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The Barbell Prescription: Strength Training For Life After 40



Synopsis

The Barbell Prescription: Strength Training for Life After 40 directly addresses the most pervasive problem faced by aging humans: the loss of physical strength and all its associated problems - the loss of muscle mass, bone mineral loss and osteoporosis, hip fractures (a terminal event for many older people), loss of balance and coordination, diabetes, heart disease related to a sedentary lifestyle, and the loss of independence. The worst advice an older person ever gets is, Take it easy. Easy makes you soft, and soft makes you dead. The Barbell Prescription maps an escape from the usual fate of older adults: a logical, programmed approach to the hard work necessary to win at the extreme sport of Aging Well. Unlike all other books on the subject of exercise for seniors, The Barbell Prescription challenges the motivated Athlete of Aging with a no-nonsense training approach to strength and health - and demonstrates that everybody can become significantly stronger using the most effective tools ever developed for the job.

Book Information

Paperback: 384 pages

Publisher: The Aasgaard Company; First edition (December 1, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0982522770

ISBN-13: 978-0982522776

Package Dimensions: 11 x 8.8 x 1 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.7 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars 102 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #15,808 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #25 in Books > Health, Fitness & Dieting > Exercise & Fitness > Weight Training #44 in Books > Sports & Outdoors > Coaching

Customer Reviews

Jonathon M Sullivan MD, PhD, SSC is the owner of Greysteel Strength and Conditioning, a coaching practice and Starting Strength Gym devoted to barbell-based training for Masters, in Farmington, MI. Dr. Sullivan conducts semi-private barbell coaching and programming for adults in their 50s, 60s, 70s and beyond. He is also Associate Professor of Emergency Medicine at Wayne State University/Detroit Receiving Hospital, a Level I Trauma Center where he has worked in patient care, teaching, and research for over twenty years. Until his retirement from basic research in 2012, he was Associate Director of the Cerebral Resuscitation Laboratory, where he conducted basic research in molecular mechanisms of neuronal salvage and repair in the setting of cardiac arrest,

stroke, and trauma. He is the author of several dozen research articles, abstracts, and book chapters in the emergency medicine and neuroscience literature, as well as articles on strength training which can be found online at Starting Strength. He has served on several committees for the Starting Strength Coaches Association, and participated in the development of the Maintenance of Certification process for Starting Strength Coaches. He is a former US Marine, holds the rank of 3rd Dan in Tang Soo Do, and has been known to publish the occasional science fiction short story. He lives in Farmington Hills, MI, with his wife, three ungrateful cats, and a wooded lot full of raccoons, skunks, possums, foxes, herons, and ducks. Andy Baker, SSC is the owner of Kingwood Strength & Conditioning (KSC), a private barbell training facility in Kingwood TX. Since opening KSC in 2007 Andy has provided coaching and personal training to clients ranging from Division I collegiate athletes and competitive powerlifters to average people of all ages and abilities who are interested in getting stronger. Andy is a former U.S. Marine and served multiple combat tours in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom between 2003-2007. While on active duty, Andy received his undergraduate degree in Health & Sport Science from the American Military University. He is a Starting Strength Coach, and is the co-author with Mark Rippetoe of the best-selling Practical Programming for Strength Training 3rd edition. Andy is also a Raw and Drug Free Powerlifter in the Natural Athlete Strength Association. In 2010 Andy won N.A.S.A. Grand Nationals in the 198 lb raw division, with a 529 lb Squat, 380 lb Bench Press, and 562 lb Deadlift. He is a native of Kingwood Texas, and currently resides there with his wife and 3 children.

This is simply the best Strength Training book out there for non-competitive athletes of any age. I am a 52 year old man and a CSCS (for what that's worth) with ten certifications and seminars under my belt (the Starting Strength Seminar was hands-down the best), and a voracious reader of health and fitness books. I have been using the principles and methods of Mark Rippetoe's Starting Strength (SS) and Practical Programming for Strength Training (PPST) for my training for the better part of the last 10 years. Barbell Prescription combines the information found in SS and PPST while filtering out the information that only applies to high school/college football players and competitive powerlifters and Olympic lifters. It presents the novice Starting Strength program as well as the intermediate Texas Method with enough variants to apply to anyone of any age or experience level, and to provide for a lifetime of sequential programming (as opposed to random variety). A 20-30 year old could jump in on the baseline programs then refer to the age-related modifications as life dictates. Advanced programming is also discussed for those very few non-competitive athletes that may need it. The only exception to the above is the guy who wants a beach body. While these

programs will pack on muscle, it will be go muscle, not show muscle, and washboard abs are not a consideration. Having said that, I don't think Sullivan, Baker, or Rippetoe would have an issue with someone doing a few sets of hanging leg raises, bicep curls or triceps extensions (lying triceps extensions are prescribed as an assistance exercise in some of the PPST programming and bicep curls are discussed in Barbell Prescription) for the sake of vanity after the heavy barbell work is done. Younger guys looking to train primarily for appearance may want to consider a hybrid strength/bodybuilding program such as Michael Matthews' Bigger, Leaner, Stronger. Only one complaint; the authors go into great detail about the benefits of high intensity interval training (HIIT) over long slow distance (LSD) work for general conditioning, but they are skimpy on the details of how to optimally program HIIT. They just give a few examples of HIIT work/rest time intervals and some non-prescriptive figures of how conditioning could be formatted into a weekly strength program, but give no rationale and leave the details up to the coach or athlete. For an excellent approach to HIIT, check out Marty Gallagher and Chris Hardy's *Burst Cardio*—heart rate-based methodology that automatically adjusts to the athlete's training and recovery status in their book *Strong Medicine*. Joel Jamieson has a ton of free cutting-edge conditioning info on his website, but unlike the authors of Barbell Prescription, he recommends 80% LSD and only 20% HIIT for general conditioning. The Starting Strength organization is known for its expertise in strength, not conditioning, so perhaps some outside assistance could help this section become a prescription (instead of general guidance) like the rest of the book. I will be enthusiastically recommending this book to my athletes, friends, and anyone else who asks me about training. Read it cover to cover (it's ok to gloss over the dozen or so pages on bioenergetics and muscle fiber types), study the videos at the Starting Strength website, then seek out a qualified powerlifting coach to get you started. Speaking from experience, the vast majority of globo-gym personal trainers are clueless on the safe and effective performance of the lifts presented in this book. Starting Strength and Practical Programming for Strength Training belong on the bookshelves of every coach and trainer, but for the non-competitive layman, The Barbell Prescription has it all.

Two initial disclosures. First, I will never appear as a verified purchaser, as I ordered the book from the publisher directly so I could receive it sooner. Second, I am a trainee at Greysteel Gym and coached by Dr. Jonathan Sullivan. The following is my honest evaluation. There is no bias as a stellar review from me will undoubtedly not reduce the number of sets I have to do on Monday regardless. Nothing in this book will allow you to live longer. But do you want to live better? I can

personally attest that the methodologies and science meticulously explained in this book will give you a chance at the latter. We have another trainee in our gym who is north of *90* years old. He could barely walk in when he started. Two weeks ago, for his 90th birthday (and this was a personal goal), he dead-lifted 100 pounds. I can think of no better real life testimonial to the precepts and prescriptions that are on offer in these pages. What will you get? The book is long. If you read a page every day, on a leap year, you would still need until January 2nd of the following year. This is not "bro-science". The endnotes run for 38 pages. Dr. Sullivan is a licensed M.D. and Starting Strength coach. If you want to understand the actual biological basis of getting stronger, this book is for you. If you want to understand the single best way to improve your odds of fighting off aging (though, again, not prolonging life), this book is for you. If you want to occasionally have a laugh or wry smile at the incisive writing and wit, this book is for you. The book is divided into three parts: Why, What and How. Why? Why should master athletes (those over 40) embark on an exercise program dominated by strength and weightlifting? Dr. Sullivan meticulously makes a case that is hard to argue with by the time you are done. This is not for the faint of heart. There is science here. Decisions are driven by data. While many fitness programs cherry pick an individual study, this book compares them across time and methodically. You are given a base understanding of cellular biology and how your body actually uses energy (anyone remember the Krebs Cycle from AP Biology?) However, while there is science, and lots of it, you are walked through with practical analogies and humor. There are no equations to master, but there are concepts to embrace. What? What exercises will maximize your gains? The guidelines here will be very familiar to anyone who has read the idiomatic tome on this, Mark Rippetoe's "Starting Strength". Rather than duplicating the detail found in that excellent book, "Barbell Prescription" summarizes the key points of the lifts. Crucially, Sullivan and Baker explain how to modify these exercises for masters athletes. For example, how do you deal with someone who cannot press due to a shoulder injury from decades ago? How do you modify the squat to allow progress when hip flexibility is compromised? What alternative exercises can you program and still allow strength to improve? How? Knowing what exercises to do is a matter of simple practice, but *training* requires their use in a disciplined and rational program based on manipulating the proper variables (whether volume or intensity) for the level of the athlete. Again, Mark Rippetoe has a more in-depth (though general) treatment of these topics in "Practical Programming for Strength". The insights of this book are how to apply programming for lifters in middle age and beyond. Volume is the enemy of age. One must focus on intensity. Familiar programs such as Starting Strength or the Texas Methods are adapted for the special challenges that the decline of our body's ability to repair itself impose. What is not so good in

this book? I can only ascribe this to a miscommunication with the printer. However, half of the tables in the programming section are in the traditional notation (weight-reps by sets) and the other half are strangely reversed (weight-sets by reps). It is very confusing and detract from what is an otherwise outstanding book. My only other quibble is that I would have liked to see a bit more in the nutrition section. However, this is fundamentally a book on the exercises, and more importantly, why one should do them, than a topic that probably requires its own book to do it justice. In the end, I will leave you with the words of Dr. Sullivan himself on page 78, "I am a physician, and a physiologist, but most importantly, I am a Masters Athlete. The material in the last six chapters isn't just a nerd or professional abstraction to me. It's personal. I have no intention of going quietly. I am committed to growing old with as much strength, vigor, and function as I possible can. I am to cling to every muscle cell, every bit of bone tissue, every inch of my range of motion, every iota of functional independence... for dear life."

This is the only book I've been able to find so far with quality advice on strength training in your 40's, 50's, 60's, 70's and beyond. The emphasis is on volume and recovery management, not loss of intensity - lift heavy, but lift less, and give more time to recover in between. As hinted in the review title, this book has quite a bit of overlap with Rippetoe's Practical Programming for Strength Training (lots of coverage given to the Texas Method, for example). However, the emphasis on what older lifters need to do makes this essential for them and those who train these older athletes. The kindle version has some formatting problems on the training tables that got mangled in the conversion process. Will up rating to 5 stars if/when this gets fixed.

Ok, I thought I knew enough since I have a science background. This books has motivated me due to the relevant information provided. I fall exactly in the age range needing this structured programing. I'm 55 y/o and can relate to the things described. I highly recommend this book.

Being a total newbie (called Novice here) to strength training, and having lived well over 60 years, I was happy to see this fine tome on M. Rippetoe's web site. Many sources recommend Rippetoe's focus on straight forward barbell training as the all-around best approach to getting strong and then enjoying many benefits resisting the evils of aging. This is well considered to be an essential antidote for sarcopenia (muscle wasting), weak bones and the horrors of metabolic syndrome (diabetes, hypertension, atherosclerosis, fat belly).

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