

THE
BODY
TRANSFORMATION
BLUEPRINT

A black and white photograph of a gym floor with a barbell and several weight plates. The barbell is positioned horizontally, with a large weight plate in the foreground on the left. The floor has a textured, pebbled appearance. The lighting creates strong shadows, highlighting the metallic surfaces of the weights and the barbell.

QUICK-START GUIDE

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QUICK-START GUIDE

While it is highly recommended that you read through the complete Body Transformation Blueprint Manual in order to gain a full understanding of all of the concepts surrounding proper training, nutrition, supplementation and the smaller details in between, this quick-start guide has been provided to organize all of the concrete “actionable” steps into one place for easy use.

If you’d prefer to get started with the program right away, you can simply read through the guidelines outlined here, begin implementing the step-by-step Body Transformation Blueprint workout system, meal plans and supplement guide, and then gradually make your way through the main manual over the next few weeks to expand your knowledge further.

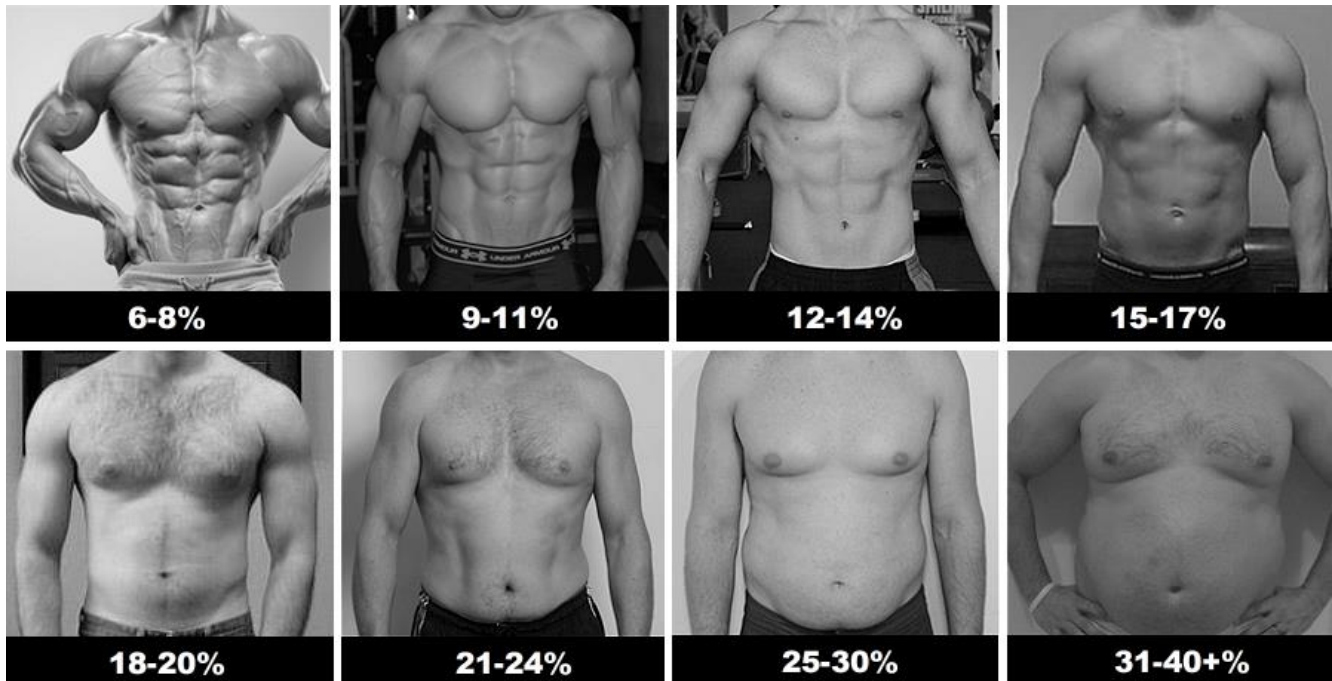
This guide also serves as a useful summary for those who have read through the manual already but would like a quick refresher on all of the most important points that were covered.

Let’s begin...

GOAL SELECTION

- If you are a male who currently exceeds 12-14% body fat or a female who exceeds 19-21%, you’ll need to begin your program with a cutting phase in order to get down to a sufficiently lean base first and foremost. Once you’ve reached these prescribed ranges, you can then shift into a bulking phase and focus on building additional lean mass. If you are currently already within these ranges or below them, you can begin with a bulking phase straight away.
- Those who are still relatively new to weight training and/or who are carrying a large amount of excess fat will usually be able to “recomposition” to a certain degree by gaining some additional muscle mass even while in a cutting phase. Others who can often successfully recombination are those returning from a training layoff or who possess significantly above average muscle building genetics.
- Aside from the use of a DEXA scan, all methods of measuring body fat contain a significant margin for error and should not be relied upon to provide accurate readings. Aside from paying \$100-\$150 for a DEXA scan to assess your current body fat percentage (a viable option for those who have the extra money to spend), most trainees will be best off to simply use visual estimations instead. The following two pages provide examples of male and female physiques ranging from very low “ripped” body fat percentages up to those in the overweight category that you can use as a reference.

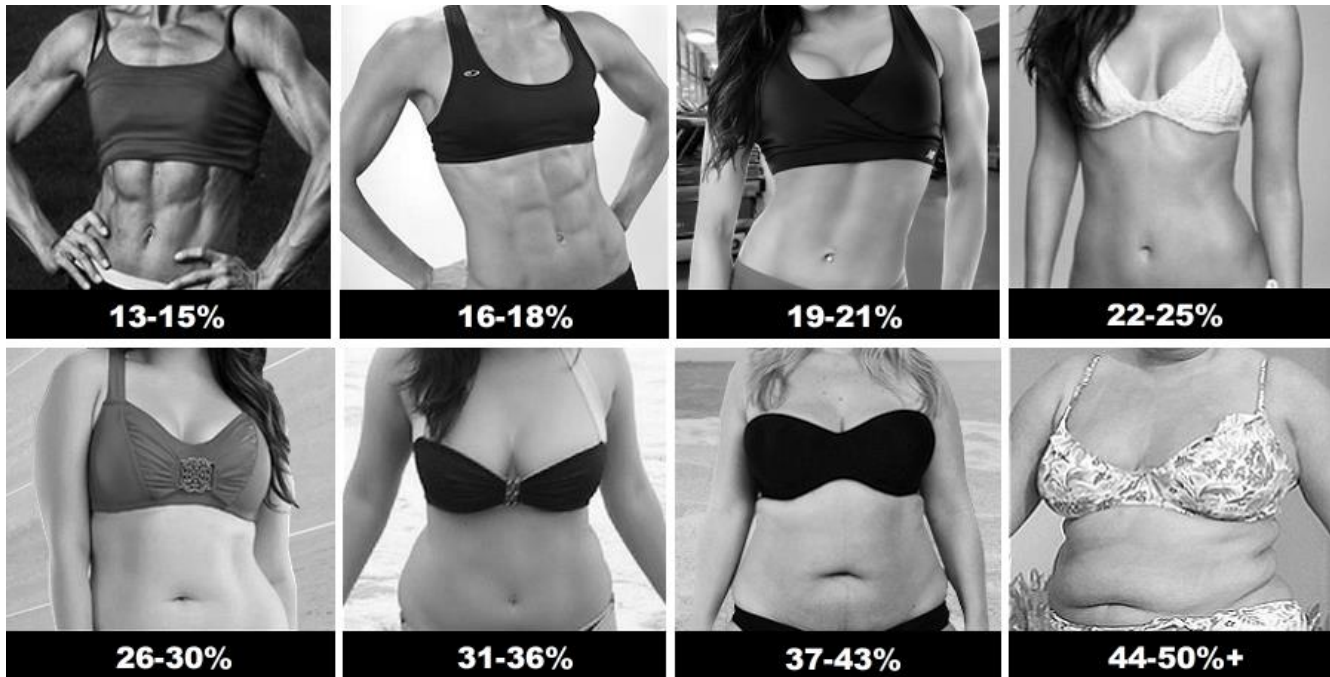
Examples of male physiques ranging from 6% body fat up to 40%+:



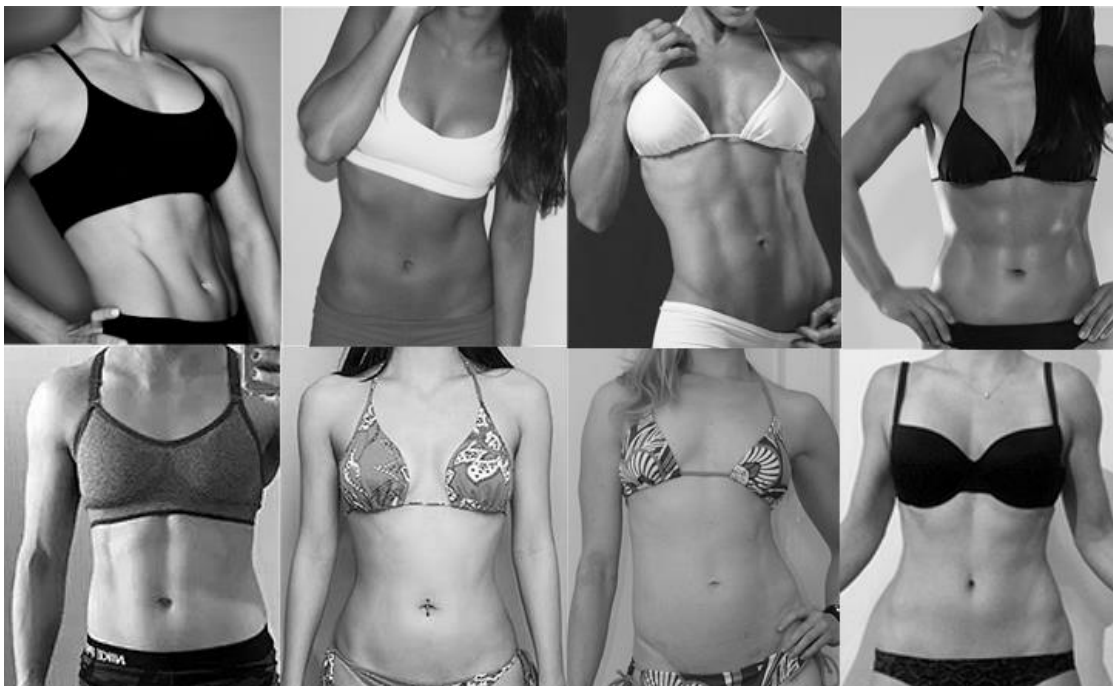
Further examples of male physiques approximately in the 12-14% range:



Examples of female physiques ranging from 13% body fat up to 50%+:



Further examples of female physiques approximately in the 19-21% range:



- If you seem to be right on the borderline with no clear visible muscle definition but only a very small amount of excess fat (a very difficult body type to accurately estimate body fat percentage for), both bulking or cutting would likely be acceptable and you can simply make the decision based on which one is more important to you. If you're mainly concerned with adding more mass to your frame and are okay with the idea of gaining some extra fat during the process (keep in mind that you'll always put on some additional

body fat during a bulk), you can go that route to start. Or, if you find the small bit of excess fat you're carrying to be bothersome and you'd rather do a quick cut to get rid of it first before bulking, that's fine too. Choose whichever path you believe will keep you the most motivated moving forward.

- There is no set timeframe in terms of cutting or bulking phase length, as it all depends on your current starting point and ultimate end goal. A cutting phase should simply continue for as long as it needs to in order to reach the prescribed ranges of 12-14% body fat for men and 19-21% body fat for women. Going lower than this is acceptable for those who wish to get even leaner based on personal preference, but 10% body fat for men and 17% for women would generally be considered as the minimum year-round level that can be realistically maintained before unwanted side effects begin setting in, such as increased hunger, strength and energy loss, decreased libido etc. Dropping below these figures for a certain event (vacation, photoshoot, competition etc.) is acceptable, but only in the short term.
- A bulking phase should continue either until you've reached a level of muscular development that you're satisfied with *or* until your body fat levels have reached the maximum recommended "cap" of 18-20% for men and 25-27% for women. At that point, a cutting phase should be inserted to bring body fat levels back down to the 12-14%/19-21% range before switching back to bulking again.
- Rather than bulking all the way up to these maximum body fat figures, the other option is to insert "mini cuts" into the mix in order to remain at a leaner year round percentage. For example, this could involve bulking from 12% body fat up to 16%, and then cutting down to 12% before going back to bulking again. If you do decide to go this route, just make sure that you commit to at least 2-3 months of focused bulking during each cycle rather than constantly switching back and forth every few weeks.

NUTRITION

- Total calorie intake is by far the most important factor when it comes to proper nutrition and should form the underlying basis upon which the rest of your diet is built. If your primary goal is to gain muscle then you'll need to eat in a calorie surplus by consuming more calories than you burn, whereas if your primary goal is to lose fat body fat you'll need to eat in a calorie deficit by burning more calories than you consume. Building muscle is still possible while in a calorie deficit as mentioned previously, but it will only occur to a meaningful degree in specific trainees (beginners, overweight individuals, those returning from a layoff and/or genetic outliers) and won't produce gains to the same degree that a surplus will.
- The first step in configuring your daily calorie intake is to calculate your calorie maintenance level, which is the number of calories required to maintain your current weight. There are three main calculators that can be used for this: the basic multiplier, Harris-Benedict formula or Katch-McArdle formula. Each equation is outlined in the main manual starting on page 39. Keep in mind that all calorie calculators are merely intended to provide rough estimations at the start and the resulting figure will often need to be adjusted later on depending on how your body responds. Aside from using a calculator, the other option is to simply log your regular food intake over the course of a week or so, add up the calories manually and then use that as your estimated maintenance level assuming your weight has been relatively stable in recent weeks. Once you have your maintenance calories in place, you'll then add or subtract calories from it in order to create either a calorie surplus for bulking or calorie deficit for cutting.
- If you'll be implementing a bulking phase, the following surplus figures can be used based on your level of training experience:

Less Than 1 Year: 300 calories above maintenance

1-2 Years: 250 calories above maintenance

2-3 Years: 200 calories above maintenance

3-4 Years: 150 calories above maintenance

4-5 Years: 100 calories above maintenance

- If you'll be implementing a cutting phase, 350-500 calories below maintenance will be a reliable figure to go by. The full 500 calories would be recommended for the majority of trainees, while those who are looking to reach a fairly lean body fat percentage may optionally go with the lower end if they've already been cutting for a prolonged period and hunger/energy loss has become an issue.
- Protein intake should fall between 0.8-1 gram per pound of body weight daily. Vegans (or those who consume very little animal protein in general) should ideally stick to the higher end of the range for optimal results. As long as sufficient protein quantity is being consumed for the day as a whole, the specific food sources that are used to reach the total are of far less importance. That said, some high quality, macro-friendly protein sources that work well as part of a muscle building and fat burning diet include foods such as lean poultry, fish/seafood (all types), lean beef, eggs/egg whites, low-fat dairy (yogurt, cottage

cheese, milk), protein powders and protein bars/snacks. Some higher protein plant-based sources include tofu, beans, lentils, tempeh, seitan, chickpeas, edamame, whole grains, quinoa, amaranth, soy milk and meat substitutes.

- Fat intake should land at approximately 25% of total calories. Going a bit higher is acceptable if you prefer it (up to 30%-35%), but 20% would be considered the minimum. To calculate the total grams of fat to consume per day, multiply your total calorie intake by 0.25 and then divide by 9, since fats contain 9 calories per gram. A good portion of your fat intake will be automatically derived from the natural fat content of your protein and carbohydrate sources, with additional healthy fats being included to make up the rest. A good guideline is to consume 1-2 servings of monounsaturated fat sources per day (avocados, nuts/nut butters, olives, seeds, plant oils etc.), along with 1-2 grams per day of the omega-3 fatty acids EPA and DHA from fatty fish (salmon, mackerel, cod, herring, tuna, anchovy, sardines etc.) or a [high quality fish oil supplement](#).
- After calculating your protein and fat requirements, the remainder of your daily calorie intake should be allotted to carbohydrates. To determine how many grams of carbohydrates to consume each day, multiply your protein intake in grams by 4 (since protein contains 4 calories per gram) and fat intake by 9. Add these two figures together, and then subtract it from your total daily calories. Since carbohydrates contain 4 calories per gram, take the resulting figure and divide it by 4. The majority of your carbohydrate intake should be derived from higher fiber, minimally processed whole food sources such as vegetables (all types), fruits (all types), oats, potatoes, rice, sweet potatoes, yams, rice, beans, lentils, quinoa, couscous, pasta, pita, whole grain breads and whole grain cereals. Regardless of what combination of sources you choose, aim to get in at least 2 servings of vegetables and 1-2 servings of fruit per day as part of your overall carb intake.
- The specific way in which you space your food intake out during the day (in terms of meal frequency and meal timing) is a far less important factor in comparison to simply meeting your overall calorie and macronutrient needs for the day as a whole. That said, in order to maximize protein synthesis for optimal muscle recovery and growth, you should ideally aim to get in at least two (and preferably three) separate protein feedings in total, each containing 25 grams of protein or more and spaced out by at least 2-3 hours each. More advanced trainees who are trying to squeeze out every ounce of hypertrophy possible (or those who simply prefer eating a greater number of meals based on personal preference) can go even higher at 4-6 protein feedings per day, though the additional gain that would be produced from this would likely be marginal at best.
- Proper pre-workout nutrition should consist of any basic pairing of protein and carbohydrates consumed 1-2.5 hours before training. If you prefer training on an empty stomach for whatever reason, you should ideally consume 10 grams of an essential amino acid supplement 5-15 minutes before your workout in order to offset the slight catabolic effect of weight training in a fasted state. A scoop of protein powder will accomplish the same thing. (Keep in mind though that fasted training does not lead to improved fat loss as is commonly believed, so there is no need to use it specifically this purpose.)

- Proper post workout nutrition should consist of any basic pairing of protein and carbohydrates consumed 1-2.5 hours after training.
- There is no set guideline for water intake in terms of ounces since the optimal amount will depend on your body weight, activity level and the type of climate you live in. Just make sure to consume enough water throughout the day so that your urine is on the clearer side most of the time.
- It is not necessary that you eat a perfectly “clean” diet 24 hours a day, 7 days week in order to build muscle and lose fat effectively. If the majority of your food intake (roughly 80-90%) is being derived from nutrient dense, minimally processed whole food sources, incorporating some higher fat/higher sugar “treat food” to fill in the remaining 10-20% is acceptable as long as the calorie and macronutrient content is properly accounted for.
- A weekly average of 1-2 standard alcoholic drinks per day for men (half that amount for women) is also acceptable assuming the calories are tracked and all other aspects of your program remain consistent.
- Given equal 24 hour calorie intake, eating in the later evening hours will not lead to increased fat storage as is commonly believed, nor will consuming a breakfast meal soon after waking lead to increased fat burning. Net fat loss/fat gain will be almost entirely dictated by total calories consumed vs. total calories burned for the day as a whole, with the specific distribution of those calories likely having no noticeable impact on your bottom line results from a fat loss standpoint.
- Cycling between higher and lower calorie intakes on workout days vs. rest days is fine as a matter of personal preference, but is not a requirement in terms of optimizing body composition. For the sake of simplicity, maintaining a consistent intake from day to day will generally be the best approach for most people.
- When it comes to tracking your nutritional intake throughout the day, there are three main options to choose from: (1) track all calories and macros down to the precise amount, (2) track total calories only while roughly estimating macros, (3) eat intuitively based on visual estimations and “feel” without specifically tracking anything. For the majority of trainees, the second choice will work well as a default option and will strike a healthy middle ground balance between overall effectiveness and sustainability. Those who prefer a higher degree of precision and organization – or who want to “learn the ropes” as quickly as possible in terms of dietary tracking – can go with option one. Option three should be reserved only for more advanced trainees who have built up the necessary knowledge and experience needed to employ an intuitive eating style effectively.
- To track the nutritional breakdown of the foods you’ll be eating, you can use an app such as [MyFitnessPal](#) or [Cronometer](#), an online website like [CalorieKing.com](#), and/or just check the nutrition labels on each food item and log things manually. You can also utilize the step by step Body Transformation Blueprint Meal Plans, as those lay out full days of structured eating at various calorie levels that you can simply print off and follow.

- When portioning out your meals at home, the use of a basic food scale is highly recommended. Cups and spoons measure volume rather than weight and can often be inaccurate depending on the shape of the item you're trying to measure and how tightly it's been packed.
- If you'll be on the go and eating out for a particular meal, the four main options for tracking its nutritional content are as follows: (1) look up the nutritional info online if the restaurant has it available, (2) if no nutritional info is available, use the calorie/macro content for a similar meal from a different restaurant, (3) estimate the portion size of each individual ingredient for the meal and combine the calories/macros together manually, (4) simply eyeball things and make the best estimation you can. To minimize the chances of going overboard on calories before a particularly large meal or event, eating lighter throughout the earlier portion of the day can be helpful to create a "calorie buffer" for yourself.
- If you do go too high on total calories for a given day, it's usually best to simply put it behind you and get back on course the following day. It's critical to remember that your overall results will ultimately be determined by what you do *most* of the time over the longer term, and a "bad" day of eating or two is not going to be enough to have any significant negative impact on your results assuming your diet is on track the majority of the time. That said, if you do want to be as accurate as possible with your eating plan and/or are looking to get into a certain shape by a very specific deadline, reducing your calories the following day and/or implementing some additional cardio can be used to offset any very minor regression that might have occurred.
- Those in a cutting phase can optionally incorporate a "refeed day" once every 1-2 weeks as a way of offsetting some of the typical dieting side effects that come with an ongoing calorie deficit. A refeed day involves bumping calories back up to maintenance, with the increase coming primarily in the form of carbohydrates.
- Along with individual refeed days, longer "diet breaks" can be added in throughout your cutting phase as well where calories are increased back to maintenance for a full 1-2 week period for every 1-3 months of consistent dieting. As an approximate guideline, men between 10-15% body fat can employ a diet break once every 4-6 weeks, those between 15-20% can go with 8-10 weeks, and those above 20% can incorporate one every 12-14 weeks. Women can take the body fat figures above and add 7% to each of them to find their appropriate ranges.
- If you have or have had issues in the past maintaining dietary consistency over the long term, make sure to read through the "consistency tips" section of the main manual (page 91) for twelve helpful pointers in this area.

WEIGHT TRAINING

- Aim to perform each set in the gym at an intensity level of 1-2 reps short of muscular failure. Muscular failure is defined as the point in the set where you cannot complete any additional reps in proper form despite your best effort. For example, if lifting with every ounce of available strength meant that you could perform 8 reps with a given weight, you'd leave 1-2 reps "in the tank" and stop at the 6th or 7th rep rather than attempting that final "all out" 8th rep.
- If you're still a beginner, it will take some time to get a feel for things and learn exactly where the point of muscular failure is and how to properly anticipate it. Rather than just diving headfirst into the heavier weights, make sure to start off on the moderate side and slowly scale up your intensity levels over the first few weeks of lifting. Focus on developing proper technique first and foremost, and then gradually push the envelope further as you become more accustomed to each exercise.
- In order to make consistent, ongoing gains in muscle size and strength, the total amount of stress the muscles are subjected to must be gradually increased over time. This is known as the principle of "progressive overload". While there are several different forms of progressive overload that can ultimately be utilized, the most reliable method for anyone who has not yet reached the advanced stages of training is to simply focus on gradually increasing the amount of weight lifted on each exercise.
- To achieve these increases as efficiently as possible, it's very important that you keep a written record of every workout including the exercises performed, weight lifted and reps executed on each set, and then aim for continual improvement with each subsequent training session. The basic approach should be to strive for additional reps with a given weight until you're able to hit the upper end of the rep range for that exercise, at which point you should increase the actual weight on the following workout, go back to training for reps again, and repeat the process. (A complete explanation of this progression method can be found on page 108 of the main manual)
- Any time a weight increase is applied, your lifting form should remain exactly the same as it was with the previous weight. If your technique is being compromised through the use of excessive momentum, shortened range of motion and/or increased rep speed as you progress to a heavier load, you're simply moving at too quick a pace and need to take things more slowly.
- If everything in your program is being implemented properly, you should be able to increase the weight on each exercise roughly every 2-4 weeks throughout the beginner to intermediate phases of training. Larger compound lifts will progress at the fastest rate and can be increased in increments of 5-10 pounds at a time depending on the movement, while smaller isolation lifts will increase more slowly and in increments of 2.5-5 pounds. The rate of increase will also be influenced by calorie intake, with those in a bulking phase experiencing more pronounced strength gains in comparison to those who are cutting.

- When you eventually progress further into the advanced stages and are lifting weights that are quite heavy for your body, moderating your loads on some exercises may become necessary in order to protect your joints and prevent injuries. At that point, other methods of progression can be utilized beyond just lifting more weight in general, such as performing more total volume per workout, training each muscle more frequently throughout the week, reducing rest times in between sets, or adjusting your lifting form and rep speeds in order to make the same weight more mechanically challenging to train with.
- Each individual muscle group should be directly trained between 1.5-3 times per week. While there are a wide variety of different training splits available that can be used effectively given sufficient volume and intensity for the week as a whole, a reliable template that will work very well for the average natural trainee is as follows:

Beginners: Full body workout 3x per week for the first 6-12 months of training.

Intermediates: Upper/lower routine 3-4x per week for another 6-12 months after having completed the previous full body training cycle.

Advanced: Legs/push/pull split 4-5x per week for 6-12 more months after the upper/lower phase has been completed.

4 months is an acceptable length for each of these training cycles as well but would be considered as the absolute minimum time frame.

- Perform between 8-15 total sets per week for larger muscle groups (quads, hamstrings, glutes, back and chest), and between 4-8 total sets for smaller muscle groups (shoulders, biceps, triceps, abs and calves).
- Compound exercises should be treated as the underlying foundation of your workouts due to their high potential for progressive overload and ability to target multiple muscle groups simultaneously. After your compound exercises have been completed, additional isolation movements should be included afterwards to target your smaller muscle groups more closely.
- Barbells, dumbbells, cables and machines all have their own unique benefits and drawbacks depending on the exercise being performed, and while it isn't mandatory that every single one be included in your workouts in order to achieve significant gains, utilizing a mixture is typically ideal for the most complete and well-rounded results.
- The details behind the specific structure, function and optimal lifting methods for each major muscle group are outlined beginning on page 119 of the main manual.
- Virtually any rep range (as low as 3 up to 30+) can produce comparable increases in muscle size given sufficient intensity, volume and frequency throughout the week, but for optimal gains in hypertrophy, 5-10 reps per set would be considered the "sweet spot" that the majority of your training should be centered around, with very low rep and very high rep work being treated as an optional add-on.

- Muscle burn, muscle pump and muscle soreness are all inevitable by-products of intense weight training, but are not indicators of a successful workout in and of themselves and do not need to be specifically strived for in the gym. Progressive overload should always be used as the primary gauge as to whether or not muscle growth is being successfully stimulated from your workouts, regardless of how much muscle burn/pump/soreness you do or don't experience.
- Every rep of every exercise should be executed with proper form at all times and with the fullest range of motion that can be comfortably utilized. A small amount of natural body movement is fine throughout the lift, but you should always have the general sense of being in complete control of the weight from start to finish. Each exercise listed in The Body Transformation Blueprint Workout System is clickable and provides a video demonstration, written description and rundown of important form cues that should be applied to get the very most out of the lift.
- On the concentric portion of the rep (the "lifting" phase), move the weight as hard and fast as possible in proper form from point A to B, consciously focusing on contracting the targeted muscle. On the eccentric portion (the "lowering" phase), guide the weight back down in 2-4 seconds while actively resisting against it.
- Every muscle group on the body should be trained with equal focus and intensity in order to develop your physique in a balanced and symmetrical manner. Only when you become more advanced and have built up a solid size and strength foundation should muscle prioritization come into play as a means of bringing up potentially lagging body parts.
- There is no specific resting interval between sets that must be abided by at all times. The basic goal should simply be to rest as long as you need to in order to feel fully recovered from the previous set and ready to give a maximum effort on the next one. 1.5-3.5 minutes of rest should suffice for most sets most of the time, with larger compound exercises requiring more rest in comparison to smaller isolation movements. However, if you do feel that you require a bit more rest after a particularly challenging set, that's fine too. If in doubt, always rest longer rather than shorter.
- Instead of constantly mixing up your training variables from week to week (exercise selection, exercise order, rep ranges etc.) under the misguided notion of "confusing" the muscles into further growth, a much more effective approach is to remain consistent with one set routine for a period of time so that progressive overload can be properly tracked and strength gains can be maximized on a given set of lifts. Workout structure should only be modified if: (1) strength gains have plateaued and other possible causes (such as diet) have been properly addressed, (2) you're graduating from a beginner to intermediate or intermediate to advanced lifting routine, (3) a pre-set routine has been followed for a period of at least 8 weeks or more and you'd like to switch things up for the sake of mental variety.
- The optimal time to train during the day from a pure strength and performance standpoint is in the late afternoon to early evening hours due to increased core temperature, muscle activation and blood flow. Morning workouts are certainly still acceptable if they better suit

your schedule and/or you feel more psychologically motivated to train at that time (caffeine or a [high quality pre-workout](#) can also be used for an added boost), but if you have no set preference on the matter, waiting 5-6 hours after waking is ideal to fully maximize the quality of your workouts.

- There is no set “time limit” that your workouts must be completed in. Just aim to move through your routine in an efficient manner without wasting unnecessary time in between sets. Anywhere from 45-75 minutes would be a standard time frame for most hypertrophy-based weight training workouts, excluding warm ups.
- Incorporate a one week “deload phase” for every 6-12 weeks of consistent training. The two options for deloading are to either continue with your regular training plan but reduce the amount of weight on each exercise by 50%, or to simply take a full week off from lifting altogether. Either choice is acceptable and the decision can be made based on personal preference. In terms of nutrition, those in a bulking phase should remove the calorie surplus from their daily intake during the deload week, while those in a cutting phase can either continue maintaining a net deficit by keeping their intake at the same level, or add 200-300 calories back in per day if they’d prefer to treat the deload week as a diet break.
- Injury prevention should always be treated as a primary concern in your training plan, as your entire ability to build continual muscle size and strength hinges on the fact that your joints are healthy enough to keep up. Most serious lifters will encounter minor injuries here and there throughout their training career, but the chances of this can be minimized through the use of proper pre-workout warmups, correct lifting technique, balanced exercise selection, keeping training intensity/volume/frequency all within the appropriate limits, maintaining proper posture outside of the gym, and including joint care supplements as an optional add-on. (The details behind each of these points are covered starting on page 168 of the main manual)
- If you do experience an injury of some kind and the pain is only minor, you can try experimenting with different variations of whichever exercise(s) are causing discomfort to see if you’re able to work around it. If that isn’t possible, your best bet will be to take some time away from training the affected area altogether and get a professional diagnosis to help speed up the recovery process.
- If you are forced to take time away from the gym for any reason, keep in mind that muscle loss won’t begin to kick in until about two full weeks of inactivity assuming you continue eating roughly around maintenance calories and are consuming adequate protein. Even then, the process will be fairly slow moving from week two onward. Your physique may start to look a bit “deflated” in the mirror, but this is primarily the result of decreased fluid retention in the muscle cells, reduced glycogen storage and lowered levels of inflammation in the tissue as opposed to significant losses in actual lean muscle mass. Furthermore, due to the benefits of “muscle memory”, you’ll be able to regain whatever muscle you may have lost at a much quicker rate than it took to originally build it once you resume your regular training program.

- To optimize training performance and recovery (as well as overall physical and mental health in general), make sure you're getting enough restful sleep each night so that you feel reasonably alert and energized throughout the day. 7-9 hours will be an appropriate amount in most cases, though everyone is different and some may be able to operate fine on less than this. Some helpful tips to maximize the quality of your sleep each night include maintaining a consistent sleeping/waking schedule from day to day, avoiding work or other mind stimulating activities while in bed, cutting off all electronics 30-60 minutes before sleeping, avoiding going to sleep too full or too hungry, keeping your room cool (between 60-67 degrees) and as dark as possible, eliminating sudden background noises by sleeping in total silence or using white noise, and by avoiding caffeine and other stimulants within 6-8 hours of sleep.

CARDIO

- Although cardio is not a mandatory aspect of losing body fat during a cut or staying lean during a bulk (since this can technically be accomplished through proper diet alone), it is still recommended that some cardio be included in your plan during the week both for its supplemental calorie burning effects as well as the wide variety of overall physical and mental health benefits that it provides.
- 2-3 weekly cardio sessions is a reliable guideline for most average trainees to follow, optionally increasing the frequency later on for those who are deeper into a cutting phase and are looking to lose additional fat without decreasing their calorie intake any further. This cardio frequency takes into account both traditional “gym cardio” as well as any other physically demanding activities you might be performing during the week, such as sports, outdoor activities or a strenuous job.
- If you prefer including a greater amount of cardiovascular exercise throughout the week simply out of personal preference then that’s ultimately up to you, but keep in mind that cardio can become potentially counterproductive to muscle size and strength gains if the overall intensity/frequency/duration reaches an excessive level and begins interfering with weight training recovery and performance.
- If you’d like to combine your weight training and cardio together into a single session for the sake of efficiency, always perform your cardio post-workout rather than pre-workout so that your lifting strength is not negatively impacted. Weight training should always be treated as the number one priority in your workout program by far. The other option (and the ideal one from a pure muscle building and fat burning standpoint) is to separate the two by a period of at least six hours or more. However, the difference between spacing your weight training and cardio further apart versus performing your cardio post-workout will likely be fairly small in the grand scheme of things, so this is typically best decided based on personal preference.
- LISS cardio (“low intensity steady state” lasting 40-45 minutes per session) and HIIT cardio (“high intensity interval training” lasting anywhere from 5-20 minutes depending on the specific structure being used) both have their own unique benefits and drawbacks and ultimately burn a similar number of calories in the overall picture. Most trainees will be best off to simply choose the form they most prefer depending on which one is more enjoyable and sustainable for them over the long term. The only caveat here is that, for those who are aiming to fully maximize muscle size and strength gains, HIIT cardio should ideally be limited to no more than twice per week since it can be quite demanding on the body as a whole. Going somewhere in the middle by using a moderate intensity pace for 25-30 minutes per session is an option as well, as is utilizing a mixture of different forms throughout the week.
- When it comes to exercise selection, virtually any method that raises breathing/heart rate and requires sustained physical exertion can ultimately be used as an effective form of cardio. This could involve any traditional gym cardio machine (treadmill, bike, stairstepper, rower, airdyne, elliptical etc.), a mixture of different machines during the same session, or

other activities such as jumping rope, swimming, hitting a heavy bag, body weight intervals, outdoor activities, sports, gym classes etc. Once again, the decision here should ultimately be based on the preference of the individual, with the most important factor being that you simply get your cardio in for the week, period.

- Whatever specific cardio method(s) you do decide to go with, just aim to space them out during the week so that interference with your weight training workouts is minimized wherever possible in terms of the major muscle groups being utilized. For example, if you were on the first day or two of recovery from heavy squats and Romanian deadlifts, performing uphill sprint intervals or explosive plyometrics probably wouldn't be your best choice in that case. Or, if you had an upcoming chest and triceps session in the next 24 hours, repetitive high intensity punching on a heavy bag would be better replaced by something more lower body dominant.

SUPPLEMENTATION

- Supplements are not a mandatory aspect of an effective muscle building and fat burning program and it is still possible to achieve significant results without them. However, including a few properly formulated, scientifically backed supplements in your plan can provide an extra boost that helps to fully maximize your results over the long term while also improving the overall convenience of your diet plan.
- Despite the endless number of different supplements available on the market, only a very small percentage of these are supported by legitimate research showing clear improvements in training performance, body composition and overall health as a result of their use. The vast majority of the fitness supplement industry is centered around over-hyped, over-priced products containing ineffective ingredients and insufficient dosages that will provide minimal to no benefit at all. When selecting supplements for your program, it's very important that you choose carefully and do the proper research first.
- For the average trainee, there are five main recommended items (listed below) that should form the underlying basis of an effective supplementation plan. This includes certain “approved” third party brands, as well as supplements from [RealScience Athletics](#), a company I personally founded as a way of combatting all of the misleading tactics so common in the supplement industry today. [RealScience Athletics](#) takes a much different approach to most “mainstream” supplement brands by providing only a small list of select products that are 100% research-backed, clinically dosed, transparently labelled and manufactured with the highest quality cGMP certified methods available. (Body Transformation Blueprint members are also eligible for a 10% discount on their first order by using coupon code **BTB10**)
- **Recommended Supplement #1: Protein Powder.** Protein powders can be used to make a variety of different shakes, smoothies, snacks and other recipes that will allow you to hit your daily protein needs with improved convenience. Any type of protein powder is ultimately acceptable (whey, casein, egg, plant-based sources etc.), though whey works well as a reliable “default” option due to its high quality amino acid profile, taste and mixability. Anywhere between 1-3 scoops daily would be a standard amount depending on the individual and their daily protein needs. The specific timing is not important – protein powder can be utilized at any time of the day when it is most preferred. Three high quality whey protein options among many include [Optimum Nutrition 100% Whey](#), [Dymatize Elite Whey](#) and [Cellucor COR-Performance Whey](#), with some additional suggestions outlined in The Body Transformation Blueprint Supplement Guide. Protein bars/snacks are another acceptable option this category as well.
- **Recommended Supplement #2: Multivitamin.** A properly formulated multivitamin will help to ensure that all of your daily micronutrient needs are being fully met to optimize muscle growth, fat loss, training performance and overall physical/mental health. The primary vitamins and minerals that most hard-training lifters will benefit from include vitamin D, magnesium, zinc and vitamin K. The recommended product in this category is [Microcore](#) from RealScience Athletics, as it provides a complete blend of these four specific micronutrients (along with a full B vitamin complex for added nutritional

insurance) all delivered in their optimal dosages and highest quality forms. Traditional full spectrum multivitamins are best avoided in most cases, as they are typically under-dosed, provide low quality forms of the various micronutrients, and include many vitamins and minerals that are unnecessary (or potentially even unsafe) to consume in supplemental form over the long term.

- **Recommended Supplement #3: Fish Oil.** Fish oil contains the highly valuable omega-3 fatty acids EPA and DHA, two essential nutrients that produce a long list of benefits within the body related to improving overall health, preventing disease and optimizing body composition. Unless you regularly consume the equivalent of about 100 grams of fatty fish per day, chances are that your daily EPA/DHA intake falls below the recommended 1-2 gram range. [O3 Prime](#) from RealScience Athletics provides a premium quality source of Icelandic fish oil in the highly absorbable “re-esterified triglyceride” form (providing a higher bio-availability in comparison to the commonly sold ethyl ester and natural triglyceride forms) and is processed using enhanced molecular distillation for optimal levels of purity. Consume 2-4 grams of [O3 Prime](#) daily (delivering 1.1-2.2 grams of combined EPA/DHA), ideally split into two dosages taken with breakfast and lunch.
- **Recommended Supplement #4: Creatine Monohydrate.** Creatine improves the efficiency of the body’s usage of ATP (the primary energy molecule utilized during explosive bouts of exercise such as weight training), allowing you to lift slightly more weight and perform additional repetitions on your sets. Creatine also increases muscle fullness by drawing more water inside of the muscle cells. Consume 3-5 grams of creatine monohydrate per day in the form of Creapure™ ([Optimum Nutrition 100% Creatine](#) is one reliable choice of many), taken at any time and mixed with any liquid of your choice. Full creatine saturation will be reached after 2-3 weeks of consistent use. Creatine does not need to be loaded or cycled.
- **Recommended Supplement #5: Pre-Workout.** The goal of a pre-workout supplement is to maximize the overall quality of your training sessions by increasing levels of energy, strength and mental focus. Three reliable, research-backed pre-workout ingredients that would be recommended for this purpose are caffeine (200-300mg), l-tyrosine (2000-3000mg) and citrulline malate (6000-8000mg). [PureForm](#) from RealScience Athletics combines these three compounds together using their full clinical doses and most highly absorbable forms into a naturally sweetened pre-workout powder for guaranteed quality and convenience. The formula also includes 200mg of the calming amino acid l-theanine, which helps to “smoothen out” the effects of the caffeine and further improve mental focus without any sedative effects. Consume 1 scoop of [PureForm](#) 20-30 minutes before training.
- To learn about some additional “secondary” supplements that can be optionally added for those who already have the basics covered and the extra money to spend, as well as a list of “non-recommended” supplements that are best avoided (and why), you can consult the Body Transformation Blueprint Supplement Guide for more information.

PHASE TRANSITIONING

- When transitioning from a cutting phase to a bulking phase, the first step is to return to eating at your calorie maintenance level. You can do this by either re-calculating your maintenance calories using one of the equations given on page 39 of the main manual, or by adding calories back in based on your previous rate of weight loss. For example, one pound of consistent weekly weight loss would represent roughly a 500 calorie daily deficit since one pound of fat contains about 3500 calories. Give the initial calorie increase a few days to settle in, and once your body weight has stabilized, complete the transition by adding in the appropriate calorie surplus figure of either 100, 200 or 300 calories above maintenance. Your resting caloric expenditure will gradually increase after you've shifted into a surplus as fat burning hormone levels rise in response to the higher calories, so make sure to continue tracking your body weight and apply an increase of 100-150 calories per day whenever the scale clearly plateaus for a 1-2 week period.
- When transitioning from a bulk to a cut, you'll first need to determine your starting calorie intake for cutting by calculating your new calorie maintenance level and reducing it by 350-500. You can use one of the methods on page 39 of the main manual for this, or, if your body weight had remained relatively stable during the final stages of your bulk, whatever amount you were consuming in that period would represent your maintenance intake. Next, calculate the difference between your bulking calorie intake and cutting calorie intake, divide it by three, and then decrease your calories by that amount each week over a three week period to gradually acclimate your body to eating in a deficit. If you'll be performing additional cardio as part of your cut, add in the extra sessions at an even pace over that three week period as well. For those who want to lose fat as quickly as possible and are willing to simply tough out the initial spike in hunger, this three week "pre-diet phase" can be optionally skipped. However, reducing calories at a slightly slower pace is usually the better approach for most trainees when it comes to managing hunger and maximizing long term dietary adherence. The one exception here is for shorter 2-6 week "mini cuts", as the pre-diet phase is usually not necessary in these cases.
- If you'll be transitioning from either bulking or cutting into a maintenance phase (either because you've achieved your goal physique or need to put your training plan on hold temporarily), simply go back to eating at your calorie maintenance level on a continual basis. In terms of weight training, if your goal is to perform the minimum amount necessary to maintain your existing muscle mass and strength, roughly 5-6 weekly sets for larger muscle groups and 2-3 sets for smaller muscle groups should be sufficient, hitting each muscle directly at least once per week and sticking to the same weights from session to session rather than actively striving for progressive overload.

PROGRESS TRACKING

- An average rate of overall body weight gain (including muscle, water, glycogen and fat) for a muscle building beginner would be approximately half a pound per week during the first year of training. 3 pounds per month should be considered as the maximum upper limit, as consistently gaining more than this likely indicates excessive increases in body fat. For every year of proper training thereafter, this rate of growth should decrease by about 50%. Women can expect to gain muscle roughly half as quickly as men due to hormonal differences. Since muscle growth is a fairly slow process and the exact rate of increase will vary between individuals, these figures should all be simply treated as ballpark estimates.
- To track your changes in body weight, weigh yourself first thing in the morning on a digital scale at least once every 2-3 days before eating and after using the washroom. If your body weight is increasing at a rate significantly above or below the ranges previously given (or isn't increasing at all), the first step is to conduct a "dietary audit" by precisely measuring all of your daily food intake in detail to ensure that no errors are being made with your calorie/macro tracking. Assuming no tracking errors are involved, increase or decrease your calorie intake by 100-150 per day every 5-7 days until your changes in body weight are landing within the proper range.
- Until you've reached the advanced stages of lifting (at which point your progress in the gym will come at a much slower pace), you should expect your strength levels to be consistently increasing in some form virtually every single week, whether that involves performing an additional rep or two with the same weight on each exercise or increasing the actual weight itself. If you've gone two full weeks without any progression at all, something in your plan is off and needs to be adjusted. Possible steps that may help include increasing calorie intake, fine-tuning macronutrient intake, increasing training intensity levels or reducing training volume/frequency. Each of these methods are discussed in more detail starting on page 244 of the main manual.
- If your body weight and strength are both consistently increasing at an appropriate rate, you can be reasonably assured that your bulking phase is on the right track for the most part. To fine-tune your progress tracking approach further, you can take progress photos once every 2-4 weeks (first thing in the morning before eating or training and using the same lighting conditions each time) and body part measurements (chest, upper arm, forearm, neck, waist, thigh and calf, once again taken first thing in the morning before training).
- Since body fat percentages are notoriously difficult to accurately measure, this typically won't be necessary to include as a progress tracking method for the vast majority of trainees. That said, if minimizing body fat gains is a top priority for you and you'd like to be as detailed as possible with your tracking, in-home methods such as body composition scales, handheld BIA devices or calipers can be optionally included as long as the same method is being consistently used each time. Just remember to treat these measurements as rough approximations only and to use them as a way of tracking the *relative* increase in body fat over time rather than as a tool to determine your actual objective body fat percentage. A net increase of 0.5-1% body fat per month would be an acceptable rate while bulking.

- An expected lifetime goal for a natural lifter with average genetics would be approximately 30 pounds of total lean muscle mass gained. Those with below average or above average genetics would likely be looking at around 20-40 pounds respectively. Assuming you're following a properly structured program and implementing it consistently, you should expect to achieve roughly 50% of your total genetic muscle building potential in the first year of training, 75% after the second year and 85-90% after the third. By year 4-5 and beyond you should be right up near your maximum natural limit, and while continued muscle gains can certainly still be made at that point, the increases will be very marginal and require much longer time periods to achieve.
- When tracking progress during a cutting phase, the same methods outlined above also apply. In terms of body weight, an expected rate of overall weight loss in most cases (the majority of which will be in the form of fat) would be between 1-2 pounds per week depending on the size of the calorie deficit used. You may experience a quick initial drop of 3-4 pounds per week in the first week or two as your body adjusts to the lower calories, but it should stabilize at around 1-2 pounds per week after that. (Those who are significantly over weight may be able to comfortably lose upwards of 3 pounds per week on a consistent basis, at least in the beginning stages of their program.) If your body weight is decreasing at a rate slower than this (or isn't decreasing at all) the first step is to once again conduct a dietary audit. If after accounting for everything in detail it turns out that no calorie/macro tracking errors are being made, decrease your intake by 100-150 calories per day once every 5-7 days until the scale begins moving at the appropriate rate.
- If your body weight is remaining mostly stagnant from week to week (or is decreasing but at a fairly slow pace) yet you're clearly seeing improvements in body composition in terms of overall leanness, muscle definition, changes in how your clothes fit etc., this indicates that you are likely recompositioning by losing fat and gaining muscle at the same time. In that case, you can keep your calorie intake at the same level for the time being and use the other methods described below as your primary means of tracking progress rather than relying on the scale.
- Changes in strength should be closely monitored during a cut as this will be an important indicator as to how well your existing muscle mass is being retained as you lean down. Strength levels should be at least maintained as a minimum on most exercises (though they'll often continue to increase as long as your training and diet are properly structured, especially in novice lifters), only potentially reducing slightly in the later stages, particularly for those who are cutting down to fairly low levels of body fat. If strength levels are significantly dropping from week to week throughout your cut, this may indicate the need to increase calorie intake, monitor macronutrient intake more closely, reduce cardio frequency and/or reduce weight training volume/frequency. Consult page 256 for more details on each of these options if necessary.
- Progress photos, body part measurements and body fat percentage readings should all be utilized during a cut in the same way as was described above for bulking. If you are currently in a recomposition phase, waistline measurements and progress pictures become increasingly important in order to determine whether body fat is being consistently lost despite minimal changes in overall body weight. Body fat percentage readings can once

again be used to track the approximate relative decrease over time, with a 0.25-0.75% reduction per week being a fairly standard amount depending on one's current body weight, body fat percentage and the size of the calorie deficit being used. For those with the extra money to spend and who want to be as accurate as possible with their tracking, DEXA scans can be used to obtain more reliable readings.