

STARTIN' OUT

REVERSE GRIP BENCH PRESSES as told to *PLUSA* by Doug Daniels

Decades ago, the reverse grip bench press was a novelty lift. Since then, a few top lifters like Rick Weil have used it as one of their mainstay assistance exercises for the bench. The late, great Anthony Clark challenged the 800 pound bench press mark while using a reverse grip bench press style in competition.

This form of the bench drastically alters a lifter's leverage as well as the involvement of the muscles. The weight lifted by the pecs decreases while the triceps and delts kick in to handle more of the load. The muscles used to stabilize the weight are called upon in a different manner. To successfully lift a weight, you must first control and stabilize it. The increased stabilizing strength you develop to do the reverse grip bench should spill over to your competition bench.

The feel of reverse grips is very different from the regular bench, so patience should be practiced before moving on to heavy weights. Spotters are an absolute requirement. If the weight falls, it will tend to drop on your head - not a good thing. Ask your spotters to lift the weight into position for you. I suggest getting close to the bench racks. For the regular bench this is not desirable, but for safety concerns, during hand off and actual lifting, it's best to get closer. The bar path for a reverse grip bench tends to be straight up as opposed to the bar path of a regular bench which goes upwards from the chest towards the head and bench rack in an arc.

You really need to get used to the unique feel of this exercise. If you start too heavy too soon, you risk injury. You can also do reverses inside a power rack with safety pins set to catch the bar in case of a mishap. I would suggest a thumbled grip over thumbless. A thumbless grip poses a greater risk of the bar falling out of your hands and onto your face.

There are many ways to include reverse grips into your routine. I regard it as a substitute for close grip benches. Since both of these exercises decrease pectoral involvement in favor of the delts and triceps, there is no need to perform both of them in the same workout. Your triceps can get a good workout with reverse grip presses, especially if you concentrate on keeping your elbows in close to the body. You could perform 3-5 sets of reverse grips after your regular benches or do reverses only on your other bench day, to the exclusion of regular benches.

You can experiment with various grip widths. I suggest not going narrower than shoulder grip or wider than your regular bench grip. The number of reps is up to you, but have them coincide with where you are in your regular training cycle. If you are doing 8 rep work sets, use 8s as your rep scheme for reverse grips, and so on.

Some weight machines, like those from Eagle, offer a machine that allows a lifter to do seated reverse benches safely without a spotter. Reverse grips can also be done on a Smith Machine, but since the bar is on a sliding rack, stabilizing power would not be built, which also applies to the Eagle machine. I would not recommend using dumbbells for this exercise as controlling them would be too precarious.

Reverse grip benches provide lifters with an excellent assistance exercise with high positive transfer of strength gains to the competition bench because they are benches; just performed with a reverse grip. Never sacrifice proper exercise form for weight. Don't go overboard and overtrain by doing too many sets of reverses and other assistance work. If your bench press is in a rut, try reverses as your main assistance exercise.



Anthony Clark benched more with a reverse grip than he did with his narrow conventional grip.