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Your 3-Step Quick Start Guide

by

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“Thank you for downloading this free bonus. To simplify things as much as possible, I’ve outlined the most essential steps you need to take when putting together your upper/lower training split. Without further ado, let’s take a look at the steps you should take:

Step #1: Determine Your Weekly Training Frequency

As I discussed in [the upper/lower training guide](#), you can train anywhere from two to six times per week.

I recommend the 4-day split for the majority of lifters out there. This frequency offers a healthy balance between training commitment and the results you can achieve. You don’t have to get to the gym every day, and you also don’t have to deal with lackluster results.

If you can’t make it four days per week, the 3-day split can also work. I typically don’t recommend the 5-day split as I feel it complicates things too much and piles too much fatigue without delivering any significant advantage.

If you’re near your genetic limit and progress has slowed down to a crawl, the 6-day split can work if you can make it to the gym that often. It allows you to accumulate more weekly volume and more frequent exposure to the various exercises without spending two hours at the gym every time.

Here’s an example of a 4-day upper/lower split:

Monday - Upper body
Tuesday - Lower body
Wednesday - Off
Thursday - Upper body
Friday - Lower body
Saturday & Sunday - Off

You can also do it like this:

Monday - Upper body
Tuesday - Off
Wednesday - Lower body
Thursday - Off
Friday - Upper body
Saturday - Lower body
Sunday - Off

Or like this:

Monday - Upper body
Tuesday - Lower body
Wednesday - Off
Thursday - Off
Friday - Upper body
Saturday - Lower body
Sunday - Off

Or like this:

Monday - Upper body
Tuesday - Lower body
Wednesday - Off
Thursday - Upper body
Friday - Off
Saturday - Lower body
Sunday - Off

Really, there are many ways to go about it. Once you've picked your weekly frequency and schedule, move on to the next step:

Step #2: Pick Exercises And Program Your Upper and Lower Workouts

The upper/lower split can be tricky to set up because you have to train more muscle groups on your upper than on your lower-body days. You have to train your chest, back, biceps, triceps, and shoulders on the upper days. On lower days, you have to train your quads, hamstrings, glutes, and calves.

To create an effective upper workout, include one of each:

1. Horizontal push (e.g., bench press)
2. Horizontal pull (e.g., barbell row)
3. Vertical push (e.g., overhead press)
4. Vertical pull (e.g., pull-ups)

This is the bare minimum. Once you've added one of each, you can also include some accessory and isolation work for your biceps, triceps, and shoulders. Here's how an upper workout might look like:

Flat barbell bench press - 3 sets of 6 to 10 reps
Bent-over barbell row - 3 sets of 6 to 10 reps
Seated overhead dumbbell press - 3 sets of 8 to 12 reps
Lat pulldowns - 3 sets of 12 to 15 reps
Standing dumbbell bicep curl - 2 sets of 12 to 15 reps
Dumbbell tricep kickbacks - 2 sets of 12 to 15 reps
Lateral dumbbell raises - 3 sets of 12 to 20 reps
Cable rope face pulls - 3 sets of 15 to 25 reps

Structuring your upper workouts that way ensures that the major muscle groups receive direct work, which prevents imbalances from occurring. If you follow the 4-day split, you will have two upper workouts per week. To ensure optimal development, it's a good idea to make your second workout a bit different. Like so:

Pull-ups - 3 sets of 6 to 10 reps
Standing barbell push-press - 3 sets of 6 to 10 reps
T-bar rows - 3 sets of 8 to 12 reps
Incline dumbbell press - 3 sets of 8 to 12 reps
Seated dumbbell hammer curl - 4 sets of 10 to 15 reps
Standing overhead dumbbell tricep extension - 4 sets of 12 to 15 reps
Lateral dumbbell raises - 3 sets of 12 to 15 reps

As you can see, this workout follows a similar structure, but there are a few differences. Namely, you start this workout with a pull instead of a push. The exercise selection is also slightly different, and you now have an incline press variation to emphasize your upper chest. There is also a bit more volume for your biceps and triceps.

Setting up your lower-body workouts is simple enough, as the process is mostly the same across all splits - push/pull/legs, upper/lower, bro split, and more. To create an effective lower workout, include one of each:

1. Two quad movements
2. Two hamstring movements
3. Zero to one glute movement
4. One to two calve movements

Here's an example:

High-bar back squats - 3 sets of 6 to 10 reps
Romanian deadlift - 3 sets of 8 to 12 reps
Alternating dumbbell lunges - 3 sets of 8 to 12 reps
Lying hamstring curl - 2 sets of 12 to 15 reps
Standing machine calf raises - 4 sets of 8 to 15 reps

If you follow the classic 4-day upper/lower split and have two lower workouts per week, your second one should be a tad different. Like so:

Front squats - 3 sets of 6 to 12 reps
Glute-ham raises - 3 sets of 8 to 15 reps
Leg press - 3 sets of 10 to 15 reps
Lying hamstring curls - 3 sets of 12 to 15 reps
Seated machine calf raises - 4 sets of 12 to 20 reps

Our exercise selection is slightly different, and we are also working with somewhat different repetition ranges. As far as your abs, forearms, and traps are involved, I recommend doing them on your lower days. The reason for that is simple:

Your upper workouts are long and draining as is. Adding even more work will make them disproportionately long and fatiguing. Instead, it's better to add direct work for these muscles on your shorter lower-body workouts to maintain a better volume distribution across your training week. For example:

Lower Workout 1

High-bar back squats - 3 sets of 6 to 10 reps
Romanian deadlift - 3 sets of 8 to 12 reps
Alternating dumbbell lunges - 3 sets of 8 to 12 reps
Lying hamstring curl - 2 sets of 12 to 15 reps
Standing machine calf raises - 4 sets of 8 to 15 reps
Hanging knee raises - 4 sets of 10 to 15 reps
Dumbbell wrist curls - 3 sets of 12 to 20 reps

Lower Workout 2

Front squats - 3 sets of 6 to 12 reps
Glute-ham raises - 3 sets of 8 to 15 reps
Leg press - 3 sets of 10 to 15 reps
Lying hamstring curls - 3 sets of 12 to 15 reps
Seated machine calf raises - 4 sets of 12 to 20 reps
Dumbbell shrugs - 4 sets of 8 to 15 reps

Let's move on to the next step:

Step #3: Learn How to Progress On An Upper/Lower Split

You've laid the foundation. Your split is ready, you've picked the exercises, you've assigned different ranges on the movements, and you're amped to make gains. The next most logical question is, "But how do I progress over time?" There are a few things to consider:

1. Picking your starting weights.
2. Resting enough between sets.
3. Maintaining proper technique.
4. Increasing the weight when appropriate.

Let's take a look at each of these:

1. Picking your starting weights.

Picking your starting weights takes a bit of trial and error, but you can get a good idea of what you're doing within one to two workouts. For example, say that your program calls for three sets of 6 to 10 reps on the barbell back squat. If you've been training for a while, you should have a good idea of how much weight you should place on the bar to hit this goal.

For example, say that you pick 100 kilos (220 pounds), and it goes like this:

Set 1 - 12 reps
Set 2 - 12 reps
Set 3 - 11 reps

In that case, you're overshooting the upper goal of ten reps, and you should bump the weight to 102.5 kilos (~226 pounds) for your next workout. Let's also say that your program also calls for three sets of 6 to 10 reps on the barbell bench press. You pick 85 kilos (~186 pounds), and it goes like this:

Set 1 - 7 reps
Set 2 - 6 reps
Set 3 - 5 reps

In that case, 85 kilos might be a bit too heavy, and you should drop to 80 or 82.5 kilos for your next workout.

In general, you should always leave at least one repetition in the tank. If you have to grind all of your sets to reach the upper end because you're eager to add more weight to the bar, you'll eventually find yourself ego lifting.

2. Resting enough between sets.

Resting enough between your sets is crucial for optimal performance and proper technique. You might be able to do well with your current weights, but resting too little between sets can be sabotaging you.

For example, let's take the above example of the squats again. Resting appropriately allows you to get 12, 12, and 11 reps with 100 kilos across the three sets. If you rest too little, however, it might look like this:

Set 1 - 12 reps

Set 2 - 8 reps

Set 3 - 6 reps

As a rule of thumb, you should rest:

- 3 to 5 minutes on heavy sets (3-6 reps)
- 2 to 3 minutes on moderate sets (5 to 8 reps)
- 1 to 2 minutes on lighter sets (8 to 12 reps)
- 30 to 90 seconds on light work (12+ reps)

It's also essential to avoid pushing yourself to failure on each set, as that significantly prolongs your recovery time and hinders your performance on subsequent sets.

3. Maintaining proper technique.

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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Progression often brings ego lifting to the progress-hungry lifter, and the explanation for that is simple:

In the pursuit of lifting heavier weights, trainees often lose sight of a much more critical thing: performing each repetition with good form. This may sound like an obvious problem, but it can go unnoticed often. For example, many lifters start with decent squat form and depth. But then, as the months go by and they squat heavier weights, form starts to deteriorate, and depth becomes smaller and smaller. And thus, the half-squat is born.

The primary issue is, people want results, and they want them now. They expect that progress should come weekly and, if it doesn't, they force it.

But adaptations occur non-linearly and often unpredictably. In some cases, we seem to progress well for no apparent reason, and then, we hit a plateau. It's normal. We all experience it. The goal isn't to get frustrated, but to lift as much as we can with good form and hope that we do better next time.

No one will be impressed by a 315-pound half-squat, so do things at a sustainable pace and always prioritize good technique.

4. Increasing the weight when appropriate.

Knowing when to increase the weight is a bit tricky, and you should use your best judgment. Say that you've chosen to do six to ten reps per set on the bench press. You pick 80 kilos, and it goes like this:

Upper Workout #1: 3 sets w/ 80 kg x 7, 7, 6
Upper Workout #2: 3 sets w/ 80 kg x 8, 7, 7
Upper Workout #3: 3 sets w/ 80 kg x 9, 8, 8
Upper Workout #4: 3 sets w/ 80 kg x 10, 9, 8
Upper Workout #5: 3 sets w/ 80 kg x 10, 10, 9
Upper Workout #6: 3 sets w/ 80 kg x 11, 10, 10

Now we're talking. Add 2.5 kg to the bar and start progressing to sets of ten again. But, before you happily slap a couple of 1.25 kg plates on the bar, make sure that:

- Your technique is good
- You haven't cut the range of motion short for the sake of doing more reps
- You haven't been grinding sets to failure for the sake of doing more reps

Ideally, you should increase the weight when you reach the upper end without training to failure and while doing each repetition with good form.

An Example 4-Day Upper/Lower Split Program

Here is what a 4-day intermediate upper/lower program might look like in the real world:

Upper Workout 1 - Monday

Unilateral dumbbell floor press - 3 sets of 8 to 12 reps
T-bar rows - 3 sets of 8 to 12 reps
Standing overhead dumbbell press - 3 sets of 10 to 12 reps
Underhand lat pulldowns - 3 sets of 10 to 12 reps
Cable chest fly - 2 sets of 12 to 20 reps
Standing dumbbell bicep curls - 3 sets of 12 to 15 reps
Rope cable tricep extensions - 3 sets of 12 to 15 reps
Rope cable face pulls - 3 sets of 15 to 25 reps

Lower Workout 1 - Tuesday

Front barbell squat - 3 sets of 8 to 12 reps
Dumbbell Romanian deadlift - 3 sets of 8 to 12 reps
Leg press - 3 sets of 10 to 15 reps
Seated hamstring curls - 2 to 3 sets of 12 to 15 reps
Seated machine calf raises - 3 sets of 12 to 20 reps

Upper Workout 2 - Thursday

Pull-ups/chin-ups - 3 sets of 6 to 10 reps
Incline barbell chest press - 3 sets of 8 to 12 reps
Unilateral dumbbell row - 3 sets of 10 to 15 reps
Seated dumbbell overhead press - 3 sets of 12 to 15 reps
Classic push-ups - 2 sets of up to 20 reps
Dumbbell hammer curls - 3 sets of 12 to 15 reps
EZ-bar lying tricep skullcrushers - 3 sets of 10 to 15 reps
Rope cable face pulls - 3 sets of 15 to 25 reps

Lower Workout 2 - Friday

Hack squats - 3 sets of 8 to 12 reps

Glute-ham raises - 3 sets of 10 to 15 reps

Leg extensions - 2 to 3 sets of 12 to 15 reps

Seated or lying hamstring curls - 2 to 3 sets of 12 to 15 reps

Standing machine calf raises - 4 sets of 8 to 12 reps

This is a reasonably standard upper/lower program, and it should give you a decent idea of what your end split might look like. Because your lower workouts tend to be a bit shorter, you can also include some direct work for your traps, forearms, and abs to them.

What To Do Next

Hopefully, you have all the tools you need to build yourself a solid upper/lower split. If you have any questions, you can email me at philip@thinkinglifter.com. You can also leave a comment under [the guide](#), and I'll be sure to respond in a timely manner.

If you want to learn more about the upper/lower split, [click here](#) and head over to the entire guide I wrote.

Thank you for taking the time to download and read this! I hope it's been of tremendous value to you. :)