

WILD DOG ATHLETICS

A RUNNER'S GUIDE TO STRENGTH TRAINING



INTRODUCTION



My name is Abby Heffern,

Owner and head coach of Wild Dog Athletics. I compete in and coach ultrarunning, Olympic Weightlifting, and powerlifting- as well as being a general strength and functional fitness coach.

For most of my life, I was the typical runner who was afraid of the barbell and never considered herself "strong." I thought it would make me "bulky," slow, or I would get hurt. Ironically, it took accumulating a fair amount of running related injuries to finally realize I needed to start strength training.

Lifting has not only allowed me to run healthy for years, but it has also improved my performance and completely changed my perception of what my body can do. I'm living proof that there is no truth to "gains ruin cardio" or "cardio ruins gains" because I continue to become both a better runner and a stronger lifter year after year.

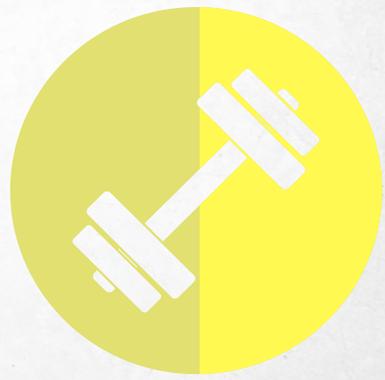
I strive to help runners come to this same realization; that "strong" and "running" aren't mutually exclusive, and that strength training is absolutely necessary for a lifetime of healthy miles as well as performance gains. I've developed this guide as a way to combat the harmful misconceptions about strength training for runners that constantly circulate the Internet and prevent any runner from making real progress with strength and injury prevention.

This guide will serve as both a tool to develop your own strength training routine, as well as your defense against the incorrect and damaging narratives most of the Internet places on what strength training for runners should or shouldn't be.

I not only hope you'll find this useful for the practical reasons of getting stronger and preventing injury, but that you'll also find it opens up a completely new realm of potential and possibility.



THE “STRENGTH TRAINING FOR RUNNERS” MYTH



In my opinion, there is no such thing as “strength training for runners.” There’s just strength training, period. Any good strength program takes into account the individual’s sport, injury history, strengths, weaknesses, experience, age, lifestyle, etc. Single leg work is important for runners and will definitely be a part of any runner’s strength program- but that doesn’t mean everything else is excluded. Runners should still be squatting, pressing, pulling, and working on every other fundamental that is often excluded from their program because it’s “non-specific.”

At the end of the day, the runners I coach need to run well, but they also need to LIVE WELL. They need to be able to play with their kids and sit down on the toilet when they're 85. This requires doing more than just single leg work. Working with a variety of exercises will only add to their strength, ability, and resistance to injury- while also ensuring that they have the tools to live a long and able life beyond the miles they run.



That's why it was so important to me that this manual was called, "A Runner's Guide to Strength Training" and not, "Strength Training for Runners." I hate to be the one to break it to you, but "strength training for runners" is merely a marketing ploy. Unfortunately what the industry sells you- that high volume, bodyweight, single leg work is the **ONLY** way runners should be training- prevents you from ever getting strong *for real* and doing the work you need to do to keep yourself truly healthy and well-rounded.





Don't let yourself, and your strength, get bogged down by the need for specificity. It's a part of the program, but it can't be the whole program. The strength and conditioning community puts a whole lot of weight on its importance- when in reality, the specificity has to happen when you're out there actually practicing your sport. You can hammer single leg exercises and core day after day after day, but if as soon as you start to run your shoulders slouch and you collapse at your hips, those reverse lunges and planks don't mean a damn thing. The purpose of a strength program is to give you the tools to run stronger and healthier- but you still have to apply it properly in practice.

OTHER MYTHS DEBUNKED

"Strength training is going to make me bulky and slow."



Listen, I've been actively trying to bulk up for YEARS and it still ain't happening. So long as you're running, your body is smart and will do what it needs to do to stay adapted to that activity. You're not going to touch a dumbbell and spontaneously gain 30lbs in muscle. It's the number one thing I talk about with my athletes on a regular basis- do the work and trust your body to adapt as necessary. Our bodies are SO SMART. If we train and fuel properly, they will figure out how to optimize.

Studies also show that strength training will improve your running economy and stride efficiency. Lifting increases your power output (run longer/faster with less effort), improves muscular resilience (run longer with less muscular damage), improves resistance to muscular fatigue (run longer without hitting the "wall" or cramping), and MORE. It's not just about injury prevention. If you aren't strength training, you're missing out on performance gains.

"I should only do bodyweight exercises."



If you're brand new to strength training, bodyweight exercises may be enough initially to stimulate muscle adaptation. But after a little while, most likely just a few weeks, your body will need a new stimulus to adapt to in order to continue to progress- which often means adding weight. Real strength- the kind that produces all of the benefits in performance gains we talked about above- cannot be gained through bodyweight exercises alone. Your body needs an increasingly challenging stimulus to be able to continue to build muscle and become stronger.

In fact, due to the 2-3x bodyweight forces imposed upon your body while you're running- using weight is **NECESSARY** to build strong enough tendons, muscles, and bones to withstand that stress. How could we expect our bodies to be properly prepared to absorb all of those forces otherwise?

"I'm going to get injured."



I'm fairly certain this has become more common knowledge now, but just in case- strength training will help you **PREVENT** injuries from running, not cause them. I've had far more running related injuries than I've had lifting related injuries- and most of those running related injuries came about during a time *when I wasn't strength training*. **REMEMBER:** We endure 2-3x our bodyweight in force when we run- there's **NO** possible way for your muscles, tendons, and bones to be prepared for that without strength training.

At this point you might be saying,

"Okay Abby, I'm with you. I see why single leg exercises aren't enough, I understand why I need to train with weights, and I want to reap all of the benefits of being a runner on a fully comprehensive strength program. But all I know are lunges and mountain climbers! Where do I go from here?"



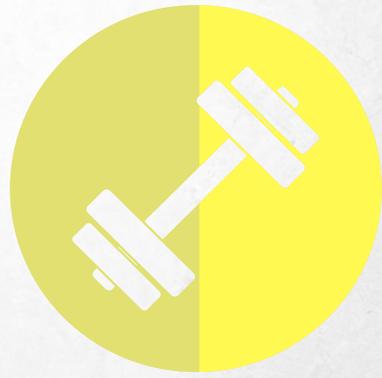
I've GOT you:

LET'S BREAK IT

DOWN



STRENGTH TRAINING: EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW



The next few pages are going to give you a basic definition and overview of progressive strength training, and hopefully answer all of your questions about weight, reps, and options for those with limited access to equipment.

Let's start with making sure you have an understanding of the most fundamental concept in strength and conditioning:

PROGRESSIVE OVERLOAD.



PROGRESSIVE OVERLOAD states that in order to stimulate adaptations in the body (i.e building muscle and getting stronger), you must increase the demand placed on the body over time. This is why doing the same amount of reps at bodyweight forever does not work for building strength and preventing injury. Your body will become adapted to your 3 sets of 12 bodyweight lunges fairly quickly, and it will no longer be enough to stimulate change and growth.

The most obvious and effective way to apply progressive overload to your training routine is to vary load and volume. Most commonly, an athlete will start a strength cycle with higher reps of 10-12 of each exercise with a lighter weight- and then each week following the reps per set will go down, while the weight goes up.

For example, if you were to apply this to goblet squats, the first week you would do 3 sets of 10 with 20lbs, the second week you would do 4 sets of 8 with 25lbs, the third week you would do 5 sets of 6 with 30lbs, etc. The total volume of work stays the same (around 30 reps), but the weight increases every week, which ensures that your body is constantly being stimulated to adapt.



This is just one approach to progressive overload. While there are other ways to vary reps and load, this tends to be the easiest method for beginners to grasp conceptually, track their progress, and apply to their own training without the help of a coach.

Now that you have a basic understanding of progressive overload, the three most burning questions you're probably asking are,

"How much weight should I use?"

"What if I don't have access to a wide range of weights?"

"How many reps should I do?"

"HOW MUCH WEIGHT SHOULD I USE?"



There are lots of ways to determine what weight you should be using. The method that will be most helpful to you, someone who is new to strength training, is most likely going to be RPE or "Rate of Perceived Exertion."

Simply put, RPE is a way to rate the difficulty of each set. For RPE, we use a scale of 1-10, and it's based on how many reps you think you had LEFT in the tank.

RATE OF PERCEIVED EXERTION

RPE 10

It was **HEAVY**,
potentially a max.
You could not have
done another rep.

RPE 9

Heavy, but you
could have done
one more rep.

RPE 8

Moderate, you
could have done
2 more reps

RPE 7

Not challenging.
You had 3 reps
left in the tank.

To see progress in strength, you want to be working at an RPE 8-9 consistently. This keeps the training challenging enough to stimulate adaptation, but not so impossible that you get burned out. Anything below RPE 8 would mostly likely be used for the purpose of recovery or maintenance, and will not be challenging enough for strength gains.



The most important takeaway in knowing what weight to use is that it has to be challenging. Using weight that's so light that it doesn't feel difficult is the same as working with bodyweight, and it will not be enough to stimulate adaptation. If RPE went over your head, just make sure the last 1-3 reps of every set gets challenging, and you're probably in a good range.

"WHAT IF I HAVE LIMITED ACCESS TO WEIGHTS?"



If you have the means you should either join a gym that has a wide selection of weights, or buy the kettlebells, dumbbells, or barbell you need to have an at-home gym. This ensures that your progress will never be limited, and it's the best case scenario for being able to properly progress and build strength.

HOWEVER, I understand that not everyone has the means- whether they're lacking the financials or the access. In this case, you have two main options to increase the difficulty of your training with the weights available:



**ADD
TEMPO**

**ADD
VOLUME**

TEMPO

Tempo increases your time under tension. Instead of moving through your exercises at normal speed, you slow down the movements or add pauses. For example, a tempo squat might look like counting down from 3 seconds on the way down, pausing for 2 seconds at the bottom, and counting down from 3 seconds on the way up. It could also look like just holding the bottom of every squat for 5 seconds before standing up. Again, there are a lot of ways to play around with the numbers to add tempo and make the movements you're doing substantially more challenging.

Because of the benefits it carries for muscle gain and movement control, tempo is great to add into any strength routine- even for those who have access to a wide range of weights!



VOLUME

Volume increases the reps per set or increases the number of sets. If 4 sets of 8 isn't challenging enough, try 6 sets of 8, or 4 sets of 12. Just like tempo, there are a lot of ways to play around with the numbers here to find a progression of reps and sets that will be challenging enough for you.



"HOW DO I KNOW HOW MANY REPS TO DO?"



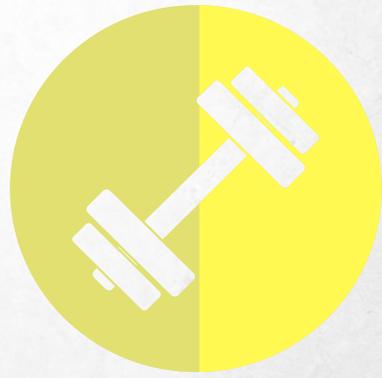
Typically, higher reps (7-15) are used for hypertrophy (muscle mass and endurance), and lower reps (3-6) are used for building strength (muscle durability and how much weight you can lift). Anyone who is not a bodybuilder or a powerlifter should be doing a mix of BOTH, because both hypertrophy and strength training have important benefits for injury prevention, muscle and tendon health, and longevity.

Therefore, like everything else so far, the most important thing is that you're following some sort of progression. You're either building volume and decreasing weight, decreasing volume and building weight, or possibly spending 4 weeks in a hypertrophy phase followed by 4 weeks in a strength phase.

“BUT IF I’M AN ENDURANCE ATHLETE, SHOULDN’T I ONLY BE DOING HYPERTROPHY FOR MUSCLE ENDURANCE?”

If your only goal of strength training is to better resist muscular fatigue while running long distances, maybe. But if you want to reap the full benefits of preventing injury, increasing power output, and improving muscular resilience- you have to train strength to build the DURABILITY and CAPABILITY of each muscle, not just the size and how long it can work past fatigue.

BUILDING YOUR OWN STRENGTH PROGRAM



Although I'm a big believer in the value of an individualized program, I understand that not everyone has the necessary financial means, which is why I'm providing you with the framework and knowledge to **BUILD YOUR OWN** strength program. Hopefully this framework will not only help you develop your own routine, but it will also give you the knowledge and background to spot B.S on the Internet and keep you from falling into marketing traps.

We've already discussed progressive overload, reps, and weight- which means the last piece to the strength program puzzle is choosing your exercises.

In building a well-rounded general strength program, you want to make sure you're working a variety of muscle groups as well as types of movement. There are many ways to accomplish this, but the simplest "plug and play" method that doesn't require an in depth knowledge of human anatomy just requires making sure you have these boxes checked on a weekly basis:

- ✓ **Upper body double arm push/pull (i.e push ups and pull ups)**
- ✓ **Upper body single arm push/pull (i.e single arm press and row)**
- ✓ **Lower body double leg push/pull (i.e squat and deadlift)**
- ✓ **Lower body single leg push/pull (i.e step ups and single leg deadlift)**
- ✓ **Isometric core (i.e plank holds and hollow holds)**

Knowing this framework, you can plug and play depending on how many days you have available to strength train. For runners, I recommend AT LEAST 2 days/week- with 3 days/week being optimal if possible. In case you're still confused or overwhelmed, I've provided one sample template for organizing your exercises if you're strength training 2 days per week.

2 DAYS/WEEK SAMPLE TEMPLATE

DAY ONE

A) 3 sets:

10 reps of lower body
double leg push
10 reps ea. of upper body
single arm pull

B) 3 sets:

10 reps of upper body
double arm push
10 reps ea. of lower body
single leg pull

C) 3 sets:

:15-1:00 Isometric core
holds

DAY TWO

A) 3 sets:

10 reps of lower body
double leg pull
10 reps ea. of upper
body single arm push

B) 3 sets:

10 reps of upper body
double arm pull
10 reps ea. of lower body
single leg push

C) 3 sets:

:15-1:00 Isometric core
holds

How to progress this training split...

From what we've learned so far, we know that we can take this template, select the appropriate exercises, and progress our weight/reps week by week to make sure we are progressively loading our body and stimulating it to adapt. Week Two of the above training split might look like 4 sets of 8 for all of the exercises with increased weight. If you don't have access to enough weight, you might go up in volume for Week Two and keep the weight the same OR keep the volume and weight the same and add tempo to make it more challenging.

Typically, you'll progress a training split for 4-5 weeks, decreasing reps and adding weight each week, increasing volume each week, increasing tempo each week, or some mixture of all of those things. After 4-5 weeks of progression, you can either start over with the same progression with the goal of starting with more weight or different exercises- OR you can switch up the progression and start a new one that focuses on strength, hypertrophy, or tempo- whatever aspect you left out the first time around.

There are SO many options in developing a strength program. It may take some trial and error to figure out what works best for you!

As you can see, I did not provide specific exercises in the sample template- because the possibilities are endless and each individual needs to find which handful best allows them to get results and address their weaknesses, past injuries, and goals. The most optimal exercise selection for performance and injury prevention will be different for everyone.

However, following the conclusion, you will find a sample exercise library to provide you with just a few of your options for upper and lower body pushing and pulling, as well as core. That will at least give you a place to start, but I encourage you to research and explore other exercises and their purposes outside of this e-book so that you're able to build the most effective strength program for YOU.



CONCLUSION



The online fitness industry targets runners in a very similar way that they target women- by promoting harmful body image ideals and propagating fear around weight training and becoming "bulky." They've created a damaging and incorrect narrative that strength training should be different for runners and women than it is for everyone else. In order to fuel their marketing campaigns, they've put runners and women in a box by telling them that it is not their role to be "strong," and that their workout regimens should revolve around staying as slim as possible. They've taken "building muscle" and replaced it with "toned" (not an actual thing) to make runners and women believe that there is a type of strength training they should be doing (bodyweight), and a type of strength training they shouldn't be doing (loaded).

One of my greatest motivations as a coach is to help as many people as possible break out of the boxes they've put themselves in due to the false narratives and information they've consumed online. Not just for the sake of health and performance, but for the sake of EMPOWERMENT and FULFILLMENT. Time and time again, I've met runners who think they're satisfied with their high volume, bodyweight, non-progressive faux strength training routine- until they're shown how empowering it is to actually get stronger and be able to lift more weight. It doesn't just prevent injury and increase their performance- but it also gives them a whole new level of confidence and excitement about what their bodies can do. In my opinion, that's just as valuable, if not more valuable, than the physical gains.

I hope this e-book has started that journey for you. I hope that you now have the tools to combat misinformation and discover or rediscover strength training. I hope it's taught you something new, or maybe changed your perspective.

Above all, I hope you close this book knowing strength is not exclusive. It can mean getting out of your comfort zone, but just like running, it's possible for anyone who is willing to head out the door, pick up a dumbbell, kettlebell, or a barbell- and begin.



Still left with questions?



Contact us:

 wilddogathletics.info@gmail.com

 @wild_dogathletics

 wilddogathletics.com

Interested in 1-on-1 or remote coaching for running and/or strength?

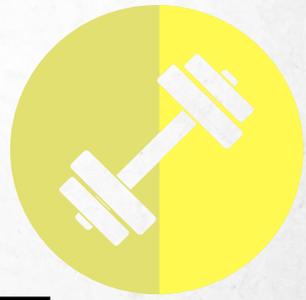
Contact us:

 wilddogathletics.info@gmail.com

 @wild_dogathletics

 wilddogathletics.com

SAMPLE



EXERCISE

LIBRARY

This exercise library is nowhere near an exhaustive list, but it will provide you with a few options for training upper body, lower body, and core. My hope is that this library will help you get started on your journey, and you will continue to be curious about finding the exercises that are the most optimal for YOU.

LOWER BODY PUSH

Goblet squat,
Back squat,
Front squat.



Modify by
squatting to
a box or
chair.

Single Leg
Step Up,
Lateral
Single Leg
Step up.



Modify by
using as low
of a surface
as needed.

Rear Foot
Elevated
Single Leg
Split Squat.



Modify by
keeping the
back foot on
the ground.

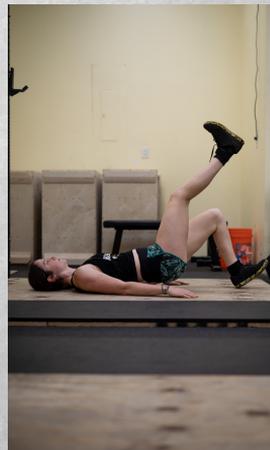
Deficit Calf Raise,
Single Leg Deficit
Calf Raise,
Single/Double Leg
Calf Raise no
Deficit,
Single/Double Leg
Calf Raise
Weighted



Single Leg
Reverse Lunge,
Walking Lunge,
Lateral Lunge.



Single Leg Glute
Bridge, Double Leg
Glute Bridge,
Elevated/Weighted
Single Leg/Double
Leg Glute Bridge.



Don't forget to add weight once you're comfortable with each exercise :)

LOWER BODY PULL



Barbell
Deadlift,
Kettlebell
Deadlift,
Dumbbell
Deadlift

Modify by
not going
fully to the
floor.



Barbell Sumo
Deadlift,
Kettlebell
Sumo
Deadlift,
Dumbbell
Sumo
Deadlift.

Great option
for those with
back pain.



Single Leg
Romanian
Deadlift.

Modify with a
single leg
deadlift by
putting the back
foot on ground.

NOT PICTURED:
Russian Kettlebell
Swing, Banded
Hamstring Curls,
Eccentric Nordic
Curls

UPPER BODY PUSH



Push Up.

Modify by going to an elevated surface like a box, counter top, table, or bench.



Single Arm Dumbbell Press, Double Arm Dumbbell Press, Barbell Strict Press



Box Dips, Bench Dips, Chair Dips, Couch Dips

NOT PICTURED:
Dumbbell Single Arm Bench Press, Dumbbell Double Arm Bench Press, Barbell Bench Press

UPPER BODY PULL

Pull Up.

Modify by doing TRX or Ring Rows, pull ups with the assistance of a band or a box, or a dumbbell row.



Dumbbell Frontal Raise



Single Arm Dumbbell Row, Double Arm Dumbbell Bent Over Row, Barbell Row



Dumbbell Lateral Raise



Single Arm Bicep Curl, Double Arm Bicep Curl, Kettlebell Bicep Curl, Barbell Bicep Curl



Dumbbell Reverse Fly



ISOMETRIC CORE

Plank Hold,
Weighted Plank Hold,
Bird Dog Hold



Single Arm Farmer's Carry,
Double Arm Farmer's Carry



Side Plank Hold



Single Arm Front Rack Carry,
Double Arm Front Rack Carry



Quadrapped Hold,
Quadrapped Walk



Hollow Hold

Modify by dropping arms to side, grabbing one knee, or tucking both knees.

