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# Weight Training for Old Guys

(and good advice for the rest of us!)



Timothy Caso

**SPORTS PERFORMANCE COACH**

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*Weight Training for Old Guys takes you on a comprehensive, light-hearted fitness journey and incorporates both traditional and little-known Olympic Weight Lifting training methods that guarantee that no bully will ever kick sand in your face again! Written in layman's terms, Weight Training for Old Guys is a comprehensive how-to guide that enlightens and entertains the reader. It reveals trade secrets on how to build muscle mass, transform physiques, and how to remain injury-free.*

*The book has a strong, detailed focus on proper weight lifting techniques, discusses gym equipment necessities, warm-up routines, workouts for readers of all fitness levels, and exercise variations that keep the body continually challenged. Filled with detailed instructions and illustrations, Weight Training for Old Guys should be every man's bench-side companion*

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# **Weight Training for Old Guys**

A Practical Guide for the Over-Fifty Crowd

(And Good Advice for the Rest of Us!)

Timothy Caso

Sports Performance Coach

*Weight Training for Old Guys* supports the **Wounded Warrior Project (WWP)**. Ten-percent of the proceeds from this book are donated to the **WWP**.

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# Chapter I

## Introduction: Get Real

Let's face it: we're old. Fifty is not the new thirty (we wish). Fifty is fifty. If *spry* is the last word you would use to describe yourself when you get up in the morning or off the couch after the game, then you've come to the right place, and this book is for you! Like it or not, we are not part of the supple-jointed generation anymore! As they say, that ship has sailed. Stiffness, soreness, limps we didn't know we had—yes, we fifty-and-over folk are staring into the abyss. Or are we? Does it have to be this way? Can we counteract the effects of aging? Or do we have to accept that we are on a slippery slope? The good news is that our athletic lives don't have to end at our age. Far from it! We can still be strong, look good, and feel great! For example, I recently overheard my very attractive wife (more on her later) describing a young man to her twenty-something daughter. She said, among other things, "But he's not built like Tim." To which my step-daughter rolled her eyes and replied, "Nobody's built like Tim!" I'll admit that I chuckled with pride at my step-daughter's candid, unsolicited observation - she'd *never* say anything like that in front of me! But wait a second! How can that be possible? How can a fifty-something over-the-hill type look and feel better than most guys twenty-five years his junior? Do you have to be a gifted athlete, have super-human genetics, or have been the Big Man on Campus (BMOC)? (If you don't remember that expression, then you're too young for this book!) No, you don't have to fulfill any of the requirements above because the simple fact is that you'll get results if you're dedicated and work hard. The formula for success is good, old-fashioned hard work. No magic potions; no YouTube subscriptions – just you with a proven old-school training program. Quick word-of-caution: you're not about to walk into the gym and pound out the same workout you did thirty years ago. Not in what's left of this lifetime—unless you're thinking of regularly replacing body parts and auditioning for the real-life bionic man. Modification and patience (yes, these terms are unpopular with me too) are the keys to progress. So, how do we make our physical aspirations become, well, more than just aspirations? We'll get there. Promise.

So, who am I and why should you listen to me? I thought you'd never ask! Well, for starters, I've been weight lifting for more than four decades. I was an Olympic-style weightlifter for a few years in my fearless youth. (My parents were ever so thankful that I expressed all my fearlessness on the weightlifting platform and nowhere else!) Before we move on, let me clarify a few things. First of all, I was *never* on an Olympic team. However, I am proud to say that my training partner made the Olympic team in 1980, and I had something to do with it! Secondly, Olympic lifting is a sport featuring two lifts: the snatch and the clean and jerk. (And, if you must know, my best lifts were a 297-pound snatch and a 391-pound clean and jerk. Why the odd numbers? Kilos to pounds, dear reader. Kilos to pounds.) Lastly, Olympic lifting is my first, true love—and yes, my wife has come to grips with that. Back in the seventies (you remember: disco, bell bottoms, and your first color television), my club was a big-time Olympic-style weightlifting club, and a total of four guys made the Olympic team at one time or another. We were a somewhat elitist, competitive club where bodybuilding and bodybuilders were shunned. Strength was king, and little else was on the menu. Our goal was to keep improving our *totals*, which was your best snatch plus your best clean and jerk. Over the years, we'd have fifteen to twenty team members throwing three, four, or even five hundred pounds around every single night. Quite impressive indeed! As my career progressed, five-to-ten ton workouts were the norm—and this did not include the warm-up weights! Standard operating procedure was to have everyone do six to eight sets of their heaviest weight of the night. Out of all this training, I learned one hard-and-fast rule (besides the one about ice really, really coming in handy for sore joints after a workout):

**volume** is the key to building your body. Volume means to do a lot of sets with a lot of weight. This core principle is as true today as it was back in the day.

“But wait!” you might say. “What does competitive weightlifting have to do with me? All I want to do is get in shape and live to talk about it!” No worries, dear reader. We are going to borrow one of the guiding principles of competitive weightlifting and apply it to our workouts. Also, this book is all about *modification* because if you could do what you did twenty or thirty years ago, you wouldn’t need me!

Since my days as a competitive weightlifter, I’ve tried various workouts over the years, and the pattern I noticed is that when I did a lot of sets of just a few select exercises while staying off most of the machines in the gym, I stayed ahead of the old-age curve. I came to a very straightforward conclusion: simplicity works. I like to keep things simple. Most guys I know like to keep things simple. Simplicity has a profoundness all its own!

Okay, I think we’re getting somewhere: simplicity equals sets, reps, and a reasonably heavy weight. This is otherwise known as *volume*. Groovy (you remember that word, right?), but we’re forgetting one little thing—the proverbial elephant in the room—we’re old. Oh yeah. Now what? Does the bottom fall out? Not by the hairs of your graying chinny-chin-chin it doesn’t! The fact that we’ve lost a little muscle over the years – or, in some cases, a lot - and that most of us have the flexibility of a two by four has been factored into the design of this weight lifting program. We will work around, through, and sometimes, right over these temporary issues. Did you notice that I didn’t say *obstacles*? “Patience and modification” doesn’t mean we work out like we’re made of glass. I’ll make you another promise: you will have one of the best - if not *the best* - and most effective workouts in the gym. You will improve faster than you thought possible if you stick with the principles and follow the workouts described in this book. And, you’ll be working out the *right* way—a way that will last and last. You only have to promise me and, more importantly, yourself, one thing: you will be patient while undertaking these workout routines. Trying to rush progress or make up for a missed workout is a great way to get injured. I should know because my youthful impatience had devastating, life-long consequences.

### *Personal Story*

As you may have guessed, I was an aspiring Olympic-style weight lifter. My training partner had made the Team, and I was in a great club surrounded by inspiring figures. I was a reasonably good athlete so I thought a spot on the Olympic team seemed possible. In my mid-twenties, I was on my way to getting pretty strong. I had already squatted 500 pounds for five reps and making short work of it, I might add. So, I was moving along nicely. Enter stupidity. One week, I had missed my heavy squat day, which always fell on a Saturday, a non-work day, a day in which I was always well-rested. So to catch up, I thought I’d just squat during the week (after a long work day, a day in which I was far from well-rested). My twenty-five-year-old rationale was that I wasn’t going *that* heavy anyway. My workout actually seemed to go pretty well because I achieved my objective, which was 435 pounds for three sets of five reps easily that night. The next morning, I could barely move my left leg because I had partially torn my patella tendon. One workout. One mistake. And my weightlifting career was over—just that fast. Oh sure, I tried to make a comeback. I even squatted 440 pounds for reps at one point. But my abilities were never quite the same. Plus, I was young. We’re old. We’re not going to make a similar mistake now. We need to have patience in order for our bodies adjust to the new routines. We can always lift that heavier weight tomorrow or next week.

My final word and then we get to the good stuff: I've done everything - and I do mean *everything!* - that I recommend in this book. Over years and years, these routines have been time-tested, juggled, massaged, torn apart, and put back together. I've made every mistake in the book—and some that aren't in the book. The exercises that don't produce results have been thrown out, and the good stuff has been thrown in. I know one thing about these routines: done right, they work! Simple.

## Chapter III

### The Preliminaries

#### The Notebook

We're all a bit egotistical even if we don't want to admit it. We like to look back with pride at some (but Lord knows, not all) of the things we have done over the past few decades. We like to pull out old newspaper clippings in which we were prominently mentioned. We don't mind telling and re-telling that shop-worn story of our famous victory to our spouse or to our significant other. These stories help us keep that I-still-got-it spirit alive, which leads me to my next point. Another vital aspect of your workouts is to keep a diary of your exercises: your sets, reps, and weights. You need to do this a couple of reasons. First, the cliché "it's easier to see where you're going if you know where you've been" applies. Consider it history in the making. If you've ever caught yourself reviewing your Social Security statement and marveling about how you got by on so little income when you were young, you'll know what I mean. When you look back at your notebook after a couple months, you'll find yourself saying things like "gee, two months ago, I could only do *that*?" Then you'll be looking forward to the *next* two months! Second, you're old. You won't remember. Trust me.

*Fads.* A few words about fads and about that "great workout you saw on the internet!" Okay, I confess: my body is smarter than I am. Don't kid yourself: yours is smarter than you are too! Yes, dear reader, even I, your humble host, have occasionally fallen prey to that "great" chest/shoulder/ab/back workout I saw on YouTube! Hey, I'd like to cheat Father Time too but somehow that never works out. Another case in point: I once fell in love with a so-called beach-body-worthy shoulder routine, which consisted of four exercises in a row, without rest. I admit that I was a bit envious of the shoulders on the guy in the video and pictured myself squeezing sideways through the doorway after doing this workout for a while. "Yes," I thought, "that could be me!" The first time I tried this workout, I was hooked! My shoulders got a great pump, and I could barely get my shirt off to show my wife! Wow! I was hot stuff—even the doorways started to look a bit narrower! Do you know how long that lasted? Exactly two workouts. Yes, *two*—before my shoulder joints started biting back and my elbow began crying. Oh yes, I tried to tough it out: "C'mon, Tim," I said. "You have forty years of experience, and you've been through much worse—like the time 405 pounds fell on your back!" (Another story for another time). But it was all to no avail. My body was unconvinced and, once again, it proved to be much smarter than I am! Needless to say, I bathed myself in ice for a few days, put my tail between my legs, ditched that great beach-body-worthy workout, and got back on track.

#### Dress Code

When choosing gym wear, you should never "dress to impress." Be mindful of the fact that your clothes are simply another tool to help boost your performance, and you should use them that way. You'll go a long way if you develop the mindset that *everything* you do in the gym will either move you forward or push you backwards. Stick with loose-fitting T-shirts, shorts, and when the occasion calls for it, sweats because you need to stay warm throughout your workout.

#### Equipment

Remember our plan to keep things simple? We're going to keep things *real* simple here. For the weight lifting routines in this book, you'll need a barbell, a couple of dumbbells, another accoutrement or two, and that's it. You'll be working large muscle groups so you can pass on the preacher curl bench, the leg extension machine, the cables, the smith machine, and the multitude of other stuff you'll find cluttering the

gym. If you work out at home like I do, then you'll need a few other things: a leg press of the vertical or the forty-five-degree-angle variety, a bench that will also incline, a lat machine, and a place to do pull-ups. That should cover it. I've had my "newest" stuff for over twenty years. I bought my bench forty years ago, and it still works just fine. Around that time, I sawed a couple pieces off an old barbell to make the dumbbells that I still use! Invest in good equipment, and you only have to buy it once!

**A word about barbells:** Barbells will be the most important pieces of equipment in your gym. No other piece of equipment will help you develop both your body and your *balance* as well as the good old-fashioned barbell! Yes, this olden-day invention has yet to be eclipsed as *the* training tool. Whether standing, sitting, or lying down, you must engage your ancillary muscles, which are the muscles that aren't being directly worked, in order for you to maintain your balance while you complete your movements. When you use barbells, you get a complete workout that machines simply cannot match.

**How To Use That Belt.** Belts are another important piece of equipment to have on hand. Like any other tool, there's a right way and a wrong way to use this one too. And, not surprisingly, most people misuse weight belts as well. Using a weight lifting belt actually takes a bit of coordination. "Really, Tim?" you say. "Now I know you're losing it!" Stick with me here, and I'll explain. Put the belt on so that it's snug around your waist. So far, nothing new. Now, here's where the "coordination" part comes in: push your stomach **out** strongly against the belt while simultaneously arching your back. This creates a solid foundation from which to lift, and it helps keep that back tight! It's tricky, but once you get the hang of it, your technique, and then your weights will improve.

### **Sets, Reps, and Rest**

Gosh, I've heard it all: thirty-second rest! Only do sixty seconds of rest between sets, max! Circuit this and circuit that! Train to failure! Go heavy or go home! Yeah baby! Watch me break a bat over my head! Okay, I made up that last one, but frequently, the gym-goer's mindset is to appear macho. We need to slow down a bit. I promise you that you *will* be challenging your body. Over and over and over again. At the same time, you will be doing so in a way that will leave you looking forward to your next workout; you won't be making up excuses as to why you "just can't find the time." So what *is* the right number of sets and reps, and what is the appropriate rest period? Well, the answer is this: it depends. It depends on where you are in your training, what exercise you're doing, how heavy you're going, and, sometimes, how much time you have to work out. Generally speaking, you'll start out doing three sets of each exercise to start out. The reps and rest periods are going to vary. If you continue on to my advanced routines, you'll move to eight sets for most of the exercises (remember that *volume* concept?). And, again, the reps are going to vary. Also, count on a two-to-four-minute rest period between sets. Final Note: be *precise* with your rest periods. If your workout calls for a two-minute rest period, make it *exactly* two minutes. I wear a watch with a second hand when I work out in a gym so I can keep track of time.

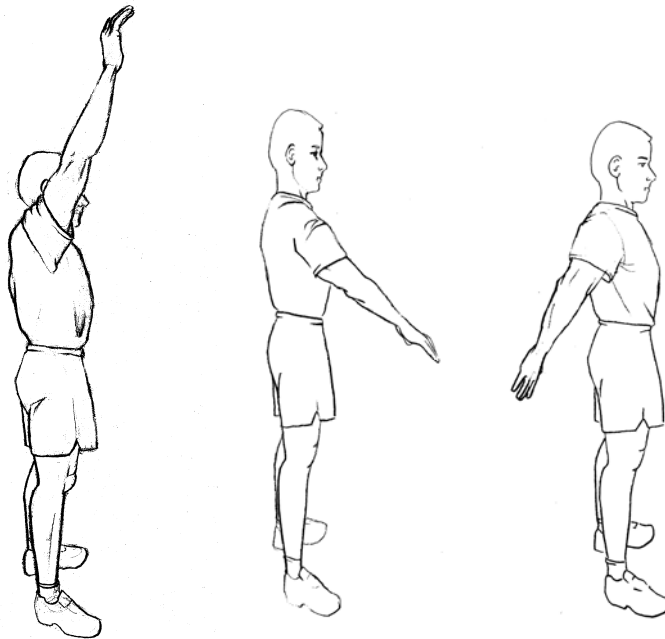
### **Stretch**

Every now and then, we all long for the quick fix, the magic pill that will "make it all better" and solve whatever problem we're facing. When I first started lifting, I remember thinking that if I worked out really, really hard for *one day*, I'd come upstairs from my basement gym looking like a world champion bodybuilder. Youth. Well, I think it's safe to say that the Captain America-type transformations only happen in the movies. Like most things in life, progress is a cumulative thing. The same goes for the most important pre-workout activity you can do: stretching. I'll confess that I was never a big fan of stretching; I've always longed for a flexibility pill myself. The anticipated discomfort with that first stretch always

made me look for one or two other things to do before I got started. Once you do get started, though, things start to happen: the body starts feeling suppler, the juices start flowing, and, darn it, you do feel just a bit more athletic! Stretching makes a huge difference in your *mental* workout game too.

So how do we get started? It's always better and easier to stretch warm muscles rather than relatively cold ones. A great way to get going is to first do a few minutes on a stationary bike or calisthenics like jumping jacks, jogging in place, or jumping rope. Anything will work as long as you get the heart pumping warm blood to your cold muscles. Also, make sure that you stretch your *entire* body before each workout. As you'll see in the more advanced sessions, the workouts are split between upper-body days and lower-body days. When you get to that point, you'll be tempted to stretch just the body parts that you'll be working. However, keep in mind that, in addition to preparing you for your workout, stretching is also therapeutic, and it prepares the unit that is resting for the next day's workout. I've outlined some good stretches below.

A. The Arm Swing - Rotate each arm one at a time in wide circles. Do these rotations for a specified time, i.e. for fifteen to twenty seconds at a time; that way you can't cheat. Continue back and forth for one full minute.



B. The First Shoulder Stretch - Fold one arm across your chest, grab your elbow, and pull gently. Hold that position for five to ten seconds. Repeat the stretch with the other arm. Continue for about a minute.

C. The Second Shoulder Stretch - Point your elbow to the ceiling as vertical as you can, and touch the back of your neck. Allow a second or two for your head to clear. Grab your elbow and pull gently. Remember, this stretch isn't intended as a contest to see how far you can go. The best stretching is controlled stretching. Stretching enables you to maximize your range of motion and help you remain injury-free. Don't skimp, but go slowly.



**More Great Advice:** When stretching, start with your weak side first. If you're righty, start with your left side; if you're lefty, start with your right side. I remember the first time I read this one, and quite frankly, I was a bit skeptical. To my black-and-white way of thinking, it just made no sense that starting with my weaker side would make a dime's worth of difference. So, of course, I put it off. But, at the time, my left hamstring was very tight, and I could never get it real loose no matter what I did or how hard I tried. Nothing worked. So I finally gave it a shot. Within one session—*one session*—I noticed a difference! Now, finally, both legs are in sync, and I no longer favor my left side when I work out.

D. The Pec Stretch - Sounds like this would go good with Punkin' Chunkin'. Find a convenient doorway, or go to the corner of a room. Place your hands on either side of the doorframe, or place one hand on each wall, and lean in *slowly*. Always, always, always do this one slowly. You risk straining your shoulder if you attack this stretch too aggressively—no need to be Rambo here. When you start to feel a good pull, pause for a few seconds. Repeat this exercise a few times until your chest feels stretched out.

E. Overall Leg Stretch - This next exercise is great for your body as a whole; think of it as kind of a group stretch. This stretch will loosen your back, your sides, and, of course, your legs. Sit on a carpeted floor with your feet as far apart as possible and lean forward for a few seconds. Turn towards your weaker leg, hold onto your ankle or foot and gently pull. Eventually, your objective will be to touch your nose to your knee while keeping your leg straight. Repeat this stretch on your strong side. Once you've gone back and forth three times, lean straight forward as far as you can. Hold this position for ten to twenty seconds. Release slowly. Repeat the whole process three times. This stretch feels horrible at first, but your body will feel a healthy "rush" when you're finished! Finally, I recommend stretching in stockinged feet.



F. Quad Stretch - Let's not forget the quads. Yes, you have to stretch those too! Sit on your lower legs with your hips touching the floor—or at least, try to touch your hips to the floor. Now comes the good part: sit bolt upright and don't slouch. Instead, arch your back—you'll be doing a lot of back-arching when you start the weight lifting exercises so you might as well get used to it. Lean back and hold this position for fifteen to thirty seconds.



As with the rest of this program, give yourself time to work into each position. We older folks tend to tighten up more quickly than we did once upon a time, so patience is the order of the day!



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