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DUMBBELLS!  
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# DELTS

(*'shōl-dər*) • \ shol+der \ *n.*

Here's your next chapter in our comprehensive encyclopedia, containing five shoulder movements that hit the delts from front to back

➤ **Delt training consists of the relatively simple task** of combining compound presses with single-joint moves aimed at hitting each of the three heads. With lots of variations to choose from, we concentrate on key pointers for five shoulder movements, with insider's tips on how to use them in your workout. Pull out and save this section for future reference. **BY BILL GEIGER, MA**

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## muscle groups

front deltoid, middle deltoid, trapezius

## Seated Overhead Dumbbell Press



» Dumbbells are one of the many ways to vary the overhead press. Because this compound movement works so much of the shoulder mass in a single movement and allows you to train fairly heavy for low reps, it's a great first exercise in your routine.



» Alternate the dumbbell version with the barbell press (Smith machine or free bar) to add variety to your delt workout. Since dumbbells are somewhat more difficult to control, you typically have to go a little lighter than you do with barbell presses.

» Follow this movement with single-joint shoulder exercises that hit each of the three delt heads separately.

**GRIP**

Use an overhand grip, wrapping your thumbs around the bars for maximal control.

**POSITION**

Sit erect on a bench with your chest out, shoulders back, low back slightly arched, abs tight and your feet flat on the floor. Position the weights just outside and slightly in front of your ears.

**ANGLES** In the bottom position, your upper arms should be about parallel to the floor, elbows pointed out and down. Angle your forearms just slightly inward for better control of the weights.

**FORM**

Keep your head facing forward for safety.

**CAUTION**

Reverse direction quickly to take advantage of built-up energy, but don't bounce out of the bottom position, which can overly stress your joints.

**[A]****[B]****FORM**

Don't bounce out of the hole. Change direction smoothly.

**BREATH**

Exhale as you reach the uppermost position.

**MOVEMENT**

Press the weights up and in toward each other, almost fully extending your arms at the top as the dumbbells nearly touch.

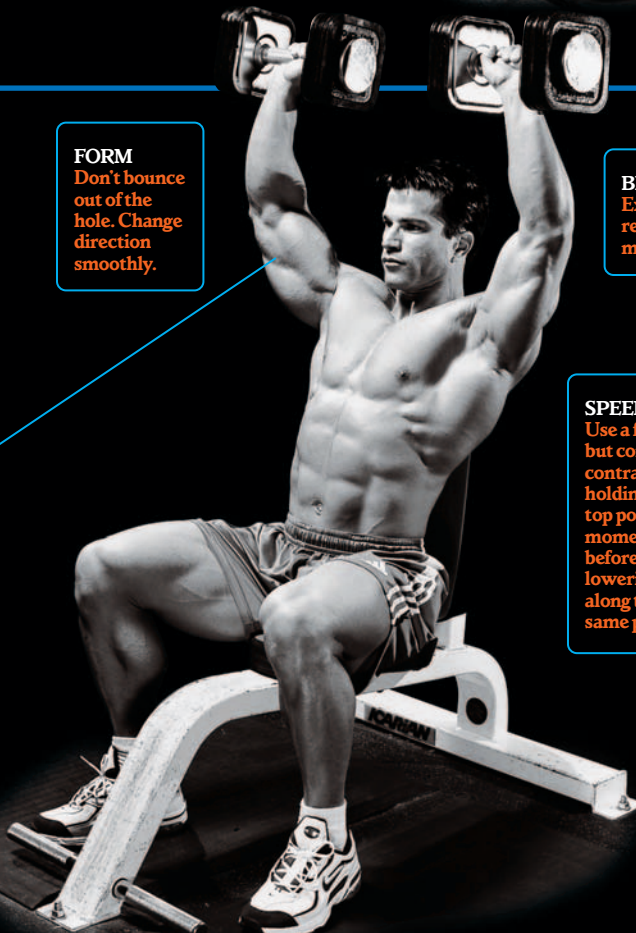
**TIP** | The neutral-grip press (your hands face in at the bottom) is a variation that stresses the front delts and upper pecs to a greater degree. Keep your elbows pointing forward, not outward.

**SPEED**

Use a forceful but controlled contraction, holding the top position momentarily before slowly lowering along the same path.

**CAUTION**

As you fatigue, the chances of muscle failure leave you at risk for losing control of the weights overhead. Make sure your spotter provides help as necessary.



SUBSTITUTIONS

**Good**  
Machine overhead press

**Better**  
Arnold press  
Standing military press




**Best**  
Seated barbell press



## muscle groups

rear deltoid, trapezius,  
rhomboids

## ICON KEY

-  do this exercise early in your workout
-  do this exercise late in your workout
-  use a spotter for this exercise
-  do this exercise for fewer reps (6–10)
-  do this exercise for higher reps (10–15)

Reverse  
Pec-Deck  
Flye

**SETUP** Adjust the seat height so your shoulders and hands are in the same horizontal plane. Some machines require adjustment of the arms to the back position.

**POSITION**  
Sit erect on the bench, face straight ahead and press your chest against the pad.  
**CAUTION**  
Avoid turning your head to the side while you pull the weight, as it can contribute to neck strain.

[A]

## GRIP

Use a neutral grip, wrapping your thumbs around the bars for a secure grip.

**TIP** | Target your rear delts more effectively by facing your palms down and grasping the handles from the inside.

**MOVEMENT** Don't allow the weights to touch the stack until you complete the set to maintain tension on your working muscle.

## ANGLES

Elevate your elbows to the same level as your hands and shoulders to facilitate optimal strength as you pull the handles back.

SUBSTITUTIONS

**Good**  
Standing upper-cable reverse flye

**Better**  
Bent-over dumbbell lateral raise

**Best**  
Bent-over cable lateral raise



Use single-joint exercises like the reverse pec-deck flye toward the end of your workout after you've completed your heavy presses, which more thoroughly work your entire delt. Include other isolation exercises for the front and middle delts to complement your routine.



Presses are all about going heavy and training in the lower-rep ranges; here, choose a relatively lighter weight that allows you to complete at least 10 reps with good form. Since presses more strongly work the front and middle delts, rear delts are commonly a weak spot. Still, occasionally rotating the order of your three isolation moves is a smart idea, as it allows you to take advantage of higher energy and lower fatigue levels and really give each head a thorough pump.

[B]

## MOVEMENT

Pull the handles out in a wide arc as far as is comfortable, bringing your elbows behind the plane of your back. Hold the peak-contracted position before returning to the start.

## SPEED

Use a motion that's strong but controlled. Return to the start position slowly to ensure that you get the most from the eccentric (negative) contraction.

**TIP** | This works your rear delts in the same way that the bent-over lateral raise with dumbbells or cables does, but it's more challenging because it's harder to cheat. Switch back and forth between the exercises to vary your workouts.



## FORM

Keep the motion confined to your shoulders — your body shouldn't rock or otherwise try to assist in the movement.

## muscle groups

front deltoid, trapezius

## Front Barbell Raise



» Start your shoulder workout with various compound presses before performing single-joint exercises like the front raise.



Include other isolation exercises for the rear and middle delts to ensure that you hit all three heads.

» Choose a weight that allows you to complete at least 10 reps with good form. You rarely should go heavy for fewer reps with this exercise.

» If your front delts are weak compared to your middle and rear delts, or if they quickly fatigue when doing chest presses, perform this move before middle- and rear-delt exercises to prioritize this area.

## GRIP

Hold the bar about shoulder-width apart with your palms down, wrapping your thumbs underneath the bar. The bar should never rest against your thighs once you begin the set.

**POSITION** Stand erect with your head up, feet about hip-width apart and a slight bend in your knees.

**FORM** Your arms should be fully extended throughout the movement, but don't lock out your elbows.

**TIP** | Keep your arms as straight as possible to obtain full benefit – bending your elbows shortens the lever and makes this exercise easier and thus less effective.

## CAUTION

The barbell locks your hands in position and may strain your shoulders, causing pain. Instead, try this move with dumbbells, which provide more freedom in your shoulder joint.

[A]

[B]

## BREATH

Exhale as you reach the top position.

## MOVEMENT

With a smooth, controlled motion, raise the bar in an arc directly out in front of you. Momentarily hold the peak-contracted position before lowering.

## ANGLES

Bring the bar to where your arms are just above parallel to the floor; going all the way overhead more strongly recruits the traps and reduces work done by the front delts.

**FORM** Don't use body english to help get the weight up.

**TIP** | If you find that you sway back and forth to assist your lift, try doing the movement leaning against an incline bench to reduce momentum.

SUBSTITUTIONS

**Good**  
Cable front raise

**Better**  
Dumbbell front raise

**Best**  
Incline barbell front raise

## muscle groups

front deltoid, middle deltoid, trapezius, supraspinatus

## EZ-Bar Upright Row



➤ This compound movement is frequently done after shoulder presses or with trap work.



Although it's a multijoint exercise, you typically can't go as heavy as you can with presses, so don't use it as your main mass-builder.



➤ You can still go fairly heavy on this move, but it's important not to sacrifice range of motion by using heavier weights. Another option is to perform it last in your workout when using relatively lighter weights to pump the muscle.

## ANGLES

The EZ-bar enables you to use a grip that's not fully pronated, which may be easier on your wrists than the straight palms-down grip you must take with the barbell.

## POSITION

Stand erect with your abs tight, shoulders back, feet hip-width apart and a slight bend in your knees. Keep your head focused forward.

## CAUTION

Moving your hands too close together can be uncomfortable, increase shoulder impingement and push the elbows too far forward at the top, limiting your range of motion and reducing bar control.

**FORM** Extend your arms in front of your thighs in the start position.

**GRIP** Grasp the EZ-bar with a shoulder-width overhand grip, wrapping your thumbs under the bar for better control.



[A]

## BREATH

Exhale as you reach the uppermost position.

## FORM

Raise the bar to just below chin level to maximally contract your muscles.

**TIP** | If you go too heavy, you won't get a full range of motion or maximum muscle contraction.

[B]

## MOVEMENT

Pull the bar straight up so that it travels within a few inches of your body. Do this by pulling with your elbows, bringing them as high as possible and pointing them out to your sides. Keep them above the level of the bar.

**FORM** Refrain from using any body english to assist with the lift. Confine movement to your shoulders and arms.

SUBSTITUTIONS

**Good**  
Smith machine upright row

**Better**  
Dumbbell upright row  
EZ-bar cable upright row

**Best**  
Barbell upright row





## muscle groups

middle deltoid, supraspinatus, trapezius

## Seated Dumbbell Lateral Raise

## FORM

Keep your head in the neutral position, facing forward.



➤ This less-common version of the lateral raise almost entirely eliminates body english, which often creeps into the standing raise. Use it to better isolate your middle delts or if you have low-back problems.



➤ Begin your delt workout with an overhead pressing movement, then hit each of the three delt heads with isolation exercises like this one. Include other single-joint moves for the rear and front delts to complete your workout.  
➤ Choose a weight that allows you to do at least 10 reps with good form. Isolation work typically isn't done with very heavy weights in a low-rep training zone; instead, go a little lighter to pump and burn the muscle.

**GRIP** Grasp the dumbbells with a neutral (palms-in) grip, thumbs wrapped around the bars for better control. Your arms should be straight with just a slight bend in the elbows.

**TIP** | It's critical that you lock your elbows into a very small angle throughout the range of motion.

[A]



## POSITION

Sit upright on a flat bench with your chest out, back arched and feet spaced for balance.

**TIP** | You need the weights to clear your thighs at the bottom; if your legs get in the way of your range of motion, bring them in closer.

SUBSTITUTIONS

**Good**  
Machine lateral raise

**Better**  
Cable lateral raise

**Best**  
Standing dumbbell lateral raise

[B]

## BREATH

Exhale as you reach the top position and hold it for a count before releasing.

## MOVEMENT

Raise the weights out to your sides in a wide arc, keeping your elbows just above the level of your hands.

**TIP** | Don't allow your hands to move above your elbows or open and close the bend in your elbows, both of which reduce the effectiveness of the exercise.

**ANGLES** Bring the weights to about shoulder level – lifting higher begins to tax your traps more than your delts. Go too heavy and you'll bend your elbows more and limit how high you can raise the weights.

**TIP** | Although this version of the lateral raise reduces your ability to cheat, it's still possible. Don't allow your body to rock back and forth during the rep.

