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What are you trying to do for fitness?

A Better Bench Press

You must first realize where you are to ever get better. In this situation it relates to how you bench press. Should everyone bench press exactly the same – yes, if our bodies were all made the same, but we are all differently. Specifically to the bench press, this is referring to the range of motion that the exercise should be executed thru. Contrary to some popular belief, the bench press should not necessarily always go all the way down to touch the chest – most of the time it shouldn't touch the chest.

The distance it should be lowered should be dependent on the range of motion of the joint capsule of the shoulder. Since the bench press is normally performed on a flat bench, the movement of the shoulder blades is limited and thus puts more strain on the shoulder joint capsule. If the bar is lowered with weight beyond the normal range of motion of the joint capsule, then this extra load can cause the shoulder joint capsule to be injured or stretched causing damage to proprioceptors of the capsule which can lead to more pain and/or injury down the road.

So before benching, find out how far to go down on the Bench Press. One can assess his or her range of motion by placing the arms in the air as if performing the exercise without any weight or a bar. Slowly lower the arms downward until they stop without being forced any lower. This position is the max bottom position, but it is not suggested to train to this max position, rather 1-2" higher to give yourself room for error if you become fatigued. A general rule of thumb is no lower than 90 degrees at the elbow – but it could be different for each person. If you have trouble controlling the range of motion, try bench pressing on the floor so you have protection from going too far.

The next most crucial step for a better bench press is rotator cuff work – see the 4 Week Shoulder Stability Super Circuit Workout under the workouts section on Tri4Fitness.net. There have been very successful research studies showing improvements in bench press strength from improving the rotator cuff without changing any other component as it is crucial for stabilizing during the exercise.

Finally, make your bench press purposeful and useful for your life. Are you really going to need to push an object with two hands on the same object, such as a barbell? Or would it be more realistic to push two separate dumbbells? Using dumbbells is often times more useful for individuals, but still able to develop the musculature in the same way. In addition, dumbbells assist in making the body not only strong, but also stable and coordinated.

References

Chek, P. Big Benches – Bad Shoulders. PT on the Net. Online. August 1999