

A simple, effective method to build muscle & lose fat while getting stronger

# **StrongLifts 5x5**

How to Build Muscle & Lose Fat through Strength Training

## **StrongLifts 5x5**

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## Disclaimer

[Statistics](#) show that weight lifting is the safest sport when looking at the rate of injury. Practical evidence will confirm that you'll be less injured than your friends playing soccer, rugby, MMA, etc. Unlike many other sports, in weight lifting no-one will hit your knees or ankles or whatever. It's just you and the bar. If you injure yourself, it will be your fault and your fault only.

The best way to avoid injuries is to start light, learn correct exercise technique, add weight slowly but systematically and use your head. The barbell is great at teaching you lessons the hard way if you try to run before learning to walk. Greediness, as in using too much weight too soon, often leads to injury. Control your ego.

I believe that you can do strength training whatever your age, gender or limitations. It all comes down to what you think you're capable of. Most people can do more than they think. Maybe you want to consult your doctor first and ask if (s)he thinks you're ready for this. I believe you better find out yourself. No-one knows better than you do. But this is your life. You decide.

By reading this eBook, you agree that you take full responsibility for your life, choices & actions and that anything that happens to you is your fault and your fault only.

## Preface

In June 2007, 1 month after [StrongLifts.com](http://StrongLifts.com) went online, I published the "Beginner Strength Training Program". Readers liked it and some called it "[StrongLifts 5x5](#)". 6 months later I released the 2<sup>nd</sup> version of this program: StrongLifts 5x5. With this 2<sup>nd</sup> version came a FAQ answering 47 questions and the free [StrongLifts 5x5 eBook](#) which bundled everything.

1 year later, people all over the world are doing StrongLifts 5x5. The original article got more than 200 comments, the [StrongLifts 5x5 Forum category](#) has 5 pages of questions and I've seen the program work with hundreds of people with different body types, age, gender & goals. It was time to bundle all this knowledge.

This eBook is the result of all of that. I rewrote StrongLifts 5x5 and the FAQ so they answer any questions you might have about the program. There's nothing about exercise technique in this ebook anymore. It's all about the StrongLifts 5x5 program and how to use it.

So what is StrongLifts 5x5?

From 1999 to 2003 I used to do bodybuilding routines. I had results to show for it: people at the gym/work/clubs/etc asked me questions about it all time. But I was getting bored of training for aesthetics only which I also thought of as not masculine.

As a light weight (75kg/165lbs at 1m73/5'8), I always got a kick out of lifting more than guys at the gym weighing 20kg more than me and on the juice. This grew my interest in strength training. One of the many routines that I found at that time was [Madcow's Bill Starr's 5x5](#) routine. It was popular on several forums, but I never gave it a try until later.

In 2004, after training for 5 years in the same gym, the manager kicked me out. The new gym I went to wasn't like the previous one: non-revolving 10kg bars without middle knurling, small plates instead of 45lbs plates, dumbbells with plastic handles, ... I couldn't train like that.

I read about home gyms. I had the space and was surprised I could get a Power Rack, bar, 250kg plates and dumbbells for less than 2000€/3000\$ (note: it's cheaper now). I knew I'd get the investment back within 3 years by cutting on gym membership & fuel and that I wouldn't quit lifting any time soon. But what sealed the deal was the ability to train how and when I want.

Summer 2004 I got a home gym. I didn't have access to machines anymore. I searched for routines that would fit. The first one I remembered was Bill Starr's 5x5 routine. But it had no arms/calves work or isolation exercises. Only compound exercises like Squats, Bench Press & Deadlifts. I feared losing the physique I built through the years doing Bill Starr 5x5.

I could have done dumbbell flies & dumbbell curls since I had dumbbells, but I decided to just give it a try. 2 things persuaded me: a) feedback on the program was great b) the routine took only 3 workouts/week while I was training 5x/week. I decided to do Bill Starr 5x5 for the full 9 weeks. If things had gone bad, I'd switch to something else.

I never went back. Physique didn't change, it improved. Friends said I had a "denser" look versus "pumped" look before. I liked the routine, did it several times and read about similar 5x5 routines by Glenn Pendlay, Pavel Tsatsouline, Reg Park, Bradley Steiner, J.V. Askem and many more.

When people asked me how to get started with weight lifting, I now gave them a 5x5 template. 3-4 exercises, 5x5 everywhere, add weight each workout, 3 days per week, ... You don't get anything simpler than that. And more important: it works.

5x5 is not the only way to train. In fact, depending on how strong you are, 5x5 might not suit you at all. 5x5 is hard for example if you're past the beginner's stage and can Squat more than 1.5x your body-weight for 5x5. I might do 5x5 from time to time, but usually I train differently.

However if you're a beginner, which is if you can't Squat at least 1.5x your body-weight for 1 rep, then 5x5 is one of the best ways to get started. You'll learn exercise technique fast, you'll get stronger fast and you'll see your physique change fast.

One of the many reasons why you'll like StrongLifts 5x5 is because of its simplicity:

- Do 5 sets of 5 reps with the same weight
- Add 5lbs/2.5kg total weight each workout until you can't get 5 reps on all 5 sets anymore
- Take 10% weight off for the exercise you stalled on only, continue adding weight on the other exercises
- Continue adding 5lbs/2.5kg total weight each workout until you stall again
- Repeat this 1 step back, 2 steps forward approach until you can [Squat](#) close to 1.5x your body-weight for 5x5

Simple and yet the program gets a lot of questions. This eBook will teach you everything you need to know about StrongLifts 5x5: first the program, then +40 pages which answer frequently asked questions about the program.

For best results, I recommend you find someone doing StrongLifts 5x5 with similar stats & goals in the [training logs](#) of [StrongLifts.com Forum](#). You'll learn more reading the application of StrongLifts 5x5 than reading the theory that follows.

Remember you shouldn't fear making mistakes, it's all part of the learning process.

## Acknowledgment

Thanks to the StrongLifts.com Community for your comments, emails & forum posts which lead to the creation of this eBook. I wrote this eBook to help you get better results from StrongLifts 5x5. Without your feedback, this eBook wouldn't exist. Thanks.

Thanks to all readers sending me thank you emails and telling me StrongLifts.com changed your life. Know that StrongLifts.com changed my life as much as yours. Thanks.

Thanks to all readers who spread the word about StrongLifts.com by emailing articles to friends, telling friends & colleagues about StrongLifts.com, posting links to posts on other sites & forums, stumbling posts, etc. This is really the best way you can help me out. Thanks.

Thanks to the tens of thousands of people visiting StrongLifts.com daily and the StrongLifts.com Forum community. Without you reading the blog and participating on the forum, I wouldn't be able to do this. Thanks.

Thanks to Sean for turning the StrongLifts.com server. Thanks to mjh for correcting all the spelling & grammatical errors in this eBook. And thanks to all the people I forgot. Thanks!

"Somewhere along the line people have been fooled into believing that life is supposed to be easy. I often work 12+ hour days, and there are weeks when I work 7 days. I perform my own workout at the crack of dawn. Do I enjoy waking up at 4AM? Not really, but I get it done. I have a wife and son, with another on the way next month. I also have dogs, house work, work in the yard, etc. I'm beyond busy. Oh well, that's life. I won't cry about it and feel bad for myself. I won't rush to the local fast food restaurant. I cook much of my food ahead of time. I make time. I find a way. Most people aren't trying to make time. They aren't making an effort.

We need to stop making excuses for others. People need to stop feeling bad for themselves. Life is tough. That's a fact. There are good times and bad times. There are action takers and action fakers. There are ultra busy professionals who make time for fitness, while others don't. We all have options, and we all make our own decisions. If someone has made poor decisions, I won't sugarcoat it and console them with more excuses."

- Ross Enamait



## **StrongLifts 5x5: Beginner Strength Training Program**

StrongLifts 5x5 is a [strength training](#) program that will help you to [build muscle](#), [lose fat](#), get stronger and learn correct exercise technique so you avoid injuries. And it does all of this using only 3 workouts per week of 45 mins each.

StrongLifts 5x5's simplicity & efficiency has lead to thousands of people world wide doing the program. This 3rd version of StrongLifts 5x5 beginner strength training program will teach you everything you need to know to get started.

**Results You Can Expect.** More strength is more muscle. More muscle is more calories burned, thus lower body fat. People who do StrongLifts 5x5 as laid out achieve the following within 1-3 months:

- **Muscle Gains.** Legs, chest, shoulders & arms get bigger. Clothes feel different. [People start asking questions](#). Some [gain 25lbs the 1st month](#) by eating lots of healthy foods while doing StrongLifts 5x5.
- **Fat Loss.** Waist goes down by several inches. Body-weight often stays the same while body fat goes down, which means StrongLifts 5x5 will make you build muscle & lose fat at the same time.
- **Strength Gains.** 60kg [Squat](#) for 5x5 with hips coming lower than knees within 2 months on the program. 100kg Squat for 5x5 within 6 months. Body-weight [Bench Press](#) for 5x5 within 6 months.
- **Better Health.** Increased testosterone levels, stronger joints, [healthier knees](#) from Squatting, increased flexibility and increased [cardiovascular fitness](#): people often report running is easier since they started.
- **Increased Motivation.** You have a plan when you go to the gym. You'll look forward to adding weight each workout and breaking records. Most people don't miss workouts the first 3 months doing StrongLifts 5x5.

**Why StrongLifts 5x5 Works.** The 5x5 method has been around for years. [Reg Park](#), [Bradley Steiner](#), [John McCallum](#), [Brooks Kubik](#), [J.V. Askem](#), [Bill Starr](#), [Glenn Pendlay](#), [Pavel Tsatsouline](#) and many more recommend 5 sets of 5 reps.

- **Size & Strength.** You can lift faster & lift more weight using 5 reps vs. 8. Lifting fast recruits more muscle fibers and lets you use heavier weights. Lifting heavy stresses your body more, thus building more muscle.
- **Progressive Loading.** Always lifting the same weight causes strength loss. You have to add weight systematically to get stronger and build muscle. It's easier to [add weight each workout](#) doing 5 reps vs. 8.
- **Short, Efficient Workouts.** The 5x5 method uses compound exercises like [Squats](#) that hit several body parts at the same time. This keeps the workouts brief, but intense. Great if you're short on time.

[Madcow](#) & [Starting Strength](#) have increased the popularity of the 5x5 method in recent years. Tens of thousands of lifters have done it with success. And while 5x5 isn't the only way to train, it's proven efficient, especially for beginners.

**Equipment for StrongLifts 5×5.** StrongLifts 5×5 uses free weights as these replicate natural motions, force you to stabilize the weight and build real life strength. You'll start light to practice technique & avoid injuries.

- **Power Rack.** J-hooks to unrack the bar for [Squats](#) & [Bench Press](#). Safety pins to catch the bar if something goes wrong. Pull-up bar for [Pull-ups](#) & [Chin-ups](#). Example of a quality Power Rack: [Powertec P-PR](#).
- **Olympic Barbell.** 7 feet/2m20 long, 45lbs/20kg weight, 50mm sleeves, knurling to improve grip, guaranteed to handle heavy weights. Example of a quality Olympic barbell is the [Iron Woody Barbell](#).
- **Plates.** 2.5, 5, 10 & 45lbs plates with 50mm holes. 300lbs/140kg weight is a good start. If your gym has no 2.5lbs plates, wrap a chain of 1.25lbs on each side of the bar or get fractional plates by [ATP/ Iron Woody](#).
- **Bench.** Standard upright support bench or one you put in your power rack. It doesn't have to be incline but must be sturdy. Example [bench](#).
- **Chalk.** Improves grip & [minimizes callus formation](#) by filling skin folds. If your gym doesn't allow [chalk](#), try [liquid chalk](#). No gloves: they make grip harder by adding inches to the bar and prevent [correct grip technique](#).
- **Shoes.** Running shoes with air/gel filling have a compressible sole which impairs power transfer & stability. Wear shoes with an incompressible sole, like [Chuck Taylor's](#). Or go barefoot.
- **No Belt.** [Weight lifting belts](#) give a false sense of security. Bad technique will injure your back even if you wear a belt. Start light, focus on proper technique, add weight progressively.

Some gyms don't have the equipment you need to do StrongLifts 5×5. Find a gym that does or invest in [home gym equipment](#). You can start with a barbell & plates to test the waters, check [StrongLifts 5×5 with 1 barbell](#).

**The StrongLifts 5×5 Program.** StrongLifts 5×5 is a full body strength training program that includes [weight lifting](#) & body-weight exercises. These will work each muscle of your body and build a strong, proportionate physique.

#### **Workout A**

[Squat](#) 5x5  
[Bench Press](#) 5x5  
[Inverted Rows](#) 3xF  
[Push-ups](#) 3xF  
[Reverse Crunch](#) 3x12

#### **Workout B**

[Squat](#) 5x5  
[Overhead Press](#) 5x5  
[Deadlift](#) 1x5  
[Pull-ups/Chin-ups](#) 3xF  
[Prone Bridges](#) 3x30sec

Alternate workout A & B each session. Most people train Mo/We/Fr or Tu/Th/Su or Sa/Tu/Th. Always take at least 48 hours rest between 2 workouts. Alternate [Pull-ups & Chin-ups](#) each workout B.

Do 5 sets of 5 reps with the same weight on all exercises. [Deadlifts](#) is only 1 set of 5 reps. Do 3 sets until failure on body-weight exercises: 3 sets of as many reps as you can do with good technique.

**Download StrongLifts 5×5 Spreadsheet.** This file includes tips & reminders of what you need to do to achieve your goals and tools to track your progress.

- Exercises & work weight prefilled for 12 weeks
- Strength goals based on your body-weight
- Graphs showing progress in strength, body-weight & body fat

[Click here](#) to download StrongLifts 5×5 spreadsheet (right click — save as). The file is 20kb and takes less than 1min to download. Unzip the file using [7-Zip](#) and view it with [OpenOffice](#) or [Microsoft Excel](#).

## Changes in Version 3 of StrongLifts 5x5

### **What changed in version 3 of StrongLifts 5x5?**

Small tweaks to fix common problems:

- [Inverted Rows](#) instead of [Barbell Rows](#).
- [Push-ups](#) instead of [Dips](#)
- Direct abdominal work: [Prone Bridges](#) & [Reverse Crunches](#)

Many people were doing this already upon my recommendation. Now it's official. 3rd version of [StrongLifts 5x5](#) also includes a better [spreadsheet](#) and a +40 pages FAQ you're reading now.

### **Why did you remove Barbell Rows?**

3 reasons:

- Many lack [hip mobility](#) to do [Barbell Rows](#) correctly: lower back rounds, causing back pain.
- Slouching shoulders/bent upper-back is common & prevents correct Barbell Row technique.
- Starting weight of 40kg/88lbs is sometimes too heavy to do Barbell Rows correctly. You can't start with less weight as the correct bar position starts at mid-shin level. Only solution is to do them inside a power rack using less weight, but this gets too complicated.

[Inverted Rows](#) work your upper-back & arms like Barbell Rows, don't cause back problems and allow you to row correctly while you improve [hip mobility](#) & posture.

### **Why did you remove Dips?**

Also 3 reasons:

- Chest pain & clavicle pain is common on [Dips](#).
- Dips put your shoulder in an awkward position, many people's shoulders can't take it.
- Lack of equipment: bar dips. Bench dips aren't an option since they're worse on your shoulders. Dipping between 2 chairs doesn't work well when adding weight.

[Push-ups](#) increase shoulder health by strengthening your serratus anterior and they don't require any equipment. You can make them harder by using a [resistance band](#), wearing a rucksack filled with weights or wrapping chains around your body.

### **Why additional abdominal exercises?**

Many people who want/need ab work were doing less effective exercises. [Prone Bridges](#) train the stabilizing function of your abs, [Reverse Crunches](#) train flexion. They're harder than they look: I always see people doing them wrong while they think they're ready for more advanced stuff.

### **Do I need to change what I'm doing?**

If you're doing [StrongLifts 5x5](#) and don't have the above problems, keep doing what you're doing. The point of the program is to [Squat](#) 3x/week, do compound exercises and add weight each workout. The changes concern assistance exercises.

## **StrongLifts 5x5 for Teens, Females & Older Guys**

[StrongLifts 5x5](#) works for everyone. Progress can be slower/faster depending on your age/gender, but you'll get stronger, [build muscle](#) & [lose fat](#) if you persist. If you're older and think young guys have it easy: they often struggle with lifestyle & budget. This stuff isn't meant to be easy, don't let anything be an excuse. *"You can do it if you believe you can"* - Napoleon Hill

### **I'm 16. Is it safe to follow StrongLifts 5x5 (with proper form) as I'm not "fully grown" yet? Do you suggest altering StrongLifts 5x5 in any way for a 16 year old?**

[Weight lifting](#) is safe, whatever your age, as long as you use correct technique. Start light, focus on learning proper exercise technique and add weight slowly but systematically. [Weight lifting doesn't stunt growth](#) by the way, it's a myth.

### **I'm 15. I've heard that exercises like the [Deadlift](#) and [Squat](#) can stunt your growth. Is this a myth or is there truth behind this?**

Children & adolescents have growth plate at the end of most bones. Growth plate regulates the length & shape of bones. Bone grows around growth plate, not from the center outward. Growth plate is the last part of bones to harden. This makes it more vulnerable to fractures which can cause problems like unequal bone length.

[Weight lifting](#) can stunt your growth if you damage the growth plate. You don't get hit on your ankles & knees during weight lifting like with Soccer. You also don't get collisions like in Football. So the only way you can damage your growth plate with weight lifting is by letting the weight fall on you. If you start light, focus on good technique and add weight slowly this will never happen. [Statistics](#) confirm that weight lifting is the safest sport when looking at the rate of injury.

### **I'm 15, is it suitable for someone my age to be packing on loads of weights as I've heard I shouldn't.**

To pack on a load of weight, you have to train hard and eat a lot of food, it doesn't happen over night. Just lift the weights and eat healthy, you don't get bulky that easily. Again: [lifting heavy doesn't stunt your growth](#).

### **Is StrongLifts 5x5 good for women to use?**

StrongLifts 5x5 works for everyone, whatever your gender. Here are some examples of the physique that a weight lifting program like StrongLifts 5x5 will build for women:

- Crossfit. Search for "[crossfit girls](#)" on youtube, [Nicole Carol](#) for example.
- [Stumptuous](#). Krista has lots of info about weight lifting for women.
- [Figure Athlete](#). Has also info about weight lifting for women.
- [Sherdog](#). Clean pictures of girls who [Squats](#) & [Deadlifts](#) and aren't bulky.
- Joe De Franco's [female athletes](#)
- Jenna Corrado. Top 10 finalist for Guess? faces to watch model search, check [this](#) & [this video](#).
- [Cheryle Anderson](#). Squat: 281lbs, [Bench Press](#): 176lbs, deadlift 331lbs at 105lbs body-weight, not bulky.
- [Buffmother](#). 130lbs Squat at 120lbs body-weight

### **I'm a woman and I feel [StrongLifts 5x5](#) is making me bulky.**

You probably were very [skinny](#) to start with or always wanted to be skinny before starting to lift weights. Don't be brainwashed by the standard of beauty that magazines & movies sell, you don't need to be skinny: it's not healthy and a lot of guys don't like skinny girls at all.

- Stop weighing yourself. Body-weight is irrelevant: if you're over-weight, you're always too fat. Body-weight is also inaccurate: influenced by water retention, bowel content, ...
- Focus on Fat Loss. Get a [fat caliper](#) and track your body fat every 2 weeks. Get stronger and eat healthy so your body fat goes down. A good number to strive for is around 15% body fat for females.
- Get used to muscles. You'll never get the amount of muscles males have, but you will [build muscle](#). Get used to your new look.
- If you're really getting bulky, lower the volume. 3 sets of 5 instead of 5x5. Less volume will build less muscle.

### **My girlfriend can't handle a bar for [Squats](#) & [Overhead Press](#) yet. What could she do?**

Most females can handle a 20kg empty bar without problems. Sometimes skinny, inactive females with a history of low calorie diets will lack the necessary strength. Some options:

- Squat. Have her do body-weight Squats for 5x5 every other day, with both hands behind her head. 2nd week 5x10 body-weight squats, both hands behind head. 3rd week try the empty bar again, it should work.
- Overhead Press. Remove the exercise for 2 weeks. Focus on getting stronger at Bench Press & Push-ups. After 2 weeks, re-introduce the Overhead Press, should be no problem.
- Use a Lighter Bar. Official Olympic barbells weigh 45lbs/20kg. If it's too heavy, use a lighter bar of 25lbs/10kg or less and increase the weight each workout from there.

Remember that being a woman isn't an excuse. Granted, you'll never get as strong as men can, but you can get stronger than the average population. Examples: [140kgx10 Squat](#) & [60kg Bench Press for reps](#) (notice they aren't bulky).

### **I am 43 years old. Would you recommend any modifications to [StrongLifts 5x5](#) based on my age?**

While it's true that recovery gets different as you get older, you shouldn't think about it. There are plenty of 40, 50 and even 60 years old guys doing StrongLifts 5x5 without problems. Just take things slowly: start light, add weight slowly but systematically, focus on good technique and pay special attention to recovery (sleep, nutrition, water intake). Your body will tell you how far you can go.

- Read the forum thread [StrongLifts 5x5 progress for older guys](#)
- Read [Buffalo's log](#), he's 53y old
- Check [this video](#) of Ron Ringewold deadlifting 481lbs at the age of 73

### **My mother is 60 year old. What do you recommend if she wants to start StrongLifts 5x5?**

Same advice as for anyone else: start light, focus on good technique, add weight slowly but systematically. For inspiration, check:

- [This video](#) of Ron Ringewold deadlifting 481lbs at the age of 73
- [Gayle](#), she deadlifts 275lbs at age 63.

## **StrongLifts 5x5 for Busy People**

*"No man achieves great success who is unwilling to make personal sacrifices. There is no something for nothing, everything has a price." - Napoleon Hill*

### **I don't have time to train 3x per week.**

Switch to 2 workouts/week with at least 72 hours rest in between. Monday/Thursday or Tuesday/Saturday or Wednesday/Sunday. Progress is slower this way, but it works.

### **Can I compensate by adding exercises, doing more reps or doing more sets?**

No. If you have time to do more exercises/reps/sets on that day, you have time to go a 3rd day to the gym. Stick with the program as laid out.

### **Can I split StrongLifts 5x5 into an AM/PM Session?**

Yes, but make sure you don't lose more time this way because of extra showering/driving to gym/ etc. You could do this:

- AM: main exercises. [Squats](#), [Deadlifts](#), [Bench Press](#), [Overhead Press](#) & [Inverted Rows](#), according to workout A/B.
- PM: assistance exercises. [Pull-ups](#), [Chin-ups](#), [Push-ups](#), [Reverse Crunches](#), [Prone Iso Bridges](#), again according to workout A/B.

### **The workouts last too long, I have a busy schedule. What Can I do?**

3 options:

- Switch from 3 workouts per week to 2 workouts per week. At least 72 hours between 2 workouts. Monday/Thursday for example. Progress is slower this way, but it works.
- Remove [Pull-ups](#), [Chin-ups](#), [Push-ups](#), [Reverse Crunches](#), [Prone Iso Bridges](#). Do only [Squats](#), [Deadlifts](#), [Bench Press](#), [Overhead Press](#) & [Inverted Rows](#).
- If that's still too long, switch to 3x5 instead of 5x5. This reduces gym time by almost half.

### **I tried that, the workouts still last too long.**

Listen, if you want to get somewhere, you'll have to sacrifice. [StrongLifts 5x5](#) takes 3x45mins per week, that's less than 5 hours per week. You have 4 days left to do other stuff. Invest the other 3 days in going to the gym. There's no easy way to achieve your goals, everybody has to sacrifice to get somewhere. Free time to go to the gym or forget about your goals. If you really want what you want, you'll find a way to get it.

### **How does StrongLifts 5x5 take 3x45mins/week? Even with 1min rest for each set, 5 sets of Squats, Bench Press, Inverted Rows & Push-ups takes longer than 45mins.**

1 minute rest for each set is about 20mins. The exercises take less than 3mins (1 second up, 2 seconds down). That leaves 10mins for Push-ups & abs. So less than 3x45 minutes during the first weeks. As you get stronger, you'll need more rest time between sets, which can increase the workout length to up to 60mins. Keep workouts short by taking little rest time between your warm-up sets and only taking as much rest time between your work sets as you feel you need.



## **StrongLifts 5x5 for Fat Loss & Weight Loss**

To [lose fat](#): 1) get stronger 2) eat healthier 3) add cardio. Cardio without strength training & healthy nutrition is useless. You need [strength training](#) to [build muscle](#) so you burn more calories even when at rest (muscle burns more calories than fat).

### **I'm a heavy guy and want to lose weight while getting stronger. Will [StrongLifts 5x5](#) help me?**

Yes. More strength is more muscle. More muscle is more calories burned, even at rest. Combine that with healthy nutrition and your body fat will go down. Cardio can speed things up, but is useless without strength training and healthy nutrition. Here's what you should do:

- Get Stronger. Increase your [Squat](#) to 1x body-weight for 5x5, then get as close as you can to 1.5x body-weight Squat for 5x5. If you weigh 250lbs, that's 250lbs for 5x5 as 1st goal.
- Eat Healthy. Eat every 3 hours, eat whole protein with each meal, eat veggies/fruit with each meal, eat carbs post workout only, eat whole unprocessed foods 90% of the time, drink 1 gallon water per day, eat healthy fats.
- Add Cardio. Moderate intensity cardio on the elliptical trainer gives good results. 60-70% bpm, breathing heavier than at rest but not gasping. Start with 15mins post workout. Add 1min each workout until you're doing 45mins. Do the cardio directly post [strength training](#), without eating anything in between. No need to do cardio on empty stomach or whatever, just do it this way, it works well.
- Focus on Fat Loss. Not weight loss. Get a [fat caliper](#) and track your body fat every 2 weeks. 3% fat loss/month is do-able. Take also pictures every 2 weeks to track progress. Measure waist/neck/thighs/arms/chest every 2 weeks too to check progress there (everything will go up, except waist which will go down).

### **I'm overweight and need to lose 45-50 lbs. A lot of it is fat. I know most of my work will come from an overhaul on my eating habits, but would also like to start up cardio and StrongLifts 5x5.**

Getting stronger is most important, then comes eating healthy and only then comes cardio. Focus on fat loss. Not weight loss. Body-weight is inaccurate (bowel content, water retention, ...) and irrelevant. One guy weighs 250lbs with 30% body fat, the other guy also weighs 250lbs but with 12% body fat and a lot of muscle. They'll both weigh the same but look completely different. Get the [fat caliper](#), track body fat, aim for 3% fat loss/month. Forget about your body-weight, most big guys, once they get stronger and decrease their body fat, don't even want to lose weight anymore. Focus on fat loss and apply the tips to lose fat in the previous question.

### **Isn't High Intensity Interval Training (HIIT) more effective for fat loss?**

Yes. But HIIT is also harder physically & mentally. I always do HIIT, never do moderate intensity cardio. But I recommend beginners do moderate intensity cardio. It's easier and gets good results. Once you've built base strength you'll also have base endurance and then HIIT becomes easier. If you feel motivated, feel free to try HIIT, but know that moderate intensity cardio directly post workout will lower your body fat too.



## **I want to try HIIT. What could I do and when?**

2 ideas:

- [Burpees](#). 100 reps post workout. 10 reps, wait 30sec, another 10 reps, until you get 100 reps. If it's too much, start with sets of 5 reps for a total of 50 reps, with 30sec rest in between. Always try to beat your previous time.
- The Bear. 5 sets of 5 rounds of [Power Clean](#), [Front Squat](#), Push Press, [Back Squat](#), Behind Neck Press. No rest during the rounds, go as fast as you can (with proper technique). Watch [this video](#) and [read this](#). Start with 5 sets with 30 sec between sets, you should be breathing heavily after set 2-3 depending on your conditioning levels. No more than 1min rest between sets, the point is really to get out of breath here. Time how long it takes you to complete the 5 sets. Beat your record next time. So it's at least 5 sets of 5 rounds, with 30 sec between each of the 5 sets, no rest between the 5 rounds. Empty bar for a start, 5 sets. When it gets easier: shoot for 8 sets with empty bar. Then you can start adding weight, 5lbs/2,5kg.

You can do this directly after StrongLifts 5x5 3x/week. Or you can do this on your recovery days 2x/week.

- After StrongLifts 5x5. I recommend this approach, so you have 4 days/week complete physical & mental rest.
- On recovery days. If you train Mo/We/Fr, then do HIIT on Tu/Sa, this way you have Th & Su off.

## **Losing Stomach Fat and Building 6 Pack Abs**

**Most of my fat forms around the lower abs and hip area (spare tire). Should I add ab work at the end of [StrongLifts 5x5](#) each day? I have a gym ball and could do ab moves.**

Spot reduction is a myth: you can't lose the spare tire by training your abs more. If you want to lose your stomach fat:

- Get Stronger. Your lower back keeps you upright from the back, your abs from the front. Exercises like [Squats](#), [Deadlifts](#), [Overhead Press](#) force your abs to stabilize your torso while weight tries to destabilize you. Increase your Squat to 1x body-weight for 5x5, then get as close as you can to 1.5x body-weight Squat for 5x5. This will reduce your waist size while increasing thigh/chest/back size, giving a totally different look.
- Eat Healthy. Reduce alcohol consumption to 1-2x/week, 90% of weekly liquid intake must come from water. Eat every 3 hours, eat whole protein with each meal, eat veggies/fruit with each meal, eat carbs post workout only, eat whole unprocessed foods 90% of the time, drink 1 gallon water per day, eat healthy fats.
- Add cardio. Only if your [fat caliper](#) says you have more than 15% body fat. Otherwise getting stronger & eating healthy will lower your body fat. If you have more than 15% body fat: moderate intensity cardio on the elliptical trainer at 60-70% bpm, breathing heavier than at rest but not gasping. Start with 15mins post workout. Add 1 min each workout until you're doing 45mins. Do the cardio directly post [strength training](#), without eating anything in between. Remember: getting stronger and eating healthy is more important than cardio.

**Although [StrongLifts 5x5](#) includes exercises which work the abs, I want to do extra ab work on my rest days. If I lift on Mo/We/Fr can I do extra ab work on Tu/Th? Will it hamper my recovery? Ab work includes weighted crunches, leg lifts, oblique crunches.**

3 reasons why you should forget about these extra ab exercises:

- The primary function of your abs is to stabilize your torso from the front, while your lower back supports it from behind. Squats, Deadlifts and Overhead Press work your abs this way. Your first goal is to increase your Squat to 1x body-weight for 5x5, that's with hips coming lower than knees. When you can do that, your waist will be smaller and you'll have strong abs.
- Your abs are a muscle. Like all other muscles in your body, your abs grow at rest, not when you workout. If you train them constantly they don't get any time to rest, thus they don't get any time to grow.
- Squats, Deadlifts, Overhead Press, [Push-ups](#), [Reverse Crunches](#) & [Prone Iso Bridges](#) already train your abs either directly or indirectly. You don't need more ab work than that, you're already working your abs harder than other muscles.

## Cardio, Running, Rowing, Boxing, etc

### **Do I need to do cardio?**

If you have 20% or 30% body fat, cardio will make you lose fat faster. But [strength training](#) & diet must always be your priority. More strength is more muscle, more muscle is more calories burned. Eating healthy improves [fat loss](#): protein has higher thermic effect than other foods, healthy fats like fish oil improve fat loss. Cardio always comes third: to speed things up.

- **You carry more than 15% body fat** according to your [fat caliper](#). Do moderate intensity cardio. But remember your priorities in order to [lose fat](#) a) get stronger b) eat healthier c) moderate intensity cardio. Cardio always comes third, getting stronger & eating healthy is more important. HIIT is better for fat loss than moderate intensity cardio, but it's also harder. Build base [cardiovascular fitness](#) through [weight lifting](#), before getting into HIIT.
- **You have less than 15% body fat.** Lowering your body fat is useless if you don't [build muscle](#) to show off first. Get your [Squat](#) to 1x body-weight for 5x5, then 1.5x body-weight for 5x5 and improve your diet. More strength means more muscle, more muscle means more calories burned. Couple that with healthy nutrition and your body fat will go down.
- **You Need Endurance Work.** Strength training will increase your cardiovascular fitness above average. When you Squat your body-weight for 5x5, your whole body works hard, including your heart. If you're doing competitive boxing or MMA or whatever, then you'll need additional endurance work. Know, however, that it's hard to build maximal strength & maximal endurance at the same time.

### **Can I add 20mins rowing after doing [StrongLifts 5x5](#)?**

Yes. But remember strength training & eating healthy are more important for fat loss than cardio.

- Start with 15mins at 60-70% bpm, breathing heavier than at rest, but not gasping.
- Row right after StrongLifts 5x5, without eating anything before the cardio.
- Build up to 45mins rowing post workout by adding 1 min each session.

### **Can I add 20mins running on a treadmill after doing [StrongLifts 5x5](#)?**

Yes. But as you get stronger you'll have a hard time running for 20mins after Squats & [Deadlifts](#). Consider sprints (HIIT), it's better at increasing your VO2 max and takes less time.

### **Can I add 20mins heavy bag boxing after [StrongLifts 5x5](#) or would this slow progress?**

Yes. Just get enough sleep & eat a lot of healthy food so you have the necessary energy. If your strength goes down after a few weeks, you're doing too much.

# **Building Muscle, Building Big Arms, Losing The Skinny Look**

More strength is more muscle. The stronger you become, the more muscular you'll be.

## **I Want to Build Muscle. Is Bodybuilding Better? Or can I do StrongLifts 5x5?**

Bodybuilding is lifting weights for aesthetic reasons, without paying any attention to strength. You'll get stronger through bodybuilding, just like you'll build muscle through strength training. However, the goal of bodybuilding is building muscle in the first place, not getting stronger.

Some of the most accomplished bodybuilders started training for strength using heavy compound exercises before getting into bodybuilding. Examples: [Arnold Schwarzenegger](#), Franco Columbo, [Reg Park](#), Ronnie Coleman, Johnny Jackson, etc. Schwarzenegger was a competitive powerlifter for years, his best lifts: Squat 215 kg, Bench 200 kg and Deadlift 310 kg. That's a sick [Bench Press/Deadlift](#) compared to his [Squat](#) which explains why Arnold's chest and back were his best body parts while his legs never were that great. The lesson this teaches you is that if you have a weak body part, you should focus on getting it stronger.

If you want to focus on building muscle solely, build base strength first through [strength training](#). Once you can Squat 1.5x body-weight and more for 1 rep, you can switch to bodybuilding to focus on aesthetics. Chances are, however, that you won't even want to switch anymore. Check the physique of powerlifter [Kirk Karwoski](#), strongman [Mariusz Pudzianowski](#) and [Michael Sidorychev](#) or Olympic weightlifter [Ivan Stoitsov](#). These guys train for strength, not for aesthetics. Most people are satisfied with this kind of physique that looks and is strong.

## **Is StrongLifts 5x5 a complete body workout?**

[Stronglifts 5x5](#) is a full body weight lifting program. You'll work all muscles so you avoid muscle imbalances and disproportionate physiques. StrongLifts 5x5 includes 4 compound exercises per workout + 1 extra ab exercise. Each exercise works several muscles at the same time.

- Forearms. Pull-ups, chin-ups, deadlifts and inverted rows will work your forearms hard.
- Biceps. Pull-ups, chin-ups and inverted rows work your biceps. You also get a biceps workout from squeezing the bar hard on squats/deadlifts.
- Triceps. Push exercises like Bench Press, Overhead Press & Push-ups work your triceps.
- Abs. Lower back keeps your torso erect from the back, abs from the front. Abs work hard during squats, deadlifts, overhead press. You also have direct ab work from reverse crunches & prone bridges.
- Chest. Bench Press, Overhead Press & Push-ups work your chest muscles.
- Shoulders. Overhead Press, Bench Press, Push-ups work your shoulders.
- Back. Squeezing shoulder-blades together during Inverted Rows work upper-back. Upper-back also works during Deadlifts, Pull-ups, Chin-ups. Lats are worked through pull-ups, chin-ups, deadlifts.
- Traps & neck. Deadlifts & Overhead Press work the traps hard. Neck will increase in size from heavy squats/deadlifts.
- Thighs. Squats & Deadlifts work your quads, hams & glutes.
- Calves. Calves work hard during Deadlifts and are isometrically contracted during overhead press, squats, bench press, etc.

**StrongLifts 5x5 features 3 x Squats/week. Does that mean my legs will grow bigger than my upper-body? My upper body is already lacking compared to my legs which are thick and I don't want a disproportioned body.**

3 things:

- [Squats](#) are a full body exercise. Although your legs move the weight, your whole body works: upper-back is squeezed, arms squeeze the bar hard, abs keep you upright, etc. That's why the Squat is the most important exercise: it works everything.
- Following exercises work your upper-body directly: Bench Press, Overhead Press, Inverted Rows, Pull-ups, Chin-ups, Push-ups. StrongLifts 5x5 is balanced, don't worry about that.
- If you have thick legs to start with, you're not going to lose them, whatever you do. Accept how you were born. Stop watching yourself in the mirror and your confidence will increase. Nothing to be embarrassed about, nobody is perfect and you're not expected to be.

**How long does it take to see results from StrongLifts 5x5?**

People will ask what you've been up to within 3 months. Muscles will feel tighter, body fat will go down, clothes will fit differently (smaller waist, bigger legs/chest/arms), etc. Read [Sumoboy's story](#): gym people thought he was using steroids because of his progress. For fast results:

- Get stronger. Get your [Squat](#) to 1x body-weight for 5x5, then 1.5x body-weight for 5x5.
- Eat lots of healthy foods. Read [nutrition on StrongLifts 5x5](#).
- If you're skinny: drink 1 gallon whole milk/day. You can gain 20lbs/month that way. Read [Bluestreak's story](#): he gained 25lbs in 25 days by drinking 1 gallon milk/day and eating up to 9000kcal/day. Read also [how to gain weight for skinny guys](#).

**I'm 1.76m tall and 60kg however instead of looking lean and muscular, I have the skinny-fat look. Should I stay on StrongLifts 5x5 or change to a program that leaves me walking out the gym feeling sore & drained?**

60kg at 1.76cm is too skinny. If you have a lot of body fat, you most likely have zero muscle mass. Very skinny & weak with some body fat. Solution:

- Get stronger. Get your Squat to 1x body-weight for 5x5, then 1.5x body-weight for 5x5 with hips coming lower than knees on each rep. That will increase your muscle mass.
- Eat More. Eat breakfast & eat every 3 hours. Drink 1 gallon whole milk/day to first get your weight up above 70kg, then close to 80kg. Should get rid of your skinny look within 2 months. You're so skinny gaining weight will be a joke: you just need to eat more. Check again [Bluestreak's progress](#) and read [how to gain weight for skinny guys](#).

Stop drinking milk once you weigh 80kg. Keep getting stronger and eating healthy foods: proteins, veggies, fruits, whole grains, etc. Your body fat will decrease as strength increases (more strength is more muscle, more muscle is more calories burned). Problem solved.

**Are there any additional exercises for biceps and bench as these are traditionally my weakest points?**

No need for more exercises. You're already doing enough exercises for your biceps and bench:

- Biceps. Inverted rows, pull-ups, chin-ups, plus isometric contractions during Squats & Deadlifts (gripping bar hard).
- Bench. Bench Press 3x/15days, but also Overhead Press & Push-ups which work similar muscles and help increase your Bench Press. No need for more.

## StrongLifts 5x5: Does it work?

"Neglecting to broaden their views has kept some men to do the same thing all their lives" - Napoleon Hill.

### General Thoughts

- I have a bodybuilding background and used to do body part splits until I bought a [home gym](#) and had to rely on barbell exercises only. The 5x5 method was completely different to what I did before. But I gave it a try and never went back.
- Magazines have brainwashed people that to get results you need to 1) lift weights 6 times/week 2) take [supplements](#) 3) isolate muscles to get them bigger etc.
- Sprinters run multiple times per week. Swimmers swim multiple times per week. Weight lifters clean & jerk and snatch multiple times per week. The ONLY sport where you train a muscle once per week, is bodybuilding. Ask yourself why the difference since swimmers, sprinters & weight lifters have athletic builds.
- The 5x5 method of training is nothing new, it's probably a century or more old. [Reg Park](#), [Bradley Steiner](#), [John McCallum](#), [Brooks Kubik](#), [J.V. Askem](#), [Bill Starr](#), [Glenn Pendlay](#), [Pavel Tsatsouline](#) and many more recommend 5 sets of 5 reps.
- The 5x5 method is proven to work: thousands of people all over the world have done the program with success. Check the [training logs](#) in StrongLifts.com forum and google 5x5.
- You don't need to change or add anything to the program. There are always people who think they're smarter and try to make a superior individualized version. You're asking for failure. StrongLifts 5x5 is proven to work as laid out: with [skinny guys](#), over-weight people, youth, 50y guys, women, ... Whatever you are it has worked for someone else already. Check the forum for proof: find someone with similar stats/goals, check his progress. Don't reinvent the wheel, the wheel works great already.
- If someone tells you the 5x5 method doesn't work: 1) he never tried it 2) it goes against how he trains 3) he tried it but made the common mistake of underestimating the program (example: starting too heavy, adding exercises, etc)
- The best way to find out if [StrongLifts 5x5](#) works is by trying it for 2 months. Don't take what I or anyone else say for granted. Try the program, build experience and form YOUR opinion based on YOUR experimentation.

If you ever (you will) get someone who tells you that StrongLifts 5x5 doesn't work while you feel it's working, don't lose your time convincing people. Skeptics don't change opinion, whatever you say. Keep doing what you're doing, joke about it when bullshit statements fly your way and let your results speak for themselves. *"Do not tell the world what you can do, show it"* -Napoleon Hill.

### **3 days/week doesn't seem like enough. Should I do some extra work on the off days?**

You're judging StrongLifts 5x5 without having tried it. Otherwise you'd know it's enough.

- Muscles grow when you rest, not when you workout. If you want to [build muscle](#) and get stronger, you need rest days, especially as a beginner (which is, anyone who can't [Squat](#) 1.5x body-weight for 1 rep, with hips coming lower than knees).
- You're doing [Squats](#) 3x/week, which is a full body exercise that works your legs but also the rest of your body. You're getting a hard workout from these alone.
- If you want to do something on your rest days: do [hip mobility/glute activation](#) exercises and [soft tissue work](#).

**My friend who knows a lot about bodybuilding says that 3x quad is too much and that it shouldn't be mixed with other large muscles in a same day. What do you think?**

This is [strength training](#), not bodybuilding. Bodybuilding is the only sport where you train a muscle 1x/week. Soccer players run multiple times per week. Swimmers swim multiple times per week. Weight lifters clean & jerk multiple times per week. And on StrongLifts 5x5 you Squat several times per week. Your legs will get used to Squatting 3x/week while doing other full body exercises if you start light and add weight slowly but systematically.

**Squatting 3 x/week is a bit much isn't it? To me it seems like you'll be overtraining quickly.**

Say that to sprinters or soccer players or football players or any sport you can think of EXCEPT bodybuilding, that working a big muscle group like your legs multiple times per week leads to overtraining. There is no sport where this theory is applied except in bodybuilding. Your legs can handle a lot of work if you give it time to adapt. Start with an empty bar, add weight slowly but systematically. Everyone is squatting his body-weight within 3 months on StrongLifts 5x5 program by adding weight each workout. If you can add weight each workout, you're anything but overtraining: your fitness is increasing.

**I told some people in my gym about StrongLifts 5x5 and they said that you need to give a muscle a week to recover and that you would for instance, not give your legs enough time to recover in order for them to get stronger. How would you counter this argument?**

90% of what you hear at the gym is retarded. Why do you believe them? Form yourself your own opinion: try the program for 2 months and then you'll know if they're right or not. Don't take what I or the gym people say for granted: find out by trying the program. Check my previous replies for argumentation, but don't waste your time on this at the gym. Send them to StrongLifts.com.

**In my opinion StrongLifts 5x5 is asking for over-training.**

So you never tried it. Here are some lifters/authors/coaches who recommended the 5x5 approach:

- [Reg Park](#)
- [Bradley Steiner](#)
- [John McCallum](#)
- [Brooks Kubik](#)
- [J.V. Askem](#)
- [Bill Starr](#)
- [Glenn Pendlay](#)
- [Pavel Tsatsouline](#)
- etc

Most people are undertraining rather than overtraining. They fear doing too much and end up doing not enough, wasting their time doing Biceps curls and whatever else. Ever heard of [Smolov](#)? Smolov has you do 125 Squat reps per week for 3 weeks in a row and with the weight increasing each workout. Anyone who looks at the program thinks "crazy", "not possible without steroids". Well lots of naturals, including me, have done Smolov without overtraining and to our own surprise adding weight each workout without problem. StrongLifts 5x5 is only 75 Squat reps per week compared to Smolov and you're starting with an empty bar. You can definitely do this without overtraining. Check the [training logs](#) for proof.



## **Training heavy on a continuous basis has to wear you down. Why don't you use the Heavy, Medium, Light periodization technique, like [Bill Starr's Big 3](#)?**

You're not training heavy on a continuous basis. You're starting with an empty bar and adding weight each workout. By the time the weights get heavy, your body is conditioned to the volume & frequency. As long as you can add weight each workout, you don't need to include light days. If your strength increases, you're not overtraining: you're gaining fitness.

Everyone reaches a 1x body-weight Squat for 5x5 easily doing StrongLifts 5x5 and stalls once getting close to 1.5x body-weight Squat for 5x5. Then it's time to switch to a heavy, medium, light template like [StrongLifts 5x5 Advanced](#). Switching sooner is waste of time: you progress faster adding weight each workout as in StrongLifts 5x5 compared to a heavy, medium, light template like the Big 3 or StrongLifts 5x5 Advanced, where the weight increases weekly.

## **Which one is better? Rippetoe's 3x5 or StrongLifts 5x5?**

Both programs are proven to work and will give similar results. The main difference between Rippetoe's and StrongLifts 5x5 are:

- StrongLifts 5x5 recommends starting with an empty bar the first workout. Rippetoe has you start with weight on the bar depending on how much you can handle. You'll progress faster with Rippetoe since you're starting with more weight. When I train people 1 on 1, I also tell them to use bigger increases or start with heavier weights if I think they can handle more weight. But when I give a standard template, it's empty bar everywhere.
- StrongLifts 5x5 includes assistance exercises like Pull-ups, Chin-ups, Push-ups, Prone Iso Bridges & Reverse Crunches because beginners always want extra arm & ab work. Better than wasting time with triceps extension & biceps curls. Rippetoe also includes Pull-ups & Chin-ups in the starting strength program from [Practical Programming](#) (not in [Starting Strength](#)) and recommends weighted Roman Chair Situps to help the Overhead Press.
- StrongLifts 5x5 includes Inverted Rows instead of Power Cleans (Starting Strength) or pull-ups/chin-ups (Practical Programming). You can include Power Cleans instead of Inverted Rows if you want, but from my experience it's easier to learn how to Power Clean once you can Squat/Deadlift correctly.
- StrongLifts 5x5 has 5 sets of 5 instead of Rippetoe's 3 sets of 5. Why 5 sets of 5? 1) more sets to practice technique 2) more hypertrophy because of the increased volume.

Those are the differences. Similarities: Squats, Deadlifts, Overhead Press, Bench Press and weight increasing each workout. Both programs work and give similar results. Decide for yourself which one you want to do.

## **Does StrongLifts 5x5 also work for the early intermediate? I have a 1.5x BW Deadlift/Squat.**

Yes. It's a good way to practice technique, further increase strength and get your body used to Squatting 3x/week. Start with 30% less than your 5 rep max on Squat & Deadlift and build from there. 1 month later you'll Squat 60lbs/30kg more. Expect it to get hard by week 3/4. Read also [Glenn Pendlay's](#) writings on this.



## How to Choose Your Starting Weight

Start with an empty bar on [Squats](#), [Bench Press](#) & [Overhead Press](#). Olympic bars weigh 45lbs/20kg and are 7feet/2m20 long. The empty bar will be too light for [Deadlifts](#): start with 88lbs/40kg for that exercise and build from there. Always include the bar weight.

### **Why start with an empty bar?**

4 reasons:

- Increased Motivation. Most people don't miss 1 workout the first 3 months [StrongLifts 5x5](#). Weights feel easy in the first weeks and you're adding weight each workout. Adding weight gets addictive: you'll look forward to going to the gym and increasing the weight each workout. You'll also see your body change as the weight on the bar increases.
- Decreased Soreness. Too much soreness from the 1<sup>st</sup> week would prevent you physically & mentally from going back to the gym 2 days later. You'll get sore legs your 1st time doing [Squats](#) with the empty bar, but less than if you started heavier.
- Minimal Need for Equipment. You can do [StrongLifts 5x5 with 1 barbell](#) and weights if you want: [Steinborn Lift](#) for Squats and Floor Press instead of [Bench Press](#). Not the safest way, but many people start this way, like it & decide to invest in [home gym equipment](#).
- Better Technique. It's easier to practice technique with light weights. Correct technique prevents injuries and allows for more weight in the long term since your body moves more efficiently. Starting light forces you to focus on technique rather than lifting heavy without learning how to lift correctly.

### **Do I have to start with an empty bar? I think I can handle more.**

The point of starting with an empty bar is to learn correct technique. You're adding 5lbs/2.5kg each workout, that's 66lbs/30kg per month on Squats. Meaning you'll hit a 100kg Squat for 5x5 within 3 months if you don't miss any workouts and don't stall. No need to start heavier, the weight increases fast already. There's only 1 reason to start with more weight: greed. Forget about the ego. [Strength training](#) is a marathon not a sprint.

### **No really, I'm an experienced lifter. I know how to perform Squats and the other exercises. Can I start with weight on the bar?**

I'll assume you have good technique on all exercises and base strength. 2 solutions:

- Start with 30% less weight than your 5 rep max. If you don't know your 5 rep max: do workout A and work up to 1 heavy set of 5 reps on all exercises. Same approach 2 days later with workout B. Start the next week with 30% less weight and build from there. So if you can handle 150lbs/70kg for 5 rep max, do 100lbs/50kg for 5x5 the next workout, then build from there, adding 5lbs/2.5kg each workout. First 1-2 weeks will be easy, in week 3 you'll hit 150lbs/70kg for 5x5, then 166lbs/80kg for 5x5 by the end of your 1st month.
- Use bigger increments. Start with the empty bar and add 10lbs/5kg each workout on Squats & [Deadlifts](#). You can add 10lbs/5kg per workout on the Bench Press too, but stick with 5lbs/2.5kg increases on the [Overhead Press](#). When it gets hard to add weight each workout, switch back to smaller increments of 5lbs/2.5kg per workout.

Remember: better is to start too low than too high. Let it be easy for the first 2-3 weeks, you're adding 66lbs/30kg per month anyway. The lighter weights allow you to focus on technique & speed. Do your exercises correctly and lift as fast as you can on the way up.

**My 5RM for Squat is 75kg and for Bench Press 85kg. How much weight should I start with? The 20kg empty bar seems low.**

Start with 30% less than your 5RM. In your case: 50kg on Squats and 60kg on Bench Press. The first 1-3 weeks will feel easy, focus on technique & speed. You might get sore legs if you never did Squats 3x/week before, but it shouldn't last more than 1-2 weeks. 1 month later you'll Squat 80kg for 5x5, which is more than the 75kg for 5 reps you started with. Same for the other exercises.

**I've been going to the gym for 2 years doing Bench Press, Lat Pulldown, Bicep Curls, Triceps Extensions and Ab Work. Tonight I'm starting StrongLifts 5x5. I've never done Squats before or any leg work. Since I'm not completely out of condition, can I add weight for Squats or should I start with empty bar? What about the other exercises?**

If you've never done Squats before, you'll get sore legs the 1st time, even if you play soccer/walk alot/whatever. The soreness will be more pronounced if you use heavier weights. Start with the empty bar for Squats. Start with 30% less of your 5rep max on Bench Press as explained above.

**Am I supposed to reach failure on all 5 sets? Or do I pick a weight that allow me to max out on the last set of 5 reps but make the previous 4 sets easy?**

Pick a weight you can easily do 5x5 with so you can focus on technique and so your body has time to adapt to Squatting 3x/week. As the weight on the bar increases each workout, it will get hard to get the 5x5 and you'll stall. Best is to do workout A and work up to 1 heavy set of 5 reps on all exercises. Same approach 2 days later with workout B. Start the next week with 30% less weight and build from there, adding 5lbs/2.5kg each workout. First 1-2 weeks will be easy, then it will get harder. Focus on technique & speed while the weights are still easy.

**Should I do pyramid sets? Example: 150lbs in set 1, 155lbs in set 2, 160lbs in set 3, etc. Or should I do all sets with same weight increasing 5 pounds each workout.**

Don't do pyramid sets. Do sets across: use the same weight on all 5 sets and increase the weight by 5lbs/2.5kg each workout. Sets across are harder than pyramid sets.

**Do I include the weight of the bar?**

Yes. Olympic bars are 7 feet/2m20 long and weigh 45lbs/20kg. If your gym has another kind of bar, stand with the bar on a weight scale so you know how much it weighs. It's usually between 10kg & 20kg. Realize that Olympic bars have revolving sleeves, small bars usually don't. Non-revolving sleeves make gripping harder, meaning less weight you can lift. You also don't know how much weight small bars can handle without breaking on exercises like Squats. Olympic bars handle 3-400kg. Find a gym with quality bars or invest in quality home gym equipment.

**I downloaded the [StrongLifts 5x5 spreadsheet](#). The suggested weights are the total combined weight or the weight on 1 side of the bar?**

The weight in the spreadsheet is the total weight you have to lift: weight of the bar + plates. So if I mention 100kg Squat, it means 1x 20kg Olympic bar + 2 plates of 20kg on each side. Whenever you see someone mention some weight in a blog post, forum, powerlifting competition or weight lifting competition assume they mean total weight: weight of bar + weight of plates.

## What if The Starting Weight Is too Heavy?

The empty bar is rarely too heavy. Most people (man, woman, youth, elder) can handle an empty bar and even more the 1<sup>st</sup> time. Some can handle 175lbs-220lbs/80-100kg their 1<sup>st</sup> time [Deadlifts](#). Usually it's not the weight that is too heavy, but technique that needs work (hence why you should start light). If the empty bar is too heavy, it says a lot about your lifestyle and nutrition: probably inactive most of the day, lack of physical activity and malnutrition. Luckily [StrongLifts 5x5](#) can help you overcome all of this.

### **I can't handle a barbell for Squats yet. What could I do?**

Start with body-weight [Squats](#) with both hands behind your head for 5x5 every other day. You'll most likely get sore legs. 2nd week go for 5x10 body-weight Squats. 3rd week try the empty bar again. There will be no problem by then.

### **I can't handle the weight on the Overhead Press. What could I do?**

If you have access to a lighter bar, use it until you're strong enough for the 45lbs/20kg Olympic bar. Otherwise drop the [Overhead Press](#) for 2 weeks. [Bench Press](#) & [Push-ups](#) will build strength. 3rd week try the empty bar on the Overhead Press. Will be no problem by then.

### **I can't handle 40kg/80lbs for Deadlifts. What could I do?**

Remove Deadlifts for 2 weeks. Build base strength using Squats & [Inverted Rows](#). 2 weeks later try Deadlifts again, will be no problem.

Don't let the fact that you're a woman or older guy be an excuse. I've seen guys in their 50s struggling with empty bar Squats. We switched to body-weight Squats for 2 weeks as described above. 3 months later he was doing [Box Squats](#) with 150lbs for 5x5 with more left in the tank, while he was struggling with the empty bar a few months before. Strength comes fast in the beginner's stage, you just need to persist.

## What if You Can't Do a Single Pull-up, Chin-up, Inverted Row or Push-up?

### **I lack the strength to do Pull-ups/Chin-ups. Can I substitute with the Lat Pull-down or Assisted Pull-up Machine to build strength?**

No. Machines balance the weight for you and force you into fixed movement patterns. Strength built on machines doesn't carry over to free weights/body-weight exercises like [Pull-ups & Chin-ups](#). Try these solutions and you'll be able to do 1-3 reps within 4 weeks [StrongLifts 5x5](#).

- Ask someone for help. Have him grab you by your side and help you on the way up. Make sure you do most of the work yourself.
- Use momentum. Use hip drive on the way up, like Jesse Marunde in [this video](#). Notice he does 21 pull-ups at 310lbs body-weight. It's all about strength, body-weight is irrelevant.
- Do negatives. Lower yourself slowly and jump up on each rep. Expect lots of soreness using this method.
- Use bands. Attach a resistance band to your pull-up bar and loop it around your knee, like in [this video](#). I have & recommend [Iron Woody bands](#). They're cheap & quality. Check their assisted Pull-up package.
- Try 'greasing the groove'. Get a [doorway pull-up bar](#) and do 1 Pull-up or Chin-up each time you pass the bar, multiple times per day.
- Do Chin-ups only. Chin-ups (palms facing you) are easier than Pull-ups. Stick with Chin-ups. Once you can do 5 reps of Chin-ups, alternate between Chin-ups & Pull-ups again.
- Do multiple sets of low reps. Do 10x1 Pull-ups with as much rest between sets as you need. Once you can do 10x1 Pull-ups, do 10x2 Pull-ups. Again: take as much rest as you need to get 2 reps on all 10 sets. Once you got that, do 10x3 Pull-ups. Take enough rest to get all 3 reps. When you can do 10x5 Pull-ups, switch back to 3xF (3 sets until failure), you should be able to do almost 10 Pull-ups on your 1st set.

I recommend you start with Chin-ups. If you're a big guy, use a [resistance band](#). Or do multiple sets of low reps, starting with 10x1 Chin-ups 3x per week. Once you can do that, 10x2. Then 10x3. Once you can do 10x5 Chin-ups, switch to 3xF alternating between Chin-ups & Pull-ups. Then you can start adding weight and do 3x5.

### **What's the difference between doing Pull-ups & Chin-ups using a resistance band and an Assisted Pull-up Machine?**

The [resistance band](#) helps you most in the bottom position, not much in the top part of the movement. The Assisted Pull-up Machine helps you from start to finish.

### **I lack the strength to do [Inverted Rows](#).**

Lack of strength usually means you can't touch the bar with your chest. Solutions:

- Put your feet flat on the floor and push from your heels on the way up. Make sure you use your upper-back muscles as much as you can.
- Once you can do 10 reps on your 1st set, move to straight legs with heels on the floor.
- When that gets easy do them with your feet on a box, straight legs.
- Then add weight: wear a rucksack with plates in it or wrap chains around your body.

**I lack the strength to do [Push-ups](#).**

Solutions:

- Do kneeling Push-ups. Keep your knees on the floor and do Push-ups. Make sure you use your upper-body most, not your hips.
- Once you can do 10 good reps using your upper-body most, switch from kneeling Push-ups to regular Push-ups with straight legs.
- Keep doing the [Bench Press](#) & [Overhead Press](#) in the meanwhile, it will build strength for Push-ups.
- Once you can do 15 push-ups: get a [resistance band](#) and do 3 sets of 5 against bands. Or wrap chains around body or use rucksack with weight in (wear it on your upper-back, not lower back).

## Sets & Reps, Rest Between Sets, Lift Tempo & Breathing

[Squat](#), [Bench Press](#), [Overhead Press](#): 5 sets of 5 reps with the same weight. [Deadlift](#): 1 set of 5 reps. [Pull-ups](#), [Chin-ups](#), [Push-ups](#), [Inverted Rows](#): 3 sets of as many reps as you can with correct technique. Start with 1min rest between sets. If you struggle to get all reps, take more rest before doing the next set, up to 5mins if necessary. Lift as fast as you can on the way up once you've got good enough technique (after 3-4 weeks). Way down should be controlled but not slow. You'll breathe correctly if you don't pay attention to it.

### **Can I do 3x8 instead of 5x5?**

No, this is [StrongLifts 5x5](#) not 3x8. The 5x5 was chosen for specific reasons:

- 5 reps builds technique. You can focus better on technique when doing 5 reps than 8. You also don't get fatigue like with high reps which gets in the way of technique.
- 5 reps build speed. You can lift faster doing 5 reps than 8 (fatigue sets in as reps go by). The faster you lift, the more weight you can lift.
- 5 reps means more weight. You can lift more weight because a) you're only doing 5 reps b) you can lift faster.
- 5 reps build strength. It's easier to add weight each workout when doing 5 reps vs 8 reps.

Nothing is wrong with 3x8 if you want to do 3x8. But StrongLifts 5x5 doesn't work with 3x8, it only works with low reps of 5. If you want to do high reps, choose another program.

### **The trainer at the gym said that 3x8 was better if I don't want to get bulky.**

2 things:

- Many people struggle with losing their [skinny look](#), although they're lifting weights, because they aren't eating enough. Getting bulky isn't that easy: you have to eat more than you're doing now. You won't get you there by training hard.
- 3x8 actually gets you more bulky than 5x5. High reps build sarcoplasmic hypertrophy (fuller muscle, less strength) while low reps build myofibrillar hypertrophy (denser muscles & more strength). So if you don't want to get bulky, stick to the 5x5.

### **Wait, you just wrote 3x8 builds fuller muscles than 5x5. I want big muscles, should I do 3x8?**

No you should do 5x5 for the reasons given above. Stick with the program for 3 months, get your strength up everywhere, apply the tips from [how to gain weight for skinny guys](#), then look in the mirror, compare with pics taken months earlier and decide if you like what you see. I train low reps all the time and never have to tell people that I train, they can see it by looking at me. And I'm considered a light weight (5'8"/1m73 – 165lbs/75kg).

### **Why only 1x5 on Deadlifts vs 5x5 on other exercises?**

5x5 [Deadlifts](#) is overkill combined with 5x5 [Squats](#), especially since every 2 weeks you'd be doing 2 times 5x5 Deadlifts combined with 3 times 5x5 Squats within the same week. This can get in the way of recovery, causing stalling on Squats and other exercises which wouldn't occur otherwise.

**I don't do 5x5 but 3x8 since I want to focus on muscle size and I don't want to train with the heavier weights of 5x5 since I train alone at home. Lately I'm beginning to stall. Can I continue to do the 3x8 instead of the 5x5? Or should I alternate? Or should I do something like 2x8 + 2x5? My goal is to lose fat, then gain muscle and then be strong. I train alone at home and nobody can spot me.**

3 things:

- 3x8 doesn't work, as you experienced. You're stalling sooner that way, doesn't work to add weight each workout like when doing 5x5
- If [fat loss](#) & muscle gains are your goals, then strength should be your primary goal. Not the other way around. More strength is more muscle, more muscle is more calories burned.
- Many people lift weights without a spotter. I'm one of them: I train alone at home just like you, without a spotter. Read the article on how to [Squat safely when you're alone](#) and how to [Bench Press safely when you're alone](#).

I recommend you take 10% weight off and do 5x5 as laid out in the StrongLifts 5x5 program.

### **I like Deadlifts. Can I do more than 1x5 for Deadlifts?**

You can get away with 2x5 or 3x5 Deadlifts the first weeks. But once you Deadlift more than 1x to 1.5x your body-weight for 5 reps (so 200-300lbs for 5 reps if you weigh 200lbs), it's best is to stick with 1x5 Deadlifts. [StrongLifts 5x5 Advanced](#), which is for intermediates, includes 5x5 Deadlifts once per week, but with Squat sessions alternating between heavy, medium & light. When you hit intermediate level and do that routine, you'll understand why there's no 5x5 Deadlifts in the StrongLifts 5x5 program: 5x5 Deadlifts are brutally hard.

Another thing you can do - and I recommend this solution - is to build volume using your warm-up sets. Example: if your work weight on Deadlifts is 220lbs/100kg:

- 5x135lbs/60kg (once you have the strength, start straight with 135lbs/60kg, your legs are warmed up from Squats anyway and the correct starting position has the bar starting at mid-shin level).
- 5x175lbs/80kg (45lbs/20kg increase)
- 5x220lbs/100kg (45lbs/20kg increase)

You only did 1x5 220lbs/100kg, but you had 2 more warm-up sets of 5 reps to practice technique. This should be enough. If you want to add sets to Deadlifts, best is to add warm-up sets, working with increments of 45lbs/20kg until you get to your work weight. Or 25lbs/10kg if you really need extra sets. This is better than 5x5 sets across with the same weight. Just make sure you don't wear yourself out for your work sets when adding warm-up sets.

### **What about lowering the amount of Squats I do, so I can do more Deadlifts?**

See how you're complicating things? More doesn't mean better. Your Deadlift is going up anyway, so you don't need to train it more. Focus on getting stronger at Squats & Deadlifts, doing 5x5 for Squats & 1x5 on Deadlifts. As long as strength goes up, you'll get the results you're after. Don't risk doing too much, especially on exercises like the Deadlift: it can work against you.

### **Can I take a break in between reps?**

You can hold the weight for a split second at the top (at the bottom on Deadlifts) between reps. No need to wait longer. Just go for it.



### **How much rest should I take between sets?**

Take about 1min rest between sets the first weeks, just enough to get ready for the next set. As you get stronger, getting 5 reps on all 5 sets will get harder. Taking more rest between sets can make the difference between failing and succeeding at getting all 5 reps on the next set. If you just struggled to get your 5 reps, take more rest before doing your next set. Up to 5mins: more rest gives your muscles & central nervous system more time to recover for the next set.

### **As the weights get heavier, is it possible that I'll need 5mins rest between sets? What's the maximum amount of rest allowed between sets?**

Take 1min rest between sets in the first weeks. When the weight gets heavier and you have trouble doing 5 reps on each set, try more rest between sets, up to 5mins if necessary. Anything above 5mins usually doesn't make a difference.

Rest time doesn't matter much, what matters is that your strength increases as the workouts go by. Don't lose your time at the gym fooling around between sets, but also don't take too short rest times that get in the way of recovery for the next set. Start with 1min rest between sets and take more if necessary as you get stronger so you get all reps on the next set.

### **Can I superset the StrongLifts 5x5 exercises? Do you think there would be any benefits and if there were how would you apply super setting?**

Supersets will fatigue your muscles and undermine your strength and form. The goal of StrongLifts 5x5 is to build strength. Stick with the program as laid out, no need to superset. If you want to superset, choose another program.

### **Are the sets done all at once or do we alternate exercises in between? Example: do I do 5 sets Squats, then 5 sets Bench Presses or do I rotate through the exercises like a superset until I reach 5 sets in all exercises?**

No supersets. Do your 5 sets Squats. When you're done, switch to the next exercise and do your 5 sets. When you're done, switch to the next exercise. This way your whole focus is on 1 exercise and its technique. The point is not to get you sweating (you might, but it's not the goal), the point is to build good technique and add weight to the bar each workout. No need for supersets or circuit training.

### **Today I was benching. I got through 4 reps with ease and the last rep took a little longer, but I still pushed it out without any help. The spotter then said "You had a 6th rep in you. You should have taken it." Then he turned around and walked off. It kind of pissed me off. If I have a great day and can do a 6<sup>th</sup> rep on the last set, should I?**

Your goal is to break your 5x5 record each workout by adding weight systematically. Your goal isn't to do as many reps as you can on each set. Squeezing a 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> rep out doesn't really matter. Understand that your spotter most likely has no idea of what you're doing and the system behind what you're doing. He's probably used to training to failure. Unless you want to play that game, stick to 5x5 increasing the weight each workout.



## How to Warm-up

A warm muscle is harder to injure than a cold one. Always warm-up.

### **How should I warm-up?**

If you're just starting out, you won't need much warm-up since your work weight is too low. The first 2 weeks: start with body-weight Squats, then go straight to your work sets. No need to warm-up for [Bench Press/Overhead Press/Inverted Rows/Deadlift/etc.](#)

Include warm-up sets once you can lift 66lbs/30kg. Start with 2 sets of 5 with empty bar. Then switch to sets of 3 reps, adding 25-45bs/10-20kg per set until you're at your work weight.

Example 1: [Bench Press](#) work weight 110lbs/50kg

- 2x5 empty bar
- 3x 77lbs/35kg (increased weight by 33lbs/15kg)
- 5x5 110lbs/50kg (increased weight by 33lbs/15kg)

You used equal increases of 33lbs/15kg. Don't add more than 20kg per set.

Example 2: [Squat](#) work weight 185lbs/85kg

- 2x5 empty bar
- 3x88lbs/40kg (45lbs/20kg increase)
- 3x135lbs/60kg (another 45lbs/20kg increase)
- 2x160lbs/72,5kg (2 reps only, we're getting close to work weight, don't want fatigue body for nothing, just meant to warm-up)
- 5x5 185lbs/85kg

45lbs/20kg increases at first, then 27lbs/12,5kg increases. You can increase the weight differently, but it's easier to go from empty bar to using 25/10kg plates then straight to 135lbs/60kg weight using the big plates. Weight increases don't have to be exact, keep it simple.

Example 3: [Deadlift](#) work weight 220lbs/100kg

- 5x135lbs/60kg (once you have the strength, start straight with 135lbs/60kg, your legs are warmed up from Squats anyway and the correct starting position has the bar starting at mid-shin level).
- 5x175lbs/80kg (45lbs/20kg increase)
- 5x220lbs/100kg (45lbs/20kg increase)

Since you're only doing 1x5 on Deadlifts, it makes sense to do sets of 5 instead of sets of 3 or 2 reps on your warm-up sets. This builds volume and give you extra sets to practice technique.

### **Do I need some light cardio before I start? Or running?**

No. It will only wear you out for Squats, making it harder. If you need specific warm-up:

- [Soft Tissue Work](#). Massage everything with a [foam roller](#) before you start, should take about 5mins.
- [Mobility work](#). Work on [hip mobility](#), [ankle mobility](#), ... More specific than running/jogging.
- Activation work. [Glute activation](#) can help fire your glutes during Squats/Deadlifts, which may be dormant from sitting all day before going to the gym.

**I've noticed my strongest lifts are on the 2nd thru 4th sets. The first set is usually the hardest on any of the exercises. Is this due to not enough warm up reps or just a fact of getting in a rhythm? For instance on Squats last night I did 5 empty bar, 4x65, 3x85, 2x105, 1x125 and then work weight of 145.**

Your central nervous system also needs to warm-up properly. Tips:

- Focus more doing your warm-up. Pay attention to what you do: technique & speed.
- Do your warm-up sets as fast as you can. This is assuming you already have good technique to allow maximal speed. If so: lift as fast as you can on the way up.
- You could use a better warm-up. Check again the explanation above. In your case your warm-up would look better like this:
  - 2x5 bar
  - 3 x 80lbs
  - 2 x 110lbs
  - 5x5 145lbs

## Changing or Adding Exercises

90% of the time the answer is NO: you can't change or add exercises. [StrongLifts 5x5](#) works for everyone as laid out. You don't need to change anything. Focus on getting stronger.

### **Do I have to Squat/Deadlift?**

Yes. [Squats](#) & [Deadlifts](#) are the 2 most important exercises: they allow you to use heavy weights and work your body from head to toe. Anyone who can Squat/Deadlift heavy weights has bigger arms & strong abs.

If you want to look muscular and lose your stomach fat: include Squats & Deadlifts in your routine and work at increasing your strength on both lifts. If your routine doesn't include the Squat & Deadlift, then it is flawed and will lead to sub par results.

### **Aren't weight lifting exercises like [Squats](#), [Deadlifts](#), [Bench Press](#) & [Overhead Press](#) dangerous?**

All [weight lifting](#) exercises are dangerous if you don't know what you're doing. [Statistics](#) show that weight lifting is safer than any other sport. Practical evidence will confirm that you'll be less injured than your friends playing soccer, football or boxing.

Nobody will hit your knees like in soccer. Nobody will tackle you like in football. Nobody will hit you like in boxing. If you hurt yourself, it will be your fault: usually bad technique or greediness. Start light, focus on technique and add weight slowly but systematically.

### **Can I use Dumbbells instead of Barbells?**

[StrongLifts 5x5](#) is a barbell program. It doesn't work with dumbbells. You want to use dumbbells, do a dumbbell program.

### **I Don't Have Access to a Squat Rack or Power Rack. How Can I Squat?**

If your gym doesn't have a [Power Rack](#), it has the wrong mindset and probably won't allow you to [Deadlift](#) neither. The long-term solution is to find a gym that fits your mindset or to invest in [home gym equipment](#). Short-term solutions:

- Steinborn Lift. Get the bar in position using the [Steinborn Lift](#) then [Squat](#). This lift is named after Milo Steinborn, a strongman from the 1930s who could Steinborn Lift 550lbs then Squat it for 5 reps. Not the most practical/safest way to get the bar on your back, but it will get you strong (especially your abs). Secure the collars so the plates can't move.
- Bottom Squat. Elevate the bar using 2 boxes, get under it and Squat up. Bottom Squats are harder than regular Squats because you're starting from a dead stop, much like a Deadlift. They will, however, make regular Squats easier once you switch. Bottom Squats are also safe: the boxes catch the weight if anything goes wrong.

In the long-term best is to get a [Power Rack](#): safer, easier to get the weight on your back and you can use more weight. If a Power rack is too expensive, build boxes for Bottom Squats or buy/build [Squat Stands](#). I recommend getting a Power Rack, it will get you better results.

**I don't have a Power Rack, I have Squat Stands. But I don't have a spotter when I lift since it's in my basement. How can I lift safely?**

Many StrongLifts.com readers, including me, are like you: no spotter, training alone at home. Best is to get a Power Rack, read how to [Squat safely when you're alone](#).

**Can I do [Front Squats](#) instead of [Back Squats](#)? I don't have a Power Rack, so I want to Power Clean the bar on my chest then do Front Squats.**

Back Squat work your quads/posterior chain 40/60, [Front Squats](#) 50/50. Most people are quad dominant and have weak hamstrings/glutes. Weak posterior chain is a common cause of back pain & knee pain. Deadlifts & Back Squats are posterior chain dominant exercises in StrongLifts 5x5.

If you remove [Back Squats](#), you only have Deadlifts to emphasize posterior chain development, which is done every other workout. So you'd have to add extra posterior chain work which gets things too complicated. Bottom line: get a Power Rack and do Back Squats.

**No Squat Rack so I do Front Squats. But I'm afraid once I get to heavier weights my Power Clean won't be strong enough to rack the bar. What do you think of [Power Cleans](#) on Tuesday & Thursday?**

You'll never catch up with Front Squats even if you do extra Power Cleans. You're training with sub maximal weights, so your limiting factor will rarely be leg strength on Power Cleans. It will be your pull: getting the bar on your shoulders.

I also don't recommend Front Squatting 3x/week since you need extra hamstrings/glutes work to strengthen the weak posterior chain most people have. Address the cause of problem: find a gym with a Power Rack or build a home gym so you can Back Squat.

**Can I use the Smith Machine or Leg Press or whatever other Squat machine instead of Squats using free weights?**

No. StrongLifts 5x5 only works with free weights, it doesn't work with machines.

- Smith Machine. Forces your body into unnatural movement patterns. You have to position yourself correctly under the bar to make sure you don't force range of motion in ways that can cause injuries, especially with heavier weights. The Smith Machine also balances the weight for you, working your muscles less than free weight Squats.
- Leg Press. Same problems. Your pelvis can also tilt backwards when going deep which can cause your lower back to round (and thus back pain or worse hernias in the long-term).

**I ruptured my cruciate ligament & had it repaired through surgery. I can Squat 40lbs without problems. But if I increase the load do you think I'll have cause for concern?**

Try it. Start with the empty bar for 2 weeks doing 5x5. Focus on good technique. After 2 weeks add weight to the bar each workout using the smallest increment. Let pain be your guide: if it doesn't hurt, keep adding weight.

Many people report their knees feel better since they Squat. Read "[My knees hurt for years until I started to Squat](#)". Reason is that by strengthening your legs, knee stability improves. That's if you Squat correctly, so make sure you use good Squat technique.

## **Some guy at the gym told me Squatting below parallel is bad for your Knees.**

Consider this:

- [Asian people](#) sit in the bottom Squat position daily
- [Babies](#) sit in the bottom Squat position while playing with toys
- Millions of competitive Olympic weightlifters [Squat ass to grass](#) with heavy weights with a [low rate of injuries](#).

Why don't they get injuries? Because your knee joint is strongest in a fully flexed or fully extended position, not the positions in-between. Partial Squats only strengthen your knees & quads, but not your glutes & hamstrings. This causes muscle imbalances & thus knee injuries. Practical evidence shows that [Squatting deep improves knee health](#).

Knee pain on Squats is usually caused by:

- Bad Technique. Start light & focus on technique. Read the article on [how to squat](#).
- Lack of Flexibility. Lack of [hip mobility](#) and/or lack of [ankle mobility](#) will make your knees compensate, causing injuries. This is often linked to poor [glute activation](#).

Read the [10 tips to stop knee pain](#).

## **Some guy at the gym said Deadlifts will kill my back. Is he right?**

[Deadlifts](#) will kill your back, just like any other weight lifting exercise will, if you don't do them correctly. If you do them correctly, Deadlifts will build a strong back. You're already doing Deadlifts multiple times per day: picking something up from the floor is a Deadlift. Many people injure their back because they don't pick stuff up correctly, hence the fear for Deadlifts. In reality, Deadlifts will prevent back injuries by teaching you to pick stuff up correctly: with a flat lower back. Start light, focus on technique and read the post on [Deadlift technique](#).

## **Some guy at the gym said...**

Listen, 90% of the stuff you'll hear at the gym is bullshit. 90% of the things your doctor will tell you is horseshit. 90% of the things your co-workers will tell you is chickenshit. I could tell you that I had never had knee problems during the last 10 years Squatting below parallel and that I think doctors are asses for telling you Squatting is bad for your knees while my 10y Squat experience fails to confirm this. BUT until you try it like I did, you won't understand. So decide what you're going to do, try it for 2 months and then evaluate your choice.

## **Yeah, but the guy trains for 20 years/is the biggest dude at the gym/has a medical degree/... So he knows...**

Irrelevant. Stop accepting what people say - including me - because of their reputation/authority/whatever. Think for yourself and form an opinion yourself based on your research and experience. Be open minded, challenge your beliefs and experiment as much as you can.

## **My gym doesn't allow me to do Deadlifts.**

If your gym has a Power Rack, set the safety pins so the bar is just below your knee caps and [Deadlift](#) from there. These are [Rack Pulls](#). Technique is similar to Deadlifts. Do 1set of 5 reps here too. Rack Pulls are a temporary solution. You need to pull from the floor. Find a gym that allows you to Deadlift or invest in [home gym equipment](#).

**I have a problem with Deadlifts. I've seen many videos but haven't managed to do it correctly. In my gym nobody knows that exercise. What exercise can I substitute for Deadlifts? I know Deadlifts are important, but nobody can teach me how to do them.**

Most StrongLifts.com readers, including me, are like you: nobody has taught us how to do Deadlifts or any other exercise. We're self-taught: we learned it ourselves through reading & practice. Giving up on an exercise is never the solution: 1) it's the wrong mindset 2) if you can't Deadlift correctly, you'll get problems on other exercises anyway (Squats for example).

Read the guide on [how to Deadlift](#), practice a lot, tape yourself at the gym so you see what you're doing (don't use mirrors, tape yourself). Read & compare to what you're doing and understand what you need to fix. Repeat until you've got the technique right. With lots of practice, persistence & patience you'll get there like everyone else.

**Can I substitute Deadlifts with Straight Leg Deadlifts or Romanian Deadlifts?**

No. You can pull more weight using the conventional Deadlift than the Straight Leg Deadlift or Romanian Deadlift. The latter 2 are assistance exercises: good for intermediates, but not for beginners for whom the goal is to get stronger as fast as possible.

**Can I do Power Cleans? How many sets & reps should I do?**

Substitute [Inverted Rows](#) by [Power Cleans](#) and do 5 sets of 5, increasing the weight each workout. StrongLifts 5x5 will look like this:

- Workout A: Squat 5x5, [Bench Press](#) 5x5, Power Clean 5x5, [Push-ups](#) 3xF, [Reverse Crunch](#) 3x12
- Workout B: [Squat](#) 5x5, [Overhead press](#) 5x5, Deadlift 1x5, [Pull-ups/Chin-ups](#) 3xF, [Prone Iso Bridges](#) 3x30sec

Do Power Cleans from the hang position the first weeks. When you can Power Clean close to your body-weight for 5x5, start pulling from the floor. Read the guide on [how to Power Clean](#).

**Can I replace the Bench Press with Dumbbell Bench Press? I don't have a spotter and feel dumbbells would be safer.**

No. 3 reasons:

- You can lift more weight using barbells than dumbbells. Strength is priority with beginners.
- It's hard to add weight each workout using dumbbells. An increase of 5lbs on a bar is a lot easier than an increase of 5lbs on a dumbbell. Even if you have dumbbell increments of 2.5lbs/1.25kg, it's still harder than if you'd add this on a barbell. Meaning you'll stall sooner using dumbbells than barbells.
- When you stall, the only way to get heavy dumbbells safely back to the floor is to throw them on the floor. Not easy to lower them under control and raise yourself off the bench.

Just get out of your comfort zone and ask someone at the gym to spot you. Nobody will say no & your self-confidence will increase. If you train at home use the safety pins in your squat rack. Read [how to Bench Press safely when alone](#).

**I want to Bench Press inside the Smith Machine because 1) my lifting partner is unreliable (he's my spotter) 2) I don't like Bench Pressing without spotter for safety reasons 3) I can't use the Power Rack because there's always a line so other patrons will complain if I use it for more than 20mins.**

You can't use a smith machine for any exercise, including the Bench Press, whatever the reason. The Smith forces you into unnatural movement patterns which can cause injuries and it balances the weight for you which means sub par results.

If there's a line for the Power Rack then there are enough people to spot you. Ask someone to spot when your trainingpartner isn't there. Get out of your comfort zone and ask it. Nobody will say no, never happens. You might even find a new training partner who is more reliable.

I can't stress enough the importance of making friends with gym people. You'll get better results by making friends with other gym go-ers who can spot you, encourage you when you lift and who share the same lifestyle. Your environment plays a large role in achieving success. Your co-workers & regular [friends might see you as a freak](#) for eating differently, going to the gym and paying attention to your health. You might feel alone in what you're trying to accomplish. That's why you need to make friends with the regulars at the gym: they're like you, they share the same mindset, they are who you want to be friends with to get the maximum out of all of this. Even if they don't Squat below parallel, don't Squat at all or are on the juice, it's still worth it.

Ask someone to spot. No-one will say no. I can't imagine someone replying "no I won't spot you". That guy doesn't exist, but if he does, he's 1 in a million. Worst thing that can happen is that someone says "going to help that skinny dude/fat guy". So what, this is the only way you'll get rid of your looks anyway. Let them remember how you look now, because you'll look different a few months from now if you stick with this. Make it a habit to talk to strangers. You don't have to become friends with them, just be friendly, propose to help first and they'll help you back too. The social skills you build at the gym will raise your confidence & help you in other areas like career, business, dating, etc. So just ask.

### **Can I replace Overhead Press with Seated Overhead Press?**

If you train at home and the ceiling is too low, [Overhead Press](#) outside. If outside doesn't work, do the [Seated Press](#). Know that standing Overhead Press is better since it works more muscles.

### **Can I replace Overhead Press with Bench Press? I want bigger chest muscles.**

You'll get chest development from the [Bench Press](#) & [Push-ups](#). No need to Bench 3x per week. Alternate Overhead Press & Bench Press each workout for a balanced shoulder girdle.

### **I have bad shoulders and can't do Overhead Press with a bar. I don't have a problem with dumbbells or machines. Can I substitute a machine press or seated DB press for Overhead Presses in StrongLifts 5x5?**

Pain is your body telling you something is wrong with your technique or body. Substituting the exercise doesn't fix the cause of the problem, it ignores it. Find the cause and address it. Read [how to Overhead Press](#), practice technique, tape yourself and check your technique. Check also the [Inside/out](#) DVD, it will help you with shoulder problems.



### **I hate body-weight exercises. Would StrongLifts 5x5 still be effective if I drop Chin-ups, Pull-ups & Push-ups?**

Yes, dropping Chin-ups, Pull-ups & Push-ups is no problem, it's all about the barbell lifts. But if you hate an exercise, it's probably because you suck at it. I recommend you always do the exercises you don't like.

### **I don't have a Pull-up Bar. How can I do Pull-ups & Chin-ups?**

Your Power Rack should have a Pull-up bar. If it doesn't or if you don't have a Power Rack:

- Put the bar high in your Power Rack and pull yourself up from there. Load the bar so it can't move. [Example video](#).
- Doorway Pull-up Bar. Check [this pull-up bar](#) for example.
- Hang at arms length to whatever surface available. Can be a door, can be the branch of a tree, can be a towel looped over something. Be creative.

### **Can I add exercises for my calves?**

Calves work hard during Deadlifts and contract isometrically during Overhead Press, Squats, Bench Press. No need to add exercises. Remember this is [strength training](#), not bodybuilding.

### **Can I add exercises for biceps & triceps development? I want big arms.**

StrongLifts 5x5 already includes exercises for biceps/triceps development. The following exercises work your arms:

- Biceps. Pull-ups, Chin-ups, Inverted Rows
- Triceps. Bench Press, Overhead Press, Push-ups

Add to this isometric contractions of both muscles during Squats & Deadlifts: your arms tense hard during heavy Squats & Deadlift, this works your arms indirectly.

Biceps & Triceps are small muscles which are already getting plenty of direct & indirect work on StrongLifts 5x5. Measure your arms when you start StrongLifts 5x5, and keep measuring every 2 weeks. Compare stats. Arm size will go up as you get stronger. If you're a skinny guy: make sure you eat a lot: read [how to gain weight for skinny guys](#).



## Changing The Exercise Order

Do not change the exercise order, it was chosen this way for a reason.

**Am I supposed to finish all 5 sets of Squats, then move to 5 sets of Overhead Press, to Deadlifts and finally Pull-ups? I've been doing 5 reps of Squats, 5 reps of Overhead Press, 5 reps Deadlifts and 5 Pull-ups. I did this sequence for 5 times, thinking that this is 5x5. Have I've been doing this wrong?**

Yes, you've been doing things wrong. You need to do 5x5 [Squats](#), then 5x5 [Overhead Press](#), then 1x5 [Deadlifts](#), then 3xF [Pull-ups/Chin-ups](#). This allows you to focus on 1 exercise. Do it like this from now on.

**Can I do the exercises in a different order each time I do StrongLifts 5x5?**

The exercise order isn't random, it was chosen for a reason.

- Squat first because it's 1) the most important exercise 2) the hardest exercise
- Overhead Press/[Bench Press](#) next to give your legs/lower back a break
- Then Deadlifts which work your lower back/legs again like Squats (or [Inverted Rows](#))
- Next [Push-ups](#)/Chin-ups/Pull-ups to work upper-body again
- And finally [Reverse Crunches](#) & [Prone Iso Bridges](#) for abs.

Don't change the order of exercises, it works best this way.

**Sometimes the Squat Rack is busy when I get to the gym. So I start with Bench Press or Overhead Press and do Squats next. What do you think of this?**

Get out of your comfort zone and ask the guy/girl working in the Squat Rack if you can do sets in between. They have to rest between sets anyway, do your sets while they rest.

Ask it even if they lift more than you: it's not a problem unless you think it's a problem. Load & unload the bar to make their life easier (you're asking to work in between after all).

No one will tell you you can't do your sets in between. By asking, they'll often speed up their training and by the time you've finished your warm-up sets they're done with their training.

**I prefer upper-/lower-body split routines. Can I split the 5x5?**

No. [StrongLifts 5x5](#) is a full body routine. If you prefer split routines, choose a split routine. The only thing you can do is do an AM/PM split, like this:

- AM: main exercises. [Squats](#), [Deadlifts](#), [Bench Press](#), [Overhead Press](#) & [Inverted Rows](#) in the morning, according to workout A/B.
- PM: assistance exercises. [Pull-ups](#), [Chin-ups](#), [Push-ups](#), [Reverse Crunches](#), [Prone Iso Bridges](#), again according to workout A/B.

## Dealing with Soreness

### **My muscles are sore. Should I wait until the soreness goes away before lifting again?**

The best solution for soreness is to train the muscle again. This flushes blood (nutrients) into your muscles, speeding up recovery. Do not take an extra day in between. Go to the gym as planned. The soreness will decrease as the workouts go by and should be gone by week 2-3.

Things you can do to make the soreness go away faster:

- Make sure you don't start too heavy. Best is to start with the empty bar as recommended.
- Massage. [Soft tissue work](#) using a [roam roller](#) helps to reduce soreness.
- Light physical activity. [Hip mobility](#) exercises or 5x10 body-weight Squats for example. Nothing intensive, just enough to flush blood into the muscles.
- Contrast showers. 30 seconds cold water, 30 seconds warm water, alternate for a few minutes.

### **I've been on [StrongLifts 5x5](#) for 3 weeks and still feel sore from the previous workout when it comes time to go again. Should I rest an extra day? Or lighten my loads? Or suck it up and push through and hope it gets better?**

Soreness will go away if you keep doing the program. You were probably not very active before starting StrongLifts 5x5. Or you started with weights too heavy for you to handle. Few tips:

- Take rest days. No running or boxing or whatever on your rest days. Let your body recover so it's ready for the next workout 2 days later.
- Eat plenty of healthy foods. Eat every 3 hours, protein with each meal, lots of fruits & veggies, carbs for energy, 1 gallon water per day for hydration, etc.
- Get enough sleep. Quality of sleep matters more than quantity. Make sure you get quality sleep, especially the night before going to the gym.

### **I'm NOT feeling sore. Am I doing something wrong?**

No. Soreness isn't important. What matters is adding weight on the bar. As long as you're getting stronger and technique is good, you're doing fine. Keep going.

### **I'm not getting a "pump". Am I doing something wrong?**

Pump isn't the goal. Adding weight to the bar is. As long as the weight on the bar goes up, you're doing fine, continue.

## Rest Weeks, Missed Workouts, Illness

**I've been on [StrongLifts 5x5](#) for 2 weeks. I've never expected my body to do this much and I think the progress is going well. But next month I need to go camping, so I'll have to skip StrongLifts 5x5 for about a week. Could you suggest how to keep the program on? Like bodyweight exercises while I'm at the camp?**

Take 1 week off and enjoy camping. As long as you train hard 45 weeks/year you'll be OK. Make sure you eat & sleep well during your off week. Some junk food & alcohol is OK, but don't drink gallons of alcohol daily without getting any food in & sleeping 2 hours/night. That will cause more strength/muscle loss & fat gains than 1 week off training.

Continue where you stopped when you get back as if you didn't take a break. 1 week off training won't influence your strength much. You should feel stronger when going back to the gym, assuming you ate/slept well during your week off.

**What do you do when you go back to training after missing 1 or 2 workouts due to bad cold. Do you start at 10% less than your last workout? I've managed Tuesday, won't train today got swollen glands. Hopefully be ok for Saturday.**

Swollen glands & colds aren't valid reasons to skip workouts. If you have the flu or injured yourself badly (like pain 7-10 on a scale from 1 to 10), then you can take some days off. Simple stuff like headaches, sinus infections, colds, whatever: go to the gym. Headaches always go away after a few sets. Other stuff: you usually feel better afterwards, worst case you'll get one of your best night sleeps. Make sure you eat lots of healthy food to speed up recovery from your illness.

If you want to wuss out and skip workouts, continue with the weight you stopped with when you go back. As long as the rest week didn't last more than 7 days and you ate & slept well, you won't have any strength loss and can continue where you stopped.

**I've been doing StrongLifts 5x5 for 4 months now and am [Squatting](#) almost 1.5x my body-weight for 5x5. The workouts are hard and I'd like to take 1 week off to get physical & mental rest. What's the best way to do this?**

Take 1 week active rest: 2 light workouts without assistance exercises. Use the same weight as in your previous week. Your active rest week will look like this:

- Monday: Squat 3x3, [Bench Press](#) 3x3, [Inverted Rows](#) 3x8
- Thursday: Squat 3x3 (same weight Monday), [Overhead press](#) 3x3, [Deadlift](#) 1x3

The following week, go back to the gym and do the usual StrongLifts 5x5 program, using the same weight as in your rest week.

## **Progressing: Adding Weight**

**When you say "increase the weight by 5lbs/2.5 kg" is that 5lbs/2.5kg total or on each side of the bar (10lbs/5kg total)?**

We're always talking about the total weight you lift: weight of the bar + weight of all plates on the bar. Increase the total weight you lift by 5lbs/2.5kg each workout, that is 2.5lbs/1.25kg per side.

**How should I increase the weight? Should I do all 5 sets with the same weight or should I increase the weight on each set?**

Use the same weight on all 5 sets. Increase the weight you lift by 5lbs/2.5kg each workout.

**Do I increase the weight on Squats each workout (3x times each week) or each time you perform that workout (e.g. Workout A and B is same then increase)?**

Add 5lbs/2.5kg each time you do Squats. So you're adding 15lbs/7,5kg per week. Make sure you use the [StrongLifts 5x5 spreadsheet](#), makes it easier to understand how StrongLifts 5x5 works.

**The gym I go to has no 2.5lbs/1.25 kg plates, which means I have to add 10lbs/5kg each workout. Any suggestions?**

10lbs/5kg increases are do-able on [Squats](#) & [Deadlifts](#) but doesn't work long on the [Bench Press](#) and should never be used on the [Overhead Press](#). After a while you'll need 2.5lbs/1.25kg plates, even on Squats & Deadlifts, to avoid stalling. Solutions:

- Washers. Glue washers with a 2" hole together to get 2.5lbs/1.25kg weight.
- Small chains. Buy 2 chains of 2.5lbs/1.25kg and loop them around the bar on each side.
- Fractional plates. Get fractional plates by [ATP](#) or [Iron Woody](#) and take them to the gym.

**Today I couldn't keep my back straight on Deadlifts. Should I lower the weight until I can do them with perfect form? Or should I keep the weight so that I'm balanced with respect to the other exercises & muscles I'm developing?**

Lower the weight by about 20% on Deadlifts only to practice technique. Build the weight up from there by adding 5lbs/2.5kg each workout. Never hold back on 1 exercise so other exercises can catch up in weight. The weight will auto-balance itself as you get stronger.

**Should I repeat a weight until I can do 5x5 or is 5,4,3,3,4 and the ability to increase next time considered progress?**

Thinking that you can lift a weight is good, but doesn't count. You must lift the weight for 5x5 to make it count. Try again the same weight next time. Get your 5x5 since you think you can do it, then add weight the next workout.

**When and how should I add weight on [Pull-ups](#), [Chin-ups](#), [Push-ups](#) & [Inverted Rows](#)?**

As soon as you can do 15 reps with good technique on your 1st set. Then start adding resistance and do 3 set of 5 reps, adding weight each workout.

### **How do I add weight on Pull-ups & Chin-ups?**

Some hold a dumbbell between their feet, but that doesn't work well when going heavy.

- Get a leather belt & chain. Loop it through the plate around your belt.
- Check how to [make your own belt](#).
- Or get [Ironmind's belt](#), it handles up to 1000lbs.

Start with 2.5lbs/1.25kg and do 3 sets of 5, adding 2.5lbs/1.25kg each workout.

### **How do I add weight on Push-ups?**

4 solutions:

- [Resistance bands](#). Get bands from [Iron Woody](#) and do Push-ups like in [this video](#).
- Wear a rucksack. Fill it with plates. Wear it high on your back, not on your lower back.
- Wrap chains around your body.
- Wear an [Xvest](#).

Start with 2.5lbs/1.25kg and do 3 sets of 5, adding 2.5lbs/1.25kg each workout. For the resistance band: start with the number #1 band for 3x10, switch to stronger bands as you get stronger.

### **How do I add weight on Inverted Rows?**

3 solutions:

- Wear a rucksack and fill it with plates.
- Wrap chains around your body.
- Wear an [Xvest](#).

Start with 2.5lbs/1.25kg and do 3 sets of 5, adding 2.5lbs/1.25kg each workout.

### **How do I make Prone Bridges harder?**

Prone bridges are harder than they look. Make sure you use correct technique. People often do them wrong. Once you can do 3x30sec with good technique, try one of these variations:

- 1 Leg Prone Bridges. One leg in the air, other leg on the floor. Harder to stabilize.
- Side Bridges. Prone bridges done on your side.
- Prone Plate Switches. Put 4 plates of 2.5lbs/1.25kg on 1 side, move them to the other side while holding the prone bridge position, then move them back. Check [this video](#).

### **How do I make Reverse Crunches harder?**

Same thing here: make sure you do them correctly first. Upper-leg can not go past perpendicular on the way down, keep feet close to your glutes and crunch up until your knees hit your forehead.

When you can do 3x12 with good technique, try this:

- Decrease The Weight. Start by holding to a 45lbs/20kg dumbbell or heavy medicine ball. Lower the weight as your abs get stronger.
- Remove The Weight. Reverse crunches without counter weight. Keep your hands behind your head and crunch your abs.
- Switch to Dragon Flags. Keep your hips & knees straight and crunch your abs. Check Dragon Door's [how to](#).

## Stalling: How to Deal with Plateaus

*"Before success comes in any man's life, he is sure to meet with temporary defeat, and, perhaps, some failure. When defeat overtakes a man, the easiest and most logical thing to do is to QUIT. That is exactly what the majority of men do. Persistence is key to success." - Napoleon Hill.*

### **1 step back, 2 steps forward.**

You can't add weight each workout forever. You'll miss reps after a while: first on the [Overhead Press](#), then on the [Bench Press](#), then on the [Squat](#) and then on [Deadlifts](#). By the time you stall on Squats, you'll most likely have stalled 2x on the Overhead Press.

Stalling is normal. Everyone stalls otherwise this would be too easy. Don't let it get in your head. Re-try up to 3 times with the same weight. If you still don't get 5x5, take 1 step back so you can take 2 steps forward.

- **Retry up to 3 times.** If you don't get 5x5, use the same weight the next workout that includes that exercise. Focus hard on technique, go as fast as you can on the way up, take more rest between sets, up to 5mins. Do your best. First time you stall, you'll probably get your 5x5 on your 2nd or 3rd attempt by focusing better and lifting faster.
- **Deload.** If you still don't have the 5x5 with that weight after 3 attempts, deload. Take 10% weight off for the exercise you stalled ONLY and progress from there. Don't change anything for the other exercises. So if you stall on your press at 88lbs/40kg only getting 5/5/5/3/2: take 10% off, which is 80lbs/35kg, do 5x5 the next workout and restart from there, adding weight 5lbs/2.5kg each workout.
- **Hard Deload.** Usually when you stall, you'll get this: 5/5/4/3/2 x 135lbs/60kg. Next workout: 5/5/5/4/3 x 135lbs/60kg. 3rd workout: 5/5/5/5/4 x 135lbs/60kg. Total reps you achieved increased, but you still didn't get all 5 reps in the last set. So you deload, take 10% weight off and progress from there. But sometimes you'll get something like this: 5/5/4/3/2 x 135lbs/60kg, next workout: 5/5/5/4/3 x 135lbs/60kg, 3rd workout: 5/5/4/2/1 x 135lbs/60kg. Now the total amount of achieved reps regresses as the workouts go by. That usually means fatigue is setting in. In that case, do a hard deload. Back off the weight by 20%, doing 3 sets of 3 reps for 1 week for that exercise only, then get back to 5x5 adding weight each workout the week after.

### **If I can't get 5x5 on an exercise, should I drop the weight so I can finish the 5x5?**

No. Never drop the weight. The only way to get stronger is to lift heavier weights. If you always lift lighter weights 1) your body will never have a reason to get stronger 2) you'll lose strength. Stick with the weight and do as many reps as you can on each set. Retry up to 3x if you stall and deload if necessary.

### **If I stall on 1 exercise, do I also deload on other exercises to keep exercises equal?**

No, don't hold back. Only deload on the exercise you stall. Keep adding weight on other exercises. Don't worry about strength balance between exercise: [StrongLifts 5x5](#) takes care of it. You'll stall first on the [Overhead Press](#), then on the [Bench Press](#), then on the [Squat](#) and then on [Deadlifts](#). Stalling on Overhead Press happens fast, it can happen during your 1st month.

**If I'm unable to complete 25 reps in 5 sets, can I use an extra set? If I miss 1 rep in set 4 and 2 reps in set 5, can I do 1 more set to complete 25 reps in total?**

No. Stick to 5 sets of 5 reps. If you miss reps in one or more sets, use the same weight next time you do that exercise, for up to 3 workouts. If you still don't have 5x5 with that same weight after 3 attempts, take 1 step back 2 step forward (deload).

**If form suffers on the last set of 5, should I count that as "missing a rep" or push forward? I can't help but cheat by pulling my knees in on my last few Squats.**

Failure to do 5x5 means technical failure: failure to do your exercise with correct technique. If you can't perform the 5x5 with good technique, you failed the set and have to apply the stalling methods: re-try for up to 3x, deload if needed.

If you don't consider this stalling and continue adding weight, the technique problems will get worse. Best is to address the problem now.

**I've been doing StrongLifts 5x5 for about 12 weeks now and am Squatting almost 1.5x my body-weight for 5x5 (250lbs for 5x5 at 180lbs bw). I'm happy with the progress so far and haven't stalled yet on Squats, but the workouts are getting hard. Sometimes I don't feel like going to the gym because I know the Squats are going to be hard. Any suggestion?**

2 solutions:

- Take a [rest week](#). Things should be easier the week after.
- Drop the volume from 5x5 to 3x5. So instead of doing 5x5 Squats, you do 3x5. Keep adding weight each workout, but only do 3x5. This will feel lighter coming from 5x5 and will give you physical/mental break. You should be able to continue adding weight on your Squat for a while like this. You can keep doing 5x5 on your other exercises or drop to 3x5 (1x5 on Deadlifts) there too if you want, depending on how you feel about it.

**I weigh 86kg. My 1RM Bench Press is 100kg. Other StrongLifts 5x5 exercises lag behind because I used to do bodybuilding routines with lots of chest work. I've been stuck on 5x5 85kg Bench Press for a while after a couple of deloads. Should I switch to an Intermediate routine just for Bench Press?**

Switch to 3x5 for Bench Press only. Keep doing 5x5 on other exercise so they catch up in weight.

**I'm struggling with the Press. I'm in week 9. Last successful Press was 5x5 30kg. I've tried 32.5kg 3x and failed each time (best was 5,5,5,5,1). I deloaded to 30kg, and then stepped to 32.5kg again but failed again. Perhaps I should have deloaded further? Stats: 80kg body-weight, Squat 60kg, Deadlift 65kg, Bench 47,5kg.**

The Overhead Press is tough, it's normal to stall on that exercise sooner. Things you can do:

- Take more rest between sets. Up to 5mins can make a difference.
- Go fast on the way up. Squeeze the bar hard, squeeze all muscles, explode up.
- Get stronger on your bench. Strong bench helps your Press. You probably can get your Bench to 70kg without problems at your body-weight, this will make your current press weight a piece of cake. Keep getting stronger on Deadlifts & Squats too, it improves stability during the Overhead Press.



## **Which program should I do after StrongLifts 5x5?**

### **When should I change from StrongLifts 5x5 to another strength training program?**

Beginner's programs like [StrongLifts 5x5](#) use workout to workout increases. Intermediate programs use weekly increases. Progress is therefore slower on an intermediate program compared to a beginner's program: you'll get stronger faster using workout to workout increases.

That's why I recommend you stick with StrongLifts 5x5 as long as you can. How long depends on your attitude, recovery, nutrition, sleep, age, body-weight, etc. Most people are ready to switch when they get to this:

- [Squat](#): 1.2-1.5x body-weight Squat for 5x5. 1x body-weight Squat is not enough, you can get stronger on StrongLifts 5x5. Some get to 1.5x without problems, some can't stretch it longer than 1.2-1.3x body-weight Squat for 5x5.
- Stalled & deloaded on Squats at least 2x. You'll be squatting 1.2-1.5x your body-weight by then. Once you stall more it's better to switch to an intermediate programs since you're no longer progressing fast anyway.
- Workouts get brutally hard. Physically & mentally it gets hard to go the gym. One solution is to switch from 5x5 to 3x5 to keep the progress for a while as explained in [this post](#).

Are you still making progress? Can you still add weight each workout on Squats? If the answer is yes, keep doing StrongLifts 5x5. Don't change what works. There's no magic training program. It's all about working hard & StrongLifts 5x5 will be hard work as the months go by.

### **Which program can I do after StrongLifts 5x5?**

Best is to keep things simple. 2 strength training programs you can try:

- [StrongLifts 5x5 Advanced](#). Heavy/medium/light template with 4 blocks high volume and 4 blocks low volume. This program can be done several times in a row, strength will go up each time you do the cycle.
- [Texas Method](#). Heavy/medium/light template that includes 5x5 across and 1x5. You can do this program for several weeks/months where you'll hit weekly personal records.



## **Nutrition on StrongLifts 5x5: What Should You Eat?**

### **8 Simple Nutrition Rules.**

Don't lose your time counting calories. Just eat plenty of healthy foods. You won't get fat eating healthy, especially when lifting weights 3x/week. Any weight gain will be muscle gain, your body fat will decrease (track body fat every 2 weeks using a [fat caliper](#) to get confirmation).

Hunger means you're not eating enough. If you're hungry: eat more healthy foods. Remember you need the food for energy to lift weights. Expect to eat more than before, but while losing fat, on [StrongLifts 5x5](#). Follow these 8 simple rules:

- Eat Breakfast. Get food from the 1st hour. Read how to [build the habit of eating breakfast](#) and try one of these [breakfast recipes](#).
- Eat Every 3 Hours. Speeds up metabolism & prevents relying on junk food because you ended up hungry. Spend 45mins in the morning or evening cooking your food for the day.
- Eat Protein with Each Meal. Protein has the highest [thermic effect](#) and helps building & maintaining muscle. Eat meat, poultry, fish, eggs, cottage cheese, [whey](#),... with each meal.
- Eat Fruits & Veggies with Each Meal. Apples, berries, carrots, oranges, bananas, spinach, broccoli, tomatoes, pumpkin, beans, ...
- Eat Carbs Post Workout Only. Most people don't do well on carbs. Eat quinoa, rice, pasta, oats, breads, ... post workout only.
- Eat Healthy Fats. Helps fat loss and prevents heart diseases & cancers. Eat olive oil, ground flax seeds, [fish oil](#), real butter, etc
- Drink Water. 2 cups with each meal. Aim for 1 US gallon water/day. Sip water during your workout. Try green tea & squeezed lemon in water.
- Eat Whole Foods 90% of The Time. [Supplements](#) make your life easier, but whole food is better. You can eat 4 junk meals/week if you eat 6x/day. Rest of the time: whole foods.

### **Example Diet.**

Here's how your diet looks like when you apply the above rules. This diet works great if you want to build muscle while losing fat.

- Breakfast: whole eggs with veggies, orange, green tea
- Snack: cottage cheese with apples
- Lunch: chicken, bok choy, tomato, chicory, apple, olive oil
- Snack: tuna, salad, tomato, bell pepper, pear, olive oil
- Post workout: ground round, rice, mixed veggies, banana
- Dinner: chicken, spinach, pasta, pineapple
- Pre-bed snack: cottage cheese, berries, ground flax seeds, fish oil

### **Diet for Skinny Guys.**

Best is to go higher on the carbs. Read [how to gain weight for skinny guys](#) for more info.

- Breakfast: 100g oats, 50g raisins, 1scoop whey
- Snack: 100g mixed nuts or 1 liter milk or tuna sandwich
- Lunch: 200g white pasta, bolognese sauce, parmesan cheese
- Snack: 100g mixed nuts or 1 liter milk or tuna sandwich
- Post workout shake: 1.5scoops whey, 60g oats, milk, banana
- Dinner: 200g white pasta, bolognese sauce, parmesan cheese
- Pre bed: cottage cheese, berries, flax seed, fish oil

### **Habits You Should Build.**

*"Failing to plan is planning to fail".* Usually if you can't stick to the above rules, it's because you lack preparation. 5 tips:

- Do the Groceries Weekly. List everything you need for next 7 days and go buy it so you don't end up without food.
- Prepare Your Food in Advance. Cook your meals for the day on waking up or the night before. Takes about 45mins.
- Take Food with You. To work, school, movies, whatever: take food with you. Gives you total control over what you eat.
- Eat before Going Out. Eat a big meal before you go to town, movies, clubs, etc. Prevents ending up hungry and eating junk food when away too many hours.

### **Read Also.**

More free articles about nutrition from StrongLifts.com:

- [20 Ways to Eat Healthy on a Budget](#)
- [10 Foods You Think Are Healthy, but Aren't](#)
- [10 Cheapest Sources of Protein](#)
- [20 Super Foods You need To Build Muscle & Lose Fat](#)
- [The Only Supplements You Need to Build Muscle & Lose Fat](#)

## Common Mistakes on StrongLifts 5x5

*"Every failure is a blessing in disguise, providing it teaches some needed lesson one could not have learned without it. Most so-called Failures are only temporary defeats." - Napoleon Hill*

The most common mistake is thinking that you know better. [StrongLifts 5x5](#) works. Check the [training logs](#) in [StrongLifts.com Forum](#) for proof. Don't change the program because you think it would work better your way. StrongLifts 5x5 only works if you follow it as laid out.

More common mistakes include:

- Adding Exercises. StrongLifts 5x5 includes exercises for each muscle. No need to add exercises for your arms, abs or calves. Focus on [Squats](#).
- Substituting Exercises. Don't use machines, dumbbells, kettlebells, pistols instead of Squats, etc. StrongLifts 5x5 only works with the prescribed barbell exercises.
- Changing Sets & Reps. 5x5 is key to strength, technique & adding weight each workout. 3x8 or 3x10 or whatever, doesn't work.
- Starting too Heavy. You'll get sore legs and stall too soon. Control your ego. Back off the weight and take your time.

There's nothing wrong with dumbbells or kettlebells or Pistols or 3x8. All of that is good IF you know how to use it. StrongLifts 5x5 uses barbells for 5x5. You want to use dumbbells/kettlebells: follow a program that includes those.

Read also: [do you make these 15 common mistakes on StrongLifts 5x5](#).

## **Setting Goals & Achieving Them**

### **Strength Goals.**

StrongLifts 5x5 spreadsheet includes strength goals based on your body-weight. [Click here](#) to download StrongLifts 5x5 spreadsheet. The file is 20kb and takes less than 1min to download. Unzip the file using [7-Zip](#) and view it with [OpenOffice](#) or [Microsoft Excel](#).

### **Body Fat Goals.**

Focus on fat loss even if weight loss is your goal. If you're over-weight, you're always too fat. Get a [fat caliper](#) and track your body fat every 2 weeks. Losing 3% fat loss per month is do-able and equals to more than 15% fat loss in 6 months. Body fat goals you can set:

- Males: 10-12% body fat
- Females: 15% body fat

To [lose fat](#): 1)get stronger 2)eat healthier 3)add cardio. Cardio is useless without [strength training](#) & healthy nutrition. Make sure you get stronger & eat healthier before even thinking about cardio. Get your [Squat](#) to 1x body-weight for 5x5, then 1.5x body-weight for 5x5 and eat healthy.

### **Body-weight Goals.**

This only applies if you need to [gain weight](#). If you're a big guy, focus on fat loss. Big guys often prefer to stay big once they've lowered their body fat.

For [skinny guys](#), a rule of thumb is to weigh at least 1kg for each cm above 1m. Anything less and you'll always look skinny. There's no upper limit, if you want to weigh more go for it. Examples of minimum goal weights:

- 1m70/5'5" at least 70kg/154lbs
- 1m75/5'7" at least 75kg/165lbs
- 1m80/5'9" at least 80kg/176lbs
- 1m85/6'1" at least 85kg/187lbs
- 1m90/6'3" at least 90kg/200lbs

### **Achieving Your Goals.**

*"The man who actually knows just what he wants in life has already gone a long way toward attaining it". - Napoleon Hill.*

- Define what your goal is. Bad example: get ripped & stronger. Good example: 10% body fat at 80kg body-weight and a 120kg Squat for 5x5.
- Set a deadline for your goal. Example: your next birthday.
- Make a plan on how you'll achieve your goal. Example: eat healthy food every 3 hours, take food with you to work, go to the gym 3x/week first thing coming back from work no matter what, etc.

Write your goal, deadline & plan on a piece of paper. Read it 2x/day aloud: once on waking up, once before going to sleep. Believe what you're saying while you're reading it. Doing this daily will brainwash you into the achievement of your goal. Only thing you need to do is believe that this works & read your statement 2x/day until you get what you want.

## **Recommended Strength Training & Weight Lifting Books**

List of books on [strength training](#), [weight lifting](#), nutrition, flexibility, injuries, mental training & personal development that are inline with StrongLifts.com philosophy. Some of the recommended products are DVDs.

### **Strength Training Books.**

- [Dinosaur Training](#) by Brook D. Kubik
- [Infinity Intensity](#) by Ross Enamait
- [Mastery of Hand Strength](#) by John Brookfield
- [Maximum Strength](#) by Eric Cressey
- [Of Stones & Strength](#) by Steve Jeck
- [Power to the People](#) by Pavel Tsatsouline
- [Practical Programming for Strength Training](#) by Rippetoe & Kilgore
- [Powerlifting Basics Texas-Style](#) by Paul Kelso
- [Rock Iron Steel](#) by Steve Justa
- [Science & Practice of Strength Training](#) by Vladimir M. Zatsiorsky
- [Strength Training for Young Athletes](#) by William J. Kraemer
- [Super Squats](#) by Randall J. Strossen
- [Supertraining](#) by Mel C. Siff
- [The Complete Keys to Progress](#) by John McCallum
- [The Naked Warrior](#) by Pavel Tsatsouline
- [The Strongest Shall Survive](#) by Bill Starr
- [Ultimate Off Season Training Manual](#) by Eric Cressey
- [Vertical Development Bible](#) by Kelly Bagget
- [Westside Seminar DVD](#) by EliteFTS

### **Weight Lifting Books.**

- [An Introduction to Olympic-Style Weightlifting](#) by John M. Cissik
- [Building the Efficient Athlete](#) by Eric Cressey & Mike Robertson
- [Essentials of Weightlifting & Strength Training](#) by Mohamed F. El-Hewie
- [From The Ground Up](#) by Dan John
- [Kelso's Shrug Book](#) By Paul Kelso
- [Optimal Muscle Training](#) by Ken Kinakin
- [Starting Strength](#) by Mark Rippetoe & Lon Kilgore
- [The Weightlifting Encyclopedia](#) by Arthur J. Drechsler

### **Nutrition Books.**

- [Anabolic Solution](#) by Mauro DiPasquale
- [Burn the Fat, Feed The Muscle](#) by Tom Venuto
- [Gourmet Nutrition](#) by John Berardi
- [Nutrient Timing](#) by John Ivy
- [Precision Nutrition](#) by John Berardi
- [Protein Book](#) by Lyle McDonald

- [Scrawny to Brawny](#) by John Berardi
- [The Metabolism Advantage](#) by Jon Berardi
- [TNT Diet](#) by Jeff Volek
- [Ultimate Diet](#) by Lyle McDonald

### **Flexibility/Injuries Books.**

- [Bulletproof Knees](#) by Mike Robertson
- [Diagnosis & Treatment of Movement Impairment Syndromes](#)
- [Inside/out](#) by Robertson & Hartman
- [Kinetic Anatomy](#) by Robert S. Behnke
- [Low back Disorders](#) by Stuart McGill
- [Magnificent Mobility](#) by Cressey & Robertson
- [Relax into Stretching](#) by Pavel Tsatsouline
- [Super Joints](#) by Pavel Tsatsouline
- [Trigger Point Therapy Workbook](#) by Clair Davies

### **Mental Training Books.**

- [Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway](#) by Susan Jeffers
- [Ironmind: Stronger Mind Stronger Bodies](#) by Randall J. Strossen
- [Mastery: Keys to Success & Long-Term Fulfillment](#) by George Leonard
- [Strong Enough?](#) by Mark Rippetoe
- [The Education of a Bodybuilder](#) by Arnold Schwarzenegger
- [The Stone Lifter](#) by Steve Jeck
- [Under The Bar](#) by Dave Tate

### **Personal Development Books.**

- [48 Law of Power](#) by Robert Greene
- [Attract Hotter Women](#) by Brent Smith
- [Awareness](#) by Anthony De Mello
- [Fight Club](#) by Chuck Palahniuk
- [How to Win Friends & Influence People](#) by Dale Carnegie
- [Law of Success](#) by Napoleon Hill
- [Meditations](#) by Marcus Aurelius
- [Man's Search for Meaning](#) by Victor Frankl
- [Mind-OS](#) by Doctor Paul
- [Psycho-cybernetics](#) by Maxwell Maltz
- [The Stellar Man](#) by John Baines
- [The Way of The Superior Man](#) by David Deida
- [Think & Grow Rich](#) by Napoleon Hill

## About Mehdi

**Mehdi** is author & founder of StrongLifts.com, a website with tens of thousands of daily visitors. His [StrongLifts 5x5](#) routine has helped people from all over the world to [build muscle](#) & [lose fat](#) through [strength training](#).

Mehdi got into strength training in 1997 doing [Push-ups](#) at home. He joined a gym in 1999 and started lifting weights doing bodybuilding routines. In 2004, he built a home gym. To his own amazement, his physique became better than ever when he began training for strength solely.

Mehdi has read hundreds of [books about strength training](#), weight lifting & nutrition and has spent hours on Internet forums learning from the best. People where he lives know he has been training for years. He gets questions about it all the time and has helped family, friends and co-workers build muscle, lose fat & get stronger.

One day Mehdi realized he could change people's life on a worldwide scale. May 1st 2007 StrongLifts.com goes online. Within a few months it establishes itself as the #1 strength training site in the world with [readers from more than 180 countries](#).



### Strength Stats.

- Deadlift: 170kg
- Box Squat: 137,5kg
- Box Front Squat: 130kg
- Bench Press: 100kg
- Overhead Press: 65kg

All done raw, without belt, at 75kg/165lbs body-weight. Body fat hovers around 10-12% year-round. Height: 1m73/5'8". Strength stats are still increasing. You can follow [Mehdi's training log](#) in Stronglifts.com Forum.

Mehdi is 28 and lives near Brussels in [Belgium](#). The name "[Mehdi](#)" is of arabic origin and pronounced "Médi".

## **More Free Content**

This eBook is a glimpse of what StrongLifts.com is about. For more free articles on how to build muscle & lose fat through strength training, go to <http://stronglifts.com>. The site is regularly updated with free articles on strength training, weight lifting, exercise technique, nutrition, diet, building muscle, losing fat, injuries, flexibility and much more.

There's also the [StrongLifts.com Forum](#) where more than 3500 members can help you with questions about building muscle & losing fat through strength training. I'm an active member on the forum. Registration is free. [Click here](#) to go to StrongLifts.com Forum.

If you liked this eBook and it really helped you out:

- Consider making a [donation](#). Any amount is appreciated.
- Get a [StrongLifts.com T-shirt, Tank Top or Hoodie](#).
- Send this eBook by email to one of your friends or colleagues
- Print this eBook and leave a copy at your gym
- Tell people about StrongLifts 5x5 & StrongLifts.com: on sites, forums, work, ...

Thanks again for reading this eBook and good luck with everything you want to accomplish. I used the word "luck", but you won't need luck. It's all about having a strong desire & being persistent. You can get whatever you want if you really want it and do what it takes. Never give up.

-Mehdi



"I have never met a truly strong person who didn't have self-respect. When I see guys working out for cosmetic reasons, I see vanity exposing them in the worst way, as cartoon characters, billboards for imbalance and insecurity. Strength reveals itself through character.

Muscle mass does not always equal strength. Strength is kindness and sensitivity. Strength is understanding that your power is both physical and emotional. That it comes from the body and the mind. And the heart.

The Iron is the best antidepressant I have ever found. There is no better way to fight weakness than with strength. Once the mind and body have been awakened to their true potential, it's impossible to turn back.

The Iron never lies to you. You can walk outside and listen to all kinds of talk, get told that you're a god or a total bastard. The Iron will always kick you the real deal. The Iron is the great reference point, the all-knowing perspective giver. Always there like a beacon in the pitch black.

I have found the Iron to be my greatest friend. It never freaks out on me, never runs. Friends may come and go. But two hundred pounds is always two hundred pounds."

- Henry Rollins