

— TRAINING SYSTEM · GET STRONG

STRENGTH ARCHITECTURE

Twelve periodised weeks to get genuinely strong on the squat, bench, deadlift and press — and the standards that keep you healthy while they climb.

LEVEL

Advanced

LENGTH

12 Weeks

SCHEDULE

4 Days

FOCUS

The Big Four



01 — BEGIN HERE

NOW YOU GET STRONG.

Size is built; strength is engineered. This is twelve weeks of periodised barbell work — one heavy top set to raise the ceiling, back-off volume to build the floor, intensity climbing block by block until you test new maxes on the four lifts that measure a strong body.

FOR YOU, IF

You own the four lifts, you've trained a year or more, and you want the numbers to move. You have a barbell, a rack and plates, and four days a week.

NOT YET, IF

Your squat, bench, deadlift or press still feel uncertain under load. Build the technique and the base in Foundations of Form and Hypertrophy Method first — strength rewards a body that's ready for it.

BY THE END OF WEEK TWELVE, YOU WILL

Have run a true periodised block · know how to drive a lift up with top sets and back-offs · be able to read effort by RPE instead of guessing · and have tested — and beaten — your numbers on all four main lifts.

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02

THE FIVE PRINCIPLES

Strength has its own rules. These five separate it from training for size.

01 STRENGTH IS A SKILL

A heavy lift is a motor pattern practised under load. You get strong by performing the lifts often and precisely — not by grinding them into the ground.

02 INTENSITY IS THE DRIVER

Maximal force is built with heavy loads and low reps. Where hypertrophy lives in volume, strength lives in the high-percentage, low-rep work this block is built around.

03 TOP SET, THEN BACK OFF

One hard top set raises the ceiling; a few back-off sets at a lighter load build the base beneath it. Together they drive strength without burying you in fatigue.

04 AUTOREGULATE WITH RPE

Strength varies day to day. Rate of perceived exertion lets you match the load to the day — heavy when you're sharp, sensible when you're not. → p. 10

05 PEAK, THEN TEST

You cannot push hard and express maximal strength at once. The final weeks cut volume so fatigue clears and the strength you built can finally surface.



03

THE PLAN AT A GLANCE

Twelve weeks, one page. Screenshot it. This is the whole architecture — everything after is detail.

THE ARC · FOUR BLOCKS

WEEKS 1–4

BASE

Top sets of 5 @ RPE 7–8.
Groove technique, build
work capacity.

WEEKS 5–8

BUILD

Top sets of 3 @ RPE 8.
Heavier; reps drop, load
climbs.

WEEKS 9–11

PEAK

Top sets of 1–2 @ RPE 8–9.
Intensity peaks, volume
taper.

WEEK 12

TEST

Work up to new maxes.
Express the strength you
built.

THE WEEK · FOUR DAYS, EACH LIFT HEAVY ONCE

D1

SQUAT

- 1 Back Squat
- 2 Bench
- 3 RDL
- 4 Row · core

D2

BENCH

- 1 Bench Press
- 2 Pause Squat
- 3 OHP
- 4 Pull · arms

D3

DEADLIFT

- 1 Deadlift
- 2 Front Squat
- 3 Barbell Row
- 4 Hams · core

D4

PRESS

- 1 Overhead Press
- 2 Close-grip Bench
- 3 Pull-up
- 4 Delts · arms

THE ONE RULE

Each week, **add a little to the top set while holding the prescribed RPE** — the back-off sets follow it up. When a block ends, drop the reps and raise the intensity. Small, steady, heavier.



04

THE LIFTS · STANDARDS

Four lifts carry this program. Strength is technique expressed under load — hold the standard, and the numbers are free to climb. One cue, one error each.

01 BACK SQUAT

Quads · the whole body braced

Cue: big breath into a braced belt of muscle, bar over mid-foot, sit between the hips to depth, drive evenly. **Avoid:** knees caving, hips shooting back into a good-morning.

02 BENCH PRESS

Chest · shoulders · triceps

Cue: shoulder blades pinned and down, slight arch, feet driving, bar to the lower chest and back over the shoulder. **Avoid:** bouncing the bar, flaring the elbows wide.

03 DEADLIFT

The whole posterior chain

Cue: bar over mid-foot, lats tight, take the slack out, then push the floor away — hips and shoulders rise together. **Avoid:** rounding the back, hips shooting up first.

04 OVERHEAD PRESS

Shoulders · triceps · trunk

Cue: glutes and abs locked, bar from the front rack in a straight line, head through at the top to full lockout. **Avoid:** leaning back, pressing around the face.

If a standard breaks under load, the load is too heavy — that rep doesn't count toward strength, only toward risk.



05

THE WEEK

Warm up to the top set in small jumps. Numbers shown are the **Base block (Weeks 1-4)** — adjust per the progression model on p. 8. "Top" = one heavy set; "back-off" = lighter sets ~10% under it. Rest 3-5 min on main lifts.

D1 · SQUAT FOCUS

EXERCISE	SETS × REPS	RPE	NOTE
Back Squat MAIN	Top 1×5 · 3×5	8	Back-offs -10%
Bench Press SECONDARY PRESS	3 × 6	7	Crisp, not maximal
Romanian Deadlift POSTERIOR	3 × 6-8	7	Feel the stretch
Chest-supported Row BACK	3 × 8-10	—	Build the bench base
Hanging Leg Raise CORE	3 × 10-15	—	Braced, controlled

D2 · BENCH FOCUS

EXERCISE	SETS × REPS	RPE	NOTE
Bench Press MAIN	Top 1×5 · 3×5	8	Back-offs -10%
Pause Squat SQUAT EXPOSURE	3 × 4	7	1-sec pause in the hole
Overhead Press PRESS VOLUME	3 × 6-8	7-8	Strict
Pull-up / Lat Pulldown BACK	3 × 8-10	—	Full range
Triceps + Curl ARMS · SUPERSET	3 × 10-12	—	Lockout strength

**D3 · DEADLIFT FOCUS**

EXERCISE	SETS × REPS	RPE	NOTE
Deadlift MAIN	Top 1×4 · 2×4	8	Less back-off — it taxes most
Front Squat QUADS · BRACE	3 × 5	7	Tall, elbows high
Barbell Row BACK THICKNESS	3 × 6-8	7	Supports the pull
Seated Leg Curl HAMSTRINGS	3 × 10-12	—	—
Ab Wheel / Plank CORE	3 × 8-12	—	Anti-extension

D4 · PRESS FOCUS

EXERCISE	SETS × REPS	RPE	NOTE
Overhead Press MAIN	Top 1×5 · 3×5	8	Back-offs -10%
Close-grip Bench PRESS · TRICEPS	3 × 6-8	7-8	Elbows tucked
Weighted Pull-up BACK · LATS	3 × 6-8	8	Add load when easy
Lateral Raise SIDE DELTS	3 × 12-15	—	Healthy, capable shoulders
Face Pull + Curl REAR DELT · ARMS	3 × 12-15	—	—

Order the week with a rest day between the heaviest sessions — e.g. D1, D2, rest, D3, D4. Never stack squat and deadlift days back to back.



06

THE PROGRESSION MODEL

How the main lifts move across the twelve weeks. Within a block, add a little weight to the top set each week and hold the RPE; the back-offs ride along at the same percentage under it.

BLOCK	TOP SET	BACK-OFF	INTENSITY & INTENT
Base WEEKS 1-4	1 × 5	3 × 5 (-10%)	RPE 7-8 · ~78-83%. Technique and work capacity. Add ~2.5 kg (press) / 5 kg (squat-dead) weekly.
Build WEEKS 5-8	1 × 3	3 × 4 (-8%)	RPE 8 · ~85-88%. Reps drop, load climbs. The bulk of the strength is made here.
Peak WEEKS 9-11	1 × 1-2	2 × 3 (-8%)	RPE 8-9 · ~90-93%. Intensity peaks; total volume tapers so fatigue clears.
Test WEEK 12	work to 1-3RM	—	RPE 9-10. Warm up in small jumps and find a new top single, double or triple on each lift.

IF A LIFT STALLS

Miss the top set two weeks running? **Hold the weight and drop the RPE to 7 for a week**, or take three easy days, then resume. A stall is a recovery signal, not a reason to grind.



07

ACCESSORIES THAT MATTER

Accessories exist to serve the big four — to build the muscle that moves them and the resilience that protects them. Keep them submaximal: 2–4 sets of 8–15, a rep or two in reserve. They support the lifts; they never compete with them.

PURPOSE	CHOOSE FROM	WHY IT MATTERS
Back & lats	Barbell / chest-supported row · pull-up · pulldown	A strong back stabilises the bench and the deadlift.
Posterior chain	Romanian deadlift · good morning · leg curl	Builds and armours the hinge behind every pull and squat.
Triceps & delts	Close-grip · dip · overhead ext · lateral raise	Lockout power on press and bench; healthy shoulders.
Core & carries	Ab wheel · plank · hanging raise · farmer's carry	A braced trunk is what transfers force to the bar.
Biceps & grip	Curl variations · heavy holds	Elbow health for pressing; a grip that won't fail the pull.

If an accessory ever steals from your main-lift performance, it has stopped being an accessory. Cut it back.



08

READING EFFORT · RPE

RPE — rate of perceived exertion — is how you steer this program day to day. It counts the reps you had left in the tank.

RPE	REPS LEFT	IT FEELS LIKE
10	0	Maximal — nothing left
9	1	One more, maybe
8	2	Two left — most work sits here
7	3	Bar still moves fast
≤6	4+	Warm-up · technique

IF YOU KNOW YOUR MAX

Rough reps-to-percent of 1RM: **1RM 100%** · 2RM ~95% · 3RM ~92% · 5RM ~87% · 8RM ~80% · 10RM ~75%. Use it to set starting loads, then let RPE fine-tune from there.

IF YOU DON'T

Just use RPE. Pick a weight that leaves the prescribed reps in reserve and adjust set to set. By week 12 you'll have real maxes to work from next time.

THE POINT

Percentages assume a perfect day; **RPE respects the day you actually have**. Use them together — the percentage sets the plan, the RPE keeps it honest.



09

THE PLATE

Strength is expensive to build. Feed it — at maintenance or a slight surplus. You cannot set personal records out of a hard deficit.

BUILD EVERY PLATE FROM FOUR PARTS

PROTEIN

1.6–2.2 g / kg

Eggs, curd, paneer, soya, chicken, fish, whey. The material that rebuilds what heavy lifting breaks down.

CARBS

Fuel the heavy days

Rice, roti, oats, fruit. Heavy, braced lifting runs on carbs — keep them up, especially pre-training.

VEGETABLES

Two fists

Recovery, digestion, health — so a big training appetite stays a healthy one.

FATS

A thumb

Ghee, oil, nuts. Enough for hormones and joints, which heavy training leans on.

HOW MUCH

Eat at **maintenance or a small surplus** for the Base and Build blocks — fuel the work and let some size come with the strength. Hold weight steady through the peak so the lifts stay sharp into the test.

PAIRS WITH

The full around-training system — what and when to eat for heavy days — lives in **Performance Fueling**. This half-page is enough to start strong today.

IN SHORT

Protein every meal · carbs to fuel the heavy work · weight steady or slightly up · don't chase P&S while dieting hard. Strength is built on being well-fed and well-rested.



10

RECOVERY

Heavy lifting taxes more than muscle — it taxes the nervous system and the joints. Managing that is what lets the bar keep climbing.

SLEEP

7–9 hours. Maximal strength is a nervous-system output, and the nervous system is rebuilt in sleep. It's the first lever to pull when the lifts feel heavy.

SPACING

Keep a rest day between the heaviest sessions. The four-day layout already separates squat and deadlift — respect it.

THE GRIND TEST

Bar speed dying, joints aching, top sets missing? Pull the RPE back or take an early deload. Strength is lost to overreach, not built by it.

TWO THINGS TO HOLD

The peak is a taper, not a let-down. Weeks 9–11 cut volume on purpose. It will feel like you're doing too little — that easing is exactly what lets the strength surface on test day.

Grinding is not a virtue. A rep that takes five seconds and breaks your position builds risk, not strength. Leave the maximal grind for week 12, under control.



11

THE TOP-SET LOG

Print this. Record the top-set weight × reps for each lift as the weeks pass. Watching this table climb is the whole point of the block.

LIFT	WK 2	WK 4	WK 6	WK 8	WK 10	WK 12
Back Squat						
Bench Press						
Deadlift						
Overhead Press						
Front Squat						
Pause Squat						
Barbell Row						
Weighted Pull-up						

Each week, nudge the top set up and keep the RPE where it's written. If the number won't move and the RPE keeps rising, that lift is asking for recovery — give it.



11

TEST DAY · WEEK 12

Warm up in small jumps and work to a heavy single, double or triple on each lift. Record it, then read your estimated 1RM from the reference — those become next block's starting numbers.

LIFT	OLD BEST	WEEK-12 RESULT (WT × REPS)	NEW EST. 1RM
Back Squat			
Bench Press			
Deadlift			
Overhead Press			

ESTIMATE YOUR 1RM

From the reps you hit: a 1-rep best $\approx 100\% \cdot 2 \approx \div 0.95 \cdot 3 \approx \div 0.92 \cdot 5 \approx \div 0.87$. (e.g. $100 \text{ kg} \times 3 \rightarrow 100 \div 0.92 \approx 109 \text{ kg}$ 1RM.)

THEN

Take a full week easy. Restart the Base block with these new maxes — or move to **Recomposition** to lean out while holding the strength you just built.



12

QUESTIONS, ANSWERED

DO I NEED TO KNOW MY MAXES TO START?

No. Use RPE — pick a load that leaves the prescribed reps in reserve. You'll have true maxes after the week-12 test to program from next time.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD I MAX OUT?

Once — at the end. Maxing drains far more than it builds; this block earns the strength first, then tests it.

WILL I GET BIGGER TOO?

Some. Strength and size overlap, and the back-off volume builds muscle. But this biases force — run **Hypertrophy Method** when size is the goal.

CAN I DO CONDITIONING ALONGSIDE?

Keep easy walking and a little low-intensity cardio. Avoid hard conditioning that steals recovery from heavy lifting — especially in the peak.

I MISSED A SESSION.

Skip it and continue; never cram two heavy days together. If you must drop one, protect the main-lift days over the accessories.

DO I NEED SPECIAL EQUIPMENT?

A barbell, a rack with safeties, and plates — this is a barbell program. A bench and a pull-up bar round it out.

A LIFT STALLED MID-BLOCK.

Hold the weight, drop the RPE to 7 for a week, and check technique. If it persists, take three easy days — then resume where you left off.

WHAT COMES AFTER WEEK 12?

Retest done, run the block again with your new maxes — or move to **Recomposition** to lean down while keeping the strength.



STRENGTH IS BUILT IN SINGLE REPS, OVER SEASONS.

There is no rushing a heavy bar. You add a little, you hold your standard, you recover — and twelve honest weeks later the number that was a ceiling is a warm-up. Then you do it again.

NEXT PROGRAM

RECOMPOSITION

Lean out while holding the strength you just built.

EVERY MORNING

THE EDGE

One letter before noon. One principle, one practice.

WHEN YOU'RE READY

COUNSEL

Direct guidance from the studio. By application.

vysnfitness.com