

Instructions: How To Do Deadlifts

Written by: John Seif

Perfect form is critical with this exercise. If you want size you have to do deadlifts -- here's how!

BACKGROUND

In tandem with squats, deadlifts rank as the most productive size-blaster in the repertoire of bodybuilding movements. Deadlifts are one of the most overlooked exercises, particularly by novice and intermediate bodybuilders, who may mistakenly view the exercise as more of a powerlifting move than a bodybuilding exercise. Deadlifts are a challenge, but you won't fulfill your back potential without them. Perfect form is critical with this exercise, because so many muscle groups are involved. For this reason, five reps are sufficient for all sets, including lighter sets. Performing higher reps with lighter weights can fatigue stabilizers before larger muscles have been challenged to their full extent, creating a risk of injury.

Develop good habits by first using light weight. Do more warm-up sets if you feel it will help you develop your groove. Never get sloppy with deadlifts.

STARTING POSITION

Stand facing the bar; your feet should be about shoulder-width apart, toes pointing slightly outward. The bar should be roughly over the center of your feet. Bend over and grasp the bar with either an overhand or alternate grip (one hand with palm forward, one with palm facing back). Keep your chest up, your shoulders back and down, and your lower back arched and "locked." The upper part of your thighs should be about parallel with the floor. Your glutes and hams should be as tight as a compressed spring as you force yourself into the start position. Keep your head up: Look at a spot on the wall facing you that will be eye level when you stand up -- don't look down at any time during the lift. Inhale deeply. Tense your triceps and flex your abs hard. Drop your hips down and push your butt back as far as possible, keeping your shins straight. If you want to use lifting straps, employ them sparingly, such as when your grip becomes limiting in terms of your exercise form or the weight you can lift.

EXECUTION

Keeping your weight on your heels, your head up and your back arched and tight at all times, pull the weight off the floor by pushing through your heels using the power of your thighs.

Use your hands as hooks on the bar.

Do not pull on the bar as that will not only diminish your strength tremendously, but will also activate inappropriate muscles and biomechanics, greatly increasing your risk of injury.

Keep your knees in line with your feet (pointed in the same direction) and never twist or turn your head.

As you drive through your heels, think about pushing or leg pressing the ground away from you rather than about pulling or lifting the bar.

The bar should stay close to your legs at all times. It may help to visualize the bar as moving toward your midsection rather than straight up.

As the bar passes your knees, drive your hips forward and squeeze your glutes hard. Keep your chest high, your lower back arched and your shoulders down. Don't exaggerate the finish by leaning back.

Exhale and take another deep breath, push your glutes back, and keep the weight on your heels. Don't drop the weight, but let the bar down relatively quickly and without a lot of resistance.

Pause momentarily. Take a deep breath before starting the next rep.

INJURY PREVENTION

Deadlifts are one of the most complex of all exercises and our experts caution that to avoid injury not only must strict form be followed, but also an adequate warm-up should take place. Younger bodybuilders in particular tend to leap into the core of their training without a proper warm-up. If you take the time to do two sets of hyperextensions using your body will be ready for the stimulating work to come.

Stay focused on your larger goals of overall muscular growth, but concentrate also on each smaller goal, whether that's keeping your spine properly aligned or holding your shoulders in the proper position.

To say that the final rep of a set is the most important and that the effort on that last rep is what determines the rate and amount of growth is misleading. If it were true, a program of all-out single attempts would be the fastest route to a physique like Dorian Yates' or Ronnie Coleman's. It takes little experience to realize that this is not the case. Every rep counts. Perform each rep of every set of every exercise (regardless of how many you're doing) as if you were attempting a maximum single. Remember, bodybuilding success is achieved one perfect rep at a time.

SUGGESTED WORKOUT INCORPORATING DEADLIFTS

Hyperextensions* -- 2 sets of 15 reps

Deadlifts** -- 2 sets of 5 reps

Deadlifts** -- 3 sets of 5 reps

Close-grip cable rows -- 3 sets of 8 - 10 reps

Close-grip pulldowns -- 3 sets of 8 - 10 reps

Dumbbell shrugs -- 3 sets of 8 - 10 reps

* Perform as a warm-up.

** Perform two warm-up sets with light weight; do only five reps to avoid fatiguing smaller supporting muscles before the heavier working sets to follow.