

7 FASTEST WAYS TO INCREASE YOUR BENCH

SPECIAL REPORT: Rut Busting Bench Press Matrix



by Mike Westerdal

 **CRITICAL BENCH.com**

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About the Author

Mike Westerdal is the owner of CriticalBench.com, a free online strength training & weight lifting magazine. He earned his BS from Central CT State University where he played four years of D-IAA football.

After college Mike acquired his certification as a personal trainer with the American Council on Exercise. Westerdal is a contributing muscle writer for various iron magazines including REPS!, Powerlifting USA and numerous online publications. In addition Mike is the author of the best selling [Critical Bench Program](#) boasting over 10,000 copies sold.

Westerdal is an amateur powerlifter who has competed in the AAPF, APF, and APA federations. Currently he trains at Tampa Barbell and resides in sunny Clearwater FL with his wonderful wife Courtney.



Introduction

In this Critical Bench Special Report we're going to embark on the road to a 300 plus pound bench press. It's no surprise that everyone fights over the benches at the gym on Monday evenings. The bench press or variation of it should be a staple of every program. If you're one of the people scrambling for an open bench you're on the right track. When done correctly the bench press can be a full body exercise that will make you harder, thicker, stronger and more muscular in the least amount of time. Here are some tips you can use right now to increase your max in the bench press and set a personal record. Implement some or all of these techniques next time you workout to bust through your own bench press rut and add pounds to your one rep max.



Big Chris Janek Has Benched 315 For 27-Reps!

1. Tuck Your Elbows

Almost everyone you talk to says they want to increase their bench press, but not everyone actually bench presses. The number one excuse I get, "I can't bench press because my shoulders hurt." Its true bench pressing with bad form can cause shoulder injuries but there is a way to alleviate this. I had the same issues myself and thought my heavy benching days were over. That is until several years ago when I met with a powerlifting coach and discovered this tip.

As you bench press, keep your elbows tucked in close to your body. By doing this the path of the bar will change a bit. The bar will touch a little lower on your chest right below your nipples. The fact you're touching the bar lower on your chest will decrease the pressure on your deltoids.

The further you are from your center the less leverage you have. When you tuck your elbows and keep them from flaring out you transfer the load to your triceps taking pressure off the shoulder complex.

Touching the bar lower and keeping your elbows in close will allow the bar to travel in a straight line. We all know the fastest way from point A to point B is with a straight line. Give this technique a try. You may drop in poundage the first few workouts, but you'll skyrocket past where you were in the past in record time.

Example Of Tucked Elbows



Notice in the photograph above (courtesy of SAS Digital Memories) the lifter has his elbows tucked in nice and close to his sides. This forces him to touch the bar a little lower on the chest, just below the nipples. You'll also notice that his forearms are perpendicular to the bar and perfectly straight for maximum leverage.

Example Of Flared Elbows

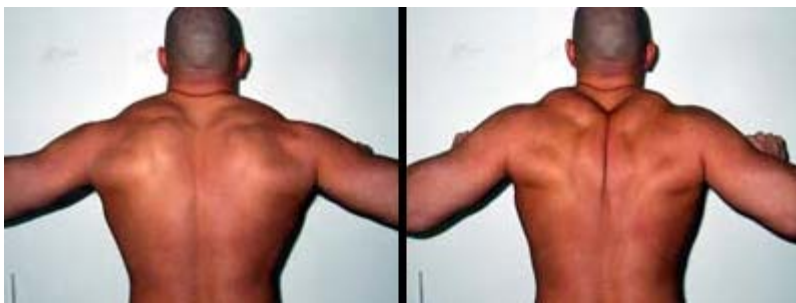


This is an example of a lifter that has flared elbows. It is not wrong to do this it just puts more pressure on the shoulders. If you were to follow the path of the bar I'd guess that the it would touch higher on the chest probably at or above the nipples. Personally I prefer the tucked elbows technique. Photos courtesy of Brian Silk of SAS Digital Memories.

2. Decrease the Range Of Motion

There are a few ways to accomplish this. **First of all widen your grip on the bar.** If your pinkie finger is on the knurling of the bar, than move it out to your ring finger. Eventually you'll want to move your grip out so that your pointer finger is on the rings. Don't make too big of a jump at once, take a month or two to move out one finger at a time. This is common sense, the wider your grip the less distance you're pressing.

Next you're going to want to **retract your shoulder blades.** Picture yourself doing a cable row. At the end of the movement you pull your shoulders back, squeeze your back and bring your scapulas together. This should be how your start the bench press. It removes several inches from the range of motion and keeps your body tight.



Squeeze the shoulder blades together.

Arch your back. Your butt, shoulder blades, and head should always be in contact with the bench, but its okay to arch your lower back. If this isn't natural for you, you can place a foam roller under your lower pack for practice. Once again this brings your chest closer to the bar during the eccentric movement decreasing the path the bar travels.



Neal Dreisig Competing at the
2009 Raw Unity Meet

3. Hold Your Air

As a personal trainer I typically teach my clients to take a deep breathe in during the negative portion of the lift and tell them to exhale during the concentric part of the exercise. When it comes to maximum effort work it's another ball game. The rules that apply to high rep training are thrown out the window.



Fill your stomach with air before you unrack the bar and hold that air until the lift is completed. It may take practice but try to fill your belly with air rather than your chest. If you let you air out

during a max lift attempt, your body will move making you unstable. Holding your air keeps your entire body tight and gives you a stable base to press from.

Some people actually prefer to take two airs. This means they take one breathe when they unrack the bar. Than while holding the bar at lockout they exhale and take another breathe before starting to descend. Give both techniques a try and see which you prefer.



*600 Pound Raw Bencher Pictured To The Right With Teammates
From Space Coast Barbell in Merritt Island, FL.*

4. Rep Ranges

Plain and simple change your rep ranges. If you've already achieved the muscle mass you're looking for and you want to focus on making your strength level match your looks than it's time to decrease the reps you're doing in the bench press.

When you train with low reps your strength gains are neurological: You develop a greater ability to recruit muscle fibers. You won't necessarily get bigger from this rep range but you will increase the weight you can lift.

If you've been training for hypertrophy in the 6-12 rep range drop your reps to fives to start. The classic 5x5 program is a huge strength builder. Once your stabilizers have adapted to lower reps the meat of your program will be triples. Triples are the "nectar" of strength gains and should be the foundation of your bench routine.

When your reps drop, guess what else happens? You got it, the weights go up. The heavier loads will force your bones, tendons and CNS to adapt. All are essential in getting stronger. Maybe your muscles can handle the weight but if your tendons can't and your CNS can't than you're in for a shock. Pun intended.

5. Training Partners

If you're not on the Hammer Strength Machine or the Smith Machine, than you're going to need a spotter. Best case scenario, find a buddy to do the same routine as you or just ask someone that trains at the same time if they want to up their max as well. If you can't find someone you're going to have to suck it up and ask a stranger for some help. Make sure it's not a guy that wants to work on his cheat curls at your expense! If you absolutely must train alone be sure you have access to a power cage with pins in case you come up short.

Training partners will keep you accountable. It's a lot harder to take the day off when someone is relying on you to be there. Motivate and encourage each other, everyone has an off day from time to time but it's not likely you'll both have an off day together. To build a big bench you need to be consistent and training partners keep you on track.

Internet forums can be a double edged sword. On one hand you can talk to people all over the world and pick up training tips from elite level lifters. On the other hand many forums today have turned into "troll" boards or a place where anonymous posters criticize and bash each other. At the Critical Bench Muscle Forum we have created an online environment that is supportive and positive. There are several sponsored pro athletes available to help you with any of your strength training questions. Although people can't physically help you through the computer

screen they can provide motivation and help you create a plan of attack when you're not sure how to proceed.

In addition you can keep an online training log or training diary to track your progress and set goals for future work outs. Yes other people can see what you're doing but that's a good thing. This way you can receive feedback and advice from others if you want it.

Go ahead and register for free at the Critical Bench Muscle Forum at this url: <http://www.criticalbench.com/muscleforum>



Brian Carroll of Team Samson Powerlifting is one of "Ask the Pros" You Can Chat With in the Muscle Forum.

6. Squeeze The Bar

You'll notice that most big benchers have massive forearms. This helps control the bar. Grip the bar low in the palm and keep your wrists straight. This helps transfer your power straight to the bar. When you place the bar too high in your hands your wrists may bend and even become sore. A pair of APT wrist wraps will also help you keep your wrists straight.



Bodybuilder Dave Draper

By squeezing the bar as hard as you can you will recruit more active motor units. The harder you can contract a muscle the better you can demonstrate strength in that muscle. You can contract a muscle much harder if you also contract the muscles surrounding it. Try flexing your bicep. Now flex your bicep while making a fist. You should get a much stronger contraction while making a fist.

Now apply this same principle to the bench press. Squeeze the bar as hard as you can and keep your entire body tight and contracted. You'll be able to recruit the individual muscle groups needed for a monster bench much more efficiently when using this tactic.

7. Don't Neglect Other Muscle Groups

Your bench is going to get stronger on days you're not training bench. That's right. You grow and get stronger while you're recovering. There are also other important muscle groups that need attention if you want to break your bench press rut.

When you start the lift you are primarily using your pecs, but after a few inches your triceps will take over so we'll need to strengthen those triceps with some exercises like rolling dumbbell extensions and dumbbell floor presses.

Your back needs attention as well. You need to train the antagonist muscle group to avoid imbalances. Your lats also serve as a shelf and give you a more stable base to push from. Your back muscles help you stabilize the weight in the eccentric phase which makes up half the lift! Work your back on the same plane as your bench. Bench friendly back movements include barbell rows and close grip lat pull downs.

This is a bench report so luckily you won't have to squat and deadlift right? Wrong! Squats and deadlifts trigger your body to release growth hormone and will temporarily raise testosterone levels in your blood. This puts you in an anabolic state and all your other muscles will benefit. These are compound exercises that will add muscle mass and work your entire body. Besides you don't want to look like a light bulb do you? You know the type, guys with a huge upper body and tiny chicken legs. The deadlift will build your back up big time.



*"Heavy Deadlifts & Squats Flood The Body
With GH and Testosterone"*

Now for the good news. Bicep training can actually help your bench. The hammer curl significantly targets the brachioradialis which is the largest muscle in the forearm. Developing this muscle will help you at the bottom of the bench press and you can build your biceps at the same time.

If you're ready for that 300-400 plus pound bench press than open your mind to the possibility. Before your body can perform something your mind has to accept it as reality. So get your head on straight, try out some of these bench press tips and get ready to claim first dibs on any bench you want at the gym.

Overview Of The "Rut Busting Bench Press Matrix"

Monday - Chest/Triceps

Bench Press 5 sets of 3 reps
Close Grip Bench Press: 5 sets of 5 reps
Rolling DB Extensions: 3 sets of 8 reps
Dumbbell Floor Presses: 3 sets of 8 reps

Wednesday - Legs/Rear Delts

Squats 5 sets of 3
Leg Press 3 sets of 8
Glute Ham Raises 3 sets of 8
Reverse Flyes 3 sets of 8

Friday - Back/Biceps

Deadlift 5 sets of 3 reps
Barbell Rows 3 sets of 8
Lat Pull downs 3 sets of 8
Hammer Curls 4 sets of 5

Notes: *This is a 12-week program. Go heavy for three weeks than take a light week where you do 12 reps of each exercise. If you can't stay away from the gym add cardio and core exercises on your off days. Take one full day off per week to rest your CNS. Before starting this program you may need to train two-three weeks with five reps to safely make the transition to the triples rep scheme used in this routine. Add abs whenever you'd like. Twice a week should suffice.*

The 12-week layout would look like this. 3 heavy weeks, 1 deload week, 3 heavy weeks, 1 deload week, 3 heavy weeks, 1 deload week.

Points to Remember

- **Tuck Your Elbows**
- Touch The Bar Lower On Your Chest
- **Decrease The Range Of Motion**
- Hold Your Air
- **Lower Your Rep Range**
- Recruit A Training Partner
- **Squeeze The Bar**
- Don't Neglect Other Muscle Groups
- **Do A Few Weeks Of 5 Reps Before Starting This Routine**
- Every 4th Week Should Be A Deload Week
- **Limit Your Cardio**
- Train Your Core/Abs 2x's Per Week

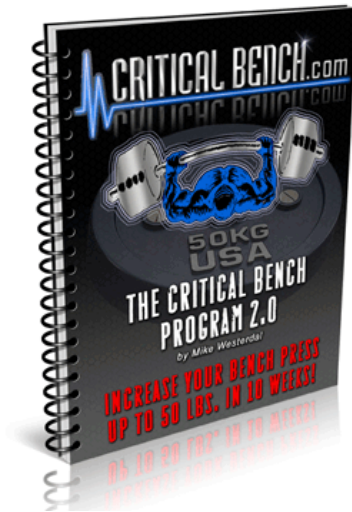
You Have Completed This Rut Busting Bench Press Matrix Routine. Now What?

You Are Now Ready For A More Advanced System....

.....[The Critical Bench Program](#)

This bench press program is a power program designed to help you increase your one rep max by an average of fifty pounds during the ten week training cycle. It is different from other programs because you are provided with the actual weights you will be using on bench day and given a full body lifting split to follow. Over 10,000 powerlifters, weekend warriors, and athletes have had success with this system.

Visit: <http://www.Add50PoundsToYourBench.com>



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