



Marathon Crossfit

Stronglifts 5x5

My personal experience as an
overview

made with
Beacon

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Ten months of 5x5 experience in a nutshell

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Introduction

You are a beginner and don't know whether to do Stronglifts 5x5. This ebook will walk you through several steps depending on your needs based on my 10 month experience with the program.

There are many programs out there promising **quick results**. Stronglifts will provide you with **solid results**. If you follow the program you will become **one of the strongest in your local gym after a year**. This Ebook covers the program from many angles to make sure you succeed and have picked the right program for your needs.

Key Insights

This ebook will provide you with the knowledge of

- How to do the exercises
- Why the program is structured like it is structured
- What to do on off days
- What to eat

Learn firsthand from me, who has been in the trenches and finished the program with a 120kg squat.

Enjoy!

Pascal Landshöft

About The Author

Father of two, powerlifter, marathon runner, german and fitness enthusiast

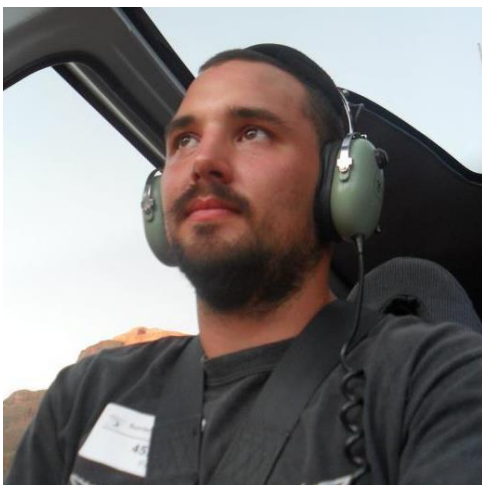
Marathon Crossfit was started by me in 2014 as a project for my work. It grew into a neverending experiment of my body and mind to push the limits of what is possible to be the best I can possibly be. **The motto is run faster, lift stronger and think deeper.**

My journey

I have run three marathons, respectively in Dublin, Frankfurt and Vienna and lost 15 kg in half a year. On my blog you will find reports of the Jim Wendler 5/3/1, Smolov and German Volume Training programs. I hold the record for the squat, deadlift and bench press in my local gym and help other members to reach their fitness goals.

About me

I am a German living in Ireland with my wife, two teenagers, two dogs and two cats. I am a guy like everyone else. I don't do drugs and just try to have a better life. Sport challenges me and helps to forget some of the stress of everyday life.



What equipment should i use for stronglifts 5x5



What equipment should i use for Stronglifts 5x5 ?

The basic things to use for Stronlifts 5x5 are a gym membership, barbell, lifting shoes and a belt. I personally feel like the wrist wraps are optional. However you do not need any equipment to start apart from a gym membership to start.

I've discussed this topic on my blog in quite some detail before, so please see the other posts at bthe end of this article for more detail on the different options available. This will be short and sweet, so that you can get your bearings.

Free weight area

To do Stronglifts 5x5 you need free weights. These can be either at home or at a gym. Most likely you will not have the space or the resources needed to buy / build your own equipment and place it somewhere at home. The most likely scenario will therefore be that you will got to a gym. You can see here [how you can pick the right gym for your needs](#).

Barbell

Whether you do Stronglifts 5x5 at home or at the gym you will need a barbell to perform the necessary movements. Dumbbells are no supplement to do the movements. What kind of barbell you use is up to you, but it should live up to the standard of 20kg weight and should be sleeved.

Lifting shoes

These you do not directly need. When you progress to squatting your own bodyweight on stronglifts I would recommend to switch from a normal pair of runners to a pair of lifting shoes. This will ensure that you can develop force from the ground better as lifting shoes are designed for that purpose. Possible models are the [adidas powerlift 2.0](#) or [adipower](#) shoe.

Belt

Same thing as for shoes I would also recommend for a weightlifting belt. Once you start lifting more than your own bodyweight progress to using a weightlifting belt. The [Rogue Ohio belt](#) and the Inzer Lever belt are both good options for that purpose. The Rogue Ohio belt is a all around weightlifting belt, while the Inzer Lever belt is more designed to the needs of powerlifting in my opinion.

Wraps

[Wrist wraps](#) are an option, but in my opinion not necessary for beginners. They can be useful once you start to do 100kg+ for repetitions on the [bench press](#) or 60kg+ for repetitions on the overhead press. Before that you can use them, but it will not make that much of a difference based on my experience.

Conclusion

You do not need any equipment to get going. Once you have progressed to move your own bodyweight comfortably around I personally think it is time to gear up with shoes and a belt. Up from then you are sorted for many years of happy lifting. If you want to know more about Stronglifts itself [check out my review of the 5x5 program](#).

Stronglifts 5x5 diet



Stronglifts 5x5 Diet

The best source is Mehdi the man himself. He wrote an excellent article in my opinion where he outlines [simple rules of nutrition](#). In the following I'll give you my insight in how applied to my daily life.

Skip Alcohol

Mehdi has a 90/10 rule when it comes to sweet drinks, alcohol and water. 90% of the times you should drink water while 10% of the times you can drink sweet crap and / or alcohol if need be. This is generally a good rule to follow as it leaves you one to two nights in the week to drink something else apart from water.

This does not mean that you can binge on Saturday because you drank about 50 liters of water during the week so Saturday can have its share of 5 liters of beer. I personally

found that for me it is very hard to stick to that 90/10 rule as once the first bottle of beer is opened or the wine bottle uncorked, for me it usually does not stay with that. Some goes for the Coca Cola out of the vending machine or freezer. If there is one, there will be more. So my advice on this one would be just stay away from it unless you have a special occasion. If Saturday night out is a special occasion for you, maybe you should get some perspective on life.

Breakfast

Eat breakfast, celebrate it, enjoy it and attribute enough time to it. Bacon and eggs makes a good start to the day or an oatmeal with berries / banana and a whey shake to the side. Whatever brings your [protein](#), omega 3 and [Vitamin D](#) intake up will help.

90/10 rule

The recommendation is to eat 90% whole meals, which means unprocessed food very near to their original state and only 10% of processed food like pizza or frozen meals to keep yourself healthy and make progress on [Stronglifts 5x5](#). This is the same approach as mentioned with alcohol and water.

4 - 6 meals a day

Train your gut to eat 6 meals a day at set times, so that you will get in a routine and hungry at approximately the same times of day. This is more healthy in general and will also help you to have a healthier lifestyle as your overall daily routine will work closer to clockwork. This will leave you energised to throw some weights through the gym in the evening. Have some [protein snacks](#) ready for work to be prepared for this.

Stronglifts to lose weight ?



Stronglifts to lose weight ?

So you are looking into doing 5x5 to lose weight ? Keep going. Even If I will describe that the program is not ideal for this purpose, if you like it and you are not active yet, it is more important that you get your ass off the couch. If you were really serious about losing that 40% body fat of yours, try running. That worked best for me.

What is Stronglifts ?

Stronglifts 5x5 is a beginner lifting program in which you train three times a week utilising the squat, bench press, deadlift starting from an empty bar. It is tailored to the needs of beginners who want to get strong and build muscle at the same time. If you are interested in learning more about the program I recommend that you read this [Stronglifts 5x5 review](#).

Does the program work to lose weight ?

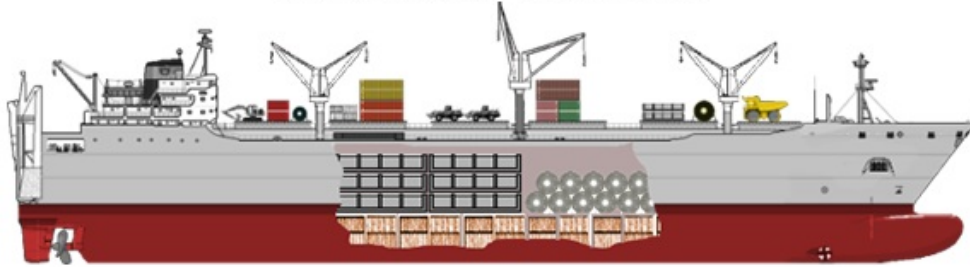
For me personally, it did not help me to lose weight. My physique changed to more muscular, but when i stepped on the scale after a year I actually had gained weight. This was also related to me stopping to run. Still, all in all, this program seems not really to be designed to lower weight. If you want to achieve this goal pay attention to your diet and incorporate some circuit work as accessory work.

Conclusion

If you read up about it, think about how physics work and apply a bit of common sense you will soon realize that gaining strength and muscle is related to producing more energy over a shorter period of time. The bigger you are the easier it becomes to move something of equal size. If you do not have a lot of fat, it will be hard for you to activate the necessary energy to lift hard. Therefore Stronglifts is not the best pick to lose weight if this is your main priority. There are reports that it worked, my guess for those is, though, that the general work ethic and lifestyle of these individuals were sub par and the easy structure of 5x5 helped to overcome that.

Stronglifts for bulking ?

BREAK BULK



VS



BULK

Stronglifts for bulking ?

Generally Stronglifts is not the ideal program for building a lot of mass quick, if that is your goal. If you want to clean bulk and accompany that by a well rounded multi purpose lifting program as a beginner, 5x5 is a solid and widely tested choice.

What is bulking ?

I personally find it is important to talk about the meaning of things before making a decision and give people perspective based on my personal experience which is the purpose of this article. I hope the image I picked for this post illustrates why answering this question first is important.

The word itself means:

Noun:

Size, mass or volume, especially when very large

Adjective:

Bulk buy, bulk mailing

Phrasal verb:

Bulk up: to gain weight by gaining muscle

Bulking is generally referred to as the process of putting on mass within bodybuilding circles. In business terms it would be used to describe the process of buying something in big quantities to get a cheaper price per unit to drive down production cost and therefore turn over a bigger margin per item.

As you have found this article in the context of Stronglifts 5x5, which is a weightlifting program, let's focus on bulking in terms of gaining muscle mass.

There are two types of bulk which you will find most commonly discussed. First being a "dirty" bulk and second a "Clean" bulk.

A dirty bulk has the main purpose of gaining weight as quickly as possible by any means necessary. This includes fast food, mass gainers, protein shakes and eating everything within your grasp without checking calorie intake. You eat as much as you can, even if your hunger is satisfied. This way of bulking is generally preferred by less sophisticated and some might even call them lazier bodybuilders. This would include me as I personally do not like to count calories as I do not go on the stage. However I do not go mad by eating everything within sight. I check my intake with my hunger and take care that my food choices are generally healthy. Therefore I managed to stay between 80 - 85 kg of bodyweight at 185cm.

A clean bulk is more sophisticated in its approach by being very specific about what kind and how much food you take in over the day while at the same time checking on the calories you burn. This involves either having an individual like a personal trainer do all the leg work for you in terms of cooking & calorie counting or investing more time in educating yourself first and then tracking your progress accordingly. As my goal is not to be on a stage, but to get strong, this is too much hassle for me personally. Still if you want to look like the super shredded magazine covers, you either have to be meticulous by bulking clean or go through extended periods of cutting (calorie deficit), to basically starve yourself to the aesthetic level you want.

The most basic approach for bulking is to enter into a calorie surplus to put on mass for

the purpose of building muscle. A good diet and a training program are the two major drivers for putting on mass. "You can't outrun a bad diet" is something you might hear from personal trainers all over the world, which is true. The interesting question in this is however, why the diet is bad.

What is your goal?

The clearer your goals are, the easier it becomes to determine whether a certain action as a detraction from that goal or getting you closer to reaching that goal. In easier terms, with a goal you can say what is a good or bad diet which does or does not help you get there.

As you are looking to bulk when you found this article, the questions i why do you want to bulk. If you want to bulk for aesthetic reasons, a dirty bulk might not be advised. If you want to bulk because you feel weak / not strong enough a dirty bulk might not be the best option either. If you want to go up a weight class in sports as quickly as possible or put on a protective layer of fat over your muscles as a boxer, a dirty bulk might just be the right solution for you.

Your personal goal while also determine which program you want to pick. If you want to gain muscle to look big in a bodybuilding stage, to get drafted as a line backer in football but you currently do not meet the size criteria or generally want to get stronger different strategies might be advised.

Stronglifts 5x5 for bulking ?

For someone who wants to become a bodybuilder I would not advise to follow Stronglifts 5x5. When big muscles take priority over strength for you German Volume Training might be the better program for that purpose. [I have discussed the effect of 5x5 and GVT on hypertrophy and hyperplasia at length in my article in which I compare the two programs](#) and it might be a worthwhile read if you are an aspiring bodybuilder.

For someone who is in sports and wants to hit a certain weight at a certain date I personally think there are two approaches. If this date is far in the future and you have the time and will for a clean bulk, this is the preferred and generally recommended option for health purposes. Stronglifts 5x5 is a good program to accompany this process in the first year to move to more dvanced lifitng programs afterwards.

If you are looking into hitting that weight goal in a very short period of time, a dirty bulk up until that date accompanied by German Volume training might be a preferable option to get there, even though there are risks attached to that approach.

I am not a professional so please always consult your doctor for feedback which is specific to you.

Stronglifts to get ripped

Stronglifts to get ripped

Stronglifts for powerlifting

Stronglifts for powerlifting

All in all Stronglifts 5x5 is only an option for powerlifters who are very early in their career and even then it might not be the optimal option if you are fully committed to the specific lifting that comes with being a powerlifter. If you are still on the fence on what you want to do in the gym or want to postpone the decision whether you go for strength or muscle mainly, 5x5 is a very good middle way to travel down.

What is Stronglifts ?

Stronglifts 5x5 is a beginner program for lifters which can be easily followed in the gym. This is achieved by its easy progression and supporting material like the [stronglifts 5x5 app](#) and the [corresponding website](#). If you wanted to dive deeper on the topic, just follow my blog where I have already [reviewed the program](#) and discuss its usefulness from my perspective for several purposes.

What is powerlifting ?

Powerlifting is

"a form of competitive weightlifting in which contestants attempt three types of lift in a set sequence."

According to the first google search that I have done.

To be a bit more specific the three types of lifts performed in powerlifting are the [bench press](#), [squat](#) and [deadlift](#). In a competition the contestant will get three attempts on each from which the best will be totalled for the meet.

A meet is usually referred to as a powerlifting competition. The lifter with the highest

total wins the day.

Main differences to olympic weightlifting are that the lifts are usually less explosive and because the powerlifting sport is so fragmented with different rules and associations, it did not make it to being olympic yet. This is also what it has in common with Karate and professional boxing. (Amateur boxing is an exception as it somehow managed to be better and more centrally organised).

In powerlifting there are different weight classes which are shown in the table below taken from [Powerliftingtowin](#)

Powerlifting Weight Classes			
Male		Female	
IPF	All Others	IPF	All Others
59kg/130lbs	56kg/123lbs	47kg/104lbs	44kg/97lbs
66kg/145lbs	60kg/132lbs	52kg/115lbs	48kg/106lbs
74kg/163lbs	67.5kg/148lbs	57kg/126lbs	52kg/115lbs
83kg/183lbs	75kg/165lbs	63kg/139lbs	56kg/123lbs
93kg/205lbs	82.5kg/181lbs	72kg/159lbs	60kg/132lbs
105kg/231lbs	90kg/198lbs	84kg/185lbs	67.5kg/148lbs
120kg/265lbs	100kg/220lbs	84kg+/185lbs+	75kg/165lbs
120kg+/265lbs+	110kg/242lbs		82.5kg/181lbs
	125kg/275lbs		90kg/198lbs
	140kg/308lbs		90kg+/198lbs+
	140kg+/308lbs+		

What you usually find is that the heavier the lifters get, the more they are able to lift. Here you can already see the distinction between the IPF and all other associations and their definition of different weight classes. You can dive deeper in the [article how to pick your weight class for powerlifting](#), where the graphic was taken from.

Another debated topic is raw lifting compared to supported lifting. Raw lifting generally means that you are lifting the weight without the help of any additional gear, usually a [bench press shirt](#), squat suit or [straps](#). You will find a LOT of opinions around whether people who use gear are weaklings and so further. I personally think that discussion is a bit pointless as strong individuals usually lift a lot with or without gear.

Does Stronglifts 5x5 make sense for powerlifters ?

Strictly speaking, if you are a powerlifter already, Stronglifts 5x5 won't make that much sense for you. If you are an aspiring powerlifter, it is very likely that you decided to become one, because you already like lifting in the gym and the raw strength of

powerlifters peaked your interest. Therefore you can conveniently assume that you would be beyond complete beginner status and somewhere in the Intermediate range. As Stronglifts 5x5 is designed for beginners mainly, it would not be optimal for you.

In addition some people might make an argument for incorporating less repetitions, but therefore working more regularly with [higher loads](#), to make a program more specific to the needs of powerlifting.

In both of these scenarios Stronglifts 5x5 is very likely not the go to option.

If you are just starting out with lifting and want to lay a solid foundation to decide at a later stage whether you want to go into powerlifting, bodybuilding or olympic weightlifting, then I personally think Mehdi's program is a very valid option to consider.

Conclusion

If you are already a powerlifter this program most likely will not meet your needs as it is not advanced enough. For anyone who is just starting out and ramping up, has to learn technique properly and has not made up their mind whether power or muscle is first for them, I think Stronglifts is a very solid option to work with for half a year to a year until moving on to other programs.

Stronglifts for intermediates



Stronglifts for intermediates

Generally speaking Stronglifts was designed for novices and beginners, not for intermediate lifters. Therefore Stronglifts might not be the ideal fit for you. Check in this article whether you are an intermediate or not and if you should consider Stronglifts 5x5.

What is Stronglifts ?

Stronglifts 5x5 is a lifting program focused on developing strength and muscle mass at the same time. With 5 sets of five repetitions on the squat, bench press, deadlift, barbell row and overhead press it fulfilled that purpose for me. If you want to know more

about the program and my indepth experience with it, please check out my [extensive Stronglifts 5x5 review](#).

What is an intermediate ?

I am all for definitions because I personally think half of the times we do not know what we are even talking about (including me), because language & perception are a tricky thing.

Intermediate might not mean the same thing all over the world and for all different disciplines, even though anyone who speaks english for a while gets the idea of "someone somewhere in the middle of the skill tree" when you hear intermediate.

Here are two general definitions of intermediate:

- **occurring in the middle of a process or series**
- **relating to or having the knowledge or skill of someone who is more advanced than a beginner but not yet an expert**

So applied to lifting you can either come in from a knowledge perspective or how far you have progressed through a certain program. Usually when talking about intermdiates in lifting the second definition is more relevant.

While these were two general definitions, you can go find [weightlifting performance standards](#). While the site is not much to look at, it has a ton of information on it. Here you will find following definitions:

Untrained

An individual who has *not trained* on the exercises before, but can perform them correctly.

Novice

An individual who has trained regularly for up to *several months*.

Intermediate

An individual who has trained regularly for up to a *couple years*.

Advanced

An individual who has trained *multiple years*.

Elite

An athlete competing in strength sports. Keep in mind, the standards shown in the tables do not represent the highest level of strength performance possible.

For your personal lifting level please refer to the website to find out details which are relevant to your body measures.

So that you still get a rough idea of whether you are an intermediate or not I will use [the average male weight](#) based on this chart:

Country	Average Male Weight
United States	191 lbs (87 kg)
Germany	182 lbs (82.4 kg)
Finland	181 lbs (82.1 kg)
Canada	177 lbs (80.3 kg)
United Kingdom	176 lbs (79.8 kg)
Chile	166 lbs (75.3 kg)
Brazil	160 lbs (72.7 kg)

So now when you combine this information with the weightlifting performance standards you get this:

US, German, Finnish Intermediate lifter based on average weight

Bench Press 90kg

Squat 122.5 kg

Deadlift 142.5 kg

Canadian, British, Chilean Intermediate lifter based on average weight

Bench Press 85kg

Squat 112.5kg

Deadlift 135kg

Brazilian Intermediate lifter based on average weight

Bench Press 77.5kg

Squat 105kg

Deadlift 122.5kg

Again of course these are those averages as of 2016 regarding to weight. It might vary to a great deal for the individual lifter.

Should intermediates use Stronglifts 5x5 ?

It all depends on your goals, but generally speaking it is not the best program for intermediates as it is designed for beginners. It is in my opinion a great program to bring you from complete Novice to Intermediate and maybe even a bit beyond. It can be an option for someone more advanced who is injured and has to rebuild or train around it, depending on the nature of the injury.

Which other options are out there ?

More suitable for intermediates would be madcow, the juggernaut method, Jim Wendler 531 or the Texas method, depending in preferences and style.

Stronglifts 5x5 for crossfitters

JUST YO' BODY These first girls represent the "lightest" as they consist only of body weight movements.	BARBARA 5 ROUNDS 3 MIN REST 20 Pull-ups 30 Push-ups 40 Sit-ups 50 Squats	CHELSEA EMOM FOR 30 MIN 5 Pull-ups 10 Push-ups 15 Squats	MARY AMRAP IN 20 MIN 5 handstand push-ups 10 single leg squats 15 pull-ups	CINDY AMRAP IN 20 MIN 5 pull-ups 10 push-ups 15 squats
ANNIE 50-40-30-20-10 Double unders Sit-ups	NICOLE AMRAP IN 20 MIN 400m run Max rep pull-ups	ANGIE AFAP 100 Pull-ups 100 Push-ups 100 Sit-ups 100 Squats	NO BARS HERE Here come the props as bodyweight movements and fun things like wall balls collide.	EVA $R_x = 2 \text{ POOD}$ 5 ROUNDS 800m run 30 kettlebell swings 30 pull-ups
HELEN $R_x = 1.5 \text{ POOD}$ 3 ROUNDS 400m run 21 kettlebell swings 12 pull-ups	KELLY $R_x = 20 \text{ LBS}$ 5 ROUNDS 400m run 30 24" box jumps 30 wall balls	KAREN $R_x = 20 \text{ LBS}$ AFAP 150 wall balls	MIX IT UP These girls represent some of the most difficult WODs with the combinations of heavier barbell movements and calisthenics.	AMANDA $R_x = 135 \text{ LBS}$ 9-7-5 Muscle-ups Snatch
JACKIE $R_x = 45 \text{ LBS}$ AFAP 1000m row 50 thrusters 30 pull-ups	DIANE $R_x = 225 \text{ LBS}$ 21-15-9 Deadlift Handstand push-ups	FRAN $R_x = 95 \text{ LBS}$ 21-15-9 Thrusters Pull-ups	ELIZABETH $R_x = 135 \text{ LBS}$ 21-15-9 Cleans Ring dips	NANCY $R_x = 95 \text{ LBS}$ 5 ROUNDS 400 m run 15 overhead squats
LYNNE 5 ROUNDS MAX REPS Body weight bench press Pull-ups	GET HEAVY Finally, the "heavies". These girls are all about barbell movements that use heavy weight to build strength and nothing else.	ISABEL $R_x = 135 \text{ LBS}$ AFAP 30 Snatches	LINDA 10/9/8/7/6/5/4/3/2/1 Deadlift 1 1/2 body weight Bench body weight Clean 3/4 body weight	GRACE $R_x = 135 \text{ LBS}$ AFAP 30 clean and jerks

Stronglifts 5x5 for crossfitters

In total i think that [Stronglifts 5x5](#) is a great program for beginning [crossfitters](#) who are aged, before they go into the hardcore WODs from the open, the games or generally into olympic weightlifting. This opinion is based on the facts that the powerlifts used

are less technically challenging than the olympic lifts and I think you should build a stringbase before going into the dynamic strength efforts of olympic lifts to avoid that you hurt yourself.

The dangers of Crossfit

Crossfit was never intended to be for the average joe. It came out of military programs which wanted to create bodies that enables you to perform in a warzone switching from running, to lifting and jumping at the brink of exhaustion. With crossfit becoming more and more mainstream, the common public sees it as the new kool aid to [lose weight](#), [build muscle](#) and become more bad ass.

This is certainly the path with Crossfit, however i personally feel that Crossfit is geared towards wanting too much, too fast, too early because the standard WODs are already mad hard. Most of the staff at my workplace do Crossfit and I hear frequent complaints about [pains resulting from crossfit](#) in the staff kitchen. If it hurts that bad, maybe you should not be doing it in the first place. The crossfit answer to this will of course be "Pascal, come on get over it". But also talking to professionals I know they think doing olympic lifts for repetitions is just wrong.

The good thing about Crossfit is that there is a standard for everything, which keeps you challenged and your results comparable. This is exciting, new and productive in my opinion.

Why Stronglifts 5x5 for crossfit ?

[Stronglifts 5x5](#) will help you to get used to a barbell with movements which are more easy learned and controlled than the olympic lifts which are so common in Crossfit. This will help you to lay a strong foundation to then move on to accelerating the bar in the olympic lifts with control, if the basic strength to do this has not yet been developed.

If you use the [Mike Burgener warm up](#) to start your session you can ingrain the movement patterns for the olympic lifts, run Stronglifts 5x5 3 days a week for a year to build strength and then switch the lifts to olympic. For the other days of the week you can focus on the girls or bodyweight WOD's.

Why not Stronglifts 5x5 for crossfit ?

You can argue that you are better off with training specifically for crossfit and do the different workouts in a scaled down version with less weight. I tried this and I did not find it to be very satisfying, as I am a pretty competitive person. I also think that things

should be done as designed rather than dumbed down to make it fit for yourself. If you are too weak for crossfit, yet still pay to do crossfit, that is not really smart in my book. This is like buying a pick truck with 22 inch wheels to than downsize those rims to 10 inches to fit it in your garage.

If you only do [Stronglifts 5x5](#) the argument can be made, that you will not train the proper form and technique for all the other things related to crossfit like double unders, kipping pull ups, wallballs and box jumps. This can easily be compensated for by incorporating these movements in your warm up and accessory work if you have 1.5 hours to spare in the gym.

Stronglifts 5x5 for runners



MARATHON RUNNER

Name Coolboy Ngamole
Height 5'5" **Weight** 128 lbs
Purpose Endurance



FITNESS MODEL

Name Kelechi Opara
Height 5'9" **Weight** 181 lbs
Purpose Aesthetics

Stronglifts 5x5 for runners

This is a post to help you decide whether you want to do [Stronglifts 5x5](#) whilst preparing for a race in running. If you are an average athlete I would recommend it to [prevent injury](#) if you have the time to spare. If your overall goal is general health and fitness this is a great program to run next to a three day running plan. If your main goal is a [very fast race time](#), you might want to step away from this idea. If you want the details of the program itself and the results it can provide please see this [Stronglifts review](#), as I will not describe the program itself in this post. Always consult a doctor before deciding for a special exercise program or diet.

What kind of runner are you ?

If you consider Stronglifts 5x5 while being on a running plan ask yourself why you are running. If your running is aimed at [shed off these pounds](#) for summer or stay generally fit and you are now looking into options to make your exercise regime a bit more exciting I personally think you are in the right spot.

If you are obese and your major aim is to lose the additional fat, maybe step away from Stronglifts 5x5 and look in to [30 Day Challenges](#) and especially programs which are based on "As many repetitions for time" using body [weight](#) like [bikinibodymommy](#) or bring up your overall mileage in running slowly easing into faster pace.

For the ones who are long distance runners aiming for a better time I think [Stronglifts 5x5](#) is a great option during your off season after the central race of the year to build strength and prevent injury during season.

Time management between Stronglifts 5x5 and running

To do [Stronglifts 5x5](#) you will need three days a week starting out at half an hour each which will quickly escalate to 1 to 1 and half hours while you are progressing on the program. For casual runners this should not be too much of a challenge and I did split my time three days in the gym, three days outside to run when preparing for my first marathon which I finished in 3:58.

For [runners](#) who are aiming to go below the 3:00:00 mark for the [marathon](#) I personally think this time is better invested into getting more mileage in to achieve this goal. Weightlifting is a distraction for this goal, which I had to learn the hard way and I am still on the quest to prove that it is possible to [lift heavy](#) and run fast for long. However not everyone is as insane as me, therefore put the Stronglifts to off season and do so minimal strength training most elaborate marathon plans have anyway.

For all runners alike I highly recommend the program to [stay injury free](#). I run for two years now and finished [three marathons](#) in that period. I stayed injury free through the entire time while friends of mine hurt their ankles, pulled their knees and I heard of more injuries which are common for runners. I mainly attribute this to doing Judo for 12 years [when I was a teenager](#), which I think hardened my system for shock impacts and the weightlifting I did in parallel to my running training.

So if you want to stay [injury free](#), in my book, lift. If you lift, [Stronglifts 5x5](#) will be a program which especially long distance runners will like as they know the mechanics of

the daily grind to improve in increments.

[Stronglifts 5x5](#) is a lifting [program](#) for [beginners](#) and reading this article I assume you are a beginner in the field of lifting. If you are advanced, maybe consider a different program like the Cube, the Lilliebridge method or [Jim Wendler 5/3/1](#).

Stronglifts 5x5 for Teenagers ?



Stronglifts 5x5 for Teenagers ?

All in all I would only recommend [Stronglifts 5x5](#) in the late teenage years. Parents should be open to the needs of their children, inform themselves and make a decision based on facts which take into account the needs of everybody involved equally based on merit, rather than authority. Different approaches will most likely lead to tension in the household and resources being wasted needlessly (been there, done that). I hope this article is informative and helpful, if your family is faced with the decision of allowing a teenager to go on Stronglifts or not. Please always consult a doctor before deciding for a program. This article covers the dynamics and concerns within a family rather than the program itself. The program is safe and works and I have done it myself and you will find details in [my review of Stronglifts 5x5](#).

My background

I did Stronglifts for a year and trained for strength as part of my schedule when I was a Judoka in my teenage years in Germany. I started Stronglifts in 2014 and ended it in

2015. I have two stepchildren, boy and girl, in their teens. We live in Ireland with my partner, the teens, a dog and two cats. I [bench press](#) 135 kilograms, [Squat](#) 140kg and [Deadlift](#) 175kg by time of writing at a body weight of 85kg and have run [three marathons](#).

Would you recommend it for teenagers ?

If you want to [get stronger](#) in your late teens after finishing your growth phase Stronglifts 5x5 is one of the best options around in my opinion but do not start earlier.

Stating the obvious, the teenage years span a decade in which a lot of hormonal changes happen for a teenager and they become more and more aware that their parents might not be the ultimate source of wisdom and knowledge for any topic. To answer the posed question in more detail I would like to split the teenagers in two groups. Early teenagers of 11 - 15 and late teenagers of 16 - 19, because based on my experience with weightlifting the answer is different for these groups. Also being a man and having been a male teenager I would hesitate to make any recommendations for the female readers of my blog. Good thing is, this seems to be more of a male challenge anyway (I do not see a lot of teenage ladies lifting [weights](#)).

I would not recommend weightlifting in the early teenage years. Main reason being that most teenagers of this age are either just starting or are directly in their growth phase. This phase is usually met with coordination problems, as limbs become longer than they were and growth stress on ligaments and joints which puts teenagers at higher [risk of injury](#) when weightlifting. In addition the good news is that the amount of hormones in their blood will help to stimulate [muscle growth](#) just by doing [body weight work](#) like pull ups, push ups and sit ups. This will build a [strong base](#) to start weightlifting at a later stage after the growth phase is completed.

To put it in one sentence start lifting when you have hair growing on your chest and in all the other relevant places which identify you as a young man, rather than a young boy.

When I did Judo in my early teens we worked with circuit training including rope climbs, push ups, sit ups, squats and sprints. That worked well for me until I started [working out in the gym](#).

For late teenagers which have gone through the growth phase I personally think that Stronglifts 5x5 is a lot better than what I used to do back in the day and I would strongly recommend it, if the intention is to build strength mainly and more muscle secondly. This would apply to all semiprofessional teenagers who want to build strength for the

sport they play.

What happened with me, without having a beginner program like starting strength or Stronglifts 5x5 and only working of some rudimentary advise from my judo coach for the gym, is that I did not [pick my numbers right \(meaning I lifted way too heavy\)](#), making things up while I was in the gym, avoiding the squat and mainly did bench presses. Being 30 this has the consequence that my upper body is overdeveloped compared to my legs, my mobility for the squat is bad and I wasted a lot of time doing exercises which got me nowhere.

Using the Stronglifts 5x5 framework ensures you will use a clearly defined framework starting with an [empty bar](#). This limits [time wasted in the gym](#), risk of injury and builds a strong base step by step. The [free 5x5 App](#) will help you as a teenager to go through everything without having to make up any thing. Also all lifts are explained in depth, **if** you follow the instructions and take them serious, which you should by all means.

Should the teenager in question be overweight, try to lose it first before starting 5x5 through dietary means or by doing more cardio.

The teenagers point of view

Looking back to my teenage years I had the following interests to do weightlifting, even if i did not admit it or realise it by that time:

1. Impress the ladies
2. Impress my friends
3. [Build muscle](#)

If you are a teenager reading this hopefully you accept my advise when I tell you:

1. The ladies do not care as much as you think if you have muscles. I had way more success chatting up ladies with card tricks and charm than flexing my muscles (and no I was not a fat nerd, I was an above average Judoka, not great, but still ok). Charm and being funny taking priority over the card tricks. This is how I met my future wife, so believe me when I say this. Card tricks are better ice breakers than muscle...hands down.
2. My friends were way more impressed that I did not drink at weekends after I had my drivers license and therefore could drive them to cool places. Maybe I was taken advantage of here and there, but having the skill to enjoy yourself without alcohol at a party will save you a lot of money and hassle. (The smart reader will notice, that I did drink before I had my drivers license. Let's just stick with that. I got that urge out of my system by 18, I am not a priest. Remember drinking might be illegal if you are

under 18, depending on where you are from.).

3. Stronglifts 5x5 builds muscle, but if that is your main goal I think [German Volume Training](#) is the better choice.

So I personally get that you want to do these things, but these [motivators](#) will not help you to stick to a program and make the best of it. I always fared best when I tried to be the best version of myself, which includes being [strong](#) rather than muscle in my book, and not care too much about what others thought. So please think and discuss honestly with your parents why you want to get into weightlifting. If you feel not comfortable talking to your parents, post a comment below and I will do my best to help you. Maybe even show them this article to avoid conflict in your house.

This video might help to provide some perspective:

```
// <!--[CDATA[ (function(d, s, id) var js, fjs = d.getElementsByTagName(s); if
(d.getElementById(id)) return; js = d.createElement(s); js.id = id; js.src =
'//connect.facebook.net/en_GB/sdk.js#xfbml=1&version=v2.3';
fjs.parentNode.insertBefore(js, fjs);(document, 'script', 'facebook-jssdk')); // ]-->
```

WireTap: How to Age Gracefully

CBC Radio's WireTap is saying farewell. In this special video message, people of all ages offer words of wisdom to their younger counterparts.

Posted by [CBC Radio](#) on Wednesday, 19 August 2015

Mom's point of view

My future wife's concerns were majorly around health and therefore she refused to allow weightlifting for my stepson in the first place in my opinion mainly due to lack of understanding and interest. What followed were a lot of arguments between her and him about whether he should be allowed or not and that all of his friends were allowed etc.

If you flat out refuse weightlifting be aware that your son most likely will find a way to do it somehow, because there will always be at least one place in town where the people in charge do not give a heap about who enters their [gym](#) and do not control vigorously. This might bring you into a precarious situation where you have to explain to the insurance company why your minor was left unattended in a [gym](#) he was not even subscribed to when he buried himself under a barbell in some form. Just be aware that this might be an outcome of being stubborn. If you are a teenager reading this, ready to point it out to Mom, be aware that you will potentially have broken bones which will put your parents into debt and therefore will not be able to pay for your college education or your shiny new car. You might even not be able to recover fully or

quick, because you have just been as stubborn as Mom (and out of carelessness hurt yourself in the process).

As Mom try to take interest and help out with a plan. [Stronglifts 5x5](#) is a really good source for educating yourself on weightlifting and also gives you and your teenager a clear framework where you can both agree what is allowed and what is not without the necessity of constant monitoring. Your teenager does not want you around when he/she trains and most likely wants to hang out with the lads in the gym. That is a better prospect than the local bus or train stop in my opinion.

[Check the facilities](#) and your first impression of it. Talk to the owner's and whether they accept teenagers or not (not all of them do). I would recommend a commercial gym membership over one in a dingy "powerlifting gym" even though I am subscribed to a more rough gym myself. Reason for that is, that it is less likely to find people who sell substances in a commercial gym than in a bodybuilding / powerlifting focused gym due to the goals their members have. Your teenager might not be able to say no to approaches.

All in all, if your teenager went through growth face and is a clear mini adult now I think more harm can be done by denying the request for weightlifting rather than supervising it, channel it in the right direction and give it one of the best frameworks there is with 5x5.

Dad's point of view

As a dad the challenge for me was not to take completely over and admitting that my son had no interest what so ever to go to the gym with me if there was the opportunity to go with his friends instead.

I tried to force a program on him with all the best intentions and miserably failed. There was no initiative to go by himself, I had to drive him there every time even though it was just a 5 minute walk away. A lot of energy and time was wasted. Also with the internet around be prepared that your teenager has more spare time than you and will search for information to challenge every single thing you will bring up in a discussion about training. So do some homework before the discussion.

I found that the best approach with the least hassle and most happiness for everyone was to inquire where the friends are going for their exercises and get a membership at that [gym](#). Give your teenager a lift there from time to time and maybe become a member yourself, if you are not already. Just stay out of earshot of the "huddle" to not come across as intrusive and please please do not correct your teenagers form. Let the

gym personnel handle that (maybe give them a hint though, if necessary). And if you are a teenager reading this, maybe accept that Dad has to work hard to pay the subscription and might know a thing or two about training too. Even if he is silly, embarrassing or bossy, he only does it to help you succeed (yes sometimes dad shows this in weird ways).

Conclusion

[Stronglifts 5x5](#) is a great, if not one the best beginner programs for teenagers whose bodies are ready to put under extra stress after their growth phase. Mom's should not get overly concerned and educate themselves on the topic while Dads should take down their "know it all" attitude about training one nodge to make room to the teenagers concerns. At least that was the case for us.

The teenager should accept that a no is a no, question their real motivation for weightlifting and make their case based in facts and good merit rather than throwing a hissy fit by saying "it's not fair" or "everybody else does it". If you help Mom and Dad to understand what you are trying to achieve, why, how much it will cost and whether it is safe or not, it is way more likely that you will get what you want.

To learn more read and watch my impressions on [my year with Stronglifts 5x5](#)

What to do on off days for Stronglifts



What to do on off days for Stronglifts

The more experienced you are, the more you can do on off days on Stronglifts 5x5. As you are most likely a beginner for whom the program has been designed, it is very likely that you should rest on the off days unless 5x5 has been given to you by your personal

trainer as part of a strength boost to achieve other fitness goals on the pitch.

Goals

The path to take for your off days depends on your personal goals, as I always like to point out, when talking about training structure. If you struggle to decide what to do on off days on [Stronglifts 5x5](#), it might be worthwhile to revisit why you do the program in the first place. If you prioritise getting strong before getting muscle, which has to be assumed if you picked this program over [German Volume training](#), then your off day routines should also pay into that for your overall training strategy to make sense. Be aware, that the off days are designed for beginners to actually take a day off. The less fit you are, the more I would recommend to establish the routine of being active three times a week first and then move on to more days, rather than shocking your system with a program that has you train five days a week. If you are already used to higher workloads from doing sports, you might directly hop in with a more demanding schedule, if you wish to do so.

Week structure

The program republished and made famous by Mehdi under the Stronglifts 5x5 label leaves you with four days in the week where you would not hit the gym, if the program is strictly followed. Usually you [hit the gym](#) on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays or Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, depending on personal preferences. Depending on this you can choose what you do on the remaining days to expand on your goals or fast track them.

Bodyweight exercises

[Bodyweight exercises](#) can be used in multiple ways to accompany 5x5 to get better results, if you have the time and capability to do them. I see three major applications for using bodyweight exercise

- Establish better movement patterns
- Explosiveness
- Strength development for the lower back and abs

Repeating the movements for beginners which are starting with weightlifting without the barbell or a lighter barbell for technique purposes will help to practice and work on good form on the squat, Deadlift and bench press.

Exercises like box jumps, medicine ball throws and boxing can be used to also work on explosiveness so that the strength which is being developed can be released in a fast

and impactful matter. This might be very interesting to individuals who do competitive team sports and have been put on a strength development plan.

Finally the program falls a little bit short on strength development for the lower back and abs. Exercises like glute ham raises and sit ups can help to compensate for this.

Running

I personally prepared for two marathons while doing 5x5, one in [Frankfurt](#) and one in [Vienna](#). I ran my fastest marathon when I was not on a lifting program in [Dublin in 2013 with 3:58](#). In my opinion the take away is that running is a distractor from lifting as lifting from running.

There are only so many ours in the day / week to train if you have a full time job. Therefore make your choice based on your goal and available time whether you want to run on off days or not. For a more rounded overall approach running is a good addition.

If you would like to do a program which fits with the Stronglifts 5x5 and is easy to understand I would recommend [Hal Higdon's Marathon 3](#) for the more ambitious amongst you. I have not done that program myself, ut prepapred for all of my marathons with programs of Hal Higdon and liked them, as they are easy to use and do not need a lot of equipment.

Weak links

You can train your weak links on off days as an alternative which would be a more focused approach to lifting then running on off days. Weak links are parts of the three main lifts which you feel weak in. Usually this is the lock out in the hips or grip strength for the [deadlift](#). The [squat](#) usually fails in the lowest point of the where the momentum has to change from a downward to an upward movement. Here you can work on explosiveness "out of the hole" which means from the lowest point of the hip. The [bench press](#) can fail in the lower chest, which is usually attributed to a weak chest muscle, or mid lift when the lock out occurs. This can mean that you have to develop your triceps further.

In addition for the deadlift and squat you can develop weak rump muscles if they are not adressed by proper accessory work. (Nothing to freak out about, won't kill you, just something to consider)

Mobility

Last but not least mobility work so that your tendony and body have a better recovery and you develop bigger range of motion. In my personal experience this is the point I neglected most when starting out in lifting and it show now two years into the progression. If I could redo it and just focus on getting stringer this would be the area where I would spent most of the time on that I had spent on running instead in 2014.

Conclusion

All in all you have a multitude of options of what to do on the off days on Stronglifts 5x5. The fitter you are entering the program the more extra effort you can put in in my opinion without putting your health under too much risk. The less fit you are the more you should tread the off days as what they should be, days to rest and recover.

Stronglifts with accessory work

Stronglifts with Accessory work

This post will walk you through why I think that there is not enough accessory work in Stronglifts 5x5, which options are out there and which of these I personally see best fitted to create a well around athlete for strength performance. The main points 5x5 misses in its programming are the lower back and posterior chain. Utilising the good morning and glute ham raises compensate for that instead of pull ups and dips as recommended by Stronglifts.

What is Stronglifts 5x5 ?

[Stronglifts 5x5](#) is a beginners program for lifters which has been made popular by Mehdi. You will train three times a day, squat every day and utilise the deadlift, bench press, barbell row and overhead press in addition. The program starts with an empty bar and usually finishes after 8 - 14 months progression depending on your personal physique around a 120kg - 150kg squat. One of the major downsides of the Stronglifts 5x5 program is that there is not enough emphasis and advice for accessory work given. You still have some and can buy an add on to the app itself, however, this post is geared towards people who are about three months into their 5x5 program and want to work on the weaknesses which are showing.

Why do accessory work ?

[Accessory work](#) are lifts and exercises which help you to train the weak points in the [bench press, deadlift and squat](#). These movements usually use a lot of muscle but are less taxing on the joints and nervous system. [The accessory work you do should be picked as close as possible to your main three lifts to ensure maximum carry over](#). The more specific the accessory work, the more carry over you get, the more time efficient and effective you train. This means that if you want to improve your back squat

personal best, [fartlek runs](#) might not be the preferable choice for accessory work.

In each lift, you will find that over time it will show some weaknesses. Be it the lock-out on the bench press, breaking ground on the deadlift or driving the weight out of the hole in the squat. [Most lifters do not do enough accessory work](#) and [lack the objectivity to find their weak links](#). In commercial gyms, I also find that you might feel embarrassed if you do some of these weird movements to become a stronger athlete. The real professionals usually do a ton of accessory work to iron out their weaknesses. [The point at which a chain breaks is always the weakest one](#). So your weaknesses become the limiting factors of your performance. Accessory work is, therefore, a good way to build all around toughness and constant performance in the gym, on the platform or wherever else you find to achieve the latest and greatest.

How often should I do accessory work ?

That depends on the intensity of your main sessions. [Most lifters do not put enough effort into their accessory work](#). While this is the lazy extreme it is also not to be recommended to make it a case of majoring in the minors. Accessory work is a supporting, not a supplementing exercise, to the main big compound lifts.

The frequency of your accessory work is determined by the intensity of your main sessions. The more intense your main session, the less accessory work you do. The less intense your main session, the more accessory work can be done. The intensity of your main session is determined by following factors:

- How often per week do you train ?
- How many sets do you have per session ?
- How close are you operating to your one repetition maximum ?

The more you train the closer to your maximum at higher volume, the less fuel in the tank there will be for accessory work. Therefore the question of how often you should do accessory work highly depends on your overall workload and specific strength and weaknesses. So for anything that works at 80% to 95% percent in the main session, it would be wise to follow up with low weight high rep accessory work. Wherever you go in the area of 50 - 75% of your maximum go for the heavy accessory with lower repetitions.

Generally most recommended accessory work

Once you enter the world of accessory work you will most likely find that the multitude of options is seemingly endless. I have done some of the legwork for you by reading the 20 most popular blog posts based on Google search and the accessory work which

comes up most often are:

1. **Good mornings**
2. **Box squats**
3. **Glute Ham Raises**
4. **Curls of various sorts**
5. **Pull ups and Dips**
6. **Rack pulls**

Generally, you want your accessory work to be as close to the movement you want to improve. The less the accessory lift looks like the original movement, the more likely it will be that there is little to no carry-over. Most repetition schemes for accessory work are programmed in the 8 - 12 repetitions per set at 3 - 5 sets for heavy accessory and 4 - 6 repetitions at 3 sets for heavy accessory work.

While Good mornings, box squats and rack pulls are more suited to powerlifting and strength purposes, glute ham raises, curls, pull ups and dips are good for any athlete who wants to get generally fit.

Good mornings are performed by going into the back squat starting position. Instead of folding at the knees, you fold at the hips and bent forward until your upper body is parallel to the ground. Once parallel to the ground you return to beginning position. This counts as one repetition. Good mornings can be performed using a regular barbell or a safety bar. If you go heavy on good mornings a safety bar is a very good option to make the movement less strenuous on your lower back, if your local gym provides one. This exercise is beneficial to build a strong core. This will help you to utilise your weightlifting belt better for the last parts of the movement of the squat once you managed to get out of the hole (lowest position of the squat). If you fail your squats because you can not lock out your hips, this is the accessory exercise to go for. Good mornings are a movement which is more suited to intermediates who have a good feeling for their body and know how much load they can handle. Beginners might expose themselves to too much risk doing them, when unsupervised.

Box squats will help you to improve performance out of the hole or the lowest position in the squat. You can adjust a box squat based on the height of the box you choose to squat down on. A good rule of thumb is to pick somewhere between 50 - 70% of your one repetition maximum on the back squat for this exercise. Here you perform 8 - 12 sets of two repetitions. The downward movement is controlled and slow. If you crash onto the box you will fuck up your spine! (sorry for strong wording, but DON'T be stupid, spine injuries are no joke). Once you have made it to the box your aim is to get under tension and shoot up from the box as quick and controlled as you can back to starting position. Rest should be 30 seconds to 1 minute between sets, not more. A

good box squat session will make you sweat heavy. This will train your explosiveness to improve the downward to upward momentum change in the squat. So if you usually fail at this point in the movement, box squats are your friends. Box squats are also more suited for intermediates if done unsupervised for mentioned reasons.

Glute ham raises are often overlooked as many commercial gyms do not have the equipment for it. They will help you to strengthen your lower back and thighs. As this is an exercise which can be done without a barbell and load this is more suited to beginners than the good morning and box squat. Glute ham raises are performed on a [glute ham raise machine](#). If you follow the link you will see Mark Bell explaining how this exercise is done.

Curls of various sorts are also often mentioned for accessory work. I will not enter the world of dumbbell exercises and machines which involve curls too deep, as this would make this post way to long. Generally speaking, curls tend to isolate muscle groups as they are not multi-joint movements (which most of the other accessory exercises on this list are). If you use curls for your programming be aware of that you are more likely to enter the bodybuilding realm, rather than power and strength development sphere of lifting.

Pull ups and Dips are the accessory work that Stronglifts 5x5 themselves recommend for the program. Pull ups and Dips are great exercises to build your arms and lats even further while maintaining the good feel of your body. For dips and pull ups for strength purposes perform them strict. This means that you do not get any momentum out of your legs and hips and use the full range of motion by going fully down to the lowest point on the pull-up and extend fully to lock at the elbow for the dip. While the movement for pull ups and dips are easy, the strength levels necessary to perform these for 5 to ten repetitions for multiple sets are quite high. The heavier you are, the harder these will be. Therefore I do not generally see them as an exercise for beginners.

Rack pulls are a very good weapon to improve on your deadlift. Rack pulls are being performed by making use of the safety pins in the rack and letting the barbell rest on them. Utilising this you can influence how far you have to pull the weight and knuckle down on specific areas in the deadlift that give you trouble. Furthermore, rack pulls can help advanced lifters to bring up the training volume without putting too much stress on their lower back.

Stronglifts with accessory work

All in all, it depends on your personal strengths and weaknesses which kind of accessory work you pick. Hopefully, this post gave you some ideas to look into. I

personally think that accessory work is the biggest weakness of the 5x5 program. The recommended pull ups and dips seem to have mainly been implemented so that teenagers would be satisfied that there is some biceps development going on in the program. If you are a real beginner the pull ups and dips will also be too hard for you and you will have paid some extra coin (not a lot but still) on the app to enable this feature. If I could to my ten months of Stronglifts 5x5 over again the accessory I would pick would be good mornings and glute ham raises. This will make sure that you will hit your core and posterior chain also when being a beginner because that came back to bite me in the at a later stage for having too weak a core. If you are to implement these movements, be very careful to not overload them.

Stronglifts without spotter



How to do Stronglifts without a spotter

When doing Stronglifts without a spotter it is paramount to have good technique and common sense. In this article I will explain how both is expressed in detail when doing Stronglifts by describing technique, setup, what to do if you fail and why you should stay calm at all times during a lift. Even if you think you have good technique maybe do a little refresh here and take home some extra knowledge around rack setup and how to behave when a fail occurs.

Technique

The back squat

The very first for you to get right is **basic technique of squatting**. You should know how to

- Distribute the weight equally
- White knuckle
- Get under the bar
- Unrack the bar
- Do a three step walk out (BACKWARDS)

- Plant your feet
- Breathe correctly
- Pull in the bar
- Brace your abs
- Squat as low as you possibly can
- Squeeze your glutes when coming out the lowest position
- Repeat the process and breathe between repetitions according to your experience and load.

That is what you should focus on first before loading the bar and stepping into [the gym](#) without having a spotter. If you do not know how to do these things, get somebody to help you. It is less embarrassing to ask for help than being a cripple as a result of your own stupidity by burying yourself under a barbell.

Distribute the weight equally on the barbell to avoid imbalance. I am sorry that it has to be written down, but I have seen enough people even getting this one incorrect. Check that you have the same amount of plates with the same denominations on each side of the bar or expect bad things to happen once you start [the squat](#). In all fairness there are even cases when they get this wrong at powerlifting world masters.

White knuckle which means that you squeeze [the bar](#) until your knuckles turn white while you wrap your thumbs around the bar to get a good and fastened [grip](#).

Get under the bar in an aggressive & explosive manner. This does not mean to go into “wife beater” mode and start grunting and screaming like [Al Pacino in scent of a woman](#). Keep the screaming and craziness for doing a PR. Being aggressive and explosive means that you own the bar. Be focused. Visualise every step before you [lift](#) and own every repetition. **Dig yourself under the bar** and find the shelf for the higher or lower bar squat position. This will occur naturally to you. The shelf for the high bar squat is the first place you will feel comfortable with putting the barbell on below your neck. The position for the lower back squat will be the next step down with which you feel you have the most grip and control over the barbell. If you are squatting for [Olympic weightlifting](#) focus on high bar squats, low bar squats seem to work well for [powerlifters](#). If you are afraid of getting under the bar, you should not be surprised that you do not get results.

Unrack the bar by getting your feet aligned once you found the position for it on your back. Once the feet are in place pop your hips forward to unrack the bar. Ideally it only takes you to **move your hips forward to get the weight out of the racked position when your feet are parallel**. If you struggle to either get the bar over the [J Cup](#) (that’s the thing the bar rested on) to walk out, adjust down. If you have to do a half squat to

even get to the starting position the bar is too low and needs to be placed higher.

Do a three step walk out (BACKWARDS) to get distance between the starting position and where you will squat. The three step walk out works for all scenarios so practise it. The two step walk out only works with monolift stations. Cross that bridge when you can squat 2 times your own bodyweight for competition day. Until then just forget what I just said and work on your three step walk out. **First step will provide distance to the starting position.** This will your biggest step of the three. **Second step will align the other foot in the squatting position.** This foot should already be planted. **The third step will finish the setup and is only aligning the foot after the second step to distribute the weight evenly.** To all of you who think that it is a good idea to walk out forward... you are wrong. Only exemption is when you fully intent to drop the bar to the ground when you finish your set. This is a pro move for advanced lifters and they usually drop the bar overhead to the front, rather than down from the back. Also more common among weightlifters than powerlifters, as powerlifters do not do a lot of overhead pressing of 300kg+ (in fact no one does). You are not Rich Froning! WALK OUT BACKWARDS or you will hurt yourself when you have to rerack the bar on a [heavy set](#).

Plant your feet like an eagle that would grip a branch of a tree. This will happen during the walkout (get that right first, then work on the foot planting, once the three steps come naturally to you). It sounds odd, but try it and you will get the knack of it.

Breathe correctly to get the maximum power into your squat and avoid lower back and abdominal [injuries](#). Start with one [breath](#) per repetition and gradually move on to challenge yourself to do multiple with inhaling once. The best way for me to breathe when I squat is as follows:

1. Short sharp breath out when you unrack the bar
2. Stay calm during walk out
3. When feet are planted breathe out as much as you possibly can through your mouth. Get the last bit of air out.
4. Breathe in through your nose and brace your abs against the belt or just brace
5. Start with one repetition and repeat breathing pattern.
6. Work your way up to more repetitions per breath at same weight

The heavier your set will be, the more you should breath. If you work a very heavy triplet at 90% of your one repetition maximum, breathe between each repetition. When you work around 75% you should come to a stage where you will be able to do five without taking a breath in-between.

Pull in the bar into your shoulders while bracing your abs at the same time. This will ensure that you activate your lower and upper back to incorporate the power out of

these muscles also. It will also provide more stability to the bar during the lift which means less likelihood of losing the bar to the side or back. In addition the less imbalance there is in the bar the less you have to compensate for balancing it with your legs. This leaves more fuel in the tank to create thrust in the direction that matters, which is up.

Brace your abs to protect your spine and inner organs and enable maximum force development. If you follow the steps mentioned under breathing this comes very naturally to you. Bracing your abs does not mean pumping up your chest. In fact the less your chest raises during this process the better. You want your abs to be rigid and pushing out against your lifting belt in case you have one. If you do not have a belt you want to have them as tightened up as possible as if somebody was about to punch you in the stomach and you wanted to minimise the damage. To keep the tension will especially help in the lowest point of the lift. It is a lot easier to get out of the lowest position of the squat if your body is under full tension as the thrust from your legs is transferred better to drive the weight up. The less solid you are, the more power gets lost in the process. Think of trying to push a wheel into the ceiling with an iron rod or an ice cream. You are more likely to succeed with the stiff iron rod as the power from your arm will actually be transferred to the ceiling (physics and all of that jazz).

Squat as low as you possibly can to get the maximum bang for your buck per lift. This is determined by the flexibility in your hips, knees and ankles. Each squat should be executed as low as you possibly can based on your mobility. If depth suffers due to load rather than mobility, use less weight.

Squeeze your glutes like you want to crack a nut in your crack. This will help immensely for getting out of the hole (name for the lowest position of the squat). Especially the last few bits of the squat can be made a lot easier by activating the area around your butt cheeks to drive that barbell up these last few inches to complete the lift.

Repeat the process and breathe between repetitions according to your experience and load. The less experienced you are and the more weight you use the more you will have to breathe between repetitions. So in the beginning repeat the breathing steps described earlier for each and every attempt. Once you get more comfortable work your way up to doubles, triples and sets of five with just one breath.

The Bench press

The next thing to look at is correct [bench pressing technique](#) which fortunately is a bit less complex:

- Find a grip a thumb's width apart from the inner knurl on each side
- White knuckle
- Pull your pinkies in
- Build an arch while planting your feet
- Breathe correctly
- Unrack the bar forward
- Bring the bar to rest on the chest
- Rack the bar backwards

Find a grip a thumb's width apart from the inner knurl of the bar on each side. This is literally a rule of thumb. Of course depending on your leverages, body size and arm length you might find a different point on the iron better. Still this is a good starting point from which you can make individual adjustments.

White knuckle as explained for squats. Squeeze the bar as much as you can until your knuckles turn white. This is even more important on the bench press than for the squat to get the best results.

Pull your pinkies in after the white knuckling. You basically try to bend the bar towards you to get more tension into your overall body.

Build an arch while planting your feet. You want your butt cheeks still to be on the bench while most of your back does not touch it any more. The next touching point is your shoulder belt which rests on the bar. This way you will be able to activate your leg power more into the bench press and get even more tension into your overall body.

Breathe correctly by taking a deep breath in and bracing your abs to initiate the unrack. I usually can do 3 - 5 repetition depending on weight until I have to breathe again.

Unrack the bar forward. Please do yourself a favour and set your [equipment](#) up in a way that the unracking for the bench press is forward and out of the J cups.

Bring the bar to rest on the chest. Ideally you want the momentum to completely leave the weight while doing a bench press. This is doing it by competition rules for powerlifting and also helps to get more out of each repetition for developing strength and muscle. Touch and go repetitions are ok, but only for top sets or if you work on explosiveness. If you want to optimise for nice packs and overall strength let the bar come to rest for a short period (one to two seconds) before initiating the upward movement.

Rack the bar backwards. If you have done the setup correctly you can rack the bar

backwards into the J cup. This is handy after a taxing set and avoids that you have to fiddle the barbell back into place at your weakest. If you can just stupidly move your arms in direction of your head at fully extended arms to hit the resting place of the bar in the J cups you have done it right. If drop backwards and the bar is only two inches away from your forehead, reconsider your setup.

For the deadlift

The deadlift is performed without a spotter and can be exited easily by dropping the bar or bringing it back to the ground. The question of technique comes in to protect your lower back but will not be discussed in this article.

Rack Setup

For the back squat

The setup of the bar for the squat should be high enough so that you still only have to straighten your hips to get the weight unracked. If you pop your hips forward and still have to wiggle the barbell out of the starting position, the J cups are set up too high. You have to be able to comfortably walk out backwards without anything in the way once you have popped the weight out of the resting position.

The barbell is setup too low if you require to activate your legs to unrack the bar. Only the movement of bringing your hip forward should be enough to unrack the bar. If you set the bar up too low you will have to do a half rep per set more and will get problems when you rack the bar at the end of the lift as you have to lower your hips to a point at the end of set to a degree where your legs might give and you bury yourself under the weight.

Setup of the pins should be slightly below the lowest point you can reach for the back squat. The idea is to get the minimum distance between you going to the lowest points and the points. This ensures in case of a fail, that you can bring the barbell down in a controlled manner to the lowest point, transfer it to the safety pins and exit safely underneath.

If you set up the safety pins too low you expose yourself to the risk of a barbell falling into your back or snapping the ligaments around your knees because of over compression / twisting on the way down. If you set them up too high you cannot execute the movement fully or bang into the safety pins while squatting and destabilise yourself.

As you see take care of the setup for the squat. It is like a safety belt. Put in place wrong

or not at all does not matter as long as everything is going to plan. However, if worst case scenario happens, it only protects you in the intended way if taken care of before you start properly.

For the bench press

Bench Press safety



The barbell should be set up at a height so that you can grip it with your hands while you have it at a bit more than an elbows length. This should enable you to easily unrack the bar while straightening your arms without using only little power from your chest. Experiment with a few setups until you found the right hole in the rack for you where you do not have to do a half rep for getting started and yet still have enough room between your cup and arms to drop the bar backwards into starting position when done.

The pins should be set up just slightly above the line of the highest point of your arch. What this means is that if you fail a repetition you can exit safely by exiting the arched position and pushing the barbell forward to get out.

A fail is a fail

If you do not have a spotter get into the habit of treating fails on form as fails as you did not execute the movement properly. This will ensure that you will not do repetitions that potentially harm your form or yourself. When I did the Stronglifts program I was actually not good at taking my own advice and had to rebuild my squat dropping from 120kg to 100kg with good form. That made me lose about three months of training. Same on the deadlift where I lifted with bad form for quite some time and then could not deadlift for four months to get my lower back to heal. This led to my PB dropping from 190kg to a 150kg. So, as Mark Bell says, protect yourself before you wreck yourself.

One rep less

Now the usual credo in amongst lifters is "one more rep" and as long as you have someone to help you out with a spot please do follow that path. However, if that is not the case, which is the more common scenario, avoid the next repetition if the last one was already a grinder. Yes usually you can squeeze out one more repetition after the first grinder repetition of the set. Still without a spotter you possibly bury yourself under the bar or break your nose. That is not worth it. You want to train often and constantly to get stronger and not ones stupidly to be out of the game for a month or more.

Keep calm

When you are in the predicament of failing a rep and nowhere near the racking position with no spotter around, stay calm. Lower the bar to the pins as controlled as possible to be safe. If you did not set up the pins correctly, which is your own stupid fault in the first place, still stay in control to the lowest point for the squat and drop the bar from there. This will minimise uncontrolled momentum of the bar which could potentially break your shin (bar thrown off back from high position onto pins / into rack, bounces back in your direction = ugly result. Less momentum less chance of this happening).

For the bench press same applies, stay calm. Move the bar away from your face to your chest and park it there. ALWAYS move the bar AWAY from your face in case of a failed bench press attempt unless you want to get face surgery. If you have no clips on the weights, once the bar rests on your chest tilt the bar slowly and controlled so that plates can drop to the floor. Try to get one plate off each side in this way. When that is done you should be able to push the weight up again to racking position and exit. In case you have clips on the bar and can not remove plates by tilting without having the pins set up to rescue you either stay under the bar until help arrives or push the bar down so that you can get to sitting position and then try somehow to stand up like doing a sumo deadlift while moving the bar up and away from you. Take care that when the bar comes to rest on the bench it might come up on either end to hit you in the side.

Conclusion

If you do stronglifts without a spotter pay double attention to form and execution. Stay safe by knowing your limits and not pushing too far. Keep that for the days when a spotter is around. Know your ideal setup of pins and J cups and keep. Make no compromises for speed when it comes to setup. If you are in a busy gym, maybe wait until the guy before you is finished rather than hopping in. If you can already see that

there is a person who constantly walks dangerously close to people who are doing heavy lifting, wait until he is gone. If you follow all of the tips I mentioned here you will be fine. I did not hurt myself yet because of failing a repetition. *knockonwood*

Stronglifts with machines



Stronglifts with machines

Overall I think that doing Stronglifts 5x5 with machines is missing the point of the program. The only justifications I can think of to do it with machines is lack of technique or medical record. For the first, just have faith and put in the work to learn the lifts. For the second, if your age or medical record does not allow for lifting free weights than stay away from it. You probably need professional advise on your program anyway and I'd doubt that it is a good idea to download something from the internet and just go with it...

What is Stronglifts ?

Stronglifts 5x5 is a lifting program for beginners which lets you train three times a week using the barbell row, bench press, squat, deadlift and overhead press. It has been made popular as a lifting program by [Mehdi who promotes it on his website as the simplest workout to get stronger](#) and explains the underlying principles. If you wanted

to read a review on the topic, please refer to [my extensive 10 month review](#) on this blog.

What are machines ?

Machines are a great many things. Harvesters, terminators, computers and robots. Here is a definition for you to educate and (hopefully) entertain:

"An apparatus using mechanical power and having several parts, each with a definite function and together performing a particular task."

Wandering a bit off topic I'd like to show you the Charlie Chaplin speech from the great dictator, in which he talks about machine men, which I think is a very good one to know and to motivate yourself:



I really like this one a lot, but back to the topic at hand.

Machines in the gym are usually what you find in a commercial gym. The smith machine, bicep curl machines or others to define and tone your muscles. The general definition which we have introduced in this article actually applies quite well for them, as these machines are in general designed to isolate and stimulate one particular muscle group in the body. For more details you can visit [the website of gym80](#) which has all kinds of machines on offer to get a general overview of what is out there.

Where will you train ?

The question of whether or not to do Stronglifts with machines is usually tied to what is available to you in your local gym. The decision on where you will train depends on how far you have travel to your gym, what your personal goals are and how you intent to achieve them. If you do your research and goal finding correct and assuming you live

in an urban area I would say you can already answer the posed question just by [picking the right gym for your goals](#). If you are leaning more towards bodybuilding, machines might be the way to go. If you are looking to build functional strength, free weights are usually the better bet. Of course this is working with a very broad brush here.

How well / strong are you ?

Another thing to consider is your health status and whether you are allowed to use free weights. Age, medical record and other factors might impede your ability to work with free weights which Stronglifts 5x5 prescribes and the program therefore might not be an ideal option for you. If you are too young to be allowed to use free weights [the programs of Frank Medrano are a cool alternative to strength training with weights](#). Herniated discs and torn tendons might call for a professional physiotherapist and not for Stronglifts 5x5. The weaker you are, the less likely it will be that Stronglifts is a viable option for you. To do Stronglifts you should be well able to handle a 20kg plate with ease, as this is the starting point utilising the barbell in the free weight area.

Conclusion

Stronglifts 5x5 has been designed to create real world strength in an easy manner, which it does. Free weights are an ideal way to address this goal as you have to balance the weight without any help from pulleys, straps and set ups in machines. I personally feel like that doing Stronglifts 5x5 with machines completely misses the point and is done because you are afraid to hurt yourself using free weights or you are not strong enough yet. For former, work on technique and know [how to set up a power rack properly to minimise injury risk](#). For the latter, well, simply don't do Stronglifts yet.

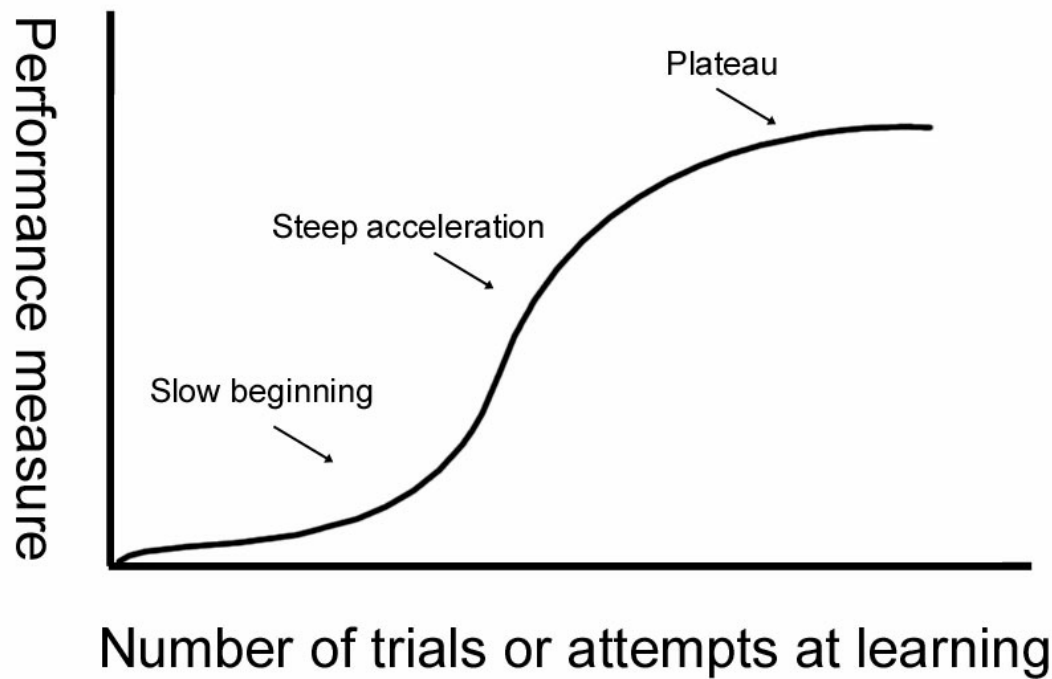
Why are there so many squats in Stronglifts 5x5?

Why are there so many squats in Stronglifts 5x5?

The main reason that there are so many squats in Stronglifts 5x5 is because it is one of the best movements for beginners to build a solid base from which they can go further.

If you look at Mark Rippetoe's Starting Strength or Greg Everett's book on olympic weightlifting the squat is usually the first movement to be taught in depth. The reasons for that are its emphasize on hip, ankle and knee mobility, which can be utilised in the olympic lifts or other movements, and that the [squat](#) is a full body exercise without being as heavy on the nervous system as the deadlift. In addition it can also be done fairly save in a squat rack to start with, if done right.

In term of frequency you will do 75 squats a week when on 5x5. Compared to other beginner programs in crossfit or bodybuilding, this is actually not that much. Of course compared to intermediate powerlifting or olympic weightlifting programs it seems like way too much, but these fullfill other purposes. Another effect for beginners is that their rate of adaption is way higher and the learning curve a lot steeper than for most advanced lifters and therefore it makes sense to expose them to more volume.



This chart describes how performance increases for a certain task over a given number of trials or attempts, also known as the learning curve. The aim in lifting is to restart this process at every plateau by switching or resetting the program to achieve continuous overload and therefore increase in strength and size of the lifter. Stronglifts 5x5 has been designed for beginners. Usually they can hit personal records every time when they step into the gym for a considerable amount of time. The learning curve for them accelerates quicker and the phase of steep acceleration covers a longer period in time. [In my case this was about ten months.](#) To take advantage of this effect you will find more squats in 5x5 than other intermediate lifting programs.

Supercompensation theory

Another way of looking at this is the shown supercompensation model. While the curve looks relatively complex at first this means basically that at point B the ideal point in time has come to train the muscle group again for maximised results whilst A is too early and C is too late. As beginners expose their bodies to a lesser stimulus per session due to less weight being moved point B comes in shorter intervals in time for a certain muscle group than for experienced lifters. While for beginners the interval for recovery is in the range of days, for more experienced olympic and powerlifters the recovery period might be weeks or even months depending on how far the lifter pushes the limit in a given session.

Professional powerlifters, for example, train an entire season to reach their peak performance.

How long should I do Stronglifts ?

How long should I do Stronglifts ?

All in all in the most scenarios, which is that you are a beginner doing this program, you will do it for 6 - 12 months. In other scenarios you will do 5x5 for the time that you can afford (off season) or until you have reached your goals (active recovery from injury).

Goals

Avid readers of my blog will know this already, however it can not hurt to repeat it yet again. How long you will stay on a program should mainly depend on your personal goals. If you are running a program just for its own sake, you probably will get bored quite quick. Asking how long you have to stay in stronglifts already gives away (in my perspective), that there might be some work to do on your personal goals. If you get them straight, this question will just go *poof*. Believe me. The very basic answer is that you should do Stronglifts until you have reached your goal or until you do not get any stronger.

As a beginner

If you have never lifted before and the program got recommended to you to gain strength by one of your friends or you found it on the Internet, do some research and maybe stop reading this article and go to [my extensive Stronglifts 5x5 review](#). Then continue here. Most likely you will progress on the program as written **for six to twelve months** depending on your starting point which I discuss in more detail in when does stronglifts get hard. Off season

If you are a semi professional marathon runner I would highly recommend to consider this program off season after your September / October marathon. Usually the winter months are not very pleasant or even dangerous to run in, depending on your climate

and preparedness (I mean some people run marathons in the antarctic, but let's conveniently assume you are not one of those). The benefit to gain from this is to strengthen your body to have a lesser risk of injury in your preparations during season for your races.

Same would apply for any other outdoor sport like football, rugby, tennis or soccer when you want to increase strength. 5x5 is a program in the mid range of strength development which could not make you too stiff or pump you up without any strength gains.

So whatever your off season is, Stronglifts can be a good addition, if you wanted to develop strength with free weights.

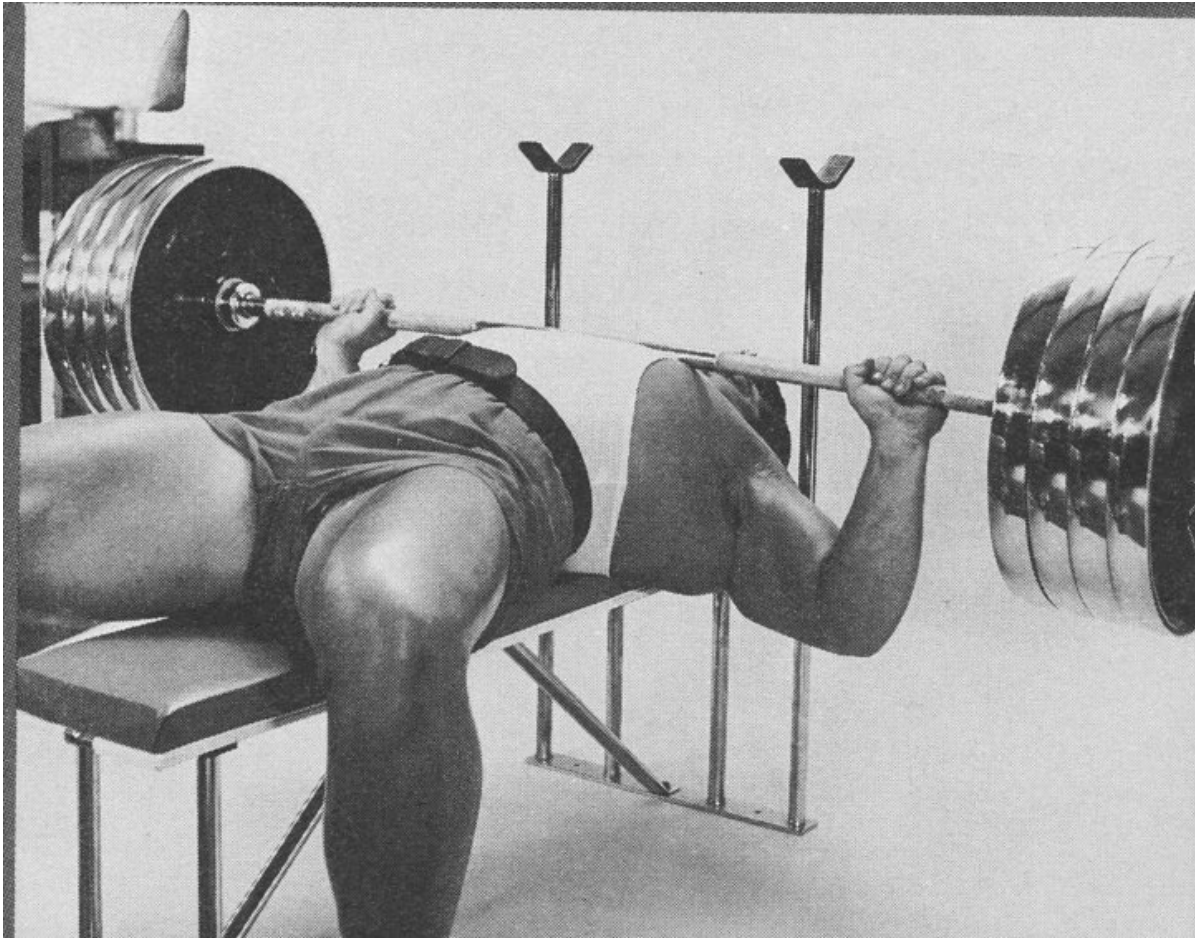
For recovery

For experienced lifters Stronglifts 5x5 might be an option after injury to work your way back up to intermediate and expert programs after surgery. This would also have the benefit to have a good few months for working on technique, when you are rebuilding and coming closer to your former strength. Depending on your ambitions you might want to start with 50% of your one repetition maximum rather than an empty bar. Still after serious injury this is more likely to be hubris than anything else.

Conclusion

Whatever the reason are for looking up Stronglifts, it is a good all purpose program for strength in my opinion (some tend to disagree). I have done it for 10 months to high satisfaction and if you do some further research you will find that most people run it between 6 - 10 months to then move on the intermediate programs like madcow, the texas method or [Jim Wendler 531](#).

How to bench press for Stronglifts



How to bench press for Stronglifts

All in all the most important bit is to take it step by step, know your goals and keep good form. Good form includes a straight bar path, keeping your ass on the bench and pausing on the chest. I have included further tips in this post, which are especially of interest to people who want to build a strong bench press first and grow muscle second.

How often do you bench press on the program

If you want more details on the entire program structure please refer to my [extensive Stronglifts 5x5 review](#). As the program is structured with three training days per week alternating between A and B, whereas workout A includes one bench press session covering 5 sets per 5 repetitions you will

Bench press between 1 - 2 times a week including 25 - 50 repetitions

This assumes that you will hit all of your repetitions per session. This assumption is relatively save to make for the beginning of the program in which it will be a lot easier to hit all repetitions on all sets. Sucessively this will get arder as you mature as a lifter and you might ave weeks where you only hit 20 - 40 repetitions.

If you do less than 15 repetitions of bench pressing I would consider a deload and the [Stronglifts 5x5 App](#) will also most likely tell you to do so at this stage, as you have now entered 5x3 territory which is suitable for advanced lifters when you have gotten everything out of 5x5.

[How to warm up](#)

You have a choice of either following your own warm up routine or purchasing the add on in the 5x5 app for warm ups. I would always recommend some dynamic stretching before and static stretching after your session.

The general dynamic stretching can be done before the entire sessions starts. I like to work with the [De Franco Agile 8 warm up](#) in addition to [working your shoulders with a broom stick](#). Without the broom stick work I find the De Franco to fall a bit short, especially on a bench day.

Specifically for your bench press repetitions use the guidance from the app starting from an empty bar working with 20kg, 40 kg, 50 kg, 80kg and 100kg warm ups, depending on where your at in your progression. I encourage you, even if you have a monster bench, to start your warm ups from an empty bar to "brush of the rust" for the specific bench press movement pattern, before putting on load.

The warm up should be conducted as if you were doing your hardest set. Stay fully focused, rest the bar on your chest (more on that later) and drive it out with full force in a controlled way. Lifting light weight like heavy weights will lead to lifting heavy weights like light weights.

[Use full range of movement](#)

Full range of motion for the bench press means that you bring both of your arms to full

lockout at the elbow and from there lower the barbell fully onto your chest. From the chest you take the same path upwards as you did downwards to end with fully locked out elbows at the highest point.

The barpath for this should be as straight as possible while using your natural leverages in the best way. This covers two principles out of physics. First being that the more straight the bar travels up and down, the less inches it has to travel overall and therefore less force is needed to be applied. This means you will bench more at same strength level.

Second principle is the one of leverages which varies from lifter to lifter due to how long their arms are in proportion to their upper body. A perfectly straight line might not be physically possible or even not advisable depending on personal physique. Even though straight bar path is ideal you will find out with experience which is the perfect balance between the two for you personally.

To keep it simple as a beginner as your upper body will not be overdeveloped to get in the way of a straight bar path, keep it straight unless medical circumstances do not allow for it.

Using full range of motion will help you to activate the most muscles possible for the bench press and to develop a more rounded physique. Half repetitions are most likely to develop a less rounded physique, less strength and expose you to higher risk of injury due to overuse of one particular muscle group which you isolate.

Touch and go bench press

A touch and go bench press means that you use the momentum that the bar develops on the way down to drive it back up again by only touching your chest minimally before initiating the upward push. This is the type of bench press I most commonly have seen in gyms that I have been to.

Better form and more bang your buck especially to develop muscle in the lower chest tissue is to pause the bench press. This is one of the things I would personally do differently if I could go back in time.

Paused bench press

The paused bench press is the big brother of the bench press you most commonly see. Here you do everything in the same way, except that you let the bar rest on your chest fully so that it loses momentum at the lowest point.

This forces you to develop more strength out of your chest as you do not cheat by making use of physics to your advantage. The paused bench press can be enhanced and made more challenging if you have a spotter. The spotter can then give you a command to press which gets you more bang for the buck for training your nervous system and your muscles and how they interact. For powerlifters that would also closer mirror competition standards.

Keep your ass on the bench

A mistake that I made too. When you start out with the bench press you will most likely want to bring your lower end up from the bench to activate the glutes in the lift. The hardcore version of avoiding this is to strap your legs stretched out to the bench, if you have one that is long enough to allow for that.

Generally keep your ass on the bench to make it up the chest and not your entire body. The less arch you have and the less grounded your feet are, the more the bench press will become a chest exercise. If you are really strict and follow 5x5 by the book then if your lower half leaves the bench the repetition is not counted and therefore no full set awarded.

Building an arch on the bench press

This one is up to you and only recommended if you have the flexibility. By building an arch on the bench you can get similar effects as with getting your lower parts of the bench while still adhering to powerlifting rules. I personally learnt this technique and find it to be fun now. However you will also get results if you do not bench with an arch. In fact I would say, if your main goal is to build extra muscle and not to gain strength mainly you might be even better off with a paused bench press with your legs off to the ground. Comments appreciate on this point, as I did not compare and try myself over a longer period of time.

Pulling the bar into you with your pinkies

This is also a queue as with the arch which is a nice to have, but not a must have depending your training style. First get your bearings with barbell and get used to moving it up and down. Once you have "greased" that movement get into working your grip with white knuckling and the pinky.

Pulling the bar into with your pinkies means to apply pressure to the barbell as if you wanted to bend it. This will give you a stringer grip and activate your triceps more during the lift.

White knuckling

White knuckling can be applied not just to the bench press, but to any lift including a barbell or dumbbell. This means that you wrap your fingers around the bar and squeeze it until your knuckles turn white. Combined with the aforementioned tips you actively work on developing a stronger grip and therefore a stronger bench press.

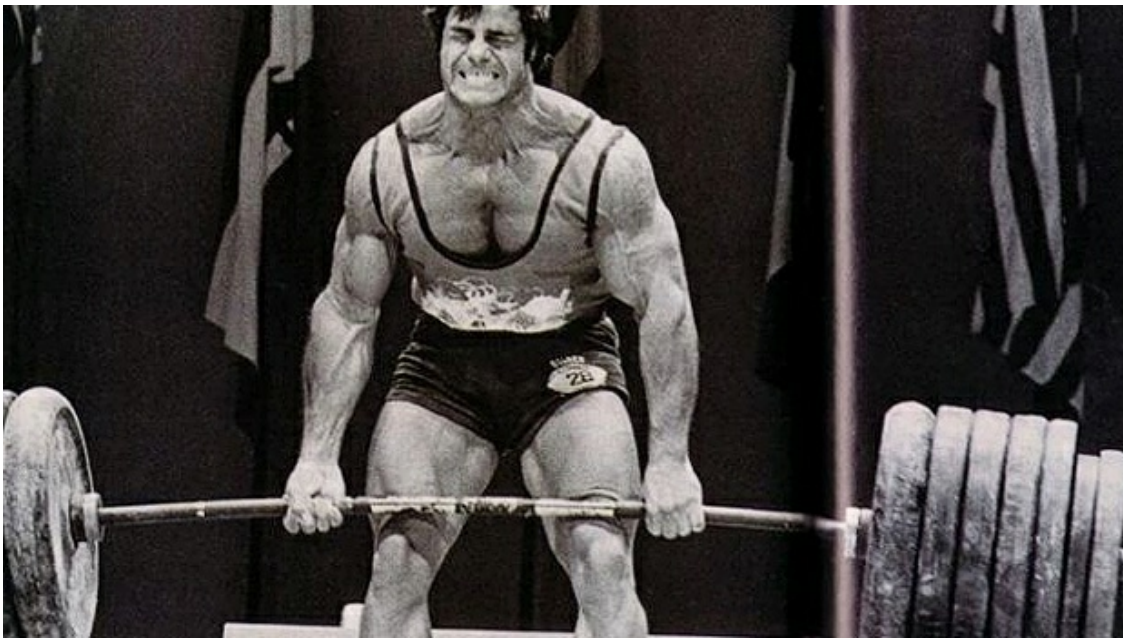
Conclusion

Stronglifts 5x5 is a program for beginners and treat it as such. Start with an empty bar for the bench press and get used to the movement. If your aim is maximum strength development try to incorporate all of the tips mentioned in this post bit by bit. I would not try to learn all of these additions like the arch at once, because this might be much to adapt to.

If you are leaning more towards muscle development in the chest and strength is only an afterthought for you, keep your legs off the ground and do paused bench presses.

I am now at a 140kg bench press at 82kg bodyweight and I hope these tips will help you to achieve the same and beyond.

Why are there only 1x5 Deadlifts in Stronglifts ?



Why are there only 1 x 5 Deadlifts in Stronglifts ?

Overall volume

Stronglifts is a program that already has a considerable [amount of volume](#) in a week on the big three lifts compared to other more advanced programs. [The squat](#) is being emphasized most, as this is the movement which will have the most carry over to overall fitness and strength performance. The reason for this is that the back squat is incorporated partially or fully in other many other movements in fitness and it also works on your overall mobility.

This leaves not a lot of room for a big amount of heavy deadlifting. [Most programs](#) actually tend to have lesser repetitions on the Deadlift compared to the [bench press](#), squat, overhead press, barbell row and other beneficial movements for strength and muscle development.

Most taxing lift

The deadlift is one of the most taxing movements you can do with a barbell as you will most likely move the most weight per repetition. This is especially challenging for your nervous system. Usually, it is not the muscle system that fails a lifter on the deadlift, it is the nervous system that just refuses to fire any more impulses to the overall body to initiate heavy fibre twitching / contraction, to get the load off the ground.

Protect lower back

If done incorrect and even if executed perfect, the deadlift is a strain on your lower back and discs. Less deadlifting therefore is not a bad thing when you consider that you want to stay in the game for the long run. I personally deadlifted too much, too heavy in 2016 when on [Jim Wendler 531](#) and had to pay the price by curting the deadlift out altogether for about four months to recover.

Protect your shins

[A correctly executed deadlift will leave the barbell very close to your shins](#). If you do not wear Deadlift socks or any other pair of socks that goes up to the knee, you most likely will scrape your shins doing heavy deadlifts. Not a pleasant outlook if you have to do that every day and no time to heal

When does Stronglifts get hard?



When does Stronglifts 5x5 get hard?

There are several factors going into this, but I personally think your fitness level, age, diet, lifting, sleep and bodyweight will be part of the equation of when [Stronglifts 5x5](#) gets hard.

The younger, fitter, heavier, healthier, better nourished and rested you are the more likely it will be that you can do Stronglifts 5x5 for a longer period of time without it getting hard for you due to the nature of the program.

In my case it got hard at 29 years of age, 80 – 85kg of bodyweight, a fitness level of a marathon runner and with an average of six hours of sleep after nine months into it starting from an empty bar.

What is hard?

You might think that is irrelevant to mention, but hard can be a very subjective topic. Some people find it hard to only think about physical activity while others swing from trees like Tarzan, do a 10k run and then chase their little ones around the house. All a matter of perspective.

In the context of lifting I define a hard set for myself as a set where I can barely make it to the planned finishing line. In Stronglifts this would mean that you have to push to almost not making the last repetition of the last set. For me that occurred roughly nine months into the program when I started with an empty bar. I had run a marathon before and I am generally of a bulkier build. I loved lifting as a teenager so maybe for some this point comes sooner or later depending on their physique and habits.

Fitness level

Stronglifts 5x5 is a program which lets you start with an empty bar and does not use your current strength levels as a reference point if you follow it by the book. There is an option for people who feel like this is not challenging enough to start with 50% of your one repetition maximum. I personally think however, if you are able to run a [one repetition maximum test](#) with proper form without killing yourself you might have missed the point of the program to its entirety. Ultimately up to you to decide.

The fitter you are from other sports or based on your habits the longer it will take for you personally, when you start from an empty bar, that the program will get challenging to you. If you are only beginning to learn how to lift this is a good thing, as you will learn proper technique and progress for a longer time without hitting a plateau.

This might seem counterintuitive, but believe me proper form and staying away from injury are the two best ways to get strong. By this I mean real beast mode "I can pull a truck and squat your daddy's cow strong". If you are a yuppie swap the truck for an SUV and the cow for your safe in which you keep your jewellery and important papers.

In a nutshell the fitter you are entering the program, the longer it will take to get "hard" as defined earlier.

Technique

[Proper technique](#) will do two things for you. The first is staying away from injury and the second is making optimal use of the strength you already possess by making use of your natural levers and keeping the bar on a straight path.

The first part of this is related to not getting injured. The worse your technique is the

more likely it will be that you will pull a muscle, tear a tendon or hit yourself in the head on the bench press. If any of these things occurs things will get hard by default, because you managed to keep yourself from doing the exercises by wrecking yourself. Paradigm is "Protect yourself before you wreck yourself".

Second part of this is plain physics. If you paid attention in school you will know that leverages, load and distance travelled are important to how much force you have to apply to get shit done. The lesser the distance and the better the leverage the less force has to be applied to move a bigger load. Reads simply: The better your technique, the more you can lift for longer until it gets hard (or your body reaches its limits as it can't produce more force = you are too weak... a million different ways of saying the same thing).

So, to conclude on technique, the better it is the longer it will take for Stronglifts for you to get hard.

Diet

This related to what and how much you eat. The intake of food will also determine on how well you will progress. Even if you have the best engine in the world (fitness level) and you are a well-tested race driver (technique), it is still no use if there is no fuel (food). Eat much, unprocessed food. When you are hungry, satisfy the hunger by eating, to make good progress on Stronglifts. You can fuel yourself with bad food, however keep in mind that this will come at the cost of health.

Sleep

The more you sleep, the better rested you will be when hitting the gym and progress for longer. Recommend are seven to eight hours of sleep. Anything less might mean that %x5 will get hard for you sooner than others who put in enough sleep

Age

Age play an important role in fitness as the older you become the slower your cell regeneration usually gets. The slower the cell regeneration becomes the quicker Stronglifts will become hard as hard lifting will attack your muscle tissue and break some of it to be rebuild stronger. So the younger you are (within reason of course after puberty) the longer it will take for Stronglifts to get hard for you.

Bodyweight

Last but not least its bodyweight which goes back to physics and mass. The lighter you are the quicker 5x5 will get hard due to the nature of the beast. The bar weighs 25kg unless you will use a woman's bar or a technique bar. If you are 50kg in weight that is already 50% of your bodyweight. For a man weighing a 100kg this is 25% of his bodyweight. By default you are therefore doomed to hit the ceiling quicker with 5x5 if you are lighter in bodyweight.

Conclusion

I have described the factors which influence when and how Stronglifts get hard. As a rule of thumb you will start to struggle first when you scale to bodyweight squat. Considering all of these factors somewhere between 6 – 12 months it will get hard and between 9 – 12 months you might will have to change program.

When to move on from Stronglifts

When to move on from Stronglifts

A question that is usually posed either at the beginning of the program or when someone starts to stall on the template for the first time. The main reasons to switch to something else are injury, lack of progress, being bored, lack of challenge and a changing goal set. All of these points will be discussed in this article in more detail.

What is Stronglifts

Stronglifts 5x5 is a lifting program for beginners which utilizes the squat, bench press, deadlift, barbell row and overhead press to develop strength and muscle gains in parallel. For this purpose, the load increases more rapidly than in lifting programs for intermediates. For more details on the program and what you can get out of it refer to my [Stronglifts 5x5 review](#) when I ran the program for three months.

What does moving on mean

Moving on in this context means that you stop doing Stronglifts 5x5 to do a different program. The timing of moving to different programs is sometimes very emotionally debated on the internet, as so many things. The voices of reasons and professionals, though, seem to point to the same reasons. Here is a little write-up for you, if you consider doing Stronglifts and want to know when to move on to something different.

Injury

One of the most obvious reasons to move on from Stronglifts is an [injury](#). In my personal case, I developed elbow bursitis. When I was in the gym it looked like I had a tennis ball stuck under my skin in the area of my right elbow. The interesting bit was, that it did not hurt at all. Still this was the end for me as also some other points on this

list let me to moving on from Stronglifts.

Lack of progress

Once you see yourself stalling on the load increases it is also time to move on. The free Stronglifts 5x5 App is actually programmed in a way that it will tell you when switch programs based on how many times you fail to progress as the program intends. Do not be disheartened when this point comes. The program is designed to push you to a failing point as quickly as possible. The reason for this is that beginners recover a lot quicker than more advanced lifters and pushing them hard when they start is a good way to get the most out of your first year of lifting.

Boredom

Be careful with this one. This is only a valid point of are dreading to go to the gym for months on end because of the routine you are doing. If a certain way of training sucks the joy, motivation and will to challenge yourself out of you, change it. Still, do not mistake a slight downturn for being bored. For example, in 2016 I have not been deadlifting heavy almost half a year due to injury and being afraid to pick it up again. I know I will get back stronger when I rebound. That is the kind of bored and down I am talking about when you need a change.

Lack of challenge

If you are very competitive and feel like there is always more in the tank after finishing your Stronglifts 5x5 routine, you might want to step up your game. This depends on what kind of training you are doing and what your goals are. If you feel like you have surplus energy after a 5x5 session sled pulling and pushing is a VERY good way to get rid of that. If you are into martial arts, grab the boxing back and beat the shit out of it. Those two always worked for me. [German Volume training](#) and [Smolov Jr](#) might be alternative lifting programs to look into if that does not suffice for you.

Changing goals

The change of your goal sets for your fitness are also a pretty obvious reason to change the program or maybe even stop lifting. In my own experience, the 5x5 template is a very good that can be run beside other interests. If you do something very specific and compete in it, you are usually better off training specifically for it and cut SL 5x5 out.

Time constraints

This point becomes relevant late into the program. In the beginning, you will be done with most of your session somewhere between 30 - 45 minutes. Once you get better and the workout more challenging this will bump up to one hour / 1.5 hours. This is a lot of time if you have a job and other commitments to look after. Once at this point, you might want to switch to a program like [Wendler 531](#) or the Stronglifts 3x5 program which in my opinion are more time effective / efficient.

Conclusion

To sum it all up, the main reason to switch the program is once it loses its usefulness towards the goals set you set for yourself. This can manifest in the points I have just mentioned and I personally think the most common are covered. If you think there are more, feel free to comment below.

What program to do after Stronglifts



What program to do after Stronglifts

This is a short overview of the Texas method, Madcow 5x5 and Jim Wendler 531 program which are popular programs to follow the Stronglifts 5x5 program. This is not a full list or extensive list of all the programs, but rather a short overview for you to dive deeper from.

What is your goal ?

When you stall on Stronglifts 5x5 it is a good time to reevaluate why you are actually running into the gym three times a week. Is it to get the birds ? Is it to get that beach body or to build pure, brutal strength to crush it ?

Depending on where you are on this spectrum, there are decisions to be made. For the sake of this article I assume you want to be one hell of a strong beast and stick with

strength, rather than muscle development. If you want to get more birds or muscle than either stay less in the gym (to achieve meeting more women) or switch to a template like German Volume Training which is more suitable to building muscle.

If you found this article after only doing two months of Stronglifts 5x5, I have to honestly say... get a grip and earn the next program, you are killing to give up too soon. I got ten good months out of Stronglifts 5x5 myself.

There are a million and one lifting templates out there and I will only focus on some of the more popular ones which have strength at their heart.

Options with Stronglifts

If you have downloaded the Stronglifts 5x5 app you have the option to switch to a 3x5 / 3x3 and 1x3 program which is more suitable for intermediate lifters. The app will tell you by itself when this point is reached based on your performance. This would be the easy way out, if you want to stick with the "SL franchise".

Madcow 5x5

Madcow 5x5 is a program that is also using sets of five to achieve the goal of strength development. In this program you will mainly use 4 ramp sets and perform one top set of five as heavy as possible. If you want further detail read up on this post on Stronglifts or the original Bill Starr reference.

Monday

Squat 1x5

Bench Press 1x5

Barbell Row 1x5

Wednesday

Squat 2x5

Overhead Press 1x5

Deadlift 1x5

Friday

Squat 1x3

Bench Press 1x3

Barbell Row 1x3

4x5 Sets except the 2x5 http://stronglifts.com/madcow/5x5_Program/Linear_5x5.htm

Texas Method

The Texas Method has proven its worth over time and is a popular option for intermediates all over the world. [Mark Rippetoe recommends it as a follow up to his starting strength routine](#) which is similar to Stronglifts 5x5.

The basic structure of the program is training three times a week with a Volume, Recovery and Intensity day. The basic template to follow is:

Monday: Volume day

Squat 5x5 @ 90% of 5 repetition maximum

Bench press or Overhead press same as squat

Deadlift 1x5 at 90% of 5 RM

Wednesday: Recovery day

Squat 2 x 5 at Monday's load

The lift you did not do on Monday for 3x5 at same load

Chin up 3x Bodyweight

Glute Ham Raise 5x10

Friday: Intensity day

Squat: Warm up and then work up to one single New 5rm

Bench Press: work p to one single new 5rm

Power Clean or snatch: 5x3 / 6x2

As I will focus to outlay the program structures for overveiw purposes in this article, please refer to Rippetoe's article, if you are generally interested and want to understand

the [Texas method](#) in more depth.

5/3/1 and beyond 5/3/1

If you are fed up with only doing sets of five after doing SL 5x5 the Jim Wendler 531 program is a viable option for intermediates which I have done myself. In this program you will use sets of fives, threes and singles to develop strength and rotate these with one deload week in-between. You will find further detail in the explanation of the Jim Wendler Calculator on the structure of the program. While 531 addresses a more general audience beyond 531 goes deeper to address individual preferences in more depth.

Did you enjoy the read?

If you enjoyed the read and learned something new, why not take it a step further and see me in action on my YouTube channel. Click on the button below to see me lifting, commenting and follow my journey to keep you motivated.

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