The Vegains Training Guide



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Stupid Question

Let's start with a stupid question I get all the time: Do I have to be plant-based/vegan to build muscle? No! Being vegan doesn't really have anything to do with building muscle. As long as you get enough calories and protein, your muscles are happy and don't really care where they come from. However, eating plant-based, or mostly plant foods, is certainly healthier and has other countless benefits for the environment and the animals, for example. I cover all of that in <u>The Vegains Nutrition Guide</u>, so check it out as well if you want to thrive on plants. Back to the topic of this e-book: Building muscle. Building muscle is simple, especially at the beginning IF you stick to the principles you will learn in this guide, so let's get started.

My Story

I have always wanted to build muscle and have an aesthetic physique. I tried so many sports, but it always came down to building a better physique so I felt more comfortable in my skin. Simply because I didn't really feel at ease in my skin and with my body. I was a skinny guy who people didn't take seriously, and girls were not interested in me. Even though I felt like a strong guy on the inside, I didn't reflect that from the outside. So I asked myself: What is the best way to build muscle? Weightlifting, of course! I signed up at my local gym and started to lift. I had no clue what I was doing, so I looked around and tried to mimic the exercises people, who were bigger than me, were doing around me. I really spend a lot of time in the gym but with this unstructured training and not understanding the principles of building muscle, I made very little progress and my physique didn't really change at all.

I stumbled upon a plant-based diet because I watched vegan fitness YouTubers who spoke about the benefits of a plant-based diet for building muscle. Many of them challenged their viewers to try it for a month. Long story short, I started my vegan journey selfishly over 4 years ago because I wanted to build muscle. After this month I continued eating plantbased because my acne went away, I felt great, and my performance was on point so why stop? Later, I found out all the other benefits regarding health, animals, and the environment, so there was no going back for me to a diet containing animal products. And why would I have? I felt great. I still hadn't gained any muscles, but now I was motivated like never before because I wanted to debunk this stupid myth that I got all the time back then that "you can't build muscle as a vegan".

So I stopped copying what other people in the gym where doing and dug into the research. I read a lot of books on the subject and studied online courses where I learned the principles of building muscle and how to structure a training plan. From this point on, I gained over 20kg/45lbs of solid muscle mass and am still gaining. For example, I progressed in the squat from only 30kg/65lbs to +140kg/310lbs and in the deadlift from 50kg/110lbs to +170kg/375lbs, because strength correlates with muscle mass as you will learn later. So now I will teach you these basic principles as easily as possible in order for you to know what you are doing and to be able to structure your training that actually makes you stronger and more muscular without wasting another training session.



How do muscles grow?

To produce muscle growth, you have to apply a load of stress greater than what your body or muscles had previously adapted to. How do you do this? The main way is to lift progressively heavier weights. This additional tension on the muscle sets a stimulus which makes the muscle cell repair a little bit bigger than before to be stronger and better adjusted to/ prepared for the heavier weights. Note that this process happens when you rest. While you train your muscles break down and you set the stimulus. This is called the catabolic process and when you come home, rest, and eat food, you switch to the anabolic process. Using progressively heavier weights is crucial for strength, and therefore muscle growth, because it sets a proper muscle stimulus which makes us grow. If we don't progress and just chase the pump, we are mostly only moving glycogen through our muscles, but aren't setting a stimulus that makes us get stronger and grow. That's why this guide will teach you how to progressively overload so you get stronger and more muscular.

The 3 pillars of building muscle



Nutrition

Let's start with nutrition because there isn't really much to it. We are not talking about a healthy diet but just what is necessary to get in, in order to build muscle. However, if you want a healthy well-balanced diet, I would highly recommend my other eBook, <u>The</u> <u>Vegains Nutrition Guide</u>, to you. To build muscle we need enough calories (the more nutrient dense those calories are, the healthier it is) and enough protein.

The most important thing is that we get enough calories, **because muscles are a luxury product.** Our body isn't really interested in building muscle. Our body is much more interested in keeping us healthy, keeping our organs functioning properly, renewing our cells etc. Not until all that is covered can our body have the capacity to build muscle. That is

why we should avoid a caloric deficit. Of course, if you want to shred down for the summer, for a competition, or are just overweight, a caloric deficit is needed. If you are overweight your body can take your fat storage to use as an energy source, so you can even build muscle in a caloric deficit. If you are overweight, then definitely start with a caloric deficit. But for everyone who is at a normal weight or is rather skinny, it is really hard to build muscle in a caloric deficit long-term. It works to some extent, but not long-term, and that's probably not the result you want to achieve. Because when you are in a caloric deficit, you lose weight and your body uses all the calories it gets to keep you alive and for your overall health. At some point in a caloric deficit, your body even starts to use your muscles as an energy source, especially if you don't train and don't get enough protein. So we need to eat at least enough to hit our maintenance calories (maintenance calories are the calorie needed so that you don't lose or gain weight but remain your weight - input = output). But even better is a **slight caloric plus** (eating a little bit more than you burn). Then you have calories, nutrients, and protein in abundance and can use those to build muscle. We only want a slight caloric plus because all calories above that (high caloric plus/dirty bulk) don't give us an advantage for building muscle but rather disadvantages because we store them as fat, which we have to diet back down at some point, we often feel more tired after we eat too many calories because our body requires a lot of energy for digestion, our testosterone level decreases if our body fat percentage is higher than 20% (men)/30% (women), and other downsides we avoid by not dirty bulking. I recommend "lean bulking" meaning a slight caloric plus where we get all the benefits without any of the downsides.





And if we eat a slight caloric plus we will automatically have enough protein! We don't need as much protein as a lot of people think, we just need enough protein. Nowadays most people get way too much protein which is not necessary, and too much animal protein is really unhealthy because it stresses your kidneys, makes you lose calcium, increases cancer cell growth, etc. That's why I recommend protein from plant sources. You don't need to focus on getting enough protein because if you eat enough calories, preferably from whole plant foods, then you will always get enough protein. If you are in a caloric deficit and want to maintain your muscles, or are overweight and want to build muscle in a caloric deficit, then make sure to have some high protein foods in your diet such as:

- peas
- chickpeas
- lentils
- beans
- edamame
- tofu
- tempeh
- other soy products
- plant milk (oat milk, rice milk, almond milk, hemp milk, etc.)
- seitan
- oats
- whole grain pasta
- buckwheat
- quinoa
- chia
- hemp
- other seeds
- peanuts
- almonds
- walnuts
- other nuts
- nut butters
- mushrooms
- leafy greens
- broccoli
- spinach
- kale
- vegan protein powder



Vegan protein powder is optional, because as I said, whole plant foods have all the protein you need, just eat a big variety of those you like out of these groups: fruits, vegetables, legumes, whole grains, nuts, seeds and other plant-based products you enjoy and you'll get all the protein you need to thrive, get stronger and build muscle. Just eat enough! If you want a vegan protein powder and want to conveniently increase your protein intake I recommend **Vivo Life**. They have the highest vegan protein guality I know and they are not just a vegan protein but also a superfood with the healthiest plant foods added like turmeric, ginger, peppermint, beetroot, berry powder, reishi mushrooms etc. making it not only super rich in protein but also in micronutrients, while tasting super delicious. I love what they do, their team and be proud to be part of the Vivo team. You can use my code **VEGAINS10** to save 10% on all products for your first order and if you want to support me after that (meaning that I get a commission of your order which doesn't cost you any extra), please use my affiliate link which you can find on my website vegains.org, under my YouTube videos YouTube/Vegains and YouTube/ VegainsDE and in my highlight story on Instagram @vegainstrength and @vegainsfood called Protein. Thank you for your support and enjoy high-quality supplements.

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How do you know your maintenance calories and when you are in a caloric deficit or plus? I cover all that in <u>The Vegains Nutrition Guide</u>, so make sure to read it as well because there are important things to keep in mind, and in it, I teach you in depth how to manipulate your weight according to your goals and how to make your diet healthy in an easy and enjoyable way. So now that we got the nutrition part out of the way, let's tackle the main pillar of this eBook: Training.



Training

Let's talk about gravity. On our planet, we are exposed to a certain force of gravity that pulls us down. We all grow up getting stronger and adjusting to gravity. After about age 14, we don't really get any stronger because we are well-adjusted to gravity and to our day-today activities like picking up a backpack or walking to school.

But if we want to get stronger and more muscular than the average person, we need to expose ourselves to a stronger gravity. That means using a heavier physical load in the gym. As I said, I started off deadlifting 50kg/110lbs and progressed with a heavier physical load over time and now I am deadlifting over 170kg/375lbs for reps and am still progressing. The same goes for pull-ups, bench press, squats and other exercises. My body adapted to the heavier physical load and thus I got stronger and more muscular. It is really as simple as that. Make progression long term with a good plan. Note that we are not machines but human beings and can't progress linearly forever. We feel different each day due to so many factors like stress, what we ate, motivation, sleep, etc. Yes, we can optimize these factors, but there are still so many outside factors that influence us like the weather and bad news, for example. As a result, our progression will always fluctuate, but as long as the trend goes up long term, we will stay on the right path to getting stronger and more muscular. So don't expect you will get stronger after every training session. It will not work long term and is an unachievable goal that only leads to failure, frustration, and injuries. And especially since the stronger you get, the longer it takes you to get even stronger. I am happy to achieve 2,5kg/5lbs progression in the compound exercises after 4 weeks of training. Later you will learn how to cycle your training so that you break through plateaus and progress long term.

Now let's look at the most important factors of training which are **progression**, **frequency**, **volume**, **and intensity**.



Progression

Progression means getting better/stronger and getting stronger means you will build muscles. When you have accomplished the necessary reps and sets of one exercise with proper form, increase the weight by the smallest amount that is possible in your gym. I recommend that when you start with the new training plan I have later on for you, you start off with a weight that you will definitely handle easily for the first times. During the beginning phase, you will need to adjust to the new training plan and concentrate on the proper form and perfecting your form before the weight starts to get heavier, so be sure to start out with light weights.

How to make progression:

Progression can be achieved by 4 different main factors. The most important factor is that your training weight increases long term.

1. Training weight increase: For example, you bench press 50kg/110lbs 5x5 and the following week you bench press 52,5kg/115lbs 5x5 (weight increase of 2,5kg/5lbs)

2. You progress with reps, "making reps full": For example, you bench press 55kg/120lbs 5x5 but in the last set you only achieve 4 reps (5,5,5,5,4). Thus the next time you try to make the reps full with 5x5 and only when you have achieved all the required reps and sets with proper form can you increase the weight. **Proper form is key, so don't let the form suffer only to make weight increase.**

3. You progress in proper form: For example, last week you achieved a bench press of 55kg/120lbs with 5x5 but in the last set, your last 2 reps weren't proper because your pelvis went up. Thus, instead of increasing the weight, try next time to do all sets and reps correctly, and only if you have achieved all the required reps and sets with proper form can you increase the weight in your next training.

4. You progress with time/shorter rest periods: For example, last time you squatted 80kg/175lbs 5x5 with a 2 minute rest in between, this time you squat 80kg/175lbs 5x5 with a 1.5 minute rest in between.

The most important thing is that you always have proper form, meaning that you do the exercises correctly so you decrease your risk of injury and build muscle long term in a healthy way. When the form is proper, we focus on progressing with: **1**. Training weight increase and **2**. Progressing with reps, but **3**. Always focus on keeping proper form. Never let your form suffer only to increase the weight! It will lead to injuries and you will not train the muscle effectively since you are not yet strong enough for that weight and will compensate with momentum and other muscle groups which is not the goal. The goal with each exercise is to train the target muscles. **4**. Progressing with time is not something we focus on, but rather wait until we are ready for the next set so we can lift more weight than the same weight with a smaller rest period. We will cover rest periods later in this guide.

Frequency

Frequency is how often you train the same muscle group per week. For example, if you train your upper body and your lower body twice per week, then your frequency is 2x per week because you target the same muscle group twice per week. But if you have a "bro split" where you only train one muscle group in one training session per week, e.g. "chest day" every Monday, where you only train your chest, then you have a low frequency of only 1x per week (stimulating the same muscles only one time per week).

Studies show that a higher frequency of 2-3 (stimulating the same muscles 2-3x per week) is ideal for natural athletes. To understand this we have to look at the protein synthesis. Protein synthesis is one of the most fundamental biological processes by which individual cells build their specific proteins. In other words, it's when your muscles grow after a muscle stimulus. Studies showed that the protein synthesis for natural athletes is not much longer than 36 hours (so 2 days, because you don't train the same muscles again after exactly 36h/1.5 days because it would likely be night time, hence 2 days). That means after 2 days your muscles don't grow anymore, and it doesn't matter how much you have trained your muscles and how sore you are, after not much longer than 2 days your muscle growth stops! That's why it is important to train the same muscle groups at a high frequency, and it means stimulating the same muscle group 2 to 3 times per week for optimal and fast results. Also, you will work on your technique and proper form more often when you have a higher frequency. When you are squatting 2-3 times per week you become a much better squatter compared to when you only squat once per week. And better technique makes the exercises easier and more effective because you target the right muscles and thus gain more muscle while you have a lower risk of injury.

It's called "training" because we always train the exercises and the more frequently we perform them, the better we get.

Of course, you can also gain muscle with a low frequency, but it just takes longer and only works to some extent. The guys who usually have these "bro splits", who you often find in magazines or forums; where they train only one or a few muscle groups per day with high volume, are often on steroids. And when you take steroids your protein synthesis is much longer. I highly recommend **NOT** taking steroids because the side effects are severe and make it not worth it. Side effect of steroids can include: acne, difficulty sleeping, high blood pressure, increased growth of body hair, insomnia, lower resistance to infection, muscle weakness, sudden mood swings, stomach irritation or bleeding, water retention, swelling, worsening of diabetes, sudden death, osteoporosis, and many more, so please stay away from steroids! Stay natural! Your body will thank you in the long run.

Back to natural athletes and protein synthesis. Since the protein synthesis (the time when our body forms new muscle cells) is only 2 days (36h), it doesn't make much sense to do low-frequency training because you would miss out on so much muscle growth potential.

Let's take an example of Max and Jon. Max is doing a "bro split" and is only training one muscle group per week. Max trains chest on Monday with a high volume and completely destroys his chest. After a couple exercises his chest is so fatigued that he can no longer have a strong performance and thus doesn't stimulate the muscle but basically only moves glycogen through his muscle. Max's chest is sore for 4 days and he feels like it will grow like crazy. But, in reality, it will only grow for 2 days and then the chest will have to wait for another 5 days until it gets stimulated again during the next chest training.

In contrast, Jon is doing an upper body/lower body split, 4x per week and is training upper body 2x per week which includes chest. Since he only does 1-2 exercises for the chest, he can perform them really well and sets a good muscle stimulus. His chest is only a little bit sore and grows for the next two days. After only 3 days, Jon's chest is ready to train again and he sets another good muscle stimulus in his next upper body training (from which he will grow again during the next two days when the protein synthesis is active). Who do you think has gained more chest gains, Max or Jon? Very likely Jon, because not only did he train his chest with a higher frequency, but he probably also had a higher volume (which we will cover in the next chapter).

Proper form is key, so don't let the form suffer only to make weight increase.

Volume

Volume = Exercise weight x sets x reps. For example, you bench press at your upper body training 5x5 with 80kg/175lbs. Thus your volume for the chest with bench press is 80x5x-5=2000kg/175x5x5=4375lbs.

Let's go back to the example with Max and Jon. I said that Jon had not only a higher frequency, but probably also a higher volume accomplished. When we look at Max's chest training, he did:

Bench press Butterfly
High cable chest fly
Low cable chest fly
Chest press machine

Since the chest is a fairly small muscle, his performance (how strong you are/how much weight you can move) decreased dramatically and looked like this:

Bench press: 3x5 50kg/110lbs Butterfly: 3x8 40kg/90lbs High cable chest fly: 3x10 20kg/45lbs Low cable chest fly: 3x10 10kg/20lbs Chest press machine: 2x8 20kg/45lbs

So if we calculate all that according to the formula at the beginning of the chapter, we get a total volume of that chest day of 2930kg/6480lbs.

(3x5x50=750) +(3x8x40=960) +(3x10x20=600) +(3x10x10=300) +(2x8x20=320) =2930kg/ (3x5x110=1650) +(3x8x90=2160) +(3x10x45=1350) +(3x10x20=600) +(2x8x45=720) =6480lbs

Since Max does a "bro split" and only trains chest one day per week, that is his entire volume for the chest for one week. Now let's look at Jon. Jon does an upper body/lower body split 4x per week and trains upper body 2x per week, therefore training his chest 2x per week because chest is part of the upper body. On his first upper body training for the chest Jon only did:

Bench press

And on his second training he did:

Bench press Close grip bench press

So let's calculate his volume:

Upper body training 1: Bench press 5x5 60kg/130lbs

Upper body training 2:

Bench press 4x8 50kg/110lbs

Close grip bench press 3x8 40kg/90lbs

His total chest volume for the week is 4060kg/8930lbs!

(5x5x60=1500) +(4x8x50=1600) +(3x8x40=960) =4060kg/ (5x5x130=3250) +(4x8x110=3520) +(3x8x90=2160) =8930lbs

That is (4060-2930=1130kg)/(8930- 6480=2450lbs) 1130kg/2450lbs more than Max, even though Jon did fewer exercises for the chest. The reason is, as you might have understood by now, that Jon not only had a higher frequency but also performed better (stronger) because he was always "fresh" for the exercises. "Fresh" means that when you do your first exercise for a muscle, you are always the strongest, and it's where your performance is the highest (sometimes it might feel like you are stronger during your second exercise, but this is only if you didn't warm up properly). And from this point on through every rep and set for the same muscle, your performance decreases meaning you get weaker and weaker. Thus it makes much more sense to only stimulate a muscle with little exercise(s) but effectively and more frequently. As a result, we are stronger at every training and can grow more consistently because we are using the 36-hour protein synthesis window ideally. And Max grows for two days after his chest day, but is probably sore for the next 4 days and misses out on growth potential for the next 5 days, (until he trains chest again), Jon, on the other hand, trained chest strongly and effectively with only one exercise during his first upper body training and sets a good muscle stimulus and grows for the next 2 days. After 3 days, he has recovered well because he only did bench press for the chest, and he goes to his

next upper body training and sets another good muscle stimulus again with bench press and close grip bench press. Jon, therefore, grows during the following two days and gets stronger and more muscular than Max in the long run.

How much volume is perfect for me? I already balanced out the volume in the training plans that I will present to you later in this guide, but the sweet spot is 40-70 reps for a muscle group per training, 2-3x per week. Or 80-210 reps for a muscle group per week.

Note that many exercises overlap. For example, all pull exercises where you train your back also involve partially your biceps. So you don't need to isolate your biceps fully with my volume recommendations I just gave you (40-70 reps per training/80-210 reps per week) but can calculate 1/3 of the pull exercises you did prior in it so you are left with "only" 2/3 for the volume recommendations to perform for your biceps. Same goes for all push exercises when you isolate your triceps etc. Don't worry if that sounds complicated, I calculated everything already in your training plans to come and by then you will have a better understanding of it.

If you are a beginner, you need less volume to set the proper growth stimulus (around 40 reps, 2-3x per week or around 80 reps per week) and the more advanced you get, the more volume you need. This also happens automatically because when you get stronger, you automatically increase the volume. For example, two months ago, you squatted 50kg/110lbs 5x5 so 5x5x50=1250kg/5x5x110=2750lbs. Now you squat 60kg/130lbs 5x5, so 5x5x60=1500kg/5x5x130=3250lbs. Even though you didn't increase the exercises or reps and sets, your volume still increased because you got stronger.

Here is what to do if you are unsure if you should change your volume. Are you progressing (getting stronger in the compound exercises which we will cover later)? If yes, change nothing (!) because progression is what we want and is an indicator that your volume is in the sweet spot. If the answer is no, and you aren't progressing, I need to ask you a new question: Do you feel you've recovered? If yes, then increase the volume. For example, you started with 40 reps per muscle group per training 2x per week, so now increase it to maybe 45-50 reps per muscle group per training 2x per week. If you answered the question with no (you don't feel you've recovered), then it's time to do a deload (which we will cover later). If after the deload you are progressing again, don't change the volume. If after your deload you still aren't progressing, reduce the volume.



Intensity

Intensity is NOT how "intense" you train, how much you sweat, or how out of breath you are, but how heavy you train. There are two ways to measure your intensity:

1. Percentage of your maximum weight. For example, your one rep max at bench press is 100kg/220lbs, thus when you bench press 80kg/175lbs, you are training with an Intensity of 80%

2. RPE scale 1-10= how many reps you have left in the tank/how many reps you can do with proper form. RPE means "Rated Perceived Exertion". For example, training RPE scale 8 means you have 2 more reps in the tank with proper form. Training RPE 9 means you have 1 more rep in the tank with proper form. Training RPE 10 means you have 0 reps in the tank (training until failure), etc.

Why shouldn't I train with 100% intensity? Isn't that the right mentality like, "rest is for the weak", and, "train hard, gain hard"? No, it's "**train smart, gain hard**". Because otherwise, you will burn yourself out eventually. If you always train until failure, and always give it all you got, then your risk for injuries is much higher, and over time you get these little aches and pains in your elbows, knees, wrists, shoulders, etc. Also, your CNS (Central Nervous System) will be put under so much stress and could burn out eventually which would lead you to be sick or over trained, and you wouldn't have the motivation and energy to train anymore. This training approach will not make you get stronger (and thus more muscular) in the long run. Always think long-term when it comes to building muscle; it is not a sprint but a marathon.

The performance level of your body is dependent on many factors. Some are not influenceable), e.g. the weather. When it comes to your progression, your body is dealing with daily fluctuations which are normal. Listen to your body! If you force yourself to surpass the weight from your last training, even though you didn't sleep well and feel sick, then you probably won't be able to increase the weight from that last training, and if you try, the risk of injury will be very high. If you stick to the RPE scale, then you will progress long-term -**not in every training, but long-term in a healthy and injury preventing way.**

RPE scale:

10: You wouldn't have achieved 1 more rep with proper form (training until failure)
9: You would have achieved 1 more rep with proper form
8: You would have achieved 2 more reps with proper form
7: You would have achieved 3 more reps with proper form
6: You would have achieved 4 more reps with proper form
5: You would have achieved 5 more reps with proper form
1-4: Too little workload (weight)

It is important to know that everything under 50% of your one rep max weight is too little weight to adopt for building muscle. If you can bench press 100kg/220lbs for one rep (that is your one rep max), then everything you bench press for reps under 50kg/110lbs is too little weight to build muscle. Because if you use too little weight (under 50% of your one rep max), your body adapts not by building muscle, but by other factors like lactate toler-ance, better provision of energy, endurance, etc. So we need to stimulate our muscles with enough weight (>50% of our one rep max). But also not too heavy because then we can't accumulate enough volume because we could only perform a couple reps with too much weight so we need to find the sweet spot. The sweet spot is between 60-90% of your one rep max, or, a 6-9 on the RPE scale.

Why not RPE 10? As I said before, when it comes to building muscle mass, the essential factors are volume, frequency, and intensity while making progression. If you train until muscle failure, your regeneration will take much longer and thus you will have to lower your frequency and overall volume. Besides that, training to muscle failure gives you a much higher risk for injuries.

Why not train with 100% of my one rep max? Think about it: What is more volume? 1 rep with 100kg/220lbs or 5 reps with 80kg/175lbs? 1x100=100kg/1x220=220lbs vs. 5x80=400kg/5x175=875lbs? Doing more reps with only 80% intensity gives us 300kg/655lbs more volume (!) compared to only 1 rep with 100% intensity. Because we need to achieve a critical volume (enough volume to set a growth muscle stimulus) for building muscle, it is much easier if we train with an intensity between 60-90% of your one rep max, or, 6-9 on the RPE scale. That is the sweet spot and usually brings us to around 5-15 reps. Everything under 5 reps is likely too heavy, and so we can't accumulate volume, and everything over 15 reps is usually too easy, so we don't adjust by building muscle but by other factors like endurance. So now on to how to use the RPE scale. As I explained earlier, the sweet spot is between 6-9, meaning having 4-1 more reps in the tank with proper form. In each training plan, you will find the RPE I recommend for the training. For example, I start with bench press and go so far with the demanded weight that I could have done 2 more reps with proper form. If I'm not feeling well on that day and the required weight is, for example, 80kg/175lbs for 8 reps, and during the first set I only accomplish 6 reps with RPE scale of 8, then that is fine. If I had trained until muscle failure, then I would have been even weaker during the other sets because I'd have already pre-exhausted my muscle. If you pre-exhaust your muscles, your performance (strength) decreases drastically. If I had trained until muscle failure in the example above and achieved the 8 reps with RPE 10 (training until muscle failure), then I would have probably only achieved 8/5/4/4 in the sets of bench press, but if I had stuck to the RPE scale, my sets would have looked more like 6/7/6/6, so in total 25 reps with RPE 8 compared to 21 reps when I would have pre-exhausted my muscles with RPE 10 in the first set. I also might have failed at the last rep and might have injured myself, and eventually burned myself out because my CNS broke down and I'd be lying in bed for a week. What is better? Not training at all or not training until muscle failure? What I've learned over the past years of weightlifting, and what most experienced weightlifters say is that less is often more! They wish they would have rested on that one day when they didn't feel right, and regret training until muscle failure because that is when a bad injury in their carrier happened, and which put them out of training for half a year or so. For me, I would often keep pushing out reps and then my form suffered and wasn't proper anymore and it just led to my elbows and shoulders hurting. Because we can not always top our weight from the last training. But if we use the RPE scale, we can top it long term, not every training, but long-term. It might be hard at the beginning, but after a while, you really get to know your body and how many reps you could have done. So leave your ego at the door and don't burn yourself out. Always think long-term when it comes to building muscle. You will find the RPE range I recommend for each training at the top of your training plan. You recover faster from upper body compound exercises like bench press than from lower body compound exercises like squats; that's why the RPE is lower on your lower body training (7-8) compared to your upper body training (8-9). And if you choose the full body training, it is in the middle. We will cover your training plans later in this guide.

We have already covered the most important factors for building muscle: frequency, volume & intensity while making progression. If that all made sense to you so far then you are on the right path to know the basic principles of building muscle and can use them for your training. If you are still a bit confused, I encourage you to read through it again to see if that helps everything become clear.

 $\mathcal{O}\mathcal{O}$ A State A **Always think long-term when it** comes to building muscle; it is not a sprint but a marathon.

Training splits

For natural athletes, the frequency is a significant factor. Numerous studies showed that the protein-synthesis for natural athletes is no longer than 2 days. We covered that in detail in the frequency chapter, so you know that after 2 days your muscles no longer grow, and it doesn't matter how much you trained your muscles and how sore you are, after about 2 days, your muscle growth stops! That's why it is important to train the same muscle groups at a high frequency. This means stimulating the same muscle group 2 to 3 times per week for optimal and fast results. How many days you want to train is up to you. I recommend for beginners 3-4 times, and for advanced weightlifters 4-5 times per week. I wouldn't recommend 7 times per week (every day) because a frequency of more than 3 doesn't give you an advantage but rather disadvantages because you have to do very little volume to be able to train every day, and structuring your training becomes much more difficult. Plus, during rest is when your muscles actually grow and therefore necessary in order to make progression long term. I recommend at least 1-2 rest days per week. I love that you are motivated and might want to train 6-7 times per week, but as I said, when it comes to building muscle, less is often more. From the studies we have about frequency, my experience, and the athletes I have coached, I found out that for beginners, 3 times per week is enough, and for slightly/more advanced or really motivated athletes, 4-5 times is the sweet spot. It also allows you to still have a life outside the gym while getting maximum gains since you'll have the perfect frequency and also enough time to regenerate. This means that you should recover well before your next training and make progression easier. I did train 6 times a week for a while and it burned me out because the workload became too much, I couldn't recover from it, and I soon plateaued. Now I'm at 5 times per week (2x lower body and 3x upper body), and I hit the sweet spot for me and my current state.

If you train 3 times per week or less, then you should do a full-body training in order to stimulate the same muscle groups 2-3 times per week. For example:

Monday:	Full body training A
Tuesday:	Rest
Wednesday:	Full body training B
Thursday:	Rest
Friday:	Full body training C
Saturday:	Rest
Sunday:	Rest

If you train more than 3 times per week, so 4-6 times, then you should do an upper body/ lower body split to stimulate the same muscle groups 2-3 times per week. For example, an upper body/lower body split 4 times per week:

Monday:	Upper body A
Tuesday:	Lower body A
Wednesday:	Rest
Thursday:	Upper body B
Friday:	Lower body B
Saturday:	Rest
Sunday:	Rest

That is the split I made most of my gains with, and the one I used to coach most of my athletes.

If you want to train 5-6 times your week can look like this (this is actually how I train right now):

Monday:	Upper body A
Tuesday:	Lower body A
Wednesday:	Upper body B
Thursday:	Rest
Friday:	Lower body B
Saturday:	Upper body C
Sunday:	Rest

And for 6 times just add lower body C on Sunday, for example. But 3 lower body trainings per week is too much for my legs, so I train 2 times lower body and 3 times upper body per week. So my lower body has a frequency of 2 and my upper body has a frequency of 3 thus both are in the sweet spot for natural athletes (a frequency between 2-3). You have to find your sweet spot, and how many days you want to go to the gym, but studies show (and through my own experience) that for beginners, 3-4 days per week is ideal, and for advanced athletes, 4-5 days per week.

Yes, you can also split your training a bit further than only upper body/lower body with, for example, a push/pull/leg split . That means training on day 1 all push exercises (chest, triceps and front shoulder), on the next day, all pull exercises (back, biceps, shoulders), and on the following day legs and maybe core. But if you split your training into 3 muscle groups, you would have to go to the gym at least 6 times per week to get a frequency of only 2. This split only makes sense if you are dedicated to go to the gym 6x, and it doesn't give you an advantage -- especially not for beginners -- so I wouldn't recommend this split. This split would look like this:

Monday:	Push A
Tuesday:	Pull A
Wednesday:	Legs A
Thursday:	Push B
Friday:	Pull B
Saturday:	Legs B
Sunday:	Rest

Remember your muscles grow when you rest, and while you train you break them down. This split would only give you 1 rest day which is very little. And I would never split further than this. All splits above 3 I consider as "bro splits" and only work effectively long term for steroid users. So my top recommendations are the full body training and the upper body/ lower body split. It is not just the higher frequency, but also the fact that you will get much better at the exercises you perform when you do them more frequently.

Now we will cover your training plans. These plans are already greatly adjusted to the factors of volume, frequency, and intensity. First, we will cover a full body training which you should do if you want to train 3 times per week or less. Then an upper body/lower body training if you want to train 4 times per week (what is ideal for most people), followed by an upper body/lower body training if you want to train 5-6 times per week with either 3 upper body training days and 2 lower body training days or the other way around or both so training 6 times per week. Let's make this clear: There is no perfect training plan, but only an individual training plan that is customized according to your needs and goals. So later in this guide, you will learn how to customize the plan to your needs and goals.

Full Body 3x per week

Monday	Full Body A
Tuesday	Rest
Wednesday	Full Body B
Thursday	Rest
Friday	Full Body C
Saturday	Rest
Sunday	Rest

If you already feel fully recovered on Sunday (as in the example week above) then you can already start with Full Body A (so one less rest day). But only if you feel 100% recovered, rest is where you actually grow.

Used abbreviations:

В	-	Barbell
DB	-	Dumbbell
Μ	-	Machine
С	-	Cable

Focus: Progression RPE: 8-9

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS	NOTE	ALTERNATIVE
Squats	5	5	В	Leg Press, Hack Squat
Deadlifts	3	5	В	Romanian Deadlift
Bench Press	5	5	В	DB, M
Rows	5	5	м	DB, B
Shoulder Press	3	8	B or DB	м
Biceps	4	8	DB Alternating Rotation Curls	Any Curl Variation
Triceps	4	8	Rope Pushdown	Bar Pushdown
Core	4	8-10	Knees Raises or Toes to Bar	Any Core Exercise

2

FULL BODY	Focus: Progression
	RPE: 7-8

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS	NOTE	ALTERNATIVE
Squats	4	8	В	Leg Press, Hack Squat
Romanian Deadlifts	4	8	В	Leg Curls (Seated or Lying)
Incline Bench Press	4	8	В	DB, M
Lat Pulldown	5	8	Overhand Grip	Pull-Ups
Close Grip Bench Press	3	8	В	DB, M, Any Triceps Exercise
Face Pulls	3	10	Rope	м
Lateral Raises	3	10	DB	м
Biceps &/or Core	4	10	DB Rotation Curls &/or Ab Machine	Any Biceps/Core Exercise

FULL BODY

Focus: Progression RPE: 7-8

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS	NOTE	ALTERNATIVE
Squats	4	10	В	Leg Press, Hack Squat
Leg Curls	4	10	Seated or Lying	Romanian Deadlift
Bench Press	4	10	В	DB, M
Rows	4	10	В	B, DB
Lat Pulldown	2	10	Underhand Grip	Chin-Ups
Biceps	4	10	B Curls	Any Biceps Exercise
Triceps	4	10	Rope Overhead	Any Triceps Exercise
Core	4	10	Crunches	Any Core Exercise

Upper Body/Lower Body 4x per week

Monday	Upper Body A
Tuesday	Lower Body A
Wednesday	Rest
Thursday	Upper Body B
Friday	Lower Body B
Saturday	Rest
Sunday	Rest

If you already feel fully recovered on Sunday (as in the example week above) then you can already start with Upper Body A (so one less rest day). But only if you feel 100% recovered, rest is where you actually grow.

Used abbreviations:

В -	Barbell
DB -	Dumbbell
M -	Machine
C -	Cable

Focus: Progression RPE: 8-9

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS	NOTE	ALTERNATIVE
Bench Press	4	6	В	DB, M
Rows	4	6	м	B, DB
Incline Bench Press	3	6	B, DB or M	Overhead Press
Lat Pulldown	4	6	Overhand Grip	Pull-Ups
Lateral Raises	4	8	DB	м
Triceps	4	8	Rope Pushdown	Bar Pushdown
Biceps	4	8	DB Alternating Rotation Curls	Any Curl Variation
Face Pulls	3	8	Rope	м

LOWER BODY Focus: Progression RPE: 8

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS	NOTE	ALTERNATIVE
Squats	4	6	В	Leg Press, Hack Squat
Front Squats	2	6	В	Leg Press, Hack Squat
Deadlifts	3	6	В	Romanian Deadlift
Romanian Deadlifts	4	6	В	Leg Curls (Seated or Lying)
Calves	4	8	Standing Calf Raises	Seated Calf Raises
Core	4	8-X	Knees Raises or Toes to Bar	Any Core Exercise

Focus: Progression RPE: 8

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS	NOTE	ALTERNATIVE
Bench Press	4	8	В	DB, M
Rows	4	8	В	DB, M
Shoulder Press	3	8	В	DB, M
Lat Pulldown	3	8	Underhand Grip	Chin-Ups
Butterfly	4	8	м	Cable Flys
Reverse Butterfly	4	8	м	Reverse Cable Fly
Biceps	4	10	B Curls	DB Rotation Curls
Triceps	4	10	Rope Overhead	Any Triceps Exercise

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IOWED RODY	Focus: Progression
	RPE: 7

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS	NOTE	ALTERNATIVE
Squats	4	8	В	Leg Press, Hack Squat
Leg Press	3	8	м	Front Squats, Hack Squat
Deadlifts	3	8	В	Romanian Deadlift
Leg Curls	4	8	Seated or Lying	Romanian Deadlift
Calves	4	10	Seated Calf Raises	Standing Calf Raises
Core	4	10-X	Ab Machine	Any Core Exercise

Upper Body/Lower Body 5-6x per week

	_
Monday	Upper Body A
Tuesday	Lower Body A
Wednesday	Upper Body B
ŕ	
Thursday	Rest
Friday	Lower Body B
Saturday	Upper Body C
Sunday	Rest

Pick either Upper Body C or Lower Body C as your fifth training depending on if you want to emphasise more on your upper body or lower body. Or train both if you want to train 6x per week. How you build in your rest days is up to you. Listen to your body. For example ON-ON-OFF or ON-ON-OFF.

Used abbreviations:

В	-	Barbell
DB	-	Dumbbell
Μ	-	Machine
С	-	Cable

Focus: Progression RPE: 8-9

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS	NOTE	ALTERNATIVE
Bench Press	4	6	В	DB, M
Rows	4	6	м	B, DB
Incline Bench Press	3	6	B, DB or M	Overhead Press
Lat Pulldown	3	6	Overhand Grip	Pull-Ups
Lateral Raises	4	8	DB	м
Triceps	4	8	Rope Pushdown	Bar Pushdown
Biceps	4	8	DB Alternating Rotation Curls	Any Curl Variation
Face Pulls	4	8	Rope	м

LOWER BODY Focus: Progression RPE: 8

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS	NOTE	ALTERNATIVE
Squats	4	6	В	Leg Press, Hack Squat
Front Squats	2	6	В	Leg Press, Hack Squat
Deadlifts	3	6	В	Romanian Deadlift
Romanian Deadlifts	4	6	В	Leg Curls (Seated or Lying)
Calves	4	8	Standing Calf Raises	Seated Calf Raises
Core	4	8-X	Knees Raises or Toes to Bar	Any Core Exercise

Focus: Progression RPE: 8

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS	NOTE	ALTERNATIVE
Bench Press	4	8	В	DB, M
Rows	4	8	В	M, DB
Shoulder Press	3	8	B or DB	м
Lat Pulldown	3	8	Hammer Grip	Pull-Ups (Hammer Grip)
Butterfly	4	8	м	Cable Flys
Reverse Butterfly	4	8	м	Reverse Cable Fly
Biceps	4	10	B Curls	DB Rotation Curls
Triceps	4	10	Bar Pushdown	Any Triceps Exercise

P

LOWER BODY	Focus: Progression
	RPE: 7

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS	NOTE	ALTERNATIVE
Squats	4	8	В	Leg Press, Hack Squat
Leg Press	3	8	м	Front Squats, Hack Squat
Deadlifts	3	8	В	Romanian Deadlift
Leg Curls	4	8	Seated or Lying	Romanian Deadlift
Calves	4	10	Seated Calf Raises	Standing Calf Raises
Core	4	10-X	Ab Machine	Any Core Exercise

Focus: Progression RPE: 8

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS	NOTE	ALTERNATIVE
Bench Press	3	10	В	DB, M
Rows	3	10	Μ	B, DB
Overhead Press	3	10	м	B, DB
Lat Pulldown	3	10	Underhand Grip	Chin-Ups
Butterfly	3	10	С	м
Lateral Raises	3	10	DB	м
Triceps	3	10	Rope Overhead	Any Triceps Exercise
Biceps	3	10	DB Rotation Curls	Any Biceps Exercise

Focus: Progression RPE: 7-8

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS	NOTE	ALTERNATIVE
Squats	3	10	В	Leg Press, Hack Squat
Front Squats	2	10	В	Leg Press, Hack Squat
Deadlifts	2	10	В	Romanian Deadlift
Leg Curls	3	10	Seated or Lying	Romanian Deadlifts
Calves	3	10	Standing or Seated Calf Raises	Any Calf Exercise
Core	3	12	Perfect Crunches	Any Core Exercise

Which exercise to pick

When it comes to picking the right exercises, the best way is to combine heavy compound exercises with isolation exercises and with imbalance exercises. Compound exercises (also called compound movements) are exercises where more than one joint is involved. An example is the squat because you are using multiple joints (ankles, knees, hips, shoulders), so it is a complex exercise that involves more than one compound of your body. The great thing about compound movements is that we can use the most weight and thus get the strongest and the most muscular in a holistic way. We also can make progression over a much longer period than with isolation exercise. For example, if you bench press 100kg/220lbs and you want to increase the weight by 2,5%, you just have to put on 2,5kg/5lbs, but if you want to increase the weight equivalently at an isolation exercise like the biceps curl where you curl 20kg/45lbs, you would have to increase the weight by 0.5kg/1lbs which is almost always impossible because we generally only have dumbbells that increase in weight by 2kg/5lbs increments.

Other compound exercises are: deadlift, front squat, bend over row, pull up, bench press, overhead press, lat pull-down, leg press, etc. So compound exercises are our base which will set the strongest muscle stimulus and thus are the most important exercises to focus on for proper form and making progression. This is why we always start with them, because at the beginning of the training, we are the strongest and the most focussed in order to perform them properly.

Isolation exercises are when you only use one joint like the elbow for the bicep curl where you isolate the bicep muscle. You are generally isolating just one muscle. These exercises are great if you want to focus on weak spots. For example, when you bench press, your chest is stronger than your triceps, but since both muscles are involved in bench press, you need both to get stronger at bench press, so you can build in isolation exercises for your triceps that will carry over to your bench press strength. Plus, they are great to get the maximum growth potential out of a muscle and "finish off" the muscle. In the beginning, you don't necessarily need isolation exercises to get maximum results, but when you get to be a more advanced weightlifter, they are important to set the proper muscle stimulus which makes you grow. But the focus for progression should always be in your compound exercises. They are easier to progress long term because you can stack the smallest weight increases as explained above at with the 1% example. And if you make progression "only" in your compound exercises, you've

also made progression for your isolation exercises because you were able to lift the same weight, but with a higher grade of fatigue due to the heavier load you accomplished at the compound exercise. At the beginning, you can likely increase the weight in every exercise, but you will soon come to a point where to curl the next dumbbell weight takes a couple of weeks to months, but as I said, you will still progress if you do the same weight for the isolation exercises but progressed prior in the compound exercise. So always focus on making progress in the compound exercise, and don't worry if you get stuck at a weight for an isolation exercise for a while, because as I just explained, it is not "stuck" if you progressed in the compound exercises before.

Our body is never 100% even. Your right bicep is maybe a little bit stronger, and thus bigger, because you are right-handed, and your left quad might be a bit stronger and bigger as well because you used to ride a skateboard and pushed with your left leg, etc. Sometimes these normal imbalances are so small that you hardly notice them, and sometimes they are bigger. In my case, my right arm is about 1cm bigger, so I focus more on the left to have a better symmetry. There are 2 kinds of imbalances: **symmetry** and **proportions**. **Symmetry** is comparing your left and right side, like the example I gave you of my right arm being bigger than my left. **Proportions** are when some muscles groups are better developed than others. For example, my traps are really strong and muscular whereas my shoulders are fairly small, so for better proportions (overall aesthetic), I don't isolate my traps but isolate my shoulders with e.g. lateral raises.



That's why imbalance exercises are great to work on your symmetry and proportions. Note that at the beginning, you probably won't have noticeable muscle imbalances. This is something that generally develops over years of training. But if you have noticeable proportions of weak spots and strong spots, train the weak spots with isolation exercises and the strong spots only from involving them in the compound exercises. Going back to my example with my traps and shoulders, I only train my traps because they are involved in compound exercises like the deadlift, and I not only train my shoulder in compound exercises like bench press, but also isolate them with lateral raises so I get better proportions.

If you have an uneven symmetry, I recommend unilateral exercises. That means exercises where you can train each side separately. For example, with dumbbells, when you row, you can row "unilateral" meaning each side after the other, so, separately. You can also use machines like the rowing machine, single-leg press, or chest press starting with the weaker side. Always start with the weaker side and really focus on it. Then when it comes to the stronger side, only do as many reps as you did with your weaker side, even though you could have done more. That is how you will get a more even symmetry. Of course, your stronger side won't grow as much but that allows your weaker side to catch up. This doesn't work with compound exercises as much because you are mostly using both sides fully for the exercise like the deadlift. But you can still focus on the bench press, for example, to press with your weaker side more, or, at least as much as you press with your stronger side.

Now we learned that when it comes to picking the right exercises, it's best to combine compound exercises at the beginning, followed by isolation exercises to finish off, and maybe imbalance exercises if you have a noticeable imbalance (symmetry and/or proportions wise). This combination is ideal to get enough volume for all muscle groups. It's important to find the sweet spot of not too few, but also not too many exercises, which you can find out with the volume recommendations I gave you in the volume chapter (and the graphic), in addition to the questions I asked you there in the end which determine if you are doing enough, too much, or the right amount of volume.

Warm up

Before the working set (working set = your first set that counts), you should warm up thoroughly and effectively. We want to prepare ourselves optimally for the working set, but we don't want to pre-exhaust our body and thus lose performance.

Static stretching (staying longer in a stretch and trying to come further) right before training should be avoided because it increases the injury risk as well as decreases your strength. If you lack mobility for certain exercises (e.g. the depth for the squat), you should work on your mobility after your training or on your rest days, but not right before you stimulate the muscle.

Dynamic stretching (active stretching where you move and not try to get further in the stretch, but just loosen up) should be done before your first exercise, and mobility in the form of foam rolling etc. can be done before your training, and only before you start the first exercise. After your first exercise, you are already warmed up and will only need to warm up the movement for the next exercise with easy weight. The exercise specific warm up should be completed before every exercise to avoid the risk of injury and make your body ready for the upcoming exercise and the weight. For example, if the next exercise is bend over row, take the empty barbell and do a couple rows to activate the right muscles, prepare for the heavy load and train the movement, then start your first working set.

Here is an example warm up if you plan to Squat 100kg/220lbs 5x5 for your FIRST exercise (of course adjust the the weight you are using):

20kg x 10, 40kg x 8, 60kg x 6, 80kg x 4, 90kg x 2, START 5x5 45lbsx 10, 90lbs x 8, 130lbs x 6, 175lbs x 4, 200lbs x 2, START 5x5

For your second, third, etc. exercise, it's enough to do 1 easy set to get your body ready for the upcoming exercise and movement (like the example I gave before with the bend over row), but you don't have to go through all the warm up sets above; these are only for your first exercises because after that, you are already properly warmed up and just need to "warm up" with the next exercise movement for a couple reps.

Rest time

I like to call it "wait-lifting". Rest until you are ready! As I said, our overall goal is to progress with weight, not by shorter rest periods, so don't rush it! Take your time and do the next set when you feel ready. But here are typical rest periods:

Rep Range:	Rest Time:
1-5	3-5 min
8	2-3 min
10	2 min
10+	1.5-2 min

Proper form

Proper form means having the right technique for the exercises. With proper form, you really target the right muscle groups, and therefore make more gains long term while significantly decreasing your risk of injury. How can you learn the proper form? If you don't know how to properly perform an exercise in your plan, please watch a few YouTube tutorials. Just type in the exercise and plenty of good exercise tutorials will pop up. Proper form is of paramount importance and always comes before weight! **Don't increase the weight if the form is not proper!** It means you are not strong enough for the new weight. Always, always focus on the form so you don't injure yourself and are targeting the right muscles effectively. This is how you will gain muscles long term in a healthy and holistic way. Leave your ego at the door and don't think more weight is better. The heavier weight will come soon enough when you train with proper form.

Regeneration

When you train, your muscle cells are injured and your central nervous system (CNS) is stressed. To recover until your next training, your body needs sufficient regeneration. Also, your body needs enough macro- and micronutrients (more in <u>The Vegains Nutrition</u> <u>Guide</u>). So take your regeneration seriously. I know it's sometimes hard in our world nowadays, but try to avoid stress as much as possible. Sleep well and enough. Eat healthy and enough but don't overeat. Do moderate exercise like walking, stretching, mobility e.g. with a foam roller. Be happy and smile. If you are in a good mood and have a positive mindset, you'll recover better and faster.



Deload

Deload means training with less weight and less volume. Because we are not machines and cannot make progression linearly and continuously for the rest of our life.

After a while of training and getting stronger, your joints, tendons, and ligaments need a break to fully recover because the stress accumulates. When you are doing my plan right, then your muscles will probably grow faster than your ligaments and tendons and these will need to catch up. That's why it is important to take active deloads. Also, your CNS needs a break after a while. Because every time you train, you put a little stress on your CNS. Sometimes more and sometimes less, depending on your intensity of the training. But the fact is that the stress accumulates, and that's why we need deloads to recover from the built up stress on our CNS, joints, tendons, and ligaments. You might get away with it for a while without a deload, but eventually, you will have done too much and might even reach a point of overtraining. What happens most, however, is that people either get sick or lose motivation because their body is breaking down.

While your muscles can recover for a few days before they are trained again, your CNS will get stressed every training. So deloads are very important to progress long term, avoid injury, brain fog, low energy, and have healthy trainings overall with success and motivation. Especially when you stuck at a plateau where you can't progress for a while, a deload is often the breakthrough.

Deload was my turning point after 1 year of making gains to continuously make gains. I trained and trained and at some point could not progress. I had the mentality that "rest is for the weak," and burned myself out. I didn't get stronger and even got weaker. My elbow, shoulders, and knees started to hurt, and I needed tons of caffeine to make it through my training. I realized I was doing something wrong. I researched and found out that I had overexerted myself (overreached) and needed a deload.

In my deload week, I only trained with 60% of my normal intensity and volume. The deload training felt so super easy and didn't put a heavy load on my body. I could focus on proper form and not try to force a heavy weight that I couldn't do the week before. My shoulder, knee and elbow pain slowly went away and I felt fully recovered. After this week, my CNS was back on point and I was hungry for the heavy weights again. I felt so strong and energized after that week and was finally making progression again. Now I do deloads every 4 weeks and still progress continuously.

I don't want you to make the same mistake and think "rest is for the weak" like I did, because you will eventually burn yourself out, stop making progress, and probably won't build muscles long term.



If you want to make gains and train healthily year round, deloading is a very important tool. Some people are forced to take deloads because they train so hard that they get sick and can't go to the gym for 1 week or so, and can't do anything really during that time besides lying in bed. We don't want to let it come to this body breakdown and need to do active de-loads where our body can really heal. Because when you are sick, your body doesn't care about building muscle or healing your joints. It only cares about getting rid of the illness, and when you are healthy again, you will probably need another week of deload because then your body can actively heal your CNS, joints, ligaments, tendons, etc. But most people go straight back to the gym, train for a while, and get sick or injured again and then wonder why they aren't progressing and making long term gains.

Building muscle is not a sprint - it is a marathon. Always think long-term and do active deloads.

Here is how you do your deloads: Train using my training plan for 4 consecutive weeks and try to make progression. If you still feel super fit, strong, and motivated after week 4, then train week 5 also with progression. But after week 4, or maximum week 5, do one week of deload. Even if you still feel perfectly fine and capable, you have to think long term.

During your deload week, you train with only 60% of your normal weight and only 60% of your normal volume. For example, if normally you bench press 80 kg/175 lbs 5x5, on your deload week, you only want to bench press 80/100x60=48 kg/175/100x60=105 lbs and only 5/100x60=3 sets. So, 3x5 with 48 kg/105 lbs.

Simple and easy, right?

Now, it doesn't have to be exactly 60%, but roughly around 60-80% (though don't train heavier than 80% of your normal weight). Because exactly 48kg/105lbs can be impossible to stack in some gyms, and it's not needed, just stack roughly the required weight, so, in this example about 50kg/110lbs. And when you divide your sets and it doesn't come out to a whole number (as in the example above with 3 sets), then just do one more or one less set; it doesn't really matter. Listen to your body. For example, 4 sets are required and 4/100x60=2.4, so decide if you feel like doing only 2 sets or 3 sets. On your deload week, the overall goal is to recover, but moving helps recovery and actives protein synthesis, so if you feel full of energy, do 3 sets, and if you feel tired, only do 2 sets. As I stated above, most people tend to do too much, and often less is more.

Take the deload to really work on your proper form and technique. You can also take your deload week to not train at all, like when you go on vacation. But if you can, I would recommend training with 60% because actual training where you train proper form and technique is so important, and it can eventually become subconscious, meaning you get a proper muscle-mind connection. And when you lift heavy again, you'll have the proper form without even thinking about it. Also, training stimulates protein-synthesis and prevents muscle loss. After your deload week, you start off with the last weight from week 2 or 3 of your last mesocycle (we will cover this term in the next chapter). Here is an example:

Training week 1 you squatted 60kg/130lbs Training week 2 you squatted 62,5kg/135lbs Training week 3 you squatted 65kg/140lbs Training week 4 you squatted 67,5kg/145lbs Training week 5 you deload with 67,5/100x60=40kg/145/100x60=87lbs Training week 1 (of your new mesocycle) you will squat 62,5kg or 65kg/135lbs or 140lbs

So now you start with either week 2 (62,5kg/135lbs) or week 3 (65kg/140lbs) depending on how heavy that weight felt and how good you feel now. My recommendation is to start easily in week 1 of your new mesocycle, so start with week 2. If week 2 feels ridiculously easy, then start with week 3. Again, think long term. It's better to start with week 2 and progress year round then it is to always start with week 3 and plateau at some point.





Your mesocycles are the time during which you are doing my training plan progressively until you do a deload (that is one cycle and usually takes 4 weeks/1 month). Therefore, you train 4 to maximum 5 weeks (mesocycle), then you take one-week deload (microcycle) with 60% intensity and volume, and then your next mesocycle starts with the second or third weeks' weight from the last mesocycle.

Macrocycle is the longest of the three cycles and represents multiple mesocycles. Often counted as one year.

Mesocycle is the period during which you progress and get stronger, between deloads (usually 4-5 weeks).

Microcycle is one week of training and refers either to the deload week or a week of your mesocycle.



Customized training plan

First, pick one of the plans for your needs, depending on how often you want to train. If that's 3 times a week or less, then pick the full body training. And if it's 4 times a week or more, then pick one of the upper body/lower body trainings. I want you to start with the plan as it is set up, and stick to it for at least 1 month (3 months is even better), before you change something (unless you are already an advanced weightlifter and know which exercises you need, or if you really can't perform an exercise, etc.). I always recommend starting super easy, meaning with little weight, so you have time to adjust to this plan and learn the proper form (proper form is key and should be learned correctly before increasing the weight). It takes a couple of weeks to 1 month to get used to your new plan, so give yourself time to adjust. As I explained, you train 4-5 weeks with this plan (mesocycle) and try to increase the weight each time with the smallest weight increment possible in your gym. At the beginning, this will be easily possible if you start with an easy weight (as I strongly recommend). After 1 mesocycle, you do 1 week of deload and then start your next mesocycle with the weight from week 2 or 3 of your last mesocycle, and that is how you get stronger and more muscular over time in a healthy and holistic way.

Your upper body training should contain: Horizontal push exercise (e.g. bench press) Horizontal pull exercise (e.g. rows) Vertical push exercise (e.g. overhead press) Vertical pull exercise (e.g. lat pull-down) Biceps exercise (e.g. rotating dumbbell curl) Triceps exercise (e.g. triceps rope pull-down) Middle shoulder (e.g. lateral raises) Rear shoulder (e.g. facepulls) These 8 exercises should be the base of your upper body training in order to cover every muscle group of your upper body. And then over time, adjust to your needs. For example, if your triceps are strong and well-developed, you don't need to isolate your triceps because you already train them effectively with bench press and overhead press, but if your traps are not strong and well-developed, you can build them up with a trap isolation exercise.

Your lower body training should contain: Compound quad/glute exercise (e.g. squat, front squat) Compound hamstring/glute and lower back exercise (e.g. deadlift) Assistant quad/glute exercise (e.g. leg press, Bulgarian split squat) Assistant hamstring exercise (e.g. Romanian deadlift, leg curl) Calves exercise (e.g. standing calf raise) Core exercise (e.g. ab machine, perfect crunch, toes to bar)

These 6 exercises should be the base of your lower body training in order to cover every muscle group of your lower body + core and lower back, which we didn't train at upper body, and thus, combined with upper body training, your entire body is well trained.

Your full body training should contain: Compound quad/glute exercise (e.g. squat, front squat) Compound hamstring/glute and lower back exercise (e.g. deadlift) Horizontal push exercise (e.g. bench press) Horizontal pull exercise (e.g. row) Vertical push exercise (e.g. overhead press) Vertical pull exercise (e.g. lat pull-down)

The isolation exercises for the muscle you want to focus on should vary during your different full body trainings. For example, in one training, you isolate biceps and triceps and in the other, you isolate middle shoulder and rear shoulder. You could build in all-in-one full body training, but then your training quickly becomes too long and exhausting, and thus it gets harder to recover from it until your next full body training. Note that these 6 compound exercises I mentioned above already cover almost your entire body. Isolation exercises are not always necessary, especially for beginners. You will set the proper muscle stimulus with compound exercises alone. But especially when you become more advanced and don't want to switch to an upper body/lower body split (though I recommend it), you should build in isolation exercises. Choose isolation exercises for muscle groups you want to develop more, are weak spots, or to work on your symmetry or proportions. When is it time to change the plan? When an exercise hurts you or doesn't "feel right". I highly recommend that you really try to learn an exercise first before you say it doesn't feel right for you. Often people don't have the muscle mind connection yet, and struggle with the movement, but it takes time and effort from you. After you've really tried to learn an exercise, however, and it still it doesn't feel right/feels weird/you don't feel it at all, or is even hurting a bit, then it is wise to substitute this exercise with another one that trains the same muscle group(s). But most people don't put the effort in to learn it, so please don't be one of these people who ditches great exercises in your plan because you don't want to make the effort to learn them! If a great exercise you like is causing pain, you can use another exercise during a couple of mesocycles that trains the same muscle, and then come back to the old exercise, or, keep this new exercise. Another reason is that you plateau with an exercises for a while and can't progress. Then, as I mentioned just before, try switching the exercises for a couple of mesocycles with another exercise that targets the same muscles, and then come back to the old exercise you plateaued in to break through your plateau.

It is also time to change the plan if you develop a weakness or an imbalance. For example, in the example above, your triceps are strong and well-developed, but your traps are weak and you can barely hold the deadlift weight with them. Then ditch the triceps isolation exercise and do a trap isolation exercise instead. Always listen to your body and analyse. **You have to be the athlete and the coach at the same time.** During the working sets, focus on the exercise (**athlete**) and between sets, and before/after your training, analyse (**coach**). How do I feel today? Did something not feel right? Why didn't I progress? Is the form proper? Is it wise to lower the weight? Are my symmetry and proportions even (when you look in the mirror)?

Don't change things too often, however, because then you won't see if the plan works. That's why I say don't change anything for the first 1-3 months, and then if you want to switch an exercise, especially a compound exercise, stick to it for at least a couple of mesocycles. This is because our body always needs to adapt to the new exercise and learn the proper form until we CAN make progression, get stronger, and thus more muscular. If you switch exercises all the time, your body is only adapting, and, as a result, you never get the full potential of an exercise and won't get as strong and muscular as you could get in this exercise if you had stuck to it. You reap the maximum gains after the neuronal adaptation phase of an exercise. That means you've learned the proper form, really got used to it, and progress over time, but if you switch exercises all the time, you will never get to this point and won't get the physique you probably want.

You have to be the athlete and the coach at the same time. How to substitute exercises?

The bench press is a horizontal chest exercise, so substitute with another horizontal chest exercise like the chest press machine.

Lat pull-down is a vertical pull exercise, so substitute with another vertical pull exercise like pull-ups.

Bend over row is a horizontal pull exercise, so substitute with another horizontal pull exercise like row on the machine, dumbbell/cable row.

The squat is a compound exercise, mostly for the quads, so substitute with another compound exercise for the quads like front squat, leg press, or the hack squat machine.

Rotating dumbbell curl is an insolation exercise for the biceps, so substitute with another isolation exercise for the biceps like barbell bicep curl.

I think you get the point. Think of what muscle groups are trained with an exercise and pick another one that trains the same muscle groups. Or if a muscle is well-developed and another is lacking, switch the exercise to another muscle group like in the example I gave you above with the triceps and traps.

I hardly ever change compound exercises because squats, deadlifts, bench press, etc. really work and are some of the best exercises if done with proper form to stimulate the muscles and using the right amount of weight. Other compound exercises I rarely switch, for example from weighted pull-ups to the lat pull-down, and then I stick to it for at least 1-3 mesocycles (3 is better unless the machine isn't good, something hurts, I don't feel it, etc.). I change up isolation exercises more often because the neuronal adaptation phase is very quick compared to compound movements. This means that you can quickly stimulate the muscle to a maximum, because you quickly adapt to isolation exercises, especially if you have done that exercise before. But, I often stick to the ones in the plan because they are all some of the best exercises (like the rotating biceps curls with dumbbells, or the cable triceps pull down on the rope or bar are one of my favorites because I have a strong muscle-mind connection, and progress without having any pain).

General rule: Think twice before changing compound exercises, and, if so, pick one you can stick to for at least the next 1-3 mesocycles (or more). You can change isolation exercises more frequently, but only if there is a reason like something is hurting, not just to switch it up for the sake of switching it up. Many people think the muscles need new stimulation with different exercises, whereas the best new stimulation is with a heavier weight for the same exercise! And you only get the greatest stimulations with the same exercise if you stick to them for a long time, so keep it simple, be consistent, and your gains will follow constantly.





Mobility

You need the mobility to perform all the exercises in your plan, or other exercises you want to include. Like, for example, the depth of the squat that you can squat under parallel and therefore you need the hip, knee, and ankle mobility.

Work on your mobility after your training, and/or on your rest days if you lack mobility for a certain exercise. If you have the mobility for all the exercises, and especially the compound exercises, being more mobile and flexible is not needed, and doesn't give you an advantage, but if you enjoy mobility and stretching, then do it after your training and/or on your rest days.



How to track your training?

I recommend either a training diary or an app. I have used a basic free app for years. You just need something basic so that you can fill in your training with all the sets and reps in order to see what you did last week and the weeks before. You want to keep track of your training, mesocycles, when it is time to deload, when your new mesocycle starts, what weight you were using in last mesocycle week 2 or 3 to start with this weight, etc. Find out what works best for you (diary or app), and keep track of your training.

Also add notes. For example, if you had RPE of 9 or 10, and therefore, it is wiser to stay at this weight next week and progress with reps and proper form instead of progressing with weight, or if you learned something to make the form more proper, etc. Your future self will thank you for it the following week.



Range of motion

For every exercise, we should perform the full range of motion (FROM). Some argue that if you do half reps, you have constant tension on the muscle and can use more weight, and this is true, but studies come to the consensus that full range of motion will give your muscles a better stimulus and more muscle growth, because if you perform an exercise full range of motion, you will stimulate the muscle full range. You'll also constantly work on your mobility, and stay mobile and flexible, because you are using the full range. Thus, you also train a lot more safely, because, let's say you only do half rep squats (squatting not under parallel/using little range of motion), and the weight is so heavy it pushes you down, and you quickly injure yourself because you don't have the mobility. But, if you go full range all the time, you use your mobility and keep it. **Use it or lose it.** So, always perform a full range of motion, but don't go beyond that. For example, at the bicep curl, if your biceps are fully contracted at the top, there is no need to curl even higher because your biceps won't contract any further, and you'll just be using your shoulder, lean back, and momentum, so you'll lose energy and strength, and thus can't stimulate your biceps as much. The full range of motion is key for proper form and training injury free while staying mobile.



Motivation

Motivation is crucial, otherwise, you don't want to train, focus, or push yourself. So, it is really important to find your WHY. Since you've already bought this guide and have read until here, I think you already have a strong why. But if not, here is what motivates me 24/7: I do it for the vegan movement -- to debunk this stupid stereotype that vegans can't build muscles, and to be a better advocate for it by showing a muscular and aesthetic physique, all built by eating plant foods without animal products. This really pushes me to become my strongest version. During heavy sets, I just have to think about all the injustice going on, and that I can actually cause a change from leading by example. Another motivation is that training gives me balance in life; I just feel great the rest of the day. It's like yoga; afterwards, you feel fantastic. My meals taste better, rest feels more deserved, etc. We all want to make progression in the things we do with passion, so having structure in my training plan and the goal to get stronger every mesocycle really gives me purpose to go to the gym, and seeing my strength increase fulfils me. I also really care about my health, and I know how healthy it is to lift weights and exercise. Who wouldn't want stronger bones, a healthy heart, proper blood flow, etc.? Also, I want to look good naked, like almost everyone! I just feel more comfortable in a strong, fit, and active body. These are my motivations; maybe some of them motivated, or will motivate, you as well.



Low energy

If you have low energy during your training, it can be because of countless reasons. Here are the most common ones:

You are over-trained or have overexerted yourself because you haven't done a deload in a long time, and trained close to muscle failure, so, follow this guide and take active deloads.

You are in a caloric deficit over time, and as a result, your energy level decreases because your body holds on to it in order to avoid scarcity/starvation mode. If you don't want to lose weight, then eat more, and if you want to lose weight, then energize yourself before your training with caffeine from sources such as: coffee, green tea, yerba mate, guarana, or matcha. These are all plants that naturally contain caffeine.

Even if you are not in a caloric deficit, caffeine is a great natural performance enhancing tool which I use before almost every training. What's important is that you have a healthy relationship towards caffeine, and that you don't get hooked on it, because, otherwise, you'll become dependent on it, and the boosting effect will disappear, and you'll need more and more just to make it through the day. 1-2 cups of caffeinated tea or coffee is beneficial. 4-6 cups is not, and enough to create a dependence on it. I recommend that you also take caffeine breaks, so your body doesn't get used to it, and so that you can continuously get that boost of energy you want during your training. I recommend using your deload every 4 to 5 weeks to go caffeine-free during your 1 week of deload. That's how I do it, and I don't need it during my deload week at all because deload training is super easy. I only drink caffeine before my training, and that's why I get so much energy from it; it's the only time I use it, and my body is really sensitive, which is exactly what I want. If you drink caffeine-rich beverages and don't get an energy boost afterwards, it's wise to do a caffeine-free week to allow your body to become more sensitive to caffeine again.

I also love to train on an empty stomach in the morning as well, or, with a pre-workout meal in the morning such as: a porridge, smoothie, nice cream, vegan energy bar, or just fruits. I digest for 1-2 hours before hitting the gym. I notice that I have a bit more energy throughout my entire training when I've eaten something before, but find out what works for you. Some people feel nauseous when they eat before training, and other people feel tired and weak without eating before. **Do what's best for you.** Other reasons why you can experience low energy are: stress, poor sleep, too little sleep, overeating, lack of motivation and purpose, and an unhealthy diet with lots of junk food and animal products like dairy. I recommend whole food, plant-based nutrition which gives most people tons of energy, myself included. For more on how to thrive on plants, please read <u>The Vegains Nutrition Guide</u>. There are, of course, many individual factors specific to each person, so I recommend listening to your body. The more you listen to your body, the better the feeling you get for it, and you can start to predict why you experience certain states of being. It also has A LOT to do with your mind. You are the placebo. Your thoughts will literally manifest, and if you think a certain way, you probably will experience that. So, stay positive, and live with passion and drive. For more on that subject, I highly recommend the book: **You Are the Placebo** by Dr. Joe Dispenza.



Let's go

I know this was a lot of information, and I applaud you for having read all the way through. Enough wondering what to do to achieve the physique you are after! Now you have the tools in your toolbox and can use them. And not only that, but you now know what you are doing. You know why you hit every muscle 2-3 times per week and not only once, you know why you focus on getting stronger in the compound exercises, you know how to make progression, how to cycle your training, and why it is wise to take active deloads to progress and build muscles in a healthy and holistic way long term. **You got this.** So pick one of the training plans, start writing it in your diary or app, and hit the gym. Give yourself time to adjust to the new plan, and time to learn the proper form. Start easy and focus on the long run.

I want to do this sport for the rest of my life in a healthy and holistic way, and not ruin my health with steroids, or damage my joints, ligaments, tendons, and CNS with overtraining and injuries caused by bad form and training until muscle failure all the time.

If something didn't make sense, just try reading through it again. So now, take a training diary, or download an app, and fill in one of the training plans, depending on how often you want to train and what you want to focus on. Watch tutorials of the proper form. Go to the gym and start. As I said, it takes a couple of weeks to a month to get used to this plan and to learn the proper form. Start super lightweight so you can learn the proper form and progress long term. Let's go.



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