

Bench press safely by avoiding major technique flaws

Technique is considered paramount in sports and other skilled activities for optimal performance, career longevity, and safety.

The bench presses are often the most popular free weight exercise performed in mainstream gyms. Right or wrong the free weight bench press has become the tool of choice for developing and testing upper body strength. Unfortunately with the bench press the lifter may begin sacrificing good technique to lift more weight at the expense of longevity and safety.

Two of the most common flaws in bench press technique are bouncing the bar off of the chest and/or lifting the buttocks from the bench during the exercise. While some may think they are getting stronger by employing these techniques they are really just becoming more proficient at cheating in the lift instead of becoming stronger in the lift.

Bouncing the bar off the chest involves dropping the bar rapidly to the chest and using the rib cage as a spring to propel the bar upward. It is important at this point to keep in mind that a standard barbell is made of high strength steel and is only slightly over one inch in diameter and over time steel will win out over the bones and tissues of the rib cage and chest.

Official powerlifting competition requires the bar to be held motionless on the chest until a press command is given by a referee only then is the bar driven up from the chest. For regular training a good cue is to imagine that you have a sheet of glass on your chest that you must touch but cannot break.

Thrusting the hips upward and causing the buttocks to leave the bench transfers lift into the bar and improves the leverage angle of the lift. This is also a technique that is not allowed in official Powerlifting competition. The immediate hazard is a loss of control that can pitch the bar towards the face or neck. The long term consequences of this type of cheating are injuries to the neck and lower back.

If you cannot perform the bench press without committing these two flaws you are simply trying to lift too much weight. If this is the case, check your ego and lower the weight until your technique is correct and only increase the weight if you can maintain perfect technique with every repetition of the set!

Many people cannot tell when they are committing a lifting fault, a competent trainer can help you get a feel for your problem areas and keep you lifting longer, safer, and pain free!

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