

Advanced Upper Body Training: Stage 3

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Bring on the Pain-Upper Body Advanced Upper Body Training, Stage 3 by Ian King Time for part three of Ian's second generation upper body program. 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), ...

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Time for part three of Ian's second generation upper body program. 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). Ian provides slightly different programs for each goal.

What follows is stage three of a four stage upper body program. If you missed stage one, you can find it [here](#).

A Word About Recovery

The completion of stage two brings you to the halfway mark. Whilst ideally I want you making recovery decisions on a daily basis, this halfway mark is one of the more critical moments of recovery decision-making. An error in this decision can diminish or totally negate the potential gains that should be received in the second half of the program.

Typically, when making this decision as to whether a recovery week is required, one often makes it based on how he feels now. That's not enough. I want you to make this decision based on a projection into the future. You do this by asking yourself this question: "Based on how I'm feeling now, how will I feel in two to four weeks time if I don't take a recovery week now?"

Now, asking the question is often only half the equation! It's so tempting for an individual who's answering his own question to override rationale with emotion, ignoring obvious signs of fatigue and pushing on because of fear (of losing muscle) or greed (I want it now!). So bouncing your response off a significant other has merit.

For my high-level athletes, I tend to ensure they respect their intuition and rationale, not their emotion! But if you don't have a coach, and if you suspect you have historically overruled logic with emotion, bounce your response off a levelheaded person you respect. Let them keep you honest to yourself!

There are two parts to recovery — the taking and the replacing of energy. Training takes or depletes; it disrupts homeostasis, destroys tissues. The degree of damage you inflict needs to be in context of your recovery ability. Exceed it at your peril.

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The replacement or replenishment, known as the recovery process, is not immovable. You can alter it, although age and stress are some of the greatest negators. You can alter the recovery process through various means including nutrition, supplements, drugs, and sleep/rest. If you want to train harder, longer or more often, be prepared to spend time and energy learning about and implementing ways to enhance recovery. This focus on recovery enhancement is often the difference between winning and losing.

In **part three** of the second generation legs program, I discussed simple ways to evaluate your recovery, including asking the following questions:

- 1) Did you feel stronger every week?
- 2) Did you remain keen to train every week?
- 3) If your goal was to put on weight, did it happen?
- 4) Are you sleeping well?
- 5) Do you wake up feeling refreshed each morning?

The amazing thing about sleep is the way it acts as a vicious cycle. If your recovery status is such that it's affecting your sleep, then the sleep disturbance then in turn further damages your recovery status. And on goes this damaging cycle. The key to minimizing this damage is to recognize it as early as possible and take effective steps to knock it on the head.

These steps will include reduction of training as well as improving current (or introducing new) recovery methods. I regularly face the task of counseling athletes with sleep disorders because this early intervention wasn't implemented. No matter when it occurs, intervention is necessary to return the athlete to an optimal sleep pattern.

On to Stage Three!

Now what's in store in stage three? Pushing dominates over pulling in this stage. This is because the first exercise on the first workout of the week is bench press. Note this is the first time that the bench press has appeared as high as this in the week's sequence of exercises. I de-emphasize bench for a while in an attempt to return some balance to the average weight-trainer's body. Most people always do bench first in the workout and in the first upper-body workout of the week.

Hopefully by now, the upper back is stronger and the anterior muscles of the upper torso are longer and more able to contract. That means a bigger bench, which is something you may have doubted would result when you did the first stage and noted the bench was virtually done last in the workout on the last upper body day of the week! If you had the faith to stick to my plan (as crazy as it may have seemed to you at the time), you'll be rewarded!

As the upper-body workouts in stage three are the first and third workout of the week, I've called them A and C. If you're following the linear periodization plan, you'll be going lower in reps and doing less exercises in this stage compared to stage two. If you're going to work the alternating plan, you'll be using this program after stage one and then doing stage two

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after this stage (which means you may not have been able to advance too much in the program 'till getting this stage!). There's an eccentric (negative only) set in all versions (hypertrophy, mixed, and neural), and pushing and pulling are mixed on both workout days.

I also want to touch briefly on the loading protocol that dominates this phase. You'll be using a form of wave loading, but only a single wave. In brief, as each subsequent set calls for a lower number of reps, the load is increased: 6/5/4 for the Hypertrophy/Lower training age option, 5/4/3 for the Hypertrophy-Neural/Intermediate training age option, and 4/3/2 for the Neural/Advanced training age option. All are then followed by an eccentric set and then what I call a "back-off" set.

The critical key to load selection in wave loading is to avoid total fatigue in any of the early sets. For example, if the first work set in a wave was five reps, I don't recommend doing 100% of your five rep max. Rather, do about 90%. So in lay terms, at the fifth rep you might still have another rep in you, but of course you don't do it! If you don't respect this you may negate the potential neural "disinhibition" that wave loading offers!

The eccentric set requires you to lower a load under control you couldn't lift — possibly somewhere between 10 to 25% more than the load your RM for that number of normal reps — and having an appropriately trained partner (or partners) doing the work in the lifting phase. The critical key in load selection for the eccentric is to select a load that you can control at the desired speed (in this program, this ranges from a five to three second eccentric time frame), and that doesn't overload any injury potential you may have.

Eccentric training, by virtue of it going closer to your limit, has an inherently higher risk of injury. I wouldn't recommend you do it if you have any potential for injury or if you don't have adequately trained spotters!

The key in the back-off set is to select a load that allows you not only to do the reps required, but allows you to rehearse and experience "speed" in the concentric phase. By this I mean I want you to aim to lift as fast as you can and to "feel" the higher speed of movement.

Here are loading examples:

Sample loading pattern in week 1 for the 5/4/3/3/12-15 method:

1 x 5 @ 100 kg (about 220 pounds)
1 x 4 @ 105 kg (about 230 pounds)
1 x 3 @ 110 kg (about 240 pounds)
1 x 3 @ 130 kg (about 285 pounds) This is the eccentric-only set.
1x 12 @ 80 kg (about 175 pounds) This is the back-off set.

Sample loading pattern in week 2 for the 5/4/3/3/12-15 method:

1 x 5 @ 102.5 kg (about 225 pounds)
1 x 4 @ 107.5 kg (about 235 pounds)
1 x 3 @ 112.5 kg (about 245 pounds)
1 x 3 @ 132.5 kg (about 290 pounds) This is the eccentric-only set.
1x 13 @ 80 kg (about 175 pounds) This is the back-off set.

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Sample loading pattern in week 3 for the 5/4/3/3/12-15 method:

1 x 5 @ 105 kg (about 230 pounds)
1 x 4 @ 110 kg (about 240 pounds)
1 x 3 @ 115 kg (about 250 pounds)
1 x 3 @ 135 kg (about 295 pounds) This is the eccentric-only set.
1x 14 @ 80 kg (about 175 pounds) This is the back-off set.

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

Enough talk — let's do it!

UPPER BODY

Stage 3 — Weeks 7-9 (longer if you choose)

A Day

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

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

A — Hypertrophy/Lower Training Age Option

Bench Press (MG/LB/FD/Med arch)

Warm-up: 10/8/6

Sets: 6/5/4, 1 x 4 (eccentric only), 1 x 15-20 (back-off set)

Speed: 211, 500, 211 respectively

Rest: alternate with bicep curl below

Bicep Curl (EZ-bar/MG/supine grip)

Warm-up: 10/8/6

Sets: 6/5/4, 1 x 4 (eccentric only), 1 x 15-20 (back-off set)

Speed: 211, 500, 211 respectively

Rest: alternate with bench press above

A — Hypertrophy-Neural/Intermediate Training Age Option

Bench Press (MG/LB/FD/Med arch)

Warm-up: 10/8/5

Sets: 5/4/3, 1 x 3 (eccentric only), 1 x 12-15 (back-off set)

Speed: 211, 500, 211 respectively

Rest: alternate with bicep curl below

Bicep Curl (EZ-bar/MG/supine grip)

Warm-up: 10/8/5

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Sets: 5/4/3, 1 x 3 (eccentric only), 1 x 12-15 (back-off set)

Speed: 211, 500, 211 respectively

Rest: alternate with bench press above

A — Neural/Advanced Training Age Option

Bench Press (MG/LB/FD/Med arch)

Warm-up: 10/8/5, 1 x 3 optional

Sets: 4/3/2, 1 x 2 (eccentric only), 1 x 10-12 (back-off set)

Speed: 211, 400, 211 respectively

Rest: alternate with bicep curl below

Bicep Curl (EZ-bar/MG/supine grip)

Warm-up: 10/8/5, 1 x 3 optional

Sets: 4/3/2, 1 x 2 (eccentric only), 1 x 10-12 (back-off set)

Speed: 211, 400, 211 respectively

Rest: alternate with bench press above

General Notes:

- This program is based on alternate setting. Do a set of one exercise, rest as long as you feel you need to, and then do a set of the next exercise, rest again for as long as you need to, then repeat this cycle. How long is "rest long enough"? A general guideline for work sets (warm-up sets require less) might be:

Hypertrophy/Lower Training Age Option: 2-3 minutes

Hypertrophy-Neural/Intermediate Training Age Option: 3-4 minutes

Neural/Advanced Training Age Option: 4-5 minutes

- If your gym is busy and it's difficult to alternate between two work stations without needing your own guards to retain the equipment, just take a normal standard set rest approach: set, rest, repeat set of same exercise, rest, repeat set of same exercise etc. until all sets for that exercise are complete.
- Make sure you use spotters whenever the load is above the body, and especially good ones for the eccentric sets!

Here's a description of the exercises involved in A day:

Bench press: (medium grip, low bar, feet down, medium arch) Take a medium grip on the bench press. For most this will be with the little fingers inside the lines on the Olympic bar. You'll lower the bar down to the lower portion of the chest. This is a strong position, allowing a greater arc in the bar movement and greater lat involvement. Your feet should stay on the ground.

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I want you to use a medium arch. The simple concept of an arch is to bring the hips and shoulders closer together, creating a bow-like effect in the trunk. This reduces the distance of travel for the bar and again increases the contribution of the lats. There are a number of ways to get into this position. Once you've established your grip and your upper back position on the bench, move your legs up a bit further to an acute knee angle. This will allow you to lift or slide your hips closer to your head, resulting in an arch of the spine.

In the final position, your feet should be flat and pointed slightly outward, knee angle acute (less than 90 degrees), bum, upper back and head in constant contact with the bench, legs tight and bum cheeks squeezed (resulting in increased force into the ground through the feet).

Note that the greater the arch, the heavier the loads you can potentially lift, but I don't want the maximum arch you can attain in this program. Save this for stage four.

A few tips for benching as the load is increased:

- Use chalk on the hands to prevent outward slipping.
- Use wrist wraps to reduce strain on the wrist joint.
- If the bench is high for you (short legs or unusually high bench) place a plate on the ground under each foot.
- Make sure the bar isn't bent before starting. Even a slight bend can reduce the ability to lift high loads and increase injury potential.
- Use spotters for all work sets.
- Consider a lift off and rack for the heaviest sets. Rehearse this with your spotter in a prior set.
- Don't allow the feet to slip or move from their starting position, and keep the bum down!
- I stress again only do the eccentric bench set if you're experienced, injury-free and have solid spotters. If there's any risk of injury, pass up this option.

Bicep Curl: (medium grip, EZ-bar, suping grip or palms forward, standing) Take a medium grip on the EZ-curl bar so that your hands are slightly internally rotated. If you want to save lifting the bar off the ground each time, set it on a bench or similar. The starting position is with the arms by the side. As you lift, aim to slide the elbows back a bit and leave them there for the duration of the lift.

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Bend the elbows to the point where, to take the bar any higher, the elbows would have to come forward, then lower from there. Make sure you do go to full extension at the end of the eccentric phase. Whilst I'm sure there are specific hypertrophy benefits from not fully extending, I don't like the thought of altering (shortening) the length of the biceps too much, which I believe may occur from chronic use of non-full extension in biceps curling.



You may also want to stand with your feet shoulder width apart, knees slightly bent. Maintaining this knee position can help minimize or prevent extension through the spine. I'm not as concerned about injury from this (which I believe has been blown out of proportion) but rather I want to isolate elbow flexion, not elbow flexion plus shoulder flexion plus trunk extension, etc.

I do believe that the tendency to (and the benefits from) using cheat movements is greater in flexion movements (pulling) than extension movements (pushing), or at least these benefits apply earlier in the strength capacity of these lifts. This is a discussion in itself but I suspect it may be tied to the weaker force curves typically evident in many joint flexions. What I'm saying is I allow cheating earlier in flexion movements (biceps) than extension movements (bench press).

C Day (second upper-body day of the week)

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

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

C — Hypertrophy/Lower Training Age Option

Chin-up (MG/prone)

Warm-up: 10/8/6

Sets: 6/5/4, 1 x 4 (eccentric only), 1 x 15-20 (back-off set)

Speed: 211, 500, 211 respectively

Rest: alternate with close grip bench press below

Close-Grip Bench Press (shoulder width grip)

Warm-up: 10/8/6

Sets: 6/5/4, 1 x 4 (eccentric only), 1 x 15-20 (back-off set)

Speed: 211, 500, 211 respectively

Rest: alternate with chin-up above

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C — Hypertrophy-Neural/Intermediate Training Age Option

Chin-up (MG/prone)

Warm-up: 10/8/5

Sets: 5/4/3, 1 x 3 (eccentric only), 1 x 12-15 (back-off set)

Speed: 211, 400, 211 respectively

Rest: alternate with close grip bench press below

Close-Grip Bench Press (shoulder width grip/FD/med arch)

Warm-up: 10/8/5

Sets: 5/4/3, 1 x 3 (eccentric only), 1 x 12-15 (back-off set)

Speed: 211, 400, 211 respectively

Rest: alternate with chin-up above

C — Neural/Advanced Training Age Option

Chin-up (MG/prone)

Warm-up: 10/8/5

Sets: 4/3/2, 1 x 2 (eccentric only), 1 x 10-12 (back-off set)

Speed: 211, 400, 211 respectively

Rest: alternate with close grip bench press below

Close-Grip Bench Press (shoulder width grip/FD/med arch)

Warm-up: 10/8/5

Sets: 4/3/2, 1 x 2 (eccentric only), 1 x 10-12 (back-off set)

Speed: 211, 400, 211 respectively

Rest: alternate with chin-up above

Here's a description of the exercises involved in C day:

Chin-up: (medium grip/prone) Take a shoulder width grip with palms facing away from you. Allow the feet to come off the ground slowly, without inducing any body sway. Cross the feet at the ankles and tuck them up behind you. Pull straight up and finish the pull with the chin over the handgrip level. Don't do another rep if this pulling range isn't met.



A key to avoid swaying in the chin-up is to control the lowering (eccentric phase) and prevent any body sway. Swaying in the chin-up is a catch-22 situation. It can help get you a rep or two, but the energy lost in combating the swaying can cost you more. I recommend using a controlled technique.

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As with any exercise, I like to isolate the target muscles and therefore the joint actions. Flexing at the hips and knees and other "additional" body movements aren't uncommon during the concentric phase of the chin, but I discourage them. If you can't do the rep using the target muscles, don't do the rep.

Another concern with using additional movement of the body to achieve reps is the likelihood of controlling this variable. As the load is increased, if the cheating movements are increased, have you really placed the full additional load through the target muscles? I doubt it.

Here are some more tips for the chin-up:

- Use the lat pulldown to warm up on, using the same grip. Your warm-up loads are selected as a percentage of your first work set weight.
- If the chin bar is slippery, use chalk on the hands (only use wrist straps as a last resort).
- I prefer a chin bar that's straight and doesn't bend at the ends. This allows you greater flexibility in choosing your grip position. If you have to use a bar that dips down at each end, look for one that has the least downward angle. I'm not convinced about the mechanics of the bars with excessive downward slope, including the ability to pull the chin over the grip level.
- When using external loading to increase the load, use a method that negates body sway caused by the additional loading.
- When performing eccentric chins, either have a partner lift you or in the absence of a partner, place a bench under the chin bar and jump up from there, providing it doesn't interfere with your ability to lower.
- Don't start a rep unless you know you'll finish it.
- In the back-off set, really aim for speed in the lift!

The final set of chin-ups is something that I imagine may be concerning you. Relax! If you can't get at least half the suggested number for the back-off set, use the lat pulldown instead. Or use the lat pulldown in a superset to compliment the reps if you don't hit the target on the chin bar. Either way, show speed in the lift!

Close grip bench press: (shoulder width grip, feet down, medium arch). The set up is exactly the same as the bench press in A day, only on this day take a grip that's above or just outside your shoulders. If you're experiencing wrist discomfort (in addition to using wrist wraps), you can rotate your hands with the thumbs going outwards, joining your fingers.



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All the keys and tips for the regular bench press above apply here also. You may find you're able to lift within about 5 to 10% of your conventional bench, usually on the lower side, unless you have above average arm (tricep) strength.

A very important safety comment: if you do fail during a rep on the close grip bench press, it will happen with greater suddenness than the conventional bench press. Don't put yourself through this unpleasant experience! Make sure you use a spotter!

Conclusion

I know that many of you upon first reading this workout will wonder where the other exercises are! "Perhaps Ian accidentally left them out," you may be thinking! Well, I didn't. Just two exercises per workout is all I had in mind! With the longer rest periods indicated, plan for a similar duration workout as earlier in this program, however.

Remember, don't try to get super strong in week one of this stage. Use it as an "exposure week". Doing this will give you extra strength into week two, and then go hard in the final week!

Now go and bring on the pain!

Note: You can get further technical guidelines on video. The *Get Buffed!*TM *Video Series* and *How to Teach Strength Training Exercises* (for strength coaches) are both available at **KingSports.net**.