

How to Design Your Own Strength Training Program

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There are many different workout strategies. Almost all of them will create positive results for certain individuals. For you personally, there will be a variety of workout strategies that can produce positive results for you, whereas others program that simply don't make sense for your situation. Remember that a program that worked for one person might not work for you. Having the wrong strategy can leave a variety of negative results, including getting injured, losing strength, gaining fat, and feeling burned out.

I've made my living developing workouts that I hope are ideal for each individual. I've tried a lot of different ideas, seen many trainers trying different ideas, and seen many clients and how they respond to those various training programs.

The following are the basic keys to program design that I've learned since I initially became obsessed with strength training programs around thirteen years ago.

#1. The program must reflect your goals. *(Cardio and strength training should be integrated in a way that fits your specific goals and preferences. For this article, we will focus on strength training alone).*

#2. The program must reflect your level of workout experience. *(It's a big and common mistake for trainers to put a beginning exerciser on a program which works for the trainer themselves – the advanced trainee).*

#3. The program must take into consideration your current lifestyle stressors. *(Your stress in relationships and job, your nutrition status, sleep status, and more impact how your body recovers from exercise and how your program should be designed).*

#4. For maximal results, the program must integrate a nutrition program that is designed for your specific goals.

#5. You must recuperate between workouts or you are wasting your time.

#6. If you are training “drug-free”, do not try to copy a program that works for an athlete or exerciser who is training with the aid of performance-enhancing drugs.

Strength Training Guidelines (for drug-free exercisers and athletes)

Strength Training For Beginners (up to 3-6 months of consistent training for most trainees)

- Start with whole-body strength training 2-3 days per week.
- Pick 1-2 exercises for each muscle group.
- For the first month of training, perform one to two sets of each exercise you pick for your workout.
- Starting at the beginning of month two and ending if and when you begin a “split routine” (where you train different body parts of different days), stick to two to three sets for each exercise.

Strength Training For Intermediates (usually start between 3 to 6 months of consistent training experience)

- Person remains at the intermediate level for at a very minimum of an additional three to six months of training until person is willing to commit to four to six days of strenuous strength training per week (if they desire to go to the “advanced” level).
- Many people will never want or need to move out of the intermediate level. (Even college level athletes can improve with this type of program design)
- Intermediate workouts are ideal as maintenance training programs for even lifters who have been lifting for years.
- Once a person is intermediate, they will split their workout routines. Generally this split will be between upper and lower body.

Here are a few typical intermediate splits:

Each Week:

Monday: Lower body

Tuesday: Upper body

Wednesday: off

Thursday: Lower body

Friday: Upper body

Saturday: off

Sunday: off

OR

Week 1:

Monday: Lower body

Tuesday: off

Wednesday: Upper body

Thursday: off

Friday: Lower body

Saturday: off

Sunday: off

Week 2:

Monday: Upper body

Tuesday: off
Wednesday: Lower body
Thursday: off
Friday: Upper body
Saturday: off
Sunday: off

- Since you are allowing the muscles more recovery time between workouts during the intermediate phase you must perform more exercises and sets for each muscle group.
- Whereas as a beginner, you may have been performing 1-2 exercises (and 1 to 3 sets for each exercise) for each muscle group, as an intermediate, you will pick two to three exercises for each muscle group and generally perform three to four sets of each.

Strength Training For The Advanced Strength Trainee

*You can be an advanced exerciser and not need an advanced strength training program. In fact, this type of program would be ideal for less than 5% of the public. (Less than 5% of my clients would use this type of program).

*Advanced programs are generally best for advanced bodybuilders. A common mistake made by beginning exercisers (and beginning bodybuilders who aspire to be like people who make their living as bodybuilders) is training like an advanced bodybuilder.

*Many personal trainers who have backgrounds in advanced bodybuilding forget that the program that works for them after 10-20 years of training experience is not the appropriate program for someone who is just starting a program, no matter what their goals are.

- Advanced bodybuilding is characterized by split routines that isolate just one to two bodyparts for each training day in the week. Currently, it's popular to train the body in a way where you train each body area once per week. This allows for maximum recovery time, which is of critical importance for the advanced, but is simply not needed and is possibly detrimental to beginning and intermediate exercisers.

Here's an example of an Advance Bodybuilding split:

Monday: Legs
Tuesday: Back and Biceps
Wednesday: Abs and calves
Thursday: Chest and triceps
Friday: Shoulders and traps
Saturday: Abs and Calves
Sunday: Off

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- For advanced bodypart workouts, you will typically choose four to five exercises for each major muscle area and perform three to four sets for each. This amount of total sets for each muscle group, although not necessary and possibly detrimental for beginners and intermediates, allows the advanced trainee to continue stimulating their muscles to continue becoming stronger, more shapely, and in better condition.

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