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# Complete bodybuilding program

If you want a simple but highly effective 3-day full-body workout routine designed for muscle hypertrophy, one that doesn't involve doing weird exercises you've never heard of, counting rep tempos, or spending hours in the gym, this page will show you how it's done. Before you continue, I do want to point out a few things. First, building muscle is hard work. It takes ferocious consistency, discipline and sustained effort over a period of several years. While you can make significant changes to your physique in a matter of months, it will take a lot longer before you get anywhere near the upper limit of muscle mass you're capable of adding to your frame. Even if you're following the greatest muscle-building workout routine ever devised in all of human history, adding muscle to your frame takes persistence, hard work and patience. Second, I can't make any promises about how long it's going to take to build muscle, because I don't know you. I don't know how long you've been training, what your genetics are like, or how close you are to your maximum muscular potential. All of these things can have a big impact on the speed at which muscle is built. Third, this is a 3-day full-body workout routine designed to stimulate muscle hypertrophy. It's not meant to help you prepare for a Spartan race, give you the conditioning of a UFC fighter, or turn you into a serious contender for the title of World's Strongest Man. Don't try to improve multiple physical qualities at the same time. To make progress as fast as your genetics will allow, you'll need to focus on one major goal to the exclusion of everything else. Finally, if you want to drop some fat, there's no reason why you can't combine this training program with a diet geared towards fat loss (which I cover in more detail inside my Gutless nutrition manual). It is possible, for some people at least, to gain muscle while they lose fat. However, you won't gain muscle as fast as you would have done had your diet been set up for the sole purpose of building muscle. The 3-Day Full-Body Workout Routine With all that out of the way, here's what the training program looks like. I'll talk more about why it's set up the way it is in just a moment. Full Body Workout 1Bench Press 3 sets x 5-8 repsLat Pulldown 3 sets x 10-15 repsSquat 3 sets x 5-8 repsLeg Curl 3 sets x 10-15 repsDumbbell Shoulder Press 2 sets x 5-8 repsIncline Curl 2 sets x 10-15 repsTriceps Pressdown 2 sets x 10-15 reps Full Body Workout 2Incline Dumbbell Press 3 sets x 10-15 repsSeated Cable Row 3 sets x 15-20 repsLeg Press 3 sets x 10-15 repsRomanian Deadlift 3 sets x 10-15 repsLateral Raise 2 sets x 15-20 repsDumbbell Hammer Curl 2 sets x 10-15 repsOverhead Triceps Extension 2 sets x 10-15 reps Full Body Workout 3Cable Crossover 3 sets x 15-20 repsDumbbell Row 3 sets x 5-8 repsLeg Extension 3 sets x 15-20 repsLeg Curl 3 sets x 15-20 repsBent Over Lateral Raise 2 sets x 10-15 repsPreacher Curl 2 sets x 10-15 repsLying Triceps Extension 2 sets x 10-15 reps The number of sets listed are the actual work sets only, and don't include warm-up sets. It's always a good idea, especially if you're using heavy weights, to do several progressively heavier warm-up sets. This will prepare the joints, the muscles and the nervous system that controls those muscles for the heavy work to come.In most cases, somewhere between 1-3 warm-up sets will do the job. However, the exact number of warm-up sets you do will vary depending on the temperature of the gym you're training in, how your joints feel, the amount of weight you're lifting, the exercise itself, and where that exercise is placed in the workout. There have been times when I've been training in a cold gym, it's early in the morning and my joints are feeling a bit stiff, where I've ended up doing 7-8 warm-up sets before getting into the heavy stuff. The 3-Day Full-Body Workout Routine: Weekly Schedule This is the default version of the 3-day full-body workout routine. You train on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, then take the weekend off. Monday: Full Body Workout 1Tuesday: OffWednesday: Full Body Workout 2Thursday: OffFriday: Full Body Workout 3Saturday: OffSunday: Off However, the days of the week that you train aren't set in stone. If you can't make it to the gym on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, you could always train on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. And if you miss a workout, you can just push things back a day. For example, let's say that you miss your Wednesday workout. Here's how your week might look: Monday: Full Body Workout 1Tuesday: OffWednesday: OffThursday: Full Body Workout 2Friday: OffSaturday: Full Body Workout 3Sunday: Off In an ideal world, you'll have a day of rest between each workout. That is, if you train on Monday, you'll have Tuesday off, then train again on Wednesday. But let's say that you miss your Wednesday workout, and training at the weekend isn't an option. In this case, training on consecutive days is not a problem. In fact, training the same muscle groups on consecutive days has been shown to have a similar effect on muscle hypertrophy compared to taking a day of rest between workouts [1]. Here's how it might look: Monday: Full Body Workout 1Tuesday: OffWednesday: OffThursday: Full Body Workout 2Friday: Full Body Workout 3Saturday: OffSunday: Off The 3-Day Full-Body Workout Routine: Key Points 1. No matter how your training week is set up, it's important to train hard and focus on improving your workout performance over time. Do the same exercises, for the same number of sets and reps, while lifting the same amount of weight, for the next five years. Nothing much is going to happen. That's because the training you're doing is a challenge your body has already adapted to. As a result, no new muscle will be gained. I'm not saying you'll make progress in every single workout. To do so indefinitely would be impossible, and there'll be times when you end up lifting the same amount of weight, for the same number of sets and reps you did before. However, your focus should always be on pushing yourself to increase the amount of work your muscles are doing, whether that's lifting heavier weights, doing more reps with the same weight, or doing more sets. You need to give your muscles a reason to get bigger, or you'll remain stuck at the same size you are right now. So make sure to keep a training diary, write down your numbers, and always try to beat your previous workout in some way. 2. Take 2-3 minutes of rest between each set. If in doubt, err on the side of giving yourself too much rest rather than not enough. As a rule, I'd suggest resting for longer between sets of multi-joint exercises that work a large amount of muscle mass, such as squats, rows, deadlifts, leg presses and so on. You won't need as much rest between single-joint exercises, such as dumbbell curls, lateral raises and pressdowns. 3. Don't try to save time by cutting your rest periods short and racing from one exercise to the next. This isn't so-called metabolic resistance training. The hypertrophy stimulus generated by a given workout will be that much greater if you get a decent amount of rest between each set before tackling the next one. A better way to save time is to use paired sets, which involve exercises that target opposing muscle groups performed back-to-back. Example: Bench PressRest for 45-60 secondsLat PulldownRest for 45-60 secondsBench PressRest for 45-60 secondsLat PulldownRest for 45-60 secondsBench PressRest for 45-60 secondsLat Pulldown This way, you're making better use of your inter-set rest periods by doing another exercise. As well as saving time, paired sets may even make you stronger. In one study, a group of trained men was able to do significantly more reps on the leg extension when they did the leg curl beforehand [2]. In fact, the men were able to crank out, on average, three additional reps on the leg extension machine when they did leg curls immediately, 30 seconds or 60 seconds earlier. 4. If you're pushed for time, just do the first 4-5 exercises in each workout. Your shoulders, biceps and triceps will get some stimulation from the other exercises. 5. While the exercises listed work well, there's no reason why you can't replace them with something else that does a similar job. Don't have access to a leg press machine? Do Bulgarian split squats or reverse lunges instead. Prefer pull-ups to pulldowns? Then do pull-ups. You can also throw in some ab and calf work at the end of each workout. The 3-Day Full-Body Workout Routine: The Science Let me talk a bit more about the science behind full body workout routines, and explain why the program is set up the way it is. First up, we have training frequency, which refers to the number of times you train a muscle group each week. Training each muscle once a week can and will make that muscle bigger. However, for most people at least, it's probably the least effective way to train. In most cases, working a muscle group 2-3 times per week will produce a faster rate of hypertrophy than training it once a week. You also vary your reps from workout to workout. While this isn't essential, it has been shown (in some studies at least) to have a small but beneficial effect on muscle growth [3]. That is, alternating between low, medium and high reps will build muscle faster than sticking to the same number of reps all the time. Doing some of your training with higher reps and lighter weights is also a good way to give your joints a break from the constant pounding they get if you're always lifting heavy. The program also involves different exercises for each muscle group, which has a number of benefits. The first is a reduction in the risk of "repetitive stress" injuries. Doing the same exercises week after week, especially if you're pushing heavy weights, can take a big toll on your joints. Second, maximizing the development of a given muscle group requires the use of several exercises, and not just one. The quadriceps, for example, is made up of four different muscles. And if all you're doing for your legs are squats, those muscles won't all grow to the same extent. In one study, a training program that included several exercises for the quads – the leg press, squat and lunge – led to muscle hypertrophy in all heads of the quadriceps, while a squat-only program did not [4]. While the squat leads to high levels of muscle activation in vastus lateralis and vastus medialis, the leg extension preferentially recruits rectus femoris – the large muscle that runs down the middle of the front of your thigh [5, 6, 7]. While the potential shape and size of each muscle is determined by the genetic blueprint you were handed at birth, you can make the most of that potential by using different exercises to emphasize different regions of a muscle group. Final Thoughts If you're looking for a highly effective 3-day full-body workout routine that you can use to gain muscle (or even just retain muscle while you drop fat), this one ticks all the right boxes. It works your muscles often enough to make them grow. It can be used by beginner, intermediate or advanced trainees alike. It's also flexible, and can be set up in various different ways depending on which days of the week you're able to train. If you're overwhelmed and confused by all the conflicting advice out there, then check out The Muscle Building Cheat Sheet.It's a quick guide to building muscle, which you can read online or keep as a PDF, that shows you exactly how to put on muscle. To get a copy of the cheat sheet sent to you, please enter your email address in the box below, and hit the "send it now" button. PRIVACY POLICY: This is a 100% private email list, and your email address is not shared with anyone for any reason. You can unsubscribe quickly and easily if you ever want to. What beginners do in the gym can be the difference between making gains, and making RAPID gains! So what's the ideal workout routine for beginners just taking up resistance training? Well, just going to the gym and lifting weights is probably going to result in muscle gain for a complete beginner if done consistently. But that does not mean it is optimal, or well balanced. You'll get better results if you do things properly. This post will give you one example routine. If you want to get this workout plan in excel and Google Sheets format where you can log your sets and reps (plus get SIX more routines with options for different workout frequencies!) then click this link! You may have the following questions: What is the ideal workout frequency? How much volume should I be doing? What is the ideal lifting intensity? How many times per week should I be training each muscle group? What are the best exercises? How many rest days should I have? How do I progress as a beginner? Read on to find out how to devise your own full body workout program that is perfect for beginners! Beginners should keep things SIMPLE First point – no workout program will work to build muscle if you get everything else wrong! You need to apply certain principles to this (or ANY) program in order for it to actually work. Those principles are usually not mentioned in workout programs. Growing muscle requires certain ingredients to be present. What you do in the gym is just one ingredient in the recipe. You also need to be getting your nutrition and recovery right. DO NOT copy workouts from magazines, mainstream fitness websites or advanced bodybuilders! Many workout programs recommended by fellow gym-goers, popular websites and magazines, will result in muscle groups being worked once per week – usually for an insane amount of volume on one specific day of the week. This is not ideal for a beginner. You are potentially leaving a lot of gains on the table by waiting a whole week to train a body part again. I do not recommend the following types of programs for beginners: Monday: Chest Tuesday: Biceps and calves Wednesday: Triceps and abs Thursday: Quads and shoulders Friday: Hamstrings and Back These programs can be found all over the internet, and they're usually much better suited to more advanced lifters than beginners. They're often put together by pro body builders who are at a completely different stage of their muscle building journey and therefore are more likely to require 20 sets of different biceps exercises to stimulate a muscle building response. There's a reason why they might be doing a weird split that sees them training forearms directly, or working shoulders 3 times a week. That might be their only weak points. They also are more likely to have some "extra help". It's also not optimal to wait a whole week to train a muscle group again, when it's likely recovered and ready to go again after 2-3 days. You Don't Need to BLAST a Muscle Group In One Session! For a beginner (and even intermediate and experienced trainees) this way of training is likely going to take you well past the required volume to stimulate a muscle building response for each muscle group. 25-30 sets on one muscle group in one session is completely unnecessary for almost everyone. You're probably not doing much except eating into your recovery with at least half of those sets. A better way to train would be to cut down the volume within individual sessions, but keep the same, or similar, volume throughout the week by combining muscle groups within a session and training each one more than once per week. That way you end up with something like this: Monday: Upper body (chest, back and indirect shoulders and arms work) Tuesday: Lower body (various compounds hitting quads, hamstrings, glutes) Wednesday: Rest Thursday: Upper body (Back, shoulders and indirect chest & arms work) Friday: Lower body (various compounds hitting quads, hamstrings, glutes) This set up could result in the same overall volume per muscle group as the first plan where body parts are trained once per week. The key difference is you split the training up across the week, so you do a greater amount of useful work. The sets in the second half of the week come when you are fresh and recovered, and can elicit a new muscle building response. This is much better than sloppy work done in the second half of a training session that amounts to flogging a dead horse. Do this every week with 2 weeks off and you'll end up with 100 useful training sessions per muscle group that promote a muscle building response, rather than 50. Full Body Programs Give the Most Bang for Buck for Beginners For beginners, I usually recommend a 3x per week full body program utilising two different alternating workouts. This is because beginners need even less stimulus per muscle group to get a response, so it makes sense to train the entire body in one session. Now you can adequately stimulate each muscle group THREE times per week! This is a faster route to gains! These workouts focus on compound movements that hit multiple muscle groups at once so the whole body is worked more efficiently. Beginners are going to see their biceps grow from barbell rows and chinups, even though these primarily target the back. Beginners' triceps are going to grow from bench press and overhead press, even though these primarily target the chest and shoulders. Your traps, abs, forearms, hamstrings etc. are going to grow from deadlifts, and your quads, hamstrings, glutes, calves, abs etc. are going to develop from squats. Perform the following two workouts in an alternating fashion – with always at least 1 day between workouts. Perform 3 total workouts per week. One week you will perform Workout A twice, with Workout B sandwiched between. The next week you will perform Workout B twice, with Workout A sandwiched between. You might do: Monday: A Tuesday: B Wednesday: REST Thursday: Rest Friday: A Saturday: Rest Sunday: Rest: Or You Might Do: Monday: B Tuesday: Rest Wednesday: A Thursday: Rest Friday: B Saturday: Rest Sunday: Rest Here's how the workouts look: Beginners Full Body Workout A: Barbell back squats, 3 sets of 8 – 12 Pull-ups/chin-ups (use assistance if necessary – machine or bands) – 3 sets of 8 – 12 Overhead Press (seated or standing, dumbbell or barbell), 3 sets of 8 – 12 Dumbbell single arm row, 3 sets of 8 – 12 Bench press (dumbbell or barbell), 3 sets of 8 – 12 Beginners Full Body Workout B: Romanian deadlift, 3 sets of 8 – 12 Barbell bent over row, 3 sets of 8 – 12 Dumbbell walking lunges (or barbell reverse lunges), 3 sets of 8 – 12 Lat pulldown, 3 sets of 8 – 12 Incline bench press (dumbbell or barbell), 3 sets of 8 – 12 A few things to note: There is a deliberate lack of emphasis on chest. Chest is only worked with one exercise per workout. This is because too many beginners focus too much on chest, and end up building up the anterior deltoids too much. This causes the shoulders to overdevelop on the front, pulling them out of alignment. Not only does this look bad, giving a slouched, round shouldered look, it also causes shoulder problems later down the line. Arms are not a focus. As previously mentioned, they'll get enough work from the rows and presses. If you REALLY want to, you can add ONE biceps exercise to workout A, and one triceps exercise to workout B, to be done at the end. There are no ab exercises. These will be worked enough from squats, deadlifts, pull-ups and military press. To see them, you don't need to work them, you need to lose fat from your midsection by being in a calorie deficit Every exercise is performed for 3 sets of 8-12 reps. You do not gain muscle by trying to hit new 1 rep maxes, you gain it by being in a calorie surplus and by lifting more volume, with greater load under tension. This next one is really important! TRACK WHAT YOU LIFT. Pick a weight you can do 8 good reps with for 3 sets. Write down what you did or record it in your phone. Next time, pick the same weight but try to do 3 sets of 9. If you can't, try to do 2 sets of 8, and one set of 9. Keep increasing the reps like this until you're doing that weight for 3 sets of 12. Then up the weight and go back to 3 sets of 8. This shouldn't take too long at the beginning because your nervous system adapts first as you learn how to do the movements. If the weights aren't going up fast at the start, you're probably not eating enough or not sleeping enough. Pull-ups/chin-ups can be done assisted if needed (you probably will need to if you're a beginner). Your gym should have a machine that has a platform that supports your knees while you do these exercises. This connects to adjustable weights that mean you lift less than your own bodyweight. What if I can't do the exercises in the program? I understand not everyone starts with the same starting level of strength, level of general fitness, ease of movement, proficiency, etc. Some people may not be able to bench press the bar, or feel comfortable trying to do back squats. Others are unable to do pullups (see image and video below for help with that). How to do Pullups and Chinups if You're Not Strong Enough for them Yet Some gyms have assisted chinup/pullup/dip machines. If you have one of those, these work great. This is like a pullup station with a platform you rest your knees on, which moves up and down as you do pullups, chinups or dips. You choose how much assistance it gives you by selecting weight plates in a stack. The more weight you choose, the more it helps you by offsetting your own weight. I used one of these to get my first unassisted pullups. Over weeks and months I progressively reduced the weight that was assisting me, until I could do them with no weight. If you don't have access to one of these machines, you can use resistance bands or a chinup max. Make sure you get the right type of resistance bands. You'll also probably want multiple different "weights" or thicknesses, as these provide more/less assistance so you can swap them you as you get stronger. You want the long resistance bands, not the small ones that are meant to go round your legs and are intended for adding resistance to squats and glute exercises. If you're using resistance bands to do pullups at home, you'll obviously need a pullup bar. How to use a Resistance Band to do Pullups and Chinups Loop your resistance band around the bar and through itself, so it will remain in place. Depending on its length and the amount of space you have, you can put your knee or you foot in the other end. This will mean that the band will be stretched when you're at the bottom of the pullup or chinup. This tension will help to boost you back up as you perform reps, therefore making them easier. It looks like this: Tie the band round the bar, and put your knee or foot in the bottom Here's a video that will show you the best way to do pullups and chinups, and also how to use resistance bands to assist you until you can do them unassisted: You should ensure you're progressively overloading the work on your muscles by reducing the amount of assistance you are getting from the band. You do this by using lighter and lighter bands, or doing more reps. It might look like this: First time: 8 reps with 2 bands (thick and medium). Adding 1 rep per week until: Next level: Back to 8 reps but now using a thick band and a light band. Adding 1 rep per week until: Next level: Back to 8 reps but now only using a thick band. And so on, until you're using medium and light bands, then eventually just light bands, then no band. You can buy something called a chinup max, which is essentially 1 piece of equipment with multiple different bands built into it. You can change the amount of assistance without needing a load of bands. If you're training at home I HIGHLY RECOMMEND Crossgrips from Jayflex Fitness. These are way better than a normal doorway pullup bar. You can read my review and find out why here. Use the code ROB10 to get 10% off. Basic Version of the Beginner Full Body Program You may not have access to a gym, or you may not feel ready to approach some of the more intimidating or technically challenging exercises like barbell back squats. Here's a regressed version of the beginner full body program that will work just as well, but is at a less advanced level. Basic Workout A: Bodyweight squats, or goblet squats if you can manage them Dumbbell walking lunges Lat pull downs Dumbbell bench press (your gym should have some light dumbbells that you can start with before progressing up) Seated cable row Basic Workout B: Kettlebell deadlift Dumbbell Walking lunges Seated dumbbell shoulder press (use light dumbbells) Lat pull downs Single arm dumbbell row What if You're an Intermediate Lifter? Past a certain point, lifting "straight sets" isn't the most effective way to build muscle or strength. "Straight sets" means you use the same weight and the same number of reps, for all of your sets. For example, 3 sets of 10 reps, all with 225 lbs (100kg). If you're able to hit 10 reps with the same weight on all 3 sets, then the first 2 sets weren't challenging you as much as the last set. A more effective way to train (for intermediate and advanced lifters) is to utilise something called Reverse Pyramid Training (RPT). When you use an RPT approach, you start with a heavier weight on your first set and lift lighter weights for the subsequent sets. As the weight comes down, the number of reps per set goes up. All sets are taken close to failure, so every set is challenging, not just the first one. It might look like this: First Set: 225 lbs x 4-6 Second Set: 200 lbs x 6-8 Third Set: 180 lbs x 8-10 Fourth Set: 160 lbs x 10-12 If you're an intermediate lifter who's struggling to continue making progress, I highly recommend adopting this approach. Keep track of everything you do. You don't need to increase the weight on every set every week. Just stay within the rep ranges for each set. If you only manage to hit 4 reps on the first set, just try to hit 5 the next time OR add 1 rep to one of the other sets. Try to add a rep on every set, then increase the weight when you reach the top of the range (for example 6 reps on the first set). If you only add 1 rep to just one of the sets every session, that is still progress. Conclusion Remember! None of this will work if you don't follow all of the other principles of building muscle too. What lifts you do in the gym is 1/10th of the puzzle. Find out the rest here. There you go, two full body programs for beginners, one more basic than the other AND direction to adapt this for intermediate lifters. Keep that up for 3 to 6 months and eat in a calorie surplus and you should see great muscle gains. You'll then probably be ready to move on to another program like upper/lower or push/pull/legs. Remember, to build muscle you need to eat in a calorie surplus, and sleep to recover. If you've got fat to lose and you'd rather lose this before focusing on gaining muscle, then you need to eat in a calorie deficit. This will limit how much muscle you gain. If you have a bit of fat, but not that much, you can focus on building some muscle and it will look like you've lost fat. This is because the fat you had now has to cover more of you due to increased muscle size so you'll look bigger AND leaner! Are you working out to lose fat? You need to follow certain principles BESIDES being physically active. I've got a free ebook you can download here which will walk you through setting up my fat loss framework that I use to easily drop 8-10 lbs a month.


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