



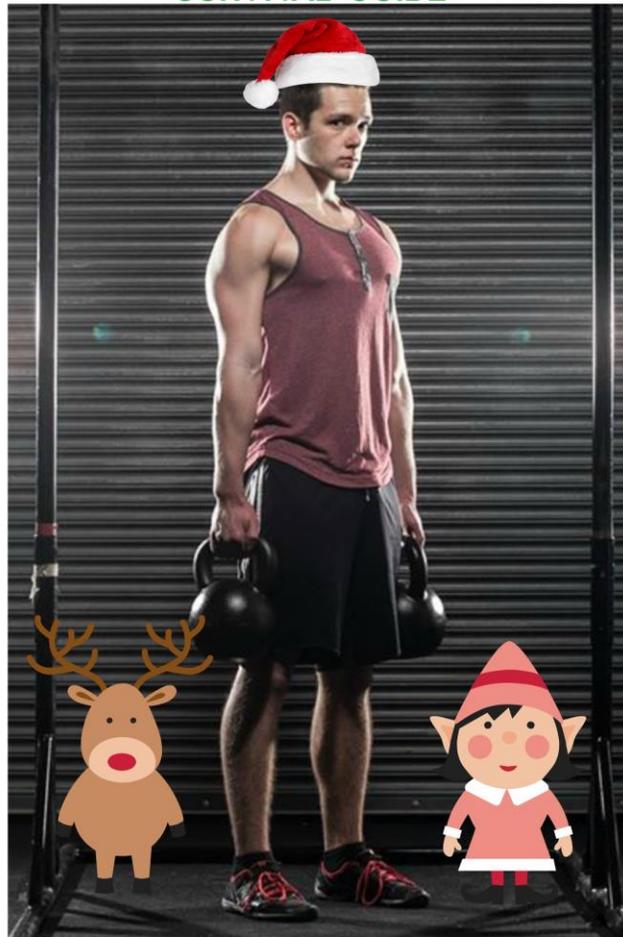
Pat Flynn's...

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# CHRONICLES OF STRENGTH

*A Fitness Minimalist Manifesto*

THE 2014 HOLIDAY  
SURVIVAL GUIDE



Most people put weight on Thanksgiving through Christmas time, so extravagantly, in fact, that some companies like QVC or HSN no longer have contests for employees to lose weight around the holidays, but to *maintain* weight. Even that is an insurmountable challenge to many, it would seem—the holidays are too tempting a devil to get through without so many sweet and savory inducements.

The goal of this month's correspondence is to not request you to avoid the holiday season entirely, but to approach it more sensibly. I want you to enjoy the indulgence, from time to time, that is...from time to time. And I want to give you tips on how to keep on track without losing your sanity.

This issue is going to be very list-oriented. Despite my general unfriendliness towards numerical lists (I think they are a cheap, discreditable way for bloggers to nab attention, and ultimately deliver very low value). I figure that would be the easiest way to deliver the info this time around.

## 5 Ways to Keep on Track

### 1. Limit indulgences to ONE day a week.

If people just kept their “cheats” on Thanksgiving and Christmas, the net effect would hardly be noticeable. The problem, however, is that people don't do that; they don't even *think* to do that. Along with the holidays, and in with the snow, people start to slacken their dietary restraints, picking up cookies here and there at the office, the morning pumpkin spice or eggnog latte. This all adds up.

My best advice here, of course, would be to limit your “cheats”, as we will call them, for want of a better term, to either the holidays exclusively, or, at a maximum, once per week. I will explain later how a strategic cheat meal can maybe accelerate progress for some, but so long as it is kept within certain parameters a cheat can also be used as a measure of sanity adjustment. It gives you freedom, certainly, and enjoyment, too. You don't feel so tightly wound up like a spring.

Don't have a cheat day, if you can help it. It's better to have a cheat meal, or a “cheat evening”—and there are certain, particular things you can do, which we will presently investigate, to hedge against that cheat meal, and ensure it doesn't go straight to your whatever.

## 2. **Limit carb/calorie intake previous to the big meal.**

A deluge of carbohydrates (sugar, in scrupulous detail) is what's going to most notably fund the fat bank. So if you can keep carbs low, or better yet deplete carb stores through the use of an intense, weight-bearing workout, you will make room, that is, accommodate the heavy evening meal more acceptingly, and be less liking to store it in unseemly places. This brings me to our next point.

## 3. **Move/exercise before you eat.**

A short intense workout, lasting but only five minutes, even, may considerably negate fat storage, and induce your body to repartition nutrients to hungry muscle tissue. The more intense, the better, usually, though any movement will do.

I will provide below my choicest selection of short, intense metabolic workouts, hand-picked from my overflowing stock of kettlebell workouts, to be done previous to any major meal.

But if time or equipment is an issue, set the clock for five, ten, fifteen minutes, and see what movement you can accumulate—push-ups, pull ups, bodyweight squats, crawling, planks, whatever, you can do them all, or just one or two. But make it hard on yourself.

The best time to exercise is 30 minutes before you eat, and 30 minutes after. But if you can only accommodate one, do the first. Men use a 24kg kettlebell; women use 16kg.

### **Killer Swing and Squat Workout**

10 kettlebell swings  
10 goblet squats

10 swings  
9 squats

10 swings  
8 squats ...

... 10 swings  
1 squat



Watch video demo here: <http://bit.ly/1vbNkXu>

## **Single Kettlebell Strength and Fat Loss Workout**

One Arm Swing x 5  
Staggered Stance Squat x 5  
Military Press x 5

As many QUALITY rounds as you can in 15 minutes.



Video demo here: <http://bit.ly/1FJ8DTB>

## **Quick Little Fat-Burning Kettlebell Complex**

Complete 1 rep each:

Swing  
Clean  
Press  
Snatch  
Squat

Complete five cycles on right side; switch; complete five cycles on left.



Video demo here: <http://bit.ly/1pHv3R2>

### **5-Minute Double Kettlebell Workout**

5 x Squat Thrusters  
5 x Squat Burpees

Complete as many QUALITY rounds as you can in 5 minutes.



Watch video demo: <http://bit.ly/1vBA52e>

### **Single Arm Metabolic Complex**

5 x one-arm swings  
5 x clean and press  
5 x snatch

5 x squat

Complete all reps and movements on one side; switch sides; repeat. As many QUALITY rounds as you can get in 15 minutes.



Video demo: <http://bit.ly/1rOd7QB>

**4. Eat until you are 80% full.**

A large majority of damage can be avoided very simply by not eating until you are thoroughly engorged and about to throw up. This rule applies to the holidays, of course, but to every regular occasion as well. Most people eat until they are 90-95% full, and could use to scale some variable percent.

On holidays we tend eat until we are beyond 100% full, naturally, and very savagely—and we know this percentage exists, too, by how we loosen the belt, expand on the couch and summarily pass out with our mouths open, a little line of drool trickling down our cheek. You should see the pictures I have of Christine.

Set the fork down between every bite and slow your eating pace. Chew your food slowly, and take small bites. These small, seemingly unimportant pieces of advice are not to be disregarded. They work.

**5. Order your food (start with the good stuff, finish with the treats).**

I have been pouring this advice for four or five years now, and people seem to really like it. The premise is decidedly simple. Eat your veggies first, and fill up on those. Then move onto your meat and fat. Finally, when you are

good and satisfied with the healthy good stuff, you can have the starchier carbs, and maybe dessert.

You probably don't need to be told why this works, but I'll explain it anyway. Ordering your food fills you up on the low-calorie bulk (fibrous veggies and protein) so that you eat less of the high-calorie food later on. It's a simple advantage, but notable.

## **Fast Before You Feast?**

One cool fasting strategy you can do before any major meal is to having nothing but a wee little bit of live veggies and light protein. This is a controlled fast, naturally, as we are still eating something. The purpose of this is to 1) deplete glycogen stores and make room for the impending debacle and 2) not let ourselves get too hungry by eating a multitude of fibrous bulk (like broccoli, cauliflower, etc.).

If you are to sit at a feasting around five or six o'clock, fast until then, eating nothing with any real net carbs in it. Your best options are any and all dark green or low-sugar veggies. Raw is best, as living foods help to replenish your enzyme pool, and make it easier to digest a heavy meal later on. You may additionally consume some light protein sources, like hard-boiled eggs, or whatever.

To complete the deal, throw in a short, intense workout 30-60 minutes prior to any major meal, like we talked about above. This will prime the body to assimilate nutrients more efficiently, and partition them to the tired, hungry muscle tissue. It will also deplete glycogen stores, and make room for carbs to come in without being stored as fat.

As for feeding frequency during the fast eat every 2-3 hours. Remember, no full meals, just a light grazing. You should be hungry by when it's time to eat, but not ravenous. If you strictly fasted, and then worked out, probably you'd be ravenous. We don't want that, because you may overcompensate. We want just enough hungry and just the right amount of depletion. For these two reasons, I call for a controlled fast over a strict fast around the holidays.

## A Health Nut's Guide to Alcohol

Many people like it, some don't, and that's OK. I'm a wine drinker, mostly, but beer, too, I greatly enjoy. Gin, I could live without and never think of again or long for in any way.

So I have two—just two—rules for drinking. They are, 1) never drink alone, and 2) don't mix carbs and alcohol. Drinking alone means you have an issue; mixing carbs and alcohol will make you fat. I won't talk on the first rule to any great extent, but to say that I'm very serious about it. If compelled to drink alone and on a regular basis, there is something going on that needs to be righted. Find out what it is, and take care of it.

The second rule, if you follow it, will dramatically decrease the likelihood of storing fat while you drink. Alcohol shuts down the fat burning process, turns it off almost completely. So any carbs you take in while you drink, less you are actively burning them off (most people aren't exercising while they drink, so...) have only one place left to go, really, and that is into storage.

Most alcohol that people prefer comes with an allotment of carbs already, beer especially. Some would say drink light beer, then—but I could never recommend that. I would rather you have one or two beers you actually enjoy, something you can really chew on, than to sip on that thin, prissy stuff. There's no taste to it, and hardly any alcohol, either. I've never understood the point of light beer.

The best selection is dry red wine, like a pinot, a cab, a merlot, or a malbec. With these wines, residual sugar is low. Red wine carries with it some very powerful antioxidants, too; it would take a lot of grapes, more than would be worth it, to get the same amount of resveratrol that you get out of a glass of good red wine.

Dark beers have a higher nutrient profile than light beers. So stouts, I guess, are more nutritious than lagers. I say I guess because nobody drinks beer for its nutrition, so just drink what you enjoy.

Stay away from mix drinks entirely. In other words, don't add anything to your alcohol if you can help it. Juice, syrups, and even those little maraschino cherries add unnecessary sugar and carbs. The one exception to this is if you enjoy vodka or tequila with lime. For those of you who prefer spirits, the "norcal margarita" (tequila with lime), as it's called, is a fine option.

The best thing to eat with alcohol is protein or fat. Cheese with wine is a classic idea, and still a good one. Obviously, you could eat nothing at all when you drink, if you want, but I don't recommend it. Not because eating will impede the result you're after, but because I'd rather you not be too hungry when you drink, as alcohol

lowers inhibition and self-control (if you drink and then get very hungry, you are infinitely more likely to eat something you perhaps shouldn't.).

To sum up my notes on drinking alcohol:

1. Limit alcohol intake to 1x a week.
2. Don't drink mixed drinks
3. Don't drink alone
4. Don't mix carbs and alcohol
5. Red wine and dry spirits (tequila/potato vodka) are your best bets
6. You can, if you want, mix alcohol with protein/fat (like wine and cheese)

## **Guest Post: The Anthropology of Food How to Adhere to the Good Life During the Holidays**

By: Christine Mooney, editor

Food is present in nearly every human activity, from the celebration of a birth to the mourning of an elder's passing. There are rules governing how the food is prepared (e.g. kosher), who prepares it (e.g. mothers or wives), how it is to be served (e.g. on the "good" China), and how it is eaten (e.g. ritual feasts, such as the Seder). Food is both symbolic and real.

It is an incredibly powerful common denominator, as we are all humans and we all have to eat. The basic need for sustenance is common to all of us, regardless of how or what we eat. Across every culture, in any time period, we see that people use food as a celebration, as a rite of passage, as a way of bonding together, as a way to delineate gender roles, and show hospitality—in virtually every human activity. This idea of food as celebration, as community, as a binding contract becomes especially important in terms of understanding your own relationship with food and with the culture around you, particularly when you try to live as healthfully as possible.

In essence, when you dedicate yourself to eating more healthfully, you are breaking or modifying the age-old way of bonding with others. This can be seen as a threat to some people. They simply don't like it. People want you to eat a certain way because when you don't, this divergence from the norm conveys a sense of inequality, regardless of whether or not you judge them for their *unhealthy* choices in the same way that they judge you for your *healthy* ones.

It boils down to this: When you don't consume the same foods in the same manner as the people you are eating with, and whether anyone is consciously attuned to it or not, something can feel missing from your relationship with them.

Whether your friends, family, coworkers, media portrayals of food consumption, or any combination of the above are involved, it becomes a very interesting dynamic once you switch your eating behaviors so that they no longer comply with the cultural norm. Anyone who has ever decided to cut back on sugar, alcohol, refined carbohydrates, etc. knows that when you do so, you inevitably wind up taking a lot of flak from the people around you. Maybe it's your friends who think you're being uptight when you turn down pizza and beer or your mom who rolls her eyes at you when you pass on a piece of birthday cake or warns you that you're going to get "bulky," if you keep lifting those "cattleball things" or the waitress who rudely asks you if you're on some kind of a diet when you order a burger without the bun. Once you get used to this sort of response to your healthy lifestyle, you no longer take much notice of it. But ignoring these exasperating responses isn't always an option, and even when it is an option, it's not always the best one.

First and foremost, in order to create the optimal response to a particular reaction, you must understand the reasoning behind that reaction so we'll explore that first before moving onto how you can counteract those reactions.

## **Food and Culture**

In a very primal sense, eating forces you to set your guard down (I mean, come on, haven't you seen the Red Wedding episode on *Game of Thrones*??). It (1) shows that you are vulnerable enough that you have to eat—you *are* an animal, after all—and (2) shows that you are willing to put yourself in a vulnerable position where you might not be able to fight or defend yourself should the need arise.

Look at an animal of prey, the zebra, for example. When it comes to a watering hole in the wild, it is in a very vulnerable state. The zebra has to look around, test things out, and only when it feels comfortable does it take a drink. But during that period when it is drinking water, it's in a very defenseless position.

Simply the idea of "breaking bread" is a very powerful example. This short phrase conveys how important eating together is to establishing and maintaining relationships with other people. A wedding reception is another good example. There, you have two separate families who (presumably) don't know each other very well, yet they sit down and eat together in order to help bind the union between the two groups.

In the name of celebration and the hope for posterity, you join with a whole different family, a group of people you might not have ever really met before, you

put your guard down and display your vulnerability, all of which signifies that you are willing to trust these strangers, trust the food that is being served, and are enjoying the same thing at the same time together. It's a very bonding experience. The power of food and eating within culture can be seen in something as commonplace as happy hour with coworkers. You and your coworkers, who all share the same or similar work experiences, go out after work, maybe after a particularly stressful day, you have drinks and have food together, and you get to commiserate about how stressful your day was, what problems you're facing, even what little triumphs you've experienced, and you understand these stories in the context of where all this is coming from in a way that your non-work friends and family cannot.

You don't always get to go out and celebrate this connection that you all have, but when you do go out for happy hour, you're bonding with the people you work with in a very strong way (similar to how only siblings can really commiserate about how crazy their parents were). You're solidifying this bond with the fact that you are comfortable enough to drink around your coworkers (since not everyone can control themselves with alcohol, this puts you a weakened/vulnerable position). You're also eating with them. Again, this is a very powerful bonding experience that revolves around and is solidified by food consumption.

What this means to the person who is trying to be healthy is this: Food is an integral part of culture and society, no matter where you live, what generation you are, or who your family and friends are, and to some degree, you *will* receive backlash from those who typically love and support you most when you try and transform your lifestyle into a healthy one.

There is no denying this, and it can be insanely frustrating. But if you understand the science behind this infuriating response, it can be easier to ignore the jibs, the teasing, the "But it's Christmas; you *have* to eat [pie, marshmallow-topped sweet potatoes, creamed spinach, bread, brownies, sugar cookies, all of the aforementioned] on Christmas".

People are responding to your challenge of food norms in this way because they feel you are declaring yourself unequal to them. But remember, what makes you unequal at the Christmas dinner table will also make you unequal on the beach. In a bathing suit. Baring a lot of beautiful muscle and clear healthy skin.

Now, that's not to say you can't treat yo'self. Pat outlined some very simple guidelines on how to make it through the holiday season without feeling deprived. But if you're going on your fourth holiday party in a week, it's time to step back and try some other strategies. One "cheat" a week is one thing. Cheating from Thanksgiving to New Year's is quite another.

## Act and React

You cannot control how others act, but you can certainly control how you *react*. *Much* easier said than done, right? I know all about that. I can't even begin to tell you the number of times I've gotten eyes rolled at me, fingers pointed, accusations made, whatever, over the simple act of saying "No thank you" to a dinner roll. And I'm certainly guilty of not always reacting in the most productive or positive manner. Sometimes, I've reacted in a downright unproductive and negative manner. But it doesn't have to be like that, and the more you expect some degree of questioning and understand the "why's" behind it, the better primed and prepared you can be to deal with it.

First off, at all times, a condescending / know-it-all attitude should be avoided.

No one likes a know-it-all.

Not even your mother.

And certainly not your mother when you're challenging her Christmas dinner.

So unless someone comes to you asking for your opinions on healthful eating, keep your mouth shut, even when your sister, who may or may not have added 15 pounds to her frame since you saw her at your cousin's wedding, reaches for another ladleful of stuffing. Just keep eating your roast turkey and baked sweet potatoes. You're supposed to chew with your mouth closed anyways.

Also (and this applies to many areas of life), when someone *does* ask you your opinion on proper nutrition, understand that there is a mighty fine chance that they aren't really asking you for your opinion. They are asking you for validation of theirs. So when someone asks you about which grains are the healthiest and you say "none of them," well, that probably wasn't the answer they were looking for. At this point, you can educate them with stone cold truth and some disarming humor (again, don't let that ego get in the way), or you can move on.

## Top Three Reactions to Your "Weirdo" Eating Habits

### 1. "I don't believe in depriving myself. I mean, so long as it's in moderation."

Heard that a million times, right? I sure have. But everything in moderation, huh? Well, I'm sure when people say that, they don't mean MSG, trans fats, high fructose corn syrup, and so on in moderation, but that's really what they're saying because in reality, that is what is in all of those "in moderation" kinds of foods.

## **2. “I’ve been eating all this stuff my whole life, and I feel fine.”**

Sure, you feel fine now, but oftentimes, people who stay stuff like this simply don’t know how fan-freaking-tastic you do feel once you give all the “bad” stuff up. We’ve gone accustomed to the aches, the pain, the discomfort to the point that we either don’t notice them or we simply think that’s just the way things are. And the way things are? Well, those “the way things are” kinda people probably have a strong common denominator—eating crap foods, like grains and high-sugar foods. Just something to think about...

## **3. “If you’re eating higher fat and you aren’t eating grains, how are you getting all the vitamins and minerals you need?”**

Looking at the nutritional label of loaf of pre-packaged whole grain bread is a veritable menu of vitamins and minerals. But as we so often forget, the human body is a complex organism, meaning that just because that loaf of bread is jam-packed with vitamins and minerals, it doesn’t mean that your body is even absorbing them. For example, phytic acid, an anti-nutrient found in grain, binds to minerals (such as calcium, magnesium, zinc, and iron, just to name a few) in the grain and prevents their absorption in the gut. Research shows that cultures who rely on grains display deficiencies in other minerals.

And as for the higher fat? Some of—if not, *the*—richest sources of vitamins and minerals, including vitamins D, E, and K2 and choline, come from fats, such as those found in egg yolks, red palm oil, cod liver oil, grass-fed butter, etc. And in opposition to how the anti-nutrients in grains can inhibit nutrient absorption, the presence of healthy fats in the diet improve the fat-soluble vitamins, such as A,D, and E, in the foods you are preparing.

## Top Three Responses to those “Annoying” Reactions

1. “I gave up grains and all that sugar, and you know what? I feel so much better. I didn’t realize how not like myself, how tired, how crummy I felt until I gave it up. And besides, I wouldn’t call myself deprived. There’s nothing “deprived” about eating filet mignon!
2. “I always thought I didn’t have a problem with this stuff until I gave it up. Even after a few weeks I felt so much better. I’m more convinced than ever that those inevitable aches and pains of aging are really connected to how you eat, especially because ever since I gave up all the grains and sugar, I don’t have any of those things anymore.
3. “There are actually some components of grains, like phytic acid, that don’t allow the body to absorb and use those vitamins and minerals you see on the nutrition labels. And as for fat, there are some fats, like egg yolks and extra virgin olive oil, that are incredibly nutritious and unlike grains, help the body absorb all the nutrients in the other foods I eat so I’m actually getting plenty of vitamins and minerals just from eating fruits, veggies, healthy fats, and animal protein.”

Now, my personal favorite way to help alleviate the tensions surrounding a life dedicated to health and wellness in social settings is simply to try and share your food with others. When you can bring food to the table, it shows that you are still willing and open to feast with others, just more so on your terms and not solely on theirs. This could include anything from a revamped but über-delicious rendering of the pumpkin pie to a butternut squash soup to deviled eggs made with homemade mayonnaise. It doesn’t matter so long as it is apparent that you are taking part. Sure, not everyone will want to try your food, and heck, your older brother will probably still tease you a little, but it’s all about give-and-take (and you never know, you might catch that same brother taking a nibble of your paleo brownies when no one is looking).

## Four Guidelines to Live the Good Life and Save Your Sanity (During the Holidays and Beyond)

1. **Feast** on whole natural foods.
2. **Be stubborn** for your health but never condescending towards others because of your choices.
3. **Share** the food you consume and the reasoning behind your lifestyle -- People

fear the changes they cannot understand (blame it on our innate need to survive; change = unknown = inability to defend and protect = death).

4. **Understand** that being healthy in modern society is not an easy task but the most worthwhile one. Without health, we have the ability to truly enjoy little else.

### **About Christine Mooney**

*Christine is the editor of the Chronicles of Strength Inner Circle newsletter (and thus withholds making dinner for Pat once she reads each issue and sees she has once again been made the brunt of a joke). She's also an anthropologist, studying human behavior in terms of food, motherhood, and health and wellness. She is a Killing It With Kettlebells (KIWK) certified instructor.*

## **Guest Post: How to Use Crawling to Improve Upper Body Power**

By: Aleks Salkin

When people think of building a brutishly strong upper body – one that looks like it can dish out some punishment and take just about as much – plenty of great exercises come to mind, like the pull-up, row, dip, military press, bench press, and so on. For some reason, crawling doesn't appear on the list. Wonder why.

If anything, it probably has to do with the fact that, well, hardly anyone has done it! I, however, have. And a number of my colleagues and clients have as well, and the results have been pretty incredible. Before we talk about programming this sort of thing, let's take a look at some of the reasons why crawling in general is helpful for strength training (if you've been reading my articles in the past couple issues of Pat's newsletter, much of this has been covered earlier).

- Crawling reactivates and stimulates your vestibular system, bringing online all of your muscles – especially the oft-ignored ones
- Crawling helps to remind your stabilizers and your prime movers of their jobs, allowing you to essentially “get out of your own way” and move heavier weight.

- It gently puts a lot of muscle under tension – reflexive tension, specifically – including, but not limited to, your triceps, pecs, shoulders, neck, back, core, hips, legs, as well as a lot of other muscles that you’re sure to discover once you do it for a protracted period of time (and I sincerely hope you will).
- It will gently add mobility and flexibility where it needs to be while giving your body the control of the ranges of motion you need.

Now, if all that wasn’t good enough for you, just hold on to your hats; it gets better. While the most natural tendency is to crawl forward, the REAL magic starts to happen when we crawl...backward.

In thinking about our bodies, we can agree that our legs are just naturally built for greater strength than our arms for reasons so obvious I shouldn’t have to mention them, chief among them being that they’re built to support us standing on them all day, not to mention walking while carrying things, squatting with things, picking things up, etc.

Crawling backward flips the script. Now, instead of your legs propelling you forward, it’s up to your arms, whereas your legs take your arms’ role and “reach” instead.

Simple as this change is, it has a profound impact on your strength for the same set of reasons that switching from walking on your legs to walking on your hands would. The action – locomotion – is the same, but the method used requires a set of limbs capable of doing the job, but not used to it. They are forced to get stronger faster, and stronger they get, indeed.

Because I like bullet points (and as that seems to be the trend of this month’s issue of the Inner Circle newsletter), here are a few describing the benefits of crawling backward. These are all in addition to the great stuff mentioned above, which still holds true.

- Crawling backward helps improve scapular stability – crucial in building upper body brute strength. This will keep you from attempting to fire a cannon from the proverbial canoe.
- Crawling backward essentially amounts to loads upon loads of mini presses, gently sharpening the groove for pressing both horizontally and vertically.
- Surprisingly enough, it also improves your pulling abilities. Crawling backward very strongly activates not only your lats, but also your entire upper back. These muscles have to stabilize your body in motion as well as your big noggin as you keep it upright. This pays off in dividends when you

go for your next set of pullups or rows, as your back is now lit up and ready to roll (or pull, as the case may be). Needless to say the core activation from a bout of crawls will absolutely carry directly over into your body's ability to pull in a better, more coordinated fashion.

- It's also very therapeutic for the shoulders. Karen Rossler, a fellow Original Strength Certified Coach, rehabbed a bad shoulder (made bad by a neck muscle that had to be removed as part of a cancer treatment) with a few days' worth of backward crawling.

In short, crawling backward rocks. And its implementation is mercifully simple. Simply hit the deck and crawl backward!

Now, as enticing as it may be to simply jump into full on crawling backward with your knees up off the ground, don't get ahead of yourself. The time for that will come, but in order to ensure that you're getting the most out of it and are not turning the crawls into a high tension activity, here are a few benchmarks to hit first:

- 1) The ability to crawl on your hands and knees (baby crawl) forward under control – i.e. eyes facing forward, hips not “spilling” all over the place, smooth transitions between steps.
- 2) The ability to do all of the above for an extended period of time. 5 minutes is a bare minimum.
- 3) The ability to crawl backward while maintaining the points in number 1.
- 4) The ability to crawl backward for an extended period of time. Again, 5 minutes is a bare minimum goal that will do you good.
- 5) The ability to crawl backward SLOWLY for 5 minutes. Make each step take 3 seconds. Not only is this a helluva workout, but it will reveal a lot to you in terms of how well you move and manage your gait pattern in its most rudimentary of forms.

This is a lot to work with and it will keep you busy for a while. So while you're busy with working up to these standards (which, by the way, apply also to leopard crawls and spiderman crawls once you get there, wherein the knees do not touch the ground and you crawl only with your hands and feet) here are three quick options to train the backward crawl as an assistance exercise for your upper body training.

- 1) Before you begin your pushes and pulls, crawl backward for several minutes, and then have at it.

- 2) After you finish your regular upper body training, throw in backward crawls as a finisher and call it a day.
- 3) Between sets of pushes and pulls, crawl backward.

Of all of the above, I'm partial to 3 the most, but I have used each of them and to great effect. In case you'd like the above to be better illustrated, here are a few program examples to better exemplify the points:

- 1) A) 5 minutes of backward crawling, rest, military press practice  
B) 5 minutes of backward crawling, rest, pull-up practice
- 2) Dips + Pistols + Chin-ups, alternated for 20 minutes. Finisher: 10 minutes of slow backward crawling, resting as needed.
- 3) A1) Military press  
\*Crawl backward 20 paces\*  
A2) Pull-up  
\*Crawl backward 20 paces\*  
Repeat until freakishly strong

Or, you could always spring for a bonus #4, which (I have to admit) is more what I do nowadays than anything.

- 4) Crawl, do strength training session with crawls between each move, crawl as a finisher.

It's about as evil as it sounds. But, unlike doing countless amounts of essentially any other exercise, boatloads of crawling will leave you feeling fresh, invigorated, and energetic – not drained.

So what are the benefits of each and how might they fit your training goals?

### #1: **Benefits**

Crawling prior to your training acts as a fantastic warm-up and preps your stabilizers to stabilize and your prime movers to, well, move things. Best of all, it wakes up and coordinates both your pushing and pulling muscles in unison – a crucial, oft-overlooked aspect of training your favorite pushes and pulls, since these different muscle groups feed off of each other in important ways, hence the reason why heavy benchers and military pressers always emphasize “pressing with the lat” and gymnasts strive to engage their pecs in all of their pulls. More muscle recruitment toward a single objective = more strength and performance, period.

**The drawback?** If you overdo it in terms of your ability to recover before your pressing and pulling exercises, you run the risk of simply using up too much of your

energy and not being able to lift as heavy or as easily. For this reason it's best to take it a little easier than you think you should and save your energy for the iron. Build up in time, but start easy.

## **#2: *Benefits***

Crawling AFTER your iron practice serves as a fantastic finisher and a reset to your body, meaning it allows you to undo some of the stress you've placed on your body while under load. Furthermore, it's a quick, painless way to add to your work capacity and "pseudo-volume" in your exercises (since you're not actually doing more reps it can't count as real volume per se, but given that the muscles are being placed under tension for a longer period of time – albeit gentle, reflexive tension – it still holds a myriad of benefits that you wouldn't get if you skipped it all together). Plus, you can go a lot harder and for a lot longer, making it a real smoker of a finisher.

### ***The drawback?***

You don't get the benefit of the jolt to your vestibular system and the accompanying reflexive stability to help you base your heavy strength training on like you would get from doing it first. Which brings me to the next choice (and my personal favorite)

## **#3 *Benefits***

Shorter bouts of crawling between sets of any exercise (and this goes for deep breathing, head control movements, rolling, and rocking as found in the Original Strength system as well) offer a fantastic jolt-after-jolt approach to prepping and re-prepping your nervous system to do some serious work – and with far less stress on it as you're including a mini-recovery session between each set. This also allows you to build up greater work capacity as you're doing smaller amounts of work more consistently and are using active recovery in between your sets. Quite often within a few sets of any exercise, it will feel like a lock has been taken off of your movements and presses, pulls, squats, and whatever else will feel smoother and easier than ever before.

### ***The drawback?***

Not many, but you don't get the benefits of crawling for long distances/times as you would for either 1 or 2, which counts for something. Crawling for long distances and longer periods of time is where the magic of crawling really shines through, which you more than likely will miss out on if employing this technique. It's strictly a brief reset before your next set, and not much of an opportunity to build boatloads of work capacity and mental toughness, although it will still help a bit in these two areas. This, of course, is a great reason to work on option 4, but I wouldn't try it until you've tried the first three prior to that. It is far more time consuming and requires having spent a good amount of time getting your crawling skills up to snuff.

While the above all have advantages and disadvantages, there's some good news: You can get the best of ALL of the above by mixing them all up. How?

By employing each of the above options throughout the week, you can emphasize different things on different days, essentially offering yourself a more well-rounded program that accepts the disadvantages of each while maximizing the advantages of each. Here's an example program with some commentary.

The moves:

Kettlebell military press

Pull-up

Double kettlebell front squat

Kettlebell swing

Farmer's carry

### **Day 1) Light day (50-60%)**

Start off with a few minutes of backward crawling until you start breathing heavy. Today you'll mostly be focusing on technique with each movement, so warming up with some backward crawling will get all of your muscles online, primed, and ready to roll. You'll be going lighter on everything, so the crawls will leave you feeling invigorated and ready for a brief, but powerful session. You'll walk in with plenty of energy and out with just as much.

*Benefit: An invigorating warm-up for a light day to wake you up and gently prep you for your technique-based session.*

### **Day 2) Heavy day (80-90%)**

Today you're going to be going heavy on all the moves – between 1-3 reps on everything, and plenty of rest in between – from 3-5 minutes. Your total number of reps may be lower as well, particularly because this will be an exhausting, high tension effort for everything. For any given move, you may be doing as few as 6-10 HEAVY reps total on each move. As such, your crawling will match the spirit of this hard-as-coffin-nails session: Long, protracted, and pushing yourself to the last drop. 10-20 minutes on the clock, crawling until you collapse and then starting all over again is the name of the game here.

*Benefit: mental toughness and crawling volume that will both test your limits and extend them.*

### **Day 3) Medium (70%)**

This is your bread-and-butter session. You'll be hitting medium weights with moderate sets and reps – something that should leave you feeling worked but not worked out. Between each move you'll crawl. Not before and not after, only during, preferably directly after each set, to be followed by a brief but fair rest. Then back

to the weights. Repeat until your prescribed number of sets and reps on each is done.

*Benefit: improved work capacity and recovery abilities as you won't be going into each move as fresh as you did during your heavy day. Faster recovery + better work capacity = increased potential for epic personal greatness.*

You can get creative in mixing these up, but suffice it to say that the above is a program that will give you a lot to work with for a long time, and progress doesn't have to mean making it more complicated with more and more variations – simply extend your crawling time or go progressively slower, up a hill, etc. I've got roughly a million variations and routines in my head, but suffice it to say this is the easiest, most straight-forward approach of getting the best of all three worlds. Next time you're due for a new program, give this a shot. You'll be amazed at the cascade of improvements you'll make on all fronts. I guarantee it.

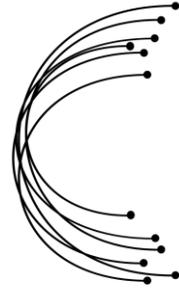
### **About Aleks Salkin**

*Aleks Salkin is a StrongFirst-certified kettlebell instructor (SFG), StrongFirst-certified bodyweight Instructor (SFB), and an Original Strength Specialist. He grew up scrawny, unathletic, weak, and goofy, until he was exposed to kettlebells and the teachings and methodology of Pavel in his early 20s. He is currently based out of Jerusalem, Israel and spends his time spreading the word of StrongFirst and calisthenics, and regularly writes about strength and health both on his website and as a guest author on other websites. Find him online at <http://www.alekssalkin.com>.*

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- February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2015: Bodyweight and Kettlebell Seminar with Pat Flynn and Jen Sinkler. Details to come.
- April 10-12<sup>th</sup>, 2015: Killing It With Kettlebells Certification. Save \$500 with the Early Bird Discount if you register before 1/1/2015. How to Register: Go [HERE](http://bit.ly/1vu5tPK):  
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