

My kingdom for a bigger bench! That may sound a bit extreme, but the truth is that most lifters would give almost anything for a bigger bench press. They scour every issue of *PL USA* for the newest routine of the hottest benchers, hoping they too, will find bench pressing nirvana. Even the best routine needs some extraneous assistance from sources outside of sets and reps. In this article, I'd like to provide a few tips that you may want to try which can aid your conquest of Newton's law of bench press gravity.

Technique is a great place to start. A very common problem I have noticed is the Harley Davidson style of benching. When some lifters lower the bar, they tend to bend or twist their wrist back like shifting gears on a motorcycle. When the lifter starts the push up to lockout, he must shift or twist his wrist back to the straight position. This is a waste of energy and the all-important drive off the chest is compromised during this effort as a lot of leverage is lost. This can mean the difference between success and failure.

Another technique flaw is how some lifters hold the bar too high in their hands. The bar tends to ride up higher in the hand near the base of the fingers with the wrist bent back. Try pressing against an object

The BENCH

Tips on Improving Your Bench

as told to *Powerlifting USA* by Doug Daniels



Doug Daniels' Buddy Chris Confessore reports that he feels confident of breaking the 700 pound barrier in the bench press in 1995

with your hand bent back with the power directed from under the base of the fingers. Now try pressing with the power directed, from lower on the palm. You should notice that the latter method provides more power with less wrist strain, a win-win situation. Try practicing keeping the wrist straight from start to finish during your press. Have a partner watch your pressing method to see if you are shifting gears. Keep the bar a little lower in the palm, but not so low it will fall out. Resolution of these two flaws will result in a much more efficient flow of power due to the bar being more in-line with the movement of the arms, chest and shoulders. I don't recommend a thumbless or bodybuilder's grip. This grip offers a much lower degree of safety and the bar can easily slip out and fall on you. Just recently a member of the gym I lift at cracked his sternum when the bar fell out of his hands and on to his chest. He was using a thumbless grip.

Most bench experts believe the best place for the bar to hit the chest is at the nipple area. However, I see a lot of lifters lowering the bar higher on their chest, near their shoulders. This method de-emphasizes the contribution of the stronger lower pecs in favor of the smaller, weaker upper pecs. This will result

in a lower bench press. The trouble is, few lifters who are guilty of this actually know they are doing it. One good way to find out if this fits your description is to have a partner watch your press. Even this may not be enough. I found a good way is to rub chalk on the center of the bar. When you bring the weight down, it will leave irrefutable evidence of where the bar hits the chest. If a lifter has been using this style for some time, his upper pecs may be proportionally stronger than the lower pecs. The lifter may actually bench less initially after changing to the new style. It may take a training cycle or two to get the lower pecs strengthened to the desired level. This will be worth it though. Make use of the stronger muscle groups and more advantageous leverage positions.

Taking videos of your benching can help. With videos you can actually review your form during the press. Watch the video with an objective eye for glitches like the ones I just described. You and your training partners can review each other's lifts as well. Of course, video can be used for all your lifts. Take videos on a regular basis and watch for any improvement or worsening of your technique.

Many lifters wear a belt when benching. I firmly believe there is no need to wear a belt while benching. There is little, if any downward pressure on the torso. For lifters who bench with a back arch, they are lessening the degree of arch they can attain because of wearing a belt. Lifting belts are like security blankets for many lifters. Reconsider using a belt for benching, but if you must wear one, wear a thin belt, loosely buckled.

One final tip, when changing lifting styles or incorporating any new tips like in this article, never jump right into these changes without spending a few workouts getting used to the new way of doing things. Lower the weights back a bit and take your time. Diving too fast into new methods can result in an unnecessary injury and setback. Muscles and tendons may not be ready for their new challenges.

I hope I have supplied you with a few tips that you can incorporate into your bench press training. Getting a bigger bench is more than just the latest routine, it involves rethinking of your current practices to see if they can be improved upon. This should be an ongoing practice to insure long term success.

Doug Daniels is partners with Jim Vrabel in Strength Ink, Inc., a company that offers personalized powerlifting training programs. See their ad in this issue.