How to make dumbbell workouts harder

Your dumbbells feel light. You don't need heavier ones yet.

Sooner or later, your dumbbells feel light. You don't need heavier ones straight away. Make the same weight harder.

Light weights still work

Lighter weights build muscle too, as long as each set ends close to your limit: one or two reps left. Heavy weights are a little better for pure strength. For most people at home, that is fine.

Four ways to make it harder

- **More reps.** Add reps until the last few are hard.
- **Slower.** Take three or four seconds to lower the weight.
- **Pause.** Hold for two seconds at the bottom of each rep.
- **One side.** Swap a split squat for a Bulgarian split squat: back foot on a chair. See Exercise videos.

One change at a time

Change one thing. Keep it until it feels easy. Then change the next. Note it on the last page of your plan, “Your lifts, week by week”.

When to buy heavier

When you can do 20 good reps with a slow lowering, it is time. Adjustable dumbbells save space and money.

SOURCES

1. Schoenfeld BJ et al. (2017). Strength and hypertrophy adaptations between low- vs. high-load resistance training: a systematic review and meta-analysis. Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research.

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