

Free Weights Workout Guide

Specific benefits:

Resistance training with free weights is a great way to increase muscular strength, function, and appearance. A vast array of potential health benefits can be obtained via regular free weight exercise, these benefits include:

- Increased lean muscle mass
- Decreased body fat percentage (as increased muscle mass boosts the metabolism)
- Decreased resting blood pressure
- Increased bone mineral density
- Increased insulin sensitivity (a key component in diabetes prevention)

For those with goals of improving muscle strength and size; free weights (barbells, and dumbbells) provide the greatest workout. This is due to the fact that unlike machines, the use of free weights requires increased muscle fibre recruitment as your muscles need to stabilize the weights themselves. This increased level of fibre recruitment results in greater muscle gains (as more of the muscle is trained) as well as the development of more functional strength.

Free weights are also the safer way to train (once correct technique has been learned) as the body is free to move the weights in a more natural motion; unlike with some gym machines which due to a constantly fixed movement can lead to muscle and joint strain from overuse.

Before you begin:

There are several practices which are good to adhere to that will ensure your long term and immediate safety so that you can get the absolute best out of your free-weight resistance training routine:

- Always warm-up before you exert yourself, and perform a light warm-up set for each exercise before your working sets to prepare the muscles (and your technique) for what you need to do. Cool down at the end of your workout and consider stretching too.
- Ensure you drink enough water before, during and after exercise.
- Start your exercise programme slowly and build it up progressively, don't try to push yourself too hard, too soon.
- Don't get caught up on what weights other people are lifting, choose the correct weight to challenge your own self (train your muscles safely and correctly, not your ego).
- If you are over 35 and / or not currently taking regular exercise, consult your doctor before beginning any exercise programme.
- Ensure correct posture when performing exercises to prevent injury.
- When weight training, exhale on exertion & inhale on the return motion.

- Always control the “eccentric” (negative) phase of the exercise; it should take the same amount of time as the “concentric” (positive) phase, and not only will help prevent injury, but will lead to greater gains in the long run.

How many reps should I do?

Appropriate weight and repetitions varies from person to person and their specific goals:

- Hypertrophy (increased muscle size) = 12-15 repetitions
- General strength = 8-10 repetitions
- Pure/maximal strength = <5 repetitions
- Muscle endurance = >20 repetitions

Please note: beginners should stick to the 8-10 rep range initially to build up base general strength before progressing on to more advanced goals such as hypertrophy and/or pure strength for safety reasons.

Exercises – types, volume and frequency:

Depending on your specific goals, there are two main types of exercises that can be performed with free weights. These two main types are compound and isolation exercises.

Compound exercises are large multi-joint movements which train several muscles at once. Examples of these kinds of exercises would be bench presses, barbell rows, squats, lunges, shoulder presses etc. These exercises are key to overall muscle development as they allow you to train and develop the main muscle groups together, in a functional way.

Isolation exercises are single joint exercises that are used to hone in on a specific muscle and develop it. These exercises should not make up the majority of your routine, however they are a great addition to work on any weak points in particular. Examples of isolation exercises include bicep curls, tricep extensions, calf raises etc.

Volume depends on individual training status, and experience. As well as any other factors which can influence how much rest and recovery an individual may need such as age, and genetics.

Work outs should be spread out over your week to allow for more recovery time for each muscle group. This is done by alternating which muscle groups you train on a specific day. For example, on one day you may train your chest and triceps together (as the triceps assist in pushing exercises), and then the next workout train your back and biceps (as biceps assist in pulling exercises). By alternating like this, the muscles get more time to recover and repair before they are worked again, allowing for strength gains to occur via adaptation.

Generally speaking, for a beginner it could be advisable to select 2-3 compound exercises for a main muscle group (such as the chest), and an isolation movement for the smaller assisting muscle group (which in that case would be the triceps). 2 working sets ideally should be performed per set to prevent overtraining initially. An example workout (with the goal of general strength) would be as follows:

Example chest and tricep workout

Exercise	Sets	Reps	Rest Between Sets
Incline Dumbbell Bench press	2	8-10	2-3 minutes
Flat Barbell bench press	2	8-10	2-3 minutes
Tricep pushdowns	2	8-10	2-3 minutes

Frequency of training is very important to getting the right results. Unfortunately, unlike other aspects of life such as work or study, more isn't necessarily better when it comes to training. It is crucial that you allow a specific muscle group at least 72 hours to recover before you train it again to give it time to not only recover, but then adapt further with increased size and strength before you work it again. By allowing for this recovery time you will find that each following workout that the muscles will be capable of greater reps, and weights which can slowly be increased in a progressive nature (to keep the gains coming).

An example beginner routine that allows adequate time for recovery is as follows:

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Rest / Day off	Back / Biceps	Rest / Day off	Chest / Triceps	Rest / Day off	Legs	Rest / Day off

Progression

A key factor to resistance training and getting the results you wish for is progression.

Progression involves asking your muscles to do more with each session, leading to continual growth and strength gains. The best way to achieve this is that once you can perform your goal number of repetitions for an exercise (with good form), to increase the weight by the smallest increment possible.

Once your goal number of repetitions are again possible with the new weight, repeat the process by progressing further. It can also be a huge help to record the weight you used for each exercise, and the number of reps you achieved in a notebook. This way you can know exactly what you need to beat each workout and aim to create a new personal best performance!

By progressing your performance (weights and reps) on subsequent workouts, over the course of several months you will find yourself lifting with ease weights much heavier than when you first started. Logically you will also have a more muscular, defined body as a result as if you were to compare a body that struggles to do even 10 press-ups, versus a body that can do 30 press-ups with ease, then 30 pull-ups too without any challenge – which do you imagine would look better?

Key exercises

Compound exercises

Bench press

Is a fantastic exercise for development of the pectoral muscles (chest), the front deltoids (shoulder) and triceps (upper arm). Bench presses can be performed with either a barbell or dumbbells.

Correct technique involves lowering the bar (or dumbbells) to your lower chest and then pressing it back up by contract the muscles. It is important to keep your buttocks, lower back, and shoulders in contact with the bench during the exercise (i.e. no arching off the bench) to prevent taking emphasis off the target muscle groups and potentially cause lower back strains. Remember to use a spotter to ensure safety.



Incline Bench press

This exercise trains the same muscle groups as a standard bench press but from a different angle, emphasizing the upper portion of the pectoral muscles more, as well as the shoulders. This exercise can be considered key to developing the upper chest and shoulders, which create a very powerful look. Remember to use a spotter for safety.



Shoulder press

This exercise involves the deltoids (shoulders) as well as the triceps of the upper arm. Strong shoulders are well worth developing as not only do they create a powerful look visually, but can also prevent injury when performing other exercises or playing sport due to increased joint stability. This exercise can be performed with either a barbell or dumbbells.

Correct performance of this exercise involves carefully lowering the bar below your chin (until your upper arms are at least parallel with the ground) and then lifting the bar back up to the overhead position. Due to the nature of this exercise it is important to use a spotter, as well as pick an appropriate weight.

Barbell Rows

Are a great exercise for developing the back muscles, primarily the lats. The exercise also involves many other back muscles for support and stability, as well as the biceps and brachialis of the arms.

Correct technique involves keep a healthy arch in your back and not letting it round under the load. Your torso should be kept at a 45° to the floor. Use your back muscles to draw your arms back, pulling the bar towards your stomach while squeezing your lats.

Pull ups

Are a fantastic way to develop the muscles of the back using your own body weight as resistance. This exercise is an incredible lat developer, and key to developing the “V-taper” look which comes from wide shoulder, lats, and a trim waist. If you initially find your own bodyweight too much of a challenge we stock a range of power bands which can be used to help you perform this exercise until your strength increases.

Squats

Squats are a highly effective lower body compound exercise which develops the quadriceps, hamstrings, glutes and calves. Correct technique involves avoiding allowing your knees to go beyond your toes when squatting down to prevent injury; the movement involves an equal amount of knee and hip flexion to allow this.

The bar should also not be placed across the neck itself as these vertebrae are delicate and not designed for load bearing; the bar should rather rest across the upper back. It is also very important to not round your back under the load of the bar. A healthy arch should be maintained at all times to ensure safety from injury. This exercise can be performed with either a barbell across the upper back or dumbbells held at the sides.



Deadlift

Deadlifts are an incredible exercise that involves almost every muscle in the body; developing everything from the back muscles, quadriceps, hamstrings, calves, traps, and even the forearm muscles as they grip the bar! Correct and safe technique involves keeping the bar close to your body at all times and maintaining a healthy arch in your back – do not let your back round from the load. This exercise can be performed with either a barbell or dumbbells.



Isolation Exercises

Lying tricep extensions

Are a fantastic isolation exercise for overall development of the triceps. For safety as well as keeping constant tension on the triceps throughout the range of motion; rather than lowering the bar to your forehead on the eccentric phase, lower it past your head instead. This change in position also takes pressure off the elbows, preventing joint pain or injury.



Dumbbell tricep kick-backs

Are an isolation exercise for the triceps, placing emphasis on the lateral (outer) head. To perform these correctly; ensure your upper arm stays parallel with the ground throughout the performance of the exercise, and contract your triceps to extend your forearm to be parallel with the ground also. Correct weight selection is critical for this exercise, as it is at the end range of the motion that the triceps receive the most work.



Bicep curls

Are a great developer for the bicep muscles. It is important when performing this exercise not to swing the weight up as this takes work away from the bicep muscles. Instead keep your torso stable and contract the biceps for a full range of motion from extended, to fully flexed. This exercise can be performed with either a barbell or dumbbells.



Curl bar reverse curls

Are an excellent way to develop the forearm muscles, as well as the brachialis (which lies underneath to biceps). The use of a easy-grip curl bar takes strain off the wrists to allow for safe and comfortable performance of this exercise compared to using a straight bar.



Dumbbell side deltoid lateral raises

This exercise develops the lateral deltoid (side of the shoulder), which is important in creating the “V-taper” or “upside down triangle” appearance many associate with strength.



Dumbbell rear deltoid raises

Are key for developing the posterior deltoids (back of the shoulder). This exercise is important to prevent muscle imbalances as the front of the shoulder often receives more work than the rear due to chest exercises such as bench presses etc. To prevent developing rounded shoulders and impingement problems in future this exercise definitely deserves your attention and effort!



Dumbbell front raises

Develops the anterior deltoids (front shoulder). Do not swing the weights, instead control them and allow the target muscles to do the work.



Dumbbell chest flies

Are an isolation exercise for the pectoral (chest) muscles. They also involve the anterior deltoids (front shoulder) as well.

Correct performance of this exercise involves not over stretching the shoulders at the bottom range of the movement as this place them in a vulnerable position and takes emphasis off the chest muscles. Also a slight (but not excessive) bend should be kept in the elbows throughout the movement to prevent elbow

strain or injury. This angle should be constant throughout, do not cheat by bending your arms more than required to help get the weight up.



If you need any further workout ideas, please don't hesitate to contact our highly skilled sales team via 0800 222 190 and our staff will be more than happy to assist you.