The 5 Biggest Training Mistakes

And How To Fix them

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Introduction

Hi.

I'm Greg.

I really appreciate that you took the time to download this ebook, and I hope you get a lot out of it. For some of you, this may be a take on strength training that is entirely different from anything you've ever heard before. For others, you may already know all these concepts, but you can learn a little bit more about their scientific and theoretical underpinnings.

More than anything, I wrote this to be an accessible overview of some common, and easily fixable training mistakes.

Hopefully I can save you guys a lot of the wasted time and frustration I experienced. I spent my time doing the wrong things because I was asking the wrong questions.

For a long time, I saw so many **programs**, but precious little information on **programming**, and the information floating around on programming was written by coaches to other coaches – all on a level that I couldn't understand as a new lifter with limited experience. So naturally I assumed that the goal was to find the right program, and everything would take care of itself.

How wrong I was. I spent time doing programs that were appropriate for lifters less experienced than I was, or way more

experienced than I was. If I was lucky enough to happen upon something that worked fairly well, I didn't know how to keep the gains coming when plateaus came.

This ebook is less of a roadmap, and more of a compass. It's not going to write a program for you, but it WILL teach you some principles of effective programs. You'll learn some tips for identifying good programs, for tweaking your current program, and for monitoring progress. It's not a complete picture of the training process, obviously, but it will help you step into the mind of a coach so you can think about, perhaps for the first time, WHY some programs work and others don't.

With this handy guide and a little thought and experimentation, you should be able to look at how you're training, find where it's inefficient, and start being able to confidently make changes, listen to your body's feedback, and take control of your training.

So, without further ado, let's start with problem #1.

1.   Training too infrequently

Let's start with a basic question that most people never think to ask: At its most basic level, HOW do you gain muscle?

It all comes down to protein retention.

Throughout the day, your body builds new muscle protein from amino acids, and breaks down your current muscle tissue into amino acids. These two processes essentially remain in balance.

So, the next question: how does working out make you bigger and stronger?

Working out increases protein synthesis (building new protein from amino acids), and over time it helps your body resist protein degradation (breaking down protein into amino acids). The net effect is that you retain more protein and gain more muscle.

So, now we're getting to the exciting part – how often should you train a muscle group?

Conventional wisdom says 1 time per week.

However, science says otherwise.

In fact, protein synthesis increases post-workout and peaks sometime around 24 hours after you work out. After that, it returns

to baseline by [36 hours post-workout](). Roughly a day and a half is all it takes until the growth cycle is over (slightly longer for brand new lifters, and even shorter for more experienced lifters, based on the volume and intensity of the training done). So if you're training a muscle or movement one time per week for fear of overtraining, you're building new muscle for a day and a half, effectively letting the other five and a half days go to waste.

So, if you're a drug free lifter (you know how 1 time per week became the norm? Protein synthesis is elevated for much longer when you're on steroids!), you should be stimulating each muscle group AT LEAST twice per week, although 3 or 4 times may be even better. In fact, remember how protein synthesis peaks around 24 hours post-workout? I made some of the best gains in my life training every muscle every day – and not with sissy workouts with pink dumbbells – we're talking about near-maximal weights every day. My story isn't the only one like that.

I coached a guy in his early 40s who had been struggling to add to his squat. He knew I'd experimented with training my squat heavy every day, so he asked for some guidance. In just 12 weeks he'd added over 50 pounds to his squat. And lest you think that he was just some new lifter with plenty of room to grow, we're talking about a middle aged guy squatting over 3x body weight – 600+ at 198.

Now, I'm NOT saying you have to train all the major lifts heavy every day, but I AM saying you're probably short changing yourself if you stick with the 1-2 times per week dogma.

This concept was born out in a [study on high level powerlifters](#). Two groups used the exact same training volume – except one group trained 3 times per week, and the other group used half the daily volume but trained six times per week. The 6x per week group gained more strength AND more muscle than the 3x per week group.

Of course, neurological adaptations come into play too. Strength is a skill. Most people don't think of it that way, but lifting heavy weights is something that your nervous system must become efficient at if you're going to perform your best – much like pitching a baseball or shooting a basketball.

If you want to improve your free throws, do you shoot once a week and hope for the best? Of course not. You need to practice, so you shoot every day so your body learns the movement.

It's the same way with lifting weights. The more often you perform a movement, the more opportunities your nervous system has to perfect the movement so you can use your muscles more effectively and efficiently.

In this way, higher frequency training is perfect for people who want to get as big and strong as possible, as fast as possible *AND* for the people who want to get stronger without gaining much size. 2-4

times per muscle/movement per week tends to work the best for most people, although there are plenteous examples of people doing well with even higher frequency.

2. Being inflexible day-to-day

Look, some days are better than others. When you go to the gym with the exact sets, reps, and weights you MUST hit for the day, you run into two big problems.

1) If it's a bad day and you're starting to get fatigued, forcing yourself through your workout with no modifications will just dig you into a deeper hole. If you're already having issues recovering from your workouts, this is exactly what you DON'T want. All you'll do is get frustrated while increasing your risk for injury.

2) If it's an awesome day, but you constrain yourself to *just* the workout you have planned for yourself, you're leaving a lot on the table. You might be able to do more volume, move more weight, or try some new exercises. Instead, you miss an opportunity to push yourself, and maybe hit some new personal records (PRs).

This is where auto-regulation comes in. It's something I work into all of my programs in some way or another. Essentially, based on how you're feeling day to day, your workout changes to accommodate you. It could be as simple as having one or two "money sets" where you just hit the bare number of reps (a pretty conservative number) on a bad day, and really push yourself for rep PRs on a good day.

For example, maybe your current routine has you doing 3x5 with about 85% of your one rep max. You could modify that to at least 3x3 with 85% (which should be manageable on a bad day), with the option of doing 5 reps on your first two sets, and as many as possible on the third if you're having an awesome day in the gym. This doesn't fundamentally alter your program, but it allows you to take advantage of your good days, and glide through your bad days.

It could be the use of cluster sets, where you do a few reps, rest for a short period, and then do a certain number of reps at given time intervals until you're unable to hit the required number anymore – it won't take very long on bad days, but you may double your training volume for the lift on good days.

In the above scenario, 3x5 with 85% could become 2x3-5 with 85%, and then 1 set of as many reps as possible, followed by a 20 second rest, then one rep, then a 20 second rest, then one rep, and so on until you're fatigued. Your cluster set may start with a set of 4 followed by 2 or 3 cluster reps on a bad day, or start with a set of 8 followed by 10 cluster reps on a good day. Again, the point is to allow your program to automatically adjust to your readiness to train on a day-to-day basis.

Of course, autoregulation could employ really complex means. You may determine your max weight for the day based on how a submaximal weight feels, and use that feedback to determine your

training weights for the day, and then again use your rate of perceived exertion (RPE – how hard a sets feels) to determine how much fatigue you want to accumulate throughout the training session. This is how fellow drug free powerlifter Mike Tuscherer regulates his training to win world championships and break records.

Regardless of HOW you autoregulate your training, having a concrete means of "listening to your body" while you're working out helps you make the most of your good days, cut your losses on bad days, and minimize injury risk.

3. Trying to force adaptation at a certain rate or a certain way

Too many programs progress by saying "you have to add 'x' pounds to your lift every session/week/month/etc." That's certainly not as bad as not having ANY way of gauging progress (think of the guy at your gym who had done the same sets and reps with the same weight for the past 5 years, and wonders why he's not getting any bigger or stronger!). However, it leaves a lot to be desired.

Our bodies are complex biological systems. It's impossible to predict a rate of adaptation – much less force it! And even if you could, it would NOT be linear.

Linear looks nice on paper, but it's not how training actually works.

More often than not, rates of progress jump around wildly. At one point, I'd added 5 pounds to my squat in 6 months, and then 95 in 10 weeks. If I tried to gain those same 100 pounds on my squat linearly, I'd have spent the first 6 months banging my head against a wall and probably hurting myself, and the last 10 weeks progressing MUCH slower than my body was capable of.

In training, you're trying to force your body to adapt (and get bigger and stronger), but at the end of the day, you have to accept and build upon the results your body actually gives you.

For this reason, it helps to track progress and adjust accordingly, rather than map out expected progress for weeks or months at a time, and then be forced to make mid-course corrections.

One simple way to do this that I incorporate into many of my programs is the use of rep maxes. Every so often (for a beginner this could be every week, for a more advanced lifter it could be every month or 2 months), you simply use a certain percentage of your max (85-90% is the sweet spot that's heavy enough to give you an accurate estimate, but light enough that you can still get a few reps on an off day), rep it out as many times as you can, and then use your performance to estimate your current maxes to use in your training going forward.

This way, you're letting your body tell you how much stronger it's gotten (and consequently if you need to make changes to your training if you HAVEN'T gotten stronger), rather than blindly expecting it to get stronger at an arbitrary rate in a linear fashion. It treats you as a human being, not as a lifeless machine.

4. Neglecting work capacity

For a working definition, work capacity is the amount of training you can put your body through and recover from. It's the most important part of training that no one talks about.

Ever wonder why so many people start off on a beginner program, stall, and then flail around without making much more progress? Or maybe they jump to a slightly lower volume program, and then make a little more progress, but ultimately stall again.

This approach neglects the need to build work capacity.

Here's why it's so important:

When you train, you subject your body to a certain degree of stress. This stress triggers an adaptive response so you'll be more able to cope with that stress in the future. If the stress is heavy loading, the adaptation is bigger, stronger muscles that can cope better with heavy weights.

However, over time, you need more and more stress to trigger a response. It has to pose a large enough threat to your body that your body is forced to build more muscle.

Eventually, you'll get to the point that the amount of stress you need to subject your body to is equivalent to the amount of stress you're capable of recovering from. Boom, you just hit a plateau.

You *NEED* to be able to subject your body to more stress, which first means you *NEED* to be able to recover from that added stress – that's work capacity.

Without intentionally increasing your training volume over time, you WILL hit a wall if you only focus on adding weight to the bar.

So next time you plateau, instead of just decreasing weight and running the exact same progression again (isn't the definition of insanity: doing the same thing and expecting different results?) or program hopping and hoping for the best, try this:

Decrease your training weights, add more sets and/or increase how often you train each lift (refer to point 1), and then start working back up in weight. I guarantee you that will be a more reliable strategy for getting past plateaus than the first two options I mentioned.

5. Focusing ONLY on the gym

Remember, it's the amount of work you can do AND recover from. Recovery happens the other 22-23 hours in the day.

Have the best training session of your life, and then sleep 4 hours the next night. You know what happens? Decreased protein synthesis, decreased insulin sensitivity, decreased testosterone and decreased fat oxidation. Great training is effectively meaningless without good nutrition and sufficient sleep.

If your recovery is on point but your training is subpar, you can probably still make progress for quite some time.

If your training rocks but your diet and sleep are lacking… well, let's just say it's not going to rock for long!

For nutrition, shoot to hit about .8g of protein per pound of bodyweight (1.8g/kg), and watch the rest of your calorie intake so that your weight is either staying the same or *gradually* increasing or decreasing (if you're bulking or cutting, respectively). Your weight gain shouldn't exceed 1 pound per week, and your weight loss shouldn't exceed 2 pounds per week, otherwise you'll gain too much fat on a bulk or lose too much muscle on a cut.

For sleep, your goal should be to not need an alarm to wake up in the morning.

Wrapping it all up:

So there you go. Five solid, evidence-backed tips to get you bigger and stronger.

No secret formulas?

Nope, because secret formulas don't exist. There is no perfect program – just programs that are more or less appropriate for you at any given point in time.

The best ways to ensure your continued progress toward your full potential are either to learn the principles that good programs are built around (these are some biggies), or hire a competent coach who knows how to write good programs, and then adjust them to your ever-changing needs and abilities.

After reading this, you SHOULD be able to look at your current training plan, start seeing what's good about it, start seeing what could be improved upon, and start taking control of your training. When you make changes, make a point of tracking progress. You changed your squat program – is your squat increasing faster than it was before? You changed your diet – are you gaining muscle or losing fat faster than you were previously? As management expert Peter Drucker said: "What gets measured gets managed."

Experiment, track results, compare results to previous experiments, and find what works best for you. Use these principles for guidance,

and to suggest changes that will, more likely than not, produce positive effects.