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Big Muscles, Busy Schedules
How to Build by only Training Two Days a Week
by Ian King

The program below is best suited for those who are already familiar with Ian's work here at *T-mag*. It's not because the program is all that advanced, but because the newbie may not recognize all the exercises listed or Ian's unique method of putting them together. If that's the case, you may want to read [Part I](#) and [Part II](#) of our article called "The Ian King Cheat Sheets".

If you're not familiar with some of the exercises listed or need a reminder, simply type the name of the movement into the search engine on the left and you'll soon find a description and probably a picture of the exercise. Most of the abdominal exercises can be found in Ian's [Awesome Abs](#) program. Likewise, many of the relatively obscure leg movements can be found in Parts [I](#) and [II](#) of Ian's "12 Weeks of Pain" Program.

Here's an e-mail I received last week:

Dear Ian,

I find myself in a situation where I can only make it to the gym once every three to four days. I plan on doing full body workouts but have no idea how to set this up in terms of sets, overall volume, and exercises. Can you help me out? What are the concerns here? Can you provide a program? My goal is mainly hypertrophy. Thanks!

A Busy Guy

I get practically the same letter every week. A devout trainee gets himself into a situation where he has a very limited amount of gym time. Not being able to train four or five days per week, he begins to panic and swears he can see his muscles beginning to catabolize before his very eyes. Well, his muscles aren't wasting away, of course, and believe it or not, I think this is a great situation to be in!

Reduced frequency will likely reduce the risk of overtraining. In reality, many people should only be going to the gym with this frequency anyway, either because they train with such volume that they would need this reduced training frequency to really recover, or because they have reduced recovery ability (from getting older, getting less sleep, being more stressed out, etc.)

You *can* do full body workouts, but don't believe you *have* to! This is a decision in itself. Sometimes you should, sometimes you shouldn't. This is because there are some downsides to total-body workouts. Mainly, as these relate to this situation, the muscle groups trained last are always compromised because of residual fatigue. Additionally, if you want to avoid excessive volume, you have to reduce the number of sets per muscle group and some muscles may need more volume within a given workout.

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The whole aim of split routines is to give more muscles the opportunity to be prioritized in training. They're prioritized by being performed earlier in the sequence and by taking up a larger part of the total workout. Remember this: it's not a given that any or all of your muscles really need multiple weekly exposures. I'm not saying they don't, mind you, just reminding you to qualify whether they do!

Now, without knowing which of these two options (full body or split) would be best for the individual, I'm going to show you a neat way to get the best of both methods in the same way I go about alternating between all pull/all push workouts and mixed push/pull workouts.

Another consideration I give when reviewing exercise selection in a total-body workout is the number of exercises per muscle group. Less exercises per muscle group allow higher intensity (due to the inverse relationship between volume and intensity), but more exercises per muscle group allow more joint/muscle angles to be overloaded.

Again, in my illustration below I can show you how to get the best of a mix of methods over time. In essence, you're going to get about two workouts per calendar week which would look something like this:

Day 1: Workout A
Day 2: Off
Day 3: Off
Day 4: Workout B
Day 5: Off
Day 6: Off
Day 7: Off

I'm going to use a six-stage approach in this example, but you could use more or less based on your needs. How long should each stage be? Basically, shorter phases should be adopted by the more advanced lifter (two weeks per stage) and longer phases for the less experienced lifter (four weeks per stage). Just keep in mind that I'd expect you to build in recovery weeks in the six stages below.

Here's how we'll schedule this program:

Stage 1: Total Body Workout
Stage 2: Split Routine
Stage 3: Total Body Workout
Stage 4: Split Routine
Stage 5: Total Body Workout
Stage 6: Split Routine

Within the total-body workouts, I'm going to use the two main approaches I mentioned above — more variation in angle overload and less volume per exercise; and less variation in overload and more volume per exercise. Within the split-routine workouts, I'm going to use the two main approaches I mentioned above: separating push/pull and then integrating push/pull.

So here we go, a six-stage workout for those who get to the gym less often!

Loading Parameters

First let's cover the loading parameters. Generally speaking, I'd expect the loading parameters to run something like the following:

Stage 1

Number of exercises: 12

Number of work sets per exercise: 1

Average number of reps per work set: 12-15

Average speed of movement (tempo): 321

Average rest period between sets: Less than one minute

Stage 2

Number of exercises: 8

Number of work sets per exercise: 1-2

Average number of reps per work set: 10-12

Average speed of movement (tempo): 321

Average rest period between sets: 1-2 minutes

Stage 3

Number of exercises: 10

Number of work sets per exercise: 1

Average number of reps per work set: 8-10

Average speed of movement (tempo): 311

Average rest period between sets: 2-3 minutes

Stage 4

Number of exercises: 6

Number of work sets per exercise: 2

Average number of reps per work set: 6-8

Average speed of movement (tempo): 311

Average rest period between sets: 3-4 minutes

Stage 5

Number of exercises: 4

Number of work sets per exercise: 2-4

Average number of reps per work set: 4-6

Average speed of movement (tempo): 211

Average rest period between sets: 4-5 minutes

Stage 6

Number of exercises: 3

Number of work sets per exercise: 3-6

Average number of reps per work set: 2-4

Average speed of movement (tempo): 211

Average rest period between sets: 5-6 minutes

Exercises

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Below is a list of exercises to use in each stage and in each of the twice weekly workouts (A and B). Using stage one below as an example, on "A" day you'll perform thin tummy variations for the lower abs. A few days later on workout "B", you'll perform slow speed curl ups for the upper abs.

STAGE 1

Workout A

Muscle Group: Lower abs

Exercise: Thin tummy variations

Muscle Group: Lateral abs

Exercise: Side raise on ground

Muscle Group: Calves

Exercise: Single leg calf press

Muscle Group: Upper traps

Exercise: Dumbbell shrugs

Muscle Group: Lower back

Exercise: Single leg back extension

Muscle Group: Glutes

Exercise: Single leg lying hip/thigh extension

Muscle Group: Hamstrings

Exercise: Single leg stiff legged deadlift

Muscle Group: Quads

Exercise: Single leg partial range squat

Muscle Group: Vertical pull

Exercise: Wide grip lat pulldown behind neck

Muscle Group: Vertical push

Exercise: Arnold press

Muscle Group: Horizontal pull

Exercise: Prone dumbbell row

Muscle Group: Horizontal push

Exercise: Dumbbell incline bench press

Workout B

Muscle Group: Upper abs

Exercise: Slow speed curl up

Muscle Group: Rotational abs

Exercise: Unanchored Russian twist

Muscle Group: Biceps

Exercise: Zottman single arm curl on preacher bench

Muscle Group: Triceps

Exercise: Dumbbell seated overhead tricep extension

Muscle Group: Horizontal pull

Exercise: Prone fly

Muscle Group: Horizontal push

Exercise: Supine fly

Muscle Group: Vertical pull

Exercise: Dumbbell pullover

Muscle Group: Vertical push

Exercise: Lateral dumbbell raise

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Muscle Group: Hamstrings

Exercise: Leg curl

Muscle Group: Quads

Exercise: Leg extension

Muscle Group: Lower back

Exercise: Rounded back good morning (using both legs)

Muscle Group: Glutes

Exercise: Sumo deadlift

STAGE 2

Workout A

Muscle Group: Lower abs

Exercise: Toes to sky

Muscle Group: Lateral abs

Exercise: Side raise on Roman chair

Muscle Group: Posterior lower body

Exercise: Wide grip deadlift

Muscle Group: Posterior lower body

Exercise: Wide grip stiff leg deadlift

Muscle Group: Posterior lower body

Exercise: Wide grip barbell shrugs (with bar held behind the back)

Muscle Group: Horizontal pull

Exercise: Seated row

Muscle Group: Vertical pull

Exercise: Wide grip chin-up

Muscle Group: Biceps

Exercise: Reverse grip EZ bar curl

Workout B

Muscle Group: Upper abs

Exercise: Normal speed curl up

Muscle Group: Rotational abs

Exercise: Lateral rotation of legs, lying on back

Muscle Group: Horizontal push

Exercise: Wide grip bench press

Muscle Group: Vertical push

Exercise: Wide grip, behind the neck shoulder press

Muscle Group: Triceps

Exercise: Lying triceps extension

Muscle Group: Anterior lower body

Exercise: High bar squat, narrow stance

Muscle Group: Anterior lower body

Exercise: Dynamic lunge

Muscle Group: Calves

Exercise: Standing calf press (using both legs)

STAGE 3

Workout A

Muscle Group: Horizontal pull

Exercise: Bent over row

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Muscle Group: Horizontal push
Exercise: Medium grip bench press
Muscle Group: Vertical pull
Exercise: Medium grip chin-up
Muscle Group: Vertical push
Exercise: Medium grip shoulder press, behind the neck
Muscle Group: Posterior lower body
Exercise: Medium grip deadlift
Muscle Group: Anterior lower body
Exercise: Front squat
Muscle Group: Lower back
Exercise: Loaded back extension
Muscle Group: Calves
Exercise: Seated raise
Muscle Group: Lower abs
Exercise: Knee up on incline
Muscle Group: Lateral abs
Exercise: Side raises with a twist on Roman chair

Workout B

Muscle Group: Anterior lower body
Exercise: Back squat, medium bar, medium stance
Muscle Group: Posterior lower body
Exercise: Medium grip stiff leg deadlift
Muscle Group: Glutes/Hamstrings
Exercise: Loaded hip/thigh extension
Muscle Group: Upper traps
Exercise: Medium grip front shrug with bar
Muscle Group: Vertical push
Exercise: Front shoulder press
Muscle Group: Vertical pull
Exercise: Lat pulldown to front using triangle bar
Muscle Group: Horizontal push
Exercise: Incline bench press
Muscle Group: Horizontal pull
Exercise: Underhand seated row
Muscle Group: Upper abs
Exercise: Weighted curl up
Muscle Group: Rotational abs
Exercise: Anchored Russian twist with load

STAGE 4

Workout A

Muscle Group: Horizontal push
Exercise: Medium grip bench press with arch
Muscle Group: Horizontal pull
Exercise: Medium grip bent over row
Muscle Group: Calves
Exercise: Seated calf press
Muscle Group: Upper traps

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Exercise: Speed shrug from above the knees

Muscle Group: Lower abs

Exercise: Knee up on vertical

Muscle Group: Lateral abs

Exercise: Loaded side raise with twist on Roman chair

Workout B

Muscle Group: Anterior lower body

Exercise: Squat, medium bar, medium stance

Muscle Group: Posterior lower body

Exercise: Medium grip deadlift

Muscle Group: Vertical pull

Exercise: Medium grip chin-up

Muscle Group: Vertical push

Exercise: Shoulder press, medium grip, behind neck

Muscle Group: Upper abs

Exercise: Medicine ball sit-up

Muscle Group: Rotational abs

Exercise: Medicine ball leg lateral lowers

STAGE 5

Workout A

Muscle Group: Anterior lower body

Exercise: Back squat, low bar, medium stance

Muscle Group: Horizontal push

Exercise: Medium grip bench press

Muscle Group: Horizontal pull

Exercise: Bent over row with underhand grip

Muscle Group: Integrated abs

Exercise: Wrist to knee curl up

Workout B

Muscle Group: Vertical pull

Exercise: Chin up, reverse grip

Muscle Group: Vertical push

Exercise: Shoulder press, medium grip, behind the neck

Muscle Group: Posterior lower body

Exercise: Medium grip deadlift

Muscle Group: Integrated abs

Exercise: Knee up on Swiss ball

STAGE 6

Workout A

Muscle Group: Horizontal push

Exercise: Medium grip bench press with arch

Muscle Group: Vertical pull

Exercise: Chin-up, reverse grip

Muscle Group: Integrated abs

Exercise: Full V-sit ups

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Workout B

Muscle Group: Anterior lower body

Exercise: Squat, low bar, medium stance

Muscle Group: Posterior lower body

Exercise: Medium grip deadlift

Muscle Group: Integrated abs

Exercise: Push-up hold and variations

Conclusion

Let me make a prediction. You're going to get the same benefits from this program as the average person who goes to the gym more often. You might even get greater benefits! In fact, because it's such a fine program, you may surprise yourself with your growth! Don't believe you can make more progress by spending less time in the gym? Give it a try and find out for yourself.

Note: For more of Ian's training philosophies, read his books *Get Buffed!* and *How to Write Strength Training Programs* available at www.getbuffed.net and KingSports.net.