



FORGED MIND & BODY

THE FORGED MUSCLE BUILDING BLUEPRINT

The Complete System for Building Muscle, Getting Stronger,
and Training With Purpose

SECTION 1 | FOUNDATIONS OF MUSCLE GROWTH

HYPERTROPHY • PROGRESSIVE OVERLOAD • RECOVERY • PURPOSE

Consistency beats perfection. Train with purpose. Recover to grow.

YOUR 40-PAGE SYSTEM

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Use this blueprint in order the first time. Return to the programs, trackers, and checklists whenever you begin a new training phase.

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Learn the principle. Apply the action step. Track the result. Adjust only after you have enough consistent data.

THE ADAPTATION CYCLE

How Muscle Growth Happens

Muscle growth is an adaptation. Resistance training challenges muscle fibers. During recovery, your body uses amino acids and energy to repair and remodel the trained tissue. Over time, repeated productive training can increase the size of those fibers.

1 TRAIN

Create a clear stimulus

2 RECOVER

Repair and rebuild

3 ADAPT

Return more capable

4 REPEAT

Progress over time

WHAT ACTUALLY CHANGES?

THE SIMPLE VERSION

- The trained muscle experiences high mechanical tension when it produces force through a challenging range of motion.
- Muscle protein synthesis rises after training. Growth requires the repeated balance of building to exceed breakdown over time.
- The body adapts specifically to the work you perform. Better technique and higher force production can increase strength before visible size changes appear.

RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

The 2026 ACSM position stand found that resistance training reliably increases muscle size. Higher weekly volume generally supports more hypertrophy, but consistency remains the first priority.

COACHING TIP

Do not chase soreness. Chase repeatable performance: quality reps, a stable technique, enough weekly work, and recovery that lets you train productively again.

WHAT DRIVES THE PROCESS

Hypertrophy Explained

Hypertrophy means an increase in muscle size. Training does not need to destroy the muscle to make it grow. The most useful target is repeated, high-quality tension with enough effort and volume to create adaptation.

MECHANICAL TENSION

The primary training signal. It rises when muscle fibers produce high force, especially during challenging repetitions performed with control and a useful range of motion.

METABOLIC STRESS

The burn and pump can accompany productive training, particularly with moderate-to-high reps. They may contribute, but they are not proof that a set will build muscle.

MUSCLE DAMAGE

Some disruption can occur after unfamiliar or demanding training. Excessive damage is not the goal and can reduce performance in later sessions.

MYTH VS. FACT

MYTH: You must be painfully sore to grow. FACT: Soreness mainly reflects novelty and muscle sensitivity. Productive overload can occur with little soreness, while extreme soreness can interfere with training quality.

THE PRACTICAL HIERARCHY

- 1. Consistent resistance training** Show up and train the major muscle groups regularly.
- 2. Progressive challenge** Add productive work as your body adapts.
- 3. Adequate recovery and nutrition** Supply the time and resources needed to rebuild.
- 4. Patient repetition** Judge the system across weeks and months, not one workout.

THE ENGINE OF LONG-TERM GROWTH

Progressive Overload

Progressive overload means gradually increasing the training demand as you become more capable. It is not limited to adding weight every workout. The best form of overload is the smallest change that keeps progress moving without sacrificing technique.

SIX WAYS TO PROGRESS

LOAD

Use slightly more resistance.

REPS

Perform more reps with the same load.

SETS

Add a hard set when recovery supports it.

RANGE

Use a deeper, controlled range of motion.

CONTROL

Improve stability, tempo, and target-muscle execution.

DENSITY

Do the same quality work in slightly less time when appropriate.

EXAMPLE: DOUBLE PROGRESSION

WEEK	LOAD	SETS x REPS	DECISION
1	50 lb	3 x 8	Keep the same load
2	50 lb	3 x 10	Keep the same load
3	50 lb	3 x 12	Top of range reached
4	55 lb	3 x 8	New cycle begins

COMMON MISTAKE

Adding load before earning it. If range of motion shortens, control disappears, or the target muscle stops doing the work, the number increased but the training stimulus may not have improved.

YOUR PROGRAMMING CONTROL PANEL

The Variables That Shape Results

Training variables work together. Changing one affects the others. Use these levers to create enough stimulus while keeping fatigue recoverable.

VOLUME

The number of challenging sets performed. A practical starting point is roughly 8-12 hard sets per muscle each week, then adjust by progress and recovery.

INTENSITY / LOAD

Hypertrophy can occur across a broad loading range when sets are sufficiently challenging. Moderate loads are often the most practical and time-efficient.

FREQUENCY

How often a muscle is trained. Training major muscle groups at least twice weekly is a useful default and helps distribute weekly volume.

REST PERIODS

Rest long enough to repeat high-quality work. Often 2-3 minutes for demanding compound lifts and 1-2 minutes for isolation work.

RANGE OF MOTION

Use the greatest pain-free range you can control. Do not force positions that create joint pain or loss of stability.

TEMPO

Control the lowering phase and lift with intent. Extremely slow reps are optional, not required, and may reduce the load you can use.

QUICK WIN

Keep your exercise list stable for four to eight weeks. Stable movements make performance easier to track and let you improve skill instead of constantly relearning the workout.

EFFORT, RIR, AND TECHNICAL FAILURE

Train Hard - With Purpose

A set must be challenging enough to recruit and fatigue the target muscle, but every set does not need to reach absolute failure. Reps in reserve (RIR) estimates how many clean repetitions you could still complete.

EFFORT GUIDE

RIR	WHAT IT FEELS LIKE	BEST USE
4+	Comfortable; many clean reps remain	Warm-ups, technique, recovery work
3	Challenging but clearly controlled	Early work sets, beginners
2	Hard; two good reps likely remain	Most hypertrophy work
1	Very hard; one clean rep remains	Later sets, experienced lifters
0	No additional clean rep possible	Selective use on safer exercises

RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

Evidence generally shows similar hypertrophy when sets stop close to failure compared with momentary failure, provided effort and volume are sufficient. Failure adds fatigue and is a tool, not a requirement.

COACHING TIP

Most work sets should finish around 1-3 RIR. Beginners may progress farther from failure while learning technique. Use 0 RIR selectively on stable isolation movements.

STOP THE SET WHEN...

- Your range of motion shortens substantially.
- You must change body position to complete the rep.
- The target muscle loses tension or a joint becomes painful.
- Rep speed slows and another clean repetition is unlikely.

THE STIMULUS-RECOVERY BALANCE

Recovery Is Part of Training

Training starts the adaptation. Recovery allows it to happen. More work is useful only while you can recover, perform, and progress. The goal is not to avoid fatigue; it is to manage fatigue so it does not bury the signal you are trying to create.

SLEEP

Aim for a consistent sleep opportunity. Most adults function best near 7-9 hours, though individual needs vary.

NUTRITION

Eat enough total energy and protein. Carbohydrates support demanding training and glycogen restoration.

TIME

Allow a trained muscle time to recover before another demanding session. Soreness alone is not a perfect readiness test.

STRESS

Work, family, and emotional stress count. Adjust training when total life stress is unusually high.

RECOVERY TRAFFIC LIGHT

	GREEN	Performance stable or improving; normal motivation; manageable soreness.	Continue the plan.
	YELLOW	Two poor sessions; unusual soreness; sleep or motivation trending down.	Hold load or reduce a set.
	RED	Persistent pain; several declining sessions; illness or severe fatigue.	Recover, modify, or seek qualified care.

COMMON MISTAKE

Treating rest as weakness. If fatigue prevents quality training, additional work is no longer discipline - it is poor load management.

MEASURE WHAT MATTERS

Expectations and Progress Tracking

Muscle gain is slow enough that day-to-day judgment is unreliable. Track several signals and look for trends across four or more weeks. Strength can improve before visible muscle growth because skill and coordination improve quickly.

THE FIVE-SIGNAL SCORECARD

TRAINING PERFORMANCE	Loads, reps, sets, RIR, and technique
BODY WEIGHT	3-7 morning weigh-ins; use the weekly average
MEASUREMENTS	Chest, arm, thigh, waist; same conditions monthly
PROGRESS PHOTOS	Front, side, back; same light, pose, and distance
RECOVERY	Sleep, soreness, stress, motivation, and joint comfort

SET REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

Beginners may see faster changes than trained lifters. Genetics, age, sex, training history, nutrition, sleep, and consistency all affect the rate. Avoid guarantees based on dramatic social-media transformations.

MYTH VS. FACT

MYTH: If scale weight did not rise this week, no muscle was built.
FACT: Water, glycogen, digestion, and measurement error can hide small tissue changes. Use multi-week trends.

FOUR-WEEK REVIEW

- Are key exercises gaining reps or load at a similar RIR?
- Is body weight moving in the direction your nutrition plan intends?
- Are measurements or photos changing without an excessive waist increase?
- Can you recover and repeat high-quality sessions?

TURN KNOWLEDGE INTO EXECUTION

Foundation Action Plan

SECTION STANDARD

You do not need a perfect program. You need a sound plan performed consistently, tracked honestly, and adjusted patiently.

YOUR BASELINE CHECKLIST

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Record current body weight and weekly average. | ☐ Take front, side, and back progress photos. |
| ☐ Measure waist, chest, upper arm, and thigh. | ☐ Choose a realistic weekly training schedule. |
| ☐ Select stable exercises you can perform pain-free. | ☐ Start a workout log with load, reps, sets, and RIR. |
| ☐ Set a consistent sleep and recovery routine. | ☐ Commit to four weeks before judging the system. |

WEEKLY CHALLENGE: BUILD YOUR TRAINING BASELINE

- Complete every scheduled session - no bonus workouts required.
- Use 2-3 RIR for most working sets and record the estimate.
- Repeat the same exercise technique and range of motion each session.
- Write one next-session target before leaving the gym.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Which habit is most likely to limit my muscle-building progress?
- What is the smallest change I can repeat every week?
- How will I respond when motivation is low but the plan is still appropriate?

KEY TAKEAWAY

Muscle is forged through a repeated cycle: train with sufficient effort, recover, adapt, track, and progress. Consistency turns the cycle into results.

EVIDENCE BASE: ACSM (2026) Resistance Training Position Stand; Schoenfeld et al. hypertrophy research; Forged reference library: ISSA CPT, Strength & Conditioning, Bodybuilding, and Exercise Therapy texts.

NEXT: SECTION 2 - NUTRITION FOR GROWTH



FORGED MIND & BODY

NUTRITION FOR GROWTH

Eat to perform. Recover to grow.

SECTION 2 | PAGES 11-20

CALORIES • PROTEIN • CARBOHYDRATES • MEAL TIMING • SUPPLEMENTS

Nutrition supports the work. It does not replace the work.

ENERGY BALANCE

Calories and the Growth Equation

Building muscle requires training, protein, recovery, and enough available energy. A calorie surplus can make growth easier, but the exact surplus needed is unknown and differs by person. Start conservatively, then adjust from real data.

START WITH THREE STEPS

ESTIMATE MAINTENANCE

1

Use 14-16 calories per pound of body weight as a rough starting range, or track intake and weight for two weeks.

ADD A SMALL SURPLUS

2

Begin near 5-10% above maintenance, often about 150-300 calories per day. Larger bodies or very active athletes may need more.

WATCH THE TREND

3

Use weekly average weight, waist, performance, hunger, and recovery. Adjust by 100-200 calories only when the trend is clear.

RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

Research confirms that prolonged energy deficits can limit lean-mass gains. However, the optimal surplus is not established. More calories do not guarantee more muscle.

COMMON MISTAKE

Treating a calorie calculator as a diagnosis. Every estimate is only a starting point. Your two-to-four-week trend is the real answer.

QUICK WIN

Track normal intake and morning body weight for 7-14 days before adding calories. This produces a better starting estimate than guessing from one day.

GAIN WITH CONTROL

The Lean-Bulk Strategy

A lean bulk is a controlled gaining phase designed to support training and muscle growth while limiting unnecessary fat gain. It is not permission to eat everything in sight.

RECOMMENDED RATE OF GAIN

A PRACTICAL STARTING TARGET

0.25% to 0.5% of body weight per week

Advanced lifters and people who gain fat easily may choose the slower end. Newer or underweight lifters may tolerate the faster end.

DECISION RULES

TREND OVER 2-3 WEEKS	ACTION
Weight flat; performance/recovery not improving	Add 100-200 calories daily
Weight rising within target; waist controlled	Keep calories the same
Weight rising too fast; waist climbing quickly	Reduce 100-200 calories daily
One unusual weigh-in	Do nothing; collect more data

MYTH VS. FACT

MYTH: A bigger surplus builds muscle faster. FACT: Muscle growth has a limited rate. A large surplus often increases fat gain more than lean gain.

WHAT TO TRACK WEEKLY

- Average morning body weight, not one isolated weigh-in.
- Waist measurement under the same conditions.
- Performance on key lifts at a similar RIR.
- Appetite, digestion, sleep, and training recovery.

COACH AVERY'S STANDARD

Earn the calorie increase through consistent training. If the program is random, more food simply supports random results.

DAILY TARGETS AND FOOD QUALITY

Protein: The Building Material

Protein supplies the amino acids used to repair and build tissue. Total daily intake matters most. Distribution across the day is a useful secondary strategy.

FORGED DAILY PROTEIN RANGE

1.6-2.2 g/kg | 0.7-1.0 g/lb per day

PROTEIN DISTRIBUTION

Body Weight	Daily Range	Per Meal x 4
150 lb / 68 kg	110-150 g	27-38 g
180 lb / 82 kg	130-180 g	33-45 g
200 lb / 91 kg	145-200 g	36-50 g
230 lb / 104 kg	165-230 g	41-58 g

RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

ISSN guidance supports about 1.4-2.0 g/kg for active adults. Around 1.6 g/kg captures most muscle-gain benefit for many people; higher practical targets provide flexibility.

COACHING TIP

Build each main meal around 25-50 grams of high-quality protein. Larger athletes, older adults, and plant-based eaters may benefit from the higher end.

HIGH-PROTEIN FOODS

LEAN MEAT & FISH

Chicken, turkey, lean beef, tuna, salmon, shrimp

DAIRY & EGGS

Greek yogurt, cottage cheese, milk, eggs, egg whites

PLANT OPTIONS

Tofu, tempeh, edamame, lentils, beans, seitan

CONVENIENCE

Whey, casein, soy protein, ready-to-drink shakes

TRAIN HARDER. RECOVER BETTER.

Carbohydrates: Fuel Performance

Carbohydrates replenish muscle glycogen and support high-quality resistance training. They are not magically anabolic, but they help you perform the work that drives adaptation.

BUILD YOUR CARBOHYDRATE TARGET

PRACTICAL STARTING RANGE

2-5 g/kg per day

Use the lower end for lighter training or lower calorie needs and the higher end for high-volume training, sport, or large energy demands.

PLACE CARBS WHERE THEY WORK

1-3 HOURS BEFORE

Rice, oats, potatoes, cereal, bread, fruit. Pair with protein; keep fat and fiber comfortable for digestion.

0-3 HOURS AFTER

A normal mixed meal with protein and carbohydrates supports recovery. There is no need to race for a shake.

REST OF THE DAY

Distribute according to preference, appetite, calorie target, and training schedule.

MYTH VS. FACT

MYTH: Carbohydrates automatically cause fat gain. FACT: Long-term energy surplus drives fat gain. Carbohydrates can support training within an appropriate calorie target.

QUICK WIN

Add one cupped-hand serving of carbohydrate to the meal before training. Track energy, pump, and performance for two weeks.

SMART SOURCES

Rice • potatoes • oats • whole-grain bread • pasta • beans • fruit • cereal • tortillas • quinoa

THE SUPPORT SYSTEM

Fats, Hydration, and Micronutrients

Muscle-building nutrition is more than calories and protein. Dietary fat supports health and hormone production. Water and micronutrients support performance, recovery, and normal physiology.

HEALTHY FATS

Start near 20-35% of total calories. Prioritize olive oil, avocado, nuts, seeds, eggs, and fatty fish. Do not drive fat extremely low.

HYDRATION

Use pale-yellow urine and stable body weight as practical checks. Add fluid around training and replace more during heat or heavy sweating.

FRUITS & VEGETABLES

Aim for several servings daily and vary colors. These foods supply fiber, vitamins, minerals, and compounds that support health.

FIBER & DIGESTION

A common target is about 14 g per 1,000 calories. Increase gradually and adjust around training if high fiber causes discomfort.

SIMPLE HYDRATION PLAN

WHEN	ACTION
Morning	Drink 12-20 oz and assess thirst
Before training	Arrive hydrated; drink to comfort
During training	Sip regularly; more in heat or long sessions
After training	Replace losses; include sodium with meals

COMMON MISTAKE

Adding supplements before fixing food variety, hydration, and digestion. The foundation should make you feel and perform better, not merely produce impressive macro totals.

THE FLEXIBLE PERFORMANCE PLATE

Meal Timing and Building Your Plate

Meal timing matters less than total daily calories and protein, but a smart schedule can improve training energy, appetite, and recovery. Most lifters do well with three to five protein feedings across the day.

FORGED PORTION GUIDE

PROTEIN

1-2 palms

25-50 g

CARBOHYDRATE

1-2 cupped hands

25-60 g

VEGETABLES / FRUIT

1-2 fists

Color + fiber

HEALTHY FAT

1-2 thumbs

8-20 g

TRAINING-DAY TIMING

WINDOW	PRIORITY	EXAMPLE
2-3 hr pre	Protein + carbs	Chicken, rice, vegetables
30-60 min pre	Easy carbs; optional protein	Banana + yogurt
0-3 hr post	Protein + carbs + fluids	Lean beef, potatoes, fruit
Before bed	Optional protein-rich meal	Greek yogurt or cottage cheese

RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

Evidence favors meeting daily protein first. Distributing quality protein every three to five hours is reasonable, but the so-called anabolic window is much wider than a few minutes.

COACHING TIP

Choose the meal schedule you can sustain. If large meals cause discomfort, split them. If frequent meals feel burdensome, use three larger meals and a shake.

ACTION STEP

Plan tomorrow's meals backward from your training time. Place one protein-and-carbohydrate meal before training and another afterward.

QUICK WIN

Prepare the protein source first. Add carbohydrates based on training demand, produce for health, and fats to complete calories.

FOOD FIRST. EVIDENCE SECOND.

Supplements: What Helps?

Supplements can improve convenience or provide a small performance benefit. They cannot repair inconsistent training, inadequate calories, poor sleep, or an unbalanced diet.

TIER 1: STRONG PRACTICAL VALUE

Supplement	Use	Practical Dose
Creatine monohydrate	Strength, repeated effort, lean mass	3-5 g daily
Protein powder	Convenient protein target support	20-40 g as needed
Caffeine	Alertness and performance	Start 1-3 mg/kg pre-training

TIER 2: SITUATION DEPENDENT

Supplement	May Help When...	Note
Beta-alanine	Repeated hard efforts lasting ~1-4 min	Daily loading; tingling is common
Citrulline malate	Seeking a possible pump/work benefit	Evidence and product dosing vary
Vitamin D / iron / B12	A deficiency or elevated risk is identified	Use clinician/lab guidance
Electrolytes	Long, hot, or sweat-heavy sessions	Food and sodium often cover basics

Supplement Safety

Choose products tested by an independent program such as NSF Certified for Sport or Informed Sport. Avoid proprietary blends and exaggerated claims.

Creatine Note

Loading is optional. Daily consistency matters. Creatine can increase scale weight through water stored in muscle; that is not fat gain.

Check Before Use

- Medication or medical-condition interactions.
- Third-party testing and complete ingredient disclosure.
- Whether the benefit solves a real problem in your plan.
- Whether the same money would improve food quality or sleep.

BUILD THE ENVIRONMENT

Forged Muscle-Building Grocery Guide

A productive diet becomes easier when the right foods are already available. Choose several items from each category based on preference, budget, culture, and digestion.

PROTEIN

Chicken breast/thigh • lean beef • turkey • eggs • tuna • salmon • shrimp • Greek yogurt • cottage cheese • milk • tofu • beans • protein powder

CARBOHYDRATES

Rice • potatoes • oats • pasta • bread • tortillas • cereal • quinoa • beans • fruit • frozen fruit • granola

HEALTHY FATS

Olive oil • avocado • peanut butter • nuts • seeds • whole eggs • salmon • cheese

PRODUCE

Spinach • broccoli • peppers • onions • carrots • asparagus • frozen vegetables • berries • bananas • oranges

CONVENIENCE

Rotisserie chicken • microwave rice • frozen potatoes • canned tuna • yogurt cups • pre-cut vegetables • ready-to-drink protein

FLAVOR & PERFORMANCE

Salt • herbs • spices • salsa • low-sugar sauces • broth • coffee • electrolyte mix when needed

BUDGET QUICK WIN

Buy store brands, frozen produce, larger containers of oats and rice, canned fish or beans, and family packs of protein. Premium labels do not build premium muscle.

PUTTING THE SYSTEM TO WORK

Sample Day of Eating

Example for a 180-pound lifter beginning near 2,700 calories. Approximate target: 175 g protein, 340 g carbohydrate, and 70 g fat. This is an example, not a universal prescription.

MEAL	EXAMPLE	APPROX. MACROS
Breakfast	Oats, Greek yogurt, berries, honey, eggs	40 P / 85 C / 18 F
Lunch	Chicken rice bowl, vegetables, avocado	48 P / 90 C / 18 F
Pre-workout	Banana, cereal, milk	18 P / 65 C / 6 F
Dinner / post	Lean beef, potatoes, vegetables, olive oil	50 P / 80 C / 22 F
Snack	Cottage cheese, fruit	25 P / 30 C / 5 F

SWAP, DON'T START OVER

Use equivalent foods: chicken for turkey, rice for potatoes, Greek yogurt for cottage cheese, olive oil for avocado. The structure matters more than the exact menu.

SECTION 2 ACTION CHECKLIST

- ☐ Estimate maintenance and start with a small surplus.
- ☐ Place carbohydrates around demanding training.
- ☐ Track weekly average weight and waist.
- ☐ Use supplements only for a defined purpose.
- ☐ Set protein near 1.6-2.2 g/kg daily.
- ☐ Include dietary fat, produce, fiber, and fluids.
- ☐ Adjust calories only after a clear 2-3 week trend.
- ☐ Prepare tomorrow's protein sources today.

WEEKLY CHALLENGE

Hit your calorie range, protein target, and planned training meals for seven days. Track consistency - not perfection.

EVIDENCE BASE: ISSN protein position stand; Schoenfeld & Aragon protein-per-meal review; Slater et al. energy-surplus review; Helms et al. controlled-surplus trial; ISSN creatine and caffeine position stands; uploaded ISSA Nutrition text.



FORGED MIND & BODY

TRAINING FOR HYPERTROPHY

Train with intention. Progress with discipline.

SECTION 3 | PAGES 21-30

EXERCISE SELECTION • VOLUME • FREQUENCY • EFFORT • PROGRAMS

A program is only powerful when it can be performed, recovered from, and progressed.

BUILD A PROGRAM THAT FITS

Choosing the Right Exercises

The best exercise is not automatically the hardest or most popular. It is the movement that trains the intended muscle through a useful range, feels stable, can be progressed, and fits your structure and equipment.

THE FORGED EXERCISE FILTER

TARGET

Does the exercise load the muscle you intend to train?

COMFORT

Can you perform it without sharp pain or worsening joint symptoms?

STABILITY

Can you control the path without wasting effort on unnecessary balance?

RANGE

Can you use a meaningful, repeatable range of motion?

PROGRESSION

Can load, reps, or execution improve over time?

ACCESS

Can you perform it consistently with available equipment?

COVER THE MAJOR PATTERNS

PATTERN	EXAMPLES
Squat / knee dominant	Squat, leg press, split squat, leg extension
Hinge / hip dominant	RDL, deadlift variation, hip thrust, leg curl
Horizontal push / pull	Bench press, push-up, row variations
Vertical push / pull	Overhead press, pulldown, pull-up
Isolation / carry / trunk	Curls, extensions, raises, calves, carries, anti-rotation

COMMON MISTAKE

Changing exercises every week. Novelty makes soreness easy to create and progress difficult to measure.

COACHING TIP

Keep core movements for 4-8 weeks. Change an exercise when pain, poor fit, equipment, boredom, or a true plateau justifies it.

DO ENOUGH - THEN EARN MORE

Training Volume

Volume is the amount of challenging work performed. For hypertrophy, hard sets per muscle per week are more useful than counting every warm-up or easy repetition. More volume can build more muscle until recovery and set quality begin to fall.

FORGED STARTING RANGE

8-12 hard sets per muscle per week

Start lower if you are new, returning, highly stressed, or training close to failure.

VOLUME DECISION LADDER

SIGNAL	RESPONSE
Performance improving; soreness manageable	Keep volume the same
No progress for 3-4 weeks; recovery strong	Add 1-2 weekly sets for that muscle
Performance falling; soreness persistent	Remove 2-4 weekly sets or deload
Technique deteriorates within session	Stop adding sets; quality has fallen
A set is far from failure	Do not count it as a full hard set

RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

The 2026 ACSM position stand supports higher weekly volume for hypertrophy, with benefits commonly seen at roughly 10 or more sets per muscle per week. Individual response still varies.

JUNK VOLUME

Extra sets that produce poor execution, very low effort, or recovery cost without useful overload are not a badge of discipline. They are work without a clear return.

COUNT SETS INTELLIGENTLY

- Count direct work fully: a curl is a biceps set.
- Count indirect work conservatively: a row also trains biceps, but not identically.
- Warm-up sets prepare performance; they are not primary growth volume.
- Track muscle-specific progress before adding work.

ORGANIZE THE WEEK

Training Frequency

Frequency is how often a muscle is trained. It mainly helps distribute weekly volume and maintain set quality. Training major muscle groups at least twice per week is a strong default, but the schedule must fit your life.

CHOOSE YOUR SPLIT

3 DAYS | FULL BODY

Best for beginners, busy schedules, and frequent practice of key movements.

4 DAYS | UPPER / LOWER

Balanced volume, recovery, and session length for many intermediate lifters.

5 DAYS | HYBRID / SPECIALIZATION

More room for targeted volume; requires reliable recovery and scheduling.

6 DAYS | PUSH / PULL / LEGS X2

High frequency and shorter sessions, but little room for missed days or poor recovery.

MYTH VS. FACT

MYTH: Every muscle must be trained exactly twice weekly. FACT: Weekly volume and effort are more important. Frequency is a tool for distributing productive work.

SCHEDULE RULE

Choose the fewest training days that allow you to complete quality weekly volume. A four-day plan completed consistently beats a six-day plan repeatedly missed.

RECOVERY SPACING

- Leave roughly 48 hours before hard direct work for the same muscle when practical.
- Indirect overlap matters: pressing also loads triceps and front delts.
- Place the most important muscle groups early in the week and early in sessions.
- If one missed day breaks the entire plan, the plan is too fragile.

MAKE EVERY SET COUNT

Intensity, Reps, Rest, and Effort

Hypertrophy can occur across a broad range of loads when sets are taken sufficiently close to failure. Moderate rep ranges are usually efficient, joint-friendly, and easy to progress.

PRACTICAL LOADING ZONES

USE	REP RANGE	RIR	REST
Heavy compounds	4-8	2-3	2-4 min
Primary hypertrophy lifts	6-12	1-3	2-3 min
Machine / dumbbell work	8-15	1-3	1.5-3 min
Isolation exercises	10-20	0-3	1-2 min
High-rep accessories	15-30	0-2	1-2 min

REST LONG ENOUGH

Short rest is not automatically better for growth. Rest until breathing and focus allow another high-quality set. Larger compound lifts usually need more time.

EFFORT STANDARD

Use 1-3 RIR for most work. Reserve failure for selected stable exercises. Beginners can progress with more reps in reserve while technique develops.

EXERCISE ORDER

- 1

Priority muscle or skill
- 2

Heavy or technically demanding compound
- 3

Secondary compound or machine
- 4

Isolation and weak-point work
- 5

Carries, conditioning, or trunk work

COMMON MISTAKE

Rushing rest, losing repetitions, then calling the workout intense. Fatigue is not the goal; productive muscular work is.

3-DAY FULL BODY

Forged Beginner Program

Schedule: Monday - Workout A | Wednesday - Workout B | Friday - Workout A. Alternate the pattern the following week. Begin at 3 RIR and prioritize repeatable technique.

WORKOUT A

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS	REST
Goblet squat	3	8-12	90s
DB bench press	3	8-12	90s
Romanian deadlift	2	8-10	120s
Cable / DB row	3	10-12	90s
Lateral raise	2	12-20	60s
Plank	3	20-45s	60s

WORKOUT B

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS	REST
Leg press	3	10-15	120s
Lat pulldown	3	8-12	90s
DB overhead press	3	8-12	90s
Hip thrust	2	10-15	90s
Leg curl	2	10-15	75s
Farmer carry	3	20-40 yd	60s

PROGRESSION METHOD

DOUBLE PROGRESSION

When every set reaches the top of the rep range with clean technique and 2-3 RIR, increase upper-body load 2.5-5 lb or lower-body load 5-10 lb. Return to the lower end of the range.

SUBSTITUTIONS

IF UNAVAILABLE	USE
Goblet squat	Hack squat, box squat, leg press
DB bench	Machine press, push-up, barbell bench
RDL	Back extension, cable pull-through
Pulldown / row	Band or supported dumbbell variation

DELOAD

After 6-8 weeks, or sooner if performance drops, use 1-2 sets per exercise at 4-5 RIR for one week.

COACH AVERY'S NOTES

Stop each set before technique changes. The first goal is not exhaustion - it is becoming skilled enough to overload safely.

4-DAY UPPER / LOWER

Forged Intermediate Program

Schedule: Mon Upper A | Tue Lower A | Thu Upper B | Fri Lower B. Most sets finish at 1-3 RIR. Warm-up sets are not listed.

UPPER A

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS	REST
Bench press	3	6-8	180s
Chest-supported row	3	8-10	120s
Incline DB press	3	8-12	120s
Lat pulldown	3	8-12	120s
Lateral raise	3	12-20	75s
Triceps pressdown	2	10-15	75s

LOWER A

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS	REST
Back / hack squat	3	6-10	180s
Romanian deadlift	3	6-10	180s
Leg press	3	10-15	120s
Leg curl	3	10-15	90s
Standing calf	3	8-15	75s
Dead bug	3	8-12	60s

UPPER B

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS	REST
Overhead press	3	6-10	150s
Pull-up / pulldown	3	6-10	150s
Machine chest press	3	10-15	120s
Cable row	3	10-15	120s
Rear-delt fly	3	12-20	75s
DB curl	2	10-15	75s

LOWER B

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS	REST
Deadlift / trap bar	2	4-6	240s
Front squat	3	8-12	150s
Hip thrust	3	8-12	120s
Leg extension	3	12-20	75s
Seated leg curl	3	10-15	90s
Seated calf	3	12-20	75s

PROGRESSION

Use double progression. Add load only after all working sets reach the top of the range at the assigned RIR. Add sets only after 3-4 stalled weeks with strong recovery.

DELOAD AND NOTES

Deload every 6-10 weeks as needed: cut sets about 40-50%, keep 4-5 RIR. If deadlifts impair lower-body recovery, replace them with a less fatiguing hinge.

5-DAY HYPERTROPHY SPLIT

Forged Advanced Program

Schedule: Mon Lower Strength | Tue Push | Wed Pull | Fri Lower Hypertrophy | Sat Upper Specialization. Use only if you recover reliably and can execute 1-2 RIR accurately.

MON - LOWER STRENGTH

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS	REST
Back squat	3	4-6	3m
RDL	3	6-8	3m
Leg press	3	8-10	2m
Leg curl	3	8-12	90s

TUE - PUSH

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS	REST
Bench press	3	5-8	3m
Incline DB press	3	8-12	2m
Cable fly	3	12-15	90s
Lateral raise	4	12-20	75s
Triceps ext.	3	10-15	75s

WED - PULL

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS	REST
Weighted pull-up	3	5-8	3m
Chest-supported row	3	8-12	2m
Pulldown	3	10-15	2m
Rear-delt fly	3	15-25	75s
EZ curl	3	8-12	90s

FRI - LOWER HYPERTROPHY

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS	REST
Hack squat	4	8-12	2m
Hip thrust	3	8-12	2m
Leg extension	3	12-20	75s
Seated curl	3	10-15	90s
Calf raise	4	8-15	75s

SAT - UPPER SPECIALIZATION

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS	REST
OHP	3	6-10	2m
Machine press	3	10-15	2m
Cable row	3	10-15	2m
Lateral raise	3	15-25	60s
Arms superset	3	10-15	60s

PROGRESSION

Progress reps, then load. Add only 1-2 sets to a priority muscle when recovery is strong. Maintain or reduce volume elsewhere.

DELOAD

Every 4-8 hard weeks as indicated: reduce sets 50%, load 5-10%, and keep 4-5 RIR. Resume below prior peak workload.

KEEP THE SIGNAL MOVING

Progression Methods

Progression should improve the training stimulus, not merely the number written in the log. Choose one primary progression method for each exercise and keep execution standards constant.

DOUBLE PROGRESSION

Reach the top of a rep range across all sets, then add load and return to the bottom.

REP PROGRESSION

Add one or more total reps while load, sets, range, and RIR stay stable.

LOAD PROGRESSION

Add the smallest practical load after the prescribed reps are achieved cleanly.

SET PROGRESSION

Add a set only when progress has stalled and recovery supports more volume.

RANGE / CONTROL

Improve depth, pause, stability, or target-muscle control before increasing load.

SPECIALIZATION

Add volume to one or two priority muscles while holding other muscle groups near maintenance.

WHEN PROGRESS STALLS

CHECK FIRST	THEN
Was technique and RIR consistent?	Correct execution before changing the plan
Did sleep, food, or stress worsen?	Restore recovery inputs
Has only one session stalled?	Collect more data
Have 3-4 weeks stalled with good recovery?	Add reps, load, or 1-2 targeted sets
Is fatigue high across several lifts?	Deload or reduce volume

COACH AVERY'S RULE

Do not change load, reps, sets, exercises, and tempo at the same time. Change one variable, track the response, and learn from the result.

RECOVER. REVIEW. REBUILD.

Deloading and Program Selection

A deload is a planned reduction in training stress. It is not lost progress. It creates space for fatigue to fall so performance can return. Use planned deloads or respond to clear warning signs.

THREE DELOAD OPTIONS

VOLUME DELOAD

Reduce working sets by about 40-60%. Keep normal movements and leave 4-5 RIR.

LOAD + VOLUME

Reduce sets by about half and load by 5-15%. Useful when joints or overall fatigue need relief.

ACTIVE RECOVERY

Use easy movement and technique work when illness, pain, or major life stress makes normal lifting inappropriate.

CHOOSE YOUR STARTING PROGRAM

YOU ARE...	START WITH
New, returning, or training 3 days	Beginner full body
Consistent for 6+ months; 4 days available	Intermediate upper/lower
Experienced; accurate RIR; recovery reliable	Advanced 5-day
Unsure between two levels	Choose the simpler program

SECTION 3 CHECKLIST

- ☐ Use exercises that fit your body and equipment.
- ☐ Train major muscle groups about twice weekly.
- ☐ Rest long enough to preserve performance.
- ☐ Progress one variable at a time.
- ☐ Start near 8-12 hard sets per muscle weekly.
- ☐ Keep most work at 1-3 RIR.
- ☐ Log load, reps, sets, and RIR.
- ☐ Deload when fatigue hides fitness.

WEEKLY CHALLENGE

Select your program, schedule every session, and record every working set for one week. The log turns effort into usable information.

EVIDENCE BASE: ACSM 2026 Resistance Training Position Stand; Schoenfeld et al. volume, frequency, load, and rest research; NSCA programming principles; uploaded ISSA CPT, Strength & Conditioning, Bodybuilding, Tactical Conditioning, and Exercise Therapy texts.

NEXT: SECTION 4 - MAXIMIZING RESULTS



FORGED MIND & BODY

MAXIMIZING RESULTS

Build the habits that build the body.

SECTION 4 | PAGES 31-40

PLATEAUS • RECOVERY • SLEEP • 8-WEEK PLAN • TRACKING • EXECUTION

Results are not found in one perfect week. They are forged through repeated standards.

DIAGNOSE BEFORE YOU ADJUST

Breaking Through Plateaus

A plateau is a meaningful lack of progress despite consistent execution - not one difficult workout or one unchanged weigh-in. Before changing the program, confirm that the stall is real.

THE FORGED PLATEAU AUDIT

1. EXECUTION

Were sessions, sets, reps, RIR, calories, and protein completed consistently?

2. MEASUREMENT

Has progress truly stalled across at least 3-4 weeks using several indicators?

3. RECOVERY

Are sleep, stress, soreness, motivation, and joint comfort supporting performance?

4. NUTRITION

Is body weight moving as intended? Has your maintenance need increased?

5. PROGRAMMING

Does the target muscle receive enough quality volume without excessive fatigue?

IF RECOVERY IS GOOD

Add one repetition, a small load increase, or 1-2 weekly sets for the stalled muscle. Change only one variable and track 2-3 weeks.

IF FATIGUE IS HIGH

Deload, remove low-quality volume, improve sleep and nutrition, or replace an unusually fatiguing exercise. More work is not always the answer.

WHEN TO CHANGE AN EXERCISE

- Pain or joint irritation persists despite technique changes.
- The movement does not load the intended muscle effectively.
- Equipment or schedule makes consistency impossible.
- Progress remains stalled after recovery and programming are corrected.

COACHING RULE

Do not solve a consistency problem with a more complicated program.

READINESS BEFORE EGO

The Forged Recovery System

Recovery is not passive. It is a set of behaviors that protects training quality. Use the scorecard below before increasing volume or intensity.

DAILY RECOVERY SCORECARD

CATEGORY	0 POINTS	1 POINT	2 POINTS
Sleep	<6 hr / poor	6-7 hr / fair	7-9 hr / good
Energy	Very low	Usable	Strong
Soreness	Limits movement	Noticeable	Mild / none
Stress	Overwhelming	Elevated	Managed
Motivation	Dreading training	Neutral	Ready
Performance trend	Declining	Stable	Improving

INTERPRET THE SCORE

0-4 | RED

Use recovery work, rest, or a major session reduction.

5-8 | YELLOW

Train, but hold load or reduce 1-2 sets if warm-ups feel poor.

9-12 | GREEN

Proceed with the plan. Progress only if performance earns it.

ACTIVE RECOVERY

Easy walking, mobility, light cycling, and normal daily movement can support recovery without adding meaningful fatigue.

PAIN IS DIFFERENT

Sharp, worsening, radiating, or function-limiting pain is not ordinary soreness. Modify training and seek qualified medical guidance when appropriate.

MINIMUM RECOVERY STANDARDS

- Consistent sleep opportunity.
- Adequate calories, protein, carbohydrates, and fluids.
- At least one lower-stress day each week.
- Training adjustments during illness or major life stress.

THE 24-HOUR ATHLETE

Sleep and Lifestyle Optimization

The training session may last an hour. The adaptation depends on what happens during the other twenty-three. Sleep, stress, alcohol, movement, and routine influence performance and recovery.

BUILD A SLEEP RUNWAY

60-90 MIN BEFORE

Lower light, finish demanding work, reduce stimulating media, and begin the same wind-down sequence.

30-60 MIN BEFORE

Prepare the room: cool, dark, quiet, and comfortable. Set tomorrow's training and nutrition plan.

BEDTIME

Use a consistent schedule. If you cannot sleep, choose a calm low-light activity rather than fighting the clock.

MORNING

Get light exposure, hydrate, and keep wake time reasonably consistent.

LIFESTYLE LEVERS

ALCOHOL

Can reduce sleep quality, recovery, and training readiness. Less is generally better for the goal.

STRESS

Use planning, breathing, prayer, journaling, walking, or professional support. Stress management is performance work.

DAILY MOVEMENT

Walking supports health and appetite without creating the fatigue of excessive conditioning.

SCHEDULE

Protect training times, food preparation, and bedtime like appointments. Systems reduce reliance on motivation.

QUICK WIN

Choose one repeatable pre-sleep cue tonight: dim the lights, prepare tomorrow's clothes, and place the phone outside arm's reach.

WEEKS 1-4 | BUILD THE BASE

8-Week Muscle-Building Plan

Use the beginner, intermediate, or advanced program from Section 3. The eight-week plan controls effort and progression; it does not replace the selected exercise schedule.

WEEK 1 | BASELINE

Complete all prescribed sessions at 3 RIR. Record every working set. Use conservative loads and establish consistent technique.

Training: no missed sessions

Nutrition: establish calorie + protein baseline

Recovery: record sleep and readiness

WEEK 2 | REPEAT

Repeat the same movements. Add reps only when technique and RIR remain correct. Do not add exercises.

Training: beat 1-2 total reps per lift

Nutrition: hit protein 6 of 7 days

Recovery: protect bedtime

WEEK 3 | PROGRESS

Use double progression. Add the smallest load only where the top of the rep range was earned.

Training: progress priority lifts

Nutrition: review weight trend

Recovery: one low-stress day

WEEK 4 | CONSOLIDATE

Hold exercise selection and weekly sets. Improve execution, range, and rep quality. Review the first four weeks.

Training: repeat quality

Nutrition: adjust only if trend is clear

Recovery: complete scorecard

WEEK 4 REVIEW

Compare performance, body-weight trend, waist, photos, and recovery. Continue only the adjustments supported by evidence from your log.

WEEKS 5-8 | OVERLOAD AND TRANSITION

8-Week Muscle-Building Plan

Weeks 5-7 build on the baseline. Week 8 reduces fatigue and prepares the next cycle. If recovery turns red earlier, deload earlier rather than forcing the calendar.

WEEK 5 | RELOAD

Return with loads equal to or slightly below Week 4. Target 2 RIR on most working sets and resume double progression.

Training: controlled overload

Nutrition: maintain surplus

Recovery: assess joints

WEEK 6 | BUILD

Progress reps or load on priority lifts. If a target muscle is stalled and recovery is green, add only 1-2 weekly sets.

Training: one-variable progress

Nutrition: protein consistency

Recovery: manage life stress

WEEK 7 | PEAK WORK

Complete the hardest productive week. Use 1-2 RIR; optional failure only on stable isolation exercises.

Training: high quality, not chaos

Nutrition: fuel key sessions

Recovery: protect sleep

WEEK 8 | DELOAD

Reduce working sets about 40-60%, use 4-5 RIR, and lower load if needed. Keep the movement pattern and leave the gym fresh.

Training: reduce fatigue

Nutrition: keep protein stable

Recovery: plan next cycle

NEXT-CYCLE DECISION

Repeat the program if lifts are progressing and exercises fit. Specialize one or two muscles only when the foundation is stable.

WEEKLY REVIEW

Muscle-Building Progress Tracker

Complete under similar conditions each week. Use trends, not isolated numbers.

WEEK / DATES

PROGRAM

CURRENT PHASE

BODY AND PERFORMANCE METRICS

METRIC	START	THIS WEEK	4-WK CHANGE
Average body weight			
Waist measurement			
Priority lift 1			
Priority lift 2			
Priority lift 3			

EXECUTION SCORE

STANDARD	TARGET	RESULT
Training sessions completed	___ / ___	
Protein target achieved	___ / 7 days	
Calorie range achieved	___ / 7 days	
Sleep target achieved	___ / 7 days	
Average recovery score	___ / 12	

WEEKLY REFLECTION

WHAT IMPROVED?

WHAT LIMITED PROGRESS?

WHAT ONE CHANGE WILL I MAKE NEXT WEEK?

DECISION

KEEP • PROGRESS • HOLD • DELOAD • ADJUST NUTRITION (circle one after reviewing the complete trend)

TURN EFFORT INTO DATA

Forged Workout Log

DATE

WORKOUT

BODY WEIGHT

SLEEP HOURS

READINESS / 12

SESSION GOAL

EXERCISE	LOAD	SET 1	SET 2	SET 3	SET 4	RIR	REST

SESSION REVIEW

Improved • Stable • Declined

TECHNIQUE

Improved • Stable • Needs work

PAIN / DISCOMFORT

None • Mild • Modify next time

NEXT-SESSION TARGET

COACHING NOTE

Record the set immediately. A log written from memory loses the RIR, rest, and technique details that make the data useful.

NOTES

CONSISTENCY UNDER PRESSURE

30-Day Forged Challenge

The challenge is not to be perfect for thirty days. It is to return to the standard quickly whenever life interrupts the plan.

FIVE DAILY STANDARDS

01

Complete the scheduled training or recovery action.

02

Hit the daily protein target.

03

Stay within the planned calorie range.

04

Complete the sleep routine.

05

Record one useful data point.

30-DAY SCORECARD

DAY 1 SCORE ___ / 5	DAY 2 SCORE ___ / 5	DAY 3 SCORE ___ / 5	DAY 4 SCORE ___ / 5	DAY 5 SCORE ___ / 5	DAY 6 SCORE ___ / 5
DAY 7 SCORE ___ / 5	DAY 8 SCORE ___ / 5	DAY 9 SCORE ___ / 5	DAY 10 SCORE ___ / 5	DAY 11 SCORE ___ / 5	DAY 12 SCORE ___ / 5
DAY 13 SCORE ___ / 5	DAY 14 SCORE ___ / 5	DAY 15 SCORE ___ / 5	DAY 16 SCORE ___ / 5	DAY 17 SCORE ___ / 5	DAY 18 SCORE ___ / 5
DAY 19 SCORE ___ / 5	DAY 20 SCORE ___ / 5	DAY 21 SCORE ___ / 5	DAY 22 SCORE ___ / 5	DAY 23 SCORE ___ / 5	DAY 24 SCORE ___ / 5
DAY 25 SCORE ___ / 5	DAY 26 SCORE ___ / 5	DAY 27 SCORE ___ / 5	DAY 28 SCORE ___ / 5	DAY 29 SCORE ___ / 5	DAY 30 SCORE ___ / 5

WEEKLY MISSIONS

WEEK 1

Establish baseline and log every set.

WEEK 2

Progress one lift without losing technique.

WEEK 3

Win the recovery routine five nights.

WEEK 4

Complete review and plan the next cycle.

30-DAY STANDARD

Aim for at least 120 of 150 possible daily points. Missed points are information - not permission to quit.

FORGE THE NEXT VERSION

Final Muscle-Building Checklist

Use this page before every new training cycle. Strong outcomes come from a complete system, not one favorite exercise, food, or supplement.

TRAINING

- ☐ I use a program matched to my experience.
- ☐ I train with stable technique and 1-3 RIR.
- ☐ I log every working set.
- ☐ I progress only when performance earns it.

NUTRITION

- ☐ I have a clear calorie target.
- ☐ I hit 1.6-2.2 g/kg protein daily.
- ☐ I fuel demanding sessions with carbohydrates.
- ☐ I adjust from trends, not emotion.

RECOVERY

- ☐ I protect a consistent sleep opportunity.
- ☐ I track readiness and manage life stress.
- ☐ I use deloads before fatigue becomes a crisis.
- ☐ I distinguish soreness from pain.

EXECUTION

- ☐ I track weight, waist, photos, and performance.
- ☐ I review progress every four weeks.
- ☐ I change one variable at a time.
- ☐ I return quickly after imperfect days.

THE FORGED STANDARD

Consistency beats perfection. Progressive overload drives results. Recovery is part of training. Nutrition supports performance. Sustainability matters more than extremes. Build habits that last.

YOUR COMMITMENT

For the next _____ weeks, I will follow _____, track my execution honestly, and adjust only after reviewing the complete trend.

FINAL MESSAGE

You do not need to become someone else to build muscle. You need to become more consistent, more capable, and more intentional - one decision at a time.

FORGE THE MIND. BUILD THE BODY.

Educational resource only. Individual needs and medical conditions may require guidance from qualified health professionals.