

How to Create an Effective Weightlifting Plan

We're all well aware of the fact that weight training increases muscle mass and strength, but there are so many other benefits of strength training that often fly under the radar. Routine weightlifting helps decrease risk of a fall, enhances functional capacity, wards off depression, reduces body fat, lowers blood pressure, increases bone strength, regulates blood sugar levels, and may even improve cholesterol levels (1); all of which promote and maintain good health throughout our lives.

So, feeling ready to hit the weights and reap all those incredibly benefits? Not so fast! There are 8 key factors that should be taken into consideration before charging to the gym at full speed!

Selection: Whether you're interested in strengthening your [core](#), increasing leg muscle, or enhancing sport performance, your workout plan should reflect your personal goals by choosing exercises that target the right muscle groups. For example, [leg raises](#) won't result in stronger arms, but hey, they can certainly improve your soccer kicks! Be selective in order to see results!

Order: No matter what your [exercise goals](#) may be, there's a certain order to be followed during each sweat session. Always start with the larger muscles before targeting smaller groups, as they require more skill and energy to perform. For instance, focus on leg extensions before calf raises, and chest presses before arm curls. Stay organized to maximize your performance!

Variation: Our muscles are sort of like teenagers; they get [bored](#) so quickly. To continue to challenge your muscles and prevent them from getting used to your same old routine, [mix up your moves regularly](#). Do back lunges one week and switch it up the next week by doing front lunges instead, or by performing twisting arm curls instead of basic curls. Keep those muscles guessing and you're guaranteed to see greater gains!

Frequency: Adequate rest and recovery is necessary in order to maintain your health, prevent injury, and promote muscle gain. Therefore, you need at least one rest day between training sessions that utilize the same muscle group so you don't target your lower body two days in a row. Ouch! On the flip side, it's best to avoid waiting longer than three days between sessions so you can still maintain a level of consistency. Start with two to three sessions per week and slowly work your way up to more days. Remember quality over quantity!

Load & repetitions: Training load refers to the weight used, and repetitions ("reps") are the number of times you complete an exercise motion. So, the greater the load, the fewer number of reps obtainable. If you do over 12 reps per cycle or "set", it starts to look a lot like cardio instead of weight training! To maximize your benefits from all that work, the weight should be heavy enough so that you're barely able to complete up to 12 reps per set with proper form. Once the load feels like it's getting too easy, try adding five pounds to continue to improve! That's it, keep on challenging yourself!

Volume: If you're new to weightlifting, you may only be able to complete one set per muscle

group in a session. And hey, that's totally okay! As you improve, aim for three sets to better increase your stamina!

Speed: Did you know how quickly you complete a rep impacts your strength gains? But don't go pumping away furiously; slow and steady wins the race! Take one to three seconds to lift a weight, and another two to four seconds to lower it. Remember to breathe your way through it!

Rest: Along with all the points above, taking a break in between sets greatly influences the effectiveness of a training program. How *long* of a break is needed, however, is entirely up to you. Instead of plopping down in a chair between reps (we know, that bench in the corner is lookin' *mighty* comfy), consider walking around for at least 30 seconds to stay warmed up and energized for the next rep. Rep, rest, and repeat!

Now that you've got the 411 on an effective weightlifting plan, do your own research to dig into more tips and tricks! Browse some fitness sites and lurk around YouTube for more ideas on fun strength-building moves that you can toss into your routine! Happy lifting! Get more inspiration in our fitness section!

References:

1. Williams MA, Haskell WL, Ades PA, et al. Resistance exercise in individuals with and without cardiovascular disease: 2007 update: a scientific statement from the American Heart Association Council on Clinical Cardiology and Council on Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Metabolism. *Circulation*. 2007;116(5):572-84.