

Men's Fitness

Increase Your Bench

As much as you like the bench press, the bench press doesn't like you. It's a tough lift that requires total concentration, and it will crush your dreams of a new max (if not your rib cage) if there's any weakness in your setup or flaw in your form. The solution: Show that bar who's boss-and squeeze the life out of it. Try the following technique from Jim Wendler, an elite powerlifter from London, Ohio, who used it to reach his personal best bench of 675 pounds.

HERE'S WHAT YOU DO

Lie down on the bench, but before you lift the bar off the rack, squeeze it as hard as you can for three to five seconds. Relax, and let go of the bar for another three to five seconds. Now grip it again and begin your new max attempt.

As simple as it is, the squeeze has many benefits. "Many people have trouble staying tight when they lift," says Wendler. "By squeezing the bar beforehand, your arms, chest, lats, legs, and glutes will tense up -- and that needs to happen when you have a heavy weight over your chest." In fact, if you don't feel those muscles fire, says Wendler, repeat the squeeze and channel your focus until you do.

In addition to preparing you for the feel of a heavy bench press, the bar squeeze also dials in your central nervous system to the amount of muscle recruitment you'll need to complete the lift. "Squeezing hard essentially overloads your system, albeit very briefly and safely -- so when you take the bar off the rack and begin to press, your nervous system will feel like it's already handled a heavy load, and it's not so intimidated by the one you've got on the bar." The result: You'll psych out one of the meanest lifts in your workout -- and score a new max in the process.



© 2007 Weider Publications, LLC, a subsidiary of American Media, Inc . All Rights Reserved.