



STRENGTH TRAINING 101

*Everything You Need To Know To
Get Results From Your Workouts*

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Introduction

As a trainer, I speak to a lot of people who want to get stronger and build muscle, but they don't know how. I understand. Strength training can be complicated and intimidating. There are a lot of exercises to learn and so many different ways to lift weights. It's tempting to search for the best program to help you get results.

The truth is, there isn't a "best" or "right" way to strength train. Many different programs and workouts can be effective. Unfortunately, though, many people who start strength training don't get the results they expect.

That's because the key is not the program you use, it's how you execute it.

There are a few basic principles of strength training, and they make the difference between achieving amazing things and simply going through the motions.

You won't learn these things just by following along with a workout video or a pre-written program, and even many trainers won't teach you these essential skills of strength training.

That's why I wrote this eBook, and why I want to share my knowledge with you. Once you understand these strength training principles, you'll be able to apply them to any program you want, or even create your own.

This knowledge will unlock your strength potential.

I truly believe that strength training is one of the best things you can do for your physical and mental health, and I hope this information helps you get the most out of your strength training journey!



Why Strength Training

You probably know that strength training helps you build muscle and look great, but it can also help you achieve so much more!

Many studies have found that strength training has health benefits similar to cardio exercise, reducing risk factors for many diseases, improving mood, increasing energy levels, supporting brain health, and much more. It also has some additional benefits that you don't get from cardio, like boosting metabolism (so it can help you lose weight if that's your goal) and increasing your bone density.

Research has even found that people who have more strength live longer, probably because of all the other incredible benefits of strength training.

Strength training also gives you self-confidence and independence. If you need to move furniture or carry your kids up the stairs, you'll know you can do it. It also teaches you valuable skills, like the ability to push yourself and be patient and persistent.

Being strong makes every aspect of your life better!

Benefits of Strength Training:

-  **Decreased Risk of Dozens of Chronic Diseases, Including:**
 - Cardiovascular Disease
 - Type 2 Diabetes
 - Several Types of Cancers
 - Dementia
-  **More Energy**
-  **Better Mood**
-  **Improved Brain Function**
-  **Increased Strength**
-  **Improved Joint Function**
-  **Less Pain**
-  **Better Sleep**
-  **Increased Bone Density**
-  **Muscle Mass and Definition**
-  **Boosted Metabolism**
-  **Improved Self-Esteem**
-  **Longer Lifespan**

Strength Training Types

There are several different types of strength training which use a variety of equipment (or no equipment at all). They all have a place in a good strength program, but some are more effective than others.



Free weight exercises use tools like dumbbells, barbells, or kettlebells. They are important for building functional strength, because they activate your core and your small stabilizer muscles. They are the most effective for increasing strength and building defined muscles.



Body weight exercises are things like push ups, pull ups, and squats, where you use your own body as resistance. Bodyweight exercises also activate your core and stabilizing muscles, build coordination and functional strength, and can help you build muscle. Since they don't require any equipment, you can do them anywhere!

Weight Machines:



Weight machines are useful for beginners who are unsure about how to do free weight and bodyweight exercises. They are also good for isolating individual muscle groups.

The downside of weight machines is that they lock you into a fixed range of motion, which can be hard on your joints. They are also not particularly functional. Since the machines support the weight for you, they don't activate your core or stabilizer muscles.

Resistance Bands:

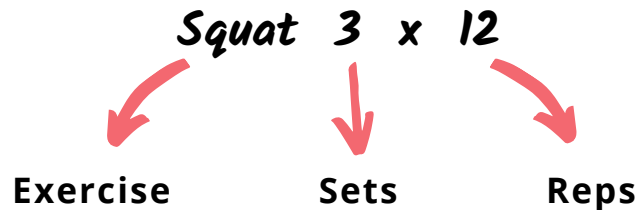


Resistance Bands are inexpensive and portable, so they are a good option for home or travel workouts. You can build muscle with resistance bands, but the type of resistance they provide is less effective at stimulating muscle growth than free weights, bodyweight, or machine exercises. It's also more difficult to progress beyond beginner strength gains with resistance bands, since the amount of resistance is usually limited.

I recommend using mostly free weight and bodyweight exercises in your training, and including weight machines and resistance bands only as additional exercises in certain situations, like when you don't have access to free weights or if you need to rehab certain muscles.

Sets and Repetitions

Strength training programs are usually written in terms of sets and repetitions, or "reps". You might see a program written as "*squat 3 x 12*", or "*3 x 12 squat*", or "*3 sets of 12 squats*".

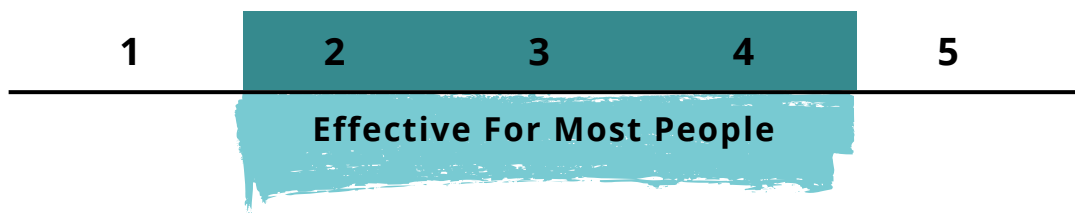


A repetition is when you do a movement once. In this example, one squat would be one rep. A set is a group of reps in a row. In this example, if you did 12 squats in a row, that would be one set.

Many people are concerned about doing the "right" number of sets and reps. In reality, there isn't really a "right" or "best" number. In fact, research has found that different people respond better to different numbers of sets and reps, depending on their individual physiology and genetics.

In general, anywhere between 2-4 sets and 4-15 reps can be effective for most people to build strength.

Number of Sets:



Number of Reps:



I recommend choosing your sets and reps depending on your training experience and your goals, then experimenting to see what works best for you.

How Many Sets And Reps Should You Do?

When you first start out with strength training, you'll get stronger and build muscle no matter how many sets and reps you do as long as you train consistently.

Most beginners don't need to do too much to see changes, so I recommend doing only two sets per exercise at first. Start with 12-15 reps per set, which gives you plenty of opportunity to practice learning good form for each exercise. You'll learn more about good exercise form later in this eBook.

After the first 6-8 weeks of consistent training, you'll benefit from doing a few more sets and moving to a rep range of 8-12.

Once you move past the beginner stage, usually after about six months of consistent training, it's time to vary the number of reps you do. You can choose your reps based on your goal.

For most people, lifting about 4-6 reps in each set is best for building maximal strength. Eight to 12 reps is good for muscle growth and definition. Higher reps, in the 12-15 rep

range, improves your muscular endurance. That means it increases your stamina and teaches your muscles to work longer before becoming fatigued. That's good for cardio-related goals. For example, if you want to complete a 5K run, muscular endurance will help.

You may find that you enjoy a certain rep range more than others. If that's the case, it's perfectly fine to base your training around the number of reps that feels best, as long as it's within the general guidelines.



With most of my clients (unless they have a specific strength or endurance goal), I mainly use the 8-12 rep range, with some sets of 4-6 and the occasional 12-15 rep set.

General Guidelines For Sets And Reps:

If you're just starting out:

Do 2 sets of 12-15 repetitions per exercise

After the first 6-8 weeks of consistent training:

Do 3-4 sets of 8-12 repetitions per exercise

*If you've been training consistently
for 6 months or more:*

Do 3-4 sets per exercise

Choose your rep range based on your goals:

Strength = 4-6 reps per set

Muscle Definition = 8-12 reps per set

Endurance (to help with cardio) = 12-15 reps per set

You can experiment with different sets and reps within these guidelines and see what works best for you.

When you do that, make sure to spend at least a few weeks on each set and rep range. Changing your program very often isn't a good idea. It takes time for your body to change, and if you jump from one thing to another too quickly you won't give it enough time to work for you.

Rest Between Sets

Rest times depend on your goals and rep ranges. If you're training for strength, you'll need the longest rest in between sets: about 2-3 minutes. If you're training for muscle definition, take about 1-2 minutes between sets. When training for muscular endurance with high reps, you should take very short rests between sets, about 30-60 seconds.

<i>Goal</i>	<i>Rep Range</i>	<i>Rest Between Sets</i>
<i>Strength</i>	<i>4-6</i>	<i>2-3 minutes</i>
<i>Muscle Definition</i>	<i>8-12</i>	<i>1-2 minutes</i>
<i>Endurance</i>	<i>12-15</i>	<i>30 - 60 seconds</i>

How Often Should You Train?

Aim for at least two strength training sessions each week. For best results, I recommend three full-body workouts per week.

If possible, you should train on non-consecutive days. That gives your muscles time to recover and adapt before your next workout.

Once you've been training consistently for more than six months, you could continue to do three full-body sessions per week or train even more frequently. If you want to train more frequently you should split your workouts into upper body and lower body sessions to allow each muscle group time to recover.

Example Training Schedule:

	<i>Mon</i>	<i>Tues</i>	<i>Wed</i>	<i>Thurs</i>	<i>Fri</i>	<i>Sat</i>	<i>Sun</i>
<i>3-Days Per Week:</i>		<i>Full Body</i>		<i>Full Body</i>		<i>Full Body</i>	
<i>4-Days Per Week:</i>	<i>Lower Body</i>		<i>Upper Body</i>	<i>Lower Body</i>			<i>Upper Body</i>

Train Movements, Not Muscles

A good strength training program works all your major muscle groups. That's very important to prevent muscle imbalances and injuries, as well as to stimulate strength and muscle growth.

Many mainstream programs prescribe exercises in terms of isolated body parts. They might do "back" exercises one day, "chest" the next, then "legs".

For the average person, that's not the most effective way to get the benefits of strength training, for several reasons.



First, this method of training is complicated and time consuming. There are 8-10 different major muscle groups (depending on how you split them up), and there are many different exercises you could do for each muscle group. That's a lot of exercises to learn and remember, and training your individual muscles this way requires a lot of time in the gym.

It's much better to set yourself up for success by keeping things simple.

More importantly, separating muscle groups doesn't train your body in the way it was meant to move.

The Most Effective Way To Work All Your Muscles

Muscles are not designed to work in isolation. If you think about your daily activities, you're constantly doing things that require your body to move in coordinated ways.

Every time you get in and out of a chair, walk up stairs, carry your groceries, push open a door, or lift your kids, you need many different muscles to work together effectively and efficiently.

If you train in a way that transfers to your daily life, you'll get more than just nice looking muscles. You'll be able to move through your day with more ease and less chance of pain.

Finally, exercises which use more than one muscle group at a time (known as "compound exercises") are the most effective at releasing hormones which stimulate muscle growth and strength gains.

Training Using Movement Patterns

Rather than splitting up exercises by individual muscles, a more savvy and practical method of strength training is to organize exercises in terms of movements.

My method focuses on five functional movement patterns. Together, these five movements will work all of your major muscle groups.

The Five Fundamental Movements:

Push Pull Squat Hinge Core

Movement

Muscles Worked

Push



Chest, Shoulders, Triceps

Pull



Back, Shoulders, Biceps

Squat



Quads, Glutes, Hamstrings

Hinge



Glutes, Hamstrings, Lower Back

Core



Deep Core Muscles, Abs

Push



The **push** movement is any exercise where you are pushing something away from your upper body.

That might be a push up, where you're pushing your body away from the floor, or any exercise with the word "press" in it, like a bench press, chest press, or shoulder press. Any time you push open a door, you're doing a push movement pattern.

The **pull** movement is the opposite of a push. You are pulling something towards you or pulling yourself towards something.

Pull ups or chin ups are in this category, and any exercise with the word "pull" or "row" in it. In real life, you do a pull movement any time you pull open a door.

Pull



Squat



Squat exercises have the word "squat" in the name, and for our purposes we will also put lunges into this category, since they are basically one legged squats.

You squat all the time, any time you get in and out of a chair or crouch down to play with a cute dog or a baby.

A **hinge** is when you bend at the waist, without bending your knees much. That's different than a squat, which is when you bend at the waist and at the knees about equally. The hinge builds strength in your back and legs with exercises like the deadlift or glute bridge. Any time you lift anything large and heavy, like a suitcase, you should be doing a hinge movement.

Hinge



Core

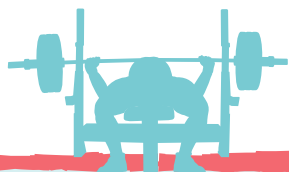


You're probably familiar with core exercises, like the plank. Less well-know core exercises include the dead bug, which is probably the best core exercise there is.

Core activation is incredibly important for protecting your spine and moving effectively. Any time you lift or hold anything away from your body, your core needs to be working.

Choosing Exercises

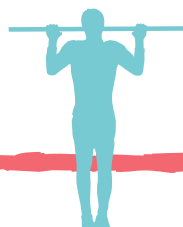
For an effective, full-body workout, choose 1-2 exercises from each of the movement categories. Here is a selection of exercises from each movement category.



Push

*Chest, Shoulders,
Triceps*

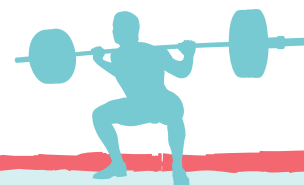
- Push Up
- Bench Press
- Chest Press
- Shoulder Press



Pull

*Back, Shoulders,
Biceps*

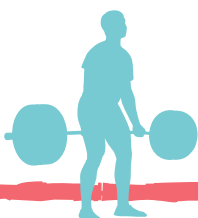
- Horizontal Row
- Pull Up
- One-Arm Row
- Bent-Over Row



Squat

*Quads, Glutes,
Hamstrings*

- Squat
- Barbell Squat
- Split Squat
- Lunge



Hinge

*Glutes, Hamstrings,
Lower Back*

- Hip Hinge
- Deadlift
- One-Leg Deadlift
- Glute Bridge

**Follow the
links to my
YouTube page
with videos
for each
exercise.**



Core

*Deep core
Muscles, Abs*

- Dead Bug
- Plank
- Side Plank
- Fitball Rollout

Exercise Order

You should start each workout with compound exercises that work your biggest muscle groups first, then move to smaller muscle groups. Since all the fundamental movements work several big muscle groups, you have a lot of flexibility in the way you arrange your exercises in each workout.

I usually recommend alternating between upper body and lower body exercises so you can recover and be ready to give 100% effort in your next exercise.

I also recommend doing your core exercises after your other fundamental movement exercises. Your core supports and stabilizes your back, so it's best not to fatigue those muscles until after you've done your other major exercises.

For example, you might do: Push, Squat, Pull, Hinge, then Core. Or you could do Hinge, Pull, Squat, Push, then Core.

After you've completed your five fundamental movements, you can also do isolation exercises for any specific muscles you want to focus on, like bicep curls or tricep extensions.

Example Full Body Workout:

<i>Movement</i>	<i>Exercise</i>	<i>Sets</i>	<i>Reps</i>	<i>Rest</i>
<i>Squat</i>	<i>Split Squat</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>8-12</i>	<i>60 sec</i>
<i>Push</i>	<i>Dumbbell Chest Press</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>8-12</i>	<i>60 sec</i>
<i>Hinge</i>	<i>Deadlift</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>8-12</i>	<i>60 sec</i>
<i>Pull</i>	<i>One-Arm Row</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>8-12</i>	<i>60 sec</i>
<i>Core</i>	<i>Plank</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>8-12</i>	<i>60 sec</i>

Good Form

Once you choose your exercises, you need to make sure you're doing them correctly, in other words, with "good form".

Good form means using the target muscles to perform a movement under control and through a full (pain free) range of motion.

The Importance of Always Using Good Form:

- *Ensures that you're putting the target muscles under the right stress so they can get stronger and more defined*
- *Decreases your risk of injury*
- *Builds confidence and increases motivation*

Good Form and Building Strength

Exercise is a form of good stress. To get results from your exercise program, you need to consistently and progressively stress your body over time, and it adapts by getting fitter and stronger. You'll learn more about how important that is later in this eBook.

Each strength training exercise stresses specific muscles. When you do push ups with good form, for example, you are mostly working your chest, with some help from your shoulders, triceps, and even your core.

A good form push up puts the correct muscles under enough stress to stimulate them to grow. When you don't use good form, you're either using the wrong muscles, so the right ones don't get the stress they need to grow, or you don't contract each of the correct muscles fully, which also doesn't give them the growth stimulus they need.

Good Form and Injury Prevention

Using good form keeps your muscles and joints safe from injury by avoiding unnatural positions and unnecessary strain.



In a good form push up, for example, you keep your upper arms at 45 degree angles to your torso and your entire body in a straight line. If you always do your push ups with good form, you'll protect your joints.

If your elbows start to flare out to the sides, it puts an unnecessary amount of strain on your shoulders and rotator cuffs, which can cause pain and other issues. Letting your lower back sag puts too much strain on your spine.

Good Form and Motivation

Imagine walking into a gym with the confidence that you know exactly what you're doing. As you go through each exercise, you're not worried that you're doing it wrong, that you might be wasting your time or setting yourself up for injury, or that someone might be judging you. Your mind is clear and you feel sure of yourself.

That confidence can improve your motivation. In fact, confidence is one of the three major factors for building effective motivation to exercise, because it opens the door to enjoyment.

Exercise releases many substances in your brain (like endorphins, but also many others), that contribute to positive feelings and improved mood.

When you really enjoy exercising, it's easy to work out. You want to do it, because your brain starts to crave those mood-boosting feelings.



When you don't feel confident in your form or your ability, though, it dampens those mood-boosting effects. If you're constantly worried about whether or not you're doing it right, it's harder to tap into those positive emotions.

Learn how to do each exercise correctly not only to get the maximum physical benefits, but also to unlock the mental benefits that can improve your motivation and help you build consistent exercise habits.

How To Learn Good Form For Each Exercise

I like to think of good form as "owning the movement". Owning the movement means you know what muscles you should be targeting, you're able to use a full range of motion, you're in total control of your body and the weights at all times, and you feel confident while doing the exercise.

The best way to make sure you're doing your exercises correctly is to have an expert teach you and give you feedback. Contact me to find out how I can help you get the most out of your strength exercises!

If you're doing it on your own, start with an easy version of each exercise. Use a mirror or take a video of yourself so you can see if you need to make any adjustments. Slowly increase the weight or difficulty as you become more confident with each movement.

Make sure you use the full range of motion for each exercise, not cheating by stopping short of the full movement. If you can't complete the full movement, the exercise is too hard for you and you should try an easier version that allows you to use a full range of motion. It's much better to do an easier version properly than to sacrifice form doing an exercise that you're not ready for yet.

When you're first learning how to do an exercise, think of it as a practice session rather than a workout. **You're learning movement skills, not just trying to fatigue your muscles.** Like any other skill, the more you practice each exercise, the better you'll get.

You could even do small practice sessions when you're not in the gym. For exercises like squats or push ups, do one or two reps every couple of hours throughout the day. That frequent practice will help your brain learn the movement pattern most efficiently, so when you do those exercises during your gym workouts you'll get the maximum benefits.

Tracking Your Workouts

A smart strength program doesn't include random exercises and leave you to guess how much weight to use for each one. A smart program has a direction and builds on itself, slowly and consistently challenging you so you get fitter and stronger.

You need to keep track of your progress so you know what you've done, what you should do in the next workout, and so you can see all the progress you've made.

Without tracking, you're just going through the motions of exercise, you're not really training.

Keep a log of your workouts. Record the exercises you did, how many sets and reps, and the weight you used.

Example Workout Log:

Movement	Exercise	Set 1		Set 2		Set 3		Set 4	
		Reps	Weight	Reps	Weight	Reps	Weight	Reps	Weight

Choosing Your Weights

Now that you know how many sets and reps to do, how to choose your exercises, and how to keep track of your workouts, the next step is deciding which weights to use. It's very important that you choose the right weight for each of your strength exercises. That means lifting weights that are heavy enough to challenge you.

The Importance of Lifting Heavy Weights:

- *Your muscles will only grow and get stronger if you stimulate them with challenging weights.*
- *Lifting too light means your muscles don't get the stimulus they need to grow, and you won't get the results you're working so hard for.*

What Does "Heavy" Weight Mean?

The term "heavy" makes some people nervous. Rest assured, lifting heavy weights doesn't mean you have to start throwing around huge dumbbells or load up a barbell with 200 pounds. **Heavy is relative to you; it's a feeling, not a number.** It's a weight that challenges and fatigues your muscles.

At first, 5 pound dumbbells might be heavy enough for you in certain exercises. As you get stronger, you should increase your weights to match your current strength level. You never need to lift more than you can handle.

Don't be scared off by talk of muscle growth or size, either. Despite what you may have heard, you can't build "longer" or "leaner" muscles. Your muscles can only get bigger or smaller.



If you want to look “toned” or “defined”, you do that by making your muscles bigger and losing body fat so you can see them. Lifting heavy weights (and practicing healthy eating) is the best way to achieve a toned look.



Some people are hesitant to lift heavy because they don't want to look big and bulky. The truth is that you have to train and eat in a very specific way, for a very long time, to look like a bodybuilder. It's extremely difficult, and it doesn't happen by accident.

If you're concerned about getting too muscular, I suggest you give heavy strength training a try and monitor your progress. If you feel that your muscles are getting too big, you can just back off the weights.

In my years as a trainer, though, I have never worked with a client who had to do this. Most are very happy with the way their appearance (and many other aspects of their life) changes when they start lifting heavy weights.

Finally, some people are concerned about the risk of injury. Strength training is not inherently dangerous, but injuries do happen. You can prevent them by working your way up to heavy weights slowly (using systematic progressions as you'll learn later in this eBook) and focusing on using good form in every exercise.

The Right Weight Is One That Challenges Your Muscles

The last 2-3 reps in each set should be very challenging, and you should finish the set when you feel that you couldn't do more than one more rep with good form.

You should also end the set feeling like you need a rest. If you finish the set and feel that you could immediately start the next one, you haven't challenged your muscles enough.

Learning how hard to push yourself is a skill. Take your time, and try to do a little more as you get more comfortable with your exercises.

How To Choose The Right Weights For Each Exercise

Figuring out the correct weight to use for each exercise is a process of trial and error.

You'll need to go through this process for every exercise. You'll be able to lift different amounts of weight depending on the exercise and the muscles you're using.

For example, you should usually use more weight on leg exercises than chest exercises, because your leg muscles are bigger and stronger than the muscles in your chest.

Even exercises for the same muscle group need different weights. Most people can lift more weight in a barbell chest press than a dumbbell chest press.

The weight you use will also depend on the number of reps you're aiming for. The fewer reps you're doing, the more weight you can lift.



Here's how to figure out the right weight for 8 reps, using the dumbbell chest press exercise as an example:

1 Take a Guess.

Choose a weight for your first set. It's a good idea to start lighter than you think you can handle.

Let's say for your first set of dumbbell chest presses, you choose a pair of 10 pound dumbbells.

As you do your set, pay attention to how challenging the weight feels. When you get to repetition number 8, assess how many more reps you feel like you could do.

Let's say you feel like you could do a 9th rep. You should do it and assess again.

If after your 9th rep you feel that you couldn't possibly do more than one more with good form, you should end the set.

In this case, you underestimated the amount of weight that you could lift for 8 repetitions. That's ok.

2

Adjust The Weight For Your Second Set.

For your second set, choose a heavier or lighter weight that brings the total number of reps you can do closer to 8.

In this example, since you underestimated on the first set you might increase the weight on your second set to a pair of 15 pound dumbbells. Again, assess how challenging the weight feels during the set, and end the set when you feel like you couldn't do any more with good form.

This time let's say you overestimated, and you can only do 7 repetitions with good form.

3

Adjust Again For Your Last Set.

On your third set, you might try a pair of 12 pound dumbbells. Maybe you're able to do 8 good form repetitions but you feel that you wouldn't be able to do a 9th rep, so you end the set at 8.

4

Record What You Did.

After each set, write down the number of reps you did and the amount of weight you used. Note that for dumbbell exercises, you record the weight of an individual dumbbell in the pair, not the combined weight of both dumbbells.

In this case, you were able to chest press 10 pounds for 9 reps, 15 pounds for 7 reps, and 12 pounds for 8 reps.

Now you know that for 8 reps of the dumbbell chest press, the right weight for you is a pair of 12 pound dumbbells. If you didn't quite figure out the right weight for 8 reps, try again the next time you do the exercise.

What About Bodyweight Exercises?

When you're doing an exercise that uses your own bodyweight as resistance rather than weights, like push ups or bodyweight squats, the same principles apply.

You need to figure out the variation of the exercise that makes it very challenging to complete 8 reps with good form.



For example, if you're doing incline push ups, you would use the same step-by-step system above but instead of adjusting weights, you would adjust the height of the incline in each set.

For the first set you might adjust a bar in a power rack to level 7, for example, and find that that's too difficult for 8 good form push ups. In that case you would adjust the bar up a level for the next set and try again, and so on until you find the right level for 8 reps with good form.

Progressing Your Strength Training

The key to getting the amazing benefits of strength training is to progress your workouts. To do that, you need to use an essential principle of exercise science, known as "Progressive Overload".

Progressive overload means making your workouts a little more difficult over time, to force your body to adapt and get fitter and stronger.

How Progressive Overload Works

Exercise, at its core, is a stress on your body. Just like there is good cholesterol and bad cholesterol, there is also good stress and bad stress. Exercise is a type of good stress.

The body doesn't like stress. It likes to keep a constant internal environment, which is called homeostasis. Even when it's faced with changes in the outside environment, your body will adjust so that things inside stay under control.

When you exercise, things change inside your body, and your body has to work hard to bring everything back to normal. So when you consistently stress your body with exercise, it does something pretty amazing. It adapts so that the next time it experiences that same level of stress, it can handle it more easily.

When your body adapts in these ways, it improves your overall health, makes you feel and function better, and helps you achieve your goals. Those adaptations are your results.



Adaptations to Strength Training and How They Translate To Results



Your brain gets better at sending signals to your muscles.

That improves coordination and helps you move more freely and easily, whether you're playing catch with your kids, climbing into a truck, or getting out of bed.



Your muscles get bigger and stronger.

When you get stronger through exercise, you're stronger all the time. You'll be able to move furniture without help and need less trips to bring in the groceries. Building muscle also improves metabolism, so you burn more calories.



Your tendons and ligaments get stronger.

When you accidentally trip over a curb, you're less likely to sprain an ankle.



Your bone density increases.

That trip and fall is less likely to break your bones.



Your heart gets stronger and better at pumping blood.

That helps you get more oxygen and nutrients to your muscles during exercise, and also reduces your overall risk of cardiovascular disease.



Your blood vessels handle pressure changes better.

When your heart pumps blood through your veins and arteries, the pressure in those blood vessels increases. They respond by expanding to let more blood through. When your blood vessels don't expand and contract well, you end up with high blood pressure. When you train your blood vessels to respond better, you decrease your blood pressure and your risk of a heart attack or stroke.



Your metabolism improves.

Along with the metabolism boosting effect of building muscle, exercise also makes your body better at burning fat. Your body uses fat as a fuel during exercise, so burning it more efficiently improves your performance. It also helps you burn fat when you're not exercising, which improves your body composition.

Making these adaptations uses energy and resources, and your body doesn't like to use extra energy unless it has to. It will only adapt if you force it to.

When you first start strength training, your body makes some adaptations to help you deal with the stress of lifting weights.

Once your body adapts to that stress, it doesn't need to adapt any more. It gets to a point where it can handle the exercises you're doing and the weights you're using. That's when you hit a "plateau" and you stop seeing results.

If you want to keep getting fitter and healthier, you need to keep stressing your body a little more than it's used to over time. That's where progressive overload comes in. Progressive overload means aiming to increase the difficulty of some aspect of your training. In other words, it means pushing a little harder each time you exercise.

There are many ways to use progressive overload in your training. You could lift more weight or do more reps or sets. The tricky part is knowing when you're ready to progress, and by how much. To simplify this process, I use a system that I call the **"Rep Range"** system.



How To Use The "Rep Range" System To Progress Your Strength Training

1

Choose a Repetition Range.

In the section on choosing the number of sets and reps, you may have noticed that I provided a range of repetitions for each goal rather than a single number. To build maximal strength, you should do 4-6 reps. For muscle definition, 8-12 reps is most effective, and 12-15 reps is best for muscular endurance.

You can use those ranges as a guide to make progress in your training. I'll use the 8-12 rep range as an example, but you can use this system with any rep range.

2

Start with a weight that's heavy enough for you to complete 8 reps (the bottom of the repetition range).

Remember that the weight should be heavy enough to challenge you for those 8 reps.

3

Every time you do that exercise again, use the same weight and try to do just one more rep in at least one set.

As you get stronger, you'll be able to do a little more in each workout. Take your time with this. Sometimes you'll be able to increase your reps a lot, and sometimes your progress will slow down. Be persistent and always aim to do a little more.

Soon, you'll be able to do 12 repetitions (the top of the rep range) in all of your sets with that weight.

4

When you reach the top of the repetition range, increase the weight in your next session.

When you can complete 12 reps in all your sets for a particular exercise, you're ready to increase the weight.

In your next session, increase the weight to a heavier one that takes you back to the bottom of the range (8 reps).

5

Start working your way back up to 12 reps again.

Repeat the process, aiming to do 1 more rep in each session with the same weight until you get back up to the top of the range.

Do this for as long as you want to get the life-changing results of strength training!

Example Rep Range System:

	Set 1		Set 2		Set 3	
	Reps	Weight	Reps	Weight	Reps	Weight
Week 1	8	20 lbs	8	20 lbs	8	20 lbs
Week 2	9	20 lbs	9	20 lbs	10	20 lbs
Week 3	10	20 lbs	11	20 lbs	11	20 lbs
Week 4	12	20 lbs	12	20 lbs	12	20 lbs
Week 5	8	25 lbs	8	25 lbs	8	25 lbs
Week 6	9	25 lbs	10	25 lbs	9	25 lbs
Week 7	10	25 lbs	11	25 lbs	11	25 lbs

Stronger!!!

Consistency

The fitness industry is full of empty promises about gaining muscle or changing your body quickly. Unfortunately, that's not how exercise works.

Building strength takes patience, persistence, and consistent effort. An important mindset shift is to think of it as a long-term process where you build slowly from one workout to the next.

That means not simply focusing on getting the most out of your current workout, but instead making sure that you'll also do the next workout, and the one after that, and so on, week after week, month after month, and year after year.

Consistency is absolutely the biggest factor in getting results from your training.

The Most Important Part of Building Strength:

~~The right exercises~~

~~"Feeling the burn"~~

~~The best equipment~~

~~Pushing yourself to the limit~~

~~The right number of reps~~

~~Feeling tired and sore~~

Not missing workouts

The best workout is the one you'll actually do, so lift in ways that you enjoy and that feel good for your body. If that means sticking to certain exercises that you're confident in, or using a certain repetition range that feels good for you even if it's not exactly in line with your goals, that's ok. If you only have time to do 1 set of each exercise, that's also ok.

The important thing is that you do something, anything, on a regular basis. Find ways to strength train consistently, even if it's not ideal, and you'll be well on your way to achieving your goals. Consistency isn't easy, but I can help you create exercise habits that fit into your lifestyle. Contact me to find out how!

Sample Program

This 3-day per week program is designed to build muscle definition. Do all sets for each exercise before moving to the next exercise.

Workout 1

Movement	Exercise	Sets	Reps	Rest
Push	Push Up	4	8-12	90 sec
Hinge	Glute Bridge	4	8-12	90 sec
Pull	Horizontal Row	4	8-12	90 sec
Squat	Squat	4	8-12	90 sec
Core	Plank	4	8-12	90 sec

Workout 2

Movement	Exercise	Sets	Reps	Rest
Squat	Lunge	4	8-12	90 sec
Pull	One-Arm Row	4	8-12	90 sec
Hinge	1-Leg Deadlift	4	8-12	90 sec
Push	Bench Press	4	8-12	90 sec
Core	Dead Bug	4	8-12	90 sec

Workout 3

Movement	Exercise	Sets	Reps	Rest
Hinge	Deadlift	4	8-12	90 sec
Push	Shoulder Press	4	8-12	90 sec
Squat	Split Squat	4	8-12	90 sec
Pull	Bent Over Row	4	8-12	90 sec
Core	Side Plank	4	8-12	90 sec

ABOUT ME



Sharon Gam, PhD

Personal Trainer and Strength Coach

I earned my PhD in exercise physiology from the University of Western Australia, and am a Certified Strength and Conditioning Coach and Certified Health Coach.

I specialize in strength training for mental health. In my more than 17 years of experience in the fitness industry, I've helped many people with anxiety, depression, ADHD, chronic dizziness, and chronic pain overcome their symptoms and achieve happier and healthier lives.

I know that achieving your goals isn't easy. I can help! **Contact me today** to find out about personalized, one-on-one coaching options!

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