

Six Insane New Power Rack Exercises

By Nick Nilsson, The Mad Scientist of Muscle

The power rack is one of the most versatile pieces of equipment in the gym, IF you know how to use it. These six unique, new exercises will help you get MUCH more out of your rack. These are taken directly from my book "[The Best Power Rack Exercises You've Never Heard Of](#)."



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Please Note: Any exercise program contains an element of risk. Be aware that the exercises in the book may not be familiar to you and, even though every attempt has been made to ensure safe instruction, how and if you decide to execute the exercises is ultimately your responsibility. Consult your physician before taking part in any exercise program. [By reading the information in this book you hereby agree to the Terms and Conditions of use.](#)

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Back-Off Bench Dumbbell Press



The version of the dumbbell bench press I'm going to show you here today is the **ULTIMATE** beach body exercise.

This going to force continuous tension on your chest while placing **TREMENDOUS** tension on the abdominals as well... (you'll see why in a second).

The Back-Off-Bench Press is a unique movement for the chest that **LOOKS** like a standard dumbbell bench press...until you look a little closer. You'll be doing the bench press with your upper back hanging off the end of the bench.

And while it is true that you'll be forced to use less weight than in a normal bench press, I found this technique basically **FORCED** the pecs into continuous tension. I got a **GREAT** pump using lighter dumbbells and hit the core at the same time (and especially the rectus abdominis six-pack muscles).

This exercise is really the ideal beach body exercise...chest, abs and arms all in one shot :)

Don't let that "beach body" thing fool you, though...this exercise is **VERY** tough and actually very valuable. Its definitely one I'm going to be including in my training more often.

How to Do It:

To perform this one, you'll need a few things for the set up...dumbbells (they don't need to be heavy), a bench and something to brace your legs under. I used a power rack with a loaded barbell set on the rails to brace my legs on and that worked perfectly (Smith machine will actually be useful for this). You can also use just about anything else you can think of that you can brace your legs under...even a partner pushing down on your knees, if that's what you've got.

Here's what my setup looked like...a flat bench inside the power rack with the barbell set in the rails at about hip height. You'll need to adjust the bench position under the bar, depending on how it feels when you're doing the exercise. I've got the bar basically over the midpoint of the bench.

The first time you do this, start with **LIGHT** weight until you get a feel for the exercise. If you're

using the rack setup, just set a couple of plates on the bar to keep it from coming up.

This is one of the **ONLY** times I'll ever recommend you set your feet on a bench for bench pressing...in a normal press, you need the stability of your feet on the floor. In this version, your knees will be locked under the bar, giving you stability there.

Grab your dumbbells. I'm using a pair of 65 lb dumbbells in the demo here. Stand up and set the dumbbells on end on your thighs.



Sit down on the bench then shuffle yourself forward so that your hips are a bit closer under the bar. Again, you'll need to experiment to get the position right for you.





Raise one leg up and brace it under the bar. Then get the other leg up. If you've got a partner to hand the weights to you, this will be even easier - just get into position on the bench first, then have them hand the dumbbells to you.



Lie back on the bench and feel for where your upper back is. With the moderate weights I'm using, I had the end of the bench right in the center of my shoulder blades. Make sure you have at least that much of your upper back off the end of the bench.

Now bring the dumbbells back and into position for the bench press.

THIS is where your abs are going to fire HARD and stay contracted HARD for the duration of the exercise. Its also the reason why the pecs are going to be contracted continuously...your back has nothing to brace on, therefore even at lockout, the pecs are forced to contract to

stabilize and hold the weight.

Taking the back support away places HUGE demands on the entire upper body.

Now press up. Do this exercise at a moderate pace, under control the whole way. You're using lighter weight so go for FEEL with this one and squeeze the pecs at the top. Your abs will contract no matter what you do here.



The first time you do this, the weight will be something you'll need to adjust. Go up to about half of what you'd normally use for a heavy set of dumbbell bench press and do 6 to 8 reps with it.

When you're done, you can either just drop the weights to the floor (which most gyms don't like), or move them back up onto your thighs then use your knee-bracing to do a sit-up.



Then just stand up and set your dumbbells down and you're good.

Like I said, try it with a lighter weight the first time you do it but definitely give it a try if you've got the equipment to do it - I was very impressed with how strongly this targets the pecs and the core.

It's a nice alternative when maybe your joints are a bit beat up for doing heavier benching and you still want a strong pec workout or if you want to get the incredible abdominal work you'll get from it without the repeated spinal flexion of a crunch or sit-up movement.

Back-Off Bench Press Variations

The first variation of this exercise is done on an incline bench set to a small incline of about 20 degrees or so.

The only thing I would recommend to do differently than I did here would be to raise the level of the bracing bar up a few inches to make it easier to get into position. Other than that, GREAT upper pec exercise.



One of the nice things about this "back off" setup is that your shoulder blades are able to move more freely, which I find allows for better stretch on the upper pecs at the bottom and a great contraction at the top.

The last variation is the dumbbell flye using the same setup.



If you need a change-up in your chest training, these are some nice options...theyll also really teach you what isometric ab training with resistance can do for you as well.

Nilsson Curls



If you want to TRULY maximize your bicep mass, you're going to LOVE this exercise.

The reason I named it after myself is that it basically summarizes what I'm all about...doing everything completely "backwards" and getting MUCH better results.

The Nilsson Curl looks almost exactly like a chin-up. In fact, another name I've called this exercise is the "Forearm-Braced Chin-Up". Because what you'll be doing IS a chin-up...but you'll be doing that chin-up with your forearms braced against another bar so that the VAST majority of the tension goes to your biceps instead of your back.

You'll be using this bracing to change the fulcrum (pivot point) of the exercise from the shoulder to the elbow.

You'll need to be able to do probably 8-10 or so regular chins before you can really use this exercise effectively.

To do this exercise, you'll need a rack or a chin-up bar that allows you to set another close underneath it.

Set the racking pins (where you would normally rack the bar on a squat, for instance) to the highest point you can on the rack.

Now move the safety rails up to a point that is about 12-18 inches below that. Adjust this difference based on the length of your own forearms.

Set a bar on the top racking pins and set another bar on the safety rails, pushed up against the uprights. It's going to look like two rungs of a ladder.

If you have a power rack that has pins you can slide in and out of the frame (I don't - mine are integrated right into the rack) you can also more easily get this set up by setting one safety rail in the top set of holes then the other safety rail in a set of holes below (making your own ladder, essentially).

Now get in the rack and take a close, underhand grip on the top bar. Your forearms should be braced up against the bottom bar, just above your elbows. Your arms should be straight at the bottom.



Now start doing a chin-up. As you pull yourself up, your forearms are pressed against the bottom bar, changing it to a biceps-oriented movement.



Pull yourself all the way up to the top, focusing on getting a hard contraction in the biceps.



Come down under control and **DO NOT** slam into the bottom position. Your forearms are braced and if you slam down, your elbows will take the brunt of it.

As you get stronger with it, you can also add weight by holding a dumbbell between your feet or wearing a dip belt. But that's **VERY** advanced. This exercise is just **BRUTAL** even with just your bodyweight.





I recommend you do this exercise FIRST in your bicep routine. It requires a lot of strength and you'll be better off doing it when fresh.

Go for 3-4 sets of as many reps as you can get with good form.

Conversely, if you want to specialize on your biceps, one set of this exercise done to near failure at the end of every single workout you do (not just for biceps...every workout) is going dramatically improve your bicep size and strength fast.

Frankenstein Plus Dumbbell Squats



This is a phenomenal exercise for developing strength in the muscles that help prevent the torso from tilting forward during a Front Squat.

Essentially, it's a "hands free" Front Squat done holding a dumbbell in those hands that are free. This substantially increases the loading on the anterior core "support" muscles, the front delts and the entire trapezius muscle so that when you go back to doing regular Front Squats, you won't tip forward as easily, even with heavier loads.

The hands-free squat on it's own is known as a "Frankenstein Squat" or a "Zombie Squat."

To do this one, you'll need a rack and a dumbbell. Set the rack rails to the bottom height of a Front Squat - I recommend doing these "bottoms up" Anderson Squat style.

I've got 135 lbs on the bar and I'm holding a 20 lb dumbbell. You really don't need much weight for these because of the dual resistance and where it's located out in front of you.

Squat down under the bar, then get it racked across your front delts. Pick up the dumbbell and hold it horizontally by the "bells."



Now stand up...



Come all the way up to the top, keeping your arms horizontal.



Then come back down under control. Let the bar set fully back down on the rails (primarily so you can breathe), then go again.

I like this one for low reps (e.g. 3-5). To do higher reps would require a very light weight and decrease the specific strength-building effects of the exercise.

And yes, you will likely sound like you're being murdered by a monster as you're doing it. Its a very different way to load the body and it is extremely challenging.

Corner Rack Pull-Ups



The pull-up is a classic bodyweight exercise for developing the lats. This variation takes the pull-up to a whole new level of stretch and tension on the lats, effectively targeting the outermost fibers of the lats for improving back width.

Its very simple. Instead of doing pull-ups on a regular straight bar, you will instead do them in the corner of a power rack, gripping onto the top cross-beams.

The key with this exercise is that you will grip with your palms facing **OUTWARDS**, away from your body. As you pull-up, you want to focus on actually **PUSHING** outwards against the beams. This helps take the biceps and brachialis out of the movement, putting even more focus on the lats.

As well, you will also use a thumbless (false) grip, which further takes the biceps out.

You'll need to be strong enough to do at least 7-10 regular pull-ups before using this one.

Start from a dead hang at the bottom. Make sure you still maintain some tension in the shoulder joints.



Now begin the pull-up by activating the lats and pushing outwards against the beams. This will put massive tension on the outermost fibers of the lats. You will feel this from the very first

rep.

Use a very controlled, zero-momentum movement here. This is absolutely critical. There should be no pumping or power pulling here. Feel your lats activating strongly as you pull up.



Come all the way up as high as you can.



Lower slowly, coming back down into the bottom position. At the bottom, let the shoulder blades come up to get a full stretch on the lats. Again, don't let tension out of the shoulder joints. This is a very controlled movement.

I recommend performing 3-4 sets of as many quality reps as you can get.

Corner Rack Pull-Ups With Lateral Band Tension

Now we're going to add some constant directional resistance in the form of a band. This is going to put even MORE tension onto those lat fibers.

I'm using a small 42 inch band looped in half.

If you need bands, [click here to go to my recommended supplier](#) (use coupon code "RBTFFITSTEP" to get 10% off any band packages on that page).



Put your hands through the loops of the bands and set them on your wrists.



Now the fun begins...

Grip the rack with your left hand, then stretch the band and grip it with your right hand. You'll feel the constant tension immediately.



This is going to force your lats to not only pull you up, but also fight to keep the hands from being pulled inwards at the same time. It is absolutely brutal and incredibly effective.



Then perform the pull-up, just like you did in the original version.



These will be tougher reps...the constant stretch is extremely demanding.

Perform 2-3 sets of this one.

Conclusion

Start with the regular Corner Rack Pull-Up and make sure you feel it exactly where and how you need to feel it. Once you get comfortable with that, you can add in the lateral band tension and really put it over the top.

After working these hard, you will feel soreness in your lats that you've NEVER felt before. I

found it not only got the outermost fibers, it really targeted the lower lats nicely as well, especially when you make sure to pull up as high as you possibly can.

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Rear Delt Rack-Rail Lateral Raises



If you have an issue developing your rear delts (and in particular, feeling your rear delts working when you try and train them), this is an exercise you will absolutely want to try.

The normal Bent-Over Lateral Raise is a good exercise for rear delts...as long as you have the muscle control and focus needed to really make sure you're getting the contraction in the actual rear delts and not letting the larger, stronger muscles of the upper back take over.

What were going to do with the exercise is FORCE the rear delts into an optimal peak contracted position and give you the time and opportunity to make sure it happens.

One of the problems with rear delt lateral raises is the instability of the dumbbells. When it comes to developing the rear delts, because of the propensity of the larger upper back muscles to take over, you can actually want to minimize instability. This can be pretty effectively done by using a flye machine facing backwards.

If you don't have that, or if you want something even BETTER, try this.

You'll need to use a power rack for it as you're going to be using the safety rails as stoppers to brace your wrists against.

Set the rails to about 3 inches or below waistband height. You can always adjust this as you experiment with the exercise.



Grab a pair of LIGHT dumbbells (and do I mean light...I'm only using 10 lb dumbbells here and that was plenty).

Get in the bottom position of the rear delt lateral raise.



Now...I've got one more trick for you...

Instead of performing the raise with a neutral wrist position, I want you to do a reverse wrist extension first. Basically, just bring your knuckles upwards. This helps take the upper back muscles out of the movement.



As you come up in the lateral raise, try to transcribe a wide arc with the dumbbells, as though using them to wipe the inside of a large bowl.



Come all the way up until your wrists contact the underside of the rails.



Now the REAL fun begins...

Keep contracting the rear delts against the solid bracing of the rails....while you're also holding the weights up. This is called an Overcoming Isometric (where you're pushing against an immovable object).

Now, it gets worse...

To achieve a true MAXIMUM contraction, while you're holding your wrists against the rails, bring your chest down towards your knees a little more, using the bracing against the rails to keep forcing your wrists up. The bracing helps tamp down the instability of that peak contracted position, allowing you to focus the contraction on those elusive rear delts.



Hold this for at least 5 seconds or more and squeeze your rear delts HARD.

This will be extremely painful because of the multiple types of contraction and the forcing of your body into optimal peak contraction position.

Its not often you'll be screaming when using 10 lb weights...this could be just the occasion.

By the time you've done a full of set of 8-10 reps, your rear delts will have an incredible, almost painful pump...they will be lit up in a way that you may not have ever felt before, especially if you've really gotten your mind into the muscle and focused on that contraction.

In terms of sets, I would actually recommend just one or maybe two sets of this one at the end of a shoulder workout, taken essentially to muscular failure. You don't want a lot of training volume for this one...you want targeted tension.

Bottom line, if you have an issue with rear delts, try this one. Its an exercise that will help you laser-target your rear delts like nothing else.

You can also perform this method with [lateral raises](#) and [front raises](#).

Rack Glute-Ham Raises



The Glute-Ham Raise bench is one of the BEST pieces of equipment you can use for developing the posterior chain (the powerful muscles that run down the back side of the body...i.e. lower back, glutes, and hamstrings).

These muscles are the true power source of your body and are critical for squats, deadlifts, and all forms of Olympic lifting.

However, if your gym doesn't have a GHR bench or you train at home and there's no room for another piece of equipment (specifically a very EXPENSIVE piece of equipment), what do you do?

You do THIS.

This setup allows you to very closely mimic a GHR bench using a rack, a loaded barbell and a 45 degree back extension bench (which most gyms have and which are much cheaper than a full GHR bench).

First, set the safety rails in the rack to about waist height. Set a bar on the rails and load it with 300-500 lbs (how much you load will depend on your bodyweight and how much extra resistance you plan on using, if any).

Move the back extension bench into the rack, with the ankle pads just below the bar. The bar should be pushed up against the back uprights of the rack.



You're going to use the bar to brace your heels under while performing the exercise, which is why it needs to be loaded heavily. You'll be locking your lower body into position with your mid-thighs on the pads of the extension bench (higher up than you would do for a regular back extension on this bench).

This is the big difference with this exercise compared to regular back extensions. The heels pushing up against the bar like this dramatically ramps up glute activation far beyond back extensions (which focus more on the lower back due to body positioning).



It's going to take a little tweaking to the setup to get it just right. You may have to adjust the height of the back extension machine a bit so that you get free movement.

You CAN do this with a flat bench, but it's much easier to set up (and gives you a greater

range of motion) with the extension bench.

Start with your torso fully vertical and pointed downward. Make sure your lower body is solidly locked in.



Now come up, pushing hard against the bar with your heels. This will fire the glutes strongly. The hamstrings and lower back will kick in automatically.



Come all the way up until your body is straight from the knees to the head.



Hold for a few seconds, squeezing the glutes hard, then come back down under control.

Here's a side view of the exercise setup.





This exercise is very effective when done with just bodyweight. You can also add resistance in the form of dumbbells, weight plates or bands.

This is the exercise with a dumbbell held to the chest.



You can also hitch a band to the base of the bench then loop the other end around the back of your neck.



This gives you a harder contraction at the top due to the increasing stretch on the band.



You can also do BOTH at the same time.



I recommend doing this one for fairly low to mid-range reps (e.g. 3-6 reps). The posterior chain muscles are strong and need to be challenged with resistance. You CAN do higher-range reps, though, if you really want to.

Overall, this setup is a great way to mimic the effect of a Glute-Ham Raise bench, which is itself a fantastic lower body exercise and important assistance exercise for improving squat and deadlift strength.

If you don't have a moveable back extension bench like this, [you can also perform a similar movement with a flat bench](#) (though you will get more lower back and less hamstrings and glutes).

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