

Cycled Recovery

One of the most overlooked aspects of training is the proper cycling of training frequency. The current approach is to train rather infrequently during the off-season, with 4-5 days weekly being most common, and to increase the frequency of workouts when entering a contest preparation period, usually to near daily workouts. This is hardly a new tactic, as it has been in place for forty years.

Of course, each person preaches their own variation on which particular 'split' is optimal, and the typical trainee often ends up following one of two paths: Trying multiple splits in a haphazard fashion, or sticking with the same scheme for months or years at a time. Neither approach is very effective and can actually lead to injury and/or burnout. The confusion leads many to believe that there is a 'perfect' split if they can only find it, but the truth is, there is no single best way to group your workouts. How then can we hope to achieve our goals?

The first step is to realize that all variables of training and nutrition are related. You cannot alter your intensity, volume, frequency, rest periods or calories without affecting each of the other variables. To radically change one element of your regimen without modifying the others greatly compromises the efficacy of your routine and can even be dangerous. For instance, introducing ballistic or plyometric moves while following a high frequency split, or abrupt changes in repetition or intensity without utilizing proper preparatory split schemes, can easily lead to injury, or at the least greatly reduced results.

Outside of bodybuilding, most power and strength trainers are intimate with the principles of volume and intensity, but still little attention is paid to the actual programs, which house all of these elements. Proper manipulation of training frequency is essential for optimal gains in strength, mass and performance, and should be treated accordingly.

Next, the athlete should pick a date within the year that he or she desires to be in peak condition. If you haven't figured it out already, competing more than once yearly just about cancels your gains in strength and mass, but if you insist, you can still modify your plan to accommodate in smaller increments.

For our example we will simplify matters by assuming the contest is one year from today. Our goal is to juggle our variables of intensity, volume, nutrition AND training frequency in a pattern that will induce the maximum gains while minimizing the risk of injury. Below is a sample plan for the average competitor who is interested in increasing explosive power, strength and mass, and maintaining these gains while reducing bodyfat levels for competition.

Phase 1*

Intensity Level: High
Volume Level: Low
Frequency Level: Frequency
Calories: Low

Monday:

Squat - View
Cleans - View
Stiff Leg DeadLift - View
Calf Raise - View
Full Range Hanging Leg Raise - View

Wednesday:

Snatch - View
Wide Grip Pull Up - View
Weighted Push Up - View
Close Grip Chins - View
Tricep Dips - View

Friday:

Repeat Monday

* 3 non-consecutive days (MWF)

This is an oscillating routine; one week trains half the body twice, the next it receives only one session. Note the emphasis on power moves in the true sense. This means exercises that require speed of movement and therefore explosiveness. This routine will prove effective after the Post Competition Growth Phase, or after any lengthy period of high frequency training. It should not be used for more than approximately one month.

I define intensity as percentage of maximum effort, but not limited to one repetition maximum. In other words, the absolute heaviest weight that can be handled for ten reps is 100%, as is a one rep maximum. This routine is to be completed at 100% intensity, which means the goal should be to complete only one set per exercise. Multiple sets are an indicator of a failure to truly apply oneself to the task at hand.

I recommend you pick one rep target for two to three sessions, then reduce the weight and target a higher repetition for one or two workouts to maintain enthusiasm and minimize joint strain. You should increase your weights by at least 2% per session. Rest periods are unlimited between movements. Allow for full recovery.

A sensible change would be to move to the next routine, which works each bodypart every five days:

Phase 2

Intensity Level: Moderate-High
Volume Level: Moderate
Frequency Level: Moderate
Calories: Low-Moderate

Day 1:
Entire Leg Session
Day 2:
Chest/Back/Abdominals

Rest One Day:

Day 3:
Shoulder/Arm

Day 4:
Begin Cycle again

Rest One Day:

A solid approach with this routine would be to utilize drop sets. Perform three sets per movement, each to failure, with weight drops during the brief rest intervals to insure the repetitions are kept constant. Three movements per bodypart should provide adequate volume. This particular scheme may only be effective for 2-3 weeks. After that, switch to Phase 3.

Phase 3

Intensity Level: Moderate
Volume Level: Moderate-High
Frequency Level: Moderate-High
Calories: Moderate

Day 1:
Thigh/Abdominal
Day 2:
Chest/Shoulder/Tricep

Day 3:
Back/Bicep/Calf

Rest One Day:

For our goal of priming the body for the Serious Growth Phase, a pyramid scheme will be used here. Various plans exist and all are effective; the principle is to simply decrease the reps while increasing the weight. Two of my favorites are 12, 10, 8, 6 and 20, 15, 12, 10, 8. Perform three movements per bodypart in this fashion for a total of 15 sets. Note that the frequency has now increased to every four days, preparing the body for the final routine. Rest 90 seconds between sets. Perform Phase 3 for no more than three weeks. Now move to Phase 4.

Phase 4

Intensity Level: Low
Volume Level: High
Frequency Level: High
Calories: Low-Moderate

Day 1:

Chest/Back/Calf

Day 2:

Shoulder/Arm

Day 3:

Thigh/Abdominal

Repeat Days 4-6:

Rest Day 7:

The intent of this final split is twofold: Decrease bodyfat, and to place the body into an overtrained state. Both conditions will greatly enhance the effects of the Serious Growth split to follow. Supersets are the name of the game here, with five straight sets per movement. Target a total of twenty sets per bodypart, though this may take 2-3 workouts to achieve. Do not strive to work to failure; use weights that allow for strict control. Decrease rest periods to a minimum. Again, three weeks is probably optimal for most individuals on this routine.

If time permits, performing a double split routine is very effective to finish this period. Follow the same guidelines for sets and repetitions, using supersets where possible. This final scheme should bring bodyfat to its lowest level, and effectively overtrain the system.

This routine is not absolutely necessary but will prove worthwhile during the Serious Growth split, especially the two workouts per day variation.

Phase 4B

Intensity Level: Low
Volume Level: High
Frequency Level: High
Calories: Low

Day 1:
AM - Chest/Back, PM - Calf/Abdominal

Day 2:
Thigh Shoulder/Arm

Day 3:
Repeat Day 1

Day 4:
Repeat Day 2

Day 5:
Repeat Day 1

Day 6:
Repeat Day 2

At this point, strength, mass and explosiveness will be significantly reduced. You may be doubting the efficacy or sanity of the entire program. Hold on, because the next 18 weeks will more than compensate. Order and follow Optimum Training System's Big Beyond Belief. No, this isn't a marketing ploy, I don't own stock and this isn't a sick joke. This is my recommendation to you to bring you incredible results. In my experience, no one who fully followed this program failed to grow at rates exceeding their greatest expectations. It works. And it works even better if preceded by the program provided here.

Notes On The Serious Growth Routine

Radically increase your calories during your first 18-week cycle. Multiply your current bodyweight by 30 to provide a good estimate. During the second cycle, decrease your calories to maintenance level and attempt to maintain strength levels. This should reduce your bodyfat to a very manageable level. You can now use Phase 4A or 4B to reduce fat

levels further, repeat the Serious Growth program to increase mass, or take some time off and repeat the entire program outlined here.

16 weeks (maximum) for preparatory routines - Phase 1 through 4B

18 weeks Serious Growth, maximum mass cycle

18 weeks Serious Growth, fat reduction/strength maintenance cycle

To many this program will seem like a simple example of the same periodization principles that have been used for years. The difference is the use of various frequency schemes and nutritional variation in a plan that is designed to exploit the effects of supercompensation. The effects are dramatic and stunning, and are not limited to the drug abusing or genetic elite. If you are serious about getting as big and strong as possible, use it and grow. Period.

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