

Advanced Upper Body Training: Stage 1

by Ian King | Fri, May 04, 2001, T-mag.com

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Bring on the Pain-Upper Body Advanced Upper Body Training — Stage 1 by Ian King A few issues ago, Ian finished up his new "Bring the Pain" lower body series. Now it's time to hit the upper body. If you haven't tried the leg program yet, don't worry. You can combine it with this new upper body program. If you haven't completed Ian's first series (the "Limping" program, the "Super Strength" program ...

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A few issues ago, Ian finished up his new "Bring the Pain" lower body series. Now it's time to hit the upper body. If you haven't tried the leg program yet, don't worry. You can combine it with this new upper body program.

If you haven't completed Ian's first series (the "Limping" program, the "Super Strength" program and the "Great Guns" program), then Ian encourages you to do so before you attempt this new series. Links to those programs can be found in our **FAQ** section.

As Ian will explain below, this new series differs from the old one in several ways. For one, you get to customize it to fit your needs and goals. If you're only interested in getting *hyooge*, then choose the hypertrophy option. If your main focus is on strength, choose the neural option. If you want the best of both worlds, go for the hypertrophy-neural option. Training age (how long you've been seriously hitting the weights) also plays a role in choosing which option to use. According to Ian, those that have been training a long time would do better choosing the neural option. Beginners should probably go with the hypertrophy option.

If the **Bring the Pain** series is new to you, be sure you've read the introduction article that shows how to manipulate the variables and prepare for the program. What follows is stage one of a four stage program.

In the last few months I've laid out the Bring the Pain program for the lower body. Now it's time to premier the equivalent program for the upper body. This program will eventually become part of my second generation Get Buffed™ program, but you're getting a sneak preview of it here in *T-mag*.

The first generation series of articles provided 12-week programs using a four day per week split. Some of the exercises used in stage one were guaranteed to draw a cry of "I ain't gonna do that poofy stuff!" from some of the hardened lifters (and also from those less hardened but pretending to be so!). But the programs soon gained appreciation from those Columbus types who were prepared to sail into uncharted waters! Simply put, those who took the chance and used the programs got bigger and stronger!

Before we get into it, I want to answer two of the most common questions I get in relation to these programs:

Q: Can I keep repeating this 12 week program?

A: Yes, you could, but it may not be the most effective approach. In addition to which, if you read into the options outlined for you in the **intro article**, you'll note that there are three different programs. Add the first generation program to that and you have four different 12 week programs. Add a recovery week after each one and you have accounted for a year of training!

In reality, full exploitation of all the variables outlined in the introduction will result in 730 different programs and subsequent training outcomes!

Q: Can I combine the lower body, two-day-per-week program with the upper body two-day-per-week program?

A: Yes! Somewhere along the line there was a misinterpretation that participating in both upper or lower body programs concurrently wasn't appropriate. (I do suggest, however, that when using my "Great Guns" program you simply maintain other body parts so you can appropriately prioritize arms.) Actually, the upper and lower body programs were designed to be used together! I think this came from a vague but firm belief held in the US that lower-rep work shouldn't be done for the whole body, or at least not done on subsequent days. I sense some background of interpreting lower rep work as being too demanding on the neural system.

I'll share my two cents worth on this topic. Provided the volume isn't excessive, then this isn't an issue. In fairness, however, there may be a period of conditioning/general adapting to more frequent exposure to lower rep training. Should your background be lacking in lower-rep work, monitor your recovery, keep the volume low, and avoid excessive intensity levels relative to the reps used.

Now for some background rationale for those who want to know the "why" of what they're about to do. You'll train your upper body twice per week as part of a standard four day per week split routine. You can either do this program by itself and simply "maintain" your other muscle groups on the other two days, or you can combine this program with the Bring the Pain lower-body program. If you choose the latter, then the lower body will dominate over the upper body in stage one and two if you use a linear periodization, and in stage one and three if you use an alternating approach. In stage one, pulling dominates over pushing. You do all your pulling in the first upper body workout of the week and all your pushing in the second workout of the week.

Now, historically, it's nothing new to split pushing and pulling in strength training, although I don't use this method all that much in comparison. But what I'm doing that's less conventional is the sequencing of priority from pulling to pushing. Not many programs get the pushing done later in the week. Ask yourself, how many programs have you left bench and shoulder press for later in the week? And you're wondering why you have a muscle imbalance?!

On that topic, I could kill another popular question: How long would I have to prioritize my weaknesses before my muscle imbalance was corrected? One way to answer this is to simply

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determine how long (in say, months or years) you trained in an unbalanced way and in rough terms you can expect that same amount of time to spend in prioritizing your weaknesses. Not the answer you wanted to hear, I know! However, that's the worst case. With smarter programming, you can reduce this time. Based on this, I've given priority to what I've observed is most strength training participants' greatest weaknesses — their pulling muscles. More specifically, their ability to pull in horizontal (scapula retract) and vertical (scapula depress) planes.

Additionally, arms are prioritized over the core pushing/pulling muscles in stage one. Within the pulling in stage one, I've prioritized horizontal pulling over vertical pulling and in the pushing I've prioritized vertical pushing over horizontal pushing. This is simply based on my experience and observations of common muscle imbalances.

Remember, in this series I give you the power to increase the individualization and therefore the effectiveness of this program. To do this, I'm going to help you exploit the six variables outlined in the introduction article found [here](#). These are the variables we'll exploit to varying degrees:

1. Body part prioritization
2. Loading parameters
3. Periodization models
4. Rate of change
5. Bilateral muscle balance
6. Recovery models

Note that the below days are called "B" and "D" days. They are simply the first and second upper body workouts of the week in this stage. A and C days are intended for the lower body, subject to your individual modification of course!

Enough talk. Let's do it!

UPPER BODY

Stage 1: (Weeks 1-3, longer if you choose)

B Day

Warm up: 10 minutes of light aerobics, compulsory 20 to 30 minutes of stretching.

Choose one of the following three options for B day. (I'll explain the exercises in detail below.)

B — Hypertrophy/Lower Training Age Option

Forearm Flexion (wrist curls), one or two arm

Warm-up: 1 x 10

Sets: 1 x 8-10, 1 x 10-12, 1 x 12-15

Speed: 311*

Rest: tri-set

Bicep Tri-set:

Incline Dumbbell Curl

Warm-up: 1 x 10

Sets: 1 x 10-12

Speed: 311

Rest: none

Reverse EZ Curl on preacher bench

Warm-up: 1 x 10

Sets: 1 x 8-10

Speed: 311

Rest: none

Seated Dumbbell Hammer Curl

Warm-up: 1 x 10

Sets: 1 x 6-8

Speed: 311

Rest: 2-4 minutes

Horizontal Pull Tri-set:

Prone Dumbbell Fly

Warm-up: 1 x 10

Sets: 1 x 10-12

Speed: 311

Rest: none

Bent Over Row, wide grip

Warm-up: 1 x 10

Sets: 1 x 8-10
Speed: 311
Rest: none

Seated Row, underhand grip
Warm-up: 1 x 10
Sets: 1 x 6-8
Speed: 311
Rest: 2-4 minutes

Vertical Pull Tri-set:

Dumbbell Pullover
Warm-up: 1 x 10
Sets: 1 x 10-12
Speed: 311
Rest: none

Lat pulldown, wide grip
Warm-up: 1 x 10
Sets: 1 x 8-10
Speed: 311
Rest: none

Chin up, palms facing you
Warm-up: 1 x 10
Sets: 1 x 6-8
Speed: 311

B — Hypertrophy-neural/Intermediate Training Age Option

Forearm Flexion, one or two arm
Warm-up: 1 x 10
Sets: 1 x 6-8, 1 x 8-10, 1 x 10-12
Speed: 311
Rest: tri-set

Bicep Tri-set:

Incline Dumbbell Curl
Warm-up: 1 x 10
Sets: 1 x 8-10
Speed: 311
Rest: none

Reverse EZ Curl on preacher bench
Warm-up: 1 x 10
Sets: 1 x 6-8
Speed: 311
Rest: none

Seated Dumbbell Hammer Curl

Warm-up: 1 x 10

Sets: 1 x 4-6

Speed: 311

Rest: 2-4 minutes

Horizontal Pull Tri-set:

Prone Dumbbell Fly

Warm-up: 1 x 10

Sets: 1 x 8-10

Speed: 311

Rest: none

Bent Over Row, wide grip

Warm-up: 1 x 10

Sets: 1 x 6-8

Speed: 311

Rest: none

Seated Row, underhand grip

Warm-up: 1 x 10

Sets: 1 x 4-6

Speed: 311

Rest: 2-4 minutes

Vertical Pull Tri-set:

Dumbbell Pullover

Warm-up: 1 x 10

Sets: 1 x 8-10

Speed: 311

Rest: none

Lat pulldown, wide grip

Warm-up: 1 x 10

Sets: 1 x 6-8

Speed: 311

Rest: none

Chin up, palms facing you

Warm-up: 1 x 10

Sets: 1 x 4-6

Speed: 311

B — Neural/Advanced Training Age Option

Forearm Flexion, one or two arm

Warm-up: 1 x 10

Sets: 1 x 6-8, 1 x 8-10, 1 x 10-12
Speed: 311
Rest: tri-set

Bicep Tri-set:

Incline Dumbbell Curl
Warm-up: 1 x 10
Sets: 1 x 4-6
Speed: 311
Rest: none

Reverse EZ Curl on preacher bench
Warm-up: 1 x 10
Sets: 1 x 6-8
Speed: 311
Rest: none

Seated Dumbbell Hammer Curl
Warm-up: 1 x 10
Sets: 1 x 8-10
Speed: 311
Rest: 2-4 minutes

Horizontal Pull Tri-set:

Prone Dumbbell Fly
Warm-up: 1 x 10
Sets: 1 x 4-6
Speed: 311
Rest: none

Bent Over Row, wide grip
Warm-up: 1 x 10
Sets: 1 x 6-8
Speed: 311
Rest: none

Seated Row, underhand grip
Warm-up: 1 x 10
Sets: 1 x 8-12
Speed: 311
Rest: 2-4 minutes

Vertical Pull Tri-set:

Dumbbell Pullover
Warm-up: 1 x 10
Sets: 1 x 4-6
Speed: 311

Rest: none

Lat pulldown, wide grip

Warm-up: 1 x 10

Sets: 1 x 6-8

Speed: 311

Rest: none

Chin up, palms facing you

Warm-up: 1 x 10

Sets: 1 x 8-10

Speed: 311

Notes:

- A tri-set is intended to be done as follows: one set of the first exercise, 0-10 seconds rest, then one set of the second exercise, 0-10 seconds rest, then one set of the third exercise. If there's a warm up and a work set involved, or more than one work set, this cycle is repeated after resting up to two to four minutes (two minutes for hyper/intro version, three minutes for mixed hyper-neural/intermediate version, and four minutes for neural/advanced version).
- As a general guide, use less rest between sets during the tri-set and between cycles of the tri-set in week one, and you can allow more rest time to be added each subsequent week of the stage.

Here's a description of the exercises involved in "B" day, stage 1:

Forearm Flexion: Kneel down in front of a bench with your wrists supported across it, palms up, hands just over the side. If you choose to do a bilateral movement, use a bar, and if you elect to work more unilaterally, use a dumbbell in each hand. In flexion, allow the bar or dumbbells to roll to your fingertips. If you're feeling too much strain on your wrists when using a bar, an EZ bar is something to consider. If the lightest bar in the gym causes you fatigue in the warm up set, it just became the work-set, so move on to the next exercise. Use a full range and terminate the reps if range is lost.



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Bicep Tri-set:

Incline Dumbbell Curl — Use a bench with about a 45 degree incline. The elbows should remain still and behind the body throughout. Palms remain supine or facing upwards. Only flex as high as you can without the elbows moving. The elbows should remain behind the body, with the upper arm perpendicular to the ground throughout.

Reverse EZ Curl on preacher bench — Take the EZ bar and sit on the preacher bench. Use a palms down (prone), medium grip. Place the full length of the upper arm against the preacher bench with your armpits seated into the top of the pad. If the bench is adjustable, use a 45 degree angle. Use a full stretch, but don't come up to a point where the load or tension is reduced.



Seated Dumbbell Hammer Curl — Sit on the end of a flat bench with dumbbells down by the sides, palms facing inwards (neutral grip). As you lift, rotate the dumbbells outwards so that at the top the thumb end of your grip is as externally rotated as it can be without the elbows leaving the side. Reverse this movement during the lowering.

Notes:

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- If you want to do the reverse curl at least semi-unilaterally, you should use dumbbells instead of a barbell.
- If you have a serious bilateral imbalance, you could choose to do the above movements one arm at a time. In other words, finish doing the tri-set for one arm, and then do the tri-set for the other arm.

Horizontal Pulling Tri-set:

Prone Dumbbell Fly — Lie face down on a bench. Keep the elbows only slightly bent and at a constant angle throughout the movement. Raise the dumbbells up to the side of your body, keeping them at approximately 90 degrees to the long axis of the body. Pause at the top and don't rest the hands on the floor between reps. Minimize the upper trap involvement.



Bent Over Row — Stand with your feet shoulder width or slightly wider apart. Bend forward at the waist and push your hips back a bit so that your center of gravity is as close to directly over the legs as possible. Have the legs slightly bent. Keep the trunk flat in a line or angle slightly above horizontal to the ground and don't allow this angle to change whatsoever during the lift.

Take a wide grip on a barbell and raise it to a high point on your chest. If you're not able to keep your lower arm and wrist in a straight line, pull the bar to a point lower on the body and/or lower the load being used. Use a full stretch and ensure you make it to the trunk. Focus on pulling with the shoulder blades and squeezing them together at the top. If you prefer a more unilateral movement, you can do this in the same body position using dumbbells or lying face down on a bench using dumbbells.

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Seated Row — Using a shoulder width, underhand grip (palm facing up), pull the bar to the middle of the trunk. If during this movement you feel any upper trap involvement (like your shoulders lifting), lower the point on the body to which you're pulling. Ensure full retraction (pulling together) of shoulder blades at the top of the movement.



Vertical Pulling Tri-set:

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Dumbbell Pullover — If you want to exploit a unilateral movement, have one dumbbell in each hand, either lying along a bench or across a bench on your back. Start with a slight elbow bend and maintain this throughout. Look to have the lats do the work, not the triceps, which will require a focus on the movement coming from the shoulders. How far you lower the dumbbells depends upon your comfort range. Most importantly, be consistent in your range.

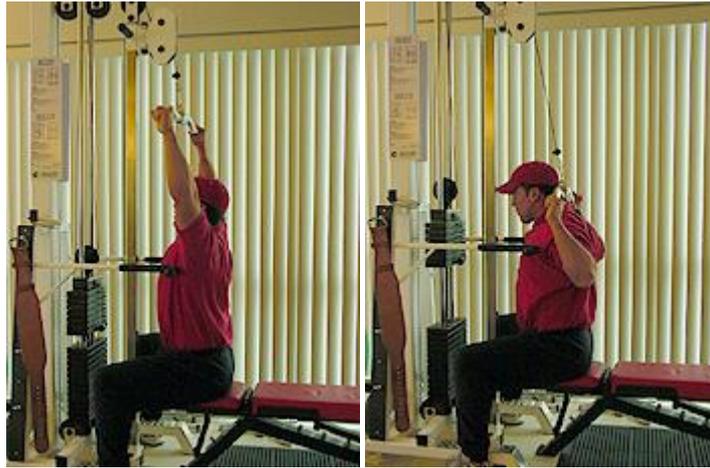


Pause and then lift back up to the top, but stop before the arms reach a perpendicular position to the ground. Ensure the arms stay at the same height throughout but don't allow them to touch. If you prefer a bilateral movement, do the same thing but use a bar.

Lat Pulldown — Take a wide grip on the bar and pull it behind the head to the base of your neck. Use this full range if you can, but you may have conditions that don't allow use of a full range. Most importantly, be consistent in the range you use. Ideally, at the bottom position your elbows are directly under your wrists. To achieve this you may find the need to lower the load *considerably* and to use a spotter who has the courage to tell you the truth!

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Allow the arms to go to a full stretch in the top position. There'll be some whose shoulder laxity or injury/surgery history suggests that they should be going to the front rather than behind the head. In this case, apply the same technical tips.

Chin up — Use a supine (palm facing you), shoulder-width grip. Start in a full stretch position with the feet crossed and tucked up. Ensure that the chin goes well over the bar and that you return to the full stretch position while keeping the body sway under control.



D Day (second upper body day of the week)

Warm up: 10 minutes of light aerobics, compulsory 20 to 30 minutes of stretching.

Choose one of the following three options for D day.

D — Hypertrophy/Lower Training Age Option

Forearm Flexion, one or two arm

Warm-up: 1 x 10

Sets: 1 x 8-10, 1 x 10-12, 1 x 12-15

Speed: 311

Rest: tri-set

Tricep Tri-set:

Overhead Extension

Warm-up: 1 x 10

Sets: 1 x 10-12

Speed: 311

Rest: none

Lying Triceps Extension

Warm-up: 1 x 10

Sets: 1 x 8-10

Speed: 311

Rest: none

Dips or Bench Dips

Warm-up: 1 x 10

Sets: 1 x 6-8

Speed: 311

Rest: 2-4 minutes

Vertical Push Tri-set:

Seated Lateral Dumbbell Raise

Warm-up: 1 x 10

Sets: 1 x 10-12

Speed: 311

Rest: none

Seated Arnold Press

Warm-up: 1 x 10

Sets: 1 x 8-10

Speed: 311

Rest: none

Seated Shoulder Press, wide grip

Warm-up: 1 x 10

Sets: 1 x 6-8

Speed: 311

Rest: 2-4 minutes

Horizontal Push Tri-set:

Supine Dumbbell Fly

Warm-up: 1 x 10

Sets: 1 x 10-12

Speed: 311

Rest: none

Decline Dumbbell Press

Warm-up: 1 x 10

Sets: 1 x 8-10

Speed: 311

Rest: none

Incline Bench Press

Warm-up: 1 x 10

Sets: 1 x 6-8

Speed: 311

D — Hypertrophy-neural/Intermediate Training Age Option

Forearm Flexion, one or two arm

Warm-up: 1 x 10

Sets: 1 x 6-8, 1 x 8-10, 1 x 10-12

Speed: 311

Rest: tri-set

Tricep Tri-set:

Overhead Extension

Warm-up: 1 x 10

Sets: 1 x 8-10

Speed: 311

Rest: none

Lying Triceps Extension

Warm-up: 1 x 10

Sets: 1 x 6-8

Speed: 311

Rest: none

Dips or Bench Dips

Warm-up: 1 x 10

Sets: 1 x 4-6

Speed: 311

Rest: 2-4 minutes

Vertical Push Tri-set:

Seated Lateral Dumbbell Raise

Warm-up: 1 x 10

Sets: 1 x 8-10

Speed: 311

Rest: none

Seated Arnold Press

Warm-up: 1 x 10

Sets: 1 x 6-8
Speed: 311
Rest: none

Seated Shoulder Press, wide grip
Warm-up: 1 x 10
Sets: 1 x 4-6
Speed: 311
Rest: 2-4 minutes

Horizontal Push Tri-set:

Supine Dumbbell Fly
Warm-up: 1 x 10
Sets: 1 x 8-10
Speed: 311
Rest: none

Decline Dumbbell Press
Warm-up: 1 x 10
Sets: 1 x 6-8
Speed: 311
Rest: none

Incline Bench Press
Warm-up: 1 x 10
Sets: 1 x 4-6
Speed: 311
Rest: 2-4 minutes

D — Neural/Advanced Training Age Option

Forearm Flexion, one or two arm
Warm-up: 1 x 10
Sets: 1 x 6-8, 1 x 8-10, 1 x 10-12
Speed: 311
Rest: tri-set

Tricep Tri-set:

Dips or Bench Dips
Warm-up: 1 x 10
Sets: 1 x 4-6
Speed: 311
Rest: none

Lying Triceps Extension
Warm-up: 1 x 10
Sets: 1 x 6-8

Speed: 311
Rest: none

Overhead Extension
Warm-up: 1 x 10
Sets: 1 x 8-10
Speed: 311
Rest: 2-4 minutes

Vertical Push Tri-set:

Seated Shoulder Press, wide grip
Warm-up: 1 x 10
Sets: 1 x 4-6
Speed: 311
Rest: none

Seated Arnold Press
Warm-up: 1 x 10
Sets: 1 x 6-8
Speed: 311
Rest: none

Seated Lateral Dumbbell Raise
Warm-up: 1 x 10
Sets: 1 x 8-10
Speed: 311
Rest: 2-4 minutes

Horizontal Push Tri-set:

Incline Bench Press
Warm-up: 1 x 10
Sets: 1 x 4-6
Speed: 311
Rest: none

Decline Dumbbell Press
Warm-up: 1 x 10
Sets: 1 x 6-8
Speed: 311
Rest: none

Supine Dumbbell Fly
Warm-up: 1 x 10
Sets: 1 x 8-10
Speed: 311

Here's a description of the exercises involved in "D" day, stage 1:

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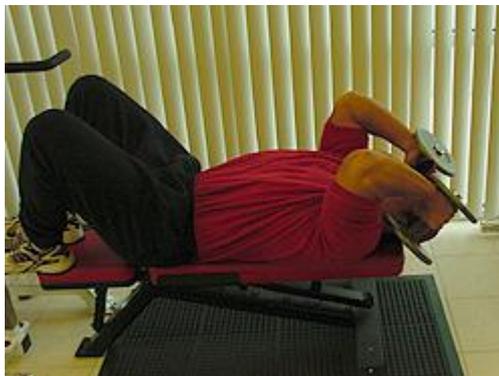
Forearm Extension: Kneel down in front of a bench, with your wrists supported across it, palms *down*, hands hanging just over the side. If you're going to use a bilateral movement use a bar, and if you elect to work more unilaterally, use a dumbbell in each hand. In extension, ensure you extend as high as the joint will allow without the forearm leaving the bench whatsoever — and be consistent with this range! If you're feeling too much strain on your wrists when using a bar, an EZ bar is something to consider. If the lightest bar in the gym causes you fatigue in the warm up set, it just became the work-set so move on to the next exercise. Use a full range and, as always, terminate the reps if range is lost.

Tricep Tri-set:

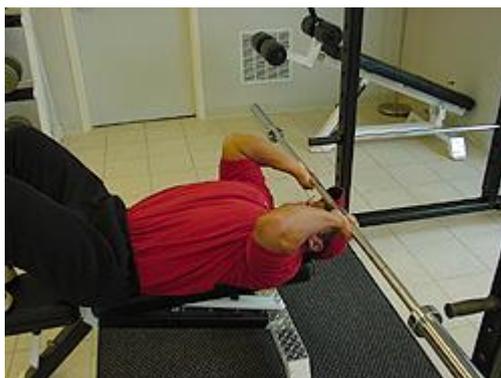
Overhead Extension — These are to be done seated, using dumbbells or a bar. Keep the elbows as high and as far back as possible at all times (to maximize the stretch on the tricep) and keep the elbows to the ears. If using dumbbells, use a range that results in the dumbbell touching the upper back.



Lying Tricep Extension — Lie on your back on the bench. Start with the upper arms slightly behind the vertical and the head slightly off the end of the bench. Don't let the elbow or upper arm position change from there during the movement. Lower the bar to the top of the forehead. You can use a bar or dumbbells.



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Dips or Bench Dips — If your triceps aren't up to it, do bench dips (between two benches). Otherwise, use a medium width (just outside shoulders) parallel bar. Cross the feet at the ankles; bend the knees so the ankles are at or near knee height. Lower down until the shoulders are lower than the elbow joint (providing you have no conditions that contraindicate this). Keep the body still during the lift and lower so the movement isn't affected by momentum. Don't lock out fully at the top.

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Notes:

- If you want to do the overhead extension or the lying tricep extension at least semi-unilaterally, you should use dumbbells instead of a barbell.
- If you have a serious bilateral imbalance, you could choose to do the above movements one arm at a time. In other words, finish doing the tri-set for one arm, and then do the tri-set for the other arm.

Vertical Pushing Tri-set:

Seated Lateral Dumbbell Raise — Sit at the end of a bench with the feet together. Hold dumbbells by the side. With a slightly bent elbow, raise the arms up to the side keeping the little finger just a little higher than the thumb. Stop at about the top of your head and then lower back down.



Arnold Press — Sit on a bench with feet apart forming a triangle with your bum. Hold dumbbells in each hand on the shoulder. In the bottom position, the dumbbells will be facing your ears. As you lift, slowly rotate the dumbbells out until they're facing out as much as you can rotate them in the top position. Reverse this during the lowering.

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Seated Shoulder Press — Take a barbell from the squat rack and sit on a bench with feet apart forming a triangle with your bum. With a wide grip on the bar, press the bar up evenly but avoid full lock out. When you lower down, do so to a consistent point on the back of the neck, preferably to the base of the neck.

As with the lat pulldown to the back of the neck, there may be some whose shoulder condition limits their range or precludes them from this lift. Be sensible. During the lift keep the bar in line. When I say "in line", I mean in a consistent line of movement. "Losing line" in this lift can be stressful on the neck



Horizontal Pushing Tri-set :

Supine Dumbbell Fly — Lie on your back on a bench, dumbbell in each hand held directly above your chest. Your elbows should be slightly bent. As you lower and lift, this elbow angle is not to change. Use as full a range as is comfortable and safe, and most importantly, be consistent with the range. When it comes to range you may have to decide where your priorities lie — with range or load. In the early stages you may not be able to have both and I recommend you go with range.



Decline Dumbbell Press — Place the decline at a low angle (about 30 degrees). Hold the dumbbells with the thumbs facing in and make sure you use a full stretch. Lower as far as you can and press the dumbbells towards each other at the top. Avoid full lockout and use a spotter when going near fatigue. (There's at least one recorded death from using a decline, but admittedly it was with a barbell. Still, be careful!)

Incline Bench Press — Using an incline bench angle of about 30 degrees, take a wide grip on the bar. Lower the bar to a position high on the chest (high on the sternum). When you press back up, avoid full lockout. Again, get a spotter when using loads likely to cause high level fatigue.

Conclusion

The above may seem complex, but I do encourage you to study it closely before you start the program. Rushing will be guaranteed to result in a misinterpretation, even right down to the finer technical issues. I'll leave you with two pearls of wisdom: Firstly, if in doubt, do less! And secondly, having a twelve week plan prepared in advance will almost always give you better results than making it up as you go.

Now go, bring the pain and get buffed!

If you'd like more info on the finer technical details of Ian's methods, checkout his *Get Buffed!*[™] *Video Series*. If you're really advanced, checkout *How to Teach Strength Training Exercises*. Both are available at **KingSports.net**.

* Please refer to our **FAQ** section for an explanation of tempo prescriptions.