

THE HARDGAINER BODYBUILDING / WEIGHTLIFTING FAQ

by

Frank J. Kelly (kellyfj@cns.bu.edu)
Craig R. Sadler (zia%sunstroke@sdsu.edu)

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RECENT CHANGES:

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Date	Description
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12/13/96	Added in information on "The Insider's Tell-All Handbook on Weight-Training Technique"
4/8/97	Grammatical Errors Fixed
4/24/97	Prices changed for Hardgainer, Brawn etc. to 1997 prices.
6/30/97	More Typographical/Grammatical Errors Fixed - Thanks to Mark Odell!
7/17/97	Yet More Typographical/Grammatical Errors Fixed by Mark
3/11/98	Added in information from PlateMate MICROLOADS (Sec. 5.4)
	and also Pullum Sports info.
4/21/98	Added small plates information from Nancy Strasser (Sec. 5.5)
	Updated addresses and Phone numbers in Sec. 5.5
	Added "Where can I find this FAQ" section.
11/20/98	Added Piedmont Design Associates Web site (Sec. 5.4)
11/29/99	Removed pricing information.

DISCLAIMER:

The authors of this FAQ have no qualifications in Sports Medicine, only years of working out, and trying different formulas. This is the general formula they advocate (low sets, high intensity). It is NOT a magic formula but it does work. The advice given here is based on, and to a degree excerpted from, that given in the book "Brawn" and the bi-monthly magazine HARDGAINER, both created by Stuart McRobert. The technique tips are only that: TIPS. They are not to be interpreted as guides to how to perform those exercises, just as reminders of what aspects to focus on. Many books are available which cover exercise technique much better. "The Insider's Tell-All Handbook on Weight-Training Technique" by Stuart McRobert (see Section 5.5.3) is one such book. Naturally when doing anything described here, caveat emptor (let the buyer beware;

i.e. be careful).

WHERE CAN I FIND THIS FAQ?

This FAQ is mailed every month to the following Newsgroups:

alt.sport.weightlifting
misc.fitness.weights

alt.answers
misc.answers
news.answers

It can also be FTP'd from rtfm.mit.edu.

On the Web the ONLY site that the authors guarantee to be up to date is:
<http://cns-web.bu.edu/pub/kellyfj/hgfaq.txt>

If none of these work only then e-mail : kellyfj@cns.bu.edu

(1) Hardgainers

1.1 What is a "hardgainer"?

A Hardgainer is a genetically-typical person (if there is such a thing). To be more specific he/she is born with no special genetic 'gifts' which enable them to pack on muscle mass quickly. Such people cannot gain lots of strength using

VOLUME

training, but a hardgainer can make impressive gains using less frequent workouts with considerably less volume.

Estimates of the percentage of the population who are "hardgainers" range from 60% (Steve Holman, in his book "The Home Gym Handbook" from Ironman Publications) to 95% (Some writers in HARDGAINER magazine). The authors of this FAQ believe this percentage to be at least 85%. On this percentage, maybe we should call ourselves NORMALgainers? :-)

We grant that some people (the lucky few?) can make great gains training 4-6 days per week using split routines and lots of hours in the gym as the pros do. However these people are in the minority, and hardgainers who use these routines will only overtrain, _perhaps_ making decent gains at first, but quickly reaching a frustrating plateau.

1.2 Am I a hardgainer?

This is a tough question. Some decisions on "hardgainer-ness" depend on physical measurements such as wrist/ankle-size etc.

each But if you find it impossible to add some poundage regularly to
of your exercises every week or two using a
"conventional/popular"
training program (one that has you training with the weights
more than three days a week), then it is highly likely that you are
overtraining.
As a hard gainer, your tolerance to exercise is much less than
that of an easy gainer, so what the latter can gain on will just wear
you down and out. For sure you will be much better off doing fewer
exercises and sets and training less often.

The So the question of being a hardgainer is very much a side issue.
better core question is whether the "Hardgainer Method" would work
in than current "popular" methods. The answer is an emphatic YES,
guidelines a large majority of cases; especially if you follow the
laid out below as much as you can.

1.3 What is overtraining / How do I know if I am overtraining?

to Overtraining occurs when you train your body beyond its ability
recover (its so-called recovery-ability). If your body cannot
recover from the last workout then it will be unable to adapt and unable
to grow.

Symptoms of overtraining include:

- (i) A higher-than-normal resting pulse
- (ii) Illnesses become more frequent and last longer than usual
- (iii) Muscle spasms while resting e.g. eyelid twitch etc.
- (iv) Shaky hands
- (v) Loss of Sleep
- (vi) Loss of appetite
- (vii) Unexpected and unexplained fatigue
- (viii) Unintended weight loss
- and MOST IMPORTANT OF ALL --
- (ix) very slow or non-existent gains in exercise poundages in

the gym; i.e. static poundages or poundages that are only a few
pounds more than you were using months ago. In extreme cases,
overtraining can lead to a loss of strength and the use of reduced
poundages.

Solution: If you are overtraining on your current routine, then
cut back on workout-days per week, and exercises and number of

6-8 sets used. Best of all give "The Hardgainer Method" a shot for weeks just to see what you are missing. In most cases the person who tries this for the first time will experience a rapid gain in strength and muscle mass, along with an increase in energy. The method is outlined below in Section 2.

1.4 What kind of results/gains can a Hardgainer expect?

A common experience when an overtrained person switches to a hardgainer-style workout, is for rapid gains initially (4-8 weeks). This would mean being able to add 5-10 lbs on the 'big basic' exercises (Squat, Deadlift, Rows, Bench Press etc.) each week, along with 2-5lb increases on the smaller exercises such as the Arm Curl etc.

After this period the gains slow down to 1-2lbs poundage increase each week for a further 4-8 weeks, after which the gains stop. It is here where we apply 'intensity cycling' (see Section 3). Basically this involves working on lighter weights (80-95% of your best poundages) for 3-4 weeks without going to failure so as to allow your body to recover. It also prepares your body for further gains of 2-5lbs each week in the next cycle.

Writers for the magazine HARDGAINER (such as Stuart McRobert) believe that an advanced hardgainer can reach (and surpass) 300lbs in the bench, 400lbs in the Squat, and 500lbs in the classic style deadlift a.k.a the bent-legged deadlift, at LEAST for single reps. This is called the 300-400-500 level. Many of the writers for HARDGAINER (commonly abbreviated to just HG) are much stronger than this level, for example in 1992 Stuart McRobert deadlifted 400lbs for 20 reps!

However, these goals are NOT unconditional: they are based upon an advanced hardgainer, who did not start too late in life and who has no serious structural or injury limitation, who trains diligently and very seriously for several years.

In other words, being a hardgainer does not mean being unable to get extraordinarily strong; it just means having to work out

in a different way to get to this level.

Since Frank started doing Hardgainer-style workouts over two years ago

here's the progress he made:

	March 92	February 95
Deadlift	100x10	307x15/335x8
SL Deadlift	50x10	243x9
Shoulder Press	77x8	143x6/90x20/160x1
Pulldowns	110x8	198x8/220x3
Leg Press	260x10	400x35
Squat	100x10	209x15 (I only began to do this lift again in the last year)

BTW, by March 92 he had already done two years of more-conventional workouts, so he was no beginner and he had used up all of his "beginner-gains".

1.5 What costs are involved?

With the hardgainer method, there are
NO supplements you have to buy/take
NO special pieces of equipment to buy
NO gimmicks

You don't even have to subscribe to HARDGAINER magazine for any extra 'secrets'. The program is simple!

In fact you don't have to spend ONE \$. ALL you need is a barbell, weights to put on it, and some effort (in the gym).

BUT (there's always a but) you won't get to the 300-400-500 level

in weeks or months. It will take years of hard work on the big basic exercises with lots of cycles and small poundage increments to your exercises to get there.

It's not easy (it takes effort in the gym, and patience); it's not advertised with a lot of snazzy over-the-top claims

like Cybergenics[tm] is; and there are no drug-supported bodies promoting it like there are for some other products in the field (though they don't mention their drug use), but the hardgainer method is cheap and very simple. It works for lots of people to get them VERY strong and well-built without having to despair and resort to "chemical help".

(2) The Hardgainer Method of training

2.1 What exercises should I do?

The emphasis on "balance", "proportion", and "symmetry" for the beginning bodybuilder or hardgainer almost always results

in less than satisfactory gains being made. The goal ought to be safely building some muscle mass; then when one is able to move some impressive weight, one can work on the sculpting and detailing that comes from doing isolation exercises. To build some size and strength one should work hard over a period of years on *basic compound exercises*.

Though the basic compound exercises are certainly the emphasis of this program, there can be additions of small-muscle exercises like barbell curls and calf raises. Injury-preventing exercises for the rotator cuff as well as grip work can also be valuable, even necessary as one surpasses 200 Lbs in the Bench Press and 300 Lbs in the deadlift for more than 10-15 reps.

2.2.1 What are the basic movements?

The basic movements are:

- Squats
- Deadlifts
- Bench Presses
- Overhead Presses
- Rows and Pull-Ups
- Bar Dips

on (Each exercise must be performed with good biomechanics and not an injured or otherwise structurally-limited body.)

Obviously, there are many variations on the above exercises; they can and should be used for variety from cycle to cycle. For example, one cycle could be centered on the back squat while utilizing incline bench presses. The next cycle could be based on the classic deadlift and use the regular bench press. Weighted dips can substitute for close-grip bench presses, and supinated pull-ups could substitute for biceps curls and pull-downs.

There is no rule to have to use barbells or machines: Use what works; i.e. it adds muscle and helps you get stronger.

Other exercises to take beyond one's limits by progressive poundage are: Weighted Abdominal work with an emphasis on spinal flexion instead of hip flexion, Bent-over Rows, One Arm Dumbbell Rows, Leg Presses and Standing Calf Raises, and Medium or Parallel Grip Pull-Downs.

If you have a movement that you like, and get results from, do it, but do it within the hardgainer philosophy of fewer sets, fewer

exercises, and fewer workouts with intense effort and progressive poundage.

2.2.2 What movements can be ignored and why?

The following movements can be ignored for the following reasons:

EXERCISE: The Good Morning Exercise

REASON:

Given the Deadlift, Stiff Legged Deadlift and hyperextension exercises,

which all hit the lower back very effectively when done safely, this exercise can be left from your schedule because it is hard to do and can be very strenuous on the lower back, in a dangerous manner. With the DL and SLD, when failure is reached it is easy to place the bar on the ground and stop

the

set whereas in the 'good morning' a lot of harmful stress can be placed on the neck and lumbar region.

EXERCISE: Rear deltoid

REASON: As Dr. Ken E. Leistner says: you can concentrate on your rear delt when you are 220lbs of rock-hard muscle. Before that you should concentrate on increasing your overall deltoid size using presses, benches, and back exercises such as the row which involve the rear deltoid in order to bring the arm back.

EXERCISE: Pulldowns with palms facing away (as opposed to the classic chinning grip with palms toward you).

REASON: In this grip, the biceps are placed in a weak position where full flexion cannot be achieved; this will translate to being able to use less weight and thus not being able to hit the back as heavy and hard. The traditional grip provides a more efficient and effective method.

EXERCISE: Upright Rows

REASON: With very heavy weights this exercise can easily hurt your shoulders and/or elbows. The shrug is a much more effective and safer way to hit the traps.

Other exercises which can be avoided since they are not the large compound movements suggested by the Hardgainer method of training include chest flyes, leg extensions, leg curls, lateral shoulder raises etc.

2.3.1 How often should I work out?

Training each lift in the all-out effort that comes at the end of a cycle would very quickly result in overtraining for most normal gainers if it were attempted three times a week. Training each movement once a week while dividing all the exercises into three separate workouts can be productive, but better still

would

several be to divide all movements into two separate workouts with
at days for recovery in-between. For the confirmed hardgainer, or
the end of a heavy Deadlift or Squat cycle, working an exercise
twice in three weeks may be required for full recovery.

Muscles grow in-between workouts after being stimulated by a
specific exercise. What good does it do to perform an exercise
when not fully recovered from a previous session? Showing up in
the gym because one has become "habituated" to bodybuilding has to
be completely thrown out.

A good rule of thumb for the hardgainer is never to train while
still feeling systemically tired. Have one day completely free of
systemic fatigue before training again. While it is still
possible to have some local soreness from, say, Monday's Squat workout, you
may be systemically fine and raring to go for Friday's deadlift
session.

"When in doubt do less, not more."

.2 How many sets and reps are required?

The answer to this question can vary from person to person and
certainly changes within the span of a cycle. First, if you know
that you benefit from high reps, low reps, or medium reps, use
what works, but cut your total workload per session to no more than
10 total work (heavy) sets if you use low to medium reps. Do 8 or
fewer work sets if you use high reps. All of this also depends
on how heavy (intense) the work is. The more intense the workout,
the fewer sets that can be done productively.

When in doubt do less, not more

There are certain exercises that seem to work best when
performed with high reps; the Squat and the Deadlift fall in this category
with hardgainers getting excellent results with 15 to 20 reps.

Training these two "giant" movements with high reps allows one safely to
correct problems with form early in a cycle that might occur,
without risking life and limb under a super-heavy bar. However, others
prefer low-rep work, not only because it can be easier to do,
but

because it can be darn effective in its own right.

But There is no rule on the exact number of sets and reps to use.
try for low volume (10-30 work sets A WEEK) over a few (4-8 exercises).

2.4 What equipment is required?

With just a barbell, a bench, a safety stand for squatting and an overhead bar for pull-ups, a hardgainer can get great results.

Other equipment, like a good leg press machine or even Nautilus equipment, can be used for compound movements as long as progressive poundage and abbreviated routines are adhered to. At least one noted hardgainer trains the squat with no stand at all; he cleans and presses the bar to start, then presses it again after completing 15-20 slow reps!

2.5 What does an example Hardgainer workout look like?

The 'classic' hardgainer workout is a full-body workout done at most twice a week, and in some cases once every 4-5 days. The routine might look something like this:

10-20 minute whole body warmup used beforehand to get the body thoroughly warmed-up (use stationary bike or calisthenics etc.).

Squat	2x20	(or Deadlift(DL))
Stiff Leg DL	1x10	(don't do this if doing DL)
Bench Press	2x6	(or Dumbbell press / dips)
Dumbbell Rows	2x8	(or barbell rows/chins etc.)
Shoulder Press	1x6	(or Dumbbell Press etc.)
Calf Raises	1x15	
Arm Curl	1x6	

Only the WORK sets are shown. 1-3 warmup sets are used. Abs are worked for 1-2 sets to absolute failure before & after the workout.

Doing a whole-body routine infrequently, yields the most recovery time.

Another abbreviated routine might look like the following:

Mon		Wed		Fri
deadlift 5 x 6		lat pull-downs 5 x 6		leg press
1x8,2x12				
	incline bench press 5 x 6	barbell curls 3 x 6		weighted dips
3x6				
	weighted ab work 3 x 12	calf work 3 x 15		shoulder press
5x6				
		side bends 3 x 12		calf 3x20

Here warmup sets are shown as the first 2 sets of a 5 set exercise and the first set in a 3 set exercise. As the weights increase

through the cycle, two things can be done to optimize the workload to prevent overtraining. The first is to drop 1-3 sets from each exercise, and the second is to eliminate the Wed workout and split its exercises between the other days. Finally one might eliminate all but the main exercise (deadlift in this case) and one or two others in order to squeeze an extra 5-10 pound increase for the focus lift out of the cycle.

A very abbreviated routine might look like this:
(only work sets shown, 1-2 warmups done prior to these)

thighs)	Day 1: Squat	1x15 (affects whole body,
delts)	Weighted Pressups	1x6 (Triceps, Pecs, front-
	Arm Curl	1x6 (isolation for biceps)
	Day 2: Deadlift	1x15 (whole body, back)
	Pulldowns to Front	1x15 (upper back)
	Shoulder Press	1x6 (delts, triceps)

One or two more warmup sets might be added to each exercise above especially near the end of a cycle as the weights are getting very heavy. Though this may seem extreme, a cycle like this could easily result in a 25-30 lb increase in the poundage of the two focus lifts over the one's previous max by the end of a 12 week cycle. This type of schedule is also appropriate for the ultra-hardgainer who must limit total sets to the minimum.

There are many exercise routines in "Brawn", some with as many as 7 exercises per workout. Some routines in "Brawn" are based on doing ONE exercise in a workout! A maximum of 15 total sets early- to mid-cycle, and around 8 total sets at the end of a cycle constitute the abbreviated routine. The fewer sets you do, the more weight you'll be able to lift, and the better you'll respond. If you get into an overtrained state, you are not responding (growing) optimally and you may very well regress!

2.6 What must hardgainers focus on and what can they ignore?

The emphasis is progressive poundage in basic exercises, cycling of intensity, good exercise form, and complete recovery from the

previous workout before lifting again.

Progressive poundage means adding an appropriate weight to the bar each week. An appropriate weight may be less than the smallest plate that your gym makes available. Craig's whole body can adapt to 5lbs per week for most of the cycle, while his biceps can handle 2.5lbs per week only early in the cycle; later the appropriate weight increment for curls is 1 lb or less per week. The less you add, the longer you'll keep adding, whilst maintaining good form.

REP SPEED:

Rep-speed arguments are a waste of time. As long as the weight is not bounced around, and is in full control, with very little abuse of momentum, then use whatever rep speed feels comfortable and then do reps until your eyes pop out. Basically the authors believe that explosive training is not advisable, however super-slow training may hold some benefits for some people (but not the majority).

BREATHING:

Make sure to breathe as often as you need to: breathe in on the easy part, out on the part that requires most effort. You may take several breaths between reps if required.

(3) Intensity Cycling

3.1 What is Intensity Cycling?

Intensity cycling basically means 'going easy' on the weights for a few weeks (3-5 weeks) so as to allow your body some time to get ready for more growth in the future (for a period of 6-12+ weeks).

Normally what happens when a person starts weight training is that there is an initial period of growth (can be rapid in some cases) which gradually slows down to a point where you can't add 1-2lbs on your exercises each week. At this stage, your body (and your mind) could use a short break from the brutal hard work. This recovery period normally last 3 weeks or more. Of course, you still use weights, but you use less weight and don't go to failure. Gradually you build back up to your maximums from the last cycle.

And then you'll find (if you give yourself enough recovery weeks) that you can now add a good bit of weight to the bar each week (5lbs or more on the big basics, 2lbs or more on the smaller ones) to reach new personal bests.

Of course this cycle too will eventually stop, when the gains stop. Then it's time to begin another cycle by doing your 3+ weeks recovery. Using this method you can make consistent gains bit by bit, week by week, which will total up to big gains in a relatively short period.

Bear in mind that 'intensity cycling' is different from 'periodization' where you start a routine with relatively-high reps (e.g. 12 reps) and after a period of weeks drop the reps by a third, then another third over another few weeks: the idea being to 'shock' the muscle by varying the reps and weight used. 'Intensity cycling' stays with the same rep scheme throughout the cycle, and also for repeated cycles.

The trouble with training flat-out all the time, is that it always ends up in overtraining.

3.2.1 Why do athletes cycle intensity?

Today, most professional athletes cycle their intensity. Over the past few years, techniques have been found to better the athlete's performance, however they take a much higher toll on the body. The athlete must also reach PEAK fitness and strength at the right time. For both of these reasons, athletes will cycle the intensity of their exercise routine.

.2 Why MUST hardgainers cycle intensity?

Hardgainers don't have the genetic gifts that easy gainers do. Even if they did they should include cycling for spurring extra gains when plateaus/stagnation set in. Remember, once you have overtrained, you can't bully your way out of it. The only solution is to drop your intensity temporarily. Cycling is a planned and organized effort to arrange irregular progress into a regular progression of 'ups' and 'downs', with each new 'up' or 'down'

being a little higher than the previous one. After a cycle (of 12-20 weeks) one should look at having gained 15-20 pounds on the bench press, 20-30 pounds on the squat and Deadlift. Maintaining this progress for 12-18 months will give you tremendous gains.

3.3 How do I put a cycle together?

The easiest way to describe a cycle is to go through an example. Say your recent best barbell curl was 100x6 and your best squat 280x20. Now you REALLY want to get to 110x6 on the curl and 300x20 in the Squat. You are feeling burned-out lately as the hard part of your cycle has been going on for some time now, and the gains have stopped. If you are foolish you might try adding a 'shock' 5lbs to the bar each week to get your goals. But being that burned out, and close to overtraining, all that will happen is the 105lb curl will feel way heavier than 100 and you won't get 5 reps -- never mind 6.

Don't expect to get to 110lbs in a month -- a few months is what you need. The following cycle considers only the first work set of the barbell curl and squat, each done ONE day a week. (There are other exercises in the cycle, but they are left out for clarity.) The one to two warmup sets are also omitted from the description. One to two work sets are all you need, starting with three in the early stage of the cycle and dropping to two and then to one as the cycle reaches its hardest. You must NEVER train more frequently than you can cope with as far as your energy level and recovery-ability are concerned. IF IN DOUBT TRAIN WITH LESS VOLUME AND WITH LESS FREQUENCY.

So here we go, how does the cycle begin:

First thing is to get well-rested; this means 7-10 days off, no weight training and no aerobics. This will give your body a good deal of the time it takes to recover after burning out/overtraining. Then drop your poundages to 75-85% of maximum and build up from there slowly.

ARM CURL

SQUAT

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Week 1:	OFF	OFF
Week 2:	85x6	235x20
Week 3:	90x6	245x20
Week 4:	95x6	255x20
Week 5:	100x6	265x20
Week 6:	102x6	270x20
Week 7:	104x6	275x20
Week 8:	106x6	280x20
Week 9:	107x6	285x20
Week 10:	108x6	292x20
Week 11:	109x6	294x20
Week 12:	110x6	296x20
Week 13:	110.5x6	298x20
Week 14:	111.0x6	300.0x20
Week 15:	111.5x6	301.5x20
Week 16:	112.0x6	303.0x20
Week 17:	112.5x6	304.5x20
Week 19:	112.5x6	306.0x20

In the first workout, we cut back to 85% poundages for the same reps. Each week we add a little weight to the bar to get back to our previous poundages, and then we add some more weight each week which become personal bests. Note that the Squat takes a lot longer to get back to 100% than the arm curl. This is because the Squat is a very brutal exercise to do and in the recovery phase adding 20lbs each week (which may only constitute 5-10%) has too much of an impact on recovery. If the poundages in the Squat are less, then a shorter build-up period of 4-6 weeks may be allowed, but the bigger your poundages are, the more recovery time your body needs.

- A Mini-Cycle

Cycles need not be very long. A short-but-successful mini-cycle will last for 6-8 workouts. A sticking point is the stimulus for a new cycle. Take an EXTRA 4-6 days rest between your workouts before starting this new mini-cycle. Cut back all poundages to 85%. The first two workouts (85% and 90%) will be comfortable, as you stay with your usual reps but with less poundage. The next workout at 95% will be more demanding. Then comes 97 1/2%, and then the 100% workout that you ended your previous cycle on. This cycle will be testing but, so long as you've eaten and rested adequately between

workouts, it will be successful. Next comes a new personal best, by adding 2-5lbs to all your exercises. Now you might want to add an extra rest day between workouts to allow more recovery time. This continues until you are stuck at the same poundage for the same reps for two weeks in a row, then it's time to start another cycle.

3.4 What happens to a cycle when I get sick?

Most people get sick at some stage during the year and whether it be a cold or flu, or worse, DO NOT work out while you are sick. For your own sake (your illness will get worse if your body can't pool its resources to fight it if it's trying to recover from heavy squatting) and for others' (passing illnesses on in the gym is a major NO-NO for obvious reasons).

But say you are only sick for 1-2 days, then what do you do? It's a good idea to start with 5-7 days of complete rest to ensure the illness is really gone. Then take 2 weeks to get back to your before-illness poundages (one week at 90% and one at 95%).

If you are sick for longer, or you feel very drained or tired after your illness, then take 7-10 days off, and start your cycle over again. If you made any gains, then you have new 'easy' percentages to calculate. If you were still in the 'recovery' phase, then stay with the same percentages when you start over.

3.5 What are the keys to a cycle?

Be aware of the big misuses of cycling. First and foremost, don't reduce the number of easy workouts so you can get back into the hard sessions. This happens a lot because people are too greedy, but it only brings the cycle to a sudden halt with no gains to show for it. A 40:60 split between comfortable and hard workouts is a sound place to start. Adding too much poundage or going for too many reps (even with reduced poundage) will bring this cycle to a halt too. At the start of a cycle you should plan your 'new-ground' increases somewhat.

e.g., I'll add 5lbs a week to my squat for 4 weeks, keeping my style good. Then what usually happens is the gains slow down, so I'll

drop to 2lb a week increases for 4-5 more weeks, and then 1lb increases for 2 more weeks; it's then I usually have to end the cycle. That will give me almost 30 lbs on my squat in 10 weeks (using a 14-16 week) cycle.

Obviously, you will have to chop and change this somewhat as you can never foresee every eventuality. Try to reach stay with the program as much as possible. But when you feel you can't add 5lbs next workout, then DON'T. Always make sure you can your target reps! Don't be greedy by trying to add 5lbs when you really handle 2lbs. You'll only end up with poor style (as the extra 5lbs will feel like a ton), giving you pseudo-strength and worst of all you could possibly get an injury. Stay with increases you can handle. 2lbs a week may not seem like much but with 26 such increases in the year (with 26 recovery weeks), you will add 52lbs to an exercise!

Cycling of intensity isn't infallible, as it depends on many variables. No cycling system works if you do too much work, do it too frequently, and rep-out to your max too early in the cycle. You need to experiment. You will make mistakes, but you must learn from them and not repeat them. Remember: do whatever gives you the most muscle gains in the least time.

**** Experiment a bit to find what's best. ****

The two biggest variables involved are rest and nutrition. In the recovery phase, you can get by with two workouts every seven days. But when you reach the growing phase your body will need some more time to grow and adapt. In the first two to three weeks you can stay at two whole-body workouts per week, but then as you lose some momentum, you should add an extra day of recovery time, working out twice every 8-9 days. Or you could divide up the whole-body program whereby each exercise is trained only half once a week with half the exercises in one session and the other half on the other training day. Also try to make sure that you get enough sleep. In the growing phase simply getting an extra hour's sleep every night can have a great impact on how long

this growth phase lasts.

Nutrition is also very important. You won't become really big and really strong when you have cola and fries at every meal! You must eat nutritious foods. By now most people know what these are: Bread, potatoes, lean-meat (fish, chicken) non-fat fat yoghurt etc. etc. Try to keep out as much junk-food as possible. For drinks, MILK is the best. It has lots of vitamins in it, and is probably the best 'supplement' available. It's cheap and should be drunk in fair quantities. Hardgainers should think about drinking a litre of milk every day. Full milk would be ideal, but as always keep an eye on your waistline, and balance muscle gains against some small 'acceptable' fat gains. Low-fat (1% or 2%) or non-fat may be more acceptable to those highly-conscious of what they consume. Note also, that milk is only good if it agrees with the consumer. There are products on sale which can help if you have trouble digesting milk (which is most easily handled if drunk by itself when the stomach is empty).

3.6 Will I lose muscle mass and strength if I cycle my intensity?

The answer is NO. Many people will want to nay-say this, but one author has used cycling for over two years and can honestly say he has never lost any strength during the recovery phase of any cycle as is shown by good, consistent gains in the corresponding growing phase: in one cycle adding 85lbs to the stiff-legged deadlift (to go from 108lbsx10 to 193lbs x10) over a period of 12 weeks. The build-up phase of cycling is short enough, but gives enough stimulation to keep your muscle from 'forgetting' what the 100% feels like.

3.7 Exercise X is gaining like a demon, but exercise Y has stopped. Should I stop my cycle?

No. If one exercise is gaining a lot, and another is not, then stay with the cycle. Try to add 11b to the 'sticking' exercise, or even 0.5lbs each week (possibly do the 'sticking' exercise once every two weeks to allow any other faster-

gaining exercise to keep on gaining). Pump every cycle for as much gain as you can. In the end you may only be able to add 0.5-1.0 lbs a week but keep it up and when these gains stop too THEN start over.

3.8 Specialization Routines

Many of us have a weak bodypart or set of muscles we would like to improve upon. However, until one is 80% of the way to becoming advanced (the 300-400-500 level), you should concentrate on the Squat, Deadlift, and Bench/Dip poundages.

If, after that stage, you still want to specialize, the key is to decrease work on other exercises -- still going to failure but using fewer sets and reps. Make the weak area the first muscle you hit in a workout and try 2-3 exercises instead of just 1 but keep the volume low. Concentrate on increasing weight/reps, but don't neglect the squat/deadlift.

(4) Squatting and the Deadlift

4.0 A word of warning.

If you have had a serious back injury, get the clearance of a sports-oriented chiropractor first before working these lifts. Even if you have had any minor back injuries, get a chiropractor's clearance.

NOTE: For many hardgainers, working the squat and the classic deadlift may be too hard on the lower back. Try doing the Squat and the Stiff-legged deadlift OR the classic Deadlift and use the (horizontal) leg press. Beginners should not try the Stiff legged Deadlift until they have done at least 6 months of weight-lifting including the classic DL as the SLD can be dangerous for the newcomer if not done right. The vertical leg-press is not recommended due to shearing forces involved and the problems it sometimes causes in the lower back.

4.1 Why do I have to use the Squat and/or the Deadlift?

Well you don't HAVE to use the Squat or Deadlift. That is unless you want to get as big as possible as quickly as possible. These exercises are the toughest to do, because you can really move a lot of weight in them for a lot of reps. This is because they use the strongest muscle complexes in the body: thighs, gluteals, back structure where 70% of your muscle mass resides. Naturally by inspiring gains here, a 'spill-over' will

occur in the other exercises such as the bench press, arm curl etc.

Without these exercises, gains will be possible but not near half as quickly as they will be with them. Some people will shy away from them because of the intensity of effort required (they will also be some of the weaker members in the gym compared with those who use the Squat and DL for a couple of intense work sets during the week). Next time you are in the gym see who does the Squat and the Deadlift(DL) and see who doesn't, then compare muscle mass! :-)

4.2 How do I Squat?

The key to Squatting is Form. If your form is great then this movement will have only benefits. If your form is poor then you will have serious injuries.

The key to getting good form in the squat relies on three things:

(i) Stretching. This will get you limber enough to get the correct form during the movement. The stretching that needs to be done is for

- Calves (so no heel support is needed)
- Hamstrings & Lower Back (to help keep back straight)
- Groin (to help keep a wide stance during squat)

NOTE: Support under the heels is often required by many people for squatting, but this is actually very dangerous on your knees IMHO. Flat-footed squatting is also more productive since you aren't as shaky on your feet. This still means wearing shoes with a regular heel.

(ii) Technique:

Taking the bar in a power rack, place the bar low on the traps. Step out from the power rack.

Using no heel support, with a wideish stance, and head up; lower yourself slowly until your thighs are parallel to the ground.

In this bottom position, pause momentarily as you DRIVE your feet

into the ground to get back up. In the bottom position your back should be straight but will be slightly bent forward. The less the bend forward, the less danger on the back.

During this ascent - Keep your head up and this will help keep your back straight and near upright. Also make a major effort to keep your knees from bending in.

Do this with high reps for best effect (15-20 reps).

Take 1-2 breaths between the early reps.

Later as the Squat gets hard try for 3 HUGE breaths (sucked through teeth) between reps. Later you will need 10 or more breaths to get to 20 reps, but this is the kind of effort that builds serious muscle.

(iii) Slow Buildup.

Most people find it difficult to get correct squatting form with their current weight as it involves too many factors to get form right (head up, knees wide, watch your back etc. etc.). For these reasons and for people who are new to squatting I would advise learning the Squat from scratch while doing the Leg Press or whatever to keep the Quads strong.

Start off with just the bar. Practice the Squat twice a week, for 4-5 sets since the weight is so light. Make a very serious effort to get your form right and stretch as outlined above every day to get your muscles limber enough. Add 5lbs at every workout and keep your form 110% perfect. As the weeks pass, you will need fewer sets (2-3 per workout). Then the effort to get to 20 reps will become evident, but FORM must be the focus still.

Then drop to squatting once a week when you begin to squat to failure. Use a few sets, since the squat can be very brutal if done right for high reps and high weight. Add at most 2-5lbs a week when squatting to failure (whatever you can handle and still keep form perfect).

4.2.1 Squats and their impact on the Gluteals

Although the Squat has been criticised for its ability to give some people oversized gluteals, this is the case in people who do ONLY the squat. By doing the big basics and working the whole body, the gluteals will look only a natural part of a muscular body.

4.2.2 Squats and compression of the spine

When using very heavy weights (above double bodyweight) certain people have reported effects resulting from compression of the

spine. This can be alleviated to some degree by having strong shoulders, traps and and overall back muscles, and by performing hanging from a bar by your hands to help alleviate any stress. However before reaching double-bodyweight squats this should not pose any problem.

4.2.3 Squats and the lower back

The lower back is often the first place to be hurt by the Squat when it is not done right. Done with perfect form, your lower back will not get hurt. However, people with back trouble (OF ANY KIND) should see a sports-knowledgeable doctor before trying the Squat as it is very tough on the body.

4.2.4 Squats and the knees

Some people say the Squat wrecks their knees but in my experience these people did one of the following:
-Using support under the heels.
-They descended too fast and rebounded at the bottom.
In the first the knee is put in an awkward position it should never be in, and in the second, the force of rebounding is way too much for your knees to handle. Done slowly and correctly, you can squat until you are 70,80,90 whatever.

There is some evidence to suggest that even with all these safety precautions, squats can cause excessive soreness in this area for a few people. Therefore the Deadlift (classic or stiff-legged) should become the focus lift.

4.2.5 Alternatives to the Squat?

If you can squat you MUST squat! It is THE exercise to build muscle, not just in the lower body but which promotes growth elsewhere too.

The Classic Deadlift is the nearest rival. Do BOTH and you will already have the foundation for one heck of a program.

I would advise doing the bar-on-the-traps squat but there are some good machines out there. However they only come close to the free-weight version and cannot surpass its muscle-building capabilities.

For home trainees you should invest in a power rack, or buy the

Squat harness that wraps around the waist and keeps the bar between the legs called the hip belt. This is advertised in IronMan magazine and elsewhere.

Although not as good as the bar-on-the-traps version it's better that not squatting at all, but only if it can be done without a board under the heels to minimize the stress on the knees.

4.3 How do I do the Classic Deadlift (DL / BLDL)?

Some basic tips:

(a) Start Position

- Set yourself up with bent legs, feet close together, bar close to the shins, and head up.
- In the start position, the back will be bent forward, but will be STRAIGHT.
- Your arms hang in a straight and vertical line, no bending at the elbow.
- Your arms will lie outside your legs.

(b) Lift

- "Squeeze" the bar off the floor. No Snatching. Simultaneously push with the legs and pull with the back. Keep the pressure on your feet well spread, and off the toes.
- At the top, straighten up, and shrug the weight back slightly. But do not thrust your hips out.
- When lowering the weight, don't drop it rapidly, and don't

bounce

it off the floor. Briefly set the weights down between reps.

Working the DL, and SLD once a week is enough in the hardest parts of your cycle. If you are getting acclimated to these exercises, and the weights are light, twice a week may be okay. But don't train any of these lifts if your back is sore.

.1 How do I do the Stiff Legged Deadlift (SLD)?

Some Basic tips:

- If the back is not 100% avoid the full range SLD and just stick with doing it to the floor with 45-pound plates on the bar to prevent excessive extension.
- Don't do the full-range movement until you can touch your knuckles to your toes whilst keeping your knees locked and together. Slowly and progressively increase your flexibility.
- Use 45- or 35- pound plates whilst standing on the floor until you are flexible enough.
- When you get sufficiently flexible, the bar should only go so deep that it will touch your shoelaces. You might want to do the exercise from a slightly raised platform to get the required stretch.

The Lift:

-Initially lift the weight in a BENT-LEGGED DEADLIFT style.
-Stretch down to the lower position slowly!
(ankle/shoelace depth at MAX)
-From the bottom position, smoothly and steadily lift the bar.
Don't jerk, twist, bounce or accelerate rapidly. Smoothly up,
a short pause at the top, and lower smoothly.
-Don't try to keep your lower back flat or rigid. Keeping your
head up as you pull will avoid excessive rounding of the back.
-Keep your knees slightly unlocked until your style is good.

Don't work both exercises SLD & DL hard in the one cycle, focus
on one at a time.

*** The Stiff Legged Deadlift is very dangerous if done wrong.
If in doubt get a fully-qualified trainer to show you how or start
off light with just the bar, and progress slowly, 5lbs per week.

4.4 Why are 15-20+ reps best for these exercises?

Simple:
Lots of weight + Lots of reps = Lots of muscle

This is only possible with the Deadlift and the Squat.
There is some evidence that the use of high reps in these
promotes the release of testosterone, possibly due to the
huge effort involved mentally and physically to take a
large weight to 20 reps (squat/dl) in good form.

4.5 What powerlifting gear will help me in these lifts?

Unless you are entering competitions, you should
avoid knee wraps, and the use of a weight-lifting belt which
protects the back. If your back is prone to injury, avoid these
lifts as they are very strenuous. But if you squat and you NEED a
belt, then you should try to improve your squatting technique and
the belt will become unnecessary. The belt will only impede the
squatting deep 'abdominal' breathing required to get through a tough
session. Wearing a belt in the DL may be more acceptable,
especially for reps less than 6, but if you can use the DL in good style
without it, drop the belt.

FIRST AND FOREMOST YOU MUST GET YOUR TECHNIQUE CORRECT.

Wrist straps are OK for the DL and SLD, but as
competing with the belt, if you can work without it, do so. If you are
do the DL without gloves to get used to the rigours of the lift,
but otherwise gloves are okay.

(5) Miscellaneous

5.0 HIT vs. Hardgainer

Hardgainer and HIT methods are very similar. HIT concentrates somewhat more on INTENSITY, e.g. using drop sets etc.; whereas Hardgainer concentrates more on CYCLING intensity and keeping the volume even lower than traditional HIT methods.

The eclectic reader is advised to try both methods and choose which one works the best. Sometimes a change between the two can be effective also.

5.1 What grips/stances are recommended for the exercises?

(*S*) = Spotters highly recommended if you can get them.
Or else use a power rack.

Bench Press : The recommended grip is slightly wider
(*S*) than shoulder-width (by 1-3 inches on each side). Much wider than this can be dangerous for the rotator cuff.

Squat : The stance is 40-60 degrees of leg separation.
(*S*) That is the angle between your thighs!
(remember to keep the head up and back straight)

Deadlift (Classic style/Bent-Legged):
Feet are close together (heels about 8-12 inches apart, toes a bit wider).
Arms fall straight down to bar (very wide, or very narrow grips not recommended).
As with the squat, keep the head up ALWAYS, and keep your back straight. Drive with the legs.

Deadlift (Stiff-Legged):
Feet are very close together, and point forward, from 6 inches apart to no separation.
Grip is shoulder width. Ankle depth is the maximum depth recommended.

Pulldowns/Chins: Various grips are recommended.
But very-wide grips are not, because of possible problems these grips can cause with the rotator cuff. Anything from 3-4 inches wider than shoulder-width to almost-hands-together is fine.

Shoulder Press: grip the bar just outside shoulder width. In the bottom position the forearms should be nearly vertical as it places less stress on the shoulder joint.

Arm Curl : Grip the bar with arms parallel i.e. exactly shoulder width apart, maybe altering grip +/- lynch for variety.

Close-Grip Bench: Use a shoulder-width grip (or a little less). (*S*) Be very watchful as balance is tough on this one.

5.2 How and when should I do aerobics?

This will depend on each person, and what their goals are. Some aerobic exercise will be beneficial, but too much WILL interfere with muscle gains and recovery. Current opinion in HARDGAINER recommends 30 minutes of medium-intensity aerobics done twice a week, on top of two weights workouts. Naturally as we want maximum muscle gains, aerobics should be kept to a minimum in the hardest parts of a cycle to encourage maximum growth, so NOT doing aerobics is acceptable late in a cycle.

However, as one gets older, aerobics becomes more important. After 35 years of age aerobic work should be included, increasing in emphasis as one gets older, but NOT ignoring the weight-lifting aspect and its myriad benefits too.

5.3 What differences apply for Women?

All goals, exercises, sets and reps apply for women too. However, the increments may be smaller and so the goals need not be attained for a woman to become as 'advanced'. A 200lb bench press, 250-300lb squat and 300-350lb Deadlift for singles would undeniably be very strong for a woman.

5.3.1 Especially for Young Lifters

The key question here is when should teenagers begin to lift?

The authors have no medical qualifications, but from reading we have uncovered the following general advice:

Before 12 years of age, general cardiovascular work is the most kids should be asked to do e.g. running, playing, jumping etc.

Lifting weights should be avoided, but use of bodyweight resistance in pushups (with feet/knees on ground), assisted chin-ups, and no-weight squats can be useful in building some strength.

For 12-16 year olds, some weightlifting with dumbbells and light barbells can increase strength and muscle mass. Emphasis should

NOT be on the weight being lifted, but on form, with high reps. Working out to failure may NOT be a good idea. A 30:70 ratio of weights and cardio work is advisable.

For 16-18 year olds, more weight can be added and built upon.
A 50-50 mix of weights and cardio is about right.

5.4 Where can I get those little 0.5 and 1lb plates?

In the US:

You can order 125-gram, 250-gram, and 500-gram discs from
MAV-RIK at (213) 257-9139,

and 250-gram and 500-gram discs from
Piedmont Design Associates
104 Bangor Street,
Mauldin, SC 29662, USA

see <http://www.fractionalplates.com>

MAV-RIK's address is:

Bob Hise c/o MAV-RIK Barbell
3602 Eagle Rock Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90065

they now have an 800 number : 1-800-328-8762

You can also try:

MICROLOADS by PlateMate for magnetic weight plates
of 1.25lbs - call 1-800-877-3322 or +207-633-5912
from outside the US.

Write to:

Benoit Built, 4 Factory Cove Rd., Boothbay Harbor, ME 04538,

USA

Dynamic Fitness Equipment, Inc. (734-425-2862)

They distribute Eleiko
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I have recent reports that Pullum Sports may have moved to
Pullum Sports, 58/59 High Street, Tring, Herts HP23 5AG, England
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A softcover edition of "Brawn" can also be got from the US
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For more information, point your Web browser to:
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(excerpted from Hardgainer Magazine)

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Press	Calf Raise Variations
Overhead Lockout	Side Bend
Incline Bench Press	Bench Shrug
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Breathing Pullover	Hypertension Dumbbell Press
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