

THE RESET CO.

Exercise Form Library

Every movement in the plan, coached — cues, breathing, mistakes, and three levels for each

STRENGTH FILE 2 OF 6

How to Use This Library

This file is your coach. All twenty-four movements in the 12-Week Strength Plan live here, grouped by the phase that introduces them. Before any movement's first session, read its entry — it takes two minutes, and it's the difference between rehearsing a pattern and rehearsing a mistake.

How to read an entry. Every movement gets the same one-page treatment: what it trains (so you know why it's earning space in your week), the setup, three to five form cues in kitchen-table words, the breathing pattern, a "you're doing it right if..." line so you can self-check without a mirror, the two mistakes that account for most of what goes wrong, three levels, and a joint-friendly swap. You don't need to memorize the cues. Pick the *one* that fixes your rep and say it to yourself as you work; next week, pick another. One cue at a time is how form is actually built.

The breathing rule, once, for everything. You'll see it echoed in every entry because it matters that much: **inhale on the easy part, exhale on the effort.** Breathe in as you lower into the squat or bring the weight down; breathe out through the hard part — standing up, pressing, pulling. Imagine the exhale is what moves the weight ("blow the weight up"). This keeps pressure from bearing down on your pelvic floor and keeps you from breath-holding through a grind — which, at this program's effort levels, you never need to do.

Film yourself. Seriously. You cannot feel your own form — nobody can; that's why coaches exist. Your phone is your coach's eyes: prop it against a water glass at hip height, side-on, and film one set of each new movement in its first week. Compare what you see against the entry's cues. Ten seconds of footage will teach you more than ten sessions of guessing, and nobody ever has to see it but you.

The three levels philosophy. Every movement here has an **Easier**, **Standard**, and **Harder** level, and I want to be precise about what those words mean, because fitness culture has poisoned them. The levels are *doors into the same room*. Every level loads the same pattern and produces the same adaptation — the right level is simply the one where you can do the prescribed reps, at the prescribed effort, with form you'd be happy to see on film. Starting at Easier is not a remedial track; it's accurate self-assessment, which is the most advanced skill in this program. Moving up a level is never a graduation requirement — the session tables work at any level, and the harder level will still be there whenever your reps outgrow the standard one. And the **joint-friendly swap** at the bottom of each entry is a full-credit substitute, not a consolation prize: it loads the same pattern while offloading a cranky joint. Use it for a week or a year. The pattern is the point.

One last note: movements marked **opt-in** (Heel Drops, Low Hops) are the bone-support extras — genuinely optional, with specific skip-conditions printed in their entries. Everything else in this library is for everybody, at some level, which is exactly why there are levels.

Phase 1 Movements (Weeks 1–4)

The twelve foundation movements. Bodyweight, a chair, a wall, a doorway, a backpack. If you did the Reset's No-Gym Starter, the first six will feel like old friends with better instructions.

Chair Squat → Box Squat

What it trains: Thighs, glutes, and the sit-down-stand-up pattern you use dozens of times a day — the single most practical strength there is.

Setup: Stand in front of a sturdy chair (seat around knee height), feet hip-to-shoulder width, toes turned out slightly. Arms reach forward as a counterbalance, or cross them over your chest.

Form cues: - Push your hips *back* first, like you're reaching for the chair with your bottom - Lower for a slow two-to-three count — don't fall the last inch - Knees track over your toes, not caving toward each other - Touch the seat lightly (or sit and pause — that's fine too), then stand by pushing the floor away - Chest stays proud the whole time; eyes on the wall, not the floor

Breathing: Inhale on the way down, exhale as you stand.

You're doing it right if... your whole foot stays planted, the descent is quiet and controlled, and your thighs — not your knees or back — are what report the work.

Top 2 mistakes: 1) Plopping — free-falling the last few inches onto the seat instead of lowering all the way down. 2) Knees diving inward as you stand; think “press the floor apart with your feet.”

Levels: *Easier* — higher seat (add a firm cushion) and hold the chair-back of a second chair for balance. *Standard* — chair-height seat, light touch, stand. *Harder* — lower box or step; then slow the descent to four counts; then hug a loaded backpack.

Joint-friendly swap: For cranky knees, shorten the trip: squat to a raised seat within the pain-free range, and slow the tempo instead of adding depth.

Wall Pushup → Incline Pushup

What it trains: Chest, shoulders, and the backs of the arms — plus the push-yourself-up-off-the-floor pattern.

Setup: Hands on the wall (or a counter, or a sturdy table edge) a bit wider than your shoulders, arms straight. Walk your feet back until your body makes one straight line from head to heels, leaning into your hands.

Form cues: - Body moves as one plank — hips don't sag or pike - Lower until your chest nearly reaches the surface, elbows angling back at about 45 degrees, not flaring straight out - Push the surface *away* until your arms are fully straight - Squeeze your bottom gently the whole set — it locks the plank line

Breathing: Inhale as you lower toward the wall, exhale as you push away.

You're doing it right if... your body arrives at the wall as one piece — chest and hips together, not chin first.

Top 2 mistakes: 1) Head pecking forward like a chicken while the chest stays put. 2) Hands too high on the wall, which turns it into a gentle lean — if 12 reps felt like nothing, your hands need a lower surface.

Levels: *Easier* — stand closer to the wall. *Standard* — wall, then progressively lower surfaces: counter, table, sturdy chair. *Harder* — the lower the incline, the harder it gets; this ladder continues all the way to the floor in Phase 3.

Joint-friendly swap: For sore wrists, make fists and push on your knuckles, or grip the edge of the counter so wrists stay straight. For a cranky shoulder, shorten the range and keep elbows closer to your ribs.

Glute Bridge

What it trains: Glutes and hamstrings — the engine of your hips, and the counterweight to every hour spent sitting.

Setup: Lie on your back, knees bent, feet flat on the floor hip-width apart, close enough that your fingertips can graze your heels. Arms at your sides, palms down.

Form cues: - Push through your heels and lift your hips until your body makes a straight line from knees to shoulders - Squeeze your bottom hard at the top for a full second — the squeeze *is* the exercise - Ribs stay down; don't arch your lower back to fake extra height - Lower with control, one slow count — don't collapse

Breathing: Exhale as you lift, inhale as you lower.

You're doing it right if... your glutes are doing the loudest talking at the top, not your lower back or hamstrings.

Top 2 mistakes: 1) Lifting too high and arching the back — height comes from hip squeeze, not spine bend. 2) Rushing — a bounce off the floor turns ten reps into one blurry rep.

Levels: *Easier* — smaller range; lift halfway and hold the squeeze. *Standard* — full bridge, one-second squeeze at the top. *Harder* — pause three seconds at the top; then single-leg (one knee hugged to chest); in Phase 2, a dumbbell rests on your hips.

Joint-friendly swap: If your knees ache, move your feet slightly farther from your bottom. If your lower back grumbles, shorten the range and re-read cue three — it's nearly always the ribs.

Bodyweight Step-Up

What it trains: One leg at a time — thighs, glutes, and balance. This is stairs, curbs, and hiking, rehearsed on purpose.

Setup: Stand facing a sturdy step — bottom stair, low bench, or a solid step stool (start around 6–8 inches). Something stable within reach for a fingertip of balance if needed.

Form cues: - Put your whole foot on the step, not just the toes - Push down *through the top heel* to lift yourself — don't spring off the bottom foot - Stand all the way up at the top; hip fully open, tall finish - Lower yourself down slowly — the descent is half the exercise - Finish all reps on one side, then switch

Breathing: Exhale as you step up, inhale as you lower back down.

You're doing it right if... the top leg does almost all the work and the descent takes as long as the ascent.

Top 2 mistakes: 1) Bouncing off the bottom leg — the step-up becomes a hop and the top leg gets robbed. 2) A step so high your knee complains and your torso pitches forward; lower the step, keep the quality.

Levels: *Easier* — lower step, fingertips on a rail or wall. *Standard* — 6–8 inch step, no hands. *Harder* — taller step (up to knee height); slower descent; in Phase 2, dumbbells in hand.

Joint-friendly swap: Knee flare-up? Drop the step height to a couple of inches — even a thick book works — and slow everything down. Height is negotiable; control isn't.

Farmer Carry (household weights)

What it trains: Grip, shoulders, core, and posture under load — the carry-all-the-groceries-in-one-trip muscle, literally.

Setup: Two matching-ish heavy objects — gallon jugs, loaded tote bags, a pair of full water bottles. Stand tall between them, hinge down with a flat back, grip, and stand up.

Form cues: - Walk tall — imagine a string pulling the crown of your head to the ceiling - Shoulders back and down, not shrugged up around your ears - Smooth, even steps; the weights shouldn't swing or bang your legs - Keep your ribs stacked over your hips — no leaning back

Breathing: Steady and continuous — never hold your breath while carrying. If you can't speak a short sentence, the weights are too heavy for today.

You're doing it right if... someone watching from across the street would only know the bags are heavy because of your grip — not your posture.

Top 2 mistakes: 1) Shrugging the shoulders up and letting the weight round you forward. 2) Racing — fast, choppy steps with swinging weights. Slow down; tension is the point.

Levels: *Easier* — lighter objects, shorter distance (20 steps). *Standard* — 30–40 challenging steps. *Harder* — heavier jugs or a loaded backpack in each hand; in Phase 2, dumbbells take over.

Joint-friendly swap: If grip gives out before anything else, use bags with handles or loop a towel through — grip strength catches up fast. For a cranky shoulder, carry slightly lighter and focus on the “down and back” cue.

Wall Plank → Forearm Plank

What it trains: Your deep core — the muscles that hold your spine steady while your arms and legs do life.

Setup: Wall version: forearms on the wall, elbows under shoulders, walk feet back until your body is one firm diagonal line. Floor version: forearms on the mat, elbows under shoulders, knees or toes down, body in one straight line.

Form cues: - One straight line, ear to ankle — no sagging hips, no mountain peaks - Gently tighten your middle, like preparing for a light poke in the belly - Squeeze your bottom — it flattens the line instantly - Neck long; look at the floor (or wall), not up

Breathing: Steady, quiet breathing throughout. If you're holding your breath, come up — a plank you can't breathe in is longer than today's plank should be.

You're doing it right if... you're shaking slightly by the end while the line stays straight. Shaking is fine; sagging is the signal to stop the clock.

Top 2 mistakes: 1) Hips drooping toward the floor as you tire — end the set there; the timer only counts straight-line seconds. 2) Hiking the bottom up into a tent to make it easier — it works, which is the problem.

Levels: *Easier* — wall plank; then countertop plank; then knees-down floor plank. *Standard* — forearm plank on knees or toes, 20–40 seconds. *Harder* — toes, longer holds; then lift one foot an inch for a few seconds per side.

Joint-friendly swap: Shoulder or elbow complaints? Raise the surface (countertop instead of floor). Lower back complaints? Shorten the hold and double down on the bottom-squeeze cue.

Bird Dog

What it trains: The muscles along your spine, your glutes, and the skill of keeping your back quiet while your limbs move — back insurance, in exercise form.

Setup: Hands and knees on a mat — wrists under shoulders, knees under hips, back flat like a table you'd trust a coffee cup on.

Form cues: - Slide one arm forward and the opposite leg back until both are straight — reach *long*, not high - Hips stay level, like headlights pointing straight at the floor - Pause one full second at full stretch - Return with control and switch sides — smooth, no wobbling rush

Breathing: Exhale as you reach out, inhale as you return.

You're doing it right if... that imaginary coffee cup on your lower back never spills.

Top 2 mistakes: 1) Lifting the leg so high the lower back arches — length beats height every time. 2) Speeding through reps like a swimming lesson; this is a balance drill wearing an exercise costume.

Levels: *Easier* — arms only, then legs only. *Standard* — opposite arm and leg together, one-second pause. *Harder* — three-second pauses; then draw slow elbow-to-knee touches under your body between reps.

Joint-friendly swap: Sore wrists: make fists or drop to forearms. Sore knees: fold the mat double or do the standing version — hinge slightly and reach one arm forward, opposite leg back.

Dead Bug

What it trains: The deep abdominal layer that braces your spine — the same brace you'll use under every squat and carry in this program.

Setup: Lie on your back, arms pointing at the ceiling, knees bent 90 degrees and lifted so shins are parallel to the floor. Press your lower back gently toward the floor — that contact is your gauge for the whole set.

Form cues: - Lower one arm overhead and the *opposite* leg toward the floor — slowly, both at once - Your lower back stays glued to the floor; the moment it starts to lift, you've gone as far as today allows - Move at syrup speed — two counts out, two counts back - Alternate sides; stay smooth

Breathing: Exhale slowly as the arm and leg travel out (this is the effort), inhale as they return.

You're doing it right if... it looks easy and feels surprisingly hard — and your back never leaves the floor.

Top 2 mistakes: 1) Letting the lower back pop up to buy extra range — range means nothing without floor contact. 2) Holding your breath; the slow exhale is half the exercise.

Levels: *Easier* — move arms only, or heels sliding along the floor instead of hovering. *Standard* — opposite arm and leg, slow tempo. *Harder* — straighten the moving leg fully and hover it an inch off the floor; add a two-second hold at the far position.

Joint-friendly swap: Neck tension? Rest your head on a thin cushion. Hip flexor cramping? Shorten the leg's travel and let the arm do more of the work.

Doorway Hinge (hip hinge pattern drill)

What it trains: The hip hinge — how you pick things up off the floor with your hips instead of your spine. This drill is the direct ancestor of the Romanian deadlift, which makes it the most valuable two minutes in Phase 1.

Setup: Stand in a doorway (or arm's length from a wall), back to the frame, feet hip-width, about a foot forward of the frame. Soft knees. From Week 3: hold a loaded backpack in both hands, arms hanging.

Form cues: - Push your hips *straight back* to touch the frame behind you — this is a reach-back, not a bend-down - Your back stays long and flat; chest tips forward as one piece, like a drawbridge - Knees stay softly bent but don't travel forward — this is the not-a-squat part - Touch the frame, then drive hips forward to stand tall, squeezing your bottom at the top

Breathing: Inhale as your hips reach back, exhale as you drive up to standing.

You're doing it right if... you feel a stretch down the backs of your thighs at the bottom, and your back feels like a passenger, not a worker.

Top 2 mistakes: 1) Bending the knees and turning it into a squat — hips go *back*, not down. 2) Rounding the back to reach the frame; step an inch closer to the doorway instead and keep the spine long.

Levels: *Easier* — stand closer to the frame (shorter trip). *Standard* — a foot away, bodyweight, then backpack from Week 3. *Harder* — step slightly farther out, heavier backpack, slow three-count lowering.

Joint-friendly swap: If hamstrings scream or your back rounds early, raise the target: hinge to touch a chair-back beside you instead of the frame behind — same pattern, shorter trip.

Backpack Row (bent-over row, loaded backpack)

What it trains: Upper back and biceps — the pulling muscles that balance a lifetime of forward-hunching, and the other half of good posture.

Setup: Load a backpack with books. Hinge forward (your Doorway Hinge, shallower — chest tipped toward 45 degrees), back long, one hand braced on a chair seat or counter, backpack hanging from the other hand. From Phase 2, this same job passes to the One-Arm DB Row.

Form cues: - Pull the backpack up toward your hip pocket — not your armpit - Lead with your elbow, and let your shoulder blade slide toward your spine - Torso stays still as a table; no heaving or twisting for extra height - Lower slowly until your arm is fully long — that stretch is half the rep

Breathing: Exhale as you pull up, inhale as you lower.

You're doing it right if... you feel a squeeze *between* your shoulder blade and spine at the top, and the backpack rises without your torso lurching.

Top 2 mistakes: 1) Shrugging the shoulder toward the ear instead of drawing the blade back — think “put your shoulder blade in your back pocket.” 2) Body-English: jerking the torso to launch the weight. If you need momentum, remove one book.

Levels: *Easier* — lighter load, more upright hinge. *Standard* — challenging backpack, firm brace, strict pulls. *Harder* — more books, a one-second squeeze at the top, three-count lowering.

Joint-friendly swap: For a cranky lower back, kneel with one knee and hand on a padded chair seat — same row, back fully supported. For an unhappy elbow, turn the palm to face forward slightly and shorten the range.

Calf Raise

What it trains: Calves and ankles — push-off strength for walking, stairs, and balance, plus the lower half of your bone-loading chain.

Setup: Stand tall behind a chair or at a counter, fingertips resting for balance (balance, not support). Feet hip-width, weight even across both.

Form cues: - Rise up onto the balls of your feet as high as you can go — all the way up, every rep - Pause one second at the very top - Lower with a slow two-count until heels kiss the floor - Keep ankles steady — don't let them bow outward at the top

Breathing: Exhale as you rise, inhale as you lower.

You're doing it right if... each rep reaches the same full height at the same unhurried speed — including the last one.

Top 2 mistakes: 1) Bouncing — small fast pulses instead of full slow reps. 2) Leaning into the chair so your arms secretly do the lifting; fingertips only.

Levels: *Easier* — smaller range, both hands resting. *Standard* — full range, one-second top pause. *Harder* — single leg; then toes on a thick book so heels can dip below level at the bottom (bigger stretch); add the backpack.

Joint-friendly swap: For unhappy ankles or plantar fascia complaints, do seated calf raises — same motion with your backpack resting across your knees — and work back to standing as things calm.

Heel Drops (bone micro-dose, opt-in)

What it trains: This one isn't for muscle — it's for **bone**. Bones respond to brief, unaccustomed impact, and research protocols using small, regularly repeated doses of impact — gradually built up over months — have measurably improved hip bone strength (Brown 2020; the loading principle also underpins Watson 2018). Heel Drops are the gentlest rung on that ladder: a small, safe jolt that tells your skeleton it's still needed. Two or three minutes, two to three times a week, riding along with Sessions B and C.

Setup: Stand tall at a counter or chair-back, fingertips resting. Feet hip-width.

Form cues: - Rise up onto the balls of your feet — like the top of a Calf Raise - Then *drop* your heels to the floor — don't lower them gently; let them land with a firm, flat-footed thud - Stay tall through the drop; the little jolt should travel up through straight ankles and soft knees - Reset, rise, repeat — unhurried, about one drop every couple of seconds

Breathing: Exhale lightly with each drop; keep it casual — this is a rhythm, not a strain.

You're doing it right if... you feel a small, brisk thump through your heels and hips — noticeable, never painful. If it feels like nothing, drop a touch more crisply; if it stings anywhere, soften it.

Top 2 mistakes: 1) Lowering the heels slowly and politely — that's a Calf Raise; the *drop* is what signals bone. 2) Doing them barefoot on hard tile and wincing; supportive shoes or a firmer landing surface fix it.

Levels: *Easier* — smaller rise, softer drop, shoes on. *Standard* — full rise, firm drop, 2 sets of 10. *Harder* — the graduation is Low Hops in Phase 3.

Joint-friendly swap: If drops bother knees or hips, do firm, quick heel *presses* into the floor and brisk stair-walking — and mention it at your next checkup.

Who should skip Heel Drops.

These are opt-in for a reason. **Skip them entirely — and skip Low Hops later — if you have a history of vertebral (spine) fracture, or any current prolapse symptoms** (vaginal heaviness, bulge, or leaking with impact). Do the rest of the program without them and bring the question to your doctor or pelvic floor physical therapist. With diagnosed osteoporosis, ask your provider about impact work specifically — the answer is often yes, but it should be *their* yes.

Phase 2 Movements (Weeks 5–8)

The dumbbells are here. Eight new movements — each one the loaded descendant of a pattern you built in Phase 1. Starting weights live in the Home Gym Setup file; keep it open beside your log for the first week.

Goblet Squat

What it trains: Thighs and glutes with real load — your Chair Squat, graduated. The front-held weight is a built-in posture coach.

Setup: Hold one dumbbell vertically against your chest, both palms cupping the top end like you're holding a goblet — elbows pointing down, weight touching your breastbone. Feet hip-to-shoulder width, toes slightly out.

Form cues: - Hips back and down, like the Chair Squat — the chair just isn't there anymore - Keep the dumbbell glued to your chest; if it drifts away, you're tipping forward - Elbows travel down between your knees as you descend - Whole foot planted; push the floor away to stand, squeezing your bottom at the top

Breathing: Big inhale at the top, lower on the inhale, exhale forcefully as you stand — blow the weight up.

You're doing it right if... your torso stays proud and tall enough that the dumbbell never leaves your chest, and depth arrives without your heels lifting.

Top 2 mistakes: 1) Letting the weight pull you into a forward lean with the dumbbell hovering away from your chest. 2) Cutting depth as the weight gets heavier — keep the depth you built in Phase 1; the double progression rule only counts full reps.

Levels: *Easier* — squat to a chair or box while holding a light dumbbell (Goblet Box Squat). *Standard* — free goblet squat, thighs near parallel. *Harder* — heavier dumbbell; then a three-count lowering; the Phase 3 graduation is the Double-DB Front Squat.

Joint-friendly swap: Knees flaring? Return to the Goblet Box Squat at a height your knees accept, and progress load there — the box version builds the same strength.

DB Romanian Deadlift

What it trains: Hamstrings, glutes, and grip — the strongest pattern in your body, loaded. This is the Doorway Hinge all grown up, and the closest thing this program has to a signature lift.

Setup: Stand tall, a dumbbell in each hand resting against the front of your thighs, palms facing you. Feet hip-width, knees soft.

Form cues: - Push your hips straight back — same drawbridge motion as the doorway drill - The dumbbells slide *down your thighs* like they're on rails; keep them touching you - Back stays long and flat; chest proud, eyes on the floor a few feet ahead - Lower until you feel a firm stretch down the backs of your thighs — mid-shin territory eventually, but the stretch decides, not a ruler - Drive hips forward to stand; squeeze your bottom at the top — don't lean back past tall

Breathing: Inhale as you lower, strong exhale as your hips drive forward.

You're doing it right if... your hamstrings are lit up like a stretched rubber band at the bottom, and your lower back feels like a bystander.

Top 2 mistakes: 1) The weights drifting forward away from your legs — this quietly hands the whole load to your lower back. Rails, always. 2) Bending the knees and squatting the weight down; hips back, knees soft-and-parked.

Levels: *Easier* — one lighter dumbbell held in both hands, shorter range (knee height). *Standard* — two dumbbells, stretch-limited depth. *Harder* — heavier, three-count lowering, one-second pause in the stretch.

Joint-friendly swap: If your back rounds or grumbles no matter the cues, elevate the finish: lower the dumbbells to a chair seat beside your shins each rep — same hinge, shorter trip — and go back to the Doorway Hinge drill for two minutes on warmup days.

One-Arm DB Row

What it trains: Upper back, lats, and biceps — the Backpack Row refined into the classic single-arm dumbbell version, and your straightest line to visible upper-body strength.

Setup: Left hand and left knee on a bench or sofa seat (or hand braced on a chair-back, feet staggered), back flat like a tabletop. Dumbbell hanging from the right hand, arm long.

Form cues: - Pull the dumbbell up toward your hip pocket, elbow skimming your ribs - Shoulder blade leads — pull it toward your spine, *then* the arm follows - Torso quiet as a table; no twisting to hoist the weight - Lower slowly to a full hang — feel the stretch across your upper back

Breathing: Exhale as you pull, inhale as you lower.

You're doing it right if... the squeeze lands between your shoulder blade and spine, and a cup of coffee on your back would survive the whole set.

Top 2 mistakes: 1) Twisting the torso open to lift higher — the extra inches come from your spine, not your back muscles. 2) Pulling to the armpit with a shrug, which turns a row into a neck-tenser. Hip pocket, elbow low.

Levels: *Easier* — lighter weight, hand braced higher (counter height). *Standard* — bench-supported row, full range. *Harder* — heavier weight, one-second top squeeze, three-count lowering.

Joint-friendly swap: Elbow or wrist complaints? Rotate the palm to a half-turn (thumb pointing forward) and shorten the top of the range. Lower back complaints? More support: both knees wide on the bench, chest nearly parallel.

DB Floor Press

What it trains: Chest, shoulders, and arms — pressing strength with a built-in safety floor. This is the home lifter's bench press.

Setup: Lie on your back on a mat, knees bent, feet flat. A dumbbell in each hand, arms pressed straight up over your chest, palms facing your knees (or turned slightly in — whichever your shoulders prefer).

Form cues: - Lower both dumbbells with control until the backs of your upper arms rest lightly on the floor — elbows angling about 45 degrees from your sides - Touch the floor softly; no bouncing off it - Press straight back up until arms are fully long over your chest - Keep your lower back relaxed and your feet planted

Breathing: Inhale as the weights lower, exhale as you press up.

You're doing it right if... the dumbbells travel the same quiet path every rep and finish stacked over your chest, not drifting toward your face or belly.

Top 2 mistakes: 1) Flaring elbows straight out to the sides at 90 degrees — shoulders hate that angle; keep the 45. 2) Letting the dumbbells wander wide on the way up so they wobble at the top — press them toward each other slightly.

Levels: *Easier* — one dumbbell at a time, free hand steadying the working shoulder. *Standard* — two dumbbells, controlled touch-and-press. *Harder* — heavier, a one-second dead-stop rest on the floor each rep (which removes all bounce and adds honesty).

Joint-friendly swap: For a cranky shoulder, turn palms fully toward each other and keep elbows even closer to your ribs — the “neutral grip” floor press is the friendliest press in existence. Wrist complaints: check the dumbbell is resting on the heel of your palm, not bending the wrist backward.

Half-Kneeling DB Overhead Press

What it trains: Shoulders and arms, plus a sneaky core challenge — pressing overhead is putting-the-suitcase-in-the-bin strength, and the half-kneeling position keeps your lower back honest while you learn it.

Setup: One knee down (kneel on a folded mat), the other foot planted in front — like proposing, but stronger. Dumbbell in the hand on the *same side as the down knee*, held at shoulder height, elbow tucked, palm facing in.

Form cues: - Squeeze your bottom on the kneeling side before every rep — it locks your ribs over your hips - Press the dumbbell straight up until your arm is long, biceps finishing beside your ear - Ribs stay

down; don't let the lower back arch as the weight goes up - Lower with a slow two-count back to the shoulder

Breathing: Inhale at the shoulder, exhale as you press — blow it up.

You're doing it right if... the dumbbell finishes directly over your shoulder (not out front), and your torso is as still at rep ten as rep one.

Top 2 mistakes: 1) Arching the back to lean the weight up — that's your spine volunteering for the shoulder's job; re-squeeze the glute and lighten if needed. 2) Pressing out front like a diagonal — straight up, ear-side finish.

Levels: *Easier* — lighter weight, or seated in a firm chair with back support. *Standard* — half-kneeling, one arm, full lockout. *Harder* — standing press once the half-kneeling version is boring; then both arms at once.

Joint-friendly swap: If overhead motion pinches no matter the weight, press at an angle: a high-incline "landmine-style" press holding one end of the dumbbell up and slightly forward — or stay with the DB Floor Press and revisit overhead monthly. Overhead range often returns as rows and presses build.

Suitcase Carry

What it trains: Everything the Farmer Carry trains, plus the waist muscles that keep you upright when life loads you on one side — which is how life usually loads you: one suitcase, one grocery bag, one grandchild.

Setup: One dumbbell on the floor beside you. Hinge, grip, stand tall. That's it — one heavy thing, one hand, and a hallway.

Form cues: - Walk as if carrying nothing — shoulders level, stride even - Do not lean away from (or toward) the weight; someone behind you shouldn't be able to tell which hand is loaded - Shoulders back and down; the loaded arm stays long and quiet - Steady steps, eyes ahead; turn carefully at the ends of your walkway

Breathing: Continuous and unheroic. Talking-pace breath; no breath-holding, ever, on carries.

You're doing it right if... your waist muscles on the *opposite* side of the weight light up by step twenty — that's them holding you level.

Top 2 mistakes: 1) The lean — hip jutting toward the free side to counterbalance lazily. Stack tall instead; that's the entire exercise. 2) Going so heavy your shoulder droops and your steps shorten to a shuffle; drop one weight step and walk beautifully.

Levels: *Easier* — lighter dumbbell, 20 steps per side. *Standard* — challenging weight, 30–40 steps per side. *Harder* — heavier; or slow “cliffhanger” steps with a one-second pause per stride.

Joint-friendly swap: Grip fatigue? Towel-loop the handle or switch sides more often — grip catches up quickly. If one-sided load provokes your back, split the difference: return to Farmer Carries (both hands) and re-introduce suitcase walks lighter, later.

DB Step-Up

What it trains: Single-leg strength with load — your Bodyweight Step-Up carrying groceries. One of the most honest lower-body exercises there is: no side can hide.

Setup: Same sturdy step as Phase 1 (6–8 inches to start; knee-height is the eventual ceiling). A dumbbell in each hand, arms long at your sides.

Form cues: - Whole foot on the step; push through the *top heel* - No spring off the bottom foot — the down leg is a passenger - Stand fully tall at the top; finish the hip - Lower on a slow two-to-three count; place the bottom foot quietly, don't drop onto it - All reps one side, then switch

Breathing: Exhale as you drive up, inhale as you lower.

You're doing it right if... the descent is so controlled it's silent, and your top thigh burns while your back and arms just hang out.

Top 2 mistakes: 1) The bottom-leg bounce (same crime as Phase 1, now with weights as accomplices). 2) Torso folding forward over the knee as fatigue arrives — when the chest drops, the set is over, whatever the rep count says.

Levels: *Easier* — bodyweight or one light dumbbell, lower step. *Standard* — two dumbbells, 6–8 inch step. *Harder* — heavier dumbbells or a taller step (never both in the same week).

Joint-friendly swap: For touchy knees, lower the step and lighten the load — a 4-inch step with dumbbells is still a loaded single-leg exercise. If stepping *down* is the sore part, step up leading right, then walk backward off the far side (or step down to a cushioned surface).

Side Plank (knees → feet)

What it trains: The waist muscles along your side — the same team the Suitcase Carry works, trained from the floor. Together they're your spine's side-armor.

Setup: Lie on your side, elbow directly under your shoulder, forearm flat and pointing away from you. Knees bent and stacked (knee version) or legs long and stacked (feet version).

Form cues: - Press through the forearm and lift your hips until your body makes one straight line — head to knees (or heels) - Hips *forward* and proud; don't let your bottom drift back into a fold - Shoulders and hips stacked vertically, like you're between two panes of glass - Neck long; gaze straight ahead

Breathing: Steady and quiet for the whole hold. Breath-holding means the hold is too long or too hard for today — drop to the easier level, not to zero.

You're doing it right if... the burn runs down the side closest to the floor, and your hip line is as straight at second thirty as second three.

Top 2 mistakes: 1) Hips sagging toward the floor — the set ends when the line breaks, not when the timer says so. 2) The elbow creeping away from the shoulder, which loads the joint instead of the waist; re-stack every set.

Levels: *Easier* — knees bent (the → in the name is the path: everyone starts here). *Standard* — knees for full holds, working toward feet-stacked. *Harder* — feet stacked; then top foot staggered in front; then a slow top-arm reach to the ceiling.

Joint-friendly swap: Shoulder complaints? Do the standing version: a heavy-ish Suitcase Carry hold (stand tall with one heavy dumbbell for time, no walking). Same muscles, zero floor.

Phase 3 Movements (Weeks 9–12)

Four final movements: two heavier graduations, the pushup's arrival at the floor, and the top rung of the bone ladder.

Double-DB Front Squat

What it trains: Everything the Goblet Squat trains, with more load and a bigger ask of your upper back and core — the strongest home squat in this program.

Setup: A dumbbell in each hand, resting one end on each shoulder — hold them like you're carrying two logs against your collarbones, elbows lifted forward. Feet in your goblet-squat stance.

Form cues: - Elbows stay *lifted* — they're the shelf; if they drop, the weights pull you forward - Same squat you've done since Week 1: hips back and down, whole foot planted - Chest proud against the

weights' pull — this is the core exercise hiding inside the squat - Stand by pushing the floor away; exhale hard

Breathing: Inhale at the top, descend, then a strong exhale from the bottom up. At these loads the exhale genuinely helps — blow the weights up.

You're doing it right if... your torso stays as upright as your goblet squat, and afterward your upper back knows it participated.

Top 2 mistakes: 1) Elbows drooping mid-set, tipping you into a forward fold — rack the weights, rest, re-lift the elbows. 2) Choosing dumbbells too heavy to hold comfortably at the shoulders; the rack position has its own learning curve — give it a lighter week.

Levels: *Easier* — one dumbbell held goblet-style (that's just your Goblet Squat — a fine place to stay another phase). *Standard* — two dumbbells racked at the shoulders. *Harder* — heavier, or a one-second pause at the bottom.

Joint-friendly swap: Wrists or shoulders dislike the rack? Stay with the Goblet Squat and keep progressing its load — it's a full-credit substitute for this entire phase. Knees: box version, as always.

DB Hip Thrust (shoulders on sofa/bench)

What it trains: Glutes, at the biggest range and heaviest load available at home — the Glute Bridge's final form, and pound-for-pound the best glute builder in the program.

Setup: Sit on the floor with your upper back against a sofa seat or sturdy bench, knees bent, feet flat. The sofa edge should hit just below your shoulder blades. Rest a dumbbell across the crease of your hips (fold a towel under it — your hip bones will thank you).

Form cues: - Drive through your heels and lift your hips until your body makes a flat tabletop — knees, hips, shoulders level - Chin gently tucked; eyes stay forward (not up at the ceiling) — this keeps your ribs down - Squeeze your bottom hard for a full second at the top - Lower your hips most of the way down with control, then drive up again

Breathing: Exhale as you drive up, inhale on the way down.

You're doing it right if... the top position feels like a vice closing in your glutes — and your lower back feels nothing but neutral.

Top 2 mistakes: 1) Arching at the top — chasing extra height from the spine once the hips max out. Tabletop, no higher. 2) Feet too far out (hamstring cramps) or too close (knees complain); park your heels so your shins are vertical at the top.

Levels: *Easier* — bodyweight hip thrusts from the sofa, or stay with the DB Glute Bridge from Phase 2. *Standard* — one dumbbell on the hips, one-second squeeze. *Harder* — heavier dumbbell; then a three-second top hold; then single-leg, bodyweight.

Joint-friendly swap: If the setup annoys your back or the sofa's wrong height, the floor Glute Bridge with a dumbbell carries you through Phase 3 with full credit.

Incline-to-Floor Pushup progression

What it trains: The same pressing muscles as every pushup since Week 1 — this entry is the ladder's final descent, from whatever incline you own now to the floor itself.

Setup: Same plank rules as ever, on a progressively lower surface: counter → table → chair seat (braced against a wall) → bottom stair → floor on knees → floor on toes. Hands slightly wider than shoulders, body one straight line.

Form cues: - Drop one step lower only when the current step gives you the session's reps at 2 RIR with a clean line - Same 45-degree elbows, same one-piece body, same chest-leads-chin arrival - On the floor: squeeze your bottom *before* you bend your elbows, and keep it squeezed - Mixed sets are legal and smart: start the set on the lower surface, finish the reps on the higher one when form frays

Breathing: Inhale down, exhale up — the same rhythm you've breathed since the wall.

You're doing it right if... your first floor pushup — knees or toes — looks exactly like your wall pushup did: one line, chest first, no worm.

Top 2 mistakes: 1) Rushing down the ladder because the floor feels like the “real” pushup — every rung is a real pushup, and skipped rungs come back as saggy hips. 2) Letting the hips lead the descent on the floor (the “worm”) — if the line breaks, go back up one rung, zero shame, one week.

Levels: *Easier* — whatever surface is one step higher than today's. *Standard* — the lowest surface that gives you clean reps at target RIR. *Harder* — floor from the toes; then feet on the bottom stair; then a two-second lowering. The ladder never actually ends.

Joint-friendly swap: Wrists: fists, or grip dumbbell handles placed on the floor (they keep wrists dead straight). Shoulders: stay one rung higher and add a slow tempo instead of descending.

Low Hops / March-to-Hop (impact micro-dose, opt-in)

What it trains: Bone — this is the Heel Drops' graduation, the top rung of this program's bone ladder. The evidence for impact is genuinely encouraging: small, repeated doses of hopping, built up gradually

over months, measurably improved hip bone strength in research settings (Brown 2020), and progressive loading plus impact is the combination behind the strongest bone-training trial results (Watson 2018). Our version is deliberately scaled for home and for beginners: a few dozen gentle contacts, two to three times a week, with the March-to-Hop on-ramp so nobody jumps before they're ready. Frame it honestly: this builds a bone-supporting *habit* whose payoff compounds over years — not a bone-density number by autumn.

Setup: Supportive shoes, a firm (not concrete-hard) surface, something sturdy within fingertip reach for the first sessions. Empty bladder — genuinely useful advice for impact work.

Form cues: - **March-to-Hop (the on-ramp):** march briskly in place, then every fourth step, push off just enough that both feet leave the floor for an instant — land soft-kneed and keep marching - **Low Hops (the standard):** small two-footed hops, an inch or two off the floor — spring from the ankles, land toes-then-heels with soft knees - Land quiet — think “spring,” not “stomp”; the rebound should feel bouncy, not jarring - Stay tall through the hips; hop *up*, not forward

Breathing: Light and rhythmic — exhale on landings if you think about it at all. This should feel closer to skipping rope badly than to exercise.

You're doing it right if... you could hold a conversation, your landings are nearly silent, and you feel gently springy rather than braced for impact.

Top 2 mistakes: 1) Hopping too high too soon — height adds force fast, and the research protocols built up over *months*; an inch is a dose. 2) Landing stiff-legged with locked knees — soft knees turn impact into signal instead of insult.

Levels: *Easier* — March-to-Hop; or stay with Heel Drops all twelve weeks (completely fine — same ladder, lower rung). *Standard* — 2 sets of 10 low hops, fingertips near support. *Harder* — slightly brisker rhythm, then hop-and-hold landings; progress only when landings are quiet and confident.

Joint-friendly swap: If hops bother knees, hips, or feet, step back down to Heel Drops permanently — they remain a legitimate bone stimulus, and consistency beats intensity by a mile here. Brisk hill or stair walking adds a little more, gently.

Who should skip Low Hops.

Same rule as Heel Drops, and it's firm: **skip all impact work if you have a history of vertebral (spine) fracture, or any current prolapse symptoms** — leaking, heaviness, or a bulge sensation, especially with impact. If a hop ever *provokes* those symptoms, that's your body casting its vote: stop, do everything else in the program, and bring it to a pelvic floor physical therapist or your doctor. With diagnosed osteoporosis, impact work is a your-provider-decides feature — often approved, never assumed.

You now have a coach's answer for every rep of every movement in this program. When in doubt, come back here — the entry will still be waiting, and so will the cue you need.