

Weight Lifting Guidelines

The following guidelines will help you safely and effectively incorporate weight lifting into your fitness program.

Frequency - There's no single ideal training frequency. How many days per week you lift weights depends on your level of experience, your recovery ability, your goals, your genetics and your weekly schedule.

Rest days are just as important as training days. Muscles don't grow *during* training, they grow *after* training. Weight lifting causes microscopic tears in the muscles, and rest days allow the muscles to repair themselves, grow and get stronger. This is why you should never train the same body part two days in a row. You also never want to train a body part more than three times per week.

Many beginning weight lifters find that a full body routine works well for them. A full body routine consists of two or three workouts per week (on nonconsecutive days), with the whole body being trained each workout. Some people get better results with two workouts per week, others with three.

Many intermediate and advanced lifters prefer a split routine. A split routine consists of training different body parts on different days of the week. Split routines allow you to perform multiple exercises for each body part without spending too much time in the gym. There are many different ways to structure a split routine, and your training frequency would be dependent on what the exact structure of your routine was. One example of a split routine would be to train your upper body on Monday and Thursday, and your lower body on Tuesday and Friday.

If you've never lifted weights before, or if it's been a long time since you've lifted weights, you'll have some soreness after your first several workouts. The soreness is usually at its worst about 48 hours after you lift weights. This is called delayed onset muscle soreness (DOMS). After a couple of weeks of weight lifting you won't experience DOMS anymore, except for maybe after an especially tough training session.

Repetitions And Sets - A repetition (also called a rep) is one complete motion of an exercise. A set is a group of consecutive repetitions. Using 1-5 repetitions per set primarily builds strength and power. Athletes such as football players frequently train in this rep range. Using 6-12 repetitions per set is best for overall muscle development and fat loss. Using greater than 12 repetitions per set primarily builds muscular endurance. Even though some fitness experts disagree on how many sets should be performed for each exercise during a workout, three sets (not including warm up sets) per exercise has been proven to work very well.

Number Of Exercises - The best way to choose the proper number of exercises to perform during a workout is according to your level of experience. As a general guideline, beginning weight lifters should perform one exercise per body part, intermediate lifters should perform two exercises per body part, and advanced lifters should perform three exercises per body part.

Duration - A weight lifting workout should last 45-60 minutes. After 60 minutes, your body begins to stop producing muscle building and fat burning hormones (testosterone and growth hormone), and starts producing the hormone cortisol, which tears down muscle tissue and contributes to fat storage.

The rest between sets should be 30-90 seconds. This stimulates the most growth hormone output and also lets you perform a lot of work and still finish within 45-60 minutes.

Intensity - In order to build muscle most effectively, you need to make sure your weight lifting workouts are challenging. As you complete the last repetition of each set you should feel muscle exhaustion. Muscle exhaustion is when your muscle is so tired you can't do another full repetition in good form. You will also often feel the effects of lactic acid buildup in the muscle, which is known as "the burn." Muscle exhaustion and the burn let you know that you're working hard and challenging yourself. Once you're able to consistently complete the last repetition of each set without feeling muscle exhaustion, it's time to raise the intensity. You can do this by increasing the number of repetitions, or if you've reached the maximum number of repetitions you're aiming for, you can increase the amount of weight. If you increase the amount of weight, do so in small increments. Depending on the body part you're training, a small weight increase can make a big difference.

Weight Machines And Free Weights - Many different types of weight machines are available in gyms and for use in the home. Weight machines are good for beginners. They usually have detailed instructions on them, and many times they have a picture on them showing which muscles you're working. Weight machines put your body in proper form and isolate the right muscles.

Free weights are barbells and dumbbells. They're called free weights because they're not attached to any chains, cables or weight stacks as part of a weight machine. Weight machines isolate a particular muscle so the rest of your muscles don't get much work. Free weights require several muscles to move, balance and steady a weight as you lift and lower it. Because of this, many people find that they gain muscle and strength faster when they use free weights.

Try both weight machines and free weights. Most people find that they get good results from using a combination of both, and it also keeps their workouts more interesting.

Form And Technique - Using good form and technique is one of the most disregarded weight lifting guidelines. In every gym there are plenty of people who perform their repetitions at a fast speed, swinging the weight up and down. Many times it's an ego thing where the person wants to look strong, so they use a weight that's too heavy for them, and then have to use momentum in order to lift the weight. Use muscle power, not momentum, when lifting weights. Don't heave, swing or bounce the weights. Lift and lower the weights in a steady and controlled manner. Concentrate on feeling the muscle you're working (this is called the mind-muscle connection). Using good form and technique is the most effective and safe way to train.

Changing Workout Routines - You should change your workout routine once you stop seeing noticeable results on a consistent basis. You don't necessarily have to change your entire workout routine, but some new stimulus must be put into the routine or you're not likely to make further progress. Changes also keep things interesting. The frequency of change is different for everyone - it depends on how long you've been training and what your goals are. When you're a beginner, you can make progress on the same workout routine for a long time. The more advanced you get, the more quickly your muscles adapt. But make sure you don't change your workout routine too often, as this would not provide any continuity. Get everything you can out of your workout routine, and then make changes.

Warming Up - One of the most important weight lifting guidelines is to always warm up before you start lifting weights. Warming up will help prevent injury. It will stimulate blood flow to your muscles, increase your joint flexibility and range of motion, and get you mentally prepared for your workout. Warm up by doing a few minutes of light aerobic exercise and/or one or two light sets of each weight lifting exercise before using heavier weights.