

Back and AB Training

By: Louie Simmons

When squatting or deadlifting, a successful lift is dependent on keeping your back in good position. This takes a strong back as well as strong abs.

At Westside, we do max effort work for squatting and deadlifting on the same day, Monday. The same muscles work in these two lifts. It saves energy to lump together the special exercises that contribute to both lifts.

Let's first talk about the spinal erectors and how to develop them. Good mornings are done 40% of the time. This means 4 out of 10 Mondays. Any variation can be done. Work up to a 3 rep max.

The following variations of good mornings can be used:

Bent over with legs bent

Place the bar on your back in a squat position or slightly lower and bend over, rounding the upper and lower back. It is up to you how far to bend over. A lifter with a small waist will find it easier to bend over farther. This will build the erectors, hamstrings, and glutes by extending the legs and back simultaneously.

Bent over with legs straight

These build the erectors and flexibility in the hamstrings.

Arched back with legs straight

This style will build static strength in the erectors, which contributes to keeping the back arched while squatting or sumo deadlifting. Lower the bar as far as possible without losing the arch.

Power arched good mornings

Use a very wide stance, a low bar position, and lean, don't bend, forward until the bar is in front of the knees. Heavy weights can be employed. This is not a quarter-squat. Remember, the bar must be in front of the knees after leaning forward.

Combo squat/good morning

This one is very important for learning to extend all the squat and deadlift muscles. With a moderate stance and the bar held low on the back, bend forward until the back is close to the parallel to the floor. Then roll the lower back over

and descend into a full squat. To stand up, straighten out the legs. This is very effective for building tremendous extension strength, as well as tremendous tightness. You feel like your eyes will pop out when you're in the bottom.

Seated good mornings on a box

Sit on a parallel or above-parallel box and bend over. This takes the legs out of the exercise, which is helpful if you are injured or have a large stomach.

Seated good mornings on a bench

Sit straddling a bench and bend over until your face touches the bench. This is for the lifter with a small waist and good flexibility.

We have reviewed seven types of good mornings, but you can also change the strength curve by using the Weight Release device, Flex bands, or chains. You can vary the work by using a lot of weight and little chain or light bar weight and lots of chains or heavy or light eccentric loading with the Weight Release. These combinations are known as the contrast method. Caution: Use of the Flex bands can make one very sore due to the tremendous eccentric overloading from the tension of the bands, causing delayed onset of muscle soreness (DOMS). This phenomenon occurs with any type of eccentric stress, but especially with the Flex bands.

Now let's isolate:

Back raises or hyperextensions

These are done on a special bench where the feet are anchored and the torso is supported while lying face down. Lower the upper body until your head is close to the floor. Then raise up to parallel, but no higher, to avoid hyperextending the back. The reps are 3-8. Work up to a new max set whenever possible. The 1968 Olympic weight lifting champ Waldemar Bazanowski was able to do 225 for 4 reps, so get to work.

Pull-throughs with straight legs

Pull a low pulley cable through your legs while facing away from the machine. Done with the legs straight, this exercise will hit the lower back. Use high reps, sometimes to failure. Done with legs bent, this will work the glutes.

Reverse Hyper@5356,359 and 6,491,607b2 extensions

For the mid to the very lowest part of the back, the Reverse Hyper@5356,359 and 6,491,607b2 machine is far superior to any back exercise. Not only does it completely work the low back but it will rotate the sacrum. Also, on every rep

when the plates are under your face, it opens the disks and allows spinal fluid to enter, thus providing restoration in addition to strength building.

Abs

In my opinion the side bend is the most important exercise for the abs. The obliques not only work as stabilizers but are responsible for hip extension when lifting of the floor or out of the bottom of the squat. You must learn to push the abs out, expanding them against your power belt. Side bends with a dumbbell at a time; bend to the side and return to a standing position.

Side deadlifts

Side deadlifts also work the abs/obliques. Stand next to the bar, facing the plates on the right or left end. Lift the barbell and try not to bend to the side. This exercise will build the obliques and stability in the glutes.

We prefer to do our side bends with the help of an overhead cable machine. Stand with the lat machine to your side. Using a triceps strap held against the neck, bend away from the machine and do a side bend. There appears to be little stress on the spine using this method.

Standing situps with lat machine

Hold a tricep strap around the back of the neck with the two ends held against the chest while facing away from the machine. Now bend over as far as possible while pushing out the abs. Most lifters are very weak when first attempting this exercise, but be patient. The weight will go up and so will your squat and deadlift.

Leg lifts

Leg Lifts of any kind are good. Start with lying leg lifts with your legs bent. Progress to straight leg lifts. If your shoulders are good, do hanging leg raises. Do them with bent legs until you are strong enough to keep your legs straight. Use weight if possible. The hardest type of leg raise involves lifting your feet up to the bar you are hanging from.

Please don't be confused by bodybuilding magazines. Your hip flexors/extensors and abs must work together. A bent leg sit-up is worthless unless you have a very weak back and stomach.

There are many back and ab exercises to choose from. These are just a few. Some will work for certain individuals better than others. That is precisely why you need lots to choose from.

The information in our series of articles is the result of experimentation by 43 elite powerlifters we have developed over the years. We have a system that will teach you to teach yourself.