

# Men's Fitness

## Home Gym 101

by Joe Stankowski

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You're finally living the American Dream. You've just bought your first house or rented a good-size apartment, and you're ready to furnish it your way. That is, of course, after your wife or girlfriend picks out every chair, sofa, and curtain in the place. But, fortunately, you've got space for a home gym now-and dammit, that's *your* domain.

Congratulations. Your days of hearing "Sexy Back" blaring from your public gym's stereo-just as you're prepping for a new one-rep max on the bench press, no less-are finally a thing of the past. There will be no more chance run-ins with locker-room nudists and no more sweating with the oldies on the treadmills next to you until you hear their pacemakers give out.

Nevertheless, a new set of quandaries has arisen. What is the most necessary equipment, and how will it fit in the space you have? Where's the best place to buy it, and how much will it cost? To answer these questions and more, we've planned out the ultimate-and affordable-home gym.

### 1 | A Power Rack

Also called a "cage," a sturdy power rack encloses a small area you can stand inside for moves like the squat, or slide a bench in or out of for heavy pressing exercises. Its key feature is safety spot pins-two iron rods that slide into any one of several holes on each side of the rack's support beams to protect you from dropping a missed lift. Can't get the bar back up in a bench press? Let it crash on the safety pins. So, in essence, the power rack serves as your spotter. The pins also allow you to work on weak points in your lifts. For instance, you can set the pins at knee height and rest the barbell on them for a deadlift variation called the rack lockout. From there, perform a deadlift as normal through the shortened range of motion. You'll find you can use more weight because you don't have to begin the pull from the floor, and working in this range improves the strength you need to finish the last third of a normal deadlift. A longtime favorite of hardcore powerlifters, a power rack can lead to exceptional strength gains.

A power rack can also eliminate the need for several other pieces of equipment. It typically has pegs on it that you can use to store your weight plates, and it may even come with a chinup bar attached at the top. You can hang all sorts of other equipment off its frame, such as bands, and stow your gear inside it when you're done. The folks at Elite Fitness Systems in London, Ohio-home to some of the strongest lifters in the world-offer a number of great models. We like the one pictured at left, which stands seven feet tall and has a 30"-by-43" space inside the cage. **\$675 @ elitefts.com**

### 2 | An Olympic Barbell

As the name implies, these are the only bars that pass muster at the Olympics or any other lifting competition. Long, balanced, and almost unbendable, an Olympic bar is designed to fit your power rack. The weight is also uniform (45 pounds), no matter who the manufacturer is-something you won't find with cheaper barbells.

Olympic bars are also long enough to fit in a power rack and to have a standardized diameter perfect for all Olympic weights. (Non-Olympic bars may have a narrower diameter.) Olympic barbells can be purchased at almost any large sporting-goods store or even a local yard sale (see "Gym Dues" on the next page for several price-busting strategies), but York Barbell and Elite have long been known for setting the bar high (pardon the pun). If space permits, consider buying two barbells rather than one. Unlike in a public gym, no one will be rushing you off the equipment, so having an extra barbell will allow you to superset exercises much more easily (as opposed to having to unload and reload one bar for each set). 1,500-lb power bar, **\$185 @ elitefts.com**

### 3 | An Adjustable Bench

Self-explanatory; just aim for one that gives you multiple angles of incline, rather than just 45 degrees alone. By working at different angles, you'll be able to stimulate more muscle fibers. But don't bother paying extra money for optional leg-station attachments designed specifically for things like the leg extension or leg curl. Besides often being

uncomfortable and rickety, leg- station attachments are unnecessary. You'll get a better workout doing squats, lunges, and deadlifts with your barbell. Elite offers great benches. **0x-90x incline bench, \$499 @ elitefts.com**

#### **4 | Weight Plates**

Any brand will suffice here. As Shakespeare said, a weight by any other name would still be heavy (or something like that). However, make sure you buy round plates-not the octagonal-shaped ones you see in some trendy gyms. While they may be less apt to roll a bit on the floor between sets, plates with multiple sides tend to shift during your set and the corners smack into the floor during any lift that has you setting the bar down between reps (such as cleans or any kind of deadlift variation). That can make for an annoying distraction, if not an injury. Another caveat: Make sure the plates you're buying fit your Olympic bar. If you're ordering online, try to buy the bar and plates together from the same company. If you're shopping for one or the other in person, make sure you know the diameter of the bar. Ivanko supplies plates to many gyms, and Elite includes them with their power racks. 300-lb premium weight set, **\$285 @ Elitefts.com**