



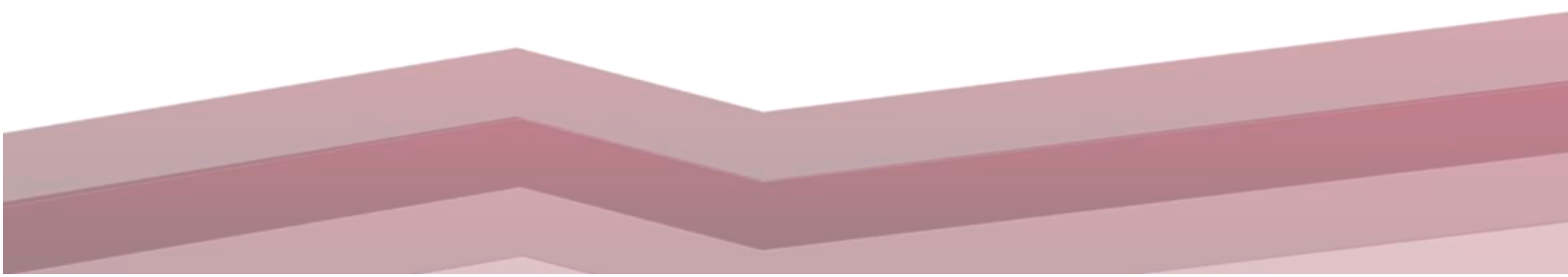
Two day per week Strength Program

By Evan Clark

SlowlyStronger.com

Contents

Two day per week Strength Program	1
Program Introduction.....	3
The Two Day Per Week Strength Program	5
Introductory Week 1	5
Introductory Week 2	7
The Two Day Per Week Strength Program.....	9
The Lifts.....	11
Squat.....	11
Bench Press.....	11
Deadlift	12
Chin-ups and Pull-ups.....	13
Form Information	13
FAQ.....	15
How do I structure the week?	15
How long do I rest between sets?	15
I missed a week?	15
What about conditioning or cardio?	16
I can't add weight to the bar?.....	16



Program Introduction

The program is designed for novice lifters or people coming back from a lay-off.

It consists of 2 weeks introductory training, following a final 3rd week which will be repeated indefinitely you stop progressing.

The program is based on linear progression: you add weight to your lifts at a consistent frequency. There are recommendations in the FAQ for how to continue progressing if just one lift has stalled, but you may choose to move onto the advanced novice program at this point.

It is focused on increasing the 5-rep max in the Squat, Bench Press and Deadlift. Learning and becoming proficient at these 3-5 lifts set an effective foundation for future training. This is because most exercises are either very easy to learn (e.g. machine-based exercises or single-joint exercises such as curls), or are very similar to these 3-5 lifts, making future learning curves minimal.

The program is based around improving your 5-rep max but does utilise a variety of rep-ranges. There are several reasons for this:

- It prevents over-specialization at the novice phase, a consistent recommendation in scientific literature.
- Strength is influenced by skill, neurological adaptations and muscle size. Training in reps of 8+ is effective for hypertrophy (additional muscle mass is important for novice lifters), and training in 1-5 rep ranges promotes skill and neurological adaptations.
- A novice program should prepare athletes to pursue the majority of strength sports. If a lifter only performs 3 sets of 5, then when they come to perform 3 sets of 10 they will feel like they're about to have a heart attack! Likewise, attempting a 1-rep max after only doing sets of 10 reps can make you feel like your head is about to explode. A familiarity with different rep ranges makes transitioning to different post-novice programs easier.

SLOWLY STRONGER

The program is only two days per week. You are trying to fit in enough work across two days to make good progress. There is a reasonable amount of evidence that progress can be made with very few hard sets for novices. There isn't much evidence either way for intermediate or advanced lifters, but I suspect intermediate lifters could still make noticeable progress training 2 days per week. However, it must be said that training two days per week is not optimal, and your progress will be less than training 3-4 days per week. This said, training twice per week is far better than not training at all!

The Two Day Per Week Strength Program

Introductory Week 1

	Exercise	Sets	Reps	Notes
Day 1	Squat	3	5	Add 5lb every week
	Bench Press	3	5	Add 5lb every week
	Romanian Deadlift	3	8/10/12	Week 1: 3 sets of 8 Week 2: 3 sets of 10 Week 3: 3 set of 12 Week 4: Add 5lb and 3 sets of 8 Repeat. Use straps.
	Pull-ups	3/4/5	To Failure	Add 1 set per week. After reaching 5 sets per week, reset back to 3 sets. Use an overhand grip. Swap out for lat-pulldowns if needed.

**SLOWLY
STRONGER**

	Exercise	Sets	Reps	Notes
Day 2	Deadlift	1	5	Add 5lb every week
	Deadlift	2	5	10% less than top set.
	Paused Bench Press	3	5	Use a weight that is 15% less than day 1 bench press top set.
	Squat	3	8/10/12	Start at 8 reps. Add 2 reps each week. At 12 reps add 5-10lb and restart at 8 reps. Start light. Use same squat as Day 1, or choose a similar variation (pause squat, different bar position etc.).
	Chin-ups	3/4/5	To Failure	Same number of sets as day 1. Use an underhand grip. Swap out for lat-pulldowns with underhand grip if needed.

Introductory Week 2

	Exercise	Sets	Reps	Notes
Day 1	Squat	3	5	Add 5lb every week
	Squat	2	5	Drop weight by 10%
	Bench Press	3	5	Add 5lb every week
	Bench Press	2	5	Drop weight by 10%
	Romanian Deadlift	3	8/10/12	Week 1: 3 sets of 8 Week 2: 3 sets of 10 Week 3: 3 set of 12 Week 4: Add 5lb and 3 sets of 8 Repeat. Use straps.
	Pull-ups	3/4/5	To Failure	Add 1 set per week. After reaching 5 sets per week, reset back to 3 sets. Use an overhand grip. Swap out for lat-pulldowns if needed.

**SLOWLY
STRONGER**

	Exercise	Sets	Reps	Notes
Day 2	Deadlift	1	5	Add 5lb every week
	Deadlift	2	5	10% less than top set.
	Deadlift	2	5	20% less than top set.
	Paused Bench Press	3	5	Use a weight that is 15% less than day 1 bench press top set.
	Squat	3	8/10/12	Start at 8 reps. Add 2 reps each week. At 12 reps add 5-10lb and restart at 8 reps. Start light. Use same squat as Day 1, or choose a similar variation (pause squat, different bar position etc.).
	Chin-ups	3/4/5	To Failure	Same number of sets as day 1. Use an underhand grip. Swap out for lat-pulldowns with underhand grip if needed.

The Two Day Per Week Strength Program

	Exercise	Sets	Reps	Notes
Day 1	Squat	3	5	Add 5lb every week
	Squat	2	5	Drop weight by 10%
	Bench Press	3	5	Add 5lb every week
	Bench Press	2	5	Drop weight by 10%
	Romanian Deadlift	3	8/10/12	Week 1: 3 sets of 8 Week 2: 3 sets of 10 Week 3: 3 set of 12 Week 4: Add 5lb and 3 sets of 8 Repeat. Use straps.
	Pull-ups	3/4/5	To Failure	Add 1 set per week. After reaching 5 sets per week, reset back to 3 sets. Use an overhand grip. Swap out for lat-pulldowns if needed.

**SLOWLY
STRONGER**

	Exercise	Sets	Reps	Notes
Day 2	Deadlift	1	5	Add 5lb every week
	Deadlift	2	5	10% less than top set.
	Deadlift	2	5	20% less than top set.
	Incline Bench Press	5	5	Bench at a slight incline.
	Squat	5	8/10/12	Start at 8 reps. Add 2 reps each week. At 12 reps add 5-10lb and restart at 8 reps. Start light. Use same squat as Day 1, or choose a similar variation (pause squat, different bar position etc.).
	Chin-ups	3/4/5	To Failure	Same number of sets as day 1. Use an underhand grip. Swap out for lat-pulldowns with underhand grip if needed.

The Lifts

Squat

The squat is trained for 3 sets of 5 reps every Day 1, followed by two back-off sets. Aim to add 5lb (2.5kg) each week to your top 3 sets of 5. There is another squatting session on day 2. This can be a variation of your day 1 squat, for example, if you do low-bar on day 1, you could squat in a high-bar position, or you could do front squats, pause squats, safety squat bar, belt squats etc.

Older lifters, people starting off very light, or female lifters may struggle to sustain weight increases. If this is you, I'd suggest aiming to add weight every other week if needed.

In terms of type of squat: I suggest either low-bar, high-bar or safety-squat bar. It doesn't matter too much, as long as you are consistent throughout the program. You can keep day 2's squat the same as day 1, or make it a variation (front-squat, pause squat, tempo-squats, box squat etc.), but keep it consistent throughout the program.

Squat form: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nhoikoUEI8U&>

Bench Press

The bench press is trained heavy on day 1, and day 1 is where you want to be driving progress. Day 2 is there to add additional volume and technique work.

Aim to add 5lb (2.5kg) every week on day 1. Try to add weight to day 2 where you can, but don't worry if this goes slower.

The bench press is likely to stall sooner than the other lifts. When you are getting close to failing sets, I suggest swapping starting to alternate weekly reps. So for week 1 do 5 sets of 3 (with 3 sets being heavier and 2 sets back-off), and week 2 doing 5 sets of 5 as in the program, adding weight each fortnight to each triple or set of 5. Once you stall with this rep scheme, you can either drop the weight by 15% and build back up, or move onto the

advanced novice program. You'll make decent progress in the long-term regardless of which option you choose. If your squat and/or deadlift has also stalled its definitely time to move on though.

On day 2 there is an incline bench press. This is to provide some additional shoulder work, whilst still getting the reps in for the bench press.

Unfortunately, with a two-day split, it is difficult to get in sufficient work for both bench and overhead press movements. This is an imperfect compromise. You can always swap it out for another pressing movement if you wish though.

Bench Press form: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rxD321I2svE>

Deadlift

Deadlifts are trained heavy on day 2. You are aiming to perform a top set of 5 reps, and then back-off the weight slightly for 2 more sets of 5, and back-off again for another 2 sets of 5. On day 1 you are programmed 3 sets of 8/10/12 reps for Romanian deadlifts.

The deadlift is typically considered a more stress-inducing lift, meaning it is harder to recover from and taxes your body more. However, higher volumes on the deadlift can be adapted to. Some lifters respond well to higher-volume, others to lower-volume. You have 8 sets of deadlifts, which is quite a lot for novices, but I've often found Romanian deadlifts are easier to recover from, so this should be 100% manageable for most lifters.

Aim to add 2.5kg/5lb to the day 2 deadlift every week. For the Romanian deadlift, do 3 sets of 8 on week 1, then 3 sets of 10 at the same weight the week after, then 3 sets of 12 at the same weight the week after, and then increase the weight and start again at 3 sets of 8.

Deadlift form: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MBbyAqvTNkU>



Chin-ups and Pull-ups

Chin-ups and pull-ups are done with bodyweight to failure. If you can do more than 10 consecutive reps, you can either still do them to failure, or you can start adding weight. I suggest keeping reps above 5 if you are adding weight though. If you can't do 3 reps of pull-ups or chin-ups, then I suggest performing lat pull-downs for 8-12 reps. With lat pull-downs, each week try to either increase the reps or the weight.

Chin-ups are done with an underhand grip (your palms facing you) and pull-ups with an overhand grip (palms facing away from you). If you are swapping for lat pull-downs, keep the same grip as if you were doing chin-ups or pull-ups.

Try to keep form consistent. They don't need to be perfect full range of motion, but should be consistent. In my training, I touch my chin to the bar and then go all the way down for one rep. Other people may have an even bigger range of motion. The key thing is the range of motion and form is the same rep-to-rep.

Form Information

I linked to different videos teaching you correct lifting form. However, please consider that there are numerous differing schools of thought on exercise form. Every fitness youtuber and influencer will have different views on how to squat, bench, press and deadlift. They will usually say that their method of lifting is correct and others are wrong.

In reality, if your form is achieving the below criteria, then you are good, and it doesn't really matter which youtuber or influencer's form you follow. I suggest picking a preferred form and following it, trying to make each repetition consistent:

- The path of the bar is efficient (usually this is straight up and down, but there are exceptions with the bench press);

SLOWLY STRONGER

- The lift is repeated in a similar manner (your form should be consistent rep-rep, set-set, week-week);
- You achieve desirable range-of-motion benchmarks (such as hitting depth on squat, the bar touching your chest in the bench press etc.,);
- The lift is safe then the technique should be fine.

The above videos I linked I have personally found to be particularly useful to at getting proficient in lifting with good form. If you have found other videos or guides with form you prefer then follow those.

FAQ

How do I structure the week?

With training two days per week this is easier. You ideally want at least two rest days between each workout, and your good to go.

You can train with just one rest day between workouts, but its going to be tough and not recommended.

Back-to-back workouts in this program should be avoided.

How long do I rest between sets?

Your main lifts that you try to progress on (the heaviest sets of squats, bench press and deadlifts) will need the most rest. I suggest resting 3-5 minutes between the heavy sets. At first you might be able to rest less than this, but do not sacrifice weight on the bar for rest. If you need 4-5 minutes, then rest 4-5 minutes. I suggest avoiding going beyond 5 minutes rest. For other exercises, rest between 90 seconds to 3 minutes.

I missed a week?

Try to just repeat the weak you missed at the same weight. If you missed two weeks, it might be worth knocking the weight down a bit and building back up, maybe even building back up faster. For example, if you squatted 200lb, but then missed two weeks, you might want to drop the weight to 170lb, but then add 10lb each squat session until you get back to 200lb. If you missed more than two weeks, drop the weight back, and increase at the specified rate.

I missed a workout?

This isn't a big deal. Just do the workout you missed next time you go to the gym.

What about conditioning or cardio?

I recommend setting up your week in a similar pattern as below:

Monday – day 1 workout

Tuesday – cardio/conditioning

Wednesday – rest day

Thursday – day 2 workout

Friday – cardio/conditioning

Saturday – rest day

Sunday – rest day

I recommend checking out my article on [cardio and strength training](#) for specific ideas.

Make sure you add conditioning slowly and take it easy at first.

If you are able to add in cardio and conditioning twice per week, I would perhaps swap to a different program though, as that indicates that you can lift more than twice per week.

I can't add weight to the bar?

First of all, make sure your diet is correct (check out this [step-by-step guide to calculating calories and macros](#)).

Make sure your form is consistent and efficient. Check out the form videos I posted above. Your bar-path should be straight on the squat and deadlift, and at a slight diagonal on the bench press. Film your lifts after each set and review them critically, comparing to the form videos I posted above.

Are you sleeping enough? Aim for 7-8 hours per night if you can.

Did you start too heavy? If you are stuck on week 2 or 3, then you started too heavy. Don't worry, just knock the weight back a bit and progress from there.

If your diet is as good as it can be, your form is correct, you didn't start too heavy, and your sleep cannot be improved, and you still can't progress,

SLOWLY STRONGER

then congratulations (or commiserations!), you have got everything you can out of this program, and its time to moved onto a more advanced program. I suggest the [advanced novice program](#).

