, because there is a good chance you'll need to have this same talk with your girlfriend, wife, mom, sister, etc. at some point in the future.

What about, you ask? About workout routines for women, and how they are complete and utter **crap**.

Now wait, hang on ladies. Don't get mad or insulted just yet. I'm going to explain exactly what I mean here, and by the end you'll (hopefully) be in full agreement with that statement.

Now, in order to do this, I'm first going to have to bring a very simple weight training fact to your attention that may shock and scare you. But don't be afraid, because right after that, I'm going to completely eliminate that fear.

Are you with me? Awesome. Now… brace yourself for what I'm about to say:

Women Should Work Out EXACTLY Like Men

Nope, I'm not joking or exaggerating. Men and women benefit equally from the same exact types of workout routines. Really, it's true.

People often ask what the differences are between designing workouts for a woman and designing workouts for a man. The honest truth is that there are no real differences. They should be exactly the same.

Despite all of the garbage you've heard or read, there legitimately is no such thing as a workout that's specifically made for a man or a woman in the first place. That's just marketing crap. There are no significant differences in what works best based on gender or what needs to be done to get positive results from weight training.

Any workout routine that works great for a man will work equally great for a woman. There are absolutely no significant differences in how we should work out. There are no changes that need to be made based on what body part you do or do not have in your pants.

Pretty Crazy, Right?

After all, you ladies have been brainwashed into thinking that guys are the only ones who need to do "guy workouts" with heavy weights and lower reps and big compound exercises and that sort of thing.

Instead, you girls supposedly only need to do "**toning exercises**" and "**sculpting workouts**" and other similar pointless nonsense.

As I've already covered in detail, everything you've been programmed into believing about "tone" is bullshit. Muscle tone happens as a result of actually building some muscle (which "toning workouts" never do) and then losing enough fat so that muscle becomes more visible (which "toning workouts" also never do).

That's how you get "toned."

High reps, light weights, machines and the rest of the typical weight training methods that are a major part of every female-specific "toning" workout do nothing but waste your time and effort. (More about that here: How To Get Toned)

And as I've also covered before, the idea that workout routines for men build "bulky" muscle while workout routines for women only build "lean" or "toned" muscle is also pure bullshit. Muscle is muscle. There are no different types.

There's just workouts that build it, and workouts that don't. As it turns out, the ones designed for men usually do build muscle. But the ones designed for women? Ha, they never do. (More about that here: Lean vs Bulky vs Toned)

My Fear-Inducing Point

So, the point I'm getting at here is this. Everything that is synonymous with workout routines for women is **crap that does nothing**. It doesn't tone, or sculpt, or firm or whatever other girly adjectives the creators of these workouts use to appeal to you and the myths you've been brainwashed into believing.

And they sure as shit don't build muscle. Which is pretty funny, because building some muscle is what you need to do to actually get that toned/sculpted/firm/sexy body you're trying to get.

Which brings us to the big important question. **How should you women build muscle?**

The answer, while scary, is quite simple: **by doing all of the things that us guys do to build muscle**. The same workout routines, the same proven principals, the same methods… *the same everything*.

The problem is, if there is one thing I know about women (and there honestly might only be one thing), it's that you are already beginning to ignore every word I'm saying. Yup, it's true. The second I said you should work out like a man… you started to tune me out.

It's okay, I knew you would. I broke the holy code that 99% of the female population adheres to when it comes to working out. And that is: Thou shalt not train like a man or use a man's workout.

Why? Because of the fear that is ingrained in the mind of every woman who has ever even thought of stepping into a gym or lifting a weight…

I'm Afraid Of Getting Too Big, Bulky And Muscular Like A Guy

There it is. The one single fear that every workout routine aimed at females is built upon.

The problem with this fear is that it single handedly:

- Prevents the majority of the female population from getting anything close to positive results from weight training.
- Has most women wasting their time every single workout doing nothing productive in any way,

shape or form.
- Prevents most women from lifting anything heavier than a 3 pound pink dumbbell.
- Keeps most women away from free weights and compound exercises.
- Forces most women to do endless sets of higher reps over and over again.
- Ensures most women will never create progressive overload.

I can go on and on and on here.

That's because it's this fear that most of you women have about getting too big, bulky, muscular and manly looking that is literally stopping you from actually getting the body you truly want. And honestly ladies… this fear couldn't possibly be more idiotic.

Let me explain…

Testosterone

You've heard of testosterone, right? It's typically known as the "male hormone" even though both men and women produce it. Men just happen to produce so much more of it than women that we just decided to refer to it as the male hormone.

Well, did you know that testosterone plays the largest role in predicting how much muscle a person can build and how quickly they can build it? It's true. And this of course brings us right to the big secret.

Why Women WON'T & CAN'T Get "Big" And "Bulky"

How shall I put this? Hmmm. Alright, I got it…

Women do not have physiological makeup to EVER get anywhere near as big and bulky as they are so scared of getting anywhere near as quickly as they are so scared of it happening.

Seriously. If I could scream that directly into the face of every girl reading this, I would.

Because no matter how hard a woman purposely tries to get that big, bulky, overly muscular and manly looking body that most women are scared to death of getting… they never EVER will.

Even if they made it their one goal in life and did nothing but work to make it happen. It would still never happen anywhere close to the degree that women are so scared it might.

Well… unless of course they use **steroids**.

How Some Women DO Get "Big" And "Bulky"

You know the women who actually are big, bulky and overly muscular? The female bodybuilders, certain female wrestlers/athletes, or just plain old female freaks? You know, the ones that every one of you ladies are so afraid to look like and who are probably most responsible for putting this fear into your head in the first place?

Well, **they all used steroids and various other drugs** that screw with their hormone levels and allow them to get bigger, bulkier and manlier than any normal female WILL EVER COME CLOSE TO GETTING NATURALLY.

Hell, steroids allow them to get bigger and bulkier than the majority of *men* can ever get. And this brings me to another important point.

Most Men Can't Get As Big/Bulky As Women Are Afraid Of Getting

I kid you not. Most of the men in the world have a billion times more testosterone than most women (exaggerated for effect), and that means we can build MUCH more muscle than you ever will MUCH faster than you ever will. And, even we can't get as big and muscular as most women are afraid of getting.

There are guys in gyms all around the world doing everything they can possibly do to get as big as they can as fast as they can, and not one of them is doing it anywhere near the degree that most women hilariously think *they* will do it at.

Seriously. Building muscle is a painfully slow, extremely gradual process for men. And you women will never even come close to reaching these *amazing* "painfully slow" levels that us guys can.

Yet, women insanely think they will not only reach those levels, but greatly *exceed* them. It's just a super idiotic/hilarious thought. Which brings up yet another important point.

The Rate Of Muscle Gain For Men And Women

I've already written about this subject in detail (How Much Muscle Can You Gain?), but it needs to briefly be mentioned now to prove just how insane some of you ladies are.

Let's pretend that we live in some magical fantasy world where women are actually capable of getting the type of muscular manly body they are afraid of getting. It will never happen, but let's just pretend that it can.

Most women think it will happen overnight. Like one day you'll lift something heavier than a 3 pound dumbbell or do less than 15 reps per set and the next day you will have gained 50lbs of muscle.

Here's the thing about that. Even with steroids, it's not possible.

For the average natural male doing everything right under the best possible circumstances, the average rate of muscle gain will be between **0.25-0.5lb of muscle per week.**

And for females? **Half that**.

Read that again, ladies. I just told you that AT BEST, a MAN whose genetics are significantly better than yours for gaining muscle can only gain half of a pound of muscle per week at most. And most men won't even be able to reach that amount, and definitely not every week for a significant period of time.

Hell, most men past the beginners stage should be happy with **10-15lbs of muscle gained PER YEAR**!

And like I said, for women… it's half that. That means, AT BEST, the average woman purposely trying to get big and bulky and huge will only be able to gain **1 pound of muscle PER MONTH**! And that's assuming you're doing everything as perfectly as possible (workout routine, diet, etc.) and trying to build muscle as quickly as you can.

For the love of God, go back and read that part again too.

Have I done enough to eliminate this fear from your mind now? I sure hope so because…

You Are Preventing The Results You Want

Here's a question. What type of body do you want?

Go ahead ladies, think about it.

Got it? Ok, now let me guess.

You want to look toned and defined. You want to be fit and tight and firm and lean and athletic looking, while at the same time always appearing completely feminine and hot/sexy/awesome in general.

Well, guess what? To get that body, you are going to need to build some muscle.

And guess what else? You know all of those things you are avoiding because you think they will make you big and bulky and manly?

Well, it's those very things that are required in order for any amount of muscle to be built.

You see, we all build muscle the same way. We all require the same muscle building fundamentals to be in place in order for muscle growth to occur. We all need and benefit from similar amounts of weight training volume, frequency and intensity. We all need to force progressive overload to happen and lift heavy weights that are truly challenging for us. We all need to ensure certain dietary requirements are in place.

Whether you are male or female, young or old, looking to build 5lbs of muscle of 50lbs of muscle. It doesn't matter. The things that need to be done for ANY amount of muscle to be built will always need to be done.

However, since most women use workout routines comprised of little "girly" weights and super high reps, and are only interested in workouts that avoid big compound exercises, using lower reps, using free weights, and absolutely never attempt to make progressive overload happen or lift anything heavier today than they lifted 100 workouts ago… most women will never build any muscle.

Do you know what this all means? It means you are preventing yourself from getting the type of body you want because of a fear of getting a body that you can't actually get.

How's that for irony?

Your fear of getting "big and bulky" is what's stopping you from getting toned and fit and lean and firm and athletic and sexy and blah blah blah.

The Solution

So ladies, please… stop worrying about getting too big and too muscular, and start doing the things that need to be done in order to build some muscle and get the body you want.

You don't have to lift hundreds of pounds on every exercise like a guy might, but you do have to lift weights that are equally challenging for YOU and continue to push yourself to progress and gradually lift heavier and heavier weights over time. This is progressive overload, and it's a requirement for any amount of muscle to be built or any amount of progress to be made.

You will likely also have to use free weights and compound exercises and lower reps and many of the other things most women typically avoid doing in favor of workouts filled with a bunch of pointless nonsense.

Like I said, these are the fundamental factors that need to be in place in order for muscle to be built. You either do them and build muscle, or you don't. Simple as that.

And sure, some of us may only want to build 5lbs of muscle and some of us may want to build 50lbs.

But, there is still no difference whatsoever in terms of the approach. The same things still have to be

done. The only difference is, when someone only looking to build a smaller amount of muscle reaches that goal, they stop right there and just maintain from that point on. The person looking to get "bigger and bulkier" would just keep on going.

So ladies, I beg of you… throw away the 3lb pink dumbbells and start challenging yourself and doing all of the things that I just explained need to be done for muscle to be built.

Use The Muscle Building Workout Routine or The Beginner Workout Routine or any of the fully designed and HIGHLY effective programs that I've included in my brand new premium guide, The Best Workout Routines.

You won't get huge and manly. You won't get big and bulky. And the muscle you do gain sure as hell won't be gained quickly or suddenly to the point where you wake up one day and all of a sudden appear to be any bigger/bulkier than you wanted to be.

Women are just not built for it genetically. Hell, that kind of thing couldn't even happen to men using steroids (let alone women who aren't).

Instead ladies, all that will happen is that your body will slowly begin to look more toned and fit and lean and tight and firm and sculpted and all around hot. You know… just like you've always wanted it to look.

I guarantee it.

How To Build Lean Muscle, Bulky Muscle, And Toned Muscle

So, what "type" of muscle do you want to build? Lean muscle? Bulky muscle? Toned muscle?

Those are usually the 3 most common "types" of muscle that a person wants to have. The question is, which "type" do you want, and how the hell do you get it?

This is a subject that brings a smile to my face every time I get asked about it or see it come up in some article or forum. It used to make me want to bang my head into a wall, but I figure it's better for my brain function if I just smile in amusement instead.

Why the apparent hatred for this silly little subject, you ask? Allow me to answer…

Lean Muscle vs Bulky Muscle vs Toned Muscle

You see, one of the most common fitness related goals a person can have is to build muscle. Simple enough, right? Hell, I even wrote a super comprehensive guide to creating the workout routine that will best allow you to build that muscle (and included a fully detailed sample muscle building routine).

The thing is, some people like to go even further than just wanting to "build muscle" by specifying the exact "type" of muscle they want to build (or in some cases, the "type" they want to avoid building).

I'm of course referring to **lean muscle**, **bulky muscle** and **toned muscle**.

And why wouldn't they? After all, there are countless magazines, books, websites, articles, forums and workouts out there that seem to be geared specifically towards building one of those 3 different "types" of muscle.

You know, here's a workout routine for building lean muscle, and here's one for building big bulky muscles, and here's a program for building sexy toned muscles (the exact opposite of bulky muscle).

I'm sure you've seen it before. Different "types" of muscle are constantly referenced as though they have numerous physiological differences that require different types of diets and workouts in order to build.

This sounds all well and good, except for one tiny little fact.

It's all complete and utter **bullshit**.

Muscle Is Muscle!!!

In reality, there is no such thing as lean muscle, bulky muscle or toned muscle. Muscle is muscle. There are no different types of muscle densities or textures. It's all the exact same thing.

There is no muscle that is lean and another that is bulky and another that is toned. There's just muscle, period. That's all it can ever be.

Got that? Good. Here's what you're probably thinking now…

But I Swear I've Seen People With Different "Types" Of Muscle?!?!

I know, I know. Muscle sometimes appears "lean" on some people, "bulky" on other people and "toned" on others. If all muscle is the same, then why does it sometimes look like there's different types of it?

Well, first of all, it's not your imagination. What it is however is an illusion created by other factors that have nothing at all to do with one muscle tissue truly being a different "type" than another.

Instead, it has everything to do with **the AMOUNT of muscle a person has built along with the amount of FAT they do or do not have covering it**.

That's the "smoke and mirrors" of this muscle illusion.

Confused? It's cool. Here's some common examples of what I mean…

Example #1

Take 2 people of the same age and gender, and magically give them the exact same genetics and body fat percentage. Then, have one build 10lbs of muscle, and have the other build 30lbs of muscle.

To the eye of the people who don't understand that there is no such thing as different "types" of muscle, it may look like the first person built "lean" muscle, while the second person built "bulky" muscle.

In reality, one person just built more muscle than the other, and it just looks "bulkier" in comparison.

The physiological makeup of the muscle tissue on both people is still exactly the same. It's the amount of muscle they built that creates the illusion that it's somehow different. It's not.

Example #2

Now take 2 people of the same age and gender, and magically give them the exact same genetics <u>BUT</u>

different body fat percentages. Instead, give one person less body fat (making them leaner looking) and give the other more body fat (making them fatter looking).

Now have them both build 10lbs of muscle and then stand them side by side right next to each other.

Did that first person build "toned" muscle while the second person built "bulky" muscle? Nope.

It's just that person #1 has a lower body fat percentage which therefore allows their new 10lbs of muscle to be more visible and appealing in that "toned, slim, sexy" sort of way people like.

Person #2 on the other hand has a higher body fat percentage which therefore causes their new 10lbs of muscle to be covered by a layer (or many layers) of fat. This in turn causes them to look bulkier and generally less appealing overall.

It's not that different "types" of muscle were built or even different amounts of muscle in this case. It's just a matter of one person having a higher body fat percentage than the other.

If that person just lost some fat, it would reveal the exact same "toned" looking muscle the first person has. And no, it's not because it suddenly changed from "bulky" to "toned." It was there just the same all along… only hidden under some fat.

Like I said, it's never the muscle itself or the "type" it supposedly is or isn't that makes a person look lean or bulky or toned. It's just the amount of muscle you build, and the amount of fat that is or is not covering it that creates that illusion.

Which means…

All Muscle Gets Built The EXACT Same Way

And here's the final big point that needs to be made on this subject.

Since muscle is muscle (meaning there is no such thing as lean muscle, bulky muscle or toned muscle… it's all the same exact muscle), that means you can take every single thing you've heard or will ever hear about building specific types of muscle and **ignore it completely**.

It's all useless nonsense that, if anything, is usually counterproductive to what actually needs to be done to build muscle as effectively as possible.

So you know all of those supposed "toning" workouts with high reps and less weight and magical "toning exercises" that claim to build only "lean" or "toned" muscle? It's bullshit. (More about that here: Muscle Tone)

And the idea that heavy weights and low reps and big compound exercises only build big "bulky" muscles? Yup… complete bullshit as well.

And so on and so on.

Muscle is muscle, and it all gets built the exact same way. No matter what you do, the muscle you build will always end up being the same "type" of muscle. There aren't different ways and methods that build different types… because **THERE ARE NO DIFFERENT TYPES**.

In terms of building muscle… there's just what works well, what works less well, and what doesn't work at all. That's it.

No matter how you want your muscle to look in the end (lean, bulky or toned), the things you need to do to actually build that muscle remain the same in every case.

And no matter how much muscle you want to build (5lbs or 50lbs), the requirements for making it

happen as optimally as possible remain the same as well.

It’s the amount of it you build and the amount of fat that is (or is not) covering it that will affect whether or not it looks lean, bulky or toned on your body.

Appendix D:

Strength vs Size: How To Get Big, Get Strong or Do BOTH

Three of the most common reasons a person ever steps into a gym and picks up a weight is because they:

- Want to build muscle.
- Want to increase strength.
- Want to do both equally.

In those first 2 cases, the game plan seems obvious enough. Find a proven workout routine aimed specifically at that one goal and train your ass off using it. Makes perfect sense, right?

Apparently not, because I see people disagreeing with this statement all the time. They'll argue that getting big and getting strong aren't mutually exclusive, and there should be no real difference in the way a person trains for either goal.

The question is, are they right? Just what is the difference (if any) between training to **build muscle**, training to **get strong** and training for an equal combination of **strength AND size?**

Let's find out…

Strength And Size Are The Same, But Different

The first thing you need to know is that these goals, while definitely different, are **very closely related** to each other.

How so? Well, for starters, the strongest person is also *usually* the person with the most muscle, and the person with the most muscle is also *usually* the strongest.

Now sure, you'll occasionally see some huge dude in the gym struggling with unimpressive weight, just like you'll occasionally see some short fat guy who looks like he's never seen the inside of a gym squatting a ton. But generally speaking, there is a definite correlation between being strong and being big (and vice-versa).

Not to mention, the **#1 requirement** of building muscle is progressive overload, and that basically means that if a natural trainee like you and I aren't getting stronger over time, we're probably not building muscle either.

Similarly, while it is very possible for strength gains to be neural (or even technical) rather than muscular, getting stronger is *usually* going to cause muscle to be built (assuming you're eating to support it).

So… the goals go hand in hand for sure, and we won't typically get one without the other… at least not often (and certainly not optimally).

The "Everyone Should Only Train For Strength" Argument

And this is usually the point when certain people like to end the discussion and just claim flat out that everyone, even if they only want to build muscle and look good, should train like a powerlifter.

They'll say to avoid ALL isolation exercises and machines completely. Train ONLY with low reps. Stick with JUST the major compound lifts. Basically, don't waste any time training for or even thinking about building muscle… just pick a good strength oriented routine, lift heavy and get strong. The muscle will take care of itself.

Sorry, but these people are morons.

Granted, they are *partially correct* morons, but still morons nonetheless. Why? Because they're missing the most important point.

Just Because It *Works* Doesn't Mean It's *Optimal*

You see, there are definite differences in the type of training that works **best** for each goal.

Again, there is plenty of overlap and many similarities between them. And sure, an intelligent workout routine aimed strictly at muscle growth will still allow you to get stronger, just like an intelligent workout routine aimed strictly at strength will still allow you to build muscle.

That's why bodybuilders are strong and powerlifters are big. Like I said before, the goals go hand in hand. So, if you're training solely for strength, you'll still be able to build plenty of muscle. That's where these people are completely correct.

But they become morons when they imply that this is what works BEST for building muscle. And when you recommend that a person with Goal A should train for Goal B because it happens to still produce Goal A, that's exactly what's being implied.

And that's just wrong.

If you want Goal A to happen as quickly and effectively as it possibly can, then you should train directly for Goal A and adjust every aspect of your program in whatever way suits it best. Why the hell should the results you want be a side effect of your program? **It should be the one and only focus of it.**

It's like saying a powerlifter should train like a bodybuilder. I can argue that getting stronger is a HUGE component of a muscle building program, and that having more muscle will lead to more strength. So, according to this same dumbass logic, someone only interested in strength should train for size.

Right?

Wait, what's that you say? That person may still get strong, but it just wouldn't be the best way for them to train for strength? Yup, you're absolutely right. And my point is that the opposite is equally true. **Training for strength will produce size too, but it's just not going to be the *best* way to make it happen.**

So while a routine aimed only at strength will work for size and a routine aimed only at size will work for strength, **neither will work as well as a routine designed specifically for that goal**.

"But No One Got Big Lifting Light Weights!"

I was recently having a little chat with a more "strength focused" individual about this very subject, and after explaining what I just explained, his reply was the headline you see above. That no one ever got big lifting light weights.

Uh… okay… but what does that have to do with anything I just said?

Ohhhh, I know… I get it. When I say "training for muscle and size" he's taking it to mean **training like an idiot**. You know, all the stereotypical dumb-shit bodybuilder nonsense I make fun of regularly. For example…

- Lifting light weights for high reps 100% of the time.
- Resting 1 minute or less between every set.
- Doing tons of isolation exercises and hardly any compound exercises.
- Doing leg extensions and leg curls instead of squats and deadlifts.
- Doing 100 sets of 100 exercises to "blast your muscles from every angle."
- Focusing more on pump than progression.
- And so on. (Plenty more here: Bodybuilding Workouts SUCK For Building Muscle!)

Yeah, that's **NOT** what I mean at all when I say "training for muscle and size." Instead, I mean using a program that is, above all else, focused on progressive overload and adjusts all of its components (training split, frequency, intensity, volume, rep ranges, rest times, exercise selection, etc.) specifically towards the goal of muscle growth (and of course eating properly to support it).

You know, something like The Muscle Building Workout Routine or the many programs included in The Best Workout Routines.

"But A Beginner Should Only Focus On Strength!"

And this is another common argument that comes up in this conversation. **And I agree with it.** The majority of what you see in this article is aimed at intermediate and advanced trainees. Beginners, regardless of their specific goal (strength or size) benefit from virtually the exact same thing.

And that is, focusing on getting stronger on a few basic compound movements using a low volume full body routine. No argument from me on that at all.

Well, mostly.

For example, I'm a fan of Starting Strength and have recommended it many times. But let's say a beginner is mostly interested in size rather than strength. Do they really need to be doing power cleans or would some type of row be a better choice for them? I'd personally go with rows.

And getting strong doing sets of 5 is great. Again, no argument from me on that. But do you know what's *also* great? Getting strong doing sets of 8. Really, as long as you're getting strong, you're doing it right.

But just making a small adjustment to the rep range you're getting stronger in or the exercise you're getting stronger on may better suit the specific goal you're training for ever so slightly. Sometimes even for a beginner.

The Differences Between Training For Strength or Size

Alright, so now you know that these two goals have some similarities (e.g. both require getting stronger). However, they also have plenty of differences between them that should dictate the specifics of how you train for each.

Want some examples? Here's the first few that come to mind…

Example #1: Training Split

I've covered this topic pretty thoroughly before in my comparison of Full Body vs Upper/Lower vs Body Part Splits, but the take home message was simple.

As long as everything else is done right, just about any sane split can work for damn near every goal. Be it increasing strength, building muscle or anything in between. Everything "works" for everything to some extent because of the overlapping principles between goals. That's why plenty of people have gotten strong as hell using a body part split and plenty of others have gotten big as hell using a full body split.

However, certain splits are just much more ideal (and proven) than others for certain goals and situations. For strength, upper/lower (and full body) tends to work best. For building muscle, upper/lower and (intelligent) body part splits tend to work best. For beginners with any goal, full body tends to work best.

Example #2: Intensity/Rep Ranges

As I've also covered before (How Many Reps Per Set?), just about every rep range is at least somewhat capable of producing your desired training effect (strength or size). That's why you can get strong doing sets of 10 and get big doing sets of 5.

However, some rep ranges are just much more ideal for certain goals than others. Generally speaking, someone only interested in getting strong will do best spending the majority of their time in the 1-8 rep range. Someone only interested in building muscle will do best spending the majority of their time in the 5-12 rep range.

Yup, this is another perfect example of the overlap I've been mentioning. However, it doesn't change the fact that going *slightly* lower in reps (and *slightly* higher in intensity) better suits strength, while going *slightly* higher in reps (and *slightly* lower in intensity) better suits size.

Not to mention, someone trying to get as strong as possible might never be able to make it happen without going below 5 reps on a regular basis. But someone only trying to get as big as possible will likely never need to go below 5 reps to make it happen.

They certainly can, but the point is that one goal significantly benefits from it (or just flat out requires it), while the other doesn't.

Example #3: Rest Periods

The higher your training intensity is (meaning the closer you are to your 1 rep max), the less reps you'll be doing per set and the more rest you'll likely need between them. As mentioned above, people training solely for strength will do better training at a higher intensity, which means they'll often require longer rest periods between sets. Specifically, 2-5 minutes tends to be the ideal range.

People training solely to build muscle or get big will do better training at a slightly lower intensity (note that I didn't say "low intensity," I just said a *slightly* lower intensity by comparison), which means that much rest won't typically be needed. In this case, 1-3 minutes between sets tends to be ideal.

Again, there's another example of the overlap between what's ideal for strength and what's ideal for size. But again, there is a difference significant enough to warrant making some minor adjustments to the way you train for each.

Example #4: Exercise Selection

The examples I can give here are virtually endless, so let me just give you one.

Let's say you feel the bench press more in your triceps and shoulders than you do in your chest (a fairly common problem). Now if you only care about getting strong, this wouldn't matter much because you're more interested in the **movement than the muscles**. You don't really give a crap about what muscle group is moving the weight so long as you're moving the weight.

But when muscle growth/building a nice looking chest is your primary goal, this instantly becomes something you SHOULD give a crap about because you DO care about the muscles doing the work. At least a little.

So if the bench press isn't fully providing the optimal training stimulus your chest needs, something needs to be done about it. Whether that means adjusting your form, adjusting your exercise selection or just including other secondary exercises (for example, the incline Hammer Strength machine or dumbbell flyes), it will likely have a significant positive effect on your results.

Now let's look at it from the other side. Would someone who is only interested in strength and bench pressing a lot of weight ever need to do an exercise like dumbbell flyes or some kind of machine press like the Hammer Strength machine? Nope, probably not.

Whereas exercises like these would have a beneficial effect on that first person training solely for size, they'd likely have little to no beneficial effect at all and may in fact be detrimental to this second person training solely for strength.

This is just one example of MANY.

Similar, But Different

See what I mean? None of the above examples are super huge differences, but they are still differences that will most definitely have an impact on the results you get. Or, the results you fail to get because you're just not training optimally for your specific goal.

So again, and I can't overstate this enough… regardless of whether you're only interested in strength or size, **getting stronger is still priority #1**. Now if all you care about is strength, then it's your *only* priority. But if all you care about is size, then you have additional priorities that you should be taking into account to get the best results possible.

Strength <u>AND</u> Size: How To Train To Get BOTH

So at this point we're (hopefully) all clear on the similarities and differences between the two goals and how to train for each. Right?

Just in case we're not, let's recap.

- **If your primary goal is building muscle,** use an intelligently designed workout routine that adjusts all of its components to suit muscle growth. You'll still get strong as hell, because getting strong is the #1 required component of an effective muscle building program. You just probably won't get as strong as you would if you were using a routine designed specifically for strength.
- **If your primary goal is getting strong,** use an intelligently designed strength routine that adjusts all of its components to suit strength gains. You'll get strong as hell and, as long as you're eating to support growth, you'll grow too. You just probably won't grow as well as you

would if you were using a routine designed specifically for growth.

With that out of the way, there's one final question that still needs to be answered: **What do you do if your primary goal is to both get strong *AND* build muscle?**

Well, when a person wants an equal combination of strength and size, there are 2 options that I like and would recommend…

Option #1: Combining Goals

One thing you will rarely ever see me recommend is combining goals. Trying to build muscle and lose fat at the same time, or train for some endurance goal while trying to build muscle, or any similar example of trying to meet two (or more) conflicting goals simultaneously is almost always a horrible idea.

Most people will either greatly limit their results or, more commonly, spin their wheels and not get anywhere with either goal.

However, there can be exceptions to this if the two goals are similar enough to each other and have some degree of overlap. Hey, what a coincidence, because that sounds exactly like increasing strength and building muscle!

So, how do you make it work? Well, there's a few different methods for doing it. Here are 2 of my favorites:

1. Let's say you're using an upper/lower based routine. In the first upper and lower body workout of the week, you could make it more **strength focused**. Higher intensity, lower rep ranges, mostly (or even entirely) big free weight compound exercises, more rest between sets, and so on. Then in the second upper/lower workouts of the week, you could make it more **size focused**. Moderate intensity, moderate-higher rep ranges, less rest between sets, still focused on compounds but with some isolation exercises too. So over the course of a week, everything still gets trained twice but one time it's more of a power/strength day, and the other time it's more of a size/hypertrophy day.
2. Let's again say you're using an upper/lower based routine. In fact, let's say you're using The Muscle Building Workout Routine. In that program, you're basically doing one primary exercise and one secondary exercise for each major muscle group in each workout (like bench press and then incline dumbbell presses for chest, or rows then lat pull-downs for back). In this case, you can do the primary exercise for somewhere in the 3-6 rep range (for example, 5×5) for more of a **strength focus**, and then make the secondary exercise for somewhere in the 8-15 rep range (for example, 3×10) for more of a **size/muscle building focus**.

Option #2: Alternating Goals

A second way to train for an equal combination of getting strong and getting big is to take what I just described in the first option but then break the goals up into phases and cycle between them. Aka… **periodization**.

For example, you could do sets of 8-10 for the primary exercise and sets of 12-15 for the secondary exercise and call that the "size/muscle building phase." At the end of that training cycle (6-12 weeks, for example), you could switch to sets of 3-5 for the primary exercise and sets of 6-8 for the secondary exercise and call that the "strength phase."

You could then alternate between phases for as long as you need/want to.

Strength Matters Most, But Other Stuff Matters Too

Now let's bring it all together.

If you want to get strong, you need to get stronger (duh). If you want to get big, you *still* need to get stronger. Regardless of which goal you care about most, getting stronger is still the key component to making it happen.

However, it's NOT the *only* component. There are many other aspects of your program and many ways of adjusting them that have proven to better suit one goal more so than the other. Will any of it completely make or break your success? Probably not. But will getting it right improve your success? Absolutely.

So depending on which goal you have (getting strong, building muscle, doing both), you should focus on getting strong as hell while every single one of those adjustments have been made.

How Much Muscle Can You Gain & How Fast Can You Build It?

If I had to guess, I'd say that the 3 most common questions people have about building muscle (besides just how to actually build some) are:

1. How much muscle can you gain?
2. How long does it take to build it?
3. How fast can it REALLY be done?

Now, I've seen people ask these questions and get answers like "Stop worrying about how long it will take or how fast it will happen… just shut up and lift!" I kinda see the point to that type of response, but I mostly see why it's completely wrong.

These Answers Are More Important Than You Think

For starters, knowing the TRUTH about the legitimate rates and limits of muscle growth allows you to know when you're being lied to by a product, program, supplement, or fitness guru claiming to allow you to build muscle faster than you actually can.

Seeing as this is something that probably 95% of all products/programs/supplements/gurus do every single day, these answers are the key to preventing yourself from falling for false promises and bullshit claims.

And just as important, knowing the true rates and limits of muscle growth allows you to have realistic expectations for your own progress and set realistic goals. You see, most people (men and women) expect to gain MUCH more muscle at a MUCH faster rate than they actually can.

With **men**, these unrealistic expectations cause them to jump from stupid program to even stupider program seeking the type of so-called "lightning fast muscle growth" they couldn't achieve even with steroids/drugs.

So when they aren't building 12 pounds of muscle per week like they thought they would, they blame their diet or their workout and change something that probably didn't need to be changed (usually in a

way that makes it 100 times worse… "My arms aren't growing fast enough, I must need more biceps exercises!!!!").

And with **women**, it's the opposite. They also greatly overestimate how much muscle they can gain and how fast they can build it, BUT they do everything they can to avoid it because they don't want to get "too big and bulky" like a guy. Which is why 50 new completely useless "Toning Workout Routines For Women" come out every other hour.

So, be it man or woman, your results suffer as a result of not truly knowing how much muscle you can gain or how long it truly takes to build it. Which is why we're going to change that right now.

How Much Muscle Can You Gain… REALLY?

I've heard a lot of very smart people discuss the rate and limits of muscle growth over the years. I've also seen a couple of studies that looked at this as well, and of course, I have my own 10+ years of first hand experience and real world observation to pull from, too.

Based on all of this, here's how much muscle you can expect to gain on average over your entire lifespan:

- **Average Natural MAN**: a total of about 40-50 pounds of muscle in their life.
- **Average Natural WOMAN**: a total of about 20-25 pounds of muscle in their life.

Please note that we're talking strictly about MUSCLE here, not WEIGHT. You could obviously gain a whole lot more weight than muscle in your life time.

Also note that these numbers are averages. There are always rare exceptions that might either exceed or never come close to reaching these amounts, and there's a handful of factors that influence what these numbers will be for you specifically (all of which I'll tell you about in a minute).

But for *most* of the people, *most* of the time… this is the **total maximum amount** of muscle you can expect to gain naturally .

How Fast Can You Build Muscle… REALLY?

So, that's how much you can gain total. The question now is, how long does it take to build it and how fast can it be done?

Well, once again, I'm going by various trainers/coaches I've heard discuss the true rate of muscle growth among their clients, the few studies that have looked at this as well, and my own 10+ years of first hand experience and observation.

Based on all of this, here's how fast you can expect to build muscle on average:

- **Average Natural MAN:** between 0.25 and 0.5 pounds of muscle per week (or about 1-2 pounds of muscle gained per month).
- **Average Natural WOMAN:** between 0.12 – 0.25 pounds of muscle per week (or about 0.5-1 pound of muscle gained per month).

Once again, we're strictly talking MUSCLE, not WEIGHT. Besides actual muscle, weight gained throughout the week could be (and often is) fat, water or glycogen. We're not talking about any of those here.

And really, this is the rate you can expect under the **best possible circumstances**. Meaning, an ideal muscle building workout routine and diet, an ideal amount of sleep, rest, recovery, consistency, lack of

stress, and so on. Basically, when everything is done as perfectly as it could be, this is how fast you can expect to build muscle.

And once again… these numbers are averages. Some may exceed them (rare) and some may never reach them (unfortunately true). The *exact* amount of muscle you can build per week, month or year is based on a handful of individual factors specific to you. Speaking of those factors, let's find out what they are.

6 Factors That Affect Your EXACT Rate & Limit Of Muscle Gain

Everything you've read so far, while almost always true and accurate for most people, is based on averages and generalities. Why? Because there are 6 major factors that can change things, and they can vary greatly from person to person. Here now are those 6 factors..

1. Steroids/Drugs

In what should come as no surprise to anyone, adding steroids and/or various drugs into the equation completely changes how much muscle a person can gain and how fast they can gain it. So, when you see crazy claims of muscle growth (like every product/supplement claims) or see people who have clearly exceeded the rates and limits mentioned above (like every pro bodybuilder on the planet does), there's a damn good chance it wasn't done naturally.

I cover this subject in more detail here: Steroids vs Natural: The Muscle Building Effects Of Steroid Use

2. Training Experience Level

One simple fact of training is that everything comes MUCH quicker and MUCH faster when you're a beginner. That's why weight training newbies will often consistently build muscle at the high end of average rate, and possibly even exceed it at certain points. However, the more experienced you get and the more muscle you build, the slower your rate of muscle gain will become.

How big is the difference? Based on what I've seen, it looks like the amount of muscle you can build in your first year is TWICE as much as it will be in your second year. And from there, it will drop off by about 50% each year after that.

3. Muscle Memory/Muscle Regrowth

Did you know muscle can be *regained* after you lose it at a much faster rate than it can be gained in the first place? It's true. Muscle memory is real and it makes a significant difference.

Unfortunately, just like steroids, it's one of the many methods used to trick people into thinking amazing muscle building results have occurred when in reality it's just that the person lost a bunch of muscle at some point and was now RE-gaining it.

The first 2 examples that come to mind was a total bunch of crap known as "The Colorado Experiment" back in the 1970′s, and a much more recent transformation by best selling author Tim Ferriss, whose best selling book (The 4 Hour Body) initially garnered a ton of hype and attention as a result of him posting about how he gained "34lbs of muscle in 4 weeks." HA!

I'd link to it so you can see for yourself, but I just can't bring myself to do it. Search around and you'll

find it in a second. And if you do, I beg of you NOT to become one of the countless people who read it and now think they can easily gain over 8lbs of muscle per week for 4 straight weeks.

4. Genetics

It's hard to come up with a factor that influences how much muscle you can gain and how fast you can gain it more than genetics. **Hormone levels**, **muscle length**, **bone structure** and more all play a huge role in your muscle building potential.

Unfortunately, we can't change our genetics (although drugs can be used to improve hormone levels), so if you ended up with less-than-stellar genetics (thanks mom and dad!), you're kinda screwed to some extent. You can certainly still build muscle… it's just going to be a bit harder and slower, and your overall potential is going to be lower than someone with average or better genetics.

And if you are one of those rare people who did hit the genetic lottery, congrats. Enjoy all of the awesome results that come with being a genetic freak, and always know that I hate your guts.

If you're interested in learning more about (and actually calculating) your personal genetic potential, Casey Butt's Your Muscular Potential is as good of a resource as you will ever find, as are his articles.

5. Age

Here's another one that shouldn't really shock you. A 16 year old with raging hormones will be able to gain a lot more muscle a lot faster than say a 50 year old whose testosterone levels are hitting record lows by the second. It's another unfortunate fact of life (unless of course you're the 16 year old).

In terms of the rate of muscle growth (and probably everything else physiological), the younger you are, the better you are. The older you get, the more you can expect things to get slower and worse and generally suckier overall.

6. Your Workout And Diet

And finally, if your workout and diet are set up as optimally as possible, you can definitely expect to build muscle faster than you would if your workout was less than ideal or just total crap altogether. This also seems obvious, but it sure as hell hasn't stopped people from working out and eating like idiots.

To ensure you're doing everything in a way that will put you in position to reach the high end of your rate and limit of muscle gain, use the guidelines laid out in my super awesome guides…

- The Ultimate Weight Training Workout Routine
- The Best Diet Plan

Or, better yet, use one of the many HIGHLY proven and effective muscle building programs included in my brand new premium guide, The Best Workout Routines.

Summing It Up

So, that's how much muscle you can expect to gain, that's how fast you can expect to build it, and those are the 6 main factors that can influence those amounts and what *your* body's exact potential is.

In most cases, muscle cannot be gained anywhere close to the rate some people like to make it seem like it can, or some of us just wish we could (hi guys!) or hope we don't (hi girls!).

You can now set realistic goals and have realistic expectations. And at the same time, you can ignore much more of the silly deceptive bullshit found everywhere in the diet and fitness industry. Meaning, if you ever come across someone who claims to have consistently gained more muscle faster than I've explained is realistically possible, or a product that claims it will allow you to do the same, ignore it.

That person is either an insanely rare exception/genetic badass, using every drug known to man, regaining lost muscle, flat out wrong, flat out lying, or just trying to sell you something.

And every once in a while… all of the above.

Appendix E:

Bodybuilding Workouts SUCK For Building Muscle!

If you're reading this, it's pretty safe to assume that you want to build muscle. Awesome.

When we're trying to reach this goal, there are 2 very important areas we need to focus on and get right. One of them is our diet. The other is our workout routine.

Now there are PLENTY of ways people screw up their muscle building diet, but we're not talking about that here. We'll save that for another day. What we're talking about here is the second part of that equation… the workouts.

And more often than not, that focus begins with **bodybuilding**. It makes perfect sense. After all, bodybuilding is literally ALL about building muscle and achieving a body that looks as amazing as possible. It's what we're all trying to do.

Therefore, if we want to build muscle as effectively as possible, bodybuilding workouts are clearly the way to do it. Right?

Well, not exactly. That's because **typical bodybuilding workouts absolutely SUCK for building muscle!**

I know, I know. That sounds completely incorrect. It sounds backwards and wrong and is the total opposite of what most of us think or would ever believe. But, it's 100% true.

Brace yourself… I'm about to show you exactly why.

What Is The "Typical" Bodybuilding Routine?

Let's begin with a definition of what we're talking about here.

The typical bodybuilding routine may very well be THE most popular type of weight training program among those training for muscle growth. It's what most of the people in your gym are probably using. It's what's been found for decades inside of every single bodybuilding magazine ever made. It's seen all the time on thousands (possibly millions) of different websites, forums and blogs.

Even if you don't know it… you probably still know it. It's the type of workout most of us either start out using or eventually find and switch to. I know I did.

So, what the hell is it?

Well, it's not one single workout routine. It's more of a **template of common characteristics** that, when combined together, form what I (and most people) would consider to be a *typical* bodybuilding routine. Specifically, it includes some or all of the following…

The "typical" bodybuilding routine is…

- A workout program that uses a low training frequency. One that trains each muscle group just once per week.
- And to do this, it uses a body part split… a schedule that breaks the body up into one or two different muscle groups and trains them throughout the week so that there's a "chest day" and a "back day" and maybe an "arm day" too.
- And in each of these workouts, there is a very high amount of volume. A lot of sets of a lot of exercises so you can blast the crap out of your muscles and hit them from every angle using a

variety of exercises.
- And most of these sets will be done in higher rep ranges… often between 8-15 reps per set (3×10 being most typical). Lower reps are rarely used.
- Many (if not all) sets will be done with shorter rest periods in between them. Longer rest periods are rarely used.
- Many (if not all) sets will be taken to failure. Sometimes beyond failure.
- A pyramid set structure is often employed.
- There's a large focus on trying to fatigue and isolate the muscles as much as possible via the use of many isolation exercises, advanced methods (e.g. dropsets, forced reps, partial reps, etc.) and exercise technique adjustments.
- There is a significant amount of attention given to "feel," as in feeling the "pump" and "burn" during the workouts, and causing/experiencing soreness in the day(s) after.
- Changes are usually made frequently. Sometimes to "shock the body and keep the muscles guessing," sometimes to include more exercises and more methods, and sometimes to generate even more pump and soreness.
- Progressive overload is often an afterthought (if it's even a thought at all) compared to everything else on this list. This is the stuff that gets the primary focus of the program.

To get a little more specific, here's a common example of what a typical "chest day" might look like in this type of routine…

A typical example of "chest day" (every Monday, of course)…

1. Flat bench press.
2. Incline bench press.
3. Decline bench press.
4. Machine and/or dumbbell version(s) of those same pressing exercises.
5. Dumbbell flyes, pec deck or cable crossovers… or maybe all of them.

All of which will often be done for 3-5 sets of 8-12 reps.

Now, does all of the above describe what EVERY SINGLE "bodybuilding routine" is? Nope. But, it DOES describe what the largest majority of them are, and that's the specific type of workout program this article is all about.

I've personally spent a lot of time using routines exactly like this, as have most people at some point. And like I said earlier, this is the most common way you'll see people training in most gyms. I see it daily.

So… What's Wrong With It?

Are we all clear now on the sort of training approach I'm referring to when I say "typical" bodybuilding workouts and routines? Good.

Now allow me to show you why **it's all horseshit for building muscle**.

1. The Low Frequency Body Part Splits SUCK!

I actually have nothing against the concept of "body part splits" if your goal is to build muscle and you're past the beginner's stage. In fact, I like them… as long they are executed *intelligently*.

What I don't like are the typical body part splits that 99% of bodybuilding workouts are designed around. The execution there is FAR from "intelligent."

Here are some common examples…

Monday: Chest
Tuesday: Back
Wednesday: Shoulders
Thursday: Biceps/Triceps
Friday: Legs
Saturday: off
Sunday: off

or

Monday: Chest/Triceps
Tuesday: Back/Biceps
Wednesday: off
Thursday: Shoulders
Friday: Legs
Saturday: off
Sunday: off

or

Monday: Chest/Biceps
Tuesday: off
Wednesday: Back/Triceps
Thursday: off
Friday: Shoulders/Legs
Saturday: off
Sunday: off

They all look pretty familiar, don't they? Maybe even "standard." So then why is it that these types of splits tend to suck?

Well, it's not just because they often involve an "arm day" or 5-6 workouts per week or other things most people won't need or benefit from… but mainly because they all involve using a low frequency where each muscle group is only trained **once per week** (every 7th day).

For that reason alone, bodybuilding routines suck.

Why? Because all research and real world experience shows that it's the **least effective training frequency** for strength or muscle gains among natural trainees.

If you're the "science" type, you'll be interested to know that there's not a single study I've ever seen that found training each muscle group once per week to be more effective than other higher frequencies.

More importantly, **not a single study has even shown it to be *equally* effective**… even when total training volume is the same. Instead, it's *consistently* found to be the LEAST effective frequency, **with 2 or 3 times per week ALWAYS proving to be the superior choice**.

If you're the "real world" type, you'll be interested to know that all real world experience confirms it. Not just my own firsthand experience of switching from this low frequency to a higher frequency and instantly improving my results. Not just the similar experience of countless others either.

If I think of every single one of the most knowledgeable, experienced and highly respected trainers and coaches on the planet — the ones that I personally find the most credible (as opposed to the steroid

using genetic freaks whose opinions are virtually meaningless to the rest of us) – **literally 100% of them feel the exact same way**.

The same goes for the small handful of well respected natural competitive bodybuilders I know of. Not a single one of them uses or recommends this training frequency either.

Now, don't misunderstand me here. I'm NOT saying it doesn't work or it can't work. Training each muscle group once per week CAN and DOES work as long as everything else is done right.

It's just that it's **the least effective way for the *majority* of the population to train to build muscle**. For some, it actually won't even be *least effective*… it will be completely *ineffective*.

You know who it tends to work best for though? **Steroid/drug users** and the **genetic elite.** These are the people who are MUCH more likely to be capable of maintaining the new training adaptations made during that previous workout over this upcoming 7 day period where they're waiting to train that body part again.

But for us natural, genetically average men and women… not so much.

We're a lot more likely to **de-train** during this stretch of time, which means by the time we're back in the gym to train that muscle group again, we'll have lost some or even all of the new progress we made, thus putting us in a wheel-spinning cycle where we progress and then regress from one workout to the next and end up getting nowhere.

There are always going to be exceptions of course, but the crucial thing to remember is that these are the exceptions… not the rule. In this case, "the rule" is that this frequency is widely considered (and proven) to be the least effective for the majority of the population.

For these reasons, every single one of the the most popular and highly proven beginner routines out there use a 3 day full body split. For a beginner, this is widely regarded as the most effective way to train for ANY goal, including muscle growth.

And once you pass the beginner's stage, a twice per week frequency (or something close to it… every 3rd to 5th day) becomes optimal. The 3 or 4 day upper/lower split is one of the most proven and popular workout splits for that frequency.

However, it's not the only workable option for it. Believe it or not, there actually are some intelligent body part splits that are designed with a more optimal frequency in mind. One such example is the rotating 5 day push/pull/legs split.

Additional details about choosing your ideal training split can be found here: The Best Workout Schedules and Full Body vs Upper/Lower vs Body Part Splits

But regardless of the specific split you use, one thing is certain: if your goal is building muscle as quickly as possible, and you're using a typical "once-per-week" bodybuilding split… **your results will not be as good as they could be.**

2. The Silly, Pointless And/Or Dangerous Body Part Splits SUCK!

In addition to the low frequency problems mentioned above and the fact that VERY few people in the world will actually need or ever benefit from having a "chest day" or "arm day" or other entire days dedicated to training a single small muscle group (e.g. shoulders), typical bodybuilding splits have other problems too.

And these problems are a little more serious than just being ineffective, unnecessary or flat out dumb. These problems are **injury-causing**.

For example, let's say your silly once-per-week body part split is something like this:

Monday: Chest
Tuesday: Back
Wednesday: Shoulders
Thursday: Biceps/Triceps
Friday: Legs
Saturday: off
Sunday: off

Now some people might look at this and see a basic 5 day body part split. I look at it and see **guaranteed shoulder problems**… maybe elbow problems too.

Why? Because even though individual muscles appear to be getting trained just once per week (which in itself is incorrect when you take overlap into account), the joints are getting trained every damn day. Specifically, the shoulder girdle is involved heavily in every chest, shoulder and back exercise, not to mention many arm exercises too (especially heavy bicep curls and compound triceps exercises like dips and close grip bench presses).

Hell, even holding the bar on your back during squats involves your shoulders. Plus, various forearm flexor and extensor tendons connecting at the medial/lateral epicondyle of the elbow are getting a significant amount of stress placed on them during damn near everything.

As someone who has had both shoulder and elbow issues at times over the years… trust me… I know this all too well. And if you've been training this way long enough, something tells me you know it too.

So do most of the people in your gym. Just try to find someone whose shoulders (or elbows) don't currently bother them or haven't previously bothered them in the past. You might not find a single person fitting that description unless they've just started training.

That's why, with all of this in mind…

- I'd be a little worried about someone weight training 5 (or more) days per week.
- I'd be more worried if 3-4 (or more) of those workouts are upper body specific.
- I'd be even more worried if it all takes place on consecutive days.
- And you know what instantly makes it all 1000 times more worrisome? The fact that it all goes along with everything else typically seen in bodybuilding routines. Meaning, a metric shitload of sets, reps and exercises. (More on that in a second.)

Not only is this a recipe for terrible muscle building results, it's a sure-fire recipe for injuries. More about that here: 8 Ways To Avoid Common Shoulder Injuries Caused By Weight Lifting

3. The Insanely High Volume SUCKS!

When I say volume, I'm talking about the amount of work being done. How many total sets, reps and exercises per muscle group, per workout and per week.

The amount of volume that is both beneficial and tolerable is a highly individual thing that varies based on factors like age, experience level, genetics, drug use and more.

That's why someone who's 18 can do fine with more volume than someone who's 48, and why someone with great genetics and/or plenty of drugs can handle WAY more volume than someone with

average (or worse) genetics and no drugs at all.

Even still, the way I see it, there's really just 5 categories of volume when it comes to building muscle:

1. **Too Little:** This of course would mean not doing enough volume to actually stimulate muscle growth. I'll be honest though, this is a pretty rare category to fall into.
2. **Enough To Work, But Not Well:** Then there's the next level up, which is doing enough volume to create the necessary training stimulus, but not enough for that stimulus to be optimal. Many "low volume" type routines fall into this category.
3. **Just Right:** The "Goldielocks" category. Not too little, not too much… just right. This is the amount of volume that is optimal for muscle growth. The best results happen here.
4. **More Than Enough:** This is when you're doing more than the optimal amount of volume we just talked about. However, this extra volume neither improves your results nor does it negatively affect your results. It's essentially just a waste of time that isn't doing anything for you… good or bad.
5. **Too Much:** And finally, this is when you're doing more volume than is needed, more volume than is optimal and just more volume to the point where it's going to become detrimental to the results you want. How so? Everything from recovery issues to overuse injuries. This is the amount of volume that negatively affects your results in some way.

Do you know what category typical bodybuilding routines fall into? Yup, #5… the "too much" category. And honestly, just calling it "too much" might be an understatement based on the workouts I see and the pure insanity taking place in gyms around the world.

And for that reason, typical high volume bodybuilding routines suck for building muscle.

You see, your goal in terms of training volume is to do **exactly enough to provide the optimal training stimulus, but not so much that it crosses that line and exceeds your capacity to recover in an ideal period of time**. Basically, you want to signal muscle growth and then get back in the gym as soon as possible to signal it again. The more often you can do that, the better/faster your progress is going to be.

However, the more unnecessary volume you do (and bodybuilding routines are filled with TONS of unnecessary volume), the longer it's going to require you to wait before you can go back into the gym to send that signal again (which brings us back to the low frequency mentioned before).

And, if that extra volume isn't providing any additional benefits beyond what that "just right" amount will provide (it's not), and it's not providing a greater "signal" than the "just right" amount provides (it isn't), then all it's truly doing is forcing you to waste time and make less/slower progress.

So instead of doing 12-16 sets (a very conservative example) for some muscle group and than sitting around for a week waiting to do it again, you'll grow better doing half that amount of volume… but twice as often.

Now I know what you're thinking… what exactly is this "just right" amount of volume and what is it based on? Is it just something I'm pulling out of my ass?

Not quite. It's based on the following:

- 12 years of real world experience and observation… just looking at what seems to produce the best results in terms of volume for natural trainees (without cutting into recovery).
- Comparing the most effective workout routines in existence and noticing that they have something in common… they all tend to prescribe a similar amount of volume. No, it's not 100% exact. However, it does tend to always fall within a similar "range" of volume.
- What I've personally found to be optimal after years of experimenting with every amount of

volume you can think of. Low volume, high volume, you name it and I've probably wasted some amount of time trying it.
- Scientific research. There are a handful of studies that look at training volume and its effects on strength gains and muscle hypertrophy, and they tend to confirm this same "just right" range of volume that the other items on this list fall in line with. This is one of the best studies of them all.

Based on all of the above, this "optimal volume range" tends to be about **30-60 reps per muscle group per workout,** with the optimal frequency being about **two workouts per week**. Although, when you take into account exercise overlap (e.g. triceps get plenty of volume during pressing exercises), those smaller muscle groups tend to only need about half that amount.

More about this here: The Optimal Volume Range

4. The Large Focus On Isolation Exercises SUCKS!

You ready for this? I like isolation exercises. Yes, seriously.

Various biceps curls, triceps extensions, lateral raises, dumbbell flyes, leg curls, shrugs. I like them all if you're training to build muscle and you're past the beginner's stage.

BUT, I only like them as a **secondary focus of your overall routine**. I like when they are **accessory exercises** to the much-more-important big compound exercises (squats, deadlifts, presses, rows, pull-ups, etc.) that SHOULD be getting the majority of your attention because they're going to be responsible for the majority of the results you get (or fail to get).

What I don't like is when it's the other way around… something often seen in typical bodybuilding routines.

I'm talking about when your workouts are filled with more isolation movements than compound movements (or even an equal amount of each). You know… when a person is doing 5 chest exercises AND 5 triceps exercises. Or 1-2 back exercises, and 4 kinds of bicep curls.

Or, even worse, when isolation movements REPLACE compound movements. You know… when a person is doing dumbbell flyes, leg extensions and leg curls INSTEAD of bench presses, squats and deadlifts.

In these scenarios, your results are going to suck.

So while isolation exercises are definitely beneficial for muscle growth, their role should always be a secondary one with compound exercises taking the primary role. The second those roles start to reverse or even become equal, that's the second isolation exercises become less beneficial and more detrimental.

More about that here: Compound Exercises vs Isolation Exercises

5. The Silly, Pointless And/Or Dangerous Exercise Myths SUCK!

Since bodybuilding workouts are *supposedly* all about building and training muscles, you'll often see plenty of silly crap included in an attempt to better train, fatigue or isolate those muscles.

I'll admit, the following examples are in no way exclusive to these kinds of routines. They are however where you'll commonly find them.

- **Wide grip pull-ups and wide grip lat pull-downs for better lats.** As the theory/myth goes, the

wider your grip on these exercises, the wider your lats will become. In reality, the wider the grip, the less range of motion and the more likely you'll be to screw up your shoulders.

- **Bodybuilder style bench press for better chest isolation.** This involves flaring your elbows out to the sides and lowering the bar to your upper chest. Does this just slightly put a tiny bit more emphasis on the pecs and a tiny bit less on your triceps? Uh, maybe. Enough to actually matter? Doubtful. But you know what it will do for sure? It will absolutely destroy your shoulders. And guess what? You'll have a mighty tough time isolating those pecs when you're unable to actually bench press anymore.
- **Higher reps and lighter weights for tone/definition/getting cut and ripped.** The myth-based thinking here is that lower reps and heavier weight build muscle mass, but higher reps and lighter weight are for increasing the definition of those muscles. You know, burning fat and cutting those muscles up and getting ripped. Or whatever. It sounds nice, but it's pure bullshit. Spot reduction is not possible, and getting more defined is strictly a matter of lowering your body fat percentage (something that's primarily a function of your diet, not weight training).
- **Isolation exercises for tone/definition/getting cut and ripped.** Exactly the same thing as above, only now the myth-based thinking is that compound exercises build muscle, and isolation exercises burn fat/add definition. Still pure bullshit.
- **Machines for tone/definition/getting cut and ripped.** See above.
- **Constant changes to shock your muscles.** Bullshit yet again. More on this later.
- **Lower reps for strength only, not muscle.** This one explains why most typical bodybuilding routines involve a million sets of 8-12, with 10 reps usually being the most common. Apparently, doing sets of 5-8 reps will only increase strength and not build muscle. Bullshit. More on this later.

That's just the first bunch that come to mind. There are plenty more. And they often get dumber and more insignificant/pointless as you go.

Case in point, you'll sometimes hear crazy shit like how straight bar triceps press downs are for building muscle mass on your triceps, but press downs with a rope are somehow magically for "cutting and toning your triceps." Funny.

6. The *Always* High Reps SUCK!

Here's another one of those common bodybuilding characteristics that is mostly based on a silly myth. And that is the belief that only higher reps can build muscle. Meaning, 10 reps per set is ideal, 12 reps are great too, and maybe sometimes going down as low as 8 reps is acceptable as well.

But less than 8 reps per set? That's something you will rarely see in typical bodybuilding workouts. Why? Because, according the logic/myth, anything less than 8 reps is great for gaining strength but sucks for building muscle.

Sounds good to me, if not for the fact that it's **total bullshit**.

The reality of muscle hypertrophy is that literally **EVERY rep range is capable of stimulating growth**. Be it sets of 3, sets of 4, sets of 5, sets of 6, sets of 7, sets of 8, sets of 10, sets of 12, sets of 15, sets of 20.

The key requirement is **progressive tension overload**. As long as you're gradually getting stronger over time, you will build muscle regardless of what rep range you're getting stronger in.

Sure, some rep ranges are more or less ideal for certain goals (e.g. the 1-6 rep range is more ideal for strength, the 5-12 rep range is more ideal for size), and some rep ranges are more ideal for certain

exercises (e.g. 5-8 for more demanding compound exercises, 8-12 for less demanding accessory exercises).

However, there is so much overlap between them that EVERY rep range can still serve a beneficial purpose for your goal… especially when it's a goal like muscle growth that just so happens to be heavily built around getting stronger.

For these reasons, always staying in the higher rep ranges prevents you from getting the significant benefits that come from training in the lower rep ranges.

Now I'm definitely not saying you should avoid those higher rep ranges and use lower reps exclusively. That's equally as dumb, and the types of people who recommend this are idiots. (More on them later.)

What I am saying is that for the best possible results, **a combination of lower and higher reps is what's going to be optimal for building muscle**.

7. The *Always* Short Rest Periods SUCK!

Just like higher reps, one thing you're sure to see in typical bodybuilding routines is shorter rest periods between sets. Not just for some exercises, but for most if not ALL of them.

Why is this? Well, I think it partially has to do with what you're seeing and feeling at the time. The shorter your rest periods are, the better "pump" you're gonna get. This of course makes your muscles temporarily look/feel bigger, which many clueless people take as a sign of their workouts already working. How cute.

But it's also because there is a belief that shorter rest periods are better for building muscle, while longer rest periods are better for increasing strength. While this isn't entirely wrong, it's not entirely right either.

Yes, shorter rest periods between sets (e.g. 30-120 seconds) play a positive role in generating metabolic fatigue, and this is something that DOES matter for muscle growth. Thus, shorter rest periods are indeed beneficial for building muscle.

However, shorter rest periods suck balls for making strength gains. That's why people training solely for strength use longer rest periods (e.g. 3-5 minutes) between sets. It's what's ideal.

Now here's the thing. While metabolic fatigue is a legit factor here, **progressive overload is always legit factor #1**. Which means, you shouldn't exclusively use shorter rest periods. Nor should you exclusively use longer rest periods.

For the best possible results, **you should use a combination of both** and get the different benefits each one provides.

The best way to do that in my opinion is to do your big primary compound lifts — the ones you're doing for lower reps — with longer rest periods (2-3 minutes). And do your secondary accessory lifts — the ones you're doing for higher reps — with shorter rest periods (1-2 minutes).

Now you'll be doing a nice combination of what's optimal for generating metabolic fatigue, and what's optimal for creating progressive overload. Your results will show it.

8. The Pyramid Sets SUCK!

In many typical bodybuilding routines, each exercise is *usually* done for somewhere between 3-5 sets of *usually* 8-12 reps (sometimes 6-15 reps). In many of those cases, it's just straight sets. Meaning, 4

sets of 10 or 3 sets of 8 or something like that.

In the cases when it's not structured that way, a traditional pyramid is what's most often used.

This set/rep approach calls for starting with your lightest weight first and lifting it for the highest amount of reps. Then, in each subsequent set, you increase the weight and decrease the reps. Here's an example…

1. 100lbs x 12
2. 105lbs x 10
3. 110lbs x 8
4. 115lbs x 6

That's a traditional pyramid setup. And like a lot of the stuff being mentioned in this article, it looks like one of those "standard" aspects of weight training that we've all seen before and most likely used at some point ourselves.

It's also another one of those common bodybuilding characteristics that just so happens to **suck for building muscle**. Here's why…

As I've said a bunch of times already, the primary stimulus of muscle growth is progressive overload, which in this context basically means getting stronger over time.

And the thing about the traditional pyramid is that it's designed ass-backwards from what basic common sense would tell you is optimal for getting stronger.

Think about it. When you're at your freshest and strongest, you're lifting the lightest weights. Then, as you become more and more fatigued (muscular fatigue, cardiovascular fatigue, etc.), that's when you start lifting the heaviest weights.

So, when you're at your weakest, the weights are at their heaviest. Genius!

What you should be doing instead is warming up to your heaviest weight and **STARTING** with it. From there, you should either keep using that **same amount of weight** and try to maintain a certain amount of reps with it in the next sets, or you should **reduce the weight** from set to set and either try to maintain a certain amount of reps or possibly go for additional reps as part of a reverse pyramid.

More about all of this here: Pyramid Sets vs Reverse Pyramid vs Straight Sets

So… can pyramid sets work for building muscle? Of course it can if everything else is being done correctly. Is it what's going to be optimal for building muscle? **Rarely, if ever.**

This seems to be a bit of trend in this article.

9. The Huge & Redundant Exercise Selection SUCKS!

This clearly goes hand-in-hand with the insanely high volume issue mentioned before, as well as the large focus on isolation exercises (and pump/soreness… more on that later). Still, it deserves its own individual mention.

I have some questions…

- Do you really think your biceps need 5 different types of curling exercises to grow?
- Do you really think your chest must be hit at every possible angle? Do you really think it needs a flat barbell, dumbbell and/or machine version of the same pressing exercise? And then flat dumbbell flyes too?
- And after all of that pressing, do you really think your triceps still need 3 or 4 or 5 (or more)

exercises?

- Do you really think you need to do wide grip lat pull-downs, then narrow grip lat pull-downs, then repeat those same lat pull-downs but now using an underhand grip instead of overhand? And then maybe repeat it with pull-ups?
- Do you really think your shoulders need a seated dumbbell press and a seated barbell press? And then maybe a machine press?
- And after the shitload of volume the anterior deltoids got from both shoulder and chest training, do you really think you still need front raises?

The answer to all of these questions and the dozens of others just like them is **NO**.

It's going to be **unnecessary at best**, and **counterproductive to your goal of building muscle at worst**. More often than not, it's going to be the latter.

These are all perfect examples of not only doing WAY more exercises than we actually need to build muscle optimally, but just doing a ton of identical, redundant and overlapping exercises that serve no real purpose other than to generate more pump and soreness, destroy your joints, cut into recovery and prevent your progress.

What's that you say? This isn't always the case? There are times when a lot of exercises are needed?

Let me guess… you're referring to the idea that you need a bunch of different exercises to target each individual head of the biceps and triceps. Right?

I'll admit, when you are a competitive bodybuilder stepping on a stage to be judged, one who has already built more muscle than 99% of the population will ever come close to building and you're nearing your natural (or even non-natural) genetic potential… this kind of thing can matter.

But for the rest of us? Just normal people trying to build muscle and look great naked? It's unlikely to ever matter much at all.

In fact, all practical experience shows us that this sort of thing is significantly more likely to **interfere** with us getting the results we want than it is to actually help us with getting those results.

10. The Frequent Changes SUCK!

Something you'll often see in typical bodybuilding routines is stuff constantly changing. I'm not talking about some intelligent form of periodization. I'm talking about changing various aspects of your workouts (exercise selection, exercise order, rep ranges, methods, etc.) with little rhyme, reason or logical purpose.

Unless of course you consider **unnecessary nonsense and bullshit myths to be logical purposes**.

These changes are seemingly made at random, and the frequency of them can vary. Sometimes it's every month, sometimes every few weeks, or sometimes — my personal favorite of all — something is changed significantly from one workout to the next.

Why? Good question. The answers you'll most often hear include:

- Gotta shock my body bro!
- Gotta keep my muscles guessing bro!
- Gotta make sure my body doesn't get used to what I'm doing bro!
- Muscle confusion bro!
- I was barely getting sore anymore bro!
- I saw something new I wanted to try bro!

- I just felt like it bro!
- [insert fitness guru, website or magazine here] just came out with an awesome new workout bro!

Hmmm, let's see. Bullshit, bullshit, bullshit, bullshit, meaningless, stupid, stupid and stupid.

Above all else, the key to muscle growth is progressive overload. That means putting your muscles under a certain amount of tension, and then increasing that tension over time. The most basic example of this is doing some exercise with some amount of weight for some amount of reps, and then gradually increasing that amount of reps and/or weight as often as you can.

Basically, do something and then improve at it.

This isn't easy, but do you know a sure-fire way to make it extra hard? By constantly making changes to what it is you're trying to improve at.

Muscle growth *requires* strength gains, and strength gains *require* consistency. So by constantly changing your workouts around, you're doing the complete opposite of what you need to be doing to build muscle optimally.

Now I'm not saying you shouldn't ever change things. You should. But, it shouldn't be that often, and it certainly shouldn't be for bullshit reasons like these. More about that here: Changing Your Routine Too Often and here: When And How Often To Change Your Routine

I've said it before, and I'll probably say it again. Your muscles don't need to be shocked or confused. They just need to be **consistently challenged**. The only change that is required for building muscle is **progression**.

More about that here: The Ultimate Muscle Confusion Workout

11. The "Advanced" Methods SUCK!

Ah yes, advanced training methods. We all want to use them, and most typical bodybuilding routines are filled with them. For example…

- Drop sets.
- Super sets (not to be confused with alternating sets).
- Pre-exhaustion.
- Forced reps.
- Partial reps.
- Negative reps.
- Rest-pause.
- Various time under tension/rep tempo protocols.
- and on and on…

Wanna hear something funny though? While a few of the many "advanced" methods out there can be worth using, most won't actually do anything all that useful in any way whatsoever besides making you feel more "hardcore" because you're using those methods.

And the few advanced methods that may actually serve some beneficial purpose in your program? Most are only likely to serve that purpose for people who **ACTUALLY ARE ADVANCED and in need of such training methods**.

But for beginners and intermediates, which describes the majority of the population? That shit is **much less likely to improve your results, and much more likely to hinder them and distract you from**

the basic fundamentals.

Just like how an advanced trainee won't do very well training like a beginner, the opposite is true too. The only difference is, you'll never see anyone truly advanced seeking out beginner methods.

What you will see are people who are no where near advanced assuming that either A) they are advanced, or B) advanced stuff always works better than non-advanced stuff. They'd be wrong in both cases.

12. The Primary Focus On Pump, Fatigue & Soreness SUCKS!

Like I briefly mentioned earlier, typical bodybuilding routines seem to be based a lot on "feel."

Feeling the pump, feeling the burn, feeling the fatigue, feeling the soreness the next day. It's these feelings that many people using these types of routines go by as THE indicator of whether or not what they're doing is right, or working, or effective, or in need of some kind of unnecessary and often counterproductive change or addition.

Crazy pump in the gym? Awesome! A ton of soreness the next day? Success!

Not enough pump? You must need to do more sets and exercises. Not enough soreness the next day? Things must not be working… better change something.

This is the common mindset people training this way have, **and it's pure bullshit**.

Sure, pump and soreness are useful for letting us know that the target muscle was indeed activated (for example, if you do a back exercise and feel nothing in your back but a ton in your biceps, that's a good sign you're using too much biceps and little to no back).

However, they tell us **virtually nothing about the effectiveness of our workouts**. You know what does though? Do you know what is a great indicator of progress? **Actual progress!** Improvements in strength, improvements to body composition (more muscle, less fat), etc..

More about all of that here: How Important Are Pump And Soreness?

But most people don't realize this. So instead of training in the way that actually produces the most progress, they're busy training in the way that creates the most pump so they can leave the gym feeling the most fatigued and like they sufficiently destroyed their muscles so they can feel nice and sore the next day.

Fits pretty well with most of the crap commonly found in typical bodybuilding routines, doesn't it? That's not a coincidence.

13. The Lack Of Focus On Progressive Overload SUCKS!

At this point I think I've mentioned progressive overload enough times that I can keep this part (somewhat) short and sweet.

In this context, progressive overload basically means increasing the demands being placed on your body by getting stronger and stronger over time. Doing this creates an environment which forces your body to become capable of meeting these ever-increasing demands being placed upon it.

How does it become capable? How does it meet those demands? **By building more muscle.**

Progressive overload is, above all else, what signals the human body to build muscle. Volume, intensity, frequency, splits, rep ranges, rest periods, exercise selection, pump, fatigue and on and on and

on… it's all important too. However, in the absence of progressive overload, it's all meaningless if you're trying to build muscle.

More about that here: Progressive Overload: The Key Requirement

And the fact of the matter is that in typical bodybuilding routines, it's this other stuff that gets the majority of the attention and focus, with the idea of progression being, at best, an afterthought.

I know this from experience. When I first started training, these were the types of routines I used. I remember being super concerned that I wasn't doing enough sets, or that I wasn't doing the best exercises, or that I wasn't sore enough the next day, or that I didn't work my muscles hard enough.

Progression came after that. I knew getting stronger was a good idea, and I tried to. But, the actual concept of progression (or training FOR progression) wasn't ever something I saw much about in the places I was getting these bodybuilding workouts from (shitty magazines, shitty websites, etc.).

It was more just something I viewed as "something I should probably try to do in addition to everything else" rather than "the primary requirement for getting the results I want."

And in my experience, this is a mindset that consistently comes with using typical bodybuilding routines.

So This NEVER Works… EVER… Under ANY Circumstance?

Nope, that's NOT what I'm saying.

The truth is, if you do most of this stuff but maybe keep it to at least somewhat sane levels (e.g. 3 chest exercises instead of 6+)… AND you focus on progressive overload AND you eat correctly to support it… this type of training *can* work. **It CAN build muscle**.

The same could honestly be said for damn near EVERY method of training, which is why so many types of programs appear to work.

However, what I'm saying is that for a natural drug-free person interested in building muscle, **it's usually the worst possible way to train**.

Tons of real world experience shows this. Every bit of research supports this. Every single trainer, coach or legit expert in this field with even half a brain fully agrees with this.

Basically, there's A) what doesn't work, B) what does work, and C) what works **best**. For *most* of the people, *most* of the time, these types of routines will be A or B.

But I Swear I've Seen People Making These Routines Work!

Yup, you certainly have. I have too. Like I said, this typical form of bodybuilding training CAN definitely work. And yes… it DOES appear to work well for some people.

However… and this is a very big *HOWEVER*… the main points I'm getting at here are that…

- It tends to work best for steroid users, people with amazing genetics, or both.
- It may work for other people… just not very well or at least not optimally.
- For many people, it's barely going to work at all and in certain cases, just not work period.
- For the natural, genetically average trainee… it's an inferior way to train for building muscle.

Steroids & Drugs

So sure, if you want to focus on the tons of people using every drug and steroid known to man (many of which deny it) that happen to be training this way and are successfully building plenty of muscle… go for it.

Just keep in mind that you're ignoring the fact that **steroids can make up for training like a moron**. These people aren't building muscle because of the typical bodybuilding routine they're using… they're building muscle because steroids work amazingly well regardless of the type of training being done.

In fact, steroids work well even when **NO training** is being done whatsoever. More about that here: Steroids vs Natural

Keep that in mind the next time you see some huge guy training this way and doing *extremely* well. Unless you're using the same amount of drugs they are (and/or have their same great genetics), they might not be the best person for you to try to emulate.

Above-Average Genetics

And if you want to focus on the people with amazing genetics who are training with these types of workout routines and also appear to have built plenty of muscle this way, feel free to do that too.

But again keep in mind that many of these kinds of genetically elite people were probably more muscular before they even started training than the average person will be after years of training (yup, above-average genetics are sometimes *that* awesome).

These are people who are going to build muscle just fine no matter how they train. It's not quite the same as comparing steroids vs natural, but above average genetics vs average genetics or great genetics vs horrible genetics isn't that much different.

In either case, comparing what works for them with what will work for you just isn't going to be a very smart idea.

Advanced

And if you want to focus on the people who appear to truly be natural AND genetically average yet seem to be training this way AND look pretty good, you're welcome to do so.

But you should keep in mind that there's a really good chance these people didn't build the majority of their muscle training this way (the same goes for many non-natural bodybuilders). They just happen to be training this way now that they're super advanced and so close to their genetic limits that they need (or at least think they need) to train this way to make that last drop of progress.

Majority vs Minority

But instead of all of these examples… do you know who you should really be focusing on? Not the small minority of people using this form of bodybuilding routine and getting good results, **but rather the majority of them who train this way and look like shit**.

Or better yet, if you happen to be training this way, the best person of all to look at is yourself. I've been in that position before. It's not fun to admit to yourself that you've been wasting a lot of time doing things wrong or at least sub-optimally.

But, if you don't, you'll never be able to break out of that rut and fix it.

Does That Mean We Shouldn't Train For Muscle Growth?

Nope, I'm definitely not saying that.

This isn't one of those articles where the author (in this case, me) tries to tell you that when your goal is building muscle, you shouldn't actually train for it. Instead, they claim, you should supposedly use a routine aimed specifically at strength or "functional" athletic training or something similar.

Why? According to them, it's because these routines will allow you to build muscle better than typical bodybuilding routines (which is probably right). They'll say "look at powerlifters… they have plenty of muscle." Or "look at athletes… they have plenty of muscle."

While this is technically all true, **it's still completely wrong and I don't agree with it at all**.

If your goal is to build muscle, you should train using a program that is 100% designed for and aimed at doing everything that is optimal for muscle growth.

In fact, this is what you should be doing for whatever your specific goal is. If you want goal A, don't train for goal B. That's stupid. Even if training for goal B is still capable of producing goal A, it's just not going to be optimal.

The results you want should not be a side effect of your training, they should be the sole purpose of it. More about this here: Strength vs Size

The problem of course is that the majority of the population with the goal of building muscle thinks typical bodybuilding routines ARE the best way to make it happen. They're obviously not.

So the solution isn't that you need to train for some other related goal. The solution is that you need to reevaluate your perception of what's truly best for the results you want. Speaking of which…

So What DOESN'T Suck For Building Muscle?

If you're a beginner, a basic 3 day full body routine built around getting stronger at a handful of big compound exercises is almost always the best way to train. Something like Starting Strength or my own similar Beginner Routine. Simple as that.

If you're past the beginner's stage (meaning you're an intermediate or advanced trainee), then you should:

- Train each body part with a moderate frequency, somewhere between once every 3rd-5th day.
- Use a workout split that allows for this frequency in a balanced and intelligent way.
- Use a moderate volume, somewhere between 30-60 reps per big muscle group per workout, less for smaller muscle groups.
- Use a moderate exercise selection. In most cases, 1-2 exercises per muscle group per workout (bigger muscle groups usually get 2, smaller muscle groups usually get 1).
- Fill the majority of your routine with big compound exercises like presses, rows, pull-ups/pull-downs, squats and deadlifts. Fill in the rest as needed with isolation exercises.
- Avoid redundant exercise selection (e.g. no need to do flat barbell press, then flat dumbbell press, then flat machine press).
- Keep your reps per set in the 5-15 rep range. It's all beneficial in some way for building muscle, and you'll often get your best results by using a combination of low and high reps. Specifically, the 5-8 rep range is ideal for your primary compound exercises, and the 8-15 rep range is great

for your secondary accessory exercises.
- Give your primary lower rep exercises more rest between sets (2-3 minutes). Give your secondary accessory exercises less rest between sets (1-2 minutes).
- Use straight sets, reverse pyramid or something similar. The traditional pyramid should rarely be used.
- Avoid training to failure… at least not very often.
- Focus less on advanced methods, and more on the basic fundamentals.
- Avoid changing things too frequently. The only thing that needs to be "shocked" is your brain for believing in dumb shit training myths.
- Don't obsess over pump and soreness. It's useful for letting you know that you successfully recruited the target muscle group, but completely useless for letting you know if your workouts are effective.
- Put your primary focus, above all else, on creating progressive overload.

If you like upper/lower, the 3 or 4 day version of The Muscle Building Workout Routine is the program I highly recommend. It already gets all of this just right.

If you prefer a more traditional looking "bodybuilding" style routine, but one that removes all of the bullshit mentioned in this article and adjusts everything in a way that is actually effective and ideal, then my **Bodybuilding 2.0** program included in The Best Workout Routines is one I highly recommend.

In fact, that guide contains a handful of different programs fitting this description. If you're interested, feel free to check it out.

The Big Point

So what's the big take home message of this never-ending article? It's pretty simple.

If your primary goal is building muscle, you should most definitely train for it directly rather than train for some other goal that just happens to be capable of producing muscle growth.

However, the typical way most people train for this goal is by using the kinds of typical bodybuilding routines I just spent 8000 words shitting on. And deservedly so.

Yes, these kinds of workouts can and do work. However, all evidence and real world experience shows us that the people who tend to do best with this form of training are steroid users, people with above-average genetics, super advanced people who are nearing their genetic limits, and people who are some combination of all of the above (which coincidentally describes most bodybuilders).

And even in those cases, it's debatable whether this form of training is optimal.

But for the rest of us? The natural, genetically average (or below average) majority of the population trying to build muscle? **There's no debate whatsoever.** Typical bodybuilding routines are one of the **least effective** ways of training for this goal.

ALL research confirms it. My own firsthand experience training this way confirms it (as does the experience of just about everyone who trained this way and eventually "saw the light"). My own 12 years of real world observation confirms it. Literally every *truly* knowledgeable and credible (in my personal opinion) trainer/coach/expert/natural bodybuilder agrees.

Typical bodybuilding routines just suck for building muscle.

Pyramid Sets vs Reverse Pyramid Training vs Straight Sets

Hey, here's a question. Once your overall workout routine is set up and you've figured out which exercises you'll be doing and how many sets and reps you'll do for each… how exactly do you structure it all?

What I mean is, are you going to lift the same weight each set? Increase the weight from one to the next? Decrease the weight each set? Do more reps in later sets? Do less reps in later sets? Do the same number of reps each set?

Or will you just wing it and hope for the best?

If you don't have a good answer to this question (and "just winging it" definitely isn't a good answer), or you just can't explain how the hell you came to the answer you do have, then you're kinda being a dumbass because this is a surprisingly important aspect of your weight training routine.

There's actually quite a few methods for structuring the sets, reps and weights you'll use for a given exercise, and some will definitely be more or less ideal for you than others based on your goals, experience level and individual needs.

Today I want to cover what are probably the 3 most simple and common set structures of all:

1. Straight sets.
2. Pyramid sets.
3. Reverse pyramid training.

Let's now take a look at each and figure out which is best for you…

Straight Sets

Doing "straight sets" (which people also refer to as "sets across") means lifting the same weight for all of your sets of a given exercise. In the traditional sense, you'll have a set/rep goal of something like 3 sets of 8 reps, where you'll use the same weight each set and try to get 8 reps each time.

When you successfully do that, you'd then increase the weight being lifted (aka progressive overload) and then try to get 3 sets of 8 reps with a new slightly heavier weight.

Using 3×8 as the example, here's how traditional straight sets would look…

Traditional Straight Sets

Set	Weight	Reps
#1	100lbs	8
#2	100lbs	8
#3	100lbs	8

As you can see, the same weight is used in all of the sets of this exercise. It's not increased or decreased at any point.

You'll also notice that the number of reps being done (or at least attempted as the goal) remained the same as well. While this is definitely a common way of doing it (hence the "traditional" nickname I've given it), it's **NOT** a requirement for doing straight sets.

In fact, I most often recommend a *modified* version of straight sets in the workouts I use and design for others, and a lot of other people do the same. The main modification being made is the use of a **rep range** rather than one exact rep amount.

So, for example, instead of prescribing 3 sets of 8 reps as the goal, I might prescribe 3 sets of 6-8 reps. Here's an example of how that might look…

Modified Straight Sets

Set	Weight	Reps
#1	100lbs	8
#2	100lbs	7
#3	100lbs	6

As you can see, it's still considered "straight sets" because the same weight is being used in each set. The difference is that your goal isn't just an exact 8 reps anymore. It's now a range of 6-8 reps. That means you could get 8, 7, 6 like I've shown above and your set/rep goal would have been reached just the same (at which point you'd increase the weight being lifted).

What's the point of the modification, you ask?

Well, the main reason I (and many others) prefer a rep range is because a lot of people suck at maintaining reps from set to set unless the weight being used is lighter than it should be or you're stopping each set *well* short of failure and just not working hard enough.

What often happens instead for these people (and I definitely include myself in this group) is that you end up losing a rep from one set to the next as a result of natural fatigue. So rather than taking forever (if ever at all) to work up to straight sets of the same amount of reps, I prefer to see a rep range used which basically builds what your body is naturally capable of right into the progression itself.

You could still get 8, 8, 8 of course. You could also get 8, 7, 7 or 8, 6, 6 or 8, 7, 6 like I've shown and most like to see before the weight gets increased. This modified version just allows for a much better progression than traditional straight sets in my experience.

This of course is exactly why it's what I recommend in The Muscle Building Workout Routine and many of the other highly proven workouts included in The Best Workout Routines.

Straight Set Recommendations

Straight sets tend to be the default set/rep/weight structure I (and most others) recommend for the majority of the population. Some people prefer it done the traditional way (and have no problem maintaining reps like that), while others prefer the modified version that uses a rep range instead. As for me, **I definitely prefer the modified version**.

Pyramid Sets

The traditional text-book definition of pyramid sets involves increasing the weight each set while decreasing the number of reps being done. For example…

Traditional Pyramid Sets

Set	Weight	Reps

#1 80lbs 10

#2 90lbs 8

#3 100lbs 6

As you can see, as the weight goes up, the number of reps being done goes down (hence the name "pyramid" sets). This example shows it being done over a rep range of 6-10, but it can just as easily be done over a smaller or larger range (4-12, 3-6, 8-10, 6-8, etc.) by using smaller or larger increases in weight.

In this case, your program wouldn't prescribe something like 3 sets of 8. It would either call for 3 sets of whatever the rep range is (6-10 in this example), or specifically say something like 1 set of 10, 1 set of 8, and 1 set of 6 with guidelines to increase the weight by a certain amount each set.

Now, this traditional form of pyramid training is probably still the most common set structure you see these days in typical bodybuilding routines and fitness magazines/articles, and it's practically the *only* one you *ever* saw years ago.

It also tends to be the default method that most people just start out using or eventually end up using, kinda like how Monday somehow just becomes "chest day."

But the funny thing is, despite this popularity, pyramid sets are the **dumbest set structure of them all**.

You see, what traditional pyramid sets essentially cause you to do is greatly fatigue your muscles and nervous system **BEFORE** you reach your heaviest weights. You end up lifting the lightest weights when you are at your strongest and freshest, and are then at your weakest when you finally get to your heaviest weights. Yeah, real smart.

This of course is completely ass-backwards from the way it should be for most people to make their best progress. Plus, in many cases, those early sets serve more as warm ups rather than actual work sets that are truly challenging for you and are truly capable of creating the training stimulus you're working out to create in the first place.

Granted, if you're not warming up properly then I guess pyramid sets could serve a purpose in that regard. But then again, you **SHOULD** be warming up properly. You shouldn't be turning your work sets into borderline warm up sets to make up for the fact that you train like a moron.

Pyramid Set Recommendations

For the majority of the population, none of what I just described is very ideal. And for that reason, traditional pyramid sets are typically the worst possible set structure to use. Can it work? Sure… assuming everything else is done right. But is it best or even remotely smart? Nope.

The one possible exception here would be beginners who are still learning proper form. In this case, pyramid sets serve the same purpose as training wheels on a bike. You get to start off each exercise by "practicing" with a lighter weight, and then continue to practice with slightly heavier weight as you go from set to set.

But beyond that, it's just a stupid way to train. I don't recommend it.

Reverse Pyramid Training

The traditional text-book definition of reverse pyramid training involves decreasing the weight each set while increasing the number of reps being done. For example…

Reverse Pyramid Training

Set	Weight	Reps
#1	100lbs	6
#2	90lbs	8
#3	80lbs	10

As you can see, it's the complete **reverse** of traditional **pyramid training** (which means the International Workout Method Naming Department did a damn fine job on this one).

As the weight goes down from set to set, the number of reps being done goes up. This example shows it being done over a rep range of 6-10, but it can once again easily be done over a smaller or larger range (4-12, 3-6, 8-10, 6-8, etc.) by using smaller or larger decreases in weight.

And just like pyramid sets, your program wouldn't prescribe something like 3 sets of 8. It would either call for 3 sets of whatever the rep range is (6-10 in this example), or specifically say something like 1 set of 6, 1 set of 8, and 1 set of 10 with guidelines to decrease the weight by a certain amount each set.

The main difference between reverse pyramid and traditional pyramid training is that here you're NOT training like an idiot. You're starting with your heaviest weight and then working down to your lightest weight, which makes **MUCH** more sense than traditional pyramid sets where you do the opposite.

This way is just much more ideal for creating progressive overload (which is really your #1 goal).

In addition to allowing you to start with your heaviest weight (which straight sets also do), some people may also like the fact that the weight gets lighter from set to set (which straight sets don't do).

Why? Because as you naturally become more fatigued from one set to the next, the weight being lifted is reduced in a way that almost compensates for that fatigue.

This could be especially beneficial for certain people based on age, genetics or just personal preference, as well as people in an already reduced state of recovery/work capacity, such as those in a caloric deficit for the purpose of losing fat.

I have a feeling this is a big part of why Martin Berkhan uses reverse pyramid training (and quite successfully, I might add) as part of his IF/Leangains approach. It's probably at least partially responsible for reverse pyramid training's increase in popularity in recent years, even though it's been around forever.

Reverse Pyramid Training Recommendations

Simply put, I like it. In fact, I like any set structure that involves starting with your heaviest weight at the point when you are at your strongest, freshest, and most capable of using and progressing with it.

Reverse pyramid training does exactly that AND has a built in way of dealing with potential performance drop-off from set to set (sort of like modified straight sets does, just to a larger degree). I probably wouldn't recommend it to beginners, but for anyone at the intermediate or advanced level, it's definitely one of many options to consider.

Are There Any Other Methods? Which Is Your Favorite?

Yup, there are other set/rep structures out there besides traditional pyramid sets, reverse pyramid training and straight sets, although these definitely seem to be the 3 most popular among the average person.

As for which one I like the most of the three, it's usually the modified version of straight sets done using a rep range (although the traditional version might be better suited for beginners). However, I also REALLY like reverse pyramid training and have personally gotten good results using both set structures.

That's why these are the 2 methods of progression I prescribe for most of the workouts included in my new premium guide, The Best Workout Routines.

Traditional pyramid sets on the other hand are the clear loser in my opinion. I spent my first few years training this way and I consider it one of the (many) dumb things I've done that hindered my progress. It's not a training method I recommend often, if ever.

But if you *really* want to know what my personal favorite set/rep structure is, then it's actually none of the methods I've mentioned in this post.

Instead, I've personally gotten my best results using a method that can best be described as a linear and nonlinear combination of straight sets AND reverse pyramid training that I tend to refer to as **modified reverse pyramid training**.

Appendix F:

Full Body vs Upper/Lower vs Body Part Split Routine: Which Is Best?

The diet and fitness world is filled with countless debates and arguments. This diet vs that diet. This training method vs that training method. This workout routine vs that workout routine. They're mostly all just silly opinion based debates that will probably never end.

However, there are a few debated topics that really don't warrant much arguing at all in my opinion. One such example is the "weight training split" debate. As in, which is best:

- **Full body split**.
- **Upper/lower split**.
- **Body part splits**.

It's something people have been arguing about for years (probably even decades), and it's a topic you've probably had your own internal debate about. Which split should you use? Which is right for you? Which will work best for you?

I think it's time we end this silly debate once and for all…

Let's Take A Look At Each Split

Before we get into which one is best, I want to make sure we're all on the same page in terms of what each split actually is. So, here now is the most common example of each…

The Full Body Split

1. **Monday:** Full Body Workout
2. **Tuesday:** off
3. **Wednesday:** Full Body Workout
4. **Thursday:** off
5. **Friday:** Full Body Workout
6. **Saturday:** off
7. **Sunday:** off

While there is also a 2 day version of this split as well as other variations that schedule the workouts a little differently, what you see above is by far the most commonly used version of the full body split.

It's a higher frequency split that allows for each muscle group, movement pattern and/or exercise to be trained 3 times per week (or once every 2nd or 3rd day).

The Upper Lower Split

1. **Monday:** Upper Body Workout
2. **Tuesday:** Lower Body Workout
3. **Wednesday:** off
4. **Thursday:** Upper Body Workout
5. **Friday:** Lower Body Workout

6. **Saturday:** off
7. **Sunday:** off

There are actually quite a few different variations of this split that I like a lot (and I explain the PROS and CONS of each in The Best Workout Routines). But again, the example shown above is BY FAR the most commonly used version of the upper/lower split.

It's a moderate frequency split that allows each muscle group, movement pattern and/or exercise to be trained 2 times per week (or once every 3-5 days depending on the exact version of the split you use).

The Body Part Split

Now while the full body and upper/lower splits have other slightly modified versions of what is essentially the same thing, there are actually dozens of different types of body part splits that vary **significantly** from one to the next in terms of everything from the schedule, to the number of days per week, to the body part pairings, to the training frequency.

I want to focus on that last variable for second. See, I think a HUGE part of the reason why "body part splits" are generally looked down upon is that the majority of them use a once-per-week training frequency per muscle group, movement pattern and/or exercise. As I've explained before, this is often the LEAST effective way to train for most goals.

The thing is, not all body part splits fit this description. There are actually a handful of them that use a more optimal training frequency, and this greatly levels the playing field when being compared to the full body and upper/lower splits.

So for the purpose of this comparison, THIS is what I'm referring to when I use the term "body part split" (not the much dumber low frequency kind). Here's an example…

Week 1

1. **Monday:** Push (Chest, Shoulders, Triceps)
2. **Tuesday:** Pull (Back, Biceps)
3. **Wednesday:** off
4. **Thursday:** Legs (Quads, Hamstrings, Calves, Abs)
5. **Friday:** off
6. **Saturday:** Push (Chest, Shoulders, Triceps)
7. **Sunday:** Pull (Back, Biceps)

Week 2

1. **Monday:** off
2. **Tuesday:** Legs (Quads, Hamstrings, Calves, Abs)
3. **Wednesday:** off
4. **Thursday:** Push (Chest, Shoulders, Triceps)
5. **Friday:** Pull (Back, Biceps)
6. **Saturday:** off
7. **Sunday:** Legs (Quads, Hamstrings, Calves, Abs)

What you see above is what I like to refer to as the rotating push/pull/legs split. Unlike the dumber body part splits I mentioned a second ago that train each body part once every 7th day, a split like this trains each body part once every 5th day. That brings this split from low frequency up into the more optimal moderate frequency range.

And like I said before, there are a handful of other similar intelligently designed body part splits that

effectively accomplish the same thing. The Best Workout Routines actually contains most of them.

So… Which Split Is The Best?

Alright, so now that we are all on the same page in terms of what I'm classifying a full body, upper/lower and body part split to be, it's time to settle the debate once and for all. **Which one is the best?**

Well, like most aspects weight training, what's best for you always depends on your exact situation. What I mean is, the answer here depends on your specific goals, your experience level, your available training schedule, your personal preferences, and possibly even more.

Until you have those answers, it's *impossible* to definitively say that any of these splits (or other workout schedules) are any better or worse than the other. Anyone who does is an idiot, and you can tell them I said so.

But once you DO know those answers, it's much easier to decide which split truly is best for you. To show you what I mean, here are the most common examples that come to mind…

Determining Which Split Is Best For YOU…

- If you're a beginner with virtually any goal (build muscle, lose fat, get strong, etc.), the **full body split** is what's best for you. The higher frequency and the lower volume/higher compound exercise focus that typically accompanies it has been proven (both by science and the real world) to be most ideal for beginners. This is why the most effective beginner workouts on the planet are all built around this split (for example: The Beginner Weight Training Routine).
- If you're an intermediate or advanced trainee whose primary goal is increasing strength or improving performance, the **full body split** or **upper/lower split** is what's *usually* best for you. Research and the real world all show that a higher frequency per exercise/movement pattern works best for strength gains, and these 2 splits allow for that type of frequency to be met along with a balance of exercise selection, volume and intensity that suits these goals. This is why damn near all of the most effective strength oriented routines are built around these splits. (Although, full body does come with some drawbacks.)
- If you're an intermediate or advanced trainee whose primary goal is building muscle or improving the way your body looks, the **upper/lower split** or **body part split** is what's *usually* best for you. Upper/lower has proven to be as effective for "looks" related goals as it is for strength/performance goals (after all, strength gains are a HUGE part of muscle growth), and body part splits practically exist for the sole purpose of training your body to look good (which is why they are based around training body parts rather than movements). This is why the majority of the most effective muscle building routines around use these splits (for example: The Muscle Building Workout Routine and the many programs included in The Best Workout Routines).

Are there exceptions to these recommendations? Maybe, but they are definitely the minority. And does a person's individual training preferences and available schedule also play a role? Of course.

But, speaking strictly in terms of what is most likely to work best for you based on your specific goals and experience level (and with all else being equal)… this is it.

Who Really Wins This Debate?

Uh… no one. Actually, if there is any clear cut winner here, it's the person who isn't wasting their time debating this nonsense in the first place.

The truth is, regardless of your exact situation, ALL of these splits will work for you to some extent as long as it's used right. This is another important point people fail to realize. Full body workouts can build muscle just fine, and you can get pretty strong using a body part split. Honestly, as long as it's all designed and executed properly… *everything works*.

Of course, this isn't about what just *works*… this is about *what works best*. And in that case, certain splits are indeed **better suited**, **better proven**, and **much more ideal** for you than others, but the reason why is NEVER just "this one rules and that one sucks." It's because of factors that are specific to you.

Which means, the reason this full body vs upper/lower vs body part split debate is so stupid is because everyone is always right and wrong at the same time. NO single split is universally "the best" in every situation, yet each split IS "the best" in certain situations.

So anyone who just makes outright claims that Split X is the best split in the world and Split Y is the worst split in the world is likely to be one of the most ignorant people in the world… at least when it comes to weight training.

On the other hand, if a person wants to state that Split X is better than Split Y **based on a particular set of factors** (such as a person's goal, experience level, etc.)… then they're on to something.

And that "something" is often the true key to settling most weight training debates.

Is A Full Body Workout Routine Best For You? Probably Not.

Look, I like full body workouts. I don't love them, but I like them.

They are as simple and basic as can be, and when it's all put together into an intelligently designed full body workout routine, it can be effective for sure. It's one of the most popular and proven types of weight training programs you'll find.

And yes, it can work for all sorts of different goals. Building muscle, increasing strength, losing fat, improving performance. Again, assuming it's all designed and executed correctly (and everything else is done right), they flat out work. No question about it.

Having said that, **I wouldn't recommend full body training to most people**. Let me explain…

What Is A Full Body Workout Routine?

It's exactly what it sounds like. Whereas some types of training have an "upper body day" or "lower body day" or "chest and triceps day" or "back and biceps day" or "push day" or "arm day" or whatever else… a full body workout routine involves only one type of day: a "**full body day**."

And on this day, you train your entire body in some capacity. Exactly what capacity can vary quite a bit.

For example, in some cases this could literally mean doing an exercise for every muscle group (quads, hamstrings, back, chest, shoulders, biceps, triceps and maybe even calves and abs too) so that everything gets trained directly every workout.

In other cases, it can mean doing nothing but one big compound push, pull and lower body exercise (e.g. bench press, row, squat) so that everything gets trained in some way directly or indirectly (e.g. shoulders and triceps get trained during bench pressing in addition to the chest).

In other cases, it can fall somewhere between those two extremes.

But the basic gist of a full body routine is that you're training all or most of your body to some degree in a single workout rather than splitting the body up into different parts or muscle groups that are trained separately on different days. This is the opposite of that.

From there, you're typically doing this type of workout 3 times per week as part of a full body split:

1. **Monday:** Full Body Workout
2. **Tuesday:** off
3. **Wednesday:** Full Body Workout
4. **Thursday:** off
5. **Friday:** Full Body Workout
6. **Saturday:** off
7. **Sunday:** off

Sometimes you might repeat the exact same workout 3 times. Sometimes you might repeat that same workout 3 times but with some kind of intensity modification (like heavy, medium, light). Sometimes you might have 2 different full body workouts that you alternate "ABA BAB" style. Sometimes you might have 3 completely different workouts altogether.

There's really a lot of ways it can go. But again, the basic gist of it is this: you train all or most of your body to some degree in every workout, usually 3 days per week with 1 or 2 days off in between each.

What Is Full Body Training "Best" For?

Beginners, beginners, and more **beginners**. There is no form of weight training that will work better for a beginner than full body training when it comes to building muscle and/or increasing strength as quickly as possible.

This of course is why the most popular and proven beginner programs around are all full body routines. Starting Strength, Practical Programming's Novice Program, and even my own Beginner Weight Training Routine. Plus dozens of others.

Full body is pretty much universally agreed to be **optimal for beginners with virtually any goal**.

But, *that's about it*. I wouldn't consider it to be the single "best" way to train for anyone else.

What Is Full Body Training "Good" For?

Good? Oh… it's *good* for lots of stuff.

- For those training specifically for **strength**, a full body routine can certainly be good (e.g. Bill Starr/MadCow 5×5). For most people however, I think upper/lower is what's going to be best. The majority of people with strength specific goals tend to agree. Just look at how most non-beginner powerlifters train. It's almost always upper/lower (or something very close to it), and

almost never full body (e.g. 5/3/1, Westside, etc.).

- It's also good for those training for some type of **performance** or sport/athletic goal. Then again, so is upper/lower. And based on what I've seen, upper/lower tends to be used more often by athletes and the coaches who train them.
- It's also good for people doing some form of **metabolic training** or just weight training specifically to **burn as many calories** as they can in the shortest period of time. Other splits can do this too, though.
- It's also good for people with **very little time for working out**. They can only lift 3 times per week, and maybe those workouts need to be kept pretty short. A basic full body workout routine is one good option out of a handful of good options for that.
- It's also good for people whose training preferences lean towards **the basics**. You know, a few big compound exercises and call it a day. Full body is good for that.
- And for many non-beginners, full body can also be good for **building muscle**. No question about it. It can certainly work for muscle growth if it (and everything else) is done right. I just wouldn't consider it the best way to do it. Just look at how the vast majority of *legitimately* natural bodybuilders or physique/figure competitors train. I don't know a single one who is training full body past the beginner stage, nor do I know a single reputable coach/trainer who would consider it ideal for growth.

Basically, a full body workout routine can be quite good for damn near everything. But in most cases, something else (like upper/lower) can be just as good or more likely *even better*. Beginners are the primary exception.

Here's Why Full Body Sucks For Most People…

Alright, "sucks" might not be the right word. Because again, an intelligently designed full body routine is capable of being "good" and working for you for almost every single goal you can think of. This is 100% true.

I didn't write this article to shit on full body routines like I wrote a previous article to shit on bodybuilding routines. This is a little different, because this type of training is actually intelligent and effective (again assuming it's all designed properly).

But the big point I'm making here is that **we are comparing what's "good" to what's "best."** And for the majority of people who are past the beginner stage, full body is just NOT going to be "best" for most goals.

There's a handful of reasons why. Here now are the 4 biggest ones…

1. Three Times Per Week?

Once you get stronger (which is something that happens as you get into intermediate territory and beyond), workouts become harder because the weights being lifted become heavier and significantly more taxing on your entire body (and mind).

So when you're squatting or deadlifting or bench pressing or whatever with some typical beginner-level amount of weight, you can do those exercises 2 or 3 times per week without much of an issue, if any at all.

But once you get more advanced and double, triple or quadruple those weights on each exercise, you're going to find that training your whole body 3 times per week is pretty damn tough. And not in a "I'm more hardcore than you bro, beastmode 4 life!" way. But rather in a "I'm doing more than I should be

doing for superior progress" way.

And it's not so much your muscles that are the real issue here. It's your CNS (central nervous system), joints, tendons, mind and more.

Muscles can take quite a bit. These other things are what will often give out long before muscles do. And when you're training your entire body fairly heavy 3 times per week and pushing yourself to make progress, something is going to be more likely to eventually give (recovery, performance, injuries, mindset, etc.). Or at least require making some kind of suboptimal adjustment to compensate.

But when you're a beginner who's able to make consistent linear progress quite easily and you're lifting significantly less weight than you'll be lifting after a few years of consistent training, this is all really a non-issue.

2. Everything In One Workout?

Similar to the previous point, as you get stronger, it also gets harder to include too much stuff in a single workout.

So again, when you're a weaker beginner, you can get away with doing various combinations of quad dominant exercises (like squats), hip dominant exercises (like deadlifts), single leg exercises (like lunges), upper body pushing exercises (like bench press and overhead press), and upper body pulling exercises (like pull-ups and rows) in a single workout.

But when you get stronger, **that shit is gonna kill you**.

Actually, it won't kill you. You just won't be capable of training hard enough to reach the point where that would happen… **and that in itself is the problem**.

Meaning, when the weights become heavier and progression becomes slower and harder to make happen, you're going to find it mighty tough to go from one big demanding exercise (like squats) to another big demanding exercise (like bench press) to another big demanding exercise (like weighted pull-ups) to another big demanding exercise (like Romanian deadlifts) and so on without a *significant* drop-off in performance.

The same is true in every type of workout of course, not just full body. You won't be as fresh for the stuff that comes later in your upper or lower workout, or your push or pull workout, or whatever else.

However, the big difference here is that the stuff coming later in those workouts is usually just secondary exercises, accessory work and/or isolation movements. With a full body workout routine it's usually more big primary compound movements for other major muscle groups.

That's the thing about full body training… you're training your "full body" every workout to some extent, so it requires putting more demanding stuff into each workout than you would with any other type of training.

And honestly, even the thought of it kills me. For example, sometimes after doing just part of a leg workout (let's say squats and RDLs), I finish my last set and try to imagine what it would be like to now first go on to something like bench press and/or pull-ups and/or overhead press and/or rows.

Um, no thanks… that's just not going to go very well. At that point, hitting some higher rep single-leg leg presses, leg curls and finishing up with some calf raises sounds like a much better idea. I'd do infinitely better putting that upper body stuff in its own separate workout.

And it's not that I can't do it, mind you. I can. I'm sure you can too. I'm capable of pushing myself pretty hard. It's just that I know that no matter how hard I push myself, those later exercises are all

going to suffer significantly as a result of the massive amount of mental and physical fatigue that has been generated during the training that came before it.

Unless of course you consciously or subconsciously make yourself hold back during those earlier exercises, which can be just as big of a problem.

You just reach a point once you hit intermediate level and beyond where **trying to train your whole body in a single workout stops being the best way for you to train**.

NOT an impossible way for you to train… just not the most ideal way.

3. I Have To Do All Of That Again?

And I don't want to just breeze past the mental aspect of this either. It's not easy to lift heavy things.

They're… ya know… *heavy*.

It's not easy to get under a bar, or above a bar, or stare down some heavy ass weights thinking "alright, I worked as hard as I possibly could last time and got 6 reps with this weight. It was the most I was capable of doing. This time however, I must somehow work even harder and get 7."

That's just as demanding mentally as it is physically.

And knowing that you have a bunch of equally big/heavy/hard exercises to go for other major muscle groups after this where you'll need to push yourself just as hard… that's just some mentally draining shit right there (and then add in the fact that you're going through this 3 times per week).

So even if your body still has plenty of more to give at that point (which, as mentioned a minute ago, it probably won't), your mind might be ready to go home. But again, when you're a beginner, the weights are WAY lighter and the progression is WAY easier. It's a non-issue.

4. What About Volume Per Workout?

Total overall volume is important, as is total volume per body part per week, as is **total volume per body part per workout**. In fact, I think that 3rd one is extra important when the goal is **muscle growth**.

Progressive tension is key for sure, but some degree of metabolic fatigue and muscular damage has been shown to be an important part of growth as well.

And with a full body workout routine, it's just not possible to get in the amount of volume per muscle group that is optimal for an intermediate/advanced trainee without something negative happening (e.g each workout becoming insanely long due to the number of sets and exercises needed, sacrificing recovery since you're training everything 3 times per week with just one day in between, etc.).

Full body workouts just aren't suited for anything but fairly low volume. That's just what it requires by design to actually be effective.

For some goals, this isn't much of an issue (and for beginners, it's not an issue regardless of their goal). But specifically for building muscle, the amount of volume that is optimal per muscle group per workout is higher than the amount of volume that full body training is capable of supporting.

At least not in any way that would be considered ideal.

Full Body = Good For Most, Best For Few

That title above pretty much summarizes this article and my overall feelings on full body workouts in general.

For beginners with any goal, it's almost always the **best** way to train. For everyone past the beginner stage, it's often a **good** way to train. And for some, it can still be better than good… even great.

But for most, full body is just not likely to be the ideal way to train at that stage for most goals. More often than not, you'll do better with some other training approach.

Full Body Split – 3 Day & 2 Day Full Body Training Routine

The full body split is one of the oldest and most popular weight training splits there is, and it probably always will be. The reason why is simple: **it works**.

Both the 2 day and 3 day version of the full body split is as proven and effective as training routines get. It works for a variety of goals (building muscle, increasing strength, maintaining muscle while losing fat, etc.) and can work quite well for people at every level of training (beginner, intermediate and advanced).

That means that no matter what your specific goal or experience level is, the full body split is an extremely solid choice.

Let's take a look at exactly how this popular workout split can be set up…

The 3 Day Full Body Split

1. **Monday:** Full Body Workout
2. **Tuesday:** off
3. **Wednesday:** Full Body Workout
4. **Thursday:** off
5. **Friday:** Full Body Workout
6. **Saturday:** off
7. **Sunday:** off

The most common version of the classic full body split is the 3 day version.

As you can see, it's a basic 3 day split (meaning you have three weight training workout days over the course of a week). The exact days of the week you choose really doesn't matter at all as long as the same every-other-day format is kept intact with 2 consecutive days off at the end.

The exact schedule shown above is probably the most common way full body training is setup because most people like having the weekends off.

Each of the 3 workouts would typically involve training all (or nearly all) of the body in some form directly or indirectly with a big focus on compound exercises. For example, the bench press might serve as one workout's chest, shoulder and triceps exercise as opposed to having 1 separate exercise for each muscle group.

This means that the 3 day full body split allows for a training frequency where each muscle group usually gets trained to some degree 3 times per week.

In most cases, this would be considered a high frequency split and would therefore require less volume (amount of exercises, sets, reps) per workout to compensate and allow for adequate recovery.

The 2 Day Full Body Split

1. **Monday:** Full Body Workout
2. **Tuesday:** off
3. **Wednesday:** off
4. **Thursday:** Full Body Workout
5. **Friday:** off
6. **Saturday:** off
7. **Sunday:** off

Even though the 3 day version is by far the most popular and ideal setup for most people, this type of training routine can also be done with a 2 day schedule. This is perfect for people who can only manage to work out twice per week (that's the main reason I'd ever recommend this version).

In fact, **The 2 Day Workout Routine** (only available as part of The Best Workout Routines) uses this exact split.

Once again, the exact days you choose really doesn't matter as long as you have 2-4 rest days between the workouts.

Of course, since this is now a 2 day split, that means training frequency per muscle group is now twice per week (as opposed to 3 times in the previous version). However, this frequency is still perfectly within the optimal range for most people.

Who Does Full Body Training Work Best For?

Like I mentioned before, this type of routine can work well for pretty much every goal.

Whether you want to build muscle, increase strength, lose fat, improve performance, or any combination thereof, the full body split can get the job done. This applies to beginners, intermediates and advanced trainees.

However, having said that, there are 3 groups of people who this split is definitely more ideal for than others. They are:

1. **Beginners with ANY goal.**
   It doesn't matter what your goal is. If you're a beginner (meaning less than 6 months of consistent and intelligent weight training), literally all scientific research and real world results prove that a 3-times-per-week training frequency is what works best for you, and the 3 day full body split is the most effective way to make that happen. I fully recommend it to all beginners. (Check out The Beginner Weight Training Workout Routine)
2. **People whose primary goal is increasing strength and/or improving performance.**
   After the 4 day upper/lower split, many of the most effective/proven strength and performance oriented weight training programs in existence tend to use the 3 day full body split. The higher frequency and almost required focus on the big compound exercises makes this type of split effective for strength and performance athletes. (Check out some recommended sample strength workouts & routines.)

3. **People who can only train twice per week.**
   No matter what your goal or training experience is, if you can only manage to schedule in 2 workouts per week, the 2 day full body split is pretty much your only realistic option because it's the only way to keep your training frequency within the optimal range. The 2 Day Workout Routine uses this split for that very reason.

These are the three groups of people who this split tends to be most ideal for and who I'd personally recommend it for.

Can it work for other people with other goals? Sure. However, there are other workout splits that will usually work better in those cases.

Best Upper Body Workout Routine & Weight Training Exercises

Let me guess… you want to create the **best upper body workout routine possible**, right?

You want it to contain the most effective weight training exercises, and you want everything to be set up in the way that will produce the best possible results for you.

Sound about right? I thought so. Now let's get down to exactly how to do it…

How To Set Up An Upper Body Workout Routine

Putting together an effective upper body workout requires a few very quick and simple steps.

1. Plan to train each of the major upper body movement patterns and muscle groups either directly or indirectly.
2. Select the best exercises to train them with while keeping proper balance around the joints.
3. Put those exercises in the most ideal order.
4. Choose the right amount of sets and reps per exercise so training volume is within the optimal range.

Let's begin…

The 6 Upper Body Movements

In the most simple and basic sense, your upper body can really only do **6 things**. It can push and pull horizontally, push and pull vertically, flex at the elbow, and extend at the elbow.

That means a proper upper body workout routine can contain (up to) 6 different exercises that target 6 different movement patterns and/or muscle groups. Here's what I mean:

- **Horizontal Push**: A horizontal pushing exercise is any weight training exercise that involves moving a weight out in front of you so that it's traveling away from your torso horizontally. For example, most chest exercises (like the bench press) fit into this category.
- **Horizontal Pull**: A horizontal pulling exercise is any weight training exercise that involves moving a weight in towards your torso horizontally from straight out in front of you. For example, most back rowing exercises (like bent over barbell/dumbbell rows) fit into this category.

- **Vertical Push**: A vertical pushing exercise is any weight training exercise that involves moving a weight up vertically in relation to your torso so that it goes straight over head (or at least in that direction). For example, most shoulder exercises (like the overhead press) fit into this category.
- **Vertical Pull**: A vertical pulling exercise is any weight training exercise that involves moving a weight down vertically in relation to your torso so that you're pulling down from over head. For example, most back pulling exercises (like pull-ups/lat pull-downs) fit into this category.
- **Elbow Flexion**: An elbow flexion exercise is any weight training exercise that involves moving a weight towards you by flexing at the elbow. For example, most biceps curling exercises (like barbell/dumbbell curls) fit into this category.
- **Elbow Extension**: An elbow extension exercise is any weight training exercise that involves moving a weight away from you by extending at the elbow. For example, most triceps extension exercises (like cable press downs/laying barbell extensions) fit into this category.

When putting together an upper body workout routine, your goal in most cases is to select exercises that will allow you train all of those movement patterns to some degree. Here's how…

Upper Body Exercise Selection

Now that you know what the upper body is capable of doing, it's time to fill out your workout routine with the weight training exercises that allow it all to happen.

Since exercise selection is based on a bunch of individual factors (your exact goals, your exact capabilities, your exact training preferences), I figure the best thing I can do here is just give you a list of some example exercises to choose from. You can then select what seems best for you.

Horizontal Pushing Movements

- Bench Press
- Low Incline Bench Press
- Decline Bench Press
- Flat/Incline/Decline Chest Press Machine
- Flat/Incline/Decline Flyes

Horizontal Pulling Movements

- Bent Over Rows
- Seated Cable Rows
- T-Bar Rows
- Chest Supported Machine Rows

Vertical Pushing Movements

- Standing Overhead Shoulder Press
- Seated Overhead Shoulder Press
- Lateral Raises
- Front Raises
- High Incline Bench Press

Vertical Pulling Movements

- Pull-Ups
- Chin-ups
- Lat Pull-Downs

Elbow Flexion Movements

- Standing Biceps Curl
- Seated Biceps Curl
- Preacher Curls
- Cable Curls

Elbow Extension Movements

- Laying Triceps Extension (Skull-Crushers)
- Triceps Cable Press-Downs
- Overhead Triceps Extension

Now this obviously isn't the super mega definitive list of exercises you can choose for an upper body workout routine, but it is some examples of the most popular and effective ones.

In *most cases*, the next step is to select **one exercise from each category/movement pattern** shown above. While that isn't an absolute rule, it is the way it should be done in *most cases*.

Doing so causes a few important things to happen.

1. First, it guarantees each movement pattern and muscle group gets trained, which is the #1 goal of the typical upper body workout routine.
2. Second, it keeps the workout a sane length and avoids unnecessary (and possibly counterproductive) excess exercises from being added.
3. Third, it ensures there will be proper balance around the joints (elbow and shoulder). What I mean is, for every horizontal push, there should be a horizontal pull (and vice-versa). For every vertical push, there should be a vertical pull (and vice-versa). For every elbow flexion, there should be an elbow extension (and vice-versa). When this type of balance **DOESN'T** take place, it's a recipe for disaster in terms of injury potential. Selecting upper body exercises in this manner greatly lessens that potential.

Exercise Order

Now that your weight training exercises have been selected, it's time to put them in order. Again, this depends on a lot of individual factors, but in general, these are the basic rules of exercise order:

- Compound exercises before isolation exercises.
- Free weights before machines.
- Bigger muscle groups before smaller muscle groups.
- Harder/more taxing exercises before easier/less taxing ones.

So, the first thing virtually EVERYONE can do is take your biceps and triceps exercises (flexion/extension) and put them at the very end of your upper body workout. Regardless of goals/preferences, that's where they belong.

Beyond that, it gets a little trickier and depends more on you than absolute rules in my opinion. So, I

figure the best thing I can do at this point is throw out some sample upper body workouts for you to learn from or just use as is.

Sample Upper Body Workout Routine #1

1. Bench Press
2. Seated Cable Rows
3. Seated Dumbbell Shoulder Press
4. Lat Pull-Downs
5. Laying Barbell Extensions
6. Barbell Curls

Sample Upper Body Workout Routine #2

1. Pull-Ups
2. Seated Barbell Shoulder Press
3. Chest Supported Machine Rows
4. Flat Dumbbell Bench Press
5. Dumbbell Curls
6. Cable Press-Downs

Sample Upper Body Workout Routine #3

1. Bent Over Barbell Rows
2. Incline Bench Press
3. Chin-Ups
4. Lateral Raises
5. Overhead Dumbbell Triceps Extension
6. Preacher Curls

For additional sample workouts, check out my brand new guide to The Best Workout Routines. It contains all of the most effective workouts you'll need to get the best results possible, including my highly successful Upper Body Focused Training program.

Choosing Optimal Volume (Sets/Reps/Exercises)

Now that you have all of the basics down for intelligently putting together an effective upper body workout routine, the major remaining step is planning how many sets and reps you'll be doing per exercise, per muscle group/movement pattern, and per workout.

The bad news is, explaining that would require a whole separate article or two. The good news is I've already written them. Check them out…

- Weight Training Volume – How Many Sets, Reps & Exercises?
- The Optimal Volume Per Muscle Group, Body Part, Workout & Week

Now Put It Into Action

And that's about it. You've learned everything you need to know to put together the best upper body workout routine possible. Now just pick your version of the upper/lower body split and put it all into action.

Upper & Lower Body Split – 3 Day & 4 Day Upper/Lower Routine

The upper/lower split is probably my personal favorite weight training split of them all.

It just works so damn perfectly for so many goals, situations and schedules that it tends to be the type of routine I end up using and recommending most often. Let me show you why…

What Is An Upper/Lower Body Split?

The upper/lower split is a type of weight training schedule that revolves around splitting the body up into 2 groups: **upper body** and **lower body**. Each group is then trained separately on its own workout day.

In most cases, the **upper body workout** would train the following muscle groups to some degree:

- Chest
- Back
- Shoulders
- Biceps
- Triceps

(More about creating an upper body workout routine.)

On the other hand, the **lower body workout** would most often train these muscle groups to some degree:

- Quads
- Hamstrings
- Calves
- Lower Back
- Abs

As for how the workouts are scheduled, there's a few options. These are the most common…

The Classic 4 Day Upper/Lower Split

1. **Monday:** Upper Body Workout
2. **Tuesday:** Lower Body Workout
3. **Wednesday:** off
4. **Thursday:** Upper Body Workout
5. **Friday:** Lower Body Workout
6. **Saturday:** off

7. **Sunday:** off

The classic 4 day upper body and lower body split is probably the most common version. It involves doing 4 weight training workouts per week: 2 upper body workouts and 2 lower body workouts.

They are classically done using the 2 on/1 off/2 on/2 off format shown above, which allows for the added perk of having the weekends off (something many people prefer). Of course, the actual days you choose really doesn't matter at all as long as that same format is kept intact.

This classic 4 day version of the upper/lower split allows for a frequency where each muscle group is trained once every 3rd or 4th day, which is right within the ideal frequency range for the majority of people who are past the beginner's stage.

The Classic 3 Day Upper/Lower Split

Week 1

1. **Monday:** Upper Body Workout
2. **Tuesday:** off
3. **Wednesday:** Lower Body Workout
4. **Thursday:** off
5. **Friday:** Upper Body Workout
6. **Saturday:** off
7. **Sunday:** off

Week 2

1. **Monday:** Lower Body Workout
2. **Tuesday:** off
3. **Wednesday:** Upper Body Workout
4. **Thursday:** off
5. **Friday:** Lower Body Workout
6. **Saturday:** off
7. **Sunday:** off

The classic 3 day upper body and lower body split is probably a very close second in terms of how commonly used it is. It involves rotating through 3 weight training workouts per week: Upper Body, Lower Body, Upper Body one week, and then Lower Body, Upper Body, Lower Body the next.

You'd then continue alternating like this from week to week.

The workouts are classically done using the 1 on/1 off/1 on/1 off/1 on/2 off format shown above, which again allows for the added perk of having the weekends off (if that's important to you). Once again, the actual days you choose really doesn't matter at all as long as that same format is kept intact.

This classic 3 day version of the upper/lower split allows for a frequency where each muscle group is trained once every 4th or 5th day. While this is slightly less frequent than the classic 4 day version, it's still **perfectly** within the ideal frequency range for the majority of people past the beginner's stage.

3 Day Version VS 4 Day Version: Which is better for you?

Well, first of all, they *both* work extremely well and will *both* produce the results you want. So, in general, one version is NOT better than the other.

However, one version may suit you a bit better than the other. Here's the most common reasons why…

If you can only manage to train 3 days per week (or if it would just be a lot more convenient for you to train 3 days per week), then the 3 day upper/lower split is definitely the better version for you. No question about it.

If you are someone who has an overall lower capacity to recover, then the slightly reduced training frequency of the 3 day version would definitely be better for you as well.

This could be due to age (recovery gets worse as we get older), having a highly stressful life (stress worsens recovery), having a very physical job (a lot of additional outside activity can hurt recovery), or just having crappy genetics. Hell, you may just be someone who feels better/stronger/fresher when they train slightly less often, in which case the extra day you have off in the 3 day upper/lower split will make a world of difference for you.

Other than that, there's nothing that really sets either version apart from the other. So, just pick one.

Whichever variation you end up choosing, the upper/lower split is considered a moderate frequency split (not too high, not too low), so volume (exercises, sets, reps) should be kept equally moderate to allow for adequate recovery.

Are There Any Other Versions Of This Split?

Yup, there are. While these are definitely the 2 most popular versions of this split, there are indeed a few others. In fact, my brand new guide to The Best Workout Routines fully explains 2 NEW upper/lower split options, one of which is my personal favorite of them all.

What About Lower/Upper Instead?

If you'd prefer to switch the order of the workouts so that you start with the lower body workout (and it essentially becomes a lower/upper routine), that's perfectly fine.

Who Does This Split Work Best For?

Honestly? The upper/lower body split works best for **the majority of the population**.

Whether you are a beginner, intermediate or advanced trainee. Whether you want to build muscle, lose fat, increase strength, improve performance or any combination thereof, the upper body and lower body split can ALWAYS be set up in a way that will be extremely effective for you.

As I mentioned earlier, this split allows for each muscle group to be trained between once every 3rd and 5th day (depending on which variation you choose), and literally all research looking into workout frequency shows that this is the frequency that works **BEST** for the majority of people who are past the beginner's stage.

Real world results and my own first hand experience confirm this as well.

And, it just so happens that the upper/lower split is a perfectly balanced and amazingly adjustable way to reach that ideal frequency. That's why it's probably my favorite workout schedule of them all.

So, if you are an intermediate or advanced trainee, the upper and lower body workout routine is a fantastic choice for you no matter what your specific goal is. **I highly recommend it.**

(For a full sample upper/lower program, check out The Muscle Building Workout Routine or any of the

many workouts I've included in The Best Workout Routines)

Beginners on the other hand would still be best served to use a 3 day full body split.

Push/Pull/Legs Split: 3-5 Day Weight Training Workout Schedule

After the full body and upper/lower splits, the push/pull/legs split is one of the next most simple, popular and proven workout schedules around. It's also one of the most intelligent and effective… assuming of course it's actually done right.

There's a few different versions of it that can work well, and a few different ways to structure it over the course of the week (some of which are definitely more or less ideal for certain goals and situations than others).

So, let's now cover all of this and more…

What Is The Push/Pull/Legs Split?

The push/pull/legs split is a weight training schedule that revolves around splitting the body up into 3 groups: **upper body pushing muscles, upper body pulling muscles** and **legs**. Each group is then trained separately on its own workout day.

- The **"push" workout** would train all of the upper body muscles that are involved in pushing exercises. This primarily includes Chest, Shoulders and Triceps.
- The **"pull" workout** would train all of the upper body muscles that are involved in pulling exercises. This primarily includes Back and Biceps.
- The **"legs" workout** would train the entire lower body. This primarily includes Quads, Hamstrings and Calves.

Beyond that, abs are probably most often trained with legs, but they can really be trained on any of the days just the same.

The main purpose and benefit of splitting the body up this way is that related muscle groups are trained together in the same workout. This is fantastic for preventing the type of overlap issues that are so common with other less intelligent (or just plain stupid) splits.

For example, compound chest exercises like the bench press will always train the shoulders and triceps indirectly. So if you trained chest one day, and shoulders and triceps on some other day, the *potential* for problems is instantly increased.

However, by pairing up all of the muscle groups that get trained indirectly during exercises for other muscle groups, the push/pull/legs split greatly lessens that potential and almost idiot-proofs the overall structure of your routine. (The key word there is "almost," as there will always be people dumb enough to screw up something that is borderline idiot-proof.)

As for how the workouts are scheduled over the course of a week, there's a few different options. Let's now take at look at the 2 most popular ones and see which is most ideal for you.

The Classic Push/Pull/Legs Split (7 Day Cycle)

1. **Monday:** Push (Chest, Shoulders, Triceps)
2. **Tuesday:** off
3. **Wednesday:** Pull (Back, Biceps)
4. **Thursday:** off
5. **Friday:** Legs (Quads, Hamstrings, Calves, Abs)
6. **Saturday:** off
7. **Sunday:** off

First up, we have what is often the only version of this split that most people even know exists.

The Good

As you can see, there are 3 total weight training workouts per week done in an every-other-day format with 2 days off at the end. This makes this by far the most convenient and easy-to-schedule version of this split you'll ever see.

However, this also means that each muscle group is trained just once per week (or once every 7th day). And that right there is where this split starts to suck.

The Bad

If you've read my post about training each muscle group once per week, then you should already know that it is the **least effective** weight training frequency. Yes, it can still work if everything else is done right. It's just NOT what works best for the majority of the population.

So, while this classic version of the push/pull/legs split is terrific in terms of convenience and easy scheduling, it's crap in terms of training frequency per muscle group/exercise. And for that reason alone, I wouldn't really recommend it to most people looking to build muscle, increase strength, or improve performance.

On the other hand, a once-per-week frequency like this is actually suitable if your primary goal is to mostly just **maintain** the amount of muscle and strength you currently have. For example, if your goal at the time is fat loss and you want to make sure you maintain all of your muscle/strength while that fat is lost. Or if you're happy with your body and no longer wish to gain any more muscle or strength.

In these types of situations, this version of the push/pull/legs split can work just fine. But for pretty much anything else, this is the version I would be LEAST likely to recommend. The frequency just isn't optimal for anything but "maintenance."

Let's see if we can fix that…

The Rotating Push/Pull/Legs Split (5 Day Cycle)

Week 1

1. **Monday:** Push (Chest, Shoulders, Triceps)
2. **Tuesday:** Pull (Back, Biceps)
3. **Wednesday:** off
4. **Thursday:** Legs (Quads, Hamstrings, Calves, Abs)
5. **Friday:** off
6. **Saturday:** Push (Chest, Shoulders, Triceps)

7. **Sunday:** Pull (Back, Biceps)

Week 2

1. **Monday:** off
2. **Tuesday:** Legs (Quads, Hamstrings, Calves, Abs)
3. **Wednesday:** off
4. **Thursday:** Push (Chest, Shoulders, Triceps)
5. **Friday:** Pull (Back, Biceps)
6. **Saturday:** off
7. **Sunday:** Legs (Quads, Hamstrings, Calves, Abs)

And now for my personal favorite version of the push/pull/legs split, which I tend to refer to as the "rotating" version.

The Good

As you can see, it's either 4 or 5 total weight training workouts per week (it varies due to the "rotating" aspect of it… but it ends up being 4 days per week the majority of the time) using a 2 on/1 off/1 on/1 off format that repeats every 6th day.

And that right there is the biggest difference between this version and the previous one. Whereas before it was 3 workouts being done over a 7 day cycle, we're now doing 3 workouts over a 5 day cycle.

What's the purpose of this adjustment, you ask? Simple… **it increases the frequency** from once per week (every 7th day) to *about* twice per week (every 5th day). Or, to look at it another way, each muscle group now gets trained 3 times every 2 weeks instead of 2 times every 2 weeks like before.

If you've read my post about training each muscle group about twice per week, then you already know that this is the **most effective** training frequency for virtually everyone who is past the beginners stage (meaning intermediate and advanced trainees).

And for that reason alone, this version of the push/pull/legs split is the one I am MOST likely to recommend to non-beginners who have a "looks" related goal in mind. It's okay for "performance" related goals too, but I'd probably suggest something like upper/lower or full body instead in those cases.

But for just building muscle and looking awesome? I think this split is great. That's why it's one of the split options used as part of my new Bodybuilding 2.0 routine.

The Bad

Now for the (potential) bad news. The fact that this split is done over a rotating 5 day cycle means the days you do and do not work out on will constantly change from one week to the next.

So some weeks you'll be training on Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Sunday. Some weeks Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday. Other weeks Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday. In the previous version, the workout days always remain fixed and constant (in the example shown, *always* Monday, Wednesday, Friday *every* week).

This lack of stability could obviously be a very big problem for many people from a scheduling standpoint. It's absolutely fantastic in terms of allowing us to reach that optimal training frequency we want to reach, but what it has in training frequency it lacks in convenience and ease of scheduling.

And that means, unless you have a fairly flexible schedule, it's going to be pretty hard to make work.

But if you can, and it fits with your training preferences, experience level and goals… I definitely recommend it.

Push/Pull/Legs vs Push/Legs/Pull

One final note worth mentioning is that this split can also be done with the workouts in a slightly different arrangement. Specifically… as **push/legs/pull** instead of push/pull/legs.

Both versions are equally effective, and this modification is mostly only relevant when using my preferred rotating 5-day-cycle version. However, there are a couple of small differences and reasons for making this change.

- **Push/Pull/Legs** ensures that the "legs" workout (which is typically the hardest/most physically and mentally demanding workout of the week) ends up always having a rest day before and after it, which is nice. The downside is that the "push" and "pull" workouts are always done on back-to-back days. While this isn't THAT big of a deal, it can still present some problems. For example, the shoulder girdle is used significantly in both workouts (as are the elbows), and this could be an issue for people with preexisting injuries or those who'd just like to prevent them. There's also the next-day soreness factor. Doing back exercises like rows and pullups with any lingering tightness/soreness in any of those "pushing" muscles can be a little annoying or possibly even limit range of motion in really bad cases.
- **Push/Legs/Pull** pretty much eliminates ALL of those potential issues (although holding the bar in place for squats could also be a little annoying if there's some chest soreness). The main downside here is that the "legs" workout no longer has that nice rest day before it.

So yeah… there's kinda some pros and cons either way, although the cons really aren't that huge in the first place.

As for which I like best, I'm much more likely to use and recommend it be done as **push/legs/pull** instead of push/pull/legs. Again, both are equally effective, but this is my preferred way of doing it most of the time.

Appendix G:

Time Under Tension, Rep Speed/Tempo and Eccentric vs Concentric

Two topics I purposely left out of my guide to creating The Ultimate Weight Training Workout Routine are **time under tension** and **rep tempo**. Why? Mostly because I didn't feel they were important enough to include. Plus, I just didn't think people would actually care about them.

I still think I'm right about that first part, but boy was I wrong about the second. Seriously. I've probably had someone ask me about these two subjects every single day since then, and I keep responding with the same 'copy and pasted' answer along with a promise to eventually write an article about it.

Today it's time to finally make good on that promise.

Let's first begin with the basics to make sure we're all on the same page…

The Anatomy Of A Rep

The following is going to be pretty noob-ish stuff that most people already know, but since I know I'll be referring a bunch of noobs to this page in the future, I can't leave it out.

So, let's break down the 4 steps of a typical rep of a typical set of a typical exercise:

1. The **starting** position. This is where the weight is when you begin a rep of an exercise. For example, with a barbell biceps curl, this is the point when your arms are down at your sides and the barbell is down in front of your upper thighs.
2. The **ending** position. This is where the weight is when you finish a rep of an exercise. For example, with a barbell biceps curl, this is the point when your elbows and biceps are flexed and the barbell is up in front of your chest.
3. The **concentric** portion of the movement. This is the "lifting" or "positive" portion of a rep, when you are moving the weight from the starting position to the end position (*against* the resistance). With a barbell biceps curl, this is when you actually do the "curl" and flex your elbows/biceps to move the weight up towards your chest.
4. The **eccentric** portion of the movement. This is the "lowering" or "negative" portion of a rep, when the weight is moving from the end position back to the starting position (*with* the resistance). With a barbell biceps curl, this is when you are extending your elbows and the barbell is being lowered back down towards your thighs.

And that brings us to two related topics involving *exactly* how these 4 steps should go…

Rep Tempo/Speed and Time Under Tension

- **Rep tempo** (sometimes called "rep speed") refers to the tempo (or speed) at which you perform a rep of an exercise. For example, 2 second concentric, 1 second pause at the top, 3 second eccentric, 1 second pause at the bottom (this is just one completely random example, by the way).
- **Time under tension** (aka TUT) refers to how long each set lasts, or really the total amount of

"time" your target muscles are "under tension" during a set of an exercise. For example, you might see something along the lines of 1-20 seconds being ideal for strength, 20-60 seconds being ideal for muscle growth, and 60+ seconds being ideal for muscular endurance.

Time under tension can generally be increased or decreased two ways. The first is by simply doing more or less reps in a set. So, a set of 10 reps will (typically) lead to more time under tension than a set of 5 reps on a given exercise.

The second way is by adjusting the rep speed. If you perform that set of 5 reps with a slower tempo and/or the set of 10 reps with a faster tempo, the set with fewer reps can become capable of providing a larger time under tension than the set with more reps.

How Important Is Time Under Tension?

I think **the idea of TUT is an important aspect of your training**, especially when the goal is muscle growth. Because, after all, you do want your muscles to be under a certain amount of tension.

But at the same time, **I don't actually think you need to give a crap about it**.

Not even half a crap, in fact.

What I mean is, if you're exclusively doing a bunch of REALLY short sets, I don't think you'll be training optimally for muscle growth. Similarly, if you're exclusively doing a bunch of REALLY long sets, I also don't think you'll be training optimally for muscle growth.

But, you know this already. It's why exclusively doing really low reps (like 1-5) or really high reps (like 15+) wouldn't be ideal for muscle growth either. And it wouldn't. The first would be more ideal for strength, and the second would be more ideal for endurance.

This of course is why I recommend 5-15 as the ideal rep range for muscle growth, along with a rep tempo that is neither too slow nor too fast (more on that in a second).

Which is all just my way of saying that **you don't need to focus at all on how long your sets are taking**. No need to set a watch. No need to count in your head. No need to purposely make your sets last a specific number of seconds.

What you should focus on is making sure your overall workout program is designed intelligently for your goal (optimal volume, frequency, intensity/rep ranges, exercise selection, etc.), that you're using good form/properly training the target muscle group(s), and that you're creating progressive overload.

That's the stuff that matters.

And as long as you're doing that stuff right, guess what? Your time under tension will automatically end up being whatever the hell it should be and the rest will take care of itself.

How Important Is Rep Tempo/Speed?

I'd say it's **important, but not enough to turn it into a mess of over-complicated specifics**.

Let me explain.

I definitely think there is a right way and a wrong way to perform each rep of each exercise. There is a "good" general speed and tempo, and then there's the opposite of that which I think can best be described as either **stupidly fast** and **stupidly slow**.

And as long as you're avoiding those stupidly fast/stupidly slow extremes and fall somewhere in the

middle, **you're probably doing your reps just fine**.

Simple as that.

So while rep tempo can certainly have its uses, I honestly don't put much emphasis on it and almost never use or prescribe a specific number of seconds for the concentric or eccentric portion of a rep. I find it's more of a distraction than anything else. I'd much rather see 100% of the focus during a set be on proper form, using the target muscle(s), and progression… not counting seconds.

That doesn't mean I don't have a slightly more specific recommendation for you, though.

Here's What I Recommend

For *most* of the people, *most* of the time, I like to see the weight **lowered under control on the way down, and then exploded back up**.

Allow me to break that down…

The Eccentric

Regardless of the exercise being done, you should lower the weight in a slow, smooth and controlled fashion. Definitely NOT super slow (that's a whole other idiotic training method for another day). Just slow enough so that you and the target muscles are fully in control of the weight rather than just gravity alone.

This would mean that the weight is NOT just dropping and you're NOT just letting it fall and lower on its own. You're controlling it the whole way down.

The Concentric

As for the lifting portion, this can vary depending on the exercise being done.

In most cases however (especially most compound exercises), you should explode the weight. Or, as I sometimes like to describe it… *hit your reps with a purpose*.

Meaning, don't intentionally slow down the speed of this part of the rep. Try to move it from the starting position to the end position in a quick and explosive manner. This **DOES NOT** mean throw the weight, or bounce the weight, or swing the weight, or use momentum to get the weight where it needs to go.

It just means, in a controlled fashion where proper form *always* remains intact and nothing funny/stupid makes an appearance, you should move the weight from point A to point B in a powerful, forceful, swift motion. Hit that rep with a purpose.

Are There Exceptions?

Yes, some exceptions to these recommendations do exist.

For example, calves tend to benefit from a slower eccentric and a pause at the bottom. And certain exercises are just less suited for being "exploded" (e.g. isolation exercises where the focus should be more on contracting/feeling/fatiguing the muscle rather than maximal strength output and progression). Plus, certain goals warrant doing certain things (such as speed benching).

But for the most part… **controlled eccentric, explosive concentric is what I recommend**.

No need to make it any more complicated than that.

How Much Weight Should You Lift & Use For Each Exercise?

When creating your weight training workout routine, you tend to focus most on stuff like which muscle groups you'll train on which days, what exercises you'll do in each workout, how many sets and reps you'll do for each, and so on.

But, there's often one very obvious question that goes overlooked…

How much weight should you lift for each exercise?

This question is typically a lot more common among beginners, but it's really a question that can arise at every experience level the first time you do an exercise you've never done before or just haven't done in a long time.

You're basically left wondering what weight will be too heavy, what weight will be too light, and exactly what weight will be perfect for you to use on that specific exercise.

Well, here's the super simple 3 step process for figuring out exactly how much weight to lift for each exercise…

Step 1: Figure out how many reps you should do for that exercise.

To start, you need to figure out how many reps you should be doing for that exercise. The amount of reps you are aiming to do will basically serve as a guide to your ideal weight to lift.

There's 2 ways to figure this out:

- **Look at your weight training program.**
  Yup, just that easy. If you're using a pre-made weight training program, all you need to do is look at how many reps it prescribes for each set of this exercise. So, go look.
- **Find the rep range that is most ideal for you goal.**
  If you've created your own weight training program, then you just need to figure out how many reps per set is most ideal for your specific goal. I explain this right here: How Many Reps Per Set? Once you've determined the rep range that is right for you, come right back here.

Step 2: Know your sweet spot.

The second step in figuring out how much weight you should lift for each exercise is to know what that "ideal weight" sweet spot will feel like so you can easily spot it when you reach it.

Let me explain…

Unless your specific weight training program says otherwise, **your goal is to use a weight that is light enough for you to do the number of reps you are trying to do per set for that exercise, but still heavy enough so that you couldn't do additional reps beyond that point.**

For example, let's pretend that you're trying to do 3 sets of 8 reps for an exercise.

The weight you use needs to be light enough so you can actually get to *about* 8 reps in all 3 of your sets

(without reaching failure), but still heavy enough so that you couldn't lift that weight many more times than the 8 reps you are setting out to do.

Meaning, if you couldn't reach 8 reps or at least get to within 1 or 2 reps shy of 8 in all 3 of your sets in this example, the weight is probably too heavy.

However, if you did 8 reps in all of your sets but could have kept going and probably done more than 10, then the weight in this example is probably too light.

The middle ground between those two points… that's the sweet spot you're aiming for.

Now about how to find it…

Step 3: Guess and adjust.

Alright, so now you know how many reps you should be doing for each set of this exercise, and you also know what your "ideal weight" for this exercise should feel like.

Now it's just a matter of taking a really good guess and then adjusting based on what happens.

So, literally pick up a weight and lift it.

Specifically, choose a weight that you know will be *a little too light and easy* for you and then lift it for your desired amount of reps (and use perfect form, obviously).

Then, based on how that set felt, just gradually adjust until you end up in your sweet spot.

Since the weight you've started with is purposely a little too light, just slowly increase it in the smallest increment possible every time you do this exercise until you reach a weight that is just right (not too heavy, not too light) for you for the rep range you are aiming to do.

When you find that, you've found how much weight you should lift for that exercise. Use it.

Bonus Step: Progression

As you gradually begin to build muscle and get stronger, you'll soon notice that your "sweet spot" weight for this exercise is now getting a little too light and easy again.

Using the same example from before (3 sets of 8 reps), you may feel like you could now probably do 3 sets of 10 reps with this weight if you wanted to.

This is good… and expected. It means your body is improving, and this previously ideal weight is no longer ideal for you any more.

Meaning, progression is taking place. **Your job is to let it happen**. To do this, increase the weight you've been using for this exercise by the smallest increment possible and lift it for your prescribed amount of sets and reps from this point on.

Eventually, this new weight will again become too light and easy for you, at which point it will again be time to progress. And once again, let it happen.

This process is known as progressive overload, and it is the absolute #1 key to getting the results you want from your weight training routine. Be sure to let it happen.

Now Start Lifting

And that's it. That's how to figure out how much weight you should be lifting for each exercise. Once you find it, use it. And once that weight becomes too easy for you, increase it.

Weight Training To Muscle Failure – Should You Train To Failure Or Not?

In weight training, the term "**failure**" is used to describe what happens when you are unable to continue a set of an exercise due to momentary muscle failure.

Some people think failure is when you just *think* you can't do any additional reps. This is wrong.

Failure is when you *actually reach the point* of being unable to finish a rep. **You literally attempt the rep and fail to complete it.**

For example, if you were attempting to do 10 reps of an exercise but could only lift the 9th rep halfway, then you failed on that 9th rep. This is failure.

Should you train to failure? Is it good? Is it bad?

As it turns out, one of the many subjects people like to argue about in the weight training world is whether you should purposely set out to reach failure during a set (or during all of your sets), or if you should purposely try to avoid it.

To answer this question, let's look at the pros and cons of training to muscle failure.

Training To Failure: PROS

If you reach failure during a set, it *usually* means you are working pretty hard, putting forth significant effort, and generating significant muscle fatigue.

It also *usually* means you are striving to make progress in some way, and progression is honestly the true key to getting positive results from any weight training routine.

Training To Failure: CONS

What many people don't realize however is that training to failure is **extremely taxing** on your body. Not just the target muscle(s) being trained at the time, but your entire central nervous system as well.

This means that reaching failure will significantly impact both your **short term** and **long term recovery capabilities**.

Meaning, going to failure on a set (or on multiple sets) will not only impact your performance on later sets of that same exercise AND the remaining exercises in that day's workout, but going to failure often will also impact your overall performance and ability to recover from one workout to the next.

In addition, there's also the issue of safety. Sure, going to failure on an exercise like dumbbell curls or leg extensions is fairly safe, but failing (especially without a spotter) during a set of barbell bench presses, squats, or something similar is not a fun place to be.

My Recommendation

Now, based on science, real world results, various expert recommendations, and of course my own first hand experience, my opinion is that **purposely training to failure does more harm than good**.

I (and most experts) most often feel that purposely setting out to reach failure on a set (or every set) is the wrong idea. In most cases, **you should try to stop about 1 (or 2) reps short of failure**.

So, if you are trying for 10 reps but felt your 9th rep was definitely going to be the last one you were going to be able to do, stop there and don't purposely go and fail on the 10th. Leave that rep in the tank and try for it next time.

In both the short term (the rest of that workout) and the long term (future workouts), this definitely appears to be more beneficial decision.

But what if it's unintentional?

On the other hand, if you thought you *COULD* do the 10th rep and tried it but failed to complete it… then so be it.

Occasionally reaching failure is ok in my opinion, and in order to continue making progress, it's pretty much bound to happen from time to time.

But, as long as it's not your goal and you're not purposely trying to reach failure all the time (and you do it safely of course), then it's ok if it happens every once in a while unintentionally.

Just try to avoid it by stopping a rep or so before reaching that point the majority of the time.

Appendix H:

8 Ways To Avoid Common Shoulder Injuries Caused By Weight Lifting

Let me preface this post by reminding you that I'm not a doctor, nor am I a shoulder specialist. Hell, I won't even claim to know half as much about shoulder anatomy or the prevention/rehab of common injuries as someone like Eric Cressey does.

What I am however is someone just like you, who started weight lifting over a decade ago with perfectly healthy and pain-free shoulders and assumed I'd never have any problems of any kind.

That of course changed within a few years as I began to experience the same **common shoulder injuries** that are experienced by damn near everyone who is weight lifting regularly and doing at least one of the many stupid things many of us tend to do.

"Stupid" in this case ranges from:

- Problems with form on certain exercises.
- Problems with exercise selection.
- Problems with overuse and overtraining.
- Problems with the overall design and programming of the workout routines we're using.

So, that makes me someone who has been there, done that and will pretty much always be dealing with the prevention of my own shoulder problems.

Based on my own experience, I feel like I now have a pretty good understanding of what I (and most people) often do wrong to cause these problems in the first place, and that qualifies me as someone capable of helping you avoid making the same dumbass mistakes.

So, here now are my top 8 tips for preventing the common shoulder injuries caused by weight lifting…

1. Push & Pull Equally (Or Maybe Pull A Little More)

Most people weight training for the purpose of improving the way their bodies look (especially guys) are more interested in the muscles they can see rather than the ones they can't.

That means chest and shoulders almost always get more emphasis than back, and that means most people end up doing a lot more pushing exercises (like bench presses and shoulder presses) than they do pulling exercises (like rows and pull ups).

The problem with this lack of balance around the shoulder girdle is that it's an *extremely common* cause of shoulder related injuries.

Luckily, there is a simple solution: **do equal amounts of pushing and pulling**. In fact, some of the big time shoulder gurus whose advice I value actually recommend doing slightly more pulling that pushing for this very purpose.

As far as practical application goes, this means that for every horizontal push (like the bench press), there should be a horizontal pull (like seated cable rows). And for every vertical push (like a shoulder press), there should be a vertical pull (like a pull up or lat pull down). I cover this in more detail in my article about Movement Patterns.

Keeping your pushing and pulling volume equal (or slightly in favor of pulling) is probably the easiest

way to eliminate one of the biggest causes of shoulder imbalances.

2. Stop Bench Pressing "Bodybuilder Style"

A "bodybuilder style" bench press would be when you flare your elbows way out in the direction away from your body and lower the bar more towards the upper part of your chest. It's one of the many stupid things bodybuilders have come up with. The purpose here is to better "isolate the chest."

While this may be true to some VERY slight degree, it also just so happens to **kill your shoulders**. I don't recommend bench pressing like this at all, even though it tends to be the default way some people learn to bench press. (This of course only helps explain why shoulder injuries are insanely common among the average weight lifting person.)

Once again, there is a simple solution. **Tuck your elbows in towards your sides** a little bit as opposed to out and away from your body (yet still not *fully* tucked like a close grip bench press), and **lower the bar down towards the bottom part of your chest** as opposed to the top of it.

This puts your shoulders in their safest position, and it also puts you in your strongest position. So in addition to injury prevention, getting this form right will have a positive effect on how much you can bench.

3. Stop Doing Super Wide Grip Pull Ups/Pull Downs

Here's another idiotic idea that comes from bodybuilders (more proof that with enough steroids, you can look amazing despite how dumb you train).

A common theory (more like myth) is that the wider your grip is when doing pull ups and lat pull-downs, the "wider" your lats will become. That's cute. In reality however, a super wide pull up/pull down grip just means less range of motion and the increased potential for shoulder injuries as a result of the dangerous position they are put in.

My Pull Ups vs Chin Ups comparison covers this as well.

The solution? Simple… avoid using a really wide grip. I personally don't go any wider than just slightly outside of shoulder width, and I recommend you do the same. Don't be one of those people with their hands all the way out on the widest parts of the bar.

4. Avoid Exercises That Commonly Cause/Worsen Shoulder Injuries

While any weight lifting exercise done incorrectly has the potential to cause problems, there are certain exercises that have just proven to be more dangerous in terms of causing or worsening shoulder injuries.

Yes, even when they are done with absolutely perfect form. In fact, *especially* when they are done with perfect form.

In this case, the problem is the exercise itself and the overall movement and range of motion it requires. The most common exercises fitting this description are:

- Pull ups/lat pull downs done BEHIND the neck.
- Overhead presses done BEHIND the neck.
- Dips

- Upright Rows

With the exception of upright rows, I started out doing everything else on that list. None of it ever bothered me until I worked up to about body weight + 25lbs on dips, at which point one of my shoulders began to feel worse and worse. So for me, dips were THE exercise that started my shoulder problems in the first place (and I've found this to be true with MANY people).

I actually continued behind the neck pressing/pulling for a few years after that without any problems, but I stopped doing them at some point mostly as a precautionary measure. It's now been years since I've done dips (which were a favorite of mine) or any exercise behind the neck.

If my shoulders could talk, they'd thank me on a daily basis. Yours probably would do, even if they seem fine right now.

5. Adjust Things Based On What's Safest For YOU!

In addition to the exercises mentioned above, which tend to be the most common non-shoulder-friendly exercises there are, some people may just find that certain other exercises bother them for whatever reason.

Case in point… incline barbell pressing gives me problems. But the incline dumbbell press and the incline hammer strength machine feel perfectly fine. So, I personally avoid the incline barbell press completely in favor of one of these other variations.

Similarly, any kind of close grip bench press bothers me as well, as does this one specific lateral raise machine my gym has. I avoid them too. Guess what else… I also don't lower the bar ALL the way down to my chest when bench pressing.

Blasphemy, right? I stop *just* short of the point where the bar touches my chest because that last inch or two is another common cause of shoulder injuries for me. (More about that here: Should The Bar Touch Your Chest When Bench Pressing?)

Would any of these examples bother someone else as well? Who knows, and better yet, who cares. They give me problems, so I've adjusted to avoid them. You should do the same.

6. Neutral Grip Is Usually Safer

Does an overhand or underhand pull up/lat pull down grip sometimes cause shoulder pain or discomfort? Does a typical dumbbell pressing grip feel a little not-so-good sometimes as well?

If so, please direct your attention to the **neutral/parallel grip**. This specific grip (where your palms face each other) is the most shoulder friendly grip there is, as it basically forces you to tuck your elbows in towards your sides (as opposed to flaring them out like you would in a super wide grip pull up or bodybuilding style bench press).

If any other grip is ever giving you problems, this is the first grip to turn to.

7. Use A Smart Overall Workout Schedule

One of the first workout schedules/splits I started out using went a little something like this:

- **Monday:** chest and triceps
- **Tuesday:** shoulders and abs
- **Wednesday:** off

- **Thursday:** legs
- **Friday:** back and biceps
- **Saturday:** off
- **Sunday:** off

Now aside from the fact that this split uses the highly ineffective once-per-week training frequency (another genius idea that originated with bodybuilders), I ended up training my shoulders a total of 3 times per week AND on consecutive days.

How? Because the shoulder girdle is involved in virtually every upper body exercise, especially presses, rows and pull ups/pull downs. That means that in addition to their own "shoulder day" (which is just a hilarious concept in the first place), they get trained to some extent with chest/triceps and back/biceps.

And that's one of the many common ways overuse injuries occur without even realizing that there's actual overuse taking place.

Once again however, the solution is simple. Use a workout schedule that is less dumb than this one and others like it. In fact, this is one of the MANY reasons smart people like the upper/lower split so much. It guarantees a maximum of 2 direct or indirect shoulder training sessions per week with a proper amount of spacing between them.

It's also part of why it's my default split recommendation in general, and part of why I use it for The Muscle Building Workout Routine.

Speaking of which, my new guide to The Best Workout Routines actually contains the exact shoulder-friendly version of this muscle building program that I personally used to not only *maintain* muscle while my shoulder healed, but actually *build* some in the process. I highly recommend it along with the many other intelligently designed programs in that guide.

8. Warm Up/Prehab/Mobility Work

I didn't know what shoulder dislocates, band pull aparts, YTWLs, scapular pushups or cable external rotations were until it was too late and I *needed* to know them, but they became a huge part of the recovery process for me, and they remain a huge part of the warm up and mobility work I (and so many others) do on a VERY regular basis to prevent any future shoulder problems.

I highly recommend making it your business to know what these exercises (and others like them) are now so you'll only ever have to use them as part of prehab work as opposed to rehab work.

I do many of them, but I've found dislocates to be the real miracle movement of the group. A lot of people agree and often report a rapid reduction in pain when they start doing them regularly. I usually use a jump rope or pipe, but a broomstick is just as good and a band is definitely easiest to start with.

As I mentioned earlier, there are plenty of people who are more knowledgeable about this stuff than me, so I'll put you in their capable hands. These are some good places to start:

- Eric Cressey's Shoulder Savers Part 1
- Eric Cressey's Shoulder Savers Part 2
- Eric Cressey's Shoulder Savers Part 3
- DieselCrew's Shoulder Rehab Protocol
- DieselCrew's Shoulder Warmup

Really anything Eric Cressey or the guys at Diesel Crew have written or put out about shoulder health is pretty much as high quality as you'll find in terms of the prevention of and recovery from common

shoulder injuries.

It May Not Be Pretty, But You Better Listen To It Anyway

Now, unless you have already had shoulder problems in the past or are currently having them right now, I know that most of the people reading this will probably ignore all of the advice I just gave. Don't feel bad, my feelings aren't hurt.

Your shoulders on the other hand… they probably will be.

See, I was just like you. I was only interested in the "pretty" advice. You know, workouts, building muscle, losing fat… that sort of thing, But information about shoulder injuries? No thanks, my shoulders feel fine. That stuff isn't relevant to me. It's just boring.

Yup, I thought all of that just like some of you are probably thinking it now.

Do you know when it becomes a lot less boring though? When it's already too late. Then it becomes necessity in order to actually do those workouts, build that muscle, and lose that fat. Trust me, nothing sucks quite as much as not being able to do 75% of the exercises you'd normally be doing because they all cause shoulder pain.

You know what also sucks? Trying to force yourself to stay out of the gym because going and trying to "work through the pain" is only making it worse and delaying your recovery. I've been dumb/stubborn enough to have been there and done that too. It's not fun sitting around losing muscle and strength because you can't work out sufficiently enough to maintain it.

And injuries (especially shoulder related) aren't an "old person" thing, by the way. I'm 28. My shoulders first started giving me problems when I was barely 21. It's also not a guy thing or a girl thing or a goal related thing.

It's a weight lifting thing, and if you're weight lifting on a regular basis, then this is all relevant to you.

That's why one of the best workout tips I can give you (and hey, "workout tips" are pretty, right?) is this: take care of your shoulders so they never become the short term or long term reason why you aren't making the progress you want to be making.

And in my experience, these are the 8 best and easiest ways to do just that.

Pull Ups vs Chin Ups – What's The Difference & Which One Is Better?

If you asked any intelligent trainer or strength coach to list the top 5 exercises the majority of the population should be doing, **pull ups** and/or **chin ups** (or lat pull-downs) will usually be on every list.

It's just universally considered one of the best exercise variations for building muscle and increasing strength in the back and biceps. It's also a common "test" exercise used to show you're at a certain level of strength and physical condition.

I of course agree with this completely, which is why every workout routine I ever create will ALWAYS contain some type of pull up, chin up, or lat pull-down movement.

The problem however is that many people don't seem to realize that pull ups and chin ups are **NOT** the

same thing. They're similar exercises for sure, but using their names interchangeably is just flat out wrong.

In fact, there are actually quite a few differences and pros/cons between them, and you'd need to know them all to figure out which one truly is best for you.

So, here now is a break down of the major differences between pull ups and chin ups…

(*NOTE* Everything in this article also applies to lat pull-downs just the same.)

Differences In Grip

The first and most obvious difference between a pull up and a chin up is the type of grip being used.

- **Pull Ups** = A pronated (overhand) grip where your palms point outwards so that they are facing *away* from you. The most common grip width is just slightly wider than shoulder width.
- **Chin Ups** = A supinated (underhand) grip where your palms point inwards so that they are facing you. The most common grip width is shoulder width.

There are a few other less common variations of these exercises that involve other types of grips, but I think the only other one truly worth mentioning now is the neutral grip.

- **Neutral Grip** = A "semi-supinated" grip where your palms are facing each other.

Differences In Movement

While both exercises take place in the vertical pulling movement plane, and they both primarily target the back (specifically the lats) and biceps, the way they do it is slightly different.

Pull ups typically use shoulder adduction, where the elbows come down and back from the sides.

Chin ups on the other hand use shoulder extension, where the elbows come down and back from the front (neutral grip fits in this category as well).

The difference isn't huge and it doesn't make one exercise better or worse than the other.

It just means that both exercises train the lats in a slightly different way, and if your goal is to build muscle/get stronger (and avoid overuse injuries), it would probably be a good idea to avoid always neglecting one type of movement in favor of the other.

Differences In Strength

Chin ups put the biceps in a stronger line of pull, so *most* people will usually be stronger at chin ups than they are at pull ups.

For example, if you can normally do 10 chin ups, you may only be able to do 6 pull ups. And if you're using a lat pull-down machine with these grips or doing pull ups/chin ups with added weight, you'll often find that you can use more weight with chin ups than you can with pull ups.

Similarly, most beginners to either exercise (or just beginners in general) will usually find that they're able to do a chin up before they can do a pull up.

For me though it's actually the other way around, which is definitely rare and kinda strange. It's probably because pull ups were the only vertical pulling exercise I did during my first few years of training. For most people though, chin ups will be your stronger exercise.

Differences In Which Muscles Get Trained

Again, both exercises will primarily train your back/lats and biceps no matter what. However, there are some slight differences in the degree in which those muscles get trained.

Since chin ups put your biceps in a stronger line of pull, they'll typically hit your biceps a bit harder than pull ups will.

Conversely, pull ups may hit your lats a bit harder, mostly as a result of your biceps being in a slightly weaker position.

Grip width also plays a role here too. The narrower your grip is, the more it will train your biceps. The wider the grip, the less it will train your biceps.

Now, it was always believed that the difference in lat/biceps usage between pull ups vs chin ups was pretty significant. However, recent EMG testing shows that, while these differences definitely do exist, it's not that significant and definitely not worthy of being the sole deciding factor in picking one exercise over the other.

I will mention though that if you tend to have a problem actually feeling and using your back during back exercises instead of your biceps, you may benefit from using pull ups instead of chin ups when trying to correct this problem, at least initially.

Differences In Safety & Comfort

Like ANY weight training exercise, both chin ups and pull ups are perfectly safe… unless you do something incorrectly. There's just way too many stupid things I've seen people do during these exercises to cover them all here, so I'll just simply say to use proper form always.

However, there are some other general recommendations to keep in mind with these exercises.

For starters, any type of pull up, chin up or lat pull-down done behind the neck is potentially one of the worst things you can do for shoulder health. Some people can do it this way for years without any problem ever, but many people will usually develop problems over time. I don't recommend it.

At the same time, a VERY wide pull up grip is another common cause of shoulder injuries. People (usually dumbasses and clueless bodybuilders) tend to think a VERY wide grip equals VERY wide lats. Um, no.

A VERY wide grip just means a VERY reduced range of motion and a VERY high risk of shoulder problems. I personally don't recommend using a grip any wider than just slightly outside of shoulder width.

Beyond that, people with a preexisting history of shoulder problems may find that a chin up grip is a little less stressful on their shoulders than a pull up grip. On the other hand, some people may find that a pull up grip is a lot more comfortable for their wrists and forearms than a chin up grip.

And in terms of being the most overall potentially safe and comfortable grip for people with one or both of the above issues… it's probably the less-often-available neutral grip. But again, that's just a generality.

A lot of people will never have a problem with any type of grip. And the ones that do will just need to experiment and figure out which one feels best for them.

Which Do I Use And Recommend? Which Is Best For You?

I honestly like and use both exercises, but if you put a gun to my head (and why would you ever do such a thing?), I'd say that I personally like pull ups done with a slightly wider than shoulder width grip more than any other type of chin up or lat pull-down variation.

My current personal record with this grip is my body weight plus an additional 65lbs for a solid 6-8 reps (UPDATE: currently at 80lbs for 6-8 reps). It's one of my all time favorite (and strongest) exercises.

However, this is nothing more than a personal preference. I don't think this grip will work any better or faster than anything else… I just personally feel strongest and most comfortable with it. Will you? I have no idea.

So then, which will work better and faster for you? Which would I most often recommend?

Well, putting the true best answer of "do what's best for you" to the side for a second, I've found that **the best (and safest) results come from using a mix of different grips**.

Maybe do pull ups for lower reps one day, and then chin ups for higher reps another day (like I recommend in The Muscle Building Workout Routine).

Maybe do chin ups for 8 weeks, then pull ups for the next 8 weeks. If your gym has neutral grip handles available, maybe give that a shot for the 8 weeks after that and then start the cycle over again with chin ups.

Of course, if you find that a certain grip feels more or less ideal for you, you should make the obvious smart decision of using that grip more or less often.

Whatever it ends up being, some type of vertical pulling movement (be it pull ups, chin ups, or lat pull-downs) should almost always be a *major* part of your overall workout routine.

Barbell Bench Press – Should The Bar Touch Your Chest When Bench Pressing?

The barbell bench press is probably the most popular exercise on the planet, especially among guys.

Chicks (supposedly) dig guys who have a lean muscular chest, and guys constantly use the barbell bench press as the ultimate measure of strength and awesomeness. They often challenge their friends, claim to bench 100lbs more than they actually can, and almost always make it the first exercise of their first workout of the week without fail (which is why you'll never find an empty bench on Mondays).

This popularity also makes the bench press one of the most argued about exercises there are, and for all kinds of different reasons.

Today I want to look at one specific reason… **how low should you lower the bar**?

Specifically, should you lower the bar all the way down until you touch your chest, or should you stop at some point before that? Let's figure it out…

Should The Bar Touch Your Chest?

The very easy, very simple, and very generic answer to this question is often **yes**… you should lower

the bar all the way down until it touches your chest.

That is, after all, the full range of motion for the how the barbell bench press is generally supposed to be done. All the way up, all the way down. You know… like how every exercise should generally be done. No bullshit half reps, no cheating, no nothing. Just a complete range of motion.

So yes, in *general*, lowering the bar until you touch your chest is *generally* the right recommendation.

However…

As usual, very few aspects of weight training are ever that cut and dry even though countless fitness gurus and dumbasses on forums often act like it is.

The truth is, there are very few "everyone-should-always-do-things-like-this" recommendations that are worthy of being listened to, and how far down you should lower the bar when bench pressing is a fantastic example.

Why? Because everyone is different. Let me explain…

If your goal is to be a competitive powerlifter, or pass some kind of mandatory bench press testing for some kind of sport or activity, or do anything that puts specific guidelines on the way you bench press, then you are pretty much the only people in the world who may be **REQUIRED** to lower the bar all the way down to your chest when bench pressing.

But if you're just the average guy or girl training regularly to look good (build muscle, lose fat, whatever) or possibly even improve strength or performance, then touching your chest is almost always **NOT** a requirement.

Still the "general" right idea? Usually. Required? Nope. Ideal? Maybe yes, maybe no. That depends on you. Here's what I can tell you about me.

I <u>DON'T</u> Let The Bar Touch My Chest

Yup, it's true. As I've previously mentioned in my article about how to avoid common shoulder injuries, I don't lower the bar all the way down to my chest when bench pressing. Here's why.

When I first started out, I *always* lowered the bar until it literally touched my chest on every single rep. According to everything I read and everyone I talked to, not going that far down meant you're not doing the full rep, not going to build muscle or increase strength nearly as well, and were being a total "half rep pussy" (that's a scientific term). This was how the barbell bench press was supposed to be done, and you'd be doing it wrong if you did it any other way.

Now like I said before, for a lot of people, this is in fact the right way to do it. But for me specifically… not so much. I don't fit in that group. Instead, I'm in the group of people whose shoulders begin to bother them when they consistently lower the bar all the way down like this.

This group may seem like it's the minority, but you'd be surprised at how many people are in it. You'd be even more surprised at how many of these people just don't realize it and keep on bench pressing incorrectly and dangerously for their body anyway.

How Low Do You Go?

So, to avoid the shoulder issues I was experiencing, I started stopping each rep a few inches short of making contact with my chest. I've never actually measured the exact amount (it would be pretty hard

especially when using my normal working weights), but I'd guess I stop about **1-3 inches** before the bar touches my chest.

Go get a ruler so you can see exactly how big/small that difference is. This is by NO MEANS anything close to the typical "pussy half reps" you see many idiots in most gyms doing where they don't even come down low enough for their upper arms to be parallel to floor.

Here the difference in depth is extremely minor in comparison, but the difference it makes in terms of comfort and shoulder health is major.

But Wouldn't This Hinder Your Chest Development? HA!

If you're wondering if such a change would lead to less than optimal chest progress, the answer is a huge **NO**. Not in the slightest. In fact, I'd say my chest is my most well built muscle group. Again, it's just a tiny 1-3 inch difference in depth we're talking about here (get out that ruler and see exactly how small that is).

The only thing this seemingly minor adjustment is doing is **allowing me to bench press safely.** If this adjustment wasn't made, then shoulder injuries would likely be preventing me from bench pressing at all at this point, and that would hinder my chest development a whole lot more than anything else.

Not to mention, a side effect of this adjustment is that a more **constant tension** is placed on the chest muscles during each rep. The fact that you're stopping a couple of inches short means it's impossible to let the bar bounce off your chest at the bottom position (a common cheating method) or just let it rest there for a split second… both of which I see on an almost daily basis.

From a muscle growth standpoint, this could only be a good thing.

So How Low Should I Lower The Bar?

Well, if you're one of those rare people training for competitive powerlifting or anything else that legitimately requires lowering the barbell until it touches your chest, then you should obviously lower the barbell until it touches your chest. Surprising, huh?

But if you're like most people and are just using the bench press to build a strong/awesome looking chest, then there's 2 possible answers:

1. If lowering the bar all the way down feels perfectly fine for you, then feel free to keep bench pressing that way.
2. If you're someone who feels any pain, discomfort or awkwardness when going ALL the way down, then I'd highly recommend stopping 1-3 inches before the bar touches your chest. It will save your shoulders and, if anything, only improve your chest development in the process.

But What If I Can't Decide Which Is Best For Me?

If you're unsure of what to do, there are certain body types that are just naturally better/worse built for certain bench press techniques than others. Case in point…

People who are taller or just have longer limbs will have to go unnaturally low in order to touch their chest. Similarly, people who are thinner or have a smaller bone structure will have to lower the bar a much greater distance before it reaches their chest.

The real trick here is to look at the elbows in relation to the bench presser's torso or the flat bench they're laying on. Now, take a shorter and/or thicker person (Person A) and put them on a bench next to

a taller and/or thinner person (Person B). Now have them both lower the bar until it touches their chest.

In every single case, Person B's elbows will be significantly lower than their body/the bench compared to Person A, and that's a damn good sign that Person B should have stopped 1-3 inches before reaching that depth. Person A on the other hand probably had no problems with that depth whatsoever.

The point here is that some people are just built for certain exercises more so than others, and the people who aren't should make smart adjustments to compensate. I've personally been stopping the bench press 1-3 inches from my chest for about 7 years now for this very reason.

My chest has still grown just fine (better than the rest of my body in fact), and my shoulders are safer and healthier because of it.

So… we can either take the advice of idiots who think they know what's always right for everyone, or we can make a small adjustment that makes things right just for us.

Hmmm, decisions decisions.

How To Use Back Muscles (NOT Biceps) During Back Exercises

Here's a question. When you do back exercises like barbell, dumbbell or machine rows, or pull-ups, chin-ups and lat pull-downs, are you *actually* using your back muscles?

I mean, do you *actually* feel the muscles in your back doing the work on every rep of every set of every back exercise you do?

If so, good for you.

But if not, then you are one of the many people with a very common problem: **You use too much biceps and too little back during back exercises.**

How Does It Happen?

It may seem a little strange at first to think that an exercise for one muscle group is being done by another muscle group altogether, but when you understand the mechanics of most back exercises, you can see why it's extremely possible (and common).

Back exercises are **pulling** exercises, meaning they involve a weight being pulled towards you in either a horizontal (think rows) or vertical (think lat pull-downs) movement plane.

And, the thing about pulling exercises is that the **biceps will always be recruited secondarily** to some degree. And what that means is, it's virtually impossible for anyone to do any type of back "pulling" exercise like a row or a pull-up without using their biceps.

This is actually a good thing for your biceps, as a very large percentage of the muscle and strength they gain will come as a result of doing compound exercises like rows and pull-ups/pull-downs.

The big problem however is when your biceps take over so much so that they end up doing most, if not ALL of the work. Because when that happens, it means your back is going untrained to some degree, possibly even completely.

What Causes This?

There's a few different reasons why your biceps are doing more work than your back muscles during back exercises.

However, in my experience, the reason usually falls into one of the following categories:

- The weight you're using is too heavy for you.
- You just don't know how to properly "pull" with your back instead of your arms.
- A combination of both.

Now let's take a look at the solutions to these causes.

The Weight Is Too Heavy For You

Walk into any typical gym in the world and you'll ALWAYS see people doing various weight training exercises with a weight that is so obviously too heavy for them.

While I see it regularly from people of all genders, ages and body types, it's usually more of a stupid guy thing. You know, lift more than you can handle to impress your friends, the girl on the bench or machine next to you, or just make your own ego feel good.

Whatever the reason, it's beyond stupid for a ton of reasons. Here's one: it's preventing you from using the target muscle group(s).

Case in point… back exercises.

If you're trying to do any sort of row or pull-up/lat pull-down with more weight than you can actually handle, then I can guarantee that you are using some weird jerky looking motion that is forcing your biceps (and God knows what else) to do most of the work.

And if you don't think you're using a weird jerky motion to get the weight where it needs to go, then I bet the weight just isn't actually going where it needs to go.

Meaning, your range of motion sucks as a result of the weight being too damn heavy for you. You're not going all the way up, all the way down, or a little of both.

In the case of most back exercises, you should be lowering the weight (or yourself in the case of pull-ups and chin-ups) until your elbows are fully extended. That means during an exercise like pull-ups, you should come to a dead hang in the bottom position. And during any sort of row, your arms should be fully extended straight out in front of you.

On the way up, you should be pulling the weight until its furthest position. In the case of rows, that's until the weight is touching your chest or stomach and/or your elbows are behind your torso. In the case of pull-ups/pull-downs, your chin should be over the bar, and the bar should be touching (or coming within an inch or two of touching) the top of your chest.

I also want to add that the best test of all for ensuring that you're using the right amount of weight is your ability to hold that end position for a second.

Meaning, when you reach the point at the end of each rep when you've pulled the weight (or yourself) to that top position, pause there for a second and squeeze your shoulder blades together.

If you can't hold the end position for that 1 second squeeze, then you are most likely using a weight that is too heavy for you.

And as if it even needs to be said, if any of the above describes something you're doing (or not doing)

during back exercises, the simple solution is to just lower the amount of weight you're using by however much you need to so that you can use perfect form and a full range of motion on every rep.

You Just Don't Know How To Use Your Back Muscles

On the other hand, the weight you're using might be perfectly fine for you. Instead, the problem might be that you just don't know how to make your back muscles do the work instead of your biceps.

This is super common, and it mostly stems from the fact that your back is in "back" of you, and you can't actually see it working or even picture it working like you can with say your chest or biceps.

And as most of us have realized at some point, it's a little tricky to create a mind-muscle connection with a muscle you can't actually see.

That is unless of course you know the tips and form cues that make activating your back muscles a lot easier. And they are…

- **Don't try to pull the weight to you.**
  When you grab any type of bar or handle to do any form of row or pull-up/pull-down, our natural instinct is to try to pull that bar/handle into our body (or, in the case of pull-ups, our body up to the bar). Unfortunately, this thought of trying to pull the weight towards you is the first step in activating the biceps and eliminating the back. We need get rid of that thought. How? Like this…
- **Don't pull with your hands.**
  I know, that sounds crazy. You're grabbing some sort of bar or handle with your hands, and I'm telling you not to use your hands to do any pulling during the exercise. Trust me, it's going to make sense in a second. See, because we literally see our hands in front of us holding the bar, we naturally want to use them to pull the weight. When we do that, we use biceps, not back. We need to take our hands out of the equation. How? Like this…
- **Think of your hands and forearms as hooks connecting your elbows to the weight.**
  You need to imagine that your hands are doing nothing other than gripping the bar or handle. You want to avoid using them to pull the weight and instead only use them as "hooks" that connect your elbows to that weight. Why? Because…
- **You must pull with your elbows!**
  And this right here is the key tip that everything else leads to making happen. Back exercises are all about the elbows. Instead of trying to pull the weight to you, and instead of using your hands to pull the weight, just grip the bar and then put all of your focus into moving your elbows back behind your body. Basically, imagine there is someone standing behind you that you want to hit with your elbows. Your goal is to try to hit them. And since your hands are "hooked" on to some type of weight, that weight will end up getting pulled towards you solely as a result of your elbows going back. It's like a tow truck pulling a car. The weight is the car, your hands are the hooks, your forearms are the chains, and your elbows are the tow truck.And in the case of pull-ups and lat pull-downs, the only difference is that you'd be trying to move your elbows down to your sides rather than behind you like with rows. Either way, it's all about gripping a weight with your hands, and then pulling through your elbows to drive that weight towards you. And when you reach that end point, squeeze your shoulder blades together for a second.
- **An overhand or neutral grip may be more ideal than an underhand grip.**
  One final tip I want to mention is regarding the grip being used during back exercises. An underhand grip (where your palms are either facing the ceiling or you) puts your biceps in a stronger line of pull than either an overhand grip (palms facing the floor or away from you) or a

neutral grip (palms facing each other). This means that an underhand grip potentially increases the amount of biceps involvement to some degree in comparison with the other grips. Don't misunderstand me here… biceps will still definitely be recruited with an overhand and neutral grip as well. It's just usually to a *slightly* higher degree with an underhand grip. So, when you're working on perfecting the "pulling with your elbows" tip I mentioned before, you may be better off sticking with an overhand (or neutral) grip when performing back exercises.

The End

So, if you have a problem using your back muscles during back exercises, I can sum up the solution in one simple sentence:

Use a weight that is light enough to allow you to use proper form and a full range of motion (although still heavy enough to be challenging), and then pull that weight with your elbows, not your hands.

If you can do that, your problem will be solved.