



3 DAYS A WEEK · FULL BODY

12-WEEK DUMBBELL WORKOUT PLAN

TRAIN AT HOME. GET STRONGER.

A complete home program that needs one pair of dumbbells. Three phases add reps, then slower tempo, then heavier weights. Every session is written out, with a no-bench option for each exercise.

LENGTH	SCHEDULE	SESSION	EQUIPMENT
12 Weeks	3 Days / Week	40-50 Min	Dumbbells

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
PHASE 1 · REPS		PHASE 2 · TEMPO		PHASE 3 · LOAD		EASY WEEK					

START HERE

HOW TO USE THIS PLAN

This is a 12-week, 3-day full-body plan that you do at home with dumbbells. Each session trains the whole body. The plan gets harder in three steps: first more reps, then slower and paused reps, then heavier dumbbells.

WHO IT IS FOR

- Beginners and returning lifters who train at home.
- Gym members who want a plan for busy weeks or travel.
- Anyone who can give **3 sessions a week** of 40–50 minutes.

WHAT YOU NEED

- **Best:** a pair of adjustable dumbbells, about 5–50 lb (2–23 kg) each.
- **Good:** two or three fixed pairs, a light, a medium and a heavy pair.
- **Optional:** a flat bench. A sturdy chair or the floor works for every exercise.
- A mat, a timer and a pen for the log pages.

THE WEEKLY RHYTHM

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
Day A	Walk	Day B	Walk	Day C	Rest	Rest

Any three days work. Leave at least one rest day between sessions. A 20–30 minute walk on the other days helps recovery.

SESSION FLOW

- 1 Warm-up, 8 minutes (page 4).
- 2 Exercises in the order shown. The big lifts come first.
- 3 Write each set in the log: weight, reps and how hard it felt.
- 4 Cool down with 3–5 minutes of easy walking.

THE 12 WEEKS AT A GLANCE

PHASE	WEEKS	MAIN REPS	TEMPO	EFFORT (RIR)	HOW IT GETS HARDER
Phase 1 • Reps	1–4	10–12	2-0-1	3 → 2	Add reps with the same dumbbells.
Phase 2 • Tempo	5–8	8–12	3-1-1	2	Lower in 3 seconds and pause. Add a 4th set in weeks 7–8.
Phase 3 • Load	9–11	6–10	2-0-1	2 → 1	Heavier dumbbells and harder versions of each lift.
Easy week	12	As Phase 3	2-0-1	3+	Two sets per exercise. Recover, then test your best set.

Safety note. General information, not medical advice. Check with a doctor before you start a new exercise plan if you have a health condition or injury. Stop a set if you feel sharp pain.

THE ENGINE

PICK YOUR WEIGHTS AND PROGRESS

You do not need heavy dumbbells to make progress. You need the work to get a little harder each week. This plan uses reps, tempo and then load.

FIND YOUR STARTING WEIGHT

- 1 Pick a weight you think you can lift about 12 times.
- 2 Do one set of 10 reps with good form.
- 3 Ask: how many more good reps could I do? That is your **RIR** (reps in reserve).
- 4 RIR 2–3 is right for Week 1. More than 4 left: go heavier. Fewer than 2: go lighter.
- 5 Write the weight in your log. Most people need a lighter pair for shoulders and arms and a heavier pair for legs and rows.

EFFORT: REPS IN RESERVE

RIR 3 SMOOTH	RIR 2 HARD	RIR 1 VERY HARD
Reps stay fast. Use in Week 1 and the easy week.	The last reps slow down. Most working sets.	One more good rep, no more. End of Phase 3 only.

WHEN TO MAKE IT HARDER

PHASE	RULE
1	When all sets reach 12 reps at the target RIR, use the next weight up, or move to Phase 2 tempo early.
2	When all sets reach 12 slow reps, add weight. Keep the 3-second lowering.
3	When all sets reach 10 reps, add the smallest weight jump.

DUMBBELLS TOO LIGHT?

- Add reps, up to 20 per set.
- Slow down: 4 seconds down, 2-second pause.
- Use 1½ reps: half a rep, back up, then a full rep.
- Go one side at a time: single-leg RDL, split squat.
- Cut rest to 45 seconds on small exercises.

Tempo 3-1-1 means 3 seconds down, a 1-second pause, 1 second up.

BEFORE EVERY SESSION

THE 8-MINUTE WARM-UP

Do this before every session. It raises your body temperature and moves each joint you will load. You should feel warm, not tired.

1 • RAISE (3 MIN)

- March or jog on the spot, 60 seconds.
- Jumping jacks or step jacks, 30 seconds.
- Bodyweight squats × 10.
- Inchworm walk-outs × 5.

2 • MOBILISE (3 MIN)

- Arm circles × 10 each way.
- Cat-cow × 8.
- World's greatest stretch × 3 each side.
- Glute bridges × 10.

3 • PRACTISE (2 MIN)

Do the first exercise of the day with your lightest dumbbells: one set of 8 easy reps. Then one set of 4 reps at about 75% of your working weight.

REST BETWEEN SETS

EXERCISE TYPE	PHASE 1-2	PHASE 3
Squats, presses, rows, RDLs	60-90 s	90-120 s
Arms, shoulders, calves	45-60 s	60 s
Core and carries	30-45 s	45 s

GOOD FORM FIRST

Move the weight under control. If your form breaks down, end the set. A clean rep with a light weight builds more than a sloppy rep with a heavy one.

01

WEEKS 1-4

PHASE 1: REPS

Learn the lifts and find your weights. Add reps each week with the same dumbbells.

WEEK	SETS	RIR	WHAT TO DO
1	3 (2 on arms)	3	Find your weights. Write them down.
2	3	3	Add 1-2 reps to each set.
3	3	2	Add reps. Go heavier where all sets reach 12.
4	3	2	Beat Week 3 on every exercise by 1 rep or more.

DAY A SQUAT + PUSH

About 45 min

#	EXERCISE	SETS × REPS	TEMPO	REST	COACHING NOTE
1	Goblet squat	3 × 10-12	2-0-1	90 s	Hold the dumbbell at your chest. Sit between your heels.
2	Dumbbell bench press	3 × 10-12	2-0-1	90 s	No bench: floor press.
3	One-arm dumbbell row	3 × 10-12 / arm	2-0-1	60 s	Hand on a chair. Pull the elbow to your hip.
4	Dumbbell lateral raise	2 × 12-15	2-0-1	45 s	Stop at shoulder height.
5	Hammer curl	2 × 10-12	2-0-1	45 s	Elbows stay at your sides.
6	Dead bug	2 × 8 / side	slow	30 s	Low back stays on the floor.

DAY B HINGE + PULL

About 45 min

#	EXERCISE	SETS × REPS	TEMPO	REST	COACHING NOTE
1	Dumbbell Romanian deadlift	3 × 10-12	2-0-1	90 s	Push your hips back. Dumbbells close to your legs.
2	Standing dumbbell shoulder press	3 × 8-12	2-0-1	90 s	Squeeze glutes. Do not lean back.
3	Bent-over two-dumbbell row	3 × 10-12	2-0-1	60 s	Flat back, chest over the dumbbells.
4	Reverse lunge	2 × 8-10 / leg	2-0-1	60 s	Long step back. Front knee over the middle of the foot.
5	Overhead triceps extension	2 × 10-12	2-0-1	45 s	One dumbbell, both hands. Elbows point forward.
6	Side plank	2 × 20-30 s	hold	30 s	Each side. Straight line from head to heels.

DAY C SINGLE LEG + MIXED

About 45 min

#	EXERCISE	SETS × REPS	TEMPO	REST	COACHING NOTE
1	Split squat	3 × 8-10 / leg	2-0-1	60 s	Back knee lowers straight down.
2	Push-up	3 × 8-15	2-0-1	60 s	Hands on a bench or wall if needed. Body stays straight.
3	Dumbbell glute bridge	3 × 12-15	2-1-1	60 s	Dumbbell on your hips. Squeeze at the top.
4	Dumbbell reverse fly	2 × 12-15	2-0-1	45 s	Hinge forward. Lead with the backs of your hands.
5	Standing calf raise	2 × 12-15	2-1-1	45 s	On a step. Full stretch at the bottom.
6	Suitcase carry	3 × 30-40 m	walk	45 s	Each side. One heavy dumbbell. Do not lean.

Short on time? Do exercises 1–3 only. That takes about 25 minutes and covers the most important work.

WEEKS 5 - 8

02

PHASE 2: TEMPO

Same exercises, harder reps. Lower each rep in 3 seconds and pause for 1 second. The same dumbbells now feel much heavier.

WEEK	EXERCISES 1-2	EXERCISES 3-6	RIR	WHAT TO DO
5	3 × 8-12	2-3 sets, as Phase 1	2	Use the 3-1-1 tempo on exercises 1-4. Expect fewer reps.
6	3 × 8-12	as Week 5	2	Add reps. Keep every rep slow.
7	4 × 8-12	as Week 5	2	Add a 4th set to the first two exercises.
8	4 × 8-12	as Week 5	2	Beat Week 7. Go heavier where all sets reach 12.

PHASE 2 CHANGES

DAY	SWAP IN	INSTEAD OF	WHY
A	Goblet squat with 2-second pause at the bottom	Goblet squat	More time under load with a light weight.
B	Single-leg Romanian deadlift	Dumbbell Romanian deadlift	Doubles the load on each leg.
C	Rear-foot elevated split squat (foot on a chair)	Split squat	Harder on the front leg.
C	Single-leg glute bridge	Dumbbell glute bridge	More load per side.

WEEKS 9-12

03

PHASE 3: LOAD

Heavier dumbbells and fewer reps on the main lifts. Normal tempo again. Week 12 is an easy week.

WEEK	EXERCISES 1-3	EXERCISES 4-6	RIR	WHAT TO DO
9	4 × 6-10	2-3 × 10-15	2	Go up one weight step on exercises 1-3.
10	4 × 6-10	3 × 10-15	2	Add reps.
11	4 × 6-10	3 × 10-15	1	Hardest week. Beat Week 10 on every lift.
12	2 × 6-10	2 × 10-15	3+	Easy week. On Day C, test one best set on the goblet squat and push-up.

DAY A SQUAT + PUSH

Phase 3

#	EXERCISE	SETS × REPS	TEMPO	REST	COACHING NOTE
1	Double dumbbell front squat	4 × 6-10	2-0-1	2 min	A dumbbell on each shoulder. Elbows up.
2	Dumbbell bench press	4 × 6-10	2-0-1	2 min	No bench: floor press with a 1-second pause.
3	One-arm dumbbell row	4 × 8-10 / arm	2-0-1	90 s	Heavier. No twisting.
4	Lateral raise	3 × 12-15	2-0-1	60 s	Last set: to RIR 0 in Week 11.
5	Hammer curl	3 × 10-12	2-0-1	60 s	Lower in 2 seconds.
6	Dead bug with dumbbell	2 × 8 / side	slow	45 s	Hold a light dumbbell over your chest.

DAY B HINGE + PULL

Phase 3

#	EXERCISE	SETS × REPS	TEMPO	REST	COACHING NOTE
1	Dumbbell Romanian deadlift	4 × 8-10	3-0-1	2 min	Heaviest pair. Slow on the way down.
2	Standing shoulder press	4 × 6-10	2-0-1	2 min	Ribs down. Press up and slightly back.
3	Bent-over two-dumbbell row	4 × 8-10	2-1-1	90 s	Pause with the dumbbells at your ribs.
4	Walking lunge	3 × 8-10 / leg	2-0-1	90 s	Short room? Alternate reverse lunges.
5	Overhead triceps extension	3 × 10-12	2-0-1	60 s	Full stretch behind your head.
6	Side plank with reach	2 × 8 / side	slow	45 s	Reach under and back up.

DAY C SINGLE LEG + MIXED

Phase 3

#	EXERCISE	SETS × REPS	TEMPO	REST	COACHING NOTE
1	Rear-foot elevated split squat	4 × 6-10 / leg	2-0-1	90 s	Dumbbells in both hands.
2	Incline dumbbell press	4 × 8-10	2-0-1	90 s	No bench: weighted push-up with a dumbbell on the back, or deficit push-up.
3	Dumbbell hip thrust	4 × 10-12	2-1-1	90 s	Shoulders on a sofa or bench. Chin tucked.
4	Reverse fly	3 × 12-15	2-0-1	60 s	Light and strict.
5	Single-leg calf raise	3 × 10-15 / leg	2-1-1	45 s	Hold a dumbbell on the working side.
6	Suitcase carry	3 × 40 m	walk	60 s	Each side. Heaviest dumbbell you can hold with good posture.

REFERENCE

EXERCISE LIBRARY

EXERCISE	MAIN MUSCLES	FORM CUE	NO-BENCH OPTION
Goblet squat	Quads, glutes	Chest up, knees follow toes, depth you can control.	—
Dumbbell bench press	Chest, triceps	Shoulder blades pinched. Lower to mid-chest.	Floor press
Incline dumbbell press	Upper chest, shoulders	Bench at about 30°. Press over the upper chest.	Deficit or weighted push-up
One-arm dumbbell row	Lats, upper back	Flat back. Pull toward the hip.	Hand on a chair or sofa arm
Bent-over two-dumbbell row	Upper back, lats	Hinge to about 45°. Neck long.	—
Romanian deadlift	Hamstrings, glutes	Soft knees. Hips back until you feel a stretch.	—
Standing shoulder press	Shoulders, triceps	Squeeze glutes and brace. No back arch.	—
Split squat / lunge	Quads, glutes	Torso tall. Push through the front heel.	Rear foot on a chair or step
Glute bridge / hip thrust	Glutes	Ribs down. Lock out with the glutes, not the low back.	Shoulders on a sofa edge
Lateral raise	Side shoulders	Slight bend in the elbow. Raise out, not up.	—
Reverse fly	Rear shoulders, upper back	Hinge forward. Light weight, no swing.	—
Hammer curl	Biceps, forearms	Palms face in. No swing.	—
Overhead triceps extension	Triceps	Elbows point forward. Lower behind your head.	Seated on a chair or standing
Calf raise	Calves	Pause at the top and at the bottom.	Edge of a stair
Suitcase carry	Core, grip	Walk tall. Shoulders level.	—

TRACK IT

WORKOUT LOG

Print one log page for each week. Write each set as weight × reps, for example "25 × 11". Fill in the progress tracker at the end of each phase.

AFTER WEEK 12

Start again at Phase 1 with your new weights, or repeat Phase 3 with a heavier pair. Compare your Week 12 best sets with Week 1. Write both in the progress tracker.

12-WEEK PROGRESS TRACKER

BEST SET: WEIGHT × REPS

WK	GOBLET / FRONT SQUAT	DB PRESS	ONE-ARM ROW	ROMANIAN DL	SHOULDER PRESS	NOTES
1						
4						
8						
11						
12						

WEEK _____

PHASE _____

START DATE _____

DAY A • SQUAT + PUSH

DATE _____

EXERCISE	SET 1	SET 2	SET 3	SET 4	NOTES

DAY B • HINGE + PULL

DATE _____

EXERCISE	SET 1	SET 2	SET 3	SET 4	NOTES

DAY C • SINGLE LEG + MIXED

DATE _____

EXERCISE	SET 1	SET 2	SET 3	SET 4	NOTES