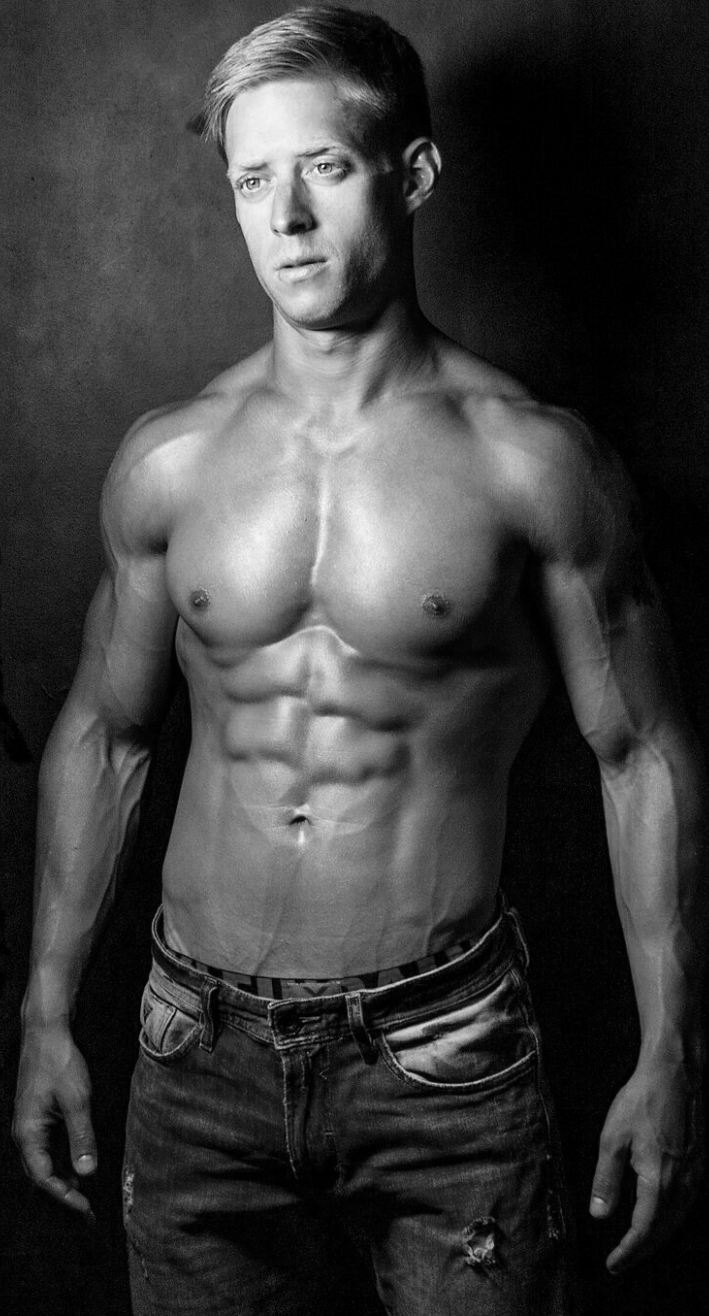


Minimalist Muscle

More Muscle In Less Time For Busy Guys

by Eric Bach



Module One: Minimalist Muscle Training

Minimalist Muscle Building

More Muscle in Less Time For Busy Guys

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Ask your physician for a complete physical examination, especially if you high cholesterol, high blood pressure, are overweight, or have diabetes.

Discuss all dietary changes with your physician or a registered dietician.

This exercise and nutrition program is not a substitute for treatment, meal plans, prescriptions or professional advice made by your physician, dietician or other health care professional.

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Don't lift heavy weights if you're alone, injured, fatigued, and inexperienced. Ask for instruction and a spotter for lifts to maximize safety. If you experience lightheadedness, dizziness, or shortness of breath while exercising, stop immediately and consult a physician.

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Introduction

Welcome! Thank you for joining the course.

You're about to get strong, muscular and athletic with a few short workouts a week.

You'll turn heads as you back up your powerful body with real world athleticism. Gaining 8 to 12 pounds of muscle in a few months is completely possible. More about that later.

But first up: what the Minimalist Course is. And what it isn't.

The course is not your run of the mill, body-part split popularized in bodybuilding. And it's not for competitive bodybuilders, competitive powerlifters, or high-end athletes.

There's a bad idea quite common in the fitness industry: you can have everything at once.

Six pack abs...

Dunk a basketball....

Squat 500 lbs....

Have 20 inch biceps.

What's not to like? Why not have it all right away? Because it's not quite that simple.

This course does include components of powerlifting, bodybuilding volume, and training like an athlete. But throughout you will be focused on one goal:

Sustainable lean muscle mass.

“If you chase two rabbits, you’ll catch none.”

- *Author unknown*

You’ll focus your training on your end goal (getting jacked and healthy), rather than a haphazard collection of exercises thrown together because they look cool on Instagram.

Your program will add muscle and give you the lean, athletic body you’re after. It’s a progressive program that will help you build strength and recover. You’ll come back to the gym energized. And then you’ll take your body and mind to the next level.

With that in mind, we’re carving a new path at Bach Performance and the Minimalist Muscle course.

Your workout routine will improve your life, not consume it. Ruthless execution of the basics is the key. You’ll focus on basic principles like progressive overload, specific muscle building strategies to build muscle on the most impactful parts of your body (hello chest, shoulders, and arms), and creating a sustainable plan. Your workout routine will improve your life, not consumes it.

We’ll build a your best body. Once that’s strong, muscular, and athletic.

How exactly does the program work so effectively?

By cutting through the bullshit and avoiding the noise.

There are so many training methods and ideas out there that most of us endlessly consume information. We read every article. Watch every YouTube video. Follow hundreds of fit-pros on social media, each with a different philosophy and agenda.

The end result is program hopping. You add trendy exercises into your routine until your program is unrecognizable and ineffective.

Then real life intervenes. Added work meetings come up. The kids get sick. Gaps slip into your training plan. Pretty soon, you're only doing the exercises you like. And guess what? Your body plateaus.

Newsflash: There is no perfect program. In fact, the best program is whichever program you'll do consistently over time. Minimalist Muscle Building is that program.

Why This Course?

Chances are, I'm a lot like you. Some dudes look at a barbell and gain lean muscle. Not me! I was one of those guys who trained daily, crushed tons of supplements and food and... not much changed!

I was the classic skinny dude with a metabolism rivaling a Hummingbird on meth. Hell, for years I fit my way into skinny jeans and a small t-shirts.

Wait, it gets worse. I had binders full of training articles. I blew money on every super-powered protein powder. And still, no results.

It wasn't until I stopped consuming so much information and focused on a few basic essentials that I finally got the muscular, lean, and athletic body and confidence I craved.

It's essential to stop comparing yourself to others. So stop critiquing your selfies. Start focusing on your goal and only your goal.

"It is quality rather than quantity that matters."

– Seneca

We'll keep workouts simple. You'll train three to four days per week.

You'll do less. But you'll do it better. You'll have better discipline, focus, and compliance than training five or six days per week.

Adopt a minimalist training perspective. You'll stay the simple course and reap big rewards.

How To Gain 10-15 Pounds of Muscle

Goal setting and narrowing your focus are the secrets.

.

Let's say 15 pounds of muscle is the goal. Step back to look at what behaviors will get you there. Remember: every race begins with one step.

It's time to set your Minimalist Muscle goals so we can track your goals, master your habits, and build a badass body.

Main Goal: I want to gain 15 pounds of muscle

Behavior 1: Lift weights 3x per week focusing on squats, deadlifts, bench presses, and chin-ups (Check off every day for two weeks.)

Behavior 2: Consume a post-workout shake of 30g protein and 60g carbs. (Check off every day for two weeks.)

Behavior 3: Get at least six hours of sleep per night. (Check off every day for two weeks.)

Get the point?

Focusing on one goal at a time yields real lasting changes to your mind, body, and life. No one wants to be the “ten year guy.” That’s someone who lives the same life as he did ten years ago. He has the same goals, but also the same body and same frustrations.

The solution?

Set practical goals.

Take action.

And change your life.

Principles of Minimalist Muscle Building

Gaining muscle isn't complicated. It requires focused and consistent execution of the basics over time.

There are better methods than crushing your body with crazy, long-duration workouts. Short, intense workouts yield much better results if you do them right.

1. Keep it Simple, Get Strong

Emphasizing advanced methods like drop sets, and the newest muscle-building method on the planet are pointless without a solid strength base. Even losing fat is tougher if you're not strong.

The problem is, you might not see strength as important for your goal. But the hard work that builds strength is exactly what you need to build a muscular, strong body.

It's time to stop majoring in the minutiae and start taking care of strength first. Then and only then can you specialize your training toward building muscle.

Building Muscle Depends on Building Strength

In newbies, training for strength gains leads to increased muscle because the body isn't used to the high stress environment. According to a study by Fry in 2004, maximum growth occurs with loads between 80-95% of your 1-rep max (1RM) when enough volume is present. This equates to sets of 2-8 reps, depending on the lifter.

This is why a base program like 5x5 works so well with beginners. The consistent overload with big lifts is plenty to make big gains outgrow those Baby Gap T-shirts.

2. Couple Strength with Volume to Build Muscle

So all you need to do is get strong, right? Unfortunately, getting stronger won't work forever if you want to build muscle. Once you build decent levels of strength, your body eventually tells you only lifting heavy will lead to problems. Your joints will ache. You'll feel fatigued. And you'll stop progressing. Once you leave the beginner stages, you'll need to change the way you train to continue to build muscle.

To get stronger and build size, your approach changes to making strength gains so you can recruit the most muscle fibers.

After all, you can't train a muscle that isn't firing. Then, drop the weight and train with more volume to create progressive overload and to build more muscle.

Once you build your strength base, improved motor unit recruitment and work capacity allow you to train muscle fibers and lift heavier weight for more reps. This drives muscle growth.

So you can't rely only on heavy lifting to maximize muscle gains. Instead, you need a mix of high training loads to build work capacity and improve muscle fiber recruitment while mixing in lighter loads to increase total workload.

Famous bodybuilder Ronnie Coleman said it best:

"Everyone wants to be a bodybuilder but nobody wants to lift heavy-ass weight."

You'll need to lift heavy ass weight, then dial back and increase volume so you grow.

3. Do Less, But Better

Most lifters fail because they focus on the number of reps or weight on the bar. Yes, these are important. But no personal record or lift is worth compromising form and rep quality.

Instead, focus purely on quality reps, get stronger, and getting more out of your training. It's stunning what happens when reps and weight take a backseat to quality of movement. Injuries fade, performance increases, and confidence skyrockets.

A common mistake is training as hard as possible, but without a rhyme or reason. Does this sound like you? (Even a little? C'mon...admit it. I won't tell anyone.)

Yes, overload is still important and necessary for gains. But it does more harm than good piling a ton of weight or conditioning on faulty technique. This sets your body up for injury, not gains in lean muscle.

Focus on how well you're executing the movement instead of on how much weight how "much". You'll be rewarded with better gains in less time and fewer injuries.

4. Basic Exercises Are Best

Your body moves as an integrated unit in sport and life. Your training should reflect real world movements. This means we'll focus on basic, free weight exercises and tools like barbells, dumbbells, kettlebells, and your own bodyweight.

Machines aren't always bad. But they lock the body into place during movement patterns, which removes real-world carry over and negates the role of stabilizing muscles. Although you use more resistance on machines, the arms and legs are writing checks the body can't cash.

Free weights and movement need your body to work together in a coordinated pattern to perform a task, just as in real life.

The basic movements are the squat, hinge, lunge, sprint, push, and pull. Most of your workouts are focused on these movements:

Squat: Front squat, goblet squat, zercher squat, back squat, pistol squat

Hinge: deadlift (all variations), good morning, kettlebell swings

Lunge: walking lunge, split squat, step back lunge, Bulgarian split squat

Sprint: Run fast on a hill, treadmill, and open surface. If you're an athlete add in change of direction work

Carry: Farmers walks, single arm farmers walk, overhead carry

Press: bench press, push-up, overhead press, jerk, one arm presses

Pull: pull-up, bent-over row, seated row, one arm row

Core: planks, side planks, pallof presses, fire hydrants, glute bridges

5. Train Major Muscles Frequently

Would you be stronger performing squats in 52 workouts per year or 104 workouts per year? Logic says to go with 104, but why?

Consistent exposure to stimuli is vital for learning new movement patterns. In other words, the more often you do something, the better you get.

Makes sense, right?

If you're struggling to put on muscle, you're probably not much stronger than you were when you first started lifting.

Even worse, your training sessions are long and inefficient with exercises that won't yield much benefit until you're substantially stronger. What most skinny guys need is a focus on greater training frequency of the big bang-for-your buck exercises, not fancy bodypart splits and crazy training methods.

It's not only my experience speaking, A 2010 study analyzed training frequency and the anabolic response. They found that repeated bouts of heavy resistance exercise and protein ingestion trigger an anabolic response and growth. In other words, training your major muscles with a higher frequency makes muscles grow faster.

With training frequency in mind, you'll make better progress with total body workouts. You'll stimulate muscles more often. As a result, you'll improve exercise technique, stimulate more muscle growth, and make gains faster.

6. Specialize in One Body Part Per Month

When I was a kid, my dad told me: *“You can do anything, but not everything.”*

Those words still apply today in the context of working out. You can make amazing progress in any one direction, but it requires dialing back in other areas.

Now, take a second and think back to when you first started lifting weights. Every week you were stronger. One month in, your arms were bigger and your clothes fit better. And you continued building muscle and getting stronger. Then, you hit the wall.

Once you leave the beginners stage of training it gets much harder to build muscle. Luckily, there is a way to supercharge growth in stubborn muscles like your chest and arms: specialization workouts.

Specialization Workouts

You want to look good and play well. But to cap off your physique you need to spend more time on your show muscles. I’m talkin’ your arms, shoulders, lats, and chest.

During your minimalist muscle workouts, we’ll put an emphasis during each phase of the course to bring out the most important muscles for a powerful, athletic body. During each specialization we’ll attack muscle groups three to four times each week. By using high volume, variety, and intensity-boosting methods, we’ll force your most stubborn muscles to grow.

But, we can online focus on one area at a time. In the meantime, we’ll keep you lifting heavy with major lifts to prevent decreases in strength or a loss in muscle size. Then, after each

specialization phase will decrease your volume, allowing your muscles to recover and continue growing, a process known as supercompensation. While this seems counterintuitive, keep in mind every workout breaks your body down.

And since your body only has a select reserve of recovery resources, you must dial back other areas of training to maximize muscle growth.

7. Progressive Overload Drives All

It's sad how many guys train for years, yet remain the same size year after year.

To make progress you must stress the system beyond your current abilities. Force your body to change, whether you're lifting more weight, lifting more weight in less time, or a higher total volume of lifting.

Give your body a reason to grow. Without more stress, your body will stay the same.

The principle is the same whether you're following the Minimalist Muscle course or another workout. Stress your body beyond its current capacity. You'll create stronger muscles, store more fuel, and grow. Progression guarantees progress.

8. Performance First

You want a bad-ass body capable of handling what life throws at you. That's where performance comes in. You must increase the capabilities of your muscles, joints, ligaments, and nervous system together.

At least once a week, you'll perform explosive movements like jumps, explosive push-ups, or throws into your workouts. These explosive movements increase the neuromuscular capabilities of your body. You'll be able to generate strength faster, recruit more muscle, and perform like a high-level athlete.

The Essentials for Hypertrophy

Want to look your best? Want to have round, full shoulders, a thick chest, and v-tapered torso? You need to incorporate classic muscle building principles into your training.

There are three mechanisms of hypertrophy, or muscle growth:

- Mechanical tension
- Metabolic stress
- Muscular damage

Together, training to stimulate these three factors primes your body to maximize muscle growth and help you look awesome naked.

Mechanical Tension

Mechanical tension comes from a base of strength. Classic bodybuilders like Arnold Schwarzenegger were incredibly strong, often competing in powerlifting, before entering the bodybuilding arena.

Mechanical tension comes from lifting heavy and performing exercises through a full range of motion. The time you spend under tension creates mechanical tension in the muscles. The more significant the tension or time, the greater the stress on your body.

This helps you build muscle. You activate muscle fibers, helping you get stronger and call even more muscle fibers to help you lift weights. In return, this creates a greater training response. You'll lift heavier weights for more volume. And all this promotes growth.

Your Takeaway:

Maximum muscle growth is only possible with a foundation of strength.

Metabolic Stress

You know the incredible swollen, pump that makes it impossible to get your shirt off after a ton of biceps curls?

The sleeve-splitting pump you're battling is metabolic stress. When you get a pump, your body builds up lactate, hydrogen ions, creatinine, and other metabolites, while preventing blood from escaping your muscles.

This metabolic stress in the muscle signals your muscles to grow.

Muscular Damage

Remember the first time you did a legs workout?

Now, do you remember the next 48 hours when you couldn't walk make your way up the stairs, let alone do more squats?

Soreness is indicative of muscle damage. Hard training can result in micro tears in your muscle fibers. Luckily, your misery isn't for naught. The damage to muscle tissue creates a temporary inflammatory response and releases the necessary signals for muscle growth.

But, there is a caveat:

Some soreness is okay and triggers the need for repair and thus, growth. But you shouldn't chase soreness. Too much soreness decreases your performance and limits your gains.

You will experience some soreness in the Minimalist Muscle building course. But there's a payoff. Through the use of different training tempos, unfamiliar exercises, and changing ranges of motion, you will force your body to grow.

Three Is Better Than One

The interplay between all three of these mechanisms is crucial to helping you build a strong, muscular body. No mechanism alone provides the necessary stimulus for growth. You'll train them all for maximal gains, bro.

Let's Grow

In the minimalist muscle course, we'll put it all together for you. We'll hammer multi-joint exercises, such as presses, rows, squats, and deadlifts to build pure strength and size.

This heavy lifting builds the size of your muscle fibers. You'll be creating that rock-solid, dense look to your body.

At the same time, you'll also sprinkle in isolation exercises to build stability and improve weak points. Using higher reps and volume, your muscles experience sarcoplasmic hypertrophy, increasing their storage of fluid and glycogen to have a round, full look.

Combined, the three mechanisms of hypertrophy will give you the perfect blend of real world strength, muscle, and athleticism.

Build Strength and Muscle Like A Pro

By now you're probably wondering: *how many sets and reps should I do?*

People always want a cut and dry answer to this question, but it's not that simple. There's no one "best" set/rep scheme, regardless of your goal.

You'll lift heavy with strength-building rep schemes. This creates the mechanical tension needed to build dense, long-term strength and muscle to your frame.

Heavy lifting is vital to recruiting more muscle fibers. As shown in 1965 by Harvard physiology professor Dr. Elwood Henneman, muscle contractions begin with small motor units and recruit larger motor neurons based on the size of the input needed to cause a movement.

In the context of lifting weights and making #gainz with the Minimalist Muscle course: When you lift a heavy bench press, your nervous system goes into overdrive, recruiting as many muscle fibers as possible. As a result, your nervous system becomes super-charged, recruiting more muscle fibers to execute the heavy bench press. And the more muscle fibers are active in a workout, the more effective all future exercises will be for building muscle.

Rep Schemes for Strength and Muscle

Pyramids

Pyramids are simple and extremely effective. We'll use multiple rep schemes for pyramids, but our first goal is strength. Using the 5/4/3/2/1 scheme, we'll attack moderate volume and lift heavy weights to build dense, real world muscle.

Strength Examples: 5/4/3/2/1

Let's say you're on the bench press and the starting weight is 155 lbs.

First, you'll do two warm-up sets with 135, then the following:

155 x 5, rest 2-3 minutes.

175 x 4, rest 2-3 minutes.

195 x 3, rest 2-3 minutes.

205 x 2, rest 2-3 minutes.

215 x 1

With this strength pyramid you gradually warm-up your muscles and central nervous system for non-stop strength gains.

Muscle Building Examples: 12,10,8,6

Because the reps are higher, you'll use lighter weights and incomplete rest to stimulate metabolic stress and muscular damage and thus, more growth.

Reverse Pyramids: 6,8,10,12

The reverse pyramid takes the typical pyramid and reverses it. Go figure, right?

Using a reverse pyramid (after a good warm-up) allows you to lift your heaviest weights first when you're fresh, decreasing weight as you add reps. Some people find this lets them lift more weight, but only if they're spending enough time warming up to the heavy first set.

We'll use a variety of pyramids in the Minimalist Muscle Course.

Wave Loading

Besides being one of the most enjoyable ways to train, wave loading helps you build incredible strength and muscle size. Wave loading involves ramping up weights while decreasing the number of reps in a set. This activates your central nervous system. You'll lift more weight while managing fatigue.

For a blend of size and strength, I prefer the 6/4/2 wave. This scheme uses more volume, so you hit your limit in three waves. With 6/4/2 waves, the first wave is conservative, the second wave would be close to the heaviest two-rep set you could do.

Squats: 6/4/2 waves. Squat Max: 275

Wave One: 185 x 6, Rest 60-90 seconds

205 x 4, Rest 60-90 seconds

225 x 2, Rest 2 minutes

Wave Two: 225 x 6, Rest 90 seconds

245 x 4,, Rest 90 seconds

265 x 2

With wave loading, your aim is to finish at a weight for two reps on your second set that is close to a max. You should never fail. But the last set should be difficult. This method allows you to accumulate volume, while ramping up your body to heavier weights.

Side note: The idea behind waves originates with Post-activation potentiation, the idea that a heavy lift “wakes up” your nervous system so you can produce more force and lift heavier notes. The problem is, when performed too heavy, these waves accumulate tons of fatigue. You would either need to rest 3-5 minutes between each set, or risk fatiguing your nervous system too much.

The solution?

Lift lighter weights and move faster on the first wave. This serves as an additional warm-up, accumulating volume for muscle growth, while limiting the fatigue before diving into your second, strength focused wave.

Drop Sets

Drop sets add in a sudden increase in reps and decrease in weight. After lifting heavy, your muscle fibers are firing on all cylinders. By adding a high volume set, you'll fatigue the maximum number of muscle fibers, get an insane pump, and stimulate incredible muscle growth. For example:

10/8/6/15-20

Perform the first three sets with with gradually heavier weights before finishing off with a high-rep pump set.. This approach attacks all the zones that have the greatest impact on building lean muscle.

Dumbbell Bench Press Example:

60 x 10

70 x 8

7 x 6

50 x 15-20 reps

Timed Sets

Instead of counting reps, set a timer and work against the clock. This might sound strange, but there's a powerful benefit. When you're fatigued, you'll need to maintain a focus on the quality of each rep rather than aiming to finish the set in a certain number of reps.

Even better, timed sets focus on two underrated factors for muscle growth: tension and metabolic stress. By keeping your muscles under constant tension and stress, you stimulate more muscle damage while building up by-products of muscle contractions (metabolic

stress). Focus on longer duration sets between 30-75 seconds to increase metabolic stress. This allows you to use less weight but keep better focus on each muscular contraction to build more lean muscle.

Try This: Stuck with only a dumbbell for squats? Hold a dumbbell in the goblet position and perform reps for four sets of 40 seconds, staying just shy of locking out at the top of the movement.

Due to the nature of this technique, don't worry too much about increasing the weight all the time. Only increase the weight when you're able to dominate that rest pause set with 15 reps on your activation set and mini sets of 5 reps.

Side note: If you can't tell time, divide the time by two and do that many reps. Example

30 seconds = 15 reps

45 seconds = 22 reps

60 seconds = 30 reps

Got it? Good, gangsta ;).

No Rep Scheme Is Perfect

There is no one-size fits all approach to building strength and size. But the foundation must be established. Build strength first. Then, as the workout continues increase the reps, adding in more stress and fatigue to force muscle growth.

Milk as much muscle out of the strength you already have. This strategic attack works extremely well for lifters who are already strong, but need more volume to build dense, full muscles.

Workout Splits

There's no "one size fits all" when it comes to workout splits. Your training depends on your goals, energy system requirements, schedule, and individual differences. That said, the Minimalist Muscle course has the busy lifter in mind

You'll focus on getting you the most bang for your buck in terms of pure strength and muscle. You won't waste time on inefficient exercises.

With efficiency in mind, two training splits are head and shoulders above the rest:

- Total body training splits
- Push/pull, lower body splits.

Total Body Training Splits

I'm a huge fan of total body training splits. They improve workout efficiency by minimizing the fluff to get you strong and muscular in a hurry. Even more, they'll help you hit major muscles and movements multiple times per week. When coupled with a variety of rep ranges, you'll maximize total body growth.

And most importantly, total body training works well in a time crunch. Even when your schedule gets insane and you miss a workout, you'll still getting well rounded workouts week in, week out.

You don't have all day, or time each day to hammer your palmaris longus and flexor carpi ulnaris because your uncle's bodybuilding magazine said so.

Instead, you need workouts that offer the best bang for your buck.

You need a workout with enough stress to build muscle and strength, but time-efficient enough to get on with your life. That's where total body training comes in.

Upper, Lower, Legs Split

For all the benefits of a total body training splits, you can't do them forever. Stronger lifters may struggle with recoverability from training legs three times per week. And a little variety keeps training fun.

In the Minimalist Muscle course we'll be alternating total body training plans with Push, Pull, and Lower body splits.

One day, I focus on **push exercises**, like the bench press and shoulder press and primary pushing muscles like your chest, triceps, and shoulders.

Pull days will emphasize movements like chin ups and rows, while smoking' your lats, rear delts, traps, and rhomboids.

Lower body days focus on squats, single leg exercises, hinge movements like deadlifts, and the muscles in your legs and abs.

Because each day has one focus, we'll be able to hit you with more volume in any given workout to promote muscle growth.

Training Tempo, Tension, and Muscle Growth

To maximize muscle growth, focus on maximizing tension in your muscles by lifting heavy weights. Increasing the total time under tension (volume.) Activating more muscle fibers and fatiguing them increases protein degradation in muscles and subsequent recovery for growth.

Except for timed sets, you'll be lifting explosively during the concentric (or up) phase. When squat, or pressing dumbbells away from your chest you'll be doing so with as much power as possible.

Slow down and control the eccentric (or down) phase of your lifts.

slowing your "down" phase increases tension in your muscles.

Bottom line: you'll be lifting "up" explosively, while taking 3-5 seconds on the way down for maximum muscle growth.

Throughout the Minimal Muscle Building course, you'll occasionally see tempo's written out as 4-0-1. The first number represents the negative, eccentric, or lowering phase of the lift. With 4-0-1 as your example, you would take four seconds to lower the weight.

The middle number is your transition, such as the bottom of your squat. Using 4-0-1, you see there is zero pause during the set.

The third and final number is your “up” or concentric phase. Since your number is one, you’ll lift the weight with as much power and speed as possible.

Now, you don’t need to be spot on with your tempo and count them out loud. I don’t want you to be that guy.

Instead, understand the principle behind a tempo: building muscle you’ll need a blend of explosive reps and slower eccentrics.

Doing so gives you the tension needed for growth, while providing the metabolic stress and muscle damage needed for muscle growth.

The Minimalist Muscle Course Overview

The Minimalist Muscle Course has four six-week phases. Now keep in mind, we’ll be strengthening and building your entire body during each of these phases.

The difference is that the specific targeted muscle groups and training splits will accelerate muscle growth in different parts of your body to create your jaw-dropping physique.

After each six-week phase concludes, we’ll move on to the next phase. Altogether, the Minimalist Muscle Course last six months, giving you the time to build 10-15 lbs of pure lean muscle. Even the most seasoned lifters will go from looking like they lift, to turning heads when walking down the street.

Each month focuses on a body-part specialization.

Phase One: Shoulders/Lats

Phase Two: Chest

Phase Three: Arms

Phase Four: Traps

Phase One: Shoulders and Lats

A set of thick, round shoulders and wide lats are essential to building a phenomenal, head turning physique.

That's why "shoulder's make the man" remains such a popular saying. In men, a good set of shoulders and lats amplifies the V-Taper and X-Power look. For women, a set of toned, wide shoulders make the waist appear smaller, enhancing feminine curves.

Well developed lats further boost the V-Taper and power look.

By making your shoulders appear wider and waist narrower, you'll look stronger and more muscular.

Plus: shoulders are the key to any masculine physique. Without well developed, thick shoulders nothing else will match up. Your shoulder has three heads: the anterior on the front, medial on the side, and posterior on the back. Shoulder presses and bench presses hammer the anterior head, so we'll focus on hitting high-volume training on the posterior

and medial heads.

To hit your lats, focus on horizontal pulls like dumbbell and cable rows to build thickness in your back. We'll also hit vertical pulls, helping to build the coveted "v-taper" to make your shoulders appear larger and waist smaller.

Both areas, when hammered with heavy weight, volume, and "surprise" finishers will transform your physique in mere weeks.

Phase Two: Chest

Most guys want a big chest that demonstrates their strength, power and dedication.

Focus on heavy pressing early in your workout to maximize muscle fiber recruitment. Then hit your chest with a variety of exercises and rep ranges to stimulate muscular damage and metabolic stress-giving. It adds up to a triple threat that results in a bigger chest.

Phase Three: Arms

Great arms, whether it's big biceps or defined triceps, aren't easy to come by. They're earned with hard work and worn like a badge of honor. No wonder people point at your arms when they ask if you work out!

Since you're focusing on building strength during the entire course, you'll already see excellent muscle growth in your arms.

During phase three we'll be hitting your triceps, biceps, and forearms with many different exercises and techniques for thorough muscle stimulation. Even better, we'll use a variety of rep ranges to blast every lasting muscle fiber into explosive growth. While it's possible to build a good set of arms by building muscle on your whole body, this specialization program is the icing on the cake.

Phase Four: Traps

No body part signifies hard work and dedication in the gym better than your traps. Sure, scrawny dudes walk around the gym with a puffed of chest or big arms, but big traps?

It's a rarity.

And by the time you've reached phase four, you're ready to cap off the true "power look" to your masculine physique.

We'll be hitting your traps three times per week, providing a yoke-building onslaught of exercises to build healthy shoulders and bigger, stronger, traps.

Warm-Up

I know, I know. Warm-ups are boring. Still, they're essential to making pain-free progress and optimizing your training.

If you have time to train, you have time to warm-up. Better to skip part of your workout AND warm-up rather than skip your warm-up. So let's look at some of the core benefits to WHY you need to warm-up:

Physiological Warm-Up

As you guessed it, one key goal of the warm-up is to raise your core temperature. In this case of your workouts, running "hotter" improves oxygen transfer, helping your body becoming more efficient, improve blood flow, and help your body expel metabolic by-products easier. All which equal out to fewer injuries, heavier weights, and more muscle.

Hormones

Well, well. With a proper warm-up your hormones are primed to release and reach home for maximum muscle growth. By this I mean the big guys like Growth Hormone, Testosterone, and IGF-1 are released to circulate around your body and connect with their receptors. These hormones all help you build strength and muscle, while cutting fat. During your warm-up, mentally imagine your big lifts and get amped up to make some huge gains.

Joint Health

Warming up is all about getting your body ready for your workout. That means getting your joints, tissues, and ligaments ready to go. You don't want to deal with an achy shoulder, sore back, or twinge knee...right?

The Minimalist Muscle warm-up will help you loosen and lubricate the joints so you feel and perform better.

Warm-Up Exercises

Perform the following exercises for one set, minimizing rest between exercises.

Quadruped Fire Hydrant x10 (5/side)

Bird-dog x10 (5/side)

Lateral Squat x10 (5/side)

Push-Up x10

Elbow Tap x10 (5/side)

Sub-scap push-up x10

Bodyweight Squat x10

Jumping Jack x50

Extra Warm-Up Before Your Main Lifts

After your general warm-up, you'll need a little more work with warm-up sets before hoisting big weights. This "greases the groove" and improves neuromuscular coordination and your technique on the main exercise.

There's a simple, basic progression you should follow. With an empty bar or light dumbbells, you'll perform a few lighter sets focused on warming up the muscles.

Warm Up Set One: 50% of the weight you'll lift for the first set x12 reps

Warm-Up Set Two: 75% of the weight you'll lift for the first set x6 reps

Example: Bench Press starting weight, 200 lbs x 10

Warm-Up One: 100 x 12

Warm-Up Two: 150 x 6

The Minimalist Muscle Course

Phase One: Push, Pull, Lower + Shoulders/lats Specialization

Workout Schedule Weeks 1-6

Monday: Day One

Tuesday: Conditioning

Wednesday: Day Two

Thursday: Off

Friday: Day Three

Saturday: (Optional) Day Four + Conditioning

Sunday: Off

Day One: Pull

1. Chest Supported Row 2x15, rest 30 seconds
2. Chin Up 5x6, rest 60-90 seconds
3. Three Point DB Row 4x8; 3-0-1 tempo, rest 45 seconds between arms and sets
- 4a. Neutral Grip Chest Supported Row with Pause 3x10; 3-2-1, tempo, rest 30 seconds
- 4b. Cable/Band Face Pull 3x10 3-0-1, tempo, Rest 30 seconds
- 5a. Lat Pull Down x8
- 5b. Dumbbell shoulder press x8
- 5c. Dumbbell lateral raise x8
- 5d. Dumbbell rear delt flye x8

Perform the set above as many times as possible in ten minutes.

Workout Notes

- (1) Start with a chest-supported row, going light to pump your back and serve as an additional warm-up.
- (2) The Chin-up is your pure strength exercise. Once able, add weight via a weight belt of a dumbbell held between your feet.

If you fail to get the reps, use a small band or weight assisted pull-up.

Tempo comes into play on the three-point row, chest supported row, and face pull. In all cases, “think” about squeezing the muscle during each rep and maximizing tension. Finish out with the quad-set killer. Keep rest minimal on the final four exercises, races the 10-minute timer.

Day Two: Lower

1a. Box Jump 2x5, rest 0

1b. Plank on elbows 2x45 seconds, rest 30 seconds

Move to hands if elbows are too easy.

2. Squat (any variation) Wave Loading 8-6-4; 8-6-4

Rest 60 seconds/between sets. 2-3 minutes after each wave.

3. Dumbbell or Barbell RDL: 4x8, rest 60-90

4a. Hanging Leg Raise 2x10, rest 45

4b. Goblet Split Squat 2x10, rest 45

5a. Single Arm Cable Pull-down x12; 3-1-1 tempo

5b. Dumbbell Y-Press x12; 3-1-1 tempo

Rather than pressing dumbbells directly overhead, press out and pause in the “y” position. Keep these light and squeeze each rep.

5c. Inverted Row x12; 3-1-1 tempo

Perform the set above as many times as possible, keeping rest minimal for eight minutes.

Workout Notes

1. The Box jump and plank on elbows will first fire up your CNS, helping you train more muscle fibers, while the plank will fire up your core, providing extra stability for your squats.

2. The Chin-up is your pure strength exercise. Once able, add weight via a weight belt of a dumbbell held between your feet.
3. Your money maker here is the squat—this lift alone is responsible for 80% of your lower body gains. Use a front squat, back squat, or back-squat and stick with the chosen variation for the entirety of the phase.
4. The tempo picks up with RDL's, providing a ton of muscle building tension to your glutes, low back, and hamstrings. Use wraps if needed for your grip.
5. Hanging leg raises and split squats will finish your legs and abs off, providing a little vanity while firing up stabilizers through your hip, knee, and ankle.
6. The single arm pull-down and “y” press provide the final “hit” of volume for the focus on your lats and shoulders.

Day Three: Push

- 1a. Clap Push up or Bench Plyo/Push-Up 2x5, rest 30 seconds
- 1b. ½ kneeling pallof press 2x8, rest 30 seconds
2. Barbell Bench Press Wave Loading 8-6-4; 8-6-4
Rest 60 seconds/between sets. 2-3 minutes after each wave.
3. Dumbbell Single Arm Overhead Press 3x8; 2-0-1 tempo, rest 60 seconds
4. Pull-up/Inverted Row 3x8, 2-0-1 tempo, rest 60 seconds
5. Dumbbell 45 degree Incline Press 3x10; 5-1-1 Tempo; rest 90 seconds
- 6a. Close Grip Cable Row x12
- 6b. Push-Up x12
- 6c. Dumbbell Lateral Raise w/pause; 2-2-2 tempo

Perform the set above as many times as possible, keeping rest minimal for eight minutes.

Workout Notes

- (1) The explosive push-up variation will fire up your CNS and improve muscle fiber recruitment.
- (2). Diving into the meat of the workout, you'll use the wave-loading focus, increasing the weight for each set of 8-6-4. After a longer rest, increase the weight again, working close to a 4-rep max on the second wave.
- (3). The dumbbell single-arm overhead press hits important core and stabilizer muscles neglected during bilateral pressing. Stay tall and brace your abs. Your obliques will be smokin' alongside your shoulders.
- (4) Pick either an inverted row or pull-up for the fourth exercise. I always strive for a pull:push ratio of at least 2:1 in workouts for shoulder health.
- (5) The high-dumbbell incline press will smoke the clavicular head of your chest, helping your pecs pop-out and fill out a t-shirt. The final finisher of rows, push-ups, and lateral raises is an eight-minute time challenge. Get after it!

Optional Fourth Day: Challenge Day

Push-Up, Pull-Up Countdown

- 1a. Push-up 10-9-8-7-6-5-4-3-2-1; rest 0
- 1b. Pull up 10-9-8-7-6-5-4-3-2-1; rest 0
- 2a. Dumbbell Biceps Curl 3x10; rest 60 seconds
- 2b. Dips or Triceps Pushdown 3x10; rest 60 seconds
- 2c. Dumbbell Farmers walk 3x40 steps; rest 60 seconds

Workout Note

Use the inverted row if you can't do the recommended Pull-ups. Perform a countdown; starting at 10 and working your way to one. Too easy? Start adding a rep each week.

Phase Two Workouts: Total Body + Chest Specialization

Schedule For Weeks Seven to Nine

Monday: Day One

Tuesday: Conditioning

Wednesday: Day Two

Thursday: Off

Friday: Day Three

Saturday: (Optional) Day Four + Conditioning

Sunday: Off

Day One: Moderate Load, Moderate Volume

1a. Dumbbell Low Incline Press (15 degrees) 4x8; tempo 3-0-1 rest 60 seconds

1b. Dumbbell Chest Supported Row 4x10; tempo 3-0-1 rest 60 seconds

2. Goblet Squat with/3 second Pause 3x8; tempo 3-3-1, rest 60 seconds

3a. Dips 3x10,8,6; 3-0-1 tempo; rest 60 seconds

3b. Ab Wheel Rollout 3x6-10; 3-0-1 tempo; rest 60 seconds

4a. Push-Up Iso-Pause 3x15 seconds x8 rest 0 seconds

Assume a push-up position, lowering yourself half way down. While holding position, imagine squeezing your hands together, firing your pecs, and holding position.

4b. Floor Flye/Power Fly 3x8 rest 0 seconds

Lying flat on the floor with dumbbells held above your chest, perform a flye until the dumbbells nearly touch the ground. Explosively bring them back together at the top. Repeat for reps.

4c. Feet Elevated Push-Up 3x8 rest 0 seconds

Elevate feet 12-16 inches.

4d. Push-Up 3x8 rest 60-90 seconds

Workouts Notes

(1) You're following a total body approach, allowing you to hit muscles with more frequency, but less volume in each workout. This workout is with moderate weight. You'll hit sets in the hypertrophy rep ranges with a moderate to high volume. You may need to drop your weight during the first week to adjust to the increased tempo and total body demands.

(2) Most of this workout is pretty cut and dried, but pay close attention to your finishing four exercises. The Push-up pause is an isometric contraction to help you maximize pec muscle recruitment.

(3) Then, you'll perform the power fly, a low-risk alternative to shoulder-crushing dumbbell flyes. You'll finish out with push-up variations, first elevating the feet and then the hands to get more volume while under fatigue. You should be failing (or damn near) on the push-ups at the end.

Day Two: Heavy Load, Moderate Volume

1a. Dumbbell Squat Jump 2x5; rest 30 seconds

1b. Clap Push-Up or Plyo Push up 2x5; rest 30-60 seconds

2. Squat (any variation) 2x5 warm-up; then 5-4-3-2-1 Rest 2-3 minutes between sets

3. Barbell Incline Bench Press 2x5 Warm Up; then 2-4-6-8; rest 2 minutes

The two sets of five should be moderate difficulty, preparing you for a heavy two rep set right off the bat. This ramps your nervous system, allowing you to recruit more muscle fibers during future sets.

4. Dumbbell Single Arm Row 6,6,8,10,12; rest 60 seconds

Decrease weight, increase reps as you proceed

Workout Notes

(1) Day two is your heavy, neurologically challenging day. Exercises that are heavier and/or more explosive are extremely demanding on your central nervous system. By combining them on our day, you'll hit it hard, but allow ample CNS recovery for you to build strength and size.

(2) First, focus on explosive squat jumps and push-ups. In both cases, pause between reps. Your goal here is power—not whipping through the exercises as fast as possible.

(3) For your squats, make sure you're warmed up. Each set of 5-4-3-2-1 should be a battle, but you must never fail. When in doubt, be conservative and play for next week.

(4) You should warm-up quickly for the bench press, but it's important to note you should be lifting near-maximal weight for your 2-rep set.(6) Decrease the weight 10-20 lbs on each set as fatigue accumulates.

(5) Finish off with rows, lifting heaviest during your first few sets. There is no "finisher" today due to the heavy weights you'll be pushing.

Day Three: Low Load, High Volume

- 1a. Stability Ball Leg Curl 3x12; 5-1-1 tempo, rest 30 seconds
- 1b. Stability Ball Knee Tuck 3x12; 5-1-1 tempo, rest 30 seconds
2. Dumbbell RDL 6x8; rest 45 seconds
3. Chin-Up or Inverted Row 6x8; rest 45 seconds
4. Dumbbell bench Press 4x10,8,6,20; rest 90 seconds

- 5a. Cable Chest Press 3x15
- 5b. Single Arm Cable Row 3x15
- 5c. Push-Up Hold x 60 seconds

Hold the top of a push-up position.

Perform the set three times, keeping rest minimal

Workout Notes

- (1) Since we hit heavy loading on day two, day three is lighter. The focus is on achieving a serious pump and maximizing metabolic stress and muscular damage.
- (2) The stability ball leg curl and knee tuck have slow tempos to scorch your hamstrings, glutes, and core.
- (3) The 6x8 rep scheme for chin-ups and RDL's is similar to the classic 6x6 and 8x8 schemes used by Vince Gironda. Keep the tempo fast, lifting the heaviest weights you can handle for eight reps despite short rest periods.
- (4) The 10,8,6,20 rep scheme on your bench press has you lifting heavy, then dropping the weight for a near failure set of 20 reps....yowza! A spotter is recommended.

(5) For the finisher, cable chest presses, cable rows, and the push-up hold will flood your chest and upper body with blood, leaving you with a serious pump before you head out. Perform three sets of the tri-set, keeping rest minimal between exercises and sets.

Day Four, Optional Challenge Day + Cardio

Push-Up, Stand-up, Squat Down

- 1a. Push-Up; 10-9-8-7-6-5-4-3-2-1; rest 0
- 1b. Band Pull-Apart (or row) 10-9-8-7-6-5-4-3-2-1; rest 0
- 1c. Bodyweight Squat 10-9-8-7-6-5-4-3-2-1; rest 0
2. 15 Minutes Free time, do whatever you'd like.
3. Incline Walk x30 minutes

Workout Note

The countdown sequence of push-ups, pull-aparts, and bodyweight squats should have you moving as fast as possible between exercises and sets. This is both a muscular and cardiovascular challenge fit for a king!. Continue with 15 minutes of free-time. Do whatever you'd like. Finish off with 30 minutes of walking on a moderate incline.

Phase Two: Weeks 10-12 Schedule

Monday: Day One

Tuesday: Conditioning

Wednesday: Day Two

Thursday: Off

Friday: Day Three

Saturday: (Optional) Day Four + Conditioning

Sunday: Off

Day One: Moderate Load, Low volume

1a. Dumbbell High Incline Press (60 degrees) 4x8; tempo 3-0-1 rest 60 seconds

1b. Dumbbell Pronated Grip Chest Supported Row 4x10; tempo 3-0-1 rest 60 seconds

Flare your elbows wide on each row, pausing at the top for a second.

2. Bulgarian Split Squat with/3 second Pause 3x8; tempo 3-3-1, rest 60 seconds

3a. Dumbbell Overhead Press 3x10, 8,6; 3-0-1 tempo; rest 60 seconds

3b. Ab Wheel Rollout 3x8-12; 3-0-1 tempo; rest 60 seconds

4a. Push-Up Iso-Pause 3x25 seconds x8 rest 0 seconds

Assume a push-up position, lowering yourself half way down. While holding position, imagine squeezing your hands together, firing your pecs, and holding position.

4b. Floor Fly/Power Fly 3x12 rest 0 seconds

Lying flat on the floor with dumbbells held above your chest, perform a fly until the dumbbells nearly touch the ground. Explosively bring them back together at the top.

Repeat for reps.

4c. Feet Elevated Push-Up 3x6-12 rest 0 seconds

Elevate feet 12-16 inches.

4d. Push-Up 3x-6-12; rest 0 seconds

4e. Hands Elevated Push-Up 3x12 rest 60-90 seconds

Workouts Notes

- (1) You're following a total body approach, allowing you to hit muscles with more frequency, but less volume in each workout. This workout is with moderate weight. You're hitting sets in the hypertrophy rep ranges with a moderate to high volume.
- (2) You may need to drop your weight during the first week to adjust to the increased tempo and total body demands.
- (3) You're making slight changes to many of your exercises. Examples include changing to a high incline press and adding more volume to supercharge muscle growth. You'll have armor-pleated pecs like Gerard Butler in 300 in no time!

Day One: High Load, Low volume

1a. Dumbbell Multi-Response Squat Jump 2x5; rest 30 seconds

Go from one jump into the next, no pause between reps

1b. Clap Push-Up or Plyo Push up 2x5; rest 30-60 seconds

2. Barbell Bench Press 2x5 Warm Up; then 5-4-3-2-1; rest 2 minutes

The two sets of five should be easy, just greasing the groove for a heavy-set of five reps.

3. Squat (any variation) 2x5 Warm Up; then 2-4-6-8; rest 2 minutes

The two sets of five should be moderate difficulty, preparing you for a heavy two-rep set right off the bat. This ramps your nervous system, allowing you to recruit more muscle fibers during future sets.

4. Barbell Bent Over Row 6,6,8,10,12; tempo 3-0-1, rest 60 seconds

Workout Notes

- (1) Day two is your heavy, neurologically challenging day. Exercises that are heavier and/or more explosive are extremely demanding on your Central Nervous System

(CNS.) By combining them on our day, you'll hit it hard, but allow ample CNS recovery. You'll build strength and size.

(2) In contrast to the previous weeks, your jumps are now multi-response. You'll go from one jump directly into the next. This is much more demanding and builds tons of explosive power.

(3) You're flipping both your bench press and squat around for a new strength and muscle-building stimulus. You'll find yourself pushing even heavier weight in the bench press to grow a bigger, stronger, and shirt-stretching chest.

Day Three: Low Load, High Volume

1a. Single Leg Hip Thrust 3 x 8; 3-1-1 tempo, rest 30 seconds

1b. Bulgarian Split Squat 3 x 12; 3-1-1 tempo, rest 30 seconds

****Keep this series light**

2. Trap Bar or Barbell Deadlift 6x6 rest 60-90 seconds

3. Wide Grip Pull-Up or Close Grip Row or Inverted Row 4x8; tempo 3-0-1 rest 60 seconds

4. Dumbbell Low Incline Bench Press (15 degrees) 4 x 10, 8,6,20; tempo 3-0-1 rest 60 seconds

Rest 90 seconds

5a. Cable Chest Press x 40 seconds (or 20 reps)

5b. Single Arm Cable Row x 20 reps

5c. Push-Up x 60 seconds

Perform as many pushups as possible in 60 seconds. If needed, hold the top of a push-up position and/or elevate the hands on a bench or step.

Workout Notes

(1) Since we hit heavy loading on Day Two, Day Three is lighter. It focuses on achieving a serious pump and maximizing metabolic stress and muscular damage.

(2) The single leg hip thrust and Bulgarian split squat will pre-fatigue your lower body, providing tons of skin-splitting tension to maximize growth on your deadlifts. Use a trap bar if available. But regular barbell deadlifts are fine. Push the weight with a 6x6 rep scheme.

(3) For the finisher, cable chest presses, cable rows, and the push-up hold will flood your chest and upper body with blood—leaving you with a serious pump before you head out. Perform three sets of the tri-set, keeping rest minimal between exercises and sets. Perform the set three times, keeping rest minimal between exercises, two minutes between sets.

Day Four, Optional Challenge Workout + Cardio

1a. Dumbbell Bench Press 4x20, 15,12,10; rest 0

1b. Dumbbell Row (or row) 4x20,15,12,10; rest 90

2a. Seated Dumbbell Curl 3x12; rest 45

2b. Seated Triceps Extension 3x12; rest 45

3. Incline Walk x30 minutes

15 Minutes Free time, do whatever you'd like.

Workout Note

Keep the weight light on all exercises. Your goal is to “feel” the muscles working, get a pump, and go home.

Month Three: Push, Pull, Lower + Arms Specialization***Workout Schedule: Weeks 13-18***

Monday: Day One

Tuesday: Conditioning

Wednesday: Day Two

Thursday: Off

Friday: Day Three

Saturday: (Optional) Day Four + Conditioning

Sunday: Off

Day One: Pull

1. Deadlift (any type); 2x5 warm-up; 4x4; rest two minutes
2. Close Grip Chin Up 4x6, 6,8,10; rest 90-120 seconds
3. Supinated Grip bent Over Row 3x8, rest 60-90 seconds
- 4a. Wide Grip Cable Row 3x12; 4-0-1 tempo, rest 30 seconds
- 4b. ½ kneeling palf Press 3x6/side; 4-0-1 tempo, rest 40 seconds
- 5a. Cross body Hammer Curl x12

5b. Triceps Rope Push-Down x12

5c. Triceps Overhead Split Extension x12

Repeat circuit for 8 minutes, performing as many rounds as possible.

Workout Notes

(1) Woot, woot! We're back to a push, pull, and lower workout routine. Day one has a push focus, and we're hitting heavy deadlifts first. Since most of your muscles are recruited during deadlifts, going heavy right away helps stimulate maximum muscle fiber recruitment.

(2) Close grip chin-ups are your moneymaker. This phase focuses on arm specialization, so the narrow grip will blast your biceps into oblivion.

(3) The supinated grip bent over row is an excellent biceps builder. Since you can go heavier with the supinated (palms up grip), you'll build head-to-toe strength and attack your biceps.

(4) To further fatigue your "pull" muscles, the wide grip bent over row combines both high-reps and a slow tempo, meaning these bad-boys will burn.

(5) Finishing off the workout is a tri-set of triceps pushdowns, curls, and overhead split) extensions. Push the weight for sets of 12, performing as many rounds as you can in eight minutes.

Day Two: Lower

1a. Box Jump 2x5 each; rest 30 seconds

1b. Elbow Tap 2x5 each; rest 30 seconds

2. Squat (any type) 4x5; rest 120 seconds
3. Dumbbell Reverse Lunge 2x8/each; rest 45 seconds
- 4a. Dumbbell Single Leg RDL 3x5/each; rest 0
- 4b. Single leg squat to bench 3x5/each; rest 30 seconds
- 4c. Single leg hip thrust 3x5/each; rest 30 seconds
- 5a. Barbell Biceps Curl 3x8; rest 45 seconds
- 5b. Dips 3x8; rest 45 seconds

Workout Notes

- (1) Box jumps will charge your CNS, while elbow taps will fire up your core to provide more strength and reduce the chance of injury.
- (2) 5x5 squats are a classic rep scheme—add weight to every set of five, aiming to beat your last set week after week.
- (3) Dumbbell reverse lunges are a knee-friendly lunge variation for two sets of eight per side.
- (4) Single leg RDL's, single leg squats, and single leg hip thrusts will challenge your strength and stability while short rest periods add tons of muscle-building stress to your muscles.
- (5) You'll lift a bit heavier than day one for your finisher. 3x8 curls and dips should be a challenge. Add weight each week. Remember, without progression there is no progress!

Day Three: Push

1. Barbell Close Grip Bench Press Wave Loading 6-4-2; 6-4-2

Rest 60 seconds/between sets. 2-3 minutes after each wave.

2. Dumbbell Seated Overhead Press 4x10, 8,6,20; 2-0-1 tempo, rest 60 seconds

3. Dumbbell 1-1-2 Bench Press 3x8, 2-0-1 tempos, rest 90 seconds

4a. Side-to-side inverted Row 3x5/side; rest 30 seconds

4b. Feet Elevated, Close Grip Push-Up x10; rest 30-60 seconds

5a. Incline Dumbbell (or EZ Bar) Curl 4x10,8,6,20; 3-0-1 tempo; rest 0 seconds

5b. EZ Bar Incline Skull Crushers 4 x 10,8,6,20; 3-0-1 tempo; rest 45 seconds

Workout Notes

(1) The barbell close grip bench press is the best exercise to build your triceps. Go right about shoulder width apart. There is no need to go ultra-close, as this is stressful to both the wrists and elbows. Use wave loading to push the weight, build strength, and activate the most muscle fibers before we bring on the volume.

(2) Speaking of volume, you'll see the 10-8-6-20 rep scheme throughout this workout. Increase the weight for 10-8-6, then decrease the weight immediately after "6" for a drop-set of 20. Grab your spotter here as this exercise will be to near failure.

(3) The dumbbell 1-1-2 bench press involves you starting with both dumbbells above your chest, like a typical dumbbell bench. From here, keep your right arm locked out, performing a single arm press with your left arm. Then, perform a single arm press with your right arm

while the left stays locked out. Finally, perform a regular dumbbell bench press with both arms, hence the name 1-1-2. Keep the weight light; this is a burner.

Day Four: Optional Bonus Day

The Rookie Complex: Pick a weight you can barbell curl for 6 reps. This is your weight for ALL exercises. Move fast between lifts, minimizing rest and pushing the tempo. Rest ONLY after all exercises have been complete.

Hang Clean 3x6

Deadlift 3x12

Military Press 3x12

Front Squat 3x12 Rest 60-90 sec.

Workout Note

Ahh, complexes. These bad boys involve many exercises performed in succession without rest. The only rest is after each set, when all exercises have been finished. Start with an unloaded 45-pound bar and progress slowly. Your technique should be the limiting factor. A progression of 5 pounds per week is plenty for most dudes. You'll feel your heart pounding right through your shirt.

Phase Four: Push, Pull, Lower + Traps Specialization

Workout Schedule weeks 19-24:

Monday: Day One

Tuesday: Conditioning

Wednesday: Day Two

Thursday: Off

Friday: Day Three

Saturday: (Optional) Day Four + Conditioning

Sunday: Off

Day One: Pull

1. Snatch Grip High-Pull 2x warm-up; 3x5; rest 90 seconds

2. Wide Grip Pull-Up; 4x5, rest 60-90 seconds

3a. Dumbbell Single Arm Row 3x6 (Heavy); rest 0

Easiest to do these together on an adjustable bench.

3b. Chest Supported Row with pause 3x12, 3-1-1 tempo; rest 45 seconds

Flare your elbows out and pause on each rep.

4a. Wide Grip Cable Row 3x10; rest 45 seconds

4b. Underhand, close grip cable row; 3x10; rest 45

5a. Dumbbell Farmers Walk x50 steps

5b. Dumbbell Reverse Flye x8

5c. Dumbbell lateral Raise x8

5d. Dumbbell Y-Press x8

Rather than pressing dumbbells overhead, press out and pause in the “y” position. Keep these light and squeeze each rep.

Perform set five above as many times as possible in eight minutes.

Workout Notes

(1). Phase four is focused on building up your shoulders and traps, leaving you with the ultimate male power look. By using the snatch grip deadlift and wide-grip pull-up, you'll 'll

focus on your upper back to maximize muscular development.

(2). Single arm dumbbell rows should be heavy. Push the weight to the heaviest set of six possible. Coupled with the row is the chest supported row, which will scorch your rhomboids and traps.

(3) Wide grip rows superset with underhand grip rows will challenge your lats, traps, rhomboids, and rear delts to the max. Start light and focus on the pump. With this routine, you'll notice extra growth of your biceps and forearms...not a bad secondary achievement, right?

(4). The finisher puts the target on your traps and shoulders. Again, stay light and perform the circuit listed as many times as possible in eight minutes to finish off your yoke.

Day Two: Lower

1. Squat 2x5 warm-up; 3x5; 1x20

Perform four sets of five reps, increasing the weight on each set. Then, after the last set drop the weight and immediately move to a drop set for 20 reps.

2. Snatch Grip RDL 3x8 reps, rest 60 seconds

3. Dumbbell Step Up 2x8/leg; rest 30 seconds

4a. Ab Wheel Rollout 3x6-10 rest 0

4b. Dumbbell High Pull 3x6; rest 0

4c. Dumbbell Overhead Press 3x6; rest 0

4d. Farmers Walk 3x80 steps; rest 2-3 minutes.

Workout Notes

(1) You'll kick this workout off with squats, work up to a heavy set of five, then finishing off your legs with a 20-rep drop set.

(2) Snatch grip RDL's will hit your hamstrings, glutes, and lower back while the wide grip hammers your rear delts, traps, and rhomboids. Straps are fine for snatch grip RDL's.

(3) Step ups will hammer home single leg stability, challenge your grip, and fill in the gaps left by most bilateral lifts. Two sets with short rest is plenty.

(4) Closin' out this ballgame we have a combination of ab wheel rollouts, dumbbell high-pulls, dumbbell overhead presses, and farmer's' walks. Do 3 sets of this quad set, moving quickly between exercises and resting briefly between sets.

Day Three: Push

1a. Clap Push up or Bench Plyo/Push-Up 2x5, rest 0 seconds

1b. Squat Jump 2x5, rest 30 seconds

1c. Single Arm Dumbbell Snatch 3x3; rest 60 seconds

2. Dumbbell Bench Press 4x6; rest 90 seconds

3. Seated Dumbbell Arnold Press 3x8; 4-1-1 tempo, rest 60 seconds

4. Dumbbell High Incline (60 degrees) Press 3x15; 2-0-1 tempo; rest 60 seconds

5a. Wide Grip Inverted Row x12

5b. Dead-stop Push-Up x12

5c. Dumbbell Lateral Raise w/pause x12; 2-2-2 tempo

5d. Dumbbell reverse fly x12

Perform set five as many times as possible in six minutes, keeping rest minimal

Workout Notes

(1) The first tri-set is all about bringing the power. Perform two sets of explosive push-ups and jump squats, but three of the single arm snatch.

(2) Perform all three tri-set exercises in succession for the first two sets. Then, rest 60 seconds and hit the final set of dumbbell single arm snatches. Reread that. We good? Good.

(3) On to more righteous gains. Push the weight on your dumbbell bench presses. You're we're stepping away from the barbell during the final phase, so push these sets of six to the max.

(4) The Arnold press is a classic builder, adding a slight twist to maximize shoulder development and cap off your physique.

(5) The dumbbell high-incline press blasts your shoulders and upper pecs.

(6) You'll finish out with a wicked quad-set of rows, push-ups, paused lateral raises, and reverse flyes. Stay light on the lateral raises and flyes. Your goal here is a wicked pump, not break records on isolation exercises. Push the tempo for six minutes and witness a glorious muscle-building pump.

Day Four: Optional

The Widow-Maker Complex: Pick a weight you can barbell curl for 6 reps. This is your weight for ALL exercises. Move fast between lifts, minimizing rest and pushing the tempo.

Hang Clean 2x6

Overhead Press 2x10

Back Squat 2x10

Reverse Lunge 2x10

Front Squat 2x10

Bent-Over Row 2x10

Romanian Deadlift 2x10

Front Squat Lunge 2x10

Biceps Curl 2x10

Front Squat Calf Raise 2x10; rest 90 seconds

Workout Notes

(1) Ahh, complexes. These bad-boys involve a number of exercises performed in succession without rest. The only rest is after each set, when all exercises have been finished.

(2) Start with an unloaded 45-pound bar and progress slowly. Your technique should be the limiting factor. A progression of five pounds per week is plenty for most people. You'll feel your heart pounding right through your shirt.

But What About Cardio?

If your goal is to gain muscle, your focus shouldn't be on cardio. Too much cardio will negate your gains in the gym and hinder recovery. That said, you don't want to get soft and pudgy like the Michelin man.

So here's an additional recommendation: perform two days of cardio each week to minimize fat gain. There are many options.

Option One: Low intensity cardio only, such as incline walking for 20-30 minutes, ideally on Saturday by itself or AFTER the optional fourth workout.

Option Two: High intensity methods like sprints, complexes, or sled work 10-15 minutes a day. Don't make it complicated. Get your regular warm-up in, push your heart rate to the max, and have a little fun. The only caveat here is to avoid sprinting the day before heavy lower body lifting.

Beyond these ideas, I don't care what you do for cardio. Just do it twice per week.

How To Add Weight to the Bar

As discussed earlier, strength drives muscle building in the gym. You want to get stronger from workout to workout to make progress.

Remember: without progression there is no progress.

There are many ways to increase the amount of weight you're lifting. Much of this depends on your comfort level. Think of a 1-10 scale. If ten was failure and 5 was easy, workout with an intensity around eight. This way, you're pushing hard and straining within 1-2 reps of failure, but never failing.

Is training to failure bad?

On one hand, failure helps you find your limits and pushes you mentally. But too many guys focus on hitting failure all the time. As a result, they spin their wheels, never getting bigger or stronger. As a basic rule of thumb, you want to avoid failure, especially on our big, heavy strength lifts in the beginning of workouts.

Constantly testing strength doesn't build strength; it depletes it.

Failure sets done at the wrong time, with too heavy of weights, or too often, failure will fry your nervous system. You'll be left weaker, smaller, and more prone to injury. So keep away from failure on your big lifts like bench presses and squats. On the flip side, hitting failure on low-risk exercises like biceps curls or triceps extensions is extremely powerful for muscle growth.

Keep away from failure on the heavy stuff, but feel free to push yourself to the max on finishers and isolation exercises.

Feeling the Weight

Depending on how heavy the bar felt, start by adding anywhere from 2.5lbs to 10lbs to each side. Do another set of 5 reps at this weight. Too easy or capable of at least two more reps? Increase the weight.

(Note: With dumbbells, increase the weight of the dumbbell and go up by 5 pound increments.)

If you were able to complete those reps both without losing form or speed, add weight. Base the amount of new weight off how it felt. If the last set felt light, add 10's, if it felt heavy, add 2.5's or 5's.

Continue to add weight until lifting speed slows down and you're working at an "8" intensity. *Next week, start heavier after looking at your training notes.*

Ramp Loading

Ramp loading, or ascending loading is the process of increasing the weight with each set. When you see straight-rep sets in your workouts, this is the best way to build strength and muscle.

Do This: Dumbbell Incline Bench Press 4x8: 40x8, 45x8, 50x8, 55x8

Not This: Dumbbell Incline Bench Press 4x8: 50x8, 50x8, 50x8, 50x8

By starting lighter and ramping sets, you'll manage fatigue and wake up your CNS, helping you build strength a little faster without fatiguing your body. Plus, you'll be able to "speed up" your sets and rest during the first one or two sets of the exercise. That's a huge bonus when you're short on time or a busy gym.

Minimalist Muscle Strength Goals

The Minimalist Muscle course isn't only about looking great. We want a real, show and go body. Again, progression is the key. If you're getting stronger, you're doing 90% of the work you need to build muscle.

With that said, there are strength standards you'll be shooting for. Should you hit them, you know you're a high-performance beast.

If you're struggling with one lift like your pull-ups, but you crush the bench press you're privy to powerful information on where you need to improve: your pull-ups.

Your body is only as strong as it's weakest link. If you can find and improve the weak link, you're set up for explosive gains from head to toe.

But absolute, or total strength isn't the only way we measure strength. Relative strength, or how strong you are for your size is important as well.

Absolute vs Relative Strength

Relative strength is the amount of strength relative to body size. All else being equal, smaller individuals have higher relative strength. Think of your middle-school fitness tests when the 90-pound wrestlers would destroy the pull-up test while big kids struggled. This reflects your ability to control or move your body through space, as in most sports.

Absolute strength refers to the maximum amount of force exerted regardless of muscle or body size. Greater amounts of absolute strength favor those with higher body weight and, in general, larger individuals. Throwing it back again to your middle-school days, faster-maturing kids with greater absolute strength absolutely destroyed their counterparts in tackling or blocking drills in a football game.

Relative Strength and Absolute Strength

Subject Body Weight: 185 lbs

Deadlift Max: 405 lbs

Relative Strength: 2.2 x Bodyweight

Subject B Body Weight: 205 lbs

Deadlift Max: 405 pounds

Relative Strength: 1.97x bodyweight

Notice that while the larger lifter has the same absolute strength as the lighter lifter, his relative strength is less than the lighter lifter. Developing greater absolute strength builds greater relative strength, or makes you stronger for your size.

This helps you improve every area of the gym: muscular endurance, activating more muscle fibers, and improves speed and power.

With heavy lifting, you develop greater absolute strength by improving technique on big lifts, improving neuromuscular function, and increasing lean muscle. When body weight is kept the same, an improvement in absolute strength improves relative strength. You improve your ability to generate force on exercises like jumps, bodyweight exercises, and moving your body through space.

In the Minimalist Muscle course, you'll be improving both absolute strength (the amount of weight you can lift) and relative strength (how strong you are for your size.) **The end result is a chiseled, athletic, body as powerful as it is visually appealing.**

What to do after finishing the course?

Once you complete the Minimalist Muscle Program you have some options.

First, if you have a weak point you'd like to continue working on, re-do that specialization phase.

Second, you can change goals. For most guys, hitting a strength and power workout, like my [Power Primer 2.0](#) cements their muscle building goals and takes their athletic performance to the next level. This sets them up for another muscle building phase or primes the body for rapid fat loss and shred mode.

Well, this is it. I've given you the tools to become self-sufficient and maximize your training no matter how busy your schedule.

Remember, training is about creating a response, forcing your body to change, and getting out of the gym. After reviewing the materials, the answer should be loud and clear: It's better to do less in the gym, but do it better.

That's the whole idea of the Minimalist Muscle Course.

: Use these the tools to get in the gym, improve your body, and get on with your life. Over the course, you'll find yourself adding lean muscle, strength, and most importantly - the knowledge that you're making excellent progress.

Final Tips

Do the program as written.

See it through.

Consistency is the most important factor in building a muscular, athletic body.

My parting words are those of my former football coach:

Pride, Passion, and Perseverance.

He preached these qualities over and over again. I used to think he was full of it. But in hindsight, I realize he was right. These three terms are vital to your success in training and in the real world.

Pride means you'll put yourself out there and take a risk, regardless of what anyone else thinks.

Passion means you'll be relentless. You'll put in the time even when nobody's watching.

Perseverance means you'll overcome the struggles, stay consistent, and keep grinding.

You need to drop preconceived notions and excuses.

And you need to do the work.

You'll get a little better every day.

And you'll be unstoppable.

So say goodbye to information overload, yo-yo diets, and program hopping once and for all.

"Simplicity is the key to brilliance."

-Bruce Lee

To building a body that improves, rather than consumes your life,

Eric

Resources:

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