

# ATHLETIC CONDITIONING QUARTERLY

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## YOU CAN LEARN A LOT FROM A DUMBBELL

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Raise your hand if you think this article is about my life story. Okay, put your hands down. Geez, I didn't know I had so many friends out there. Anyway, this article isn't about me (or any of the Three Stooges either). It's about those iron hand-held weights that have come to be known as "dumbbells."

### Advantages

There are several advantages in using dumbbells (DBs) in a workout. First of all, DBs can provide variety to your routine. Variety can be furnished in at least two ways. For one thing, every exercise that can be performed with a barbell can also be performed with DBs. This means that every barbell exercise has a DB counterpart that can be used as an alternative movement. Secondly, the lifter has the added option of being able to use a different grip with DBs. For example, a DB bench press can be done with a parallel grip (palms facing each other) as well as the traditional bench press grip.

Perhaps the biggest advantage in using DBs, however, is that each of your limbs must work independently of the other. Since most people have a dominant side of the body, they're often stronger (and more flexible) on one side of the body than the other. Usually, this isn't a significant difference. But, when there is a gross difference in the strength between limbs, the use of DBs is highly recommended. This is also an important consideration for rehabilitative strength training. In this case, an individual may even have to work one limb at a time while using a lighter weight for the weaker limb.

Contrary to what you might read in the Bolshevik Journal of Exercise Science, one of the advantages of a DB is not to increase some neuromuscular adaptation or kinesthetic whatchamacallit. Furthermore, it's not even worth mentioning the ridiculous belief that free weights are better than machines for increasing size, strength and power or help accelerate the learning of sports skills — except to say that such a notion has no basis whatsoever in the scientific literature and makes absolutely no sense at all. The advantages of DBs are pure and simple: variety and an independent workload.

The following is a list of exercises that can be performed for specific areas of the body using DBs:

**Gluteals.** One movement that is effective for exercising the hips, legs and low back is a deadlift performed with DBs. The movement is quite similar to its barbell counterparts — namely the squat and deadlift. However, this particular exercise has several advantages. DB deadlifts do not have the spinal compression associated with barbell squats; likewise, DB deadlifts are more comfortable to perform because the bar doesn't ride up and down your shin.

**Calves.** A calf raise can be done in a standing position using a DB for resistance. Simply hold the DB in one hand and stand on a stable block of wood (to obtain a stretch). You can use your free hand to hold onto a machine to maintain your balance. If you find this too easy, just do the movement with one leg at a time.

**Chest.** Three multiple joint chest exercises can be performed with DBs to emphasize different parts of the chest: the bench press, decline press and incline press. These DB movements can be executed with the traditional bench press grip or with a parallel grip. Multiple joint movements for the chest also provide indirect work for the triceps. However, a bent arm fly with DBs can be used to isolate the "pecs" and the anterior deltoid on the front part of the shoulder. Also keep in mind that as a variation, DB flies can be done on a decline and incline bench.

**Back.** Unfortunately, DB exercises for the upper back (the "lats") aren't very plentiful. As a matter of fact, there's only two decent movements: a bent over row and a

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You'll perform the bent over row more comfortably and with better technique if you do it one arm at a time. This multiple joint movement works the lats, biceps and even your forearms. On the other hand, a DB pullover is a good choice for isolating the lats with conventional equipment.

### Shoulders

There's a ton of exercises that can be done with DBs to train the shoulders. That's good, cause the shoulders are made up of 11 different muscles! The shoulder press is a multiple joint movement that involves the anterior "delt" and the triceps. The three parts of the deltoid — the anterior (on the front), the middle (on the side) and the posterior (on the back) — can be isolated using the front, lateral and bent over raises, respectively. Two DB exercises are particularly effective for training the trapezius or "traps": the upright row and the shoulder shrug. Finally, internal and external rotation can be done with DBs to exercise the deep muscles of the shoulder: the "internal rotators" (subscapularis and teres major) and the "external rotators" (infraspinatus and teres minor).

### Biceps

The basic exercise for training the biceps is the bicep curl. This movement can be performed with DBs either standing upright or seated as well as on a Preacher Curl device. DB concentration curls are also a productive and popular exercise for the biceps.

### Triceps

The tricep extension and its variations are the typical movements for exercising the triceps. DB alternatives include the tricep extension done laying supine or seated (usually referred to as a "French curl"). The so-called "Donkey kickback" isn't a bad DB exercise for the triceps, either.

### Forearms

The two basic forearm exercises that can be performed with DBs are the wrist extension and wrist flexion. Wrist extensions are used to work the posterior (or back) side of the forearm; wrist flexions are used to work the anterior (or front) portion of the forearm.

### Abdominals

The side bend is a pretty good exercise for training the oblique muscles (on the sides of the abdomen). This is a popular exercise among many fitness enthusiasts.

### Low Back

A barbell exercise used to train the lumbar area with conventional equipment is the stiff leg deadlift. This movement can also be done with DBs. The execution is similar to that of a barbell with the DBs held in front of the body.

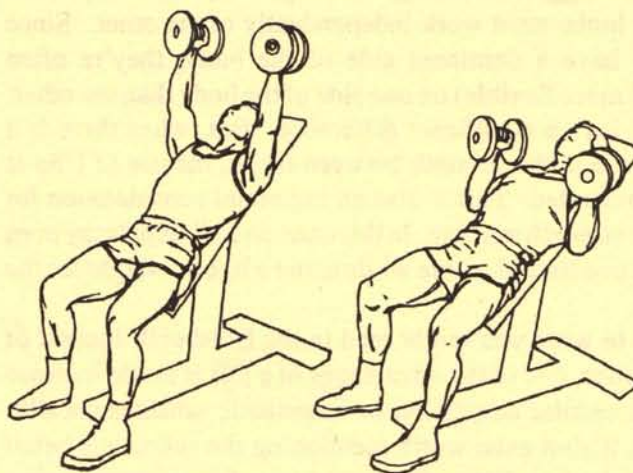
### Don't Be A DB

Dumbbells provide several advantages and a multitude of exercise options. However, to avoid getting

punched out, make sure that your training partner knows you're not talking about him when you tell others that you "work with dumbbells"!

## SUMMARY OF DUMBBELL EXERCISES

BODYPART	EXERCISE
<b>Gluteals</b>	Deadlift
<b>Calves</b>	Calf Raise
<b>Chest</b>	Bench press Decline press Incline press Bent arm fly
<b>Back</b>	Bent over row Pullover
<b>Shoulders</b>	Shoulder press Shoulder shrug Upright row Bent over raise Front raise Lateral raise External rotation Internal rotation
<b>Biceps</b>	Bicep curl
<b>Triceps</b>	Tricep extension
<b>Forearms</b>	Wrist flexion Wrist extension
<b>Abdominals</b>	Side bend
<b>Low Back</b>	Stiff leg deadlift



**The Above illustration shows an Incline Press being performed with Dumbbells using a parallel grip.**

*This illustration is taken from Bill Pearl's "Getting Stronger"*

Matt Brzycki has released his second book, *Conditioning for Basketball* co-authored by Shaun Brown, Strength Coach at The University of Kentucky. Read *The Coach's Bookshelf* for a review of it.