

BECOMING STRONG

The Beginner's Guide to Strength Training

**Build a stronger, healthier and more
capable body for everyday life.**

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WELCOME

Strength is about far more than six-pack abs or your one-repetition max deadlift.

It's about carrying your shopping with ease.

Climbing stairs without getting out of breath.

Picking up your children or grandchildren for a hug.

Travelling with confidence.

Getting up from the floor without batting an eyelid.

Meeting life's physical demands without your body becoming the limiting factor.

Some people begin strength training because they want to lose weight.

Others want to feel more confident.

Others simply don't want to become weaker as they grow older.

All of these are good reasons.

But over the years, I've come to believe that strength training offers something deeper.

It gives us freedom.

The freedom to say yes to adventure.

The freedom to remain independent.

The freedom to trust our bodies.

A stronger body doesn't guarantee an easier life, but it gives us more options within it.

My hope is that this guide helps you begin building that foundation.

You don't need to be athletic.

You don't need to be young.

You don't need to be perfect.

You just need to show up.

Welcome to the practice of becoming strong.

WHY STRENGTH TRAINING?

Modern life asks very little of our bodies.

Many of us spend hours sitting at desks, driving cars or looking at screens.

Gradually, almost without noticing, we begin to lose muscle, mobility and confidence in what our bodies can do.

It doesn't happen overnight. It happens quietly. One day the shopping bags feel heavier. Climbing the stairs leaves us a little more breathless. We think twice before getting down onto the floor because getting back up might not be quite so easy.

The good news is that this isn't simply something we have to accept.

Strength training is one of the most effective ways we know to slow, and in many cases reverse, age-related declines in strength and muscle mass. Better still, it's never too late to start.

Regular strength training can help you:

- Build and maintain muscle
- Increase bone density
- Improve balance and coordination
- Support healthy joints
- Make everyday tasks feel easier
- Support healthy ageing
- Improve confidence in your own body
- Move with greater ease and resilience

Many people also notice changes in how they look.

That's absolutely fine.

There's nothing wrong with wanting to feel comfortable in your own skin.

But I'd encourage you to let appearance become a bonus rather than the only goal.

The real gift of strength isn't simply looking stronger.

It's living more fully.

Your body is capable of far more than simply being looked at.

STRENGTH AS A PRACTICE

The fitness industry talks a lot about discipline.

"Stay disciplined."

"No excuses."

"Push harder."

There's certainly value in commitment, but over the years I've found another approach that feels kinder, more sustainable, and ultimately more transformative.

What if, instead of discipline, we practised devotion?

Not devotion in a religious sense, but devotion in the sense of caring deeply for something that matters.

Your body is the only one you'll ever have. It carries you through every ordinary Tuesday afternoon and every extraordinary moment life offers. It deserves more than punishment for what you ate yesterday or criticism for how it looks in the mirror.

Train because you want to care for it.

Train because you want to remain strong enough to live independently, to explore the world, to pick up your children or grandchildren for a hug, and to continue saying yes to the life you want to live.

Train because your body is worth looking after.

Show up, not because you hate your body, but because you're learning to care for it.

Devotion has a quiet consistency about it. It doesn't demand perfection. It simply asks us to return, again and again, with patience and care.

One workout won't change your life.

Neither will two.

But hundreds of ordinary workouts, performed with attention and consistency, just might.

THE 7 MOVEMENT SKILLS WE'RE BUILDING

You don't need to learn hundreds of exercises to become stronger.

Almost every exercise you'll ever perform is simply practising one of a handful of movement skills. As you become more experienced, the exercises may change, but the skills remain the same.

Throughout this guide, we'll focus on seven movement skills that help you move through everyday life with greater strength, confidence and ease.

Push

Whether you're pushing open a heavy door, getting yourself up from the floor or lifting something overhead, pushing strength helps you interact confidently with the world around you.

Pull

Pulling develops a strong, balanced and resilient upper body. It's essential for good posture, healthy shoulders and everyday tasks such as dragging a suitcase, opening a heavy gate or pulling yourself up onto a wall or climbing frame.

Squat

We squat every day, often without realising it. Sitting down, standing up, getting in and out of the car, or picking something up from a low cupboard all rely on this movement. Strong squats help us remain capable and independent throughout life.

Hinge

The hip hinge teaches us to bend safely and powerfully. It's the movement we use to lift shopping from the floor, move furniture, pick up children or simply tie our shoes without placing unnecessary strain on the back.

Lunge

Life rarely happens with both feet perfectly planted. Walking, climbing stairs, hiking and changing direction all require us to control our body one leg at a time. Lunges build strength, balance and stability while helping us move confidently through the world.

Carry

Carrying is one of the most practical strength skills you'll ever develop. From shopping bags and suitcases to gardening, DIY or carrying a child, loaded carries strengthen your grip, improve your posture and challenge your balance and core control all at once.

Core Control

Your core is much more than your abdominal muscles. It includes the muscles around your trunk that connect your upper and lower body. Good core control helps you stay balanced, transfer force efficiently and move with confidence whether you're lifting, reaching, twisting or simply walking.

STRENGTH FOR EVERYDAY LIFE

These aren't just gym movements.

They're life movements.

Every time we practise them, we're doing more than becoming better at exercise. We're building a body that's capable of supporting the life we want to live.

HOW WE GET STRONGER

Your body is remarkably good at adapting.

When we ask a little more of it than we did last time, it responds by becoming stronger.

This principle is called **progressive overload**, and it's one of the reasons strength training works so well.

Progressive overload doesn't mean adding more weight every workout. In fact, some of the best progress comes from improving the quality of your movement before increasing the load.

Sometimes progress looks like:

- One more repetition.
- Better technique.
- Greater control.
- A little more range of motion.
- More confidence with the movement.
- Choosing a slightly heavier weight.

Every small improvement is a step forward.

One extra repetition won't make for a dramatic Instagram post. But repeat those small improvements over weeks, months and years, and you'll build something pretty remarkable.

Muscles don't care what number is written on the dumbbell. They only care whether you've given them a good reason to adapt.

So don't chase numbers.

Chase good movement.

Chase consistency.

Chase becoming just a little stronger than you were the last time you trained.

There is no need to rush. There is no prize for getting injured in week three.

Play the long game.

Show up consistently, move well, and trust your body to do what it has evolved to do: adapt.

HOW HARD SHOULD IT FEEL?

One of the biggest questions beginners ask is:

"How heavy should I lift?"

Choose a weight that allows you to complete all of your repetitions with good technique, while feeling that you could still perform one or two more good repetitions if you absolutely had to.

The final few repetitions should require your full focus and effort.

They shouldn't feel easy, but neither should they leave you collapsing on the floor or throwing the weights across the gym.

Strength develops remarkably well in the middle ground between "too easy" and "all-out exhaustion," especially when you're new to training.

You may have heard people talk about training to failure. This simply means continuing an exercise until you can no longer complete another repetition with good technique. Training to failure can be a useful tool, particularly for more experienced lifters, but it isn't where I'd recommend beginners spend most of their time.

When you first begin strength training, your muscles often adapt more quickly than your tendons, ligaments and other connective tissues. It's easy to feel stronger after just a few weeks and be tempted to increase the weight faster than the rest of your body is ready for.

Unfortunately, nothing slows progress quite like an injury.

This guide is written with long-term progress in mind. We'll challenge your body enough to stimulate strength gains while allowing your technique, confidence and connective tissues time to develop alongside your muscles.

Remember, there is no prize for getting injured in week three.

We're not trying to discover the heaviest weight you can lift today.

We're building the strength you'll still be grateful for twenty years from now.

WARMING UP

Think of your warm-up as the bridge between everyday life and training.

Whether you've been sitting at a desk, driving the car or chasing the kids around all morning, your body benefits from a few minutes to prepare before asking it to lift heavy things.

A good warm-up isn't about making yourself tired.

It's about preparing your body to move well.

Your warm-up has three simple jobs:

- Raise your heart rate and increase blood flow.
- Move the joints you'll be using through a comfortable range of motion.
- Prepare your muscles and nervous system for the work ahead.

Begin each session with 5-10 minutes of light movement. This might be a brisk walk, a few minutes on a treadmill, bike or rowing machine, a little skipping, or even dancing around the kitchen if that's your vibe. The goal is simply to feel a little warmer and breathe a little harder.

Next, spend a few minutes moving the joints you'll be using. Circle your shoulders, hips, knees, ankles and wrists. Move your spine through a comfortable range of motion. Think cat-cow, rolling down through the spine and back up again, or any gentle mobility exercises that help you feel a little more connected to your body.

Then, before performing your first working set of any exercise, complete one or two lighter warm-up sets using around 50-75% of your working weight.

These aren't there to tire you out. They're there to rehearse good technique, prepare your muscles and joints, wake up your nervous system and help you feel into the movement pattern before adding more weight.

If you're performing a bodyweight exercise, simply complete 3-5 controlled repetitions first. Pause for a moment, shake everything out, then move into your working set.

This is also your opportunity to check in with your body.

Some days you'll feel strong and ready to go. Other days you'll notice a shoulder feeling a little niggly, a hip that's a little tighter than usual, or that yesterday's gardening has left your back a bit stiff. It's far better to discover those things during your warm-up than halfway through a heavy set.

Neither is a failure. It's simply information.

Learn to listen.

Your body is constantly giving you feedback. The better you become at listening to it, the better you'll become at knowing when to push, when to ease off a little, and when it's simply asking for a little more patience.

The goal isn't to become tired.

The goal is simply to prepare.

Prepare well. Move well.

TECHNIQUE BEFORE WEIGHT

One of the fastest ways to slow your progress is trying to lift more weight than you can control.

Good technique isn't about perfection.

It's about moving with control, maintaining stability throughout the movement, and allowing the muscles you're trying to train to do the work while placing as little unnecessary stress on your joints as possible.

Remember, the goal isn't simply to move the weight from A to B.

The goal is to move your body well.

We've all seen it.

Someone heaving a weight from A to B with every muscle in their body except the one they're supposedly trying to train. There's plenty of noise, plenty of momentum and not much control.

It can be tempting to think that strength training is about moving the heaviest weight possible.

It isn't.

The weight is just a tool. The quality of your attention is what changes your body.

Devote yourself to every repetition.

Your future self, your joints, and probably everyone else in the gym, will thank you.

HOW TO USE THIS PROGRAMME

Before each session, complete the warm-up outlined in the previous section. A few minutes of preparation will help you move better, reduce your risk of injury, and get more from your workout.

This guide contains three full-body workouts. Aim to complete two or three sessions each week, allowing at least one full day's rest between sessions to give your body time to recover, adapt and grow stronger.

Simply work through the workouts in order, then cycle back to the beginning once you've completed all three.

You might choose to train every other day, or perhaps on Mondays and Thursdays. There isn't a perfect schedule. The best programme is the one you can consistently fit into your life.

Meet yourself where you are.

If two sessions a week feels realistic, start there. Don't worry about what anyone else is doing. As your confidence, strength and recovery improve, you can gradually increase your training to three sessions each week.

Remember, doing two workouts every week for a year will always beat doing five workouts a week for a month.

Play the long game.

MAKING PROGRESS

For every exercise, begin with one warm-up set using approximately 50-75% of your working weight.

This isn't about making yourself tired. Use this set to practise your technique, prepare your joints and muscles for the work ahead, and allow your nervous system to become familiar with the movement pattern. Take a moment to feel into it and check in with yourself.

Once you're ready, complete two working sets using the weight you've chosen. These are the sets that stimulate your body to become stronger.

Rest for 1-2 minutes between working sets. As you become stronger and begin lifting heavier weights, you may find you need a little longer. For now, a minute or two is usually plenty.

Each exercise has a suggested repetition range. For example, if the programme says 12-15 repetitions, choose a weight that allows you to complete at least 12 good repetitions, while making the final 1-2 repetitions genuinely challenging. The first time you complete the workout, you might manage 12 repetitions. Next time, aim for 13. Then perhaps 14. Once you can comfortably complete 15 repetitions, or even 16 with good technique, it's time to increase the weight slightly and begin the process again.

Don't worry if progress isn't perfectly linear.

Some days you'll feel stronger than others. A poor night's sleep, a stressful week at work, or simply not eating enough can all affect your performance. That's completely normal.

Consistency beats perfection.

Over time, one extra repetition, a small increase in weight, smoother technique, or simply feeling more confident with an exercise are all signs that you're getting stronger.

Start by performing two working sets for each exercise.

After around six weeks, take a deload week. This doesn't mean doing nothing.

Keep moving, go for walks, enjoy some gentle yoga or mobility work, and allow your body a chance to recover and absorb the training you've been doing.

When you return, continue where you left off. Around week three of your second training block, you may find you're ready to increase to three working sets for each exercise.

There's no rush.

You can make excellent progress using this programme for several months.

Resist the temptation to change exercises simply because you're bored.

Your muscles do not get bored.

They respond to quality movement, progressive overload and consistent practice.

If you're ever unsure whether to increase the weight, don't rush it. Ask yourself whether your technique is improving first.

Good movement always comes before heavier movement.

Move well.

Play the long game.

Trust the process.

WORKOUT A

EXERCISE	WARM UP SET 1	WORKING SET 1	WORKING SET 2	WORKING SET 3
PUSH UP	3-5 reps	Maximal effort	Maximal effort	Maximal effort
INVERTED ROW	3-5 reps	Maximal effort	Maximal effort	Maximal effort
GOBLET SQUAT	5-10 reps	12-15 reps	12-15 reps	12-15 reps
OVERHEAD DB PRESS	5-10 reps	12-15 reps	12-15 reps	12-15 reps
PULL DOWN	5-10 reps	12-15 reps	12-15 reps	12-15 reps
WALKING LUNGE	6-10 reps	20-30 reps	20-30 reps	20-30 reps
PLANK	NA	Maximal effort	Maximal effort	Maximal effort
FARMERS CARRY	NA	20-100m	20-100m	20-100m

WORKOUT B

EXERCISE	WARM UP SET 1	WORKING SET 1	WORKING SET 2	WORKING SET 3
CHEST PRESS	5-10 reps	12-15 reps	12-15 reps	12-15 reps
CABLE ROW	5-10 reps	12-15 reps	12-15 reps	12-15 reps
TRAPBAR DEADLIFT	5-10 reps	12-15 reps	12-15 reps	12-15 reps
SHOULDER PRESS	5-10 reps	12-15 reps	12-15 reps	12-15 reps
SINGLE ARM PULL DOWN	3-5 reps/side	12-15 reps/side	12-15 reps/side	12-15 reps/side
SPLIT SQUAT	3-5 reps/side	8-15 reps/side	8-15 reps/side	8-15 reps/side
DEAD BUG	NA	10-30 reps	10-30 reps	10-30 reps
SUITCASE CARRY	NA	20-50m/side	20-50m/side	20-50m/side

WORKOUT C

EXERCISE	WARM UP SET 1	WORKING SET 1	WORKING SET 2	WORKING SET 3
DB BENCH PRESS	5-10 reps	12-15 reps	12-15 reps	12-15 reps
NEUTRAL GRIP PULL DOWN	5-10 reps	12-15 reps	12-15 reps	12-15 reps
LEG EXTENSION	5-10 reps	12-15 reps	12-15 reps	12-15 reps
LANDMINE PRESS	5-10 reps	12-15 reps	12-15 reps	12-15 reps
UPPER BACK ROW	5-10 reps	12-15 reps	12-15 reps	12-15 reps
LEG CURL	5-10 reps	12-15 reps	12-15 reps	12-15 reps
LOCUST POSE	NA	10-30 reps	10-30 reps	10-30 reps
BEAR CRAWL	NA	10-50m	10-50m	10-50m

COMMON QUESTIONS

How many days each week?

Two or three sessions is enough to make excellent progress.

How long should each workout take?

Around 60 minutes including a little time for warm up and cool down.

Will I become bulky?

No. Building large amounts of muscle takes years of dedicated training, appropriate nutrition and, in many cases, exceptional genetics or performance-enhancing drugs. Most beginners simply become stronger, leaner and more athletic.

What if I miss a week?

Life happens.

Begin again.

Consistency over months matters far more than perfection over days.

BEYOND THE PROGRAMME

The goal isn't to complete this PDF.

The goal is to build a body that supports the life you want to live.

A body that lets you travel.

Play.

Garden.

Carry.

Explore.

Climb mountains.

Walk the dog.

Move house.

Pick up your grandchildren.

Or simply enjoy growing older with greater freedom.

Strength is one expression of health.

Not the whole picture.

But it's an important one.

I hope this guide helps you discover that becoming stronger has very little to do with becoming someone else.

It's about becoming more fully yourself.

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