

King, I., 2000, 12 Weeks to Super Strength – Pt 2, Fri Feb 25 2000

12 Weeks to Super Strength - Phase 2

by Ian King | Fri, Feb 25, 2000

Twelve Weeks to Super Strength, Phase II Chest and back by Ian King To recap, this is a 12-week program, and there are four phases. This is Phase II, and Phase I was posted two weeks ago. Use each phase for about three weeks. You'll do two upper body workouts per week. Workout A of this phase targets chest, middle a...

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To recap, this is a 12-week program, and there are four phases. This is Phase II, and **Phase I** was posted two weeks ago. Use each phase for about three weeks. You'll do two upper body workouts per week. Workout A of this phase targets chest, middle and lower back, and triceps. Workout B of this phase targets shoulders, upper back, and biceps.

The two workouts are intended to be done on the first and third training days of your program. If you usually do a "four workouts a week" program, you just need to add a lower body routine on the second and fourth workouts. If you usually do a "three workouts a week" program, you just need to add a lower body routine on the second workout. And if you use a "five workouts a week" or five-day rolling program, these routines will constitute the first and third workouts.

You'll be glad to know that we're going to return to more conventional methods in this phase, which means that you're going to be able to lift more. If your ego was threatened or your fan ratings spiraled down as a result of the reduced poundages that you were able to move in the first phase, take heart. We're back in the "loading" saddle.

But you're probably nursing a secret, nagging fear. You haven't lifted heavy for three weeks, and you're worried that you might've lost a lot of strength. Yeah, and you're similarly worried that the monkey will leave you if you haven't spanked it for three weeks!

The great news is that I expect you to notice *immediate* strength gains during the first week as a result of the prior phase. How can that be? The physical explanations are relatively obvious. If you strengthen the assistant muscles — as was our goal during the last phase — all things being equal, you should be stronger when you return to the compound movement.

There are other physiological reasons for these strength increases, but I'll leave them for another day. One overlooked contributor, though, is the *psychological* component. The first phase used a pre-fatigue sequence. By the time you got to the bench, you were a lot more tired than you would've normally been at the start of benching. Metabolically speaking, *you were gone*, and your strength potential was reduced. But your mind had other ideas. You were adamant that you could still lift somewhere near your usual loads. And that's probably exactly what happened — you lifted more than you would've in the compound movement had you not held a predetermined perspective about what you could lift in normal situations!

Let's say that your 6RM for the bench is 100 kilograms when you're "fresh." In theory, upon arriving at the bench in the first phase, you could only manage ten reps at 60 kilograms (because of resultant fatigue) at your usual work capacity. But because you *knew* that your previous level of strength would allow you to do 6RM at 100 kilograms, you *believed* that you should've been able to handle at least 70 kilograms for ten reps. It's quite likely that this method "tricked" you into working at a higher level of intensity than normal.

And this ties into the next phase. If you take this higher expectation of loading or higher work effort into this phase, that prior personal best, or 6RM at 100 kilograms, in the bench is going to feel like a piece of paper. Your new 6RM, even without doing so much as one workout of this phase, will probably be somewhere around 105-110 kilograms.

Not only have you adjusted your psycho-physiological parameters, but this time you're going to hit the compound movements up front in the workout — while you're fresh.

Just a small note here. Often, the greatest gains appear to be between the third week of Phase I and the first week of Phase II, due to the great contrast of all of the factors discussed above. If the gains into the following two weeks aren't as dramatic, don't panic. The contrast in training between these latter weeks isn't so dramatic, but you'll still gain. You'll be enjoying that great feeling of being able to attack the major muscle group exercises fresh, before your arms feel like those of the proverbial stamp collector!

Another difference that you'll find in this program is the use of alternating or opposite muscle groups. Phase I separated the pushing and pulling days. Phase II employs *both*, using the full recovery alternated method. You'll feel the extra "pump" as the flexion and extension muscles are worked. And you know what Arnold said about that pump...enough talk, let's do it!

Phase II (Weeks 4-6)

Workout A

Ah, loading again! No need to work out when the gym's empty, so get out the 45-kg plates! Yes, this program allows a return to normalcy, or maybe that's the wrong word. Maybe it's back to the more *usual* — who'd want to be normal?

Actually, not even back to usual is correct, since you'll be breaking new ground in strength! Just don't try to do it all in the first week. You will, however, feel automatic strength this week, compared to the previous phase. Please remember to apply my progressive intensity method. For example, use a manageable load for the first week (not going to failure), push it up a bit for the second week (but still ideally avoiding failure), and for the third week, go for it!

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

Bench presses: Take a medium grip on the bench press. For most, this will be defined by keeping the little fingers inside the lines on the Olympic bar. Lower the bar down to the middle of the chest. Your feet are to be on the ground — unlike the last phase, when I had you elevate them. Bring your hips up slightly closer to your shoulders, thus increasing the

curve or arch of the trunk. All of these positions will allow for a greater load than the positions used in Phase I. I want at least two warm-up sets (more if your work sets are going to exceed 100 kilograms or if you have any shoulder/chest injuries or arthritis).



Using my warm-up load selection guides as described in my "How to Write Strength Training Programs" book, a two-set warm-up approach would require using 40% and 70%, respectively, of the weight that you'll be using for the first work set. For example, if the first work set was 100 kilograms for six reps, the warm-up sets would be ten reps of 40 kilograms and eight reps of 70 kilograms. Avoid causing fatigue in the warm-up sets.

In the work sets, I want two sets of five to six reps. Aim to increase the load in the second work set, even if only by 1.25 or 2.5 kilograms. Make sure that you don't blow it out in the first work set!



You'll be alternating the two work sets with seated rows, using full recovery in between each set. For example, do a set of benches, rest two minutes, do a set of rows, rest two minutes, and then go back to the second set of benches. The higher the intensity, the longer the rest period, and vice versa.

The rest period between warm-up sets need not be as long as the rest periods between work sets. I expect that the rest period between this bench and the next exercise (seated rows) will be your longest of the session, relative to the other pairings of exercises. The speed of movement that I recommend is about 211 — yes, I still want a visible pause on the chest!



Seated rows: Use a prone grip on a medium-length bar. Use the same warm-up, work set, and tempo protocols as described above for the bench unless you have specific needs in either (e.g. you feel that you need more warm-up sets in one than the other).

The technique that I recommend at this phase is to start with — and maintain throughout — a trunk angle just behind vertical (leaning back a little) and slightly bent knees. Ensure a full range of motion by pulling the bar to the trunk. Your target point for the bar should be about the middle of your trunk. This row is to be alternated (after allowing for full recovery) with the bench presses above.



Bench presses: This time, you'll be using a wide grip (outside the lines) on the Olympic bar and no arch. For most, this will be a weaker position for loading, but it will increase the stretch and isolation on the chest.



Use only one warm-up set, unless you feel that you don't need one. I like to use a warm-up set every time I take a new body position (regardless of how slight) and the work reps are ten or less. In this instance, use about 60% of the intended work-set weight, and keep the

reps down to around six. This will allow a specific joint warm-up/line of movement rehearsal without introducing fatigue.

In the work set, however, use an amount of weight that will bring you to your *predetermined* level of fatigue between eight and ten reps. Only look for a second work set in this exercise (and its paired one) if your recovery system is *superior*. Otherwise, stick with one paired set. As far as the amount of weight that you'd use for a second set, expect to come down by at least 15-20%. I recommend about a 311 tempo.



This bench is to be alternated (after allowing for full recovery) with the following bent-over rows. I don't expect that you'll need as much recovery as in the first pairing of exercises, but don't feel the need to rush. As I've recommended in the past, ensure recovery (at least one to two minutes between work sets of alternating exercises) and maintain joint and body temperature between work sets (especially in a cooler environment/gym) through the use of such devices as warm-up towels, etc.



Bent-over rows: Use an underhanded (supine) medium-width grip. This grip position provides a variation in the pull to both the elbow flexors and the scapula retractors.

Again, start with a trunk angle that's just above horizontal with your knees bent, and don't change this during the movement.

Pull to your bellybutton, or just above. The warm-up and work-set protocol is the same as for the wide-grip benches above. This row is alternated with the bench presses above, allowing for full recovery.



Bench presses: This time, use a wide grip and keep your feet up in the air. You'll also be coming to a "high" position on the chest. This is one of the weakest bench positions, but boy does it target the chest! If you don't feel like you just got off the plastic surgeon's bench after this phase of the workout, we need to do some troubleshooting — which, incidentally, is a service that I offer!

As per the previous bench press movement, take a wide grip (just outside the lines) on the Olympic bench and lower the bar to the top of your sternum — that's right, the top of your sternum — and have your feet up so that your hip and knees are at 90 degrees or greater. Cross your legs at the shins.



I want 15-20 reps on this set, so make sure that the loading is appropriate. Use a 211 tempo. If you want to up the ante, cut short the extension prior to lockout (including a reciprocal pause of one second at the end of the concentric phase). Don't extend your arms fully, and

add a pause at the bottom, too.

Unless you're very tight in the chest and shoulders, you shouldn't need a warm-up set. Use a spotter, not because I expect the load to crush you, but you may experience sudden loss of work capacity (i.e. you may fail very quickly). And when you do, there's nothing more



humiliating than struggling to lock out on 60% of your 1RM!

This bench is to be alternated (after allowing for full recovery) with the following seated rows. You can take your pick here — use a shorter recovery for more of a metabolic training effect, or take a longer rest and look to exploit a bit more loading.



Seated rows: Take an overhanded wide grip on the bar, but don't go so wide that you can't complete the concentric (pulling in) phase while keeping the wrists in line with the forearms. Pull high to the chest but, again, only as high as you can go without raising the shoulders (don't

allow the upper traps to shorten).

Use the same warm-up, work-set, and tempo protocols as in the wide-grip, high-bar benches above. As in the above benches, the loading will be limited, but the isolation will be high. This row is to be alternated



(after allowing for full recovery) with the bench presses above.



Close-grip bench presses: This time, keep your feet on the floor, but use a 6-8" grip on the bar. Perform at least one warm-up set of about ten reps. You're only doing it to rehearse the movement and provide specific joint angle warm-up, so you don't need to go heavy — about

50% of your intended first work-set weight should work fine.

For the recovery-challenged lifter, use only one work set of eight to ten reps. For those with greater recovery capacity, do up to four work sets, and I recommend the classical "light to heavy" pyramid: 1x10, 1x8, 1x6, 1x10. Use a 211 tempo and take two or three minutes between sets. Remember that if you need to cut any sets to reduce volume, cut from this movement. By the way, you're definitely going to need a safety spotter by now!



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

Bench presses

Position Medium grip, feet down, medium arch

Warm-up sets 1x10 at 40% of first work set 1x8 at 70% of first work set

Work sets 2x5-6

Tempo 211

Rest Alternate with seated rows below, allowing for full recovery (about two minutes)

Seated rows

Position Medium prone grip, pull to the middle of the trunk

Warm-up sets 1x10 40% of first work set 1x8 at 70% of first work set

Work sets 2x5-6

Tempo 211

Rest Alternate with bench presses above, allowing for full recovery (about two minutes)

Bench presses

Position Wide grip, feet down, no arch

Warm-up sets 1x6 at 60% of first work set

Work sets 1-2x8-10

Tempo 311

Rest Alternate with bent-over rows below, allowing for full recovery (about two minutes)

Bent-over rows

Position Medium supine grip, pull to the low trunk

Warm-up sets 1x6 at 60% of first work set

Work sets 1-2x8-10

Tempo 311

Rest Alternate with bench presses above, allowing for full recovery (about two minutes)

Bench presses

Position Wide grip, high chest (to the sternum), feet in the air

Warm-up sets None

Work sets 1x15-20

Tempo 211

Rest Alternate with seated rows below, allowing for full recovery (about two minutes)

Seated rows

Position Wide overhanded (prone) grip, pull to the high position of the trunk (to the chest)

Warm-up sets None

Work sets 1x15-20

Tempo 211

Rest Alternate with bench presses above, allowing for full recovery (about two minutes)

Close-grip bench presses

Position 6-8" grip, feet down

Warm-up sets 1x10 at 50% of first work set

Work sets 1x8-10 or 1x10, 1x8, 1x6, 1x10

Tempo 211

Rest 2-3 minutes between sets

Remember to do one set of bench presses, rest, and then proceed to the first set of seated rows. Rest again, and then go to the second set of bench presses, and so on.

Phase II (Weeks 4-6)

Workout B

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

Chin-ups: Take a shoulder-width grip with palms facing each other (neutral) on the chin bar. Allow the feet to come off of 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 hand-grip level. Stop when you can't do another full-range rep.



I like to use the lat pulldown machine to warm up for the chins, using the same grip. Your warm-up loads are selected as a percentage of your first work-set weight. For example, if you were planning to do only your bodyweight in the first work set, and you weigh 100 kilograms, look for warm-up sets of about ten reps of 40 kilograms and eight reps of 70 kilograms.

Again, if you feel that you need to do more warm-up sets, go ahead. Just remember to keep fatigue down to a minimum before diving into the work sets. If you intend to add an additional load to your bodyweight (and I hope that you do), take this into



account. The higher the loading of the first work set, the more warm-up sets I'd use. If your first work set weight was going to exceed ten kilograms of additional resistance, do a third warm-up set of bodyweight chins, perhaps at a lower number (two to four) reps.

As far as the work sets of chins, I want two sets of five to six reps. Aim to increase the load in the second work set, even if only by 1.25 or 2.5 kilograms. The speed of movement that I recommend is about 211 — yes, ideally I want to see a short pause with the head higher than the hands. These chin-ups are to be alternated (after allowing for full recovery) with the shoulder presses below.



Shoulder presses: Set up a flat bench in front of a squat rack or similar, and take a grip on the bar that's just outside shoulder-width. Take the bar from the squat racks in a classic front-squat position (with the elbows high) and step back. Sit on the bench that you've provided. The movement commences with the hands rotating under the bar so that they can press up, and the bar goes up in front of the head to full extension. This is the classical setup.

If you lack the shoulder/elbow/wrist flexibility to perform this exercise and/or are addicted to machines, go ahead and use a machine. I'd prefer that you do shoulder pressing on a prone bench with no back support, but more on this another day.

If you're using the method that I describe, place the feet out at 45 degrees from the body so as to create a triangular base of support with the bum, and lean slightly into that triangle. Maintain pressure through the feet during the lift. This base of support will reduce the risk of injury to the lower back. Of course, any time you're pushing or pulling over the head (what you'll be doing for this workout), you raise the likelihood of minor stresses to the neck vertebrae, which keeps me in contact with my chiropractor from time to time!



Use the same warm-up, work-set, and tempo protocols as prescribed for the bench presses in the previous workout, unless you have specific needs in either (e.g. you feel that you need more warm-up sets in one than the other). These presses are to be alternated (after allowing for full recovery) with the chin-ups above.

Lat pulldowns or chin-ups: If your chin ability is high, use the chin-ups. If not, perform the lat pulldowns. With the palms facing away, take a grip just outside shoulder-width and pull to the front. If doing chins, take the chin over hand level. If using lat pulldowns, pull the bar to the top of the sternum.



Do one warm-up, unless you feel that you don't need one. In this instance, use about 60% of the intended work-set weight and keep the reps down (about six reps). In the work set, look for a load that will bring you to your predetermined level of fatigue between eight and ten reps. Note that if you're not able to reach the desired rep bracket with chin-ups, you should be on lat pulldowns — better off recognizing this right away and building on the same exercise than crawling back to the lat pulldowns in the second week of this phase!

Only look for a second work set in this and its paired movement if your recovery system is superior. As far as the load that you'd use on your second set, expect to come down by at least 15-20%. The speed of movement should be 311.



This chin or lat pulldown is to be alternated (after allowing for full recovery) with the following shoulder presses. I don't expect that you'll need as much recovery as in the first pairing. But nevertheless, make sure to allow enough.

Shoulder presses: Take a medium grip (just inside the lines) on the Olympic bar and remove it from the squat racks as per a back squat. Sit on the end of a prone bench positioned behind you. As per above, if you have other preferences (like machines), use them. The warm-up and work-set protocol is the same as for the chins/lat pulldowns above.



One of the most common faults that I see in this movement is what I call "cutting" or *reducing* the range. I like to see the range go down to the base of the neck, shoulder level. If your flexibility prevents this, so be it. But don't start with a certain range and then reduce it upon fatigue.

If you can't maintain range, terminate! And if you're able to go full range but chose to reduce it to allow greater loading, it will only be a matter of time before you lose the ability to do full range! Don't destroy your joint mobility for 60 seconds of apparent glory. And don't kid yourself — lift a load that's best for the long term, not for short-term impression value!



This shoulder press is to be alternated (after allowing for full recovery) with the chins/lat pulldowns above. Anyone with shoulder laxity or prior shoulder surgery should review their behind-the-neck pulling and pushing. I didn't say *not* to do it — just review them with the aid of an appropriately trained person if you feel that you lack the knowledge to make an informed decision.

Lat pulldowns: Here I go, more political incorrectness! Pulling (and even pushing) behind the neck has lost popularity, but so did squatting prior to the rebirth of the close-chain kinetic theory. Yes, there's more stress in the shoulder joint with a pull behind the neck than with a pull in front of the neck. There's also more stress in benching with a wide grip than with a medium grip. Does this stop you from using the latter? Let's distinguish between relative and absolute. Pulling behind the neck increases certain parameters, but it's not necessarily bad for you unless there are contraindications!



The deeper you go in the squat, the greater the loading on both the knee and lower back. But does this relative infer an absolute? No. If it's not appropriate, don't do it. But don't throw it out just because someone said that it was bad for you! Be a big person, and make up your own mind. If you need an alternative, use the same-width grip and do it to the front.

Now let's get back on track. Take a wide grip, and aim to keep the wrists *under* the elbows (it allows for a better line of pull to strengthen the lower trap). Ideally, take the bar to the base of the neck, and minimize head and trunk movement. I want 15-20 reps on this set, so make sure that the loading is appropriate. Use a 211 tempo, and alternate (after allowing for recovery) with the following shoulder presses. Again, you



can take your pick here — use a shorter recovery for more of a metabolic training effect, or take longer and look to exploit a bit more loading.



Shoulder presses: Do these as per the medium-grip shoulder presses behind the neck above, but take a wide grip (outside the lines) on the Olympic bar. The discussion about the pros and cons and alternatives to pulldowns behind the neck applies.

Use the same warm-up, work-set, and tempo protocols as in the wide-grip lat pulldowns above. And also as in the above lat pull, the loading will be limited, but the isolation will be high. This shoulder press is to be alternated (after allowing for full recovery) with the lat pulldowns above.



Biceps curls: Set up a preacher bench with a 45-degree angle. Take a shoulder-width grip on the EZ-bar in a position that allows a degree of internal rotation of the forearm. If you want to increase the isolation of the movement, make sure that the top of the bench is in your armpits, and don't let any part of the upper arm lose contact with

the bench during the movement.

Another technique to increase the muscle fatigue is to stop the concentric range well before the arm reaches a vertical position, thus never allowing a rest position — you know, Weider Principle 33324! Perform at least one warm-up set of about ten reps. You're only doing it to rehearse the movement and provide specific joint angle warm-up, so don't go heavy. Use about 50% of your intended first work-set weight.



For the recovery-challenged lifter, use only one work set of eight to ten reps. For those with greater recovery capacity, do up to four work sets, and I recommend the classical "light to heavy" pyramid: 1x10, 1x8, 1x6, 1x10. Use a 211 tempo and take two or three minutes between sets. Remember, if you need to reduce the volume of work by cutting out some sets, do it here.

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

Chin-ups

Position Medium neutral grip

Warm-up sets On a lat pulldown machine: 1x10 at 40% of first work set 1x8 at 70% of first work set

Work sets 2x5-6

Tempo 211

Rest Alternate with shoulder presses below, allowing for full recovery (about two minutes)

Shoulder presses

Position Medium grip, seated, to the front

Warm-up sets 1x10 at 40% of first work set 1x8 at 70% of first work set

Work sets 2x5-6

Tempo 211

Rest Alternate with chin-ups above, allowing for full recovery (about two minutes)

Lat pulldowns or chin-ups

Position Medium grip, to the front

Warm-up sets 1x6 at 60% of first work set

Work sets 1-2x8-10

Tempo 311

Rest Alternate with shoulder presses below, allowing for full recovery (about two minutes)

Shoulder presses

Position Medium grip, seated, behind

Warm-up sets 1x6 at 60% of first work set

Work sets 1-2x8-10

Tempo 311

Rest Alternate with lat pulldowns or chin-ups above, allowing for full recovery (about two minutes)

Lat pulldowns

Position Wide grip, behind

Warm-up sets None

Work sets 1x15-20

Tempo 211

Rest Alternate with shoulder presses below, allowing for full recovery (about two minutes)

Shoulder presses

Position Wide grip, seated, behind

Warm-up sets None

Work sets 1x15-20

Tempo 211

Rest Alternate with lat pulldowns above, allowing for full recovery (about two minutes)

Biceps curls

Position Medium grip, EZ-bar, on a 45-degree preacher bench

Warm-up sets 1x10 at 50% of first work set

Work sets 1x8-10 or 1x10, 1x8, 1x6, 1x10

Tempo 211

Rest 2-3 minutes between sets

That's it. Remember, do this workout for about three weeks, alternating Workouts A and B. Phase III will be posted on this site in two weeks.

Although these workouts may seem more complex and regimented than most of the ones that you've done in the past, I urge you to really give this program your "full cooperation" — you won't be sorry!