

# 25 WAYS TO GET STRONGER NOW!

USE THESE TIPS TO PUT UP BIGGER NUMBERS TODAY

Follow any program that we run in this magazine, and you're sure to be significantly stronger in a few weeks. **But damn it, sometimes that's just not soon enough**—like when you're meeting your buddies at the gym in an hour, and you want to make sure you smoke them on the bench press. **Behold, our best tips to get immediately stronger.**

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Long-term results like this begin with small changes in your routine.

**1** **“Work up”** to your heaviest weight instead of using a pyramid. Do several warm-up sets with low reps that prepare you to lift your heaviest on your last few sets. That way, you’ll have energy for those sets—the most crucial ones for strength gains. Say you’re planning to squat with 300 pounds for five reps. You could do 135 pounds for six reps, 185 for five, 225 for three, 275 for two, and then 300 for five. By the time you get to the 300 set, you’ll be thoroughly warmed up but not fatigued.

**2** **Visualize every rep** before you do the set. Imagine how it will feel, where your eyes will be focused, and how you’ll breathe. Doing so will make you more “familiar” with how the set will be done, and it will seem easier.



Tensing your whole body helps you lift heavier.

**3 Rest three to five minutes** between sets. To lift your hardest, your body needs to regenerate as much ATP—the fuel source for muscle contractions—as possible. Take the time to feel fully recovered before you attempt any personal record on a lift.

**4 Work on your weak points** If you can't lock out your elbows on the bench press, try setting the safety rails in a power rack at about your sticking point on the lift. Put roughly 100 pounds more than your one-rep maximum weight on the bar and then try to press it—naturally, you won't be able to move the bar but try hard anyway for six to 10 seconds. Do four to six reps, resting a few seconds in between, and then lighten the load to the weight you usually have trouble locking out. Your central nervous system should now be sufficiently fired up for you to lift it.



**Train with someone stronger than you.** Even if you have to invite the biggest animal in the gym to spot you, having someone around who inspires (or intimidates) you will always make you up your intensity.

**6 Go barefoot** or wear Converse Chuck Taylors. The less material there is between your feet and the floor when you lift, the more muscle your body can activate. It's also better for leverage on moves like the deadlift (you'll shorten the distance the bar has to travel). If you train at home or in a hardcore gym, lose the shoes. (If your gym requires footwear, thin-soled sneakers like Chucks are ideal.)

**7 Warm up your rotator cuff** before any pressing exercise. Take a two- to four-pound medicine ball and push it into a wall with one hand, keeping your arm straight. Roll the ball around on the wall (push hard so it doesn't slip), tracing the alphabet. Do two sets on each arm, and then do your pressing. Firing up the rotator cuff increases the stability in your shoulders.



### Load the bar with small plates

It makes the bar look lighter. **Your brain won't register it as heavy.** That mental advantage can help you lift heavier or do more reps.



Make your weights look lighter.

**9 Do box jumps** in your warm-up for leg days. Do three sets of three reps, resting 60 seconds between each set. Explosive exercises wake up the central nervous system to recruit maximum muscle.

**10 Try a few glute bridges** before deadlifting. Lie on your back on the floor with your knees bent and feet close to your butt. Dig your heels into the floor and bridge up with your hips, focusing on the contraction in your glutes. Do two sets of eight to 10 reps. Preactivating the glutes—the prime movers in a proper deadlift—allows them to fire at their fullest.

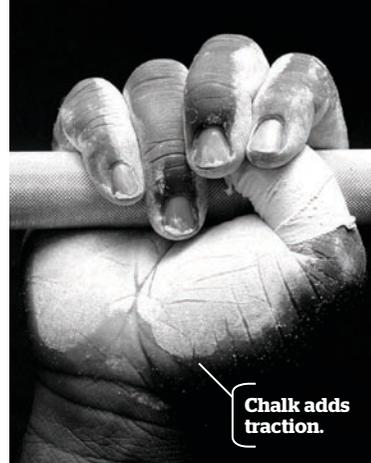
**11**

Squeeze your glutes on every lift. Tightness through your hips leads to increased stability everywhere and will let you put up more weight immediately on any exercise. In other words, you can, in fact, pull a new personal record “out of your ass.”

**12 Hold on to an ice pack** for one to two minutes before lifting. It’s like a cold shower for your nervous system, awakening your senses.

**13 Warm up with a heavier weight than your work set** Do your last warm-up set with a heavier weight than what you plan to use in your first work set. Do fewer reps than what you will do on the work set, too. Using the heavier weight in the warm-up will help you recruit extra muscle mass for the work set.

**14 Wear a weight belt** A lifting belt will help support your lower back on deadlifts, squats, and presses. You can increase your max by tens of pounds just by strapping one on.



Chalk adds traction.

**15 Use lifting chalk** Magnesium carbonate (not the same stuff you used in school to write a sentence 100 times on the blackboard) keeps your hands dry for a superstrong grip. Like the weight belt, it can help you instantly up your max.

**16 Try a hook grip** Grab the bar overhand as usual but wrap your thumbs around it first. Then wrap your fingers over your thumbs. Reinforcing the thumb with the strength of your other fingers gives you a much better grip. It’s a great way to lift heavier without using straps, which don’t let your grip muscles work hard.



Your ass is the key to bigger lifts!

STEVE BONIN/GETTY IMAGES

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Use your belly during lifts to stabilize your core.

**Push your belly out during a squat or deadlift** Take a deep breath from your diaphragm so that your stomach swells outward. (If your shoulders rise, you took the breath into your lungs.) If you're wearing a weight belt, push your gut into the belt so it feels very tight. **Inflating your abdomen increases core stability.** Do this on sets of five reps or fewer for an immediate strength increase of at least 10%.

**18 Go heavy** Before you curl, load the bar with 20% more weight than what you can lift for five reps. Cheat curl the bar to the top position and hold for two seconds, tensing every muscle. Take four seconds to lower the bar down. Rest one minute, then do your normal set of curls. The load you're about to lift will feel lighter.

**19 When bench-pressing,** drive your heels into the floor. Actively trying to force your body backward on the bench helps turn the lift into a full-body exercise, and it'll feel easier.

**20 If the bar isn't coming up evenly** during a lift (as in the bench or shoulder press), or one side begins to sink, squeeze the bar on the lagging side as hard as you can. You'll send a message to the nervous system, and it will increase strength on that side.

**21 Do two or three sets** of the plank as a warm-up (get into pushup position and then rest your forearms on the floor). Hold it for 20 to 30 seconds each. You'll wake up your core, which will better support your lifts.

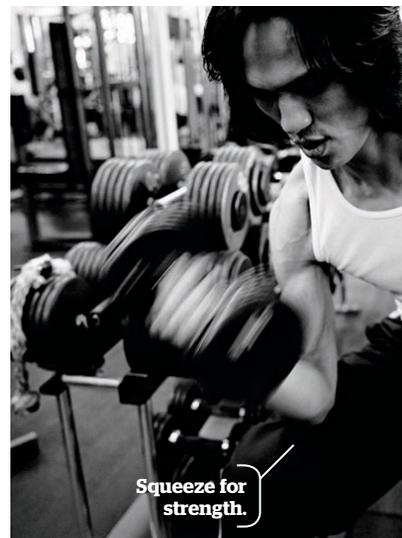
**22 Take a deep breath** after you lift the bar out of the rack on a bench press. Now hold it for your first two reps if you can. By not exhaling too soon, you won't lose your tight position early in the set. This takes a little practice, so avoid it if you're a beginner.

**23 Keep your wrists straight** during a pressing lift. The heavier the weight gets, the more you may have a tendency to let your wrists roll back, but don't. Keeping them straight is a more natural and stable position that will allow you to complete the lift more easily. If you can't keep them straight, work on your grip strength.

**24 Perform a "dynamic" warm-up** instead of jogging on a treadmill or pedaling a bike. Do body-weight lunges, throwing exercises, or jumps—any movement in which you move your joints through a full range of motion. It will better prepare you to lift than just breaking a sweat with light cardio because it warms your muscles and joints while also prepping the central nervous system to lift heavy.

25

**Squeeze the bar hard** for three to five seconds. Let go and rest for three to five seconds, and then begin your set. **Squeezing the bar (it also works on dumbbells) forces that tight feeling** everywhere in your body and reminds you to stay tight during the lift.



Squeeze for strength.







