

Easy Strength Training Program for Strength Gains

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Abstract

Easy Strength is a strength training protocol consisting of performing the same lifts on a daily basis five days in a row followed by two days off for eight weeks. A lower intensity is utilized and its effectiveness has been touted as being successful. However, these claims have never been tested. In this experiment, subjects were gathered and put through an Easy Strength protocol for eight weeks, then tested for one repetition maximum (1RM) increases in the squat, bench press and deadlift. All subjects improved the 1RM in all three lifts. The squat increased by an average of 14.29%, bench press by an average of 10.26% and deadlift by an average of 13.73%. The conclusion is that the Easy Strength training program can be an effective means of increasing maximum strength levels.

Introduction

Personal trainers are tasked with creating a training program for their clients. This can be a challenge as clients need a program they will adhere to that will produce noticeable results. This usually leads to tailoring the training program to the client utilizing popular training programs found in personal training textbooks, muscle magazines and books.

Most weight training programs that trainees engage in consist of popular bodybuilding movements for three to five sets of eight to twelve repetitions. These programs generally don't have a set progression and trainees instead train as heavy as possible in each lift. Reaching failure in the lift is often acceptable and sometimes desired. Each training day is designed to emphasize a

particular body part (such as chest, legs, etc.) with multiple exercises performed for the body part. Usually, a few days to a week is used for recovery prior to training that body part again (ACSM 2009).

Other training programs, such as those used by competitive powerlifters, are more scientific in nature. They usually consist of a six to eight week percentage based program that tapers to a peak for a competition or leads to another goal in the training process. Weights used are usually a varying percentage of the trainee's one rep maximum (1RM), with reps and sets that vary in both intensity and volume. This type of program is most likely biased toward two to four main or competition lifts utilizing a range of 65-95% of 1RM. A few selected assistance movements may be used to complement the main lifts. The main lifts are performed once or twice per week with three to seven days off for recovery. These types of programs usually include a back off week four to six weeks into the program to help aid recovery and adaptation (Wendler 2009).

For this experiment, the Easy Strength training program by Dan John and Pavel Tsatsouline was selected. Easy Strength is a 40 workout, eight week program consisting of five training days in a row followed by two days off (John, et al., 2011). The same lifts are performed each day, but a lower intensity is used so the trainee has a rate of perceived exertion (RPE) around five or six on a ten point scale. The weight should be light enough that there is no need to get 'psyched up' in order to perform the lift. Additionally, the trainee should never miss a rep and each lift will be performed with a total of ten reps or less in various rep/set schemes.

Whether or not using the same lifts on a daily basis with a lower intensity is effective has not been answered. This experiment tests the program in order to assess the effectiveness of the Easy Strength training program. Subjects were selected and put through the 40 workout training program, then assessed in the "big three" lifts, consisting of the squat, bench press and deadlift.

Materials and Methods

Nine subjects of varying height, weight and training background were selected. Each of the subjects was given instruction on proper form in each of the lifts to be performed during the eight weeks. The subjects were then tested in the one rep maximum (1RM) in the squat, bench press and deadlift. The 1RM numbers were then used to populate a Google Docs spreadsheet with percentages of the 1RM used to calculate poundages for the lifts the subjects performed.

The subjects were given the Google Docs spreadsheet to use as a schedule for each training day (Fig. 1). The spreadsheet was separated into two-week blocks. Each week long block consisted of five workout days followed by two days off for a total of ten workouts in each two-week block. The ten workouts consisted of the following set/rep scheme for each of the three lifts, as well as pullups:

Days 1 and 2: 2 sets of 5 reps with the starting percentage of 1RM

Day 3: 1 set of 5, add weight for a set of 3, add a little more weight for a set of 2

Days 4, 5 and 6: 2 sets of 5 reps

Day 7: 6 singles, adding weight with each successive set.

Day 8: de-load with 1 set of 10

Day 9: 2 sets of 5 reps

Day 10: 1 set of 5, add weight for a set of 3, add a little more weight for a set of 2

Weights for each lift were calculated using a percentage of 1RM, called the starting percentage, for each two week block. This number was gradually increased in small percentage increments throughout each two week block. For the days utilizing 2 sets of 5 reps, the percentage increment was graduated so that Day 9 was utilizing 7.5% more weight than day 1. For Day 3, Set 1 started at starting percentage while Set 2 added 10% and Set 3 added 12.5%. Day 7 consists of

six sets of singles. This day started with the weight utilized on Day 6 and gradually incremented so that Set 6 was 30% heavier than Set 1. Day 8 utilized weights that were 5% lower than the starting percentage for the two week block. On Day 10, Set 1 started at the weight utilized on Day 9 while Sets 2 and 3 utilized 10% and 12.5% more weight, respectively. After each two week block, the starting percentage was incremented by 2.5% and the cycle repeated.

A loaded carry that varied in load and distance each day, as well as abdominal wheel rollouts were also included on the spreadsheet. These were varied subtly in intensity each day.

1st 2 weeks Easy Strength										1st 2 weeks' percentages		
Week 1	Day1	Day2		Day3			Day4	Day5				
Sets/Reps	2 x 5	2 x 5		Set 1 x5	Set 2 x3	Set 3 x2	2 x 5	2 x 5	BW	Max	Starting %	
Squat	60	60		60	70	75	65	65	Exercise			
Bench	45	45		45	55	55	50	50	Squat	110	55.00%	
Pullups	Blue	Blue		Blue	Blue	Red	Blue	Blue	Bench	85	55.00%	
DL	100	100		100	120	125	105	105	Pullups	0	25%	
Loaded carry	FW, 25s x 1	FW, 30s x 3/4		FW, 25s x 1			FW, 25s x 1	FW, 30s x 3/4	DL	185	55.00%	
Ab wheel	5	5		5			5	5	FW	30	90.00%	
Week 2	Day6	Day7 - 1 rep each set						Day8	Day9	Day10		
Sets/Reps	2 x 5	Set 1	Set 2	Set 3	Set 4	Set 5	Set 6	1 x 10	2 x 5	Set 1x5	Set 2x3	Set 3x2
Squat	65	65	70	75	80	85	90	55	70	70	80	85
Bench	50	50	55	55	60	65	70	45	55	55	60	65
Pullups	Blue	B	B	B	R	R	R+5	Green	Blue	Blue	Red	Red
DL	110	110	115	125	135	140	150	95	115	115	135	140
Loaded carry	FW, 30s x 1	20lbs KB rack walk						15lb KB OH	FW, 30s x 1	1 arm 25lbs KB rack walk		
Ab wheel	5	5						5	5	5		
Note: Superset bench and body rows. G means feet on ground, Box means feet on box. Higher means set the bar a notch higher.												
Note on Loaded Carry: FW = Farmer's walk. 1 = distance from DB rack to GroupX room and back. 3/4 is 3/4 that distance												

Table 1

Four two-week blocks were utilized for a total of eight weeks (40 workouts). Weeks 1 and 2 utilized a starting percentage of 55% 1RM. Weeks 3 and 4 started with 60% 1RM, weeks 5 and 6 started with 62.5% 1RM and weeks 7 and 8 started with 67.5% 1RM.

After completion of the eight week program, each subject was again tested for a 1RM and the numbers were recorded. Each client was interviewed in order to assess client adherence to the program, perceived effort and satisfaction.

Results

Every subject had an increase in strength in each of the three lifts. Squat improved by an average of 30 pounds (13.95%) with a low of 5lbs and a high of 60 lbs. Bench press improved by an average of 15 pounds (7.89%) with a low of 5lbs and a high of 30lbs. Deadlift improved by an average of 40lbs (15.38%) with a low of 15lbs and a high of 60lbs (Figures 1, 2 and 3).

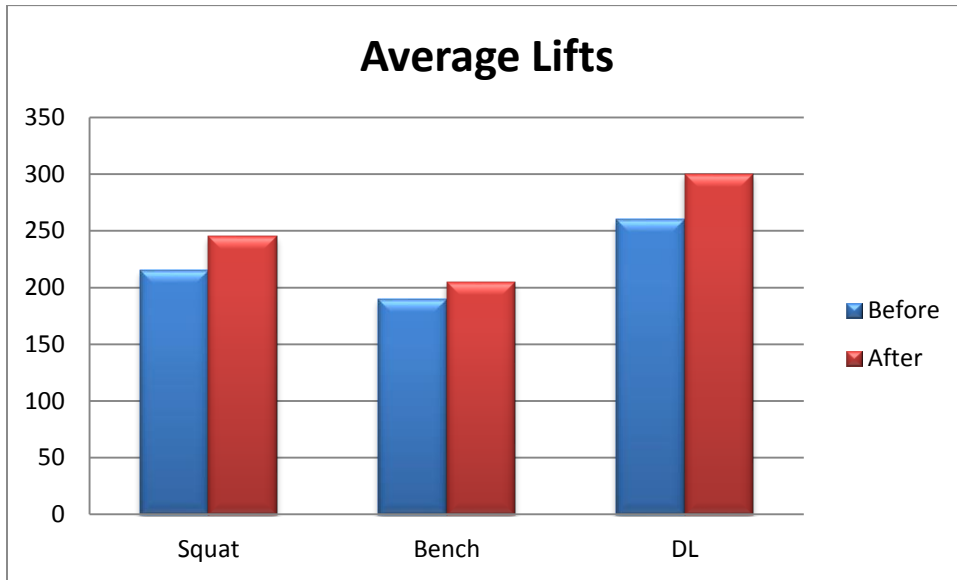


Figure 1

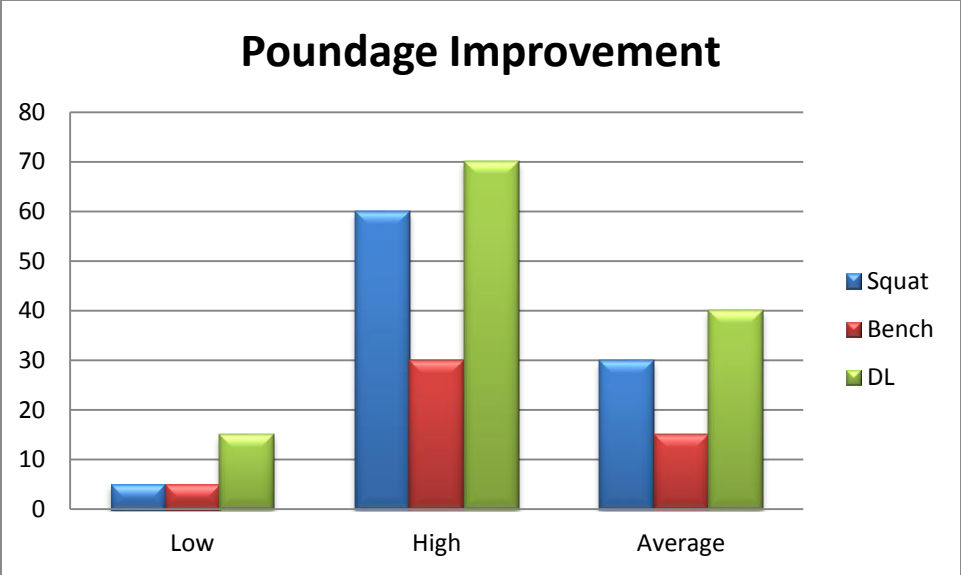


Figure 2

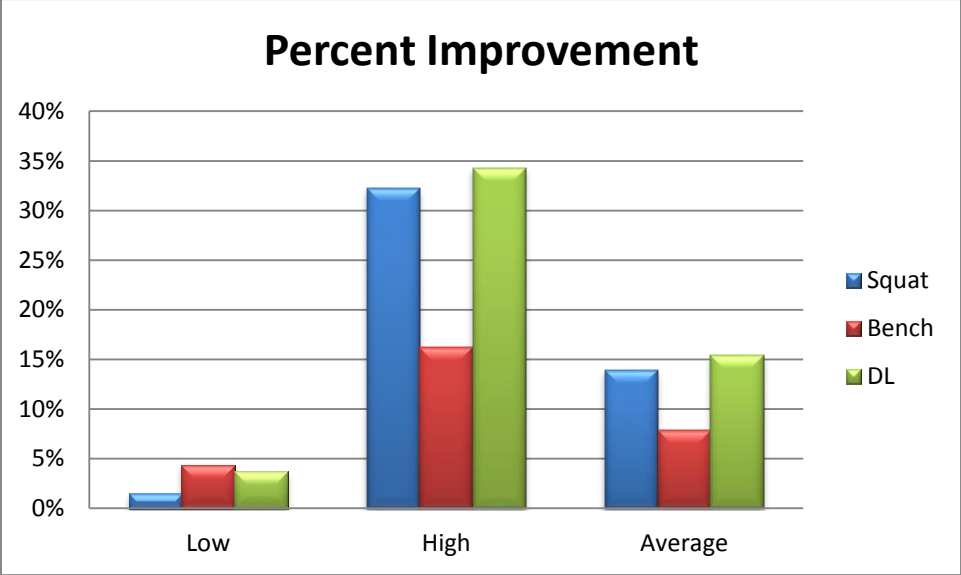


Figure 3

Discussion

Results were positive for all subjects, leading to the conclusion that the Easy Strength program utilizing the same lifts per day with a lower intensity can be an effective strength training program. Subject adherence was good due to the program being relatively quick and easy to perform. One hundred percent of the subjects were happy with their results. Multiple subjects remarked that the program felt “too easy” and was sometimes “boring”. However, these subjects were also “surprised” at the effectiveness. While each subject had a different training background, all subjects were active at the time and utilizing a training program they designed themselves. All were previously unhappy with the results they were getting and felt the Easy Strength program provided results they were looking for.

Without further study, it can only be theorized as to why this program was effective. The most likely mechanism for the strength gain was neurological adaptation. With the same lift performed on a daily basis, neurological adaptation will lead to increased “skill” at performing the movement (Tsatsouline 1999; Tsatsouline 2004). This could lead to higher motor unit recruitment or more synergistic motor unit recruitment (Duchateau, Enoka and Semmler 2006).

While the lifts were performed daily, a lower intensity was used in the form of weights at a lower percentage of 1RM. This resulted in a low daily volume, helping to prevent excessive muscle fatigue and allowing for a faster recovery and adaptation (Tsatsouline 1999). Subjects reported only minor muscle soreness that reduced as the program progressed, indicating less inflammation and therefore less muscle tissue breakdown. Further studies on this would be needed to validate this theory.

While the daily volume was low, the weekly volume for each lift was relatively high. Many popular training programs utilize high volume in order to elicit an adaptation response in the form of either hypertrophy or strength gains. The high volume is usually accrued in one or two days during the workout week at higher intensities (ACSM 2009), although in some cases it is accrued via more frequent training sessions (Poliquin 2010). In this case, it was accrued over five days. As the intensities were lower, the body may have been able to adapt more efficiently than in other high weekly volume programs. However, a comparison study would be needed to validate this hypothesis.

Conclusion

Based on the results of this experiment, the Easy Strength training program is an effective means to elicit strength gains in both trained and untrained individuals. It is easy to program, implement and sustain, making it a high value program to be implemented by personal trainers for their clients.

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