**How to Build Your Weekly Workout Schedule**

While getting into great shape doesn’t require nearly as much time in the gym as many people believe, an effective workout routine generally meets the following criteria:

1. It involves 3 to 6 workouts per week.
2. Each workout is 25 to 75 minutes long.
3. It includes both resistance and cardiovascular training.

**Thus, if you can dedicate about 4 to 6 hours to exercise each week, and train 3 to 6 days per week, we’re in the business.**

**The 3-Day Workout Routines**

I recommend you stick to one of two 3-day workout routines…

**The Push Pull Legs Workout Routine**

Push Pull Legs has been around *forever,* and for good reason: it’s simple, it makes good biomechanical sense, and it works.

Here’s how it breaks down:

**Day 1**

*Push*

On this day you train your chest, shoulders, and triceps.

**Day 2**

*Pull*

On this day you train your back and biceps.

**Day 3**

*Legs*

I think you know what this entails.

In terms of weekly scheduling, I recommend you put one day of rest in between each workout, like this:

**Monday**

*Push*

**Wednesday**

*Pull*

**Friday**

*Legs*

Or two days of rest in between your pull and legs workouts, like this:

**Monday**

*Push*

**Tuesday**

*Pull*

**Friday**

*Legs*

If you use this latter schedule, you’ll probably find your legs fresher come Friday because your pull day is going to involve heavy deadlifting, which really hits the hamstrings.

(It’s worth noting that this hamstring soreness issue is more relevant to newbies because they experience quite a bit more [muscle soreness](http://www.muscleforlife.com/reduce-muscle-soreness/) than intermediate or advanced weightlifters.)

**The Chest & Tris, Back & Bis, Legs & Shoulders Workout Routine**

This is an old-school bodybuilding routine that has stood the test of time.

**Day 1**

**Chest & Triceps**

The triceps are heavily involved in your chest training so it makes sense to train them directly as well.

**Day 2**

**Back & Biceps**

The back & biceps relationship mirrors the chest & triceps, which is why they are usually combined.

**Day 3**

**Legs & Shoulders**

These muscle groups are obviously completely unrelated, but they’re what are left so they get combined. And they make for a tough workout.

**Which 3-Day Workout Routine is Best?**

I wouldn’t say one is objectively better than the other. It depends on your personal preferences and where you’re at in your development.If you feel you still need a significant amount of development in your chest and shoulders, I recommend you go with the chest & triceps workout routine. Training your chest and shoulders separately allows you to train each more intensively, which helps maximize [progressive overload](http://www.muscleforlife.com/guide-to-muscle-hypertrophy-muscle-growth/).

**The 4-Day Workout Routine**

Here’s the 4-day workout routine that I recommend you follow…

**Day 1**

**Chest & Triceps**

This is the same as in the 3-day workout routine.

**Day 2**

**Back & Biceps**

**Day 3**

**Shoulders**

In this routine, shoulders get their own day, which helps give them the extra work they need to grow in proportion to the rest of the upper body.

**Day 4**

**Legs**

Leg training is by far the hardest and most exhausting, so it helps to give it its own day.

**The 5-Day Workout Routine**

**Day 1**

*Chest*

**Day 2**

*Back*

**Day 3**

*Arms*

**Day 4**

*Shoulders*

**Day 5**

*Legs*

**This is my favorite of all the workout schedules for maximizing** [**muscle growth**](http://www.muscleforlife.com/guide-to-muscle-hypertrophy-muscle-growth/) **and strength.**

Each workout takes about 45 minutes, each muscle group gets maximal stimulation, your muscles and central nervous system get enough time to recovery, and it fits perfectly with most people’s schedules (Monday through Friday with the weekends off).

**The Best Exercises for Building Muscle and Strength**

**The Best Chest Exercises**

*Incline Barbell Bench Press*

*Incline Dumbbell Bench Press*

*Flat Barbell Bench Press*

*Flat Dumbbell Bench Press*

*Dip (Chest Variation)*

**The Best Back Exercises**

*Barbell Deadlift*

*Barbell Row*

*One-Arm Dumbbell Row*

*Pull-Up*

*Lat Pulldown (Front and Close-Grip)*

*T-Bar Row*

*Seated Cable Row (Wide- and Close-Grip)*

*Chin-Up*

*Barbell Shrug*

**The Best Shoulder Exercises**

*Seated Barbell Military Press or Standing Barbell Military Press*

*Seated Dumbbell Press or Arnold Dumbbell Press*

*Dumbbell Side Lateral Raise or One-Arm Dumbbell Side Lateral Raise*

*Rear Delt Raise (Bent-Over or Seated)*

*Face Pull*

*Barbell Rear Delt Row*

*Dumbbell Front Raise*

**The Best Leg Exercises**

*Barbell Squat*

*Front Squat*

*Hack Squat (sled, not barbell)*

*Leg Press*

*Barbell Lunge (Walking or In Place)*

*Dumbbell Lunge*

*Romanian Deadlift*

*Leg Curl (Lying or Seated)*

**The Best Biceps Exercises**

*Barbell Curl*

*E-Z Bar Curl*

*Dumbbell Curl*

*Hammer Curl*

*Chin-up*

**The Best Triceps Exercises**

*Close-Grip Bench Press*

*Seated Triceps Press*

*Dip (Triceps Variation)*

*Lying Triceps Extension (“Skullcrusher”)*

*Triceps Pushdown*

**What About Core and Calves?**

Many workout routines neglect core and calf training, claiming that you don’t have to train them directly if you’re doing everything else right. I disagree. If you already have a great core and great calves, this is true. You don’t have to train them directly to maintain what you have. **If you need more development in your core or calves, though, you’re going to have to include them in your workout routine.**

**How to Build the Perfect Workout Routine**

**Before we get into each goal, know that each of the workout routines given earlier will work for each of the goals.**

**How you eat is also crucially important.**

**How to Build a Workout Routine for Gaining Muscle and Strength**

If you’re relatively lean and are looking to put on size and weight, the 5-day workout routine is going to be your best choice.

You’re also going to want to limit your [cardio](http://www.muscleforlife.com/how-much-cardio/) to no more than an hour per week, and if you find gaining size particularly hard, reduce it to zero if possible.

**How to Build a Workout Routine for Gaining Muscle and Losing Fat**

**That said, the best workout routine for building muscle and losing fat simultaneously is also the 5-day routine.** This allows you to maximize your “newbie gains” (or muscle memory gains) even while in a calorie deficit. While cardio isn’t necessary for fat loss, it can help quite a bit. Especially when it’s [high-intensity interval (HIIT) cardio](http://www.muscleforlife.com/high-intensity-interval-training-and-weight-loss/).

Thus, when the goal is muscle growth with maximum fat loss, I recommend you do 3 25-minute sessions of high-intensity interval cardio per week in addition to your weightlifting.

You can do your cardio on your weightlifting days or on your off days, but I do recommend that you take one day of complete rest per week when in a [calorie deficit](http://www.muscleforlife.com/how-to-count-calories/) (no strenuous physical activity on this day) to help with overall recovery.

**How to Build a Workout Routine for Losing Fat and Preserving Muscle**

If you’re happy with the amount of muscle that you have and just want to maintain it while losing fat, you can do well with a 3-day workout routine. Add 3 25-minute HIIT sessions into the week, with one day of complete rest, and you’re good to go.

**Examples of Effective Workout Routines**

**Here’s an example of a 5-day workout routine:**

**Day 1**

**Chest & Calves**

*Incline Barbell Bench Press – Warm-up sets and then 3 working sets*

*Incline Dumbbell Bench Press – 3 working sets*

*Flat Barbell Bench Press – 3 working sets*

*Optional: Dip (Chest Variation) – 3 working sets (weighted if possible)*

*Calf Workout A*

**Day 2**

**Back & Abs**

*Barbell Deadlift – Warm-up sets and then 3 working sets*

*Barbell Row – 3 working sets*

*Wide-Grip Pull-Up or Chin-Up – 3 working sets (weighted if possible)*

*Optional: Close-Grip Lat Pulldown – 3 working sets*

*Optional: Barbell Shrugs – 2 working sets*

*3 to 6 ab circuits*

**Day 3**

**Arms & Abs**

*Barbell Curl – Warm-up sets and then 3 working sets*

*Close-Grip Bench Press – 3 working sets (no need to warm up after the chest pressing)*

*Alternating Dumbbell Curl – 3 working sets*

*Seated Triceps Press – 3 working sets 3 to 6 ab circuits*

**Day 4**

**Shoulders & Calves**

*Seated or Standing Barbell Military Press – Warm-up sets and then 3 working sets*

*Side Lateral Raise – 3 working sets*

*Bent-Over Rear Delt Raise – 3 working sets*

*Calf Workout B*

**Day 5**

**Legs**

*Barbell Squat – Warm-up sets and then 4 working sets*

*Leg Press – 4 working sets*

*Romanian Deadlift – 4 working sets*

*Calf Workout C*

**And here’s an example of a 4-day workout routine:**

**Day 1**

**Chest & Triceps & Calves**

*Incline Barbell Bench Press – Warm-up sets and then 3 working sets*

*Flat Barbell Bench Press – 3 working sets*

*Dip (Chest Variation, weighted if possible) – 3 working sets*

*Close-Grip Bench Press – 3 working sets*

*Seated Triceps Press – 3 working sets*

*Calf Workout A*

**Day 2**

**Back & Biceps & Abs**

*Barbell Deadlift – Warm-up sets and then 3 working sets*

*Barbell Row – 3 working sets*

*Wide-Grip Pull-Up or Chin-Up – 3 working sets (weighted if possible)*

*Optional: Barbell Shrugs – 2 working sets*

*Barbell Curl – 3 working sets*

*Alternating Dumbbell Curl – 3 working sets*

*3 to 6 ab circuits*

**Day 3**

**Shoulders & Calves**

*Seated or Standing Barbell Military Press – Warm-up sets and then 3 working sets*

*Side Lateral Raise – 3 working sets*

*Bent-Over Rear Delt Raise – 3 working sets*

*Calf Workout B*

**Day 4**

**Legs & Abs**

*Barbell Squat – Warm-up sets and then 3 working sets*

*Leg Press – 3 working sets*

*Romanian Deadlift – 3 working sets*

*3 to 6 ab circuits*

**And here are examples of 3-day workout routines:**

**Day 1**

**Push & Calves**

Incline Barbell Bench Press – Warm-up sets and then 3 working sets

Flat Barbell Bench Press – 3 working sets

Seated or Standing Barbell Military Press – Warm-up sets and then 3 working sets

Side Lateral Raise – 3 working sets Dip (Chest Variation) – 3 working sets (weighted if possible)

Close-Grip Bench Press – 3 working sets

Calf Workout A

**Day 2**

**Pull & Abs**

Barbell Deadlift – Warm-up sets and then 3 working sets

Barbell Row – 3 working sets

Wide-Grip Pull-Up or Chin-Up – 3 working sets (weighted if possible)

Optional: Barbell Shrugs – 2 working sets

Barbell Curl – 3 working sets 3 to 6 ab circuits

**Day 3**

**Legs**

Barbell Squat – Warm-up sets and then 4 working sets

Leg Press – 4 working sets

Romanian Deadlift – 4 working sets

Calf Workout B

**Day 1**

**Chest & Triceps & Calves**

Incline Barbell Bench Press – Warm-up sets and then 3 working sets

Flat Barbell Bench Press – 3 working sets

Dip (Chest Variation, weighted if possible) – 3 working sets

Close-Grip Bench Press – 3 working sets

Seated Triceps Press – 3 working sets

Calf Workout A

**Day 2**

**Back & Biceps & Abs**

Barbell Deadlift – Warm-up sets and then 3 working sets

Barbell Row – 3 working sets

Wide-Grip Pull-Up or Chin-Up – 3 working sets (4 to 6 reps per set, weighted if possible)

Optional: Barbell Shrugs – 2 working sets

Alternating Dumbbell Curl – 3 working sets

Barbell Curl – 3 working sets 3 to 6 ab circuits

**Day 3**

**Legs & Shoulders**

Barbell Squat – Warm-up sets and then 3 working sets

Leg Press – 3 working sets

Romanian Deadlift – 3 working sets

Seated or Standing Barbell Military Press – Warm-up sets and then 3 working sets

Side Lateral Raise – 3 working sets

Optional: Bent-Over Rear Delt Raise – 3 working sets

**The Bottom Line on Building a Workout Routine**

Building the perfect workout routine requires a bit of thought but the payoff is well worth it.

Once you really dial in what works best for your body, schedule, and goals, you save yourself untold amounts of time, energy, and frustration and can focus on just getting the work done and actually enjoying the process.

**Don’t overlook the importance and power of overall program enjoyment and compliance.**

The truth is if you stuck with even the worst of workout routines for long enough, you’d eventually reach a point where you’re at least decently satisfied with your results. The purpose of building a good workout routine is to get you there faster and ultimately get you to the point where you’re thrilled with what you’ve achieved.

So, you now know more about building effective workout routines than 95% of the people you see in the gym every day. Put the knowledge to good use and let me know how it goes!

-From author: Mike Matthews

Books: Bigger, Leaner, Stronger and Thinner, Leaner, Stronger