

King, I., 2000, 12 Weeks to Super Strength – Pt 3, Fri Mar 10 2000

12 Weeks to Super Strength - Phase 3

by Ian King | Fri, Mar 10, 2000

Twelve Weeks to Super Strength, Phase III Chest and back by Ian King To recap, this is a 12-week program, and there are four phases. This is Phase III. We posted Phase II a couple of weeks ago, and Phase I two weeks before that. 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 o...

Twelve Weeks to Super Strength, Phase III Chest and back by Ian King

To recap, this is a 12-week program, and there are four phases. This is Phase III. We posted **Phase II** a couple of weeks ago, and **Phase I** two weeks before that. 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. If you normally use a "seven workouts a week" program, then you need to kick back with a couple of Dingos (the beer, that is, not the baby-stealing wild doggies) and relax a bit, you overtrained animal!

During Phase II, you probably experienced strength gains and took comfort in that phase's more traditional approach to training. Felt good, didn't it? Well, snap out of it, buddy, it's time once again to rip you out of your comfort zone and test your ability to handle humility and pain! The good news is that after Phase III, we'll return to a more conventional program in the fourth and final phase. There, you'll once again see gains in size and strength, but first you've got to pay the piper in Phase III.

For the technically inclined, I'll briefly discuss some of the methodology that I'm applying in this 12-week program. The shift up in the number of reps that you'll see in this phase is part of the alternating periodization method that I've applied in designing this program.

As for allocation of muscle groups to training days, you'll find all pulling exercises on one day and pushing on the other. This is different than the mixed push-pull method that I used in Phase II.

The sequence of exercises is reversed, too, from those targeting small muscles to those targeting large muscles. This specific training method is a pre-fatigue variation of

supersetting. Wherever possible, I've used a single joint exercise for the pre-fatiguing movement, followed by a multi-joint.

You'll see two exercises per muscle group. Perform a set of the first exercise, rest no more than ten seconds, and do a set of the second exercise. Rest for two to three minutes, then repeat the superset. Upon completion of all of the supersets required for that pairing of exercises, rest for two to three minutes again and commence the next pairing of exercises.

This is a similar approach to Phase I, with the differences including lower reps, a lower number of exercises, and a more conventional speed of movement. Note that you won't feel as strong (an understatement, if there ever was one) on the bilateral, multi-joint exercises, especially toward the end of your torture session...uh, I mean...workout.

I'm going to predominantly use two rep ranges: a 12-15 rep range for the pre-fatigue exercise, and an 8-10 rep range for the second exercise in the superset pairing. For those with less experience and lower levels of muscle mass, work toward the upper end of the range (e.g. 15 reps in the 12-15 range, 10 reps in the 8-10 range). Those with more experience and higher levels of muscle mass should work toward the lower end (e.g. 12 reps in the 12-15 range, 8 reps in the 8-10 range).

Enough talk — let's head to the gym, kick in the door, and go to work!

Phase III (Weeks 7-9)

Workout A

The pushing muscles are trained first in the week, which is a subtlety that defines this workout as one that prioritizes chest. Remember to apply my progressive intensity method. During the first week, use manageable loads and stop just short of failure. Push it up a bit during the second week, still avoiding failure. And during the third week, take a shot of Power Drive, and go for it!

Warm-up: Perform 10 minutes of light aerobics (optional) and 15 minutes of upper body stretching (compulsory). Refer to **The Lazy Man's Guide to Stretching** or my flexibility video series.

Forearm flexions with bar: Kneel on the ground beside a bench and place your forearms across it, hands just off the other side. Using a supinated (palms up) grip, allow the wrists to drop as low as possible and the bar to roll down to the fingertips. Then, roll the bar back up into the palm and flex the wrists as much as you can. Avoid any elbow or forearm movement.



After a 50% warm-up set of ten reps, do one to two strip sets of 10-15 reps per set. This means to lighten the weight after the first 10-15 reps, repeat this number of reps, and again lighten the weight for a third and final set. Take no more than ten seconds of rest in between each of the three sets within the strip set.

For the following triceps superset, you'll be doing two exercises in a row with nil to minimal rest between exercises.

1) Seated overhead triceps extensions: Perform these with a bar using a medium-close grip, which should be about equal to the distance between your ears (unless you're a fathead).



If you have wrist or elbow problems, use an EZ-curl bar and take a position with the forearms rotated in slightly. If you have significant right to left triceps imbalance, consider using dumbbells. Keep the elbows high and still throughout — the closer to the ears, the better.

Yes, you can lift more with elbows moving forward and out, but I encourage you to use a strict technique on this exercise. The stretch on the long head of the triceps in this position is a unique benefit, so don't waste it.

As a general comment, don't take risks with this exercise. Many bodybuilders refer to standing or lying triceps extensions as "elbow fuckers," so show this exercise some respect. Do one warm-up set of ten reps, then proceed to bench dips.

2) Bench/parallel bar dips: You'll first do a warm-up set of bench dips — the actual work set involves parallel bar dips. For this warm-up set, place two benches about one meter apart and parallel. Sit on one and place the feet up on the other. Slide your bottom off of the bench but keep the hands on, with the fingers pointing toward the feet and curled over the side of bench.

Using your triceps, lower the hips down as far as comfortable, then raise yourself up, stopping just shy of elbow lockout. By the last rep of the warm-up set, I want you to use a full range of motion — that is, the shoulders should dip lower than the elbows. Do ten reps of this to warm up.



Take about a one-minute rest. The rest period is shorter here as you haven't induced a high level of fatigue. Now, go back to the first triceps exercise and do a work set of 12-15 reps using a 311 tempo. Upon completing this set, take no more than ten seconds of rest and commence the first work set of *regular* dips. These are to be done between the two parallel bars, *not* the benches as you did in the warm-up.



Cross your feet at the ankles, bend your knees, and control the lowering portion. Ideally, go down to where the shoulders are lower than the elbow joint. If the dip station is adjustable, stay with a grip that keeps the arms close to the body. Avoid excessive flexion of the trunk during the movement. Also, don't lock out fully at the end of the concentric phase. These tips will increase the focus on the triceps.

As per the extensions above, show some respect to the exercise. Control the negative! I've seen an athlete subluxate his sternum when he foolishly went down faster than a Thai hooker at a "buy me drinky" bar.

Do eight to ten reps using a 311 tempo. Again, apply the guidelines provided above as to which end of the rep range to work.

That's one superset, not counting the warm-up. Repeat a second superset if you believe that you have the ability to recover from this volume. Take one to two minutes between the supersets, and one to two minutes before starting the next pair of exercises.

For the following shoulder superset, you'll again be doing two exercises in a row with nil to minimal rest between exercises.

1) Seated lateral dumbbell raises: Hold the dumbbells with the palms at your side facing toward you. Keeping the elbows slightly bent, raise the arms up until the dumbbells are level with the top of your head. Although this position is debatable, I prefer the thumb to be slightly lower than the little finger at the top of the movement (visualize a glass of water in each hand — at the top, pour a little out).



2) Shoulder presses behind the neck: Again seated, take a wide grip and press from behind the head. I spent considerable time in the last article giving a description on how I want this to be done. Check back in Phase II for details. Remember, don't lock out at the end of the concentric phase.



Use the same number of sets, reps, tempo, and pairing rest periods as discussed in the triceps superset. Repeat a second superset if you believe that you have the ability to recover from this volume. Take one to two minutes between the supersets, and one to two minutes before starting the next pair of exercises.

For the following chest superset, you'll again be doing two exercises in a row with nil to minimal rest between exercises.

1) Supine dumbbell flies: Hold the dumbbells with the palms facing each other, elbows slightly bent. Lower the dumbbells down in line with your chest using a range of motion that doesn't cause any undue discomfort. Don't change the elbow angle during the lift, and keep the feet on the bench to increase isolation.



A common question, "Should I raise the dumbbells up at the top so that they touch each

other, or should I avoid full lockout?" I like to get the best of both by alternating these options every second rep.

2) Bench presses: Take a wide grip and lower the bar to the middle of the chest. Keep your feet in contact with the floor this time. These variables will allow you, at least, to load the bar a little bit, despite having a fatigued chest and triceps. Don't fully lock out at the end of the concentric phase. Again, check the previous installments for details. Remember, don't use the back arch in the bench press for this phase.



Use the same number of sets, reps, tempo, and pairing rest periods as discussed in the triceps superset. Repeat a second working superset if you believe that you can handle it. Take one to two minutes between the supersets, and one to two minutes before starting the next pair of exercises.

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

Forearm flexions with bar

Warm-up set 1x10 at 50%

Work set Strip set of 10-15, 10-15, 10-15

Tempo 311

Rest None between sets within the strip set, but one to two minutes before moving on to the next two exercises

Triceps superset

1) Seated overhead triceps extensions

Position Medium prone grip (use an EZ-bar if you have wrist or elbow problems)

Warm-up set 1x10 at 50%

Work set 1-2x12-15

Tempo 311

Rest Superset with dips, taking ten seconds or less in between

2) Bench/parallel bar dips

Position Neutral (palms in) grip

Warm-up set Bench dips, 1x10

Work set 1-2x8-10 (on parallel bars)

Tempo 311

Rest One to two minutes before going on to the next superset, or pairing of exercises

Shoulder superset

1) Seated overhead triceps extensions

Position Seated, with dumbbells

Warm-up set 1x10 at 50%

Work set 1-2x12-15

Tempo 311

Rest Superset with shoulder presses, taking ten seconds or less in between

2) Shoulder presses behind the neck

Position Wide grip, behind the neck, seated

Warm-up set 1x10 at 50%

Work set 1-2x8-10

Tempo 311

Rest One to two minutes before going on to the next superset, or pairing of exercises

Chest superset

1) Supine dumbbell flyes

Position Feet up on bench, palms facing in

Warm-up set 1x10 at 50%

Work set 1-2x12-15

Tempo 311

Rest Superset with bench presses, taking ten seconds or less in between

2) Bench presses

Position Wide grip, lower to mid chest, feet down on the ground

Warm-up set 1x10 at 50%

Work set 1-2x8-10

Tempo 311

Rest One to two minutes before going on to the next superset, or pairing of exercises

Phase III (Weeks 7-9)

Workout B

It's now time to trash the pulling muscles. This workout will be the second upper body session of the week. Remember to apply my progressive intensity method as already described above.

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

Forearm extensions with bar: Kneel on the ground beside a bench with your forearms across it, with your hands just off the other side. Using a pronated (palms down) grip this time, allow the wrists to drop as low as they can, then extend (raise) the wrists as much as possible.



Again, avoid any elbow or forearm movement. After a 50% warm-up set of ten reps, do one to two strip sets of 10-15 reps per set as described in Workout A. Be prepared to look for the unloaded EZ-bar on that final strip set, as your forearms will be too blitzed to use anything heavier!

For the following biceps superset, you'll be doing two exercises in a row with nil to minimal rest between exercises.

1) Concentration dumbbell curls: These are to be performed by sitting on a bench and using one arm at a time. Push the working arm elbow into the thigh, but with a unique twist: allow the elbow to be out a bit from the body so that when you flex the dumbbell, the upper arm is

diagonally away from the body, shifting the overload within the elbow flexors higher in the joint angle than would normally occur.



Work the weak side first, followed immediately by the strong side, doing no more weight or reps on the strong side than the weak side could tolerate. Do one warm-up set at ten reps. Then, allowing no more than a ten-second rest period, proceed to standing reverse-grip biceps curls.

2) Standing reverse-grip biceps curls: I recommend using a straight bar, but only if you can do so without aggravating the elbow, wrist, or forearm. This narrows it down to less than 25% of the weightlifting population! Otherwise, use the EZ-curl bar. Grip the bar with palms facing down (pronated) at shoulder width. Do one warm-up set of ten reps of this exercise.



Now, take a one-minute rest. Use this break to scope out the *sheila* with the sports bra and the little black windshorts. Yeah, baby, work that *thang* for daddy. Yes, yes! Daddy likes it when you...okay, *that's enough, dammit!*

Go back to the first biceps exercise and do a work set of 12-15 reps using a 311 tempo. Upon completing this set, take no more than ten seconds of rest and commence the first work set of standing reverse-grip biceps curls. Keep the arms by your side during these reverse curls, especially as the bar nears the end of the concentric phase.

Do 8-10 reps using the 311 tempo. Again, apply the guidelines provided above as to which end of the rep range to work. That's one working superset. Repeat a second superset if you believe that you have the ability to recover from this volume. Take one to two minutes between the supersets, and one to two minutes before starting the next pair of exercises.

For the following scapula retraction superset, you'll again be doing two exercises in a row with nil to minimal rest between exercises.

1) Prone dumbbell flies: Lie on your stomach on a bench and hold the dumbbells with the palms facing downward, arms at 90 degrees to the body, and elbows slightly bent. The range of movement is from just off of the ground to as high as the arms will go without changing the elbow or shoulder angle, and without overly engaging the upper traps.



This isn't an overly strong position, so don't expect to use much of a load. If you do, your selective muscle recruitment will be less than optimal. Do one warm-up, followed by one or two work sets. Superset this movement with seated rows, allowing no more than about ten seconds in between sets.

2) Seated rows: I described this exercise in a previous article, but I'll summarize briefly. Keep your knees slightly bent and the trunk angle just behind vertical — neither is to move during the set. In this phase, I want a wide prone (palms down) grip, with the bar pulled to mid trunk.



If your upper traps are overactive (e.g. your shoulder raises during the lift), pull the bar lower on the chest. If you find that your lower arms aren't in line with your hands at the top of the pulling movement, take a slightly narrower grip. Allow full extension of the arms at the end of the eccentric phase, but don't let the trunk angle change.

Use the same number of sets, reps, tempo, and pairing rest periods as discussed in the biceps superset. Repeat a second working superset, if you like. Take one to two minutes between the supersets, and one to two minutes before starting the next pair of exercises.

For the following scapula depression superset, you'll again be doing two exercises in a row with nil to minimal rest between exercises.

1) Dumbbell pullovers: Lie perpendicular across a bench with one dumbbell in two hands. Allow the hips to drop to increase the stretch across the shoulder joint. Hold the dumbbell with the palms touching the inside of the plates at one end. The aim is to distribute the workload equally between the arms.

Keeping the elbows slightly bent, allow the arms to go over the head and toward the ground, using as full a range as is safe. When you come toward the end of the concentric phase, stop just before the arms reach the vertical position. Avoid dropping the weight on your head, as you'll be forced to take a job as one of those personal trainers at the gym who only get to wipe sweat off of the machines.



Focus on having the lats do the work in this exercise, minimizing the role of the triceps. Avoiding any change of elbow angle is the key to keeping the tris out of the movement. Do one warm-up, followed by one or two work sets. Superset this movement with chin-ups, allowing no more than about ten seconds in between sets.

2) Chin-ups: Note that I like to use lat pulldowns for the warm-up, employing the exact same arm position as to be used in the chin. The grip is pronated (palm down) wide. Again, I spent some time discussing this movement in the previous phase, so check back there if you need to be reminded of the details.



Use the same number of sets, reps, tempo, and pairing rest periods as discussed in the biceps superset. Repeat a second working superset if you believe that you have good recovery ability. As usual, take one to two minutes between the supersets.

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

Forearm extensions with bar

Warm-up set 1x10 at 50%

Work set Strip set of 10-15, 10-15, 10-15

Tempo311

RestNone between sets within the strip set, but one to two minutes before moving on to the next two exercises

Biceps superset

1) Concentration dumbbell curls

PositionMedium prone grip, EZ-bar

Warm-up set1x10 at 50%

Work set1-2x12-15

Tempo311

RestSuperset with reverse biceps curls, taking ten seconds or less in between

2) Standing reverse-grip biceps curls

PositionPronated grip, shoulder width, straight or EZ-bar, standing

Warm-up set1x10 at 50%

Work set1-2x8-10

Tempo311

RestOne to two minutes before going on to the next superset, or pairing of exercises

Scapula retraction superset

1) Prone dumbbell flyes

PositionFace down on bench

Warm-up set1x10 at 50%

Work set1-2x12-15

Tempo311

RestSuperset with seated rows, taking ten seconds or less in between

2) Seated rows

PositionWide prone grip, pull to mid trunk

Warm-up set1x10 at 50%

Work set1-2x8-10

Tempo311

RestOne to two minutes before going on to the next superset, or pairing of exercises

Scapula depression superset

1) Dumbbell pullovers

PositionPerpendicular, across bench, using one dumbbell

Warm-up set1x10 at 50%

Work set1-2x12-15

Tempo311

RestSuperset with chin-ups, taking ten seconds or less in between

2) Chin-ups

PositionWide prone grip

Warm-up set1x10 at lat pulldown

Work set1-2x8-10

Tempo311

RestOne to two minutes before going on to the next superset, or pairing of exercises

Notes

The options regarding total volume are yours to make. To keep the volume low, do only one working superset on each pairing of exercises. To raise the volume, do two work sets on some or all of the pairings. As a general rule, I find that the optimal volume is a lot lower than most initially think, so I'd strongly recommend reviewing this decision only after having used the lower end of the volume options during the first week.

In Conclusion

Remember, do this workout for about three weeks using Workout A first in the week and Workout B a couple of days later. The final phase will be posted on this site in two weeks. Prepare to blast through your previous strength limitations, bump up a T-shirt size, and make the cutie in the windshorts look twice!