

Keep Climbing Until the Day You Die

Background

I started climbing in 1978 and kept it up for about 20 years. After I left climbing, I got into other training modes including CrossFit and Olympic lifting. About 4 years ago, at 68, I returned to climbing. Now 72, because of the more advanced training methods available now, and more time to train because of an easier job, I am climbing much better than I did in my 30's and 40's. I've learned a lot on this journey, and am keen to pass it on.

On August 1, 2017 I gave a presentation at The First Canadian Climbing Medicine Symposium with the above title. My main thesis is that, as a climber gets older, more time must be allotted to general training and, bit by bit, less to specific training. The general fitness is necessary to support the specific training, particularly to help prevent injury.

So, a young climber may do a 25/75% split in favour of specific training. A climber in his or her 40's may want to make the split 30/70, a sixty year old climber would do well to make the split 35/65, and so on. At 72, about 40% of my training is general fitness, specific training is about 60%.

According to Steve Bechtel, 25% is a good number for younger climbers (younger than 40). I think that is a good minimum, it just needs to be increased as one gets older. The general fitness should involve working the antagonist muscles, maintaining mobility, preserving cardio fitness and, (very important) maintaining muscle mass.

Anyone who does specific training only is courting inevitable injury.

To help with this, here is a list of resources:

Specific Training

Generally, specific training is training you do with your climbing shoes on. It also includes training where one doesn't use one's feet like hang board training and campusing.

Trainingforclimbing.com

This is the site of Eric Horst, who was an elite climber in his younger days (still is) and who has been a climbing coach since the late 80's. Lots of good articles and the podcasts are worth listening to. His book, [Training for Climbing, 3rd edition](#) covers everything a climber needs to do. People refer to it as the "bible" for climbing training.

Climbstrong.com

This is Steve Bechtel's site. He's been coaching climbers for about twenty years. He's a big advocate of doing balanced training. It's worth subscribing for a few months, for \$15/month.

Trainingbeta.com

Lots of information on this site. You can search for many climbing-related topics - e.g. elbow injury - and come up with several good articles. The podcasts are usually with elite climbers, but there also interviews with coaches like Eric and Steve.

Mobility

The best book, in my opinion is Becoming a Supple Leopard by Kelly Starrett. It also covers lifting and bodyweight movements. His website is Mobilitywod.com

There's also good information on mobility at the 3 sites listed below. These sites also have a lot of good information on bodyweight exercises.

gmb.io The initials stand for Gold Medal Bodies.

[Gymnastic bodies.com](http://Gymnasticbodies.com)

You can buy a series of 3 follow-along stretch routines here. They are very good, and include strength work, although you may want to skip the strength work if you are developing strength with lifting or other training.

Calithentic-movement.com

Also, check their YouTube channel. They have several good mobility videos. Also, they are very good at explaining various movements and how to do them correctly - their videos on the pushup and the pull-up are especially good (most people do them poorly.)

Cardiovascular Capacity

Run less, run Faster The authors have programs for 5K to the marathon which are based on 3 “key” runs a week - intervals on a track, a tempo run, and a fairly quick long run. One needs a GPS to use this program. I like this program because of the variety and because it helps maintain speed. Just bear in mind, excessive running works counter to maintaining muscle mass. 5k to 10k (max) are good distances for climbers.

The One Minute Workout by Martin Giballa Be sure to get the one by the right author, there’s another publication with the same title. The book is all about HIIT - High Intensity Interval Training. Giballa was one of the early researchers on this mode of training. He goes into why it works and offers many protocols for doing it.

Weightlifting

Preserving muscle mass is the most important thing an older athlete can do to maintain performance. The “big lifts” - overhead press, deadlift, back squat, bench press - are the best way to do it. These lifts also develop strong connective tissue and bone density.

For climbers, the overhead press is an important antagonist (push) movement that will balance out all the pulling we do. The deadlift develops all the muscles, connective tissue, bone density, and body tension with one movement (but you have to lift heavy - take your time but aim for up to two times body weight.)

CrossFitquantum.com

Look for the Quantum Learn to Lift program. It contains prerequisites, mobility drills, specific warmups, videos on the lifts and a program. (The program is there, but remember the lifts are meant to be complimentary to

climbing, not an end goal.)

jtsstrength.com

Lots of articles. If you get into lifting, their Beginner's Guide to Lifting is worth the price.

Strongerbyscience.com

Lots of good articles here too. They also put out a monthly research review in a publication called Mass. Subscription required. Frankly, I found it offers more detail than a regular athlete needs.

I've included an article on the overhead press, which has become the "forgotten lift" since it was taken out of the Olympic lifts in 1972. I've added this for the history and for the information about this lift's benefits for shoulder health. Ignore all the stuff about wonky technique - a strict press will do.

Finally, a caution: If you want to learn the lifts, find a trainer. **You cannot safely learn these lifts watching videos.** A CrossFit gym may be your best bet for instruction. If you can find one, a gym that specializes in lifting would work well too.

That's it. Good luck in your training,

Gerry Banning
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