

Back In Shape After 40

The complete guide for men over 40 — three training tracks, 12-week progression, nutrition and recovery protocols.

Foundation Track

Sedentary restart - 3 sessions per week

Training sessions

Day 1 • Full Body A • 40 min

Rebuild movement patterns with machines and supported variations. Leave 3-4 reps in reserve on every set.

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS / TIME	REST	COACHING CUE
Incline walk warm-up	1	8 min	-	Reach a pace where you can speak but not sing.
Box squat to bench	3	8-10	90 s	Sit back, touch the bench lightly, drive through mid-foot.
Chest-supported row (machine)	3	10-12	75 s	Pull elbows to hips, pause one second at the chest pad.
Incline dumbbell press	3	8-10	90 s	45 deg bench, elbows at 45 deg from ribs, no bottom bounce.
Half-kneeling cable pulldown	2	10-12	60 s	Ribs down, no lean-back - the lats do the work.
Dead bug	3	8 / side	45 s	Low back glued to the floor throughout.
Farmer carry	3	30 m	60 s	Tall chest, shoulders packed, quiet steps.

Day 2 • Full Body B • 40 min

Hinge and vertical pull emphasis. Same intensity rule: stop 3-4 reps short of failure.

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS / TIME	REST	COACHING CUE
Bike or rower warm-up	1	6 min	-	Progressive - last two minutes should feel brisk.
Trap-bar or DB Romanian deadlift	3	8-10	120 s	Push hips back, bar close, stop when hamstrings tighten.
Assisted pull-up or lat pulldown	3	8-10	90 s	Chest to the bar line, control the negative for 3 s.
Dumbbell floor press	3	10-12	75 s	Elbows kiss the floor, no crashing.
Split squat (rear foot on floor)	2	8 / leg	75 s	Torso slightly forward, front knee tracks over toes.
Pallof press	3	10 / side	45 s	Resist rotation - the core is a brake, not an engine.
Cool-down walk	1	5 min	-	Nasal breathing, bring the heart rate under 100 bpm.

Day 3 · Zone 2 + Mobility · 35-45 min

Aerobic base and joint health. The session most men over 40 skip - and the one that changes body composition fastest.

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS / TIME	REST	COACHING CUE
Zone 2 cardio (walk, bike, elliptical)	1	30-40 min	-	60-70% of max HR; conversational the whole time.
90/90 hip switches	2	8 / side	30 s	Move slowly, no hand support once comfortable.
Thoracic extension over foam roller	2	8 breaths	30 s	Exhale fully at end range.
Couch stretch	2	45 s / side	30 s	Squeeze the glute to protect the low back.
Wall slide with lift-off	2	10	30 s	Keep the low back flat against the wall.

Weekly schedule

Mon	Full Body A
Tue	30-min walk
Wed	Full Body B
Thu	Rest / mobility
Fri	Zone 2 + mobility
Sat	Long walk 45-60 min
Sun	Rest

12-week progression phases

01 Weeks 1-4 — Rebuild	Technique, tendon tolerance and habit. Loads stay light (RPE 6). Add one set per exercise in week 3. Target 7,000-9,000 steps daily.
02 Weeks 5-8 — Load	Add 2.5-5 kg to the main lifts whenever you hit the top of the rep range with clean form. Introduce one interval session weekly.
03 Weeks 9-11 — Push	Take main lifts to RPE 8 (2 reps in reserve). Protein and sleep become the limiting factors, not effort in the gym.
04 Week 12 — Deload & retest	Halve the volume, keep the load. Retest waist, resting heart rate, push-ups and a 5-rep max. Then restart at phase 01 with new numbers.

Nutrition targets

Nutrition goals: 300-500 kcal deficit, 1.6 g protein per kg minimum, 7,000-9,000 steps daily. Prioritise habit over precision for the first four weeks.

Protein	1.6-2.2 g per kg of body weight, split across 3-4 meals of 35-45 g. Protein synthesis is blunter after 40 - dose matters more than total.
Calories	Aim for a 300-500 kcal daily deficit for fat loss. Faster than that and you lose the muscle you are training to keep.
Carbs	Place the bulk around training. 2-4 g per kg on lifting days, lower on rest days if fat loss stalls.
Fats	0.8-1 g per kg minimum - testosterone production suffers below this.
Alcohol	The single biggest hidden brake: it suppresses recovery and sleep quality. Keep it under 3-4 units per week during a training block.
Hydration	35 ml per kg of body weight, plus 500 ml per hour of training.

Recovery rules

Sleep 7-9 hours	Under 6 hours cuts strength gains and raises cortisol. Fixed wake time beats a fixed bedtime.
10 minutes of daily mobility	Hips, thoracic spine, ankles. These three dictate squat and press quality after 40.
Track the warning signs	Resting heart rate up 7+ bpm, mood down, grip weak - take a rest day instead of pushing.
Get bloodwork once a year	Lipids, HbA1c, vitamin D, testosterone, thyroid. Train with data, not guesses.
Warm up for 8 minutes	5 minutes of cardio plus 2 ramp-up sets on the first lift. Non-negotiable for 40-plus joints.
Deload every 6-8 weeks	Cut volume in half for one week. Recovery capacity, not effort, is the ceiling at this age.

Professional Track

Busy professional - 4 sessions per week

Training sessions

Day 1 · Upper Push Power · 45 min

Heavy but tight. Two main lifts, then density supersets to save time.

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS / TIME	REST	COACHING CUE
Barbell or dumbbell bench press	4	5-6	150 s	Leg drive, shoulder blades pinned, 2 reps in reserve.
Standing overhead press	3	6-8	120 s	Glutes tight, no hyperextension of the lumbar spine.
Weighted dip or close-grip press	3	8-10	90 s	Stop when shoulders round forward.
Cable lateral raise (superset A)	3	12-15	0 s	Lead with the elbow, no shrug.
Overhead triceps extension (superset B)	3	12-15	60 s	Full stretch at the bottom, elbows quiet.
Face pull	3	15	45 s	Pull to eyebrow height, externally rotate at the end.

Day 2 · Lower Strength · 50 min

One bilateral heavy lift, one unilateral lift, posterior chain finisher.

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS / TIME	REST	COACHING CUE
Back squat or hack squat	4	5	180 s	Depth you can control with a neutral spine - not more.
Romanian deadlift	3	8	120 s	Hips back first, bar glued to the thighs.
Bulgarian split squat	3	8 / leg	90 s	Weakest leg first, match the reps on the strong side.
Seated leg curl	3	10-12	60 s	3-second eccentric - hamstring insurance.
Standing calf raise	3	12-15	45 s	Two-second pause at the top.
Suitcase carry	3	30 m / side	60 s	Do not lean - resist the sideways pull.

Day 3 · Upper Pull + Conditioning · 45 min

Rebalance a desk-bound posture, then finish with intervals.

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS / TIME	REST	COACHING CUE
Weighted pull-up or pulldown	4	6-8	120 s	Full hang each rep, no kipping.
Chest-supported row	3	8-10	90 s	Squeeze one second, control three.
Single-arm dumbbell row	3	10 / side	75 s	Hips square, no torso rotation.
Incline dumbbell curl	3	10-12	60 s	Elbows behind the torso for a full stretch.
Rower or bike intervals	8	30 s hard / 90 s easy	-	Hard means 8/10, not all-out sprinting.

Day 4 · Full Body Hypertrophy · 45 min

Moderate loads, higher reps, joint-friendly machines. The muscle-building day.

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS / TIME	REST	COACHING CUE
Trap-bar deadlift	3	6-8	150 s	Reset the brace on every rep.
Incline dumbbell press	3	10-12	90 s	Slow negative, 1-second pause on the chest.
Leg press	3	12-15	90 s	Knees track over toes, no lumbar rounding at the bottom.
Cable row (neutral grip)	3	12	75 s	Let the shoulder blades travel forward each rep.
Hanging knee raise	3	10-12	60 s	Curl the pelvis, do not just swing the legs.
Zone 2 finisher	1	10-15 min	-	Optional but recommended on non-cardio weeks.

Weekly schedule

Mon	Upper Push Power
Tue	Lower Strength
Wed	Zone 2 or steps only
Thu	Upper Pull + intervals
Fri	Rest / mobility
Sat	Full Body Hypertrophy
Sun	Long walk + stretch

12-week progression phases

01 Weeks 1-4 — Rebuild	Technique, tendon tolerance and habit. Loads stay light (RPE 6). Add one set per exercise in week 3. Target 7,000-9,000 steps daily.
02 Weeks 5-8 — Load	Add 2.5-5 kg to the main lifts whenever you hit the top of the rep range with clean form. Introduce one interval session weekly.
03 Weeks 9-11 — Push	Take main lifts to RPE 8 (2 reps in reserve). Protein and sleep become the limiting factors, not effort in the gym.
04 Week 12 — Deload & retest	Halve the volume, keep the load. Retest waist, resting heart rate, push-ups and a 5-rep max. Then restart at phase 01 with new numbers.

Nutrition targets

Nutrition goals: 1.8-2.2 g protein per kg, carbs concentrated around training, alcohol under 3-4 units per week, 7-9 h sleep.

Protein	1.6-2.2 g per kg of body weight, split across 3-4 meals of 35-45 g. Protein synthesis is blunter after 40 - dose matters more than total.
Calories	Aim for a 300-500 kcal daily deficit for fat loss. Faster than that and you lose the muscle you are training to keep.
Carbs	Place the bulk around training. 2-4 g per kg on lifting days, lower on rest days if fat loss stalls.
Fats	0.8-1 g per kg minimum - testosterone production suffers below this.
Alcohol	The single biggest hidden brake: it suppresses recovery and sleep quality. Keep it under 3-4 units per week during a training block.
Hydration	35 ml per kg of body weight, plus 500 ml per hour of training.

Recovery rules

Sleep 7-9 hours	Under 6 hours cuts strength gains and raises cortisol. Fixed wake time beats a fixed bedtime.
10 minutes of daily mobility	Hips, thoracic spine, ankles. These three dictate squat and press quality after 40.
Track the warning signs	Resting heart rate up 7+ bpm, mood down, grip weak - take a rest day instead of pushing.
Get bloodwork once a year	Lipids, HbA1c, vitamin D, testosterone, thyroid. Train with data, not guesses.
Warm up for 8 minutes	5 minutes of cardio plus 2 ramp-up sets on the first lift. Non-negotiable for 40-plus joints.
Deload every 6-8 weeks	Cut volume in half for one week. Recovery capacity, not effort, is the ceiling at this age.

Minimalist Track

Travel and time-poor weeks - 2 sessions per week

Training sessions

Option A · 20-Minute Hotel Room Circuit · 20 min

No equipment. 4 rounds, 40 s work / 20 s rest, minimal noise for a hotel floor.

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS / TIME	REST	COACHING CUE
Bodyweight squat	4	40 s	20 s	Slow down to 3 seconds per rep once it gets easy.
Push-up (hands elevated if needed)	4	40 s	20 s	Body in one line from ear to ankle.
Reverse lunge	4	40 s	20 s	Step back softly, alternate legs.
Towel row on door frame	4	40 s	20 s	Lean back further to make it harder.
Plank with shoulder tap	4	40 s	20 s	Hips still - widen the feet if they rock.

Option B · 30-Minute Dumbbell Express · 30 min

One pair of adjustable dumbbells. Three supersets, 3 rounds each.

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS / TIME	REST	COACHING CUE
Goblet squat + DB floor press	3	10 + 10	60 s	Elbows inside the knees at the bottom of the squat.
Romanian deadlift + bent-over row	3	10 + 10	60 s	Same hinge position for both movements.
Reverse lunge + overhead press	3	8/leg + 10	60 s	Brace before pressing, no rib flare.
Farmer carry finisher	2	45 s	45 s	Heaviest weight you can hold with a tall posture.

Weekly schedule

Mon	Dumbbell Express
Tue	20-min circuit
Wed	Walk 8-10k steps
Thu	Dumbbell Express
Fri	20-min circuit
Sat	Walk + mobility
Sun	Rest

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04 Week 12 — Deload & retest	Halve the volume, keep the load. Retest waist, resting heart rate, push-ups and a 5-rep max. Then restart at phase 01 with new numbers.

Nutrition targets

Nutrition goals: maintenance calories, protein at 2 g per kg to protect muscle, 8-10k steps daily while travelling.

Protein	1.6-2.2 g per kg of body weight, split across 3-4 meals of 35-45 g. Protein synthesis is blunter after 40 - dose matters more than total.
Calories	Aim for a 300-500 kcal daily deficit for fat loss. Faster than that and you lose the muscle you are training to keep.
Carbs	Place the bulk around training. 2-4 g per kg on lifting days, lower on rest days if fat loss stalls.
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