

A 1-hour workout plan: what the full hour buys

Thirty minutes is enough for a lot of weeks. An hour is a different session, not the same one done slower. Here's what the extra half hour buys, according to the research, a sample hour laid out minute by minute, and how to spend it so the hour goes to sets instead of to the phone.

Short answer: An hour gives you what a thirty-minute session has to cut: a proper warm-up, full rest between sets, and more sets per muscle. In 21 trained men, three-minute rests built more strength and thigh muscle than one-minute rests. Spend the extra minutes there, not on more exercises.²

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A thirty-minute session works by cutting: a short warm-up, paired exercises, rests kept tight. [The 30-minute workout](#) is that page, and for a lot of weeks it's the right one. This page is the other case: you have a full hour, and you want to know what to do with it.

The short version is that an hour isn't a thirty-minute session with more exercises bolted on. It buys three specific things the short session gives up, and the sample hour below spends the minutes on those. A review of time-efficient training notes that, with a warm-up and stretching, traditional strength programs often exceed an hour,¹ so an hour is a normal length for a full session, not a long one.

What a full hour buys over thirty minutes

1. Full rest between sets

This is the biggest one. In an eight-week study, 21 young resistance-trained men did the same three full-body workouts a week with either one-minute or three-minute rests; the three-minute group gained more squat and bench press strength and more thigh muscle thickness.² A 2024 meta-analysis of nine studies found a small benefit for muscle growth from resting more than sixty seconds, and no appreciable difference once rests went past ninety seconds.³ A 2021 review put it this way: untrained people can do well on one to two minutes, trained people probably need two minutes or more, and the longer rests belong on the heavy multi-joint lifts.¹ In thirty minutes, rest is the first thing that gets squeezed. In an hour, it doesn't have to be. ([How long to rest, by lift.](#))

2. More sets

A 2017 meta-analysis of 15 studies found a graded dose-response: more weekly sets, more muscle growth.⁴ A 2026 meta-regression of 67 studies and 2,058 participants found the same direction for muscle and strength, with diminishing returns, more pronounced for strength.⁵ The American College of Sports Medicine's 2026 position stand found muscle growth was enhanced by ten or more sets per muscle group a week.⁶ Three hours like the one below come to about eight to eleven sets a week for each big muscle group (counting a press's sets as half for the muscles it only helps), around that line; two hours, about six or seven. That count is practical arithmetic; how many sets suit you is on [how many sets per week](#).

3. A warm-up that does its job

The time-efficiency review advises keeping the warm-up specific to the exercise, and prioritizing stretching only when flexibility is a goal.¹ In a study of 40 resistance-trained men, a warm-up of a few reps with light loads alone was not enough to optimize squat and bench press performance.⁷ So the warm-up in the hour is a few minutes of anything easy, then lighter sets of the first lift building up to the working weight. ([How to warm up before lifting.](#))

A sample hour, minute by minute

Two full-body days, A and B, alternated: two or three a week. The minutes, sets, reps and rests below are practical, inside the ranges on [how many reps](#) and [how many sets per week](#). Every set stops with one to three reps still in you. ([How to judge reps left.](#))

Minutes	Block	Day A	Day B	Sets, reps, rest (practical)
0–8	Warm-up	Easy bike or walk, then lighter squat sets	Easy bike or walk, then lighter hinge sets	3–5 minutes easy, then 2–3 build-up sets
8–22	Main lower lift	Barbell squat (form) or leg press	Romanian deadlift	4 × 6–8, rest 2–3 min
22–36	Main upper lift	Bench press or dumbbell bench press	Dumbbell shoulder press	4 × 6–8, rest 2–3 min
36–48	Second pair, alternated	Lat pulldown and leg curl	Seated cable row and split squat	3 × 8–12, about 2 min between the same exercise
48–56	Small muscles, paired	Lateral raise and hammer curl	Triceps pushdown and calf raise	2–3 × 10–15, 60–90 s
56–60	Core	Plank	Dead bug	2 sets

The two main lifts are done as straight sets, with full rest. Only the second pair and the small muscles are alternated, because the time-efficiency review advises against pairing methods for heavy compound free-weight lifts such as the squat and bench press.¹ ([How to pair exercises.](#)) Add weight by the rule on [progressive overload](#): when the top of the rep range comes with reps to spare, go up the smallest step.

How many hours a week

Two or three. The ACSM's primary recommendation is lifting at least twice a week with all major muscle groups trained.⁶ Beyond that, a meta-analysis of 25 studies found that when the total sets were matched, how often a muscle was trained made no meaningful difference to growth, so you can pick the frequency you prefer.⁸ Three hours of A, B, A one week and B, A, B the next is a complete plan. Four days a week? Split the same hour into upper and lower days: [the upper/lower plan](#). Which split suits your week is on [workout splits](#).

Cardio in the hour

If the hour has to hold cardio too, lift first. A 2018 meta-analysis of studies that put both in one session found lower-body strength was higher when lifting came before endurance training, and the order made no difference to aerobic capacity.⁹ So: the lifting blocks as written, cut the small-muscle block, and finish

with ten to fifteen minutes on the bike or the incline treadmill (practical). [Cardio and lifting together](#) has the rest.

Common questions

Is an hour too long for a workout?

No. Including a warm-up, a traditional strength session often runs past an hour.¹ An hour is too long only if it's spent between sets on a phone. If the hour keeps running to ninety minutes, cut the small-muscle block first.

Is one hour better than thirty minutes?

It's more, not automatically better. More sets meant more growth in the meta-analyses, with diminishing returns,⁵ and longer rests helped trained men.² On a short day, [the 30-minute workout](#) is the plan.

Can I do an hour every day?

You can, but you don't need to. Two or three hours a week covers the recommendation;⁶ more days only help if the weekly sets fit what you recover from. Two sessions in one day is its own question: [working out twice a day](#). [How often to train](#) walks through the choice.

What if I only have 45 minutes?

That's [the 30-minute workout's](#) territory: its list of what to cut first applies to forty-five minutes too.

If you'd rather not plan it alone

A sample hour is a starting point; your hour has your lifts, your rests and your week around it. Coaching here is general strength and fitness coaching: the sessions live in an app, built around the days and minutes you actually have, and a weekly call adjusts the next week from the last one. [Coaching for a week that doesn't hold still](#) explains how that works; [online coaching](#) covers the rest, and [apply](#) is where to start. Otherwise: book the hour, and do Day A.

General education only, not medical advice. If you have a medical condition, are pregnant, or take medication, check with your doctor before changing how you train or eat.

Sources

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