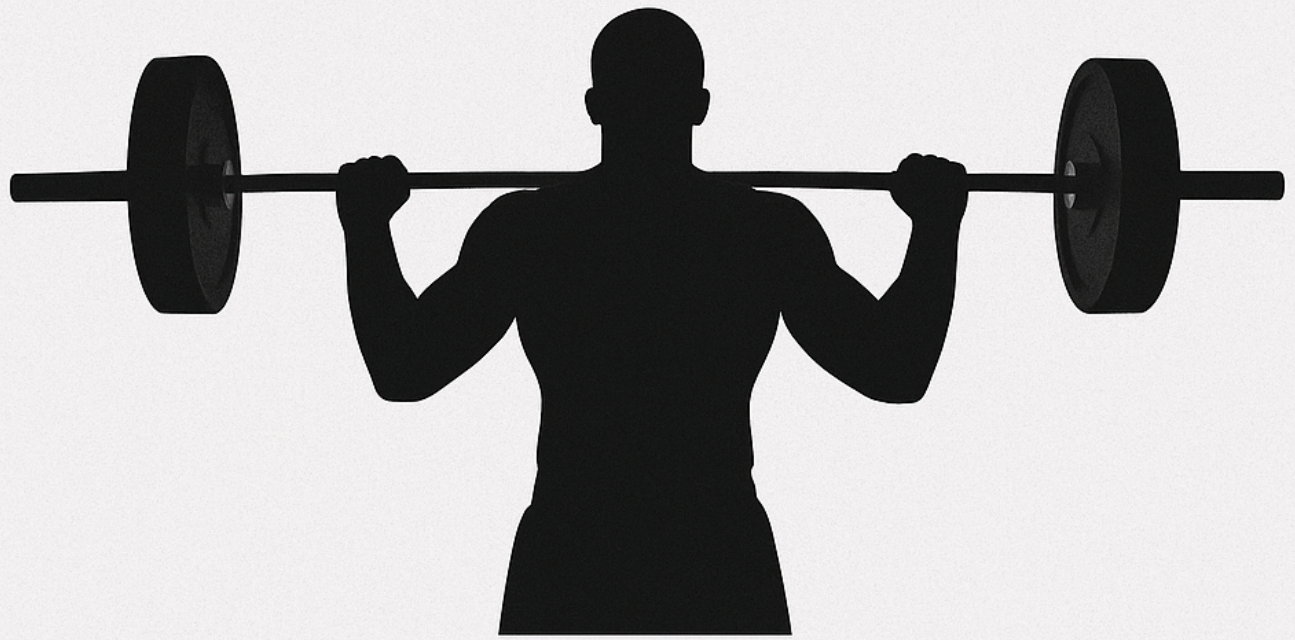


THE 8/5/3 METHOD



Phil Reichhoff

**Train Smart. Lift Heavy.
Build Discipline.**

Introduction

Thank you for taking an interest in my thoughts and picking up this e-book.

When debating to share my programing I cringed at the idea of being so open. But, the more I thought about it, if these concepts can help just one young person, coach or parent then it has to be shared.

This is far from perfect - and I reserve the right to change my mind - but here we go!

Unknowingly, the 8/5/3 Method is something I started working on in 2016 as a Graduate Assistant at Virginia Commonwealth University. We saw great success with it there, specifically with Track & Field Throwers. In 2020, I was hired at Cape Henry Collegiate, a Pre-Kindergarten through 12th Grade private school in Virginia Beach, Virginia. I would serve as Cape Henry's first ever strength coach and that presented its own unique challenges.

Those were uncertain times but there was one thing I knew for certain...

We needed to see results - and fast.

In those early weeks I got to work adapting my program and building a multi-level long term athletic development system. The goal was to apply best practices in long term athletic development to our physical education curriculum, eventually spanning ages 3-18. The overall athletic development system has expanded since then but at the core it comes down to these principles.

It is engrained into our culture, our tradition and our shared suffering. Nothing bonds people together like sharing in discomfort. As you read, you will learn what "AMAP" means and how I use it.

To us, it means more. It means we all push it to the limit, every day...together. It doesn't matter what weight is on the bar, male or female, athlete or non-athlete.

That's the power of 8/5/3.

Let's get into it.

Hope you enjoy!

Background

5/3/1 Strength Training Program

In my opinion, the original 5/3/1 is one of the foundational strength training programs in the history of the profession. I was introduced to 5/3/1 as an Undergraduate Assistant at East Carolina University. I needed a program to follow for my own workouts and I needed to learn percentage based programming. One of the Assistants at ECU suggested I try 5/3/1. The principles of the program have been a big part of my tool box ever since.

Why is the program so effective? Coach Jim Wendler rooted his system in simplicity, progression, and long-term development. 5/3/1 is designed to build foundational strength through four core lifts: the squat, deadlift, bench press, and overhead press. The genius in Wendler's philosophy is the emphasis on quality over complexity and making the program accessible for athletes of all levels.

The program is scaled for beginners to advanced primarily because of the "AMAP" (as many as possible) set. The "AMAP" set allows lifters to push themselves beyond the minimum and measure progression.

For a deeper understanding, let's take a look at the program's structure.

The Original 5/3/1 Program				
Set	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
1	40% x 5	40% x 5	40% x 5	40% x 5
2	50% x 5	50% x 5	50% x 5	50% x 5
3	60% x 3	60% x 3	60% x 5	60% x 5
4	65% x 5	70% x 3	75% x 5	
5	75% x 5	80% x 3	85% x 3	
6	85% x 5+	90% x 3+	95% x 1+	
	3x5+ Week	3x3+ Week	5/3/1+ Week	Deload Week

The last set, of every session, serves as a re-test. This allows for an estimated One-Repetition Max (1RM) to be updated every session. When you are working with young athletes who progress quickly it is important to keep up! A more experienced lifter will only see limited fluctuation in their 1RMs but a novice can see massive changes week to week, even day to day.

It also allows for the daily fluctuations in ~1RMs to naturally occur without ruining the program. Maybe most importantly, every pound is earned. Earned through previous experience. Seeing results in real time builds real, deeply rooted, confidence. And confidence changes lives!

And this brings us to APRE....

APRE (Autoregulatory Progressive Resistance Exercise) Method

When I moved to Cape Henry I dove into learning everything I could about other high schools. How they built their schedule, how they programmed, how they designed their rooms..everything. If you research high school strength coaches you will quickly find Gary Schofield and his work at Greater Atlanta Christian School. Gary used the APRE Method in a very sophisticated way and explained it very clearly. When we built our new facility Gary was working for PLAE and I was lucky enough to spend time with him. Our talks deepened my belief in auto-regulation and the importance at the youth level.

The APRE method, short for Autoregulatory Progressive Resistance Exercise, is a strength training system that emphasizes real-time adjustments based on an athlete's daily performance. Originally developed by Dr. Bryan Mann, APRE was designed to bridge the gap between percentage based programming and the natural fluctuations in strength experienced by athletes from day to day. The list of variables impacting a person (especially a young athlete) on the day to day are almost countless. Between school stress, home stress, athletic pressure, social issues, poor nutrition, fluctuating hormones, differences in maturity rates, lack of sleep...the list goes on!

Unlike traditional percentage-based programs that rely on pre-determined loads, APRE adapts to the athlete's performance each session, making it highly responsive and individualized.

The APRE method typically focuses on three variations:

Table 1. The APRE routines.			
Set	3RM routine	6RM routine	10RM routine
0	Warm up	Warm up	Warm up
1	6 reps at 50% 3RM	10 reps at 50% 6RM	12 Reps at 50% 10RM
2	3 reps at 75% 3RM	6 reps at 75% 6RM	10 reps at 75% 10RM
3	Reps to failure at 3RM	Reps to failure at 6RM	Reps to failure at 10RM
4	Adjusted reps to failure	Adjusted reps to failure	Adjusted reps to failure

The key set is the third or final working set, where the athlete performs as many reps as possible (AMRAP). The number of reps completed determines how the weight will be adjusted in the following session.

For example, if an athlete exceeds the rep goal, the load increases in the next workout. If they fall short, the load is reduced. This autoregulation allows for more accurate

tracking of progress and helps athletes avoid overtraining or undertraining. (And I am equally fearful of both!)

APRE encourages effort, consistency, and honest self-assessment—all critical traits for long-term development. It balances structure with adaptability, empowering athletes to train based on their actual capacity rather than fixed expectations.

The 8/5/3 Method

I used the original 5/3/1 for a while and I used the original APRE for a while. Through trial and error, I slowly started to make adjustments to the original programs. I was training athletes between the ages of 12-18, in the same room, at the same time. We needed a program that was scalable and self-regulating, while taking into account growth and maturation. At the end I found a systematic way to progress both beginners and advanced lifters, often in the same room doing mostly the same workout.

For the youth athlete I felt 5/3/1 did not allow enough time in the rep ranges to adapt and thrive. There was more meat on the bone. Often Week 1 is spent learning the lifts, Week 2 is their first time really training, and by Week 3 the athlete can finally start to push themselves. I wanted to expand 5/3/1 into mini cycles. I watched my first boss, Jeff Connors at East Carolina, have incredible success with different forms of “3 Week Mini Cycles”. I wanted to find a way to expand the original program and give my athletes more time to grow. We would spend 3 weeks in each phase. At this point, the following was developed:

Set	Weeks of 5s	Weeks of 3s	Weeks of 1s
1	35% x 8	45% x 5	55% x 3
2	45% x 3	55% x 2	65% x 2
3	55% x 5	65% x 3	75% x 1
4	65% x 5	75% x 3	85% x 1
5	75% x 5	85% x 3	90% x 1
6	85% x AMAP	90% x AMAP	95% x AMAP

This structure worked great while I was training NCAA Division One Track and Field throwers. We added in some velocity based training and specific accessories which resulted in some very powerful men and women. I knew right away this structure was going to be too advanced for my middle school / high school students. This is when I started to implement different APRE Methods. Working through APRE I found my athletes were having great progress in the higher rep ranges. We saw most of our strength gains during the time spent in APRE10 and APRE6. I also came to believe that

moderate to high repetitions, for the majority of the year, was most beneficial for young athletes.

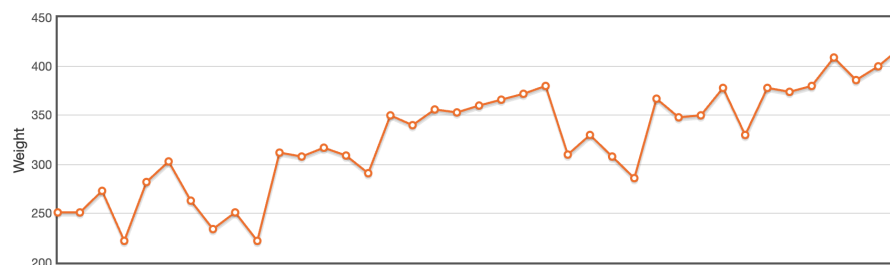
The combination that worked best was adjusting APRE10, APRE6 and APRE3, applying original 5/3/1 principles, and we would keep the 3 Week Mini Cycle structure. Three weeks of 8s, three weeks of 5s, and three weeks of 3s. Below is the structure of the original 8/5/3:

Set	Weeks of 8s	Weeks of 5s	Weeks of 3s
1	25% x 10	35% x 8	45% x 5
2	35% x 5	45% x 3	55% x 2
3	45% x 8	55% x 5	65% x 3
4	55% x 8	65% x 5	75% x 3
5	65% x 8	75% x 5	85% x 3
6	75% x AMAP	85% x AMAP	90% x AMAP

An added benefit is we do not need to know the athletes 1RM to have a productive first workout. It also does not matter when the athlete joins the program. It is ideal to start with 8s and progressively move through the program but because of the AMAP set they can jump in and train hard at any point.

For a brand new student with zero training age Set 1 might be the empty bar, sometimes a 15lb Training Bar. We then slowly add weight working towards the AMAP set. Through the warm up sets, aim to find a weight that limits the athlete to ~10 challenging reps on the last set. The following week we will have an estimated 1RM, producing weights assigned for each set. Strictly based on previous performance. The athlete will again aim for as many reps as possible with that assigned weight. This will continue and the estimated 1RM will become more and more accurate.

Here an example of front squat progress from October 2021 - January 2024 following The 8/5/3 Method. Progressing from an ~1RM of 250 to 420. Autoregulation and long term development at work, at the same time.



This is the general framework we follow for our max effort primary exercises. Typically: bench, squat, deadlift. I have also applied the concepts to: chin ups, pull ups, split squats, lateral squats, push ups and shoulder presses.

This will guide our programming for our Max Effort rep schemes. 1-2 exercises per day will follow the 8/5/3 format. Followed by 3-4 exercises of Accessory Work, which will follow either the Repeat Effort or Dynamic Effort rep schemes.

Accessory Work



This is a graphic I made and posted in our facility. Everyone gets excited for their deadlift max but it is often hard to get the same level of buy-in for the accessory lifts. It is critical in our program that you complete all assigned reps and use a weight that, on the last set, challenges you. Our goal is to push towards 1-3 reps before failure, or “reps in reserve”. When programming we place our accessory work in two buckets: Repeat Effort and Dynamic Effort.

Louie Simmons, the legendary founder of Westside Barbell, revolutionized strength training by creating the Conjugate Method. Based on original Soviet style training, the Conjugate Method allows you to train multiple physical qualities simultaneously. This philosophy focuses on three core methods: the Max Effort, Dynamic Effort, and Repetition Effort methods. These methods are rotated weekly creating a constantly evolving program. Fitting perfectly with our 8/5/3 framework.

Repetition Effort Method (RE):

The Repetition Effort method builds muscle mass, motor learning, and foundational capacity. It involves higher rep ranges, normally between 8-12+ reps. RE can be used to strengthen weak muscle groups that limit performance in the main lifts. It is also where

we build general hypertrophy needed for young lifters. These reps will progress as follows:

Set	Weeks of 8s	Weeks of 5s	Weeks of 3s
1	3x12	3x10	3x8
2	3x12	3x10	3x8
3	3x12	3x10	3x8

Dynamic Effort Method (DE):

The Dynamic Effort method focuses on developing explosive power and bar speed. Lifters use submaximal loads, typically between 50–70%, sometimes with accommodating resistance. The emphasis is on moving the bar as fast as possible with perfect technique. DE days train rate of force development, making the athletes more explosive and improving their ability to apply strength quickly. We utilize reverse cycling to take advantage of post activation potentiation and develop maximal intent. This method progresses as follows:

Set	Weeks of 8s	Weeks of 5s	Weeks of 3s
1	3x3	3x4	3x5
2	3x3	3x4	3x5
3	3x3	3x4	3x5

True DE programming is only applied in our highest level programming. Using our exercise progressions and regressions our beginner lifters will still have elements of DE in their programs. For example, instead of hang clean, a beginner would do seated vertical jump.

Conclusion

I hope the program outlined in this resource can help you and the people you train. I have attached a resources page so you can deepen your understanding and explore the experts in the world of physical preparation.

I also attached my contact information. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions regarding The 8/5/3 Method and how we are applying it to our setting. I do my best to show 8/5/3 in action on my Instagram account if you want to see things in action.

Committing to a plan, following the plan, and seeing results is a powerful lesson for a young person. A lesson that can be applied to every aspect of life. Hopefully producing future leaders, parents, and voters who will make our world a better place.

Thank you again!
Phil

Resources

5/3/1 Program (Jim Wendler)

- Wendler, J. (2011). *5/3/1: The Simplest and Most Effective Training System to Increase Raw Strength*. Jim Wendler LLC.
- Wendler, J. (2013). *Beyond 5/3/1: Simple Training for Extraordinary Results*. Jim Wendler LLC.

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- Mann, B., Thyfault, J. P., Ivey, P. A., & Sayers, S. P. (2010). The effect of autoregulatory progressive resistance exercise vs. linear periodization on strength improvement in college athletes. *Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research*, 24(7), 1718–1723. <https://doi.org/10.1519/JSC.0b013e3181d5fbd2>
- Mann, B. (2016). *Developing Explosive Athletes: Use of Velocity Based Training in Training Athletes*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.

Max Effort, Dynamic Effort, and Repetition Effort (Louie Simmons & Westside Barbell)

- Simmons, L. (2007). *Westside Barbell Book of Methods*. Westside Barbell.
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- Zatsiorsky, V. M., & Kraemer, W. J. (2006). *Science and Practice of Strength Training* (2nd ed.). Human Kinetics.

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