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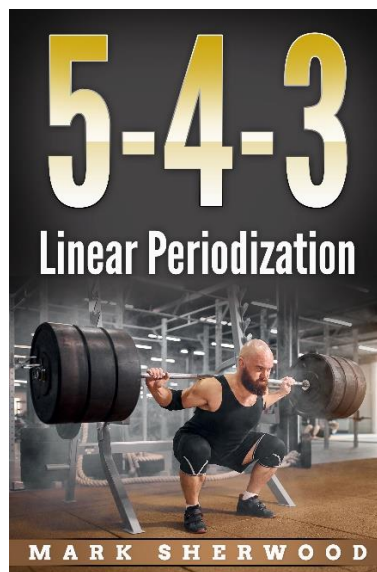
Linear Periodization



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5-4-3

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5-4-3: Linear Periodization

By Mark Sherwood

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Introduction And Overview

Many of the top Russian powerlifters do five or less reps per set for most of their training. This is true even when using weights that they can lift for ten or more reps. Staying within a lower rep range reduces the amount of fatigue that is experienced within a set. This has several advantages:

First, it delays fatigue from set to set and allows a lifter to utilize a higher training volume consisting of more sets and more total reps before weakening.

Second, lifting form is generally better in the absence of excessive fatigue.

Third, more force can be applied to each rep in the absence of excessive fatigue.

Fourth, the avoidance of a high degree of fatigue within each set makes it easier to recover and helps lifters avoid overtraining.

The result of these benefits when properly applied is an increase in strength.

It is possible to limit yourself to three to five reps per set and still use a linear periodization program. This simply means that weight is added to your lifts from week to week throughout a training cycle while using either 5 reps, 4 reps, or 3 reps per set. When using the 5 4 3 linear periodization method, you will often be training well short of failure at the start of a cycle. However, as the cycle progresses, the sets will become heavier and harder. The increased poundages will force you to come closer to reaching the point of max reps to failure by the end of a cycle.

You will find that the start of a 5 4 3 cycle is designed to promote more volume in the form of more sets than many other linear periodization programs. The volume then keeps tapering off throughout the cycle with a steady transition to more of an emphasis on higher intensity and heavier lifting. This is true of almost all linear periodization programs, but you may find that the difference in volume between the start and the end of a cycle is more pronounced when using the 5 4 3 program.

The 5 4 3 program has two versions. The first version is based on weekly poundages that are calculated according to a percentage of your single rep max. The second version is based on knowing the poundages that correspond to your 12 rep max, your 9 rep max, your 7 rep max, and your 3 rep max for each lift. These poundages help you to plan how much weight to add to your lifts throughout the cycle. Your 12 rep max is used during the first week of the cycle and initiates the use of 5 reps per set; your 9 rep max is used at week four and marks a transition to the part of the cycle where 4 reps per set are used, your 7 rep max is used at week six and initiates the phase of the cycle where 3 reps are used. Your 3 rep max is used at week nine leaving you the potential to hit a new personal record for 3 reps for the tenth and final week of the cycle. All of the other weeks of the cycle are planned around these poundages.

Individualizing the volume according to your capacity is one of the keys to training when using the 5 4 3 method. You will not be assigned to perform a specific number of sets for each workout, instead, you simply repeat sets of an exercise as long as you can maintain excellent form and a consistent rep speed from rep to rep and set to set. This tends to work better than assigning the same predetermined number of sets for all lifters. In the same way, the training frequency is personalized according to your own recovery rate and what you respond to best.

If you are looking for an effective linear periodization program, you have the opportunity to read the rest of this book and learn the important details that will help you to gain more strength by using the 5 4 3 Linear Periodization Program.

Chapter 1

Choosing Foundational Exercises

The 5 4 3 program is a linear periodization program in which weight is added to a few select lifts each week throughout an eight to ten week training cycle. It starts by selecting three to four basic strength training exercises that cover your whole body each week. I suggest choosing from the following exercises or variations of the exercises listed below:

- Bench Presses
- Squats
- Leg Presses
- Deadlifts
- Overhead Presses
- Bent-Over Rows

Foundational Exercises

I want to stress again that you should only choose three to four of the exercises that you want to focus on the most in conjunction with the 5 4 3 method. **These will be referred to as your foundational exercises.** If you do too many foundational exercises using the 5 4 3 method, you will run the risk of burning out. The foundational exercises that you select should be used throughout an entire eight to ten week linear periodization cycle. Do not switch foundational exercises from week to week.

Assistance Exercises

You can select more exercises for your workouts than the foundational exercises, but add them to your workouts in the form of assistance exercises, not foundational exercises. The assistance exercises will be covered in chapters eight, nine, and ten. The main thing you need to understand at this point in regard to the assistance exercises is that they will be done in a manner that is less demanding than the 5 4 3 method.

Chapter 2

Percentages And Reps per Set Within A 5 4 3 Cycle

Start a Cycle with Approximately 70% of Your Single Rep Max

One way to determine the amount of weight you will use each week for your foundational exercise is to base it on a percentage of your single rep max. This is called the **percentage method**. When using the percentage method, you will start each linear periodization cycle using approximately 70% of your single rep max for the foundational exercises you select. Weight will then be added each week. You can keep adding weight until you reach the maximum poundage that you can lift for three reps. If you are like many lifters who prefer not to push to an all-out gut busting three rep max, you can simply add weight as long as you can maintain excellent form and an even rep speed for all three reps. These options will most likely take you to a poundage that ranges from 87% to 92% of your single rep max.

Add 2% to 3% Each Week

When adding weight from week to week in conjunction with the percentage method, I recommend that you add approximately 2% to 3% of your single rep max each week to the foundational exercises that you select.

Do 5 Reps per Set for 3 Weeks Using 70% to 75%

The cycle starts with 5 reps per set. You will continue using 5 reps per set for the first three weeks which is a phase where you will be using 70% to 75% of your single rep max.

Do 4 Reps per Set When Using 77% to 80%

You will transition to 4 reps per set for weeks four and five while using 77% to 80% of your single rep max.

Do 3 Reps per Set When Using 82% or More

Starting with week 6, you will begin using 3 reps per set and will continue using 3 reps per set for the remainder of the cycle.

Reps per Set and Percentages on a Week by Week Basis

The specific number of reps per set that are to be performed each week is listed below along with the weekly percentages:

Week 1: Do **5 reps per set** with 70% of your single rep max

Week 2: Do **5 reps per set** with 72% to 73%

Week 3: Do **5 reps per set** with 75%

Week 4: Do **4 reps per set** with 77% to 78%

Week 5: Do **4 reps per set** with 80%

Week 6: Do **3 reps per set** with 82% to 83%

Week 7: Do **3 reps per set** with 85%

Week 8: Do **3 reps per set** with 87% to 88%

Week 9: Do **3 reps per set** with 90%

Week 10: Do **3 reps per set** with 92% to 93%

Round off Your Poundages

If you calculate a percentage based on your single rep max, some of the poundages that you calculate will come out to an awkward number for weight training. For example, imagine that you have a max bench press of 250 pounds, and you are scheduled to use 72.5% of 250 pounds during the second week of the cycle. You will find that 72.5% of 250 pounds is 181.2 pounds. You would need fractional weight plates in order to load an exact weight of 181.2 pounds on the bar. If you have fractional weight plates and want to use them, you should go ahead and use them. If not, round off your poundages to the nearest number that ends in 0 or 5. In this example, it would be easiest to round 181.2 pounds down to 180, because 181.2 is closer to 180 than 185 pounds.

Example of Steps for Calculating Weekly Poundages

Step 1: Convert Percentages to Decimals

The following is an example of a lifter who is planning out a bench press cycle based on a single rep max of 250 pounds. He is planning on increasing his poundages by 2.5% each week for ten weeks. In order to calculate each percentage of his single rep max, he will start by converting each weekly percentage into a decimal number. This is demonstrated in the following example:

Week 1: 70% = .70

Week 2: 72.5% = .725

Week 3: 75% = .75

Week 4: 77.5% = .775

Week 5: 80% = .80

Week 6: 82.5% = .825

Week 7: 85% = .85

Week 8: 87.5% = .875

Week 9: 90% = .90

Week 10: 92.5% = .925

Step 2: Multiply weekly Decimals by your Single Rep Max

In order to calculate the weight this lifter will be using for week 1, we will start with the percentage that is listed for week 1, which is 70%. Step one is to take 70% and convert it into a decimal which will equal .70. Step two is to multiply .70 by your single rep max which for this lifter is 250 pounds. This equation is written as follows:

$$.70 \times 250 = 175 \text{ pounds.}$$

The same procedure is used with each weekly percentage to determine the lifter's weekly poundages.

Step 3: Roundoff Awkward Poundages

If the poundages that are calculated do not end in a 0 or 5, move to step three by rounding off the awkward poundages to the nearest number ending in 0 or 5.

Calculation of Weekly Poundages

If we continue to consider this lifter who has a max of 250 pounds, an example of how to calculate his weekly poundages and how to round them off when necessary is presented below:

Week 1: $.70 \times 250 = 175$ lbs.

Week 2: $.725 \times 250 = 181.2$: roundoff to 180 lbs.

Week 3: $.75 \times 250 = 187.5 = 190$ lbs.

Week 4: $.775 \times 250 = 193.7$: roundoff to 195 lbs.

Week 5: $.80 \times 250 = 200$ lbs.

Week 6: $.825 \times 250 = 206.2$ roundoff to 205 lbs.

Week 7: $.85 \times 250 = 212.5$: roundoff to 215 lbs.

Week 8: $.875 \times 250 = 218.5$: roundoff to 220 lbs.

Week 9: $.90 \times 250 = 225$ lbs.

Week 10: $.925 \times 250 = 231.2$ roundoff to 230 lbs.

The 10 Week Cycle

After all the calculations are made, this lifter's 10 week cycle would be written as follows:

Week 1: Do **5 reps per set** with 70% = 175 lbs.

Week 2: Do **5 reps per set** with 72.5% = 180 lbs.

Week 3: Do **5 reps per set** with 75% = 190 lbs.

Week 4: Do **4 reps per set** with 77.5% = 195 lbs.

Week 5: Do **4 reps per set** with 80% = 200 lbs.

Week 6: Do **3 reps per set** with 82.5% = 205 lbs.

Week 7: Do **3 reps per set** with 85% = 215 lbs.

Week 8: Do **3 reps per set** with 87.5% = 220 lbs.

Week 9: Do **3 reps per set** with 90% = 225 lbs.

Week 10: Do **3 reps per set** with 92.5% = 230 lbs.

Chapter 3

The 5 4 3 Method Without Percentages

Max Reps Testing to Determine Weekly Poundages

Some of you may prefer to use the linear periodization approach, but you don't like basing your training poundages on percentages. If this is true of you, you may be wondering if there is a way to use the 5 4 3 program without basing it on percentages. The answer is that there is, but you must determine the following information about yourself in order to plan a training cycle:

You must determine your 12 rep max

You must determine your 9 rep max

You must determine your 7 rep max

You have the option of testing for your 3 rep max

Just to be clear:

Your 12 rep max consists of the maximum weight that you can lift for 12 reps.

Your 9 rep max consists of the maximum weight that you can lift for 9 reps.

Your 7 rep max consists of the maximum weight that you can lift for 7 reps.

Your 3 rep max consists of the maximum weight that you can lift for 3 reps.

The poundages that correspond to your 12 rep max, 9 rep max, 7 rep max, and 3 rep max are very important because the cycle is planned out based upon these poundages. The initial starting point of planning the cycle is to know that the 12 rep max, 9 rep max, and 7 rep max are inserted into the cycle as follows:

Your **12 rep max** is used during the **first week** of the training cycle.

Your **9 rep max** is used during the **fourth week** of the training cycle.

Your **7 rep max** is used during the **sixth week** of the training cycle.

Many lifters will want to take the cycle to the limit by pushing to failure to try to break a record for a new three rep max. Those who want to push the cycle to this point should insert their three rep max into the following week in a ten week cycle:

Your **3 rep max** is used during the **ninth week** of the training cycle.

When you insert your 3 rep max into the ninth week, your goal is to continue the cycle for another week by breaking your record by 5 or more pounds during the tenth and final week of the cycle.

Not everyone wants to push to the point of an all out max for three reps. Such lifters may want to terminate the cycle after the eighth or ninth week instead of the tenth week. This will be discussed more in chapter four.

Remember also the following information:

5 reps are used during weeks one, two and three.

4 reps are used during weeks four and five.

3 reps are used starting the sixth week until the end of the cycle.

Choosing How Much Weight to Add Each Week

When you know the poundages and reps that are to be used during the first, fourth, sixth, and ninth weeks of the cycle, the next step is to choose an increment of weight that you can add to your lifts each week. This increment of weight must be an amount that will take you from the poundage you are to use for the first week of the cycle to the poundages you are scheduled to use for the fourth, sixth, and ninth weeks of the cycle. The way to accomplish this may seem vague so we will use Steve as an example of how to determine how much weight to use for every week of the cycle.

Steve is planning a 10 week training cycle for the bench press. His goal is to gain five to ten pounds of strength by the end of the cycle. Steve has enough information to plan out a training cycle because he has taken the time to find the maximum poundages that he can use for 12 reps, 9 reps, 7 reps, and 3 reps. These poundages are listed below:

Steve's 12 rep max = 210 pounds (to be used at week 1)

Steve's 9 rep max = 230 pounds (to be used at week 4)

Steve's 7 rep max = 245 pounds (to be used at week 6)

Steve's 3 rep max = 275 pounds (to be used at week 9)

Add Weight In Increments Of Either 5, 10, or 15 Pounds

Steve must find an increment of weight to add to his bench press each week. The increment should take him from 210 pounds during week 1, to 230 pounds when he reaches week 4. The amount of weight added per week will depend upon your strength for a given lift. Most lifters will add weight in weekly increments of either 5 or 10 pounds in order to reach the poundages they should be using during weeks 4, 6, and 9. Lifters who are very strong may need to add up to 15 pounds per week, and lifters who are super strong on exercises like deadlifts, squats, or leg presses may need to add 20 pounds per week.

You will find it difficult to add the exact same amount of weight to your lifts each week unless you have access to fractional weight plates that weigh only a pound or less. For example, if Steve starts with 210 pounds during the first week of the cycle, he would need to add 6.6 pounds per week in order to arrive at 230 pounds the fourth week. Most lifters don't have weights that would enable them to add 6.6 pounds per week. This being the case, Steve will need to add 5 pounds per week some weeks, but there will be other weeks where he will need to add 10 pounds in order to arrive at the right poundages for weeks 4, 6, and 9. The following example of Steve's poundages throughout a 10 week cycle will help to illustrate this.

Week 1: Lift 210 pounds for 5 reps per set

Week 2: Lift 215 pounds for 5 reps per set (5 pounds were added)

Week 3: Lift 220 pounds for 5 reps per set (5 pounds were added)

Week 4: Lift 230 pounds for 4 reps per set (10 pounds were added)

Week 5: Lift 235 pounds for 4 reps per set (5 pounds were added)

Week 6: Lift 245 pounds for 3 reps per set (10 pounds were added)

Week 7: Lift 255 pounds for 3 reps per set (10 pounds were added)

Week 8: Lift 265 pounds for 3 reps per set (10 pounds were added)

Week 9: Lift 275 pounds for 3 reps per set (10 pounds were added)

Week 10: Lift 280 or more pounds for 3 reps (A new personal record)

Chapter 4

Starting a New Cycle

If you plan out a ten week cycle, you simply start over with a new cycle after completing your tenth week. The amount of weight you add to your new cycle is dependent on how much strength you gained from the last cycle. If you have gained five to ten pounds of strength by the end of the cycle, simply repeat the same cycle with an additional five to ten pounds each week. If you gained more than ten pounds of strength by the end of a cycle, you may need to do a test week before you start a new cycle. The purpose of the test week would be to test for your 12 rep max, 9 rep max, 7 rep max, and 3 rep max for each lift in order to plan out the poundages for your new cycle. Those of you who are using percentages would simply test your single rep max for each lift in order to plan your percentages for a new cycle.

Retesting After Big Strength Gains

A possible point of confusion can occur if you gain a substantial amount of strength between the start of a cycle and the end of a cycle. You will know that this has happened if you reach the tenth week and easily complete three reps while using more weight than you have ever lifted for three reps. If this happens, you could add more weeks to your cycle, but my advice would be to simply keep adding weight to sets of the same workout until you reach the maximum weight you can perform for three reps during the tenth week. An example will help to explain this:

John was scheduled to squat with 250 pounds for three reps when he reached the tenth and final week of his cycle. He found that three reps with 250 pounds felt easy to lift, even though it was more than he had ever lifted before for three reps. This being the case, John added ten more pounds and squatted with three reps with 260 pounds, but he knew he could do more. He then proceeded to keep adding ten pounds per set for two more sets until he reached 280 pounds. He found that this was the maximum weight that he could lift for three reps. John should start a new cycle the next week and base his poundages on a single rep max of 280 pounds, or he can do a test week to determine his new 12 rep max, 9 rep max, 7 rep max, and 3 rep max before starting a new cycle.

For Those Who Don't Want to Max Out

Not everyone may want to push a cycle until they reach the point of max reps to failure. Some lifters prefer to avoid ever maxing out on reps and never push to failure. Ed Coan was one of the greatest powerlifters of all time and never maxed out on reps or weight during his cycles, and he rarely maxed out in competition. He never failed to lift the prescribed number of reps with the amount of weight he was scheduled to lift for his workouts. Lifters who never max out on reps or weight do this in order to avoid burnout and injury. In addition, they want to program their minds and bodies for success without ever entertaining the thought of failure. These lifters want to design a cycle that allows them to have complete confidence that they will complete every lift they plan on doing without ever failing to get the weight up for a designated number of reps.

If you do not want to max out on three reps at the end of the cycle, simply stop the cycle when it seems like you are close to your max weight for three reps. The cycle does not have to last ten weeks as it is

designed to range from 8 to 10 weeks. If you don't want to max out on three reps, then determine ahead of time that you will continue the cycle only as long as you can continue to perform three quality reps per set. If you reach a week where your form or rep speed starts to slow down on the third rep while you are at full strength during your first set, end the cycle and start over with a new cycle the next week. Your goal is to be able to perform three quality reps with a little more weight when you finish the next cycle.

You should expect that you will be able to maintain excellent form in combination with an even rep pace through week seven or eight. Many will also make it to week nine, and a smaller percentage will make it through week ten. If you are on week six and have already reached the point where you can no longer maintain an even rep speed for three consecutive reps, you probably overestimated your single rep max or 7 rep max. Correct this problem by making sure that your testing is accurate and honest so that you can use the correct amount of weight from week to week throughout the cycle.

Chapter 5

How Many Sets To Perform

The way to determine the number of sets you will perform for each foundational exercise is **to monitor your performance in terms of your capacity to repeat high quality sets and reps.**

High quality sets are based on **three basic performance standards** which are listed below:

Performance Standard #1

The first performance standard requires that you have the ability to maintain near perfect form for every rep of every set.

When to Stop

If your form starts to deteriorate due to fatigue from repeating sets, stop repeating sets.

Performance Standard #2

The second performance standard requires that you have the ability to maintain a steady even rep pace throughout every rep of every set.

When to Stop

If you reach a set where you can no longer maintain a steady even rep pace for every rep of the set due to fatigue, stop repeating sets.

Performance Standard #3

The third performance standard requires that each set looks the same in terms of rep speed.

When to Stop

If you reach a set where the force, power, or speed you impart into the bar are decreasing compared to previous sets, stop repeating sets.

Don't Stop Due to a Lack of Skill

It is possible that you will fail to perform high quality sets and reps due to a lack of skill. In other words, you may have plenty of strength and energy to use good form and a steady even rep pace, but you may lack the skill to hit your lifting groove just right on every rep. This is much different than suffering a break down in form or rep speed due to fatigue. Mess-ups due to lack of skill should not stop you from repeating more sets because lack of skill requires more practice, not less.

Stop When Fatigue Compromises Quality

A very different situation occurs when you fail to perform high quality sets and reps due to fatigue. You should stop repeating sets of the exercise you are performing if the lack of quality is due to fatigue.

The Amount of Sets Will Vary Throughout The Cycle

It will be obvious to most of you that you will be able to do more sets of 5 reps with 70% than when doing 5 reps with 75% of your single rep max. The point is that you should not have a fixed number of sets in your mind that you will perform each week.

Regardless of whether you are using percentages or the max reps method to calculate your weekly poundages, the weights get heavier from week to week. This means if you are doing the same number of sets during week three that you were doing in week one, you are probably not using high quality sets and reps as the determining factor for how many sets to perform. The performance standards are what enable you to repeat sets according to your own capacity. I believe this is generally better than trying to perform a predetermined number of sets that does not take your individual capacity into account.

In most cases, it is better to train according to your own capacity rather than to follow a one size fits all program that has everyone doing the same number of sets. Likewise, let your own capacity guide you in terms of the number of sets you perform instead of imitating the number of sets that other lifters perform.

Stopping Short of Failure = More Sets

This program is based on your ability to utilize high quality form on every rep and to maintain the same rep speed from rep to rep and set to set. This is very difficult to do if you are pushing some or all of your sets to failure. The best way to practice perfect form and a constant rep speed is to stop well short of failure.

Most people can do 10 or more reps when using 70% of their single rep max, but doing so results in slow grinder reps at the end of each set. This can lead to nervous system fatigue and it will cause your nervous system to practice suboptimal firing patterns. Since you will be stopping each set well short of max reps to failure, you won't experience as much fatigue at the end of your sets. The reduction in fatigue will prevent you from overtraining while enabling you to perform more sets than you would normally do if you were pushing to failure.

Variations In Capacity for Repeating Sets

Some of you may possess a high capacity for repeating sets and find that you can perform eight or more high quality sets when doing 5 reps per set with either 70% or your 12 rep max. Others may only be able to do four or five high quality sets which is perfectly fine if that is the limit of your capacity. As the weights increase from week to week, the general trend will be that you will not be able to do as many high-quality sets per workout. This is to be expected and you may only be able to do a little over half as many sets at week 5 as you could do during week 1. As you continue through the cycle, you may only be able to do one set when you reach the ninth and tenth weeks of the cycle.

Many lifters follow a pattern of training that includes more volume at the start of a cycle. The training volume then tapers off from week to week as the poundages increase throughout the cycle. This phenomenon will be fairly pronounced when using the 5 4 3 program if you are doing it correctly. The benefit of this is that the high volume training at the start of the cycle will prepare your body for the heavy weights that are used towards the end of the cycle.

Chapter 6

Rest Between Sets

When repeating sets of an exercise, it is critical that you rest long enough between each set to fully recover your strength before doing the next set. This generally requires two minutes of rest between sets at the start of the cycle, however, the rest time between sets will need to increase to three minutes as you progress towards the end of the cycle because the weights will get heavier and the sets will grow harder. Those who need more than two to three minutes of rest to fully recover should take as long as needed. If you don't allow yourself to fully recover your strength between sets, you will tire out early and suffer a compromise in quality before you reach the maximum number of sets you are capable of performing at full strength.

Switching Back and Forth Between Exercises

If you find that two to three minutes of rest between sets results in long workouts that never seem to end, consider switching back and forth from exercise to exercise. For example, you can switch back and forth between squats and bench presses. To be more specific, you can do a set of squats and rest 90 seconds. This would be followed by a set of bench presses and 90 seconds of rest. If you follow this procedure, at least three minutes will have passed when you return to squats again. Likewise, when you return to bench presses, at least three minutes will have passed. This is simply an option to help reduce the amount of rest time between sets in order to save time if you find it necessary. It is not a requirement.

Chapter 7

Selecting A Training Frequency

Training frequency refers to the amount of training sessions that are performed for each muscle group each week. Every lifter must determine a training frequency that provides a lifting stress that occurs often enough to stimulate strength. At the same time, the schedule must provide enough rest between workouts to permit full recovery before starting each workout. This must be established according to your personal recovery rate which usually must be determined through trial and error.

Individual Differences In Recovery and Frequency

Most lifters respond best when training each muscle group two or three times per week, however, there are plenty of exceptions. There are some lifters who respond best when hitting each muscle group just once per week. At the same time, there are others who respond best when training each muscle group four or more times per week. The only way you can know what works best is to go through a process of trial and error.

Start With 2 or 3 Sessions per Week for Each Muscle Group

My advice is to start by training each muscle group two or three times per week according to your preference. If what you are doing works, keep doing it.

When to Add Workouts

If you have plenty of energy and your training doesn't seem to provide enough stimulation, you can try adding another workout per week. If you still need to add another workout after that, do so as long as you are fully recovering between workouts.

When to Decrease Workouts

You may have the opposite problem of someone who isn't getting enough stimulation and feel that you are getting too much training stimulation. If you are constantly fatigued between workouts and are not regaining your strength when doing each successive workout, cut back and don't train each muscle group as often. When it comes to establishing the best training frequency, monitor your level of strength and your level of energy between workouts. Follow what works best and let results be your guide.

The Effect of Volume on Frequency

Keep in mind that lifters will vary in terms of their capacity for training volume which refers to how many high-quality sets they can perform for each exercise. If one lifter can only perform four quality sets per exercise, and another lifter can perform ten quality sets per exercise, there's a good chance that the lifter who performed more sets will take longer to recover. If you don't have the capacity to repeat very many high quality sets within a workout, it is possible that you will benefit from a higher training frequency than normal. At the same time, you must keep in mind that an increase in frequency will only be beneficial if you have the ability to experience full recovery between workouts.

Different Exercises May Work Better with Different Frequencies

You may also find that you are better off if you use different training frequencies for different exercises. For example, you may find that you respond best when training bench presses three times per week, but when it comes to squats, you respond best to two training sessions per week. It's also worth noting that many lifters prefer only one session per week for deadlifts. Do what works best for each lift.

Chapter 8

Assistance Exercises

Many lifters prefer to add assistance exercises to enhance their ability to perform the main lifts. You won't be following the 5 4 3 method for assistance exercises, but will do **one to three sets of 8 to 10 reps for each assistance exercise**. Not all lifters include assistance exercises as some seem to do just as good or better without including them.

Assistance exercises can either be variations of the main lifts, or they can be isolation exercises that work a specific muscle from a specific angle or a specific range of motion. Typical assistance exercises are listed in the chart presented on the next page:

Assistance Exercises	
<p>Assistance Exercises for CHEST Incline presses at various inclines Decline presses Dips Partial Range Bench Presses Pause Bench Presses Dumbbell Bench Presses Dumbbell Incline Presses Chest flies with DB or cables</p>	<p>Assistance Exercises for BACK Seated Pulley Rows Machine Rows Lat Pull-Downs T-Bar Rows One arm DB rows Hyperextensions Reverse Hyperextensions</p>
<p>Assistance Exercises for LEGS Belt Squats Goblet Squats Straddle Squats Single Leg Squats Hack Squats Pause Squats Leg Extensions Leg Curls Back Ham Glute Machine Raises</p>	<p>Assistance Exercises for SHOULDERS Overhead Dumbbell Presses Lateral Dumbbell Raises Front Dumbbell Raises Bent-Over Rear Dumbbell Raises Upright Rows Barbell High Pulls</p>
<p>Assistance Exercises for TRICEPS Any form of triceps Extensions Dips with elbows back Close Grip Bench Press or Push ups</p>	<p>Assistance Exercises for BICEPS Any Form of Curls Reverse Grip Pulldowns (Use an 18 inch grip with elbows in for pulldowns).</p>
<p>Assistance Exercises for ABS Curl Ups Incline Sit ups Leg Raises while lying flat, inclined or hanging. Any ab machine work Planks</p>	<p>Assistance Exercises for CALVES Any form of calf raises: seated, standing, or bent-over.</p>
<p>The assistance exercises listed above provide a lot of choices. You wouldn't choose every assistance exercise for every workout. I recommend that you just choose one assistance exercise per workout for a given muscle group. If you want to do several different assistance exercises for the same muscle group, do them in different workouts. Perform one to three sets of eight to ten reps for each assistance exercise that you select for a given workout.</p>	

Chapter 9

Three Reasons for Using Assistance Exercises

Lifters who choose to include assistance exercises usually do them for one or more of the following three reasons:

Reason #1: To Add Necessary Volume; Especially at the End of a Cycle

As you progressively add weight throughout the cycle, you will find that your training volume grows lower and lower. This simply means that the total amount of sets and reps performed for each exercise will keep decreasing as your poundages increase. Many lifters will find that their strength starts to stagnate, or even decrease, due to a lack of training volume towards the end of linear periodization cycles. Assistance exercises will add more training volume; which can be especially helpful if you reach the point in a training cycle where your strength starts to stagnate.

Reason #2: To Build Up A Muscle Group

Many lifters feel that each muscle group must be strengthened and built up as much as possible from every angle and range of motion. Using a variety of assistance exercises will help you to accomplish this and often translates into the ability to lift more weight when performing the foundational lifts listed in chapter one.

Reason #3: To Target A Specific Weakness That Needs Improvement

Sometimes a lifter has a weak muscle, or they are weak when they reach a certain position within a lift. Assistance exercises can help with this problem. For example, lifters who are weak at the bottom position of a squat often try to correct this problem by doing pause squats in which they pause at the bottom of each rep. They may also include some sets where they reach a low depth and practice exploding out of the bottom of the squat.

When benching, the same problem can occur as some lifters don't seem to have very much power at the start of the lifting motion. Such lifters may need to do dumbbell flies, wide grip benches, and practice pausing and exploding out of the bottom of the benching motion. Others have the opposite problem as they can get the bar moving at the start of the bench press motion, but they get stuck near the top of the lift and can't lock out into a finished position. These lifters usually need more triceps work. If you have an obvious muscle weakness or an obvious sticking point within a lifting motion, the proper choice of assistance exercises can help remedy the problem.

Chapter 10

Selecting Assistance Exercises

Use Assistance Exercises as Needed

Assistance exercises should be used as needed. If you are able to keep gaining strength from cycle to cycle without including assistance exercises, it is not essential to include them. This is especially true if your form remains stellar throughout each cycle. In contrast, if your strength starts to stagnate or even starts to decrease as you proceed through the cycle, you probably need to include some assistance exercises to boost your training volume. Likewise, if your lifting technique keeps falling apart due to a weak muscle group, you need to find assistance exercises that will build up your weaknesses.

One Assistance Exercise per Muscle Group

If you decide to include assistance exercises, I recommend that you choose just one assistance exercise per muscle group for a given workout. **I also suggest that you limit the total number of assistance exercises to four per workout.**

How To Include a Variety of Assistance Exercises for The Same Muscle Group

If you want to do a variety of assistance exercises for the same muscle group, do different assistance exercises in different workouts. Even so, you should still only do one assistance exercise per muscle group within the same workout. For example, if you want to build up your chest with assistance exercises, you can do incline presses in one workout, dumbbell flies in the second workout, and decline presses in the third workout. In contrast, if you find that a specific assistance exercise works much better than any of the others, then stick with the one that works best.

When selecting assistance exercises, it would be a mistake to do separate assistance exercises for quads, hamstrings, lower back, upper back, traps, abs, chest, shoulders, biceps, triceps and calves, all in the same workout. Doing this would add up to eleven different exercises. Eleven assistance exercises within the same workout is way too much for most lifters. If you do one assistance exercise for chest or shoulders, one for legs, one for back, and one for triceps, that would be sufficient.

One to Three Sets of Each Assistance Exercise

I recommend that you perform one to three sets for 8 to 10 reps for each assistance exercise within a workout. You don't need to do a lot of sets of assistance work. The assistance exercises will always be performed after the foundational exercises that you are using in conjunction with the 5 4 3 program. This being the case, your muscles will already have been worked with a substantial amount of lifting before you even do an assistance exercise. **One to three sets of 8 to 10 reps should be enough.**

The Exact Amount of Assistance Work may Vary

When deciding whether to do one, two, or three sets of an assistance exercise, the decision should be based upon your level of energy during the workout and what works best. You may not need to do as

much assistance work at the beginning of the cycle as at the end. In fact, you may feel as though you don't need to do any at all when starting a cycle. This is because the volume that you accumulate with the foundational exercises will be high at the beginning of the cycle. In contrast the lower volume that occurs at the end of the cycle may require the need for more assistance work in order to provide enough volume to promote strength gains.

If you are going through the 5 4 3 cycle for the first time and are not sure how much assistance work to include, my suggestion would be as follows:

Do one set for each assistance exercise selected during the phase of the cycle where you are doing 5 reps per set.

Do two sets for each assistance exercise selected during the phase of the cycle where you are doing 4 reps per set.

Do three sets for each assistance exercise selected during the phase of the cycle where you are doing 3 reps per set.

The above recommendation is simply a starting place that you can begin with to see how you respond. You should adjust the amount of assistance work according to how you feel and according to your results as you proceed through the cycle and progress from cycle to cycle.

Other Rep Ranges

If you want to use a greater variety of reps for your assistance exercises than the recommended 8 to 10 rep range, you should do so. You can go as low as 6 reps, and as high as 15 reps if you feel these rep ranges have a positive effect on your strength.

One to Three Reps Short of Failure

Push your assistance exercises hard, but not to the point of horrific strain and struggle. Stop your sets one to three reps short of failure according to what you find works best for each exercise.

Chapter 11

Creating Workout Schedules

When creating a workout schedule, you can either do whole body workouts, or you can split your muscle groups and lifts into different workouts. If you prefer hitting each muscle group three or more times per week, I recommend that you use full body workouts. If you prefer to train each muscle group twice or less per week, my recommendation is that you divide your lifts and muscle groups into different workouts.

For those who prefer full body workouts, an example of three workouts per week is presented on the next page:

5 4 3

Train Each Muscle Group Three Times per Week

Monday

Use the 5 4 3 cycle for the following two foundational lifts:

Squats
Bench Press

Four Assistance Exercises

Seated Pulley Rows: Do 3 sets x 8 reps
Hyperextensions: Do 3 sets x 8 reps with added weight
Steep Incline Presses: Do 3 sets x 10 reps
Planks: Do 3 sets x 30 seconds

Wednesday

Use the 5 4 3 cycle for the following two foundational lifts:

Deadlifts
Overhead Press

Four Assistance Exercises

Lat Pulldowns: 3 sets x 10 reps
Flyes or Dumbbell Bench Press: 3 sets x 8 reps
Belt Squats: 3 sets x 10 reps
Triceps Press-downs: Do 1 set x 10 reps

Friday

Use the 5 4 3 cycle for the following two foundational lifts:

Squats
Bench Press

Four Assistance Exercises

Bent-Over Rows: 3 sets x 8 reps
Close Grip Bench Press: 2 sets x 8 reps
Dumbbell Lateral Raises: 3 sets x 10 reps
Curl ups for abs: 3 sets x 15 reps

Notice the pattern of squats and bench presses being trained on Mondays and Fridays. Overhead Presses and deadlifts are trained on Wednesdays. The 5 4 3 program is used for squats, bench presses, overhead presses and deadlifts.

Four assistance exercises are included in each workout. When you combine your foundational lifts with the assistance exercises, the major muscles of the whole body are covered in each workout.

A Sample Split Routine

If you prefer to train each muscle group twice or less per week, you may find that it works better to split your muscle groups and lifts into two different workouts. An example of a weekly schedule that is based on a split routine in which each muscle group is trained twice per week is presented on the next page:

5 4 3

Train Each Muscle Group Twice per Week

Monday

Use the 5 4 3 cycle for the following foundational lift:

Squats

Three Assistance Exercises

Goblet Squats: 1 to 3 sets x 10 reps

Hyperextensions: Do 3 sets x 8 reps with added weight

Planks: Do 3 sets x 30 seconds

Tuesday

Use the 5 4 3 cycle for the following foundational lift:

Bench Press

Four Assistance Exercises

Lat Pulldowns: 3 sets x 10 reps

Dumbbell Flyes for Chest: 3 sets x 8 reps

Overhead Presses: 1 to 3 sets x 8 reps

Triceps Press-downs: Do 1 set x 10 reps

Thursday

Use the 5 4 3 cycle for the following foundational lift:

Deadlifts

Three Assistance Exercises

Belt Squats: 3 sets x 10 reps

Leg Curls: 3 sets x 10 reps

Curl Ups for abs: 3 sets x 15 reps

Friday

Use the 5 4 3 cycle for the following foundational lift:

Bench Press

Four Assistance Exercises

Dumbbell Incline Press: 1 to 3 sets x 8 reps

Close Grip Bench Press: 2 sets x 8 reps

Bent-Over Rows: 3 sets x 8 reps

Dumbbell Lateral Raises: 3 sets x 10 reps

Chapter 12

The 5 4 3 Option

There are a lot of ways to design a linear periodization schedule and the 5 4 3 program is just one option for this. There is no such thing as a perfect one size fits all workout that will provide optimum results for every lifter. If you prefer linear periodization, consider that the 5 4 3 program will provide you with a training option.

You probably will not master the use of the 5 4 3 program the first time you try it. One of the more challenging aspects of this type of training is that the number of sets you perform is a moving target from week to week. However, as you repeat cycles, you will learn how to dial into your capacity for sets each week and how much assistance work to include throughout the cycle.

The program presented in this book was never meant to limit you to a set of rules that can never be altered. Instead, the information is meant to equip you with a framework that will help you get started with this form of linear periodization. As you gain experience with the 5 4 3 program, the training can be adjusted according to what you respond to best.

In order for the 5 4 3 program to work, you must be fully engaged in your workouts and learn how to listen to your body. It is also important to understand that strength training is a learning process that will last as long as you are willing to keep on learning. My hope is that the concepts that you learn in this book lead to better training and greater strength gains. 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

Boom!

Bottom Up Loading

Converting The Marker Rep

Cluster Set Training

Density Responsive Lifters

Developing A Feel For Effective Workouts

Easy Progression With Mini Sets

Escalating Loading Ramps

Force And Frequency Training

Frequency Responsive Lifters

Frequent Training Preparation

Fusion 3: Book 1

Giant Pyramid Training

High Frequency Strength Training

High Frequency Front-Loading

High Volume 5's

Heavy Frequency Training

Individualized Workouts For Hardgainers

Intensity Ratios

Intensity Responsive Lifters

Marker Rep Training

Minimalist Responsive Lifters

Never Miss A Lift

Overcoming Strength Training Plateaus

Overload And Acclimate

Phase Potentiation

Precision Responsive Lifters

Quick Workouts For Quick Muscles

Ramp Up Your Strength

Ramp Up Your Training Volume

Rest-Pause Training

Self Adjusting Linear Periodization

Short Cycle Mastery

Speed Responsive Lifters

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 6 – 15 Marker Rep Workout

The High Frequency Training Pyramid

The Peak Strength Principle

The Redistribution Principle

4-Way Loading

5-4-3: Linear Periodization

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