# Taking a break from training

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**Most of the strength and muscle you lose during a break comes back quickly when you start again.**

**Why it matters:** Illness, travel, injury and busy seasons interrupt every training plan. Knowing that a break isn't a reset makes it easier to start again instead of giving up.

**The big picture:** Strength in particular holds up well during time off.

## What to do with this

- **Restart at your next session.** Don't wait for a new week or month.
- **Go a little lighter** after more than a couple of weeks off, and rebuild over a few sessions.
- **Keep a little going if you can.** Even one short session a week held on to most gains in younger adults [2].
- **Older adults:** stay closer to your usual training during busy stretches. A reduced dose didn't keep their muscle [2].

## Go deeper

**What you lose, and how fast it returns:**

- A 2024 trial gave 55 untrained adults 20 weeks of whole-body lifting, twice a week, spread over 30 weeks [1].
- One group trained for 10 weeks, took 10 weeks off, then trained another 10 weeks. The other group waited 10 weeks, then trained 20 weeks straight.
- The group that took a break lost some strength and muscle during the time off.
- In their first 5 weeks back, they gained more leg press strength and muscle size than the other group did over the same stretch of training. Both groups finished with similar strength and muscle size [1].
- The authors wrote that people should not be too concerned about occasional short breaks.

**Strength holds up well:**

- In a 2011 study, 70 young and older adults trained their thigh muscles (knee extensions) three times a week for 16 weeks, then stopped or cut back to once a week for 32 weeks [2].
- Those who stopped completely lost only about 7% of their strength over the 32 weeks and stayed about 23% stronger than when they started [2].

**Keeping muscle with less training:**

- In the same study, younger adults kept their muscle gains while training at one-third or even one-ninth of their original dose: one session a week, with 3 sets or just 1 [2].
- In adults aged 60 to 75, neither reduced dose kept the gains in muscle fiber size, though their strength held up well [2].

**A planned week off:**

- In a 2024 trial of 39 trained lifters, one week off in the middle of a 9-week program didn't change muscle growth. It cost a little strength, in the squat and a knee-extension test, compared with training straight through [3].

**Between the lines:** A missed week or a month away costs less than people fear. Stopping for good is what loses the benefits.

**Reality check:** These studies looked at strength and muscle, not cardio fitness, and most participants were healthy. The 2011 study trained one exercise only. Coming back from illness or injury may need a slower restart.

**How sure are we:** Moderate that strength holds up well during short breaks and returns quickly. Few long studies exist.

## Plan around breaks

1. **Expect breaks.** Decide in advance how you'll restart.
2. **Do a little if you can.** In research, a fraction of the usual training kept muscle in younger adults. Older adults needed more, so stay closer to your usual training if you can.

3. **Restart lighter.** After more than a couple of weeks off, drop your weights a little and rebuild over a few sessions.
4. **Expect a quick comeback.** Strength and muscle return faster than they took to build.
5. **Ease back in after illness or injury,** and check with your doctor if you were seriously ill.
6. **Don't treat a break as failure.** The guide "Missed a week?" has a step-by-step restart.

## Sources


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