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4-Week Dumbbell Workout Plan

One pair of dumbbells. No bench, no machines, no barbell. Four ~40-minute strength days plus one cardio-core day per week — with starting weights, substitutions, and a tracking log built in.

Plan length	4 weeks
Days per week	4 strength + 1 cardio-core
Session time	~40 minutes
Equipment	1 pair of dumbbells (no bench needed)
Level	Beginner–intermediate

How to use this plan

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

DAY	FOCUS
Day 1	Upper body
Day 2	Lower body
Day 3	Rest (optional walk)
Day 4	Full-body push
Day 5	Full-body pull
Day 6	Cardio + core
Day 7	Rest

Only have three days? Run Days 1, 2, and 4 and keep everything else the same.

4-WEEK PROGRESSION — CHANGE ONE VARIABLE AT A TIME

WEEK	RULE
Week 1	Every exercise light. Focus on form. Leave 1–2 reps in reserve each set.
Week 2	Add 1 set to the first two exercises of each day. Still 1–2 reps in reserve.
Week 3	Drop 2 reps per set and add 5–10 lb where you can.
Week 4	Test week — keep week 3 loads, push the final set of each exercise to max clean reps.

REST PERIODS

EXERCISE TYPE	REST BETWEEN SETS
Compound lifts (presses, rows, squats, deadlifts)	90–120 seconds
Isolation (curls, raises, extensions)	45–60 seconds
Core / cardio	30 seconds

Treat these as floors, not races. More rest on the big lifts is fine.

One-pair substitution key: when the weight is wrong, change the rep, not the dumbbell. Too light → slow tempo (3 counts down, 1 pause, 3 up) or 1.5 reps. Too heavy → fewer reps or the single-arm version. Each day table lists a specific substitution per exercise.

Weight rule: the last two reps of every set should feel hard while your form stays clean.

Day 1 — Upper body

EXERCISE	SETS × REPS	REST	ONE-PAIR-ONLY SUBSTITUTION
Dumbbell bench press (floor press if no bench)	4 × 10	90–120 s	Too light: 3-count lowering every rep
Bent-over row	4 × 10	90–120 s	Too light: 1-second pause at the top
Overhead press	3 × 12	90–120 s	Too heavy: press one arm at a time
One-arm row	3 × 10 each side	90 s	Too light: 2-second squeeze at the top
Biceps curl	3 × 12	45–60 s	Too heavy: alternate arms
Triceps extension	3 × 12	45–60 s	Too heavy: both hands on one dumbbell
Plank	3 × 60 s	30 s	Too easy: raise one foot

Cues: shoulder blades pinned on presses. Pull the dumbbell to your hip, not your armpit, on rows.

Day 2 — Lower body

EXERCISE	SETS × REPS	REST	ONE-PAIR-ONLY SUBSTITUTION
Goblet squat	4 × 12	90–120 s	Too light: 3-second descent, pause at the bottom
Romanian deadlift	4 × 10	90–120 s	Too light: single-leg version
Bulgarian split squat	3 × 10 each side	90 s	No bench: reverse lunge
Walking lunges	3 × 12 each side	90 s	Too light: 2-count hold at the bottom
Weighted glute bridge	3 × 15	45–60 s	Too light: single-leg bridge
Calf raises	4 × 20	45–60 s	Too light: single-leg, slow lowering

Cue: sit back into the goblet squat like you're reaching for a chair.

Day 4 — Full-body push

EXERCISE	SETS × REPS	REST	ONE-PAIR-ONLY SUBSTITUTION
Floor press	4 × 10	90–120 s	Too light: 1.5 reps (repeat the bottom half)
Push press	4 × 8	90–120 s	Too heavy: one arm at a time
Lateral raises	3 × 15	45–60 s	Too heavy: bend elbows to 90°
Front raises	3 × 12	45–60 s	Too heavy: alternate arms
Overhead triceps extension	3 × 12	45–60 s	Too heavy: both hands on one dumbbell
Push-ups	3 × max	60 s	Too hard: drop to your knees

Cues: drive the push press with your legs, then punch the dumbbells overhead. Elbows soft at the top of raises.

Day 5 — Full-body pull

EXERCISE	SETS × REPS	REST	ONE-PAIR-ONLY SUBSTITUTION
Renegade row	4 × 8 each side	90–120 s	Too heavy: row from your knees
Dumbbell deadlift	4 × 10	90–120 s	Too light: 3-1-3 tempo
Reverse fly	3 × 12	45–60 s	Too heavy: bend elbows slightly more
Hammer curl	3 × 12	45–60 s	Too light: 3-count lowering
Concentration curl	3 × 10 each side	45–60 s	Too heavy: assist up with the free hand, lower slow
Dead hang	3 × 30 s	60 s	No bar: farmer hold, 3 × 45 s

Cues: fight the hip twist on renegade rows. Feet wide, squeeze the floor.

Day 6 — Cardio + core

EXERCISE	SETS × REPS	REST	ONE-PAIR-ONLY SUBSTITUTION
Steady cardio (walk, jog, bike, rope)	20 min	—	No machine: brisk walk or stair repeats
Plank	3 × 60 s	30 s	Too easy: shoulder taps
Russian twists	3 × 20	30 s	Too easy: hold one dumbbell
Knee raises	3 × 12	30 s	Too easy: straight-leg raises
Side plank	3 × 30 s each side	30 s	Too hard: bottom knee down

Cardio pace check: you should be able to talk, but not sing.

Days 3 and 7 are rest days. An easy walk on Day 3 helps recovery; Day 7 is fully off. Sleep and protein do more for your results this week than an extra session would.

Starting-weight chart

Heavy enough that the last two reps of every set feel hard while your form stays clean. That rule beats any chart — use these ranges only to pick your first-session weights.

LIFT TYPE	BEGINNER WOMEN	BEGINNER MEN	INTERMEDIATE WOMEN	INTERMEDIATE MEN
Presses (floor/bench, overhead)	8–15 lb (4–7 kg)	15–25 lb (7–11 kg)	15–25 lb (7–11 kg)	25–40 lb (11–18 kg)
Rows and pulls	10–15 lb (5–7 kg)	20–30 lb (9–14 kg)	20–30 lb (9–14 kg)	35–50 lb (16–23 kg)
Squats, RDLs, lunges	15–25 lb (7–11 kg)	25–40 lb (11–18 kg)	25–35 lb (11–16 kg)	40–60 lb (18–27 kg)
Isolation (curls, raises, extensions)	5–10 lb (2–5 kg)	10–15 lb (5–7 kg)	10–15 lb (5–7 kg)	15–25 lb (7–11 kg)

If a set of 12 ends and you could have done 18, the weight is too light: go up, or use the substitution column in the day tables.

The whole week on one page

DAY 1 — UPPER	DAY 2 — LOWER	DAY 4 — PUSH	DAY 5 — PULL	DAY 6 — CARDIO/CORE
Bench/floor press 4×10	Goblet squat 4×12	Floor press 4×10	Renegade row 4×8/side	Steady cardio 20 min
Bent-over row 4×10	Romanian deadlift 4×10	Push press 4×8	DB deadlift 4×10	Plank 3×60 s
Overhead press 3×12	Bulgarian split squat 3×10/leg	Lateral raises 3×15	Reverse fly 3×12	Russian twists 3×20
One-arm row 3×10/side	Walking lunges 3×12/leg	Front raises 3×12	Hammer curl 3×12	Knee raises 3×12
Biceps curl 3×12	Glute bridge 3×15	OH triceps ext 3×12	Concentration curl 3×10/side	Side plank 3×30 s/side
Triceps extension 3×12	Calf raises 4×20	Push-ups 3×max	Dead hang 3×30 s	
Plank 3×60 s				

Rest: compounds 90–120 s · isolation 45–60 s · core/cardio 30 s. Days 3 & 7: rest. Week 1 light/form · Week 2 +1 set · Week 3 –2 reps +5–10 lb · Week 4 test.

4-week tracking log

Write weight x reps for your top set each session. Beat last week's numbers by a little.

EXERCISE	WEEK 1	WEEK 2	WEEK 3	WEEK 4
Bench/floor press				
Bent-over row				
Overhead press				
One-arm row				
Biceps curl / hammer curl				
Triceps extension				
Goblet squat				
Romanian deadlift				
Bulgarian split squat				
Walking lunges				
Glute bridge				
Calf raises				
Floor press				
Push press				
Lateral / front raises				
Renegade row				
Dumbbell deadlift				
Reverse fly				
Concentration curl				
Plank (longest hold)				