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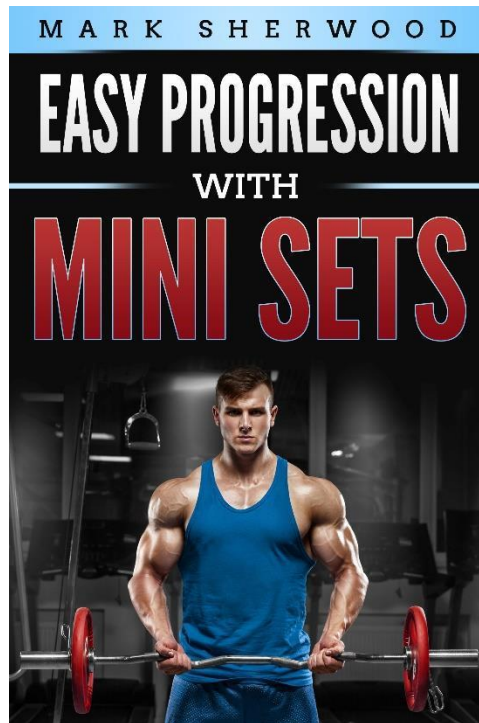
EASY PROGRESSION

WITH

MINI SETS



Easy Progression With Mini Sets



Mark Sherwood

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Easy Progression With Mini Sets

By Mark Sherwood

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Introduction

If you want to eat an 8 ounce steak, you don't eat it all in one bite. A better strategy is to cut the steak into small pieces and eat it a little at a time. If you want to do a difficult task, you will succeed much easier if you can break the process down into small steps. This is why books are divided into chapters, courses at school are divided into lessons, and big tasks are often broken down into small steps. Can you apply this concept to weight training by breaking it into smaller steps in order to make progress? Yes, one way you can do it is with mini set progression.

Mini sets allow you to break your training into small segments. This enables you to improve in smaller steps instead of trying to improve in bigger steps. The result is a form of training that makes it easy to make consistent progress. How does this work? The rest of this book will explain how.

Chapter 1

Full Sets vs. Mini Sets



When you perform a set of an exercise, the set is usually designed to cram as many reps as possible into the set. I refer to these sets as **full sets** because you are doing the full amount of reps that you can perform for each set. There is no rule that says you must perform a full set as you can break a set down into a series of mini sets that will combine to equal the same number of reps as a full set. For example:

3 sets x 10 reps = 30 reps converts to → 10 sets x 3 reps = 30 total reps

As you can see, if you are doing three sets of ten reps for a total of 30 reps, you can break three sets of ten reps down into small mini sets by doing ten sets of three reps.

Rest Time Between Mini Sets = 30 to 45 seconds

One problem with the mini set method is that your workout may seem too easy. The reason for this is that you will only be doing three reps per set instead of ten. If a workout is too easy, it won't produce results. One way to account for this problem is to utilize fairly short rest intervals between mini sets. If you normally rest two or three minutes between full sets, do not assume that you should rest that much between mini sets. A better strategy is to shoot for rest periods that range between 30 to 45 seconds.

Train with an Ideal Amount of Effort

The exact amount of rest time between mini sets is something that you will need to experiment with. Ideally, if you are using the right amount of effort you should be able to perform all of your reps using the same rep speed, however, it should feel challenging to do so by the last couple of mini sets.

If The Pace Is Too Fast

If you train at a pace that is too fast, it **will force you to grind out slow strenuous reps** on your last couple of sets. If this happens, you are not resting long enough between mini sets.

If The Pace Is Too Slow

It is also possible to reach your last set of three reps and find that the last set still feels very easy. If this is the case, you are resting too long between mini sets. Use a rest interval that will allow you to maintain the same rep speed throughout all of your sets, but it should feel challenging to do so by your last couple of sets.

Assuming you are using a training pace that makes your workouts hard enough without being overly hard, the use of mini set training can be a great way to make consistent progress. The advantage of breaking your full sets into mini sets is that it allows you to break your workout down into ten small steps. Smaller steps are easier when the goal is to make progress. You can then add reps or weight to your workouts in small steps. The next two chapters will explain how to do this.

Chapter 2

Add Reps



Let us assume that you have been doing three sets of ten reps for your workouts. You then decide that your method for making progress is to increase the reps of all three sets to eleven reps in the same workout. This would require a fairly big step. You can take smaller steps by only increasing the first set to eleven reps during a given workout. You can then increase the second set to eleven reps in a future workout, and increase the third set to eleven reps in a separate future workout. This is better than one big step, but you can break the process down into even smaller steps by using mini sets.

Add Reps At The Right Rate

When dividing three sets of ten reps into ten sets of three reps, you now have ten separate opportunities to add reps instead of three. One of the keys to doing this effectively is to add reps to your mini sets at a pace that corresponds to how fast your body is able to adapt. In order to explain this, let's imagine that you work each muscle group three times per week. We can then look at two examples of how often you might add reps to your mini sets:

Example 1

If you add a rep to **one mini set per workout**, it will take ten workouts to advance from ten sets of three reps to ten sets of four reps. You would simply increase from three to four reps for your first mini set in your first workout. The second mini set would be increased from three reps to four reps in the second workout, and you would continue with this process for each successive mini set until you increase each mini set from three reps to four reps by the tenth workout. If you do a little math, you would find that this would take just over three weeks.

Example 2

If you add one rep to one mini set per week, it would take ten weeks to advance from ten sets of three to ten sets of four reps.

Hopefully you can see that this illustrates how you can add reps to your mini sets at a rapid pace or a more gradual rate depending upon how fast you are gaining strength. If you are adding reps to your mini sets at a rate that causes you to strain and struggle to squeeze out reps on your last couple of sets, you are adding reps at a rate that is too fast. You should maintain the ability to perform all of your reps with force and power as you add reps to your mini sets.

When you have advanced from ten sets of three reps to ten sets of four reps for each mini set, add five pounds to the lift you are performing and reduce the number of reps per mini set back down to three reps again. From there, you can repeat the process and start adding reps to your mini sets until you progress to ten sets of four reps.

Adding reps to one mini set at a time is one option that you can use as a means of progression. A second option is to add weight to your mini sets. This will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Adding Weight



It is just as easy to add weight to one mini set at a time as it is to add reps. Many lifters will prefer adding weight instead of adding reps. To illustrate how this works, we will once again assume that you are doing ten mini sets which each consist of three reps. You can then add five pounds to each mini set one workout at a time, or one week at a time. If you add five pounds to one mini set per workout for ten workouts, you will be using five additional pounds for all ten mini sets by the tenth workout. This would take just over three weeks if you work each muscle group three times per week.

A Slight Adjustment

You can make a slight adjustment to the rate at which you add five pounds to your mini sets in order to increase each mini set by five pounds in exactly three weeks. If you are doing three workouts per muscle group per week, it will take exactly three weeks to complete nine workouts. In order to add five pounds to all ten mini sets within nine workouts, simply add five pounds to two mini sets during one of the nine workouts, and add five pounds to one mini set per workout for the other eight workouts.

Plan the Rate at Which You Add 5 Pounds

If you want to plan how much additional weight you will be using within the span of a year, you will need to plan out how often you will add five pounds to successive mini sets. The following information will help

you to know how much additional weight you will be using within a year when adding weight at the various rates listed:

Increase by 85 Pounds per Year

By adding five pounds to each mini set every three weeks, you will be using an additional 85 pounds at the end of a year.

Increase by 50 Pounds per Year

If you add five pounds to successive mini sets two out of every three workouts, it will take five weeks to add five pounds to each mini set, and you will be using an additional 50 pounds within a year. This assumes you work each muscle group three times per week.

Increase by 40 Pounds per Year

If you add five pounds to successive mini sets in every other workout, your poundages will increase by about 40 pounds within a year. This assumes you work each muscle group three times per week.

Increase by 25 Pounds per Year

If you add five pounds to successive mini sets once per week, it will take ten weeks to add five pounds to each mini set and your poundages will increase by about 25 pounds within a year.

The Key to The Right Rate

You can plan out the rate at which you add weight to your mini sets, but the key to consistent gains is to add at a rate that corresponds with the correct level of effort. If you get in a hurry and add weight to your mini sets too fast, it will cause you to strain and struggle when you reach your last couple of mini sets. This will eventually diminish your strength gains or even stop them. Avoid workouts that are too hard, and avoid workouts that are too easy by adding weight at a rate that corresponds to your ability to maintain the correct level of effort. Your workouts should be challenging without requiring the use of slow strenuous reps and excessive strain and effort.

Chapter 4

Micro-loading



When you break your sets into small sections, you can add weight or reps in small steps which makes it easy for your body to adapt. The smaller the change in training, the easier your body can make a successful adaptation to handle the added weight by gaining a little strength. Of course one way to do this is with mini sets, however, you can accentuate this concept even more with micro-loading.

Micro-loading is done by adding weight in very small increments. Microloading often refers to the addition of weight in increments of a pound or less, but for our purposes, it would be more appropriate to add up to two pounds to one or two mini sets per workout. For example, if you are doing ten sets of three reps with 150 pounds, you can increase your first mini set to 152 pounds in the first workout. You would do the same thing for your second set in the second workout, and the third set in the third workout and so on. The process would continue until you have increased all ten of your mini sets to 152 pounds.

35 Pounds per Year

If we continue with the example of ten sets of three reps for each exercise, and it takes three weeks to add two pounds to all ten mini sets, then you will be adding two pounds to your lifts every three weeks. This will increase your training poundages by about 35 pounds within a year.

25 Pounds per Year and 50 Pounds per Year

You can also change the set and rep scheme of the mini sets and do six sets of five reps in order to arrive at 30 total reps. Assuming you are performing six sets of five reps, you can add one pound to one mini set per workout which will take six workouts to add one pound to each mini set. This would take two weeks and would increase your poundages an additional 25 pounds within a year. If you increase this just a little bit by adding two pounds to one mini set per workout, you can double the rate of gain which would increase your poundages by an additional 50 pounds per year.

Adding a small amount of weight to a small portion of each workout is one of the best ways to make it easy for your body to adapt to added weight over time. If you have been stuck at the same strength level, consider the micro-loading strategy.

Chapter 5

Mini Set Variations



Converting 4 Sets of 12 Reps to Mini Sets

The way you organize and structure your mini sets can vary according to your preference. For example, if you normally do four sets of twelve reps when performing full sets, you will be doing a total of 48 reps. You can convert four sets of twelve reps into any of the following mini set options to reach 48 reps:

16 sets of 3 reps = 48 reps

12 sets of 4 reps = 48 reps

8 sets of 6 reps = 48 reps

Converting 3 Sets of 8 reps to Mini Sets

If you normally do three sets of eight reps when performing full sets, you will be doing a total of 24 reps. You can convert three sets of eight reps into any of the following mini set options to reach 24 reps:

12 sets of 2 reps = 24 reps

8 sets of 3 reps = 24 reps

6 sets of 4 reps = 24 reps

The point of this is that you can find a combination of sets and reps for your mini sets that you are comfortable with in order to add reps or weight to your mini sets.

Combining Mini Sets with Full Sets

Another option is to start out with some mini sets and then switch to full sets of the same exercise. For example, if you normally do four sets of eight reps for an exercise, you would be doing a total of 32 reps. You can divide those 32 reps into a combination of mini sets and full sets with any of the following options:

4 mini sets of 2 reps plus 3 full sets of 8 reps = 32 reps

4 mini sets of 4 reps plus 2 full sets of 8 reps = 32 reps

8 mini sets of 3 reps plus 1 full set of 8 reps = 32 reps

Of course you can reverse the order in the examples listed above by doing the full sets first, followed by the mini sets second.

You Can Vary The Weight Of Your Mini Set Workouts

I also want to point out that you can vary the weight from workout to workout with your mini sets. Some of you may already be using a workout plan in which your weights and reps for your full sets undulate up or down from workout to workout. For example, you may have a cycle of four workouts in which you change the weight and reps of each workout as follows:

Workout 1 = 3 full sets of 12 reps

Workout 2 = 3 full sets of 10 reps

Workout 3 = 3 full sets of 8 reps

Workout 4 = 3 full sets of 6 reps

If you wanted to change each workout to mini set workouts, the cycle of four workouts could be converted to mini set workouts. The following option would be an example of how to do this:

3 full sets of 12 reps converts to 12 mini sets of 3 reps

3 full sets of 10 reps converts to 10 mini sets of 3 reps

3 full sets of 8 reps converts to 8 mini sets of 3 reps

3 full sets of 6 reps converts to 6 mini sets of 3 reps

Alternate Full Set Workouts with Mini Set Workouts

If you decide to include mini sets in your workout plan, it doesn't mean that you must do all of your workouts with mini sets. You may decide it is better to alternate workouts with mini sets with workouts consisting of full sets. Perhaps you only want to use mini sets once per week or two out of every three workouts. You may use mini sets for a few month and then switch to full sets for a while. If you want mini set training to work, you will have to include it on a fairly regular basis. At the same time, you should not feel bound to only use mini sets.

The primary point that you should understand from this chapter is that the way you structure your mini sets and work them into your workout plan is up to you based upon your goals, preferences, and what you find works best.

Chapter 6

Small Steps Add Up To Big Improvements



The bottom line with mini sets is that they allow easy progression. If you normally do three sets of ten reps and try to add weight to all three sets at the same time, you will be trying to improve on all 30 reps in one big step. Why not divide those 30 reps up into ten mini sets of three reps and just add weight to three reps at a time? This will allow you take ten small steps instead of one big step. Your body will find it easier to deal with small improvements than big improvements, and when you make enough small improvements, they will add up to big improvements. Take this simple concept and apply it to your own training in whatever way is best for helping you to achieve your goals. I wish you much success and the best of training.

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

Bottom Up Loading

Cluster Set Training

Force And Frequency Training

Fusion 3: Book 1

Giant Pyramid Training

High Frequency Strength Training

High Volume 5's

Heavy Frequency Training

Individualized Workouts For Hardgainers

Marker Rep Training

Never Miss A Lift

Overcoming Strength Training Plateaus

Quick Workouts For Quick Muscles

Rest-Pause Training

Strength Challenge 20/20

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