

Problem Solving in the Bench Press

Although few other exercises enjoy the same level of popularity as the bench press, it is in dire need of a proper diagnosis if you want to keep improving the poundages.

I spent over 30 years in gyms on a daily basis, yet this very popular exercise is rarely performed properly.

This might explain its reputation as being responsible for a number of pec tears and shoulder injuries. That, and being overly used; go to any gym in the world on Monday, and you'll notice why it is dubbed International Bench Press Day, aka Chest day. Which is ironic, since the bench press is far from being the best pectoral exercise.

However, the bench press has its place in the gym, whether you're a bodybuilder who wants to build up his pecs or an athlete who want to improve sports performance. The focus of this article is to help you find your best assistance exercise to boost performance in the bench press. So you guys will have some of the information I give in my courses to enhance bench press performance and make a better choice of assistance exercises.

First, Find the Weak Muscles

Louie Simmons is famous in the powerlifting world to be the innovative mind behind the training methodology that made Westside Barbell a strength haven. A key concept that he and I share, is that sticking points in a big compound lift are due to one or more weak muscles in the chain that makes up that lift. Want to get better at this exercise and lift more? Find the weak muscle first, than strengthen it using a few choice assistance exercises that recruit the most motor units.

Now this knowledge is only for the serious athlete, those who bench press at least 1 ½ times their bodyweight. If you're looking for Swiss ball dumbbell press or Body blade tricks, you're reading the wrong article.

Let's take a lot at the most common pressing style and their sticking point

Pressing Style	Sticking Point	Target Muscle
Close-Grip Wide Grip	Start Mid-Range	Serratus Anterior
Both	Start	Anterior Deltoid
Wide Grip	Start	Pectoralis Major, Clavicular portion; Subscapularis
Close-Grip	Start	Pectoralis Major, Sternal portion
Wide Grip	Mid-Range	Biceps Brachii, Long Head Coracobrachialis
Both	Lockout	Triceps

Target the Weak Link With the Right Exercises

The next step is to choose what exercises will be right for your case. Don't be the Extra Average Guy who does an exercise just for the fun or the change of pace. Real life gains mean having clarity, focus and dedication, so leave the triceps pressdowns and the kickback for Muscle and Fatness fans. Now is the time for serious lifting with exercises that will recruit the largest motor unit pools possible to increase strength in the right muscles.

Have a look at table 2 to determine which exercises are right for you

Target Muscle	Assistance Exercises
Serratus Anterior	Incline Front Raises Front Cable Raises
Anterior Deltoid	Seated Press Behind the Neck Seated Dumbbell Press, Semi-Supinated Grip Seated Military Press
Pectoralis Major, Clavicular portion; Subscapularis	Wide-Grip Bench Press to Collarbone Bent-Arm Flyes Flat Crossovers Partial Bench Press (Bottom Half) Functional Isometrics Incline Press Flat Dumbbell Press, Pronated Grip
Pectoralis Major, Sternal portion	Parallel Bar Dips Decline Press Decline Flyes (Cables or Dumbbells) Functional Isometrics Flat Dumbbell Press, Semi-Supinated Grip
Biceps Brachii- Long Head	Barbell Curls Incline Curls Standing Cable Curls with elbows behind the body. Any type of curls where the upper arms are in line with the torso or behind it
Triceps	Triceps Extensions to the Neck Parallel Bar Dips Nose Crunchers Lockouts in the Power Rack Close-Grip Bench Press Reverse Grip Bench Press Board Presses

Putting it Together

One thing that made a difference early on in my career was knowing how to prioritize the exercises in a workout to make it more efficient at reaching a given goal. In this case, always

start with the pressing exercise, and then do serratus/anterior delt work, followed by triceps and finally biceps. This will ensure that your nervous system is able to recruit the most motor units in each muscle group so you will get the most bang for your training buck.

Enjoy the gains,

Coach Charles R. Poliquin

Assistance Exercises
Incline Front Raises https://vimeo.com/223211260/a757a3a3c9
Front Cable Raises https://vimeo.com/223211194/924bc223b1
Seated Press Behind the Neck https://vimeo.com/223211151/3a62f1396c
Seated Dumbbell Press, Semi-Supinated Grip https://vimeo.com/204964896/af7519f198
Seated Military Press https://vimeo.com/197130097/b7ba126f21
Wide-Grip Bench Press to Collarbone https://vimeo.com/223211038/595dc5a834
Bent-Arm Flyes https://vimeo.com/223210976/c5b3508faf
Standing Cable Crossovers https://vimeo.com/210991420/80576e33d3
Partial Bench Press (Bottom Half) https://vimeo.com/223210838/b5ae42d984
Functional Isometrics https://vimeo.com/223212748/9734b4da84
Incline Press https://vimeo.com/222570158/10273bb9b0
Flat Dumbbell Press, Pronated Grip https://vimeo.com/223210788/c0894c056b
Parallel Bar Dips https://vimeo.com/189698116/04cd8b5a1d
Decline Press https://vimeo.com/189242576/f835c0b966
Decline Flyes (Cables or Dumbbells) https://vimeo.com/223210906/63fd02b67b
Functional Isometrics https://vimeo.com/223212748/9734b4da84

Flat Dumbbell Press, Semi-Supinated Grip
<https://vimeo.com/189242398/d55e7c3cf1>

Barbell Curls
<https://vimeo.com/197338127/0099544e60>

Incline Curls
<https://vimeo.com/204956166/39a2fc5a15>

Standing Cable Curls with elbows behind the body.
<https://vimeo.com/212151444/2808652d13>

Any type of curls where the upper arms are in line with the torso or behind it

Triceps Extensions to the Neck
<https://vimeo.com/197136096/2de5948d42>

Parallel Bar Dips
<https://vimeo.com/189698116/04cd8b5a1d>

Nose Crunchers
<https://vimeo.com/223210726/e279dfd30f>

Lockouts in the Power Rack
<https://vimeo.com/223210716/8fbd3f8f56>

Close-Grip Bench Press
<https://vimeo.com/223213571/e567963018>

Reverse Grip Bench Press
<https://vimeo.com/189242576/f835c0b966>

Board Presses
<https://vimeo.com/223210857/3cda06321b>