STRENGTH, POWER, AND SPEED PROGRAM DESIGN

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Introduction

Type "how to get strong" into Google and you'll be hit with millions of templated programs claiming to get you jacked in 30 days.

These generic strength programs work until they don't. Training programs that aren't matched to your client's goals, function, and capabilities will inevitably result in a dreaded strength plateau.

What's more, doing complex and explosive movements without a proper foundation will lead to poor mechanics, and, even worse, injuries.

The key to a lifetime of gains? **Principle-based and personalized strength programs.**

Understanding exercise principles takes the guesswork out of writing programs, so you can design safe, effective, and personalized workouts with confidence.

In this guide you will learn the theory and application of the **strength continuum,** a fundamental strength principle. Read the guide and watch the accompanying videos to learn how to write programs that can bust through any strength plateau.

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The Strength Continuum **Defined:**

The ***strength continuum*** is a foundational program design principle upon which different kinds of strength activities are classified.

On the far left side is **absolute strength**, followed by **strength speed**, then **speed strength,** and on the far right side, **absolute speed**.
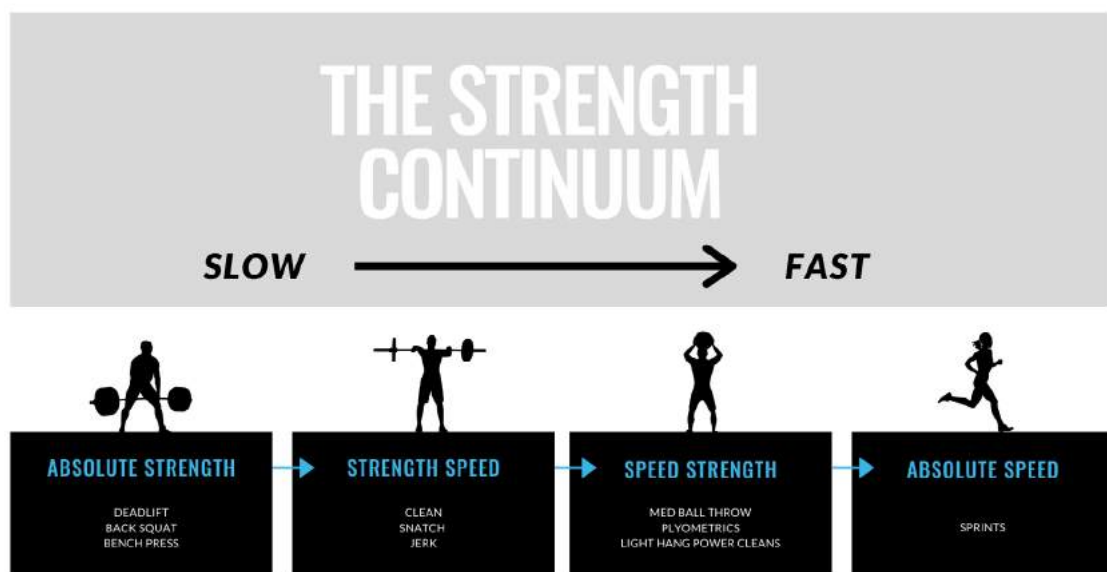
We progress the strength continuum from the left to the right, starting with slow and intense contractions and moving to faster and less intense contractions. Developing the strength continuum in this way allows for maximal expression across the continuum over time.

Click the video for an explanation of the strength continuum.

The key to a lifetime of gains? **Principle-based and personalized strength programs.**

Absolute Strength

Absolute strength is a type of strength training that involves moving heavier loads at a relatively low speed. This form of training begins with building muscle endurance and motor coordination. Absolute strength training sits on the far left side of the strength continuum and is the foundation for the rest of the strength continuum.

Most clients can train and thrive within absolute strength alone. The benefits of absolute strength training include improvements in bone density, lean muscle mass, and minimizing the negative effects of the aging process.

Progression to Develop Absolute Strength:

There are no prerequisites for developing absolute strength, but the priority of absolute strength training will depend on the training age and goals of the trainee.

To develop absolute strength, start with motor control exercises, then move to strength endurance, and then to maximal contractions.

Sample Progression of Absolute Strength in the Squat

Motor Control

Air Squat @3110, 12-15 reps x 3 sets; rest 60 seconds

Strength Endurance

Front Squat @30X0, 6-8 reps x 3 sets; rest 2 minutes

Maximal Contraction

Back Squat @20X0, 2-2-2; rest 3-4 minutes

Absolute Strength Exercises

Deadlift   Pull-Up

Back Squat   Barbell Lunge

Bench Press

Absolute Strength Training Plan

Week 1

A. Back Squat @ 31X1, 5-5-4-4-4; rest 3-4 minutes
B. Dumbbell Hamstring Curl @30X0, 10-12 reps x 3 sets; rest 90 seconds
C. 3 sets:

   10 V-Ups
   15 second Dead Bug Crunches
   10 V-Ups
   Rest 2 minutes

Week 2

A. Back Squat @ 31X1, 4-4-3-3-3; rest 3-4 minutes
B. Dumbbell Hamstring Curl @30X0, 10-12 reps x 3 sets; rest 90 seconds
C. 3 sets:

   12 V-Ups
   15 second Arms Forward Hollow Hold
   12 V-Ups
   Rest 2 minutes

Week 3

A. Back Squat @ 31X1, 3-3-2-2-2; rest 3-4 minutes
B. Dumbbell Hamstring Curl @30X0, 8-10 reps x 3 sets; rest 90 seconds
C. 3 sets:

   15 V-Ups
   15 second Hollow Hold
   15 V-Ups
   Rest 2 minutes

Week 4

A. Back Squat @ 31X1, 2-2-1-1-1; rest 3-4 minutes
B. Dumbbell Hamstring Curl @30X0, 8-10 reps x 3 sets; rest 90 seconds
C. 3 sets:

   25 V-Ups
   20m Quadruped Crawl
   Rest 2 minutes

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Strength Speed

Strength speed is characterized by the moving of a load faster, relative to absolute strength. Olympic lifts are a great example of strength speed training.

The benefits of strength speed training are very sport-specific. Clients training for health and longevity do not need to train strength speed. However, some clients do enjoy strength speed training and with the appropriate base of absolute strength and skill, this can be implemented safely.

Prerequisites to Develop Strength Speed:

Before expressing strength speed work at high intensity, it is important to make sure that force generation through absolute strength training is developed. The prerequisites of absolute strength to safely and effectively express strength speed include:

Back squat with 1 x bodyweight
Deadlift with 1.25 x bodyweight
Three strict pull-ups
Three strict dips

It is possible to train strength speed at lower loads with appropriate technique as a skill prior to developing these absolute strength prerequisites.

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Strength Speed Exercises

Snatch	Clean	Clean and Jerk

Strength Speed Training Plan

Week 1

A. 1 Snatch High Pull + 1 Snatch + 1 Snatch Balance; Every 90 seconds x 6 sets (3 sets @ 70%, 3 sets @ 75%)

B. 1 Power Clean + 1 Low Hang Power Clean + 1 Split Jerk; Every 90 seconds x 6 sets (3 sets @ 70%, 3 sets @ 75%)

Week 2

A. 2 Snatch; Every 90 seconds x 6 sets (3 sets @ 75%, 3 sets @ 77.5-80%)
B. 2 Power Cleans + 1 Split Jerk; Every 90 seconds x 6 sets (3 sets @ 75%, 3 sets @ 77.5-80%)

Week 3

A. 1 Snatch; Every 90 seconds x 3 sets @ 80-82.5%, Every 2 minutes x 3 sets @ 82.5-85%, Every 2:30 minutes x 3 sets @ 85-87.5%
B. 1 Power Clean + 1 Squat Clean + 1 Split Jerk; Every 90 seconds x 5 sets (Start @ 80% and 2.5-5lb each set)

Week 4

A. Snatch; Build to a tough single for the day in 12 minutes
B. Clean and Jerk; Build to a tough single for the day in 15 minutes

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Speed Strength

We perform ***speed strength*** with lower loads and at a faster speed than strength speed. Training to absorb and transmit forces rapidly is the main reason to perform speed strength.

Speed strength development is necessary for some sport-specific clients. This training can help increase power production in competition scenarios and prevent injuries. Specifically, speed strength and absolute speed training can allow better expression of power.

Prerequisites to Develop Speed Strength:

To develop speed strength, appropriate training in strength speed and adequate levels of absolute strength is required. However, overloading with absolute strength and strength speed will diminish the full expression of speed strength.

Speed Strength Exercises

Low Load Touch and Go Hang Power Clean   Jump Lunge

Low Load Touch and Go Hang Power Snatch   Clapping Push-Up

Speed Strength Training Plan

Week 1

A. Med Ball Chest Toss; 1 rep every 20 seconds x 12 sets

B. Touch and Go Hang Power Clean; 3 reps every 45 seconds x 8 sets @ 45%

Week 2

A. Med Ball Chest Toss; 1 rep every 20 seconds x 15 sets

B. Touch and Go Hang Power Clean; 3 reps every 45 seconds x 8 sets @ 47.5%

Week 3

A. Depth Jump Med Ball Chest Toss; 1 rep every 30 seconds x 12 sets

B. Touch and Go Hang Power Clean; 2 reps every 45 seconds x 8 sets @ 50%

Week 4

A. Depth Jump Med Ball Chest Toss; 1 rep every 30 seconds x 15 sets

B. Touch and Go Hang Power Clean; 2 reps every 45 seconds x 8 sets @ 52.5%

Absolute Speed

Absolute speed is training that develops the ability to make contractions more anaerobic.

It has the fastest contraction rate on the continuum and is the least intense in terms of load. This is a specialized expression of resistance training. Most clients will never need to train absolute speed or have the base of training required to express it.

Prerequisites to Develop Absolute Speed:

In principle, appropriate levels of absolute strength, strength speed, and speed strength are necessary for a full expression of absolute speed.

Absolute Speed Exercises	
Running Sprint	Assault Bike Sprint

Absolute Speed Training Plan
Week 1
4 sets 100m Running Sprint @ very hard Rest 2 minutes 15 seconds

Week 2

6 sets
100m Running Sprint @ very hard
Rest 2 minutes 15 seconds

Week 3

4 sets
100m Running Sprint @ very hard
Rest 2 minutes 15 seconds
+
Rest 7 minutes
x 2

Week 4

5 sets
100m Running Sprint @ very hard
Rest 2 minutes 15 seconds
+
Rest 7 minutes
x 2

Implementing the Strength Continuum

Click the video below to learn how to implement the strength continuum into your daily program designs.

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Master Personalized Program Design

The fundamental principles of the strength continuum apply to every client. However, knowing whether to prioritize squats, lunges, or cleans makes a ***master*** fitness coach.

Your success as a coach relies on your ability to personalize exercise programs according to each client's specific needs. What's more, if you plan to combine strength training with mixed modal and cyclical conditioning, you must know how to design concurrent training programs properly, manage training volume and intensity, and lay out periodized training phases.

To design well-rounded exercise programs with confidence, you need a detailed system of assessment and a deep understanding of long-term program design principles.

For over 20 years, OPEX Fitness has been teaching coaches like you, just that. **The OPEX Method** contains the science, principles, and systems you need to coach any client, anywhere.

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