

PPL **RELOADED**



PUSH. PULL. LEGS.
THE EASIEST WAY TO GAIN MASS AND STRENGTH

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It is strongly advised to get your doctors' approval before beginning this exercise program. These recommendations are not medical guidelines but are for educational purposes only. You must consult your medical professional prior to starting this program or if you have any pre-existing medical condition or injury. This program is designed for healthy individuals 18 years and older only. Oldschooltrainer.com assumes no liability and will not be held responsible for any injuries, illnesses or similar as a result of the information contained herein.

Introduction - The Classics Never Go Out Of Style

Before I say anything else, let me get this one point out there: there is no such thing as a perfect routine. If anything, because of your body's remarkable ability to adapt to stress, the perfect routine is the one you are not doing. There is no shortage of routines out there, but the key is finding the best one for you, and that essentially comes down to lots of trial and error and listening to your own body.

One of the key mistakes we often make is to buy into the trap of thinking that because something sounds more complex and is the latest big new thing, it will work better than older, simpler approaches. Many people erroneously believe that some of the old routines we read that the bodybuilders of the 50's and 60s used are "outdated". Let's not forget that people like Chuck Sipes was bench pressing over 500 pounds already in the 1950s, or Pat Casey, the first man to break the 600 pound bench press barrier in the mid-60s, were training with "old school" routines.

Let's be clear - basic compound exercises as a base for your routine will never be outdated. Deadlifts, squats, lunges, bench press, dips, overhead presses, rows, chins and cleans are your base.

Excluding specialized strength and powerlifting routines, I've pretty much trained using them all: full body, upper/lower splits, bodypart-a-day splits and endlessly complicated versions based on all of these. Some have mixed conditioning in with heavy compounds, some pure bodybuilding routines. All of the years of experimentation and screwing around has led me to believe that keeping things simple is the best approach - whether it's training, nutrition or life in general. Don't complicate things.

"Pareto's principle", or the so-called 80–20 rule, dictates that approximately 80% of the benefits come from 20% of the efforts. The rest is largely wasted effort. It would be my guess that this applies to most of the energy spent in the gym, where people add extra empty sets and unnecessary efforts. In terms of opportunity cost, this is time that could have been spent doing other things.

My experiences in dealing with lots of adversity in life and in training have been to field-strip things down to bare essentials and really focus on what's really important. That Zen thing - the essence of keeping shit simple. Not to sound like captain obvious, we live in complicated times. To simplify things, and take charge of the challenges is entirely up to us.

In outlining the Push, Pull, Legs Routine in its most basic form, it's my wish that you can see how much you can gain from keeping things simple.

Why Split The Exercise Days Like This?

When looking at designing any workout routine, one has to keep in mind several things, including overall volume, the balance in time spent on each bodypart/movement and also the synergy and overlap that the exercises complement each other as they contribute to overall training volume.

The Push, Pull, Legs routine is perhaps the most efficient routine out there, as the body is split in terms of type of movement and the muscle groups get an overall benefit from the overlap of the movements. This type of training was popular in the late 80s-early 90s (Lee Labrada apparently was one of those who used to train using a push/pull routine)

For example, when I am pounding out 5 heavy sets of bench presses for five sets, I have been stressing the heck out of my anterior delts and triceps too, so that when it is time to do 5 sets of a shoulder and the 5 sets of a tricep exercise, the shoulders and tris have received the stress of the overall volume of 15 sets. This makes it the most efficient split, in my opinion.

Your body is essentially split into three parts, in terms of "movement"

- upper body movements that move resistance away from the center of your body
- upper body movements that move resistance towards the center of your body
- movements which target the muscles of the legs

The reasoning behind this is that there is so much interplay in these movements that one can deploy relatively few overall exercises and maintain maximal growth stimulation. And since the legs comprise 1/2 of the body's musculature, they require at best one day of dedicated training.

This overlap creates an "overlap effect" between the muscles involved in the heavy compound movements. After hitting deadlifts, chins and rows, your biceps will already be warmed up and will benefit from the extra stimulation. I have also found that this is the routine that tends to cause the least training injuries as you hit related joints on the same days and then rest them out for a week.

Benefits of This Type of Split

Training the chest, shoulders and triceps together gives the tendons in your elbows, and the front delts more recovery time than would say splitting them into separate days of the week, where you may find yourself doing triceps or shoulders just 48 hours after a heavy chest workout. Again, same goes for the bicep tendons after all the pulling on back day. Training 3 days a week on this sort of split can achieve better gains than those who split their body into 5 separate parts because of the extra recovery.

Let's compare this with the bodypart-a-day approach where you have a chest day, shoulder day and arm day, all in one week. That constitutes three days out of five where you are nailing the shit out of your anterior delts and tricep tendons! With Push, Pull, Legs, you avoid oversteering body parts.

Now let's compare this with a full-body routine. Look at the 5x5 routines out there where you squat and bench on the same day. When you train like this, you need to have 48 hours of recovery between workouts to protect your nervous system. If you have pretty good recovery, you could take advantage of that and make more progress with Push, Pull, Legs, training on a one-on, one-off, two-on, one-off rotation.

The following is the basic routine. It makes sense to strip things down to essentials as it forces you to think what works best for you, and what's really important.

PPL and the Older Trainer

Which brings me to another point: with PPL, your joints and connective tissues get more rest than with any other routine, which makes it ideal for those over 40. Trust me; I am one of them - now in my early 50s. Jerry Bruton, 61 years old, says that this is still his favorite way to train!

Exercise Selection - The Basics for the Win!

Pull Days

- Deadlifts: Conventional, Sumo, Snatch-grip, Trap Bar, Rack Pulls, Stiff-legged Deadlift, Romanian Deadlift
- Rows: Barbell, Dumbbell, Machine, T-bar
- Pull-ups, Chin-ups, Machine Pulldowns
- Curls: Barbell, Dumbbell, Machine, Pulley

Push Days

- Flat, Incline, Dumbbell, or Machine Bench Press
- Military, Dumbbell or Machine Shoulder Press
- Dips or Close-grip Bench
- Tricep Extensions, JM Press (check this on YouTube!)

Legs Days

- Back Squat, Front Squat or Leg Press
- Lunge, Split Squat, or Step-up
- Stiff-legged Deadlift or Leg Curls
- Calf Raises or Toe Press off of Leg Press

Use only the compound, multi-joint movements described above. Heavy bench presses and weighted pullups are in and cable crossovers and concentration curls are out! A simple way to remember this routine at its most basic to start off with: its three days a week, three exercises a day (not counting a touch of accessory movements you want to eventually throw in, one or two after each workout)

It is best to take a day off training between workouts. For most people, the Push, Pull, Legs split should be done 3 days a week, or for those with really good recovery, on a one-on, one-off, two-on, one-off rotation thus training 3 out of every 5 days.

Some Thoughts on Parameters: ways to tailor the program to keep gains coming

5x5: The Basic Linear 5x5 Strength and Mass Routine

Probably the most middle-of-the-road approach which splits the difference between size and strength is to use 5x5 parameters with Push, Pull, Legs. There are two ways of going about this. One is to do 5 sets of 5 across with the same weights and the other is to do ramped sets of 5, with every set getting heavier (pyramiding upwards). To protect yourself from burning out, it's best to use a training weight anywhere from 75-85% of your 1 rep max. And do not go to failure; always keep a rep or two in the hole.

Calculate your 1 rep max here: <http://www.exrx.net/Calculators/OneRepMax.html>

Every fourth week will be a deload week to let your nervous system rest. This keeps the gains coming. The progression for one month then, using bench press as an example with straight sets, would be:

Week 1

75% 5x5

Week 2

80% 5x5

Week 3

85% 5x5

Week 4

60% 5x5 (deload)

Fixed rep patterns like this have their downsides for experienced lifters, but are perfect for beginners looking to build a strong base of strength and slabs of muscle!

Reverse Pyramid

Likely the best overall size builder is to train sets in reverse pyramid, which is what it sounds: do your warm up sets as efficiently as possible to get to your max as quick as possible. Get to your working sets as quickly as possible, then as your strength decreases, the weights get lowered and the reps go up. Each time the next set's weight is decreased; the reps are increased, which keeps the intensity level brutal throughout.

For example:

- Warm-up sets (maybe something like one of each: 40%, 60%, 80%)
- All Out Top Set 4-6 reps 3-4 mins rest (you will need it!)
- Set 2 (10-15% less weight) 6-8 reps
- Set 3 (10-15% less weight) 8-10 reps
- Set 4 (10-15% less weight) 10-12 reps
- Set 5 (10-15% less weight) 12-15 reps

If do not hit the minimum required number or reps successfully, then you need to reduce the weight.

Caveats: Reverse Pyramid is not suited for the beginner for several reasons. One, you really need to master the movement and use near-perfect form. Two, you need to know your body and its limits.

Because of the need to get to the top set as soon as possible, it's very likely you could injure yourself if you either used too much weight, or got to your top set without enough warm-up sets. I

Reverse pyramid is a very advanced way to train, but for an intermediate lifter, it kicks ass!

Pure Hypertrophy - German Volume Training

In the 1970s, German weightlifting coach Rolf Feser began experimenting with a high volume method of 10 sets with his athletes. The results were remarkable, with many of his athletes setting records. In the 1980s, this method was used by some bodybuilders to gain insane size, the most notable of them being Bev Francis.

A decade later, Charles Poliquin wrote about it in the late Dan Duchaine's magazine, Muscle Media 2000. Since then, thanks to the Internet, it's one of the most well-known, tried and true methods to gain lots of muscle, really quick.

GVT focuses an unusually high volume on target muscles resulting in, (you guessed it) hypertrophy. Hypertrophy itself has two aspects: 1) sarcomere hypertrophy, which is an increase in the size of the contractile portion of the muscle, and also 2) sarcoplasmic hypertrophy, an increase in the non-contractile portion of the muscle.

The two have an inverse relationship: sarcomere hypertrophy increases the density of the muscle, while sarcoplasmic hypertrophy shows an increase in its diameter. The set/rep range of GVT leads to increases in both of these aspects.

Since this is not a strength routine, and you are not training to failure, the idea is to use a bit lighter weight for sets across. Ideally, you should pick a weight that's about 60% of your 1 rep max. So, if your 1RM on bench press is say, 275 pounds, then you would do 10x10 with 165 pounds.

Increases in poundages should be roughly 5%, and only go up in weight if you did your last set for the full amount. This is a boring way to train, but it's well worth it. Remember what I said about keeping shit simple? This is an example of how you can do more, with less.

Since the original GVT plan only has you doing 2 exercises with 10x10, we will do that here with Push, Pull, Legs.

A sample of how I would do this would be:

Push

Bench Press 60% 1RM 10x10

Overhead Press 60% 1Rm

E-Z Curl Lying Tricep Extensions 5x10

Pull

Rack Pulls (partial deadlift off of racks) 60% 1RM 10x10

Supported Rows 60% 1RM 10x10

Seated Dumbbell Curls 5x10

Legs

Hammer Strength Iso-Lateral Leg Press 60% 1RM 10x10

Stiff Legged Deadlift 60% 1RM 10x10

Barbell Step-Ups 5x10

Simple. Effective. All you need to get jacked.

Bodybuilding FST-7 Style 3x5 followed by 7 sets of 8-12 reps

One of the most advanced and ingenious training methods ever devised is bodybuilding trainer Hany Rambod's FST-7. The premise of this kind of training is that besides your genetics, the degree of thickness of the fascia around the muscle will determine the amount of muscle you are going to be able to build. Stretching the thick, fascia layer around the muscle to its capacity, will allow for greater muscle growth.

The first part of FST-7 is that muscles need progressive overload to be able to grow. Without this stimulus, no routine will work adequately. So, the first part of the FST-7 routine focuses on doing heavy ass compounds to maximize growth. The second involves expanding and stretching the fascia through a high volume of sets and reps - 7 sets or 8-12 reps, with minimal rest periods.

When we apply FST-7 to PPL, we could get something like this which combines initial heavy compounds with high volume isolations:

Push

Bench Press 3x8-10

Seated Dumbbell Press 3x8-10

Dips 3x8-10

FST-7 sets:

High Incline Dumbbell Flyes 7 sets of 8-12 reps

Dumbbell Seated Tricep Extensions 7 sets of 8-12 reps

Pull

Rack Pulls 3x8-10

Kroc Rows 3x8-10

FST-7 sets:

Pulldowns 7 sets of 8-12 reps

Hammer Strength Machine Curls 7 sets of 8-12 reps

Legs

Squats 4x8-10

Barbell Split Squat 3x8-10

Leg Curls 3x8-10

FST-7 sets:

Leg Press 7 sets of 8-12 reps

Again, like the reverse pyramid, this is for more advanced trainers, but goes to show what you can build off of a simple base. Another idea which is a deviation from FST-7, but still effective is to do a pre-exhaust method. You could do Bulgarian Dumbbell Split Squats before Front Squats to put some extra stimulus on your quads. Or incline flyes before Incline Dumbbell Press, etc. This is another older way to train which was popular in the 1970s, but can be used as another way of maximizing the effects sought after with FST-7.

Rest-Pause Training

"Rest-pause" training is a brutal method of training to failure popularized by the late Mike Mentzer 25 years or so ago (FWIW, Mentzer wasn't the first to speak of rest-pause; Peary Rader talked about rest pause training in one of his Iron Man editorials in the late 40s). It is essentially a way of training beyond failure with weights about 85% 1RM. What rest pause is, summarily, is going to near failure on the last rep, then either locking out the weight or racking it, and then taking 3-5 breaths and then cranking out another rep, racking or locking out again for another rest of 3-5 breaths and hitting another rep. This is done 3-4 times after the end of the last straight set on every exercise like this:

Set 1 x 6 reps

Rack the weight or lockout and rest 15-30 seconds, breathe deeply and slowly

Set 2 x 4 reps

Rack the weight or lockout and rest 15-30 seconds, breathe deeply and slowly

Set 3 x 3 reps

Caveats with rest pause

There is plenty of work per muscle group, so most people will not need to add anything. You might be thinking "why can't I add incline bench presses or tricep pushdowns"? Trust me; there is more than enough with the rest pause set at the end of every bodypart. Done right, this is brutal and efficient.

You also need to add some small accessory work to the workouts to cover small parts, specifically grip work, neck work, rotator cuff work and core work. 15 minutes of this at the end of the three sessions will suffice.

After about 4-5 weeks you will plateau if you do not schedule one "deloading" week. Deloading involves reducing the intensity via reducing load by 25% and not doing the rest pause. The key here is not so much about giving the muscles a break as it is about letting your nervous system take a break.

Change exercises regularly. After the week of deloading, it is a good idea to change the exercises; change from flat to decline bench presses, from barbell to dumbbell shoulder presses, from squats to leg presses, etc.

Powerlifting Variation

The most proven way to train for competitive powerlifting is by using an upper/lower split routine with either conjugated or undulating periodization. While Westside Barbell's system, which is based on the conjugate method, has produced some of the strongest athletes on the planet, the plan that's helped me more than any other thing I've ever tried is Jim Wendler's 5/3/1.

My reasons for saying this is that 1) its one program that deliberately keeps things simple and 2), its conservative loading parameters take the slow-and-steady wins the race approach. In my opinion, you can't go wrong with any of the applications of this program. And there are many in his book; some aimed at building pure strength, some which are a hybrid power/bodybuilding routine, and others are practical applications for those with limited time to train. His program focuses on bench press, squat, deadlift, and overhead press (press).

Without getting too much into the details, the genius of this program is in its programming. You assess your 1 rep max. Then you calculate 90% of that to get your training weight. Each week, you strategically use percentages of this training weight to gradually increase your lifts.

One week you are doing 5 sets of 5 with 65-85% of your training weight, the next week its 3 sets of 3 with 70-90%. The third week, it gets tougher, with 75-95%. Then, the 4th week, you guessed it, a deload week, with 40-60%.

If you are interested in one program that beats all the others for building raw strength, which is accessible to the vast majority of the population, Jim Wendler's 5/3/1 is it.

You could devise some programming parameters similar to this, while using a PPL setup. Something like 5x5 one week, then 5 sets of 3 the next, using 75%-85% of 1RM.

Final Thoughts

One thing to remember, weight training is only one part of fitness. The other is mobility, which is comprised of flexibility and conditioning. As you get older, this will get even more important. (trust me on this one!)

You need to stretch and get some cardio in, and if possible, make it as practical as possible.

There is nothing more practical than learning to run really fast.

Running sprints, 100-400 yards is far better than distance running. Hill sprints, and short sprints up stairs are king (for those who live in high-rises, running up stairs in your building is a great way to keep in condition when the winter weather makes outdoor training less than ideal).

Learn to skip rope - its old school for a reason. For conditioning, it beats any machine in the gym and it fits well with our "keep shit simple" philosophy.

Stretching is something that should be done daily, both dynamic and static. Personally, I have always hated stretching, *until I started going to yoga*. The benefits of yoga for strength training are immense.

Hitting yoga a couple of times a week and 3 15 minute jump rope sessions or 2 days of running sprints for 20 minutes is all you need. Avoid mid-intensity cardio for long periods of time as this is counterproductive and it eats muscle.

In Closing

It was my objective in writing this to show how much mileage you can get out of simple ideas. This split itself is not a routine; how you customize the volume, frequency, loading parameters, etc, will make it a "routine". The most important thing is that knowledge in itself will get you nowhere without acting on it. Believe in yourself, learn to listen to your body, and discover what's best for you – applying yourself to the best of your ability.

I wish you success and look forward to your feedback!