The Max Effort Method

By Jim Wendler

The overman…Who has organized the chaos of his passions, given style to his character, and become creative. Aware of life's terrors, he affirms life without resentment.

Frederick Nietzsche

Before you embark on any physical fitness program, please consult a doctor.

Acknowledgements

This book is dedicated to the Chief.

Special thanks to my father, Jim, for all of his time and patience;
my mother, Janice, for washing my Eyehategod shirts without question;
to Darren Llewellyn for his teaching, coaching, and life support;
to Louie Simmons for opening my eyes;
and finally to Dave Tate for giving me a chance.

What Is the Max Effort Method?

Without getting too complicated, the max effort method is basically lifting a maximal load. This is generally defined as 90 percent plus of one's maximum. According to Vladimir Zatsiorsky, "The method of maximal effort is considered superior for improving both intramuscular and intermuscular coordination."

Just so we are clear on intramuscular and intermuscular coordination…

Intramuscular coordination: This is the ability to apply the motor units of a muscle at the same time. No one will be able to recruit 100 percent of the muscle fibers, but an advanced athlete will be able to activate many more than a beginner.

Intermuscular coordination: This is when different muscles coordinate together to make a fluid and efficient movement.

So lifting heavy objects helps both of these. That is essentially what the max effort method is—lifting heavy stuff.

Westside Training

The max effort method is obviously not part of one program. You can lift heavy things in any program, and judging by the number of people who I see maxing out on the bench press, it seems to have quite a following.

However, the max effort method (at least the term) has become popular in large part because of Louie Simmons and Westside Barbell. For those who do not know, Westside Barbell is a powerlifting gym in Columbus, Ohio, and is the home

of numerous world record holders. Louie Simmons is the owner of Westside Barbell, and his ideas and innovations in strength training have dramatically changed the way the world sees the subject.
At the very heart of Westside lies the integration of the dynamic, maximal, and sub-maximal effort methods. When people first began reading about Westside Barbell and these ideas (and their program), it was quite a kick in the nads. No one had seen a program that was laid out quite like it, and no one was using these kinds of terms. And no one was getting results either.

Much has been misinterpreted about Westside training. Because a person automatically loses 50 percent of their IQ points when on the internet, this news travels fast and with little regard for the truth. This is because there are many experts out there who apparently know about Westside yet have never stepped foot inside of it. Many people, even your so-called strength experts, drop the term “Westside” whenever they need some street credentials. And they don’t seem to have a problem with the fact that they don’t even know what they’re talking about.

How do I know this? Because I spent a large portion of my time studying and learning from Louie Simmons and Dave Tate. And I actually trained there. So when I speak about the max effort method know that it is in relation to the Westside method or whatever you want to dub this kind of training.

The Max Effort Method and Westside Training

To show how one uses the max effort method with Westside training, I'll first give a brief overview of the Westside method and the standard template. The standard template was first introduced in Dave Tate's article, "The Periodization Bible, Part I" and is covered extensively in "The Periodization Bible, Part II." This was the two-part series that made things easier for me and really broke things down. Remember, I didn't grow up at Westside Barbell. I was probably introduced to it the same way that you were—through articles. So if you're feeling overwhelmed, don't worry. We all were/are. Just remember the basic principles of Westside.

They use the following methods:

- Max effort: Lifting a maximal weight
- Dynamic effort: Lifting a sub-maximal weight as quickly as possible
- Repeated effort: Lifting a sub-maximal weight to failure

And now the dummy version:

- Max effort: Lifting heavy; maxing out
- Dynamic effort: Lifting light weights really fast; this is done well before failure is ever reached or muscle fatigue is apparent
- Repeated effort: Lifting like a bodybuilder; get a pump

Here is how the Westside method breaks each of these down during the training week:

Sunday: Dynamic effort bench
Dynamic bench press
Triceps
Shoulders
Lats/upper back

Monday: Max effort squat/deadlift

Max effort exercise

Hamstrings

Low back

Abdominals

Wednesday: Max effort bench press

Max effort exercise

Triceps

Shoulders

Lats/upper back

Friday: Dynamic squat/deadlift

Dynamic squat

Hamstrings

Low back

Abdominals

Here is a review of the standard template:

- two days devoted to the bench press
- two days devoted to the squat/deadlift
- two days devoted to dynamic training
- two days devoted to max effort training
- four days devoted to repetition training

Now, let's review some of the training parameters within this template. For the sake of simplicity, I'll leave out chains and bands. Everything is going to be done with straight weight so there will be no confusion about percentages. Plus, I'll leave out stance, grip changes, rest periods, and other similar items. In reality, most of this stuff is inconsequential once you grasp the big picture.

Bench press parameters for the standard template (dynamic, max effort, and repetition)

Dynamic bench press: Eight sets of three repetitions; all sets are performed with 55 percent of the raw one repetition max (RM). Rest periods are approximately 60 seconds, but personally I've never really seen the purpose of this.

The whole goal of speed day is to move the bar quickly on the concentric. If you need to take an extra minute to accomplish the day's goal, then by all means do so. Many people change their grips with every set. They go from close to medium to wide. Truth be told, it really doesn't matter that much. The only reason why I changed my grip on this day was to keep track of the number of sets that I was doing. Again, remember why you are doing what you are doing.

Max effort bench press: This will be discussed at another point in the book.

Triceps: One day is devoted to high intensity/low volume triceps work and the other is devoted to low intensity/high volume triceps. For example, high intensity triceps training could consist of 4- or 5-board presses or rack lockouts. The low intensity training would be geared toward triceps extensions and push-downs. The day on which you do these is entirely up to you. In my experience, I've always had good results putting the high intensity day on dynamic bench day.

So you have one day where you work your lockout movement with heavy weight (this is the high intensity day), and you have one day where you become Joe Bodybuilder and pump up your arms (this is the low intensity day).

Shoulders: This is similar to the triceps because there is a high intensity day and a low intensity day. The high intensity day is technically not high intensity but high stress. In this category, I would put dumbbell bench presses, dumbbell incline presses, military presses (with dumbbells or a straight bar), and dumbbell floor presses. In the low stress category, front raises, side raises, and rear raises

are good choices. Again, you can choose which day to perform them, but I like putting the high stress shoulder training on dynamic bench day.

One day is devoted to compound pressing exercises with high repetitions. The other day is geared toward an isolation movement with high repetitions. You don't need a high intensity shoulder day because you're getting this every time you perform a max effort movement.

Lats/upper back: Two days are devoted to the lats and upper back, and both are done with low intensity, high volume. The way that I incorporated this is on Sundays, I performed lat work (usually a row or a pull-up) but no upper back work. On Wednesdays, I did another lat workout (but with a different exercise). My low stress shoulder work consisted of a rear raise, face pull, or a seated dumbbell power clean. So essentially, on the low stress shoulder day, I killed two birds with one stone—an upper back exercise with a low stress shoulder movement. I did this because I never did front raises or side raises and felt that I got enough stimulation from my other work. It's not gospel, but it's something to think about.

Squat and deadlift parameters for the standard template

Dynamic squat: All sets performed on a parallel box. Use a three-week wave with the following sets and reps:

- Week 1: 10 X 2 at 50%
- Week 2: 10 X 2 at 55%
- Week 3: 10 X 2 at 60%

Upon completion of the third week, you simply start the wave over again. All percentages are based on your best squat. Let's disregard equipment at this point and say that it's based on your best 1RM of your box squat wearing whatever you usually wear on this day. Again, refer to my commentary on

dynamic bench training regarding rest periods. This is not conditioning. This is speed work. Save your conditioning for another time.

Max effort squat and deadlift: This will be discussed later in the book.

Hamstrings: Now, here is where things get tricky. Unlike the shoulders/triceps routine of high intensity/low intensity, many people are weak at exercises such as the glute ham raise. However, they simply need to do the exercise and not worry so much about sets/reps. If you don't fall into this category, you can do body weight glute ham raises on one day, and on the other day, you can add a band or a plate for resistance.

Low back: Again, we can't really isolate the lower back without hitting the glutes and hamstrings. However, you can pick from exercises such as back raises, 45-degree back raises, reverse hyperextensions, pull-throughs, and good mornings. Depending on how you do some of these exercises (i.e. with a great amount of intensity), you can use ONE of these for your hamstring and low back exercise. For example, good mornings can be done for both. If you were to pick reverse hyperextensions or pull-throughs, you can get away with doing an extra hamstring exercise.

Some people can train their lower back twice a week while others can't. A good way to do this is to pick one "easy" exercise (reverse hypers, pull-throughs, un-weighted back raises, or band good mornings) for one day and a heavier exercise for the second lower body training day.

Abdominals: These are usually trained heavy twice a week in the standard template. Some good exercises to choose from include weighted sit-ups, Roman chair sit-ups, stability ball, hanging leg raises, and side bends. This is not very complicated, but you just need to do them. That's usually the hardest part.

Please understand that this is only one version of the Westside method. There are numerous variations that people have adapted to their own needs. Hell, at Westside, there are variations.

However, once you understand the basics of the method—integrating the dynamic, max, and repeated effort—you will understand the Westside method. This is where everyone fails. They bitch and complain about what exercises work best, how much band tension an average band will give you, and why the Russians know everything (they know this because they grew up in New Jersey), but they haven't taken the time to figure out the basics of the program. Don't be this guy.

Max Effort Bench Press

Before we talk about the different exercises for the bench press, let's address some important points.

Technique is first. There are many different techniques that one can use. Some of them offer better success than others, but this is only going to be dependant on what works best for you.

Here are some simple tips for you to remember:

1. Most of your stability is going to be determined on how well you ride up on your lats and upper back. Think about how much you could bench press while lying on a bed as opposed to a hard surface. The bed is much too soft and so are most people's lats and upper back. Whenever we do seminars and put people in position to bench, they always say, "I didn't know benching hurt this much!"

   To do this, you must push your upper back and lats together and SQUEEZE. If you are remotely comfortable, you are not squeezing

enough. Your upper back and lower back should be arched and held in this position. This does not mean that you should lift your hips off of the bench though. Your butt must stay in contact with the pad.

2. When the bar begins its descent, slightly tuck your elbows to the side. This will ensure that the bar touches just below the nipples. This is crucial for pressing power.

3. When the bar touches your chest, drive your feet into the ground. Think about squatting the weight up. This needs to be a controlled but violent action.
4. The bar should travel up and back. It should end up slightly over your eyes or mouth.
5. Grip width is going to be very individual.
6. When you are benching for a heavy set, try to hold your breath for the first two repetitions. This is hard to master, but you will be surprised at much this can help once you do it.

Your grip on max effort day is another widely debated topic. Some people advocate a close grip (fingers around the smooth part of the bar) while others use a wider grip. Both will work for a period of time.

I did much of my max effort work with a closer grip and got very strong. When I began to stall, I moved my grip out a couple inches and began to make progress again. In general, I recommend using a medium grip for most people. This still allows some weight to be moved, but it keeps the strain down on your wrists and shoulders.

Board press

Board pressing is probably the most popular max effort movement for a number of reasons.

1. It works.
2. You can handle more weight, thus making it a great overload exercise. And it strokes the ego.
3. It's great for working on sticking points.
4. It's great for limiting the range of motion. This is crucial for those with banged up shoulders or pectorals.

There are many variations with board pressing. Don't get too wrapped up in trying every variation right away.

So what the hell is board pressing?

Board pressing is simply bench pressing while a 2 X 6 board rests across your chest. You bring the bar down to the boards and press back up. The boards are usually 12–20 inches long and are glued or nailed together. If you want to get fancy, many people attach a small handle to the board to make it easier to hold.

Board pressing usually requires an extra person to hold the board, but it can be done by you or with just one spotter. Many people put the board underneath their shirt or use a band or rope to tie it around their chests. This is not the best option, but I did it for years.

Technique

Your board press technique will be about the same as your bench press technique. Bring the bar into the board, compress it slightly, and press it back up. One of the major problems with board pressing is the ability to become very good at it but not necessarily get any better at bench pressing. This is usually a result of a lifter heaving the bar off of the boards. What this means is that a lifter will use the board as a slingshot to get the bar started. This isn't always bad because it has been used with success, me included. However, what people never understand is that when their board presses go up but their bench stalls, it may be because the board press isn't doing what it's supposed to do. And it just might be the technique that they are using. So remember that.

1-board press

This is kind of the redheaded stepchild of the board pressing family. This isn't used that much, but I'm not sure why. Well, I know why…you can't handle as much weight as with other board presses. This is a great variation for shirted and non-shirted benchers. This is good for those who can get the bar moving off their chest for the first few inches but then die out.

2-board press

This is probably the most often used board press for all benchers. This is a common sticking point for many lifters and is a great way to move some more weight without it strictly becoming a lockout movement. Most people can 2-board press about 102—110 percent of their raw max.

3-board press

This is one of my favorite max effort movements only because I'm good at it. Plus, as my 3-board press goes up, so does my shirt bench. A raw bencher probably doesn't need to go up any higher than a 3-board. Most people can 3-board press about 110—120 percent of their raw max.

4-board press

The 4-board is as high as I like to go on max effort day. Most people will use this board as supplemental work for their lockout, not as a max effort exercise. Still, this movement finds itself in heavy rotation in the max effort arsenal of many lifters. Most people can 4-board press about 115—125 percent of their raw max. Many times a lifter will use a 4-board to warm up prior to putting on their bench shirt. Additionally, lifters will use this as a max effort movement and an assistance movement.

5-board press

This isn't used much for max effort work, but if your arms are long, this can be an acceptable option. Like the 4-board press, this exercise is primarily used as a supplemental movement for lockout work. Also, it can be used for a warm up prior to putting on a bench shirt.

A note about the percentages in relationship to your max bench press: Don't worry about it. If you don't fall within the percentages listed above, please don't commit suicide. It's not that big of a deal. All it tells you is that you aren't as good

at it. The solution? Get stronger. Very few people have strong enough pecs, shoulders, and triceps that they can completely specialize on one aspect of their lift. Now, if you are a shirt bencher, the technique and lockout is going to be crucial, but you still need strong shoulders and pecs.

Board press with bands

This is one of the best ways to use bands on the bench press. First, it's a great way to accommodate the strength curve. And second, it allows you to use bands without destroying your pecs and shoulders.

Bands have a nasty habit of beating the crap out of you. I have no idea what the bands give at the bottom of the lift (this is up to you to figure out if you really care), but here are some numbers for the top of the lift of each band. Remember, these are estimates and are for the bands that are doubled on each side. This is the combined total weight at the top using one band per side, not counting the barbell.

- Mini-band: 60–90 lbs
- Monster mini-band: 100–120 lbs
- Light bands: 200–230 lbs

Please remember that if you use light bands for bench pressing, you had better be strong.

Setting up the bands

This is easy. Take one end of the band and put it around the sleeve of the barbell. Take the other end and wrap it under your rack, a heavy dumbbell (100 lb+), or a band peg. Take the free end up and place it back around the

sleeve of the barbell. This is what we call a doubled band.

Below is a list of all the possible board presses with bands:

1-board with mini bands
2-board with mini bands
3-board with mini bands
4-board with mini bands
5-board with mini bands

1-board with monster mini bands
2-board with monster mini bands
3-board with monster mini bands
4-board with monster mini bands
5-board with monster mini bands
1-board with light bands

2-board with light bands
3-board with light bands
4-board with light bands
5-board with light bands

Reverse band bench press

This exercise is very popular mostly because you can handle a lot of weight and it somewhat mirrors the effects of a bench shirt. There are a couple of problems with doing reverse band presses. Namely, people have a tendency to attach the bands in such a way that they are pressing a ridiculous amount of weight over their raw max. So don't be the guy who attaches a choked strong band to the top of a 10-foot rack and yells and screams about how he can now bench 900 lbs…without a bench shirt.

You can use light, average, or strong bands for this exercise. I guess you can use mini-bands, but you might want to check to see if you're wearing a skirt. To figure out how much each band is giving you at the bottom of the bench press, attach the bands and place the barbell in the bands. With the help of a partner (it is crucial that you use a partner with this), place weight on the bar until the bar drops to approximately the same level as your chest. Now you know how much bar weight is deloaded when the bar is on your chest.

It is important that you use bands that are even. Some bands stretch out over time so be sure to measure them before you use them. My only advice when doing this exercise is that you set it up the same way each time and use the same bands when doing so.

Board presses with chains

I'm not a big fan of this, but that doesn't really mean anything. People have used this with much success throughout the years so don't let my bias get to you. One of the big questions with this is how to set up the chains for the boards.

Normally, we tell the lifter that when he bench presses with chains he should have a full deload of the chains while the bar is on the chest. Of course, the same logic should apply to the boards, right? Well, the truth is I'm lazy, and I just use the same set up that I use on a full range bench press for the board presses. Why? Because I know it's going to be the same every time. However, feel free to adjust accordingly. Obviously, when you get up to the higher boards, less and less chain is going to be moving so you will need a boat load of chain to get any effect. Now, you can see why I haven't bothered with this too much.

1-board with chains
2-board with chains
3-board with chains
4-board with chains

5-board with chains

Floor press

I love floor presses. I think they have done wonders for my raw bench press, and when using chains, I think they offer great variation for shirt benchers. There was a time when I could predict exactly what I could raw bench by my floor press. So, I'm a little biased. Most lifters' floor press is about 90–92 percent of their raw bench.

What I like about floor presses is that they allow for no leg drive, making it a true upper body movement. If you can floor press more than you can bench press, there are two possible reasons:

1. You have no leg drive on the bench press so get working on this.
2. You are so skinny that the floor press is akin to a 4-board press so eat something.

Technique

Your floor press is going to be similar to your bench press except for two things. First, your elbows are going to touch the floor before the bar hits your chest. For most people, this will be true. If you have T-Rex arms or a barrel chest, this might not be the case. Second, your legs should be straight out in front of you. You can bend your knees, but too many people will drive their feet into the ground and lift their ass off of the floor. This is a floor press, not decline presses. So don't be a turd.

Once your elbows touch the floor, pause slightly and press back up. Many people will lower the bar in such a way that their elbows won't touch at the same time. My advice to you is to lower the bar at a slower pace and make it right. This isn't rocket science.

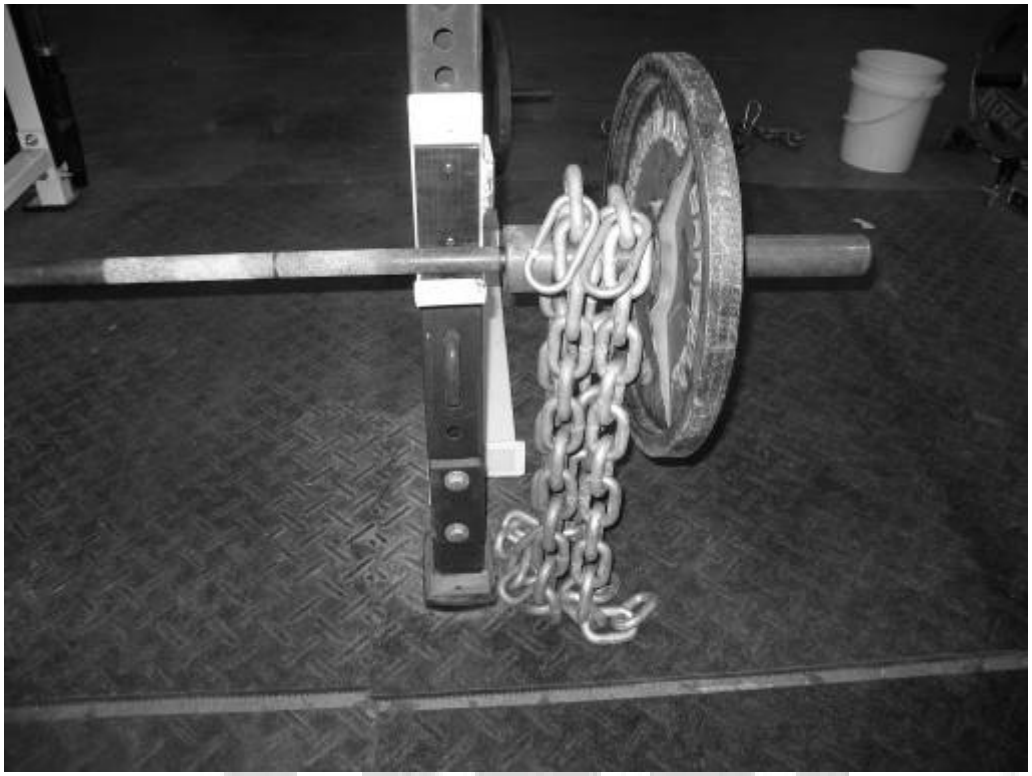
Floor press with chains (add weight/add chains)

This is one of my favorite exercises. Adding chains to this movement is a great way to accommodate the strength curve and increase your lockout strength. There are two ways to do floor presses with chains:

1. Take a set number of chains and work up by adding bar weight. I usually recommend using two or three chains per side.
2. Take a set bar weight and work up by adding chains. Most people will use a bar weight of 185, 225, 275, or 315 lbs.

I have done both and can say that the former is better. Plus, not many people have access to a ton of chains so the second option isn't always feasible.

To set up this exercise, take the chain and drape it over the sleeve of the barbell. Make sure the chain is even. You're ready to press.



Floor press with bands

I haven't done this exercise very often but can recognize its worth. Like the chains, the bands accommodate the strength curve and are a great way to increase your lockout strength. The key to doing this is setting up the mini-bands. To do this, use the same set up as you would when you deadlift against bands (see pictures below in the deadlift section).

Floor press board press

There is a lot of variation here. It's not a very popular movement though. Floor press board presses are usually done after one does floor presses. The rack is already set up so you might as well do some lockout work with some boards. Seriously, this is 99 percent of the reason why people do floor press board presses.

Full range presses

So far, we have mostly talked about partial movements for the bench press. Because many people are interested in getting their raw strength up, full range work is in order. Also, if you compete with a bench shirt, don't forget to add in some full range work so that you don't lose low end strength. I didn't list the bench press as one of the options because it's not that exciting. However, it can be used as a max effort exercise.

Bench press with chains

I like these for all lifters and think this is a great max effort option. Like the floor press with chains, these can be done two ways.

1. Take a set number of chains and work up by adding bar weight. I usually recommend using two or three chains per side.

2. Take a set bar weight and work up by adding chains. Most people will use a bar weight of 185, 225, 275, or 315 lbs.

Bench press with bands

Full range bench pressing with bands is great as long as you can handle it. This sometimes tears up my shoulders and pecs. You can use mini-, monster-mini, or light bands. Remember, light bands are not for the weak so be careful when you take the bar off. On a side note, most times people suck when they take out just a bar with bands. The bar is moving all over the place, and they are incredibly unstable. Usually some added bar weight will stabilize the bar and make the lift a little easier.

If you are a raw lifter, don't be afraid of using bands for a short cycle.

Incline press

The incline press doesn't get a lot of love, but that might be because it's incredibly prude in giving results. I used to do this when I first started training this way, and as I got stronger on it, so did my bench press. But those days are gone.

Of course, the next question is going to be what angle do you use? The answer is whatever you want. Whatever incline bench you have is fine. When doing inclines, make sure you're touching your clavicle with the bar, not your chest. I like to keep the bar as close to my chin as possible when lowering and raising it. If I bring the bar too low on my chest, it feels like my shoulders are ripping out. This is not good.

Illegal wide bench presses

When I was really trying to bring up my raw bench, this exercise seemed to work very well. An illegal wide bench press is simply doing a bench press with as wide of a grip as you can manage without tearing of your shoulder, pec, or the side of your hand on the j-hook of the bench.

These are usually done for higher reps (6–10). I usually work up to one big set, saving my energy by keeping the warm-up reps to 3–5. However, you can do it anyway you want. Just make sure that you aren't going to kill yourself. While this can be done as a max effort exercise, many people will use this as an accessory lift.

Runts

Here are some other max effort exercises that I have used or have seen over the years. They aren't used that often, but they might be just the thing you need.

Rack presses/rack lockouts

These can be done from just about any height, which means there is a lot of variety. I have done these with bands so don't be afraid to try something

different. These are usually done with the bar already on the pins. The lifter presses from a dead stop. While this might sound good in theory, I have had more pec twinges from doing this than with any other bench exercise. I have also tried taking the bar off normally, lowering it to the pins, pausing, and pressing back up. This pause allows you to store some stretch reflex from the eccentric phase.

An important technique point is to gradually build pressure into the bar when pressing. Don't slam into the bar because this is how many people get injured. This is the same concept as with deadlifting. You don't want to violently jerk the bar off the ground. You want to get the slack out of the bar, begin pulling, and

once the bar starts moving, explode up. This exercise isn't used that often. However, it's a great option for those who train alone or for those who train in a commercial gym by themselves and want to make the most commotion possible.

There are many theories on using rack presses/lockouts to develop and strengthen sticking points. It seems like a really good idea though I've never really seen it work.

Cambered bar bench

This bar has long been championed for its benefits of building low end strength. It is also the champion of tearing shit up. This exercise is usually for the young, mobile, and pain-free lifters. Basically, you have about 2–4 years to use this before you hand it down to someone else. I would rather use this as assistance work than max effort work.

Reverse cambered bar bench

This is done by using a cambered bar but turning the camber the opposite way. Instead of the bar giving you a greater range of motion, it now restricts it. This is similar to a board press or rack lockout. It seems like a good idea, but I could never get into it because the bar seemed to move around a lot and the camber tilted. I think this would work better as an assistance exercise, but people have used it for max effort.

Foam bench press (Manpon presses)

This is similar to a board press. You lay a piece of foam on your chest, lower the bar on to it, and press it back up. I'm not sure why, but even if the bar comes all the way down to your chest, it seems to alleviate many shoulder problems that I've had. By the way, a Manpon is nothing more than a foam roller sawed in half so that it forms a half-moon shape. We call it a Manpon because whoever uses it probably has sand in his vag.

Fat bar bench press

I'm a big fan of pressing the obese bar. It seems to hurt my elbows and shoulders a lot less than a regular bar. I have a theory on this that might expose me as some kind of fetish freak.

If a 130-lb woman steps on your hand with a stiletto heel, it's going to hurt. All the pressure is going to be pinpointed on one area. If the same woman has a pair of running shoes on and steps on your hand, it is going to hurt a lot less because the weight and pressure is dispersed. I think this is why a fat bar takes some of the pain away, and if it doesn't, it certainly gives you a cool way to make people think you like to be tortured by a dominatrix.

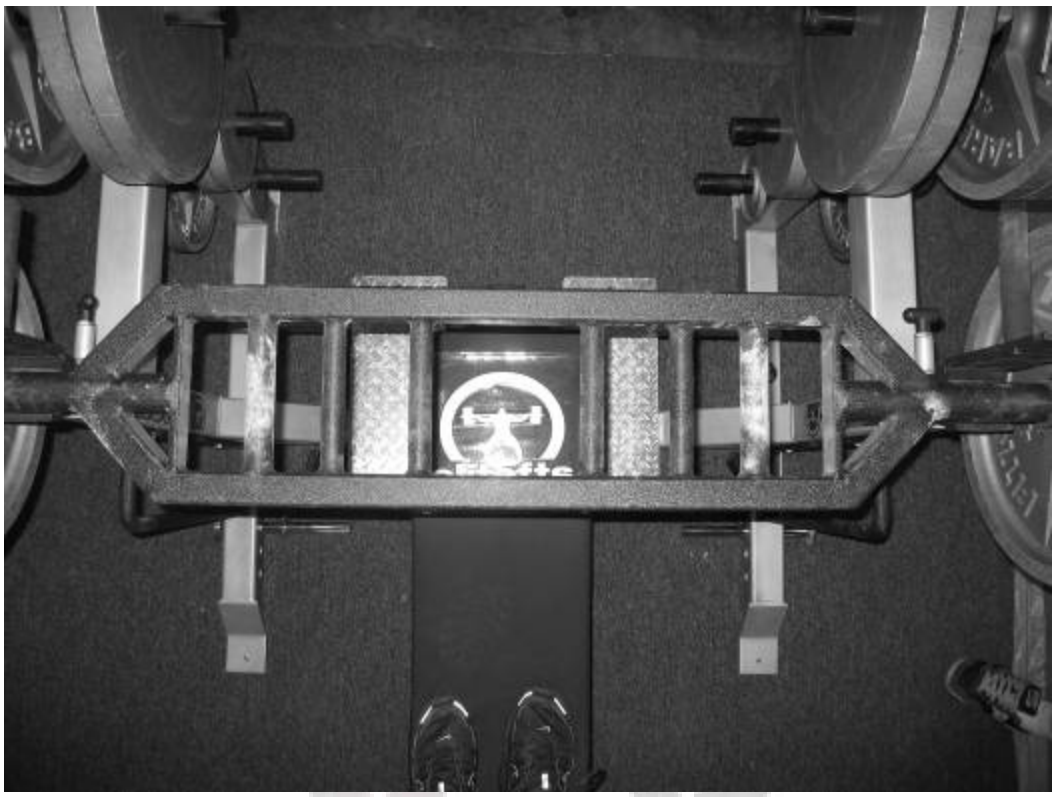
The fat bar can also be used in floor presses and board presses and just about any variation that you can think of. The only thing that I would caution you on is don't use a wide grip with this bar. It seems to be very uncomfortable and somewhat dangerous. Maybe it's because my hands are the same size as an eight-year-old girl's, but I'm suspecting that most of you aren't carrying around big mits either.

Hoagie press

I've never done this before, but one time, Dave was getting all fired up about board pressing and its benefits. He yelled at me, "I'll press off of anything! Give me a hoagie, and I'll press off of that!" It seems amusing until you realize that it's a waste of a perfectly good hoagie.

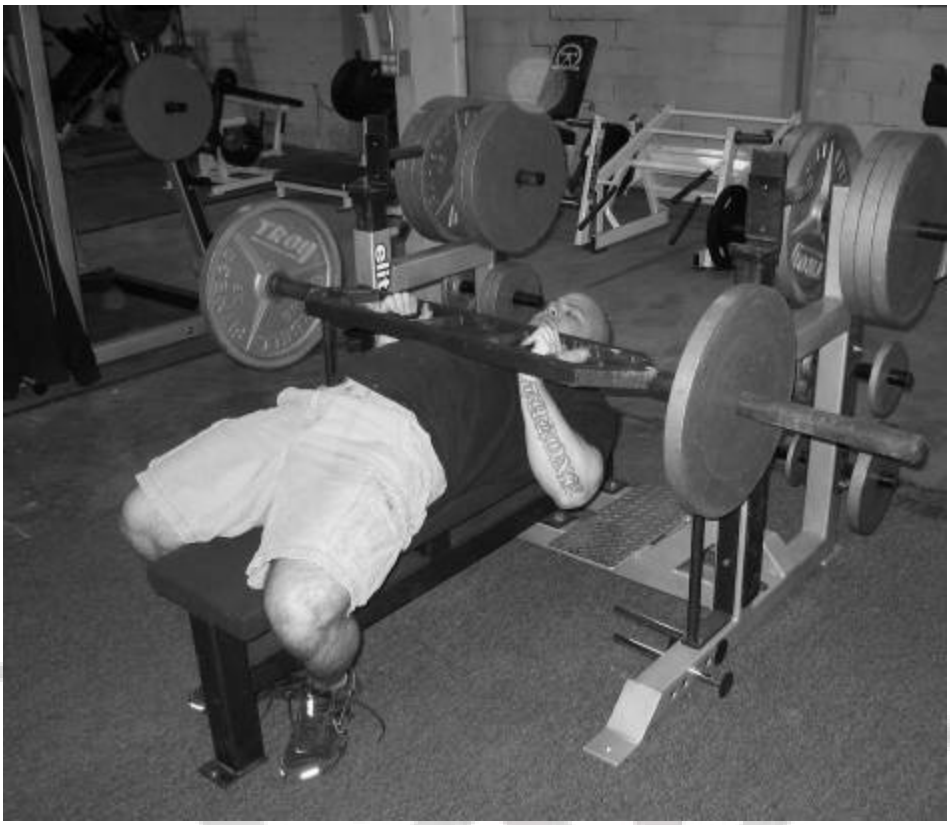
Football bar bench press

This bar is a pretty cool idea. Instead of taking a pronated grip, the bar is made in such a way that one can take a neutral grip (palms facing each other). This is great because it takes a ton of pressure and stress off of the shoulders.



The bad thing about the football bar is that it's hard to take out of the rack when you've got some heavy weight on there. Even using another person to lift the bar off is difficult. I mainly use this bar for high rep work (8–15) rather than max effort work. However, give it a shot and keep the name of a good dentist on hand.

The best thing about the football bar is the name. I guess people play football with their palms facing each other. Whatever. This bar is huge with the sport-specific crowd as well as football coaches. In keeping with the spirit, I hope they also lift with their helmets on…while getting tackled.



Top Max Effort Movements for Raw Bench

- 1-board press
- 2-board press
- 3-board press
- Floor press
- Incline press
- Bench press with chains
- Bench press with bands
- Illegal wide bench press
- Cambered bar bench

Max Effort Squat

Box squat

The box squat is one of the best ways to squat. The box squat was originally brought to light by the original Westside Barbell in Culver City, California, and made famous by Louie Simmons. The benefits of box squatting are numerous and include:

- Increased recovery time between squat sessions
- Ability to squat to prescribed depth every time
- Easier on knees
- Places stress on the hips and hamstrings
- Easy to teach

These benefits are all realized when doing the box squat correctly. This is the key. Don't be a goon and give box squatting a bad name. I'm not going to go into great detail in regards to form, but here are some simple tips to learning the box squat:

1. Make sure the box has a wide enough surface area to perform the lift. This will give the lifter confidence when squatting down. You don't want him squatting on something that requires him to have pinpoint accuracy.
2. Begin the squat by pushing the hips and glutes back first. Do not lead with the knees.
3. As the lifter descends, he will continue to push his hips back and then begin bending his knees. As he is bending the knees (squatting down), he should open up his groin. This means his knees will open and allow him to keep his shins perpendicular to the floor. This is important because this position keeps the stress off of the knees and onto the hips, low back, and hamstrings.

4. Once the lifter reaches the box, the lifter must sit on the box. Do not touch and go, and do not bounce on the box.
5. There is no relaxation on the box. The lifter must sit tight on the box.
6. After a second and a half, the lifter should explode off of the box.
7. Make sure the lifter keeps his chest up as he drives off of the box.

Box heights

There are generally three classifications of box heights—low, parallel, and high. Of course, there are derivations of each, but I recommend using one height for each of these. This will allow you to keep track of records and not have an endless amount of permutations for each lift. The parallel box is just what it sounds like—a box that places you at parallel. Now, the definition of parallel is as hotly debated as evolution. So be wary.

A low box squat will put you 1–2 inches below parallel. A high box will put you 1–2 inches above parallel.

Of course, all of these box heights are going to be dependant on your options. When I first began training the box squat exclusively, all I had at my disposal was a 10-inch box (low), a 14-inch box (about parallel), and an 18-inch box (high). So these three heights were all I had to work with. It's not a problem so don't freak out. Just use what you have. Box height is like penis length. Work with what you have and be happy.

As you get more experienced in box squatting, you will learn if certain box heights are more advantageous than others. For example, the high box squat worked well for me when I first began. As the years went on, it became less and less a staple for me because it didn't work well anymore. The same can be said for the low box. This worked very well for me, but my results began to stagnate. Over time you will realize what box heights work well for you and what you can throw away. Or at least put on the back burner.

Stance on max effort day

The stance on max effort box squat should be shoulder width or slightly narrower. I get asked all the time why someone would use this kind of stance for max effort work when most people squat wide.

Here are some reasons why:

1. Wide stance is used on dynamic effort day.
2. Dynamic effort day (because of bands) is actually trained heavier than one would think. So it does carryover to your competition squat.
3. Gives your hips a rest.
4. It can carry over to your deadlift.
5. It allows you to train without briefs/suit.

Sometimes I think max effort day is more about getting stronger than just improving one lift. Maybe I'm talking out of my ass, but it better do something because all it usually does is sit around and talk shit.

Straight bar box squat

This is probably the most used squat variation because most people have access to a straight bar. There's nothing to really note here. Just put the bar on your back and take a seat. It's not too complicated.

Variations:

- High box squat
- Parallel box squat
- Low box squat

Cambered bar box squat

I love the cambered squat bar. A cambered squat bar allows the lifter to perform a squat while keeping much of the stress off of the shoulders. Because of the

shape of the bar, the lifter's hands are placed in such a way that his shoulders are not externally rotated. This is a great variation for anyone with a bad shoulder or even a bad wrist.

This bar is also a son of a bitch. The camber makes the weights swing a little bit, which forces the lifter to stay tight throughout the entire lift. In many ways, this bar feels very similar to a Zercher squat only without the excruciating arm pain. The weights are very low on the body, and this bar really makes you expand your abs when squatting. For many people, using this bar shows them what their abs should feel like when squatting with a straight bar.

When squatting with this bar, one of the first things you will notice is that you can't explode off of the box like you would with a straight bar. You must ease off of the box with a tremendous amount of tension but with purpose. This feeling is a great learning tool for people who need to learn how to deadlift. Hear me out on this one. A deadlift should not be performed by jerking the bar off of the ground violently. This variation of the deadlift if popular among beginner deadlifters and the proud giver of bicep tears. The bar should be eased off the floor with a great deal of tightness. Only after the bar begins moving should the lifter begin accelerating. The same can be said when box squatting with a cambered squat bar. It's not the same movement. It's the same feeling.

Also, note that a cambered squat bar does not lend itself to being carried in a low bar position. It can be done but is very difficult to do.

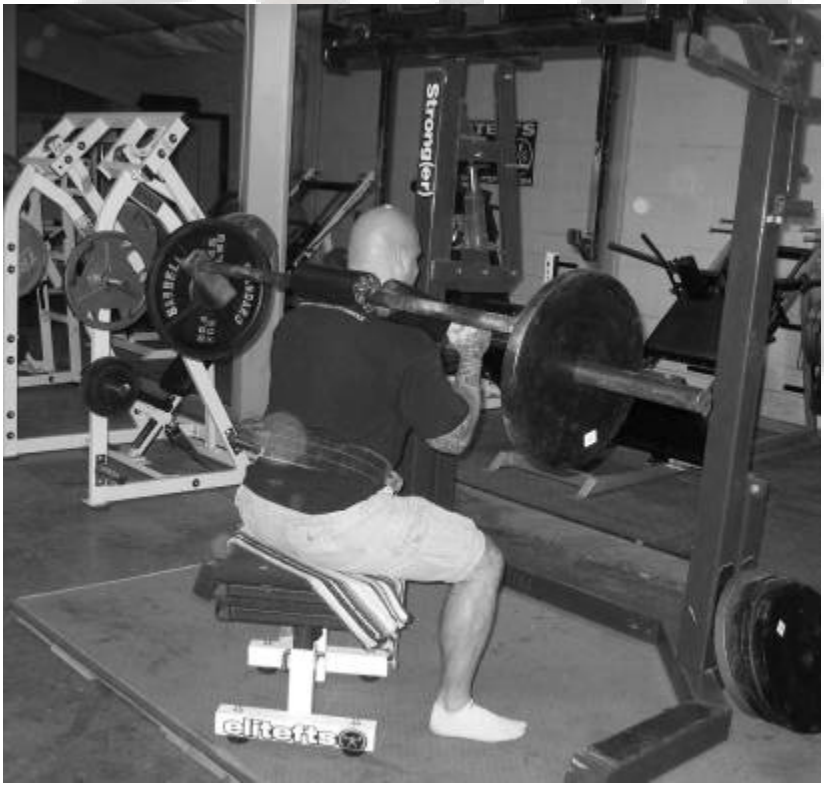
Variations

- High box squat with cambered bar
- Parallel box squat with cambered bar
- Low box squat with cambered bar

Safety squat bar box squat

The safety squat bar is probably the most popular specialty bar box squat. It is a beast and a quick lesson in brute strength if used correctly. First, max effort work with a safety squat bar is performed with the hands holding onto the yoke of the bar or down at your sides. It is not done with your hands holding onto a rack or the handles on a rack. The bar can be used in this manner (and it certainly has benefits when doing this), but max effort work is performed in a hands-free manner.

The camber of the bar when it rests on your shoulders is what makes this bar so different. This places the weight out in front of you, making it somewhat similar to a front squat, only you have to fight to stay in position by using your upper back, lower back, and in desperate situations, your neck. This bar is constantly pushing your forward, and you must learn to fight against this. Because most people fall forward in the squat when they miss, this bar is a perfect remedy.



The other thing I love about this bar is the barbaric way it promotes squatting. Once I unrack this bar, I make sure to sit back on the box. Once I'm on the box, all bets are off. I just muscle the weight up with little regard to form. With my hands on the yoke, I drive everything up at the same time, trying to keep my elbows high. I'm not saying that I squat with bad

form, but it's easier to JUST SQUAT, not worry about the angle of your pinky toe. It's a nice refreshing departure from what can become an overcomplicated lift.

Much like the cambered squat bar, the safety squat bar allows you to keep your shoulders from being externally rotated. So this bar is good for anyone battling shoulder or wrist problems.

Variations

- High box squat with safety squat bar
- Parallel box squat with safety squat bar
- Low box squat with safety squat bar

The Manta Ray

The Manta Ray is a piece of plastic that attaches to any bar and allows the lifter to place the bar higher up on his back than he normally could. Remember those puss pads that people used in high school? This is the much bigger and stronger older brother. Because many people squat with a mid to low bar position, the Manta Ray gives a nice needed variation. Plus, the bar is placed a couple of inches higher, which makes getting underneath the bar easier.

For those people who are low bar squatters, the Manta Ray will prove to be quite challenging. You will be forced to have an upright torso, and the positioning will feel

incredibly awkward. But since when has lifting weights and max effort work ever been comfortable?

Because you are more upright, you will be forced to use your quads. Now that the posterior chain is in vogue, I'm all about big quads. I hate the posterior brigade. They've turned a perfectly good area of the body into a shameful wasteland. Sad.

Variations

- High box squat with Manta Ray
- Parallel box squat with Manta Ray
- Low box squat with Manta Ray

Front squat

I have a love/hate relationship with the front squat. In high school and college, the front squat made up much of my squat training. Toward the end of my college career, I began noticing some strange symptoms when front squatting. Most noticeable was passing out during the lift and losing feeling in my legs for 5–10 minutes. This is not recommended and probably a good reason for me to stop doing this exercise. However, despite our soured relationship, I still believe in the front squat.

Strength coaches tell me all the time about how the front squat is so superior, how it's great for athletes, and blah, blah, blah…Whatever. It's a squat variation so don't start dropping your DNA all over it. It's funny because if you actually question these coaches (or any coach….listen up because this is some funny ammo to throw at people) about athletics, you can get them to admit how important the hips are in sports. Now, ask them what places greater emphasis on the hips—an athletic or wider stance box squat OR a front squat. The answer is the former (if you are confused). Saying the front squat is superior is nonsense.

There is only one person I've talked to who has a reasonably good theory for his use of the front squat. Because I respect him as a person and coach, I'll let him have his say. But for the most part, people champion the front squat because…it's not a back squat. This becomes their hook, their "I'm different" moment in life. And a selling point.

With all that being said, there are three ways to hold the bar during the front squat. One is in a clean position. This is where the barbell is racked across the shoulders in the same way as one catches a clean. The elbows are high, and the wrists are bent back. The second way is with the arms folded across each other (picture trying to choke yourself with both hands) and on the bar. The elbows must still remain high. The final variation sucks yak balls. Lifting straps are placed through the bar and you hold onto them. This, as mentioned before, is not favorable, and in fact, does suck the testicles of *Bos grunniens.* It has been scientifically proven.

There is also a front squat harness being sold, but I've never used one so it's hard for me to comment. I'm not a big fan of the Sting Ray, another device made to make front squatting easier. The Sting Ray is made by the same people who manufacture the Manta Ray. Many people enjoy having a Sting Ray on their shoulders so who am I to dissuade you from using one.

The front squat is a good exercise, but many find it limiting because of bar stability and flexibility issues. If I could do it, I would.

Variations

- High box front squat
- Parallel box front squat
- Low box front squat

Buffalo bar box squat

The buffalo bar is a seven-foot bar that has a slight camber to it and allows one to squat more comfortably. I believe the camber is about 3–4 inches and gives just enough to keep from straining the shoulders. The buffalo bar is sold by IronMind.

I love the buffalo bar and highly recommend it. While the safety squat bar and the cambered squat bar offer similar shoulder saving properties, the buffalo bar allows you to squat with the same feel and technique as a regular bar.

Variations

- High box squat with buffalo bar
- Parallel box squat with buffalo bar
- Low box squat with buffalo bar

Others

Zercher squat

The Zercher squat has some kind of mythical property to it that I can't figure out. People seem to really love this exercise, and I have a feeling it has to do with some masochistic urge to feel pain in the weight room.

The Zercher squat is performed while holding the bar in the crook of the elbow. Once the bar is in position, you hug the bar into you and perform a squat. These can be done with or without a box or off of pins in a power rack. One of the biggest things that the Zercher squat will teach you is how to push out on your belt and use your stomach to squat. You can't be loose and perform a Zercher squat—even during your warm-up sets.

The exercise's origins come from prison where squat racks were unavailable. People would pick up the bar from the ground in their elbows, and this became

known as the Zercher deadlift (named after Ed Zercher). Word leaked out in the land of the free, and both the Zercher deadlift and the Zercher squat became a staple lift for many people.

This lift has helped many people with their deadlifts, but you will be limited by the amount of weight that you can actually hold. As my good friend Glenn Buechlein once told me, “I don’t do Zercher squats because I have a squat rack…and I’m not in prison.”

You can try wrapping the bar with a towel or placing a squat pad on it. I have even tried placing a 2 X 6 board in my elbows and resting the bar on it. This last variation seemed to alleviate the pain somewhat. Another variation is to use a fat bar. You have been warned.

Reverse band squats

The reverse band squat works by deloading the bottom portion of the lift and overloading the top end. As the lifter descends into a squat, the bands stretch and take off some of the weight. This accommodates the strength curve much like squatting against bands. The difference is that the bands aren't pulling you down, thus the bar isn't dropping as fast.

The set up for this is simple. Choke a light, average, or strong band to either side of the rack. You need one band per side. Place the barbell in the bands and add weight.

Now, the first question that anyone is going to ask is, "How much do they take off?" Well, because I've answered this question about four million times, let me explain.

Once the bands are around the barbell, figure out where the bar would be when you are at the bottom of the lift. Let the bar hang down in the bands while you

and another person slowly add weight. Add weight to the bar until the bar is at the bottom position. Add up the weight (including the bar), and you have your answer.

The reverse band squat can also be done on a monolift. This is usually done by doubling up a mini-band or a monster mini-band and placing it through the bar. This is not a widely popular max effort lift, but I can see its potential.

Olympic squat

The Olympic squat is usually done as an assistance exercise, but it can be used for max effort training. For people who deadlift conventionally, this can be a great tool. An Olympic squat is done with a higher bar position, a closer stance (a little closer than shoulder width), and below parallel. This is not a common variation of max effort work, but it can be done. Any bar can be used.

Chains and bands on max effort squat

Chains and bands can be used on any of these lifts. For the most part, they aren't used on max effort squat day.

Chains and bands are usually a staple of dynamic work, and because these are heavily used on these days, max effort work allows you to take a break from them.

Max Effort Deadlift

Deadlift against bands

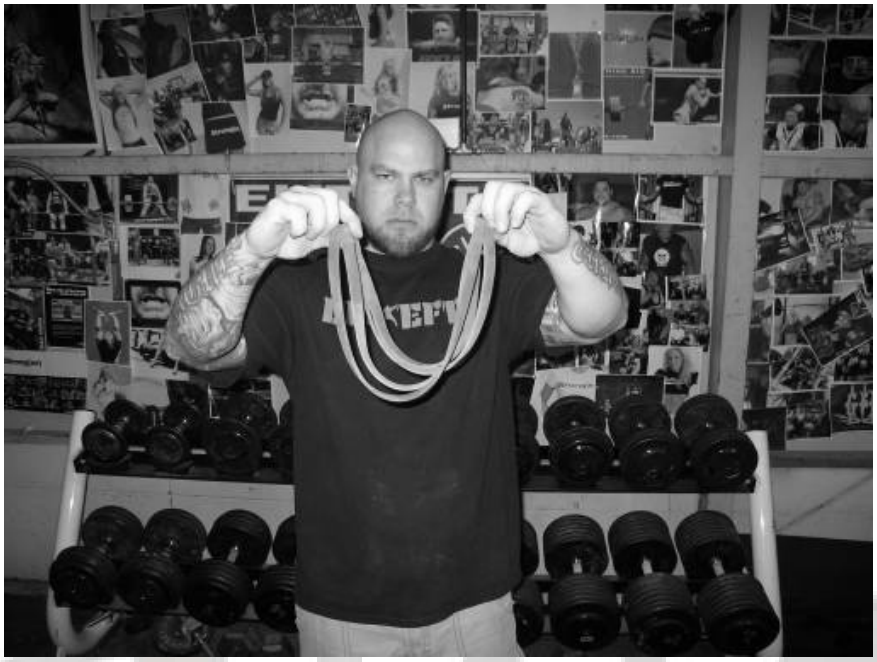
This is usually done two ways—inside of a power rack or on a jump stretch sumo platform. This overloads the top of the deadlift, a common sticking point for many lifters.

The type of band used is going to be determined by how you set it up. Most people will use a mini-band, a monster mini-band, or a light band for this exercise. The bands are quadrupled.

Take a band and spread it out in front of you. Now, take the ends of the band and bring them together. Bring them together again. You now have a quadrupled band. Because I get a million questions about this, below are some pictures demonstrating how to do this.

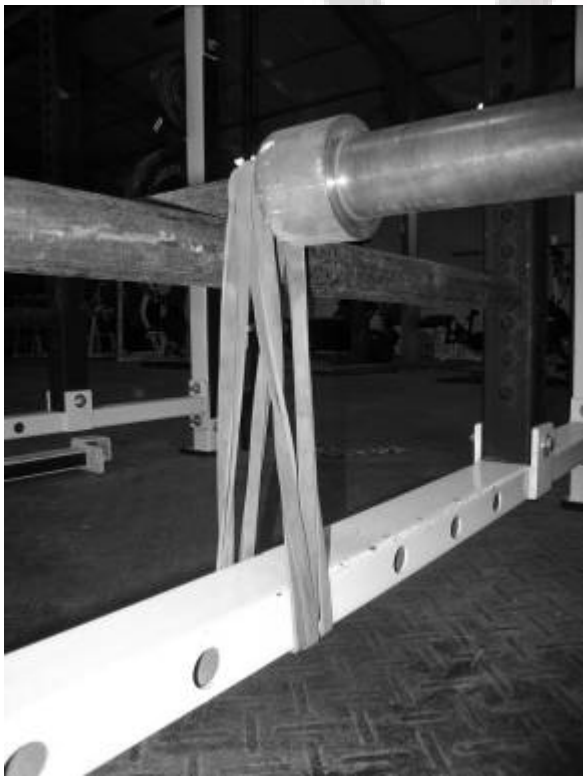
This is a mini-band. Notice my excitement.

Bring the two ends together.
Now that you have a doubled mini band, bring the ends together again.



Now you have a saggy udder.

Here is how it looks when under a power rack and attached to the bar.



This exercise is probably one of the most popular full range deadlift variations, but be wary because the excess tension from the bands can be insane if you set it up wrong. I highly recommend finding a fast, easy, and simple way to set this up. Too many times, I see a lifter looping one end here, putting another loop here, and then wrapping it twice on this side but running it through this part here. It's all very confusing. It's no wonder that the tension is different on each side. Simplicity always works best.

Deadlift with chains

Here's an excerpt from an article I wrote about deadlifting with chains:

"Matt Bash and I put our collective heads together and were thinking of different ways to approach our weak point in the deadlift—the lockout. Basically, nothing was helping, and this was getting very frustrating. I felt that I had exhausted just about every possibility: reverse hyperextensions, glute ham raises, pull-throughs, etc.

Everyone reading this article knows the drill, right? So Matt and I had an idea to deadlift with chains. This was right after we thought of 100 reasons why we shouldn't train that day. I think this made a huge difference in my lockout, even after a few workouts."

The set up

The biggest question is how is this set up? First, you need to have spring collars. Often, spring collars have rubber ends. Slip these ends off so that you can attach the carabineer through the ends. (See the picture at left.)

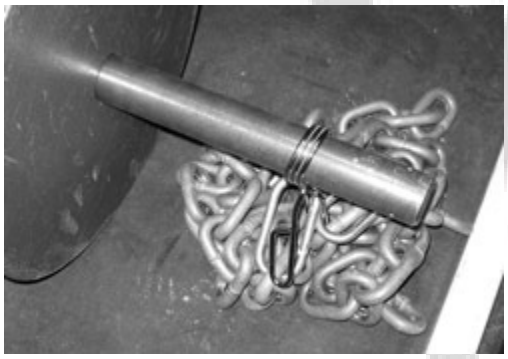
These collars need to be set on the bar so that they are close to the end of the sleeve. Do not bring the collars close to the bar weight. This will ensure that once the weight is lifted and put down, the chance of the plates landing on the chains will be lessened. For a frame of reference, we placed the collars a length of "three fingers" from the end of the sleeve. It's not too scientific, but it's better

than bringing a tape measure to the gym, which automatically qualifies you as a Douchie LaRue.

Here's another picture of the set up (at right). This is shown in a power rack to give you a better view of what it looks like.

The next important step in the set up is to have the chains right under the bar or toward the lifter. You do not want the chains in front of the bar. This will cause the bar to move forward out of position and put you at risk for injury. You may have to do some maneuvering on each side to make them even, but you don't have to be perfect.

The carabineer on the chains was never moved to accommodate the deadlift. With our chains, the carabineer is placed in the middle of the chain. This will ensure that you have almost the full load of the chain when locked out. If you don't have our chains, buy some. If you still don't have them, just find a carabineer that fits a 5/8-inch chain and place it in the middle.



How many chains?

Now that we've got the set up covered, let's look at how to use this in your training. First, we have never used more than three chains per side. We found that using any more makes the contrast in load too much. The three chains worked great for both of us. Matt is about a 500-lb deadlifter, and my best pull is 700 lbs. If you are significantly weaker than this, two chains would probably be your best bet. The point of this is that you don't want to have a small amount of bar weight and 400 lbs of chains per side.

We never accurately measured how much each chain weighs at lockout, but we figured about 20 lbs per chain. Each of our chains weighs 22 lbs (roughly), but

I'm the last person who is going to be splitting hairs over this stuff. This is what forums are for.

So with three chains per side, we have about 120 lbs at lockout. Calculate the total chain weight at whatever you want. Just make sure that you set it up the same way each time to accurately gauge your progress.

The training

We simply used this as a max effort movement. Because we had no idea what we could do before we started, we took the chain weight at lockout (120 lbs) and subtracted it from 90 percent of our best deadlift. So, if you can deadlift 600 lbs, 90 percent is 540 lbs. Subtract 120 lbs (the chain weight) from 540 lbs and you get 420 lbs of bar weight. Are you confused yet?

Basically, the weight at lockout needs to equal about 90 percent of your best pull or what you think your best pull would be on that day. There is a big difference for some in regards to their training max and their competition max.

We used this as a goal and as a guideline for the workout. Once we established where we were at, we used this as a set point for our training. We worked up as we do for a normal max effort day, working to a 1RM with our goal weight in mind.

Though I have never tried it (and am now turning into a writer whom I despise—giving theory rather than tried-and-true experience), I would imagine that one could use this exercise as either the main movement of the day or as a second movement for multiple sets with about 80–90 percent of one's 1RM (your 1RM for this particular exercise). Just make sure that you account for the added stress of pulling because this exercise can beat the hell out of you (as do most deadlift movements). Follow Prilepin's chart for the optimum number of reps at the given

percentage. I would probably stay at the low end of this chart for deadlifting movements.

What we noticed

The first thing we noticed was that we could pull much more (total) at lockout than our normal deadlift. I believe I worked up to close to 600 lbs of bar weight, and Matt was also over 100 percent at lockout. This doesn't mean you are going to be the same, but it is probably going to be the same for most people. This really let us know that part of the problem we had might be mental.

The second thing that I noticed is that I liked this much, much better than pulling against bands. For whatever reason, pulling against bands was very awkward, and I always felt like the band was dictating my groove way too much, sort of like pulling in a weak Smith machine. The chains seemed to give me a smoother transition in the contrast. Plus, the chains allow you to manipulate the bar before you lift it. With bands, this is not always the case. For example, with chains, I could still use a rolling start (i.e. I start my deadlift similar to how Garry Frank does, but he finishes with much more weight than I do) by pushing the weight out in front of me, pulling it back to my shins, and beginning the pull. Bands didn't allow me to do this.

The last thing we noticed was that we got faster with our pulls. This was especially apparent when we took the chains off. However, this was done as an experiment only to see if it really made a difference.

Reverse band deadlift

The reverse band deadlift is a favorite among many lifters simply because you can lift an ass ton of weight with it. Some people go overboard with this lift and use a thousand doubled strong bands attached to the Sears Tower and pull 1200 lbs. Then they go to a meet and wonder why they can't pull 225 lbs. The point is to not go overboard with the tension.

Because everyone has a different rack, your set up is going to be dependent on what you have. A good rule of thumb is to have all or most of the tension of the bands OFF of the bar when you are at lockout. This will ensure that you get adequate help off of the bottom of the lift but still train with a weight that is comparable to your strength. We usually set this up by placing the bands through the safety pins of the power rack. The safety pins are placed high up on the squat rack, and the bar simply hangs inside the bands. There is no choking or doubling involved.

This is a great max effort lift because it allows one to overload the lockout of the lift and train with a heavier weight. It is also great because it is fun to do. There is a tremendous amount of confidence and pride when one pulls their first 500-lb or 700-lb deadlift, even if it's with the aid of bands.

Shall I answer the question again? Place the barbell in the bands. Let the barbell hang in the bands and begin adding weight to the bar until it just touches the floor. This weight is now what the bands are deloading from the bottom of the lift.

Light, average, or strong bands can be used when doing this exercise.

However, no matter how you set up this exercise, be sure that you're consistent with the set up so you can accurately measure your progress.

Trap bar deadlift

The trap bar deadlift (or hex bar deadlift) was first introduced to me by the *Bigger Faster Stronger* program. This bar is still widely used today by many athletes. I know Joe DeFranco uses it, as do many other well-known and highly-respected coaches and trainers.

The trap bar allows you to deadlift with the bar over your center of gravity, thus theoretically making is safer. This is because you grasp the handles of the bar at the sides, not out in front of you like a regular deadlift. With the latter, the bar can drift out in front of you causing a lower back injury. The thing that I do not like about the trap bar is the very thing that makes it good.
The deadlift allows you to feel the bar across your body. It gives you feedback that allows you to adjust accordingly. If the bar is coming out in front of you, you can make the necessary adjustments. Because the trap bar is held away from the body, you do not get this kind of feedback.

Despite this, I believe the trap bar is an excellent lift. It is an easy way to teach a lifter what it feels like to sit back, and it's a perfect way to get a young athlete in the correct position. However, I don't think it really transfers over well into a bigger deadlift. It feels more like a squat to me. The positives of this

lift far outweigh the negatives though, especially when training younger athletes.

Deadlift off of mats

This is very similar to rack pulls in that you are using an abbreviated range of motion. The difference is how the bar flexes. When you're deadlifting off of pins, the bar is already bent because it is resting on the pins. When you deadlift off of mats, the bar isn't flexed when you begin. It begins to flex as you pull. It really isn't that big of a difference, but you can certainly feel it. If this weren't such a pain in the ass to set up, I would use this movement instead of rack pulls.

As with any abbreviated pull, you have to be careful in getting too reliant on these for max effort work. Some people get very good with pulling off of mats, but their deadlift goes nowhere. It is fun to move some weight so it's a great confidence builder.

One thing that I've noticed over the years is the abundance of biceps tears with these kinds of movements. Obviously, you are handling some fairly heavy weights when doing these so be careful. Using straps is not going to kill you. Don't get all tough guy and refuse to wear them.

Also, the more weight you put on the bar, the more the bar will flex. This is especially true if you are using a deadlift bar. As the weight piles on, your range of motion may be abbreviated. Your five-inch range of motion may soon become three inches. It's like going from boner to flimser. This max effort movement comes highly recommended.

Deficit deadlift

This exercise, like Satan, has many names. Some call it the deficit deadlift while others call it deadlift off of mats or deadlift off of an elevated surface. Whatever you want to name it, it is a deadlift while you are standing on a box, plates, or

something similar. Basically, your range of motion is greater with this lift than with a regular deadlift.

Some people love this exercise, but I warn you that this is not great for people who have a large tire around their waist. It becomes very difficult to get to the bar when you have a few Big Macs lodged in your stomach. I have used this exercise with much success and think it should be in just about everyone's arsenal.

The only problem that I see with this exercise is the risk some people have if they are not flexible enough to get into a good starting position. This does not mean that your low back is perfectly arched like they teach you in school. Let's be honest. No one ever deadlifts like that. At least no one who pulls over 225 lbs. However, this exercise can easily turn into a bad back if you are not careful. Just make sure you put a little more effort into squatting down to the bar when you begin the lift. Also, be sure that the bar doesn't get out in front of you. Drag the bar up your shins and thighs.

How high should the surface be? It should be high enough to make a difference but low enough to get your feet under the bar. Another option would be to use nothing but 25-lb or 35-lb plates on your sets. This would also increase your range of motion and give you the same feeling. The only thing is that most people don't have enough 25-lb or 35-lb plates to do this. But if you do have a lot of plates or if your deadlift isn't very big, give this option a shot. I just don't want to be that guy who uses 25-lb plates to deadlift.

Ultra wide sumo deadlifts

These are just sumo deadlifts done with a wider than normal stance. A normal stance is whatever you *normally* use. Many people have a stance that takes them out extremely wide—wider than the plates will allow them.

The easy solution to this is to put some kind of collar on the bar before you put on the plates. I recommend a spin lock collar or something similar. Once you put the collars on, start loading the plates and take your stance out super wide. Just be sure not to crush your toes underneath the plates.

It's beneficial to stand on a surface and/or have shoes that don't slip. Just a suggestion.

Rack deadlifts

Rack deadlifts or pin pulls are the best because this is the max effort exercise that you do when you don't know what to do.

Here's a good conversation between me and my old training partner, Kevin:

Jim: What do you want to do today?
Kevin: Safety bar squats?
Jim: Didn't we do those last week?
Kevin: What about reverse band deadlifts?
Jim: Too much time to set up.
Kevin: Rack pulls?
Jim: Excellent choice.

The rack deadlift is probably the most used deadlift variation because it's easy to do, easy to set up, requires little equipment, and you can move an ass ton of weight with this exercise. Some people believe that the rack pull is great for helping sticking points in the deadlift or increasing lockout strength. I don't know if I believe it because I haven't seen it carryover for many people. This may be true for beginners, but it doesn't happen as often with advanced lifters as the rack pull zealots would have you believe. Still, this max effort exercise has merit, or it wouldn't have stuck around for as long as it has.

Rack deadlifts can be done from just about any height. Good power racks have holes with a spacing of 1–2 inches. Any more than that and you are looking at a rack that was built by a company that doesn't like to lift weights. I recommend using holes about 3–4 spaces apart and setting records for each of them. Ninety-nine percent of people use a conventional stance when pulling off of pins, but don't be afraid to be a one percent.

I also highly recommend using an old bar for doing rack deadlifts. Something is going to happen to the bar. It will slip from your hand, you'll miss badly, or whatever. Something will happen that will screw up your bar and bend it. This is OK. Just make sure you have another bar for squatting and benching. Or at least enjoy your new homemade cambered bar.

Rack deadlifts against bands

This has recently become more popular among the powerlifting community. There is nothing too fancy about this. It's a rack pull done with some added resistance from bands. We have used mini-, monster mini-, and light bands for this exercise. Of course, you need a rack that has band pegs and a sumo base, or you will have to use some fancy engineering to set the bands up. We usually quadruple the bands when doing this exercise.

Light bands are no joke and provide a massive amount of tension at the top of the lift. For some reason, these seem to carryover more for me than a regular rack deadlift. I don't know why. Maybe I was taking more branched

chain aminos at the time. Whatever the case, this is a great variation of an old standby. To see how this is set up, please see the deadlifts against bands section.

Max effort good mornings

The good morning isn't as popular as it once was for max effort work. I still believe that heavy good mornings are a great way to build your low back, hamstrings, and glutes. And there is no mistaking the results that many lifters have received from doing them.

During seminars, I get asked all the time about the form on a good morning. After many years, I have come to the realization that there are two types of good mornings—deadlift good mornings and squat good mornings. Deadlift good mornings are done in such a way as to mimic your form on the deadlift or at least give you a carryover to your deadlift. The squat good morning is the same. They are performed in such a way as to carryover to your squat.

Now that's not to say that one doesn't bleed into the other, but what this does is help the lifter understand what he is doing. It gives them a purpose with the lift. It let's them know why they are doing the movement.

A deadlift good morning is a greater range of motion. You almost want your back in the same position as you are when you begin a deadlift. You won't be parallel to the ground, but you will be close. A squat good morning should be done to help you strengthen the muscles that will help you fight your way out of a bad squat (obviously, if you are falling forward). This range of motion is abbreviated.

When I was a fat slob, the form on the good morning was such that I went down until my stomach hit my thighs. This put my back above parallel, but I still felt a great amount of work being done by my back. This was kind of a mix between

the two styles. However, when I really wanted to increase the effect on my low back, the weight came off and the range got deeper.

There is an obvious compromise to be made here. If you go deep as hell, the weight will come off the bar. Film yourself doing a good morning, and you will be surprised at how shallow you actually go.

Good morning

Let's get one thing straight when doing a good morning. Not many people keep their back completely arched during a good morning. I would say that most people's lower backs look about the same as someone who is doing a deadlift. I've seen hundreds of people deadlift and very few of them keep an arch in their lower back the entire time. Most people will arch their lower and upper back as hard as they can and (this is the important part) keep the same position throughout the lift. So while they may not be perfectly arched, they do a terrific job of keeping this position statically (i.e. it doesn't change once they begin the lift). This is about the same for a good morning.

I don't know if it's right or wrong. Everyone seems to describe exercises as they could be done, not as they are done. So I guess I should say, "Arch your lower back" for safety's sake, but the reality is that thousands of people maintain a "kinda arch" with no problem. Take it for what it's worth.

The problem comes when someone does a good morning or a deadlift and their back changes drastically. It begins to look similar to a dog that is taking a dump, massively bowed and painful. Avoid this.

Here is a form checklist on how to do a good morning properly:

- Head: Looking forward, pushed back into the bar

- Bar placement: This is usually about the same as when you squat. As you get more comfortable performing a good morning, this may change.
- Hand placement: The same as with the squat
- Stance: There are a myriad of stances to be used. A wide stance really hits my hips, and a close stance seems to mimic a conventional deadlift. I use two stances—wide and narrow.
- Descent: Once you are set up, begin by bracing your abs against your belt or just hold them as tight as possible. Push your stomach out as much as possible and hold your breath. As you begin going down, push your butt to the rear as much as possible. Grip the bar tightly to ensure that the bar doesn't roll off. Your knees should have a natural bend to them, but don't turn this into a quarter squat. Keep just enough bend to keep the stress off of your knees.

  Keep descending until you feel one of these things:

  1. Your belly hits your thighs.
  2. You almost pass out.
  3. You can feel your back rounding way more than it should.

- Ascent: Once you reach the required depth, arch your back as hard as you can and get back to the original position. Remember that the weight needs to be lifted with the back, hamstrings, and glutes, not your quads. So don't bend your knees on the way up. Too many people do this, and it takes away from the purpose of the exercise.

The best thing about a good morning is that minimal equipment (rack, straight bar, weights) is required, and it's one of the best ways to strengthen your low back, glutes, and hamstrings.

Good morning with buffalo bar

This is my second favorite way to do good mornings. As mentioned before, the buffalo bar has a slight camber to it (3–4 inches), and thus relieves much shoulder stress. Plus, it doesn't seem to roll off your back as much as a straight bar. I'm not sure why, but it does. And that is good enough for me.

Good morning with safety squat bar

You can have this one. I threw this out years ago and never want to see it again. Still, people have done it before, and this might be the exercise for you. Doing a good morning with a safety squat bar sucks. The yoke of the bar sits on your neck, and you feel like you are going to lose your head. Keeping my head attached to my body (as well as keeping sharp instruments away from my daddy parts) is a 24/7 job for me.

The only way that I like doing these is for higher reps and very light weight. To give you an example, I've done a standard good morning with 500 lbs for three repetitions. With the safety squat bar, I use 135–225 lbs.

Good morning with cambered bar

The cambered squat bar is the king of good mornings. The bar doesn't roll at all, and this makes the exercise incredibly comfortable. Plus, it seems like you can do much more weight with this bar.

Whatever the reason, I highly recommend this bar for good mornings. Just like squatting with the cambered bar, be careful of the swinging action.

Chain suspended good morning

This has become a favorite of many. A chain suspended good morning is done by hanging two chains at the top of the power rack (one on each side). Each of the chains should form a large loop connected by a strong clip or carabineer. Place the bar inside these chains. Wedge yourself under the bar and do a good morning.

These can also be done from pins, but it's not as comfortable. The chains allow the bar to sway, thus making it easier to manipulate your body underneath the bar and get into a better starting position. However, if you choose to do them off of pins, the idea is the same. You are performing a concentric only good morning.

People have theorized that this really helps your deadlift because both of these exercises start the same way—in the bottom position. It sounds cool, and maybe it's true. However, any kind of good morning is going to help your deadlift, especially if you have a weak lower back, which most people do.

So the question that everyone seems to ask is, "How high (or low) should the bar be?" You probably already know the answer—wherever you want it to be. Now, some people like to put the bar very low like 36 inches off of the ground. I'm not one of them. I just use my belly button as a measuring tool, which almost sounds dirty. I usually put the bar about an inch or two above my belly button (about 42 inches off of the ground). This seemed to give me enough range of motion to stimulate the muscles but not so low that I kill my back.

As with the standard good morning, you should strive to not turn this into a quarter squat. But it's not going to happen. So here's the deal. Use the Malcolm

X method of training—lift the bar by any means necessary. Essentially I'm giving you the OK to be a cheater. Why? Because as long as you set up the bar the same way each time, you will probably cheat the same way, too. By using the Malcolm X method, you will be able to break records and track progress without having to second guess yourself.

Oh, and watch your fingers. Don't let the bar slam down into the chains without fully knowing where your fingers and hands are.

Some other points to remember…I like to put safety pins underneath the barbell just in case. As for the size of the chain, I've seen anywhere from ½-inch chain to 3/8-inch chain. Whatever you do, don't skimp on chain.

Any bar can be used when doing this exercise.

Reverse band good morning

While I was on vacation one year, my training partner, Kevin, did these. Upon returning from vacation, he told me that he had done them. We both had a good laugh and moved on. I forgave him for it, and we never talked about the incident again.

Seated good morning

I was motivated to do these after I saw Chuck Vogelpohl perform them on one of the older Westside Barbell tapes. His range of motion was ridiculous, and he was moving some serious weight. I think he did 495 lbs for five or six reps.

I performed these by sitting on a dumbbell bench that I placed in a power rack. I placed my feet slightly in front of me and tried to put my head on the bench. After several months of screwing around with these, I did 500 lbs for one repetition. I thought I shot some of my spine on to the ceiling. I put this in the trophy case and haven't seen it since. I still think this exercise is awesome, but you had better be ready for some serious head pressure. It's a great exercise for the number two spot in your program if performed for slightly higher reps (5–10).

Max Effort Rotation for the Squat and Deadlift

One of the biggest things that you're going to have to figure out is how and when to do each exercise. There has been much confusion about this because many have dropped the max effort good mornings, and some noted that they only performed the good morning 70 percent of the time. So I'll give you some options on how to cycle the different exercises. You can play around with them to see how they work for you.

Cycle #1

These max effort cycles work well if you are using the old school max effort wave working up to a 3RM or 5RM. This is what many people have done before, and it

has worked very well. These cycles have exercises that are rotated every week so they're more geared toward an advanced lifter.

Week 1: Deadlift variation
Week 2: Squat variation
Week 3: Good morning variation
Week 4: Deadlift variation (same as week one)
Week 5: Squat variation (same as week two)
Week 6: Good morning variation (same as week three)

Example:
Week 1: Rack pulls
Week 2: Cambered bar box squats
Week 3: Good mornings
Week 4: Rack pulls
Week 5: Cambered bar box squats
Week 6: Good mornings

Another variation of the above cycle is:
Week 1: Deadlift variation
Week 2: Squat variation
Week 3: Good morning variation
Week 4: Deadlift variation (different than week one)
Week 5: Squat variation (different than week two)
Week 6: Good morning variation (different than week three)
Week 7: Deadlift variation (same as week one)
Week 8: Squat variation (same as week two)
Week 9: Good morning variation (same as week three)
Week 10: Deadlift variation (same as week four)
Week 11: Squat variation (same as week five)
Week 12: Good morning variation (same as week six)

Example:

Week 1: Rack pulls

Week 2: Low box squat

Week 3: Good mornings

Week 4: Deadlifts with chains

Week 5: High box squat with safety squat bar

Week 6: Suspended good mornings with cambered bar

Week 7: Rack pulls

Week 8: Low box squat

Week 9: Good mornings

Week 10: Deadlifts with chains

Week 11: High box squat with safety squat bar

Week 12: Suspended good mornings with cambered bar

Another variation is:

Week 1: Deadlift variation

Week 2: Squat variation

Week 3: Good morning variation

Week 4: No max effort work; just assistance work

Week 5: Deadlift variation (same as week one)

Week 6: Squat variation (same as week two)

Week 7: Good morning variation (same as week three)

Week 8: No max effort work; just assistance work

Example:

Week 1: Deadlifts off elevated surface

Week 2: Parallel box squats with buffalo bar

Week 3: Suspended good morning with cambered bar

Week 4: No max effort work; just assistance work

Week 5: Deadlifts off elevated surface

Week 6: Parallel box squats with buffalo bar
Week 7: Suspended good morning with cambered bar
Week 8: No max effort work; just assistance work

And still another variation:
Week 1: Deadlift variation
Week 2: Squat variation
Week 3: Good morning variation
Week 4: No max effort work; just assistance work
Week 5: Deadlift variation (different than week one)
Week 6: Squat variation (different than week two)
Week 7: Good morning variation (different than week three)
Week 8: No max effort work; just assistance work
Week 9: Deadlift variation (same as week one)
Week 10: Squat variation (same as week two)
Week 11: Good morning variation (same as week three)
Week 12: No max effort work; just assistance work
Week 13: Deadlift variation (same as week five)
Week 14: Squat variation (same as week six)
Week 15: Good morning variation (same as week seven)
Week 16: No max effort work; just assistance work

Example:
Week 1: Deadlifts off elevated surface
Week 2: Parallel box squats with buffalo bar
Week 3: Suspended good morning with cambered bar
Week 4: No max effort work; just assistance work
Week 5: Deadlifts with chains
Week 6: High box squat with safety squat bar
Week 7: Suspended good mornings with cambered bar
Week 8: No max effort work; just assistance work

Week 9: Deadlifts off elevated surface
Week 10: Parallel box squats with buffalo bar
Week 11: Suspended good morning with cambered bar
Week 12: No max effort work; just assistance work
Week 13: Deadlifts with chains
Week 14: High box squat with safety squat bar
Week 15: Suspended good mornings with cambered bar
Week 16: No max effort work; just assistance work

Cycle #2

These variations are for people who prefer not to use the good morning as part of their max effort rotation. Again, these are geared toward an advanced lifter.

Week 1: Deadlift variation
Week 2: Squat variation
Week 3: Deadlift variation (different than week one)
Week 4: Squat variation (different than week two)
Week 5: Deadlift variation (same as week one)
Week 6: Squat variation (same as week two)
Week 7: Deadlift variation (same as week three)
Week 8: Squat variation (same as week four)
Week 9: Deadlift variation (same as week one)
Week 10: Squat variation (same as week two)

Example:
Week 1: Deadlifts off elevated surface
Week 2: Parallel box squat with safety squat bar
Week 3: Deadlift with chains
Week 4: Parallel box squat with buffalo bar
Week 5: Deadlifts off elevated surface
Week 6: Parallel box squat with safety squat bar

Week 7: Deadlift with chains
Week 8: Parallel box squat with buffalo bar
Week 9: Deadlifts off elevated surface
Week 10: Parallel box squat with safety squat bar

Another variation:
Week 1: Deadlift variation
Week 2: Squat variation
Week 3: No max effort work; just assistance work
Week 4: Deadlift variation (same as week one)
Week 5: Squat variation (same as week two)
Week 6 No max effort work; just assistance work

Example:
Week 1: Deadlifts against bands
Week 2: Parallel box squats with buffalo bar
Week 3: No max effort work; just assistance work
Week 4: Deadlifts against bands
Week 5: Parallel box squats with buffalo bar
Week 6: No max effort work; just assistance work

Cycle #3

These variations are more geared toward a beginner or intermediate lifter. You perform the same max effort exercise for three weeks. In this scenario, you could do the old school method or the 5/3/1 method.

Week 1: Deadlift variation
Week 2: Deadlift variation (same as week one)
Week 3: Deadlift variation (same as week one)
Week 4: Squat variation
Week 5: Squat variation (same as week four)

Week 6 Squat variation (same as week four)
Week 7: Good morning Variation
Week 8: Good morning variation (same as week seven)
Week 9 Good morning variation (same as week eight)

Example:
Week 1: Deadlifts from elevated surface
Week 2: Deadlifts from elevated surface
Week 3: Deadlifts from elevated surface
Week 4: Parallel box squat with cambered bar
Week 5: Parallel box squat with cambered bar
Week 6 Parallel box squat with cambered bar
Week 7: Good mornings
Week 8: Good mornings
Week 9 Good mornings

The next scenarios use the same exercise for two weeks. You can work up to a 3RM in one week and a 1RM in the second week. Or you can work up to a 5RM in the first week and a 3RM in the second week. Or simply work up to a 1RM each week.

Week 1: Deadlift variation
Week 2: Deadlift variation (same as week one)
Week 3: Squat variation
Week 4: Squat variation (same as week three)
Week 5: Good morning variation
Week 6: Good morning variation (same as week five)

Example:
Week 1: Rack pulls
Week 2: Rack pulls

Week 3: Close stance squats with cambered bar
Week 4: Close stance squats with cambered bar
Week 5: Suspended good mornings with buffalo bar
Week 6: Suspended good mornings with buffalo bar

Wading through the BS for max effort squat/deadlift day

There is a lot to take in here—many exercises and many set and rep combinations. But let me clear things up with everyone. Despite what you think, you don't need a ton of different bars to get the job done. And you don't need to think too much. At least not right away. To save you a lot of trouble and embarrassment, let's put you on the right track.

Let's say that all you have is a regular bar. No boxes, no chains, no bands…nothing. This actually makes your life a little bit easier because your choices are limited.

Here are your possible selections for max effort exercises:

- Good mornings
- Olympic squats
- Parallel wide stance squats
- Front squats
- Deadlifts (conventional and sumo)
- Deadlifts off of elevated surfaces
- Rack pulls

This is plenty to work with, and you can make some great gains doing these movements.

Advice for the advanced lifter

The advanced lifter doesn't need a large selection of exercises. This is because he has gone through a ton of different exercises and now knows what lifts work.

He does experiment a little bit but usually has his “go to” exercises when he needs them. If you fall into this category, I want you to make a list of three deadlift variations and three squat variations that you think strengthen your lifts the most.

Now, take those six exercises and throw out two of them (one squat and one deadlift). Think really hard and be honest with yourself. Which of these lifts are the most important?

I want you to take these four lifts (two squat and two deadlift) and get really good at them. Cycle sets and reps and perfect your form. These lifts are the ones that you feel work best for you.

Here is my list:

Deadlift variations

- Rack deadlift
- Deadlift off elevated surface

Squat variations

- Safety squat bar to parallel box
- Cambered bar box squat to parallel box

Advice for the intermediate lifter

For the first couple of years of training using the Westside template, I rotated many exercises and finally settled on about three good morning variations, three squat variations, and three deadlift variations.

Good morning variations

- Good mornings
- Suspended good mornings with a straight bar

- Suspended good mornings with a cambered squat bar

Deadlift variations

- Rack pulls
- Reverse band deadlifts
- Deadlifts off elevated surface

Squat variations

- Low box squats with a straight bar
- Parallel box squats with a safety squat bar
- Parallel box squats with a cambered squat bar

If I felt like doing another variation, I would just throw it in the mix. This is because I had not tried a number of exercises, and I needed to figure out if they worked for me.

Advice for the beginner lifter

To me, a beginner lifter is someone who has no experience in the weight room or has only been lifting for 1–2 years with no guidance and little supervision. If that is the case, you don't need to be messing with max effort lifting, and you don't need a ton of exercises.

I highly recommend that you get your hands on the book, *Starting Strength*, by Mark Rippetoe and Lon Kilgore. This book explains how to properly and correctly perform the bench press, squat, deadlift, overhead press, and power clean. Get it, learn it, and understand how to do these lifts. It's the best book that I've ever read on performing and coaching the basic lifts.

Max Effort Rotation for the Bench Press

This is a little different than how you would cycle for the squat and deadlift. This is because you have three variations of lower body exercises (deadlift, squat, and good morning). With the bench press, you only have one—a press. Here are some ideas for cycling your max effort bench press movements.

Weak everywhere

This is designed to hit all parts of your bench press and is probably best for those who use a bench shirt. Still, I used this kind of rotation when I was not using a bench shirt and made excellent gains. I think part of the reason why is that I never used max effort work to train my weak spots. I used assistance work for that. The max effort training that I did focused on one thing—moving heavy weight. This rotation is based on that premise.

Week 1: Mid-range
Week 2: Low end
Week 3: Mid-range/lockout
Week 4: Low end
Week 5: Lockout

Example:
Week 1: 2-board press
Week 2: Floor press
Week 3: 3-board press
Week 4: Incline press
Week 5: 4-board press

Weak lockout

This is designed for people who use bench shirts or really need to work their top end strength.

Week 1: 3-board
Week 2: Floor press with three chains per side
Week 3: 4-board
Week 4: 2-board with bands (mini-bands, monster mini-bands, or light bands)
Week 5: Repeat

Other variations that can be used include the reverse band bench press, any board press with bands, a full range bench press with chains, and the 5-board press.

Raw dog

Raw lifting is a different animal than bench pressing with a shirt. It's easier in that you don't have to focus on shirt technique, lockout work, mid-range work, and low end work. With raw lifting—and I have said this numerous times—if you can get the bar halfway up, you should get the lift. If you don't, your technique is probably off. This is not a strength issue, but something that must be addressed with your technique. While it may be simpler, the gains for a raw lifter come much slower. So you must be patient.

Week 1: Floor press
Week 2: 2-board press
Week 3: Close grip bench press
Week 4: Incline
Week 5: Repeat

Other variations that can be used include the 3-board press, illegal wides, cambered bar bench press, and a full range bench press with chains or bands.

Anything goes

Most of the time, this is what I follow. Anything goes is simply walking into the weight room and picking an exercise, or at best, picking it the night before. Now,

some people hate doing this, and it doesn't fit well with their personality. That's fine, and I have no problems with that. However, remember what I said about max effort work (for me) being simply a way to move heavy weight? And my weak spots being strengthened by assistance work? This is because all I wanted to do on max effort day was have fun, break some records, and grow some bigger balls.

Max effort work is fun. Who the hell doesn't want to lift heavy? So here is the anything goes plan:

Week 1: Some of these
Week 2: Whatever
Week 3: Boards or maybe bands
Week 4: "Whatever you want to do. I don't care."
Week 5: Repeat

Max Effort Mistakes

Awful form

On many max effort lifts, your form is going to be a little messed up. You're going to be straining and squirming, and many times your body is going to be contorted into positions that are better suited for circus freaks. I have seen it, and I have done it.

Now, there is a difference between having form that is ok and having form that is dangerous. If you feel that your form has deteriorated to the point that you may get hurt, it's time to shut down or take some weight off the bar. Nothing gets accomplished with bad form, and nothing gets accomplished when you're hurt. You can either film yourself, or let your training partners monitor you. If you are a veteran lifter, you will know when your form is starting to break down. This is when you have to be smart and listen. Don't let your ego get in the way.

Too much variety

In the age of boards, boxes, bands, chains, and floor presses, there seems to be an endless amount of lifting options. This is a welcome relief to many people who have been doing the same workout and the same exercises for years. Unfortunately, this variety can also be detrimental. With so much variety, most people can't gauge how strong they're getting or which lifts are working and which are not. A good rule of thumb is to have 3–4 max effort lifts for the bench press, three for the squat, and three for the deadlift. Stick with these exercises for at least four months and see how you're doing.

Here are some ideas:

Max effort bench press

- 2-board
- 3-board
- Floor press
- Incline press

Max effort squat

- Safety squat bar box squat
- Cambered bar box squat
- Buffalo bar box squat

Max effort deadlift

- Reverse band deadlift
- Rack deadlift
- Deadlifts off elevated platform (2–4 inches)

No grip variation

When I first started doing max effort work for my bench press, all of it was performed with a close grip (index finger just outside the smooth part of the

knurling). I made progress but stalled out after about a year. Needing a change, I widened my grip, and my lifts went up. Now, this is not a rallying cry for everyone to widen their grip. However, I think that too many people stick with one grip on each bench press variation and rarely change. So how do you do this?

Let's say that you use the four max effort exercises for the bench press listed above (floor press, incline press, 2-board, and 3-board). Each exercise is performed for 1–2 weeks each. Do two cycles with a close grip. This will last 4–8 weeks depending on how long you stay with an exercise. After this period, perform the same exercises, but use a wider grip. This will allow you to set and attempt to break records for each lift with each grip.

Not recording your progress

Unless you have a great memory, it's almost impossible to remember all of your max effort records. This becomes especially difficult if you use chains/bands on some lifts. And why waste mental energy on something that you can easily document?

One of the best ways to monitor your progress is to use a grease board. List your max effort lifts on one side and your records on another. Only list the max effort exercises that are used most often to prevent your record board from getting too cluttered.

By keeping accurate records of your max effort progress, you can have something to shoot for on every max effort workout. This will also allow you to see your progress and either make changes or keep forging ahead with your training. If you don't have the opportunity to use a grease board, a simple spiral notebook will do.

Max Effort Bench Press Tips

If you are guessing your 1RM, always err on the side of too light. Once you know an approximate number for your 1RM on each movement, use the following set/rep scheme.

Notice that the percentages start at 50 percent. This is NOT your first set. Warm up to that first set using any method that you want. Many times, it may take 2–3 sets until you're ready for the 50 percent set. For a stronger, more experienced lifter ("experienced" is code word for always beat up and hurting), it may take five or more sets to be ready for your 50 percent set.

1 X 5 at 50%
1 X 3 at 60%
1 X 2 at 70%
1 X 1 at 80%
1 X 1 at 90%
1 X 1 at 95%
1 X 1 at 100% (or new PR)

Here's how it would work using a real life example. This lifter has a best 2-board press of 450 lbs.

225 X 5
275 X 3
315 X 2
365x X
405 X 1
425 X 1
455–460 X 1

Now, let's say that you don't know your best performance on a floor press, but you know your 1RM on the bench press. Your best bench press is 315 lbs.

Ninety percent of 315 lbs is 285 lbs. So your goal is to perform a floor press with 285 lbs. Thus 285 lbs = 100 percent.

145 X 5
170 X 3
200 X 2
230 X 1
255 X 1
270 X 1
285 X 1

Because this is your first time performing the floor press, I would advise you to stop. Don't worry if this isn't a true max effort. It's not going to kill you if you don't work up. You've got another week of the exercise. In the next week, you have a new goal to shoot for.

Because your new goal is probably going to be fairly close to 285 lbs, I would advise you to use the same weight or fairly close to the weight that you used before for your warm-up sets. If you feel like you were good for at least 300 lbs, base the percentages on that number (300). The percentages will become a thing of the past with experience. You will begin to know instinctively how to work up to a 1RM. These percentages are great for lifters new to this program and for coaches and trainers who want something more concrete (and something they can put on paper) for their athletes.

Once you establish a record with a certain grip, STAY WITH THAT GRIP! While it's nice to use different grips and more variation, you won't ever know how you are progressing if you constantly use different grips.

Max Effort Waves

Bulgarian method, part one

This is a three-week phase designed for those who have tremendous work capacity. This is NOT for beginners! For those who perform this cycle, you should have at least eight weeks of preparation work that includes conditioning and progressively training your body for a large amount of volume and intensity. The same exercise should be used for three weeks. The last week is a deload week. After doing the one exercise, not much else is done because the tremendous load will leave you physically and mentally exhausted.

A good way to prepare for this cycle is to perform the first seven sets (from 50–100 percent) and then drop down to 90 percent for one set. After that set, stop the workout. In the second week, add in one more set at or above 90 percent. Deload the following week and begin the training cycle listed below. I don't recommend performing this style of training for very long because it can be very difficult on the body and mind.

Week 1
1 X 5 at 50%
1 X 2 at 70%
1 X 1 at 80%
1 X 1 at 90%
1 X 1 at 95%
1 X 1 at 100%
1 X 1 at 90%
1 X 1at 95%
1 X 1 at 100+% (try to beat your previous record)

Week 2: Same as week one (same exercise/set and rep scheme)

Week 3: This is a deload week (use the same exercise) .

1 X 5 at 50%

1 X 3 at 60%

1 X 2 at 70%

1 X 1 at 80%

Notes:

- The same exercise should be used for all three weeks.
- This program is for advanced lifters and those who have a large work capacity.
- You must prepare for this wave. Don't jump right into it.

Bulgarian method, part two

Week 1

1 X 5 at 50%

1 X 3 at 60%

1 X 2 at 70%

1 X 1 at 80%

1 X 1 at 90%

1 X 1 at 95%

1 X 1 at 100%

Continue doing singles at 90 percent until your speed drops off in two consecutive sets. Some people are faster than others, but you will know the difference between an "easy" 90 percent lift and a real grinder.

Week 2: Use the same lift from the previous week and base your percentages off of last week's max.

1 X 5 at 50%

1 X 3 at 60%

1 X 2 at 70%

1 X 1 at 80%

1 X 1 at 90%
1 X 1 at 90%
1 X 1 at 90%
1 X 1 at 90%
1 X 1 at 90%
1 X 1 at 90%

Week 3: Work up to a new 1RM.
1 X 5 at 50%
1 X 3 at 60%
1 X 2 at 70%
1 X 1 at 80%
1 X 1 at 90%
1 X 1 at 95%
1 X 1 at 100%

Old school method, part one

This is the traditional max effort method and probably the most popular. In this cycle, you will have three lifts at or above 90 percent—the recommended number of lifts (in that percent range) according to Prilepin's chart. When using this method, change the lift every week or every other week. This has been done for years at Westside Barbell with incredible results.

1 X 5 at 50%
1 X 3 at 60%
1 X 2 at 70%
1 X 1 at 80%
1 X 1 at 90%
1 X 1 at 95%
1 X 1 at 100%

Notes:

- This is the most popular method.
- Switch exercises every 1–2 weeks.

Old school method, part two

1 X 5 at 50%

1 X 3 at 60%

1 X 2 at 70%

1 X 1 at 80%

1 X 1 at 90%

1 X 1 at 100%

1 X 1 at 90% of 95%

Old school method, part three (with some hypertrophy)

1 X 5 at 50%

1 X 3 at 60%

1 X 2 at 70%

1 X 1 at 80%

1 X 1 at 90%

1 X 1 at 95%

1 X 1 at 100%

2 X 8–10 at 70%

Six-week progressive overload

This method can be done two different ways. The first way is to pick one exercise and perform a six- week wave. This is best done using an exercise that you are very familiar with and know your max on. Obviously, this is easier for advanced lifters who know their max effort lifts.

Here is the six-week program:

Week 1: 4 X 6 at 65%
Week 2: 3 X 6 at 70%
Week 3: 3 X 6 at 75%
Week 4: 4 X 3 at 80%
Week 5: 3 X 2 at 85%
Week 6: 2 X 1 at 90%

For example, let's say that you have floor pressed 300 lbs. A six-week cycle would look like this:

Week 1: 4 X 6 at 195 lbs
Week 2: 3 X 6 at 210 lbs
Week 3: 3 X 6 at 225 lbs
Week 4: 4 X 3 at 240 lbs
Week 5: 3 X 2 at 255 lbs
Week 6: 2 X 1 at 270 lbs

Many people think that the first couple of weeks feel too light and aren't hard enough. Don't get brainwashed into thinking that every workout has to be extremely heavy and difficult.

Another variation of this program is to use a different exercise each week. Because this is a six-week plan, you will notice that the volume will be significantly increased during your workouts. Because of this, I would monitor your accessory and supplemental work. Be careful that you don't overtrain.

Week 1: 4 X 6 at 65%
Week 2: 3 X 6 at 70%
Week 3: 3 X 6 at 75%
Week 4: 4 X 3 at 80%
Week 5: 3 X 2 at 85%

Week 6: 2 X 1 at 90%

The basic premise on how to use this training is to max out on whatever max effort exercise you are doing. Then drop down and perform a certain amount of sets/reps at a given percentage of the max that you just did on the very same exercise. For example:

Week 1: 2-board press, work up to 500 X 1 and then 4 X 6 at 325 lbs (65% of 500)
Week 2: Floor press, work up to 455 X 1 and then 3 X 6 at 315 lbs (70% of 455)
Week 3: Incline press, work up to 375 x 1 and then 3 X 6 at 280 lbs (75% of 375)
And so on…
Because the max effort movement takes longer than usual, I recommend super setting lat work and upper back work between the sets. This will allow you to keep you workout time fairly short.

Three-week method
This is a three-week cycle using the same exercise for all three weeks. This is great for lifters at all levels—intermediate to advanced. It allows intermediate lifters to get used to an exercise and form, and it provides advanced lifters with a lower intensity for two weeks, which gives their bodies time to recover. The percents listed below are estimates for an advanced lifter. An intermediate lifter may be able to use +2.5% on the last set.

Week 1
1 X 5 at 50%
1 X 3 at 60%
1 X 2 at 70%
1 X 1 at 80%
1 X 5 at 85%

Week 2

1 X 5 at 50%

1 X 3 at 60%

1 X 2 at 70%

1 X 1 at 80%

1 X 1 at 85%

1 X 3 at 90%

Week 3

1 X 5 at 50%

1 X 3 at 60%

1 X 2 at 70%

1 X 1 at 80%

1 x 1 at 90%

1 X 1 at 95%

1 X1 at 100%

Keep fresh three-week method

This is another three-week cycle that won't kill you in the first two weeks. It's great for the advanced lifter who needs a break during his training cycle. The first two weeks are pretty easy, and the last week is balls out. The same exercise is used for all three weeks.

Week 1

1 X 5 at 50%

1 X 3 at 60%

1 X 2 at 70%

1 X 1 at 80%

1 X 5 at 80%

Week 2

1 X 5 at 50%

1 X 3 at 60%

1 X 2 at 70%

1 X 1 at 80%

1 X 1 at 85%

1 X 3 at 85%

Week 3

1 X 5 at 50%

1 X 3 at 60%

1 X 2 at 70%

1 X 1 at 80%

1 X 1 at 90%

1 X 1 at 95%

1 X 1 at 100%

Repetition deload

In this max effort method, take one exercise, perform it with max effort for two weeks, and deload in the third week. The third week is usually a high repetition day with dumbbells using exercises such as dumbbell bench presses, dumbbell incline presses, or dumbbell floor presses. A sample wave looks like this:

Week 1: Floor press

1 X 5 at 50%

1 X 3 at 60%

1 X 2 at 70%

1 X 1 at 80%

1 X 1 at 90%

1 X 1 at 95%

1 X 1 at 100%

Week 2: Floor press

1 X 5 at 50%

1 X 3 at 60%

1 X 2 at 70%

1 X 1 at 80%

1 X 1 at 90%

1 X 1 at 95%

1 X 1 at 100+% (try to break a record from last week)

Week 3: Dumbbell bench press

3–5 X 8–20

When picking the weight for the dumbbell bench press, start with a very light weight and work up from there. For example, I like to do my last two sets of dumbbell bench work with 150-lb dumbbells. So a workout will look like this:

35 X 15

55 X 10

80 X 10

100 X 10

115 X 10

130 X 10

150 X 8

150 X 8

There is not an exact set/rep scheme when using dumbbells. The point of this training workout is to do some lighter repetition work. If you understand why you are doing what you are doing, the workouts will make sense.

Some like to take a pair of dumbbells and perform as many reps in three sets as possible. They record the number and try to break it at a later time. Others try to break a repetition record with dumbbells. For example, if my best set with the 130-lb dumbbells is 25 reps, I will try to break that record. If you need a true deload, use the dumbbells but keep the perceived intensity very low (i.e. don't kill yourself; just try to get a little blood in your muscles).

Two-week method

This is something that I learned from Buddy Morris, who was formerly the strength coach for the Cleveland Browns and the University of Pittsburgh. This has been slightly modified, but the spirit remains the same. Basically, you perform a max effort exercise for two weeks. The first week is used to get the body used to the lift and a heavy (but not maximal) load. The second week is an all-out effort where you try to break your personal record.

Week 1

1 X 5 at 50%

1 X 3 at 60%

1 X 2 at 70%

1 X 1 at 80%

1 X 1 at 85%

1 X 1 at 90%

1 X 1 at 92.5%

Week 2

1 X 5 at 50%

1 X 3 at 60%

1 X 2 at 70%

1 X 1 at 80%

1 X 1 at 90%

1 X 1 at 95%

1 X 1 at 100%

Notice that in the first week you work up to 92.5 percent of your 1RM. You can do this last set, cut it out, or do another set at 90 percent. The point of this workout is to continue handling heavy weight, not mentally and physically fry your body. Remember that when choosing your attempts.

Timed max effort work

This is something that is new to me. I have NOT done this yet so I will write this with caution. However, Mark McLaughlin, a coach who I know and trust, has used it. He got this idea from the book, *Explosive Power and Jumping Ability for All Sports* by Tadeusz Starzynksi and Henryk Sozanski, PhD.

With this method, you begin with 50 percent of your max. Perform six repetitions and time the set with a stopwatch. Perform the reps as quickly as possible, but DO NOT let your form suffer. I suggest doing a couple of warm-up sets with the 50 percent before doing the test set of six repetitions. These will warm-up your body and help get your rhythm down. You should fall within 6.5–8.5 seconds.

Add one second to the time. For example, if it took you 7.3 seconds to do six repetitions, your time should now be 8.3 seconds. For your second set, add 10–20 lbs to the bar and try to complete the set in less than 8.3 seconds (or whatever time you came up with). Add 10–20 lbs to the bar for every set that follows and try to complete the movement in the prescribed timeframe. When you can’t complete a set at or within the prescribed timeframe, the workout is over. Move on to the next exercise.

Try to complete more sets in every workout. Using a stopwatch can help quantify the work but don’t let your form breakdown.

Working up to a 3RM

There are a number of ways to work to a 3RM:

1 X 5 at 50%
1 X 3 at 60%
1 X 2 at 70%
1 X 1 at 80%
1 X 3 at 90%

Or:

1 X 5 at 50%
1 X 3 at 60%
1 X 3 at 70%
1 X 3 at 80%
1 X 3 at 90%

For more volume, you can try the following set and rep structure. This is a ton of work so make sure you're ready.

1 X 5 at 50%
1 X 3 at 60%
1 X 3 at 65%
1 X 3 at 70%
1 X 3 at 75%
1 X 3 at 80%
1 X 3 at 85%
1 X 3 at 90%

After you establish your 3RM, you can always look for ways to improve it.

Working up to a 5RM

1 X 5 at 50%

1 X 3 at 60%

1 X 3 at 65%

1 X 3 at 70%

1 X 3 at 75%

1 X 3 at 80%

1 X 5 at 85%

Or:

1 X 5 at 50%

1 X 3 at 60%

1 X 2 at 70%

1 X 1 at 80%

1 X 5 at 85%

Or:

1 X 5 at 50%

1 X 5 at 60%

1 X 5 at 65%

1 X 5 at 70%

1 X 5 at 75%

1 X 5 at 80%

1 X 5 at 85%

Mucho volume

I did this a couple of times just for the hell of it. I don't know why, but it sounded like a good idea. The point of this training is to do a ton of volume in a max effort

sort of way. We started with 135 lbs (doesn't matter what exercise, but I believe it was a 2-board press with monster mini-bands) and added approximately 5 percent for each set. Each set was performed for three repetitions. I approximated my max at around 400 lbs. So I added 20 lbs to each set. This was a bitch.

135 X 3
155 X 3
175 X 3
195 X 3
215 X 3
235 X 3
255 X 3
275 X 3
295 X 4
315 X 3
335 X 3
355 X 3

I tried 375 lbs and only got two reps so I was done. Again, this is just stupidity, but it was fun for a change of pace.

Super Training Section

Super Training tip #1: Keep all powerlifting gear, including a belt, off for as long as you can handle it while working up in weight. Add gear during the workout as you see fit. Most do not realize that there are many ways to accomplish max effort work. You don't need to perform a lift until you miss. I like to see my lifters make their lifts nearly every time. You can get a lot out of going 90–95 percent. Most don't realize that making lifts keeps the mood positive and allows the lifter to build confidence, which is a major factor in lifting. I believe that missing a lift should be pretty rare. In fact the biggest strides at Super Training normally come from guys who will make their last lift and still have something left in the tank.

After you reach or come near your goal weight for the day, you have a few choices to make. You can:

1. Go up in weight (traditional max effort)
2. Do multiple sets with the same weight
3. Drop the weight and perform three sets of three or three set of five reps

Here's a quick example using the safety squat bar box squat:

135, 1 X 5
225, 1 X 5
Add a belt
275, 1 X 5
315, 1 X 3
365, 1 X 1 (tough lift)
Drop weight to get more volume
275, 3 X 5

Super Training tip # 2: If your max effort lower body days get confusing because they cross over and overlap, try having one day that focuses on one lift. For me and some others at Super Training, Tuesday's main focus is on deadlift

training. The main focus on Saturdays is squat training. At Super Training, we also like to employ two barbell movements. We use a main exercise first followed by a secondary movement. After that, we perform supplemental work. Let's take a look at how we do things at Super Training.

Sample workout # 1
Multiple sets with the same weight
Main event: Low box squat
135, 1 X 5
225, 1 X 5
315, 1 x 3
Add belt
365, 1 X 1
405, 1 X 1 (grinded the weight out, but it was a good lift)
405, 1 X 1 (better form on this one; the weight felt easier)
405, 1 X 1 (that one felt heavy, but again, I made the lift)

Second barbell movement: Deadlifts off floor
135, 1 X 5
225, 1 X 5
275, 1 X 3
315, 1 X 3
365, 1 X 1
405, 1 X 1
455, 2 X 1

Sled, 5 trips of 100 feet each with four 45-lb plates
Weighted sit-ups, 4 X 10
Green band good mornings, 3 X 20

Sample Workout # 2

Deadlift while standing on mats

135, 1 X 5

225, 1 X 5

275, 1 X 3

315, 1 X 3

365, 1 X 1

405, 1 X 1

455, 1 X 1

475, miss

Super Training tip # 3: We often punish those who miss lifts by making them lower the weight and do three sets of 3–5 reps. This isn't just pointless peaking order BS. It actually helps people get stronger.

Reverse band box squat

135, 1 X 10

225, 1 X 10

315, 1 X 5

405, 1 X 3

455, 1 X 3

495, 2 X 3

The focus of the reverse band squats was to get some work in. You do NOT want two, full, max effort movements. One is heavy and the other is to get more work in.

Kettle swings, 3 X 15

Pull-down abs, four sets

Coming soon from Jim Wendler:

- Hardcore Conditioning
- Raw Training
- Training the Yoke
- Weak Point Training
- Exercise Index Book
- Workouts I'll Never Do Again
- A Man, A Plan, and a Rack
- Max Effort Manual
- Band/Chain Training
- Training for High School Football
- Complete 5/3/1 Method
- Training Three Days a Week (already published)

Dixie Rose

About the Author

Jim Wendler played football at the University of Arizona where he scored a few touchdowns. He has since squatted 1000 lbs, fathered a son, wrote some books, played in some bands, and is happily employed by Elite Fitness Systems.

About Supertraining Gym

Mark "Jackass" Bell is the owner and coach of the strongest gym on the west coast—Super Training. Super Training currently has two 800-lb benchers, three 1000-lb squatters, and five lifters who have totaled over 2000 lbs. Mark has the highest total in California history with a 2502-lb total at 308 lbs. His best lifts are a 1025-lb squat, an 804-lb bench, and a 716-lb deadlift.

Mark has made some of the most informative powerlifting DVDs ever seen with his *Never Enough* series. He is featured in the blockbuster documentary, *Bigger, Stronger, Faster*. For further information about Super Training, check out www.supertrainingGym.com. Mark can be contacted directly at supertraining06@yahoo.com.

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