



**ERIC SPOTO'S**  
**TOP TEN**  
**EXERCISES FOR**  
**BENCH**  
**PRESSES**  
**DOMINATION**



**1 Bench Press:** Of course, the best exercise to increase the bench press is going to be competition grip barbell flat bench press. So, the exact grip that you will be using in competition is going to be the number one movement to increase your bench press. There are also very many different variations of the bench press including the board press, chains and the use of the Sling Shot. All of these allow you to overload the bench press and they will ultimately help you adapt to heavier weight.

**2 Close grip bench:** This is the same concept as flat bench – the only difference is hand position. You are going to take a shoulder width grip. The close grip is going to increase the range of motion and it will also hit your triceps and lats a little

more. Your close grip should never be more than 10% of your competition grip. If your close grip bench is more than 10% below your competition grip, that is an easy sign for you to focus on close grip work in order to bring that weak spot up.

**3 Heavy Back Row:** This is going to be a shock to most beginner and intermediate lifters, but every advanced powerlifter understands how important the upper back is to benching big. I could write a whole article on why and how the back is used during the bench press but I will try to sum it up as short as possible. Your back is your built in bench press shirt. You will be contracting your lats as the bar descends towards your torso. It is like a rubber band building up tension as the bar goes down – just like a bench shirt

when you get a press command, it will help drive the weight off of your body. As for which back row works best, you want to choose a row where your body is positioned exactly as it is when you are benching. So, your setup for rows will mimic your setup for bench – you will touch the bar at the exact spot that you would touch the bar on the bench press. It will look exactly like the eccentric portion of your bench press. I prefer a chest supported row to get in optimal position but any way that you can mimic the bench press will work.

**4 Spoto Press:** The basic idea of the Spoto Press is having 100% of the weight out of the bottom on each press. By coming as close to touching your chest, but not actually touching your chest, you are going to be working a lot harder. The first benefit of



the Spoto Press is that you are supporting the full weight the entire time - it will never rest on your chest and take off some of the weight. The second benefit is that you will not get any bounce off of your chest, which can be good for your ego, but you are cheating yourself and neglecting the most important part of the press, which is the drive off your chest. There are two variations of the Spoto Press:

**Paused Spoto Presses:** In this version, you just stop the bar as close as possible to your chest without touching. Then wait 1-2 seconds and press.

**Touch and Go Spoto Press:** This is the same - there is just no pause out the bottom.

**5 JM Press/Skull Crushers:** Skull crushers are an amazing tricep builder and maybe the best size builder you can do. The problem with skull crushers is they wreak havoc

on most peoples' elbows. For the small percentage of people who can do them, they are great. For the rest of the majority of people like me who can't do skull crushers anymore, the JM press is going to be the best alternative. A JM press is like a close grip bench press and a skull crusher had a baby. It is the best of both worlds since it has the tricep building of skull crushers with less tension on your elbows. Once you get used to it, you will be able to handle some pretty heavy weight with JM's.

**6 Standing/seated shoulder presses:** I love both of these movements and I think that both should be included in every lifter's program. If you are a beginner or intermediate lifter, then the standing shoulder press should be a staple in your program. It builds amazing overall strength in your whole body. Advanced lifters will still want to do standing shoulder presses but should also incorporate seated ones, as well. The advantage to seated is that

you can use extra weight. It allows you to use the maximum amount of weight that your shoulders can handle.

**7 Rotator cuff, internal and external rotations:** For such small muscles, the rotator cuff is like the glue that holds your shoulder together. I like to use the cable machine to do both variations of rotations. You are going to want to do 10+ reps - I try to stay between 15-25 reps for rotator work.

**8 Incline dumbbell presses:** This is my way of killing two birds with one stone. You get the benefit of hitting a press from a slightly different angle and you are using dumbbells, therefore, adding stabilizers into the movement. My biggest problem with beginner lifters doing incline is that it can mess with their form. The incline press is a completely different position and touch point than flat bench. I have had trouble with clients who are



learning proper flat bench form and then going to incline because it is reinforcing the wrong position. That is why I would recommend that beginner lifters who don't have the bench press form dialed in should stay away from barbell incline bench.

**9 Dips:** This is as old school as it gets. Dips are a great overall upper body strength builder. Any weak spot will show up when you do heavy weighted dips. Try to keep dips in the 10+ rep range. They are also a great chest and tricep builder.

**10 Tricep Extension:** I know that this sounds like I should have just said tricep kick backs. Why would a powerlifter ever do tricep extensions? The answer is simple - tricep extensions make your triceps grow and they respond to the constant tension on the tricep. It goes back to my theory that a bigger muscle has the capability to be a stronger muscle. So, if we can grow our tricep with extensions, then we can strengthen the now bigger tricep with heavy pressing.

**Bonus: Speed reps** - these are just a variation of the bench press but I figured it needs some clarification. The speed reps are often overlooked and have kind of fell out of style recently. It was a Westside staple movement for many years. I have a little twist on the speed bench - I watched Westside training tapes and noticed that they would do the three speed reps very

fast during the eccentric and concentric phases. I perform the eccentric phase with the exact same speed as I would do my max competition press and then use the same force out of the bottom that I would use on a 1RM press. I always use bands with speed reps as they help protect your elbows and they consistently reinforce you to accelerate through the press. **PM**

