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Key Elements for a Bigger Bench Press

By Michael Francis

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by: **Michael Francis**

Proper positioning on a weight bench to maximize leverage Keep the bar in line with the eyes; if you are too far towards the top of the bench it puts your shoulders in a weak position and wastes energy, and creates unsteadiness when lifting off. Firm foot contact with the floor close to the bench is Paramount! Feet on the bench, straight legs with feet lightly touching the floor is a recipe for failure; it decreases force and puts you out of balance. Feet planted firmly on the floor and push from that foundation to blow through sticking points. When your feet are close to the bench, it's easier to keep the arch in your back. Keep a solid foundation by retracting your shoulder blades and powerfully push yourself through the bench. Keep the chest the highest point with the back slightly arched and shoulder blades retracted, stay tight in the midsection; this will keep your back securely in contact with the bench and create the stability needed for heavy benching. Keeping the chest with a slight arch in the lower back will decrease the distance the bar has to travel.

A word about grip strength

You will notice most Big Benchers have huge forearms; that is because grip strength is a huge factor in controlling the bar. Wrap your thumbs around the bar and squeeze hard as if you squeeze right through the bar.

Grip the bar low in the palm towards the heel of your hand and lock your wrists straight to create leverage! If you correct the frequent mistake of holding the bar near the base of your fingers causing a backward bend in your wrist you will notice an immediate increase in your max bench due to the improved leverage and increase in sending the force of the chest, deltoids, triceps bicep tendon... straight through to the bar

Use the width of your grip to exploit your strengths!

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Sticking Points result from weakness in secondary muscle groups. Where the bar stalls will pinpoint the weak muscle. Mid point = weak pecs and/or triceps Bottom = weak front deltoids Lock out = triceps. Use a wide grip if you have strong pecs and are weak in deltoids and triceps

Choose the grip width and elbow placement based on your body Long arms use a wide grip to shorten the path of the bar (elbows out) Short arms use a closer grip (elbows in more)

Employ your strengths Strong triceps? use a closer grip and elbows close to your body Weak in the Delts? use a close grip keeping elbows wide

Strengthen assistance muscles and eliminate weak points!

A Big Bench = Powerful Deltoids, Lats, Triceps, Forearms and Bicep Tendons.

Work with heavy weights on these groups and your bench will improve, (especially go heavy on triceps!)

Use rows to exercises the lats think of barbell rows as a reverse bench press this trains the back in the same plane as the bench press.

Lifting Form = Physics. The shortest distance between 2 points is a straight line! If you have shoulder pain, (like I do), keep your elbows and arms at a 90° angle and lower the bar a bit below the nipples to increase leverage, recruit more of the assistance muscles mentioned above and prevent external arm rotation which is hard on shoulder joints. Lift right away once the bar is above your chest, it's a little late to get "geared up" so don't just hold the bar over your chest, get on with it! You are stronger on the eccentric, (negative), so slow down and lower under control Pause at the bottom to prevent momentum, this is important on working any muscle for hypertrophy. Quick movements are better suited to certain sport specific training. Press straight up unless it feels causes shoulder pain or feels too abnormal Again for most people developing tricep strength will help form the most so train them heavy! Breath in deep on the eccentric stage hold your breath during the initiation of the concentric phase Push as hard as you can through a full range of motion

Between set resting

The one minute rest won't get it on a heavy bench day 2 to 3 minutes is more like it, many advanced lifters adhere to a 5 minute rest between heavy sets.

Initially strength is determined by your nervous system and connective tissue integrity 80% of initial strength increase is determined by nervous system motor unit recruitment. A motor unit is a nerve and all the muscle fibers innervated. Heavy tension is required for the recruitment of high threshold motor units– these are fast twitch which tend to grow, (increase in mitochondria and supporting cytoplasm). Slow twitch become more metabolically efficient. If the impulse from the nerve is too weak you're muscles are weak the more motor units recruited have more muscle innervations and strength increases. Once that nerve fires once in the movement it will fire every time; this is called the all or

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none principle.

When a motor unit is sufficiently activated once the entire pool of fibers contract. The central nervous system can increase the strength of muscle contraction by: Increasing the number of active motor units (i.e., spatial recruitment) Increasing the firing rate at which individual motor units fire to optimize the summated tension generated (i.e., temporal recruitment) Both occur concurrently

Heavy Benching is very taxing on the nervous system overtraining is a common mistake as trainees don't take into account nervous system recovery!

Mindset

Benching near your max has as much to do with your mind as it does with strength and technique weight mentally, you need to believe, (even picture yourself), or it will not happen Sometimes little rituals before the lift are a good idea to clear your thoughts and put you in the mindset, you've seen this with field goal kickers and other sports that are primarily mental; these are called "anchors". Develop a simple action, (anchor) such as: clapping, stomping, or something as simple as deeply breathing a given number of times. It should be an uncomplicated movement that you don't normally do. It is common for lifters to hit sticking points at times when they add another 45 lb plate (i.e. 225, 315, 405...); this is obviously a mental barrier not physical. When training people I would have them go from

say 215 to 230 to avoid this (but that is just a band aid for mental barriers!). Focus and maintain your concentration and be only selectively aware of your surroundings. You must picture in your mind doing and believing you will make the lift, a grain of doubt will = an avalanche of failure, a valuable lesson successful lifters learn early.

Apply these techniques and get the proper equipment and I guarantee serious results and a bigger bench!

Look for future articles from FitnessScape with information and tools to light the way to achieving your fitness goals.

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Exercise the right way – the decline dumbbell bench press

By Rick Mitchell

Exercise the right way – the decline dumbbell bench press by Rick Mitchell

Key Elements for a Bigger Bench Press

Other articles in this series looked at a number of exercises, mainly from the perspective of developing a comprehensive muscle building program. Sometimes we take things for granted, especially when it comes to performing the basic exercises that constitute the core of most bodybuilders' training regimes.

It is useful, therefore, to describe in detail the processes involved in actually doing these exercises. This will help beginners to start out using the correct techniques before moving on to potentially more dangerous heavy weights. If it also helps more experienced lifters to redress some of the little faults that have almost imperceptibly crept in over the years, all the better.

In this article we'll take a close look at the decline dumbbell bench press.

MUSCLES TARGETED: pectoralis major, anterior deltoids

STARTING POSITION

Sitting at the high end of a decline bench, make sure that ankles and feet are secured under the pads.

Grasp two dumbbells using an overhand grip.

Set the dumbbells in an upright position on your knees.

Lie on the decline bench whilst simultaneously bringing the dumbbells to the side of your chest on either side.

Raise the dumbbells to arm's length with the palms facing forward. Do not lock out the elbows.

This starting position sees the dumbbells touching each other, directly above the chest.

EXERCISE TECHNIQUE

Slowly bend the arms to lower the dumbbells to a position on either side of the chest. You should achieve a maximum stretch at this point.

Raise the dumbbells slowly to the starting position.

Repeat this movement until you complete the intended number of reps.

OTHER EXERCISES WORTH CONSIDERING

The Decline Barbell Bench Press places a similar emphasis on the lower part of the pectoralis major and the anterior deltoids. Other useful chest exercises have a slightly different emphasis and these include Push-Ups (mid chest), Flat Dumbbell Bench Press (mid chest), Flat Barbell Bench Press (mid chest), Flat Dumbbell Flys (mid chest), Incline Dumbbell Bench Press (upper chest), Incline Barbell Bench Press (upper chest), Incline Dumbbell Flys (upper chest) and Cable Crossovers (lower and mid chest).

Richard Mitchell is the creator of the bodybuildingadvisor.com website that provides guidance and

information to athletes at all levels of bodybuilding experience. Go to

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more about the issues covered in this article.

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