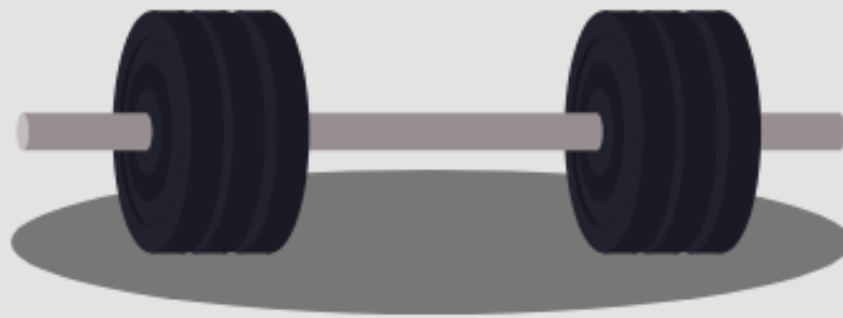


# **Gym Beginners' Training Program: Second Edition**



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# **Training Program for Beginners**

by

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This is far from the average beginner training program and you might find it a bit plain - this is intentional.

Most beginners with little to no experience with weights don't need complexity; they need to learn and apply the fundamentals consistently.

The program is designed for three workouts per week. You shouldn't train two days in a row. Always give yourself a day or two for recovery - this is when positive adaptations take place (muscle growth and strength gain).

Most people follow the typical Monday-Wednesday-Friday layout, but you can train on a different schedule if you wish.

For example, if you prefer to skip the international chest day on Monday and have a bench to yourself, you can train Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday. Alternatively, you can also train Wednesday-Friday-Sunday, Friday-Sunday-Tuesday, or Thursday-Saturday-Monday. Training three days per week offers a lot of flexibility.

Here are the workouts:

<b>Workout A (Heavy Bench Workout)</b>	<b>Workout B (Heavy Deadlift Workout)</b>	<b>Workout C (Heavy Squat Workout)</b>
Flat Barbell Bench Press - 5 sets/4-6 reps	Barbell Deadlift - 4 sets/4-6 reps	Barbell Back Squat - 5 sets/4-6 reps
Barbell Back Squat - 4 sets/6-8 reps	Overhead Press - 4 sets/6-8 reps	Flat Barbell Bench Press - 4 sets/6-8 reps
Overhead Press - 2 sets/6-8 reps	Chin Ups - 4 sets/6-10 reps	Barbell Row - 4 sets/6-10 reps
Chin Ups - 4 sets/6-10	Face Pulls - 3 sets/15-20 reps	Overhead Press - 2 sets/6-8 reps
Face Pulls - 3 sets/15-20 reps		Face Pulls - 3 sets/15-20 reps

You have three distinct workouts for the week - A, B, and C. You don't have to alternate between them every week. Day one is your A workout, day two is your B workout, day three is your C workout. Rinse and repeat.

## The Importance of a Proper Introduction

If you're new to lifting or haven't trained in some years, I recommend having a week or two where you train light and give your body time to adjust to the training stress. This allows you to mitigate muscle soreness a bit and you also get familiar with the proper execution of each exercise before you start using heavier weights.

To take full advantage of linear progression, I also recommend starting with less challenging weight on the bar and slowly ramp up from week to week as you improve your technique and build your confidence.

Start your training with a weight that allows you to do the prescribed repetitions with good form. The last rep should feel difficult but not to absolute failure. That is, you should be able to grind out an extra two or three reps if you had to.

If you're failing progression on weeks 1-3 or you have to grind them out, you're probably lifting too heavy and should lower the weight on the bar by 10-20%.

Here are some recommendations for your starting weights:

- Bench press, barbell row, and overhead press - 45 to 65 lbs (20-30 kilos) on the bar.
- Squat and deadlift - 65 to 90 pounds (30-40 kilos) on the bar. Until you work your way up to 135 pounds on the deadlift - two 45-pound standard plates on each side - I recommend using bumper plates.
- Aim to do between 6 and 10 chin-ups on each set. Many beginners would need to start with the machine-assisted chin-up or use a band to reduce the resistance. Some beginners with a bit of experience with calisthenics might be able to do 10+ chins in a single set. If you're one of them, I recommend using a weight belt for added resistance.

# Progression On This Program

Any decent program out there is going to use some progression scheme. There are many types out there with the most popular one for beginners being a linear progression. Because beginners can enjoy the blessings of newbie gains, using linear progression will work great.

Once you've picked your starting weights and you're clearing your repetitions with one or two left in the tank, add weight every week:

+2.5 kg / 5 lbs for upper body lifts (bench press, barbell row, overhead press)

+2.5 kg / 5 lbs to your squats

+5 kg / 10 lbs to your deadlift

Your gym should also have the 0.75kg/1.65lb fractional plates. After a while, adding 2.5 kg to your overhead press and row can get difficult, and this is where these bad boys come in handy. If not, you can also buy them from Amazon.

Here's an example of how your progression might look like on the bench:

## Week 1:

### Workout A

Bench press with 30 kilos - goal: 5 sets of 6 reps.

Set 1 - 6 reps

Set 2 - 6 reps

Set 3 - 6 reps

Set 4 - 6 reps

Set 5 - 6 reps

Progression **met**. Add 2.5 kilos next week.

### Workout C

Bench press with 22.5 kilos - goal: 4 sets of 8 reps.

Set 1 - 8

Set 2 - 8

Set 3 - 8

Set 4 - 8

Progression **met**. Add 2.5 kilos next week.

## Week 2:

### Workout A

Bench press with **32.5 kilos** - goal: 5 sets of 6 reps.

Set 1 - 6 reps

Set 2 - 6 reps

Set 3 - 6 reps

Set 4 - 6 reps

Set 5 - 6 reps

Progression **met**. Add 2.5 kilos next week

### Workout C

Bench press with **25 kilos** - goal: 4 sets of 8 reps.

Set 1 - 8

Set 2 - 8

Set 3 - 8

Set 4 - 8

Progression **met**. Add 2.5 kilos next week.

Most beginners can put quite a bit of weight on the bar with this simple progression method. Eventually, you'll fail progression. Like so:

### Workout A

Bench press with 60 kilos - goal: 5 sets of 6 reps.

Set 1 - 6 reps

Set 2 - 6 reps

Set 3 - 5 reps

Set 4 - 5 reps

Set 5 - 4 reps

Progression **not met**. Use the same weight next week.

This is just an example. You might not fail the 5x5 bench. You might fail the 4x8 bench, the squat, the deadlift, overhead press, or row. Failure to meet progression is an inevitable part of every program. We can't add 2.5 kilos to our lifts every week forever.

In some cases, you might fail progression early on because you didn't sleep well, you didn't eat enough, or you had a bad day. That's okay. Note it down and use the same weight on the following week.

If you fail the progression on one exercise (bench, for example), but meet your progression on another (such as the squat), increase the load for the squat and use the same weight for the bench press.

Another common reason why beginners tend to fail reps is due to inadequate recovery between sets. Here are some general rules to follow:

For your heavy sets of 4-6 reps, rest 3-5 minutes.

For your lighter sets of 6-10 reps, 2-3 minutes.

For exercises like face pulls, where reps are 15-20, rest no longer than 60 seconds.

Think of rest periods as a tool that will help you complete your recommended repetitions. If you don't rest enough, your performance is going to suffer, and your training volume will be less.

If your program calls for 4 sets of 6 reps on the deadlift, make sure to rest long enough so you can complete your 24 total reps without having to decrease the load.

At some point, no matter how well you recover and how much you eat, you won't be able to add weight on the bar at the same rate. That's alright. But you can get decently strong with a simple linear progression.

## **Proper Technique > More Weight on The Bar**

It's common for beginners to put their entire focus on the numbers they are lifting. Walk into any gym and I guarantee that you'll see many beginners and intermediates who are trying to lift more than they can handle.

All of that leads to poor form, partial range of motion, little to no benefit, and a significant risk of injury.

Progressive overload begins and ends with great form.

If you're adding weight to the bar, but your form is suffering for it, that is not progressive overload. That is ego lifting, and it's going to catch up to you fast.

## Squat depth that looks like this:

At 135 lbs.



At 225 lbs.



At 315 lbs.



Is **NOT** progressive overload.

**It's ego lifting.**

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Training through a full range of motion with good form and adding weight on the bar is what matters.

Otherwise, you're wasting your time, increasing the risk of injury and lying to yourself.

## General Warm-up and Warm-up Sets

This is one of the most critical aspects of training:

- It improves your mobility, leading to better execution of each exercise.
- It increases your core body temperature, warms up your muscles and synovial fluid for less joint wear and more stability.
- Decreases your risk of injury when training with heavy weights.
- Primes your mind and body for the work you're about to do.

A good warm-up will lift your mood, increase your energy and performance. A bad warm-up will leave you lethargic, unmotivated, stiff and prone to injury.

I've been in both camps and I can say with absolute confidence:

Warming up well for 10-15 minutes is the best investment of your time. Even if the following workout isn't your best, a proper warm-up is a must.

Since warming up is such an important aspect of lifting, there have been many suggestions made about what a proper warm-up is. The truth is, there is no one perfect way to warm up. As long as your warm-up achieves the four things I listed above, you're doing well.

But, I will give you some pointers about what a proper warm-up looks like and how to design one for yourself.

A good warm-up consists of two parts: General and specific.

## General warm-up

Low-intensity cardio for 5-10 minutes (treadmill, jump rope, Stairmaster, elliptical trainer, etc.)

Your goal here is to raise your body temperature, get your heart rate up and warm up your **synovial fluid** (as mentioned above). Whole body dynamic drills are also great to do at this point.

[Here's a video demonstrating dynamic warm-up.](#)

## Specific warm-up

Once you've raised your body temperature, it's time to take a step further and give extra attention to the joints you're about to work.

[Here is a video by Scott Herman](#) demonstrating a great warm-up routine for the shoulders (that takes less than 5 minutes).

For example, if you bench 143 lbs (65 kilos) for 6 reps, working your way up would look like this:

(Keep in mind that you should never take a warm-up set to failure. Only do as many reps as you feel comfortable with.)

Set 1 (warm-up): 45 lbs (bar only) for 10-15 reps

Set 2 (warm-up): 90 lbs (40 kilos) for 6-8 reps

Set 3 (warm-up): 120 lbs (55 kilos) for 3 reps

Set 4 (first working set): 143 lbs (65 kilos) for 6 reps

The goal of the specific warm-up is to activate your muscles, stabilize your joints, and prime your nervous system. It puts you in the groove for the heavier work.



# Training to Failure

We often toss around the term "technical failure" and there are a ton of mixed feelings among people. Some deem it the holy grail of muscle growth and strength gain. Others consider it an unnecessary part of training, only good for burning yourself out.

In essence, training to failure is the process of lifting a weight to a point where the muscles at work cannot produce enough force to move it anymore. Now, this does not mean that your muscles are completely exhausted; it only means they are exhausted relative to that load.

A significant drawback of training to failure is the breakdown of form. As we perform more and more reps and get more fatigued, our form can break down, and that could lead to an injury. This is especially true for the compound lifts: the squat, the deadlift and the bench press.

A good rule of thumb to follow is this:

The more complex an exercise is, the better it is to train within your limit and not push to failure. Side lateral dumbbell raises? Sure, take the set to failure. Deadlifts? You should leave a couple of reps in the tank.

As a beginner who's learning the movements, taking sets to failure can be dangerous.

A seasoned lifter can gauge when their form begins to break down. But as a newbie, you're more likely to hurt yourself.

## Deload Weeks

A deload week is one where you don't take time off the gym, but instead do less challenging workouts that don't fatigue you.

There are three main ways to plan out your deload week:

- Reduce training sets for each workout.
- Reduce training intensity for each workout.
- Reduce both for each workout.

### Deloading Your Training Sets

With this method, your goal is to maintain the weights you lift and instead reduce the total sets done for the workout in half. For example, if you normally do 6 sets with 135 pounds on the bench for 6 reps, now you would do 3 sets with 135 for 6 reps. Same goes for every other exercise in the program.

You can also cut back your repetitions a bit for each set to further reduce volume and don't take sets to failure. Instead of doing sets of 6 (as prescribed), do sets of 4.

## Deloading Your Training Intensity

When deloading intensity, your goal is to maintain the number of sets you do in favor of lifting less weight. You can cut the weight on the bar by 10 to 50%. For example, if you squat 5 sets with 155 pounds for 6 reps, now you would squat 5 sets with 75-135 pounds for 6 reps.

If you usually deadlift 185 pounds for 6 reps on each set, now you would lift 90-165 pounds for sets of 6 reps.

## Deloading Intensity and Sets

With this option, you reduce both the weight you lift and the total sets you do for a workout by about half.

For example, if you normally do four sets of 6 reps on the deadlift with 185 pounds, now you would do two sets with 90-165 pounds.

A quick note on the set reps and weight I used as an example:

I realize that your sets likely aren't static as the examples above and that's okay. I presented the examples in a simplified way to make things easier to understand. It doesn't matter how you usually train that much. Don't overthink your deload workouts too much.

Choose a weight light enough and do the sets.

## How Often Should I Deload?

The answer to this question is individual and I'm afraid I can't give a solution that will fit everyone. There are questions you need to answer, like:

- How many days a week do you lift?
- How much effort do you put into your workouts? (Pushing for progress vs. kind of cruising)
- What is your day job like, if you have one? (Physical labor sedentary)
- What is your current goal? (Build muscle or lose fat)
- How many hours a night do you sleep? (Are you getting your 8 hours?)
- How old are you? (A 22-year old dude could cope with fewer deloads vs. a 44-year old one)

The answer to this question is individual and I'm afraid I can't give a solution that will fit everyone. There are questions you need to answer, like:

## Lastly, Here are Some Justifications for The Programming Choices

1. I don't consider squats and deadlifts in the same workout to be a smart choice for beginners. The combined fatigue from the two exercises is enough to screw up most new lifter's form. Such workouts would also be hell to recover from. This is why you have a deadlift workout and two other sessions with squats.
2. I've added face pulls for shoulder health and rear delt development. Frequent bench and overhead pressing without the adequate back and rear delt work often makes guys hunch forward and get a bad posture. Face pulls in combination with the back work will counter that effect.
3. If you can't do chin ups yet, start with inverted rows or do band-assisted chin-ups.
4. If you can do more than the prescribed chin-ups, add additional weight on yourself.
5. There is no specific upper chest work because as a beginner you won't need it. Spend your newbie phase building a solid bench press and overhead press, your upper chest will grow.
6. I don't recommend heavy overhead press for beginners mostly for injury prevention. Once you master the movement with somewhat higher reps, then you can gradually introduce heavy overhead presses.
7. There's no direct arm work because they'll get enough attention from the rows, chin-ups, and presses. As a beginner, that will be enough to make them grow.

**Have a question that wasn't answered here? Shoot me an email at [philip@thinkinglifter.com](mailto:philip@thinkinglifter.com) and I'll help you out.**

**-Phil**