

King, I., 2000, 12 Weeks to Super Strength – Pt 1, Fri Feb 11 2000

12 Weeks to Super Strength - Phase 1

by Ian King | Fri, Feb 11, 2000

Twelve Weeks to Super Strength, Phase I Chest and back by Ian King If you've tried Ian King's "Limping" series for legs, then I don't need to tell you how effective his 12-week programs are. If you haven't tried the aforementioned program, then all I can say is, what the hell is your problem? Granted, these programs take a little more concentration, since they're a little bit more involved than the standard Muscle and Fitness fare. Of course, they're designed for lifters who give a damn. If y...

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If you haven't done Ian's leg program, make a visit to the **Previous Issues** section of the Testosterone site, dig up **Limping Into October, Part I** in Issue 70, and start! And while you're at it, begin this 12-week program for chest and back, too! If you feel that you've hit a plateau in chest or back training, then you've got absolutely no excuse but to give this program a try. Hell, if we charged you for it, I'd give you a money-back guarantee that it'll work. Since it's free, all I can offer you instead of a guarantee is one free punch to my left shoulder if it fails to meet your expectations.

If you asked anyone which muscle group was the most popular to train, chances are that the response would be chest. The chest muscles seem to be one of those all-important signs of manhood, kind of like what the mammary glands are to the female gender. And the training time devoted to chest would reflect this popularity. Take an "on-the-spot" survey at any time, in any gym worth being in, and you'll see congestion on the bench press that rivals rush hour on New York City streets!

So, why don't we see more chest development on the average gym junkie? You know, the kind of chest that comes in a door *before* the body. There might be lots of reasons which we can chew over another time, but I'm going to focus on one:

If you keep approaching the muscle group in the same way, the returns will diminish.

I liken it to beating your head against a brick wall — not a productive activity for most. So I'm going to give you an upper body workout that prioritizes the chest. When I say prioritizes, I mean that I've given specific and primary focus to the chest — without totally neglecting the other muscle groups. Your upper body training will be taken care of for 12 weeks. But don't do this workout for any longer than 12 weeks. It could result in anterior deltoid-related problems around the chest (and if you've already got these, I wouldn't recommend doing this program until you have the problem sorted out).

Remember how I said that maybe one of the reasons why we don't see too many men with a Pamela Lee-like chest (the pre-reduction version) is possibly because most take the same approach all of the time? Bench press first, incline bench second...sound familiar?

So when you get into this program, let me prepare you for the *unexpected*. You're going to do things that initially make you wonder if I made a typo when I said that this was a *chest priority program* — like when you notice that I've included bench presses *last* in the workout!!! Trust me, though. There's a method to my seeming madness.

There are four phases to this program, and you'll do two upper body workouts per week. In this Phase I, the first workout (A) targets triceps, shoulders, and chest, and the second workout (B) targets biceps and back.

Use each phase for about three weeks. The two workouts are aimed to be done on the first and third training days of your program. If you usually do a "four workouts per week" program, you just need to add a lower body program on the second and fourth workouts. If you usually do a "three workouts per week" program, you just need to add a lower body program on the second workout. If you use a "five workouts per week" or five-day rolling program, these workouts will constitute the first and third workouts.

The first phase is aimed at strengthening the muscle groups that contribute in a smaller way to benching, otherwise known as the assistant muscle groups. This is achieved by giving them priority in the sequence, or order, and using pre-fatigue as far as the chest is concerned.

The second phase, which will appear on this site in two weeks, is aimed at exposing the primary muscle groups to some loading, using a more conventional approach. The third phase goes back to a pre-fatigue sequence that prioritizes the assistant muscle groups, but with a lower degree of pre-fatigue than the first phase. The fourth phase reverts to load exposure and focuses fully on benching, the king of chest exercises. But that's all yet to come, so let's start now with the first phase.

Phase I (Weeks 1-3)

Workout A

Humility. This word describes what you're going to need in order to do this program. Like I warned you, by the time you get to the bench in this routine, even the *bar* is going to feel heavy.

Another word that you should become familiar with is *sore*. Now, that's more comforting, isn't it? (You relate to pain? You really are one sick puppy...just joking, I'd be worried if you didn't!) Go light in the first week and just concentrate on feeling your way through. You'll be surprised at how little a load you'll need in this phase if you do it the right way.

Warm-up: Perform 10 minutes of light aerobics (optional) and 15 minutes of upper body stretching (compulsory).

Forearm extensions with bar: Grab a bar and kneel down in front of a bench. With your wrists supported on the bench and your hands hanging just off the side, begin reverse wrist curls (with the palms facing down).



Forearm flexions with bar: Immediately afterward, taking no rest, do a set of standard wrist curls (curl the bar toward you with palms up). During flexions (standard wrist curls), allow the bar to roll to your fingertips.



Note that extensions will probably require a lighter load. If you feel too much strain on your wrists, try using an EZ-bar. If the lightest bar in the gym causes you to fatigue during the warm-up set, consider that your work set and move on to the next exercise. I like to do extensions first because they're the weaker movement. Use a full range, and terminate the reps if range is lost.

For the following triceps tri-set, you'll be doing three exercises in a row with nil to minimal rest between exercises.

1) Overhead dumbbell triceps extensions: These are to be done seated, one arm at a time (weaker triceps first). Keep the elbow as high and as far back as possible at all times (to maximize the stretch on the triceps) with the elbow to the ear. Use a range that results in the dumbbell touching the upper back. Without resting, go to the second movement.



2) Triceps pulldowns: Using the triceps pushdown cable (or lat pulldown) and with the palms facing *upward*, take a shoulder-width grip. Keep the elbows stationary and glued to the side throughout the lift. Don't rest, and go to the third movement.

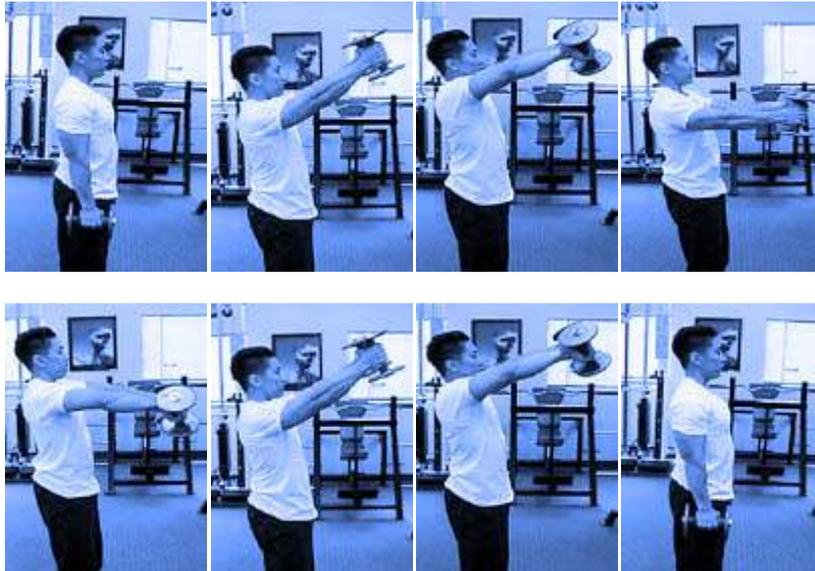


3) Dips: At the dip station (the piece of equipment, not where the guys with palm pilots hang out), cross the feet at the ankles. Bend the knees so that the ankles are at or near knee height. Lower your upper body until the shoulders are lower than the elbow joint, or until the biceps come into contact with the forearms (provided that you have no joint or injury conditions to contraindicate this). Keep the body still during the movement so that it's not affected by momentum. Do not lock out fully at the top.



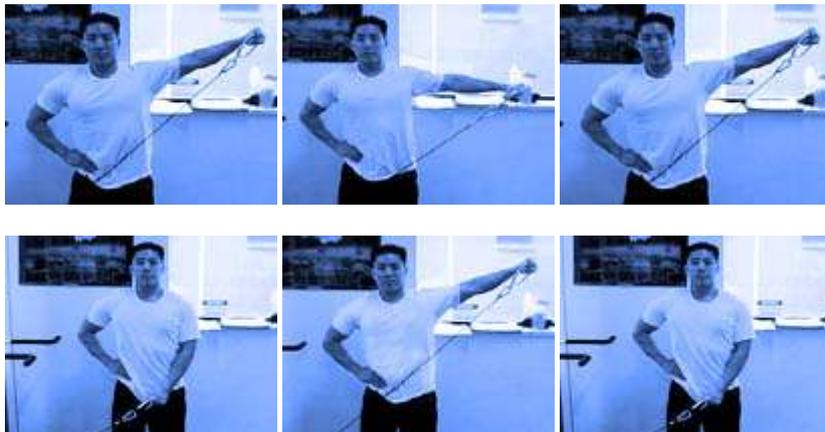
For the following shoulder tri-set, you'll again be doing three exercises in a row with nil to minimal rest between exercises.

1) Front dumbbell raises: Grab two dumbbells and let your arms hang down in a neutral position (palms facing the body). Raise the dumbbells to just above shoulder height in front of you, and at this level internally rotate the dumbbells so that the thumbs are now facing downward. Un-rotate them back to neutral, lower them down to just under shoulder height. Pause, then return them back to just above shoulder height and repeat the internal rotation. Lower them back down to your side. *This is one rep.* Keep the body still during the movement. It's unlikely that you'll need to do a warm-up set, but go light on the first day!



2) Low pulley lateral raises: If you don't have low pulley cables, use dumbbells. Stand with your side facing the weight stack. With the cable passing across the front of your body, raise the cable to the side as per a lateral raise. The top of the range is a point just above parallel, or shoulder height, and in this position I want the palm facing downward. Do seven reps from just below parallel or under shoulder height to just above parallel or above shoulder height. Pause every time you change direction.

Then do seven reps using full range, again pausing every time you change direction, and finish with seven reps from the bottom position in front of your body to just below shoulder height (the bottom of the range of the first seven reps). Again, you probably won't need to do a warm-up set. Don't be surprised if you are, in fact, using only the first plate on the weight stack! (Remember what I said about humility — it will pay off later as you'll ultimately lift impressive loads as a result of this temporary sacrifice of self-esteem!)



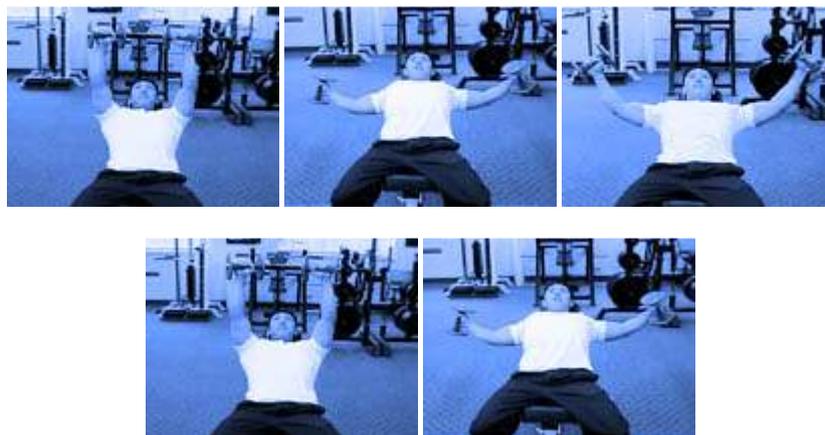


3) Behind-the-neck shoulder presses: Now to the squat rack. In a seated position, perform these using a wide grip. The range at the bottom needs to be stressed — touch the base of the neck! But don't lock out at the top. Note the slow speed indicated in the table below. If you do a warm-up set (which I doubt you'll need), use normal speed.



For the following chest tri-set, you'll again be doing three exercises in a row with nil to minimal rest between exercises.

1) Incline dumbbell flies: Using a low angle (30 degrees), go to full range in the bottom position. Keep the elbows slightly bent throughout, but without changing the elbow angle. At the bottom of the movement, pause, return to 1/3 of the way up, pause, lower back down to the bottom again, pause, and then all the way up. *This is one rep.*



2) Decline dumbbell presses: Place the decline at a low angle (again at about 30 degrees). Hold the dumbbells with the palms facing in and make sure to use a full stretch. The first seven reps should be done from this fully stretched bottom position up to 1/3 of the movement of the full range of motion. The next seven reps are to be done using full range,

and the last seven reps using the top 1/3 of the movement. Remember to pause every time you change direction.



3) Bench presses: At last, but don't load it up too much! Take a wide grip (outside the lines of the Olympic bar, if possible). Raise your feet up in the air, bend your knees, and cross your feet. Lower the bar to the top of your *sternum* or *neck*. Don't lock out fully at the top, and note the slow speeds below. Also, don't expect to use a normal breathing pattern during lifts this slow. Instead, breath often using shallow breaths.



Here's a summary of the first upper body workout outlined in Phase I:

Forearm extensions with bar

Warm-up set 20 reps

Work set 20 reps

Tempo 311

Rest None

Forearm flexions with bar

Warm-up set 20 reps

Work set20 reps

Tempo311

RestNone

Triceps tri-set

1) Overhead dumbbell triceps extensions

Warm-up set10 reps

Work set10 reps

Tempo422

RestNone

2) Triceps pulldowns

Warm-up set10 reps

Work set10 reps

Tempo422

RestNone

3) Dips

Warm-up set10 reps

Work set10 reps

Tempo422

RestNone

Shoulder tri-set

1) Front dumbbell raises

Warm-up setNone

Work set12 reps

Tempo1 1/3rds

RestNone

2) Low pulley lateral raises

Warm-up setNone

Work set 21's

Tempo 311

Rest None

3) Behind-the-neck shoulder presses

Warm-up set None

Work set 8 reps

Tempo 613

Rest None

Chest tri-set

1) Incline dumbbell flyes

Warm-up set None

Work set 12 reps

Tempo 1 1/3rds

Rest None

2) Decline dumbbell presses

Warm-up set None

Work set 21's

Tempo 311

Rest None

3) Bench presses

Warm-up set None

Work set 8 reps

Tempo 613

Rest None

Notes

Remember my load selection recommendations to start out light enough in the first week to see load increases each subsequent week, and avoid going to total muscle failure in all but the last week on this phase.

Phase I (Weeks 1-3)

Workout B

Warm-up: Perform 10 minutes of light aerobics (optional) and 15 minutes of upper body stretching (compulsory).

Forearm extensions with dumbbells: Perform these as per the Workout A day, but this time using dumbbells instead of the bar. Note the slower speeds and the lower reps indicated in the table below.



Forearm flexions with dumbbells: Perform these as per the Workout A day, but this time using dumbbells instead of the bar. Note the slower speeds and the lower reps indicated in the workout summary below.

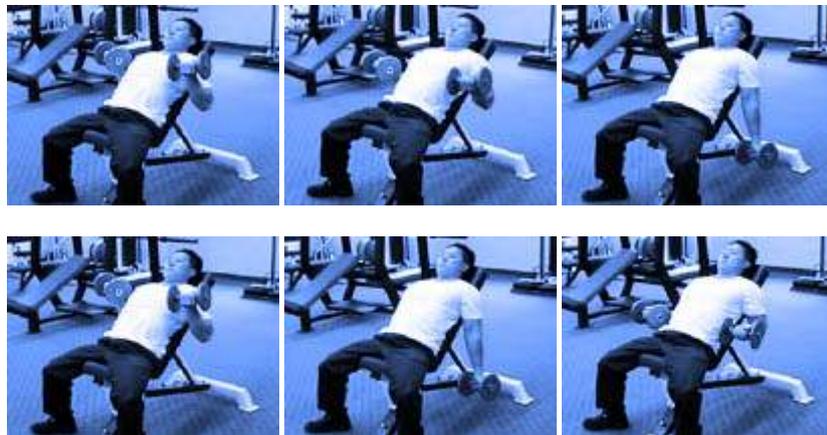


For the following biceps tri-set, you'll be doing three exercises in a row with nil to minimal rest between exercises.

1) Seated dumbbell curls and twists: Sit on the end of a prone bench with the dumbbells hanging straight down and the palms facing inward (neutral grip). As you lift the dumbbells, rotate them *outward* so that, at the top, the thumb end of the grip is as externally rotated as it can be without forcing your elbows to leave your sides. Reverse the movement when lowering the dumbbells.



2) Incline dumbbell curls: Go straight to an incline bench with approximately a 45-degree incline. The elbows should remain *behind* the body and glued to your sides throughout the movement. The palms should remain supine, or facing upward. Perform seven reps in the top half of the movement first, pausing every time you change direction. Then do seven reps full range, and finish with seven reps of the bottom half of the movement.



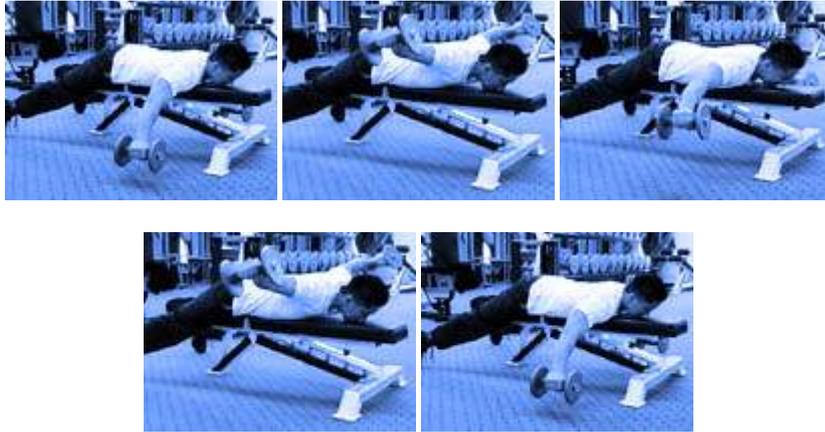
3) EZ-bar preacher curls: Now take the EZ-bar and sit on the preacher bench, using a palms-down (prone), medium-width grip. Place the full length of the upper arm against the preacher bench, with your armpits pushed into the top of the pad. If the bench is adjustable, use a 45-degree angle. Do a full stretch, but don't come up to a point where the load or tension is reduced. Note the controlled speed of movement on all of the above.



For the rows tri-set, you'll again be doing three exercises in a row with nil to minimal rest between exercises.

1) Prone dumbbell flies: Lie face down on a bench. Keep the elbows only slightly bent and at a constant angle throughout. Raise the arms up to the side, keeping them at approximately 90

degrees to the body. Pause at the top. Lower the dumbbells down 1/3 of the way, pause, and then return them to the top of the movement. Pause here, and then lower all the way down. *This is one rep.* Do not rest the hands on the floor between reps, and minimize the upper trap involvement.



2) Prone dumbbell rows: Now lie face down on a bench, preferably an elevated one. With your palms facing inward (neutral grip), raise the dumbbells as high as you can to the side of your body, again minimizing upper trap involvement. The first seven reps are to be done through the top half of the range only. The next seven are full range. And the last seven are to be done through the bottom half of the range (halfway down to full stretch). Focus on squeezing the shoulder blades together at the top.



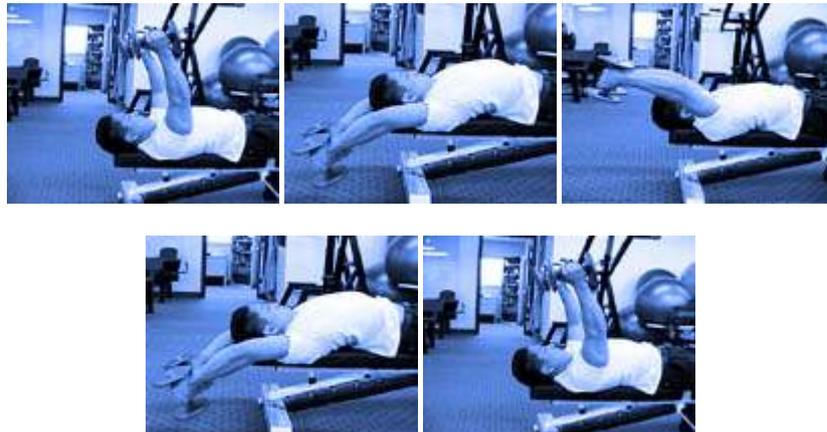
3) Seated rows: Using a wide grip, pull the bar to the middle of the trunk. If you feel any upper trap involvement (e.g. shoulders lifting) during this movement, either reduce the width of the grip, lower the point on the body that you're pulling in to, or both. Note the slow speed below. Use a full stretch at the bottom position without any trunk flexion or movement. Ensure full retraction (pulling together of shoulder blades) at the top of the movement.



For the following lats tri-set, you'll again be doing three exercises in a row with nil to minimal rest between exercises.

1) Dumbbell pullovers: Hold a dumbbell in each hand, and either lie on your back along a flat bench or across a bench. Start with a slight elbow bend and maintain this throughout the movement. Concentrate on making the lats do the work, not the triceps, which will require focusing on the movement coming from the *shoulders*.

Lower the dumbbells as far over the head as comfortable (in the shoulders). Return 1/3 of the way up, pause, then lower back to the bottom position. Pause again, then lift back up to the top, stopping before the arms reach a perpendicular position to the ground. *This is one rep.* Ensure that both arms stay at the same height (in relation to each other) throughout but do not allow them to touch.



2) Lat pulldowns: Using a triangle grip, pull to the chest, making sure that at the bottom position you push the chest *up* and pull the shoulder blades *down* and *back*. The first seven reps will be from this bottom position to halfway up, the next seven reps full range, and the last seven reps from halfway to the top stretched position.



3) Chin-ups or lat pulldowns: Now, if you're tough enough, proceed to the chin-up bar. If not, go to the lat pulldown bar. Either way, use a supine grip (palm facing your face) with the spacing of your hands shoulder-width. If doing chins, start in a full stretch position with the feet crossed and tucked up. Ensure that the chin goes well over the bar and you return to the full stretch position. Also, note the slow speed below.



Here's a summary of the second upper body workout outlined in Phase I:

Forearm extensions with dumbbells

Warm-up set 20 reps

Work set 20 reps

Tempo 311

Rest None

Forearm flexions with dumbbells

Warm-up set 20 reps

Work set 20 reps

Tempo 311

Rest None

Biceps tri-set

1) Seated dumbbell curls and twists

Warm-up set 10 reps

Work set 10 reps

Tempo 422

Rest None

2) Incline dumbbell curls

Warm-up set 10 reps

Work set 21's

Tempo 422

Rest None

3) EZ-bar preacher curls

Warm-up set 10 reps

Work set 10 reps

Tempo 422

Rest None

Rows tri-set

1) Prone dumbbell flyes

Warm-up set 10 reps

Work set 12 reps

Tempo 1 1/3rds

Rest None

2) Prone dumbbell rows

Warm-up set 10 reps

Work set21's

Tempo422

RestNone

3) Seated rows

Warm-up set10 reps

Work set10 reps

Tempo422

RestNone

Lats tri-set

1) Dumbbell pullovers

Warm-up setNone

Work set12 reps

Tempo1 1/3rds

RestNone

2) Lat pulldowns

Warm-up setNone

Work set21's

Tempo311

RestNone

3) Chin-ups or lat pulldowns

Warm-up setNone

Work set8 reps

Tempo613

RestNone

Notes

Remember my load selection recommendations to start out light enough in the first week to see load increases each subsequent week, and avoid going to total muscle failure in all but the last week on this phase.

In Conclusion

Along with a dose of humility, this program is setting the foundation for greater chest strength, as well as size, that will manifest in the latter phases of this 12-week program. It's unlikely that you wouldn't get a bigger or stronger chest (or both) if you stick to the program for the full 12 weeks. Remember, no latter phase will resemble this — don't think that it's how you'll be training for the full 12 weeks. So make the most of this unique first phase!