



Strength Training at Home — 30 Bodyweight and Dumbbell Exercises

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01

Before You Begin: Three Rules That Decide Your Results

You Have a Floor. That Is Enough – but You Need to Know How

Two workouts a week. Half an hour each. That really is enough to start building strength and to see results. I am not writing this to talk you into it — I am writing it because a study of 42 healthy adults produced exactly that outcome: eight weeks, twice a week, 30 minutes a session, and every participant recorded a measurable gain in muscle mass and strength. You can start small and do it well. That is a better strategy than starting big and quitting after a fortnight.

Three things decide whether training at home will bring results: frequency, session structure and progression. None of them is complicated.

Frequency. Train two to three times a week, but not on consecutive days. Muscles need time to rebuild — that is when they actually grow. Monday, Wednesday and possibly Friday is the classic arrangement, and it works. Two sessions a week produce effects similar to three, as long as the total work performed is comparable. In other words: consistency matters more than a heroic number of sessions.

Session structure. Every workout has three parts: a warm-up, the main work and a cool-down. The warm-up is not optional — it is what makes the main exercises worth doing at all. It should include a few minutes of light aerobic movement (marching in place, jumping, running in place), mobility drills, and one or two movements that mimic what you are about to do, but without load. The main part is the exercises from this book, 3 sets of 8–12 repetitions, with 60–90 seconds of rest between sets. The cool-down is 3–5 minutes of unhurried stretching for the muscles that worked.

Progression. This is the only term that needs a short explanation.

Progressive overload

The principle of gradually increasing the training stimulus. A muscle adapts to the load it works against — to keep growing, it has to be given progressively harder tasks. In practice: more repetitions, more sets, shorter rest or heavier weight. Without it, training stalls.

In practice it looks simple: if you did 3 sets of 10 push-ups this week, try 3 sets of 12 next week. If that goes well — move to a harder version or pick up dumbbells. You do not have to count kilograms to the gram. You only have to make sure that something gets harder from session to session.

One Goal per Workout

Do not ask: “how much can I do today?”. Ask: “what do I want to do better than last time?”. The second question leads to progress. The first leads to fatigue without results.



Figure 1.1: Steady progression — even a small change in every workout — is the key to long-term results from training at home.

Warm-Up and Cool-Down: Eight Minutes That Protect Your Joints

Most injuries in home workouts do not happen during the exercise — they happen in the first two minutes, when cold muscles take a full load. So begin every session with the protocol below.

Warm-up (5 minutes): Perform each movement for 40 seconds, with no rest in between.

1. *Hip circles* — feet hip-width apart, hands on your hips, trace large circles.
2. *Inchworm* — from standing, bend down, walk your hands out to a plank, walk back — it mobilises the whole posterior chain.

3. *Leg swings* — hold a wall and swing one leg front to back, 20 seconds per side.
4. *Paused squat* — lower into a squat, hold for 2 seconds at the bottom, stand up — this is a warm-up, not strength work, so keep the tempo calm.
5. *Kneeling thoracic rotations* — on all fours, one hand behind your head, rotate the elbow towards the ceiling.

Cool-down (3 minutes): After training, hold each position for 30–45 seconds.

1. *Child's pose* — stretches the spine and hips.
2. *Supine spinal twist* — on your back, knee to chest, then let it fall to the side.
3. *Standing quad stretch* — stand next to a wall and grab your foot behind you.

 The 1:8 Rule

If you only have 30 minutes to train, do not cut the warm-up to make room for the main work — cut the number of sets instead. Five minutes of preparation is an investment that pays back as weeks without injury.

⚠ Do Not Confuse a Warm-Up With Static Stretching

Static stretching *before* training (holding a forward fold for 60 seconds, for example) can temporarily reduce muscular strength by as much as 8%. Save it for the cool-down — that is where it does exactly what it should.

How to Read Every Exercise in This Book

Each of the 30 exercises described in the following chapters has the same structure. Read it once — and you know how to read all the rest.

1. **Muscle group** — what does the main work, what assists.
2. **Starting position** — where you stand, sit or lie before you move.
3. **Movement cue** — one specific signal to keep your attention on during the movement.
4. **Mistake** — the most common problem that ruins technique or invites injury.
5. **Tip** — practical advice: how to make it easier, how to make it harder, or what to watch out for.

Most exercises come in two variants: bodyweight and with dumbbells. The table below shows how that works in practice.

Table 1.1: Exercise variants: bodyweight and with dumbbells

Exercise	Bodyweight	With dumbbells
Squat	Bodyweight squat	Goblet squat or dumbbell squat
Press	Push-up	Dumbbell floor press
Row	Inverted row on the floor	Bent-over dumbbell row
Raise	Glute bridge	Glute bridge with a dumbbell on the hips

💡 Start With the Bodyweight Variant

Even if you own dumbbells, spend the first two weeks mastering technique in the bodyweight version. It is easier to fix a fault without extra load than with kilograms in your hands.

So much for theory. The exercises start on the next page.

02

Legs and Glutes: The Foundation of Strength

Why Legs Matter More Than You Think

The muscles of the legs and glutes are the largest muscle groups in the body — working them translates into functional strength you feel every time you climb stairs, get up from a chair or carry the shopping. The eight exercises below run from simple two-legged patterns to more demanding single-leg movements, so whatever your level, you can start at the beginning and progress in the same order.

EXERCISE 1

Bodyweight Squat

Muscle group: quadriceps (main work), glutes, hamstrings, trunk stabilisers.

Starting position: Stand with your feet roughly shoulder-width apart, toes turned slightly outward at about 15–30 degrees. Arms extended in front of you or folded across your chest.

Movement cue: Lower your hips down and back, as though you were sitting onto a low stool. Descend until your thighs are parallel to the floor. Throughout the movement the chest stays lifted and the heels press firmly into the ground.



Figure 2.1: Correct depth in the bodyweight squat — thighs parallel to the floor, chest lifted, heels planted firmly on the ground.

Mistake: Knees collapsing inward as you stand up. When you notice the knees drifting together over your feet, deliberately push them out towards your little toes.

💡 Depth Matters

Stopping before your thighs reach parallel shortens the range in which the glutes work. If you cannot yet get low enough, put your heels on a folded towel — that will temporarily improve your mobility and let you go deeper without rounding your back.

EXERCISE 2

Goblet Squat

Muscle group: quadriceps, glutes, hamstrings, spinal erectors.

Starting position: Take one dumbbell in both hands by its head and hold it vertically against your chest, elbows pointing down. Feet set a little wider than in the bodyweight squat.

Movement cue: Descend, and once you reach the bottom position, press your elbows outward from the inside against your knees. This opens the hips and straightens the trunk — the goblet squat almost automatically teaches the correct pattern, because the dumbbell in front of your chest shifts your centre of gravity and forces an upright torso.

Mistake: Letting the dumbbell drop during the movement because your arms tire. Keep it against your chest for the whole repetition. If the weight is too heavy to hold that position, choose a lighter dumbbell.

💡 A Good Test of Arm and Leg Strength at Once

The goblet squat is the exercise in which it is easiest to judge whether your torso really is working vertically. If you tip forward, the dumbbell is too heavy or your hip mobility needs work.

EXERCISE 3

Stationary Lunge

Muscle group: quadriceps (front leg), glutes, hamstrings, knee stabilisers.

Starting position: Stand tall, feet together, arms relaxed at your sides or on your hips.

Movement cue: Step forward, bending both knees to a right angle. The front knee stays above the ankle while the rear knee lowers close to the floor. Return to the starting position by driving through the heel of the front foot. The step should be long enough that the shin of the front leg is vertical in the bottom position.

Mistake: Banging the rear knee into the floor. Lower it slowly and stop a few centimetres short. A sudden impact sends force into the joint instead of the muscles.

The Torso Has to Stay Upright

Leaning forward on the way down shifts the load from the quadriceps to the lower back. If holding an upright position is difficult, take a shorter step and reduce the depth until the technique is stable.

EXERCISE 4

Dumbbell Lunge

Muscle group: quadriceps, glutes, hamstrings, trunk stabilisers.

Starting position: Hold one dumbbell in each hand, arms hanging at your sides. Feet together, back neutral.

Movement cue: Perform the lunge exactly as in the unloaded version, but pay attention to two things: the wrists stay neutral throughout (do not let them bend inward under the weight of the dumbbells), and lower the rear knee slowly, counting to two. That longer descent builds more muscular tension than fast repetitions with a lighter weight.

Mistake: Choosing too heavy a weight and cutting the range of motion in order to lift it. If you cannot complete 8 clean repetitions on each leg, go back to lighter dumbbells.

Check Your Grip

Hold the dumbbells securely, but without squeezing for dear life. Tension in the hands travels up into the shoulders and chest, and then it is harder to keep the torso relaxed through the whole movement.

EXERCISE 5

Bodyweight Hip Thrust

Muscle group: gluteus maximus (main work), gluteus medius and minimus, hamstrings, trunk stabilisers.

Starting position: Sit on the floor with your back to a sofa or a stable chair. Rest your upper back against the edge of the seat, roughly at the level of the lower shoulder blades. Feet flat on the floor, knees bent, shins close to vertical in the top position.

Movement cue: Brace your abdomen and drive your hips upward until your torso and thighs form a single line. At the top, pause for a second and squeeze the glutes hard. The pelvis is tucked slightly under, not pushed as high as it will go.

Mistake: Arching the lower back instead of activating the glutes. If at the top of the movement you feel pressure in the lumbar spine rather than tension in the glutes, the pelvis is travelling too high and the spinal erectors have taken over.

The Pause Makes the Difference

A one- to two-second hold at the top is the simplest way to check whether the glutes really are working. Without a pause it is easy to ride through the top of the movement with no genuine tension.

EXERCISE 6

Dumbbell Hip Thrust

Muscle group: gluteus maximus, gluteus medius and minimus, hamstrings.

Starting position: Identical to the bodyweight version. Lay a dumbbell horizontally across your hips, right at the hip crease. Hold it with both hands from above so that it does not slide during the movement. You can place a folded towel between the dumbbell and your skin to reduce the discomfort.

Movement cue: Perform the movement exactly as in the bodyweight version. The dumbbell should not shift, so your hands hold it steady against the hips for the whole repetition.

Mistake: Moving up to a heavier variant “because that is what you do”. Switch to a heavier dumbbell only once you can perform 15 clean repetitions with a pause at the top, not when you have a feeling that the current one is too light.

Feel the Glutes, Do Not Just Move Them

The hip thrust works only when the main effort genuinely lands in the glutes. Before you add weight, learn to feel the tension in the top position. Weight is a tool, not proof of progress.

EXERCISE 7

Bodyweight Single-Leg Deadlift

Muscle group: hamstrings, gluteus maximus, ankle and hip stabilisers, deep trunk muscles.

Starting position: Stand on one leg, arms hanging at your sides. Soften the knee of the supporting leg slightly.

Movement cue: Hinge your torso forward while lifting the straight free leg behind you. Keep a single line from your head through the spine to the heel of the raised leg. The movement comes from the hips, not from rounding the back. Return to standing by squeezing the glute of the supporting leg.

Mistake: Rotating the pelvis, that is, letting one side of the hips lift along with the raised leg. If you see that, lift the leg lower and shorten the range to the point where the pelvis stays level.

Your Eyes Help

Look at a fixed point in front of you throughout the movement. Shifting your gaze noticeably worsens your balance and makes pelvic control harder.

EXERCISE 8

Romanian Deadlift With Dumbbells

Muscle group: hamstrings, gluteus maximus, spinal erectors (stabilisation).

Starting position: Stand with your feet hip-width apart, holding a dumbbell in each hand in front of your thighs, palms facing each other.

Movement cue: Hinge your torso forward at the hips, sliding the dumbbells close to your thighs the whole way. Descend until you feel a clear stretch in the back of your thighs, keeping your back neutral. Return to standing by squeezing your glutes and hamstrings. The dumbbells do not drift away from your legs by even a centimetre.



Figure 2.2: Romanian deadlift with dumbbells — a hip hinge with the dumbbells tracking close to the thighs and the spine neutral.

Mistake: Bending the back in order to reach lower. Your depth is set by hamstring mobility, not by rounding the spine. Stop where the back is still flat.

💡 A Simple Range Test

If the dumbbells reach roughly mid-shin with a neutral back, the range is sufficient. Going lower at the cost of a rounded lumbar spine adds nothing to glute and hamstring training, and it adds unnecessary load to the spine.

✅ Checklist: Legs and Glutes

- ☐ Master the bodyweight squat to parallel before you add dumbbells.
- ☐ In the goblet squat, check that your elbows push the knees outward in the bottom position.
- ☐ In the lunge, make sure the shin of the front leg is vertical and the rear knee lowers slowly.
- ☐ In the hip thrust, pause for a second at the top and check that you feel tension in the glutes, not in the lower back.
- ☐ In the Romanian deadlift, keep the dumbbells against your legs throughout and stop before your back rounds.
- ☐ In the single-leg deadlift, controlling a level pelvis matters more than how far you hinge.

03

Trunk and Core: The Stability That Protects Your Spine

The Core Is Not Just a Six-Pack

When most people hear “ab training” they think of crunches. In fact the core is the whole system of muscles that surrounds the spine like a cylinder: the transverse abdominis, the obliques, the multifidus, the pelvic floor muscles and the diaphragm. Together they stabilise the spine a fraction of a second before every movement you make, including the squat and the deadlift from the previous chapter. The seven exercises below strengthen that system systematically rather than selectively.

Stabilisation Is the Foundation, Not a Separate Category

The core does not work only during “ab exercises”. It engages in every strength movement. Weak trunk stabilisers mean that every exercise in Chapters 2, 4 and 5 is less effective and riskier for your spine.

EXERCISE 9

Plank

Muscle group: transverse abdominis, spinal erectors, obliques, gluteus maximus (stabilisation).

Starting position: Support yourself on your forearms, elbows directly under your shoulders. Your toes push off the floor and your body forms a single straight line from head to heels.

Movement cue: Squeeze your glutes and gently draw in your lower abdomen, imagining that you want to pull your navel towards your spine. Hold the position. The hips neither sag nor rise above the line of the torso. Breathe calmly throughout.



Figure 3.1: Correct plank position: the body forms a single straight line, the hips do not sag, and breathing stays easy.

Mistake: Holding your breath to “make it easier” to keep the tension. Paradoxically, breath-holding disrupts the work of the diaphragm, which is part of the stabilising system, and shortens the time you can hold the position. If you cannot breathe in a plank, shorten the set.

Start With 10 Seconds

If 30 seconds with good technique is too much, break it into sets of 10 seconds with rests. Three sets of 10 seconds is better training than 25 seconds with your hips in the air and no breathing.

EXERCISE 10

Side Plank

Muscle group: obliques (internal and external), quadratus lumborum, gluteus medius.

Starting position: Lie on your side supported on your forearm, elbow under your shoulder. Feet stacked one on top of the other. For an easier version, bend the bottom leg at the knee with the foot behind you.

Movement cue: Lift your hips until your torso and legs form a straight line. The top arm rests on your hip or reaches straight up. Look ahead, not down.

Mistake: Letting the hips drop sideways after a few seconds. This is not the kind of fatigue you can “train through” — a dropped hip

shifts the load from the obliques onto the shoulder and lumbar joints. Once the hips drop, end the set.

 Symmetry Matters More Than Time

Hold the same set length on the left and the right. A difference between sides of more than 20–30% is a signal that one side is clearly weaker and deserves more attention.

EXERCISE 11

Dead Bug

Muscle group: transverse abdominis, obliques, spinal erectors (anti-rotation stabilisation).

Starting position: Lie on your back. Bend your hips and knees to 90 degrees and lift them up. Reach your arms straight towards the ceiling.

Movement cue: Extend the left leg and the right arm towards the floor at the same time, without touching it. The lower back stays pressed to the floor throughout. Return to the starting position and switch sides. The movement should be slow and controlled.

Mistake: Doing the exercise too fast. This is an anti-rotation drill, not a cardio one — its value comes from the lumbar spine staying still while the limbs move. A tempo faster than two seconds in each direction usually means the back is lifting off the floor.

For People With Back Pain

The dead bug is one of the safer core exercises for people with lumbar complaints, precisely because the spine stays neutral throughout the movement. Start with short ranges and do not force full leg extension if your back lifts immediately.

EXERCISE 12

Hollow Body Hold

Muscle group: the entire anterior chain: rectus abdominis, obliques, hip flexors.

Starting position: Lie on your back, arms at your sides or extended overhead. Legs straight.

Movement cue: Lift your shoulders and legs a handspan off the floor. The lower back must stay pressed into the floor, exactly as in the dead bug. The body takes the shape of a boat. Hold still and keep breathing.

Mistake: Starting straight away with straight legs. Straighter legs create a longer lever and increase the difficulty considerably. Begin with your knees bent to 90 degrees and your feet lifted. Once you can hold that version for 20 seconds with your back on the floor, lengthen the legs.

 Progression in Four Steps

Legs bent, arms at your sides. Legs bent, arms overhead. Legs straight, arms at your sides. Legs straight, arms overhead. Each step is a separate challenge.

EXERCISE 13

Russian Twist With a Dumbbell

Muscle group: external and internal obliques, rectus abdominis (stabilisation).

Starting position: Sit on the floor, knees bent, feet on the floor or lifted a few centimetres. Torso leaning back at about 45 degrees. Hold a dumbbell in both hands in front of your chest.

Movement cue: Rotate your torso to the right, carrying the dumbbell out to the side. Return to the middle and rotate to the left. The movement comes from the torso, and the dumbbell merely follows it.

Mistake: Swinging the dumbbell from side to side while the torso stays still. This is one of the most common faults in this exercise. If your arms are turning while your hips and chest stand still, you are training your wrists, not your obliques.

 Lighter Dumbbell, Slower Tempo

In the Russian twist, weight is not the priority. A 4–6 kg dumbbell and two seconds in each direction will give you far more than 12 kg swung with momentum.

EXERCISE 14

Lying Leg Raise

Muscle group: rectus abdominis (lower portion), hip flexors.

Starting position: Lie on your back, legs straight, arms at your sides or under your glutes to support the lower back.

Movement cue: Raise your legs to vertical, then lower them under control, stopping just above the floor. Do not set your legs down between repetitions. The lower back stays on the floor throughout.

Mistake: Jerking on the way up. The value of this exercise lies in the lowering phase, not the lifting. Lowering the legs slowly over three to four seconds is harder training than ten fast repetitions.

💡 A Regression for Beginners

Bend your knees to 90 degrees. The shortened lever reduces the load and lets you keep your back on the floor. Once you can manage 12 repetitions with bent knees without the back lifting, straighten your legs.

EXERCISE 15

Superman (Prone Back Extension)

Muscle group: back extensors, multifidus, gluteus maximus, rear deltoids.

Starting position: Lie face down on the floor, arms extended in front of your head, legs straight.

Movement cue: Lift your arms and legs a handspan off the floor at the same time. Hold for two seconds at the top, squeezing your glutes and back extensors. Lower under control. Keep your gaze on the floor so the neck stays in line with the spine.



Figure 3.2: The Superman activates the back extensors and glutes, strengthening the posterior chain before lumbar problems appear.

Mistake: Skipping this exercise if you sit at a desk all day, because “your back does not hurt”. Weakened back extensors are often the quiet cause of lumbar problems that only show up under heavier exercises. The Superman strengthens that area before it has a chance to start causing trouble.

Do Not Crane Your Neck

Lifting your head high overloads the cervical spine. Direct your gaze at the floor or slightly ahead; your forehead should stay close to the level of your arms.

Checklist: Trunk and Core

- ☐ In the plank, check that you are breathing freely before you start counting seconds.
- ☐ In the side plank, compare your times on the left and the right and bring the weaker side up.
- ☐ In the dead bug, make sure the lower back does not lift off the floor as the leg extends.
- ☐ In the hollow body hold, start with the bent-knee version and lengthen the legs only once the technique is solid.
- ☐ In the Russian twist, check that the torso is rotating, not just the arms.
- ☐ In the leg raise, focus on the lowering phase: a slow descent gives you more than a fast lift.
- ☐ Add the Superman to every workout if you work sitting down.

04

Chest and Triceps: Push From the Floor to the Ceiling

The Push-Up as the Centre of the Workout, Not the Warm-Up

The push-up is one of the best-researched strength exercises for the upper body. It works the chest, the triceps and the front deltoids in much the same way as the bench press, but it lets the shoulder blades move freely. The eight exercises in this chapter form a complete “push” block — from the simplest regression to triceps isolation with a dumbbell. The order is not accidental: it runs from compound movements to isolation ones, which matches the order in which you should perform them in a workout.

EXERCISE 16

Standard Push-Up

Muscle group: chest (pectoralis major), triceps, front deltoids, core stabilisers.

Starting position: Move into a plank — the body forms a single line from head to heels, hands set shoulder-width apart or slightly wider, fingers pointing forward. Shoulder blades set back, abdomen braced, hips neither piked up nor sagging.

Movement cue: Lower your chest between your hands, not to your hands. It is a subtle difference, but a crucial one: the chest should come down low, almost brushing the floor, while the elbows bend at roughly 45 degrees relative to the torso. Press back up, straightening the elbows fully at the top.

Mistake: The hips rising first, before the chest has returned to the starting position. It looks like a push-up and works like a bad plank. The whole point is one body, one movement.

💡 How to Check Whether Your Body Line Is Straight

Lay a stick or a broom handle along your back. It should touch the back of your head, your mid-back and your sacrum at the same time. If there is a gap in the middle — your hips are sagging. If the stick pushes away from your head — you are looking up too high.

EXERCISE 17

Knee Push-Up (Regression)

Muscle group: chest, triceps, front deltoids — the same muscles as in the standard push-up, but with less bodyweight involved.

Starting position: Kneel with your knees on the floor and your hands shoulder-width apart. Note: the knees do not sit back as they would on all fours — the line of the hips should extend the line of the torso, not break at the waist.

Movement cue: The mechanics are identical to the standard push-up. The chest comes down between the hands, the elbows stay at 45

degrees, full extension at the top. The only difference is the point of support.

Mistake: Treating this version as “the exercise for people who cannot manage”. That is the wrong way to think about it. It is the exercise for people who are still building strength — and that is an entirely different starting point. Once you can do 12 clean repetitions without feeling that you are about to collapse, it is time to move to the standard push-up.

 When to Come Back to This Regression

Even after mastering the standard push-up it is worth returning to the knee version for high-set work or towards the end of a session, when fatigue starts to spoil your technique. A good knee push-up beats a crooked standard one.

EXERCISE 18

Wide Push-Up

Muscle group: chest with more emphasis on the outer fibres, triceps, deltoids.

Starting position: Plank position, hands set clearly wider than your shoulders — roughly at the width of your spread elbows.

Movement cue: The range of motion will be slightly shorter than in the standard push-up, because the shoulders have less room to descend. That is normal, not a technical fault. Focus on the chest coming down evenly rather than on “getting more depth” at the cost of scapular control.

Mistake: Elbows flaring beyond 45 degrees relative to the torso, almost perpendicular to the body. With a wide hand position this is a natural temptation, but it overloads the shoulder joint. Keep the elbows at an angle — even if that means bringing your hands in a little.

Shoulder Pain With a Wide Hand Position

If you feel pinching or pain at the front of the shoulder during wide push-ups, go back to the standard hand position. Wide push-ups are not essential — the standard and close-grip versions are quite enough for full chest development.

EXERCISE 19

Close-Grip Push-Up (Triceps Push-Up)

Muscle group: triceps (all three heads) and the middle of the chest.

Starting position: Plank position, hands closer together than in the standard push-up — your thumbs and index fingers can almost touch, forming a triangle. That is not required; it is enough that the hands are narrower than your shoulders.

Movement cue: The elbows travel along the torso throughout the movement — lowering right beside the ribs, not drifting out to the sides. The chest comes down between the hands and you feel clear tension at the back of the arms.

Mistake: Letting the elbows flare out to the sides during the movement. When the elbows leave the torso, the exercise turns into a poor version of the standard push-up. The triceps then do not get enough stimulus to grow.

💡 The Simplest Test for Triceps Isolation

After a set, put a hand on the back of your arm and check whether the muscle is pumped and warm. If you feel the fatigue mainly in your chest — the elbows were drifting out too far.

EXERCISE 20

Dumbbell Floor Press

Muscle group: chest, triceps, front deltoids.

Starting position: Sit on the floor with the dumbbells stood upright on your thighs. Lie back while lifting the dumbbells, your knees helping to push them into position over your chest. Feet on the floor, knees bent, shoulder blades gently set back.

Movement cue: Lower the dumbbells until the upper arm (the triceps) rests flat on the floor. That is a natural limit to the range of motion. Press up to full elbow extension.

Mistake: Bouncing off the floor. When the arm touches down, some people use that moment as a spring. Instead, take a short pause and press from a static hold — the muscles will then get a genuine stimulus.

The floor limits the range of motion in the bottom phase — that is an advantage, not a drawback. With heavy dumbbells, the reduced range protects the shoulder joint from overload at the most vulnerable point of the movement.

EXERCISE 21

Dumbbell Floor Fly

Muscle group: chest (emphasis on stretch and tension), front deltoids.

Starting position: Identical to the floor press — back on the floor, dumbbells lifted over the chest, palms facing each other, elbows slightly bent.

Movement cue: Lower the dumbbells out to the sides in a wide arc, keeping the same bend in the elbows. Stop the movement when your forearm touches the floor — that is the natural limit. Come back along the same arc, squeezing the chest at the top.

Mistake: Straightening the elbows on the way down. Once the elbow extends, the fly turns into a press. Your arms should look as if they were hugging a large tree the whole time.

Weight in the Fly

Choose dumbbells clearly lighter than for the floor press — usually 30–40% less. Here the muscle is stretched rather than pushed, which makes it more vulnerable to overload if the weight is too heavy.

EXERCISE 22

Dumbbell Shoulder Press

Muscle group: deltoids (chiefly the front and lateral heads), triceps, upper chest.

Starting position: Seated or standing, dumbbells set at shoulder height, elbows under the dumbbells rather than in front of them. Palms facing forward.

Movement cue: Press the dumbbells straight up to full extension without pushing your head forward. At the top the dumbbells should be over the middle of your head, not in front of your face.

Mistake: Lumbar hyperextension when pressing heavier dumbbells. As the weight goes up, the lower back arches to shift the centre of gravity. Brace your abdomen as you would for a plank before you start pressing. If the spine still arches — the dumbbells are too heavy.

EXERCISE 23

Dumbbell Skull Crusher

Muscle group: triceps (all three heads, with particular emphasis on the long head).

Starting position: Lying on your back, one dumbbell held in both hands or a separate dumbbell in each hand, arms extended perpendicular to the floor.

Movement cue: Bend only at the elbows, lowering the dumbbells towards your forehead. The elbows stay still throughout the move-



Figure 4.1: The starting position for the dumbbell skull crusher – arms perpendicular to the floor, elbows steady throughout the movement.

ment — they neither travel back behind your head nor flare out to the sides. Straighten your arms back to the starting position.

Mistake: Letting the elbows drift back behind the head as you lower. When the elbow escapes backwards, the triceps no longer does the work on its own — the movement becomes a combination of elbow extension and arm lowering. Less effective, and harder on the elbow joint.

The skull crusher is an effective exercise, but for people starting out, the close-grip push-up gives the triceps a comparable stimulus with far less risk to the elbow joint. It is worth introducing the skull crusher once you have a few weeks of close-grip push-ups behind you and you are looking for a new stimulus.

✓ **Checklist: Chest and Triceps**

- ☐ In every push-up, check that the hips and chest move together, rather than the hips leading.
- ☐ In the close-grip push-up, put a hand on your triceps after a set — the muscle should be warm and pumped.
- ☐ In the floor press, take a short pause at the bottom instead of bouncing off the floor.
- ☐ In the fly, choose dumbbells clearly lighter than for pressing.
- ☐ In the shoulder press, brace your abdomen before you press so that you do not arch your lower back.
- ☐ Add the skull crusher to your plan only after several weeks of close-grip push-ups.

Back and Biceps: Pull Without a Bar

A Strong Back Without a Bar – Possible, but It Takes Ingenuity

A pull-up bar gives you an advantage. That is a fair admission. The pull-up is the king of back exercises, and without equipment it is hard to replace one for one. You can, however, build a solid “pull” block without a single screw driven into a door frame — provided you have dumbbells and the table you eat dinner at. The seven exercises below attack the back from several directions and bring in the biceps as a natural complement. Neglecting these muscles shows in your posture: the shoulders travel forward and the upper back rounds. This is not about looks — it is a sign of an imbalance between push and pull work.

EXERCISE 24

Inverted Row Under a Table

Main muscles: latissimus dorsi, middle and lower trapezius, rhomboids, biceps as an assister.

Starting position: Slide under the table so that the tabletop is roughly at hip height when you are lying down. Grip the edge of the tabletop with an overhand grip (thumbs pointing towards each other), heels

on the floor, body in a straight line from head to ankles. The hips do not sag.

Movement cue: Pull your chest to the tabletop, drawing your elbows back along your torso. Do not haul yourself up with your hands — imagine that your elbows are hooks and that they are doing all the work. At the top your chest touches the tabletop or is a centimetre away from it.

Mistake: The hips dropping during the movement. When the pelvis sinks, trunk tension disappears and the shoulder does most of the work instead of the back.

💡 How to Make It Harder and Easier

To make the exercise easier, bend your knees and put your feet flat on the floor — the lever arm shortens and the load drops. To make it harder: straighten your legs and raise your feet onto a chair.

The inverted row is underrated mainly because it looks too simple. In practice it gives the muscles of the mid-back a stimulus comparable to a machine row, and you have a table in every flat.

EXERCISE 25

Single-Arm Dumbbell Row

Main muscles: latissimus dorsi, middle trapezius, rhomboids, biceps.

Starting position: One knee and the hand on the same side resting on a chair or a sofa. Back parallel to the floor, spine neutral. The dumbbell hangs freely in your other hand, arm extended.

Movement cue: Pull with the elbow up and back, along your torso rather than out to the side. Think of it this way: the elbow travels towards your trouser pocket, not towards the ceiling. At the top the shoulder blade is retracted and slightly lifted — you will feel tension between the blade and the spine.

Mistake: Rotating the shoulder instead of moving the shoulder blade. When the shoulder rides up along with the dumbbell, the movement becomes a sway of the whole torso. The shoulder blade stops working — the lower back works instead. The dumbbell travels too high without a real muscular contraction.

Too Heavy a Dumbbell in the Single-Arm Row

When the weight is too heavy, the body automatically compensates by rotating the pelvis. If at the top the hip on the same side travels towards the ceiling, drop one level in weight.

EXERCISE 26

Bent-Over Two-Arm Dumbbell Row

Main muscles: middle and lower trapezius, rhomboids, latissimus dorsi, rear deltoids.

Starting position: Stand with dumbbells hanging at your sides, feet hip-width apart. Hinge your torso forward to about 45 degrees, knees slightly bent. Back flat, gaze directed at the floor a few dozen centimetres in front of you — the neck is a natural extension of the spine.

Movement cue: Draw both elbows back symmetrically towards your hips, squeezing the shoulder blades together at the top. The dumbbells do not travel straight up — they come back along the body. Take a short pause at the top before you lower the weight.

Mistake: Standing too upright. When the torso is too vertical, the exercise turns into a shrug and the middle trapezius stops being the main target.

💡 Torso Angle and the Muscles Involved

The more horizontal the torso, the more the mid-back works. At an angle close to 90 degrees (almost parallel to the floor) the involvement of the upper back rises noticeably. Start at 45 degrees and experiment.

EXERCISE 27

Bent-Over Reverse Fly

Main muscles: rear deltoids, middle trapezius, rhomboids.

Starting position: Identical to the two-arm row — torso hinged to about 45 degrees, knees bent, dumbbells hanging freely. This time the elbows are slightly bent and stay bent throughout the movement.

Movement cue: Open your arms out to the sides like wings until the dumbbells reach the level of your torso. Imagine that you are trying to touch the ceiling with your elbows. At the top the shoulder blades come together. Lower under control — do not let the weight fall under gravity.

Mistake: Dumbbells that are too heavy. This is the most common problem with this exercise. When the dumbbell weighs too much, the biceps takes over the work of the rear deltoid and the movement turns into a row. The reverse fly is usually done with dumbbells clearly lighter than those used for rows.

The Rear Deltoid – a Muscle Worth Protecting From Neglect

In a typical push-pull programme the rear deltoid often gets too little work. It is responsible for stabilising the shoulder joint and for drawing the arm back. The reverse fly is one of the few exercises that engages it directly — it is worth keeping an eye on.

EXERCISE 28

Dumbbell Front Raise

Main muscles: front deltoids, upper chest as an assister.

Starting position: Stand tall, dumbbells in front of your thighs, neutral grip (palms facing your body) or pronated grip (palms down).

Movement cue: Raise both arms in front of you to shoulder height — no higher. Above shoulder level the tension on the front deltoid drops and the upper shoulder starts to join in, in a way that invites overload once fatigue sets in. The elbows stay slightly bent throughout the movement.

Mistake: Rocking the torso forward as you lift and back as you lower. That is a sign that the dumbbell is too heavy. The front raise is an exercise in which a lighter weight really does mean more muscular work — because it removes momentum.

Tip: Perform the movement alternately, one arm at a time, if control is hard to maintain with both. Turning the wrist up at the top of the movement (thumb higher than the little finger) strengthens the contraction of the front deltoid.

EXERCISE 29

Dumbbell Bicep Curl

Main muscles: biceps, brachialis.

Starting position: Stand with dumbbells hanging at your sides, supinated grip (palms up), elbows against your torso.

Movement cue: Bend only at the elbow, lifting the dumbbells towards your shoulders. The elbow stays against your body throughout the movement. At the top, squeeze the biceps hard for a second before you start lowering. The eccentric phase — the lowering — should last as long as the lift, not less.

Mistake: Pulling the arms back or rocking the torso on the final repetitions. If your back is swaying and the elbow is escaping backwards, the weight is too heavy. The biceps is not working — the whole posterior chain is working as a lever. Choose a dumbbell that lets you complete all the repetitions with a still torso.

EXERCISE 30

Alternating Hammer Curl

Main muscles: brachialis, brachioradialis, biceps.

Starting position: Stand with the dumbbells in a neutral grip — thumbs pointing up, palms facing each other. Elbows against your torso.

Movement cue: Curl your arms alternately, keeping the wrist neutral the whole time. You do not supinate — the thumb stays up both on the way up and on the way down. That is exactly what distinguishes the hammer curl from the classic curl, and it works the brachialis more deeply than the superficial biceps.

Mistake: Rotating the wrist at the top. Some people unconsciously finish the movement with supination, turning the hammer curl into a classic curl. The neutral grip has to be held for the whole movement.

The hammer curl is particularly useful for people who feel discomfort in the wrist when supinating during a classic curl. A neutral grip takes the load off the radiocarpal joint without any loss of effectiveness.

✓ Checklist: Back and Biceps

- ☐ In the inverted row, check that your hips stay in line with your torso throughout the movement.
- ☐ In the single-arm row, make sure the shoulder does not ride up along with the dumbbell.
- ☐ In the two-arm row, pause for a second at the top before you lower the weight.
- ☐ For the reverse fly, choose dumbbells clearly lighter than for rows.
- ☐ In the bicep curl, check that the torso is still on the last repetition of the set.
- ☐ In the hammer curl, hold a neutral grip throughout, with no supination at the top.

06

Putting It Together: Plans, Progression and What Comes Next

YOU now have 30 exercises. You know how to perform them, what not to do and how to make them harder. One question remains: in what order should you put it all together so that it works.

This chapter contains two ready-made plans with specific exercise numbers, set counts and rest periods. Choose the one that fits your situation and start on Monday.

Plan A: Three Sessions a Week for Beginners

Three full-body sessions a week is the optimal structure to start with. Every muscle group gets a stimulus every 48–72 hours, which matches exactly the window in which muscle protein synthesis begins to fall off after the previous workout. The arrangement is simple: Monday, Wednesday, Friday.

Each session takes 40–50 minutes. The scheme: 3 sets, 10–12 repetitions, 60–90 seconds of rest between sets. For the first two weeks, do the exercises without dumbbells or with minimal weight – focus on technique, not on load.

Table 6.1: Plan A — full body 3 times a week (exercise numbers from the previous chapters)

Session	Exercise	Sets	Reps
Monday	Squat (Ch.2)	3	10–12
	Push-up (Ch.4)	3	10–12
	Single-arm row (Ch.5)	3	10–12
	Plank (Ch.3)	3	30 sec.
Wednesday	Lunge (Ch.2)	3	10–12
	Close-grip push-up (Ch.4)	3	10–12
	Inverted row (Ch.5)	3	10–12
	Dead bug (Ch.3)	3	10
Friday	Hip thrust (Ch.2)	3	12–15
	Feet-elevated push-up (Ch.4)	3	8–10
	Two-arm row (Ch.5)	3	10–12
	Side plank (Ch.3)	3	20 sec.

 Before You Start a Session

5 minutes of warm-up: marching in place, arm circles, a few unloaded squats. After the session, 3–5 minutes of unhurried stretching for the muscles that worked. Do not skip this at the start – the body needs time to adapt.

Plan B: An Upper/Lower Split for Those Coming Back After a Break

Four sessions a week split into upper and lower body is the next step, once three sessions start to feel like too little. But this is not a plan for someone starting from scratch – it assumes that the technique of the exercises in Plan A is already solid.

The scheme: Monday upper body, Tuesday lower, Thursday upper, Friday lower. Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday are for recovery. Each region gets two stimuli a week at a higher volume than in full body, which favours hypertrophy without the overtraining risk typical of daily sessions.

⚠ Moving to Plan B Too Soon

If after a week of Plan A you have severe muscle soreness for more than three days, go back to three sessions. Four sessions a week place higher demands on recovery – and the body has to adjust to them gradually.

Table 6.2: Plan B — upper/lower, 4 sessions a week

Session	Exercise	Sets	Reps
Upper (Mon/Thu)	Push-up (Ch.4)	4	8–12
	Single-arm row (Ch.5)	4	8–12
	Dumbbell press (Ch.4)	3	10–12
	Reverse fly (Ch.5)	3	12–15
	Bicep curl (Ch.5)	3	10–12
Lower (Tue/Fri)	Squat (Ch.2)	4	8–12
	Hip thrust (Ch.2)	4	10–12
	Bulgarian split squat (Ch.2)	3	10
	Hollow body hold (Ch.3)	3	20 sec.
	Leg raise (Ch.3)	3	10–12

Progression: When and How to Increase Resistance

There is one rule: if you hit the upper limit of repetitions in every set for two workouts in a row, increase the difficulty. In bodyweight exercises that means moving to a harder variant. With dumbbells – adding 1–2.5 kg.

Without that rule, training is a repetition of the same movements at the same intensity. The body adapts to the stimulus and stops responding. Progression does not have to be large – one extra repetition, a variant half a kilogram heavier – but it has to be systematic.

Write down the results of every session: exercise, weight, number of repetitions. That is the only tool that lets you track progress in home training.



Figure 6.1: Keeping a simple training log lets you track progress and make informed decisions about progression.

The One Rule That Decides Everything

Consistency beats intensity. Two workouts a week for six months will give you more than six workouts a week for three weeks, after which you quit. Choose the plan you can repeat month after month – not the one that looks most impressive on paper.

Nutrition and Recovery: What Happens Between Sessions

Training is a stimulus. Muscles grow not during the exercise but afterwards — provided you give your body the right resources and

enough time. Without those two elements, even the best-designed plan will deliver half the results it could.

Protein — the foundation of rebuilding. Aim for roughly **1.6–2.2 g of protein per kilogram of bodyweight per day**. For someone weighing 75 kg that means 120–165 g of protein. In practice: three full meals with eggs, chicken, cottage cheese or pulses, plus an optional protein shake after training, are quite enough.

Sleep — the strongest supplement. During sleep the body releases growth hormone, which is responsible for tissue repair. **7–9 hours of sleep** a night is not a luxury but a condition of progress. Research published in the *Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research* shows that cutting sleep to 5 hours reduces maximal strength by as much as 20% after just one week.

Recovery between sessions. Plans A and B assume at least one rest day between workouts for the same muscle group — that is no accident. Muscles need **48–72 hours** to rebuild fully after an intense stimulus.

💡 A Simple Recovery Ritual

After every session: 5 minutes of light stretching, a glass of water with a pinch of salt (electrolytes) and a protein-rich meal within 2 hours. That is enough to speed up your return to form.

⚠ Watch Out for a Calorie Deficit

If you train and drastically restrict your food at the same time, your body will burn muscle instead of building it. A moderate calorie deficit (200–300 kcal) is safe — starvation is not.

What Comes Next

You have everything you need. Chapter 2 gave you the foundations of strength in the legs and glutes. Chapter 3 built the trunk stability without which no other exercise is safe. Chapters 4 and 5 completed the picture with the full range of push and pull movements, with no need to go to a gym.

Start with Plan A. After six to eight weeks, judge whether you are ready for Plan B. Keep a simple log – a notebook or a file on your phone with the date, the exercise and the result. When you hit the upper limit of repetitions twice in a row, increase the difficulty.

The rest is only a matter of time.

✓ Checklist: Putting It Together

- ☐ Choose Plan A or Plan B and put the sessions into your calendar for the coming week.
- ☐ Prepare a training space: a square metre of clear floor and, optionally, dumbbells.
- ☐ Write down the results of every session: exercise, weight or variant, number of repetitions.

- ☐ After two workouts in a row at the upper repetition limit – increase the weight or the variant.
- ☐ After six weeks of Plan A, assess your progress and decide whether to move to Plan B.
- ☐ Do not change the plan after two weeks – give your body at least six weeks to adapt.