FOR THE MAN OVER 40 WHO'S TIRED OF STARTING OVER

STOP STARTING OVER



The FitForge Men's Fitness Handbook

Strength, Muscle, and Recovery for Men Over 40

ANDREW VORIS

NASM-CPT | Precision Nutrition Certified

THE FITFORGE MEN'S FITNESS HANDBOOK

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35+ years of coaching | NASM-CPT | Precision Nutrition

Copyright & Reader Notice

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The FitForge Men's Fitness Handbook: Strength, Muscle, and Recovery for Men Over 40

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This book provides general educational information about exercise, nutrition and recovery. It is not personal medical advice, diagnosis, treatment, or a substitute for care from a qualified clinician. Exercise carries inherent risks. Individuals with health conditions, injuries, or concerns should seek appropriate professional guidance before beginning or changing a program. Stop activity and obtain medical care for warning symptoms. Individual results vary.

Professional education and references

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How to Use This Book

This book is built in the order a good coach would teach you: first the education, then a goal, then a program, then the record that keeps you honest. You can read it straight through in a couple of evenings, but it is designed to live where you train — in the gym bag, on the garage shelf next to the dumbbells — for the next twelve weeks and well beyond.

Start with the foundation chapters and the education that follows. They are not filler before the "real" content. Once you understand how training actually works — adaptation, overload, movement patterns, recovery, fuel, and habit — you will never need to guess at a workout again, and you will be able to spot a bad program in about ten seconds. Most programs fail men over 40 not because the exercises are wrong but because nobody explained the system the exercises sit inside. This book explains the system first.

Next, fill in the goal-setting worksheet in Part VII before you lift anything. A wish — "get in shape" — never becomes a Tuesday. The worksheet forces the translation: an outcome you want, written in plain words; the process behaviors you control completely, like sessions per week and protein at each meal; and if-then plans for the two obstacles most likely to knock you off schedule, written now, while you are calm, instead of improvised later, while you are not.

Choose one program from Part VI for its stated length. The Starter Plan is four weeks, two programs run 28 days, and the full-body and upper/lower tracks can run longer.

Follow your chosen block, log every session, and review it before switching. Start with the Starter Plan if you are new or returning; choose 3-Day Full-Body for a sustainable baseline, or 4-Day Upper/Lower when your experience and calendar support it. Do not mix plans to chase novelty. If a lift stalls, use the progression rules in Chapter 7 before changing everything. The goal is consistency within the block and a thoughtful review after it - not twelve weeks for a program designed to last four.

Log every session. Memory is a liar under fatigue; the logbook is the only honest coach you will ever have between sessions with a real one. The condensed log in Appendix A gets you started, and the measurement tracker there shows you how to re-measure every four weeks — same day of the week, same time of day, same conditions — because daily weigh-ins are noise and four-week trends are information.

You do not need a gym for any of this. Every program chapter carries substitutions: a dumbbell version if you have no barbell, and a no-gym version if you have nothing but a floor, a sturdy table, and a hallway. Push-up progressions, split squats, backpack hinges, towel rows, and suitcase carries will carry you surprisingly far. The pattern matters more than the tool. Tell the truth about what you have, pick the version that matches it, and start there.

A word on how the next training block will actually feel like, because honest timelines save more programs than any exercise selection. The first two weeks are for technique: loads stay moderate, every set leaves reps in reserve, and the win is showing up on schedule. After that, progress is real but undramatic — a rep here, the smallest

plate there. Some week around week six will feel weaker than week five. That is weather, not climate. Judge the trend across a month of logbook entries, never a single session, and let the system do its slow work.

The companion app

This book has a companion: the FitForgeAI app at fitforgeai.net. The book is the system — it teaches the why and the how, and it works completely on its own, on paper, with no phone required. The app is the same system applied daily. A short quiz builds a starter plan from your answers — your equipment, your level, your schedule. Your sessions adapt to your readiness and recovery. Your logging, habits, measurements, and progress live in one place, and the calculators and the full workout library are there when a chapter points you to them. Where the book teaches something the app can do with you — scaling a session to the day you have, most of all — the chapter says so plainly.

Stated plainly, the way the site states it: there is no automatic one-to-one human coaching in the app, no text-message check-ins, and no voice calls, and this book does not pretend otherwise. What there is: coaching rules, progression logic, exercise selection, and safety limits written from more than 35 years on the coaching floor, applied to your data so one coach's standard can reach more than one weight room. If you strip the AI out, the coaching standard is still there. If you strip the coaching out, there is nothing worth using.

Read the book in order the first time. After that, use it as a reference: the checklists when a lift feels wrong, the troubleshooting appendix when progress stalls, the deload

chapter when the warning signs stack up. It will say something different to you in week nine than it did in week one. That is not the book changing. That is you, learning the system.

PLEASE READ — DISCLAIMER

This book is general fitness education. It is not medical advice, not a diagnosis, and not a substitute for care from your own physician, physical therapist, or other clinician. If you have a medical condition, a current or past injury, joint replacements, heart or blood-pressure issues, diabetes, or you take medication that affects exercise, heart rate, balance, or blood sugar, talk with your clinician before starting this or any exercise program. Stop exercising and seek medical care if you feel chest pain, severe shortness of breath, dizziness, or sharp joint pain. No book can guarantee results; progress depends on your health, history, consistency, and factors no page can control. Train within your limits, use loads you can control with good form, and when in doubt, choose the lighter option.

That disclaimer is not legal decoration. It governs every chapter that follows. Medications and individual conditions are always a conversation with your clinician — no exceptions, and nothing in this book outranks that conversation.

READER ROUTE

Choose the Block. Keep the Habit.

There is one training philosophy in this book, but the programs are **not all twelve-week programs**. Use each for its stated length. Start where you are, complete the block, look at the log, and decide what comes next. A program ending is not a reason to restart your identity as a lifter.

Where you are	What to use	Length
New, returning, rebuilding	Program 1: Starter Plan	4 weeks
Ready for a weekly routine	Program 2: 3-Day Full-Body	Repeatable 12-week track
Experienced; four reliable days	Program 3: 4-Day Upper/Lower	Repeatable 12-week track
Travel or schedule disruption	Program 4 or 5	28 days
Targeted specialty goal	Program 6	Follow its stated schedule

Your real minimum: aim for two manageable resistance sessions in most weeks. One session in a chaotic week still counts as showing up; it is not the same as completing your usual minimum. Resume without punishment. [01,02]

The three decisions after every block

If lifts and technique are improving, continue. If one lift stalls, troubleshoot that lift before replacing the entire program. If fatigue accumulates across performance, sleep, soreness and mood, scale the load or take an easier week. Use Chapters 7 and 14 for the specifics.

This book teaches principles, not a belief that every body must progress at the same speed. Maintaining strength during a demanding season is a win, particularly when the alternative would be dropping training entirely. [01,04]

Introduction — Stop Starting Over

You know the cycle. You have probably lived it more than once.

You find a program. It looks serious — it usually is serious, for somebody. You start hard: five or six days a week, loads you have not touched in years, soreness that makes stairs a negotiation. For two weeks you are a man transformed. Then life files its objection. A work trip. A kid home sick. A shoulder that starts talking during bench press and will not stop. You miss a week.

Here is where the program quietly kills you. It has no way to absorb that week. Week four's weights assume week three happened. You try to jump back in where you left off, because starting over feels like failure, and the session is a grind — heavier than it should be, on a body that is not where the plan thinks it is. So you miss another day. Then you tell yourself you will restart Monday, clean. Then you tell yourself you will restart next month, really clean. The program goes in a drawer. Months later you pull it out, or buy its cousin, and start over. Again.

I have coached for more than 35 years, and I will tell you what those years actually teach: the men who quit are almost never the lazy ones. The plan failed them first. A plan that only works on perfect weeks is a plan designed to be quit, because after 40, perfect weeks are rare. Your job votes. Your family votes. Your sleep votes. Your knees have a vote and they are not shy about using it. Any system that

treats a missed week as a moral failure instead of a scheduling fact will eventually be abandoned by a grown man with a life — and he will blame himself for a design flaw that was never his.

You've heard the other line, too: after 40, it's all downhill. That's only true if you sit still. Muscle does not care about your birthday. It responds to tension, fuel, and recovery. Give it those three things consistently and it grows — in your 40s, your 50s, your 60s. What changes after 40 is not your ability to adapt. It's the margin. You do not bounce back like you did at 25. Your tendons and joints recover slower than your muscles do. Your calendar is fuller and less forgiving. The cost of training dumb — too much, too fast, on no sleep — is higher, and it collects faster. A program built for a 25-year-old ignores all of that. It assumes recovery is free, time is unlimited, and nothing ever goes wrong. Then it acts surprised when a 47-year-old with a job and a family can't live inside it.

So this book is built on a different assumption: **stop starting over — train to the day you have, and nothing resets.**

That is not a slogan. It is a set of mechanics, and the whole book is those mechanics written down. The plan is built from you — your equipment, your schedule, your history — not pulled off a shelf. Every session scales to your readiness that day: push when you're recovered, back off on purpose when you're not, and treat the lighter week as strategy instead of surrender. When you miss a week, the next session is scaled to where you actually are. You repeat your last successful loads instead of advancing, you re-earn the jump in a few days, and the plan never broke — because the

plan expected real life all along. Progress is tracked in a logbook, so decisions come from evidence instead of guilt. Consistency stops depending on motivation, because the system has a floor — a minimum week that still counts — and a protocol for the weeks that fall apart. The streak you protect is not perfection. It's returning.

Inside, you'll get the whole system the way I would teach it in person. Five pillars: Train, Fuel, Recover, Move, Repeat. The five movement patterns and how to load them. The ten rules for building muscle after 40. How to warm up, how to eat enough protein without turning your kitchen into a laboratory, how to sleep and deload like they are part of the program — because they are — and six complete programs you can run for twelve weeks at a time, in a gym, with dumbbells, or with no equipment at all. Every figure in this book is stated plainly, and nothing here promises you a result. What it promises is a system that survives your worst weeks, because results belong to the people whose training survives their worst weeks, not their best ones.

This book is for three readers, and it treats all three the same. The man who has never trained and wants to start properly, without wasting his first year on a program he'll quit by spring. The man returning after a layoff — a year, a decade, an injury, a busy season of life — who does not need to be punished for the gap; he needs a ramp back in that respects where he actually is. And the self-coached lifter whose progress has stalled, who trains hard and faithfully and cannot understand why the logbook stopped moving. Different doors, same room: a system built from your life instead of against it.

This system also lives as the FitForgeAI app, this book's

companion, where the quiz builds the plan, the readiness scaling happens automatically, and the logging is done for you. The book works on its own. The app applies it daily. Either way, the standard is the same, because the standard came first: if you strip the AI out, the coaching is still there.

The hill after 40 isn't downhill. It's just a hill that rewards the men who keep climbing. So climb it at a pace you can hold for years — and stop starting over.

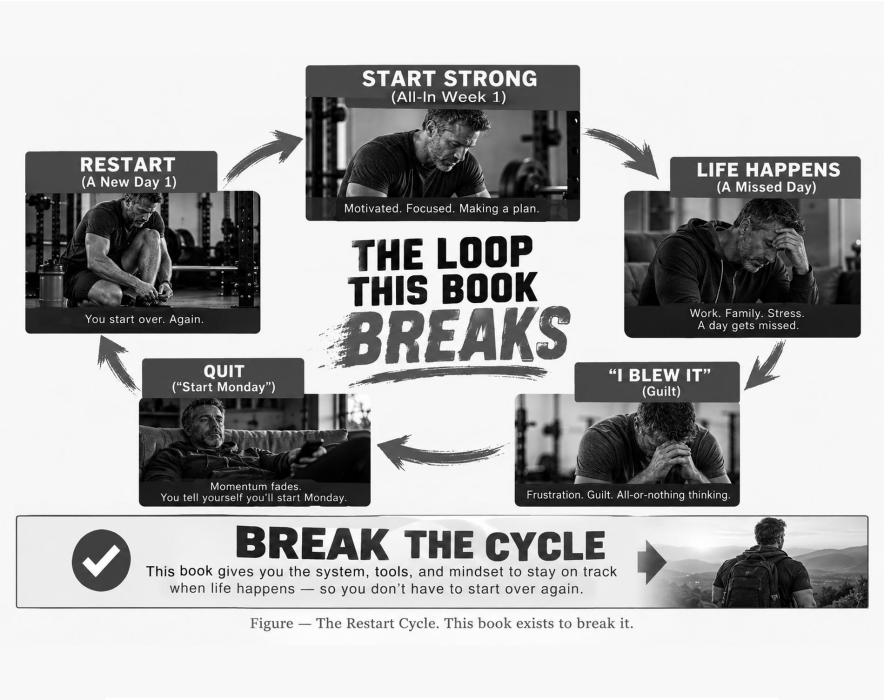


Figure — The Restart Cycle. This book exists to break it.