

A complete guide. Learn which splits are effective, and which workouts to avoid. Included are numerous workout and training splits examples.

Training splits can be a mystery. With so many available options and possibilities, it's easy to be confused about which splits are effective, and which are poorly structured. If you've ever wondered just why and how [training splits](https://www.muscleandstrength.com/workout-routines) are designed, and just what some of the best training split options are, you've come to the right place. So grab a [protein shake](https://www.muscleandstrength.com/recipes/protein-shakes), sit down and start reading.

Before we dig in, I want to explain a few simple rules. These rules will help you to understand the reasoning behind many popular [workouts](https://www.muscleandstrength.com/workout-routines) on Muscle & Strength. Keep in mind that rules are meant to be bent, and in some cases broken.

Some individuals recover more quickly than others or have learned from experience that they can break a few of the rules and make great progress. For this reason, some of the splits you see used by experienced natural bodybuilders might break the rules.

In general, it's best to stay within the boundaries of the routines presented in this reference guide. Many trainees mistakenly believe that adding volume or additional workouts is the secret key to rapid growth.

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This is far from true. [Muscle building](https://www.muscleandstrength.com/workout-routines) isn't simply add more sets, make greater gains. There are more factors involved with progress than the number of sets you perform.

Trust in the process. Believe in the conventional wisdom used by the muscle building community. The workout splits in this reference guide are effective choices. Use them, learn your body in the process, evolve your training, and smash your goals!

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Training Split Rules

1. Chest and Triceps: Don't train chest the day after [triceps](https://www.muscleandstrength.com/workouts/triceps), or vice versa. The triceps are heavily involved with pressing movements used to hit the chest. If you work triceps the day before chest, your triceps will be fatigued and could limit your [chest workout](https://www.muscleandstrength.com/workouts/chest) productivity. If you work chest the day before triceps, your triceps will be fatigued and will receive a pounding two days in a row.
2. Back and Biceps: Don't train back the day after [biceps](https://www.muscleandstrength.com/workouts/biceps). The biceps are heavily involved with pulling/rowing movements used to blast the back. If you work biceps the day before back, your biceps will be fatigued and could limit your [back workout](https://www.muscleandstrength.com/workouts/back) productivity.
3. Squats and Deadlifts: Don't train squats and deadlifts on back to back days. Both squats and deadlifts utilize many of the same muscle groups. These lifts are considered posterior chain movements, meaning they both target the lower back, spinae erectors, glutes, hamstrings, etc. It's best to have a few rest days in between these lifts.
4. Traps: Don't obsess about direct [trap](https://www.muscleandstrength.com/exercises/traps) work. The traps are worked hard when deadlifting, and also during overhead pressing and other [shoulder exercises](https://www.muscleandstrength.com/workouts/shoulders) such as laterals. Do not assume that you need an excessive amount of direct traps work to build big traps. In fact, if you are deadlifting and using a form of the military press, you may not need much direct trap work at all.
5. Forearms: Don't obsess about direct [forearm](https://www.muscleandstrength.com/exercises/forearms) work. As with traps, the forearms are worked hard by numerous other lifts. The mere act of gripping barbells and dumbbells day in and day out is often enough to stimulate quality forearm growth. Do not assume you need an excessive amount of direct forearm stimulation.
6. Rear Delts: Don't overwork the rear delts. The rear delts are hit hard on back day, and during some shoulder exercises for front and side delts. If you look at the rowing/pulling motion of most back exercises, you will notice that they are in the same family tree as rear laterals (bent over reverse flys). Some rear delt work is good, but you do not need an abundance of rear delt exercises to have great looking rear delts.
7. Front Delts: Don't overwork the front delts. The front delts are aggressively hammered when using pressing motions for chest and shoulders. These pressing movements should be the core of your front delt work. While it is a good idea to add in an additional [isolation exercise](https://www.muscleandstrength.com/exercises/isolation) (such as front raises) for your front delts, you do not need an abundance of front delt exercises to have great looking front delts.
8. Abs: Incorporate some form of a heavy ab exercise. Far too often the abs are worked the same way day in and day out, with no added resistance. Make sure you incorporate some form of progressive resistance into your ab routine to help build a thick, amazing looking six-pack. These exercise include, but are not limited to: weighted sit-ups, crunches and leg lifts, and cable crunches.
9. Arm Work: Stop obsessing about direct arm work. Working your arms hard each week is good. Believing that you need to work your arms with 30 sets, three times per week is obsessive compulsive. Big arms are built with heavy rowing and pressing movements. Direct bicep and tricep work helps to build big arms (obviously), but you do not need to overkill the amount of sets you perform.
10. Legs: Work your legs! Don't be a chicken-legged gym rat who avoids hard leg exercises. Not only do muscular legs look impressive, but strong legs will also improve athletic performance, helping you to jump higher, run faster, and explode out of the gate on sprints.
11. Isolation Movements: Don't overuse isolation exercises. Isolation movements have their place in weight training. But with that said, it makes no sense to perform 5 sets of dumbbell flyes or tricep kickbacks if you are not working your chest and triceps hard with a battery of heavy pressing movements.
12. Dips and Pull-Ups: Don't discount the power of dips and pull-ups. Though these exercises are [bodyweight exercises](https://www.muscleandstrength.com/exercises/bodyweight), the dip is known as the upper body squat for it's overall muscle-building effectiveness, and pull-ups are an amazing back blaster. If these exercises get easy, use a weight belt, and add resistance.
13. Lower Back: Don't overwork the lower back with too much direct work. The lower back is taxed hard enough as it is. A few additional sets for the lower back are good, but overworking your lower back can often result in muscle fatigue, and strains which can lead to further injuries. Do enough lower back work to stay strong, but not so much that you aren't able to function for several days.

Related: [20 Must-Read Tips For Building Muscle & Burning Fat](https://www.muscleandstrength.com/articles/20-must-read-tips-building-muscle-burning-fat)



A Look At Weekly Training Volume

Training a body part twice, or even three times a week is a viable option for many. Small muscle groups can often be trained more frequently. In fact, large muscle groups can be training twice or even three times a week if the daily volume of sets is kept in check.

One of the mistakes that many trainees make when exercising a muscle group multiple times per week is that they try to keep the volume high on each day. This is a misguided approach.

Regardless of how often you train a muscle group, a good guideline is to use the same weekly amount of sets. Let's look at a few examples:

* Twice a Week Training: If you are currently working your chest once a week for 12 sets and want to work your chest twice a week for extra stimulation, do not perform 2 weekly workouts of 12 sets each (a total of 24 sets). Instead, work your chest with only 6 sets per workout, for the same weekly total of 12 sets.
* Training Three Times Per Week: If you are currently working your biceps once a week for 9 sets and want to instead work them three times a week for extra stimulation, do not perform 3 weekly workouts of 9 sets each (a total of 27 sets). Instead, work your biceps with only 3 sets per workout, for the same weekly total of 9 sets.

A Note About Hard-Gainers

For many hard-gainers, training a muscle group more frequently, but a lower daily set volume will be more effective. If you are having a difficult time building muscle on a training split, and believe yourself to be a hard-gainer or ectomorph, it is well worth your time to experiment with more frequent training.

Training each muscle group twice, or even three times per week with a limited volume might be the key to building more muscle.

Related: [How to Increase Muscle Size With German Volume Training](https://www.muscleandstrength.com/articles/german-volume-training-for-shocking-muscle-growth.html)

Factors That Impact Training Frequency

Muscle soreness, and a muscle's ability to recover, are not the only factors involved when trying to decide how often you should train a muscle group. You also have to consider the strain that frequent training places on your [joints](https://www.muscleandstrength.com/articles/bone-broth-joint-and-tendon-pain-relief), connective tissue (ligaments and tendons), CNS (central nervous system), etc.

If you've never trained a muscle group more than once a week, and want to try a more frequent approach, don't rush into this approach with heavy weight. Take a few weeks to allow your body to adapt to the demands of this new training style.

Keep in mind that the heavier weight you lift, the less likely you are to benefit from high-frequency training. Heavy weight taxes the CNS, joints and connective tissue to a much greater degree.

It's not that a higher training frequency won't work, but more so that it may take a much longer period for your body to condition itself to this style of training.

Also, many advanced lifters that do utilize a more frequent training approach often cycle their workout intensity. Some [workouts](https://www.muscleandstrength.com/workout-routines) may focus on heavy weight for low reps, and some on moderate or a relatively lighter weight for 10-15 (or more) reps.

Sets Per Bodypart

Bodypart Training Once A Week

As a general rule, stick with the following weekly sets per muscle group. When uncertain, always start with the lowest amount of sets, and only add sets if this approach is ineffective.

* 9 to 15 weekly sets - Large Muscle Groups: These groups include chest, back, shoulders, and quads.
* 6 to 9 weekly sets - Small Muscle Groups: These groups include biceps, triceps, calves, abs, and hamstrings.
* 0 to 3 weekly sets - Minor Muscle Groups: These groups include lower back, forearms, rear delts, and traps.

Bodypart Training Twice A Week

When training a bodypart twice a week, use the following number of sets per workout:

* 4 to 8 working sets - Large Muscle Groups: These groups include chest, back, shoulders, and quads.
* 3 to 5 working sets - Small Muscle Groups: These groups include biceps, triceps, calves, abs, and hamstrings.
* 0 to 3 working sets - Minor Muscle Groups: These groups include lower back, forearms, rear delts, and traps.

Bodypart Training Three Times A Week

When training a bodypart three times a week, use the following number of sets per workout:

* 3 to 5 working sets - Large Muscle Groups: These groups include chest, back, shoulders, and quads.
* 0 to 3 working sets - Small Muscle Groups: These groups include biceps, triceps, calves, abs, and hamstrings.
* 0 to 3 working sets - Minor Muscle Groups: These groups include lower back, forearms, rear delts, and traps.



Note: When using a three times per week training system, you may choose to avoid working smaller and minor muscle groups each day. Because of the weekly set volume restrictions, it might be more convenient to train biceps and calves 1-2 times per week.

You certainly can train these muscle groups three times a week. Minor muscle groups should be worked only once a week unless they are a weak bodypart in need of extra work.

Important note: Certain splits will have unique limitations, such as a 2-day split, and therefore will deviate slightly from set per day recommendations.

The following [muscle building](https://www.muscleandstrength.com/articles/build-muscle-without-gym-equipment) fullbody workouts and splits are provided for example purposes. Feel free to alter them to fit your individual needs. Exercise selection is based upon the most effective lifts for each muscle group.

 2 Day Muscle Building Splits

While 2-day splits are rarely used, they are a very viable option for adding muscle and strength. In fact, natural strength trainer and author John Christy used them successfully on thousands of clients.

Consider using a 2-day split if you live a busy life, or need more [recovery](https://www.muscleandstrength.com/articles/3-simple-recovery-methods) days per week. Make sure to stick with compound lifts for each major muscle group. Here are some recommended compound exercise choices:

* Quads: Squats, Leg Press, Front Squats, Hack Squats.
* Chest: Bench Press, Dips, Dumbbell Bench Press, Incline Bench Press, Close Grip Bench Press.
* Back: Deadlift, Barbell Rows, Pull-Ups, Dumbbell Rows, T-bar Rows, Seated Cable Rows.
* Shoulders: Push Press, Military Presses, Seated Behind The neck Press, Seated Dumbbell Press, Seated Arnold Press.

Note: If you plan on using both deadlifts and squats on a 2-day split, it may be beneficial to use squats on day 1, and deadlifts on day 2, instead of performing both exercises on the same workout day.