

7

tips To A Better Bench Press

Table Of Contents

Intro	2
Bench Boosting Tip #1: Perfecting Placement	5
Bench Boosting Tip #2: Power-Enhancing Breathing	8
Bench Boosting Tip #3: Partner For Success	10
Bench Boosting Tip #4: Bring On The Muscular Fatigue	11
Bench Boosting Tip #5: Smart Stretching – Why You Must Do It	13
Bench Boosting Tip #6: Get A Grip	14
Bench Boosting Tip #7: Back Away From The Bar	16

7

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Intro

How to increase your bench press. This is a question that has been asked time and time again by hundreds of thousands of people – young and old, skilled and unskilled, scrawny or brawny – all who are chasing after one single goal.

To boost their bench.

The bench press exercise could easily be called the ‘king’ of exercises – the gold standard if you will that you can use to compare yourself with others.

It’s the topic of conversation both at the gym as well as at late-night after parties where the adult beverages have been flowing.

How much do you bench?

In some cases, it’s not a question, but rather a show-and-tell. Bench pressing contests run popular, from ones done in the basements that hold a home gym to organized meets where the winner takes home the medal – along with his pride.

Having a strong bench press demonstrates your strength levels like having a ripped set of abs demonstrates your ability to stick with a diet. If you’re strong on bench, chances are you have a pretty good idea of what you’re doing in the gym.

Most people don’t naturally go up and press 200 pounds without putting in some serious work and effort beforehand. For some guys, bench pressing is a particularly hard exercise to develop strength on because of the way their body is biomechanically laid out.

That’s why you can sometimes have a rather scrawny looking guy pressing much more than you would expect – his arm are so incredibly long that it works to his advantage.

7 tips To A Better Bench Press

Likewise, you can have a shorter guy pressing a much lower weight than his body stature would suggest and wonder what's really going on with him.

Fortunately, regardless of how your body stands there are a number of different techniques that you can use to boost your bench considerably.

The more you pay attention to the bench press and designate the time to train it within your workouts, the faster you are going to progress along.

Some guys will add a couple of extra sets of bench in their workout and call it a day. Then they expect to see massive changes almost overnight.

Have patience.

If you don't, you're going to give up too quickly. Muscle strength can be slow to develop at first, but once you get your body fired up and working hard, you'll be amazed at the strength gains that can be accomplished.

Remember too that low calorie diets and making strength gains do not go hand in hand. If you think you're going to add 40 pounds to your bench while on your diet to get ripped, you have another thing coming.

If you want to get stronger, you have to provide your body with fuel. And I don't just mean protein, either.

Carbohydrates, proteins, and fats all must be eaten with each meal you take in throughout the day. Preferably, six to seven times. Building a stronger bench is more than what you just do in the gym – it's what you do in the gym, what you do in the kitchen, and what you do in the bedroom as well (we're talking sleep here for those of you whose minds just drifted).

7 tips To A Better Bench Press

If you want to boost your bench, you must be prepared to work at it. Work hard and it will come.

The only requirement of that statement is that you use the right approaches and those approaches are what we are now going to go over. So get your highlighters out, jot down a few notes, and more importantly, get ready to take some serious action.



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Boost Your Bench Tip #1: Perfect Placement

Before we dive into the nitty-gritty details about the smaller things you can do with your workouts to build a better bench press, let's get the first aspect squared away. That is, the placement of it within your workout program.

If you're like some guys and are still doing a traditional 'bro-style' bodybuilding workout program where you perform legs on one day, chest on another, shoulders on the next, arms the following, and then finish up your week with some back and calves, you should be adjusting this.

While that type of approach may have been 'in' during the 70's, now we've moved on to full body workouts along with upper/lower or push/pull split workouts. These are leading to far superior results in not only boosting your bench press but increasing your performance on a number of your other lifts as well.

What's the deal with those body part splits? How come they are not effective?

Essentially you have to look at it like this. Every single time you go into the gym and subject your body to a stress – in this case, maximum weight lifting, you are going to tax the CNS. With each rep you do, set you complete, and exercise you perform, that CNS gets more and more drained.

By the end of the workout, you could be on an empty tank. If you've ever felt that your coordination is starting to go half way through the workout, this in effect is actually CNS fatigue. The CNS is responsible for a number of factors, balance and coordination being a big one of them. Another big one is strength generation.

7 tips To A Better Bench Press

When that CNS is fatigued, good luck trying to force out some maximum reps. You'd be lucky to do half your usual weight when it's really facing a serious drain.

So once that CNS is tanked, the only thing that's going to get it back up to normal again is rest. This comes in the form of you spending a good eight hours in your bed at night as well as you backing off any other forms of intense exercise.

Even the more intense forms of cardio training can impact the CNS recovery (which is why sprinting is not a wise idea when on a muscle building program – something we'll go into far more detail in the book, however).

So getting back to our point here, if you're in the gym day after day after day hammering your body hard with all that heavy weight, where is the CNS rest coming in?

Sure you may be getting your eight hours in at night, but apart from that, it sure isn't much time off.

Wait – you might be thinking. You always heard that if you gave a muscle at least 48 hours to rest, that was sufficient. So back to those body part workout programs, you're giving the chest a full week of rest before hitting it again. Shouldn't that be enough?

Remember though, we're talking CNS fatigue here, not muscular fatigue. These are two completely different things and must be looked at as such. Despite the fact you aren't pairing chest workouts back to back, you are going into the gym and subjecting your body to that same high-intensity stress day after day after day.

This is why, for example, if you've ever had a brutally hard leg-workout one day, the next day in the gym you felt somewhat weak and tired. You didn't work the muscles you were training, but yet you still feel

7 tips To A Better Bench Press

like you'd rather just get out of there and go home to relax on the couch. It's not that those muscles are all that tired, but rather it's that your CNS is saying, 'I've had enough'.

You must give your body the rest it requires in order for it to get stronger or you're never going to progress along, especially where strength is concerned.

If you were working towards getting ripped and losing fat that would be a bit different since that mostly requires a calorie deficit to be achieved. For strength gains though, nothing short of maximum muscle fiber recruitment and force generation will do, and if your CNS is tired, that ain't happening. No matter how hard you try and push it.

So right off the top, you must look at your program planning structure. Ideally you should have one day off before you perform your chest workout to ensure you're going in fresh. No muscular fatigue; no CNS fatigue. You're ready to hammer it hard when you hit the gym on chest day.

Second to that, for many of the same reasons, it's also vital that you hit the chest muscle first when you go into the gym for that workout. Even if you were planning on doing a full body workout and had squats scheduled in, if you want to be improving your bench – we're talking this is your utmost priority, it must come first.

If you were to perform squats right off the bat, you're already somewhat fatigued going into your chest exercises so right there you've reduced the progress you will make.

So before you make any other changes to your chest workouts to build more strength, start by assessing your overall program plan. Make sure everything is good there first before you consider moving on.

7 tips To A Better Bench Press

Boost Your Bench Tip #2: Power Enhancing Breathing

Next up on our list of tips to help boost your bench is breathing. Breathing? – What difference is that going to make? That's what you may be thinking. The answer is plenty.

How you are breathing while executing each chest movement you perform is going to have a huge impact on your ability to generate strength. Put it this way, let's say you were to hold your breath for one full minute and then without taking in any oxygen, pick up the 30's and crank out a set of dumbbell curls.

How do you think that would feel? Not very good. It doesn't take much knowledge about exercise to realize that if you aren't breathing, you're going to get very tired, very fast.

The same thing applies to your bench. You would be amazed at how many people – and you could be one of them – hold their breath while doing the bench press. If you want to be able to generate the most force possible, you need to start getting that oxygen into the muscle tissue so fatigue doesn't set in early.

What you need to be doing is exhaling (breathing out) when you're pushing that weight up from the lowered position to the fully extend position and inhaling as you lower it back down to the chest after completing a rep.

You may find that this feels like the opposite of what you should be doing if you don't have a lot of bench press experience, but this is the way to get results. That strong exhale on the way up is what will primarily help you develop strength and push more weight than you ever have before.

7 tips To A Better Bench Press

Also note that most guys see the best results if they exhale very quickly in one solid effort, rather than slowly releasing the breath over a period of time. This may mean for a very brief period at the top of the lift you aren't exhaling or inhaling, but that's fine.

As long as there is a continuous movement of air in and out of the lungs, that's what we're going for here.

If you've never paid much attention to your breathing before, try it next workout. You should use a slightly lighter weight than you normally would however as that will ensure that you can focus strictly on breathing and aren't so caught up on just getting that weight up there.

Then once you've mastered the breathing technique, return back to your previous weight and you may just find it no longer feels nearly as challenging as it did before.



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7 tips To A Better Bench Press

Boost Your Bench Tip #3: Partner For Success

Third up on our list of tips to help boost your bench press is to partner up with someone. While it's understandable you may be someone who likes to 'get in your zone' during your workout, turn on your mp3 player and just crank out the exercises, having a workout partner next to you can be incredibly helpful when aiming to boost your bench. What many guys fail to realize is that your performance in the gym is as much mental as it is physical. Ever have one of those days where you just weren't feeling into it? Your mind wasn't there but rather on the weekend that lay ahead or on some pressing matters that you had to deal with at work or school?

And when you were feeling like that, how did it impact your strength levels? Did you hit any personal bests? Chances are your performance was something you definitely wouldn't go around bragging about. All of us have had those days where you just don't feel like doing your workout and can't get your mind into pressing up the heavy weights. It's quite clear that this mental drain has a huge impact on your physical abilities as well.

So now going back to the benefits of a partner point, when you have a partner there beside you for spotting purposes, don't you think you'll be able to get your mind more focused on lifting maximally? Just like on those days where your mind couldn't get into the 'mood', if you feel any degree of fear of lifting a heavy weight, your mind is not going to develop the tenacity to help you push out that weight. As soon as you remove that fear however (by having your partner spot you), all of a sudden you'll find you are that much more powerful. Most people who are using a spotter feel more compelled to mentally go that extra little bit because they know they have nothing to lose and everything to gain.

If you're working out on your own however, you have a lot to lose – like your unbroken collar bone for instance. Failing to press that heavy bar up and dropping it on yourself could be a huge and very serious disaster in the gym and you know it. Therefore, you hold back.

Get that spotter by your side and this no longer becomes an issue.

7 tips To A Better Bench Press

Boost Your Bench Tip #4: Bring On The Muscular Fatigue

Earlier on in the first point we carefully discussed the concept of CNS fatigue and how it relates to you boosting your bench press. Now let's address another issue, muscular fatigue.

One very good strategy that you can use in your efforts to boost your bench press is the concept of pre-fatigue. For some guys, one of the biggest reasons why they are not progressing with their bench is because other muscles are overpowering their chest. Let's dig a bit further.

What's essentially happening in this scenario is that the biceps, shoulders, and triceps, all three muscles that will act as helpers when performing the bench press, are incredibly strong and are really taking a lot of stress off the actual chest muscles during the lift. As a result, the chest doesn't get a great deal stronger. If the bench press is one of the only exercises you're doing for your chest, then these other muscles will continue to take so much of the stress off the chest muscles and in doing so, prevent your bench from increasing to the extent it could be.

The way around this problem then is to pre-fatigue these helper muscles so that by the time you get to the bench press, the only muscle that's left to generate any significant force at all is those pectoral muscles.

To integrate this principle into your program, what you would do is go into the gym and begin with some isolated work for those three muscles. Do a few sets of bicep curls, a couple of sets of rope press-downs for triceps, and then do a few lateral raises as well for the shoulders.

7 tips To A Better Bench Press

Then move to the bench press and see how you feel.

Just do keep in mind however that this not meant to be a long-term strategy, but more as a way to spark some strength gains and get past a strength building rut. Since we talked about earlier how you should always place your bench press first up in your workout this does go against that advice, but again, you are only doing this for a few weeks at most.

By fatiguing out the helper muscles and performing the bench after, you're really going to zero in on the chest muscles and get them seeing greater strength gains.

Then when you return back to the original set-up where you perform bench press first, now you not only have the strong shoulder, biceps, and triceps working for you, but you've made strength increases in your chest as well and should be able to get past that 'stuck' point you were at earlier.

The concept of pre-fatigue does work quite well when added periodically to your program so it is definitely one bench press boosting tip to consider when you're stuck and not making any further progress.

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7 tips To A Better Bench Press

Boost Your Bench Tip #5: Smart Stretching – Why You Must Do It

If you think stretching is only for ballerina dancers wearing pink tights, you need to think again. While it may not be considered the 'manliest' of exercises, it will actually help you see better results on the exercises that are more masculine, namely, the bench press.

One very serious factor that hinders a large number of those training to boost their bench is the fact that they have virtually no degree of flexibility. If your shoulder joint is very stiff and immobile, you may not even be able to extend through the full range of motion!

This is very bad for overall strength development since without moving through that full range of motion, you're shorting the amount of stress placed on the chest muscles. Not to mention the fact that you could also be setting yourself up for injury if you do one day let the bar go too far and the muscles are not prepared to handle it.

Including some proper chest and shoulder stretches in your workout program will accomplish two goals. First, it's going to help improve your ability to generate force over the greater pattern of movement, and second, it's going to help prevent muscular soreness after a hard workout session therefore allowing you to recover faster so you can hit the gym sooner again.

Since the muscles will respond favourably to a higher frequency rate as long as you're recovering, the sooner you can get back into the gym after that chest workout and go again, the faster you will progress.

Chest and shoulder stretches take all of five minutes to perform at the end of each session so are nothing too extreme to ask of you. Place your arm up against a wall and lean away from it to stretch the pectoral muscles out and then cross one arm over the other and press in slightly against the body to stretch the shoulders out. Hold for at least 30 seconds with each stretch and be sure to stretch both sides equally.

Boost Your Bench Tip #6: Get A Grip

Another factor that can come into play with regards to how much force you're able to generate as you go through the bench press movement is how strong your grip capabilities are. For some individuals, not having a very strong grip can actually hold them back from lifting more and more weight over time as they find that their hands are fatiguing out faster than their chest.

Since bench press is an exercise that you perform while under the bar rather than over it, turning to the traditional solution of using lifting straps won't provide any benefit here.

The only way that you will be able to overcome this hindrance to improving your bench then is to actually work on strengthening your grip itself.

So in addition to performing your chest exercises, now you should also be working on grip as well as forearm exercises.

One of the classic grip strengthening exercises is using a crush gripper machine that simply has you squeezing two handles together. As you perform these you'll not only boost your grip but they will also stimulate the forearm muscles as well, so do make for quite a good exercise to add to the routine.

Moving on, another good exercise to perform are wrist curls, and will be where you tie a long string to a 5-10 pound plate weight with the other end of the string tied onto a hockey stick. From there you simply twist the stick using your hands until the weight has been rolled up to the top and then afterwards, roll back it down once again. As you perform this exercise you should notice a slight burning sensation in the forearms which means that it is working the intended muscles properly.

Never perform either of these exercises before you bench however as that will obviously fatigue them out and they are critical for keeping your arms on the bar. Better off is to perform them at home while

7 tips To A Better Bench Press

watching TV in the evening since these muscles are so small and will recover rather quickly.

Almost any exercise you perform that has you holding onto a weight or handle will work these muscles, so you really don't want them anywhere near your regular workouts if possible.

In addition to improving your overall grip strength, another important point to note is that where you place your hands will also impact how you progress along. When aiming to boost your bench press you are going to want to make sure you are placing the hands in the exact same position with each session you do or else the simple hand alteration will factor into your not seeing straightforward progress with your workouts.

When thinking about this placement, the further apart your hands are (within reason), the more you will place the emphasis on the chest muscles, while if they are closer together you're going to be primarily targeting the triceps.

Unless you're an individual who has amazingly strong triceps and has a desire to boost your narrow grip bench, always opt for the wider hand position. Most people will be far stronger at this point so you will see greater overall gains to your bench press by using it.

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Boost Your Bench Tip #7: Back Away From The Bar

Finally, our last tip to help you boost your bench is to back away from the bar – and we aren't talking about the local hang-out you meet your buddies at on a Friday night, although it should be noted that regular alcohol intake will also significantly impact progress and should be avoided.

What we're referring to here though is backing away from the chest workout altogether. Essentially, taking time off.

Now for many of you, 'time off' may be a foreign term – you can't even remember the last time you took voluntary time off. This isn't uncommon, especially among those who are extremely serious about their physical training.

The problem is though that extended months, sometimes even years, of straight training can be incredibly hard on the body and can put a serious halt to improvement. You may think that it's just a stall in progress and if you work a bit harder in the gym you can quickly overcome this and get back on track, but that's just wishful thinking. At this point, nothing short of solid time off is going to get you back on track again and help you see the strength gains that were you experiencing earlier. So what's in order is either a deloading week or a full workout break.

Deloading Week

If you choose to do a deloading week, essentially you'll just be backing away from the heavy weights for about a week-long period of time. So rather than lifting 180 pounds with your bench, you're dropping this back to 100 pounds.

In reality, it's a way to take time off without really avoiding the gym altogether. This strategy eases up on the CNS for a while (there's that CNS issue again) so that the body has to deal with less overall demands and can make sure it's fully recovered.

Usually the deloading week is going to work for someone who isn't

7 tips To A Better Bench Press

all that overtrained in the first place and who has been taking regular breaks or previous deloading weeks as well.

If, however, you find you've been stuck at the same weight for a long time in your workouts and can't even remember the last time you had a week off, then it's time for a training break.

I know what you're thinking – won't I lose all my strength and size? The answer is most definitely not.

Muscle memory is a miraculous thing and the honest truth is that a one week break is hardly any time off at all. You could take 3-4 weeks off and you still wouldn't be starting from ground zero when you return.

You may lose some muscle pump (which is the temporary muscle fullness created by regular workouts), but rest assured that as soon as you start up training again, that muscle pump will be back in full force.

Pure strength gains will not be lost in a week, so get that out of your mind entirely. It may take a session or two to feel fully back into it when you start up again, but no strength will be lost. In fact, more often than not individuals find that when they come back after a training break they are actually feeling stronger than they ever have before.

So take a moment to assess your current situation and see if perhaps a training break may be the best course of action to take in effort to boost your bench. Ideally you should be taking a break from your training about once every 6-8 weeks to allow for that extra little bit of repair and recovery, so make an effort to start tracking this more religiously.

If you are not monitoring how long you're going on a workout without ever taking a break, you could be setting yourself up to fail to see strength gains.

Conclusion

So there you have seven of our quick tips for how to boost your bench press. It takes more than just hitting the gym each day to see great improvements in both strength and size. You really must be mindful of everything you're doing so that you have the best program plan working in your favour.

Everything you do should be carefully thought out and constructed so that you are not only performing the right exercises, number of sets, and working within the best rep range, but also making sure that you are recovered between sessions and hitting the chest muscle at an ideal frequency.

Far too many people pay more attention to the specifics of the workout design while overlooking the other factors, many of which were just discussed, that will play a huge role in the progress you make with your bench press.

Another thing to note too is that if size is also a goal of yours along with increasing your strength levels, you're in the best place right now because as strength gains increase, as long as you are eating a high calorie diet, size will follow suite.

Some people place more effort on size gains without ever focusing on adding more weight to the bar, and this is a poor approach. When you're able to lift more weight in the exercise, that's when you know you've gained true muscle mass.

So keep all of these tips in mind and start implementing them immediately. It's one thing to know how to boost your bench press but quite another to make it happen. Start making it happen today.

7 tips To A Better Bench Press

Rob King is a Certified Personal Trainer & Business Owner.

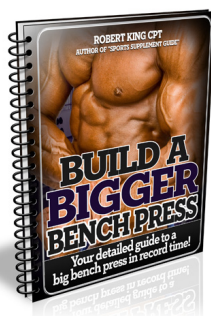
He has competed at both BodyBuilding & PowerLifting. *Rob has a competition bench press of 372 lb at a bodyweight of 190 and at his best completed 315 for 12 and 225 for 28 reps* He is a Black Belt in WTF Tae Kwon Do, and also a Level I Certified CrossFit Coach.

He has written such books as "MMA Business BluePrint", "Sports Supplement Review Guide" and "Build A Bigger Bench Press".



To really take your bench press to the next level I advise you to get a copy of "Build A Bigger Bench Press" Book. It is a complete guide to improving your Bench Press FAST!

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