GoalTodo

Get strong in 12 weeks, whether you're new or coming back

Get strong

12 weeks · Mon, Nov 30 → Sun, Feb 21

Week by week

Tick a box each time you do a session.

Nov 30–Dec 6
Week 1

Three lifts, one set

Learn the moves

- Squat
  1 set of 8, bodyweight (or sit-to-stand from a chair) ☐☐
- Press-up
  1 set of 8, hands on a wall ☐☐
- Row
  1 set of 8 each arm, light dumbbell, band or filled water bottle ☐☐
- Glute bridge and plank
  1 set of 8 bridges, 1 plank held while your back stays straight ☐☐

Done when: You finish both sessions and do 8 slow, controlled reps of each lift

Sticking point: Too easy is the point this week. You are learning the shape of each move, not testing yourself.

Dec 7–13
Week 2

Ten reps, still light

Learn the moves

- Squat
  1 set of 10, bodyweight ☐☐
- Press-up
  1 set of 10, hands on a wall or a sturdy table ☐☐
- Row
  1 set of 10 each arm, same light weight ☐☐
- Glute bridge and plank
  1 set of 10 bridges, 1 plank ☐☐

Done when: You do 10 controlled reps of each lift in both sessions, with no pain

Sticking point: Check your form in a mirror or a phone video: knees pointing the same way as your toes, back straight, slow on the way down.

Dec 14–20
Week 3

Two sets, and your starting numbers

Build

- [ ] Squat
  2 sets of 8, holding a dumbbell or kettlebell at your chest if bodyweight is easy
- [ ] Press-up
  2 sets of 8, on the wall, a table or the floor: the hardest version you can do well
- [ ] Row
  2 sets of 8 each arm, a weight where the last 2 reps are hard
- [ ] Glute bridge and plank
  2 sets of 8 bridges, 2 planks

Done when: You write down the weight or version and the reps for each of the three lifts. These are your starting numbers.

Sticking point: Not sure how heavy to go? Pick the lighter option. A weight you can move well teaches you more, and you will add to it soon.

Dec 21–27
Week 4

Same again

Repeat week

- [ ] Squat
  2 sets of 8 to 10, your starting-numbers weight
- [ ] Press-up
  2 sets of 8 to 10, your starting-numbers version
- [ ] Row
  2 sets of 8 to 10 each arm, your starting-numbers weight
- [ ] Glute bridge and plank
  2 sets of 10 bridges, 2 planks

Done when: You finish both sessions at your starting-numbers weights, with at least 10 reps on the second set of each lift

Sticking point: Repeating a week isn't standing still. Doing the same weight more smoothly is progress.

Dec 28–Jan 3
Week 5

Two sets of twelve

Build

- [ ] Squat
  2 sets of 10 to 12, same weight
- [ ] Press-up
  2 sets of 10 to 12, same version
- [ ] Row
  2 sets of 10 to 12 each arm, same weight
- [ ] Glute bridge and plank
  2 sets of 12 bridges, 2 planks

Done when: You do 12 good reps on both sets of at least one lift

Jan 4–10
Week 6

Three sets, a little heavier

Build

- [ ] Squat
  3 sets of 8; heavier if you did 12 on both sets last week
- [ ] Press-up
  3 sets of 8; a harder version if you did 12 on both sets last week
- [ ] Row
  3 sets of 8 each arm; heavier if you did 12 on both sets last week
- [ ] Glute bridge and plank
  2 sets of 12 bridges, 2 planks

Done when: You finish 3 sets of 8 on all three lifts, in both sessions

Sticking point: Heavier means the smallest step you have: the next dumbbell up, or a lower surface for press-ups. Rest until your breathing settles before the next set.

Jan 11–17
Week 7

Settle in

Repeat week

- [ ] Squat
  3 sets of 8 to 10, same weight
- [ ] Press-up
  3 sets of 8 to 10, same version
- [ ] Row
  3 sets of 8 to 10 each arm, same weight
- [ ] Glute bridge and plank
  2 sets of 12 bridges, 2 planks

Done when: You finish both sessions with steady form on every set

Sticking point: If a lift hurts, stop that exercise straight away. Pain is a reason to stop, not to push through.

Jan 18–24
Week 8

Add reps

Build

- [ ] Squat
  3 sets of 8 to 12, same weight
- [ ] Press-up
  3 sets of 8 to 12, same version
- [ ] Row
  3 sets of 8 to 12 each arm, same weight
- [ ] Glute bridge and plank
  3 sets of 10 bridges, 2 planks

Done when: You reach 12 reps on all 3 sets of at least one lift

Jan 25–31
Week 9

Same again

Repeat week

- Squat
  3 sets of 8 to 12, same weight ☐☐
- Press-up
  3 sets of 8 to 12, same version ☐☐
- Row
  3 sets of 8 to 12 each arm, same weight ☐☐
- Glute bridge and plank
  3 sets of 10 bridges, 2 planks ☐☐

Done when: You finish both sessions and add at least one rep somewhere compared with last week. If every lift is already at 12 on all 3 sets, finishing at the same weights counts.

Feb 1–7
Week 10

Add weight where you've earned it

Build

- Squat
  3 sets of 8 to 12; heavier if you did 12 on all 3 sets ☐☐
- Press-up
  3 sets of 8 to 12; a harder version if you did 12 on all 3 sets ☐☐
- Row
  3 sets of 8 to 12 each arm; heavier if you did 12 on all 3 sets ☐☐
- Glute bridge and plank
  3 sets of 12 bridges, 2 planks ☐☐

Done when: You finish both sessions, going heavier or harder on any lift that reached 12 reps on all 3 sets. If none did, finishing at the same weights counts.

Sticking point: After a weight goes up, your reps drop back towards 8. That's how it should work: build them back up to 12 before the next step.

Feb 8–14
Week 11

Last full week

Build

- Squat
  3 sets of 8 to 12; heavier if you did 12 on all 3 sets ☐☐
- Press-up
  3 sets of 8 to 12; a harder version if you did 12 on all 3 sets ☐☐
- Row
  3 sets of 8 to 12 each arm; heavier if you did 12 on all 3 sets ☐☐
- Glute bridge and plank
  3 sets of 12 bridges, 2 planks ☐☐

Done when: You finish both sessions and write down this week's weights and reps

Feb 15–21
Week 12

Beat your starting numbers

Test week

- [ ] Squat, press-up and row
  2 sets of 8 at last week's weights
- [ ] Test: squat, press-up and row
  after 1 or 2 lighter sets, the heaviest weight or hardest version you can do for 8 good reps with 2 more still in you, on the same lifts as your starting numbers

Done when: For 8 good reps, you lift a heavier weight or do a harder version than your starting numbers on at least one of the three lifts

Sticking point: Testing is where form slips. End a set the moment a rep looks different from the first one.

How the plan works

You train twice a week, on Monday and Thursday. You can move the days, as long as you leave at least one rest day, ideally two, between sessions: your muscles need time to recover.

Each session is the same three lifts: a squat (legs and hips), a press (chest, shoulders and arms) and a row (back and arms). A glute bridge and a plank finish the session for your hips and stomach. Together they cover your legs, hips, chest, shoulders, back, arms and stomach.

A set is a number of reps done without stopping. You start with one set of 8 and build to three sets of 8 to 12. As a rough guide, pick a weight where the last two reps of a set feel hard but your form still holds. That's a starting point to adjust, not a rule.

Reps first, then weight. Once you can comfortably do 12 reps of an exercise, it's time to progress. This plan's rule: when you can do 12 good reps on every set of a lift, add the smallest step of weight you have (or a harder press-up) and start again from 8 reps.

The "starting numbers" week sets your baseline (week 3 on the full plan). Write down the weight and reps for each lift. In the test week, the last week of your plan, you check yourself against them.

Repeat weeks are practice at the weights you already lift, so each step up stays small. A shorter plan leaves them out. If a week feels too hard, repeat it before moving on.

Which level to pick

- I've never lifted weights: you have never trained with weights, or it was so long ago you don't remember the moves. You start with bodyweight and light weights.
- I've lifted before but stopped: you know how to squat, press and row with good form, but you haven't trained regularly for a while.

If you're not sure, pick the first level. If getting up from a chair or kneeling down is hard work, start with the NHS strength exercises (https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/strength-exercises/), which use a chair and a wall, then come back to week 1.

Before you start

Speak to a GP or doctor first if you haven't exercised for some time, or you have a medical condition or concerns about your health. Get advice from a healthcare professional, such as a GP, before you try the plan if you have any symptoms or are feeling unwell, you have an injury, you've had a recent health event such as a heart attack or an operation, or you're pregnant or have recently given birth. Wait until you've had that advice before your first session.

Warm up for about five minutes before each session: a brisk walk, marching on the spot or an easy cycle, then a few light reps of each lift.

Stop an exercise straight away if you feel pain or become unwell. Don't train through an injury: stop and get medical advice.

If you're not sure you're doing a lift correctly, ask a registered fitness professional or gym instructor to check your form. It's worth it in the first weeks, especially for the squat.

Gear

- At home: one or two adjustable dumbbells or a kettlebell, and a resistance band. Filled water bottles will do for the first weeks.
- At a gym: dumbbells, a barbell or a cable machine all work. For the average healthy adult, machines and free weights give similar results.
- Flat, stable shoes, and clothes you can bend and squat in.
- A notebook or notes app to write down each lift's weight and reps. Without it you can't tell if you're getting stronger.

Common mistakes

- Going too heavy, too soon. Add weight only in small steps, and only once you reach 12 good reps on every set.
- Letting form slip to finish a set. A rep that looks different from the first one doesn't count. Stop the set there.
- Training on back-to-back days. Keep at least a day's rest between sessions, ideally two.
- Chasing a perfect program. Training all your major muscle groups at least twice a week matters far more than finding a perfect or complex plan. Keep it simple and keep turning up.
- Not writing it down. You can't beat your starting numbers if you don't know them.

Test day

- Keep Monday of test week light: two sets at last week's weights.
- On Thursday, warm up as usual, then do one or two lighter sets of each lift.
- Use the same lifts and the same kind of equipment as your starting numbers, so the comparison is fair. Start from last week's weight and go up in small steps, resting well between tries, until you find the heaviest weight (or the hardest press-up) you can do for 8 good reps while you could still do 2 more. Don't go to failure.
- Barbell squat or bench press: only go heavier than you've trained with if someone who knows how to spot is on hand, ready to take the bar if you can't finish a rep. Training alone? Stop at a weight you know you can lift well.
- This 8-rep check is the plan's own way to see progress. Compare the weight (or press-up version) with your starting numbers, which were also for 8 reps. Any lift where you beat them is a lift you've got stronger at.
- Then keep going: two sessions a week, reps first, then weight.

If you fall behind

Missed 1 week: Carry on with the current week. Don't add the missed session on top, and don't train two days in a row to catch up.

Missed 2 weeks: Repeat the last week you finished in full, at the same weights, then carry on. If that runs past your test date, leave out a repeat week, never the last two weeks.

Missed 3 weeks: Go back two weeks from where you stopped and use the weights you lifted then. Build up again from there. If there are no longer enough weeks, enter a new test date on the plan page.

Missed 4 or more weeks: If you had finished your starting-numbers week, go back to it and find new starting numbers with clean form. If you hadn't, start again from week 1. Either way, enter a new test date on the plan page to see if it's realistic.

Sources

NHS
`https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/how-to-improve-strength-flexibility/`
“Try to do 8 to 12 repetitions for each activity, which counts as 1 set.”

NHS
`https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/how-to-improve-strength-flexibility/`
“Try to do at least 2 sets of muscle-strengthening activities, but to gain even more benefits, do 3 sets.”

NHS
`https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/how-to-improve-strength-flexibility/`
“Remember to start gradually and build up over a period of weeks.”

NHS
`https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/physical-activity-guidelines-for-adults-aged-19-to-64/`
“Speak to your GP first if you have not exercised for some time, or if you have medical conditions or concerns.”

NHS
`https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/strength-and-flex-exercise-plan-how-to-videos/`
“Stop the exercise immediately if you feel any pain or become unwell.”

NHS
`https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/strength-exercises/`
“Build up slowly and aim to gradually increase the repetitions of each exercise over time.”

NHS
`https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/strength-and-flex-exercise-plan-how-to-videos/`
“Get advice from a healthcare professional (such as a GP) before trying them if:”

Better Health Channel (Victoria State Government)
`https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/resistance-training-health-benefits`
“Beginning with one set of each exercise, comprising as few as eight repetitions (reps), no more than twice per week.”

Better Health Channel (Victoria State Government)
`https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/resistance-training-health-benefits`
“Your aim is to gradually increase to two to three sets for each exercise – comprising eight to 12 reps, every second or third day. Once you can comfortably complete 12 reps of an exercise, you should look at progressing further.”

Better Health Channel (Victoria State Government)
`https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/resistance-training-preventing-injury`
“Before doing your strength training exercises, you need to warm up for about five minutes.”

Better Health Channel (Victoria State Government)
`https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/resistance-training-preventing-injury`
“Proper technique is essential. If you’re not sure whether you’re doing a particular exercise correctly, ask a registered fitness professional, gym instructor or exercise physiologist for help.”

Better Health Channel (Victoria State Government)
https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/resistance-training-preventing-injury
“Don’t try to train through an injury. Stop your workout immediately and seek medical advice.”

Better Health Channel (Victoria State Government)
https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/resistance-training-preventing-injury
“Work out with a partner.”

Better Health Channel (Victoria State Government)
https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/resistance-training-preventing-injury
“Don’t lift a particularly heavy weight unless you have someone on hand to ‘spot’ you (take the weight when you can’t hold it any more).”

American College of Sports Medicine
https://acsm.org/resistance-training-guidelines-update-2026/
“Training all major muscle groups at least twice a week matters far more than chasing the idea of a ‘perfect’ or complex training plan.”

American College of Sports Medicine
https://acsm.org/resistance-training-guidelines-update-2026/
“The data review found that training to fatigue or momentary muscle failure, using specific types of equipment (machines vs. free weights), and complex periodization (systematic variation) did not consistently impact outcomes for the average healthy adult.”

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (ODPHP)
https://odphp.health.gov/our-work/nutrition-physical-activity/physical-activity-guidelines/current-guidelines/top-10-things-know
“Adults also need muscle-strengthening activity, like lifting weights or doing push-ups, at least 2 days each week.”

This plan online	https://goaltodo.com/get-strong
Reach it with others on Welang	https://welang.com/goals/get-strong
Reach it on your own in HourLife	https://www.hourlife.com

This plan is a guide, not medical advice. See a doctor before starting if you have a health condition, are pregnant, or haven't exercised in a long time.