

The Ultimate Workout Cheat Sheet

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I created this document to help people overcome the hurdles of living a healthy lifestyle. I will use this document to bust common myths, and help create a more sustainable diet and workout plan.

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Common Myths

You Can Spot Reduce Fat

It is **impossible** to spot-reduce fat. The only way to lose fat is a **calorie deficit** (net calories = calories consumed - calories burned). You can change either side of the equation but typically it is easier to reduce calories consumed. A lot of your calories burnt throughout the day are from NEAT (non-exercise activity thermogenesis), and basal metabolism, not exercise and cardio.

Although, consider this: if you train your muscles to be bigger, your fat will cover a larger area, making you look *leaner*. That is why weight training is so impactful for “weight loss” because it will make you look more muscular with less fat, even though it is not burning much fat directly.

A common myth is that muscle tissue burns much more calories than fat. Muscle only burns slightly more calories than fat, so the difference is negligible at best.

You Need to Exercise Everyday to See Results

You can gain muscle working out as little as 1 day a week. If you are new to the gym, you can do the bare minimum and gain a lot of muscle quickly. **Do not workout more than 4 days a week if you are new to the gym.**

- Consistency beats any workout plan, so the most important part is that you can stick to your plan. Working out 7 days a week is not better than 3 days a week, especially if you are new
- Recovery is key - If you cannot recover in time, you are either not eating or sleeping enough, or training too hard. You grow muscle during your recovery, so prioritize recovery
- Do not train for more than 2 hours at the gym if you are new. This is too excessive.

This is what stops most people from starting at the gym or getting past the 6 months mark. Results will take time to show, and for new gym goers, less is more. **2-4 days is best.** You will literally gain less muscle by overdoing it.

Your Metabolism Makes You Fat or Skinny

People like to blame their metabolism when it comes to weight loss or weight gain. This is incorrect. Fatter people in fact have a higher metabolism due to high amounts of fat (which burns calories!). Skinny people “who eat a lot and still don’t gain fat” either don’t eat in a surplus because they may eat a lot one day and less the next day or do a lot of activity.

Girls Will Get Bulky Working Out

Most women don’t do weight lifting and only do cardio because they are scared of getting “too bulky.” This is simply incorrect, women in general cannot put on too much mass compared to males. Lifting weights and cardio is the way to go. Replacing fat with muscle won’t make you look bulky, it will create a fit appearance.

Weight lifting has so many benefits. You will:

- Get stronger
- Get higher bone density
- Will make physical tasks easier
- Reduce injury long-term
- Better flexibility

Cardio is the Best Way to Lose Weight

This is simply incorrect. Cardio is a decent way to lose weight **at best**. Best way to lose fat is by eating less calories. Some tips to optimize diet for bulking or weight loss I discuss in the diet section of this document.

If you do too much cardio (too much is different for everyone), your body will compensate for that by lowering your NEAT (non-exercise activity thermogenesis). You will be more sluggish while moving and fidgeting less.

A great way to increase cardio without lowering NEAT is to focus on getting more steps throughout the day. Try to aim for 10k steps spread out over the day. Although cardio helps, it is important to remember diet is more important. Switching out normal versions of foods for diet or low calorie versions can make more of a difference.

Supplements Are Needed for Results

Although supplements can help, unless they are steroids, they won't do much. I hit all my PR's (personal records) when I did not take any supplements at all. Currently I take a few natural supplements which I will discuss in the supplements side of the paper, it is important to note supplements make a very negligible difference. 90+% of supplements are marketing BS or hype, and they may not even contain what they state on the label. If you want to buy supplements, I will discuss a few **red flags** to look out for later in this paper.

Diet

Bulking

Lean vs Dirty bulk

Generally lean bulking is better than dirty bulking. Lean bulking is focused on consuming healthy calorie dense foods.

Some healthy calorie dense foods are:

- Nuts
- Avocados
- Higher fat yogurts, milk
- Eggs (rather than egg whites)
- Cheese

It is important to not dirty-bulk for too long. Excessive unhealthy eating will result in vomiting, tiredness, higher blood pressure, increased blood sugar spikes etc. While lean bulking can help you get more nutrients and protein.

Calorie Surplus Guide & Duration

250-500 calories for a bulk is a great calorie surplus. This will result in approx. 0.5-1 lbs of weight gain every week. If you want to bulk 10lbs, it will take you 10 weeks with a 500 calorie surplus and 20 weeks with a 250 calorie surplus. **Important note:** your total calories will increase during this period, as you gain weight your maintenance calories will go up, so maintenance + surplus calories will increase overtime.

DO NOT BULK TOO FAR, this is because if you gain too much fat or do it too fast, you will get stretch marks that will not go away. Slowly over months is much better, you can train more # of times on a surplus if you do it for longer.

Tips to Create a Calorie surplus

- Use more oil when cooking
- Eat more nuts
- Eat more meals throughout the day
- Slightly bigger portion sizes
- Liquid calories: juice, soda, smoothies, etc.

Weight Loss

Fast vs Slow Weight loss

Weight loss can be hard on the body. Your body needs calories to function and creating a large calorie deficit for a long time can lead to muscle and strength loss, sluggishness, and lower immunity. Slow weight loss is more sustainable although people don't want to be in a deficit for a long time.

If you want to lose weight fast, do not exceed 8 weeks. For example you can do: 8 weeks, 2lbs/week and lose 16lbs. Then go on a maintenance phase for 3-4 weeks and redo it.

If you want to do a slower phase you can go up to 12-14 weeks with 1lb/week. Do maintenance for 3-4 weeks and do it again. Benefit of slower weight loss is you should not lose any muscle (if you do it right) and negligible strength loss, if any.

Tips to Create a Calorie Deficit

NOTE: You do not need to do all of these. Do whatever is more sustainable for you.

- Use less oil and butter in foods
- Remove or cut down nuts and calorie dense foods (peanut butter!)
- Replace pop with diet versions
- Replace foods or syrups with lower calorie versions
- Eat smaller portions

There are many more ways to create a deficit, these are just a few ideas.

Eat Delicious Foods

A lot of people start eating super clean. This is not sustainable. You can still eat pizza, you can still drink alcohol. Eat what you love, either eat less or make it yourself! You can easily use protein bread or tortilla to make your own pizza. You can drink low calorie alcohol, etc. If you want to get drunk with fewer drinks... eat less beforehand. There are many recipes online which show healthy, high protein, delicious meals which you can make at home!

Workout Plan

Don't Static Stretch Before Weight Lifting

Most exercises are meant to **stretch and contract** your muscles. For example:

- Bicep curls stretch biceps at bottom, and contract at top
- Romanian deadlifts are meant to stretch your hamstrings at the bottom
- Squats stretch your quads at the bottom
- Chest press / bench press stretch and contract your chest muscles

Hopefully these examples show how you stretch and contract these muscles while working out, so stretching before your workout will just lead to lower strength and hypertrophy during the workout. It can even lead to higher risk of injury.

Frequency

All workout splits deliver similar results when volume is matched. Volume is described as

$\# \text{ of sets} * \# \text{ of reps} * \text{weight}$. Although, it is easier to do more volume with certain splits compared to others. For example, with a bro split you hit chest 1x a week, where you might be able to do 8 sets. Whereas with a full body 3x a week, doing 3 sets/workout you can do 9 sets for the week, probably with higher weight and better form since 3 sets in a workout is easier than 8 sets.

So to gain muscle faster, it is better to hit each muscle 2-4x a week based on your recovery.

Strength vs Hypertrophy

Training Type	Strength Training	Hypertrophy Training
Rep Ranges	3-5 is recommended	5-30 will gain muscle
# of Sets	Exercises which are focused on strength have more sets with lower reps. It can be one heavy set with a few back off sets or a few heavy sets. It varies between plans	Depends muscle to muscle. It is better to have a rated system like the one I use on https://www.intelligentlifting.net/ - All muscles recover at a different pace. In general 10-20 sets per muscle per week is good
Frequency	To get stronger, do the movement more often. This applies to almost every movement besides deadlifts. Usually benching 2x-3x per week will result in better strength gains	Hitting any muscle group in frequency with its recovery will lead to optimal gains. If hamstrings recover every 3 days, and you hit them every 3 days, this will lead to optimal gains. Higher frequency means either more volume or better quality sets, leading to better muscle gain
Gains / Focus	Strength training is focused on gaining strength on the squat, bench, and deadlifts. So all other movements (exercises) are used to improve sticking points. For example, if top half is harder on the bench press, means tricep is a limiting factor so the accessory movement will be improving tricep size/strength	All exercises over time will get stronger but that is not the focus. Improving mind muscle connection, proximity to failure, good form, pump, optimizing mechanical tension, metabolites, etc. Your training is more focused on whatever exercises provide you with the best stimulus with minimal fatigue. That is why deadlifts are not optimal for muscle gain

What is Powerbuilding

Powerbuilding is a combination of both hypertrophy and strength training. It usually starts off with a heavy set of a compound movement, then moves to more higher rep hypertrophy work.

There are a few compromises though:

- Your first exercise develops the most stimulus and growth. Doing compound movements first will make it so you are more tired for the rest of the workout leading to lower hypertrophy compared to specialized hypertrophy training. This becomes more of a problem the stronger you get. If you lift 500 lbs, doing a full hypertrophy workout after going to failure is too exhausting
- You won't get optimal strength gains. Strength is focused on recovery and keeping fatigue low. Training to failure on hypertrophy movements while strength training will make you gain strength slower. For example, if someone just does 3 exercises a day, 3 days a week focused on strength, they will become stronger than someone who works out 5 days a week doing 6-7 exercises per workout.

Powerbuilding: "jack of all trades, master of none."

Progression

For strength training progression varies from plan to plan. For beginners it is recommended to do linear progression (increasing 5 lbs every week) but that is not possible after a few years of training. It is important to follow your plan for a special progressional scheme.

For hypertrophy training increase either # of sets, weight or # of reps workout to workout. For example, if you find 3 sets ideal for hamstrings between the 10-15 rep range, do it until you can do 15 reps fairly easily on the first set, then increase the weight next week. Then build up from 10 reps to 15 again. Then keep continuing. Another approach is increasing sets week to week, which is another great way of progressive overloading.

Training Hard - To Failure?

This is a controversial topic. Here is my take:

- It is important to train to failure frequently to know what failure feels like
- Failure shouldn't be reached on the squat, bench or deadlift
- All exercises should be taken **at least 3 reps** to failure
- Drop-sets are considered training past failure, and can be used to up the intensity

NOTE: As intensity increases (proximity to failure or heavy weight), volume should decrease accordingly. So if you want to train to or past failure, only do 2 sets. If you want to trail 2-3 reps shy of failure, do 3-4 sets. More volume of hard training leads to marginally better growth.

Supersets vs Drop-sets vs Myo-reps vs Giant Sets

Supersets: Two different muscle group exercises used to save time. Usually with a slight rest in between. Doing them separately will lead to better gains (only slightly), but if on a time crunch supersets are great. For example: tricep pushdowns and bicep curls.

Drop-sets: Doing a set close to or completely to failure, dropping weight by 30-50%, then doing it again to failure. No rest in between. This is a super fun training technique and awesome for hypertrophy and saving time. Instead of doing 4 sets, you can do 2 drop sets and still get most of the gains.

Myo-reps: Going to failure on any exercise, resting 3-5 seconds, then aiming to do another specific number of reps until you can't. For example doing 5 myo-reps of calf raises looks like this: doing calf raises to failure, then resting 3-5 seconds, doing another 5 reps, resting 3-5 seconds, doing another 5 reps, etc until you cannot hit your goal of 5 reps.

Giant Sets: Aiming to do a specific amount of reps in any number of sets. For example: 100 reps is the goal for calf raises, you take each set to or close to failure until 100 reps is reached.

Rep Ranges

In the chart above I described the rep ranges to aim for. For hypertrophy training **your reps should decrease each consecutive set**. If you can do more reps on your second set than your first, you did not warm up correctly. Each set should be taken very close to failure if not failure.

Optimizing Recovery

Recovery is super underrated. Training 3 days a week can be as good or even better than training 6 days per week. Prioritize recovery by:

- Having rest days between hitting each muscle
- Optimizing sleep and nutrition
- Resting enough (ex. Not doing 5 hours of cardio a day)
- Controlling your CNS fatigue and taking deloads when you have to

Importance of Deloads

Deload week is when you lower the weight and reps you do that week. A deload should happen every 6-8 weeks. As you progress week to week, your joints, connective tissues, and CNS build up fatigue. Taking a week off or a deload reduces that fatigue build up and makes you sensitive to growth again. Important to start with lower weight/sets/reps and build up again for the next few weeks.

A deload will increase muscle gains, reduce tiredness, and risk of injury. Stronger folks will need to take a deload more often, whereas newbies can get away with not taking one at all. It is important to listen to your body! If you feel beat up, take the deload.

Exercise Selection

Despite what social media tells you, **there is no best exercise**. Everyone is built differently. For example, the barbell bench press hurts your shoulder, but dumbbell bench press does not, so why do the barbell one?

Here are a few suggestions:

- **Do not** do too many exercises. You only need 3-4 maximum for any muscle group
- Switch out exercises every few months as they get stale (that is why it's important not to do every exercise in the world for a muscle)
- Choose exercises which give you lots of stimulus but low fatigue (you feel a crazy good pump, but you aren't dying)
- Do full range of motion exercises. If an exercise lets you stretch your muscles like crazy, it's usually good!
- Squat, bench and deadlifts aren't needed to get big. They are a useful tool to grow, but there are ways to grow even better without them. Especially deadlifts
- Don't get caught up in the specifics. These **optimal gurus are clowns on Tiktok**, you do not need an "optimal exercise" for every muscle group. For example, pullups and chest supported rows will hit your **ENTIRE BACK**
- Try different exercises a few weeks at a time to find what works for you

Growing or prioritizing muscle(s)

If you want to grow a specific muscle here is the guide:

- Hit them at the start of the workout
- Hit them more frequently
- Try different variations
- Increase # of sets

Example: If I want to get a bigger back then I can:

- Train back as first few exercises of every upper body workout
- Train them 4x a week
- Have a good split of horizontal vs vertical back movements (rows and pullups)
- Add an extra set each workout week to week

Goodluck fitting through doors after that!