

# The 4-Hour Body

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AN UNCOMMON GUIDE TO  
RAPID FAT-LOSS, INCREDIBLE SEX,  
AND BECOMING SUPERHUMAN

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CROWN ARCHETYPE  
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### TIM'S DISCLAIMER

Please don't be stupid and kill yourself. It would make us both quite unhappy.  
Consult a doctor before doing anything in this book.

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# THE BENCH PRESS INTERVIEWS

*Interview with Charles Poliquin ([www.charlespoliquin.com](http://www.charlespoliquin.com))*

**Are there any particular tricks or approaches for adding 10-20 lbs. in one workout? Any nervous system prep or otherwise that can be done before a max effort or 5RM?**

Bodybuilders have made use of partial movements to boost muscle growth. For example, Mr. Olympia Frank Zane was a heavy proponent of  $\frac{1}{4}$  deadlifts to develop the erector spinae muscles. Strength athletes use partial movements to their advantage for the following reasons:

1. They allow one to use greater loads than full range movements, thus permitting an overload in the range of motion where the muscle is strongest. For example, if you always train with full squats, you will not overload maximally the top range of the movement (quarter squat).
2. They allow one the possibility to overload a specific point in the range where he or she encounters a sticking point (i.e. the lock-out in the deadlift, or bottom position in the bench press). For instance, if you are weak in the start position in curls, you can do them on a Scott Bench where the resting surface for your triceps is set at 45 to 60 degrees, and only do the first 45 degrees of range of motion with extremely heavy loads. Make sure that the movements are done slowly over that limited range to bring about maximal intra-muscular tension. Stay away from bouncing choppy movements so that your tendon longevity is not compromised!
3. They allow one to disinhibit the nervous system. Extremely heavy partials on top of the range (also known as “lock-outs”) will help the lifter overcome the inhibition of feeling a great load on the spine or at arms length. Powerlifters use it for that purpose in peaking for a competition.

One of the best ways you can overcome your training plateau is by using the “Heavy Supports” technique. This was first popularized by Chuck Sipes, a former Mr. America who was known for his amazing strength in all lifts. After completing his bench press routine, he would support at arms-length an extremely heavy load for 5 seconds. When he was able to complete 4 sets of 10 seconds with that weight, he would further increase it. He claimed it built “tendon strength” for lack of a better explanation.

The truth of the matter is that “Heavy Supports” help heighten the shutdown threshold of the Golgi Tendon Organ (GTO), which is a tension/stretch receptor located in the tendon of a muscle. The GTO inhibitory effect can be seen when two people of uneven strength levels arm-wrestle. The weaker person - when losing - will look like he suddenly quits as his wrist is suddenly slammed to the table. What is really happening is that the GTO perceives a rapid rate of stretch during the eccentric contraction, and yells to the brain, “Better shut down the contraction, or my biceps tendon is going to roll up under my tonsils!” The brain sends a rapid message to inhibit the contraction in order to prevent a

muscle tear. You can raise that threshold by interspersing 8 seconds of heavy isometric holds a.k.a. “supports” in between regular sets.

So my approach of making use of the "heavy supports" in your bench press routine may look like this:

**Set 1:** Bench Press 5 R.M. @ 85% of max

**Set 2:** Heavy supports of 8 seconds @ 120 % of max. Basically, it's 1/16th of the range; you un-rack the weight and hold with your elbows just short of lock-out. The weight should be heavy enough that your upper extremities will shake like they are suffering from a severe Parkinson's attack.

**Set 3:** Bench Press 5 R.M. @ 85% of max

**Set 4:** Heavy supports 8 seconds @ 125 % of max

**Set 5:** Bench Press 5 R.M. @ 85% of max

**Set 6:** Heavy supports 8 seconds @ 130 % of max

Don't be surprised if your load for “Heavy Supports” climbs up dramatically. Don't be shy to use even greater percentages for the heavy supports than the ones suggested. The percentages given are merely for initial guidance.

By using heavy supports, I would not be surprised if your best bench press performance goes up 20-25 pounds in only 4 workouts.

Make sure that you train in a power rack for this routine, and set the range limiting bars 2-3 inches below your lock-out position to prevent any free instant plastic surgery!

### **What are the most neglected 1-3 exercises for improving the bench?**

Actually strengthening the rotator cuff and scapulae improves the bench press the quickest as they reset the threshold for inhibition of the triceps and pectoral musculature.

### **Most neglected 1-3 exercises for preventing injuries while benching?**

Same answer as for the previous question.

**If you wanted to get someone with a 200-lb 1RM to 315-lb 1RM as quickly and safely as possible, what might a program look like? The simpler the better, but it doesn't have to be simple. How quickly might this goal be accomplished, best case and most-likely case, if they follow all of the directions exactly?**

As my old Zen Coach and world champion Hugh Cassidy told me in 1975, “The best assistance exercise for any major lift is a movement that most closely resembles the lift itself.” Ergo...

The best assistance exercises for the flat bench press are flat benching using various grips: wide grip with a pause builds start power and is pec-centric; narrow-grip benching without a pause builds finish power and is tri-centric; and dumbbell flat benching, which is my personal favorite. I use an unorthodox “completely relax and stretch” at the bottom of each DB rep: lower the bells slow and controlled, now exhale and relax, allowing the bells to stretch the pecs. From this position of complete relaxation, reengage the pecs and front delts to fire the weight upward.

On all benching, hyper-extend the elbows. The advantage of this “relaxed bottom” approach is the trainee creates an 'exaggerated' range-of-motion and is forced to use lighter poundage.

Injuries occur when the lifter strays outside the technical boundaries of proper technique... I have NEVER seen or experienced a pull, tear or rip by myself or any other lifter when they exhibited perfect technique. Reverence for proper technique keeps the athlete safe.

*Interview with Marty Gallagher (<http://marty.dragondoor.com>)*

**Are there any particular tricks or approaches for adding 10-20 lbs. in one workout? Any nervous system prep or otherwise that can be done before a max effort or 5RM?**

I'm not too big on 'tricks.' However, be aware that bodyweight increases make a tremendous difference in the bench press (and squat - and very little increase in the deadlift). My lifters usually add bodyweight over the life of their periodization cycle, thereby staying anabolic: each successive week, a little bigger, a little stronger... Optimal or maximal weight gain is 1-pound per every hundred pounds of bodyweight.

I like to 'lean out' my lifter in the off-season using high volume, high reps, more exercises, and more cardio. Yes, cardio! Cardio keeps the metabolism kicking and makes the athlete fit and capable of more training. Then when the competitive cycle starts, we do fewer things better and add quality bodyweight.

If I see the bench stall or fail at lockout in a competition, I will have them widen their grip 1-inch on each side to lessen tricep stress. Conversely, if they have a sluggish launch, I will 'narrow them up.'

**What are the most neglected 1-3 exercises for improving the bench?**

These 3 things all allow the lifter to move more weight than they are capable of:

1. Partial reps, incomplete lowering or locking out.
2. Bouncing or bridging (lifter's ass breaks contact with the bench).
3. Bench shirts.

If you wanted to get someone with a 200-lb 1RM to 315-lb 1RM as quickly and safely as possible, what might a program look like? The simpler the better, but it doesn't have to be simple. How quickly might this goal be accomplished, best case and most-likely case, if they follow all of the directions exactly?

Legally, safely, and realistically... without resorting to dastardly bench shirts?

It would take a solid year and would require the athlete to add a significant amount of muscle. If a 165-pound athlete in good condition wanted to bench 315, they would need to push their bodyweight up to 185 maintaining (or nearly maintaining) their 165-pound bodyfat percentile. You are talking a 50% in bench power and that would require a significant increase in muscular horsepower. It would take two 12-week competitive cycles, interspersed with a successful 12-week offseason, PLUS a 20-pound weight gain of pure muscle. Doable, but the athlete would need to be damned near perfect for 36 straight weeks.

### *Interview with Pavel Tsatsouline ([www.dragondoor.com](http://www.dragondoor.com))*

Are there any particular tricks or approaches for adding 10-20 lbs. in one workout? Any nervous system prep or otherwise that can be done before a max effort or 5RM? I know your other piece discusses various techniques, but which 1-2 techniques would you emphasize for the bench?

Performing a loaded pec stretch before the set and tightly gripping the bar require no practice and will produce an immediate strength increase.

One minute before your attempt, stand at the head of the bench, facing away. Grab the loaded bar with your palms facing forward (as they would in a curl), as wide as you would place them for the bench press or a little wider. Pinch your shoulder blades together and push them down towards your feet. Force your chest open, and lean forward loading your pecs and biceps (the biceps are also strongly involved in the first half of the press, which is why you can build huge pipes without curls, with benches alone). Don't tense and don't relax; aim to put controlled strain on the bellies of the pecs and the biceps. Hold the position for 10sec.

Bench one minute later. Crush the bar, especially on the way up. I promise that your max will increase.

### **What are the most neglected 1-3 exercises for improving the bench?**

One is the pause bench press. Without relaxing or breathing, pause with the bar touching your chest but not sinking in for 3-5sec, then blast off. The pause press will build the pecs and the start like nothing else.

The board press will fix the middle and the lockout. This exercise is so powerful that you would be hard pressed to find an elite bencher who does not use it these days. While powerlifters use real boards, phone books will work just as well. Duct tape several

together. Their thickness should be such that if you lay the stack on your chest, the “board” will be just a little below your sticking point. Your training partner will help you hold the contraption in place.

Of the traditional exercises, close grip benches rule. Try to “tear the bar apart.”

### **Most neglected 1-3 exercises for preventing injuries while benching?**

One is the bodyweight row. Set a bar inside a power rack at your waist level, get under it, and grip it with your bench press grip. Straighten your whole body out in one line (if this is too hard, bend one knee and plant one foot on the ground) and row. The movement is the reverse bench press.

**Key points:** Force your chest up to meet the bar, open your rib cage as much as possible. Don’t pull with your biceps but drive your elbows back instead. Touch your sternum to the bar. This is very important, as this is where the barbell should touch down in the bench press. You may need to adjust your foot position—step closer to the bar—to hit that spot. Pinch your shoulder blades together and pause for a couple of seconds, still trying to expand your chest and to drive your elbows back.

Although the bodyweight row is valuable for working the pattern opposite to the BP, this is not why I recommend it. Its greatest benefit is to teach one how to lower the bar properly in the bench press. Once you get this skill down, you may skip the rows. Because the bench press is done with a professional technique that involves active negatives (successive induction), it will work the rhomboids, the rear delts, etc. just as well.

I highly recommend the kettlebell Turkish Get-Up (TGU) and related exercises, such as the kettlebell arm bar. They work magic for shoulder health. The “high bridge” version of the get-up also teaches one a great deal about the bench press technique. If you have mastered the high bridge, your bench set-up will rival that of a world-class powerlifter. Refer to [Kettlebells from the Ground Up: the Kalos Thenos](#) by RKC’s Gray Cook, Brett Jones, and Dr. Mark Cheng for instruction on the high bridge.

**If you wanted to get someone with a 200-lb 1RM to 315-lb 1RM as quickly and safely as possible, what might a program look like? The simpler the better, but it doesn't have to be simple. How quickly might this goal be accomplished, best case and most-likely case, if they follow all of the directions exactly?**

Most bench press programs designed by professional powerlifting coaches for beginners and intermediates will have two identical components. One is multiple sets of moderate reps (around 5). The other is “cycling,” which means starting with weights considerably lighter than one’s ability in the given rep range, gradually building up to a PR, then starting over light again.

This methodology reflects the cyclical nature of adaptation. Whether you like it or not, you shall cycle. Master RKC Mark Reifkind, former coach powerlifting Team USA, jokes about the “tough guy cycle”: Heavy, heavier, even heavier, injury, light... Since your body will force you to downshift no matter what, might as well plan for it.

With that in mind, here is your plan. Pick a weight you can bench approximately 10 times. Do a couple of lighter low rep sets to groove your technique, then do 5 reps with that weight. Rest for 3-5min (once you are benching in mid to high 200s, definitely take all 5min) and do 3 reps. Rest for the same amount of time and put up 2 reps. This will be very easy. It is supposed to.

Now take 20% off the bar, bring your hands in until your thumbs touch the smooth section of the bar, and start banging out sets of 5 close grip benches with only 1min of rest in between. When you can no longer make five perfect reps, you are done for the day. There is no way of estimating how many sets you will be able to do. One trainee might be able to get 20, another only 3. You might start with 10 back-off sets and be down to 1 by the end of the cycle. Don't worry about what this means and don't compare this number to anyone else's. The only thing that matters is the 1RM test at the end of the cycle.

Bench twice a week. If you find that you are not recovering fast enough, then press three times in two weeks: Monday and Friday in week one, Wednesday in week two.

In every workout, add 10 pounds to the first three sets. Not 5, not 2.5, and definitely not one of those mini-plates. If you must know the reason why, ping me on the [www.DragonDoor.com](http://www.DragonDoor.com) forum, otherwise just remember that the Party is always right.

When it will take all you have got to press the weight five times, next workout still add another 10 pounds, but skip the first set. In other words, instead of 5, 3, 2, do only 3, 2 reps. Next time add another 10 and get rid of the set of 3 reps.

After you have stopped doing sets of 5, replace the close grip bench press with either the pause press or the board press (alternate between cycles and don't be afraid to vary the thickness of the "board" once your sticking point shifts). Do only 3 sets of 3 reps and rest for 3-5min between these sets. In your first set use 80% of the bench press work sets (the same procedure you used for your close grips). Add or subtract the weight for the next two sets, as you deem necessary. The second and third sets should be hard but not impossible.

Let's take a look at a sample cycle for a guy with a 200-pound 1RM and a 145-pound 10RM.

Start each workout the same way: 95x5, 115x3, 135x2. Then come your work sets:

1. 145x5, 3, 2 (rest 3-5min). Close grip 115x5/ max sets (rest 1min).
2. 155x5, 3, 2 (rest 3-5min). Close grip 125x5/max sets (rest 1min).
3. 165x5, 3, 2 (rest 3-5min). Close grip 130x5/max sets (rest 1min).
4. 175x5RM, 3, 2 (rest 3-5min). Close grip 140x5/max sets (rest 1min).
5. 185x3, 2 (rest 3-5min). Board press 150x3, 165x3, 155x3 (rest 3-5min).
6. 195x2 (rest 3-5min). Board press 155x3, 165x3, 170x3 (rest 3-5min).
7. Test your max: 95x5, 115x3, 135x2, 165x1, 185x1, 205x1, 210x1. After 185 rest for 5min between attempts.
8. Rest

Start the next cycle with 10 more pounds: 155x5, 3, 2. It is not a fact that the next cycle will conveniently line up to seven workouts again; you might reach your 5RM sooner



or later.

Power to you!

### *Mike Robertson Interview ([www.robertsontrainingsystems.com](http://www.robertsontrainingsystems.com))*

**Are there any particular tricks or approaches for adding 10-20 lbs. in one workout? Any nervous system prep or otherwise that can be done before a max effort or 5RM?**

The best technique to use in this case is post-activation potentiation.

If you're doing a 5-RM, work up to a heavy-ish single, take 6-8 minutes, and then hit your 5-RM. This not only primes your nervous system to handle heavier weights, but it also improves confidence when handling a heavy load as well.

If you're working up to a true 1-RM, I would suggest hitting a single in the 90% range, and then holding a weight that is ~5% heavier than your proposed 1-RM. Un-rack it, hold for 1-2 seconds, and then re-rack it.

After that, wait the 6-8 minutes and then hit the heavy single.

And make sure you get a good friggin' handoff!

**What are the most neglected 1-3 exercises for improving the bench and why?**

#### 1 – Bench Pressing

Too many guys get caught up in “cute” assistance exercises, but nothing helps you more in a specific lift than training that lift. This is the basis of all motor control work, and the foundation for Eastern Bloc powerlifting programs.

#### 2 – Floor Pressing

Works on the top half of the press, negates the stretch shortening cycle, and removes the legs from the equation. It really forces the upper body to work hard.

#### 3 – Board Pressing

Board presses help teach you high tension techniques, as you're using more than you could on a normal bench press. They improve your confidence with heavy weights, and they also get your body acclimated to holding and supporting bigger weights.

**Most neglected 1-3 exercises for preventing injuries while benching and why?**

#### 1 - Chest Supported Rows

#### 2 – Chin/Pull-up variations

These two are peas from the same pod. You absolutely must have a strong upper back if you want to bench big (and I've never seen a big bencher without one).

Without it, you're going to lose a key point of stability. Rows will hit the middle traps and rhomboids hard, while chins will hit the lats and lower traps.

### 3 – DB Fly EQI (Eccentric-Quasi Isometrics)

While you could argue external rotation work, pec strains are a common injury. The DB Fly EQI thrown in at the end of pressing workouts helps restore a more natural length/tension relationship at the pecs, as well as building strength/stability in end-range. This is one of those things I almost always throw in to keep big benchers healthy.

Grab a light pair of dumbbells and do a dumbbell fly. When you get to the bottom stretch position, stop the movement and hold for 15 to 30 seconds.

**If you wanted to get someone with a 200-lb 1RM to 315-lb 1RM as quickly and safely as possible, what might a program look like? The simpler the better, but it doesn't have to be simple.**

I think something like this would work quite well for someone who's just getting started:

**Week 1 – 4x5-6 @ 70-75%**

**Week 2 – 5x5-6 @ 75-80%**

**Week 3 – 3-4x3 @ 65-70%**

**Week 4 – 3x4-5 @ 80-85%**

**Week 5 – 3x3 @ 80-85%**

**Week 6 – 4x3 @ 85-90%**

**Week 7 – 2x3 @ 80%**

**Week 8 – 2x3 @ 90+% (They could also work up to a PR attempt if they're feeling good. I would recommend doing this at least once every 4 months.)**

I should mention that the percentages aren't to be strictly adhered to, but rather used as a guideline. In that same vein, even the set/rep schemes can be played with a bit! The goal is to get volume the first month, and then follow it up with more intensity the second month.

They should follow up the bench press on that day with a heavy rowing variation.

**How quickly might this goal be accomplished, best case and most-likely case, if they follow all of the directions exactly?**

If they have no regard for health or what they look like, they could probably do it very fast by simply eating their way up a weight class or two (think most guys in the APF). A guy with a 200-pound bench probably isn't all that heavy, so the increased body and muscle mass would go a really long way. I think someone could do it in a year or less in this case.

For most who want to stay about the same weight (assuming they're not 120 or something ridiculous), I think you're looking at a 2-3 year process. The bench press is going to be the slowest growing of the 3 major lifts. Even if you're putting 40-50 pounds a year on your bench (which is really good), that still fits into that time frame.

*Interview with Dave Tate ([www.elitefts.com](http://www.elitefts.com))*

**Are there any particular tricks or approaches for adding 10-20 lbs. in one workout? Any nervous system prep or otherwise that can be done before a max effort or 5RM?**

After technique, making sure you're warmed is very important. For a beginner, if they use bands or chains for the first 25-30% of warm up sets and then pull them off, they will trick the nervous system into pressing faster and harder. For a moderate to advanced bench, this won't work.

Try different warm up protocols. What we normally see for someone who wants to bench 300 for the first time would be this:

135x10

185x10

225x5

275x3

\*Then try max

A better approach would be:

Bar for 3-4 sets of 5

95 for 2 sets of 3

135 for 3

165 for 3

195 for 3

225 for 3

255 for 1

280 for 1

Then take a shot at 300.

This is now 3910 pounds of volume but with 40 reps. It's 31% LESS volume but 42% more repetitions. This means MORE warm up but less fatigue that can affect the top end. The lifter needs to have warm up reps to prime technique, but needs to do so without taxing or wearing themselves out first.

**What are the most neglected 1-3 exercises for improving the bench and why?**

External Shoulder Rotations

Rows - stability and drive off the bottom of the bench press

Lockouts (boards, pins, floor) and triceps strength.

More importantly, confidence and getting used to heavier weights.

**Most neglected 1-3 exercises for preventing injuries while benching and why?**

This is the same answer as for the last question. A good program will prevent injuries.

*Interview with Jason Ferruggia ([www.jasonferruggia.com](http://www.jasonferruggia.com))*

**Are there any particular tricks or approaches for adding 10-20 lbs. in one workout? Any nervous system prep or otherwise that can be done before a max effort or 5RM?**

The best “trick” is to learn proper form and technique. By arching your back, tucking your elbows and bringing the bar to the proper spot, you can dramatically reduce the stroke length. If I bench like most average gym rats, I have to press the bar 21 inches. With perfect powerlifting technique, I can shorten my range down to 13 inches. Which way do you think allows me to press more weight? Obviously the form that cuts eight whole inches off my stroke.

To get properly set for a big press, you need to first slide all the way under the bar so that your shoulders are hanging off of the bench. Grab the bar with a supinated (palms facing you) grip and pull yourself up until your chest grazes it. At this point your shoulder blades should be squeezed together as tightly as possible. Now continue pulling forward until the bar is in line with the top of your head. Now jam yourself down on to the bench without allowing your feet to move. At this point you should be very uncomfortable. The only thing touching the bench should be your upper back/ trap region and your ass. You will be up on your toes and your feet will be directly under your hips.

If this position is unbearable you can slowly inch your feet forward. But DO NOT pick them up off the floor. You need to kind of just wiggle them out toward the end of the bench. It is of the utmost importance that you keep your feet in contact with the ground the entire time because you need to maintain that feeling of being “glued” to or “screwed” into the floor. This position will give you the best arch and also set you up to get the most out of your leg drive.

Grab the bar with a slightly wider than shoulder-width grip and squeeze it as hard as you possibly can. For most people, I suggest pinkies in the rings. This grip will shorten the stroke a bit without putting the shoulders at undue risk (meaning that a wider position than this is just too dangerous to recommend). The next thing you need to do is try to rip the bar apart from the center, like you are trying to split it in half. So pull outward on it

with each arm.

When you un-rack the bar, it is best to have a spotter help you pull it out over your chest, about two inches above your nipple line. Starting with the bar above your eyes, like so many people do, is a huge mistake. That sets you up for the wrong bar path. You want the bar to start where it is going to finish.

You do not ever want to press the bar out of the rack or off the pins. Doing that pulls your shoulder blades apart and if that happens you have no shot of benching big weight. It is imperative that you keep your shoulder blades squeezed together throughout the set. So set the rack or the pins low enough that you don't need to press it out and can instead "pull" it out with the help of a partner who should guide the bar over the center of your chest; not your eyes. If you start with the bar over your eyes you are going to be increasing the range of motion and you don't want that.

Before you begin your first rep, you want to hold the bar for a second and pull down on it by pinching your shoulder blades even further back. Let the bar actually sink as far as possible while your arms are still straight. Begin the descent by tucking your elbows 45 degrees to your side. The bar should come down and touch near the bottom of your chest, right around or below your nipple line. In the bottom position your elbows should remain tucked.

When the bar touches your chest, initiate the upward motion of the bar by immediately driving your feet down into the ground as hard as you can. You want to think about pushing yourself back and down into the bench at a forty five degree angle. Instead of pushing the bar away from you, think about pushing yourself away from the bar. Flare your lats as much as you can without letting your shoulder blades come apart and begin pressing upward.

The shortest distance between two points is a straight line, so it would make sense to press the bar straight up. The only problem with that is that you will negate the strength of your front delts and instead put them in a very stressful, disadvantageous position. What you actually want to do is press straight up out of the bottom and then at the top third of the range, start allowing your elbows to flare out to the sides slightly while pushing the bar back just a bit. If you do this correctly you will lock out the bar where it started, about one to two inches above your nipple line. When viewed from the side, the perfect bench press rep will look like a J, instead of a straight line. If you press up in a straight line, your arms will be tilted forward a few degrees, instead of perpendicular with the floor. This makes the lockout far harder than it would be if you pressed slightly back and took advantage of the strength of your front delts.

Aside from mastering perfect technique there are a few other tricks you could use to fire up the CNS before attempting a heavy bench press. First, you could do some kind of dynamic or plyometric exercise right before benching. This could be few sets of plyo pushups (where you propel yourself into the air), or heavy throws from the same position you are going to bench in. You don't want to do anything too stressful like depth pushups on boxes; you just want enough of a stimulus to fire up the CNS, but nothing too intense that may take away from your performance on the bench. If you choose the pushup option, I would recommend five sets of three plyo or clap pushups done immediately before you

start warming up for the bench. Simply propel yourself into the air as high as possible on each rep, catch yourself and immediately push yourself back upward as explosively as you can.

Another option would be heavy medicine ball throws. Lay down on your back with a heavy medicine ball on your chest and throw it straight up in the air as high as possible. It's best to do this with a spotter standing above your head in case the ball gets away from you. Catch the ball at arms length and as soon as it hits your hands, drop it right back down to your chest and explosively throw it back up in the air again. The only problem with this option is that you need a fairly heavy medicine ball (20-30% of your best bench weight), which probably wouldn't be found in most gyms.

Another neural trick you can use is to work up heavier than your intended starting weight. Let's say you think you can do 250 for five reps and are going to be trying to set a new 5RM with that weight. What you would want to do in your warm ups is something like the following:

95 x 10  
135 x 6-8  
185 x 5  
205 x 5  
225 x 1  
245 x 1  
265 x 1  
250 x 5 (work set)

By doing a heavier set than your work set, you fire up your nervous system and actually trick yourself into making the 250 pound set feel lighter than it would normally be because you just had 265 in your hands the set before.

This works exceptionally well with the 225-bench test. If you are going to attempt this test, it is always advised to work up to a single at somewhere between 250 and 315 (depending on your strength levels) a few minutes before your set with 225.

Finally, one other trick that works quite well when working up to heavy sets is to wave the weights as you get near your top end set. For example, let's say you are trying to bench press 315 for the first time. When you're near or above 90%, it is often advantageous to drop the weights back down for a set, instead of continuing upward in a linear fashion.

So instead of doing this:

95 x 10  
135 x 6-8  
185 x 5  
225 x 5  
250 x 3

275 x 1

295 x 1

305 x 1

315 x 1

You would do this:

95 x 10

135 x 6-8

185 x 5

225 x 5

250 x 3

275 x 1

295 x 1

**270 x 1**

305 x 1

315 x 1

That set with 270 is what can make all the difference. When you get up to weights over 90%, your form can break down and your confidence can start to waver. To combat this, we drop back down again to a more manageable weight (below 90%) that will allow perfect technique and will shoot up explosively. This boosts confidence and fires up the CNS. After that, the next few sets will go up more powerfully than they would have otherwise.

### **What are the most neglected 1-3 exercises for improving the bench and why?**

To answer that question, we'll need to look at the important muscles involved in a big bench press. First of all, you need a big, strong upper back to support your weight on and to be sure you can keep your shoulder blades squeezed together throughout the set. When pushing the weight up out of the bottom position, the first muscle group involved is the lats, followed immediately by the pecs. You need strong shoulders to keep the bar in the perfect path and get it moving toward lockout. And finally, to complete the lockout, you need strong triceps.

That leaves us with the following three lifts to help bring up the bench: Rack deadlifts, military presses, and weighted, suspended pushups. Let's go through these one at a time.

**Rack deadlifts-** Some of you are probably thinking, "deadlifts to improve my bench press?!" But, like I said, you need a big, strong upper back to bench a lot of weight. The best exercise for building a big, strong upper back is the rack deadlift. No other rowing exercise can compare. When doing these with a bigger bench press in mind, I recommend

squeezing your shoulder blades back tightly at the beginning of the set and keeping them there throughout. This will limit the amount of weight you can use but it will make it more specific to your goals. A few sets of 5-8 reps from knee height, once per week, will fit the bill perfectly here.

**Military presses-** Nothing builds big, powerful shoulders like the military press. People neglect this exercise when working on their bench press because it's a vertical press and the bench is a horizontal press. For this reason they think it has no carryover. Nothing could be further from the truth. As your military press goes up, so will your bench. Strong shoulders are crucially important to a big bench press and nothing will get you there faster than overhead pressing.

**Suspended pushups-** These can be done with [TRX Straps](#), [the Jungle Gym](#), or just chains with towels on them for "handles." The point is to be suspended in the air. What this does is makes all of your smaller stabilizer muscles of the entire rotator cuff/shoulder region fire much harder than they do with a barbell exercise. Strengthening these often-neglected muscles will add stability and pounds to your bench press. Also, anytime you move your entire body through space versus simply moving your limbs, there is a higher level of neuromuscular activation, which leads to tremendous size and strength gains. The bigger your chest and shoulders are, the less range of motion you have to press the bar through.

### **Most neglected 1-3 exercises for preventing injuries while benching and why?**

This goes hand-in-hand with the question above. Most guys do far too much pushing and not enough pulling. I've never seen someone in a public gym whose problem was not benching enough. The problem is not doing enough exercises in the opposite direction. Bench pressing pulls your shoulders into internal rotation. You need to work on correcting this and balancing things out by using exercises that pull your shoulders into external rotation. The most specific exercises that do that are rotator cuff drills, performed lying on your side with a light dumbbell or sitting upright with your elbow on your knee. This is the most basic form of prehab exercise for the shoulders and is only really necessary in the beginning stages or if someone has a glaring rotator cuff weakness or injury.

More specifically, you need to work on a variety of rows. Dumbbell rows can be done one arm at a time, two arms together in a bent over position or face down on a bench with your chest supported. The important thing is that they get done. These will strengthen your back and help balance out your strength. While rows will work both your lats and mid back region, face pulls will specifically target the upper back musculature.

Finally, I would recommend some type of isolated move for the rear delt/rhomboid region. This could be scarecrows, bent over lateral raises, or bent over Y-raises. Two to three sets of 10-15 reps once a week should be enough to strengthen this area and help prevent injuries.

**If you wanted to get someone with a 200-lb 1RM to 315-lb 1RM as quickly and safely as possible, what might a program look like? The simpler the better, but it doesn't have to**



**be simple. How quickly might this goal be accomplished, best case and most-likely case, if they follow all of the directions exactly?**

If a guy can only bench 200, he is weak and should ideally be doing full body workouts three times per week. But once he gets to about 275 or so, he will probably start to stall and may benefit from switching to an upper/lower split. They can train lower body once or twice. It's up to them. So either upper/lower/upper on MWF if they can only do three days. Or upper/lower/upper/lower on MWFS.

The following simple cycle will be used three times throughout the year, which is exactly how long it will take to add 115 pounds to your bench. Although I have seen it happen faster if your nutrition and recovery are spot on.

Each week you will work up to a heavy, top end set. It's not a true rep max where you would allow the last rep to turn into a death set grinder. Whereas most people would add another twenty pounds to the bar, I like to cut guys off when they are still getting the weight up with perfect form. There can be absolutely no breakdown in technique whatsoever. If you are using a weight that causes you to flare your elbows too early or let the bar travel out of its intended path, you have selected a weight that is too heavy.

Over the course of 4-8 warm up sets, you will work up to one heavy set on the bench each day. After your top end set you will do another down/back off set with 90% of your best set for the day. So if you worked up to 200 pounds for eight reps, you would take 180 after a three-minute rest period and do one more set with that.

Each week for three weeks straight, the reps will drop by two. On the fourth week you will deload, not by decreasing the weight, but by not benching at all. Benching fifty two weeks per year can be hard on your shoulders, so we combat this by taking the bar out of your hands one week out of every month.

The key is to be patient and make slow, small, consistent jumps. If you go up too fast and add weight to the bar too rapidly, you will stall out and start to regress before you realize your potential. This is especially important on week one of every new four week cycle. Always leave something in the tank and don't push it too far.

## **Month One**

Week 1- One top set of 8 followed by one at 90% of that

Week 2- One top set of 6 followed by one at 90% of that

Week 3- One top set of 4 followed by one at 90% of that

Week 4- Deload. Do not bench at all this week

## **Month Two**

Week 1- 7RM + 1 back off set @ 90%

Week 2- 5RM + 1 back off set @ 90%

Week 3- 3RM + 1 back off set @ 90%

Week 4- Deload

### Month Three

Week 1- 6RM + 1 back off set @ 90%

Week 2- 4RM + 1 back off set @ 90%

Week 3- 2RM + 1 back off set @ 90%

Week 4- Deload

### Month Four

Week 1- 5RM + 1 back off set @ 90%

Week 2- 3RM + 1 back off set @ 90%

Week 3- 1RM + 1 back off set @ 90%

Week 4- Deload

After going through the whole cycle, start over and repeat. Go through this three times in twelve months. Be sure that when you start back at the beginning of the cycle, you scale your weights back and go light. So if you started your first cycle with an 8RM of 200 pounds, don't start with more than 205 or 210 on the second cycle even if you think you could do 225. Take it slow and build up gradually over the course of 16 weeks.

The workouts would look something like this:

#### Day 1- Monday

- 1) Bench- one top end set and one back off set at 90%
- 2) Row- 4 x 6-8 x 90
- 3) Pushup or dumbbell press- 3 x 6-8 x 90
- 4) Upper back work (seated dumbbell clean, face pull, etc.)- 2-3 x 8-12 x 90
- 5) Biceps (incline curl, hammer curl, alt. dumbbell curl, etc.)- 2-3 x 6-10 x 90

#### Day 2- Wednesday

- 1) Squat or Deadlift variation- heavy
- 2) Glute ham, Romanian Dead Lift, good morning, etc. - 3-5 x 6-12 x 90
- 3) Abs (rollouts, hanging leg raise, suitcase deadlift holds, etc.)- 3-5 x 8-20 x 90
- 4) Calves/ Grip/ Shrugs/ Neck, whatever

#### Day 3- Friday

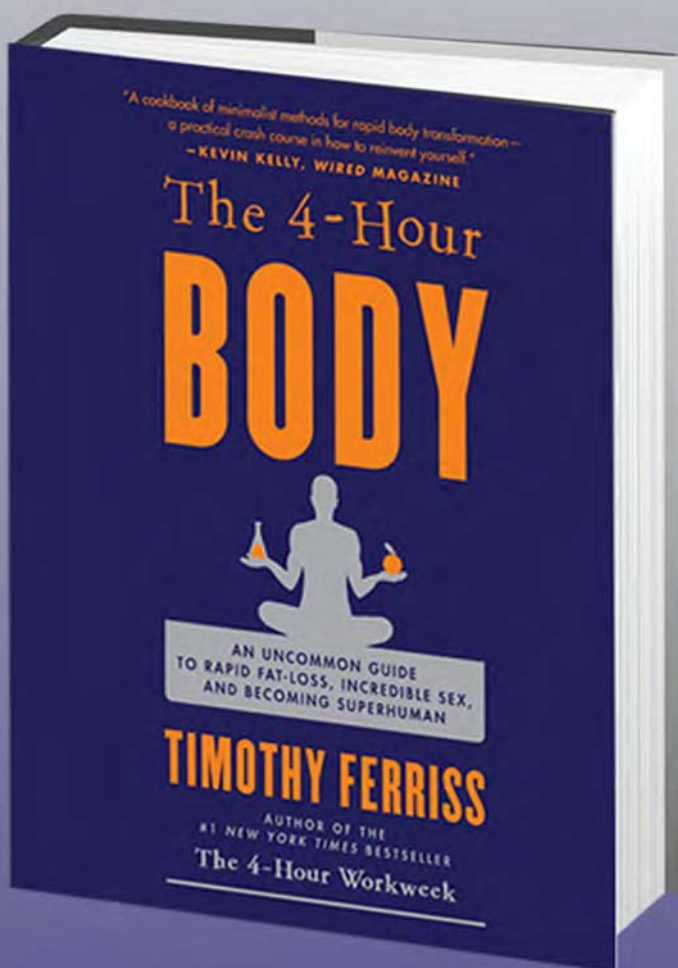
- 1) Chin Up- 4 x 8-10 x 90

- 2) Military press- 4 x 8-10 x 90
- 3) Bent Over Y-Raise- 3 x 10-15 x 90
- 4) Barbell Curl- 2-3 x 8-12 x 60
- 5) Dead Stop EZ Triceps Extension- 2-3 x 10-15 x 60

**Day 4- Saturday** Off or sprints or lower body assistance strength work...

- 1) Single leg exercise (step up, split squat, sled drag, etc.)- 2-4 x 8-12 x 90
- 2) Posterior chain exercise- 2- 4 x 8-12 x 90 2b)
- 3) Abs- 2-4 x 8-20 x 90
- 4) Shrugs- 2-4 x 8-10 x 60
- 5) Calves- 2- 4 x 8-20 x 60

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