

The Intermediate Athlete

The intermediate athlete has used the Novice program over several months to build stress and subsequent adaptation and recovery. They now need to adjust their training to account for a longer recovery and adaptation period of every week versus every two to three days. The intermediate program also accounts for an increased need for training variety between workouts using different intensities, volumes and in some cases exercises.

As athletes advance from novice to intermediate, they should be prepared to handle heavier weight and lower repetitions as they progress through a training cycle. This will add their ability to adapt to an even heavier training load the following week. These lower repetitions should also, allow the body to peak for competition as long as adequate recovery is provided. Additionally, intermediate lifters may use a greater range of repetitions overall as a part of the needed variety in volume and intensity in order to drive further adaptations and gains.

The intermediate program uses heavy light and medium (HLM) workouts over 3 days, a heavy medium workout over 2 days or a split system over 4 days to spread the training load over a week. Note that slightly more volume (number of repetitions and sets) is suggested for heavy days early in the cycle than with the Novice program. This additional volume and subsequent stress can be more easily handled with weekly versus daily recovery programming.

The following table provides an example of a Heavy-Light-Medium 3 Day program for intermediate level lifters. The 3 Days could also be: heavy day-Saturday, light day Monday and medium day-Wednesday. Which can make transitioning to competition a little easier.



Suggested Intermediate Heavy-Light-Medium - 3 Day Program

Starting Sets/Reps – Week 1

Heavy Day – Monday	Light Day - Wednesday	Medium Day – Friday
Squat 4x5	Squat 2x5 (80-85% of Hvy Day)	Squat 1-3x5 (85-90% of Hvy Day)
Bench 4x5	Press or Close Grip Bench 3x5	Bench 1-3x5 (85-90% of Hvy Day)
Deadlift 1x5	Chin-Ups or Rows 3x6-8	Deadlift 1x5 (85-90% Of Hvy Day)

Considerations:

- Be careful about too much medium day volume (sets and repetitions) which can prevent athlete from performing at their peak on the next heavy day.
- Squats and deadlifts can increase from 2.5-5kg a week while bench and press will increase by 1.25-2.5kg per week.
- Younger athletes can handle a light day of as much as 20% less than heavy day and a medium day at 10% less but older athletes may tend to detrain with this amount of offset. They might get best results with 10 to 15 % less on light day and 3- 5% less on medium day.
- Older lifters may also need to reduce the competition lifts to three sets of three or four sets of two on heavy day earlier in the cycle to ensure adequate recovery. For older athletes, increases in weight per week may be limited to 2.5kg in the squat and deadlift and 1.25kg in the pressing movements at the start then reduce to smaller increases (this will require 1.25kg plates).



Note that for continued gains it is recommended that athletes not consistently go to maximum repetitions for each training session but allow for 1 to 2 repetitions in reserve.

Intermediate Heavy - Medium Two Day Program

The Heavy Light Two Day program shown in the table below can be used by those older intermediate athletes/partners with less recovery capability or those who have other sport or heavy physical pursuits that would interfere with the 3 day program. Older lifters can use this program indefinitely or alternate with novice training after layoffs. Suggested weight increases per week are the same as for the three day program above.

Suggested Intermediate Heavy-Medium Two Day Program Starting Sets/Reps – Week 1	
Heavy Day (Monday)	Light Day (Thursday)
Squat 4x5	Squat 2x5 (85-90% of Hvy Day)
Bench 4x5	Bench 4x5
Deadlift 1x5	Deadlift 1x5 (85-90% of Hvy Day)
Chin-ups or Rows 4x6-8	Press 3x5

Intermediate 4 Day/Split Routine

Split Routines can allow for a significant amount of work to occur over a four day period (vs three days). This allows for a greater amount of recovery time. Split routines also allow more time for conditioning work or single joint exercises that do not tax the nervous system. It is recommended that the 4-Day/Split Routine only be used by athletes who have trained regularly in the Novice routine and have completed some training with the 3-Day Intermediate routine. The following table depicts a four day a week Heavy Light Split program.



Intermediate 4 Day/Split Routine Program Option – Week 1			
Monday	Tuesday	Thursday	Friday
Close Grip Bench 3x6	Squat 4x5	Bench 4x5	Deadlift 2x5
Press 3x5	Stiff Leg or Deficit Deadlifts 3x5	Incline Barbell Press 3x6	Light Squat 3x5
Lying Triceps Ext 3x6	Barbell Rows 3x8	Barbell Press 3x6	Chin-Ups 3x8

Note that sets and repetitions shown are work sets and not warm ups.

Light day work (Squats and Close Grip Bench) will include a reduction in weight of from 5 to 15% of the heavy day loads for that lift. It should be noted that bigger, stronger lifters may require larger offsets than smaller lifters and lighter lifts. Also, older athletes may require lower volume (fewer sets/repetitions) and higher intensity (weight) for effective light day work.

The following includes some weekly progression options that can be applied to two day, three day and four day intermediate routines.

Note that Prilipens table above can be used to match the correct intensity and repetitions to the progression shown.



Intermediate Program Sets and Repetition Progression

Note that light and medium days do not change

Option 1 – Increase in weight/Gradual reduction in repetitions per set

This option uses heavy day increases of weight each week following guidelines above. Using the tables above, heavy day for the three day option is Monday, while heavy days for the four day option are Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. If repetitions are not completed with any of the prescribed sets, repetitions per set are reduced the following week. Sets and repetitions might look like the following:

Week	Reps and Sets
Week 1	5,5,5,5
Week 2	5,5,5,5
Week 3	5,5,5,4
Week 4	4,4,4,4
Week 6	4,4,4,3
Week 7	3,3,3,3
Week 8	3,3,3,2
Week 9	2,2,2,2
Week 10	Competition

For Option 1, light days use 2 sets of 5, then 3 sets of 3 for last few weeks while medium days use 3 sets of 5s for most of the program then for last few weeks 2 sets of 5 then a single set of 5. Light days only go up in weight a little each week or can stay the same for more than one week or drop according to the need for recovery before Medium day. Medium days similarly increases weight gradually or stays the same for multiple weeks.



Option 2 - Rep Progression

The Rep Progression program incorporates a gradual increase or repeat of weight with a cyclical change in sets and reps. A typical weekly progression might be: 4x5 x 75kg, 4x5 x 77.5kg, 3x6x77.5kg, 4x5x80kg, 3x6x80kg, 4x5x80kg, 3x6 x 82.5kg.

This conservative approach works well for older athletes. It also may work better for lifters that have a hard time tolerating even small increases in weight every week.

When the athlete is within six weeks of competition they can change the sets and repetitions to a progression of: 4x3, 4x3, 4x3, 5x2, 4x2, 4x2 with small (1.25kg to 2.5kg for bench and 2.5kg to 5kg on squat and deadlift) increases each week.

Option 3 – Weekly Step Down

This option incorporates a weekly step down of heavy day reps from 3 sets of 5, 3 sets of 3, to 5 sets of 1 for all primary lifts over a three week period. The cycle is then repeated over each of the following 3 week periods with a little more weight each time.

Note that because this routine uses larger increases between heavy days and frequent use of 1 RM, it may be too taxing for some older athletes. Also note that because of lower volume of work experienced on the heavy day, additional work on light and heavy day becomes more important.

A modification of this option is: 4x6, 5 x 4, and 6 x 2. This variation of the 5,3,1 step down can provide some variety to athlete training as well as extra volume for some additional hypertrophy. It is important to note that as repetitions increase, there is a likelihood that proper form and technique will decrease. Make sure that athletes never sacrifice good form for more repetitions or weight!



Structuring Sets

Sets Across

Top or work sets for each primary exercise (Squat, Bench and Deadlift) can be structured several ways. Sets across uses the same weight and repetitions for all work sets. This makes it easier to plan for and track as it regards athlete and partner progression from week to week.

This training option would progress as: 67.5kg x 5, 77.5kg x5, 87.5kg x 3, 97.5kg x5, 97.5kg x5, 97.5kg x5, 97.5kg x5

The downside of this common progression is that it can be more mentally taxing to have to repeat the same top sets multiple times.

Ascending Sets

Ascending sets is another option that incorporates top sets of ascending weight and the same repetitions. This progression allows the lifter to see the “light at the end of the tunnel” without the light being the train that is about to run them down.

Ascending sets progression would look like 67.5kg x5, 77.5kg x5, 87.5kg x5 90kg x5, 92.5kg x5, 95kg x5, 97.5kg x5.

The down side of using ascending sets is that the top weight for that day is done only after doing two other taxing weights on the way up.

Drop Sets

Drop sets are sets that incorporate warmup sets then a single top or work set followed by one or more sets of reduced weight to build adequate training volume. This progression has the advantage of having less work up to and including the top set.

A drop set progression could look like: 67.5kg x5, 77.5kg x5, 87.5kg x1, 92.5kg x1, 97.5kg x5, 95kg x5, and 92.5kg x5.

Still another drop set progression that could be used to add additional volume is:

67.5kg x5, 77.5kg x5, 87.5kg x1, 92.5kg x1, 97.5kg x5, 95kg x5x2, and 92.5kg x5x2



The disadvantage of this progression is that after competing your top or target weight you still have a lot of work to do.

As indicated above, with the intermediate program, athletes may train for 8 to 10 weeks in a progression and jump from the end of the progression directly to competition. If no competition is available or desirable then the progression can continue for a few more weeks or a break can be taken and the progression can be restarted at a slightly higher weight.

Advanced Athlete and Partner Programing

The Advanced Special Olympics athlete has generally had several years of training within the context of intermediate level training. The advanced lifter requires a longer time (multiple weeks) to acquire the training stress and adaptation that is needed to perform at the highest level. The advanced lifter, will also require further increases in variety of volume, intensity and exercises used as well as other training variables to continue to push the body to higher levels of performance.

It is important that athletes are not pushed too quickly into this level as they

1. May not be ready
2. May not have time for the increased levels of work and variety
3. They can make gains at the intermediate level for years

Advanced athlete programing should be planned in phases which address a particular aspect of preparedness. As with the Intermediate phase, training will generally build adaptation to higher volume and lower intensity while follow-on phases of training will focus on maximizing the development of strength with lower volume and higher intensity.

How long each phase will be is dependent on the individual athlete. While some lifters may need to focus more on higher volume and muscle building (more repetitions and/or more sets) over a training period, others may need to focus more on strength and power with proportionately lower repetition sets.

Programing for the advanced lifter can also include a mix of the above factors within each training week and can be effective with a coach that is knowledgeable in how to

