

CANNON COACHING

THE METHOD

THE STRENGTH SERIES · FIELD GUIDE NO.01

# THE DEADLIFT

*Technique, fundamentals, and the  
mindset that actually moves the bar.*

THE LIFT · THE SCIENCE · THE MINDSET

The deadlift gets treated like the most dangerous thing you can do in a gym. Pick something up off the floor, apparently, and your spine is one rep away from snapping in half.

PUBLIC SAFETY BRIEFING

ISSUED BY THE MINISTRY OF STAYING EXACTLY WHERE YOU ARE

*Citizens are advised that bending over and picking things up, an activity humans have performed since roughly the dawn of time, has now been classified as an extreme sport. Recommended precautions include never lifting anything heavier than an oat-milk carton, avoiding all forms of effort, and lying down until the feeling of capability passes.*

It isn't. And the fear around this lift is doing more damage to people's confidence than the lift itself ever could.

This is a proper deep dive: technique, fundamentals, the genuine debates in the research, the real role a coach plays in pushing you somewhere safely that you'd never go alone, and the bit almost nobody covers properly. Your mindset. Because the evidence says that part matters more than you think.

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## 01 WHAT THE DEADLIFT ACTUALLY IS

Strip it back and the deadlift is just a hip hinge. You're loading your hips and hamstrings to lift weight from the floor, with your spine acting as a strong, stable transmitter of force, not the engine doing the work.

# IT'S JUST A HIP HINGE.

The basics that matter, in order:

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## A **SETUP**

Bar over mid-foot, shins close to the bar, hips set so your shoulders sit roughly above or just in front of the bar.

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## B **GRIP & TENSION**

Grip the bar hard before you move it. Pull the slack out of the bar. You should feel tension through your whole body *before* the bar leaves the floor, not after.

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## C **BRACING**

Breathe into your belly, not your chest, and brace like someone's about to prod you in the stomach. Not sucking in, just creating pressure that supports your spine through the lift.

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## D **DRIVE, DON'T YANK**

The first few centimetres should feel like pushing the floor away with your legs, hips and shoulders rising together. Yanking with your back while your hips shoot up first is where most people leak power and strain their lower back.

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## E **LOCKOUT**

Stand tall, squeeze your glutes, done. No leaning back or hyperextending at the top, which adds nothing and just loads your lower back for no benefit.

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## THE LIFT, IN THREE POSITIONS

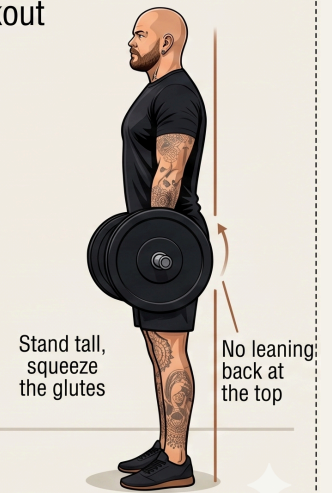
## 01 Setup



## 02 Drive



## 03 Lockout



## 02 THE BIT PEOPLE ARGUE ABOUT

A lot of deadlift coaching online is presented as fact when it's actually still being debated by the people who study this for a living.

### THE "NEUTRAL SPINE OR YOU'LL INJURE YOURSELF" DEBATE

For years the line was simple: keep your back dead straight, any rounding equals danger. There's a real reason for the caution: a flexed spine under load combined with fatigue does increase strain, and recent biomechanics work confirms rounding tends to increase as people fatigue or push to failure.

But a 2025 narrative review in the *Journal of Functional Morphology and Kinesiology* pushes back on treating "neutral spine" as a sacred, unbreakable rule, arguing the spine is more robust and adaptable than the rigid "neutral or nothing" model suggests. A 2020 systematic review and meta-analysis in *JOSPT* looked directly and found spinal flexion during lifting wasn't a clear, consistent differentiator between people with back pain and people without it.

*Somewhere right now, someone is being told their back will "go" if they round it by two degrees, by a person who has never once measured a spine in their life. Caution is sensible. Catastrophe theatre is not.*

What this means for you: technique still matters, and a controlled position you can hold under load is the goal. But a small amount of natural rounding under a tough top set isn't the disaster it's been made out to be, while grinding out failure reps with your form falling apart genuinely does increase risk. Build skill in good positions, don't panic about a millimetre of flexion, and don't use "my back rounded slightly" as a reason to spiral into fear about every future session.

## CONVENTIONAL VERSUS SUMO

Both are legitimate. Conventional demands more hip extension and leans on your hamstrings and upper back; sumo shortens the range and shifts more work to your hips and quads. Neither is cheating, neither is superior across the board. Your leg length, hip mobility and what feels strong for *you* decide this, not what looks more impressive on Instagram.

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# 03 GETTING THROUGH YOUR COMFORT ZONE, NOT BOUNCING OFF IT

Anyone can tell you to lift heavier. Almost nobody can tell you exactly *how much* heavier, today, with your sleep, your stress and your technique all factored in, in a way that pushes you forward instead of putting you on the floor. That's the actual job.

### PUBLIC SAFETY BRIEFING · NO.2

*Warning: training alone indefinitely may result in plateaus so long they qualify for their own postcode. Side effects include lifting the same weight for fourteen months, blaming your genetics, and a YouTube algorithm that now only shows you men shouting about mindset while doing nothing useful with their hips.*

The research is consistent. A 2022 systematic review and meta-analysis in the *International Journal of Strength and Conditioning*, pooling twelve randomised controlled trials, found supervised resistance training produced a moderate, measurable advantage in strength gains over training unsupervised. A separate 2025 trial comparing supervised, app-guided and self-guided programmes found supervised clients stuck to the programme far more consistently, over 88% adherence versus barely half in the self-guided group, and made the biggest gains in muscle and strength.

None of that is surprising once you see what a coach is actually doing: three things you genuinely can't do for yourself in the moment:

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**i CALIBRATING THE PUSH**

You don't have an objective view of your own effort, especially under fatigue. A coach can see when you've got two reps left and when you're actually done, and load you accordingly. That's how you get pushed somewhere new without it being reckless.

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**ii CATCHING THE BREAKDOWN EARLY**

The drift in your technique under heavier loads is invisible to you and obvious to someone watching. Fixing it early is the difference between building a strong pattern and reinforcing a bad one for years.

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**iii GIVING YOU PERMISSION TO TRY**

Having someone qualified stood there saying "go for it, I've got you" changes what people are willing to attempt. That's not motivation as decoration. It's a legitimate part of how confidence and performance work.

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The point of a coach isn't to wrap you in cotton wool. It's closer to the opposite: someone qualified stood at the edge of your comfort zone who can tell the difference between you being uncomfortable and you being in actual danger, and pushes you towards the first one, on purpose.

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## 04 GETTING MORE OUT OF YOUR LIFTS

Once your technique is solid, this is what actually drives progress.

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### PROGRESSIVE OVERLOAD

Small, consistent increases in weight, reps or sets over time. Not chasing a new PB every single week.

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### ADDRESS WEAK POINTS

Stuck off the floor? More quad and back. Stuck at lockout? Glutes and hip extension. Generic programming ignores this; targeted fixes it.

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### FILM YOURSELF

Most people are shocked by the gap between how a lift feels and how it actually looks. Video doesn't lie.

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### TRACK YOUR TRAINING

If you don't know what you lifted last time, you're guessing this time. The single most underrated tool for getting stronger.

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### RECOVER ON PURPOSE

Sleep, food and managing fatigue across the week directly affect how much you can lift and how well you move under it.

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## 05 THE MINDSET PIECE

This is the part skipped in most "how to deadlift" content, and it shouldn't be, because there's solid evidence behind it.

A 2024 randomised controlled trial in the *Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research* split over 900 military cadets into groups before a max deadlift test. One was told a cautionary message about protecting their fragile spine; another, a message about the spine being strong and resilient; a third got standard instruction.

# THE STORY YOU'RE TOLD ABOUT YOUR BODY CHANGES WHAT YOU BELIEVE YOU'RE CAPABLE OF.

3× more cadets left the resiliency group with improved beliefs about their own strength.

There was no difference in how much weight people lifted between groups. Fear-based messaging didn't make people lift less, which is reassuring in itself. But three times as many in the resiliency group walked away with genuinely improved beliefs about their own spine's strength. The story doesn't necessarily change what you lift today; it changes what you believe you're capable of going forward. And belief shapes whether you keep showing up.

The wider sport-psychology research backs this up. Motivational self-talk tends to help with strength and power tasks, while negative self-talk reliably drags performance down. Not a slam dunk in every study, but the direction is consistent: how you talk to yourself before and during a heavy lift is a trainable skill with real upside. In practice:

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- "My back is weak, I need to be careful" isn't protecting you. It's likely working against you.
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- Walking up to the bar believing you're capable isn't arrogance. It's a performance tool with research behind it.
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- Fear of getting hurt and respect for good technique are not the same thing. Train hard, train smart, and still trust your body.
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## 06 THE BOTTOM LINE

The deadlift is one of the most functional, useful, confidence-building movements you can put in a programme. It rewards good technique, it rewards consistency, and it rewards the people who stop treating their spine like it's made of glass.

Train the lift properly. Respect the process. Get someone qualified to stand next to your comfort zone and push you past it on purpose, rather than wandering up to it alone every few months and bouncing off it again. And give yourself permission to believe you're stronger than the fear lets on, because the evidence says that belief is doing real work for you.

### TRAIN IT PROPERLY



If you want a programme that builds your deadlift properly: technique, strength, someone pushing you safely past where you'd stop yourself, and the mindset to go with all of it. That's exactly what we do at Cannon Coaching.

[START THE CONVERSATION →](#)

**JACK CANNON**

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