In the realm of fitness, three-month [workout programs](https://www.muscleandfitness.com/workouts/workout-routines/6-week-fat-blast-workout-routine/" \t "_blank) dominate the landscape. You’ve even seen plenty of them in our magazine over the years. Are they effective? Absolutely. But we’re going to let you in on an interesting secret: It doesn’t necessarily take 8 or 12 weeks to get your feet wet in the gym. Not that you’ll be a seasoned vet after four weeks, but if you can just get that first month under your belt, you’ll get yourself over the proverbial hump, where so many fail and give up, and set the stage for a lifetime of [muscle gains](https://www.muscleandfitness.com/workout-plan/workouts/workout-routines/gain-10-pounds-muscle-4-weeks-1/" \t "_blank).

Let’s just call this the accelerated [beginner’s guide](https://www.muscleandfitness.com/workout-plan/workouts/workout-routines/2017-starters-guide-workout-plan/" \t "_blank) to bodybuilding. In this plan, your first month of training will be demanding, but not so demanding as to cause injury (or worse yet, burnout), and progressive in the sense that each week you’ll graduate to different exercises, [higher volume](https://www.muscleandfitness.com/routine/workouts/workout-routines/german-volume-training-build-more-size-6-weeks/" \t "_blank), [more intensity](https://www.muscleandfitness.com/workouts/workout-routines/top-10-high-intensity-interval-workouts-burn-fat-and-enhance-performance/" \t "_blank) or all of the above. After four weeks you’ll not only be ready for the next challenge but you’ll have built a significant amount of quality muscle. In other words, one month from now you’ll look significantly better with your shirt off than you look now. (How’s that for results?)

This program isn’t just for the true beginner who has never touched a weight before; it’s also suitable for anyone who has taken an extended leave of absence from training. How long has it been since you went to the gym regularly? Six months? A year? Five years? No worries: The following routines will get you back on track in—you guessed it—just four short weeks. Let’s get to work.

**BEGINNER’S WORKOUT AT A GLANCE**

* **Week 1:** Full-body split
* **Week 2:** Two-day split: Upper body/Lower body
* **Week 3:** Three-day split: Push/Pull/Legs
* **Week 4:** Four-day split: Full body

**WEEK 1: WHOLE IN ONE**

You’ll begin the program with a [full-body training](https://www.muscleandfitness.com/workouts/workout-routines/hiit-6-week-full-body-workout/" \t "_blank) split, meaning you’ll train all major bodyparts in each workout (as opposed to “splitting up” your training). Train three days this first week, performing just one exercise per bodypart in each session. It’s important that you have a day of rest between each workout to allow your body to recover; this makes training Monday, Wednesday and Friday—with Saturday and Sunday being rest days—a good approach.

The exercises listed in Week 1 are a collection of basic moves that, while also used by advanced lifters, we feel are suitable for the beginner as well. Notice we’re not starting you off with only machine exercises; a handful of free-weight movements are present right off the bat. Reason being, these are the exercises you need to master for long-term gains in [muscular size and strength](https://www.muscleandfitness.com/workouts/full-body-exercises/top-10-compound-lifts-maximum-size-and-strength/" \t "_blank), so you may as well start learning them now. Carefully read all exercise descriptions before attempting them yourself.

In Week 1 you’ll perform three sets of every exercise per workout, which over the course of the week adds up to nine sets total for each bodypart, a good starting volume for your purposes. With the exception of crunches for abs, you’ll do 8–12 reps per set. This rep scheme is widely considered ideal for achieving gains in muscle size (the scientific term is [hypertrophy](https://www.muscleandfitness.com/workouts/workout-tips/fast-lane-hypertrophy/" \t "_blank)) and is commonly employed by amateur and pro bodybuilders alike.

Notice in the workouts below that your first set calls for eight reps, your second set 10 reps and your third set 12. This is referred to in bodybuilding circles as a “reverse pyramid” (a standard pyramid goes from higher to lower reps), where you decrease the weight each set to complete the higher rep count. For example, if on your first set of lat pulldowns you used 140 pounds for eight reps, try using 120 or 130 pounds on set two and 100–120 pounds on set three.

**WEEK 2: SPLIT DECISION**

You’re only a week into the program, yet you’ll begin to train different bodyparts on different days with a two-day [training split](https://www.muscleandfitness.com/routine/workouts/workout-routines/more-or-less-perfect-training-split-workout-routine/" \t "_blank) (meaning the entire body is trained over the course of two days, rather than one as in the first week). You’ll train a total of four days this week; the split includes two upper-body days (Monday and Thursday) and two lower-body days (Tuesday and Friday), and each bodypart is trained twice. Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday will be your recovery days.

Several exercises from Week 1 are carried over to Week 2, but one move is added to each bodypart routine—with the exception of abs—so you can train all muscle groups more completely from multiple angles. Chest, for example, includes two exercises: One is a [compound movement](https://www.muscleandfitness.com/workouts/full-body-exercises/top-5-compound-moves-killer-physique/" \t "_blank) (dumbbell bench press) that involves multiple joints (both the shoulder and elbow) to work the largest amount of muscle possible, and the other is an isolation exercise (dumbbell flye) that involves only one joint (shoulder) and targets the pecs to a greater extent. (When doing presses for chest, the deltoids and triceps are involved to a degree, meaning presses don’t isolate the pecs as much as flyes do.)

You’ll again employ a reverse pyramid scheme of reps, though in Week 2 you’ll go slightly higher in reps (15) on your third set of each exercise. Fifteen reps may be just outside the ideal muscle-building range, but these sets will help you increase muscular endurance to provide a solid foundation on which to build size and strength going forward.

**WEEK 3: THREE ON THREE**

In the third week of the program we step it up to a three-day training split: Train all “pushing” bodyparts (chest, shoulders, triceps) on Day 1; hit the “pulling” bodyparts (back, biceps) and abs on Day 2; and work your lower body (quads, glutes, hamstrings, calves) on Day 3. As in Week 2, you train each bodypart twice a week, so you’ll hit the gym six days this week.

One new exercise is added to each bodypart routine to provide even more angles from which to train your target muscles to promote complete development. You’ll hit each muscle group with two exercises of 3­–4 sets each: four sets for large bodyparts (chest, back, shoulders, quads, hamstrings) and three sets for smaller bodyparts (biceps, triceps, abs, calves). The result is 16 total sets for the week for large bodyparts and 12 sets total for smaller ones—again, working in the 8–15-rep range—which is a substantial increase in volume from Week 1.

**WEEK 4: TURNING UP THE VOLUME**

In the fourth and final week of the program, you’ll train four days in a four-way split that hits each bodypart just once (except for calves and abs, which are each trained twice). Four-day splits are common among experienced lifters because they involve training fewer bodyparts (typically 2–3) per workout, which gives each muscle group ample attention and allows you to train with higher volume. As you’ll see, chest and triceps are paired up, as are back with biceps and quads with hamstrings, each a very common pairing among novice and advanced bodybuilders. Shoulders are trained more or less on their own, and you’ll alternate hitting calves and abs—which respond well to being trained multiple times per week—every other workout. No new exercises are introduced in Week 4 so that you can focus on intensity in your workouts instead of learning new movements.

Rep schemes remain in the hypertrophy range this week, but overall volume increases by adding more sets to individual exercises: up to five sets per move for larger bodyparts, and even 10 sets of calf raises on Thursday. This bump in volume will ensure that your muscles are overloaded sufficiently to continue the growth they’ve already begun experiencing in the first three weeks. Completion of this four-week program now entitles you to go to the next stage.