

The bench press is by far the most popular of the 3 powerlifts, but it's also the cause of the most frustration. Even though it contributes the least to the total, success on the bench is what many lifters seek most. For a few, the bench press is easy to excel in. This can be because of body structure (short arms, etc), the ability to train it hard, or because the lifter has found the perfect routine to follow. For most others, frustration in the bench press causes them to try numerous training methods, with little or no success. Sometimes the answer is to blitz the benching muscles with numerous assistance exercises like dips, flyes, inclines, declines, laterals, tricep extensions, etc. The list of assistance work is almost endless, plus you can't forget about adding extra sets and workout days on the bench itself.

For some people, the approach just described works well. For others, the answer remains no. Those who still can't gain may turn to even more work or continue to seek out that magic routine as promoted by the latest big bench hero. Trouble is, what works for these bench greats may be totally unsuitable for the average trainee, however, this realization is not too often reached.

A solution to this problem that is seldom tried is to train less. Yes, train less! I know this sounds like sheer insanity. How could less training add up to a bigger bench? No way, Jose!

Each individual possesses their

THE BENCH

Bench That Frustration as told to PL USA by Doug Daniels

own unique ability to recover or respond to physical exercise. All that extra work may have overstressed your body's abilities; hence the lack of progress. Doing less work may enable your body to respond favorably. If you examine the relative size of the bench press musculature and the quantity of work you may have been subjecting it to and compare it to the musculature involved in the squat and deadlift and their rather limited work load, volumewise, it may make more sense. We tend to subject our smaller benching muscles to far greater stimulus relative to size. That goes against logic. An overabundance of work is not the answer.

What then, is my suggestion? First, by less training I don't mean easy training. Intensity is critical. I can't lay out the perfect bench routine here, but I can lay out some guidelines to follow in rethinking your bench training.

1) Train your bench no more than twice a week. Once heavy

or intense, once moderate - 70-80% intensity. You can even get by once a week. Try twice first. If you still are stuck, cut out the moderate session. Benching once a week makes you go all out on that one day. Don't let the guilt of benching only once a week bother you.

2) Limit your assistance work. The best assistance move is close grip (shoulder width) benches. They work the triceps really hard. Include a back movement sometime during the week for your lats, etc. like chins, rows or pulldowns, as well as full range curls for balance and stability. Use good form on all assistance work. Use a weight that permits proper execution. Keep cheating to a minimum. No one cares how much you can curl or row. If you bench twice a week, delt work such as presses may be unnecessary as benches stress the front delts heavily. If you bench once a week, include military or presses behind the neck in another session 2-4 days later.

3) Concentrate on bench technique and explode on all reps. Too many times when a lifter tries to explode on a rep, they crash the bar on the chest and bounce it upwards. Practice a controlled descent, stay tight on the bottom and then uncoil like a compressed spring. Have someone knowledgeable evaluate your bench for flaws that may be holding you back.

4) When you reach an impasse in a lift, back off the weights by 15-20% and start over again. Continuing to use weights that frustrate you will have a negative effect. Backing off will enable you to use better form, get the reps, refresh your mind and instill confidence. As the weeks go on, increase the weight and your momentum may push you through what was once a plateau. Take 2 steps back to take 3-4 steps forward.

5) Vary your reps over a period of time. Try 3-4 weeks of 12's cutting the reps by 3 every 3-4 weeks. Take 1 week off after you max out, start over.

The key thing to remember is to work hard on the work you do. Less can mean more when it comes to benching. If you've tried just about everything, except cutting back as I've talked about here, what have you got to lose? Some of my guidelines will work in your other lifts as well, so think over what I had to say and **bench that frustration.**

Doug Daniels



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