

Strength Challenge 20/20

The Challenge To Get Stronger In 20 Minutes Twice Per Week

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Introduction

Many people are under the impression that it requires several hours of weight training per week to gain a substantial amount of strength. Some people take it a step further and believe it takes hours of training per day to get stronger. In my early years of training, I was one of those people, however, over the course of time, my point of view changed. I found that it is true that some successful weight lifters and bodybuilders do spend a lot of time in a gym, but it is not true of all successful lifters.

The original *Iron Man Magazine* was founded by a man named Peary Rader. He used a training system based on two short workouts per week to become a lifting champion. Peary is not the only one who experienced success from this type of training as Marty Gallagher, Kirk Karwoski, and Mark Chaillet are all examples of powerlifters who achieved big results from a small amount of weekly training.

Can everyone reach their absolute potential for getting as strong as possible by working out twenty minutes twice per week? I would hesitate to make that claim, but what is certain is that with intelligent training, the vast majority of your potential for strength gains can be accomplished in less than an hour of training per week. The more you understand how to focus on the most important aspects of training, the less time it takes to get stronger. This is the challenge of this book, to learn how to get as strong as possible by working out for only 20 minutes, twice per week. If this is a challenge that you would like to accept, the rest of the book will supply you with the training strategies necessary to meet that challenge.

Chapter 1

Selecting Exercises That Work

The goal of this book is to supply you with a training program that produces a large amount of results with a small amount of weekly workout time. This is only possible if the right exercises are selected. Obviously, you will not have time to do dozens of different exercises if you are going to do twenty minute workouts twice per week. Only a small amount of exercises can be chosen, and they must produce a substantial overall training effect within the allotted training time.

Best Exercises = High Efficiency Exercises

The best exercises for short workouts must be high efficiency exercises. High efficiency exercises have the following qualities:

1. Multiple muscles are used at the same time while performing the exercise.
2. The biggest, strongest muscles of the body are emphasized.
3. The body parts involved are leveraged to lift a substantial amount of weight.
4. The exercises have proven to produce outstanding results in multitudes of lifters.

The Power Exercises

All of the qualities for high efficiency exercises can be found in three types of basic power exercises. When all three types of power exercises are used, the vast majority of the muscles of your body will be activated to grow stronger. These exercises include:

1. **Presses:** Including bench presses, incline presses, machine bench presses, and over-head presses.
2. **Squats and Deadlifts:** You can also substitute leg presses for squats or deadlifts
3. **Pulling Motions:** Including bent-over barbell rows, seated pulley rows, lat pull downs, pullups, and deadlifts (notice that deadlifts are both a squatting exercise and a pulling exercise).

Some of the strongest men on earth have used just a few of the basic power exercises listed to build their strength. It doesn't take fancy equipment or a lot of exercises to get stronger, it just takes the proper application of basic exercises.

The Importance of Good Form

It is vitally important to perform each exercise with proper form. When exercises are performed correctly, the exercise stress is distributed properly to the muscles involved in the movement. In contrast, when exercises are not performed correctly, some muscles are overstressed while other muscle groups are under-stressed. This results in muscle imbalances. Poor form can also place your body in awkward positions and create poor lifting leverages. All of these problems can lead to injury and inferior training results.

Learning how to perform exercises correctly does not come with a snap of your fingers. Everyone has their own unique anatomical proportions that will determine the type of form that will produce the most advantageous lifting leverages. Along with this, everyone has muscle groups that naturally tend to be stronger than others. This will cause some variance in the optimal way that each person should perform an exercise. If you ever have a chance to work on your lifting form with a highly qualified lifting coach, take advantage of the opportunity. Doing so will likely make a big difference in the outcome of your results. However, the basics of how to perform each power exercise are provided in the next section.

High Efficiency Exercises

Section 1

Pressing Exercises

Choose just one pressing exercise per workout

Bench Press



Muscles of Emphasis: Chest (Pectoral) Muscles, Triceps, and front Deltoids

Exercise Instructions:

1. Position yourself on your back on a bench press bench.
2. Use an overhand grip to grasp the bar with your hands a little wider than shoulder width apart.
3. Take the barbell that is on the bench press rack and push it up to arm's length above your chest.
4. Carefully lower the bar down until it is touching your lower chest.
5. Push the bar straight up to arm's length above your chest.
6. Repeat until you reach the desired number of reps, and carefully put the bar back on the bench press rack that supports the barbell.

Variations

1. A wider grip with elbows wide to the side during the lift will emphasize the outer chest muscles. Caution, a wide grip with elbows wide to the side can be stressful to the shoulder joint if done too often or with weights that are too heavy.
2. A close grip will emphasize the triceps muscles. Keeping the elbows in close to the body will emphasize the inner triceps on the back of your arms and the front deltoid muscles of the shoulders. Flaring the elbows out to the side while using a close grip will emphasize the outer triceps muscles of the arms.
3. When using a chest press machine, the form is generally similar to the bench press in terms of hand placement and the lifting motion, but many machines require a sitting position instead of lying flat on your back as you would for a bench press.

Incline Press



Muscles of Emphasis: Upper Chest (Pectoral) Muscles, Triceps, and Deltoids

Exercise Instructions

1. Position yourself on your back on an incline bench.
2. Use an overhand grip to grasp the bar with your hands a little wider than shoulder width apart.
3. Take the barbell that is on the incline rack and push it up to arm's length above your face.
4. Carefully lower the bar down until it is touching your upper chest.
5. Push the bar straight up to arm's length over your face.
6. Repeat until you reach the desired number of reps and carefully put the bar back on the rack that supports the barbell.

Dumbbell Incline Variation

This exercise is often done with dumbbells instead of a barbell. The same lifting motion that is used with a barbell is used with dumbbells except that you have the option of touching the dumbbells together at the top of the lifting motion in order to squeeze your pec muscles more.

Shoulder Press



Emphasis: Deltoid Muscles (of the Shoulders), Triceps, and Upper Back Muscles

Exercise Instructions:

1. Use an overhand grip to grasp a barbell a little wider than shoulder width apart.
2. Sit down at the end of a bench with the barbell held just underneath your chin.
3. Push the barbell straight up until your arms are fully extended over your head.
4. Carefully, (avoid lowering the barbell down on your head) lower the barbell back into the starting position and repeat the lifting motion until the desired number of repetitions have been completed.

Dumbbells

You can replace a barbell with two dumbbells and use the same lifting motion by lifting the dumbbells from your shoulders to an overhead position before returning to the starting position with dumbbells at your shoulders.

High Efficiency Exercises

Section 2

Squats And Deadlifts

Choose just one exercise per workout consisting of either squats, deadlifts, or leg presses.

Squats



Muscles of Emphasis:

Upper leg muscles: (quadriceps and hamstrings) glutes, and lower back

Exercise Instructions:

1. In order to use sufficient weight for the barbell squat, you need a squat rack that will hold the barbell just below shoulder level.
2. Position your body under the bar so that the bar will rest across the back of your shoulders. Push your upper traps and shoulders up into the bar to lift the bar off the squat stands, take two steps back, and set up in a standing position with your feet about shoulder width apart.
3. Keeping your back straight, squat down until your thighs are parallel with the floor and return to a standing position. Make sure you take a deep breath and tighten the muscles of your midsection and lower back before descending into the squat position. Repeat the exercise motion until the desired number of repetitions have been completed.

Tips and Considerations

The ratio between body parts can have a huge effect on your how you squat. Lifters who possess short legs will generally find it easy to squat in an upright position. In contrast, someone with long legs and a long femur will tend to bend over much more. They will also be forced to allow their behind to stick out behind them more in order to keep their balance. A person with very long legs may find that a wide stance is the only way to keep their upper body in a fairly upright position when squatting. Each person will have to experiment to find a way of squatting that is comfortable for them. If squatting seems very awkward for you, you may need to get help from an experienced lifter, or a coach who understands your body structure and personal needs.

Deadlifts



Muscles of Emphasis: Thighs, Glutes and Back

These instructions are for the CONVENTIONAL DEADLIFT:

1. Stand just behind a barbell with feet a little less than shoulder width apart.
2. Bend over forward at the waist and hips while keeping your back straight and bend your knees while reaching down to grasp the bar.
3. Let your behind drift back as you bend over. Your knees may shift forward a little as you reach down to grab the bar, but do not let them drift forward a substantial amount as this will tend to place your weight on the front (or balls) of your foot instead of the center of the foot. It is better to have more of a vertical shin than a shin angle that slants significantly forward at the start of the lift.
4. Grasp the bar with your hands about shoulder width apart using an overhand grip with one hand, and an underhand grip with the other hand.
5. Before beginning the lift, make sure your shoulders are positioned directly over the bar; not in front or behind the bar.
6. While keeping your back straight, (don't round your back) straighten up into a standing position with the bar hanging down in front of your thighs. Make sure to take a deep breath and brace your core muscles by tightening up your midsection before pulling upward.
7. Carefully lower the bar to the floor and repeat the exercise until the designated amount of repetitions have been completed.

Variations

Some lifters prefer the **sumo deadlift** technique which is done with a very wide foot spacing and toes angled outward. Start with the upper body as upright as possible, but some forward lean is unavoidable.

Focus on pushing downward into the floor with your feet in order to use your legs as you straighten into a standing position. When using the sumo deadlift technique, you should not feel as much stress on the lower back as you would when performing the conventional deadlift, and you will likely feel more stress on your quadriceps, inner thighs, hamstrings, outer hips, and glutes.

There is no rule that says you must use the conventional style or the sumo style of deadlift. Some lifters prefer an intermediate stance in which the feet are spaced somewhere in between a wide and narrow stance.

Proportional Tendencies for Conventional Deadlifters

Lifters with long legs and a short upper body are more likely to prefer the conventional deadlift.

Proportional Tendencies for Sumo Deadlifters

Lifters with short legs and a long upper body are more likely to prefer the sumo deadlift.

These tendencies are just that, they are common tendencies to be considered, not absolute rules that apply perfectly in all cases. Each lifter should do what they find to be most comfortable according to their own leverages and strengths.

Leg Press



Muscles of Emphasis: Quadriceps, Hamstrings, Glutes

Note: Leg presses can be used as an alternative to squats.

Exercise Instructions:

1. Sit in a leg press with your with your behind firmly on the seat and your back centered flat against the back rest.
2. Place your feet about twelve to eighteen inches apart against the foot platform. The further up you place your feet on the foot platform, the more it tends to work the glute muscles of your behind along with the back of your thighs (your hamstrings). The further down you place your feet on the foot platform, the less it will work your glutes and hamstrings and the more it will force you to use your quadriceps (front of the thighs) to lift the weight.
3. Many leg press machines have a safety bar that holds the weights in place. This requires that you grasp the handles to the safety bar which are usually located down by the side of your hips. You must then extend your legs into a straight position and rotate the safety bar handles outward.
4. Once you have extended your legs into a straight position, lower the weight until your legs are bent at a 90 degree angle to establish a starting position. From the starting position, extend your legs against the weight until your legs are straight, then return to the starting position. Repeat until you reach the desired number of repetitions.
5. Finish with your legs straight on your last repetition, then grasp the safety bar handles and rotate them back up into the starting position. Carefully lower the weights until they are caught by the safety bar.

High Efficiency Exercises

Section 3

Pulling Exercises

Choose just one pulling exercise per workout

Barbell Rows



Muscles of Emphasis: Back, Biceps, and Rear Deltoids

Exercise Instructions:

1. While keeping your back straight (do not round your back), bend over a barbell that is on the ground and grasp it using an overhand grip with hands spaced about shoulder width apart.
2. While maintaining a bent over position, pull the barbell up until it touches the middle of your waist.
3. While maintaining a bent over position, lower the bar carefully to arm's length.
4. Repeat this motion until you have reached the desired number of repetitions.
5. Keep your back stable during the exercise; be careful not to jerk the weight up with your back.

Seated Pulley Rows



Muscles of Emphasis: Back, Biceps, and Rear Deltoids

Exercise Instructions

1. Not all equipment for seated pulley rows is the same. The essential concept is to face a pulley device and sit down close enough to grasp the handle (preferably a v-bar handle) at the end of the cable.
2. Legs should be slightly bent and positioned forward in front of the body with the feet placed forward on the foot platform or crossbar if it is available on the pulley device.
3. Make sure your upper body is positioned upright with the back straight and chest high.
4. Reach forward with both hands to grasp the handle at the end of the pulley cable.
5. Pull the handle towards your body until it touches the upper abdomen area.
6. Squeeze your shoulder blades together as you pull the handle into your body.
7. Lower the weight by returning your hands and arms to the starting position in front of your body.
8. Repeat pulling the handle into your body and returning it to the starting position for the desired number of repetitions.

Lat Pulldowns



Muscles of Emphasis: Back, Biceps, and rear Deltoids

Exercise Instructions:

1. Sit down on a lat pull seat and reach up with both hands and use a wide grip to grasp the lat pull bar.
2. While keeping your chest high and body stable, pull the bar down until it touches the middle of your chest.
3. Carefully straighten your arms back to the starting position. Repeat the exercise motion until the desired number of repetitions have been completed.
4. Do not jerk back while lifting, and do not round your back. Your chest should be held high in order to prevent this.

Variations

Lat pull downs can be done with a narrow grip. There are also bars or handles that allow you to use a narrower grip in order to put more emphasis on the lower lat and center of the back if you squeeze your shoulder blades as the bar is touching your chest.

Chapter 2

Work Out Twice Per Week



Once you know how to perform the power exercises, the next step is to incorporate them into two workouts that each consist of twenty minutes. The workouts should always be scheduled seventy-two to ninety-six hours apart when creating a weekly schedule. Examples of a weekly schedule would be to do the two workouts on:

Mondays and Thursdays

Mondays and Fridays

Tuesdays and Fridays

Tuesdays and Saturdays

Wednesdays and Saturdays

Avoid Poor Scheduling

Do your best to avoid scheduling workouts only 24 to 48 hours apart. If you were to schedule your workouts too close together by setting them up on a Monday and Wednesday, you may find it hard to fully recover for Wednesday's workout. At the same time, it will be five days from Wednesday to Monday. This is too long between workouts and you may find that it causes you to lose strength between training sessions. For best results, schedule two to three rest days between workouts.

Three Exercises per Workout

Once you have assigned your workouts to a weekly schedule, the goal is to do a pressing exercise, a deadlift or squat, and a pulling exercise in each workout. This will require three exercises per workout.

Exception: Two Exercises per Workout When Doing Deadlifts

An exception to three exercises per workout occurs when you do deadlifts, because deadlifts are both a squat and a pull combined into one exercise. This assumes that you begin your deadlift with sufficient knee bend to activate your leg muscles as opposed to starting your deadlift with straight legs. If you do your deadlifts properly, you only need to include two exercises within a single workout to do a pulling exercise, a squatting exercise, and a pressing exercise. For example, if you only did deadlifts and bench presses, these two exercises alone would enable you to squat, pull, and press, within the same workout.

A major benefit of selecting squatting, pulling, and pressing exercises, is that many muscles are used at the same time for each type of exercise. This can be seen when you consider the following:

Squats work the legs, glutes, lower back, and abdominal muscles.

Pulling exercises work the muscles of the back along with the rear deltoids of the shoulders, and the biceps and forearm muscles of the arm.

Pressing exercises work the muscles of the chest, shoulders, and triceps (the back of the arms).

When you consider this, the vast majority of the muscles in your body will be strengthened by a handful of exercises.

The next page shows how to divide up five exercises into two workouts in order to pull, press, and squat or deadlift in every workout:

Workout 1: Monday

Bench press: Works chest, shoulders, and triceps

Squats: Works legs, glutes, lower back, and abdominal stabilizing muscles

Bent Over Rows or Lat Pulldowns: Works back muscles and biceps

Workout 2: Thursday

Overhead Press: Works shoulders, upper chest, and triceps

Deadlifts: Works legs, glutes, back, shoulders, forearms, and abdominal muscles

Notice again that only two workouts are done in the second workout because deadlifts double as a squatting exercise and a pulling exercise.

Chapter 3

Quality Reps, Marker Reps, Grinder Reps



Assuming you select the right exercises and organize them into a weekly schedule, your next consideration is the actual training. When it comes to training, some people seem to instinctively train with the right amount of effort. This is not true of everyone. Some people would rather not push themselves to exert enough effort to improve. In contrast, others overdo it by going all-out with a gut busting, “lift the weight or die” mentality in every workout.

Effective training is based on training hard enough to make progress, but not so hard that you overstress your body and quit making progress. The question is, how do you know when you’ve trained hard enough to make progress without training so hard that it does more harm than good? The answer is to be able to identify the difference between three different types of reps including:

1. Quality reps
2. Marker reps
3. Grinder reps

Quality Reps

As long as you are pushing forcefully into the lift and can maintain a steady even rep pace, you are doing quality reps (I sometimes refer to them as strong reps).

Marker Reps

When the reps start to get harder, and you can't keep repeating reps quite as fast as you could when doing quality reps, you are doing **marker reps**. Marker reps mark the point in a set when you should stop. Some people should not do any more than one marker rep before stopping a set or they will quickly transition from marker reps to grinder reps which should be avoided. Others may be able to do several marker reps before reaching the point where they transition to grinder reps.

Grinder Reps

Grinder reps are the slow strenuous reps that can occur at the end of a set when doing as many reps as possible. Grinder reps are much slower than the previous reps of a set. You are crossing the line of productive effort when doing grinder reps, and you are usually doing more harm than good when you do them.

I personally don't know of any top powerlifters who regularly push their lifts so hard that their head looks like it's ready to explode. They may occasionally do this when competing, performing for a youtube video, or testing their strength, but they don't do it on a regular basis when training.

There is a difference between testing your strength and training for strength. The goal of training for strength is to stimulate your muscles to get stronger over time. In contrast, testing your strength is only focused on the moment when the goal is to maximize your momentary performance. The problem is that it may produce so much training stress that your body becomes inhibited to keep gaining strength. With this in mind, I don't recommend grinder reps except when testing your strength by trying find out the maximum number of reps you can perform with a given amount of weight. This shouldn't be done more than once per month.

In general, you will need to push pretty hard in order to make progress in 40 minutes of training per week. At a minimum, you must be willing to do as many quality reps as possible when performing your heaviest sets. At a maximum, you can push to the point of doing marker reps, but I highly recommend that you avoid reaching the point where you are struggling to push out slow, strenuous, grinder reps on a regular basis.

Another method that helps lifters to know how much effort to apply on each set is the percentage method. This shall be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 4

Percentages



One method that helps lifters to know how hard they should push themselves on each set is to use what is referred to as “percentage training.” This simply means that when you see a listing of sets and reps, you will also see a percentage listed next to it. The percentage refers to the amount of weight you should use in relationship to the maximum weight that you can lift for a single rep. For example, you may see the following notation:

1 x 10 30%

This notation tells you that you should do one set of ten repetitions for a given exercise. The amount of weight that you should use is 30% of the maximum weight that you can lift for a single rep for the exercise performed. Of course to calculate a percentage, you must know ahead of time how much weight you can lift for a single rep. For example, if the maximum weight that you can lift for a single rep in the bench press is 200 pounds, you would use 30% of 200 pounds for one set of ten repetitions. You can calculate this by converting 30% into a decimal, which would be .3. This number would then be multiplied by 200 pounds as follows:

$$.3 \times 200 \text{ pounds} = 60 \text{ pounds}$$

As you can see, the amount of weight that you would use for one set of ten reps would be 60 pounds, which would be an appropriate weight for a warm up set.

The reason that percentages are used is to be very specific about how much effort should be applied to each set. This is important because there are two different types of sets consisting of:

1. Warm up Sets
2. Work sets (also referred to as, “top sets”)

Warm up sets should be fairly easy, although they grow progressively harder from set to set. Only after completing each warm up set should lifters push themselves with a high amount of effort for their work sets.

Don't Make This Mistake

Lifters get into trouble when they make their warm up sets too hard and waste their strength before they get to the work sets which require the most effort. This can be prevented if percentages are assigned to each set in order to be very specific about how hard lifters should be pushing themselves during their warm up sets.

The Drawback of Using Percentages

Percentages provide a very useful tool for helping lifters to perform each set with the right amount of effort, but the drawback of using percentages is twofold:

1. Lifters may underestimate or overestimate the maximum weight they can truly lift for a single rep of a given exercise, and some lifters don't want to risk an injury by testing their strength with a maximum lift. The problem with this is that they won't have an accurate number to use when calculating the required percentages.
2. A lifter may find that they can lift more weight than what the percentage calls for, or they find that they can't lift as much weight as the percentage calls for. This applies most specifically to work sets.

Fortunately, there are solutions to these problems.

Use Your 10 Rep Max to Estimate Your Single Rep Max

If you don't know the maximum weight that you can lift for a given exercise, and you don't want to test yourself with heavy weights, you can estimate your single rep max by using the following procedure:

1. Find your ten rep max, which is the maximum weight that you can lift for ten consecutive reps when performing a given exercise.
2. Divide the amount of weight that you can use for ten reps by .75 to estimate your single rep max. For example, if your ten rep max for the bench press is 135 pounds, you would divide it by .75 by using the following equation:

$$135 \div .75 = 180 \text{ pounds}$$

From this equation, you can see that your estimated max for a single rep would be 180 pounds. You can use this number as a basis to calculate percentages.

Adjust To Lift with the Right Amount of Effort

Remember that this is just an estimate, and that percentages are used to provide you with a general idea of how much effort you should be using for a set of an exercise. It is possible that you calculate all of the percentages accurately in order to know how much weight you should be using for a given amount of reps, but the weight turns out to be too heavy or too light. For example, one of the sets of your workout may be listed as six reps with 80% of your single rep max by using the following notation:

1 x 6 80%

It may be that when you use 80% of your single rep max for six reps of squats, it doesn't feel very hard. You find that you actually have enough strength in reserve to do eight or nine reps quality reps. The opposite problem can occur if you find that you can't even reach six reps. It may also be that you can perform six reps, but you have to push to the point of doing overly stressful grinder reps in order to complete every rep. None of these situations would be considered optimal. If any of these situations occur, here's what you should do:

Instead of going by the percentage listed, adjust the weight so that your last rep is a marker rep, and all of the previous reps are quality reps. For example, if you were doing squats for six reps, the first five reps would be quality reps, and you would finish with a marker rep on your sixth rep.

Remember, there is a sweet spot when it comes to the right amount of effort. The ability to make consistent progress is predicated upon learning how to train hard enough without training too hard. Always adjust your weights for your work sets to train with the right amount of effort.

The bottom line with percentages is to use them for your warm up sets, and adjust them as necessary for your work sets.

Chapter 5

The Basic 10 – 8 – 3 – 6 Routine



In this chapter, a basic routine will be presented that provides the sets, reps, and percentages that should be used for each exercise. If you do the exercises correctly, and work out with the right amount of effort, you can make excellent progress for quite a while with the simple basic routine that will be discussed in this chapter. At some point, you will probably benefit from other routines. This will be discussed in chapter's seven and eight.

The basic routine should be applied to each exercise that you perform for your workout. It starts with three warm up sets that grow progressively heavier. By your fourth set, you will be doing a work set where you push yourself to do as many quality reps as possible, plus a marker rep. The basic routine is what I refer to as the 10 – 8 – 3 – 6 routine. This routine consists of four sets. The amount of reps and percentages that should be used for each set are listed below:

1 x 10 30%

1 x 8 50%

1 x 3 70%

1 x 6 80% This is your work set

If you put this routine into a weekly schedule that consists of two workouts, the next page provides an example of how the whole schedule would be written:

Weekly Workout Schedule	
10 – 8 – 3 – 6 Routine	
Do the following amount of sets and reps with the percentages indicated for each exercise performed	
1 x 10 30%	
1 x 8 50%	
1 x 3 70%	
1 x 6 80%	
Exercises for Workout 1	Exercises for Workout 2
Squats Bench Press Bent Over Rows	Deadlifts Overhead Press
<p>When doing the first three warm up sets for an exercise, you should move from set to set quickly. It should only take three minutes to do the first three sets.</p> <p>Rest two minutes or until your strength is fully recovered before doing the fourth set, which is a work set.</p> <p>Make sure to allow 72 to 96 hours of recovery between workouts. For example, train on Mondays and Thursdays, or Tuesdays and Saturdays.</p>	

If you follow the routine as written, you should find that the first set feels very easy. The first set consists of ten easy reps to allow you to get the feel of the exercise motion and to increase the amount of blood and oxygen to the working muscle. At the same time, the viscosity and elasticity of your muscles should improve from doing light warm up reps. This will prepare you for the increases in weight as you proceed from set to set. By the time you reach your third warm up set with 70% for three reps, the weight should start feel somewhat challenging to lift, but not so challenging that it is highly taxing.

Three Warm up Sets In Three to Four Minutes

You should move quickly from set to set when doing your first three warm up sets. Ideally, you should be able to all three warm up sets within about three to four minutes.

Rest Two Minutes Before Doing Your Work Set

After completing all three warm up sets, rest for approximately two minutes before doing your work set. Make sure you have recovered back to full strength before doing your work set with 80% for six reps. Remember, the key to working out quickly without tiring yourself out is to move quickly from set to set when doing warm up sets. At the same time, you must rest long enough to be at full strength before doing your work set.

When you have completed all four sets for one exercise, move to the next exercise and follow the same procedures of performing 10 – 8 – 3 – 6 for each exercise until you have completed your workout.

Chapter 6

Optional Back-Off Sets

Optional: Do a Back-off Set for 15 reps

If you seem to respond well to three warm up sets and one intense work set, then there is no need to add any more sets. However, some of you may find it beneficial to follow your fourth set with an additional set that consists of less weight and more reps. Lighter sets that are done after your heaviest work set are often referred to as “back-off sets.”

If you choose to include back-off sets, you should still find it fairly easy to finish your workout within 20 minutes when doing just two exercises per workout. However, when doing three exercises within a workout, you must work out quickly in order to include the back-off set within the time span of a 20 minute workout. If you want to do back-off sets, I recommend doing just one back-off set of 15 reps for each exercise. This will add more training volume to your workouts, which many lifters find to be beneficial for strength development.

When doing your back-off sets, there are a couple of considerations in regard to how you will include them in your workout.

Save Back off Sets for Squats and Deadlifts for Last

You may find that squats and deadlifts can be an exhausting exercise, whereas exercises such as bench presses, seated pulley rows, or lat pulldowns are not as demanding. Because of the fact that squats and deadlifts can take a lot out of you, you may want to perform either squats or deadlifts as the first exercise in your workout, but save the back off set for the very end of the workout. This option is shown below:

Squats: 10 – 8 – 3 – 6: save the back-off set as the last set of the workout

Seated Pulley Rows: 10 – 8 – 3 – 6 – 15

Bench Press: 10 – 8 – 3 – 6 - 15

Squats: one back-off set of 15 reps

Back-off Sets for Just One or Two Exercises

A final option is to do back-off sets for some of the exercises, but not all of them. Perhaps you don't have enough time or energy to do back-off sets for each exercise within 20 minutes, or you have found that back-off sets work well for some exercises, but they don't seem to be beneficial for others. For example, you may do squats, bench presses, and rows, within the same workout, but only do a back-off set for bench presses. You can also mix it up from week to week by doing a back-off set for just one exercise per week, while making sure to do the back-off set for a different exercise each week. In other words, you can do a back-off set for bench presses the first week, squats the second week, and rows the third week.

Chapter 7

Rapid Paced Mini Set Training



The 10 – 8 – 3 – 6 routine (with an optional back-off set) is an excellent foundational routine for building muscle size and strength, however, at some point you may want to vary your workouts. Two more routines will be discussed in the next two chapters. The first routine is made up of rapid paced mini sets, and will be discussed in this chapter. The second routine is based on working up to a heavy weight and will be discussed in the next chapter.

Rapid Paced Mini Sets

Mini sets are done by breaking up a long set into a series of short sets. For example, instead of doing a set of twelve consecutive reps, you divide the reps into four mini sets that each consist of three reps. In the routine in this chapter, the mini sets will consist of three to five reps. To be effective, the mini sets are done at a rapid pace with short rests between sets. You probably won't feel a great deal of fatigue at the end of your first two or three mini sets, but as you continue to repeat them at a rapid pace, they become more challenging.

Use 50% - 70% - 60%

When performing rapid paced mini sets, you will be using three different percentages of the maximum weight that you can lift for a single rep. After selecting an exercise, you will start out with 50% for 3 mini sets of 5 reps. You will then increase the weight to 70% and do 4 mini sets of 3 reps. The weight will then be reduced to 60% and you will finish the routine with 3 mini sets of 3 reps. This routine should be done for each exercise performed as follows:

3 x 5 50%

4 x 3 70%

3 x 3 60%

One Set Every 35 Seconds

In order to get through every set of an exercise in approximately six minutes, you must do one set every 35 seconds. This doesn't mean that you get 35 seconds of rest between sets, it means that you must begin doing a new set every 35 seconds, which means that you will probably only get about 25 seconds of rest between sets.

Start with Just 7 Mini Sets if Necessary

The rapid pace is something that you will probably need to work your way up to. It may be necessary to start with just seven mini sets per exercise by eliminating the last three mini sets with 60%. If you do this, your routine will be as follows for each exercise:

3 x 5 50%

4 x 3 70%

If you choose to start with only seven mini sets per exercise as listed above, then you will need to do one mini set every 50 seconds in order to do three exercises within a 20 minute workout. If you find that this is easy, you can add one mini set at a time to your routine until you are doing ten mini sets for each exercise. As you gain enough strength and stamina to increase the number of mini sets in your workouts, use the following guidelines for the amount of rest between sets:

8 mini sets: Do one mini set every 45 seconds

9 mini sets: Do one mini set every 40 seconds

10 mini sets: Do one mini set every 35 seconds

Ideal Intensity: Reach Your Limit of Quality Reps

Regardless of what kind of workout you are doing, one of your goals should always be to train with an ideal amount of effort. When doing rapid mini sets, the first three mini sets with 50% should be fairly easy. The next four sets with 70% are designed to be the most challenging part of the routine. The ideal amount of training intensity would be to reach your limit of quality reps, or even to hit one marker rep on your last mini set with 70%. Your last three mini sets with 60% are not designed to push you as much and should be a little easier.

Adjustments if the Routine Feels Too Hard

Make sure to avoid grinder reps. It's possible that the training pace is so fast that it causes you to start straining with grinder reps. If this happens, you have two options:

1. Reduce the weight until you are training at an ideal intensity,
2. Use a slower training pace with a reduced amount of mini sets in order to achieve ideal intensity. If you reduce the amount of sets, do not do less than seven mini sets per exercise. If you still find yourself doing grinder reps with a slower training pace and only seven mini sets, you need to reduce the weight to eliminate grinder reps.

Adjustments if the Routine Feels Too Easy

It may also be that the routine feels too easy. You may feel like you can do several more quality reps when doing your last set of three reps with 70%. If so, you have three options:

1. **Speed up the training pace** with less rest between sets until you are at your limit of quality reps when you reach your last set with 70%.
2. **Do as many quality reps as possible for your last mini set with 70%** instead of only doing three reps.
3. **Increase the weight** enough to feel as though you are close to your limit of quality reps on your last set of three reps with 70%.

Lift Forcefully When Doing Mini Sets

One of the benefits of doing mini sets is that it reduces the amount of fatigue that would ordinarily occur at the end of a full set. The advantage of reducing fatigue is that it allows you to impart maximum force into every rep. Powerlifters often avoid pushing their sets to the point of fatigue on purpose in order to lift forcefully. If they push too far into a set with too many reps, the amount of force imparted into each rep dramatically decreases at the end of a set due fatigue. This being the case, make sure you lift forcefully when doing mini sets. The amount of force you impart into each rep plays a vital role when your primary goal is to build as much strength as possible.

Chapter 8

The Heavy Lifting Routine



The emphasis of the routine in this chapter will be on heavy lifting. While the 10 – 8 – 3 – 6 routine includes some fairly heavy lifting with 80% of your single rep max, you will work up to an even heavier weight of 85% to 90% for the heavy lifting routine. The routine consists of five sets, and the reps and percentages for each set are as follows:

1 x 10 30%

1 x 8 50%

1 x 3 70%

1 x 1 80%

1 x 3 85% to 90%

This routine can also be called the 10 – 8 – 3 – 1 – 3 routine. Do not start out with this routine before doing the other routines in this book. You should only do the 10 – 8 – 3 – 1 – 3 routine if you have been pain free and injury free when doing the first two workouts discussed in the previous chapters. If you have any aches, pains, or injuries, or you feel vulnerable to injury when doing specific exercises, stick with the previous routines and do not do the 10 – 8 – 3 – 1 – 3 routine in this chapter until you have been pain free for at least six weeks.

The 10 – 8 – 3 – 1 – 3 routine should be used for a short time, not all the time. I don't recommend using this routine for more than two consecutive weeks. It can be a very productive training routine for short term training, but heavy weights can burn you out when used on a long term basis. After one or two weeks

of heavy training, go back to one of the other training routines as they are more effective for long term training.

When doing this routine, the first four sets are warm up sets. You should move quickly enough on your warm up sets to finish them within four minutes. Rest approximately two minutes before doing your final work set with three reps at 85% to 90% in order to be at full strength for the heaviest lifting.

Adjust to Achieve Ideal Effort

As with the other routines, the 10 – 8 – 3 – 1 – 3 routine should be adjusted to your capacity for quality reps. Most people will be able to do three quality reps with 85% if they are basing the percentage on an accurate single rep max. The amount of effort used for your heaviest set should allow you to do three quality reps, or two quality reps plus a marker rep with 85%. If you find that you must do grinder reps in order to squeeze out three reps, the weight is too heavy. Reduce it enough to be able to do three quality reps, or two quality reps plus a marker rep. If you feel like you could do five quality reps when using 85%, you can increase the weight enough to be challenged to do three quality reps.

It is possible to add in a back-off set consisting of 10 to 15 reps after each exercise if you are only doing two exercises within a workout. If you are doing three exercises, you will have a hard time including back-off sets unless you move through the 10 – 8 – 3 – 1 – 3 - 15 routine at a very quick pace from set to set.

Rotate the Training Routines

When you consider all three of the training routines that have been discussed in this book, you may find it beneficial to rotate them as follows:

Week 1: Do Rapid Paced Mini Set Training

Week 2: Do the 10 – 8 – 3 – 6 routine

Week 3: Do the 10 – 8 – 3 – 1 – 3 routine

Some of you may find that one particular routine consistently works better than the others. If this is the case, stick with the one that works best. Others may find that variety works better and that it is necessary to switch from one routine to the other in order to keep making progress. The essential concept is to let results be your guide when choosing which training routines to use.

Chapter 9

Adding Weight



The goal of Strength Challenge 20/20 is to get stronger within the context of 20 minutes of training twice per week. If you start doing workouts and notice that the weights you are using are getting easier to lift, it means you are getting stronger. At some point, you will need to add weight in order to keep getting stronger. This being the case, you may be wondering how much weight you should add, and how often you should add the weight.

The most basic principle for adding weight is to let your body be the guide. Some people believe that every time they add five or ten pounds to their lifts they will automatically get stronger. It may seem to work like this for a while if you are an easy gainer, but it is not a strategy that will work forever. The longer you train, the harder it is to keep adding weight to your lifts, and you will have to learn to add weight when your body is ready.

All Quality Reps Signal an Increase in Weight

How do you know when you are ready to add weight to your lifts? You will know when the weight you have been using becomes easy enough to allow you to perform quality reps for every rep of your heaviest set of an exercise. If you add five pounds and you can no longer do quality reps for every rep of your heaviest set, keep using the same weight in future workouts until the weight becomes easy enough to lift so that every rep is a quality rep.

Recall that quality reps are forceful reps that can be repeated using a steady even rep pace within a set. When you can no longer maintain a steady rep pace, your rep pace will start to slow down and you will be doing marker reps. If the reps become very slow and strenuous, you have gone too far and are doing grinder reps. You can push to the point of marker reps with a specific weight. However, don't add weight again until the current weight is easy enough to allow you to perform quality reps for every rep of the set. As for grinder reps, don't do them.

Allow the Weights To Become Easier To Lift

Many people don't know that the primary goal your body is trying to achieve when it gains strength is to make it easier for you to lift the same weight. You must allow sufficient time for the weight to become easier to lift before adding more weight, or you will be frustrating the goal that your body is trying to achieve when it gains strength. If you always keep trying to make your workouts harder before allowing them to become easier, you may get stronger for a while, but you will eventually hit a never ending sticking point.

When you first begin lifting weights, the weights quickly become easier to lift and you may be able to add weight often enough to gain 100 pounds of strength or more within a year when performing exercises such as deadlifts, squats, and leg presses. However, if you continue lifting for more than a year, your ability to gain strength will probably slow down to twenty to sixty pounds over the course of a year. When this happens, it may take four to twelve weeks of using the same weight for a given lift before it becomes easy enough to add five pounds. This is normal, but if you panic and add weight before you are ready, chances are good that you will hinder your progress instead of helping it. One of the keys to long term progress is to be patient and add weight at the right rate.

Remember These Three Rules

1. If you can perform a set with all quality reps, you are ready to add 5 pounds
2. If you run into marker reps at the end of your set, do not add weight until the set becomes easy enough to perform with all quality reps.
3. Do not add weight to the point where it forces you to perform grinder reps.

Chapter 10

Learning From Experience

At the time of this writing, it is the year 2018 and I have been lifting weights consistently since 1979. When I first began to lift weights, I was extremely enthusiastic and thought I should train an hour or more every day. I made some initial gains but I also stopped gaining after a few months. In my zeal, I read a lot of information on weight training and I tried multitudes of different types of routines and workouts. Over the years, I accumulated enough research and personal training experience to weed out the most important things for developing strength. In the end, I found there are four foundational concepts that are the chief contributors to strength gains. These concepts include:

1. Focus on doing simple basic power exercises
2. Learn how to do the exercises with the best form possible
3. Learn how to train hard enough without training too hard
4. Add weight when your body is ready

These concepts have been the central focus of this book and are the keys to gaining strength without spending hours per week in a gym. It doesn't take a huge amount of time to grow stronger, but it does take knowledge and the discipline to apply that knowledge. My hope is that Strength Challenge 20/20 provides you with the knowledge of how to gain as much strength as possible within a minimum amount of weekly training. Best of training to you.

About The Author

Mark Sherwood is a long time fitness enthusiast who has pursued weight training and other fitness activities for over thirty years. His educational and professional background include a B.S. degree as an exercise specialist in physical education from the University of Wisconsin Madison, and positions as a fitness instructor and physical education teacher.

One of Mark's passions is to distinguish between strength training concepts that are consistently effective as opposed to those that are effective for a short time period. Through his education, research, and personal trial and error, he has endeavored to gain the necessary knowledge to share effective training strategies with those who desire to maximize their training results.

Mark resides with his family in Southern California. For more training resources from Mark, you can visit www.precisionpointtraining.com. In addition, you can view more books on strength training that he has authored on the next page.

Additional Resources

A Quick Guide To Strength

Beginning Strength Training

Cluster Set Training

Force And Frequency Training

High Frequency Strength Training

Heavy Frequency Training

Individualized Workouts For Hardgainers

Never Miss A Lift

Overcoming Strength Training Plateaus

Quick Workouts For Quick Muscles

Rest-Pause Training

Strength Training Capacity

Strength Training Thresholds

Strength To The Max

Strength To The Max And Beyond

The 1 x 100 Challenge

The High Frequency Training Pyramid

The Peak Strength Principle

12-10-8-6: A Workout Plan For Building Size And Strength

