

HOME BENCH PRESS

as told to Powerlifting USA by Doug Daniels

When the average person looks to set up a home gym, they need look no further than to one of those TV infomercials for the latest ab contraction or rubber band type of equipment. They can toss in a kettle bell or two along with a medicine ball and they are ready to go. But the powerlifter is not the average person. The powerlifter needs honest to goodness iron for their home gym; just what kind of iron is the question. Many lifters may not have room, finances or living conditions at home that would permit them to equip a full gym with squat and power racks and numerous other types of lifting equipment. But many lifters have the space and resources to equip their home or garage for bench press training.

Listed below are the minimum requirements for a productive home bench gym:

- 300–500 pounds of plates from 2.5 to 45 lb.
- Competition bench
- Power bar and collars
- Non-slippery lifting surface

I suggest a minimum of 300 pounds of weights to start with, even if you are not capable of benching 300. The rule of thumb would be to have 100 pounds more of plates

than you can currently bench press. It is also best to have a good variety of plates at your disposal. Get at least 2–4 pairs of 45s, one pair of 35s and 25s, 3 pairs of 10s and 5s and two pairs of 2.5s. If you purchase Olympic or power style dumbbells and collars, you can use these plates for these dumbbells also. Stronger lifters may want to invest in at least one pair of 100-pound plates. This should do it unless you have won the Nationals. If you decide to purchase plates measured in kilos, just convert my pounds to their closest metric equivalent; that is, a 45-pound plate would be equivalent to a 20-kilo (kg) plate.

A high quality, sturdy regulation flat bench is first. I am not talking about a cheap bench you can get at the local super warehouse store. I am referring a bench that could be used in an actual competition. Forget benches you find at a local department store. They can't handle the weight and wear and tear they will be subjected to. Most cheap benches have lower weight limits. Bear in mind your body weight counts as load to the bench in addition to the bar and weights. A 150-pound lifter and a 250-pound loaded barbell run the total on the bench weight

to 400 in a flash. Some benches have adjustable rack height to fit lifters of different sizes, which can really come in handy. Benches also vary in height, width and cushioning, so try them out first if possible. If you have used a bench to your liking at a contest or gym, ask someone in charge where they got it from.

A regulation power bar is the cornerstone of any power gym. For that reason, buy the best one you can afford. Don't buy an Olympic bar, as it has more spring and has a different feel than a regulation power bar. Very important safety-wise is a set of high quality collars that lock tightly and loosen and tighten easily. Also available are quick on and off collars that can be very useful for lighter lifts. For heavy lifts, always use properly fitted regular collars.

No one wants a heavily loaded bar crashing down on their basement or garage floor. To help here, you may want to construct a safe lifting platform out of wood sheets that you can pick up at a home improvement store like Lowe's. A little carpentry expertise may be required here. Cover it with non-slick, rubber gym floor padding. I've seen indoor/outdoor carpet used, just be sure it's not slippery. Sometimes a wooden underlayment may not be needed or desirable. In this case you can go with just the rubber padding or carpeting. You may have to experiment until you find the right surface. Be sure to check how level the floor is where you will place the bench. If off noticeably, some adjustments may need to be made.

As I mentioned earlier, dumbbells can be useful for curls, overhead presses, rows, etc. You may be able to pick up regular dumbbells and non-power bar plates that may already be cluttering up someone's basement at a garage sale. Weight racks to hold plates are highly desirable for safety and help keep everything orderly in your gym. For safety reasons, I strongly suggest placing any plate not loaded on the bar back on the weight rack to eliminate tripping hazards. It only takes a moment to put them back while it could take a lot longer to recuperate from an injury from tripping on a loose plate.

Finally, since you are the gym staff, it's solely your responsibility to insure that your home gym equipment is safe and in good working condition at all times. Keep your gym clean and uncluttered. Be sure to clear up any tripping hazards immediately. Think *safety first* with all your equipment and lifting practices!

If you can pool together with a few friends, you can equip a home gym for about the same price or less as one year at a health club. You can find ads for quality gym equipment in this magazine or visit a local supplier. As you get stronger you can purchase more plates or extra equipment. Powerlifting does not require a large variety of equipment. Basic power movements revolving around a power bar are your best bets. Keep it simple. <<

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