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RuckingStart 12-Week Training Plan and Gear Guide

RuckingStart is a comprehensive program to take you from a beginner (or intermediate) rucker to confidently completing weighted hikes over 12 weeks. This guide compiles insights from military standards, fitness experts, and rucking communities to tailor the plan to *your* needs. We cover everything – from choosing gear on a budget to progressive training schedules – so you can customize your rucking plan for maximum success.

Introduction to Rucking and Its Benefits

Rucking is simply walking with a weighted pack (a "ruck") on your back – a practice with military roots that's now popular for fitness. It delivers a powerful combination of **cardio and strength training** in one workout [1]. The added weight strengthens your legs, core, back, and shoulders, while the walking improves endurance with lower impact than running. It's been shown that rucking **burns up to 3× more calories than regular walking** of the same distance. Beyond physical benefits, rucking builds mental toughness and can even improve posture if done with proper form. It's also highly accessible – all you need is a backpack and some weight. Before we dive into the 12-week plan, let's look at how to personalize the training to your situation.

Personalizing Your Rucking Plan

Every individual is different, so RuckingStart asks a few key questions to tailor the program to you. Be prepared to input the following:

- **Rucking Frequency:** How many days per week do you want to ruck? (3×, 5×, or 7×)
- **Terrain Preference:** Will you ruck on pavement, trails, incline (hills/treadmill), or a mix?
- **Body Weight:** This helps determine your target ruck weight (more on that below).
- **Rucking Experience:** Are you an **amateur** (new to rucking), **moderate** (some experience), or **expert** (seasoned rucker)? This is **separate from general fitness level** – even a very fit runner could be a rucking novice.
- **Overall Fitness Level:** Your baseline activity level (sedentary, moderately active, very fit) and any relevant training background.
- **Injury/Health Considerations:** Any joint issues, past injuries, or health concerns (e.g. back/knee problems) so the plan can adjust intensity.
- **Training Goal:** What is your goal? (General fitness, weight loss, preparing for a **military ruck test** or GORUCK event, etc.) This can influence target distances/paces.
- **Available Time per Ruck:** Approximate duration you can devote to each session (to scale distance).
- **Gear and Budget:** Do you plan to use purpose-built rucking gear or DIY weights from household items? Also, select a budget range (e.g. **"Under $300"** or **"Under $500"** for gear) if you intend to purchase equipment.

By customizing these factors, the program will adjust the weekly schedule (volume and intensity) and gear recommendations to fit you. Now, let's break down each of these customization points in detail.

Training Frequency: 3×, 5×, or 7× Per Week

How often should you ruck? RuckingStart lets you choose between 3, 5, or 7 days per week. Each frequency has pros and cons, and the plan structure will adapt accordingly:

- **3× per week:** Ideal for beginners or those who need more recovery time. You'll ruck on three non-consecutive days (e.g. Monday, Wednesday, Saturday), allowing a rest day after each session. Because of the rest, each ruck can be a bit longer or heavier. This schedule emphasizes quality over quantity – **longer rucks with ample recovery**. It's easier on the joints and reduces injury risk while you adapt. If you're new or have a busy schedule, 3×/week is a great choice.

- **5× per week:** A balanced approach for those with some fitness base. For example, you might ruck Monday–Friday and rest on weekends (or include a light active recovery walk on one weekend day). With 5 days, we'll vary the intensity: some days are short/easy rucks, others are longer or faster. This frequency builds consistency while still scheduling **1-2 rest days per week** for recovery. It's a common choice for intermediate plans – frequent enough to build habit and endurance, but not every single day.

- **7× per week:** Rucking every day can be done, especially once you've built a base, but it requires careful management. The plan will incorporate **active recovery rucks** (very light weight or short distance days) and alternate harder/easier days to avoid overtraining. Daily rucking is usually only recommended for advanced ruckers or those whose schedule favors doing a short walk each day rather than longer sessions less often. If you choose 7×/week, listen to your body – even a daily plan can be adjusted to include an occasional rest day if needed. Ensure that at least a couple days are low-intensity (e.g. a slow 1-mile ruck with minimal weight) to give your body a break while still keeping the streak.

No matter the frequency, **consistency is key**, but so is recovery. Even the military gradually increases ruck frequency and loads rather than starting every day. If you find yourself too sore or fatigued, RuckingStart can adjust your plan – don't hesitate to allow an extra rest day, especially in the beginning. Remember, rucking is an intense load-bearing exercise; your body needs time to adapt to avoid injuries like stress fractures or joint pain.

Terrain Selection: Pavement vs. Trail vs. Incline

The environment you ruck in will affect your training. RuckingStart lets you select your preferred terrain or a mix of all. Here's how each option influences your ruck:

- **Pavement/Sidewalk:** Rucking on roads or sidewalks is convenient and allows a steady, measurable pace. The smooth, hard surface makes it easier to maintain a specific speed (useful if you're aiming for a standard like a 15 min/mile pace). However, paved surfaces are high impact – you'll feel the weight more on your knees and shins. **Tip:** Wear cushioned running shoes or boots with good insoles on pavement to reduce impact. Also, be mindful of traffic and use reflective gear if rucking

along roads. Pavement is great for tracking progress (distance and speed), but if done exclusively, watch out for shin splints. Incorporating some softer terrain or varying incline can help.

- **Trail:** Trail rucking means hiking on dirt paths, grass, or uneven terrain. This is excellent for building stabilizing muscles in your ankles and hips because of the uneven ground. The softer surface is gentler on joints, but the constant small elevation changes and obstacles can make it more challenging. Expect your pace to be slower on trails – and that's okay. Focus on time on your feet rather than strict pace when off-road. **Footwear:** sturdy trail shoes or boots with ankle support are recommended, especially if carrying heavier weight, to protect against ankle rolls. Enjoy the scenery and fresh air – many find trail rucking more mentally refreshing, which can help you go longer distances. If you're preparing for a *military* or GORUCK event that will be on rough terrain, trail rucking is crucial in your training mix to mimic those conditions.

- **Incline/Hills:** Choosing incline means you'll purposefully include hills in your routes or use a treadmill set to an incline. Rucking uphill dramatically increases intensity – your heart rate and leg work will spike even at shorter distances. This is fantastic for building leg strength and conditioning (think of it as the ruck equivalent of stair climbing). If you select "incline," the plan will incorporate hill workouts or treadmill incline walks. Keep in mind that **downhills** can be hard on the knees under load, so if you climb a hill, come down cautiously (shorter steps, slow pace, or even remove some weight if your knees are hurting). One strategy is doing hill repeats where you can *ascend with the weight and possibly descend without as much weight* to reduce impact. Treadmills set at 5–10% incline are a controlled way to get this benefit without the downhill. Incline training is a great way to boost your rucking fitness, but it's intense – RuckingStart will ensure these workouts are spaced out and that you've built a base before tackling big hills.

- **Mixed Terrain:** For many users, a mix of all the above is best. The app can schedule, for example, one day on pavement (for pace training), one on trails (for endurance and ankle strength), and one hill workout per week for power. Mixing terrain not only keeps things interesting, but also prepares you for anything. **Military ruck marches** often cover varied terrain, so mixing conditions can be a good simulation. Just be sure to adjust expectations – a 3-mile trail ruck might fatigue you as much as a 4-mile road ruck due to the extra effort. We'll take that into account when planning your distances.

Whatever terrain you choose, a few universal **safety tips**: stay aware of your surroundings (especially on trails or roads – leave the headphones at home), let someone know your route if going out alone, and carry your phone in case of emergency. Terrain will affect difficulty, but with proper planning, all types can build your fitness.

Choosing Your Ruck Weight: How Much to Carry?

Selecting the right starting weight (and target weight) is a critical part of the plan. Carrying too much too soon can lead to injury, while carrying too little might not challenge you. We base our weight recommendations on expert guidelines and your body weight:

- **General Guideline (Body-Weight Rule):** Many experts use **150 pounds body weight** as a cutoff. If you weigh under 150 lb, a **20 lb** ruck is a good standard goal; if you weigh over 150 lb, aim for **30 lb**. These numbers come from GORUCK events and common challenges – for example, GORUCK Light

challenge often required participants <150 lb to carry a 20# plate and those >150 lb a 30# plate. They are considered weights that most people can handle after training. In our 12-week plan, we'll work you up to roughly that "standard" weight by the end (Week 12).

- **Start Lighter if Needed:** If you're brand new to rucking or not very active yet, you don't have to start at 20 or 30 lbs right away. In fact, **beginner recommendations are often as low as 10% of body weight** or even just 10 lbs to learn proper form. Our plan might start you around 10–15 lbs for the first week to see how it feels. Starting light (even just a backpack with a few textbooks) allows you to focus on posture and footing. *Don't compensate for a heavy ruck with bad posture!* Stand tall, shoulders back, core engaged – if you find yourself hunched over, it's a sign the weight is too heavy for now. We can always increase later. As one rucking coach put it, *"Strength and progress come from consistency, not overloading weight and suffering through a ruck."*

- **Top-End Limit:** For general fitness rucking, **avoid exceeding 1/3 of your body weight** in your pack. The risk of orthopedic injuries (knees, back, feet) goes up sharply beyond that. Military units sometimes carry heavier ("approach march loads" of 45%+ body weight in extreme cases), but those are outliers and require long conditioning (and often result in beat-up joints later [2]). For us, about 33% of body weight is a *ceiling*. For example, if you're 180 lb, one-third is ~60 lb – that would be an extreme goal for an expert over many months. Our 12-week program tops out around 30–50 lb at most (depending on your body and experience). If you ever *do* need to train beyond one-third body weight (say for a specific military selection), the rule is **increase gradually and carefully** – but again, that's outside the scope of a beginner-to-intermediate program like this.

- **Progressive Overload (Weight):** We will **progressively increase your ruck weight** over the 12 weeks. A common safe progression is adding **about 5 lbs every 1-2 weeks**. In other words, if you start with 10 lbs in Week 1, you might be at ~15 lbs by Week 3, ~20 lbs by Week 6, and so on, reaching your target by Week 12. This roughly aligns with the "10% rule" (increase weight ~10% per week). For example, 10% of a 20 lb starting weight is +2 lb – very manageable. In practice, we'll likely increase in slightly larger jumps (since weight plates or gear often come in 5 lb increments). Here's an example for a <150 lb person targeting 20 lb:

    - Week 1-2: Ruck ~10 lb
    - Week 3-4: Ruck ~15 lb
    - Week 5-12: Ruck ~20 lb (perhaps increasing to 20 a bit sooner and then focusing on distance).

For a >150 lb person targeting 30 lb:

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- Week 1-2: ~15–20 lb start
- Week 3-4: ~20–25 lb
- Week 5-8: ~30 lb (hit 30 by mid-plan)
- Weeks 9-12: possibly maintain 30 lb or push a tad beyond (35 lb) if preparing
for a harder event, but only with good form.
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The plan will adjust these numbers based on your experience. An **experienced rucker** might start at their full target weight immediately and instead focus on increasing speed or distance. Whereas a novice will ramp up weight more slowly. *Bottom line: we want you to reach the "recommended" ruck weight by Week 12,*

feeling comfortable and injury-free. That weight (20 or 30 lbs) is plenty to deliver results. You do **not** have to go heavier unless you have a specific reason. If you crave more challenge after week 12, we suggest increasing distance or pace rather than much more weight, in order to minimize injury risk.

Progressive Overload: Distance & Intensity Over 12 Weeks

Besides weight, we will also increase your **distance and/or speed** over time – this is called progressive overload, and it's how you build endurance. Here's how we structure the 12-week progression:

- **Starting Point (Week 1):** After your initial assessment, the plan will set a starting distance that is challenging but doable. For many beginners, this might be around **2 miles** per ruck at a comfortable walking pace. If you chose 3×/week, maybe you'll do two 2-mile walks and one slightly longer 3-mile on the weekend. If you chose daily rucking, perhaps 1-2 miles each day to start. The idea is to establish a baseline. *Don't worry if it feels easy:* Week 1 is about learning how it feels to ruck with weight, breaking in your shoes/gear, and practicing form.

- **Weekly Increases:** A classic guideline is to increase your total weekly volume or longest ruck by **no more than 10% per week**. RuckingStart follows this principle. For example, if in Week 1 you totaled 6 miles (say 3 rucks of 2 miles each), Week 2 might total ~6.5–7 miles. This could be achieved by adding a half-mile to one or two of your rucks. We might also add a little weight that week (e.g. going from 10 lb to 15 lb as mentioned earlier). However, we generally **increase one factor at a time** – either weight or distance, not both simultaneously. So a typical pattern might be: increase distance one week, hold weight steady; the next week increase weight slightly, hold distance steady, and so on. This "stair-step" ensures your body adapts to one stress at a time, which is exactly how the military safely builds ruck march ability (gradually upping weight & miles so recruits adapt without getting hurt).

- **Mid-Point (Weeks 5-8):** By the middle of the program, you should be rucking at least 3-4 miles per session (for 3× or 5× per week programs) or around 2 miles even on daily shorter rucks. Your weight should be at or above half of your target by around Week 6. For instance, a >150lb person should be comfortable with ~25 lb by Week 6, en route to 30 lb. We will likely introduce some **faster rucks or interval training** in this phase as well: for example, rucking a shorter distance but aiming for a brisk pace (maybe try a **1-2 mile ruck at a 15–16 min/mile pace** one day to build speed, which is quite brisk walking). By practicing some faster pace work, your normal pace will start feeling easier with the weight. *Military pace standard is 15 minutes per mile (4 mph)*, which is a solid goal for fitness ruckers too. Early on you might be at 18-20 min/mile; by mid-program we'll aim to bring that down toward 15-17 min/mile on at least flat terrain.

- **End-Point (Week 12):** In the final week, you should be hitting your top weight (20 or 30 lb for most, or whatever personalized target we set) and a good distance. Typically, the plan will culminate in a "peak week" challenge. For example, we might schedule a **5-6 mile ruck at target weight** for a 3×/week user, or a couple of shorter fast rucks and one long ruck for a 5× user. If your goal is a specific event (say a **12-mile, 3-hour military ruck test**), we will tailor the final weeks to approach that goal – perhaps an 8-mile timed ruck in week 10, 10-mile in week 11, etc., leading up to 12 miles. But for general fitness users, an ultimate test could be something like a **timed 3-mile** or **5-mile** ruck at full weight to see how you've improved. By week 12, you will likely feel a huge difference – what used to be hard (e.g. 2 miles with 10 lb) might now feel easy. As one seasoned rucker noted: *"After a few*

weeks where 70 lbs is the norm, I feel like I'm floating with only 30 lbs on my back." – While we won't be doing 70 lb in this program, the sentiment holds: your training weight will feel lighter as you get stronger.

- **Sample Weekly Breakdown:** (Assuming a 5×/week schedule for a moderately fit 180 lb person aiming for 30 lb)

- **Week 1:** 5 rucks × 1.5 miles each @ 15 lb (easy pace 20 min/mi). Total ~7.5 miles. Focus on form and breaking in gear.

- **Week 2:** 5 rucks × 2 miles each @ 15 lb (slightly brisker on flat days). Total 10 miles. (Distance ↑)
- **Week 3:** 5 rucks, four at 2 mi and one "long" 3 mi @ 20 lb. Total ~11 mi. (Weight ↑)
- **Week 4:** 5 rucks, two days 3 mi, others 2 mi @ 20 lb, try hill on one day. Total 12+ mi. (Distance ↑, introduced incline)
- **Week 5:** 5 rucks, one interval/faster 2-miler, one long 4-miler @ 25 lb. Others ~3 mi @ 20-25 lb. (Weight ↑, intensity ↑)
- **Week 6:** 5 rucks, long day 4.5 mi @ 25 lb, pace day aiming 15:30 min/mi @ 20 lb, etc. Total ~15 mi.
- **Week 7:** 5 rucks @ 30 lb on flat days (target weight reached), long day back to 4 mi but with 30 lb.
- **Week 8:** 5 rucks, total ~18 mi. Possibly a benchmark **3-mile timed ruck** @ 30 lb (aim ~45-50 minutes).
- **Week 9:** Recovery-light week: drop to 4 rucks, slightly lower weight or distance to rest (very important to avoid overtraining – plan may schedule a "deload" week here).
- **Week 10:** 5 rucks, ramp back up. If goal event, maybe 8-mile at easy pace @ 30 lb. If general, maybe maintain 4-5 mi long.
- **Week 11:** Peak volume week. E.g. 5 rucks totaling 20+ miles. Possibly a 10-mile ruck (for endurance goal) or a faster 5-mile.
- **Week 12:** Taper and test. Early week normal short rucks, then a final **12-mile test @ 35 lb in <3 hours** for military goal (or a scaled test for fitness goal). Or simply a celebratory tough ruck with friends/community.

Note: The above is just an illustrative example. Your actual plan will be customized to your inputs (frequency, experience, etc.). For instance, a 3×/week beginner plan will have fewer sessions but each slightly longer – perhaps starting with 2, 2.5, and 3 miles in week1 (total ~7.5), and working up to, say, 5, 6, 8 miles in week11 (total ~19), with 20 lb, then doing a final 10-mile hike in week12 with 20 lb as a capstone. A daily plan might keep each ruck shorter (many ~2-3 mile outings) but accumulate more total volume spread out.

- **Monitoring Intensity:** We encourage using perceived exertion or even a heart-rate monitor to gauge intensity. As one Reddit rucker described, over time your heart rate for a given weight and pace will drop – what used to put you at 70% max heart rate might become only 60% as you get fitter. This is a great sign of progress. When things feel easier, it's time to either add a bit more weight or speed up the pace to keep improving. The app will ask for your feedback on difficulty to adjust the progression – it's not strictly linear if you're struggling or, conversely, if you find it too easy.

- **Recovery and Deloads:** The plan will also schedule rest days (especially in 3× or 5× programs) and may include a lighter week around Week 9 as shown, to let your body consolidate gains. Use rest days for stretching, foam rolling, and maybe light cardio or yoga to stay loose. Rucking is taxing, so

don’t skip recovery! Good sleep and nutrition (protein for muscle repair, carbs for energy) will help you get the most out of training.

Adjusting for Experience Level

Whether you’re a total beginner or an experienced rucker, the program will adjust starting points and progression speed:

- **Amateur/New Rucker:** If you indicate low rucking experience, RuckingStart will start *very easy*. This might mean beginning with just **10 lbs** (or even unweighted walks if you’re very detrained) and short distances (1-2 miles). We might even begin with 2 days/week for the first week to gently introduce you. The focus for newbies is learning proper **technique**: how to wear the pack, how to distribute weight (we’ll cover packing in the gear section), and how your body reacts. Foot blisters, sore shoulders, and stiff legs are common in the first couple weeks – we’d rather you experience that with a light load than jump in too heavy. As you adapt, the plan will ramp up. But expect a beginner to perhaps take an extra week or two to reach the target weight. For example, rather than hitting 20 lb by Week 6, a beginner might only get there by Week 8 or 10, and that’s okay. **Injuries come from doing too much too soon**, so we’ll err on the side of caution. You might also get additional educational tips through the app (like how to care for your feet) which an experienced person may not need. By the end of 12 weeks, even a newbie should be able to complete a solid ruck (e.g. 5+ miles with 20#) thanks to steady progress.

- **Moderate Experience:** If you’ve done some rucking or long hiking before, the plan assumes you have a bit of conditioning. We’ll likely start you at a moderate weight (perhaps 15–20 lbs) and a bit more mileage. You might skip ahead to a Week-2 or Week-3 level plan right off the bat. For instance, rather than 2-mile rucks, you might start at 3 miles. We’ll still increase gradually, but you could reach the full 30# weight sooner (maybe by week 6 or 7) and then use the remaining weeks to go further/faster. We also may include more challenging elements like interval rucking (alternating fast/slow segments) or more hill work, since you can handle basics. Essentially, a moderate rucker’s program is “compressed” – you progress faster because you don’t need as long at the very low training loads. We also trust that you have some idea of how your body reacts, so the program might push you a bit harder initially, knowing you can dial back if needed.

- **Expert/Veteran Rucker:** If you’re already an expert (say you’ve completed events, or you regularly ruck heavy), our plan will serve as a structured progression to perhaps improve a specific aspect (like increasing your speed, or preparing for a high-mileage event) rather than teaching basics. We might start you at 30# right away and perhaps higher mileage, depending on your inputs. The progressive overload principles still apply – even an experienced rucker shouldn’t increase weight or distance too recklessly. But your jumps between weeks might be larger or your pace goals more aggressive. For example, an expert track (7×/week perhaps) could include advanced workouts such as ruck **shuffling** (a gentle jog with a ruck) on soft terrain, or hybrid workouts (mixing calisthenics and rucking) to mimic GORUCK challenge conditions. We’ll also assume you have your gear dialed in (broken-in boots, etc.), so fewer educational interludes and more focus on performance metrics. One thing to note: even if you’re experienced, this 12-week plan might help fix bad habits. Many self-taught ruckers discover they were overstriding or hunching; following our cues on form can improve efficiency and reduce chronic pains. An expert can also consider increasing beyond the standard weights if appropriate – e.g. an experienced 200 lb rucker might aim for training with 45 lb

eventually (since 30 lb is relatively easy for them). We allow those custom goals, but again emphasize the **<1/3 bodyweight rule** for long-term joint health.

Regardless of level, one thing remains true: **listen to your body**. The app will prompt you for feedback; don't ignore signs of overuse (excessive soreness, worsening shin/knee pain, etc.). An expert might feel confident to push through anything, but sometimes a step back is needed to avoid injury that could set you back weeks. Meanwhile, a beginner might be overly cautious – the plan will encourage you when it's time to step up the challenge so you keep improving.

Finally, if you indicated a very **high overall fitness level** (say you're a marathon runner but new to rucking), the plan will acknowledge your cardio is strong. You might handle longer distances easily, but we'll watch out for **unique rucking stress** (like how your shoulders and back feel under load). You may progress faster in distance but still need a gradual weight ramp-up to let your joints get used to the load. Conversely, if you're strong from weightlifting but not used to endurance, the plan will push your mileage more while weight might not be an issue. In short, the experience and fitness inputs allow a nuanced plan that targets your weaknesses – building endurance for the strong, building strength for the endurance athletes, and building both for the novice.

Essential Gear: Budget Options vs. DIY Hacks

One of the biggest questions for new ruckers is **"What gear do I need, and do I have to spend a lot?"** The good news: you can start rucking with basically **$0 investment** – use any sturdy backpack and put some weight in it, and you're good to go. That said, there is specialized rucking gear that can enhance comfort and durability, and some people love to geek out on equipment. RuckingStart will tailor its gear recommendations based on whether you want to **buy purpose-built gear** or **DIY with what you have**, and according to your budget (< $300 or < $500). We'll ensure you know all the **"ruck hacks"** to add weight cheaply and safely. Below is an extensive list of gear considerations and weight hacks:

Rucksack (Backpack) Selection

- **Use What You Have (at first):** To get started, you do **not** need an expensive pack. Any backpack that can hold the weight securely will work. If you have a school backpack or a daypack for hiking, you can use that initially. Just be mindful of the weight capacity – a flimsy drawstring bag won't cut it, but a decent bookbag can often handle 20-30 lbs no problem. If using your laptop backpack, consider removing the laptop first . One tip: use the built-in laptop sleeve (if it has one) to snugly hold flat weights like plates or books – this keeps weight from shifting around. Also, cinch the shoulder straps tight so the pack rides high on your back, and use the sternum strap if available.

- **Upgrading Your Ruck (budget < $300):** If you are willing to invest up to $300, you have many good options. Military surplus stores sell used ALICE packs or MOLLE packs (standard issue rucks) that are very durable, often under $100. There are also commercial packs geared toward rucking and hiking in the $150–$250 range (brands like 5.11 Tactical's RUSH series, 3V Gear's Velox II, or Mystery Ranch packs). What makes a pack good for rucking? **Look for:** wide padded shoulder straps, a waist/hip belt, and compression straps. A frame (internal or external) helps if you carry heavier loads (>30 lbs) by distributing weight. Many civilian hiking backpacks have these features and work great. For example, an **internal frame backpack** rated for 40+ lbs will comfortably support your ruck weight. In the ~$200 range, you can find a quality pack that will last years. If budget is tight, even a $50-80

durable backpack (with good reviews for carrying heavy textbooks) can suffice for moderate weights – just test it gradually.

- **Top-Tier Rucking Packs (budget < $500):** With up to $500, you could opt for premium packs like the GORUCK line (GR1, Rucker, etc.) which cost around $300–$400 new. These are extremely tough (built to withstand warzones) and have purpose-built features like dedicated **ruck plate pockets** and bombproof stitching. They often come with a lifetime warranty. Other high-end options might include Mystery Ranch tactical packs or Kifaru packs (used by serious hikers/hunters) which can run $300+. If you have the funds and plan to ruck long-term, these packs are an investment in comfort and durability. **However**, functionally they won't *carry the weight any faster for you* – a cheaper pack can do the job, just perhaps with a bit less comfort or longevity. Many in the rucking community start with a simple pack and only upgrade if they really fall in love with the hobby. Our advice: if you're unsure, start cheap; you can always reward yourself with a fancy ruck after completing the 12-week challenge!

- **Pack Fitting & Usage Tips:** Regardless of pack, how you wear it matters. Keep the weight high and close to your spine – tighten those shoulder straps. If the pack has a **hip belt**, use it (especially on long rucks) to shift some load to your hips – this spares your shoulders and backs for a while. Even a simple webbing waist strap can help steady the pack. If you don't have a hip belt, you can DIY one or repurpose an old backpack's belt if it fits onto your pack. Also, ensure nothing hard is stabbing your back; we'll cover padding in the "weight" section below.

Footwear and Foot Care

- **Shoes/Boots:** Your feet will literally carry the load, so good footwear is crucial. If you have comfy broken-in **running or walking shoes**, those are fine for lighter rucking (especially on pavement). As weight or distance increases, many prefer light **hiking boots or trail shoes** for more support. Boots designed for rucking (like GORUCK's MACV-1 or MACV-2 boots) emphasize support and stability. The trade-off: boots can be heavier and sometimes overkill for short easy rucks. Some experts advocate a more minimalist shoe to strengthen the feet (as long as you ease into it) [3] [4], whereas military training often requires combat boots. **Our recommendation:** use whatever footwear you're most comfortable walking a few miles in. If you go with boots, make sure to **break them in** before doing long rucks – wear them around the house, on short walks, etc., to mold them to your feet. If using athletic shoes, ensure they fit well (your feet swell during rucking, so a little toe room is good). Also consider the terrain: for trails and mud, boots or trail shoes with good tread will prevent slips; for road, running shoes are fine. Ultimately, *avoid cheap, unsupportive footwear* – the stress of rucking can quickly cause foot pain if shoes are worn-out or poorly fitting.

- **Socks:** This might seem minor, but socks can make or break your ruck. **Never wear cotton socks** for rucking – cotton traps moisture and causes blisters. Go for **merino wool or synthetic blend socks**, which wick sweat and reduce friction. Many ruckers swear by merino wool socks (hiking socks) because they regulate temperature and even resist odor. A common hack is to wear a thin liner sock (polypropylene or nylon) under a wool sock – the two layers rub against each other instead of your skin, preventing blisters. The plan might remind beginners to double up if hot spots occur. **Bring spare socks** on long rucks; if your feet get wet or a blister is forming, changing into dry socks can save the day. Good socks might cost $10-20 a pair, but they are well worth it for comfort. This fits in any budget since you likely already have some athletic socks; just make sure they are moisture-

wicking. A little foot powder or anti-chafe balm on your feet can also help prevent blisters on longer outings (especially in humidity). We'll provide foot care tips in the app as distance increases.

- **Orthotics/Insoles:** If you have known foot issues (flat feet, plantar fasciitis, etc.), consider using orthotic insoles in your rucking footwear. The extra weight can aggravate arch problems. A cushioned insole or custom orthotic can provide support. This is personal preference – some ruckers go without any extra padding to toughen their feet, others need that cushion. Use what has worked for you on long walks.

- **Foot Conditioning:** Be aware that rucking will strengthen your feet and ankles over time (which is good), but the process can be uncomfortable initially. Blisters, sore arches, or Achilles tendon soreness can happen. Our gradual progression helps mitigate this. On rest days, simple exercises like writing the alphabet with your toes (ankle mobility) or doing calf raises can help your lower legs adapt. Walking barefoot on grass or sand for a few minutes can also improve foot strength (or as StrongFirst coaches say, do some light barefoot activity to build ankle resilience) [5]. Just don't overdo new footwear or barefoot work too quickly – gradual adaptation is key to avoid injury [6].

"What Do I Use for Weight?" – Purpose-Built vs DIY

Now for the fun part: **adding weight to your pack**. There are many ways to create 10, 20, or 30 pounds of load. We'll break it into two categories:

- **Purpose-Built Weights:** These are products made for rucking (or weight training) that you can use.
- **DIY & Household Weights:** Creative "hacks" using cheap or free items to get weight in your pack.

We'll list a bunch of options with their approximate **cost per pound** (so you can compare value). Feel free to choose any combination that hits your target weight and fits your budget.

Purpose-Built Options:

- **Ruck Plates:** These are **compact metal weights** designed to fit in ruck sacks. Companies like GORUCK, Rogue Fitness, Titan Fitness, Fringe Sport, and others sell plates in common sizes (10lb, 20lb, 30lb, 45lb, etc). They often have handles and a smooth coating. The advantage is they are small and ergonomic – easy to secure in your pack without shifting. The downside is **price**: ruck plates cost around \$2–$3 per pound (for example, ~$65-75 for a 30# plate) when new, plus shipping. GORUCK's official plates are high quality but pricey (in 2018 a 20# GORUCK plate was about $84 shipped). Some alternatives like Titan or Yes4All plates on Amazon are a bit cheaper. As a rough guide, a 20 lb ruck plate might run \$50, and a 30 lb plate ~$70. That's $2.50/lb on average. Used market: sometimes you can find second-hand ruck plates in rucking groups for cheaper. **When to choose:** If you have the budget and plan to ruck long-term, one or two ruck plates are a convenient investment. They make loading the pack easy and consistent. If you selected the <$500 budget tier, a ruck plate purchase could fit in. Under <$300, you might still afford one 20# plate (~$60) and use DIY for additional weight if needed.

- **Dumbbells or Weight Plates:** If you already own gym equipment, you can simply use that. For instance, an old **dumbbell** or a couple of **barbell plates** can go in your backpack. Wrap them in a towel to pad sharp edges [7]. Standard weight plates (iron) typically cost about \$1.50–$2 per pound

new (cheaper if you find used ones). So a 10 lb plate might be $15. The cost per lb here is ~$1–2, which is actually better than specialized ruck plates in many cases (since those often include a premium). However, regular plates are round and can move around more in the pack; you'll need to secure them (towel wrap or put in a tight box). A **pro-tip** from experienced ruckers: put plates or dumbbells **vertically** in your pack (standing on end) rather than flat at the bottom – this keeps the weight higher on your back and prevents it from banging around [8] [7]. Use a towel or foam to wedge it tight against the back of the pack. If you have adjustable dumbbells or small weight plates (5lb, 10lb sizes), you can incrementally increase weight easily. Just be cautious about metal edges wearing through your pack fabric over time – padding is your friend.

- **Weighted Vests:** While not a backpack, a **weighted vest** can serve a similar purpose by adding weight to your body. Some people use vests (common in crossfit) that can hold weight plates or sandbags. Vests distribute weight on your torso more evenly and don't put pressure on your shoulders like a backpack does. They can be a good option if you have one, especially for shorter rucks or workouts (lunges, etc.). However, part of rucking's challenge is the specific strain of a backpack load, so we generally stick to packs for this program. Vests also can get quite hot. If you already own a weighted vest (say a 20 lb vest), you could certainly use it for some training in addition to or instead of a backpack – the cardio effect is similar. Cost: weighted vests range from $50 (for 20 lb fixed weight) to $150+ (for adjustable ones). Cost per pound roughly $2-3, similar to ruck plates. We mention it for completeness, but our plan will assume a backpack unless you specify otherwise.

- **Sandbag Trainer or Filler Bags:** Some companies make **sandbag weights** specifically to go in packs. For example, GORUCK has "sand kettlebells" and filler bags (sometimes called "brick bags") that you fill with sand to a desired weight. A common one is a 10L or 20L dry bag that you fill with sand – essentially creating a soft pillow of weight that fits nicely in your ruck. GORUCK's Brick Bag, for instance, can hold about 20-30 lbs of sand and then be placed in your pack. These are durable and have roll-top closures to avoid spillage. Cost for brand-name bags can be $20-$40 empty. Of course, you also need to buy sand (which is cheap, see DIY section) to fill them. If you like a neat solution and are willing to spend a bit, a filler bag is great – it prevents mess and is easier on the pack than loose materials or hard metal. **Cost per lb:** negligible for the sand itself, but the bag costs extra. Sea-to-Summit (a camping brand) makes durable dry bags that can serve this purpose as well.

- **Others:** Kettlebells can be used (some put a kettlebell in a backpack), but they tend to swing unless packed very tightly – not ideal. There are also products like water bladders specifically made heavy (we'll actually cover water as DIY below). If you're very budget-flexible, you could even consider specialty training gear like a weight sled drag, but that's beyond our scope. Most purpose-bought solutions boil down to: **metal plates** or **contained sand**.

DIY and Low-Cost Weight Hacks (Cost per Pound):

If you indicated you want to DIY your weights or keep costs minimal, we have **lots of creative hacks**. These options are extremely budget-friendly – many basically *free* – and allow fine-tuning weight. Here's an extensive list, with rough price estimates:

- **Play Sand:** Perhaps the cheapest weight you can buy. A typical **50 lb bag of sand** from a home improvement store (Home Depot, Lowe's) costs around **\$5** (sometimes as low as \$4 or even \$3). That's roughly **\$0.10 per pound** – incredibly cheap. You can find 50 lb "play sand" or "tube

sand" (used for adding weight to trucks or for kids' sandboxes). Sand is great because it's dense but also moldable – fill it in a sturdy bag and it won't rattle or shift much. **How to use:** Don't just dump loose sand in your pack (unless you want a mess!). Put it in **double or triple bags**. For example, fill 1-gallon ziplock freezer bags with sand (each will hold ~10 lbs), then duct tape them closed, and perhaps put those inside an old pillowcase or canvas bag. This creates manageable "sand bricks". Alternatively, use contractor-grade trash bags or dry bags for larger amounts. Once sealed, the sand bag will conform to your pack shape. A known DIY trick is the **"sandbag pill"** – basically making a brick of sand and taping it up. AllDayRuckoff (a rucking blog) has guides on making these. With sand, you can create any weight you need by varying how much you fill. *Pro:* Dirt cheap, available everywhere, and you can dump some out mid-ruck if needed (more on that later). *Con:* Potential for leakage (tape it well!), and sand can shift a bit (pack it tightly). Also, you'll want to line your pack with a garbage bag as insurance against leaks if using sand. **Price per lb: ~$0.05–$0.10.**

- **Dry Soil or Cat Litter:** Similar to sand, but sometimes even easier to find in certain areas: large bags of **garden soil** or **clay cat litter**. These usually come in 20-40 lb bags. For instance, a 20 lb bag of cheap cat litter might be about \$6-8 (so ~$0.30-0.40/lb) [9]. Cat litter is basically clay granules – a bit lighter per volume than sand, and usually dustier. It works in a pinch (some have used it when sand wasn't handy). Garden soil is even less dense, so you'd need a bigger volume for the same weight (not ideal). Overall, sand is better due to density, but we mention these if you happen to have a bag in the garage. **Pro tip:** Unscented clumping cat litter in a doubled bag can work and might feel slightly "softer" than sand when packed. But be cautious: if it gets wet, clumping litter turns to clay paste – not fun to clean. Price per lb is higher than sand, so only use if you have it already. **Price per lb:** ~$0.30 (litter), ~$0.20 (soil).

- **Water:** Water is a *brilliant* and often overlooked ruck weight, especially for beginners. Why? Because you can **dump it out** if things get too hard. Fill up sturdy water jugs or bladders and put them in your pack. For example, a standard gallon jug of water weighs 8.3 lbs. If you put two gallon jugs in your ruck, that's ~16.6 lbs. You can adjust weight by how full the jugs are. If mid-hike you feel you overpacked, simply pour out some water (or drink it!). This adjustable nature is a *huge advantage for safety*. Many ruckers start with water weight for this reason. Also, you stay hydrated – you can drink from your weight as you go, making the pack lighter over time (planned "progressive unloading"!). You can also use specialized water reservoirs (hydration bladders like CamelBak or Platypus) – a 2L bladder holds ~4.4 lbs, a 3L ~6.6 lbs. You could carry several. Water is basically free (tap water) aside from the container cost. A collapsible water bladder or even empty 2-liter soda bottles work. Pro: No mess (if sealed), and easy to drop weight. Con: Water sloshes – to reduce this, fill containers completely (air causes slosh) or use smaller containers. Pro tip: If using a large water bladder for weight, try to pack it tightly so it doesn't flop; or use multiple smaller bottles distributed evenly. **Cost per lb:** practically $0 (even buying a gallon of water at the store is ~$1 for 8 lbs, so $0.12/lb, and reusable).

- **Bricks:** Before fancy ruck plates existed, GORUCK Challenge participants often used bricks as weights (hence the "brick bag" name for those sandbags). Standard **house bricks** weigh about 4–5 lbs each [10]. They are dirt cheap: you can buy individual bricks at Home Depot/Lowes for around **$0.50 – $0.80 each** [11] [12]. That's roughly $0.10–$0.16 per pound – extremely cost-effective. Five bricks could give ~25 lbs for under $4. **How to use:** Wrap each brick in duct tape (and foam or cardboard) to blunt sharp edges and contain dust. Then you can put them in a small bag or pouch so they don't clank. GORUCK used to recommend 6 bricks as the standard weight for some events (with

each brick taped and then all placed in a secure bag). Bricks are nice because you can add/remove one at a time to adjust weight. They stack in a pack fairly well, especially if you have a padded laptop compartment. Downsides: they are *hard* (no give against your back) – so ensure padding between you and the bricks. Also, bricks can wear through fabric if they shift, so tape them smooth. But many have successfully rucked with bricks for years. If you have some old bricks lying around (or chunks of concrete), congratulations, you have free weight. Just contain any debris. **Price per lb:** ~$0.10 (super cheap).

- **Metal Scrap or DIY Plate:** If you're handy, you can make your own "ruck plate" by obtaining a piece of scrap metal or steel plate. Some people get **cut steel pieces** to specific dimensions. For example, a reader on a blog got a 20 lb cut of steel for \$20 from a local metal shop – just $1 per pound, a bargain compared to commercial plates. You'd need to sand sharp edges and maybe tape it up to prevent rust and damage. But essentially, metal is metal – an **8×10 inch steel plate** can weigh ~20 lbs if thick enough, functioning just like a ruck plate. If you have access to scrap yards or know a welder, you might craft custom weights cheaply. This is more effort, of course. For most, sand or bricks is easier DIY, but it's an option especially if you want a heavy weight (e.g. a 45 lb plate cut to size) without paying $150. Just remember to protect against sharp edges and rust (some tape or Plasti Dip coating works). **Price per lb:** ~$1 or less (scrap rates).

- **Old Textbooks or Books:** Got a stack of hefty textbooks collecting dust? Use them! Hardcover textbooks can weigh 3-5 lbs each. Fill your pack with a few and you've got weight. Cost is free if you already own them. To know the weight, you might have to weigh them on a scale. Pack them tightly so they don't shift – you can wrap them together with a belt or tape. Downsides: books are a bit bulky for the weight they provide (not as dense as sand/metal), so your pack may get filled up volume-wise before it's very heavy. Still, for ~10-20 lbs, books work fine and they're easy on the backpack (soft, won't damage fabric). Just don't use books you care about *pristine*, as they might get scuffed. This is a great zero-cost method for a beginner starting at 10-15 lbs. **Price per lb:** $0 (sunk cost of books).

- **Concrete Blocks or Paver Stones:** Small concrete paving stones or cinder blocks can be used similarly to bricks. A 12″ concrete paver (the kind you use in gardens) can weigh around 8-12 lbs depending on thickness. Some use **concrete half-blocks**. These are awkward shapes, but if it fits in your pack, it's a cheap heavy item. Often you can find extra pavers or chunks of concrete for free. If you really want to get creative, you can cast your own concrete weight in a box to perfectly fit your pack dimensions (there are guides where people poured concrete into a mold with handles to make DIY ruck plates). That's probably overkill for most, but it's doable with a ~$5 bag of cement (which itself weighs 60-80 lbs if you need raw weight!) – speaking of which: a **bag of cement mix** is another weight hack. A typical QUIKRETE bag, 60 lbs, is about \$5, similar to sand cost but heavier bag. You *could* just throw that bag in your ruck, but it would be very uncomfortable and likely to rip – better to split it into smaller bags and tape them. A StrongFirst coach mentioned using bags of cement wrapped in duct tape as his ruck weights, and found them comfortable and *"available cheaply at your local home improvement store"*. So yes, even a bag of concrete can become multiple 10 lb taped "bricks". **Price per lb:** ~$0.08 (cement).

- **Case of Bottled Drinks:** This is a fun one – if you have a full **case of water bottles or beer** (cans/bottles) – you can simply put the closed case in your pack. A 24-pack of standard 16.9 oz water bottles weighs about 25 lbs (since 16.9 oz is ~1.1 lb, times 24 = ~26 lbs plus packaging). Cost is

whatever the drinks cost, but as weight it might be effectively free if you were buying them anyway. Rucking with a 12-pack of beer has even been suggested as a social workout – *"the farther you go, the lighter your ruck becomes"* (since you drink the beers when you finish!). This obviously is more for fun events than training regularly, but it illustrates creative thinking. A sealed case of water is pretty stable and padded (just don't drop your pack – exploding beer is messy!). **Price per lb:** maybe $0.50 if counting the beverage cost, but if you consume them later, it's dual-purpose.

In summary, **no-cost/low-cost weights** are everywhere: sand, water, bricks, books, scrap metal, etc. Here's a quick reference table of these weight hacks and approximate cost per pound:

Weight Source	Approx Weight & Packaging	Est. Cost (USD)	~$ per lb (est.)
Play Sand	50 lb bag (in ziplocs/duct-tape)	$4–$5 per 50 lb bag	**$0.10**/lb
Cement Mix	60–80 lb bag (split into bags)	~$5 per bag	**$0.07–0.09**/lb
Bricks	~4.5 lb each (taped) x 6 = ~27 lb	~$0.50 each (~$3 total) [11]	**$0.11**/lb
Water (tap)	1 gal = 8.3 lb (use multiple jugs)	Virtually free (use containers you have)	**~$0**
Cat Litter	20 lb (double bagged)	$6–$8 per 20 lb	**$0.30–0.40**/lb
Books	3–5 lb each (stack to needed weight)	Free (if on hand)	**$0**
Metal Scrap	10–45 lb (shape as needed)	~$1 per lb or less	**$1**/lb or less
Weight Plates (used)	Standard gym plates, any size	~$1 per lb (used market)	**$1**/lb
Dumbbell (used)	e.g. 20 lb dumbbell	~$20 (varies, used often cheaper)	**$1**/lb
Bottled water/ beer	20-30 lb per case (24-pack)	$4–$20 depending on contents	**$0.20–$0.80**/lb

As you can see, **DIY wins on cost**. The trade-off is convenience and maybe durability. For instance, sand is cheap but you must securely bag it; bricks are cheap but not as comfy as a professional plate.

Hybrid Approach: Many ruckers do a mix – for example, buy a single 20 lb ruck plate (for $60) and then add 5-10 lbs extra using water bottles or sand to reach a desired weight without buying another plate. This way you get a stable base weight and fine-tune cheaply. Our gear recommendations can combine methods too.

Packing Your Ruck (Weight Placement)

No matter what weight you use, **how you pack it** is important. A poorly packed ruck can be torture (weights swinging or digging into your back). Here are some tips (which the app will remind you as you load up each week):

- **High and Tight:** Pack the heaviest items up high and close to your back. This keeps your center of gravity closer to you and prevents the pack from pulling you backwards. If your pack has an internal sleeve or compartment against your back, that's the spot for the heaviest weight. Fill any empty space around weights with softer items (towel, hoodie) to minimize shifting.

- **Stability:** Whatever weight you use, **prevent it from moving**. If using loose items like multiple bricks or sandbags, stuff the pack so that everything is wedged firmly. Use towels, foam, or crumpled clothes to fill gaps. Some users cut a piece of foam to line the pack for a snug fit. A trick if using metal plates or dumbbells: put it inside a small cardboard box that fits in your pack, then pad around – this can keep it stable. You want the weight to feel like it's one with the backpack, not sliding.

- **Comfort Padding:** Your back will thank you if you cushion any hard edges. Place a folded towel between you and the weight (inside the pack against the back panel). For example, if you're rucking with plates or bricks, that towel or a foam yoga block at the bottom can protect your lower back. Also, if using something like water jugs, consider wrapping them in a plastic bag in case of leaks and to smooth out any caps poking. Many ruckers put a foam yoga block or cut sleeping pad at the bottom of the pack as a shock absorber for when the pack inevitably gets set down hard.

- **Water Bladder Placement:** If you are also carrying water to drink (in addition to using it as weight), most packs have a hydration bladder pocket. Use it – staying hydrated will keep your performance up, especially on long rucks. Drinking water as you go also has a fun effect: the pack gets lighter mile by mile!

- **Rain Protection:** If you're using things that shouldn't get wet (books, or if you simply don't want your sandbag soaked), pack them in waterproof bags or line the inside of your pack with a trash bag. This keeps rain or sweat out of your stuff. (Also, if using salt-based items like bags of rice as weight, definitely waterproof them – though rice is another creative weight in a pinch, it can attract critters and swell with moisture, so not our top rec).

By Week 12, you'll likely have found your favorite weight setup and packing method. Some people get very particular (there are whole forum threads on the optimal way to pack a ruck). But our goal is to get you out rucking with whatever you have handy – you can refine the packing as you gain experience.

Additional Training Tips and Considerations

To truly serve you with the *best information possible*, here are a few more pieces of advice and common questions addressed:

- **Don't Run with a Ruck (Until You're Ready):** It's tempting to jog to go faster, but running with a heavy pack drastically increases injury risk from the impact. The mantra is "**Ruck, don't run**", especially in training. If you want more intensity, increase weight or find an incline rather than full-on running. A gentle shuffle can be used sparingly (the "airborne shuffle" is like a slow trot that many soldiers use), but we generally program brisk walking paces. Save the running for when the pack is off (do separate running workouts if you like – it will still help your rucking endurance).

- **Cross-Training and Strength Work:** Rucking itself is a fantastic workout, but a well-rounded routine helps. On non-ruck days (or after a short ruck), consider some core and leg exercises. Squats and lunges can even be done wearing your ruck to build extra strength. Planks or push-ups with the ruck on are great for core and upper body. We incorporate the occasional "ruck PT" session (physical training with the ruck as a weight) in the plan for variety. Also, regular stretching or yoga will maintain flexibility (hip flexors and calves can get tight from rucking). If you're aiming for military tests, you'll likely also be running and doing calisthenics – feel free to add those in as needed; just ensure you recover well.

- **Nutrition & Recovery:** Rucking burns a ton of calories (roughly 3x walking as noted), so you may find yourself hungrier. Eat quality foods to fuel this – plenty of protein for muscle repair and carbs for energy on long rucks. Hydrate well *before*, during, and after rucks. On any ruck over an hour, carry a snack (trail mix, energy bar) to keep your energy up; our plan will remind you to consider nutrition on long sessions. And as stressed before, **sleep** is when your body adapts – aim for sufficient sleep especially after hard ruck days so you come back stronger.

- **Listen to Your Body – Pain vs. Soreness:** Expect muscle soreness in your shoulders, legs, maybe even your core – rucking works everything. However, sharp pain in joints or very localized pain (e.g. shin that hurts to touch) could indicate something more serious like shin splints or stress reaction. The plan includes deload weeks and rest days to mitigate this. If you suspect an injury, don't push through it – ease up and address it (ice, rest, see a doctor if severe). Common issues like blisters or chafing can be managed with gear adjustments as discussed, but something like extreme knee pain might mean your pack form needs fixing or you increased too fast. We build in safety margins, but personal awareness is key.

- **Community and Motivation:** Rucking can be more fun with others. If you have a friend to join, great – you can both follow the plan. The question about sharing a **web-based training calendar** hints that we encourage you to share your journey. We provide your plan in a sharable format (e.g. a link to add it to Google Calendar or a web app view) so you can easily show it off or even organize group rucks. There's a huge rucking community out there (subreddits like r/rucking and r/GORUCK, GORUCK's Tribe groups, etc.) for tips and motivation. Don't hesitate to post your progress – the community loves seeing newcomers succeed.

- **PDF and Calendar Access:** We will email you a **PDF** of your 12-week plan for handy reference (so you can print it or view offline). Additionally, you'll have a personalized link to a **web-based calendar**

version of the training schedule. This calendar can be subscribed to or shared – if you have buddies who want to do the "RuckingStart 12-Week Challenge" with you, they can follow the same calendar. We built this feature with virality in mind: rucking together (even virtually) builds accountability. So yes, expect an email with your plan PDF and a link (e.g. **ruckingstart.com/your-plan-code** or an option to sync to your Google/Apple calendar).

- **Goal Events and Beyond:** If your goal is a specific event (like a GORUCK Challenge, a backpacking trip, or a military test), make sure to input that into the app. We'll tweak the plan to meet that goal date and requirements. For example, if you're training for a **military ruck march test (12 miles, 3 hours, 35 lb)**, our plan will gradually increase you to that distance and weight, and include pace work to hit the 15 min/mile speed. If your goal is general fitness, no "graduation event" is required – though we might suggest doing a fun mock event on week 12 anyway (like planning a long hike with friends to show off your new capability). After 12 weeks, you can of course continue rucking to maintain and further build on your progress – many make it a lifelong habit due to its simplicity and effectiveness. We'll provide guidelines for post-program maintenance too (e.g. ruck 1-2× week at varying weights to keep your gains).

By following this comprehensive plan, tailored to your inputs and backed by a wealth of rucking knowledge, you'll be well on your way to rucking success. Get ready to **embrace the suck** (as the military says) in a smart, structured way. Strap on your ruck – your 12-week journey is about to begin!

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