

The Ultimate Workout Cheat Sheet

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Introduction - Purpose of this Document

I wrote the Ultimate Cheat Sheet with the aim of helping weightlifters and individuals who aspire to live a healthy lifestyle. This cheat sheet is based on the most recent research and will be updated as new information emerges. If you have any queries, you can use the table of contents or Ctrl + F to locate what you're looking for. My goal in creating this document is to contribute to my lifelong mission of improving people's lives and making a significant difference in the world.

Common Myths

You Can Spot Reduce Fat

It is impossible to spot-reduce fat. The only way to lose fat is through a calorie deficit, which is calculated by subtracting the calories burned from the calories consumed.

$$CALORIES\ BURNED - CALORIES\ CONSUMED = NET\ CALORIES$$

When the net calories are negative, you will lose fat. You can change either side of the equation, but it is usually easier to reduce calories consumed. Many of the calories you burn throughout the day come from NEAT (non-exercise activity thermogenesis) and basal metabolism, not just exercise and cardio.

However, consider this: if you train your muscles to be bigger, your fat will cover a larger area, making you appear leaner. That's why weight training is so effective for "weight loss" because it helps you look more muscular with less fat, even though it doesn't directly burn much fat.

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

Although cardio burns visceral fat (fat around your organs), which will **reduce belly fat appearance slightly** but make you significantly healthier.

You Need to Exercise Every Day 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 can 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.

I Will Get Bulky Working Out

Most women don't do weightlifting 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 are great for health and most physiques. Replacing fat with muscle won't make you look bulky; it will create a fit appearance.

Weightlifting has so many benefits. You will:

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

In addition, you can weight lift until you have your desired build, then just maintain the muscle from then training only 1x-2x per week.

Cardio is the Best Way to Lose Weight

This is simply incorrect. Cardio is a decent way to lose weight **at best**. The 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.

Although cardio burns visceral fat (fat around your organs), which will **reduce belly fat appearance slightly** and make you significantly healthier.

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 & Supplementation

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 not to 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. 0.5-1lbs 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. The 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!

Calculate How Long Your Diet Will Take

To calculate how long your diet will take, follow this formula:

$$\frac{|TARGET\ WEIGHT - CURRENT\ WEIGHT|}{WEIGHT\ CHANGE\ PER\ WEEK} = \# OF WEEKS$$

So, if I am current 200lbs, aiming to cut to 180lbs at a rate of 1.5lbs/week, it will take me:

$$\frac{|180 - 200|}{1.5} = \frac{20}{1.5} = 13\ to\ 14\ weeks$$

Useful Supplements & Buying Guide

Supplements will not make much of a difference if your diet, sleep, and training is not on point. In addition, supplements are “add-ons” which are supposed to be used ***if your diet does not contain these nutrients. If it does, you do not need to supplement. If it doesn't, it is ALWAYS better to eat a better diet than supplement.***

Here are some food supplements to consider ***with the approval of your doctor:***

Creatine

- Increases muscle mass and strength
- Improves exercise performance, especially during high-intensity, short-duration activities
- Enhances recovery after exercise
- Can improve cognitive function, particularly in older adults
- May help with certain neurological conditions, such as Parkinson's disease and Huntington's disease
- May reduce the risk of certain diseases, such as diabetes and sarcopenia
- Safe and well-tolerated for most people, with few side effects (bloating etc.)

Creatine is the most researched supplement in the world and has proven benefits.

Caffeine

- Increases alertness and wakefulness
- Enhances cognitive function and mental performance
- May improve physical performance and endurance
- Can reduce fatigue and improve mood
- May help with weight loss by increasing metabolism and suppressing appetite
- May reduce the risk of certain diseases, such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, and liver disease
- Safe and well-tolerated for most people, with moderate caffeine intake (up to 400mg per day) considered safe for healthy adults

Note: Avoid using caffeine 10 hours before sleeping. Disrupting sleep is way more detrimental to health than any caffeine benefit.

Omega 3:

- Supports heart health by reducing triglycerides, blood pressure, and inflammation
- Improves brain function and cognitive performance
- May help with mood disorders such as depression and anxiety
- Can reduce joint pain and stiffness in people with rheumatoid arthritis
- May improve eye health and reduce the risk of age-related macular degeneration
- May reduce the risk of certain cancers, such as breast, colon, and prostate cancer
- Can support healthy pregnancy and fetal development

L-Citrulline:

- Increases nitric oxide production, which can improve blood flow and circulation
- May reduce muscle soreness and fatigue after exercise
- Can improve endurance and performance during high-intensity exercise
- May improve erectile dysfunction by increasing blood flow to the genital area
- May help lower blood pressure in people with hypertension
- May have neuroprotective effects and help with certain neurological conditions, such as dementia and Parkinson's disease

This is an excellent supplement for getting a great “pump”. **The minimum effective dose is 6g.** Most companies dilute the citrulline with malate using a 2:1 ratio, meaning you will not get as much benefit. If it is Citrulline Malate, find out the ratio and check if there is a minimum of 6g of L-Citrulline.

Workout Plan

Static Stretching vs Dynamic Stretching

Most exercises aim to both stretch and contract your muscles. For instance:

- Bicep curls stretch the biceps at the bottom and contract them at the 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.

These examples demonstrate how stretching and contracting occur during workouts. Therefore, static stretching before a workout can lead to reduced strength and hypertrophy during the workout and even increase the risk of injury. Instead, dynamic stretches are recommended before working out to prepare your joints and connective tissues for warm-up exercises.

Warmup

The best way to get ready for a heavy lifting session is to:

- 5-10 minutes of light cardio (walking, elliptical etc.)
- Dynamic stretching
- Pyramid warmup for your movements
- Last warmup is working weight for at least 1 rep

Here is an example warming up for squats:

- 10-minute treadmill walk
- 20 swings front and back and laterally each leg
- Pyramid warmup (these are % of your working weight for that movement):
 - Using bar
 - 50% for 8-10 reps
 - 70% for 4-6 reps
 - 85% for 3-4 reps
 - 100% for 1 rep

Frequency

All workout splits deliver similar results when volume is matched. Volume is described as # of sets * # of reps * 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 on 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 5lbs every week) but that is not possible after a few years of training. It is important to follow your plan for a special progression 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 exercises used to save time. Usually with a slight rest in between. Doing them separately will lead to slightly better gains, but if you are 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 number 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 must

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. 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!

Steps To Make Your Own Workout Plan

Step 1: Choose Training Style

What are your priorities? Looking bigger, gaining strength, or a bit of both? If you want to get bigger, bodybuilding is the better choice. If you want to gain strength, powerlifting is the better choice. If you want most of both, try power-building.

Step 2: Choose # of Training Days

Choose how many days a week you want to work out. Make it realistic, missing sessions is more detrimental to working out fewer days a week. Working fewer days often allows you to exert more effort on those days and can even lead to better growth for beginners. Powerlifting is done better with a lower number of days (the stronger you get, the more rest you need to recover) and bodybuilding is done better with higher number of days to increase training volume:

- Beginners (less than 2 years of training): 2x-4x/week
- Intermediate (2-5 years of training): 4x-6x/week
- Advanced (5+ years of training): 4x-7x/week

Step 3: Workout Split

Find out what your split will be. Ideally, you want to hit every muscle at least 2x a week. So here are good splits to consider:

- Upper-Lower 4x-6x a week
- Full Body 2x-6x a week
- Push Pull Legs

Step 4: Pick Your Favorite Exercises

For that training day, pick your favorite exercises. These are exercises you enjoy, can stick with, and give you a really good stimulus.

Step 5: Order the Exercises

Order the exercises ***in terms of priority***. Earlier exercises will get a better stimulus as you are strongest and freshest at the start. Later exercises will get a lower stimulus, therefore order the exercises based on weak points.