

How Long Should You Rest Between Sets?

The simple answer: rest long enough to keep your reps strong.

When you are lifting weights, the time you rest between sets can make a big difference. Rest too little, and your next set may be weaker. Rest too long on small exercises, and your workout may take more time than needed.

The best rest time depends on your goal and the type of exercise you are doing.

For Strength: Rest Longer

If your goal is to get stronger, especially on big lifts, longer rest periods work best.

Best rest time: 3–5 minutes

Use this for:

Squats

Bench press

Deadlifts

Overhead press

Heavy rows

Heavy leg press

Why? Heavy lifting requires your muscles and nervous system to recover enough so you can lift with good form, strong effort, and enough weight. Short rest periods can make the next set weaker, which can limit your progress over time.

For Muscle Growth: Use Moderate Rest

If your goal is to build muscle, you do not always need to rest as long as a powerlifter — but you still should not rush your big exercises.

Best rest time for compound lifts: 2–3 minutes

Use this for:

Chest press

Rows

Pull-downs

Leg press

Hack squat

Romanian deadlifts

Lunges

Shoulder press

Why? Research shows that longer rest than 60 seconds may give a small muscle-building advantage because you can usually do more quality reps with better weight.

For Smaller Exercises: Shorter Rest Is Fine

For isolation exercises, shorter rest periods usually work well.

Best rest time: 60–90 seconds

Use this for:

Biceps curls

Triceps pressdowns

Lateral raises

Leg curls

Leg extensions

Calf raises

Cable flyes

Why? These exercises are less demanding on the whole body, so you do not need as much recovery between sets.

Do Not Chase “The Burn” at the Expense of Progress

A hard pump and burning feeling can make a workout feel productive, but they are not the main drivers of strength or muscle growth.

The bigger priorities are:

Using good form

Lifting with control

Getting close to failure safely

Keeping your reps strong across sets

Progressing over time

Short rest can still work, especially if you are training lighter or doing smaller exercises. But for big lifts, rushing usually means fewer reps, less weight, worse form, and less progress.

Quick Rest Guide

Exercise Type	Best Rest Time
Heavy strength lifts	3–5 minutes
Muscle-building compound lifts	2–3 minutes

Isolation exercises	60–90 seconds
Light weight, high-rep training	30–90 seconds
Max effort or near-max lifts	4–5+ minutes

Club 24 Coaching Tip

Do not start your next set just because the clock says so. Start when you feel ready to give the next set real effort.

A good rule:

If your reps drop off badly, your form breaks down, or the weight suddenly feels much heavier, rest longer.

Train hard. Rest smart. Get stronger.