



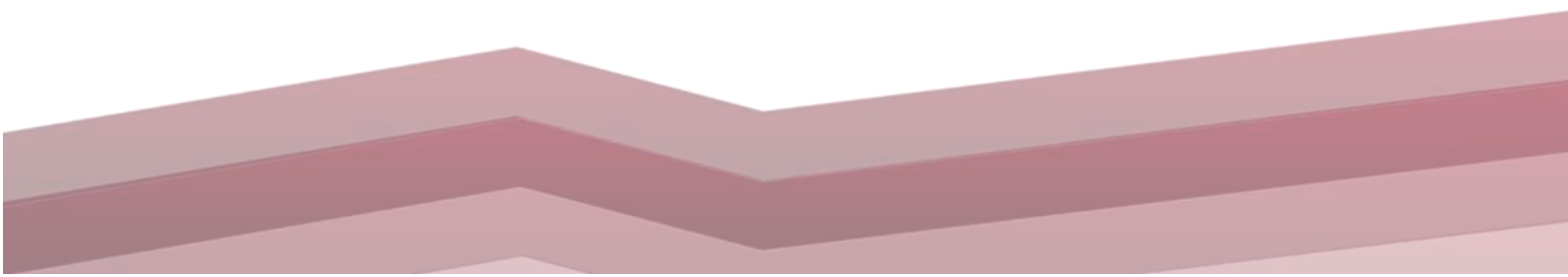
Beginner Strength Program

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Program Introduction

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

It consists of 3 weeks introductory training, following a final 4th 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, with secondary focus on Pull-ups and Overhead Press. 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.

The Beginner Program

Introductory Week 1

Day 1	Exercise	Loading Details	Last set weight
	Squat	Perform sets of 5. Add weight each set until the bar speed starts to slow down. Rest 90-120 seconds between each set	
	Bench Press		
	Deadlift		

Day 2	Exercise	Sets	Reps	Set 1	Set 2	Set 3	Notes
	Deadlift	2	8				70% of day 1
	Press	Sets of 5, add weight until bar-speed slows					Last set weight
	Squat	2	8				70% of day 1

Day 3	Exercise	Sets	Reps	Set 1	Set 2	Set 3	Notes
	Squat	3	5				Add 5lb to Day 1
	Bench Press	3	5				90% of Day 1
	Barbell Row	Sets of 5, add weight until bar-speed slows					

Introductory Week 2

Day 1	Exercise	Sets	Reps	Set 1	Set 2	Set 3	Notes
	Squat	3	5				Add 5lb
	Bench Press	3	5				Add 5lb each week
	Deadlift	2	8				70% of Week 1 Day 1

Day 2	Exercise	Sets	Reps	Set 1	Set 2	Set 3	Notes
	Deadlift	1	5				Add 5lb to Week 1
	Deadlift	2	5				Reduce weight by 10%
	Overhead Press	3	4				Same as Week 1
Squat	2	8				70% of Day 1	

Day 3	Exercise	Sets	Reps	Set 1	Set 2	Set 3	Notes
	Squat	3	5				Add 5lb
	Bench Press	3	5				90% of Day 1
Barbell Row	3	5				Add 5lb to Week 1	

Introductory Week 3

Day 1	Exercise	Sets	Reps	Set 1	Set 2	Set 3	Notes
	Squat	3	5				Add 5lb
	Bench Press	3	5				Add 5lb each week
	Deadlift	2	8				70% of Day 1
	Pull-ups or Lat-Pulldown	2	To Failure				Superset Pull-ups and DB Bench. DB Bench: Increase reps or weight each week
Dumbbell Bench	2	8-12					

Day 2	Exercise	Sets	Reps	Set 1	Set 2	Set 3	Notes
	Deadlift	1	5				Add 5lb to Week 1
	Deadlift	2	5				Reduce weight by 10%
	Overhead Press	3	4				Same as Week 1
	Squat	3	8				70% of Day 1
Chin-ups or lat pull-down	2	To Failure				If lat pull-down do sets of 8-12	

Day 3	Exercise	Sets	Reps	Set 1	Set 2	Set 3	Notes
	Squat	3	5				Add 5lb
	Bench Press	3	5				90% of Day 1
	Barbell Row	3	5				Add 5lb to Week 1
Dips or Push-ups	3	8				Add weight if needed	

The Novice Program – repeat this week indefinitely until it stops working.

Day 1	Exercise	Sets	Reps	Set 1	Set 2	Set 3	Notes
	Squat	3	5				Add 5lb
	Bench Press	3	5				Add 5lb each week
	Deadlift	3	8				70% of Day 1
	Pull-ups or Lat-Pulldown	2	To Failure				Superset Pull-ups and DB Bench. DB Bench: Increase reps or weight each week
Dumbbell Bench	2	8-12					

Day 2	Exercise	Sets	Reps	Set 1	Set 2	Set 3	Notes
	Deadlift	1	5				Add 5lb to Week 1
	Deadlift	2	5				Reduce weight by 10%
	Overhead Press	3	3				Same as Week 1
	Squat	3	8				70% of Day 1
Chin-ups or lat pull-down	3	To Failure				If lat pull-down do sets of 8-12	

Day 3	Exercise	Sets	Reps	Set 1	Set 2	Set 3	Notes
	Squat	3	5				Add 5lb
	Bench Press	3	5				90% of Day 1
	Barbell Row	3	5				Add 5lb to Week 1
Dips or Push-ups	3	8				Add weight if needed	

The Lifts

Squat

The squat is trained for 3 sets of 5 reps every Day 1 and 3. Aim to add 5lb (2.5kg) every time you train it, so day 3 should be heavier than day 1.

Older lifters, people starting off very light, or female lifters may struggle to sustain twice-weekly weight increases. If this is you, I'd suggest aiming to add weight every week on day 1, and on day 3 perform 3 sets of 5 squats at 80-90% of day 1's weight.

In terms of type of squat: for day 1 and 3 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 and 3, 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, with day 3 being a back-off day.

Aim to add 5lb (2.5kg) every week on day 1.

The bench press is likely to stall sooner than the other lifts, despite the progression being slower. When you getting close to failing sets, I suggest swapping your day 1 bench press to 5 sets of 3 reps, and on day 3 do 3 sets of 5 at 80% of day 1. Once you stall on 5 sets of 3 reps, 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.

On day 1 there is a dumbbell bench press with 3 sets of 8-12 reps. I recommend trying to increase the reps every week and once you reach 12 reps, up the weight and drop the reps back down to 8.

On day 3 there is dips or push-ups for 3 sets of 8, and the sets should be challenging. Use a dip-belt or add weight-plates to a back-pack if you need to. Feel free to do variations of push-ups or dips if needed.

Bench Press form: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rxD321l2svE>

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. On day 1 you are programmed 3 sets of 8 reps, at 70% of day 2's weight. If you choose to, you can swap this out for Romanian Deadlifts or Stiff-Leg-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. I have erred on 6 sets of deadlifts per week, as this can set a solid foundation for post-novice training.

Row

Day 3 includes a row. I recommend a Pendlay row, as rowing the bar from a dead-stop has more crossover to the deadlift. However, you can do a standard barbell row should you choose.

If you have a fancy for Olympic lifts, you can experiment with Cleans or snatches instead of rows. I'd suggest starting with the powerclean, as it has an easier learning curve and it is easy to turn into a snatch and full clean. They won't be providing a huge benefit to your deadlift, but if you have an interest in crossfit or Olympic lifting it may be worth swapping the row out for a power clean. I suggest performing 5 sets of 2-3 reps.

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

Overhead Press

The overhead press is trained every day 2. Aim to progress 5lb (2.5kg) per week if you can. However, this will be your slowest lift, and you will stall on this sooner than the others.

I recommend 3 sets of 3 reps. In week 1 you start with 3 sets of 5 reps, and add 5lb each week to this starting weight whilst reducing reps. As you are starting with a weight that you could perform for 5 reps, this hopefully gives you a couple more weeks of progressions whilst performing triples.

If you are stalling, you have a few options:

- You could drop the reps. So you stall at 3 sets of 3 reps, next week do 3 sets of 2 reps at the same weight and try to add weight the week after. Once you stall at 2 reps, go to 3 sets of 1 rep.
- You could rotate rep ranges: One week do 3 sets of 8 reps, next week 3 sets of 5 reps, next week 3 sets of 2 reps, the week after do 3 sets of 8 but at a higher weight.
- You could drop the weight and slowly build back up again.

There isn't really a correct option, it comes down to preference. The main aim is to get 3 good sets of overhead pressing.

Overhead Press form: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y5FRD8Q3DJM>

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.

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);
- 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?

The logic structure is:

Day 1 – Monday

Day 2 – Wednesday

Day 3 – Friday

Or some other combination of days which culminates into day 1 – rest – day 2 – rest – day 3 – rest – rest.

However, do not let perfect be the enemy of good. The following is fine:

Day 1 – Monday

Day 2 – Tuesday

Day 3 – Thursday or Friday

Or

Day 1 – Monday

Day 2 – Wednesday

Day 3 – Thursday

You can have flexibility as needed, just make sure you are not doing all 3 days back-to-back, and there is at least 2 rest days between day 3 and 1.

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 week 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. For example, if your day 1, 2 and 3 are Monday Wednesday and Friday, and you miss Wednesday's workout, just do it on Friday, and then Monday will be your new day 1.

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 – day 2 workout

Thursday – rest day

Friday – day 3 workout

Saturday – cardio/conditioning

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.

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, 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](#).

