

# Tweak Your BENCH TECHNIQUE

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Between the two of us we have over 25 years of powerlifting experience with over 100 meets under our collective lever belts. We have run over 20 meets and have seen so many bench styles that it boggles the mind. As all the special techniques and tricks come and go the basics remain the same. These techniques apply if you bench unequipped or with a bench shirt. These techniques must be practiced with every rep whether you are warming up or hitting doubles in a bench shirt. You must also bench with the same technique whether

you have your bench shirt on or not. In years past you could bench with one groove, put a bench shirt on and bench with another groove. Today's new high tech shirts are not that forgiving. You must train the same without a bench shirt as you do in a shirt.

Setting your body up on the bench is crucial to getting white lights. Your upper and lower back are the key to your big bench. I know some of you are thinking, "These people have no idea what they are talking about." Read on and take a few technique tips to the gym and give them a try.

Most people think of arching on bench and only think of the butt to shoulder arch. You actually have 2 arches that need to be trained and practiced. The first is the butt to trap arch or you can call it the north/south arch. The second is the left rear deltoid to right rear deltoid arch or the east to west arch.

First, lie down on the bench with your hands on the bar or bench rack for leverage. Begin by pulling your right shoulder blade in towards your spine as far as possible. Pull the left shoulder blade towards your spine in the same manner. At this point you should feel like you are laying on a small tennis ball right between your shoulder blades. Hold onto the bar or bench rack and pull your heels back until you are on your toes and begin pushing your body horizontal along the bench towards your head. What you want to do by pushing with your legs is to get your neck and upper trap to touch the bench and also shorten the distance from your hips to your shoulder blades. Now if your back is not cramping by now we will throw in one more thing. Take your right shoulder blade and squeeze it down towards the top of your right hip. All the time keeping it pulled into your spine. Do the same with the left shoulder blade. This is where the east/west arch comes into play. If you have done all this correctly you shouldn't be able to hold it for more than 10 seconds or so. You will be able to increase this time period and the intensity that you can hold it with a couple of special exercises that we will get to further down the page.

Now with your back fully cramped up take the bar at the maximum width grip that your federation allows. The wider your grip the shorter your bench stroke will be. Your elbows should be out and the bar should be sitting in your lower palm directly over your shoulders. If you set the bar high in your hand this will throw off your leverages and put undo strain on the wrists.

Start your decent of the bar in an arc towards your lower chest or upper belly. On the decent your elbows should start tucking in towards your torso. At the point the bar touches your chest, sternum or upper belly your elbows should be tucked into your sides. You need to think of the lowering of the bar as pulling your body or chest up into the bar.

The press up should begin with the flexing of your glutes and abs. Push the bar in same path that you brought it down in. As you arc back up rotate your elbows out so that they are pointed away from you at lockout. As you push the bar upwards visualize pulling the bar apart like it is made out of taffy. The lockout should consist of locking your elbows while keeping the upper back locked in place. A big problem we see is people reaching with their shoulders at lockout. Both of your arches should stay tight until you get the rack command. If you let your shoulders relax towards lockout you will actually have to push the bar an inch or more farther. If the bar floats towards your face on the press you have most likely relaxed your lats and allowed your elbows to flare out to soon.

We have a couple of special exercises that we use to strengthen the upper back muscles and teach to gain more muscle control. The first one we call the incline pull. We set up an incline bench in front of a high pulley machine. Using the longest pull down bar we place our hands at legal bench press grip width. We then set our east/west and then our north/south arch. The bar is pulled to the same position that it would touch on the regular bench press. We hold it at the chest for 2 to 3 seconds and return the bar to arms length without losing the upper and lower back arch. We normally do 4 sets of 6 reps. The amount of weight doesn't really matter. What matters is how hard you can contract and drop your lats.

The second exercise is done on the same pulley machine (with the attached seat) and the same handle attachment. Sit upright as if you were going to do a pull down in front of you. Relax your shoulder blades and let the weight pull you arms up. Using only your lats and upper back shrug down bending your elbows only slightly. You can bend back a few degrees and look upwards to make the exercise a little more effective. The bar will only be moving a few inches. Hold each rep for about 3 seconds. Again we do 4 sets of 6 reps. We hope we have given you a few things to think about and try. The setup on the bench needs to be practiced over and over to

