

I'm one of the first to agree that a well put together routine is the best way to move your bench up. However, there are other factors that are critical to getting the biggest bench possible. Many times little, if any, attention is given to factors like grip spacing, elbow angle, arching, and bar path. Neglecting any of them could stop your bench from being what it could be.

Let's start with grip spacing. We are limited by the rules to 81 centimeters measured between the forefingers. I notice many novice benchers using a more narrow grip than the rules allow. For most, that means a lower bench. Using a wider grip shortens the distance the bar must travel. Using a wide grip will involve more of the pectoral muscles in the move, rather than an emphasis on the triceps when incorporating a more narrow grip. By virtue of size, the pecs are potentially much stronger than the triceps. I say potentially because if a lifter has used a narrow grip for a considerable amount of time, his pectorals will not have been stimulated enough to perform at the level they could have if a wider grip had been used during training. That is why if you switch to a wider grip, you may temporarily suffer a decrease in poundage because of the heavier demand on the pecs. Soon, if trained sufficiently, the pecs will increase in strength and your bench will surpass previous levels. True, some top benchers use a more narrow grip, but sometimes they are suffering from an injury which makes a wide grip painful or impossible. Also, varying your grip used during training will develop the muscles used in a different manner, which could mean more strength gains.

Next is elbow angle. What I mean by this is the angle your arms are at in relation to the body during the press. This angle determines which muscle groups are being stressed at times during the bench. For example, starting the bench with your elbows at right angles to the body will emphasize the shoulders and triceps. A lifter could, then, take advantage of strengths by controlling his elbow position during the lift. However, it is not always desirable to keep the elbows locked at that angle during the entire lift. By flaring the elbows out to near right angles during the press you can add muscle groups to help. If you start with elbows near or at right angles you can not flare much, if at all, during the lift. For that reason, you should find an angle somewhere

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Bench Press Tidbits *as told by Doug Daniels*

in between both extremes and practice the timing of your elbow flare.

Arching is legal as long as the buttocks are in contact with the bench. Arching and lifting your chest higher, lowers the distance the bar must travel. With a wide grip, you can lower this distance considerably. Extreme arching can expose the spine to stress on, so don't try it unless you are quite limber. Some bigger lifters can't get a good arch, but they should try to get a little chest elevation. Also, hit the chest with the bar at its highest point. This is probably around nipple level. Many newer lifters hit the chest higher, towards the shoulders. Prac-

tice hitting the chest at the right point and it will be automatic at a meet. To save your back, during off season, train the bench with your back flat or your feet off the floor. This will also help to isolate the chest muscles.

A contradiction to my previous mention of decreasing the distance the bar must travel is bar path. Many novice lifters press the bar straight up from the chest to lockout. After all, the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. However, in bench pressing the ideal bar path to lockout does not just go straight up, but finishes above the lifter's face. Hence, the bar must go up at an angle. There are scientific explanations for this, concerning shoulder torque, etc. The best source to consult is *PL USA* Research Editor, Dr. Tom McLaughlin's *Bench Press More Now*. Watch a top benchers lift from the side. It will not lock out directly over where he touched the chest. Since the bar will be locked out over the face, you guys who bench with your head between the racks will have to move down the bench or else you'll hit the racks with the bar on the way up. Most lifters who put their heads between the racks, do so because it is easier for them to lift the bar off when they start a set. Instead, they should use a hand-off from a partner. This will save energy, especially when the weights used increase. Practice these techniques with light weights before trying this in competition.

As you can see, a bench routine is not all there is to getting a big bench press. Proper technique and practice also have an effect on the end result. Using every leverage advantage you can find will provide you with those extra pounds that can make a difference in your total and placing in competition. Hit those weights hard, but don't overlook other factors involved in a lift.