

Just about every piece of complicated electronic gear you buy nowadays comes with a troubleshooting guide or checklist to follow in case it doesn't work the way it's supposed to. With electronics, the connections could be loose, or perhaps you forgot to put in the batteries, or maybe you forgot to plug the device in. Unfortunately, the human body doesn't come with such a guide. Fortunately, a troubleshooting checklist can be developed for the bench press. Unfortunately, it may not be as easy as just plugging into a wall socket. However, some common sense items to check may come in handy to get your bench press going. Ask yourself the questions below. If the answer to any of them is yes, consider the ACTION solution.

**SYMPTOM #1:** Are you working out too often? Lifters often equate more with better. This axiom may be true in some endeavors, but not for weight training. Too many frequent workouts or workouts that are too ambitious undermine the body's recuperative powers. This may result in short term muscle increase, but, eventually, the body will rebel and protect itself by getting weaker, stopping you from lifting as frequently or as hard.

**ACTION:** Train less often. I know this takes courage and, for many of you, it may be the most difficult adjustment you will ever make in your training. Many of the top benchers train their bench no more than twice a week. Some even bench once a week. The majority of those who do bench bi-

# STARTIN' OUT

A special section dedicated to the beginning lifter

## TROUBLESHOOTING THE BENCH PRESS

as told to Powerlifting USA by Doug Daniels

weekly, bench only once a week with a heavy load. Dare to train less often.

**SYMPTOM #2:** Do you perform assistance exercises sloppily? For years, I have been underscoring the fact that the judges do not care how much you can curl, dip or dumbbell fly. If you're using assistance work to help your competitive lifts, and it's not improving them, evaluate your exercise form. Ego pushes us to use as much weight as possible, regardless of form. It makes little sense to pile on the weight during curls only to restrict the range of motion or add body swing to move the weight. The targeted muscle groups do not receive the stimulus they need to grow and develop into bigger competitive lifts.

**ACTION:** Objectively evaluate your form on assistance work. Lower the weight and watch your targeted lifts take off. Dare to train lighter and with good form.

**SYMPTOM #3:** Do you use the same routine workout after workout? It's amazing the number lifters who literally do the same workout every time they go to the gym. Example: work up to 300 for max reps every time. No variety, no progress. Jim Vrabel and I see many badly conceived workouts weekly through the development of our personalized training courses.

**ACTION:** Vary your workouts over your training cycle. Vary the reps and intensity. For example; on a 12 week cycle, devote the first 3 weeks to work sets of 8 reps, the next 3 weeks to 5s, the next to 3s,

and the last 3 to singles. On your second or light day go to 80% for sets of 5-8. Even such a rudimentary workout variation will most likely result in a new burst of gains. This magazine provides many good examples of bench workouts that can result in better gains. Dare to train smart.

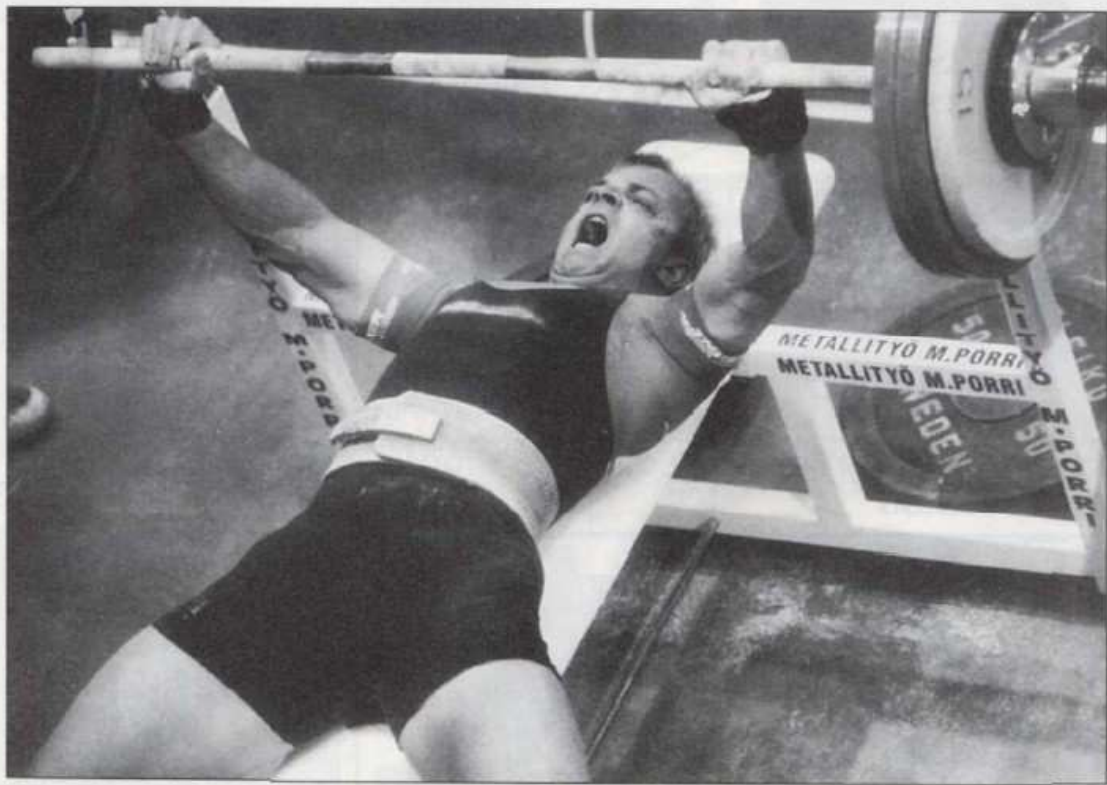
**SYMPTOM #4:** Do you take layoffs on a scheduled basis? This ties into symptom number 1; the notion that more is better. Lifters, in general, rarely take any time off or reduce the intensity of their workouts throughout their training year.

**ACTION:** I suggest taking one week off from weights every 12-18 weeks, or after a major contest training cycle. During that week of rest, your body renews itself, building new motivation. Do not touch weights. Instead, do a little cross-training - like biking, etc. Don't worry about losing any ground. One week off will have negligible effects on your strength level. This is a case when it is better to take a step back in order to take 2 steps forward later on. When you resume training, reduce your weights by 5-10% from the level where you ended your previous training program. This will insure you can get the reps with good form and actually create the momentum needed to catapult past barriers. Dare to take time off.

**SYMPTOM #5:** Do you monitor your bench form? Many lifters start with good intentions but digress a bit over time. This could be due to injuries, weight changes, or plain apathy.

**ACTION:** Take the time to have your bench form monitored. Consider having an experienced lifter watch you press or make videotapes from which you can review your form. Check for even extension to lockout. Check to see how your feet are planted on the floor. The bench is not just an upper body movement. The entire body plays a role in an optimally executed bench press. Oh yeah, keep your butt on the bench. If you have flaws, lower the weights you use by 10-15% and concentrate on form. The power may already be there, but is simply not being positively transferred to the actual lift. Dare to execute the lift properly.

This is not an all-encompassing list of possible problems. However, I think most readers may see something which applies to them. If you are having no problems right now, it's always good to go over possible trouble spots anyway to reinforce your good efforts. Although lifting difficulties are not as easily solved as remembering to plug in your stereo, you can troubleshoot and correct your bench by following the same symptom and action process.



**BLAST UP A NEW PR!!!** by analyzing your bench press problems and developing your own ACTION PLAN