



5X5: For Mass, Strength, and Fat Loss

I was having the following conversation with my cousin two weeks ago when I went to visit him to celebrate my birthday. We were coming back from watching Superbad, and were trying to decide on whether to go a strip club or a nightclub to finish off the night. Somehow our conversation went towards training:

Me: You know what man; I think you're ready to try something new with your training.

Cousin: What?

Me: (Thinking) Yeah man, I think you're ready. All right, one of the best routines I did was something called 5x5.

Cousin: 5x5? What, like doing five sets?

Me: Yeah. You know how my shoulders and legs are huge?

(Cousin agrees)

Me: So all I did was the Push Press and Deadlift, doing five sets of five reps.

Cousin: (Eyes go wide) Really?

Me: Yeah, it's really effective. All you do is five sets of five repetitions. This will allow you to use heavier weights. But you need to cut your exercises in half. For example, if you're doing four exercises, do only two. What does your chest workout look like?

Cousin: Well I do, Incline Dumbbell Press, Regular Dumbbell Presses, then I do that thing with the cables, you know where you stand up and you take each cable in your hand-

Me: Cable Crossover?

Cousin: I guess.

Me: Ok, so do only Incline Dumbbell Press, and Cable Crossover. Do 5x5 on the Incline Dumbbell Press, and then you can do like 3 sets or whatever you usually do on the Cable Crossover.

Cousin: Why those two? Why can't I do Incline Presses then Regular Presses?

Me: Well, you want to avoid overlapping. You're basically doing two pressing exercises in a row. Do pressing exercise then a flye-type exercise. You want your workout routines to be balanced.

Cousins: Oh all right. Well then how come everyone says do 3 sets of 10. That's all you need.

Me: That's because 5x5 is pretty hard. It's also unconventional. To tell you the truth, a beginner can make improvements with almost anything he does, since he has never stepped foot into a gym. So it depends on what kind of person he is. You have people who learn fast, others who need time. 5x5 requires knowing what weight is heavy for you and what is light. It requires some previous experience in the gym.



Performing sets of 10 to 12, as a beginner will teach you to listen and understand how your body reacts to certain stresses placed on your body.

Cousin: Oh.

The Basic Workout

Ok, so the conversation did not go EXACTLY that way, but you get the point. If you want to make continual gains in muscle mass and fat loss you need to switch up your training consistently. 5X5 will be a different type of stimulus for those that are used to the usual ten exercises of three to four sets of 10 to 12 reps of high-volume training designed for steroid using bodybuilders. Just to put in a little bit of my own rant, I really do believe many of these plans that are shown in bodybuilding magazines are not specific to the capacities of a common man.

The 5x5 training will pretty much make you look like you use steroids. I'm dead serious. My legs are so big now that I don't even work them anymore. I'm waiting for the rest of my body to catch up so that my body can be symmetrical. The reason why this method of training works is because it allows you to use heavier weight without worrying about lactic acid impending recovery. I was doing push presses and deadlifts up to five days a week, simply because I didn't wake up sore the next morning, I woke up stronger!

The only problem with my basic workout was that it was unbalanced. I had read about the Power to the People training protocol developed by Russian strength coach Pavel Tsatsouline. The PTP routine used only two exercises, the side press and deadlift, performing two sets of five reps of each. I liked the idea of using only two exercises. It saved time and could be done at a high frequency. But, once again, the problem was a lack of balance. I know have these two huge body parts overpowering the rest of my body. A better routine would be something like this:

What is Balance?

My definition of balance is defined not in terms of body parts trained, but movements. There are four basic movement planes: Upper Body Push, Upper Body Pull, Lower Body Push, and Lower Body Pull.

A Push exercise is any sort of exercise, which involves pushing. Exercises that involve chest, shoulders, triceps, or quad work are usually push exercises. Some examples include the bench press; push press, push-ups, overhead squat, back squat, and triceps extension.

A Pull exercise is any sort of exercise, which involves pulling. Exercises that involve the back, hamstrings, biceps, and shoulders are pull exercises. Notice that the shoulders fall into both categories. Some examples include the bent-over row, pull-ups, deadlift, upright row, and barbell curl.

Just think of it this way: are you pulling the weight towards your body, or pushing it away? However, this scenario may not work for every exercise. For example, in a deadlift you are not pulling anything "towards" your body, per say, but you are still pulling on the weight. In a bent-over row, it's quite simple that your body is moving towards the weight as opposed to being pushed away.

The reason I emphasize pushing and pulling movements rather than body parts, is that when you think about body parts, there is a lot of cross over. For example, when you do the bench press, you are working your chest, shoulders, and triceps. Many people use a split that involves chest and biceps on one day, and then back and triceps the other day. What ends up happening is that you overload one muscle group too much. This is where imbalances occur.

Balanced Basic 5x5 Routine

Monday & Thursday	
Push Press	5x5
Deadlift	5x5
Tuesday & Friday	
Bent-over Row	5x5
Overhead Squat	5x5



Just look at this common body part split:

So on day one, lets say you do a number of chest exercises. Hence you work your chest, shoulders, and triceps. And then you do a number of bicep exercises, and work your biceps and shoulders. On day two you do more direct shoulder work. Along with your shoulder work, you are also indirectly hitting your triceps and biceps. You finish the day off with some leg work. So far you've already worked your triceps, biceps, and shoulders two times this week. On the last day you do back, and triceps. While working your back, you hit your biceps and shoulders, and then do more triceps work. Hence, your biceps, triceps and shoulders are being worked three times a week.

Typical Training Split

Day One	Chest, Biceps
Day Two	Shoulders, Legs
Day Three	Back, Triceps

If this is what your goal is, then fine. But why perform so many exercises and waste so much time when you can accomplish your goal with only a few exercises working multiple muscle groups at one time?

Constructing Your Routine

You can construct your own 5X5 routine using a very simple system. The first thing you need to do is jot down the first ten to twenty exercises that you can think of. These exercises will most likely be a) once that you have previously performed and b) will be ones that you enjoy. Our brain normally recalls things that we know and like. So here's my list:

1. Push Press
2. Power Clean
3. Deadlift
4. Bent-over Row
5. Upright Row
6. Pull-ups
7. Pushups
8. Sit-ups
9. Overhead Squat
10. Front Squat
11. Power Snatch
12. Clean & Press
13. Chin-ups
14. Barbell Curl
15. Reverse Curl
16. Drag Curl

The list doesn't have to be optimal. I can already see problems with my list. But this process helps weed out the problems and fix imbalances. The next step is to split your group into upper body and lower body exercises: (Note: I actually have some full-body exercises here)

Upper body:

1. Push Press
2. Bent-over Row
3. Upright Row
4. Pull-ups
5. Pushups
6. Chin-ups
7. Barbell Curl
8. Reverse Curl
9. Drag Curl



Lower Body:

1. Deadlift
2. Overhead Squat
3. Front Squat

Total Body:

1. Power Clean
2. Power Snatch
3. Clean & Press

Abdominal:

1. Sit-ups

I'm sure now you can see some of the problems that my original list had. If I had used all the exercises in that list, then I would have over-worked certain muscle groups. Also, the total body exercises work a huge proportion of the body and some include both pulling and pushing movements. The last step is to split your upper body and lower body groups into pushing and pulling. So my new list would look like this:

Upper Body Push:

1. Push Press
2. Pushups

Upper Body Pull:

1. Bent-over Row
2. Upright Row
3. Pull-ups
4. Chin-ups
5. Barbell Curl
6. Reverse Curl
7. Drag Curl

Lower Body Push:

1. Overhead Squat
2. Front Squat

Lower Body Pull:

1. Deadlift

Total Body:

1. Power Clean
2. Power Snatch
3. Clean & Press

Abdominal:

1. Sit-ups

Now that you have a pretty good organized list of exercises, it's time to learn how to order them into a routine. The basic idea is to do an upper body push and a lower body pull in one workout, then do an upper body pull and lower body push in the other workout. However, there are numerous possibilities and no



Structure is perfect. An optimal program will be one, which is balanced and challenging. The following are a few ways of structuring your workouts:

Three Days a Week Training

Routine One

Day One:	Upper Body Push, Lower Body Pull	1 exercise per plane
Day Two:	Upper Body Pull, Lower Body Push	1 exercise per plane
Day Three:	Total Body, Abdominal	1 exercise per plane

Routine Two

Day One:	Upper Body Push, Lower Body Pull, Abdominal	1 exercise per plane
Day Two:	Upper Body Pull, Lower Body Push, Abdominal	1 exercise per plane
Day Three:	Total Body, Abdominal	1 exercise per plane

Routine Three

Day One:	Lower Body Pull	1 exercise per plane
Day Two:	Upper Body Pull, Upper Body Push	1 exercise per plane
Day Three:	Lower Body Push	1 exercise per plane

Four Day a Week Training

Routine One

Days One and Three:	Upper Body Push, Lower Body Pull	1 exercise per plane
Day Two and Four:	Upper Body Pull, Lower Body Push	1 exercise per plane

Routine Two

Day One	Upper Body Push	2 exercises per plane
Day Two	Lower Body Pull	2 exercises per plane
Day Three	Upper Body Pull	2 exercises per plane
Day Four	Lower Body Push	2 exercises per plane

Routine Three

Day One	Total Body	1 exercise per plane
Day Two	Upper Body Pull, Lower Body Push	1 exercise per plane
Day Three	Total Body	1 exercise per plane
Day Four	Upper Body Push, Lower Body Pull	1 exercise per plane

Five Days a Week Training

Routine One

Days One and Four:	Upper Body Push, Lower Body Pull	1 exercise per plane
Day Two and Five:	Upper Body Pull, Lower Body Push	1 exercise per plane
Day Three:	Total Body	1 exercise per plane



Routine Two

Day One	Upper Body Push	2 exercises per plane
Day Two	Lower Body Pull	2 exercises per plane
Day Three	Total Body	1 exercise per plane
Day Four	Upper Body Pull	2 exercises per plane
Day Five	Lower Body Push	2 exercises per plane

Routine Three

Day One and Four:	Upper Body Push, Lower Body Pull	1 exercise per plane
Day Two and Five:	Upper Body Pull, Lower Body Push	1 exercise per plane
Day Three:	Total Body, Abdominal	1 exercise per plane

5x5 as a Fat Loss Tool

My 5x5 training routine had me resting about a minute between each set. I've always used a one-minute time period. I don't like to just sit around and wait three minutes before starting another set. However, using long rest periods does have its merits. You may need two to three minutes of rest if you are a relative beginner. For example, if you are moving from 3x10 to 5x5, you may have used a weight that is too heavy and may need long rest periods on your first couple of workouts to adapt. I think that rest periods are more of a personal thing. Some people need more recovery time than others.

I like to keep my rest periods short. Sometimes I just move from one exercise to another as quick as I can. Keeping short rest periods helps with recovery time and overall conditioning. I did not realize it at the time, but 5x5 kept in pretty good shape. I may have even lost a few pounds just by following my basic program. At that time, I was just experimenting and playing around and did not know how to keep accurate records of what I was doing.

A training routine involving heavy weights will help you burn some fat due to the increased metabolic cost of the workout. 5x5 will break down your muscle tissues, which your body repairs during rest. Repairing this muscle damage requires you to use a tremendous amount of calories. You'll experience an increase in your metabolic rate. The better you become at 5x5, the faster your metabolism will become, the better your recovery ability will become, and the more calories you will burn. Besides this, because 5x5 is a hard workout, you'll be sweating and burning calories while you workout. By working out your entire body, you'll be working more muscle groups at one time, and thus burning off even more calories. Another reason why 5x5 is a good tool for fat-burning is because when you build up your muscle mass, you'll need more calories to maintain that muscle. Thus, you'll be burning more calories in the long run.

Gradual Progression

This is the real bread and butter of the program. The whole premise of 5x5 is progressive overload. Progressive overload is all about making gradual progress by continually increasing the demands that you place on your body. In short, you want to keep increasing the intensity of the workout to get bigger and stronger.

In the 5x5 program progressive overload refers primarily to increasing the weights. It's all a numbers game. I didn't do too well in math when I was in high school. I had to constantly borrow my friends graphing calculator. Luckily, you won't need any sort of fancy formula for the 5x5 program

You start off with about 75% of your one-repetition maximum on your exercises. For example, lets say your one rep max for the push-press is 150lbs. You want to start the program off at 105lbs. In your first workout, perform 5x5 with 105 lbs. This should be relatively easy. In your second workout, add five pounds. Each time you complete all five sets of five repetitions with equal amounts of rest time in between (whichever you choose; one to three minutes), you add five pounds. If you miss any set, then you do not add any weight. Stay at the current weight and try again the next workout.



So lets say after four weeks you're up to 120lbs. You do 5 reps on the first set, 5 on the second, and then do 4 on the third set. Do you stop? No, finish up the workout with the last two sets. Keep the tension on your muscles. But technically, you failed at putting up the weight. Just attempt the 120lbs again on your next workout and try again. You should be able to put up the 120 lbs relatively easily given that you finished the workout with the reps that you could do on the last two sets. Keeping the tension on your muscles is very important.

When do you stop?

The length of the program differs from person to person. A beginner can stick to this for 6 to 8 weeks. A better trained athlete may need to switch it up every 3 to 4 weeks. One idea is to switch exercises once you hit a plateau. In Dante Trudell's DogCrapp method of training, you keep using one exercise per body part until you stop making gains on that exercise in the form of weight. So, lets say you miss the 120 on the first workout. Then you miss it again on your second workout. You have one more chance. If you miss it again on your third workout, it's time to switch up the exercise. Switch it up to a Bench Press.

On my list, I have Push Press and Push Ups. You can use bodyweight exercises too. Just make sure you have a method of progressive overload, be it increasing reps, or some sort of resistance. With pushups you can progressively make the exercise harder, increase reps, or wear a weight vest.

Cardio Training

The great thing about the 5x5 program is that you won't wake up tired and sore. I believe that you can work up to training 7 days on this routine, given that your routine is balanced and your recovery abilities are optimal. One method of improving your recovery is by performing some light aerobic cardio.

I'm a huge believer in fasted morning cardio. Direct fat loss, according to Dr. Lonnie Lowery, is best achieved in the presence of hormones that are associated with fasting such as growth hormone and some cortisol and glucagon. Because your insulin levels are their lowest in the morning, you're more likely to burn off actual fat, rather than glycogen, which is what your excess food is converted into. Glycogen is good to help fuel your intense workouts, but for steady state purposes, perform your cardio when you are in a fasted state.

Besides the fat burning benefit, I also believe that light aerobic cardio helps recovery because you're moving your body and hence warming it up. Another reason steady state cardio is beneficial during the 5X5 program is because if your cardiovascular health is good, then you won't be breathing like a maniac and risk passing out when you put up all the weight. You'll be able to recover between sets, and also between workouts.

My sensei (karate instructor) used to say that you come to karate and sweat everything out. If you have some personal problems, you sweat them out. If you have some muscle soreness, you sweat it out. You know what? It works. Hence I believe that another aspect of balance is to do something opposite.

The opposite of weight training is steady state cardio. The opposite of high-intensity, anaerobic cardio is light circuit training. The opposite of gymnastics is powerlifting. I think you get the point. Just do something different to help you recover, but make sure it does not interfere with your main activity. For example, the impact of morning cardio is so low, that it won't interfere with my ability to increase my strength, unless I'm running sprints in the morning or running for 10 miles. That is what you call over training.

The following is what I believe to be the top four methods of burning fat. I've ordered this taking into consideration effectiveness, and difficulty. For example, the most effective method would probably be energy systems work, however this is a hard form of training, and would only be performed one or two times a week. Hence, it would be a better idea to start off with a program consisting of metabolic conditioning workouts so that you get both the cardio and weight training benefits in the same workout.



<i>Best Methods of Fat Loss:</i>		
Method	Definition	Example
Metabolic Conditioning	Any type of routine which results in increased work demand, increased metabolic rate, energy systems benefit, and increased work capacity	Circuit Training, Complexes, Cluster Training
Aerobic Work	Activity using oxygen/ heart and lungs.	Steady State cardiovascular exercises i.e. jogging, swimming, machines
Heavy Lifting	Resistance training using a large percentage of weight in relation to ones capacity	5X5, 10x1, Max Effort
Energy Systems Work	Activity where ATP is generated from non-oxidative sources	Sprinting, Interval Training

So, if I were to design a fat loss program for a beginner, I would include 3 days of metabolic conditioning workouts per week to tax the system and burn fat. The 5x5 program would be of no use if your goal was to focus predominantly on burn fat. However, it would come into use later on in the program to help maintain and build muscle mass. Hence a sample 12-week program for fat loss would look something like this:

Weeks One – Three

Strategy: *Use metabolic conditioning workouts to burn off the fat fast and build muscle. Begin by using bodyweight as resistance work.*

Monday/Wednesday/Friday

1. Pushups 10 reps
2. Crunches 15 reps
3. Squats 20 reps
4. Wide-grip Pushups 10 reps
5. Chinnies 15 reps
6. Double Crunch 15 reps
7. Bench Dips 10 reps

Slowly build yourself up to performing 10 circuits of this workout. The first workout you may only be able to do 3 circuits. Strive to do 4 circuits on the next workout, and then 5 on the third workout, etc.

Rest 1 minute between each circuit.

Weeks Four – Six

Strategy: *Introduce early-morning cardio to directly target fat. Introduce free-weight exercises.*

Monday/ Friday

1. Pushups 15 reps
2. Pull-ups 3 reps
3. Sit-ups 15 reps



4. Incline Pushups 10 reps
5. Squat Thrust 10 reps
6. Lunges 10 reps
7. Leg Raises 15 reps
8. Squat Jump 8 reps
9. Twisting Sit-ups 10 reps
10. Chair Dips 10 reps

Slowly build yourself up to performing 10 circuits of this workout. The first workout you may only be able to do 3 circuits. Strive to do 4 circuits on the next workout, and then 5 on the third workout, etc.

Rest 1 minute between each circuit.

Wednesday

1. Arnold Press 10 reps
2. DB Snatch 10 reps
3. DB Pullover 10 reps
4. Incline Press 10 reps

Use the same weight for each exercise. Start off with a relatively light weight. Slowly build yourself up to performing 10 circuits of this workout. The first workout you may only be able to do 3 circuits. Strive to do 4 circuits on the next workout, and then 5 on the third workout, etc.

Rest 1 minute between each circuit.

Tuesday/ Thursday

30-45 minutes of morning steady-state cardio

Weeks Seven – Nine

Strategy: *Introduce Heavy Lifting to build and preserve muscle.*

Monday

Circuit One

1. Pushups 20 reps
2. Sit-ups 25 reps
3. Squat Thrust 15 reps
4. Leg Raises 20 reps
5. Chair Dips 15 reps
6. Hindu Pushups 15 reps

Circuit Two

1. Chin-ups 6 reps
2. Crunches 20 reps
3. Plyometric Pushups 10 reps
4. Burpees 10 reps
5. Lateral Lunges 15 reps
6. Double Crunches 20 reps

Perform Circuit One, rest 1 minute, Perform circuit two, rest 1 minute. Completion of those two circuits means a completion of one large circuit.



Slowly build yourself up to performing 5 large circuits of this workout. The first workout you may only be able to do 2 circuits. Strive to do 3 circuits on the next workout, and then 4 on the third workout, etc.

Tuesday

1. Push Press 5x5
2. Deadlift 5x5

Perform this workout in a traditional 5x5 manner mentioned in this article.

Tuesday/Thursday/Saturday

30-45 minutes of morning steady state cardio

Thursday

1. DB Snatch 10 reps
2. DB Pullover 10 reps
3. DB Press 10 reps
4. DB Flye 10 reps
5. DB One-arm Row 10 reps
6. DB Overhead Extension 10 reps

Use the same weight for each exercise. Start off with a moderate weight. Slowly build yourself up to performing 10 circuits of this workout. The first workout you may only be able to do 3 circuits. Strive to do 4 circuits on the next workout, and then 5 on the third workout, etc.

Rest 1 minute between each circuit.

Friday

1. Bent-over Row
2. Overhead Squat

Perform this workout in a traditional 5x5 manner mentioned in this article.

Weeks Ten – Twelve

Strategy: Incorporate energy systems work to burn off the last bit of fat. Combine the bodyweight and DB circuits to maximize fat burning.

Monday

Circuit One

1. Pushups 25 reps
2. Squat Thrust 15 reps
3. Hindu Pushup 20 reps
4. Chin-ups 8 reps
5. Crunches 30 reps

Circuit Two

1. Plyometric Pushups 15 reps
2. Burpees 10 reps
3. Lateral Lunges 20 reps



4. Double Crunches 25 reps
5. DB Snatch 12 reps

Circuit Three

1. DB Pullover 12 reps
2. DB Press 12 reps
3. DB Flye 12 reps
4. DB One-arm Row 12 reps
5. DB Overhead Extension 12 reps

Perform Circuit One, rest 1 minute, Perform circuit two, rest 1 minute, Perform circuit three, rest 1 minute. Completion of those three circuits means a completion of one large circuit. Work up to three circuits. Use the same weight on free-weight exercises.

Tuesday:

1. Bent-over Row 5x5
2. Back Squat 5x5

Perform this workout in a traditional 5x5 manner mentioned in this article.

Wednesday/ Saturday

30-45 minutes Steady State morning cardio

Thursday:

1. Bench Press
2. Deadlift

Perform this workout in a traditional 5x5 manner mentioned in this article.

Friday

Sprint 400 meters
Jog 400 meters

Work up to 10 circuits of this workout. You can also replace bicycle sprints with regular sprinting.

You can see where a heavy training protocol such as 5x5 would fit into a fat-burning routine. If your goal is to get big and strong, simply replace your circuit training with 5x5. In other words introduce 5x5 in the first three or four weeks, then do some steady state cardio to minimize fat gain. Finally, begin implementing some sort of metabolic conditioning such as sprinting or circuit training to round out your program.