

HOW TO DO BASIC EXERCISES... **BETTER**

In any field of human endeavor, you'll almost always find that the majority of people get low to average results using conventional methods, while a small minority realizes spectacular results using much less conventional, and in some cases, even controversial methods.

Exercise training is no different. If you're even mildly observant, I'm sure you've noticed that the large majority of your gym-going peers make no discernable progress from month to month, or from year to year.

The lesson for those with ears to hear with is this: The path to super-success is the path that most of us aren't taking. And the good news is that the difference between "so-so" results and "out-of-this-world" results is often relatively minor—so minor in fact, that very often, the average onlooker might not even notice that you're doing anything different from anyone else.

This article is about those "minor" differences—those little tweaks that take an exercise from good to great. We'll

TOP TIPS FOR TAKING YOUR CURLS, BENCHES AND LIFTS TO THE NEXT LEVEL

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examine eight popular (and absolutely "good!") exercises, and explore ways to make them even better. In some cases I've presented an entirely different way to perform the exercise, and in others, I've simply presented a handful of technique modifications. But in all cases, the consistent application of the following techniques will exponentially increase the results of your workouts.



▲ The military press is a now-defunct event in the sport of Olympic-style weight lifting. It was removed from the sport in 1973 because too many competitors would perform this lift leaning so far back that it began to look like a standing bench press! Today, the military press is still a popular remnant of days gone by, but there's an even better way to do this exercise, and it's called the push press.

Think of the push-press as a "cheating version" of the standard military press. It's identical in every way except for the fact that you'll use some "body English" to help propel the bar upward to an arms-locked position.

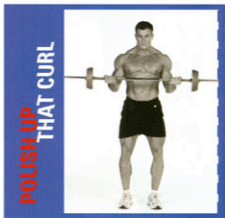
Here's how it's done: Start with the bar at shoulder level on the support hooks of a squat cage. You'll remove the bar from the rack as if you're going to front squat—in other words, the bar is in your hands and at the same time resting on your deltoids. Note: try to keep the elbows forward rather than down—this will elevate the delts and create a "shell" for the bar. Next, walk back to clear the rack, inhale deeply, hold, dip down slightly and explosively drive the bar upward until your arms lock out.

Lowering the bar back to your shoulders: Since the push press enables you to lift more than you could with a military press, lowering the bar requires a bit of timing: essentially, you'll resist the weight the best you can as you lower the bar, but at a certain point, the bar will tend to free fall the rest of the way. So simply "catch" the bar back on your delts, absorbing the shock by slightly flexing at the hips and knees as the bar lands.

The advantage of the push press is that you can assist

yourself concentrically (through the use of leg drive) which allows greater overload during the eccentric portion of the lift. This leads to improved strength and muscle mass. Additionally, the act of stabilizing a load overhead is a terrific challenge for the abdominal muscles and deep spinal musculature. Finally, push presses are just a lot more fun than military presses!

▼ The standing barbell curl is almost an institution for anyone seeking better biceps development. This exercise goes back to the earliest days of resistance training, and for good reason—it works!



The barbell curl requires precision however, and the majority of people who use it are experiencing only a small percentage of its potential rewards. Here are three tricks to improve your curl:

1 Lock those elbows: You (hopefully) do this when you perform triceps extensions, and you need to do it with curls also. So lock those elbows into your sides, and keep them there.

2 Fully extend the arms: Call me crazy, but I think a 100 percent curl is more likely to produce great results than an 85 percent curl! So each and every rep, make sure you extend your arms all the way.

3 Push from the pinky side: One of the primary functions of the biceps muscle is supination—the act of turning your hand palm-up. Therefore, when you curl a barbell, attempt to supinate your hand by pushing more from the pinky side of your hand than from the thumb side.

▼ That familiar phrase isn't as old as you might think. Back in the old days, before the supine bench press was even conceived, the military press was the standard measure of upper body strength. Given the current popularity of the barbell bench press, I thought I'd share a few tricks that you can employ to make the king of upper body exercises even better.

1 Narrower is better: I still see a lot of people using super-wide grips when they bench. Most people think they'll get better pectoralis recruitment by going wide like this. They do actually, but it's an insignificant advantage, especially when compared to the toll this maneuver takes on your shoulders. And if your shoulders are shot, you can't bench at all, so I'd rather see you bench in a manner that might be slightly less advantageous for the pecs, but a lot safer for the shoulders. Your inside hand spacing should be about the same as the distance between your armpit and your wrist—about 20 to 22 inches for most people.



HOW MUCH YA BENCH?

2 Try to "shorten the bar": In other words, attempt to push your hands toward each other as the bar goes up—this technique helps to maximize pectoralis activation.

3 Pause at the bottom: The majority of bench-pressing injuries occur when you're reversing the bar path at the bottom of the movement—this is where momentum can create forces that exceed your structural capacity. To minimize accumulating momentum, pause for one full second when the bar is about an inch from your chest.

► Lying dumbbell triceps extensions are a tried-and-true favorite for upper arm conditioning. Unfortunately, most people really miss out on the potential benefits of this exercise because of technique errors.

1 Aim back, not up: When you extend your arms straight upward, your triceps are able to relax because your elbows are locked out. So instead of aiming up, aim back (about 30 degrees works perfectly for most). This tactic keeps those tris under maximal tension throughout the movement.

2 Use your head: On the concentric portion of the lift, press the back of your head into the bench, though not with maximal effort.

3 Loosen up: Try relaxing your grip by allowing the pinky side of your palm to make contact with the inner edge of the dumbbell. When you do this, you're able to perform the extensions without actually grasping the handles. Reducing tension on the forearm musculature throws the tension right onto the triceps.

REACHING FOR BETTER TRICEPS



Here's how it's done: This is simply a standard deadlift with one small but very important modification: You'll start the movement from the "hang" position—standing upright with the bar. The best way to perform this movement is to start with the bar at mid-thigh level on the support hooks of a squat cage or similar station. Simply grasp the barbell, step back far enough to clear the rack, take a deep inhaled, and lower the bar to the floor. Allow the plates to gently touch (no pause though) and then immediately reverse this action until you're back to an upright standing position. Repeat for the desired number of reps, but as a general rule of thumb, don't exceed 5 to 6 reps per set when performing any type of deadlift.

Performing your deads from the hang position improves your strength because your body can take advantage of the pre-stretch that develops as you lower the weight to the floor. It also affords you the

chance to gauge the weight before actually pulling on it. All in all, you'll find this a much more productive way to perform this old favorite.

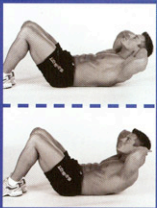
HANG UP YOUR OLD DEADLIFTS



▲ I consider the deadlift to be the most underappreciated weightroom lift of all time, but there's a better way to do it, and I bet you've never seen this before—it's called the hanging deadlift.

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A BETTER WAY TO CRUNCH



▲ It used to be that sit-ups were the only "real" way to work those abs. Then, somewhere back in the 70s, the fitness intelligentsia informed us that sit-ups were actually bad because (gasp) they didn't "isolate" the abs, due to "excessive" involvement of the hip flexors! Let me clue you into something: muscles are designed to work in groups! In this case, the rectus abdominus and the psoas major form a kinesiological "team" that work together to accomplish trunk and hip flexion activities.

As it turns out, sit-ups do rely heavily on hip flexor recruitment, and crunches do target the abs, so why not do both in the same exercise?

Here's how it's done: Lying on the floor with your hips and knees flexed to 90-degree angles and feet on the floor, simply curl yourself up, one vertebrae at a time, until your torso is perpendicular to the floor. Then repeat this motion to return to the start position. This "curl-up" exercise really delivers as compared to most conventional ab drills.

▶ Ah yes, pull-ups. The average college-aged male can't do a single rep. Pity. Pull-ups are an absolutely indispensable tool for great upper body development. So much in fact, that if I had to choose between pull-ups and bench presses, I'd take the former. Now pull-ups can be difficult to be sure, so here's one of my favorite tricks

to get this valuable exercise working for you, rather than against you:

Here's how it's done: Instead of visualizing the act of pulling your body up to the bar, I want you to focus on forcing your elbows down to your rib cage. That's it. This subtle shift in thinking makes the pull-up much easier to perform. If you can currently get one or two reps, this technique will instantly add a rep or two to your total. Before you know it, you'll be cranking off sets of 10!

T-MINUS 10 AND COUNTING

Finally, I've got a neat little trick for you that you can use with any exercise. It's the simplest and yet possibly the most useful technique I'm providing you with in this article. And here it is: count backward, not

forward. That's it. The simple act of counting down rather than up reduces the subjective difficulty of every set you do. ◀→

Charles Staley is known as the "Secret Weapon" by his Olympic and professional athletes for his uncanny ability to see what other coaches miss. Charles has written hundreds of published articles in a number of popular magazines and is in constant demand by the media for his dynamic interviews and unique ability to clearly explain his subject to varied audiences. Subscribe to Charles' FREE mini-course on Escalating Density Training at www.EDTSecrets.com.

DON'T PULL UP, PUSH DOWN

