Workout Splits to Maximise Hypertrophy

The main split types, their unique benefits, and how to build your own

A workout split is simply **how you spread your weekly training across days**. No split is magic: muscle grows when you do enough hard sets, train each muscle often enough, add load over time and recover well. The best split is the one that fits your schedule, lets you recover and **that you enjoy enough to keep doing for years**. This guide explains the main split types and their unique benefits, then shows how to build your own based on your routine, goals, recovery and exercise preferences.

1. What Actually Drives Hypertrophy

The basics first

Why this matters: A split only organises these factors. It doesn't replace them.

FACTOR	WHAT TO KNOW	NOTE
Weekly volume	Hard sets per muscle per week is a main driver of growth. Many people do well with about 10 to 20 sets per muscle per week.	Beginners often grow on less, and more isn't always better.
Frequency	Training each muscle about 2 times a week is a good default. When weekly volume is equal, frequency matters less than volume, but it makes high volume easier to spread out.	Splits are mainly a way to organise volume and frequency.
Effort	Take most sets close to failure, around 1 to 3 reps in reserve.	Easy sets don't drive much growth.
Progressive overload	Add reps, weight or better technique over time.	No overload, no growth.
Recovery	Sleep, food, stress and total training load decide how much you can handle.	Too much volume you can't recover from stalls progress.
Consistency	The split you follow for years beats a perfect split you quit.	Enjoyment and schedule fit matter.

2. Splits at a Glance

Quick comparison

Why this matters: Frequency per muscle and days per week are the key differences.

SPLIT	DAYS PER WEEK	FREQUENCY PER MUSCLE	BEST FOR
Full body	3 days	2 to 3 times	Beginners, busy people, flexible schedules
Upper / Lower	4 days	2 times	Most intermediates, a balanced option
Push / Pull / Legs (3 days)	3 days	1 time	Low-frequency, simple, tight schedules
Push / Pull / Legs (6 days)	6 days	2 times	People who enjoy training often, higher volume
Bro split (body part)	5 days	1 time	Variety and focus, some advanced lifters
Arnold split	6 days	2 times	High-volume lovers, similar to PPL
Torso / Limbs	4 days	2 times	Balanced volume, arms and legs get dedicated days

SPLIT	DAYS PER WEEK	FREQUENCY PER MUSCLE	BEST FOR
Hybrid (PHUL, PHAT, PPL + Upper/Lower)	4 to 5 days	2 times	Mixing strength and size work

3. The Splits in Detail

Layout, benefits, watch-outs

Why this works: Every split can build muscle. These notes show where each one shines.

SPLIT	EXAMPLE WEEK	UNIQUE BENEFITS	WATCH OUT FOR
Full body	Mon, Wed, Fri: all major muscles each session.	High frequency per muscle. Easy to catch up if you miss a day. Great skill practice for beginners. Efficient with 3 days.	Sessions can be long. Less volume per muscle per day, so choose exercises smartly.
Upper / Lower	Mon upper, Tue lower, Thu upper, Fri lower.	Each muscle twice a week. Balanced volume and recovery. Easy to progress, and simple to flex around your week.	Upper days can run long. Needs 4 days.
Push / Pull / Legs (3-day)	Push, Pull and Legs once each across the week.	Simple and recoverable. Lots of volume per muscle in one session.	Each muscle only once a week, so a missed session leaves a long gap. Less ideal for most people.
Push / Pull / Legs (6-day)	Push, Pull, Legs, Push, Pull, Legs, then rest.	Twice a week for each muscle with high total volume. Logical grouping, and fatigue is spread across movement patterns.	Demanding on recovery and schedule. Easy to overdo, and a missed day can throw the rotation off.
Bro split	Chest, Back, Shoulders, Legs, Arms across 5 days.	Lots of volume and focus per muscle, plenty of recovery time per muscle, and it's fun.	Once-a-week frequency. A missed day can mean a muscle isn't trained for 10 to 14 days. Works better with high effort and enough volume.
Arnold split	Chest and back, shoulders and arms, legs, repeated twice.	Twice a week per muscle, with antagonist pairing, which suits supersets and saves time.	6 days and high fatigue. Chest and back days are long.
Torso / Limbs	Torso, Limbs, rest, Torso, Limbs.	Twice a week per muscle, with arms and legs getting their own focus.	Torso days can be crowded, and limbs days can be tough on legs and arms together.
Hybrid splits	Mix, for example: Upper, Lower, rest, Push, Pull, Legs.	Flexible. Extra frequency for priority muscles, plus a variety of rep ranges.	Needs planning so the same muscle isn't hit hard on back-to-back days.

4. Volume, Reps and Rest Guide

Starting points

Keep in mind: These are typical ranges, not rules. Adjust to how you progress and recover.

TOPIC	RANGE	NOTE
Beginner (under 1 year)	About 8 to 12 hard sets per muscle per week	Learn technique first. Small amounts of well-done work grow muscle.
Intermediate (1 to 3 years)	About 12 to 18 sets	Add volume slowly as progress slows.
Advanced (3+ years)	About 15 to 22 sets, sometimes more	Needs strong recovery and a plan to prioritise.

TOPIC	RANGE	NOTE
Per session per muscle	About 6 to 10 hard sets	Quality tends to drop beyond this, so spread volume across more sessions.
Rep ranges	About 5 to 30 reps can build muscle if sets are close to failure	Use mostly 6 to 15, with some heavier and lighter work.
Rest between sets	About 2 to 3 minutes for big lifts, 1 to 2 for isolation	Longer rests help performance on hard sets.

5. Build Your Own Split

Step by step

Why this works: Work through these steps in order. Your answers shape the split.

STEP	WHAT TO DO	NOTE
1. Count your real days	How many days can you train for 6 to 8 weeks, honestly? Choose the number you'll hit even in a busy week.	Plan for your worst reasonable week, not your best.
2. Set your goal and priorities	Pick 1 or 2 priority muscle groups, such as chest, shoulders or glutes, and keep the rest at maintenance-plus volume.	Everything can't be a priority.
3. Choose frequency	Aim to hit each muscle about 2 times a week, with at least 48 hours between hard sessions for the same muscle.	Prefer full body, upper/lower or PPL x2.
4. Set weekly volume	Start near the low end of your range (about 10 to 12 sets per muscle) and add sets only when progress stalls.	Start low and build.
5. Spread the volume	Split sets across the days so no session has more than about 6 to 10 hard sets per muscle.	Keeps quality high.
6. Pick exercises you enjoy	Choose 1 or 2 main lifts per muscle, plus accessories you like. Pick movements that feel good on your joints.	Enjoyment drives consistency.
7. Order your session	Do priority muscles and big compound lifts first, and isolation work last.	You're strongest at the start.
8. Check recovery	Watch sleep, strength trends, joint comfort and motivation. Add a lighter week every 4 to 8 weeks, or sooner if needed.	Soreness alone isn't a guide.
9. Track and adjust	Log weights and reps. Run the plan for 6 to 8 weeks, then change one thing at a time.	Only change what data suggests.

6. Match the Split to Your Schedule

Days available

Why this matters: Your real calendar decides the split.

YOUR WEEK	SPLIT TO CONSIDER	WHY
3 days a week	Full body, or PPL once each.	Simple and efficient.
4 days a week	Upper / Lower, or Torso / Limbs.	Best balance for most people.
5 days a week	Upper, Lower, Push, Pull, Legs, or a bro split with some frequency.	Gives extra frequency for priority muscles.
6 days a week	PPL x2 or Arnold.	Only if you can sleep, eat and recover well.

YOUR WEEK	SPLIT TO CONSIDER	WHY
Irregular schedule	Rotating full body or a rolling split (do the next session in the order, whenever you train).	The plan follows your week, not the calendar.
Short sessions (30 to 45 minutes)	Full body with 4 to 6 exercises, or a split across more days.	Short, frequent sessions work well.

7. Make It Enjoyable

Adherence wins

Why this works: People grow most when they train consistently, and enjoyment is a big part of that.

IDEA	WHAT TO DO	NOTE
Choose exercises you look forward to	Pick movements that feel good, such as cables, dumbbells or machines, as long as they train the target muscle.	Many exercises work. Enjoy the ones that do.
Keep a few staples	Squat or leg press, press, row or pulldown, hinge.	Good progress anchors.
Rotate accessories	Swap isolation exercises every 6 to 12 weeks.	Keeps it fresh.
Respect your joints	If an exercise hurts, replace it with a similar one.	Pain-free training lasts years.
Mix intensity	Some heavy sets, some higher rep sets and some pump work.	Keeps training varied.
Add a fun day or finisher	Arms, abs or a favourite machine.	Makes the plan something you enjoy.

8. Sample Custom Splits

Starting points

Why this matters: Examples only. Adjust the exercises and sets to suit you.

PROFILE	EXAMPLE	NOTE
Busy 3-day full body	Mon: squat, bench, row, curls. Wed: deadlift or hinge, overhead press, pulldown, lunges. Fri: leg press, incline press, cable row, triceps and calves.	Good starter plan.
4-day upper / lower	Upper A, Lower A, rest, Upper B, Lower B. Use heavy compounds first and add 2 to 3 isolation moves.	Balanced for most.
5-day with a priority muscle	Upper, Lower, Push, Pull, Legs. Add extra shoulder or chest sets on the push and upper days.	Extra work for a lagging muscle.
6-day PPL	Push, Pull, Legs, Push, Pull, Legs, rest. Keep 3 to 4 exercises per session and 2 to 3 sets each at first.	Only if recovery is strong.

9. Common Mistakes

Avoid these

Watch for these: Most plateaus come from these.

MISTAKE	WHY IT HURTS	FIX
Doing too many sets	More sets aren't always more growth.	Start at 10 to 12 sets and add slowly.

MISTAKE	WHY IT HURTS	FIX
Training a muscle once a week with low effort	Not enough stimulus.	Raise frequency or push sets closer to failure.
Changing the plan every few weeks	No time to progress.	Stick with it for 6 to 8 weeks.
Ignoring weak points	Imbalanced physique.	Add extra volume and put them first.
Skipping legs or back	A lopsided body and a missed chance for progress.	Include them every week.
Copying a pro's split	Their genetics, recovery and lifestyle differ from yours.	Build around your life.
Neglecting sleep and food	Recovery limits growth.	Sleep 7 to 9 hours and eat enough protein.

Note: This is general training information written from general knowledge, not medical advice, and I did not look up studies for it. Volume and frequency ranges are typical starting points and vary by person. If you have an injury or health condition, get advice from a doctor, physio or qualified coach before changing your training.