Your barbell plan, week by week

What the twelve weeks feel like, and what to do when it gets hard.

Twelve weeks, three days a week. Here is what each part feels like, and what to do when it gets hard.

Weeks 1 to 3: it feels too easy

You start close to the empty bar. It will feel too light. That is the point. In the first weeks, most of your new strength comes from your brain learning the lift, not from bigger muscles.

So use these weeks to get the lifts right. Film a set from the side now and then.

Weeks 4 to 8: the good part

Add weight every session you get all your reps. Once a week, write your weights on the last page of your plan, “Your lifts, week by week”. Eat enough protein. Sleep.

When you get stuck

- **Missed reps?** Same weight next time.
- **Missed the same weight three times?** Take 10% off that lift and build back up.
- **Press stuck?** Use smaller jumps. 0.5 kg plates, if your gym has them.

Getting stuck is normal. It means you are near the end of the easy gains, not that you are doing it wrong.

The easy week

Every 5 or 6 weeks, or when you feel worn out, take an easy week. Same days, half the sets, a bit lighter. In one survey, 246 strength athletes did this about every five to six weeks, for about a week.

After week 12

Still adding weight? Keep going. Stuck a lot? Add weight once a week instead of every session. Not sure? Ask a question.

SOURCES

1. Moritani T, deVries HA (1979). Neural factors versus hypertrophy in the time course of muscle strength gain. American Journal of Physical Medicine.
2. Rogerson D et al. (2024). Deloading practices in strength and physique sports: a cross-sectional survey. Sports Medicine - Open.
3. Bell L et al. (2023). Integrating deloading into strength and physique sports training programmes: an international Delphi consensus approach. Sports Medicine - Open.

Ready to start? Free plans to print, at heftic.com/plans →