

This workout is for benchers. It's great for anybody who wants to bench better, and move more weight. I have seen several individuals make 20 to 30 pound increases in 10 weeks or less. That is regardless of whether you are a full meet lifter or a bench specialist. Of course, I'm a bench specialist, so I would be hard pressed to give a great workout idea for squatting and deadlifting.

Before getting to the meat of the workout, I have one basic item to address. As a bench specialist, I have two basic rules, which combined with the right bench workout, will help any bencher:

Rule #1-Do squats. Even if you never plan to compete in squats, never wear shorts in your lifetime, etc. Squatting builds a lot of back and hip muscles that play directly into benching, and the natural anabolic effects of squatting have been documented for years.

Rule #2-Do deadlifts. Same as Rule #1, the deadlift works many muscles that help with bench. This is especially important if you have a big arch, you will need strong back muscles to maintain the arch.

I don't mean that you have to perform a grueling workout for legs twice a week. Work them at least every week. Deadlifts can be done once a week, or some people seem to do well every other week. You can use any program you like, but try to keep it moderately heavy, work in some heavy triples or doubles if you like. If you are already working your squats and deads, or you are a full meet lifter, you are already ahead of the game.

The workout I will describe below is designed for a competitive bencher of any weight class or experience, who uses a bench shirt. It doesn't matter what kind of shirt, although I highly recommend checking the rules of your federation and buying the highest performance shirt they will allow.

I will warn you now, this workout is intense, and will leave most people worn out and tired. Many people need some time to become accustomed to the work volume used. For the first week or so, some lifters may have to use lighter weights in order to make it through the whole workout. Whatever you do, don't sell yourself short and skip anything. It will simply take time to increase your work capacity. I have workout partners ranging from new competitors at 17 years old to veteran competitors in their 40's using this workout with great success. This workout can be used in 8 to 12 week cycles, depending on the lifter's preference. I typically compete 4 times per year, so 10-week cycles usually work out best for me. Also, don't be afraid to take 1 or 2 weeks off during the cycle. When your body says you need time off, skip the heavy day. Some lifters actually take every 4th week off to rest.

You will need some basic equipment for this workout, including either an adjustable squat rack, a power cage, or some ingenuity. Boards for the board press can be made fairly cheaply. Some decent dumbbells and a cable machine are helpful for assistance exercises, but they are not a requirement.

The workout uses two days. One day is a heavy day using the bench shirt, and the other day is an assistance day where all work is performed raw. The days should be separated as much as possible in the week. I have found that a Tuesday heavy day and a Saturday assistance day work best for my schedule. Some people prefer Tuesday and Friday or Monday and Friday. You should pick a schedule and stick with it as much as possible.

Tuesday, heavy day:

Full range flat bench press

Use the widest legal grip you are comfortable with.

Warm-up: Use light weights for 3 to 4 sets of 6 to 10 reps. For example, a person who can bench 400 lbs. with a shirt might want to warm-up as follows:

Barx10
135x10
155x8
185x8

Start out with a medium weight that you can do 8 reps without tremendous difficulty. I find that 50% of my raw max is a good starting point. Increase by percentages of your raw max as shown. The percentages I am showing are not set in stone; adjust them however you need to avoid training to failure. Take rests of 1-2 minutes or more between sets.

50%x8
60%x6
65%x3
70%x1

Put on the bench shirt—Percentages used now will be related to your **shirt** max. This can be confusing, because I am changing reference points. It works better due to the fact that your shirt bench will increase much faster than your raw bench. Therefore, you need to treat them like two entirely different exercises when looking at the percentages.

75%x3
80%x2
85%x1
90%x1
95%x1

If you are an advanced lifter or you are peaking for a competition add the following:

100%x1

Max single—make an attempt at a PR

If you set a PR, repeat the max single for higher PR attempt

75%x2

Bench Shirt off

Rack lockouts

Rack lockouts use a squat rack or power rack with adjustable safety pins. The pins should be adjusted to allow about a 3" range of motion. Some people set up a bench in the power rack. I prefer to do these lying on the floor in the power rack. Percentages here relate to your **shirt** max. Use a slightly narrow grip, approximately 2" narrower than your competition grip. When performing rack lockouts, press the bar, hold for a 1 count, and drop the bar back to the pins. Do not try to lower the bar slowly. The negative portion of rack lockouts can cause injuries.

75%x5
80%x3
85%x3
95%x2
100%x2

Depending on your level of experience, and where your weak points are, the last two sets may be impossible when you start out. If you cannot do the last two sets, repeat the 85%x3. Over time, you will become strong enough to finish these sets.

Floor press

Floor press requires lying on the floor near a low rack or inside of the power rack. The bar is lowered until the elbows touch the floor, the pressed back up. The percentages used here are percentages of your raw max.

50%x5
60%x3
65%x3

The floor press is great for people like me who have a weak spot in their bench about 4-6" below lockout. If you have never done a floor press before, choose slightly lower weights until you are used to this exercise.

Saturday, assistance day:

Warm-up in the same manner as on the heavy day workout.

All weights on this day are percentages of your raw max.

Close grips

Use as close of a grip as you can use and still maintain bar control.

40%x8
50%x6
55%x5

Board press

Use a slightly narrow grip, approximately 2" narrower than your competition grip. I use several sets of boards made from stacks of 2x6 lumber. I have 2 through 5 boards. Some people with longer arms may want to use a 6 board. The board limits your range of motion, allowing you to target the weakest areas of the bench motion. I usually use each board for 2 to 3 weeks and then progress to the next board. For example, start week 1 with the 2 board, week 3 with the three board, week 5 with the 4 board, etc. The percentages I am giving are a ballpark for the 4 or 5 board. Different board heights will require adjusting weights appropriately. Advanced lifters may require weights well in excess of their raw max for this exercise.

80%x5
90%x4
95%x3
100%x2

Incline Bench Press

If I am feeling good at this point in the workout, I will do some incline press with a slightly narrow grip. This works a little more of the triceps and is a good exercise to finish the bench with. This can be done with dumbbells or a barbell. I prefer a barbell for all exercises, as it most closely simulates the competition movement.

Triceps

In general, it is good to include at least two extra triceps movements on this day. I typically do a mixture of the following exercises: Cable pushdowns, weighted dips, overhead dumbbell skull crushers, JM presses, and lying triceps extensions. I mix and match these exercises from week to week. Pick two exercises and do the following as heavy as possible:

First Exercise: 3 sets of 6-8 reps, as heavy as possible.

Second Exercise: 3 to 4 sets of 6 reps, as heavy as possible.

As with any routine, each individual will require some tailoring of the percentages to match the weights and exercises to his or her ability. It is not uncommon for a person's raw bench to go decrease while on this program. One of the major benefits to this program is the fact that training regularly with the bench shirt greatly improves your comfort and ability in the shirt.

As you progress through this workout, you will start to see increases by the third or fourth week. By week 10, you should have set several PR's. The constant heavy work and high volume of shirted singles tends to really help prepare you for a meet.

If you are preparing for a meet on this program, you should keep a couple things in mind. First, it is always a good idea to cut out some assistance movements as you near a meet. I tend to cut out the assistance day altogether 2 or three workouts before the meet. I always take 10 days off before a meet to rest. The recovery actually makes you stronger than the workouts would have.

Finally, I must admit that not every workout works for everyone. Different people respond differently. I can customize a workout for anyone, and I have done so in the past. If you are a raw lifter and would like some help with a program, or if you are a novice or master lifter who needs a less aggressive workout, I can help you. I can develop a bench workout for anyone who wants to increase his or her bench. I charge \$30 to develop an individual bench workout. The workout I give you is more detailed than what is above, and will include actual weights for each exercise based on the information you give me. I take information from the lifter, such as age, weight class, experience level, and what you have tried in the past, and your goals, to develop both short and long term workout programs. If you can videotape your workouts, I can also critique and make recommendations on form, analyze your strengths and weaknesses, and further customize routines for a small fee. Additionally, if you are in the Southern NJ/ Philadelphia area or would like to visit the area, I can do one on one coaching for bench press. If you are interested, please contact me by email at slattimer@yahoo.com.

Shawn Lattimer
Bench Specialist—810 lbs.