

Advanced Upper Body Training: Stage 2

by Ian King | Fri, Jun 01, 2001

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Bring on the Pain-Upper Body Advanced Upper Body Training — Stage 2 by Ian King Okay, you masochists out there, you know the rules. This program is part of Ian's second generation of painful, result producing programs. He suggests you go through the first generation of torture sessions before you try this new series. You can find links to the "Limping", "Super Strength" and "Great Guns" programs in our FAQ section. ...

Bring on the Pain-Upper Body Advanced Upper Body Training — Stage 2 by Ian King

Okay, you masochists out there, you know the rules. This program is part of Ian's second generation of painful, result producing programs. He suggests you go through the first generation of torture sessions before you try this new series. You can find links to the "Limping", "Super Strength" and "Great Guns" programs in our **FAQ** section.

Remember, in this new series Ian gives you a few ways to customize your workouts. First, there are six variables you can manipulate as needed. Ian explains all those **here**. Second, you get to choose whether your main goal is size (hypertrophy), size and strength (hypertrophy-neural), or just strength (neural). Training age (how long you've been hittin' the iron) also plays a role and those that have been in the game a long time should choose the neural option and newbies would be better off choosing the hypertrophy option. This is because Ian believes that the longer you've been training the less reps per set you need to illicit growth.

What follows is stage two of a four stage upper body program. If you missed stage one, you can find it **here**.

The time has come to move into the second stage of the second generation program for the upper body! You'll note that the reps are being lowered faster and the load will be higher in comparison to this stage in the first generation program. What you're also going to notice is the significant reduction in the number of exercises. Get used to it because this trend is going to get even more severe in the third and fourth stages of this 12-week program!

Now for the background rationale for those who want to know the "why" of what they're about to do. This upper body program is a two-day-a-week program as part of a combined upper/lower four-day-a-week standard split routine. In other words, you may combine this with the advanced lower body program already posted here at *T-mag*. The lower body dominates over the upper body in stage one and two if you use 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, in stage two, we go back to having pushing and pulling in one workout.

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Some less conventional issues remain. For example, you'll work vertical pushing and pulling early in the training week and horizontal pushing and pulling later. This means that the vertical work is prioritized in this phase. This is unusual because most people will prioritize horizontal work in general, horizontal pushing in particular. That means that most guys tend to focus all their energies on benching!

A second less common method has also been applied. On the horizontal push/pull day, horizontal pulling dominates (by appearing earlier in the sequence) over horizontal pushing. That's another hard pill to swallow for those connected by their umbilical cords to the idea of benching first in the workout! Trust me; a short-term de-emphasizing of benching will create a long term boost!

With regards to the horizontal day, I've continued to give priority to what I've observed is most strength training participants greatest weaknesses – their pulling muscles, or more specifically, their ability to pull in horizontal (scapula retract) and vertical (scapula depress) planes.

You'll also note that areas are no longer prioritized over the core pushing/pulling muscles as they were in stage one. Hopefully, the increased size and strength gained from prioritizing the elbow flexors/extensors in stage one will boost strength capacity in this and subsequent stages. This is the goal.

Wave Loading: An Overview

Before we begin, I also want to touch briefly on the loading protocol that dominates this phase. This protocol is called wave loading or the contrast method. You usually see this as the 6/1/6/1 rep protocol. In this program, depending on which option you choose (size, strength, or both) you'll also see 5/1/5/1 and 4/1/4/1. All are variations of the same concept.

Using the hypertrophy option (6/1/6/1) as an example, the aim of the first set of six is to enhance the loading potential of the first single rep and second set of six. The second set of six and second single are aimed at exploiting the neural dis-inhibition created by the first. If you don't respect this – if you go too heavy in the first set of six or first single – you won't experience this neural dis-inhibition, as it'll be clouded by fatigue.

Here's an example of wave loading using 6/1/6/1:

1 x 6 at 220 pounds (about 100 kg)
1 x 1 at 275 pounds (about 125 kg)
1 x 6 at 230 pounds (about 105 kg)
1 x 1 at 285 pounds (about 130 kg)

Then in the next week, the second six and one (6/1) become the *first* set loading:

1 x 6 at 230 pounds (about 105 kg)
1 x 1 at 285 pounds (about 130 kg)
1 x 6 at 240 pounds (about 110 kg)
1 x 1 at 300 pounds (about 135 kg)

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Of course, if there's a third week, the same technique applies but the increments don't need to be as high.

Enough talk. Let's do it!

UPPER BODY

Stage 2 — Weeks 4-6 (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

Seated Shoulder Press, wide grip with bar

Warm-up: 1 x 10, 1 x 8

Sets: 6/1/6/1

Speed: 311*

Rest: alternate with chin-ups (see below)

Chin up, wide, overhand grip

Warm-up: 1 x 10, 1 x 8

Sets: 6/1/6/1

Speed: 311

Rest: alternate with shoulder press above

Seated Lateral Dumbbell Raise

Warm-up: 1 x 10 optional

Sets: 1 x 15-20

Speed: 311

Rest: strip set, alternate with biceps curl below

Standing EZ Bar Reverse Biceps Curl

Warm-up: 1 x 10

Sets: 1-2 x 8-10

Speed: 311

Rest: alternate with lateral dumbbell raises above

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

B — Hypertrophy-neural/Intermediate Training Age Option

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Seated Shoulder Press, wide grip with bar

Warm-up: 1 x 10, 1 x 8

Sets: 5/1/5/1

Speed: 311

Rest: alternate with chin-ups (see below)

Chin up, wide, overhand grip

Warm-up: 1 x 10, 1 x 8

Sets: 5/1/5/1

Speed: 311

Rest: alternate with shoulder press above

Seated Lateral Dumbbell Raise

Warm-up: 1 x 10 optional

Sets: 1 x 12-15

Speed: 311

Rest: strip set, alternate with biceps curl below

Standing EZ Bar Reverse Biceps Curl

Warm-up: 1 x 10

Sets: 1-2 x 6-8

Speed: 311

Rest: alternate with lateral dumbbell raises above

B — Neural/Advanced Training Age Option

Seated Shoulder Press, wide grip with bar

Warm-up: 1 x 10, 1 x 8, 1 x 6

Sets: 4/1/4/1, 1 x 10-15

Speed: 311

Rest: alternate with chin-ups (see below)

Chin up, wide, overhand grip

Warm-up: 1 x 10, 1 x 8

Sets: 4/1/4/1, 1 x 10-15

Speed: 311

Rest: alternate with shoulder press above

Dips

Warm-up: 1 x 10 bodyweight dips

Sets: 1-2 x 5-6, 1 x 10 optional

Speed: 311

Rest: 2-3 minutes

Notes:

- Most of this program is based on alternate setting. The way I want you to do this is to do a set of one exercise (like the shoulder press), rest as long as you feel you need to, and then do

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a set of the next exercise (chin-up), rest again for as long as you need to, then repeat this cycle. So you'll complete all the sets for two exercises before moving on. How long is "rest long enough"? A general guideline for work sets (warm-up sets require less) might be:

Hypertrophy/Lower training age option: 1 to 2 minutes

Hypertrophy-neural/Intermediate training age option: 2 to 3 minutes

Neural/Advanced training age option: 3 to 4 minutes

- There are some exercises where you'll just take a normal standard set/rest approach, usually the last exercise in a program that has an odd number of exercises e.g. the neural/advanced training age option.
- When you get to the strip set in some of the exercises (like the lateral raises), look to use three different loads (from heavy to light) and conclude the set in the number of reps indicated. For example, if it asks for 12 to 15, you may do 4 to 6 on each of three different loads. If your load selection turns out to be at the upper end of your capability, use the ten second rest period available. If your load selection turns out to be at the lower end of your capability, which I'd expect in week one of this stage, use little or no rest between the three different loads.

Here's a description of the exercises involved in "B" day, stage 2:

Seated Shoulder Press — Take a barbell from the squat racks and sit on a bench with your 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, so be sensible. During the lift keep the bar in line; losing line in this lift can be stressful on the neck. When I say "in line", I mean in a consistent line of movement. Deviating from this line is "getting out of line".



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The hardest part about starting a shoulder press is getting it off the shoulders for the first rep, which is why many choose to start the movement from the top. I may be a bit old-fashioned but I also like to develop the strength to start from a dead-stop off the bottom. This challenge of getting the bar going really increases the need for and benefit of learning how to hold your breath and keep the torso up and tight. If you attempt to start the rep off with a body like a rag doll, you'll display the strength of a rag doll!

Note that with using a wide grip, as the load increases there may be a tendency for the hands to slip out along the bar. Negate this with the use of chalk. Also remember that the shoulder press, relative to other bigger muscle lifts, deals in smaller numbers. So a five pound increase may represent a large percentage increase in load. Respect this and use appropriate increments. Don't be down on yourself for achieving only small increments week to week in this lift.

Chin up — Use a prone grip (palm facing away) and start in a full stretch position with the feet crossed and tucked up. Ensure the chin goes well over the bar and that you return to the full stretch position at the bottom. Keep body sway under control. What constitutes a wide grip? A medium grip for me is the hand space just outside the shoulder. A wide grip is the next hand space out from that.



Note that many gyms have chin bars that drop off diagonally towards the ground at the ends. Whilst I suspect this may be more ergonomically correct, I don't like or recommend this type of bar. First, the hand grips at this area are usually too wide for the average person. Second, you aren't likely to have the horizontal bar section as a guide to maintain consistent range in the concentric phase. I'm happy for you to use a straight chin bar or the horizontal part of the chin bar if it does drop off.

The loading protocol in this phase is going to require the use of external loading. There are many ways of doing this and I'm going to share with you my preferred method. I simply get a meter of rope and tie a reef knot connecting each end. Then I insert the first end of the loop through the center of a weight plate and the second end of the loop through the first end of the loop. Then through the second end of the loop I insert the tongue of a 4" weight belt.

Ideally the rope is short enough so that the weight plate is hanging just below the crotch. I then clamp the weight plate between my thighs. This may sound like a lot of mucking around but the main thing is to get the weight plate in line with my center of gravity and not swaying about at all. You may be surprised at the positive difference this or similar positioning may have on your chins!

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Should you use wrist straps to anchor your hands to the chin bar? I'd suggest not at this phase. Again I may be old fashioned, but I like the added benefit of the training effect on grip strength as well as forearm size!

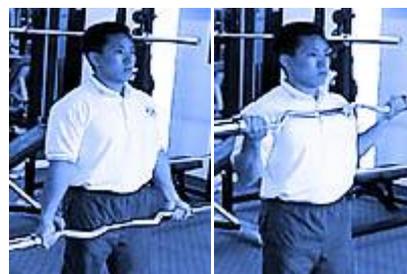
Seated Lateral Dumbbell Raise — Sit at the end of a bench with the feet together. Hold dumbbells by the side. With a slightly bent elbow, raise the arms up to the side keeping the little finger just a little higher than the thumb. Stop at about the top of your head and then lower back down.



As the loads increase into this phase, there may be the temptation to cheat a bit more on this set. Do your best to resist this temptation! But if it happens on the last rep or so of each of the three sub-sets within the strip set, so be it.

Standing EZ Bar Reverse Bicep Curl — Grab the EZ bar with a palms down, medium (shoulder width) grip. Slightly bend, or more accurately, unlock the knees and keep them there. This will reduce the ability to extend through the trunk, increasing arm isolation.

Starting with the arms fully extended and keeping the arms by the side, bend (flex) the elbows until the bar is just before the "gravity line". This is the point at which you might feel significant downturn in resistance. Going into this area increases the rest period, which isn't bad, but from a bodybuilding perspective I believe you should stay just short of this "break over" point. Then lower the bar back down to the fully extended elbow position.



There may be a temptation to avoid full extension, and there may be times when this technique is appropriate from a hypertrophy perspective. However, from an injury prevention perspective I'd encourage predominant use of full extension in elbow flexion exercises. The concern is a potential shortening of the elbow flexors.

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As per the seated lateral dumbbell raise, look to resist the temptation to cheat, but if it happens on the last rep or two in a slight way, no serious implications!

Note: In the neural/advanced training age option, for the second upper body program in the week, this exercise is performed at the end of "D" day.

Dips or Bench Dip — 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 and 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 joint or injury conditions that contraindicate this). Keep the body still during the lifting and lowering so the movement isn't affected by momentum. Don't lock out fully at the top.



Either way you perform the exercise, warm up using bench dips. If you're going to be using significant external loading in the work sets, I'd also recommend a second warm up set of at least a few reps with body weight.

Now you're hopefully going to use external loading in this exercise in at least one of the work sets! You can use my method of applying external loading as per outlined for the chin-ups if you like.

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

Bent Over Row, medium grip

Warm-up: 1 x 10, 1 x 8

Sets: 6/1/6/1

Speed: 311

Rest: alternate with incline bench below

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Incline Bench Press, medium grip

Warm-up: 1 x 10, 1 x 8

Sets: 6/1/6/1

Speed: 311

Rest: alternate with bent over row above

Prone Dumbbell Fly

Warm-up: 1 x 10 optional

Sets: 1 x 15-20

Speed: 311

Rest: strip set, alternate with dips below

Dips (or bench dips)

Warm-up: 1 x 10 bodyweight dips

Sets: 1-2 x 8-10

Speed: 311

Rest: alternate with prone dumbbell fly above

D — Hypertrophy-neural/Intermediate Training Age Option

Bent Over Row, medium grip

Warm-up: 1 x 10, 1 x 8

Sets: 5/1/5/1

Speed: 311

Rest: alternate with incline bench below

Incline Bench Press, medium grip

Warm-up: 1 x 10, 1 x 8

Sets: 5/1/5/1

Speed: 311

Rest: alternate with bent over row above

Prone Dumbbell Fly

Warm-up: 1 x 8 optional

Sets: 1 x 12-15

Speed: 311

Rest: strip set, alternate with dips below

Dips (or bench dips)

Warm-up: 1 x 8 bodyweight dips

Sets: 1-2 x 6-8

Speed: 311

Rest: alternate with prone dumbbell fly above

D — Neural/Advanced Training Age Option

Bent Over Row, medium grip

Warm-up: 1 x 10, 1 x 8

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Sets: 4/1/4/1, 1 x 10-15

Speed: 311

Rest: alternate with incline bench below

Incline Bench Press, medium grip

Warm-up: 1 x 10, 1 x 8, 1 x 6

Sets: 4/1/4/1, 1 x 10-15

Speed: 311

Rest: alternate with bent over row above

Standing EZ Bar Reverse Bicep Curl

Warm-up: 1 x 10

Sets: 1-2 x 5-6, 1 x 10 optional

Speed: 311

Rest: 2-3 minutes

Here's a description of the exercises involved in "D" day, stage 2:

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 directly over the legs as possible. Have the knees slightly bent. Keep the trunk flat in a line or angle slightly above horizontal to the ground. Don't allow this angle to change whatsoever during the lift! Take a medium grip on a bar and raise it to a low point on your chest. 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.



Now, as per some of the other exercises (more so the pulling or flexion movements) there's the temptation to cheat. Aim to resist this but don't be too concerned if it happens slightly in the last few reps, more so in the last week of this stage. However, don't risk any back injuries by excessive or sudden trunk extension.

As the loads increase in this lift, there's a specific way I like to get into position to reduce the risk of injury and strain on the lower back. I recommend you deadlifting the bar off the ground into a standing position and then lowering the bar down, keeping it close to the body as you simultaneously bend the hips and knees toward the final position. If for whatever

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reason you don't want the work of getting it off the ground to start, you can set the bar up on low blocks or even a prone bench, and step back with the bar using the same set up after that.

Incline Bench Press — Using an incline bench angle of about 30 degrees, take a medium grip on the bar (medium is with the hands just inside the lines on a standard Olympic bar), and lower it to a medium position on the chest (roughly in line with the nipples). When you press back up, avoid full lockout.



Having a spotter is *not* an option here; it's a must do! Remember, when fatigue sets in (particularly in the triceps) in this lift, failure can come swiftly and with dire consequences! You'll also need a spotter to help you take the bar off the rack and put it back on. If you're training solo with no hope of getting a spotter, do yourself a favor and use a power rack. Taking a load in the "above forehead" position places a lot of stress on the shoulder and neck joints.

Also, because of the relatively weak position when un-racking and re-racking the bar, you can lose a lot of energy. When getting closer to your max, this alone is a reason to use a spotter. Your spotter needs to also know how to "lift out", a skill in itself. You need to teach him to lift at your signal, stay with the bar as you move it horizontally towards the starting position, and then release it slowly and evenly back into your control. You don't want him dumping the weight on you!

How many spotters should you use? Your choices are basically one, two or three. I'd go one or three only; I don't like having two. There's too big a risk with two because one may lift earlier or more so than the spotter on the other side. You can cop a serious injury (like a pec tear) from this error. Having a center spotter over your head, which you have in a one or three spotter situation, negates this to a large extent.

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



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Cheating isn't much of a concern here because it's nearly impossible, but be conscious not to arch your upper back or raise your upper traps. We want a posturally flat position in which to retract (pull in) the shoulder blades. You may experience some loss in range however, which I'd only tolerate in latter reps and weeks within this three week cycle.

Note: In the neural/advanced training age option, for the first upper body program in the week, this exercise is performed at the end of "B" day.

Conclusion

What appeared complex in stage one of this program by virtue of the exercises and loading parameter may now seem simplistic – few exercises, few sets, and less variety in loading protocols. However, don't mistake simple for being ineffective. Just get it done and let the results tell you the answers.

A final word of wisdom before I leave you: don't look to get strong today. Do in today's workout what's going to make you stronger in the *next* workout!

For further technical guidelines, you may want to check out Ian's *Get Buffed!* video series at KingSports.net.