

Pull Up Mastery

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The Training Template

Max Day	Sub Max Volume	Ladder Volume
Sets: 3 (Max Effort) Rest: 5:00+	Sets: 10 (50% Starting Max) Rest: 1:00 Strict	Sets: 5 (Ascending Ladder Sets) Rests: 0:30 Strict

Fitness Prerequisites- 5-12 Pull Ups

Equipment Requirement- Pull Up Bar

Program Duration- 6-12+ Weeks

About The Program

“Pull up Mastery” is a program that I have used for nearly a decade. It was developed during my time working with elite Military and Law Enforcement personnel and combines 3 powerful modalities for rapidly improving pull up numbers. It is ideally suited for those with limited training time, moderate pull up proficiency, and 3 days per week to commit to training.

How To Use The “Pull Up Mastery” Program

This program should be performed on 3 non-consecutive days per week. I have seen some trainees make solid progress up to 12+ weeks with this method, but most will see progress slow around 8 weeks. You can run this program for as long as you are making progress. If you are using it as preparation for a fitness assessment, make sure to include a proper taper before test day to allow the fatigue to dissipate and ensure your ability to fully display your fitness gains. Simply reducing your training volume by roughly 50% or so in the week preceding your testing date would be sufficient, with 48 hours between your last training session and your assessment.

Taper Template

Max Day	Sub-Max Volume	Ladder Volume
Sets: 2 (Max Effort) Rest: 5:00+	Sets: 5 (50% Day 1 Max) Rest: 1:00 Strict	Sets: 2 (Ascending Ladder Sets) Rests: 30 sec Strict

Program Details

Day 1 (Max Day)- The first session of the training week requires that you perform 3 max effort sets of pull ups. For those using this program to prepare for a fitness assessment, perform your repetitions in the same way you will be tested and terminate your set when your reps no longer meet the technical standard required. For those using this program recreationally, set for yourself a repetition standard that you will keep for the entire program- full ROM, chin over the bar, no kipping, etc. Terminate your set when your reps fail to meet this quality standard.

Rest times between max sets should be at least 5 minutes.

Day 2 (Sub-Max Volume)- The training intensity for sub-maximal volume day will be determined by your best performance on your first max day. You will take 50% of your best set (rounding up if needed) and perform 10 sets with a STRICT 60 second rest between sets. The same rules apply in terms of form quality and technical standards.

More than likely, you will be unable to perform 10 sets at 50% of your max with a strict 60 sec rest. This is OK. You will complete as many reps per set as you can with good form and strict rest.

If your max was 10 reps, a typical first sub-max day might look like 5/5/5/5/5/4/3/3/3/2. This is where progression comes in. In each subsequent week, you will be trying to add reps to the incomplete sets. The following week might look like 5/5/5/5/5/5/5/4/3/3. You will stay with the same target set/rep scheme, week after week, until you are able to achieve the target volume. Once you have done so, you simply increase the target reps per set by 1 rep. So in this case, after achieving all 10 sets for 5 reps, your new volume target would be 10 sets with 6 reps. You repeat this process for the duration of the program. It is important to note that your starting max sets your sub-max volume target, and from that point on, the sub-max workout is progressed independently from the max day.

Day 3 (Ascending Ladders)- A ladder is a series of sets, each increasing in reps. Ladders provide an opportunity for you to perform a large amount of high quality reps while periodically approaching high effort sets. It is important to make sure you take a strict 30 second rest between sets.

To perform the ladder, start with a single repetition, rest 30 seconds, then perform 2 repetitions, rest 30 seconds and perform 3 repetitions. Continue to increase the reps per set by 1 until you are confident that you will no longer be able to complete the next set. When it requires a high level of effort to complete a set, rest 30 seconds and perform a single rep, then repeat the process. The process of going from 1 rep to your top set counts as a single ladder. You will perform 5 of these.

A typical ladder day might look like this...

1. 1/2/3/4/5 (struggled on 5th rep, probably could not complete a 6th set)
2. 1/2/3/4 (struggled on 4th rep, probably couldn't complete the 5th set)
3. 1/2/3/4 (seriously struggled on 4th rep of the 4th set)
4. 1/2/3 (struggled on 3rd set)
5. 1/2/3 (struggled on 3rd set)

If you fail a set, like 1/2/3/4/5/4, the ladder is over, so rest 30 seconds and drop back down to 1.

As you progress, you will be able to go higher in the ladder, but more often than not, you will see an increased consistency across your ladders. You can also gauge progress by taking a look at the total you are able to achieve with the 5 ladders during the workout.

Other things to consider

While running this program, I generally discourage the addition of extra upper body pulling movements. This is a pull up specialization cycle, so typically advise putting extra pulling work on hold until it is complete.

I can be run in conjunction with a push up specialization cycle or another resistance training program.

One thing to consider is that pull ups are a display of relative strength, and many times athletes can experience an improvement in pull ups just from decreases in body fat. That being said, if you are carrying more body fat than what is optimal for your scenario, adding in additional cardio along with proper dietary modifications can dramatically increase the effectiveness of this program.