

STRONGLIFTS

TIPS AND TECHNIQUES



**A SIMPLE, BUT EFFECTIVE
METHOD TO BUILD
MUSCLE & LOSE FAT
WHILE GETTING
STRONGER.**

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Preface

Where I live people know I've been training for years. They saw me at the gym. They see how I look. They want the same thing. So I get the usual questions:

- * How many times per week should I go to the gym?
- * Which exercises should I do?
- * What should I eat?

Mainstream magazines & media give the wrong advice. Do 500 sit-ups. Workout 6x/week. Last year spinning was hot, today it's Pilates classes. You can find information on how to build muscle & lose fat on the internet, but you have to dig deep to find what works.

[StrongLifts](#) is what I give to anybody who wants to lift weights for the first time. Whether online or offline. This program is influenced by the first strength training program I did when I quit bodybuilding: [Bill Starr 5x5](#).

StrongLifts has a different approach than Bill Starr 5x5 for 1 reason: I deal with beginners. Beginners who a) never lifted barbells b) never followed a program c) are out of shape and/or weak d) don't have a coach to judge if their technique is right so they can add weight.

StrongLifts minimizes risks of injury by enforcing correct exercise technique. At the same time the program acts motivating: you have a plan, you know what to do at the gym, you know which weights to lift, you feel & see the program working.

StrongLifts program is a long-term approach. Going too fast is bad. Take slow but steady steps towards success. This not only avoids injuries, it's also better mentally. Missed reps kill motivation. Leave the gym with your [training journal](#) showing personal records.

Of course, if you already lift weights, StrongLifts program will work for you too. I have given this program to bodybuilders who wanted to focus

on strength & saw their [Squat](#) increase by 20kg & [Bench Press](#) by 10kg in 2 months. This is a strength training program in the first place.

StrongLifts works for women just as for men. I'm not even like Ronnie Coleman. This program will get you muscular thighs, abs & arms while lowering your body fat. For an example of the physique StrongLifts builds, take a look at the girls of [Crossfit](#).

Readers told me they found StrongLifts after searching for ways to build muscle & lose fat. They tried the program & saw results. With the Fitness First gyms popping everywhere, I'm proud I can increase the popularity of a method that has been living underground for too much time.

If StrongLifts sounds totally different from what you've done up to now: don't judge it. I did bodybuilding routines up to 2003. When I first read Bill Starr's 5x5 program I thought “this stuff will never work: where is the arm training, where is the isolation, I will never achieve my goals”.

I was wrong & brainwashed. If you think “where are the barbell curls & calf exercises in his program?” you have been brainwashed too. Don't judge it: be open minded. Give it a try for 2 months, then evaluate. You won't go back. I never did.

Foundations

Strength Training. You need physical activity to be healthy & normal. You need to exercise. Running, soccer, tennis, rock climbing, boxing, etc. Anything is better than sitting in your couch.

The benefit of strength training is that it builds muscle fast. The stronger you become, the more muscles you'll have. The more muscles you have, the more calories you'll burn. Couple that with healthy nutrition & you can achieve a year-round body fat of 10% naturally (15% for women).

It takes time. You'll spend your first weeks learning exercise technique. Then you'll start using heavier weights. Heavy weight stresses your body, pushing it to adapt by building muscle. Your strength is directly linked to your muscle mass & thus your body fat.

Lifestyle. Your biggest challenge is building a healthy lifestyle. Career, business, relationships, family & social life will get in your way. Learn to deal with it. Decide which days you'll workout & stick to it. No matter what.

- **Morning Workouts.** Get up earlier, have breakfast, workout 1 hour later, eat, shower & go to work. Go to sleep on time.
- **Evening Workouts.** Take your gym bag with you to work/school. Go directly to the gym after work/when school ends.
- **Say No.** If you have planned to workout on Wednesday at 7pm & your friend / girlfriend / family / colleague / the Pope asks you to go have a drink, tell them you have to workout. Tell them you'll be there 2 hours later or that you have time on Thursday. People will call you a freak, but they will respect the rules you set for yourself. Learn to say no to people.

Attitude. Lack of sleep, illness, night out drinking or any other excuse: go to the gym. Sometimes these workouts turn out into your best ones.

Sometimes they don't. Bad workouts are better than no workouts. They train you mentally & reinforce the exercise habit. Don't rationalize.

The secret to long-term success is building the habit of eating healthy & lifting weights 3x/week. The only way to build these habits is by doing these actions a lot. You are what you repeatedly do. Make a plan & stick to it. No matter what.

Nutrition. Provide your body with the food it needs to build muscle by eating healthy. More muscle is more calories burned. More calories burned means a lower body fat. I recommend [Fitday](#) to keep track of your protein & calorie intake. Here's what your diet should consist of:

- **Protein.** 1g/lbs daily to build muscle. Meat, poultry, turkey, fish, [whey](#), quark, cottage cheese, milk, dairy, eggs, etc.
- **Carbs.** Necessary for energy. Whole carbs are healthier & have fiber which helps digestion. Oats, rice, breads, pasta, potatoes, yams, beans, etc
- **Veggies.** Fill your stomach but are low in calories. Spinach, broccoli, cauliflower, salad, kale, asparagus, cabbage, chicory, cucumbers, green beans, peppers, zucchini, etc.
- **Fruits.** Full of vitamins, minerals & fiber. Apples, pears, banana, oranges, pineapple, peaches, etc.

- **Fats.** Flax seeds, fish oil, olive oil & some saturated fat. Saturated fat is good for your testosterone levels. You won't get fat/overweight as long as you keep the rest of your diet healthy. Keep in mind that you are exercising & eating veggies, fruits, whole grain carbs.
- **Water.** 1L per 1000kcal you expend. 1 US gallon for men, $\frac{3}{4}$ gallon for women per day is a good rule of thumb.

Hacks. Make sure the majority of your diet is healthy. Try the 90/10 or 80/20 rule: eat healthy from Monday to Saturday. Eat 2-3 junk meals on Sunday. Here are some habits I've built through the years to stay away from junk food:

- **Take Food With You.** Avoid situations where you end up eating junk food because you're hungry. Take food with you to work/school. Take leftovers with you. Take [protein shakes](#) with you. Take peanuts when you go the movies.
- **Prepare Your Food.** Prepare double rations. Prepare your food for the day in the morning or evening while having breakfast/diner. This way you only need to warm-up your meals when it's time to eat. Do the same thing if you work from home.
- **Eat in Advance.** Going shopping for a few hours? Eat a whole meal before leaving the door. Again: don't end up hungry.
- **Have Food Ready.** Make a grocery list that includes everything you need for the next 7 days (or even 14 days). Buy somewhat more just in case. You don't want to end up without healthy food in the middle of the week.
- **Make it Taste Good.** Learn to cook so the food tastes good. If you've been eating junk food for years, your taste will need to adapt at first.

Cooking takes me about 30-45mins daily. The rest of the day I just need to warm up the food in the microwave for 2-3mins. Canned & frozen food like tuna & frozen veggies will simplify your life.

Skinny. Eat more & you'll gain weight. Eat less & you'll lose weight. You're skinny because you're not eating enough. I know you think you do, but you're not. Proof: you're skinny.

You need at least your body-weight in lbs x 20kcal if you're skinny. Track your food intake for a week using [Fitday](#) & you'll see you're hardly getting that. Eat [breakfast](#), eat every 3 hours, take food with you, eat calorie dense food like whole grain carbs & peanuts.

Skinny & Fat. Sometimes you can be skinny & fat at the same time. This often happens with women. Fat is emergency storage for your body. If you don't eat enough, your body will hold the fat & burn muscle. You'll end up skinny but fat.

Eat more healthy food so your body stops burning muscles for energy. Follow the program to build muscle & lower your body fat.

Don't do too much cardio to lose the fat. In fact, don't do cardio at all. You need to eat more, you don't want to make it harder on yourself by burning more calories.

Overweight. It's easy to lose body fat by just exercising & eating healthier. No need to count calories yet. Better is to change your lifestyle & habits. There's a reason you are overweight, and it's most likely bad nutrition & a sedentary lifestyle.

Get onto [StrongLifts](#) program, quit drinking soda, eat lots of veggies, free time to cook meals, take food with you to work, make sure you have healthy food available at home.

Once you're used to StrongLifts program & eating healthy, you can add 15 mins cardio at moderate intensity (breathing heavier than at rest, not gasping) post strength training. Add 2 mins every week until you're at 30-40mins cardio. This speeds up the fat loss.

The Rest. If you are not skinny, but also not overweight, focus on StrongLifts 5x5 program. You're probably already eating healthy. You'll just need to pay attention getting 1g/lbs protein daily.

You will gain weight from lifting weights. I went from 62kg to 72kg my first year by training hard, without paying attention to what I ate. If you don't want to get heavier: keep your calorie intake at body-weight in lbs x 18kcal & add cardio if needed.

StrongLifts Beginner Strength Training Program

I give StrongLifts Beginner Program to anyone who want to gain strength, [build muscle](#) or [lose fat](#). I've seen skinny guys gain 5kg & overweight guys lose 5kg in 4 weeks using this [strength training](#) program & the right nutrition.

But this program isn't for beginners only. If you've done bodybuilding routines until now or if you're unfamiliar with barbell exercises like the [Squat](#), [Overhead Press](#) & [Deadlift](#), this program will get you results fast.

Benefits of StrongLifts Beginner Program. This [weight lifting](#) routine takes 3 x 30mins/week. You probably think that's not enough, you'll change your mind once you try it. Here's what you can expect in less than 4 weeks:

- **More Strength.** You'll start light, adding weight every workout. You'll get stronger as the weight on the bar increases.
- **More Muscle.** The stronger you become, the more muscles you'll have. Your muscle mass will increase as you lift heavier weights.
- **Less Fat.** Muscle burn calories. The more muscles you build, the more calories you'll burn. Your body fat will decrease.
- **Better Health.** Increased testosterone levels, increased cardiovascular fitness, increased flexibility, stronger joints, etc.

Success Stories. Example of readers doing StrongLifts Beginner Program. Read their training log to check their progress.

- [Korsair](#). Gained 2.5kg weight in 2 weeks: from 66 to 68,5kg.
- [Mutt](#). Lost 8lbs in 4 weeks, going from 208lbs to 200lbs.
- [Dwayne](#). Increased his Squat from 5×5 145lb to 5×5 230lbs in 4 weeks.

Why This Works. Key to this program is the Squat which works your whole body. You'll Squat 3x/week, adding 2.5kg/5lbs each time. The

stronger you get on the Squat, the more muscles you'll have & the more fat you'll burn.

Several variations have been released since: [Starting Strength](#), [Madcow](#) & this one. All use the same approach: sets of 5 reps with 3 Squat sessions per week.

StrongLifts 5×5 acts motivating. You have plan: exercises & weights. Weights increase each workout. You look forward to this. You see and feel your body change. You build the exercise habit. StrongLifts 5×5 is a long-term approach.

What Do You Need? Gyms like Fitness First don't have the equipment you need. [Building a home gym](#) might be the only solution if your gym has no:

- **Power Rack.** Or Squat Rack or Squat Stands. No smith machine. You need to stabilize the weight, not the machine.
- **Olympic Barbell.** 2.2m long, 20kg in weight with 50mm sleeves. Grip section of 28mm & knurling.
- **Bench.** A standard upright support bench or one you can use in the power rack. Again: no smith or bench press machine.
- **Plates.** 50mm plates with increments as low as 1.25kg/2.5lbs. Bigger increments won't work with the Bench Press & Overhead Press.

The Exercises. StrongLifts 5×5 Beginner Program includes 8 exercises. You'll do 4 of these every workout to hit all muscles.

- **Squat.** Squats are key to the program. You'll do them 3x/week. You'll quickly experience they work your whole body, not just your legs.
- **Bench Press.** The most popular exercise in the gym. The Bench Press works your chest & triceps muscles.
- **Overhead Press.** Push weight overhead while standing. The Overhead Press works your shoulders, triceps, back & abs.
- **Deadlift.** Besides working the legs, the Deadlift builds a strong back by teaching you to keep your spine rigid against a load.

- **Barbell Row.** Pulling weight from the floor against your lower chest. The Barbell Row works your back & biceps.
- **Pull-ups & Chin-ups.** Pull-ups are done palm facing away, Chin-ups palm facing you. Both work biceps & back muscles.
- **Dips.** Last one, Dips work your triceps & chest muscles.

Program Template. StrongLifts 5×5 Beginner Program takes 3×30mins/week. Most train Monday/Wednesday/Friday. Tu/Th/Sa or Su/Tu/Th works too. Always keep at least 1 day rest between 2 workouts.

Alternate between workout A & B every session. Week1: A/B/A, week2: B/A/B, week3: A/B/A, week4: B/A/B, etc.

Workout A	Workout B
Squat 5x5	Squat
5x5 Bench Press	
5x5 Overhead Press	5x5
Barbell Row 5x5	
Deadlift 1x5	
Dips 3xF	Pull-ups/Chinups 3xF

- **5×5.** 5 sets of 5 reps with the same weight after you have warmed up properly. 5×5 60kg means 5 reps with 60kg on all 5 sets.
- **1×5.** One set of 5 reps after you have warmed up properly.
- **3 x F.** 3 sets until failure. Do as many reps as you can do with proper technique. Try to do more reps the next workout. Once you can do 10 reps on the first set, switch to weighted Pull-ups/Chin-ups/Dips doing 5×5 & adding 1.25kg every workout.
- **Pull-ups/Chin-ups.** Alternate Pull-ups (palms away) with Chin-ups (palms facing) every workout B. If you can't do 1 rep: increase your Pull-up strength first.
- **Rest Between Sets.** Take 1min rest between sets. When the weight gets heavier & you struggle to get 5 reps, try 2-3mins rest between sets.
- **Lift Tempo.** Once your technique is ok, lift fast. Apply maximal force to the bar while controlling the bar. Control the bar on the way down, but don't make it slow.

Choosing Your Starting Weight. If you've never done these exercises before, you first need to learn correct technique before thinking about heavy weights.

- **Squat, Bench Press & Overhead Press.** Start with an empty barbell.
- **Barbell Rows.** Start with 30kg/66lbs including the barbell.
- **Deadlift.** Start with 40kg/88lbs including the barbell. Put small plates on the floor for Deadlifts to get the correct bar height.
- **Pull-ups, Chin-ups & Dips.** Start with your own body-weight.

If you've done these exercises before & your technique is ok: do workout A the first day working yourself up to one heavy set of 5 reps on all exercises. Do the same for workout B two days later. Start the next week with 30% less weight.

You can also use bigger increments. If your technique is good & the weight feels too easy: increase the weight by 5kg/10lbs per workout on the Squat & 10kg/20lbs on the Deadlift. Go back to smaller increases when this gets heavy.

Progression. Add weight every workout. Even if it's only a small increment, it adds up. Start with an empty barbell on Squats & you'll lift 50kg/110lbs 1 month later, 80kg/175lbs 2 months later.

- **Squat.** Add 2,5kg/5lbs each workout. 5kg/10lbs if it's too easy & your technique is ok. Go back to 2.5kg/5lbs increments when this gets hard.
- **Bench Press & Barbell Rows.** Add 2,5kg/5lbs every time you do them. You can try 5kg/10lbs, but won't be able to keep that pace for long.
- **Overhead Press.** The toughest exercise of all. Starting with an empty barbell & adding 2.5kg/5lbs will be ok for most.
- **Deadlift.** You can lift the heaviest weight on the Deadlift. Add 5kg/10lbs every time. Switch to 2,5kg/5lbs increases when 5kg/10lbs gets hard.
- **Pull-ups, Chin-ups & Dips.** Switch to weighted Pull-ups/Chin-ups/Dips when you can do +10 reps on the first set with your own body-weight.

Stalling. You won't be able to add weight every workout indefinitely. You'll stall on the Overhead Press first. Next the Bench Press. Then the Squat. And finally the Deadlift. There are the 3 scenario's for stalling:

1. You didn't achieve 5×5. [Retry up to 3 times](#). Bad days happen.
2. You didn't achieve 5×5 for 3 workouts. Perform a [soft deload](#).
3. Achieved reps regress as workouts go by. Fatigue sets in. [Hard deload](#).

After 2 hard deloads on the Squat, you're past the beginner stage. Switch to the [Beginner Strength Training Program II](#).

Nutrition on StrongLifts 5×5 Beginner Program. In general you'll need your body-weight in lbs x 18kcal daily. Add/remove 500kcal from there if you want to gain weight or lose weight.

- **Protein.** 1g/lbs daily. Meat, poultry, fish, eggs, dairy, whey, etc.
- **Whole Grain Carbs.** Oats, rice, pasta, breads, yams, potatoes, etc
- **Fruits & Veggies.** All kinds. Eat veggies and/or fruits with every meal.
- **Fat.** Fish oil, flax seeds, olive oil, etc.
- **Water.** 1 liter per 1000 calories you expend. 1US gallon a day will do.

The Squat

If you would only do one strength training exercise, it would be the Squat. No exercise works your body as one piece the way Squats do. Key to StrongLifts program is the Squat exercise which is done 3x/week.

However the Squat is probably the trickiest exercise to learn to do with proper technique. This article will teach you how to squat with proper technique.

What's a Squat? Bend through your knees with the bar on your back until your hips come lower than parallel. That is until your hip joint comes lower than your knee joint when looking from the side. Come back up. That's a Squat.

Some of the most popular variations of the Squat include:

- **Olympic Squat.** High bar position, close stance & deep.
- **Front Squat.** Barbell rests on your front shoulders.
- **Overhead Squat.** Squats while holding the bar overhead.

Benefits of The Squat. Every muscle works when you Squat: legs move the weight, abs & lower back stabilize, upper-back stays tight, arms squeeze the bar, etc. The Squat is a full body exercise.

- **Builds Muscle.** You can use heavy weight when doing the Squat. Heavy weight means more stress. This stress causes a hormonal response: increased testosterone levels. Meaning more muscle.
- **Leg Strength.** Squats strengthen your legs by working them through a full range of motion. This helps all sports but also daily activities. No more bending over to pick up an object, you can just Squat.
- **Hip Flexibility.** While you need hip flexibility for Squats, once you have this flexibility, doing Squats maintains it.
- **Knee Stability.** Squats done with proper technique, with the bar coming below parallel, strengthen your knees.

Squats & Knees. “*Squatting deep is bad for your knees*”. That’s a myth you’ll hear a lot. Some will advise you to do Partial Squats, staying above parallel, to avoid knee injury. This is wrong info. Wrong.

Your knee joint is strongest in a fully flexed or full extended position, not the positions in-between. Partial Squats only strengthen your knees & quads, but not your glutes & hamstrings. This causes muscle imbalances & thus injuries.

Millions of competitive weightlifters Squat deeper than described in this article. If you have knee pain from Squats, you’re not using proper technique or you lack [ankle/hip mobility](#). Squatting deep is never the cause.

Before You Start. Lack of hip flexibility makes it impossible to Squat with proper technique. Do the Squat stretch – picture above – 4 sets of 30 seconds. Chest forward, knees out & curled toes. The Squat stretch increases hip flexibility.

Unracking The Bar. Set the bar in the Power Rack at about mid-chest level. Position your feet directly under the bar. Squat under the bar & put it on your back. Tighten everything & Squat up to unrack the bar. One step back with one leg, one step back with the other leg.

Squat Setup. You'll have to think about a lot of things at first. Study the tips below, start with an empty barbell, focus on your technique.

- **Chest Up.** Keeping your chest up makes lower back rounding impossible & tightening of your upper-back easier.
- **Forward Look.** Look down & your back will bend. Look at the ceiling & your neck will hurt. Look forward.
- **Bar Position.** Put the bar low, on the muscles of your back shoulders. Below the bone at the top of your shoulder-blades.
- **Grip Width.** Narrow grip makes it easier to tighten your upper-back. Do lots of [shoulder dislocations](#) if this position feels uncomfortable.
- **Thumbless Grip.** Put your thumbs on top of the bar, next to your fingers. You'll be able to keep your wrists inline with your forearms.
- **Straight Wrists.** Your back supports the weight, not your hands. Keep your wrists inline with your forearm, never bend them.
- **Tight Upper-back.** Bring your shoulder-blades together. Tightening the upper-back gives the bar a solid base to rest on.
- **Elbows Back.** Don't let them come forward during the Squat. Pushing your elbows back prevents elbows injuries.
- **Foot Stance.** A narrow stance doesn't work for the low bar Squat. Heels should be shoulder-width apart.
- **Toes Out.** Point your toes out at about 30 degrees. Your toes must always follow your knees.
- **Weight on The Heels.** Curl your toes up if needed. Never get on your toes. Push from the heels.

Squatting Down. You have unracked the bar correctly. All muscles are tight & ready to Squat. Key to the low bar Squats are the hips.

- **Hips Back.** Think sitting on your toilet. Hips go back first, way back. If you can't, you probably have tight hamstrings. Do the [Squat Stretch](#).
- **Knees Over Toes.** Don't let your knees travel forward in the bottom Squat position. Knees over the toes, not further.

- **Knees Out.** Never allow your knees to buckle in. It can cause knee injury. Push your knees out.
- **Hit Parallel.** Your hip joint must come lower than your knee joint. Ask someone to judge your depth or tape yourself. No Partial Squats.

Squatting Up. Your hip muscles are stretched when you hit parallel. Use that stretch to bounce from the bottom. DO NOT relax your hip muscles & DO NOT bounce off your knees. Keep your hip muscles tensed.

- **Hips Up.** If your hips come forward, your knees will also come forward. Drive your hips up straight out of the bottom.
- **Squeeze Your Glutes.** Power comes from the glutes. [Squeeze your glutes](#) as hard as you can while driving your hips up.
- **Push From The Heels.** Curl your toes up if needed. Don't let your heels come off the floor. Push from the heels.
- **Knees Out.** Same as for the way down: don't let your knees buckle in. Push your knees out.

Common Squat Problems. If you have someone to help you improve your Squat technique, great. Otherwise tape yourself and use the following tips to improve your Squat technique.

- **Lower Back Rounds.** Keep your chest up & do the [Squat Stretch](#). Read why your [lower back rounds during Squats & how to fix it](#).
- **Leaning Forward.** Happens when your hips go up faster than your shoulders. Read how to avoid [leaning forward on Squats](#).
- **Bent Wrists.** Will cause wrist pain once the bar gets heavy. Support the weight with your back muscles, not with your wrists.
- **Knees In.** You have weak and/or tight hip muscles. Do the [Squat Stretch](#) & actively push your knees out on every rep.
- **Knees Forward.** Move from the hips: hips back when Squatting down, hips up – not forward – when Squatting up.
- **Heels Off The Floor.** Puts stress on your knees & impairs stability. Curl your toes up and push from the heels.

The Overhead Press

Flexible athletes arched their back to press more weight overhead. This made judging hard, causing the removal of the Overhead Press from competitions.

Today the Overhead Press has lost favor for the Bench Press. Which is a shame, as the Overhead Press is in many ways a better exercise than the Bench Press. That's why the Overhead Press is part of [StrongLifts](#) program.

You won't see many people do the Overhead Press in the average gym. Hard to find someone to teach you how to do the Overhead Press correctly. This guide will help you – how to Overhead Press with correct technique.

What's the Overhead Press? Press the bar from your front shoulders overhead until your elbows are locked. Your knees stay locked during the whole lift with feet shoulder-width apart. Overhead Press variations include:

- **Military Press.** Overhead Press with heels together.
- **Push Press.** Overhead Press using leg drive.
- **Jerk.** One of the two lifts in Weightlifting: the [Olympic Jerk](#).
- And [many more](#).

Note that the correct name for the Overhead Press is Press. The Press is always done Overhead. Many say Overhead Press to avoid confusion with the Bench Press. The Bench Press is a variation of the Press, not the other way around.

I use Overhead Press in this article because that's what you probably searched for. I first [Power Clean](#) the weight on my front shoulders.

Is the Overhead Press Safe? If you can't press the bar overhead, lower it back on your chest & put it on the floor like in the Overhead Press video. You'll never find yourself stuck under the bar [like with the Bench Press](#).

Like with any barbell exercise, you'll have problems finding balance the first time you try to Overhead Press. Start light, focus on your technique & add weight progressively. You'll improve.

Benefits of The Overhead Press. You can lift more weight with the Bench Press than with the Overhead Press. But the Overhead Press has many benefits over the Bench Press. Some examples:

- **Full Body.** The Overhead Press works your body as one piece. Your trunk & legs stabilize the weight while your shoulders, upper-chest & arms press the weight overhead.
- **Builds Muscle.** Abs & back stabilize the weight. Shoulders, upper-chest & triceps press the weight overhead. The Overhead Press builds the physique of old-time strongman like [Eugen Sandow](#).
- **Healthy Shoulders.** The Bench Press works your front shoulders more than your back shoulders. The Overhead Press works all shoulder heads equally. Alternating the Overhead Press with the Bench Press minimizes risks of shoulder injuries caused by muscle imbalances.
- **It's Fun.** Picking up a weight from the floor & pressing it overhead is more fun than pressing the same weight while lying on a Bench.

Overhead Press Setup. Put the bar on your front shoulders by taking it out of the uprights of your power rack or by [Powercleaning](#) the weight on every set.

- **Foot Stance.** Shoulder-width apart. Try a staggered stance: one foot 5-10cm/3-4" in front of the other one.
- **Grip Width.** About 46cm/18". The larger your build, the wider your grip. Hands should never touch your shoulders.
- **Gripping the Bar.** Grip is [same as for the Bench Press](#). Bar close to your wrist, in the base of your palm. Not close to your fingers.
- **Chest Up.** Make a big chest & lift it up. Makes it easier to use your back muscles & shortens the distance the bar has to

travel.

- **Elbows Forward.** Elbows in front of the barbell when looking from the side. Not upper- arms parallel with the floor, it's not a [Front Squat](#).
- **Look Forward.** Looking up is bad for your neck. Look forward, fix a point on the wall before you.
- **Squeeze Your Glutes.** Makes it impossible to arch your lower back, thus increasing safety. [Squeeze your glutes](#) hard.

Performing the Overhead Press. Press the bar overhead in a straight line, that's the shortest distance from start to finish. Unfortunately your head is in the way. So you'll need to move your head & torso during the Overhead Press.

- **Tilt Head Back.** Quickly [tilt your head back](#) so the bar can pass your chin/nose without hitting them. Keep looking forward.
- **Shift Torso Forward.** Once the bar reaches forehead level, shift your torso forward. Continue pressing the weight overhead.
- **Head Forward.** Your chin should almost touch your chest when the weight is overhead. Look forward, not down.
- **Lock Everything.** Squeeze shoulders, traps & back. Lock your elbows. End position should look like in the picture below.

Tips to Improve Your Overhead Press Technique. Common errors you'll make while learning how to Overhead Press with correct technique.

- **Elbows Forward, Chest Up.** You'll forget to reposition yourself between reps at first. Start each rep with elbows in front of the bar & chest up.
- **Bar High.** The higher the bar on your chest, the shorter the distance it has to travel. Put the bar close to your clavicles. Quickly tilt your head back & forth. Clavicles might hurt at first, your skin will adapt & thicken.
- **Go Forward.** You'll miss reps if you stay back vs. getting under the bar. Shift your torso forward when the bar reaches forehead level.
- **Breathing.** If you breathe at the top, you can bounce the bar off your chest making the next rep easier. Breathe at the bottom & you'll press from a dead stop, making the next rep harder. The former allows more weight. The latter makes the exercise harder, making the former easier.

The Bench Press

The Bench Press is the most popular lift in the gym. It's the upper-body exercise that lets you lift the most weight. The Bench Press builds upper-body strength like no other exercise & that's why it's part of [StrongLifts program](#).

Unfortunately, the Bench Press causes most injuries. Shoulder pain from doing the Bench Press is common. Proper Bench Press technique not only minimizes risks of injury, it's also key to lifting more weight. This article will help you with the Bench Press technique.

What's The Bench Press? Lie on an upright support bench or a bench inside a Power Rack. Unrack the weight & lower it to your chest. Press it back up until your arms are locked. You've done a Bench Press.

You have several ways to Bench Press by varying grip, grip width, bench angle, etc. Some Bench Press variations are:

- **Close Grip Bench Press.** Shoulder width grip. Emphasis triceps.
- **Reverse Grip Bench Press.** Palms facing you. Also emphasis triceps.
- **Incline Bench Press.** From an incline bench. Emphasis shoulders.
- **Decline Bench Press.** From a decline bench. Allows more weight.
- **Floor Press.** Bench Press while lying on the floor. More triceps.

Benefits of The Bench Press. Why should you Bench Press? Here are two reasons to do the exercise.

- **Builds Muscle.** Bench Press if you want a big chest, as popularized by [Arnold Schwarzenegger](#) in the 70s. Front Shoulders & triceps work too.
- **Builds Strength.** The Bench Press is the strength training exercise that lets you lift the most weight using your upper-body muscles.

Bench Press Safety. Most injuries in the gym happen when doing The Bench Press. One reason is of course because it's the exercise done the most. Other reasons are not using the following tips.

- **No Thumbless Grip.** Use your thumbs when doing the Bench Press. You don't want the bar to slip out of your hands.
- **Start Light.** Add weight gradually. You'll get a feeling of what you can & can't handle while learning proper Bench Press technique.
- **Ask Someone to Spot.** Spotters will help you if you get stuck with the bar on your chest. If you don't have a spotter, read the guide on how to [Bench Press safely when you're alone](#).

Bench Press & Shoulders Pain. Shoulder pain from doing the Bench Press is common. Switching to dumbbells or quitting the Bench Press avoids pain, but doesn't solve your shoulder problem. What you should do:

- **Improve Technique.** If you don't Bench Press with proper technique you'll injure yourself sooner or later. Read on.
- **Fix Posture.** You can't Bench Press with proper technique if you have slouching shoulders. Start doing [shoulder dislocations](#). Focus on bringing your chest forward & squeezing your shoulder-blades.
- **Avoid Muscle Imbalances.** The Bench Press works your front shoulders more than the back ones. If you don't strengthen these by doing the Barbell Row & Overhead Press, you'll get a muscle imbalance. Causing bad posture & thus bad Bench Press technique. Get on [StrongLifts 5×5](#), it's a balanced program.

Bench Press Setup. You need a strong base to press the weight from. Tighten your upper-back. Grip the bar hard: try to break it apart like breaking spaghetti.

- **Grip Width.** Too narrow & you'll lose strength. Too wide & the distance the bar travels shortens. Grip width should be about 55-71cm/22-28" depending on your build. Forearms perpendicular to the floor when the bar touches your chest.

- **Gripping the Bar.** Secure the bar with your thumbs by rotating your hands in. Put the bar in the palm of your hand, close to your wrist. If you put the bar close to your fingers, you'll get [wrist pain](#).

- **Tight Upper-back.** Squeeze your shoulder-blades before getting on the bench. Keep your shoulder-blades back & down at all times like. This gives your body a solid base to press the bar from.
- **Chest Up.** Don't allow your chest to go flat or shoulders to roll forward. You'll lose upper- back tightness, losing power & increasing risk of shoulder injury. Keep your chest up at all time.
- **Feet.** Use a wide foot stance to increase stability on the bench. Feet flat on the floor, weight on the heels, lower leg perpendicular to the floor. This prevents extreme arching of your lower back.

The Bench Press. Remember to keep the tight position during the Bench Press from start to finish. Squeeze the bar, keep your upper-back tight & your chest up. Unrack the weight with straight arms. Bench.

- **Bar to Chest.** Touch your chest where your forearms are perpendicular to the floor when looking from the side.
- **Press in a Straight Line.** Don't look at the bar. Fix a point at the ceiling. Press the bar in a straight line above your chest, not towards your face. Keep the bar above your elbows during the whole lift.

Common Errors. The following Bench Press errors are either inefficient or potentially dangerous. Avoid them at all costs.

- **Unracking with Bent Arms.** Don't risk the bar falling on your face. Your arms are strongest when your elbows are locked. Unrack & bring the bar above your chest with locked elbows.
- **Pressing to Your Face.** The shortest distance between 2 points is a straight line. Press in a straight line. Fix a point at the ceiling where you want the bar to go. Don't look at the bar.
- **Bending Your Wrists.** This will get you [wrist pain](#). Put the bar in the [palm of your hand](#). Close to your wrists, not close to your fingers. Squeeze the bar so it doesn't move.
- **Elbows.** Too high is bad for your shoulders. Too low is inefficient. Put your elbows between perpendicular to & parallel with your torso.

- **Shoulders Forward.** Don't let your shoulders roll forward. It's bad posture, bad technique & a guaranteed way to get shoulder injuries. Keep your chest up, [shoulder-blades back & down](#) and upper-back tight.
- **Glutes off the Bench.** This makes the distance the bar travels shorter & thus the Bench Press easier. However it puts pressure on your back, especially when the weight gets heavy. You're more stable when your glutes are on the bench. Keep them there.
- **Pushing Your Head into The Bench.** You'll injure your neck. Tighten your neck muscles, without pushing your head into the bench.

[The Deadlift](#)

Many daily activities require a solid back. Lifting something heavy off the floor or simply cleaning your floor must be done using a straight back. Bending your back increases the pressure on your spine, leading to [hernia](#).

The Deadlift teaches you to hold your back straight while gravity or the weight of the object you're lifting tries to bend your back. The Deadlift builds a strong back & that's why it's part of [StrongLifts](#) program.

You'll lift the heaviest weights on the Deadlift. Proper technique is therefore a must. Proper Deadlift technique will not only make you lift

more weight, it also minimizes risks of injuries. Here's how to Deadlift with proper technique.

What's a Deadlift? The Deadlift starts with the bar on the floor. You grab the bar from the floor with both hands & pull it with your leg & back muscles until your body is fully extended like in the picture above.

I wrote pull, but the Deadlift is not a pull contrary to what you might believe. There's no pulling involved. Proper Deadlift technique is done by pushing from the heels & bringing the hips forward. Not by pulling with your lower back.

Benefits of the Deadlift. The Deadlift works muscles similar to the Squat. You can use it as a replacement for Squats, although Deadlifts don't let you go as deep. Grip is also often the limiting factor with Deadlifts.

- **Back Strength.** The weight tries to bend your lower & upper-back. Keeping your back straight & the bar close to you builds back strength.
- **Leg Strength.** The hip forward motion during the Deadlift lockout works the hamstrings & glutes. Quads work during the first part of the pull when you straighten your knees.

- **Grip Strength.** You need a strong grip to hold the weight.
Don't use straps if you're serious about your training.

The Deadlift builds a strong grip and muscular forearms, legs, back & traps. Let's go with the proper Deadlift technique.

Before You Deadlift. Basic stuff you need to know before you even think about trying to Deadlift with correct technique.

- **Bar Height.** The Deadlift starts with the bar at about mid-shin level. Put small plates on the floor like in the picture above if you don't have 20kg/44lbs plates or if you aren't strong enough yet to use them.
- **Lifting Shoes.** Shoes with air or gel filling are compressible, impairing power transfer & stability.
- **No Straps.** Never use straps for Deadlifts. If your grip is weak, Deadlift more. Switch to an alternate grip (baseball grip) & use chalk.

Setup for Deadlift. Don't move the bar to get into proper position. Walk to the bar & position your feet correctly. Then grab the bar & Deadlift.

- **Foot Stance.** Shoulder-width stance with toes slightly pointing out. Curl your toes up. Jump up a few times: that's the stance for Deadlifts.
- **Bar Position.** Bar should be 5 to 10cm (2-4") from your shins when standing. Remember the position of your laces under the bar.
- **Chest Up.** Make a big chest & lift it up. Pull your shoulders back. Keep this position at all time & your back will never be able to round.
- **Look Forward.** Looking down makes your back round. Looking to the ceiling can cause neck pain. Look forward during the whole lift.
- **Grip Width.** Too small & your hands touch your legs on the way up. Too wide & you have to pull the bar higher. Use about 51cm/20" grip width.

- **Gripping the Bar.** Put the bar close to your fingers, not in the palm of your hands. This will minimize [callus](#) formation & torn skin.
- **Straight Arms.** Deadlifting with bent arms can tear your biceps muscles. Keep your arms straight. Tighten your triceps.

Performing The Deadlift. Deadlift by pushing from the heels & bringing your hips forward. Not by pulling back with your lower back. If you Deadlift correctly, you'll feel most stress in your upper- back, glutes & hams.

- **Shoulder-blades over Bar.** Put your [shoulder-blades directly over the bar](#), shoulders in front of the bar. Your hips will be at the correct height.
- **Bar Against Shins.** Pull the bar up in a straight line. The closer the barbell to your shins, the better. No need to [scrape your shins](#).
- **Push From The Heels.** Simple trick: curl your toes up. This automatically puts the weight on your heels.
- **Bar Close to You.** Keep the bar in contact with your body during the whole lift, rolling the bar over your shins & thighs. The closer the bar, the less stress on your lower back & the more weight you can Deadlift.
- **Squeeze You Glutes.** Bring your hips forward by pushing from the heels & [squeezing your glutes](#) hard. This prevents pulling with the lower back.
- **Lock The Weight.** The Deadlift ends when your knees & hips are locked. No need to roll the shoulders or hyper-extend the lower back.

Bringing the Weight Down. Don't lose time bringing the weight down. Do it controlled but not slow. The rule: hips unlock first, then knees.

- **Chest Up, Look Forward.** Neglecting to do both will make your back round. Keep your chest up, shoulders back & look forward.
- **Bar Close to You.** Keep the bar in contact with your thighs until it reaches knee level. It's friendlier on your back.
- **First Hips, Then Knees.** Flex at the hips first to return the bar below knee level. Then bend at the knees until the bar is on the floor.

Common Deadlift Errors. Common mistakes you need to avoid to minimize risks of injuries when doing Deadlifts.

- **Hips Too High.** Use your knees: it's not a Stiff-legged Deadlift. Put the bar against your shins with the shoulder-blades directly over the bar.
- **Hips Too Low.** It's not a Squat. Put the bar against your shins with the shoulder-blades directly over the bar. Shoulders in front of the bar.
- **Bending Your Back.** Increases the pressure on your spine thus increasing risk of injury. Keep your chest up at all time & look forward.
- **Hyper-extending Your Back.** As bad as bending. The Deadlift ends when your hips & knees are locked. No need to arch at the top.
- **Rolling the Shoulders.** Dangerous & inefficient. Your hip muscles move the weight, not your shoulders. Extend your knees & hips, stop.
- **Shrugging at The Top.** Unnecessary. If you need more trap emphasis do shrugs or [Power Cleans](#).
- **Pulling with Bent Arms.** You could tear your biceps by pulling with bent arms. Keep your arms straight, tighten your triceps.

The Barbell Row

Barbell Rows are hard. Not as hard as Squats or Deadlifts, but certainly harder than the Bench Press. When you get stronger on the Barbell Row, you'll often see your strength increase on other strength training exercises.

Barbell Rows are the best exercise to train your upper-back. Unfortunately the Barbell Row is often done with incorrect technique. This article will teach you how to perform the Barbell Row with proper technique.

What's a Barbell Row? Pull the barbell from the floor to your chest while extending your hips. Done. Variations of the Barbell Row:

- **Pendlay Row.** [Pendlay Rows](#) involve arching of your upper-back.
- **Reverse-grip Row.** Using an underhand grip. Works biceps more.

The barbell starts & ends on the floor on each rep, just like Deadlifts & Pendlay Rows.

Benefits of Barbell Rows. Barbell Rows are a tough exercise that will often get you dizzy when using heavy weights. However they're worth the effort.

- **Back Strength.** Barbell Rows strengthen your upper-back. You need upper-back strength for Squats & Deadlifts. The Overhead Press & Bench Press are the opposite movement of the Barbell Row. Get stronger at Barbell Rows & you'll get stronger on your other lifts.
- **Builds Muscle.** Upper-back & arms pull the weight to your chest. Trunk muscles including lower back stabilize the weight. Hip muscles build momentum at the start of the Barbell Row to get the weight up.

Bar on The Floor. The bar starts & ends on the floor on each rep. The bar doesn't hang from the arms between reps. Two reasons:

- **More Strength.** You can build momentum by using your hip muscles. This helps your upper-back muscles lift more weight than if you'd start the Barbell Row from a dead hang at the arms.
- **More Muscle.** You're using your upper-back & arms but also hip muscles.

Hip Extension. Extending your hips builds momentum, helping your upper-back & arms lift more weight. Using too much hip extension turns the Barbell Row into a partial Deadlift, killing the purpose of the Barbell Row.

Your upper-back is most worked when your torso is parallel to the floor. Don't overdo the hip extension. Weight increases on Barbell Rows must be the result of strength increases, not of a more advantageous technique.

Barbell Row Setup. The bar starts & ends on the floor on each rep. Keep your lower back straight & your chest up.

- **Foot Stance.** Foot stance on the Barbell Row is same as for the Deadlift: about shoulder-width apart.
- **Bar Position.** Put the bar directly under your shoulder-blades. Over your feet, close to your body.
- **Grip Width.** Same as for Bench Press: about 55-71cm/22-28". Forearms perpendicular to the floor when the bar touches your chest.
- **Grip.** Put the bar close to your fingers, not in the palm of your hands. This minimizes callus formation.
- **Head Position.** Looking forward will hurt your neck. Looking down will make your back bend. Look at the floor in front of you.
- **Knees.** Keep your knees almost straight but unlocked at the start of the Barbell Row. Hips move, knees don't.

The Barbell Row. Get the bar off the floor with straight arms by extending your hips. Pull your elbows to the ceiling, slamming the bar against your chest.

- **Breathing.** Take a big breath before pulling the weight to your chest. Breathe on the floor between reps.
- **Hip Extension.** Don't extend your hips too much. Your back shouldn't rise much higher than where it was at the start of the Barbell Row.
- **Elbows Back.** Don't pull with your hands. Pull your elbows to the ceiling. Try to make your shoulder-blades touch & open your chest.
- **Bar Against Chest.** Pull the bar against your lower chest, not to your stomach. Pull it against the [xiphoid process](#).

Common Errors. The bar starts on the floor on each rep. Don't overdo the hip extension. Don't try to hold the bar against your chest. Don't try to return the bar slowly to the floor.

- **Bar Too Far Away.** Keep the bar close to your body. Put the bar over your feet, straight under your shoulder-blades.
- **Back Going Vertical.** It's not a Deadlift. Your upper-back should do the work, not your hips. Lower the weight if you extend your hips too much.
- **Dropping the Chest.** You'll drop your chest to meet the bar when the weight gets heavy. Lower the weight when this gets excessive.
- **Extending the Knees.** Use hip extension on the way up, but no knee extension. Keep your knees unlocked but straight.

Pull-ups & Chin-ups

Pull-ups & Chin-ups force you to lift your own body-weight. They are the best strength training exercises you can do for upper-body strength & muscle mass. Unfortunately Pull-ups & Chin-ups are hard. Very hard.

If you're a beginner, chances are you can't do 1 Pull-up or Chin-up. This article will not only teach you how to do Pull-ups & Chin-ups with proper technique, but also how to get stronger at them so you can do the weighted versions.

What are Pull-ups & Chin-ups? Hang on a pull-up bar with straight arms & pull yourself up until your chin passes the bar. The difference between Pull-ups & Chin-ups is in the grip:

- **Pull-ups.** Palms facing away. Less biceps, more back. Harder.
- **Chin-ups.** Palms facing you. Work your biceps more. Easier.

Other Pull-up variations include: palms facing each others, thumbless grip, towel Pull-ups, Fat Bar Pull-ups, Mixed Grip Pull-ups, Horizontal Pull-ups, Kipping Pull-ups, etc. This article deals with Pull-ups & Chin-ups.

Benefits of Pull-ups & Chin-ups. [StrongLifts](#) program includes Pull-ups & Chin-ups for the following reasons:

- **Build Muscle.** Pull-ups & Chin-ups force you to lift your own bodyweight. This stresses your body, building the muscles of your arms & back.
- **Grappling Strength.** Pull-ups & Chin-ups help any sport which involves gripping, grappling & pulling, like [MMA](#) or Rock Climbing.
- **Carryover.** Get stronger at Pull-ups & Chin-ups and you'll get stronger on the opposite movements: the [Overhead Press](#) & Bench Press.

- **Shoulder Health.** Balancing press exercises like the Bench Press with pull exercises like Barbell Rows & Pull-ups prevents muscle imbalances.

What Do You Need for Pull-ups & Chin-ups? A Power Rack with Pull-up bar works best. Or a [Doorway Pull-up bar](#). Any surface where you can hang from at arm's length will do for Pull-ups & Chin-ups.

What if You Can't Do 1 Pull-up or Chin-up? Whatever method you choose: pull yourself up as if nothing/nobody was helping you. Pull-ups & Chin-ups feel very different without assistance. And always try to beat your previous record.

- **Chin-ups.** Chin-ups are easier than Pull-ups. If you can't do 1 Pull-up, try Chin-ups. Alternate Chin-ups with Pull-ups when you get stronger.
- **Resistance Band.** Use a [flex band](#) to help you one the way up. Mini/light bands for light weights. Average/strong bands for heavier weights.
- **Ask For Help.** Ask someone to grab your side with his hands. Let him help you on the way up by squatting down & pressing up.
- **Kipping Pull-ups.** Swing your hips while pulling yourself up until you get stronger. Check how [Jesse Marunde](#) uses his hips on the last reps.
- **Routine.** You can also try this strength training routine to [increase your strength on Pull-ups](#) (or Chin-ups).
- **Use Momentum.** Jump up & use momentum. Control yourself on the way down. This one will get you a sore back & arms. You're warned.

I'm too Heavy For Pull-ups & Chin-ups. Your body-weight is not the problem. Strength is. If you want to get stronger at Pull-ups & Chin-ups, do them more.

Assisted Pull-up Machines & Lat Pulldowns. Stay away from both. If you want to get stronger at Pull-ups & Chin-ups, do Pull-ups & Chin-ups. The strength you build on machines doesn't convert to Pull-ups & Chin-ups.

- **No Balance.** You don't have to balance yourself on machines. You'll lose strength when switching to Pull-ups & Chin-ups: they're harder.
- **Mental Factor.** You're using less strength on the Assisted Pull-up Machine because you know the machine is helping you on the way up.

Once again: if you want to get stronger at Pull-ups & Chin-ups, do Pull-ups & Chin-ups. You're losing time with machines. If you can't do 1 rep, try the above methods. You'll be able to do 1 Pull-up/Chin-up within a month.

Weighted Pull-ups & Chin-ups. Once you can do 10-15 Pull-ups or Chin-ups in a row, add weight to keep the exercise challenging. Here's how:

- **Dumbbell Between Legs.** Gets you an ab workout too. Doesn't work once you're using more than 10-20kg.
- **Rucksack.** Wear a rucksack & put plates in it.
- **Belt & Chain.** What I do. Wear a belt. Suspend plates from a chain, attach the chain to your belt.

Pull-up & Chin-up Technique. Start each rep from a dead hang with straight elbows. Clear the bar with your chin on every rep.

- **Squeeze The Bar.** And put the bar close to your fingers, not in the palm of your hand. It minimize callus formation.
- **Breathe at The Bottom.** It's easier to breathe at the bottom. Take a big breath before pulling yourself up.
- **Chest Up.** Don't let your shoulders go forward: it's unhealthy for your shoulders. Lead with your chest up & keep your shoulders back.
- **Look Up.** Never look down during Pull-ups & Chin-ups. Look at the bar. Look where you're pulling yourself up to.

- **Elbows to The Floor.** Drive with your elbows to the floor. This involves your stronger back muscles more.
- **Bend Your Legs.** And cross your feet. Letting your legs hang means less strength in my experience. [Squeeze your glutes](#) on the way up.

Common Errors. Most common error on Pull-ups & Chin-ups is cheating the range of motion by not going low or high enough on each rep.

- **Not Straightening the Arms.** Start from a dead hang with straight elbows. No partial Pull-ups/Chin-ups.
- **Shoulders Going Forward.** It's bad posture & bad technique. Lead with your chest up while driving your elbows to the floor.

- **Using The Hips.** Keep your legs inline with your torso, unless you're doing [Kipping Pull-ups](#).
- **Chin Over Bar.** Nose or forehead against the bar is a partial Pull-up/Chin-up. Chin over bar unless you're not strong enough yet.

Dips

Dips are better than Push-ups. Your whole body is moving & you can do them weighted more easily. Like Pull-ups & Chin-ups, Dips force you to lift your own body-weight. Stressing your upper- body & thus building muscle.

All strength training exercises have a technique to master. Dips are no different. Here's how to perform Dips with proper technique.

What are Dips? Raise yourself on 2 supports with elbows locked. Lower your body until your shoulders are lower than your elbows. Push yourself up by straightening your arms. Variations for Dips:

- **Parallel Bar Dips.** Parallel bars that are 55cm/22" apart. My Squat Rack has 2 removable parallel bars I use for Dips.
- **Rings Dips.** Dips using [rings](#) are harder than parallel bar Dips: you need to stabilize yourself more.
- **Chair Dips.** Put 2 chairs back to back & dip in between. Make sure the chairs are stable enough so you don't fall.
- **Bench Dips.** Feet elevated, hands on a bench. Avoid. The torso position is unhealthy for your shoulders, especially when you do them weighted.

Benefits of Dips. Push-ups have your feet planted. Dips move your whole body through space. Dips are harder and thus superior to Push-ups because you have to balance your body. Other benefits of Dips:

- **Build Strength.** Dips build lockout strength: straightening your elbows. This helps the Bench Press & the Overhead Press.
- **Build Muscle.** Dips will develop your triceps & chest muscles.
- **Rehab.** Try Dips if you can't do the Bench Press because of a shoulder injury. Dips work similar muscles, do them if your shoulders can take it.

What If You Can't Do 1 Rep? Stay away from Dip Machines. The strength you build on machines doesn't transfer. Dips are harder: you

have to balance yourself. If you can't do 1 rep, try one of these:

- **Ask for Help.** Ask someone to help you on the way up by grabbing your side with his hands and squatting up & down.
- **Partials.** Get on the 2 supports with locked elbows. Unlock your elbows, lower yourself slightly & push back up. Gradually increase the range of motion as you get stronger until you can break parallel.

Weighted Dips. Switch to Weighted Dips once you can do 10-15 reps with proper technique to keep the exercise challenging.

- **Dumbbell Between Legs.** Hold a dumbbell between your feet while doing Dips. Doesn't work well with weights above 10-15kg.
- **Rucksack.** Wear a rucksack & put plates in it. Make sure you use a strong rucksack so it doesn't break.
- **Belt + Chain.** Wear a belt. Attach plates to a chain and to your belt. I recommend this method for Weighted Dips.

Dip Technique. You might not be able to lean forward & go as deep as James on the picture above. If your shoulders or sternum hurts, stay more upright with your chest up. But always apply the following rules on Dips.

- **Squeeze The Bar.** Put your thumbs around the bar & squeeze it hard. The more force you apply to the bar, the stronger you are.
- **Look Forward.** Don't look straight forward, don't look the floor. Look to a point slightly in front of you.
- **Breathing.** Take a big breathe while hanging with locked elbows & hold it. Lower yourself & come back up. Breathe at the top, not during reps.
- **Chest Up.** Don't let your shoulders roll forward. Keep your chest up & shoulders back. It's easier on your shoulders.
- **Bend Your Legs.** And cross your feet. Letting your legs hang means less strength from my experience. [Squeeze your glutes](#) on the way up.

- **Break Parallel.** Your shoulders must go lower than your elbows. Deeper stretches your chest more, but your shoulders might not agree with it.
- **Lock Elbows.** Drive out of the bottom until your elbows are locked. Squeeze your triceps. No partial Dips.

Common Problems. Break parallel on each rep just like with Squats. Use a complete range of motion from start to finish.

- **Not Hitting Parallel.** Don't cheat by doing partial Dips. Your shoulders must go lower than your elbows on each rep.
- **Not Locking the Elbows.** Lock your elbows at the top. Squeeze your triceps & keep your chest up.
- **Shoulder Issues.** Don't go too low. Stop when you break parallel, keep your chest up & torso upright. Try [shoulder dislocations](#).
- **Torso Pain.** Don't let your shoulders roll forward & don't let your torso shift forward too much. Keep your chest up.