Get Strong Challenge

The Big 3

Get Strong Challenge - The Big 3





The Squat, The Bench Press & The Deadlift - These are the 3 exercises that set a benchmark for strength, as those movements engage the entire body, most of its major groups, and show just how much strength you hold.

Though strength isn't the only important thing, it is a fundament for your performance in the gym, as greater levels of strength allow you to realize progressive overload to a greater extent.

In this guide, we're giving you a challenge to get stronger and a blueprint to do so, via a methodical approach to training.

If you're ready to take your progress a step further, do keep on reading as we go through the most important things you need to know about getting stronger and building muscle.

The Musculature

Your body holds great potential for performance as the majority of your body mass is muscle tissue, which was designed for movements of different kinds.

Looking at its complexity, it is fair to say that humans were built for high performance and we all have the potential to reach it.

Now, if we look at exercise on a broad scale, there are two main types of training:

1. Low-intensity, aerobic training (Cardio)
2. High-intensity, power-burst training (weights, calisthenics, etc)

Each of these two types engages different muscle fibers and different energy compounds that help you sustain muscular contraction.

So, let's have a look!





Cardio Training

Cardio, also known as “aerobic” training, implies the completion of low-intensity, prolonged activity, such as jogging, running, skipping and swimming.

The exertion during this type of training is pretty low and the main points of adaptation are the lungs & the heart.

When doing cardio, you primarily use the slow-twitch muscle fibers, which were built for endurance and for that reason, they have the lowest power output & potential for growth.

Last but not least, cardio training makes the body use oxygen to burn muscle & liver glycogen, as well as fatty acids.

This type of training mainly results in increased capacity for cardio endurance during low-intensity, prolonged activities.

High-Intensity Training

Contrary to low-intensity cardio training, we have high-intensity power training, such as weight lifting, bodyweight training and high intensity interval training.

The exertion during this type of training is high and the main adaptations result in increased muscular strength, explosiveness, strength endurance and last but not least, muscle size.

When training with high intensity, you mainly engage the fast-twitch muscle fibers, which were designed for high-intensity performance, explosiveness, force production and strength.

These fibers have the highest power output & potential for growth, which is why, in the context of getting stronger, activating these bad boys will be your main goal!

High-intensity training makes the body use adenosine triphosphate (ATP), muscle creatine & muscle glycogen (stored carbs), to sustain muscular contraction.

The energy release during high-intensity training does NOT require oxygen to occur.

This type of training results in increased maximum strength, strength endurance, explosiveness and hypertrophy (muscle growth).

Rep Ranges

Now, since the goal of this challenge is to get you stronger, lifting heavy weights is quite inevitable.

Generally speaking, working in the 1-5 rep range (powerlifting range) will lead to increases in maximum strength, which is what we're after here.

Oppositely, the 6-15 rep range (bodybuilding range) will primarily result in bulk muscle growth and increased strength endurance.

Nevertheless, that doesn't mean you should totally ditch one of them and instead, you should put most of your focus on the rep range that resonates with your goal, while occasionally doing the other one.

Rest Times Between Sets

While getting stronger, you have to realize that high intensity, by nature, is more strenuous for the nervous system and thus, requires more rest times between sets.

While the bodybuilding rep range only requires rests of ~3 minutes for you to sustain performance from set to set, the 1-5 rep range requires 5-15 minutes between sets.

For this reason, one of the main character traits that this challenge requires is patience!

Remember that leaving enough window for recovery both in-between sets and the separate workouts, is essential in order for you to maximize performance and decrease the risk of injury.

The Workout Cycle

Alright, so in terms of training, you now know that getting stronger is about a couple of things well combined:

1. Utilizing the 1-5 rep range
2. Using compound movements
3. Resting enough between sets
4. Resting enough between workouts

So without further ado, let's have a look at the workout split you can use during this challenge, to bump up your maximum strength!

Push Workout

On day one from the split, you will be training your pushing muscle groups - The chest, shoulders & triceps.

Note that the workout table provides 1 exercise, plus possible substitutes for each movement (choose 1 of the two).

Exercise	Sets	Reps	Rest Times
Flat barbell bench press / Incline barbell bench press	6	Warm up: 2x10 speed reps Working sets: 5,5,3,3	90 sec between warm-up sets, 4 minutes between 5-rep sets, 5 minutes between 3 rep sets
Weighted triceps dips/weighted close grip push-ups	3	6 reps	4 minutes
Barbell overhead press/Machine shoulder press	4	5 reps	3-4 minutes

Pull Workout

On day two, you will be targeting your major pulling muscle groups - The back, the biceps and forearms.

Exercise	Sets	Reps	Rest Times
Weighted wide grip pull-ups / Weighted chin-ups	5	Until failure	3-4 minutes
Rack Pulls	3	5 reps	4 minutes
Straight barbell curls/Dumbbell hammer curls	4	5 reps	3-4 minutes

Legs Workout

On day three, your lower body will be the main objective of your workout, which includes exercises for - The quadriceps, the hamstrings, the glutes & the calves.

Exercise	Sets	Reps	Rest Times
Barbell Back Squat / Barbell Front Squat / Leg Press	7	Warm up: 2x10 speed reps Working sets: 5,5,5,3	90 seconds between warm-up sets 4 minutes between 5-rep sets 5 minutes between 3-rep sets
Barbell Romanian Deadlift	5	5,5,5,3,3	4 minutes between 5-rep sets 5 minutes between 3-rep sets
Barbell Hip Thrusts	4	6 reps	4 minutes
Standing calf raises	5	8-10 reps	3 minutes

Rest Days & Progressive Overload

As you can see, this workout split does not have too many working sets, meaning that you are likely to be fully recovered on day four, where you'd usually place a rest day.
Nevertheless, recovery is individual, so the day after your leg day, you have to see how your muscles feel.

If you feel recovered, fresh and full of energy, a rest day won't really be needed, as you are in the state of peak recovery, when it is most adequate to train again.

If that is not the case however, give day 4 to recovery and only engage in some light cardio, plenty of food, water, sun and rest, in preparation for your next mini workout cycle!

As you advance through the workouts, make sure to progressively overload on your exercises, by doing the following:

1. Increasing the working weight
2. Increasing the repetitions (i.e if you've done 3 reps with a weight so far, try going up to 5)
3. Slightly reducing rest times (doing the same volume but for less time)

Increasing The Weights

This is one of the best ways to make muscle gains, especially in the context of getting stronger. For each exercise, take a given weight and try to sustain it through the given rep ranges, for the entire number of sets.

If you have a main lift, where you also have sets of 3 repetitions, try and bump those up to 5 repetitions.

Here's an example:

Exercise: Bench Press

Sets: 4 working sets

Reps: 5,5,3,3

Set 1 - 5 reps, 80 kg

Set 2 - 5 reps, 80 kg

Set 3 - 3 reps, 80 kg

Set 4 - 3 reps, 80 kg

As you progress through this lift, try to complete 4 sets of 5 reps with 80 kg (or whatever your working weight is), by increasing the reps from 3 to 4 and 5, in time, on the last two sets.

Once that happens, bump up the weight with 2-5 kg, and aim to progress up to 4 sets of 5 with that weight.
When you do that, odds are that you will be able to get 5 reps on your first set, followed by sets of 3-4 reps on the last sets.

In time however, you will gain strength and you will be able to increase the repetitions.

Maxing Out

Throughout the duration of this workout cycle, you will periodically test your maximum strength capabilities on your main lifts (squats, bench, deadlifts).
This means, doing a one repetition maximum (1RM), which essentially showcases your max strength. You have to consider though, that this is a significantly higher level of intensity, which is quite strenuous, so a proper build up to it will be necessary.

Here's how to prepare for and execute a one-rep max:

1. Go through your regular pre-weights warm-up (light cardio, muscle flexing, dynamic stretching & light-weight warm-up sets on your first exercises)
2. Load the bar with ~50% of what you use for 5 reps normally and do 5 repetitions at a moderate pace
3. Rest 90 seconds
4. Load the bar with ~70% of what you use for 5 reps normally and do 5 repetitions at a slightly higher speed (explosive reps)
5. Rest 2 minutes
6. Load the bar with ~80-90% of what you use for 5 reps normally and do 2-3 repetitions, explosively
7. Rest 3 minutes
8. Time to max-out! Load the bar with 15-20% more than what you normally use for 5 repetitions and do 1 rep
9. Rest 4-5 minutes
10. If the load moved easily, increase the weight a bit and max out again
11. Rest 4-5 minutes
12. Add weight until you complete 1 repetition that is significantly more challenging

How Often Should You Max Out?





As we've already mentioned, getting close to your maximum strength capabilities is strenuous.

This is the reason why even professional sprinters only max-out on their sprint once or twice a WEEK!

Think of your workout split as 3-day cycles, which lead up to your max-out days, which are done once every second week.

And so, if your training cycle starts at the beginning of the month, you'd be maxing out around the middle & the end of each month.

De-Loading

Because this workout split is more intense than usual, it may happen that your muscles feel exhausted and performance decreases due to lack of proper recovery.
If that is the case, implementing the de-loading concept may be ideal, as it would allow you to actively recover and get stronger overtime.

The concept is simple - Reduce intensity, stay away from failure and do speed reps. Basically, do your working sets with 60-70% of the weight you'd normally use and rely on quicker, more explosive repetitions.

Again, this approach will not take you close to failure and will allow the muscles to recover, while still pushing through an effective amount of weight.

De-loading can be sustained for as long as 7 days, before you get back to training at peak intensity.

Take-Home Message

Getting stronger and bigger is about setting up the correct amount of stimulus and complement that with proper recovery windows, both in-between sets and separate training days.
Use the workouts in this short guide and you will inevitably start seeing strength and muscle gains.
Combine this with proper nutrition, sleep and stress management, and you will likely be unable to recognize yourself in just a few weeks time!

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