

Massive and Thick Pecs

Shake it up

Making consistent progress over the long term means varying intensity from one workout to the next. For all movements in my chest program, incline bench presses (the lone free weight exercise in this group), vertical bench presses, pec decks and cable crossovers, I will do four sets of either 10 - 12 reps (if I'm working light) or five reps (if I'm working hard and heavy). On a heavy day, I'll typically do a warm up set of 12 - 15 reps and then follow with three sets of five reps with a fairly heavy weight.

On lighter days, my rule of thumb is to increase the weight in 10 to 20 pound increments. I'll go to muscle failure on the fourth and final set to break the muscle down. And to keep things fresh, I will periodically experiment with drop sets; it's another method of stimulating growth and packing on maximum muscle mass. I'm really like a little kid in a sandbox playing with a new toy. My goal is to have fun with bodybuilding. There's no sense walking in the gym if you're not going to enjoy yourself.

Top heavy

My chest routine begins with incline bench presses. I do these when I'm fresh so that I can handle the heavy poundages required to add thickness to my upper chest. How heavy will I go? It depends on how I feel when I walk in the gym. I trust my instincts, and my body, to tell me what I'm capable of on any given day.

The incline barbell press is similar to its flat bench counterpart; the primary difference is that I place myself in a fixed position that allows me to isolate my upper pecs. I slowly lower the bar to my clavicle before propelling the weight from my elbows, not my hands, to the top. I go for a squeeze, contracting my upper pecs, then lower the bar to my clavicle. I'm very careful to keep the mind muscle link in place for every rep, especially towards the end of the set. The emphasis, as always, is on keeping tension on the muscle at all times. If you let the muscle relax, it will not grow.

I go next to the vertical bench press, which is almost like doing a standard bench press. The unique alignment of this movement, however, puts my arms in a pre-stretched position than enables me to get a different type of contraction. I keep my back arched throughout the movement to isolate my pecs. I try to push with my elbows and really feel the muscle involvement, that mind muscle link of complete concentration. I never try to push with my hands or force the weight to do anything. My upper body stays under control and focused on working the pecs in complete isolation. I never press from my shoulders; doing so puts more emphasis on the deltoids than it does on the pecs.

I vary my grip from workout to workout. Sometimes I'll use the palms down approach standard with this machine; at other times, I'll grab the vertical handles with my palms facing each other, which is not unlike the hand positions I used on the old Nautilus chest machines. By using a vertical grip, I can change the angle of attack on the muscle. I've noticed that the vertical grip lets me feel a greater contraction in my pecs at the top of the movement, allowing me to generate more squeeze and to stretch the pecs farther back in the starting position, much deeper than with the standard grip. Be aware, however, that with the palms facing grip, you engage more of the triceps in the action, so they'll get a little pumped too.

Now I'm ready for the pec deck. Alignment is crucial: My elbows are parallel to the floor and move evenly across the center of my pecs. I push from the inside of my elbows and squeeze right down the middle of my chest. Keep in mind that it's a strict movement, don't jerk your body around. Focus all your mental energy on squeezing the pecs.

After the pec deck, it's time for cable crossovers. I never bend too far at the waist. I flex, but do not hyperextend, my elbows in the starting position. This allows me to drive with my chest, placing the emphasis on contracting the pecs. Of course, I go for an intense squeeze at the bottom, pushing the handles together and letting the pecs do the work. At times, I will actually move beyond the crossover position at the bottom, turning my wrists over so that my palms are facing the floor. I'll go for an extra squeeze, holding the contraction for one or two seconds before releasing it nice and slow as I return to the top.

The key to building mass with machines is to feel what you're doing. Don't be robotic. Focus on the muscle you're isolating. You can't always train balls out with heavy free weights, and this mostly machine workout for chest is an effective alternative. It's worked for me, and I've been training injury free for more than 10 years.