SETUP

WHAT MAKES THE DEADLIFT EFFECTIVE IS THAT IT IS HEAVY. THERE IS NO MOMENTUM, NO STRETCH REFLEX, NOTHING THAT YOU CAN DO TO MAKE THE LIFT EASIER OR MORE EFFICIENT. ALL THIS MEANS THAT YOU NEED TO GET OUT OF THE WAY OF THE BAR. YOUR SETUP ALLOWS THE BAR TO TRAVEL IN A STRAIGHT VERTICAL LINE WHILE ARRANGING YOUR BODY AND LEVERS TO MOST EFFICIENTLY IMPART FORCE TO THE BARBELL, MOVING IT IN A STRAIGHT VERTICAL LINE FROM THE FLOOR TO THE LOCKOUT POSITION.

PUT YOUR BODY IN THE RIGHT PLACE: DON’T MOVE THE BAR!

STANCE: 1” FROM YOUR SHINS, 4-6” BETWEEN YOUR HEELS, 15° TOE ANGLE

PLACE YOUR FEET UNDER THE BAR WITH THE BAR IS DIRECTLY OVER THE MIDDLE OF YOUR WHOLE FOOT OR ABOUT 1 INCH FROM YOUR VERTICAL SHINS. TAKE A NARROW STANCE, WITH YOUR FEET
DIRECTLY UNDER YOUR HIPS (ABOUT 4-6 INCHES BETWEEN YOUR HEELS), AND POINT YOUR TOES OUT SLIGHTLY (15-20 DEGREES).

GRIP: OUTSIDE YOUR LEGS
GRIP THE BAR ON THE KNURLING JUST WIDER THAN YOUR LEGS. THE NARROW STANCE FACILITATES A NARROW GRIP, WHICH IS BETTER FOR THE DEADLIFT.

POSITION: BEND YOUR KNEES UNTIL YOUR SHINS TOUCH THE BAR
REMEMBER: DON’T MOVE THE BAR!

SET YOUR BACK
SQUEEZE YOUR BACK FLAT BY TRYING TO POINT YOUR CHEST AT THE WALL IN FRONT OF YOU AND YOUR BUTT AT THE WALL BEHIND YOU. DO NOT LOWER YOUR HIPS AND DO NOT MOVE THE BARBELL. THIS WILL BE UNCOMFORTABLE.

DON’T FORGET TO BREATHE
TAKE A BIG BREATH AND HOLD IT UNTIL THE BAR IS BACK ON THE FLOOR.
EXECUTION

IF YOU DID THE ABOVE STEPS CORRECTLY, YOUR BODY AND THE BAR ARE NOW IN THE CORRECT POSITION RELATIVE TO EACH OTHER. MOST DEADLIFT ERRORS ARE PREVENTED WITH A GOOD SETUP, BUT YOU STILL HAVE TO FINISH THE LIFT.

BAR ON YOUR LEGS

MAINTAIN CONTACT BETWEEN THE BAR AND YOUR LEGS ALL THE WAY UP. IMAGINE YOU ARE TRYING TO GRAB THE HEM OF YOUR SHORTS WITH THE BARBELL.

STAND UP TALL

FINISH WITH YOUR CHEST UP AND SHOULDERS DOWN, LIKE YOU ARE STANDING AT ATTENTION.

SET IT DOWN SIMPLE

DON’T OVERTHINK HOW YOU PUT THE BAR DOWN. STAY TIGHT, KEEP YOUR BREATH HELD, AND SLIDE THE BAR BACK DOWN YOUR LEGS.
TIPS AND TRICKS

PUSH TO START
START EACH REP BY PUSHING WITH YOUR FEET, AS IF YOU ARE TRYING TO LEG PRESS THE EARTH AWAY FROM THE BAR. THIS IS IN CONTRAST TO LIFTING YOUR CHEST (OPENING YOUR HIPS) OR PULLING WITH YOUR ARMS.

SQUEEZE THE BAR OFF THE FLOOR
AS YOU SET YOUR BACK, MAKE THE WEIGHT HEAVY IN YOUR HANDS AND YOUR FEET HEAVY ON THE FLOOR. THIS WILL HELP YOU TAKE ON SOME OF THE WEIGHT OF THE LIFT BEFORE THE BAR BREAKS CONTACT WITH THE GROUND, HELPING YOU MAINTAIN YOUR BALANCE AND HOLD YOUR BACK FLAT. REMEMBER THE DEADLIFT DOES NOT NEED TO BE FAST; IT NEEDS TO BE CORRECT.

FIND YOUR BALANCE
STAY HEAVY ON YOUR WHOLE FOOT THROUGHOUT THE LIFT. A HEAVY BARBELL CHANGES YOUR CENTER OF MASS, PAY ATTENTION TO HOW YOUR WEIGHT IS DISTRIBUTED ON YOUR FOOT SO THAT THE BAR DOES NOT PULL YOU FORWARD AND SO THAT YOU STAY OVER THE BAR FOR AN EFFICIENT LIFT.
TROUBLESHOOTING

THE BAR SWINGS AWAY FROM YOUR LEGS

It is the job of your latissimus dorsi muscles (your armpit muscles) to keep the bar on your legs. First, check your setup: hips high and pushing to start.

If you are still having trouble, squeeze your chest up more to improve the angle of pull for your lats to keep the bar on your legs and actively sweep the bar back into your legs.

HITCHING TO FINISH

If you find that you have to re-bend your knees to finish the lockout, likely your back is not fully extended when you start the lift. If you have trouble setting your back, you may need to improve your conscious control over your back extensor muscles. (See the video on setting your back below.)

If you still have trouble setting your back, try adjusting your stance. Take a slightly more toes-out position and push your knees out to touch your elbows during your setup. This both creates room for your torso and allows you to bend your knees a little bit more, both of which can help you set your back.

GRIP IS FAILING

It may be time to switch your grip. You can use a hook grip, mixed grip (one hand supinated), or lifting straps. Each has pros and cons, but we like the hook grip for most lifters most of the time. See the tutorial below.
ACCESSORY LIFTS

ACCESSORY WORK IS UNNECESSARY FOR NOVICES, BUT THE FOLLOWING LIFTS CAN HELP IMPROVE YOUR DEADLIFT. THE RECOMMENDATIONS PREMISE THAT YOU ARE LIFTING USING A FOUR DAY SPLIT WITH A WEEKLY SLOT FOR A SUPPLEMENTAL DEADLIFT AND ASSISTANCE WORK. FOR MORE ON THE FOUR-DAY SPLIT, READ HERE.

ADD VOLUME WITHOUT OVERDOING THE STRESS

STIFF-LEGGED DEADLIFT: TRAIN AS A SUPPLEMENTAL DEADLIFT FOR THREE SETS OF FIVE TO EIGHT REPETITIONS, ADDING STRESS AND VOLUME AS NEEDED.

ROMANIAN DEADLIFT: THREE SETS OF SIX TO EIGHT REPETITIONS

TARGET SPECIFIC WEAKNESSES

DEFICIT DEADLIFT: IMPROVE THE BOTTOM OF YOUR DEADLIFT BY MAKING IT MORE DIFFICULT. 2” DEFICIT DEADLIFTS FOR FIVE SETS OF THREE AS YOUR SUPPLEMENTAL DEADLIFT WORKS VERY WELL. LEADING UP TO A COMPETITION ADD WEIGHT BUT CUT THE REPS DOWN TO DOUBLES OR SINGLES.

RACK PULL: TRAIN THE TOP HALF OF YOUR LIFT AND FEEL THE HEAVIER WEIGHT IN YOUR HANDS WITH A RACK PULL IN YOUR SUPPLEMENTAL DEADLIFT SLOT. START WITH A LOW RACK PULL
USING FIVE SETS OF THREE REPETITIONS TO START. THE GOAL IS USUALLY TO PUSH THE INTENSITY OF YOUR LIFT BY ADDING WEIGHT AND DECREASING THE VOLUME GRADUALLY.

ASSISTANCE WORK
GLUTE HAM RAISES
GOODMORNINGS

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES
HOW TO DEADLIFT
SETTING YOUR BACK
HOOK GRIP
COCAINE DEADLIFTS FOR BACK PAIN