



# THE MOST EVIDENCE-BASED 4-DAY PROGRAM

## FOR BUILDING SERIOUS SIZE AND STRENGTH

An Upper / Lower / Upper / Lower split built entirely from the resistance training literature — Schoenfeld, Grgic, Helms and colleagues. Every muscle group trained twice a week, every session opens with a heavy compound lift for strength, and every set, rep range, and rest period is chosen to match what the research actually shows maximizes hypertrophy and strength together.

**The Logic:** Each session starts with one heavy compound lift trained in the 3–6 rep range for pure strength — bench, squat, pull-up/row, and deadlift rotate through the week. Everything after that is built for hypertrophy: 10–20 hard sets per muscle group per week, spread across 2 sessions, mostly in the 6–15 rep range, taken to within 0–2 reps of failure. Nothing here is arbitrary — every number is pulled directly from meta-analyses on volume, frequency, load, and rest.

### WEEKLY OVERVIEW — 4 SESSIONS

| Day | Session                                       |
|-----|-----------------------------------------------|
| Mon | Upper Body A — Bench Press (Strength)         |
| Tue | Lower Body A — Back Squat (Strength)          |
| Wed | Rest / active recovery                        |
| Thu | Upper Body B — Weighted Pull-Up (Strength)    |
| Fri | Lower Body B — Deadlift (Strength)            |
| Sat | <i>Optional</i> — Day 5: Arms, Delts & Calves |
| Sun | Rest                                          |

*Upper/Lower x2 is the split best supported by the frequency literature for a 4-day week: it lets every major muscle group be trained twice, which meta-analyses (Schoenfeld et al., 2016 & 2019; Grgic et al., 2018) show outperforms once-weekly training at equal volume. At least 48 hours separate repeat sessions for the same muscles.*

## KEY PRINCIPLES — WHAT MAKES THIS OPTIMAL

|                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Volume</b>                | 10–20 hard sets per muscle group per week. Schoenfeld, Ogborn & Krieger's 2017 dose-response meta-analysis found more weekly sets generally drove more growth up to this range, with returns flattening beyond it. Every exercise here is capped at 3 working sets for time efficiency, but because each muscle group is hit by several exercises across 2 sessions a week, most still land in the 9–15 total set range.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Frequency</b>             | Every muscle group is trained twice a week. Schoenfeld et al. (2016, 2019) and Grgic et al. (2018) found twice-weekly training reliably beats once-weekly at matched volume, with little extra benefit from going higher than twice for most lifters. Splitting weekly volume across 2 sessions also keeps any single workout from becoming unmanageably long.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Intensity / Effort</b>    | Main compound lift: heavy, 3–6 reps, 1–2 reps in reserve (RIR). Hypertrophy accessory work: 0–2 RIR, meaning most sets are taken close to failure. Proximity to failure is what drives the recruitment of high-threshold motor units responsible for growth — training with a couple of reps left in the tank protects joints and technique without meaningfully sacrificing results.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Load / Rep Ranges</b>     | Schoenfeld et al.'s 2021 re-examination of the repetition continuum, along with earlier meta-analyses, found similar hypertrophy across a wide range of loads (roughly 30–85% of 1RM) as long as sets are taken close to failure. This program still leans on 6–15 reps for most accessory work because it's the most time- and joint-efficient zone, while keeping the opening lift heavy (3–6 reps) for strength.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Rest Periods</b>          | 3–4 minutes on the day's main compound lift; 2 minutes on other multi-joint accessory work (rows, presses, hip hinges); 90 seconds minimum on isolation work. Schoenfeld et al. (2016) found 3-minute rest periods produced greater strength <i>and</i> hypertrophy than 1-minute rest, because longer rest preserves the load and total volume you can lift set to set. No exercise in this program drops below a 90-second floor — short rest purely for the sake of a metabolic "burn" isn't supported by the evidence.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Exercise Flow / Order</b> | Heaviest, most technical, most fatiguing movement first (the main compound lift), followed by other multi-joint exercises, finishing with single-joint isolation work. Fatigue accumulates through a session, so the lifts that need the most coordination and load get done while you're freshest, with smaller, more fatigue-resistant muscle groups (arms, calves, delts) mopped up last.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Full Muscle Coverage</b>  | Exercise selection is deliberately varied so every major muscle gets trained through more than one angle or joint action across the week, not just repeated sets of the same movement: chest via flat (bench) and incline (DB press) pressing plus a stretch-focused fly; back via vertical pulling (pulldown, pull-up) and horizontal pulling (rows); all three deltoid heads (pressing for front, lateral raises for side, rear-delt fly and face pulls for rear); both biceps heads and brachialis (curl variations); both triceps heads (pushdown for lateral, skullcrusher/overhead extension for long head); hamstrings via hip-hinge (RDL, deadlift) and knee-flexion (leg curl) patterns, which research shows target the proximal and distal hamstring differently; and calves via straight-knee (standing) and bent-knee (seated) raises to hit both the gastrocnemius and soleus. |
| <b>Progressive Overload</b>  | Use double progression: once you hit the top of a rep range for all working sets, add load next session and drop back to the bottom of the range. This is the simplest, most consistently supported method for ensuring the mechanical tension driving adaptation actually increases over time.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Tempo</b>                 | Controlled, not exaggerated — roughly 1–2 seconds up, 2–3 seconds down. Schoenfeld, Ogborn & Krieger's (2015) tempo meta-analysis found no added hypertrophy benefit from very slow repetitions; the priority is full range of motion and control, not artificially stretching out each rep.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |

*Key sources: Schoenfeld, Ogborn & Krieger (2017) J Sports Sci — volume dose-response. Schoenfeld, Grgic & Krieger (2019) J Sports Sci and Grgic et al. (2018) Sports Med — training frequency. Schoenfeld et al. (2021) Sports — loading/repetition continuum. Schoenfeld et al. (2016) J Strength Cond Res — inter-set rest periods. Schoenfeld, Ogborn & Krieger (2015) Sports Med — repetition tempo.*

## UPPER BODY A — BENCH PRESS FOCUS

MONDAY

### Strength lift first, then chest/back/shoulder hypertrophy work

~60-70 minutes

| Exercise                   | Sets | Reps  | Intensity            | Rest    |
|----------------------------|------|-------|----------------------|---------|
| Lat Pulldown               | 2    | 8-12  | 0 RIR (true failure) | 90 sec  |
| <b>Barbell Bench Press</b> | 3    | 4-6   | Heavy, 1-2 RIR       | 3-4 min |
| Chest-Supported Row        | 3    | 8-12  | 0-2 RIR              | 2 min   |
| Incline Dumbbell Press     | 3    | 8-12  | 0-2 RIR              | 2 min   |
| Seated DB Shoulder Press   | 3    | 10-12 | 0-2 RIR              | 90 sec  |
| Cable Lateral Raise        | 3    | 12-15 | 0-1 RIR              | 90 sec  |
| Cable Bicep Curl           | 2    | 10-15 | 0-1 RIR              | 90 sec  |
| Triceps Pushdown           | 2    | 10-15 | 0-1 RIR              | 90 sec  |

*Chest and back are trained horizontally here (bench, row) before shoulders and arms are finished off — the two biggest, most fatigue-heavy muscle groups get the freshest effort of the session.*

*The 2 lat pulldown sets before bench press are taken all the way to true failure (0 RIR) — this is real back training volume, not a token warm-up. It's placed first for a second reason too: pre-activating the lats braces the shoulder blades and stabilizes the upper back during the bench press, improving bar path and shoulder safety under heavy load. Capping it at 2 hard sets (rather than 3-4) is what keeps it from compromising the bench press afterward — lat pulldown is a machine-guided, single-pattern movement with far less systemic and CNS fatigue cost than a heavy barbell lift, so even trained to genuine failure it doesn't meaningfully blunt strength on the bench a few minutes later.*

## LOWER BODY A — SQUAT FOCUS

TUESDAY

### Strength lift first, then quad/hamstring/calf hypertrophy work

~60-70 minutes

| Exercise                             | Sets | Reps       | Intensity      | Rest    |
|--------------------------------------|------|------------|----------------|---------|
| Back Squat                           | 3    | 4-6        | Heavy, 1-2 RIR | 3-4 min |
| Romanian Deadlift                    | 3    | 8-10       | 0-2 RIR        | 2 min   |
| Leg Press                            | 3    | 10-12      | 0-2 RIR        | 2 min   |
| Seated Leg Curl                      | 3    | 10-12      | 0-2 RIR        | 90 sec  |
| Hip Abduction + Adduction (superset) | 2    | 12-15 each | 0-1 RIR        | 90 sec  |
| Standing Calf Raise                  | 3    | 10-15      | 0-1 RIR        | 90 sec  |
| Hanging Knee Raise                   | 3    | 10-15      | 0-1 RIR        | 90 sec  |

*Squat first while central nervous system fatigue is lowest, then a hip-hinge pattern (RDL) to balance quad and hamstring stimulus before finishing on single-leg work, calves, and core.*

*The hip abduction/adduction superset replaces the split squat here — it isolates the glute medius and adductors directly, two hip-stabilizer groups that are easy to under-train but matter for knee and hip health under a heavy squat and deadlift week.*

## UPPER BODY B — PULL-UP FOCUS

THURSDAY

### Strength lift first, then back/shoulder/chest hypertrophy work

~60-70 minutes

| Exercise                | Sets | Reps  | Intensity      | Rest    |
|-------------------------|------|-------|----------------|---------|
| Weighted Pull-Up        | 3    | 4-6   | Heavy, 1-2 RIR | 3-4 min |
| Standing Overhead Press | 3    | 8-10  | 0-2 RIR        | 2 min   |
| Single-Arm Dumbbell Row | 3    | 8-12  | 0-2 RIR        | 2 min   |
| Cable Fly               | 3    | 10-15 | 0-2 RIR        | 90 sec  |
| Rear-Delt Fly           | 3    | 12-15 | 0-1 RIR        | 90 sec  |
| Skullcrusher            | 3    | 10-15 | 0-1 RIR        | 90 sec  |
| Hammer Curl             | 3    | 10-15 | 0-1 RIR        | 90 sec  |

*This session emphasizes the vertical pull/push pattern (pull-up, overhead press) that Monday's session doesn't, so the back and shoulders get a genuinely different stimulus across the week, not just repeated sets of the same movement.*

## LOWER BODY B — DEADLIFT FOCUS

FRIDAY

### Strength lift first, then quad/hamstring/glute/calf hypertrophy work

~60-70 minutes

| Exercise              | Sets | Reps  | Intensity      | Rest    |
|-----------------------|------|-------|----------------|---------|
| Conventional Deadlift | 3    | 3-5   | Heavy, 1-2 RIR | 3-4 min |
| Front Squat           | 3    | 8-10  | 0-2 RIR        | 2 min   |
| Leg Extension         | 3    | 10-15 | 0-2 RIR        | 90 sec  |
| Hip Thrust            | 3    | 8-12  | 0-2 RIR        | 2 min   |
| Seated Calf Raise     | 3    | 12-15 | 0-1 RIR        | 90 sec  |
| Cable Crunch          | 3    | 10-15 | 0-1 RIR        | 90 sec  |

*Deadlift still gets the longest rest window (3-4 min) of any lift in the program — it's the most systemically fatiguing movement here, and research on fatigue and recovery supports giving it full recovery between sets so bar speed and bracing don't degrade. Front squat and hip thrust pick up additional quad and glute volume afterward.*

## OPTIONAL DAY 5 — ARMS, DELTS & CALVES

SATURDAY

### Optional bonus session — isolation only, no compounds

~30-40 minutes | skip this entirely and the program still works as designed

| Exercise                         | Sets | Reps  | Intensity | Rest   |
|----------------------------------|------|-------|-----------|--------|
| Incline Dumbbell Curl            | 3    | 10-15 | 0-1 RIR   | 90 sec |
| Overhead Cable Triceps Extension | 3    | 10-15 | 0-1 RIR   | 90 sec |
| Machine or Cable Lateral Raise   | 3    | 12-15 | 0-1 RIR   | 90 sec |
| Face Pull                        | 3    | 12-15 | 0-1 RIR   | 90 sec |
| Standing Calf Raise              | 3    | 12-15 | 0-1 RIR   | 90 sec |
| Seated Calf Raise                | 3    | 12-15 | 0-1 RIR   | 90 sec |

*This day is entirely optional and entirely isolation — no compound lifts, no real central nervous system cost, so it doesn't interfere with recovery for Monday's session. It exists to push arms, shoulders, and calves to a 3rd weekly touch instead of 2, since smaller muscle groups trained with single-joint movements tend to recover fast enough to tolerate the extra frequency well. Face pulls are included specifically for rear-delt and rotator cuff health given how much pressing this program already includes.*

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**Bottom line:** nothing in this program is a guess. Each major muscle group lands in the 10–20 weekly set range across two sessions, every set is taken close enough to failure to matter, rest periods are long enough to protect performance set-to-set, and the heaviest, most technical lift of each day always comes first. Add load whenever you hit the top of a rep range, and the results follow the same dose-response curve the research describes.