

Let's Do Bench Press!

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A few weeks ago, we featured some information about the importance and benefits of strength training in your workout routine. We mentioned that lifting weights can help you lose, and keep off unwanted fat, help your joints become stronger and more resistant to energy, and overall, contribute to a more complete level of your own personal fitness.

However, with weight training, much as is the case with most fitness exercises, proper mechanics and proper form could mean the difference between a good workout and an accident waiting to happen. Weight training, especially with free weights such as barbells, dumbbells and kettle bells is all about proper form — after all, as you increase your workload and weight, bad habits and improper lifting techniques can magnify the stress put onto joints overcompensating for the uneven weight distribution, and eventually, lead to injury.

If you are thinking about adding weight training to your fitness routine, one of the cornerstone exercises of weightlifting is the bench press. There are a few variations of the bench press, such as the incline press, the decline press, and the military press, which is more for your shoulders than pectorals muscles.

Settling In

If you are just starting out, let's start with the simple, flat-bench, barbell press. If you've never done the exercise before, make sure to use a spotter, and grab a personal trainer if possible. The bar can be a little difficult to balance for someone not used to it, even with small weights. Keep in mind that a bar with no weights does not equal to 0 pounds! Most gym "Olympic" bars weigh approximately 45 pounds, so any weight you slide onto the ends would be in addition to that. For example, a barbell with 2 25-pound weights on each side would weigh 95 pounds. Don't be embarrassed doing a few sets with just the bar — 45 pounds is a decent weight for a beginner, and getting the form right without weights will cement the right mechanics.

Lifting

This seems like the most obvious direction there is, but a surprising amount of people get this wrong — put an equal amount of weights on both sides of the bar! While most people would not intentionally rack up an uneven load, not keeping track of how much weight you put on or take off from set to set, especially in a busy gym can leave your bench press with an extra 5 or 10 on one side. So, check and double-check! Be sure to secure the weights down with a weight clamp — these can be found in pretty much any gym. Keep in mind that it is hard to balance the bar, especially for beginners, so keeping the weights secured will make sure they don't slide off in the middle of a set, and make for quite a

dangerous and, not to mention, embarrassing situation.