

The bench press is the most widely used and abused exercise in the world of weightlifting today. Whether it is in a health club or at a contest, I see many lifters losing precious pounds because of bad technique. Over the years, I have come to love the bench press and if you share that love or just need to add to that total, read on.

I like to teach my clients, athletes and powerlifters to first go over a checklist before even touching the bar.

1. Feet - positioned on the floor with your backside as close as possible to the bench without hurting your back. It should make your back feel tight.

2. Backside - glute muscles isometrically contracted.

3. Shoulders - should be even on the bench while digging them in by pushing your shoulder blades into the bench.

4. Head - placed in a stable position on the bench with your chin tucked close to your chest, looking at the bar with your eyes.

**Key Points** - You must take advantage of the natural arch in your back. Anyone who tells you to put your feet on the bench, otherwise it will hurt your back, is illogical and totally uninformed. Get a solid base.

**GRIP** - Here is where you will find a lot of variation in opinion. You must take into account your arm length before setting your grip. From a kinesiology standpoint, the wide grip bench will work your pecs more than the close grip which will work the triceps more. With experimentation in the gym, you must determine where your strong point is and take a grip accordingly. Remember, the pectoral is the largest major muscle that moves the bench press. I used to be a narrow grip bencher, but I hit a plateau at 440. Widening my grip helped me develop my chest and add nearly 100 pounds. Super wide grip benches can be detrimental to performance for a few reasons:

(1) Moving your grip too far away from your power center makes the movement less stable and puts more stress on your shoulder joint.

Joe McAuliffe's Intermediate Peaking Cycle: **Week 1:** 5 sets of 10 reps with 55% of Projected 1 Rep Maximum Weight. **Week 2:** 5 x 10 x 60% 1 RM. **Week 3:** 4 x 10 x 65% 1 RM. **Week 4:** 3 x 10 x 70% 1 RM. **Week 5:** 5 x 5 x 75% 1 RM. **Week 6:** 5 x 5 x 78% 1 RM. **Week 7:** 4 x 5 x 80% 1 RM. **Week 8:** 3 x 5 x 85% 1 RM. **Week 9:** 3 x 3 x 90% 1 RM with shirt. **Week 10:** 2 x 3 x 95% 1 RM with shirt. **Week 11:** 1 x 2 x 98% 1 RM with shirt. **Week 12:** Contest.

# WORKOUT of the Month

## Joe McAuliffe's Bench Press



Joe McAuliffe set an ADFPA American Record with a 515 BP at 198 (3/16/96)

(2) When you go out too far, you lose the maximum stretch on your pecs which have the most power. Conversely, a grip that is too close will place too much stress on your wrists and elbows.

My advice to you is to take a moderate grip that puts your upper and lower arm close to a right angle when the bar is on your chest. This grip allows maximum stretch on your pecs without stressing your joints out. I am still learning how to teach those with long arms how to power bench. First, you must find your best grip, then wrap your thumb around the bar. I saw someone drop 385, from the top, onto his chest because of the 'Suicide Grip'. You won't see too many World Record holders holding the bar this way. Wrap your wrists even if it feels uncomfortable at first. (Titan Red

Devils are awesome.)

**Breathing** - Take a huge breath in and hold it all the way. Maximal air inspiration raises your sternum and you shorten your stroke and it helps to support your spinal discs.

Take your air in as soon as you take the bar from the rack. Your systolic blood pressure will rise so be sure to get a check-up from your doctor before you power bench to see if this maneuver is safe for you. An average bench press takes about four seconds, so hold it and PUSH HARD - Don't Give up! Don't move your feet! Don't move your backside! Don't move your head! STAY TIGHT!

**Assistance Movements** - Since the bench is a multi-joint movement, try to be specific in your use of them. Until the incline press is added to the Power Meet, I suggest you stay away from too much incline work. I haven't done inclines in two years and my BP has gone up 80 lbs. Also, gaining 20 lbs. body-weight also helped a little bit. However, at this point, I must give credit where credit is due. I never thought decline benches were any good until I called Dr. Larry Miller and he opened my eyes. If your arch is good, the decline is much more specific to the bench press. You can

handle overloading poundages, which has definitely helped me improve. Once you close your mind and stop learning, you will stop getting stronger. Thanks, Larry! You are the best! (475 at 165 body weight and over 40 years of age is mind blowing.) I hope someday I can be as good as you are.

The assistance work I suggest are decline, close grip BP, weighted dips, military press, pull-ups and lateral raise downs, pull-downs, rows, hammer curls, hyperextensions (to help your arch). I do two or three sets between 5 and 10 reps. I cut assistance out two weeks before the meet. I limit my assistance to 15 sets per heavy workout.

**Frequency** - I like to bench heavy once per week and do heavy assistance on that day. The light day should be three days later. This should be a day to work on form explosion and flexibility. Do all pause reps on the light day. This should be a pump day to feel blood in the muscles. The workout should be no more than 15 sets. Do 8 to 10 reps per movement and stretch in between sets. This will help aid in recovery.

**Speed** - Bring the bar to your chest in a slow controlled fashion. Referees will always take longer to signal when you almost drop the bar to your chest. Control it and you will get a quicker press call. When the bar flies to your chest, you have to overcompensate to stop the acceleration forces. You can also slip out of the groove more easily. I like to think of my chest like a rubber band building explosive energy while lowering the bar to my chest. Then when I hear "press", I ballistically explode the bar off my chest.

**Equipment** - I like the denim shirt. Make sure you get a few because a perfect fit is hard to find. I like to start using a loose shirt for my top two sets when going heavy. I progress from a Size 33 in Week 9 to a size 30 by Week 12. Do all contest pause work in the shirt. This is the cycle that I have used in the past two years to break all my own records. Remember, whether you think you can or think you cannot, you are right!

**Joseph McAuliffe, currently holding a World Champion title, is now offering his years of experience, winning techniques and superior strength and conditioning coaching skills to all Powerlifters. Call (908) 935-6612 for a brochure about the "Athletes' Edge" - Mind and Body over Iron.**