APEX GYM

Hypertrophy Training Plan

4-Day Upper / Lower Split

Hypertrophy training is the science of building lean muscle through progressive mechanical tension, metabolic stress, and controlled volume. This plan is structured as a 4-day upper/lower split — one of the most evidence-backed programme layouts for natural trainees. Each session pairs compound movements for maximum muscle recruitment with isolation work for detail and symmetry. It can be run alongside a caloric deficit for simultaneous fat loss or at maintenance/surplus for pure muscle gain.

Programme Overview

Day	Session	Primary Muscles
Day 1	Upper A	Chest · Shoulders · Triceps · Back
Day 2	Lower A	Quads · Glutes · Core
Day 3	Upper B	Back · Biceps · Chest
Day 4	Lower B	Glutes · Hamstrings · Core

The Workouts

Day 1 — Upper A

Focus: Chest · Shoulders · Triceps · Back

Warm-Up: Push-Ups 3×12 + Band Pull-Aparts 3×20 (superset, minimal rest)

Superset Warm-Up (no rest between A & B)

Push-Ups — 3×12

Controlled descent — 2 sec down. Elbows at 45°, not flared.

Band Pull-Aparts — 3×20

Drive arms apart to full extension. Great for shoulder health.

Main Compound Block

Seated Dumbbell Shoulder Press — 3×10 @ RPE 7–8

Full ROM — lower to ear height. Brace core throughout.

Barbell Row (overhand grip) — 4×8–10 @ RPE 8

Hinge to ~45°, pull bar to lower sternum. Squeeze at top for 1 sec.

Incline Dumbbell Press — 3×10 @ RPE 7–8

30–45° bench angle. Slow eccentric 3 sec. Stretch pecs at bottom.

Isolation & Accessory Block

Dumbbell Lateral Raises — 3×15 @ RPE 7

Slight forward lean, lead with elbows. Don't shrug at the top.

Triceps Dips or Rope Pushdowns — 3×12–15 @ RPE 7

For dips: upright torso to bias triceps. For pushdowns: full extension.

■ ***Finisher: 3×30 sec Plank + 3×10 each side Pallof Rotation (no rest between)***

Day 2 — Lower A

Focus: Quads · Glutes · Core

Warm-Up: Glute Bridges 2×15 + Bodyweight Squats 2×15 (activate glutes before loading)

Pre-Exhaust

Leg Extensions — 3×15 @ RPE 6

Pre-fatigues quads so squats hit them harder. Full extension & hold 1 sec.

Main Compound Block

Walking Lunges — 3×12 each leg

Long stride, front shin vertical, rear knee hovers 2 cm off floor.

Back Squats — 4×6–8 @ RPE 8

Key lift of the day. Bar on traps, brace hard, squat to depth. 2 sec descent, drive through heels.

Bulgarian Split Squats — 3×10 each leg @ RPE 7–8

Rear foot elevated ~45 cm. Bias glutes by keeping torso slightly forward.

Accessory & Core

Standing Calf Raises — 3×20

Full ROM — all the way up and all the way down. Pause at stretch.

Cable Crunches or Hanging Leg Raises — 3×15

For cable crunches: load the abs, not the hip flexors. Round the spine.

■ ***Finisher: 2×40m Sled Push — heavy enough to feel it, fast enough to keep moving***

Day 3 — Upper B

Focus: Back · Biceps · Chest

Warm-Up: Light band rows 2×15 + Dumbbell Curls 2×15 (prime pulling muscles)

Main Compound Block

Lat Pulldowns or Pull-Ups — 3×10 @ RPE 7–8

Full stretch at top, pull elbows to hips. Lean back slightly. For pull-ups: add load when 3×10 feels easy.

Romanian Deadlifts (RDLs) — 4×8 @ RPE 8

Hip hinge — push hips back, soft knee. Bar stays close to legs. Feel hamstring stretch before driving hips through.

Dumbbell Chest Press — 3×10 @ RPE 7

Flat bench. Controlled 3-sec eccentric. Full stretch at bottom.

Accessory & Arm Block

Dumbbell Rows — 3×12 each side @ RPE 7

Brace on bench, elbow drives back — think 'row to hip', not 'row to armpit'.

EZ Bar Bicep Curls — 3×10 @ RPE 8

Full supination at top. Resist the urge to swing — slow down the eccentric.

Preacher or Hammer Curls — 3×12–15 @ RPE 7

Preacher removes cheating — great for peak contraction. Hammer hits brachialis for arm thickness.

■ Finisher: Dumbbell Thrusters ×10 — 3 rounds, 30 sec rest between (squat + press in one).

Day 4 — Lower B

Focus: Glutes · Hamstrings · Core

Warm-Up: Light Hamstring Curls 2×15 + Hip Bridges 2×15 (wake up posterior chain)

Pre-Exhaust

Leg Curl Machine — 3×15 @ RPE 6

Pre-fatigues hamstrings. Curl slowly, hold at peak contraction 1 sec.

Main Compound Block

Hip Thrusts — 3×12 @ RPE 8

Bar padded across hips, shoulder blades on bench. Drive through heels, squeeze glutes hard at top. Don't hyperextend lower back.

Deadlifts (Conventional or Sumo) — 4×5 @ RPE 8–9

Heaviest session of the week. Brace 360°, bar over mid-foot. Push the floor away — don't think 'pull'.

Goblet Squats — 3×15 @ RPE 6

Dumbbell or kettlebell at chest. Upright torso, elbows inside knees. High rep — feel the burn and keep depth.

Accessory & Core

Seated Calf Raises — 3×20

Targets soleus (deeper calf). Slow — 2 sec up, 2 sec down.

Plank or Weighted Sit-Ups — 3×30 sec

For plank: squeeze everything — glutes, quads, abs. For weighted sit-ups: hold plate at chest, full ROM.

■ Finisher: Kettlebell Swings ×20 + Mountain Climbers ×30 sec — 2–3 rounds, 45 sec rest

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Training Tips

Rest Periods	60 seconds between most accessory sets. 90–120 seconds after heavy compounds (squat, deadlift, barbell row). Shorter rest = more metabolic stress; longer rest = more strength expression.

RPE Explained	RPE (Rate of Perceived Exertion) is a 1–10 effort scale. RPE 7 = 3 reps left in the tank. RPE 8 = 2 reps left. RPE 9 = 1 rep left. Use it to auto-regulate load on days you feel stronger or fatigued.
Tempo	Where noted, use a 3-second eccentric (lowering phase). This increases time under tension — one of the key drivers of hypertrophy — without adding extra load to your joints.
Form First	Ego lifting is the fastest route to injury and the slowest route to muscle. If form breaks, drop the weight. Good form means more muscle fibre recruitment, not less.
Track Everything	Log sets, reps, and loads every session. You cannot manage what you don't measure. Even a 2.5 kg jump per week compounds dramatically over a training year.

Cardio — Optional Add-On

Type	Protocol	When to Use
LISS	Brisk walk or light cycle — 30 min	2–4×/week. Best on rest days or after lower sessions. Enhances recov
HIIT	Sprints, assault bike, rowing — 15–20 min	1–2×/week MAX. High CNS cost — don't stack with heavy lower days.
Zone 2	Conversational pace, 45–60 min	1–2×/week. Builds aerobic base. Ideal Sunday morning activity.

Beginner's Guide to Progressive Overload

Progressive overload is the single most important principle in strength and muscle training. It simply means doing more over time — more weight, more reps, more sets, or better technique. Without it, your body has no reason to adapt. With it, every session moves you forward. Here's everything you need to know.

What Is Progressive Overload?

When you stress a muscle beyond what it's used to, it repairs and grows back slightly stronger. Progressive overload means systematically increasing that stress over weeks and months. Your muscles are smart — they adapt quickly. Your job is to stay one step ahead of them.

The Double Progression Method (Recommended for Beginners)

This plan uses a rep range for most exercises (e.g. 3×8–10). Step 1: Start at the bottom of the range (e.g. 3×8). Step 2: Each week, try to add 1–2 reps until you hit the top of the range (3×10). Step 3: Once you can complete all sets at the top of the range with good form, increase the weight by the smallest available increment (usually 2.5 kg) and restart from the bottom of the rep range. This is sustainable, measurable, and works for months or years.

How Much Weight to Add?

Upper body: add 1.25–2.5 kg per session when you hit the top of your rep range. Lower body: add 2.5–5 kg per session — the legs are stronger and adapt faster. Never add weight just because time has passed. Only add when you've earned it by hitting the top of your rep range with solid form.

What to Do When You Get Stuck (Plateaus)

Plateaus are normal. If you haven't progressed in 2+ weeks, try: (1) Deload — reduce weight by 10–15% for one week, then come back fresh. (2) Change rep range — switch from 3×10 to 5×5 for 4 weeks. (3) Check recovery — sleep, nutrition, and stress outside the gym affect progress more than most people realise. (4) Technique reset — sometimes better form unlocks more strength.

Tracking Your Progress

You cannot progressively overload without data. Use a notebook or app. Log: date, exercise, weight used, sets completed, reps per set. Before each session, check last week's numbers. That's your target to beat. Even one extra rep on one set counts as progress.

Progressive Overload Methods at a Glance

Method	How to Apply	Example
Add Weight	Increase load when top of rep range is hit for all sets	Bench 3×10 @ 50 kg → next session 52.5 kg
Add Reps	Complete extra reps within the target range before adding load	3×8 → 3×9 → 3×10 → increase weight
Add Sets	Add a working set to a key lift over several weeks	3×8 → 4×8 on your main compound
Reduce Rest	Shorten rest periods to increase density	90 sec rest → 75 sec → 60 sec
Improve Form	Better technique = more muscle fibre recruitment	Deeper squat, controlled eccentric (3 sec down)
Increase Frequency	Hit muscle group more often once adapted	Move from 2× to 3× per week for lagging muscles

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Suggested Weekly Schedule

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
Upper A	Lower A	Rest / LISS	Upper B	Lower B	LISS / Active Rest	Rest

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Training for something different? Want a 3-day, 5-day, or sport-specific plan? Speak to a coach at Apex Gym and we'll build it around your goals.