

Deadlifts for 50+ yr trainers

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Deadlifts – Straight Bar v's Trap/Hex Bar

For those older trainers who would like to partake in functional exercises in the gym, there is nothing better than having to lift a heavy weight off the ground and then place it back down on the ground!!

This exercise movement simulates what we need to do in every day life (and what we become increasingly less able to do well as we age).



One of the main issues with bending over and picking objects up off the floor is the decrease in flexibility through our pelvis (in particular our hamstrings) resulting in the inability to maintain a good flat lower back (and good posture) when bending over.

The end result is that we overload our lower back (Lumbar spine) and place pressure on the discs and ligaments that make up this important region.

There is a high percentage of older individuals who have lower back issues. This is largely due to a combination of a poor core (not able to develop the intra abdominal pressure required to protect the spine) and the poor flexibility described above that places the spine in a vulnerable position

whenever trying to bend over to pick something up.

DEADLIFTS:

The deadlift exercise has been around for a long time and is a mainstream exercise for strength and powerlifters alike. It is an excellent exercise to incorporate into any lifting routine as it is a total body exercise and if undertaken correctly, will develop a strong core and associated musculature.

When confronted with the choice of Deadlift exercise, there are a few different options:

1. Barbell Deadlifts
2. Trap/Hex bar Deadlifts
3. Dumbbell Deadlifts



Depending upon what you want to achieve (and any physical limitations), the following adaptations can be had from these exercises:

Barbell Deadlifts:

- Greater Hamstring Activation
- Greater Erector Spinae Activation



Trap/Hex bar Deadlifts:

- Greater Quadricep Activation
- Greater force & power generated.

Dumbbell Deadlifts:



Similar to that of the Trap/Hex bar Deadlifts (if dumbbells held in the same alignment).



As outlined above, the traditional barbell deadlift results in the trainer having to move into a large hip flexion position to be able to effectively pick up the bar whilst maintaining a neutral spine.

It is important in this position to be able to maintain a neutral pelvic position and flat or slightly arched lower back – if you are tight in the hamstrings then this position will be impossible to move into. Resulting in a flexed lumbar spine making lifting any load in this position very dangerous.

Lack of Hamstring Flexibility and your options?



1. You can continue to use the barbell deadlift but you do not start the movement from the floor (or return the weight to the floor).

This reduction in Range of Motion (ROM) will reduce the need for good flexibility in your hamstrings allowing you to maintain a correct pelvis position during the lift.

In time, this exercise should assist in improving hamstring flexibility and allowing you to maintain the correct pelvic position whilst increasing your ROM.



2. You could use the Trap/Hex bar to complete your deadlifts.

This bar allows for a more upright stance (as the bar is now by your side and not out the front (no need to have to negotiate lifting the bar over your knees!!)).

This movement can start in a more upright position to better protect your lower back and if needed can also be done on a raised platform to reduce total ROM in the early stages.

* It is important to clarify that in both the above cases, you still need to be able to get into some form of hip flexion with a neutral/slightly arched lower back. If this position is not possible then you will need to address the lack of flexibility in your pelvis/hamstring region through a flexibility routine.

What is becoming quite popular is the undertaking of a flexibility course whereby you are assisted in improving your ROM through all your joints. As we age, as outlined in a previous article [Flexibility & Aging](#) it is possible to improve your flexibility but the resistance through the muscle and joints increases as we age (collagen replaces more elastic material within these regions) and therefore it often requires a greater load than basic static stretching to increase your flexibility.

One of the great benefits of the Deadlift (all varieties) is that if you are able to maintain a solid pelvic position when performing the lift, you will place a higher level of stretch load onto the hamstring region than what would be impossible using ordinary stretching techniques.

So it is expected over time that if you continue to train with this exercise and increase the load where you can, that you will increase not only your core and pelvis strength but you will get a concomitant increase in ROM also.

Personally, I haven't used the barbell deadlift in many years. Whilst I have pretty reasonable core strength and hamstring flexibility I still find it difficult to place myself in the correct position to initiate a barbell deadlift with a heavy weight without placing excessive load on my lower back.



With the trap/hexbar deadlift you can move your grip position and posture more forward to increase activation of your hamstrings/erector spinae, or move it back and be more upright to increase the load on your quads and reduce lower back strain – this is a real advantage of the trap/hex bar over the barbell straight bar.

As I get older, it takes me longer to really warm up, and so the use of the trap/hex bar is ideal as the first couple of sets you can be in a more upright position and then progressively increase your hip flexion as you wish to increase the load on the hamstrings/erector spinae muscles.

SUMMARY:

1. Deadlifts should be a part of all older client's strength routine as it simulates a typical day to day activity of having to pick something up off the ground.
2. Core strength and pelvic/hamstring flexibility can be limiting factors in the use of the barbell when deadlifting.
3. The use of the Trap/Hex bar is an excellent alternative that increases the options you have when lifting using this exercise.
4. A more upright position takes the load off the lower back and increases the load on the quads (like a squat) whilst if you bend over further you increase the load on the erector spinae and hamstrings as well as flexibility in the hamstring/gluteal muscle groups).