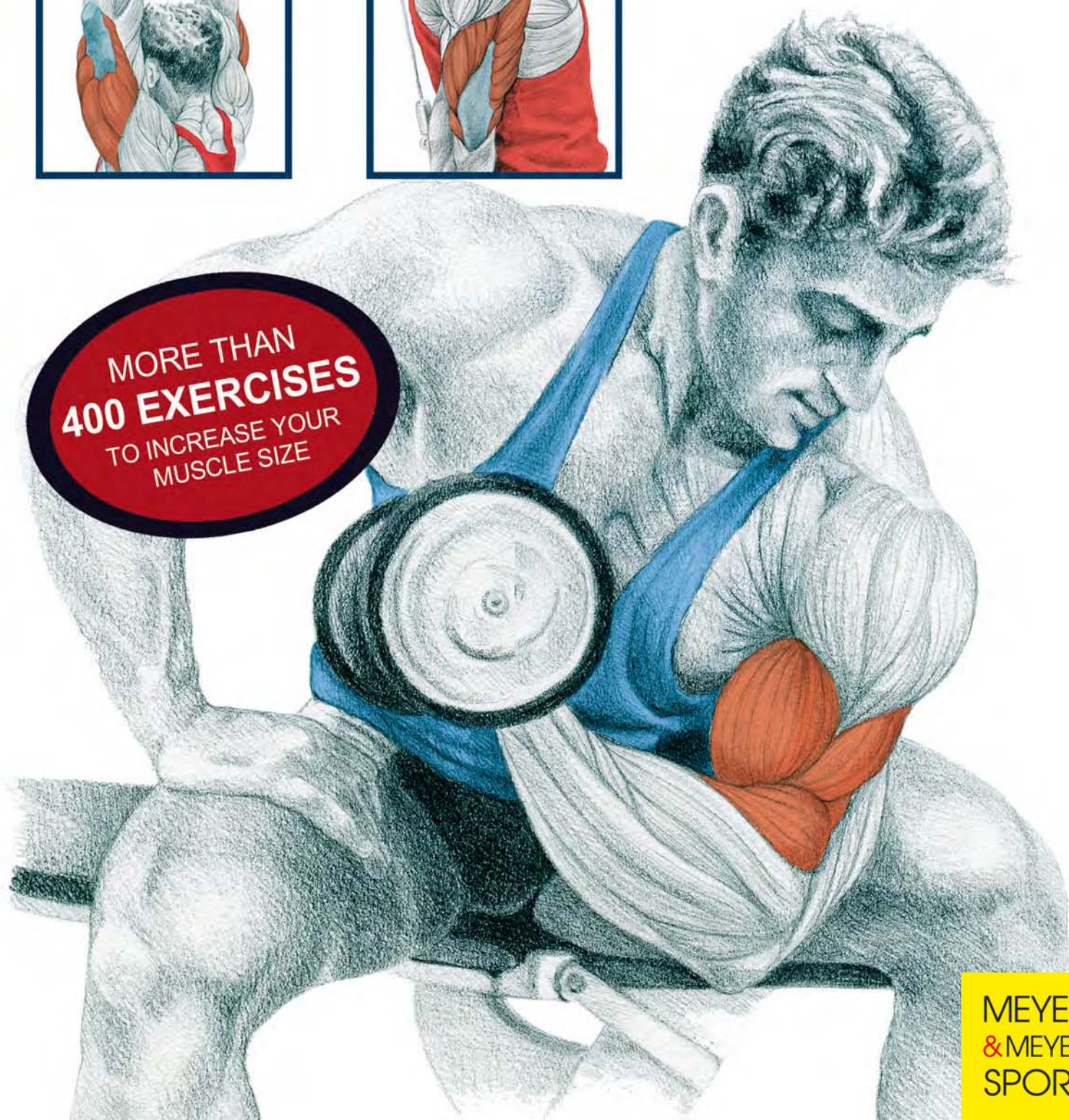


Óscar Morán & Isabel Arechabala (Illustr.)

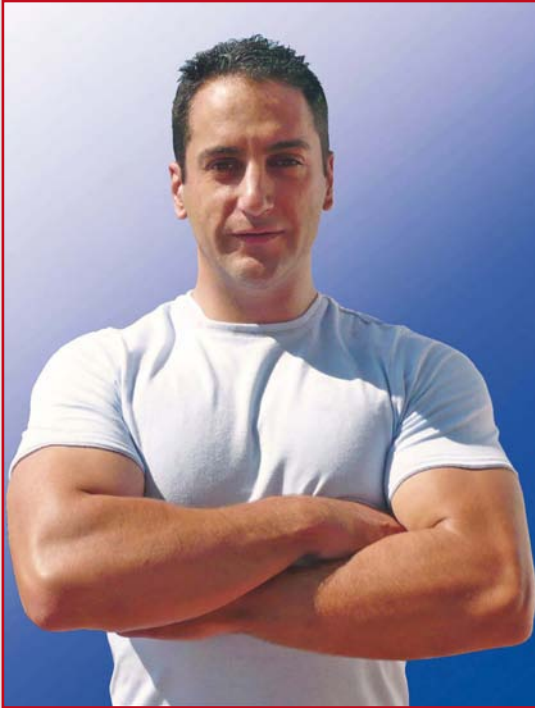
MUSCLE EXERCISES ENCYCLOPEDIA



MORE THAN
400 EXERCISES
TO INCREASE YOUR
MUSCLE SIZE

MEYER
& MEYER
SPORT

Author



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Muscle Exercises

Encyclopedia

Óscar Morán (author)

Isabel Arechabala (illustrations)

Encyclopedia of

Muscle

Exercises

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Foreword

The usual routine in a gym is a combination of custom, individual experience, habit and pseudoscience, which does weight training few favors. Take a look around even the most prestigious locations, and you will immediately notice the lack of uniformity and, still worse, of knowledge in the athletes' individual approaches to training.

In this book, the author explains that many of the false beliefs currently found in gyms and sports centers are based on no more than myths and habit, or on individual experiences that cannot be generalized. From a biological standpoint, we should remember that each individual has his/her own thresholds for absorbing workouts, and what may be good for one person could lead to injury in another. It is a paradox of physical exercise that we do it to improve our health, yet many activities can actually be detrimental if done improperly due to ignorance or bad advice.

This book addresses scientific questions to help the reader understand the issues, but not in so much detail as to put off those who are looking for quick, effective solutions. The approach taken is rational and based on know-how gained from years of experience. The author, then, wishes to advocate a blend of science and experience.

I find this book contains and clearly explains all the information a reader could want. It steers clear of myths and false ideas about weight training, and takes a rational approach to the key issues for successful training. I truly believe that this book will prove easy to use for those who work in gyms and people who want or need appropriate guidance for their workouts. It is worth reading carefully and drawing your own conclusions about exercise without being led astray by half-baked ideas and bad advice.

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Introduction

Ever more people have taken to working out in our modern industrialized society to make up for the decline in the physical activity that was once needed to obtain food, a roof over their heads, security and mobility. These people have realized:

1. That physical exercise is a fun, effective and economical route to well-being. However, it can have health implications, and this makes it necessary to maintain a modest awareness in our training routines.
2. That a sedentary lifestyle is the shortest route to ill health. Our body is always with us, and it is our responsibility to look after it and work out to enjoy quality living.
3. Weight training, intelligently combined with other factors, is the most complete, prophylactic, therapeutic and aesthetic method to achieve the objectives of good health and well-being.

This book describes over 440 exercises with comments and illustrations based on empirical knowledge and scientific research. It includes all of the basic and numerous less common exercises with comments and illustrations, as well as some that are really unusual. It is thus an authentic encyclopedia of exercises and biomechanical information, but we have tried to ensure that the language used is easily comprehensible at all times.

Effective training requires knowledge, planning and perseverance. Don't be fooled by the myths, legends and false tips that may circulate in your gym. Most of them are little more than "magic" formulas for every circumstance and none. Tips like these provide no answer to intelligent questions. For example:

- "I train using machines to define the muscle and free weights to gain volume."

Why do you gain volume with free weights and not with machines? Does your muscle feel the difference when it contracts?

- "I do Scott curls to build my biceps peak."

Why does this exercise give you the peak? Why do some people who do Scott curls lack the biceps peak and others who ignore this exercise have it?

- "This is how I improve my reflexes."

Do you mean your reflexes (innate) or your reaction time?

- "I don't do weights because the muscle turns to fat when you stop."

What is the process involved? Could fat change to muscle?

- “I need to do more abs to lose this belly.”

Would you expect exercising your biceps more would lose you your arm?

Enough said. However, it should be clear that the whole fitness process, including training for strength, needs to be based on scientific fact. I try to help my own students understand that there are no short cuts or wonder workouts. There is only hard work, intelligence and tenacity.

How to use this book

Any beginner starting a program of workouts will want to know how to do the exercises involved to achieve his or her goals. This “Encyclopedia of Muscle Training” is intended as a work of reference both for the beginner and the advanced athlete, for the enthusiast or the fitness professional, whatever the users level. The beginner will understand the execution of each exercise and the muscles involved in each movement by looking at the illustrations and reading the text. Meanwhile, the fitness trainer or advanced athlete should also consult the variants, and the origin and insertion of the muscles depicted at the beginning of each chapter. This work does not include exercises using elastic belts and other devices that imitate weight, since the relevant comments do not differ markedly from the exercises described here. Finally, we may note that the muscular functions discussed here are “open chain” movements in which the terminal (distal) segment of each joint is the moving part.

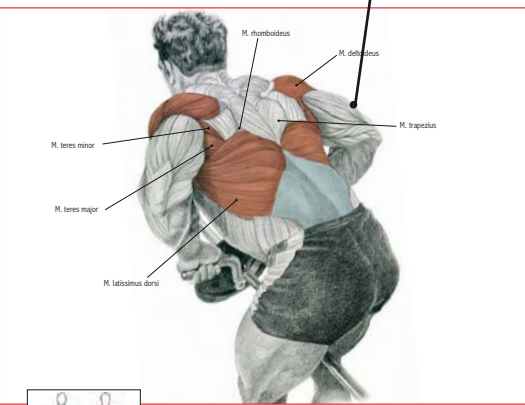



All of the exercises are accompanied by drawings illustrating the execution of the movement. The artwork was created by a specialist in human anatomy drawing from life with the aid of muscle training professionals supervised by the author. The comments not only describe the correct execution of the exercise but also provide the names of the main muscles trained in each variant, how to breathe, and common mistakes to avoid, as well as offering practical tips.

This is a reference book, and you can therefore start reading from any page. Bear in mind, however, that the basic exercises are presented first, and pages that follow contain more information.

How to use the next exercise pages

- **NAME.** Common name and number of the exercise. Traditional names are sometimes used even where they are not quite precise. Where they are not apt, however, they have been replaced with a more accurate name.
- **ILLUSTRATION.** Position and correct movement for the basic exercise. The muscles involved are identified in an “anatomical position” sketch.
- **MUSCLES INVOLVED.** The muscles involved are listed in order of importance and/or strength applied in the exercise. Note that the separation between primary and secondary muscles is not perfectly defined, given the influence of factors like the individual’s tendon insertions and personal technique, or the design of the apparatus used. Also, some fibers or parts of the muscle may behave as antagonists depending on the movement or the moving part of the body segment. Some muscles that are only very slightly involved may be omitted.

- **EXECUTION.** Stance or position of the body, explanation of the movement and breathing (where appropriate).
- **COMMENTS.** Clarifications, tips and frequent errors. References to the parts of the muscle in demand should be viewed with caution in some cases, because research is not always definitive.
- **VARIATIONS.** Variations of the basic exercise using the same muscle or muscle group, or less often, the same position and movement, are explained in this section. Only the main muscles worked are mentioned here because the secondary muscles are the same as in the basic exercise in the majority of cases.
- **BIOMECHANICAL INTRODUCTION TO THE MAIN MUSCLES.** Given the practical nature of this book, this preliminary section at the beginning of each chapter contains a brief anatomical study of the origin, insertion and functions of the main muscles (size, strength and role). This discussion refers to the general features of the human body, which may vary from one person to another.

3 Back, Free Weights	T-BAR ROW	Execution	Comments
	 <p>Muscles involved</p> <p>MAIN MUSCLES: latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, deltoide (rear) SECONDARY MUSCLES: rhomboids, biceps, brachialis, brachioradialis, trapezius, infraspinatus, (lower back muscles) ANTAGONISTS: pectoralis major, biceps, deltoide (front)</p>	 <p>Execution</p> <p>Stand with your feet slightly apart and your torso straight, hips bent around 45° and knees slightly bent. Hold yourself firmly in position. Grasp the T-bar with an overhand grip (palms down). Pull the bar up to the top of the abdomen, keeping your elbows open. You can straighten your body slightly at the same time. Because of the position for this exercise, it is necessary to inhale just before you lower the weight, then hold your breath and exhale over the last third of the upward movement without releasing all of the air.</p>	<p>Comments</p> <p>Almost all of the comments on the Bent-over Barbell Row (Ex. 2) also apply to the Long Bar / T-bar Row. However, the effort is exerted at more of an angle, which means the position is more comfortable and not so hard on the vertebrae. If you do not have a specific bar for this exercise, you can rest the end of an ordinary long bar in a corner, loading the weights at the moving end and using a crossbar to pull up. This may reduce the range of motion in the exercise. If the weights come in contact with your torso too early, you will need thick discs with a small diameter and a U-shaped crossbar.</p> <p>There is a machine for this exercise, but it is not common due to its limited versatility.</p> <p>Common mistakes: swinging the body too far forward; incomplete set or movement; curving the spine and overall poor technique</p>
<p>VARIATIONS</p> <p>3.2 ... WIDE GRIP</p> <p>MUSCLES USED latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, deltoide (rear), rhomboids, trapezius</p> <p>TECHNIQUE The exercise is similar to the same as the Long Bar Row, but the wider grip shifts some of the work to the upper back. There is a more limited range of motion in this exercise, as is always the case when you widen your grip on the bar in traction exercises of this type for the back (Pull-ups and Rows).</p> 		<p>3.3 ... ONE-ARM</p> <p>MUSCLES USED latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, deltoide (rear)</p> <p>TECHNIQUE The technique used is the same as in the basic exercise, but the movement is performed with one arm and to the side of the body. Given the position, the weight will obviously have to be lighter if you use only one arm. The only advantage of this variant is that it concentrates the exertion on one side of the back and allows a few degrees more movement. However, this is not enough to warrant replacing the conventional exercise with the one-arm variant. The exercise can be improved by placing your free hand on something for support to relieve some of the strain on the lower back, as in Ex. 4).</p> 	<p>Principal Exercise</p> <p>Variations</p>

76 Muscles involved

77

At the end of each chapter you will find a page of “other exercises,” which are explained separately either because they are unusual or because they offer few advantages over the basic exercises.

This book does not include specific sections and exercises for all of the muscles in the body, partly in view of the basic objectives of the manual, and partly because conventional bodybuilding language has defined major muscle groups comprising the largest and strongest voluntary muscles. However, when you work on the main groups, you are also working on all of the other muscles, which could not be isolated outside a laboratory. The inclusion of specific exercises for all of the muscles in the body would make this work unusable as a handbook. We have therefore omitted the muscles involved in swallowing, the facial muscles, those responsible for excretion, and so on.

The terminology used is always precise and may sometimes be technical. However, we have sought to adapt it to ordinary language and the mental image of the exercises that each athlete will form. Purists may therefore disagree with some of the terms used and comments made. An example will make this point clearer. In the pectorals “bench press” (Ex. 1), the position for the grip on the bar is described as “palms down (pronation)” in order to ensure the explanation is visually straightforward. Technically, however, this position could be defined as a neutral grip with the elbow flexed and abduction of the arms. While the author wishes to be as accurate as possible on these matters, using complicated or technical language would be counterproductive if it confused the reader. The top priority is to do the exercise properly.

The descriptions of the exercises are preceded by a chapter on the “theory of muscle training,” which the reader will find invaluable for the comprehension of the rest of the book.

The Theory of Muscle Training

The four basic physical qualities are:

1. Strength
2. Endurance
3. Flexibility
4. Speed

The first three of these qualities have a direct effect on health. To simplify Speed is important for sports but less so in everyday life. Flexibility helps prevent injuries and muscular imbalances. Endurance or stamina is the key to cardio-respiratory health and reducing flab. Training for strength is vital for the health of our musculo-skeletal system.

Let us now consider some key features of muscle training, as well as basic guidelines and tips, from a cause and effect standpoint. What is the right way to train?

HOW TO MOVE, HOW TO TRAIN AND SOME MISTAKES TO AVOID

First, it is essential to warm up. Stretching is highly recommended, as is a balanced intelligent diet and rest.

There are, of course, numerous different warm-up techniques, but the one described here is simple and effective for our purposes (the times given are for reference):

1. Begin with gentle to moderate cardiovascular exercise, not only to activate your heart and breathing but also to ready yourself mentally for the training session (“psychological warm-up”). 5 to 10 minutes.
2. Warm up your joints around the area you intend to work out without using weights. 2 or 3 minutes.
3. Start with a couple of sets of the basic exercise you intend to do first, using only half the usual weight. It is also advisable to warm up the synergetic and fixing muscles involved in the exercises you plan to do. These are almost always the abdominal and lower back muscles (lumbar region). 5 or 6 minutes.
4. Briefly stretch the muscles concerned in the planned exercises. 2 or 3 minutes.
5. Begin the training session, making the first set lighter than the rest.

Some people will say they have no time to warm up, but it is worth remembering that if you are injured you cannot train at all.

Unless you are training for a specific sport or activity involving special needs, do your exercises at a slow or moderate speed, avoiding rapid movements. Doing exercises too fast has the following adverse effects:

- It ruins your technique.
- The impetus (inertia) required prevents constant work on the muscle.
- It puts extra strain on your joints, which can be dangerous.
- You will probably be using less weight than is necessary to stimulate your muscles (see “intensity” below). The explanation lies in the “velocity curve theory,” the basic conclusion of which is that the faster the movement, the lower resistance must be.

People may exercise too fast because of time constraints but sometimes this defect is more a matter of ego or the wish to project an image. Obviously, if you keep the same weight but slow down, you will not manage the same number of repeats in a set.

Performing exercises too quickly is usually safe enough to avoid injury and it does produce some gains in terms of strength. If the movement is too slow, meanwhile, the weight used will also have to be much less than the specific muscles concerned could manage, and they will also tire sooner than necessary. Some bodybuilders achieve good results using a training rhythm of around 2 seconds in the positive phase and 6 or 7 seconds in the negative phase. Nevertheless, postures are uncomfortable and ineffective at such a slow pace (in the eccentric phase), and it can be more difficult to control your breathing. Furthermore, many people make good progress at a moderate pace. In this regard, the right approach is to perform the concentric or positive phase explosively but with control (i.e., not too fast) and the eccentric or negative phase a little more slowly. Another option is to apply a wave or “pumping” motion that maintains a similar rhythm cadence and is, above all, controlled (i.e., in permanent tension).

Certain studies point to the advantages of “eccentric only” training, but this research is still at a very early stage. Unfortunately, this technique is difficult in practice using free weights (as a lot of help is required), and existing machines are not usually designed for training in this way. More research is needed in this area, given the numerous questions that remain.

A frequent mistake is to lock or block the joints at the ascent point of some movements (i.e., the point of maximum extension). The most obvious example here is the dangerous habit of locking the knees when the legs are fully extended on a “press” machine. The main, but not the only, risk is that this can leave the ligaments and bone structures to support the full weight without the help of the main muscle. There is a widespread belief among bodybuilders that taking movements to these limits “works out all of the fibers,” but this is in fact quite untrue. Furthermore, the margin between what is safe and the absolute limit does not involve any workout loss or impair the growth of the muscle. In addition, the chance of sustaining injuries such as dislocation, torn ligaments, damage to the joints, torn muscles and so forth is much greater “at the limits,” especially when under strain. This does not mean performing only a partial movement; on the contrary, it is necessary to attain a good, long trajectory in the majority of exercises, although the danger of injury means that a somewhat shorter movement is better in some cases (“squats” or “barbell preacher-bench curl,” for example). In other cases, however, the movement can be taken to the limit without danger (e.g., trapezius “shoulder shrug”).

Each individual should consider the level of risk to musculo-skeletal health that he or she is willing to accept.

For further details, see “Why does muscle grow?” below.

Any movement that forces the rotation of a part of the body close to the limit combined with the maximum extension or flexion of the muscle is hazardous, and will be much more so under a heavy load. Other examples of potentially harmful exercises are “bench lumbar hyperextensions” combined with rotation, “squat” or “press” exercises resulting in downward, internal rotation of the knees and ankles, and “one-handed dumbbell deadweight lift to opposite foot.”

One last point is that isometric training should be employed as a complementary technique rather than the only one. While this method certainly helps develop control, isometric exercises can also block breathing and local blood flow, and they do not raise our awareness of the body’s movements. They can also sometimes cause dangerous levels of strain.

To conclude this explanation, let us note that muscular balance is just as important as strength, flexibility or any other physical quality. Any training program must consider the body as a whole without ignoring any area and should compensate each joint. This guarantees a healthy motor system. Because we do not have eyes in the back of our heads, some weight training enthusiasts end up prioritizing the areas of their bodies they can easily see, favoring the pectoral over the dorsal muscles, the biceps over the triceps, the quadriceps over the ischiotibial group, and so on. Don’t make this mistake.

Clothing

Wear loose-fitting, light sports clothes made of breathable fabrics and free of uncomfortable seams, rivets and metal finishings. Have a spare top handy to change in case you become sweaty during the training session.

Weightlifter’s gloves are recommended to avoid hurting your hands and ensure a firm grip at all times. The use of a support belt is optional for certain exercises, unless on medical advice.

Your training gear should always include a clean towel to cover benches and seats, and to wipe down any sweat from equipment after use.

Use weightlifting shoes (available in specialty stores) or good quality sports footwear with anti-slip soles. Your shoes should be tied at all times. Do not wear the same shoes as in the street, as you will bring dirt and grit into the gym. Though the need for proper footwear may seem obvious, some people can still be found training in flip-flops or dress shoes, and even barefoot. They may have seen pictures of a youthful Arnold training with no shoes on or in flip-flops, but he hardly trained barefoot, and when he did so (for the photo opportunity) he was always running the risk that a slip could cause injury. Prominent people like the one-time athlete and former California governor have many virtues, and there is no need to copy their few vices. Footwear is normally your only point of contact with the ground or with the footplate on the machine. Just as a driver wants the best tires for his automobile, so athletes should also choose the right footwear.

Breathing

We can draw an initial distinction here between breathing for light and heavy loads:

- Light loads: keep your breathing natural and avoid forcing it while doing exercises that use little weight effort for your personal capacity and for the muscle involved. This style should also be used when you are working on very small muscles that put little demand on the cardio-respiratory system, such as the forearm.

- Heavy loads: proper technique requires that you inhale through your nose and mouth at the same time (or only through the mouth for short, quick breaths) during the first half or during the first third of the movement, and exhale through your mouth in the last half or the last third. The rest of the time you should hold your breath. In certain heavy exercises (e.g., squats or bench press) you can begin as you take the strain just before starting the movement, although this requires some practice. If you breathe in through the nose only, as you would do at rest, you will not produce sufficient air flow for the effort involved in weightlifting exercises.

Another reason for this rather unnatural breathing is that the body's own levers function better when supported by a firm trunk. Inhalation should be moderate, neither very deep nor very shallow.

Do not eat, drink or chew gum when you are doing the exercise set, as this hinders normal breathing.

HOW LONG SHOULD I REST BETWEEN SERIES AND EXERCISES?

This depends on several factors, including your objectives, the specific exercise concerned, individual fitness, and the muscles involved.

In general terms, you should restart the exercise and do your next set when your breathing slows to normal from the panting caused by the effort, or when you feel the local muscular congestion caused by the exercise go down. As these variables are not constant and depend on the individual and the muscles involved in the workout, the best advice is to wait until you can do another a series like the preceding one (same weight and number of repeats), but without lingering until you get "cold." Large muscle groups need more rest. The feeling of muscle burn is not always a good benchmark, as very heavy exercises do not produce much accumulation of lactic acid, but they do cause neuro-muscular fatigue and depletion of anaerobic energy reserves. This is a common error even among veteran weight trainers, who see the burning feeling as the only sign of an exercise well done and hang onto it to decide the number of repeats (see "Lactic acid").

The average rest period should be between 1 and 3 minutes.

HOW MANY REPETITIONS SHOULD I DO?

Once again, this depends on your objectives and level. The usual method is to work with percentages, taking 100% as the maximum weight you can lift in a single, properly executed movement (see the appendix at the end of this book). A beginner will achieve some hypertrophy (muscle growth) at 50% of his or her maximum, but advanced athletes will not make much progress at this level.

Some approximate, basic statistical benchmarks for different objectives are as follows:

Objective	Intensity	Repetitions (approx.)
Maximum Strength	85 to 100%	1 to 5
Hypertrophy	70 to 85%	6 to 12
Strength / Endurance	40 to 70%	15 to 25
Endurance	1 to 40%	26 to ...

This table shows why many people who want to increase the size of their muscles fail: they are outside the recommended margins of weight and intensity. If your goal is to achieve muscular hypertrophy, the effort made must go as far as “failure” (i.e., inability to go on) within the parameters indicated. If you find you can do more, it is because you are not using enough weight, or you are using impetus to complete the series (“cheating”). In this instance, the weight* must be somewhat below the maximum. Furthermore, these are not closed-end ranges. Some positive results will be achieved if the percentage approaches either the upper or the lower level. For example, some degree of hypertrophy will occur whether you train at 87% or at 68%, but training at 100% or 10% will make no difference

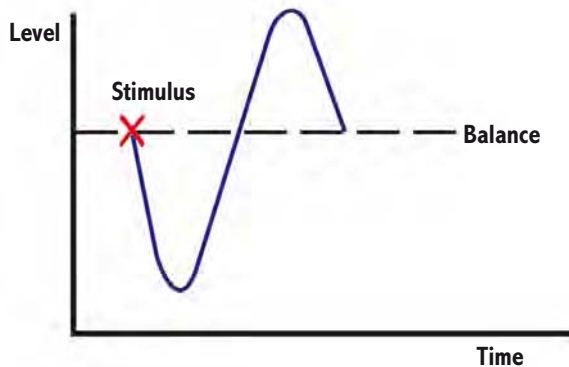
Note: the correct term here would be “mass,” the international unit of which is the kilogram (kg), but the term “weight” is more common in both muscle training and other sports, so we shall use it here to avoid confusing the reader. Basically, the difference is that mass does not change, while weight does depending on the force of gravity. On earth, of course, gravity varies only slightly depending where it is measured, and we may therefore loosely use the term “weight” measured in kilograms or pounds (lb) and not in Neuton Meter to facilitate matters for the lay reader.

THE KEYS TO SUCCESS: INTENSITY AND OVERCOMPENSATION

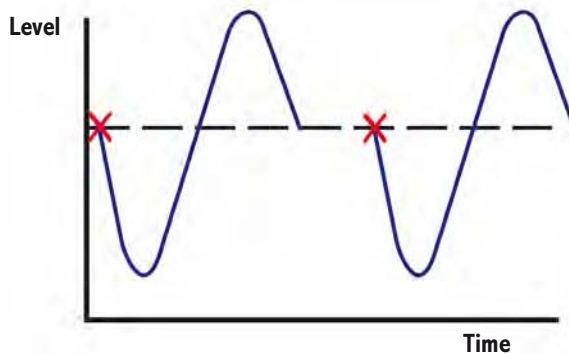
In general, the body is governed by three fundamental laws in fitness and muscle training in particular.

1. The General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS). This law refers to the body's non-specific physical response to any event that alters its general equilibrium (illness, hunger, physical training, etc.). The GAS has three phases:

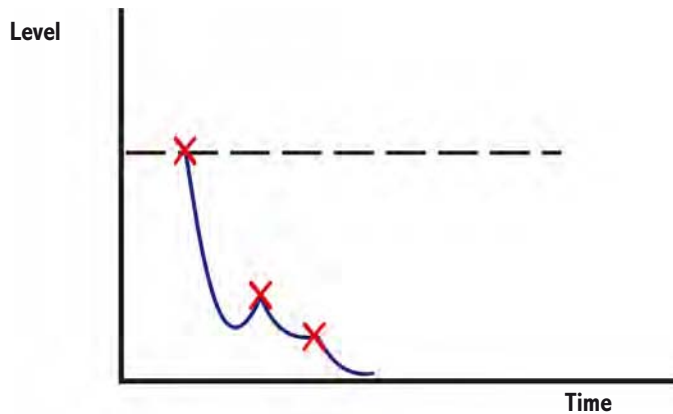
1.A. Reaction: A stimulus (in this case, the training program) alters the body's biological balance, causing it to react and reorganize its defenses to recover its former equilibrium. This can be seen more clearly in a graph:



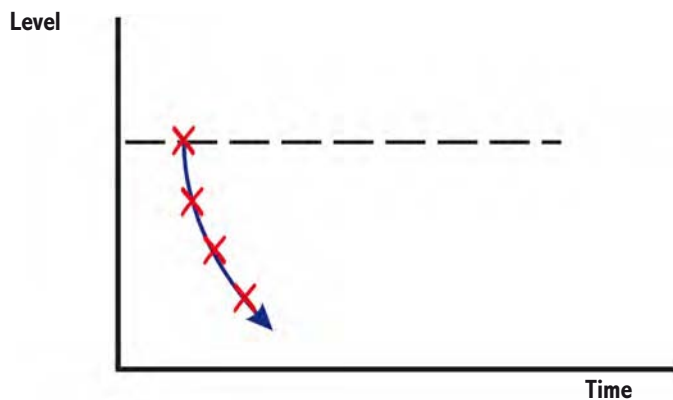
1.B. Resistance: The body not only recovers its initial state, but will go beyond it if training is kept up. The practical explanation for this is that our organism will return to its initial state much earlier than the next session if training is sporadic, and there will be no improvement.



On the other hand, if the next stimulus is delivered too early, the body will not have enough time to recover properly. If this situation is prolonged, it will result in overtraining, not only preventing improvement but eventually causing a deterioration in our physical condition.



1.C. Exhaustion: If the stimulus is not removed, the body becomes exhausted. In practical terms, high intensity training cannot be sustained for very long. There is therefore little point in spending hours on end in the gym.

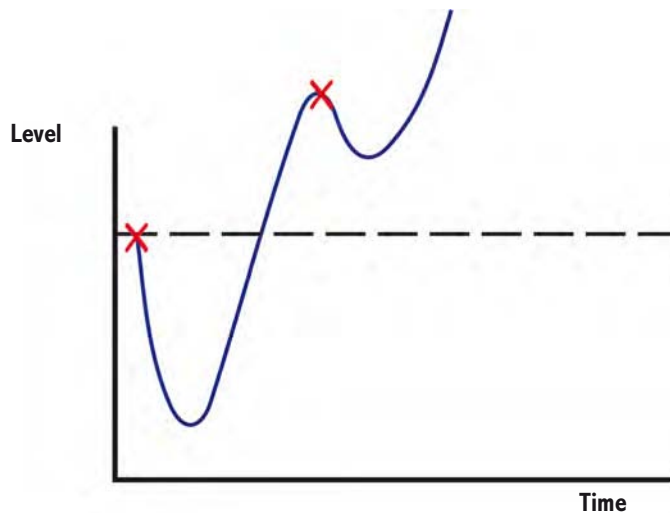


2. Overcompensation Law. This law refers to the body's physical response to training, which is to accumulate a higher workout potential than the initial level. This results in "extragenetic adaptation" (also known as "acute" or "functional" adaptation) during training, and "chronic" or "epigenetic" adaptation" leading to a progressive functional improvement due to the repetition of functional adaptation.

In practical terms, overcompensation (or "supercompensation") is how the body prepares itself for a similar effort in the future. This can be understood most clearly if we imagine always training with the same exercises and weight loads. The body would quickly adapt and no progress would be made beyond a certain point. At this point, the "overload principle," which is explained below, comes into play. Adaptation to training not only causes muscle growth, but also stimulates enzymatic changes, muscle capillarization, neuro-motor development, and metabolic change.

Each individual and training program is different, but in statistical terms it is fair to say that the periods of stimulation of a specific muscle can be repeated between once and three times per week to achieve hypertrophy. A longer, general rest should also be allowed from time to time, and the weights and repetitions

used should be changed periodically (light, moderate and heavy cycles). Meanwhile, the muscles often recover faster than the nervous system, leading some people to the false belief that they can work on the same muscle group again as soon as they feel rested.



(Timing of a properly planned training program)

3. Threshold Law. It is at this point that the concept of intensity comes into play. It is common knowledge that the intensity threshold is influenced by numerous variables, but for practical purposes we may define “acceptable intensity” as a given level of effort below which no significant gains will be made.

The practical explanation for this is that we cannot always control the frequency of training sessions, diet and other important factors, because of work or studies, or for personal reasons. The minimum we can demand of ourselves is to train with intensity whenever we can. While intensity is usually measured in percentage terms (see “How many repeats should I do” above and the appendix at the end of this book), we can in fact intensify an exercise in various ways – by adding more weight, shortening rest times, changing the training times, etc. In any event, the effort must be significant and demanding. A cool head is needed, however, because exaggerating the intensity of workouts can lead to painful and even chronic injuries. In practice, very few people ever take a series to the point of local muscular exhaustion, and most are happy to repeat the exercise a given number of times, as if it were a magic formula. In fact, most of us would be surprised at the effort we are capable of in each exercise if we really put our minds to it, and would find that the limit is well above what we usually do. To go back to an earlier point, the concept of training intensity provides the answer to the question “Do I need to train for several hours each day?” You can either train very hard, or you can train for a long time; but you cannot do both at the same time. Schwarzenegger and Columbu, for example, sometimes did deadweight lifts of up to 650 lb. This may astonish you, but the German strongman Hermann Goerner won fame in the early 20th century for lifting over 725 pounds with just one hand. I hereby challenge any training enthusiast to load up a bar with that weight and try to lift it with one hand. It would feel as if it was literally welded to the floor.

Some people reject working out on one side only in exercises like “Bench quadriceps extensions (one leg),” because they think it is less intense than bilateral lifts, but this belief is not quite accurate. Of course, the total weight involved will be less and in general terms the effect on the body will be less (smaller GAS effect), but the exercise intensity for each quadriceps is probably the same. In this light, it is necessary to consider

the workout for each muscle, specifically to establish local intensity on a case-by-case basis. In the above example, some machines have a lateral load, which prompts a greater effort on the side taking the strain when both legs are used simultaneously. In such cases, working out on only one side may give better results than bilaterally.

To return to the optimum training time, it will depend on the muscle groups you are working on, how many hours you have available each week, your physical condition and your objectives. In approximate terms, the right amount of time would be 30 to 90 minutes for each session, and from 3 to 6 sessions per week. It is not possible to be more specific here because of the numerous factors involved, although it would be fair to say that some 90% of people would fall within these margins. Lengthening your training time does not necessarily mean increasing intensity. In fact, if you increase intensity, you should cut the workout time and volume.

Enthusiasm can lead some people to overtrain. If you think this may be happening, you should lower some of the variables but not the intensity of your workouts. Here are some basic tips to “cure” overtraining.

Start with a week of total rest. When you begin working out again, establish your routine as follows, and for as long as necessary: 3 times per week on alternate days; 2 muscle groups per day (one large and the other small); 1 or 2 basic exercises per muscle group; 3 series per group; 10 repeats to “failure” per series; 8 or 9 hours of sleep; a good diet and sufficient hydration.

Of course, this is just one of many approaches available. In fact, some bodybuilders design their habitual routine in this way, and not only as a solution to overtraining. However, other people may find that the volume of work is rather low.

Having looked at the three basic laws of physical training, let us now consider the foundations of muscle growth (hypertrophy), which may be summarized as follows:

- Good biomechanics
- Appropriate rest
- Proper diet
- Sufficient hydration
- Specific workouts
- Appropriate frequency
- Sufficient intensity
- Exercise order
- Progressive overload
- Exercise variety

We could also add proper warm-up, good breathing, the right choice of exercises, psychological preparation, dietary supplements when necessary, and patience. This long list explains why sometimes it can be so difficult to make progress, whether your objective is muscle growth, weight loss, fitness, or any other goal.

Let us continue this discussion with a brief explanation of some key principles:

- Overload principle

Workouts should involve a greater effort than is usual for each individual, in his or her daily life.

In practice, a beginner should start with light exercises, increasing the load little by little as they become easier. This explains why beginners make progress using almost any training program, but also why they give up when they fail to make further gains. It is also for this reason that intermediate and advanced weight trainers need to program their training schedule and diet much more strictly, taking a scientific approach.

- Progress principle

This is linked to the overload principle. The body adapts to new exercises, so they must gradually be made more intensive.

In practice, when your goal is to increase workout intensity, the right approach is to first increase the number of repetitions and then increase the weight used (at which point you will again reduce repetitions).

If at the same time you increase the weight used and the number of repetitions (the number of repetitions that you were able to manage with a lighter weight), you are likely to suffer injuries sooner or later. Lifting just few more ounces will be a triumph, and as time passes, gains will be larger.

- Reversibility principle

If the stimulus stops, the body will tend to return to its initial condition. When you stop working out, the body atrophies week by week and slips back into its former state.

In practice, physical activity, and muscle training above all, must eventually become a lifestyle. Because if you stop, your body will gradually return go back to its former state. Obviously, the muscle does not turn into “fat,” a common excuse for not even starting exercise.

- Specificity and transfer principle

The best way to gain strength is to train for strength. To gain endurance, train for endurance.

In practice, if you want to gain strength, muscle volume or both, you will need to train using a considerable amount of weight. If your aim is to lose weight or “define” your muscles, you will need to concentrate mainly on diet and aerobic exercise. However, we now know that there is a positive correlation between the majority of physical capabilities: this is known as “transfer.” For example, if you gain strength in your legs, you could be able to run faster, but not by excessive muscular hypertrophy, because it would slow you down again by becoming heavier.

- Individuality principle

Every individual reacts differently to the same stimulus or training program.

In practice, there is little point in copying what may have worked for someone else without considering your own physical condition and aptitudes. The basics, as described in this book, work for almost everybody, but eventually you will need to personalize your workouts and training programs.

- Continuity principle

The need for continuity is explained at the beginning of this section. Briefly, it may be defined in terms of regularly planning of your workouts. If they are too spread out over time, the biological adaptation you are looking for will not appear. On the other hand, if your training sessions are too close together, you run the risk of overtraining.

The other “principles” of muscle training, such as pre-exhaustion training, muscular confusion, burn, antagonistic super series and so forth have no scientific value and are little more than a means for bodybuilding gurus to make a name for themselves. Their only real advantage is to prevent boredom.

Anabolic steroids are another matter, but are not the subject of the present work.

WHY DO MUSCLES GROW?

Numerous theories exist in this area, some of which are actually contradictory. In this section, we shall look briefly at the most modern and widely accepted of these.

Muscle is made up basically of muscle cells or fibers, which contract when they receive an electrochemical stimulus. There are basically two types of fibers: slow and quick. The slow fibers appear to specialize mainly in short, rapid contraction and the quick fibers in contractions that require less strength but more time. The percentage of these fibers varies in each muscle and each individual, which explains in part why some people are highly suited to endurance training and others to strength training. According to some theories, muscle fibers can be adapted or changed by training counter to their natural disposition, but other studies suggest the contrary.

Aside from methods like liquid retention or increasing overall weight, there are various specific, and healthier, ways to achieve hypertrophy.

1. By increasing the thickness of muscle fibers (and myofibrils). This requires sub-maximum strength workouts (75-85%), which is the most common and effective method of achieving muscle growth.
2. By increasing the number of capillaries. This requires endurance or strength-endurance training (20-50% and 50-75%, respectively).
3. By increasing the number and thickness of the other muscle components, such as connective tissue, sarcomeres, etc. To achieve this, movements must be extensive, although within natural safety limits, and it is necessary to train at a different speed from your usual workouts.
4. By increasing the number of fibers. Experts do not agree whether the increase is actually in the number of fibers (questionable), the myofibrils (more likely), or whether it is actually the longitudinal breaks in the fibers that raise the count.

There is a belief (widely held in some bodybuilding circles) that it is possible to grow certain parts of a muscle without affecting other adjacent structures, especially in the same muscle sheath. The truth is that this is not possible, at least not to the extent supposed, unless there is bone or tendon insertion in between. To clarify this, some exercises may affect different areas (especially of large, broad muscles, such as the latissimus dorsi or the gluteus maximus) because some fibers make different, and even antagonistic, movements. However, this is not usually the case when the distinction is made based on proximal or distal insertions, but rather when it refers to deep or surface areas, lateral and medial areas, or upper and lower areas. It is because of this that it is possible to work the upper or lower area of the pectoral muscle, the superficial or deep part of the gluteus, and so on (although not exclusively), but not the proximal or distal area of the calf muscle.

Doping with anabolic substances like testosterone, human growth hormone (HGH) and insulin is dangerous; it does not matter, whether these drugs are taken orally, injected or administered in any other way. Only a specialized physician can, or should, control the need for such a treatment. Modern research offers some clues about how to boost the secretion of some hormones naturally, although these studies are not always conclusive:

- Testosterone: anaerobic training for maximum strength (80-95%) with short rest periods (30 to 60 seconds), especially in combination with exercises that work out major muscle groups (rather than single muscle exercises). This may be better done in the evening due to the natural circadian rhythm, and it requires sufficient rest between workouts. It is especially effective in men because the hormone is produced naturally by the testicles.
- HGH: sub-maximum anaerobic workouts (65-85%) with incomplete recovery (approximately 60 seconds), especially in combined exercises. Aerobic and anaerobic training with reduced loads is less effective. Also, cold seems to inhibit the secretion of this hormone. Changes may be observed in both sexes, although the effects are influenced by the menstrual cycle in women. Some amino acids, like Arginina, appear to stimulate the secretion of HGH.

This does not mean that training programs should be based on these parameters, since there are various routes to achieve muscle growth, all of which should be used as explained above. Furthermore, training in the evening may be advisable in view of the evidence for better results, but work, studying, and daily activities mean that most people feel much more tired at this time than they do mid-morning. In this light, we recommend that you train at a time of day when you have the most energy, and that you avoid working out too soon after eating.

Insulin is another protagonist of muscle growth. Although it is very difficult to control, it is still an ally of the athlete who is training for strength, because among other properties, it helps glucose and amino acids enter the muscle and decreases catabolism. Some preliminary studies suggest that insulin increases when a liquid diet is followed and during workouts. However, the use of diet supplements, especially carbohydrates, may not have the desired effects because they alter the balance of insulin and other powerful hormones.

Let us end with a final point about strength. Everybody thinks that a larger muscle volume means more strength, but this is only true up to a point.

We are likely to find “strength difference” between two people who are following the same training regimen, who also have the same height and weight, are equally motivated, eat the same diet, have the same muscle volume, and so on.

One explanation for this may be a “mechanical advantage,” which is to say a genetic predisposition that is favorable or unfavorable for certain movements. In this example, if one of our athletes has a more prominent kneecap than

the other, for example, he will be able to lift a little more weight in “quadriceps extensions” due to the difference in leverage provided by his bone structure. However, this inherited capacity is no more than a predisposition, and it is personal effort that leads to athletic progress.

WEIGHT LOSS TRAINING

This book is not only concerned with muscle training, but it also helps to plan workouts to lose weight and expand or tone our muscles. When the objective is to lose weight, people oftentimes erroneously choose workouts involving a large number of repetitions. The idea is to “define” or “trim” their musculature locally (e.g., by doing the “biceps 21 curl”). There are two basic biological errors in this approach:

1. You cannot lose weight locally by doing specific workouts for that area.
2. Fat burn in (intense but short) anaerobic exercises is negligible compared to aerobic exercise using light or moderate weight for a prolonged period.

Lifting a weight 15, 20 or 30 times, for example, is still an anaerobic exercise. So what is the solution?

Even though this book does not include a detailed study of different energy systems or any extensive discussion of sports nutrition or fiber types, we may still sum up the matter as follows:

Probably the smartest way to lose weight and at the same time display a more defined musculature is to train hard using weights, which also burns up calories and maintains a high metabolic rate. It is also advisable to combine aerobic exercise (e.g., jogging), with a balanced diet (i.e., less but better food intake), and the results will soon be visible.

MACHINES AND FREE WEIGHTS

Volumes of literature could be written on the ongoing argument between the use of exercise machines or free weights, but here we shall conclude that both are important and complement each other in muscle training. To get rid of some old myths, free weights do not help to gain more muscle mass than machines, and machines do not provide any additional benefits in terms of “form and definition.”

Let us look at the pros and cons.

- Safety: no difference.

Some machines, such as “cable pulldowns” for the back muscles can be dangerous if they break, and such problems are unlikely to happen using free weights. Inadequate maintenance and wear and tear affect machines more than free weights.

Machines may also be poorly designed, resulting in inadequate execution of the exercise over long periods. On the other hand, the discs used for free weights may be inaccurately calibrated, bars may lack grip notching, or they may be too thick or too thin (ideally they should be about 1 to 1 1/4 inches).

A machine is usually safer than a free weight if you suddenly run out of strength, or injure yourself midway through an exercise and you end up dropping the load (e.g., “multipower bench press”) because safety features are normally in place to prevent these accidents.

Some machines also allow you to pick up and put down the load more safely than the equivalent free weight would. This is particularly useful in the case of back problems.

- Ease of use: machines

Machines are usually easier to use because they have a fixed travel, making them particularly suitable for beginners. Meanwhile, advanced users can concentrate on the muscle they wish to train without the risk of losing balance or the need to train with a companion.

Good technique is essential when training with free weights, although many exercises are very simple.

- Ergonomics: free weights

Machines normally allow numerous adjustments, but even so the individual will always need to adapt in some way. Free weights adapt to the individual.

The load on a machine is not usually the “actual” weight lifted by the athlete due to the effects of pulleys and levers. In the case of free weights, “what you see is what you get.”

Movements are usually much more natural using free weights than machines.

- Motivation: no difference

Free weights tend to be more motivating than machines, although there is no real reason for this.

Some people dislike having to load up bars, unload them and put the weights away.

- Versatility: free weights

Free weights, and especially dumbbells, are much more versatile than machines.

- Price: free weights

Free weights are much more economical to buy than machines. Because of this, you are more likely to find a gym that is more stocked with free weights than machines.

- Time: machines

It is usually quicker to change the weight selection on a machine, which is very useful if you are sharing an apparatus or want to change the load fast.

- Efficacy: no difference

Machines allow permanent effort, in contrast to some exercises using free weights, where only a part of the movement is made against the force of gravity.

Free weights tend to involve the fixed muscles more, an important difference.

In terms of muscle growth, both machines and free weights are complementary and useful.

Bodybuilders often believe that free weights encourage more growth than machines, but this is a matter that should really be assessed on the basis of the exercise in question. For example, a “standing calf raise” using a bar across the trapezius or under a machine support is exactly the same measured in terms of the effect on the calf muscle. In contrast, a “preacher bench biceps curl” may be less intense than the equivalent machine, where the strain is constant. It is because of this that “efficacy” is treated as equal in the above paragraphs.

LACTIC ACID

Many athletes use the feeling of “burning” in their muscles to set the rhythm of their workouts without really knowing why. We shall briefly describe the cause of this feeling here and explain how it should be understood.

Among other things, the metabolism of energy produces cellular oxidation; this mechanism releases hydrogen ions from the nutritional substrate due to the action of the enzymes that regulate the process.

These hydrogen ions are picked up by the coenzyme NAD^+ . In short, the substrate loses ions as it oxidizes, and these are gained by the coenzyme, which is reduced to NADH while the other H^+ is released into the cellular liquid.

Another receptor, called FAD , acts in a similar manner, bonding with two hydrogen atoms to form FADH_2 .

As both FADH_2 and NADH are transported around the respiratory chain, two hydrogen ions bond with one atom of oxygen to form water.

Also, adenosine triphosphate (ATP) is the primary fuel burned by the muscle in short, intense bursts of effort (like those required by muscle training). The process by which FADH_2 and NADH are transferred to the molecular oxygen is called phosphorylation.

In very intense exercises, a deficit of O_2 occurs, causing an imbalance between the release of H and its capture by O_2 . The hydrogen ions accumulate and bond with the pyruvic acid present in the muscle to form lactic acid (not to be confused with lactate, a salt), which is in fact a waste product but is recycled back into pyruvic acid by the body for further use.

This lactic acid spreads through the bloodstream, moving away from the place where it was created. However, when an intense effort continues for some time, the system fails to generate ATP as fast as it is needed, and the resulting accumulation of lactic acid inhibits the functioning of some of the enzymes necessary for muscular contraction, which slows down or stops.

The effort involved in a “leg press” series of 3 maximum repetitions (to “failure”) would be enormously intense, but would take little time. However, if we were to try 15 maximum repetitions of the same exercise, we would experience a burning sensation and panting, indicating an accumulation and deficient synthesis of the lactic acid. Having reached this point, you should bring your breathing under control and actively rest the area concerned by massaging or moving the muscles to stimulate irrigation and the normalization of the body’s systems.

WEIGHT TRAINING AND PREGNANCY

Most women can continue training until the later stages of pregnancy under medical supervision. The basic rules to follow are:

1. Reduce intensity (use less weight, do fewer series, increase rest periods).
2. Shorten your daily training time (30 minutes is usually enough).
3. Avoid holding your breath.
4. Do not do any exercises that put pressure on your tummy (e.g., “dorsal row” machines).
5. Do not do any exercises in a prone position (lying with the face downward) after the third or fourth month of gestation (approximately 20 weeks of gestation).
6. Slow the pace of aerobic exercises to avoid raising your pulse rate above 120-140 beats/min (depending on your age and your doctor’s recommendations).
7. Do not perform movements to the limits. Hormonal changes can cause instability in the joints.
8. Perform stretches with caution for the same reason.
9. Strictly control your hydration and diet.
10. The later months of pregnancy are the most delicate, and your doctor may recommend that you reduce training to the level of mobility exercises with no additional load.
11. Avoid exercises that are technically difficult or potentially hazardous.
12. Stop any competitive sports.
13. Pay attention to your body’s temperature and the ambient temperature inside the training room.
14. Be careful with hygiene and your physical and mental well-being.
15. Post-natal recovery should be supervised by your doctor. However, most women can return to their normal exercise routine a few weeks after giving birth, especially when they have not suffered any complications and were in good physical condition before becoming pregnant.

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES OR OTHER IMPAIRMENTS

The dictionary's definition of disability is any impairment or difficulty affecting the performance of daily tasks due to the alteration of certain physical or intellectual capacities. Muscle training may or may not be advisable depending on the type and degree of disability or impairment (e.g., illness, old age, injury, etc.). This decision should be jointly made by the doctor and the individual concerned. When there is no impediment, most disabled people can do many weight training and aerobic exercises and enormously benefit from them. There is no room in this book to discuss the full range of possible disabilities and problems, and we have confined ourselves to briefly mention those that are most common and affect muscle training.

- Psychological impairment. Depending on the type and severity of the disability, being accompanied by a family member or another responsible person who is aware of his or her condition should be sufficient to safeguard the physical and mental well-being of the athlete.
- Sensory impairment. Blind and partially sighted people, as well as those with hearing or speech problems can do the same exercises as anybody else. Nevertheless, the blind and partially sighted (depending on the severity of the impairment) should be accompanied by another person in the gym, which is a highly changeable environment where the location of all objects is difficult to memorize.
- Illness. Only a specialized physician can determine whether physical training is advisable or not during sickness. If training is possible and you are prescribed drugs of any kind, it is important to inform your doctor that you intend to continue working out and also to inform your trainer that you are taking medication.
- Reduced mobility in any part of the body. There is almost always some way to adapt workouts to the needs of the individual, and your trainer will be able to help you.

Throughout this book, we will note exercise variations suitable for people with disabilities or suffering from injury and allowing the design of a personalized training program (see, for example, Exercise 29 shoulders, 12 chest, 1.5 legs, 8.3 abdomen and 8 biceps). The number of exercises explained (over 400) offers a wide range of choice.

People with disabilities will also benefit psychologically and socially from training. It helps them to feel self-sufficient and provides an opportunity to establish relationships with fellow athletes at the gym.

A good sports center should adapt to people with disabilities and not vice versa.

A WEIGHT TRAINING CODE OF CONDUCT

At all times, a good athlete should be friendly and polite in relating with his or her peers. This code of conduct summarizes certain rules of etiquette that everybody using a gym, sharing space, and apparatus with others should observe.

1. Be respectful of others, whether they are beginners or advanced athletes, male or female, young or old. This includes showing respect for those who turn up to train but appear to be wasting their time. Not everybody goes to the gym for the same reasons.
2. Leave all apparatus clean and put them away after use; not where you found it, but where it ought to go.
3. Respect hygiene standards before, during and after working out. A towel should always be used in shared training rooms. It is advisable to take a shower before entering the gym, but do not use perfumes or scents.
4. Although the gym is for everybody, you should always try to use weights or machines that are completely free, because if you use them while another person is resting, you may break their concentration or extend their break too long. On the contrary, it might happen that while you are resting, someone else uses the apparatus you have been using and then you would need to show politeness.
5. If you see somebody having difficulty, or you think they might be having problems starting an exercise, offer your assistance only if you have learned how to do it because the wrong help could cause accidents.
6. Some noise is inevitable in a gym, but there is no need to allow weights to clang onto the floor or clash dumbbells together, to shout or to groan aloud with effort. This is rude and can be annoying to other users.
7. Proper sports clothing should be worn, because rivets or metal finishing could tear bench covers.
8. The wrong kind of shoes can mark the floor, and wearing street shoes bring dirt and grit inside the gym.
9. Every sports center usually has its own rules, which are mostly the use of common sense and politeness. We should respect them if we want to earn respect from others.
10. Work out hard but be modest about it.

CONCLUSION

Among this mass of information and technical details, the reader will find specific answers and solutions for muscle training in pursuit of a healthy, aesthetically muscled body. With due caution, given that we do not know the reader's level of fitness, genetic predisposition, or other factors, we may sum up as follows:

- Number of repetitions: between 6 and 12 repetitions (to “failure” on the last series).
- Intensity: between 70 and 80% of our personal maximum, in line with the number of repeats intended.
- Sets: between 5 and 12, although as a general rule, you should stop when muscular fatigue prevents you from doing any more sets within the parameters given for repetition and intensity. It is best not to focus everything on a single exercise, and if you intend a high intensity workout, less will probably be better than more.
- Rest between sets: between 1 and 3 minutes (longer in the case of large muscles or high intensity workouts, and shorter for small muscles and lighter effort). The general rule is to rest long enough to go on to do another set correctly but without “cooling off” or losing your concentration.
- Number of exercises: between 2 and 4 for each muscle group (more in the case of large and less in the case of small groups).
- Order of exercises in the training session: start with the large muscle groups and go on to the smaller ones; start with the more hazardous exercises (e.g., “bench press”) and go on to those that are safer (e.g., “pushups”); start with any atrophied or weaker muscles and go on to the hypertrophied ones; start with free weights and go on to the machines, which are generally safer in the case of muscular failure; start with combined exercises and finish with the simplest ones.
- Weekly frequency per muscle group: once or twice per week, but if your workouts are very intense, once a week is enough.
- Number of days per week: between 3 and 6 depending on intensity, level of fitness, training schedule, and available time.
- Routine changes: make weekly changes in your training routine when any of the following factors occurs: general or local stagnation, discomfort or injury, boredom or lack of motivation, changes in the objectives or goals, changes in diet or rest habits, changes in workout time availability, etc. In any event, some changes in your routine every few months could be beneficial, and they could be more or less drastic, depending on the circumstances.

Despite these general rules, there are countless exceptions. Do not be afraid to seek the advice of trainers at your gym. To safeguard your health, a visit to a doctor specialized in sports medicine is recommended.

A BRIEF PHILOSOPHY OF TRAINING

Classical biomechanics teach that the body is governed by three basic principles:

- Balance
- Comfort (absence of pain)
- Economy

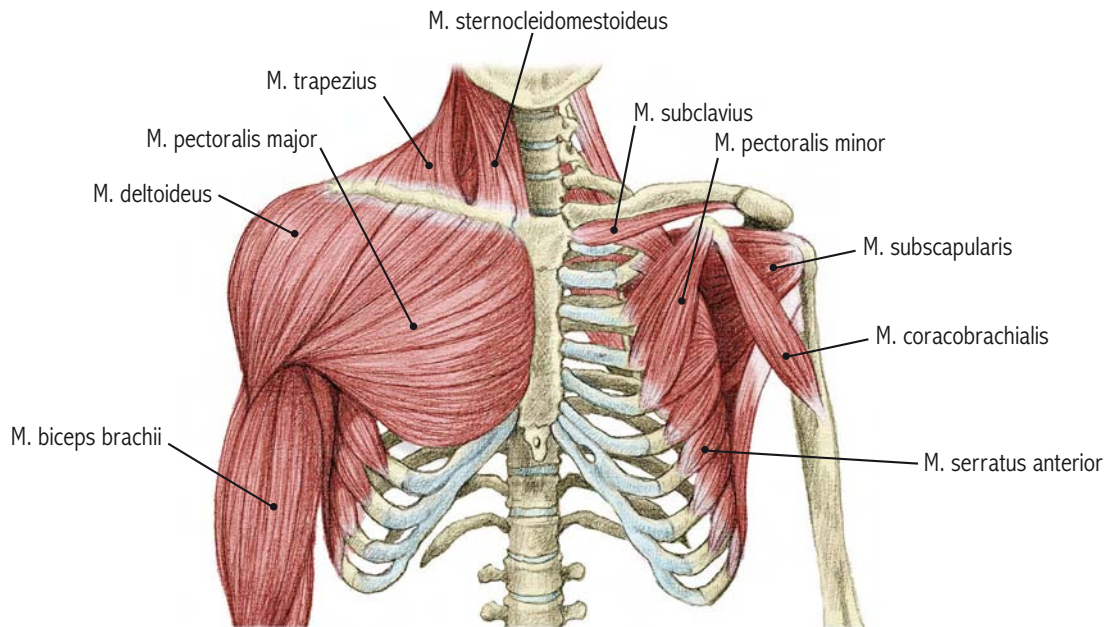
It is obvious that high intensity weight training temporarily breaks these laws to achieve muscle gain through overcompensation by:

- Upsetting the physical balance by training one part of the body and temporarily ignoring its antagonist.
- Ending the comfort of rest and approaching the threshold of bearable discomfort and even pain.
- Dispensing with economy of movement, since the pattern in workouts is not based on this principle, but on the most appropriate movement in biomechanical terms to make gains without incurring excessive risk in each specific exercise.

Although lack of time is the most common excuse used to give up training, or not even to start, in reality, the real reason so many people drop out is the discomfort caused by breaking the three laws of biomechanics. We have become used to a soft world that treats ease and quick results as desirable, but as all weight training enthusiasts know, it is a demanding sport that requires years of practice. Muscle training is in fact one of the few sports where daily workouts themselves become a form of competition, if only against ourselves. We need to comprehend that training is necessary to improve both our physical and our mental health because the mind and the body are with us throughout our lives. It is our responsibility to look after them. Those who wisely understand this message and make physical fitness a philosophy of life will be happier people.

MYOLOGICAL STRUCTURE OF THE CHEST: BIOMECHANICAL INTRODUCTION TO THE MAIN MUSCLES

MUSCLES WITH INSERTION IN THE HUMERUS



PECTORALIS MAJOR (anterior, superficial)

Origin: clavicle (clavicular head: arising from the anterior surface of the sternal half); ribs and sternal membrane (sternocostal head: arising from the rib-cartilage); rectus abdominis (abdominal head: arising from the anterior lamina of the abdominal wall)

Insertion: humerus (crest of the greater tubercle)

Main functions: anteversion of the arm if extended (abduction); adduction and medial rotation. The sternocostal and abdominal parts of the muscle lower and raise the shoulder. It also plays an ancillary role in breathing (arms still).

SUBSCAPULARIS (anterior, deep)

Origin: scapula (subscapular fossa)

Insertion: humerus (lesser tubercle and the proximal part of the crest)

Main functions: medial rotation of the arm

CORACOBRACHIALIS (anterior, deep)

Origin: scapula (coracoid process)

Insertion: humerus (medial area, prolongation of the crest of the lesser tubercle)

Main functions: anteversion of the arm and to hold the head of the humerus in the joint. It also acts in adduction depending on the starting position

BICEPS BRACHII (anterior, superficial)

See "BICEPS"

Observations: The pectoralis major is one of the most striking muscles in the human body, to such an extent in fact that it is often overtrained compared to the back muscles. Combined with overtraining of the abdomen (no less common), this can eventually produce a kyphotic posture (i.e., outward curvature of the spinal column in the thoracic region, causing a rounded back). This problem is easily prevented by training the whole body harmoniously and regular stretching. It is not normally necessary to specifically work out the lower part of the pectoral muscle, which is sufficiently exercised by conventional training and can be "trimmed" by dieting.

MUSCLES WITHOUT INSERTION IN THE HUMERUS

PECTORALIS MINOR (anterior, deep)

Origin: ribs (3rd to 5th)

Insertion: scapula (coracoid process)

Main functions: rotation and lowering of the scapula

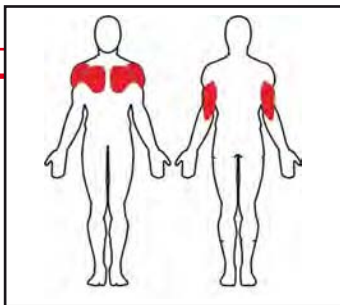
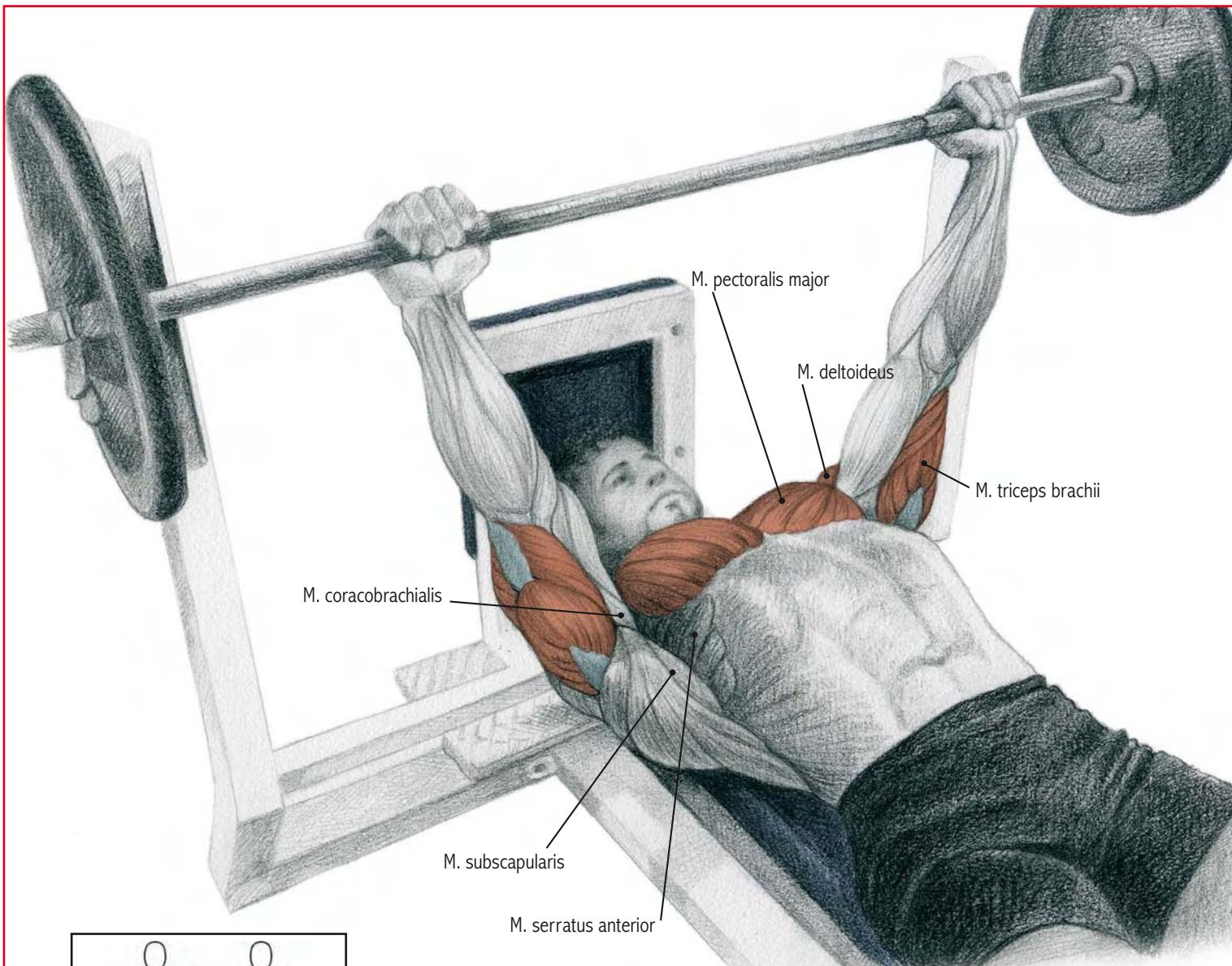
SERRATUS ANTERIOR (anterior, deep)

Origin: ribs (generally the first 9)

Insertion: scapula (medial margin, from the upper to the lower angle).

Main functions: anteversion of the arm, thoracic stabilization of the scapula; downward and lateral rotation (lower part), upward rotation (upper part); secondary elevation of the ribs (ancillary function in breathing)

Observations: The serratus can normally be trained sufficiently via compound movements of the chest muscles using exercises like the “bench press.” Nevertheless, this book contains some specific exercises for this muscle. Problems with the serratus will be felt in abduction above 90° to the body and the condition known as “winged scapula” (i.e., displacement of the bone). In this regard, we may note that winged scapula also occurs in the case of problems with the rhomboid muscles, but it is not accompanied by any difficulty in raising and extending the arms. As may be observed from the diagram, the key anterior muscles of the trunk are less numerous than the back muscles, but many muscle training enthusiasts are paradoxically keen on them. Doubtless this is because it is easier to see your front than your back in a mirror. However, the smart athlete never ignores any part of the body and will certainly not train in a manner that is in any way unbalanced.



Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: pectoralis major, triceps, deltoids (anterior)

SECONDARY MUSCLES: coracobrachialis, serratus anterior, subscapularis

ANTAGONISTS: latissimus dorsi, biceps, deltoids (posterior)

VARIATIONS

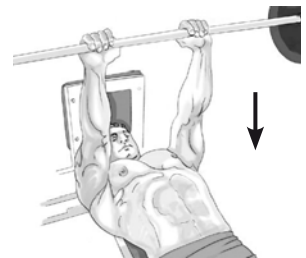
1.2 ... CLOSE GRIP / HANDS TOGETHER

MUSCLES USED

triceps, pectorals and deltoids (anterior)

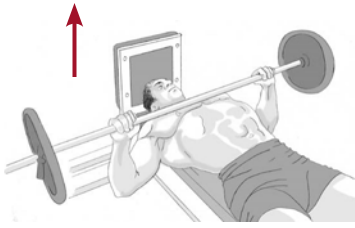
TECHNIQUE

The movement is the same, but the hands are kept only about 20 cm apart. As a result, the triceps takes over a part of the work done by the pectoral muscle. Do not do this exercise if you have problems with your wrists, and use a lighter weight than in the basic exercise.





Execution



Lie flat on the bench (supine) supporting your head and back, with your feet firmly planted on the ground. Position yourself and take hold of the bar, which should be directly above your eyes, with a symmetrical overhand grip (pronation), hands slightly beyond shoulder-width apart, preferably keeping your thumb below the bar. Inhale before taking the bar down from its supports and bring it into line with your chest. Lower your elbows away from trunk until the bar is just above the middle part of your chest, and then raise it vertically. Breathe in as you lower the bar and exhale as you complete the lift.

Comments

This is a basic exercise. It is heavy but simple; it requires concentration and, often, assistance. If the bench is high, it is a good idea to position the feet on a step to avoid excessive curvature of the lower back. However, the main thing is stability. You may arch your back (which provides greater power) to complete a set, but only if you have difficulty with the last repeat and you do not have the help of a fellow athlete. Be careful to leave the bar properly in its supports when you finish. Variations outside the trajectory described (e.g., lowering the bar toward the shoulders or the abdomen) are not recommended, and in any case, they do not provide any additional benefits. Though it is defined as an antagonistic muscle in this exercise, the biceps also takes the strain in the bench press. This is just one of the many examples where a muscle moves in one way but can also help its antagonist, depending on which part of the body is focused on and other factors (see Ex. 1 “Shoulders and Neck,” for example).



Common mistakes: arching the back (this means your feet are placed too low); bouncing the bar off the chest, lowering the bar toward the neck or abdomen; excessive or insufficient weight; locking the elbows at the apex of the movement; moving the feet, back or head



Imbalances in muscle tone between the anterior and posterior muscles of the torso can cause kyphosis (rounding of the upper back due to outward curvature of the spinal column), among other problems. This means your workouts should be evenly spread to include both the anterior and posterior regions, as well as laterally.

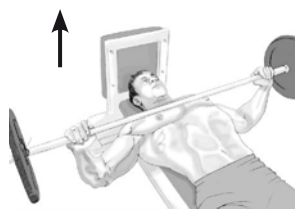
1.3 ...WIDE GRIP / HANDS APART

MUSCLES USED

pectorals, deltoids (anterior) and triceps

TECHNIQUE

The only difference is the greater separation between the hands. This displaces a part of the effort to the deltoids and takes some of the strain off the triceps. Clearly, the movement will be somewhat shorter. In theory, this variant helps expand the chest (see Ex. 5). It helps to inhale deeply as you lower the bar.



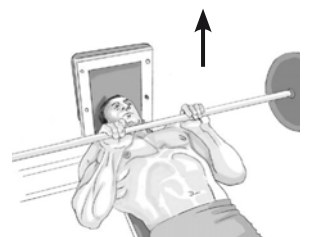
1.4 ... CLOSE GRIP WITH ELBOWS IN

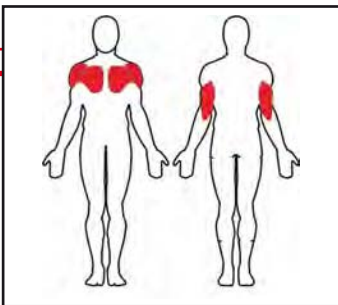
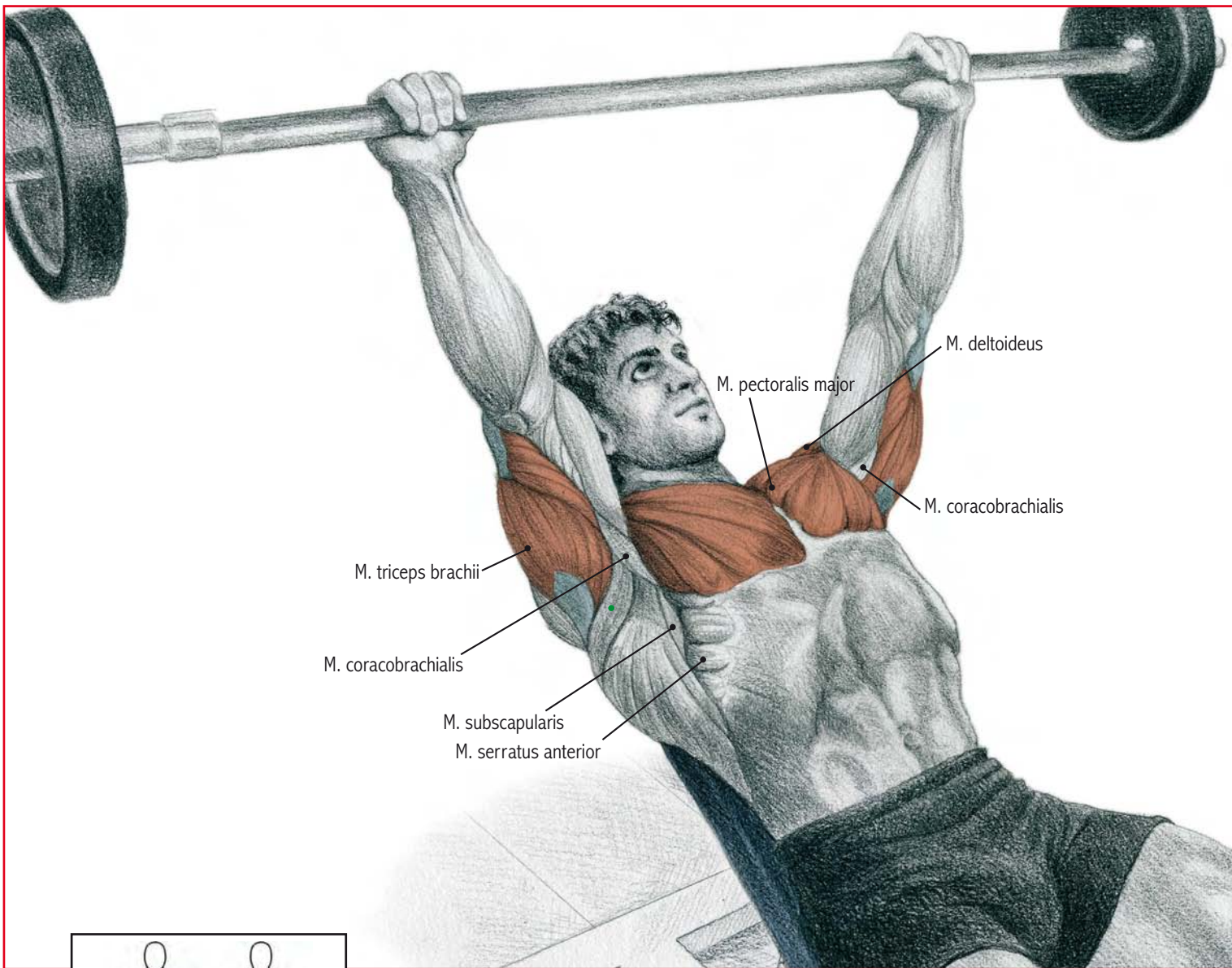
MUSCLES USED

deltoids (anterior), triceps and pectorals

TECHNIQUE

The technique is the same as the close grip press, but in this case the elbows stay close to the trunk and the bar comes down toward the lower ribs. This shifts a part of the work done by the pectoral muscle in the basic exercise onto the shoulder and triceps. This is, in fact, a heavy variant of the “French press” (see Ex. 1, triceps).





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: pectoralis major (clavicular area), triceps, deltoids (anterior)

SECONDARY MUSCLES: deltoids (medial), coracobrachialis, serratus anterior, subscapularis

ANTAGONISTS: latissimus dorsi, biceps, deltoids (posterior)

VARIATIONS

2.2 ...WITH DUMBBELLS

MUSCLES USED

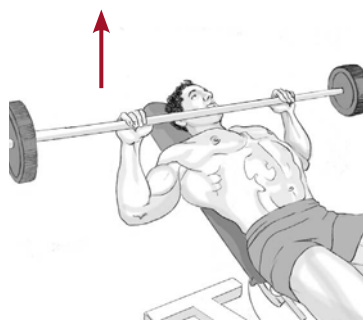
pectoralis major (clavicular area), triceps, deltoids (anterior)

TECHNIQUE

Set up the bench in the same position as described for the basic exercise and lie back with the dumbbells on your knees or on the floor. The lift is the same as using a bar, but you can “close” toward the end of the movement, bringing the weights closer together. In theory, this provides a proximal workout (i.e. close to the sternum). However, the difference is not great because the whole muscle in any case contracts, given that there are no insertions between the medial and external area. That said, the movement is more natural. Doing the incline bench press with dumbbells allows you to lower the weight further, which helps flexibility, although you should be careful to reduce the load to prevent injury. The main disadvantage is that the weight used is normally less than using a bar because of the movements needed to get into position starting from a low position (rather than lifting the weight down from supports). Also, there is a greater risk of instability toward the end of each set due to muscle exhaustion (often affecting the triceps).



Execution



Sit back on the bench, set at an incline of no more than 30 or 45°, placing your feet firmly on the ground and supporting your back and head. Take hold of the bar, which should be directly above the forehead, with an overhand grip (pronation). The forearms should move perpendicular to the ground, and your hands should be a little more than shoulder-width apart.

Breathe in before lifting the bar off its support. Lower the bar until just touching the upper part of your chest and then raise it vertically. Keep your elbows away from your body. Exhale on completing the lift.

Comments

The bench can be set at an inclination of up to 60 or 70°, which increases the work done by the upper part of the pectoralis major, but does so at the cost of shifting much of the effort to the shoulders.

This region of the chest should not be ignored, but it usually receives less attention than the lower part. Contrary to popular belief, however, it does not help women prevent or correct sagging breasts, though the exercise is no less useful for that.

Remember that you can train some muscles (e.g., the pectoralis, dorsal, and gluteus) by working one or another area because of the structure of the muscle fibers, but that bodybuilders tend to overstate the benefits of workouts targeting different parts of a single muscle sheath. This is often impossible, at least to the extent claimed. The medial and external region of the pectoral muscle is activated by horizontal adduction of the arm against resistance, like bench press exercises.



Common mistakes: setting the bench at too much of an incline (over 50°); arching the back; bouncing the bar off the chest; locking the elbows at the apex of the movement



Wrist movements under strain can result in damage to the small bones and muscles in the joint, and sometimes injury to the forearm. A grip with the thumb in opposition to the fingers (“clasping” the bar) is more natural and, above all, safer for any kind of press.

2.3 ...WITH DUMBBELLS AND OUTWARD TWIST

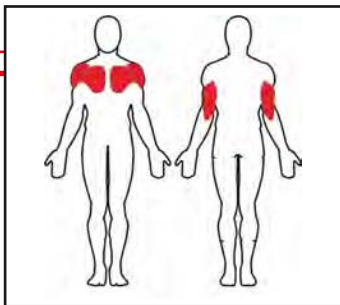
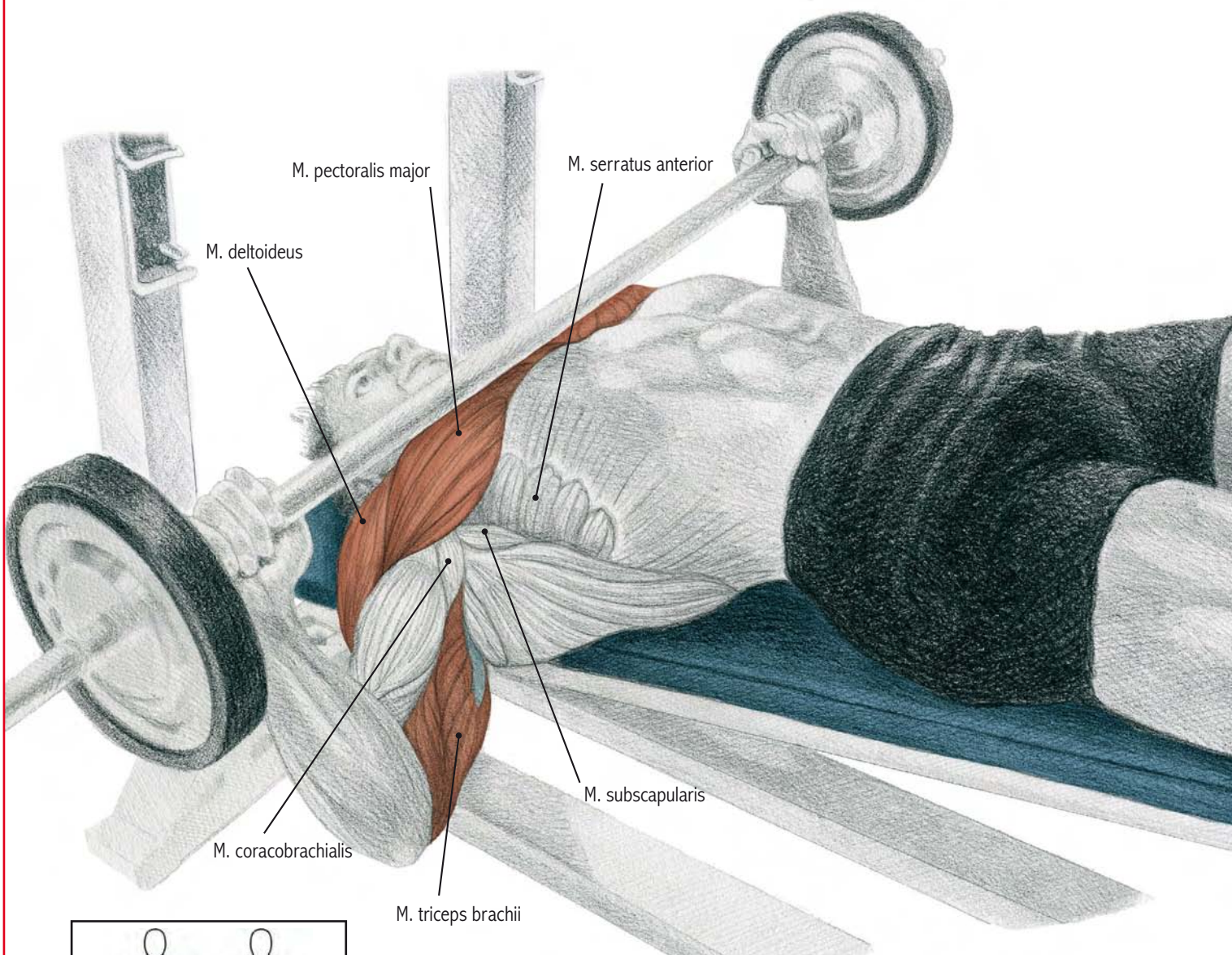
MUSCLES USED

pectoralis major (clavicular area), triceps, deltoids (anterior and exterior)

TECHNIQUE

Basically the same as for the incline press with dumbbells. In this case, however, twist the thumbs outward as you raise the weights, producing an external rotation of the arm. The movement must be made by the whole arm and not just the forearm (supination). The twist is intended to increase the final contraction of the sternal part of the muscle, though it will not be very effective because it is usually only the forearm that rotates when the weight is already up. The movement is therefore not caused by the pectoral muscle, the action of which involves medial and not external rotation. This exercise is not recommended for very heavy sets or beginners. In general, twist variants of this kind are non-essential.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: pectoralis major (lower part), triceps, deltoids (anterior)

SECONDARY MUSCLES: pectoralis minor, coracobrachialis, serratus anterior, subscapularis

ANTAGONISTS: latissimus dorsi, biceps, deltoids (posterior)

VARIATIONS

3.2 ... WITH DUMBBELLS

MUSCLES USED

pectoralis major (lower part), triceps, deltoids (anterior)

TECHNIQUE

The position is the same as for the barbell press, but it is necessary to lie back while holding the dumbbells with the arms flexed, unless you are being helped by someone who can pass you the weights. In addition to the drawbacks mentioned previously, using dumbbells for this exercise obliges you to manage your weights in this rather unnatural posture at the beginning and end of each set, although it does allow a longer movement. In this light, it is advisable not to do heavy sets and to seek assistance.

Picking up and putting down the weights involves some risk to the shoulders, not to mention the possibility that you may damage the apparatus.



Execution



Lie head down on a decline bench (between 20° and 30°) with your legs restrained. Take hold of the bar, which should be directly above your eyes, with an overhand grip (pronation). Inhale before lifting the bar down from its supports and lower it until just touching your chest. Raise the bar vertically. Your forearms should move perpendicular to the ground (see Ex. 1 and 2), and you should keep your elbows away from your trunk, as in the previous exercises. Exhale on completing the lift.

Comments

This unfortunate exercise is (or should be) no longer widely used because it works out an area of the chest (the lower part) that is easily trained using basic exercises. Moreover, it is not advisable to work out intensely for prolonged periods with the head below the level of the heart. This is because the human body is not designed for effort in an inverted posture. In any event, the bench should never be set at a decline of more than about 35°, and you should always seek help when doing this exercise. Whatever some authors and trainers say, this variant does not “trim” the lower pectoral muscle. This effect is achieved through normal chaining of the chest muscles, diet and aerobic exercise.



Common mistakes: excessive decline of the bench; too much weight; and unwarranted repetition of the exercise



Sooner or later, any muscle training enthusiast must learn a little anatomy and physiology. If not, how can you know that you are working out right?

3.3 ... WITH DUMBBELLS AND OUTWARD TWIST

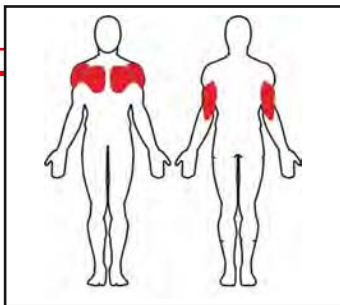
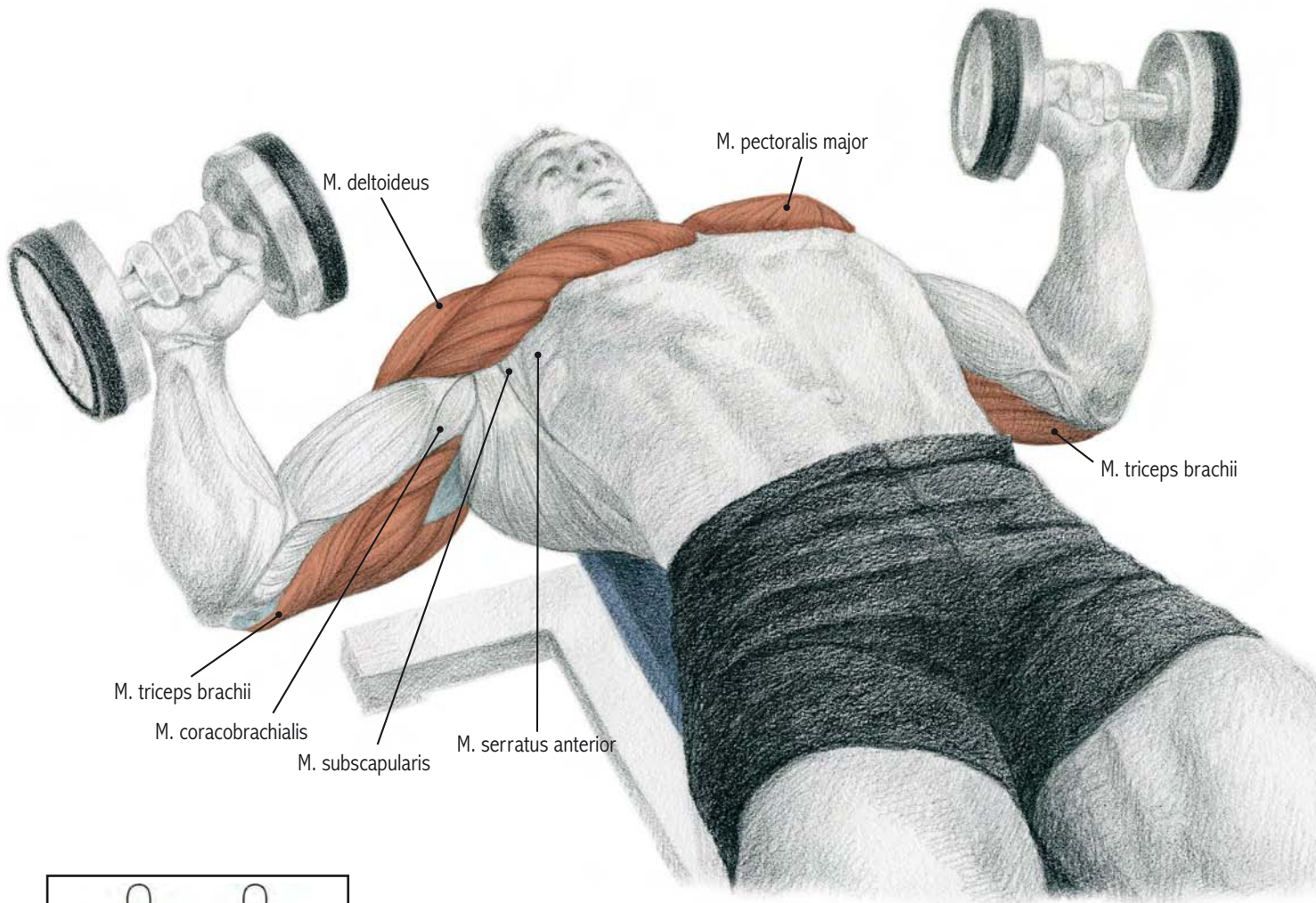
MUSCLES USED

pectoralis major (lower part), triceps, deltoids (anterior)

TECHNIQUE

Basically, the technique is the same as for the decline press with dumbbells but with an outward twist of the thumbs. In theory, this twist produces a more intense contraction in the lower sternal part of the muscle, although this is not actually very effective (see Exercise 2.3). This exercise is not recommended for very heavy sets.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: pectoralis major, triceps, deltoids (anterior)

SECONDARY MUSCLES: coracobrachialis, serratus anterior, subscapularis

ANTAGONISTS: latissimus dorsi, biceps, deltoids (posterior)

VARIATIONS

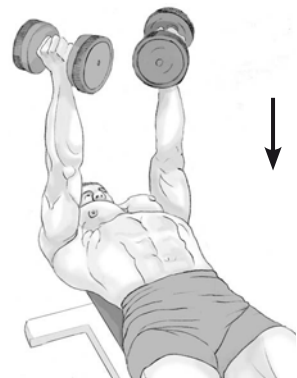
4.2 ... WITH OUTWARD TWIST

MUSCLES USED

pectoralis major, triceps, deltoids (anterior)

TECHNIQUE

Essentially, this is the same as the basic exercise, but it includes twisting the thumbs outward and the pinkies inward so that they come closer together in the final part of the movement. This twist is supposed to provide a more intense final contraction in the sternal part of the muscle. However, the twist usually only involves the forearm, and the pectoral muscle is hardly working against gravity at the end of the lift, which makes the movement less effective (see Exercise 2.3).



Execution



Lie flat (supine) with your head and back supported by the bench and your feet on the ground (if the bench is low) or on a step. Hold the dumbbells vertically above the chest, keeping them slightly apart. As in the barbell press, the forearms should move perpendicular to the ground. Breathe in as you begin to lower the weights down to the level of your chest (depending on flexibility) and then raise them vertically and toward the center. Keep your elbows perpendicular to and away from your body. Exhale on completing the lift.

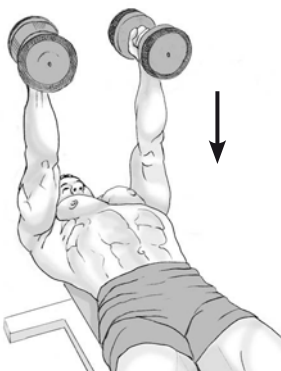
Comments

As in other exercises, dumbbells allow a longer travel movement. The main disadvantage is managing the load at the beginning and end of each series. The help of a partner is recommended in heavy exercises. One way to start is to hold the dumbbells on your knees and lie back with your arms flexed, lifting with help from another person. At the end of the set place your hands in the neutral position, flexing the elbows, raise your knees and bring the dumbbells down onto them at the same time as you sit up. Don't let them fall to your sides while you are lying down, as you could injure your shoulders and/or damage the apparatus. Some studies suggest that the sternal area of the pectoral muscle works harder when you use dumbbells, but there may in fact be little difference because there are no insertions between the medial and external areas. Given the structure of the muscle fibers, it is possible to work the upper and lower areas of some broad muscles (like the pectoralis and latissimus dorsi) by changing the incline of the bench, or using other techniques described in this book.



Common mistakes: lowering the weight too far; picking up and putting down the dumbbells incorrectly at the beginning and end of each set; and clashing the dumbbells together at the top of the movement

4.3 ... WITH PALMS FACING IN

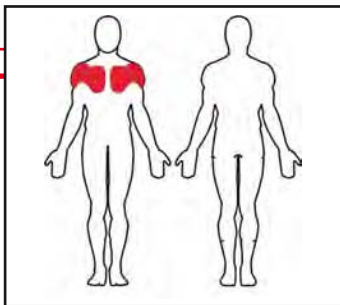
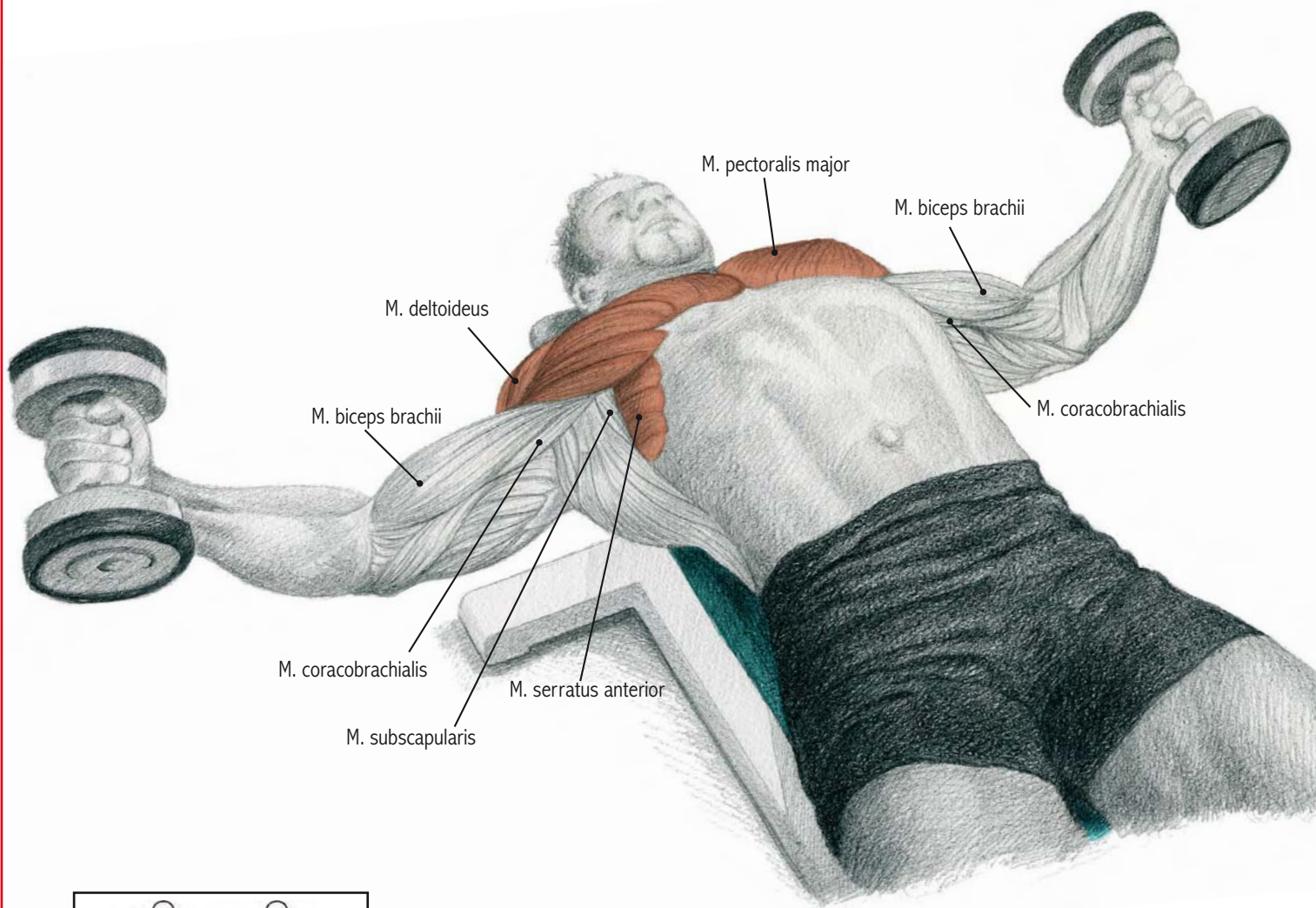


MUSCLES USED

pectoralis major, deltoids (anterior), triceps.

TECHNIQUE

This technique is the same as the basic exercise, but the hands face each other (knuckles outward) over the course of the movement. In theory, this will tend to cause a greater expansion of the thorax as in "heavy flyes," although the load is usually lighter. However, most people make the twist only with the forearm and not with the whole of the arm, which would not affect the pectoral muscle (see "insertions" in the appendix).



Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: pectoralis major, deltoids (anterior), serratus anterior

SECONDARY MUSCLES: coracobrachialis, subscapularis, M. biceps brachii

ANTAGONISTS: latissimus dorsi, deltoid (posterior), triceps, trapezius, rhomboids, teres

VARIATIONS

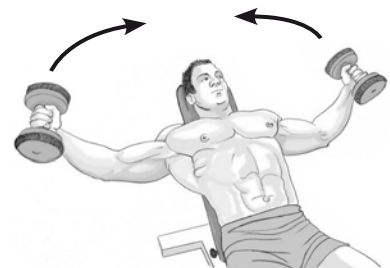
5.2 ... INCLINE

MUSCLES USED

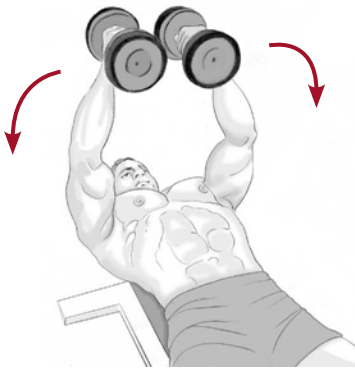
pectoralis major (clavicular area), deltoids (anterior), serratus anterior

TECHNIQUE

Essentially, the technique used is the same as in the basic exercise but on a bench set at an incline of 30° to 45° (see Ex. 2.2 “incline press with dumbbells”). Obviously, it is the upper fibers that make the greatest effort, although the rest contribute.



Execution



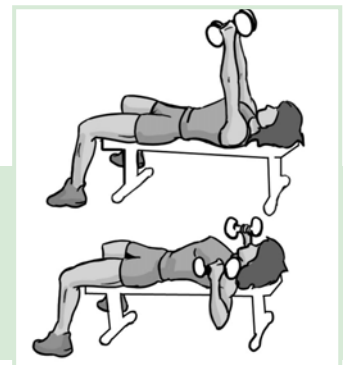
Lie flat on a narrow bench supporting your head and back with your feet on the ground (if the bench is low) or on the end of the bench. Hold the dumbbells vertically over your chest, keeping them slightly apart, with your palms facing each other and your elbows semi-flexed. Inhale deeply while you lower the weights to the level of the chest (depending on your flexibility) without changing the position of your elbows. Raise the dumbbells vertically and inward but without letting them touch. Breathe out at the end of the movement. Keep your elbows away from your body as if you were hugging someone.

Comments

In theory, this exercise helps the expansion of the chest, especially in young athletes who are still growing. The gains are less for older people, although there is evidence that dumbbell flies may elongate the intercostal cartilage (see Ex. 5, Back Group). In reality, it is almost identical to the dumbbell press (Ex. 4), at least with regards to the pectoral muscle. The pectoralis major is inserted in the humerus, which moves in the same manner in both the press and flies. The difference in the feeling experienced when you do this exercise is due to the more distant point at which power is applied in bodily leverage (in technical terms, the “power moment” is stronger). Surprisingly, this error is still frequent among trainers and can be found in books, journals, and bodybuilding courses. The only real difference is that the exercise works out the pectoral muscle more strictly, as the triceps is not involved.



Common mistakes: flexing the elbows, which turns the exercise into a press (this is not harmful, but you are no longer doing flies); excessive weight load, which risks damaging the joints; shifting the strain onto the deltoid muscles; incorrect breathing



People commonly imagine they are doing “flies” when in fact what they are doing is a “palms-in press”. At the level of the pectoral muscles, practically nothing changes. This is because it is not possible to load up with so much weight in basic flies (the only variant that really deserves the name). If you have to choose a movement that will work the muscle intensively, the barbell or dumbbell press is better than dumbbell flies.

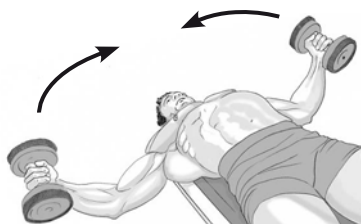
5.3 ... DECLINE

MUSCLES USED

pectoralis major (lower part), deltoids (anterior), serratus anterior

TECHNIQUE

The same as in the basic exercise, but on a bench set at a decline of between 20° and 40° (important: see Ex. 3 and 3.2 “decline press”). In contrast to incline flies, it is the lower fibers that do most of the work in this exercise.



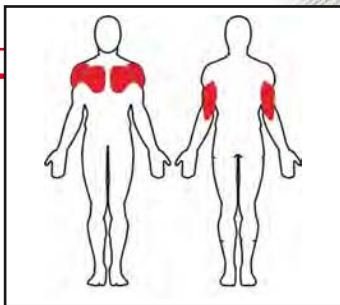
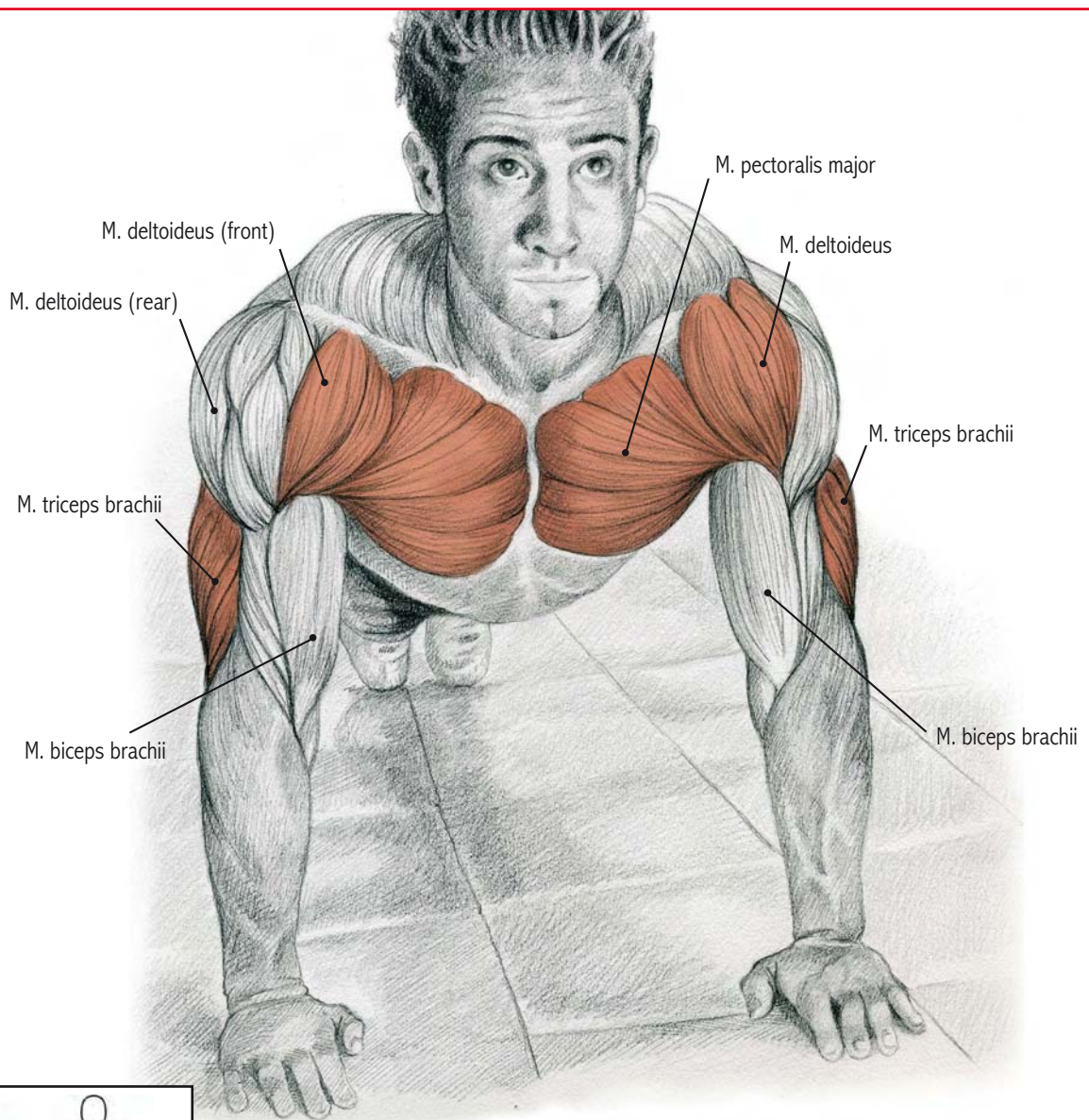
5.4 ... CROSSOVER

Muscles involved: pectoralis major, deltoids (anterior), serratus anterior.

TECHNIQUE

The technique is the same as in the basic exercise, but the hands cross over at the end of the movement. This causes a stronger final contraction of the pectoral muscle, although the force of gravity is unfortunately no longer present. The aim is to achieve a complete contraction and, in theory, to increase the participation of the pectoral muscle's sternal part, although this is not actually viable in practice for the reasons explained above. To attain this extra contraction, you need to do the movement using cables (Ex. 17).





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: pectoralis major, triceps, deltoids (anterior)

SECONDARY MUSCLES: serratus anterior, coracobrachialis, subscapularis

ANTAGONISTS: latissimus dorsi, biceps, deltoids (posterior)

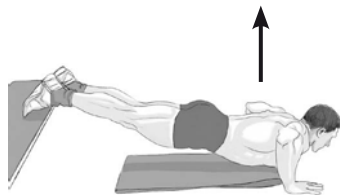
VARIATIONS 6.2 ... DECLINE

MUSCLES USED

pectoralis major (clavicular area),
triceps, deltoids (anterior)

TECHNIQUE

The movement is the same, but the feet are supported on a bench or step. The upper part of the pectoral muscle (clavicular area) and the center part work harder in this variant.



VARIATIONS 6.3 ... INCLINE

MUSCLES USED

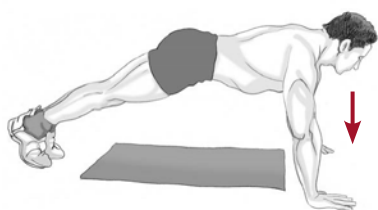
pectoralis major, triceps, deltoids
(anterior)

TECHNIQUE

The same as in variant 6.2 but with your feet on the ground and your hands on a bench or step. The lower and center parts of the pectoral muscle work harder in this variant.



Execution



Lie on your front on the floor (prone) with your feet together and your hands just over shoulder-width apart, fingers facing slightly inward. Start with your arms extended and your legs straight. Lower your body until your chest is just touching the floor. Keep your hips immobile. Your body should be rigid like a board as you come down. Inhale in the downward movement (to about halfway) and exhale toward the end of the upward movement.

Comments

This exercise is similar to the bench press, but it uses the body's own weight. If you feel pain in your wrists, you can use your fists as support without changing the workout received by the muscles. A progressive regimen from light to demanding would be as follows: (1) against a wall with feet close; (2) against a wall with feet further back; (3) on the floor with the support of your knees and your hands on a raised support; (4) on the floor with knee-support and your hands on the floor; (5) feet (but not knees) on the floor and hands on a raised support; (6) hands and feet on the floor as explained for the basic exercise. Any of these variations becomes easier if you open your legs wider.



Common mistakes: failure to lower the shoulder and waist at the same time; short movement and/or doing the exercise too fast



Injury: distension of the pectoral muscle

Movements involving a lot of strain and/or movement can distend or tear the pectoral muscle, especially at the insertion into the humerus. This kind of injury is usually caused by trying to lift too great a weight or when the muscle is stretched too far under strain. Rest and the application of ice is usually enough to cure the problem if the strained muscle is not serious, but it may be necessary to seek medical attention. In less serious cases, at least one week's absolute rest will be needed. Otherwise, you may have to avoid exercising the muscle for up to two months, or even longer.

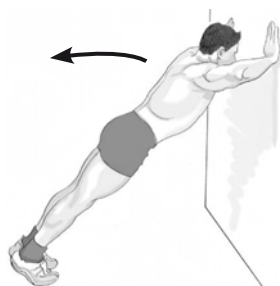
6.4 ... AGAINST A WALL

MUSCLES USED

pectoralis major, triceps, deltoids (anterior)

TECHNIQUE

The movement is the same but the exercise is done against a wall. This is an easy exercise for beginners or as a warm-up. Clearly, you will need to perform the movement slowly enough to maintain constant tension. This variant becomes more difficult the farther your feet are from the wall.



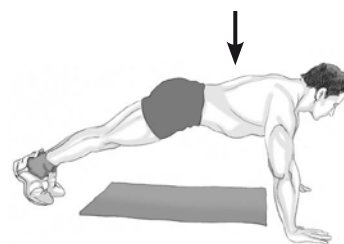
6.5 ... ELBOWS STRAIGHT

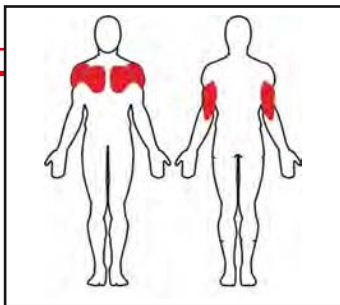
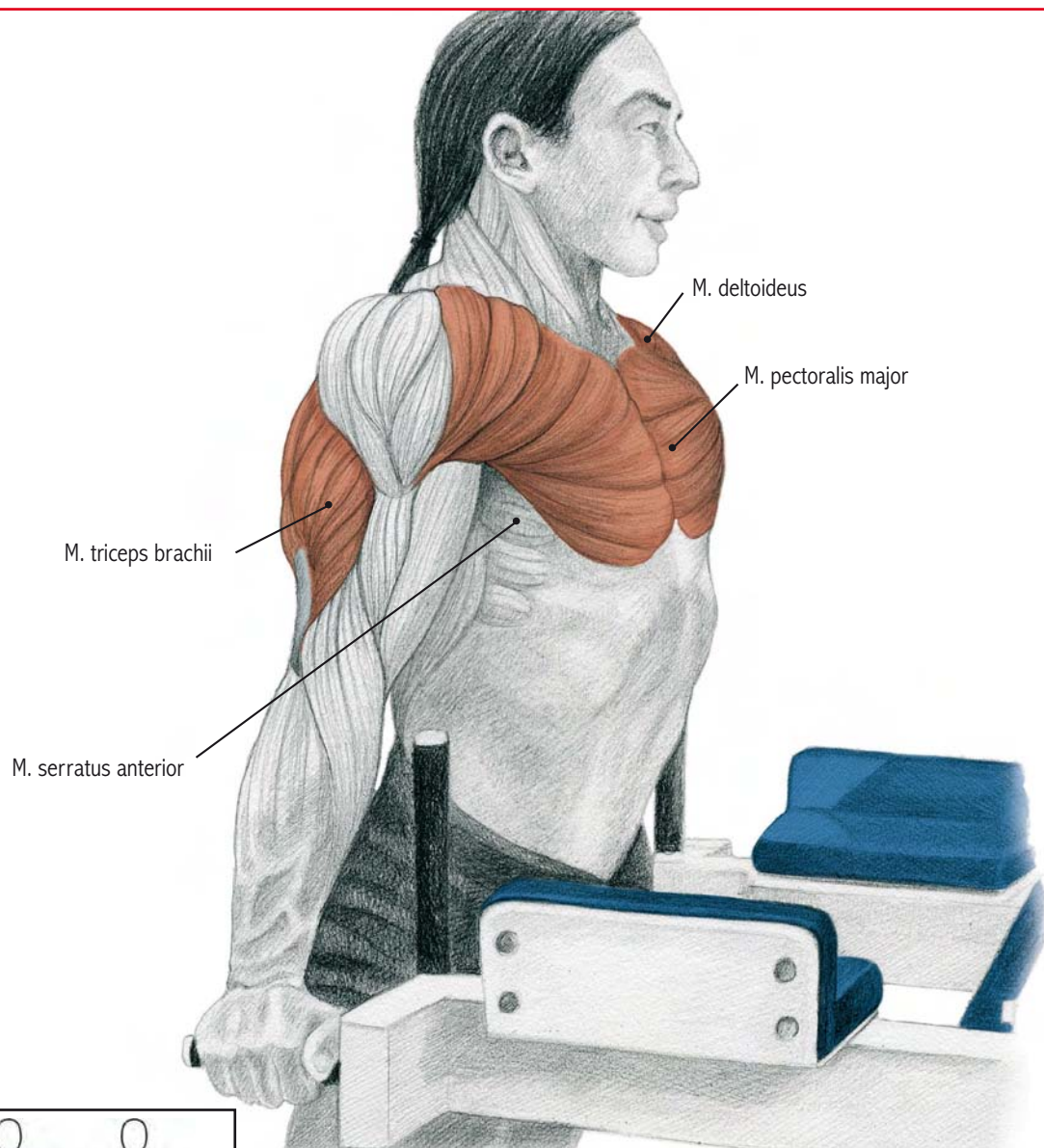
MUSCLES USED

serratus, subscapularis, deltoid (anterior), pectoral muscles

TECHNIQUE

The position is the same as in the basic exercise, but the elbows are not flexed at any time. Make the movement with your shoulders by pressing against the floor to curve your spine. Travel is only an inch or so, but it is enough to work out the serratus and subscapularis muscles. This movement is more comfortable on a barbell bench press (Ex. 12).





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: pectoralis major (lower part), triceps, deltoids (anterior), pectoralis minor
SECONDARY MUSCLES: serratus anterior, coracobrachialis, subscapularis
ANTAGONISTS: latissimus dorsi, biceps, deltoids (posterior), trapezius

VARIATIONS

7.2 ... WITH WEIGHTS

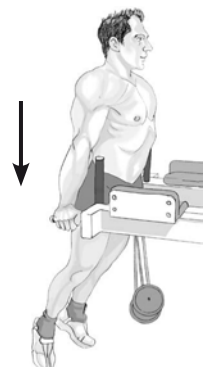
MUSCLES USED

pectoralis major (lower part), triceps, deltoids (anterior), pectoralis minor

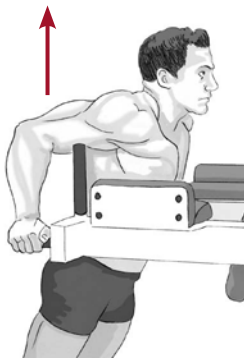
TECHNIQUE

The movement and technique are the same as for the basic exercise. The only difference is to hang a weight from your waist or a belt (or hold a dumbbell between crossed feet). If a weight is used, the precautions mentioned for the basic exercise are even more important because you are increasing the risk of harm to the muscles worked. Because of this, it is advisable to slow down and increase the number of repeats rather than adding any additional load.

Machines exist (for both dips and pull-ups) incorporating a weighted plate and a cable running vertically to the body to hook up the belt, although they are not common. All of the preceding comments concerning free weights also apply.



Execution



Take hold of the parallel bars with a moderately broad neutral grip (or even better a downward V-grip). Keep your trunk slightly inclined forward and your legs together. Breathe in as you lower your body vertically, flexing the trunk forward and bringing the legs back. Your elbows should move backwards away from the trunk as you come down.

Push back up again when you reach the lowest point of the movement and breathe out.

Comments

This exercise is an excellent alternative to the decline press, although it requires some strength and is therefore not recommended for beginners. The demands placed on the triceps and deltoids are considerable, but you should concentrate effort on the pectoral muscle above all. You should be able to feel the elongation as you lower your body and the contraction as you push back up against the grips. Be careful if you have suffered any elbow or shoulder injuries, or avoid the exercise.

This exercise should always be done slowly unless you are doing training specifically for a sport.

This exercise is difficult to perform properly, which leads some people to make only a short impulse close to full extension of the arms.



Common mistakes: scant travel; excessive demands on the triceps, too much weight (where used); poor positioning of the trunk during the movement; performing the exercise too fast



Proteins are the building blocks of the muscles, and eggs, fish and meat are excellent natural sources. Soya is a good vegetable source of protein.

7.3 ... BODY STRAIGHT

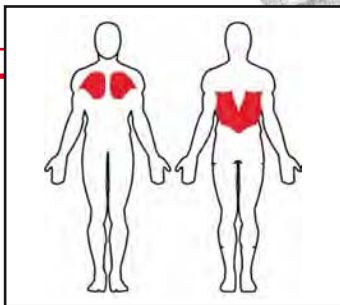
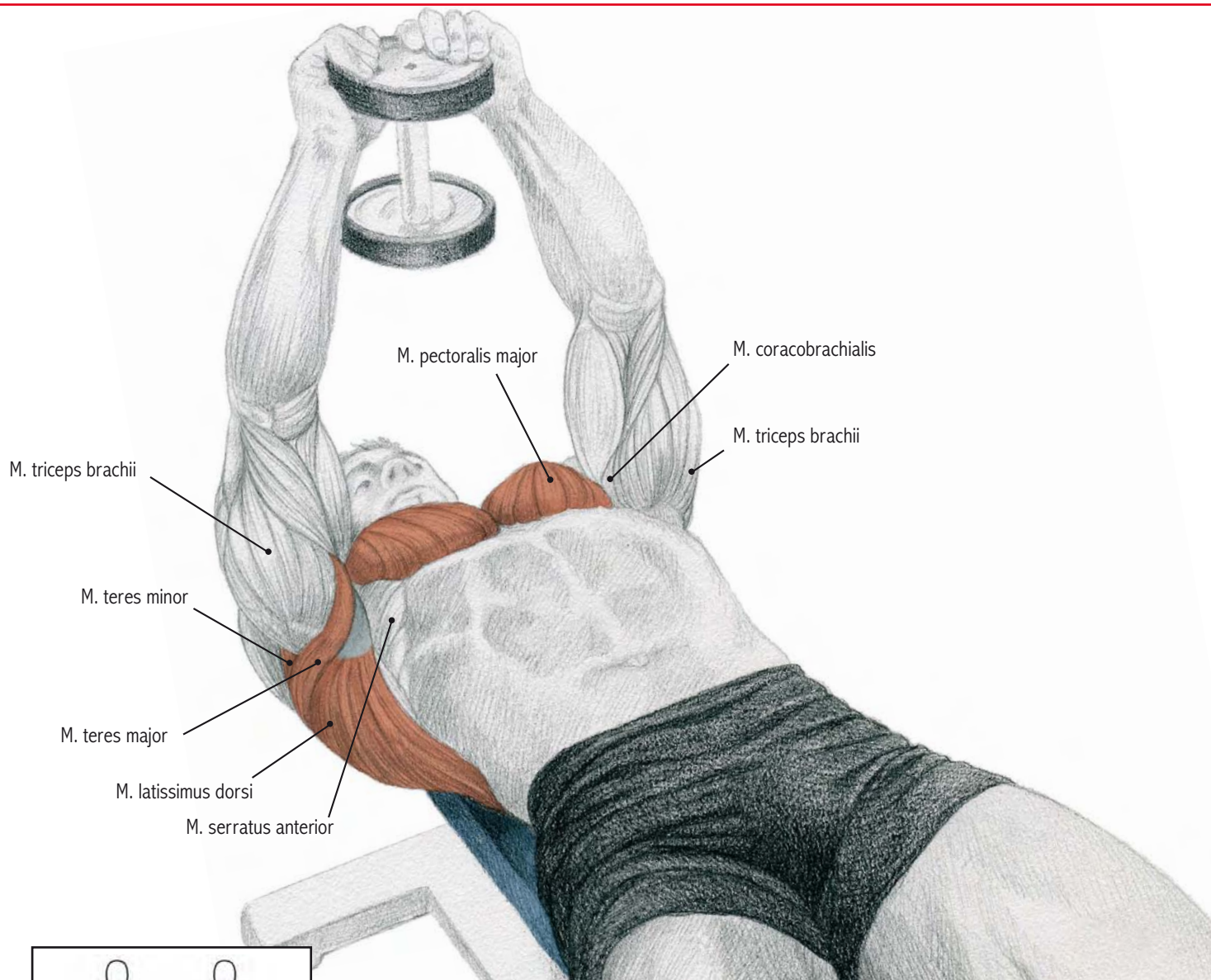
MUSCLES USED

triceps, pectoralis major (lower part), deltoids (anterior), pectoralis minor, latissimus dorsi

TECHNIQUE

The downward movement is much more vertical in this variant, and the trunk is not inclined forward. This shifts more work to the triceps, although the lower of the part pectoral muscle is still intensively worked.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: latissimus dorsi, teres, pectoralis major

SECONDARY MUSCLES: serratus anterior, coracobrachialis, triceps, rhomboids

ANTAGONISTS: pectoralis major, deltoids (anterior), triceps

VARIATIONS

8.2 ... WITH BARBELL

MUSCLES USED

pectoralis major, latissimus dorsi, teres major

TECHNIQUE

Take a short barbell with an overhand grip (pronation) and perform the same movement as with the dumbbell. This variant is not as safe as the basic exercise as there is a risk of losing your balance.



Execution



Lie flat on a bench with your head at the edge. Hold the dumbbell vertically with the bar running through the triangle formed by the thumbs and index fingers. With your elbows semi-flexed, slowly lower the weight above and behind your head at the same time as you inhale deeply. Keep your elbows still. You should feel a stretch in your pectoral muscles and an expansion of the chest. Bring the dumbbell back up vertically above your eyes as your pectoral muscle contracts. Exhale on completing the lift.

Comments

This is an exercise for experienced athletes, which not only works the pectorals but also the dorsal and adjacent muscles. In theory, it “expands” the chest (see Ex. 5 “Dorsal Group”), and it has traditionally been used for this purpose and to improve flexibility. It is therefore important to inhale deeply. The muscles involved are very strong and leverage is favorable, so it would be possible to move considerable weights. This is normally unnecessary, however, and can lead to poor execution and injury. The dumbbell pull-over should not be used to achieve hypertrophy of the pectoral muscle. Other more specific exercises exist for this purpose. Finally, we may note that the use of a barbell or dumbbells does not differentiate between a chest and a back exercise.



Common mistakes: too much weight; incorrect breathing; too short or too long a movement; flexing the elbow (triceps)



Mental concentration on the muscle worked is key to performing exercise movements properly, not only to avoid accidents but also to stimulate the area you wish to train. If concentration is lacking, other muscles may take over to some extent from the one you are supposedly working out.

8.3 ... CROSSED BENCH

MUSCLES USED

pectoralis major, latissimus dorsi, teres major

TECHNIQUE

The only difference in this exercise is that your butt will be in the air and your trunk will rest on your shoulders on a bench set crosswise to the body. You need to find your balance before beginning the exercise with the dumbbell. This allows a longer stretch if you slightly lower your hips at the same time, although you should not take this movement too far. Begin with the dumbbell at the bench to one side of your head and replace it when you end each series (or seek assistance from a partner). The crossed bench variant is recommended for more advanced athletes.



8.4 ... TWO HANDS ALTERNATING

MUSCLES USED

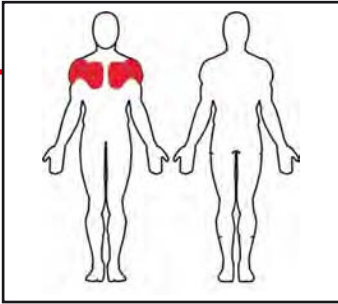
pectoralis major, latissimus dorsi, teres major

TECHNIQUE

The technique is the same as in the basic exercise (with the bench in line or crosswise), but two dumbbells are used alternately. This allows independent localization of the muscles worked, although the variant is more difficult technically. In general terms, it is no better than the conventional exercise.



DUMBBELL TWISTS



Muscles involved

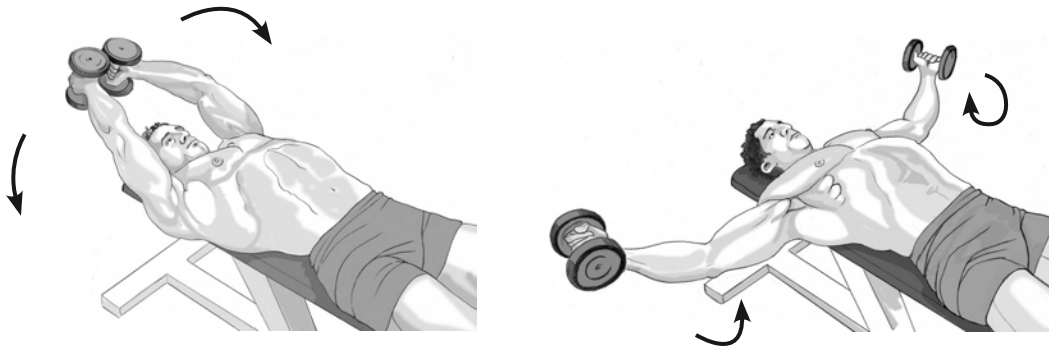
MAIN MUSCLES: pectoral, deltoid

SECONDARY MUSCLES: serratus anterior, coracobrachialis, biceps

ANTAGONISTS: pectoral, dorsal, triceps

Execution

Lie flat on a bench holding the dumbbells vertically above your head (palms facing each other). Keeping your elbows semi-flexed, slowly lower the weight above and behind your head at the same time as you inhale (as in Ex. 8 “pull-over”). Keep your elbows still. When you have brought the dumbbells down to the same height as your head, open your arms (adduction) to slightly below shoulder level, and from there flex the shoulder muscles to raise them to the starting position. The whole movement should be performed slowly and with control. Inhale as you lower the dumbbells pull-over style, and exhale as you complete the movement.



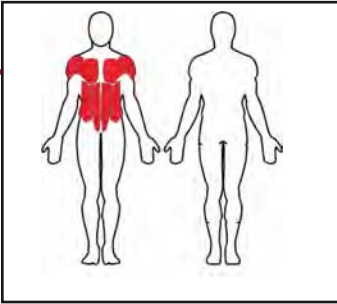
Comments

Visually, this exercise is like swimming on your back (using the three dimensions in which the shoulder is free to move). This is a mobility rather than a volume exercise strictly speaking, and you should use a light weight. Also, the pectoral muscle needs considerable help from the deltoids and other adjacent muscles. As a variant, you can do the twists in reverse, working the same muscles eccentrically (negative movement) and in the opposite direction.



Common mistakes: too much weight; exaggerated circular movement of the shoulder

ROLLING DUMBBELL PUSH-UPS



Muscles involved

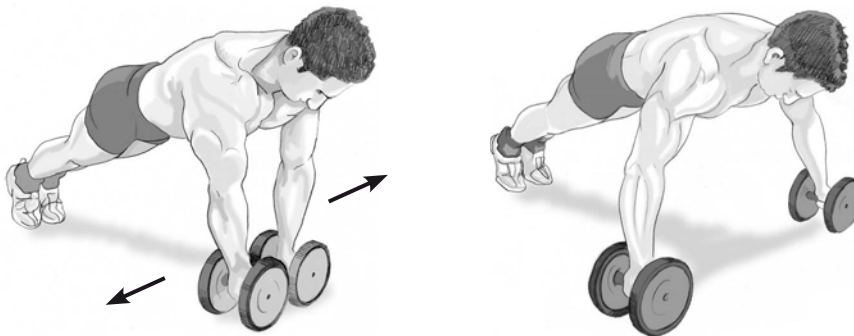
MAIN MUSCLES: pectorals, deltoids (anterior), abdominals

SECONDARY MUSCLES: serratus anterior, coracobrachialis, subscapularis, biceps

ANTAGONISTS: dorsal, teres, trapezius, deltoids (posterior)

Execution

The same position as for “floor push-ups” but supported on two dumbbells with the elbows semi-flexed. Let your arms open as you roll the dumbbells outward. This movement is similar to the one when doing flies. Hold the movement and contract your pectoral muscles to bring the dumbbells bac together at the starting position. Breathe in as you go down and out as you come up.



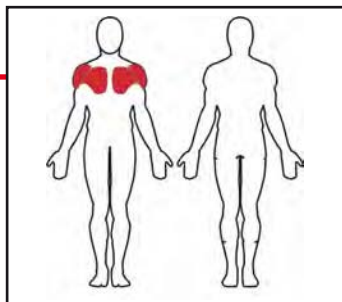
Comments

This rather unusual exercise takes both strength and coordination. It is not recommended for beginners, and it can easily be substituted by less difficult exercises. Some dumbbells cannot be rolled as explained, although special “skates” exist for this purpose. A variant is to roll the dumbbells forward, intensively working the abdominal and dorsal muscles. A single moving disc with a bar running through it and held on each side is preferable (see Ex. 13). Rolling dumbbell push-ups are not really any better than the classic exercises for the pectoral group, although the technique can be used for training outside the gym when sufficient weight is not available to achieve high intensity.



Common mistakes: poor technique; failure to warm up properly

ONE-HANDED LATERAL BARBELL LIFT



Muscles involved

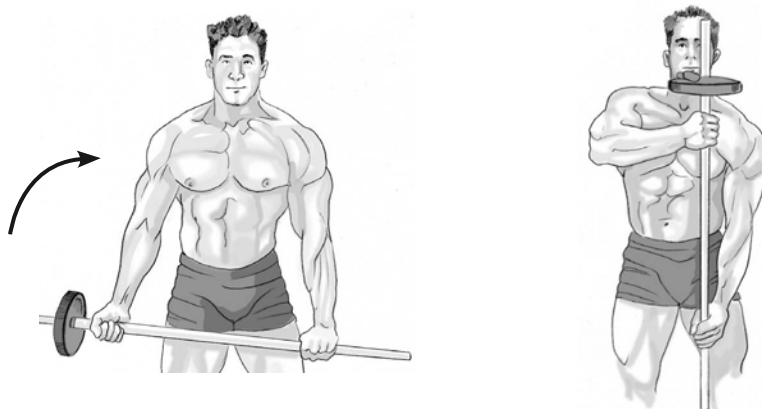
MAIN MUSCLES: pectoralis major (clavicular area), deltoid (anterior)

SECONDARY MUSCLES: serratus anterior, coracobrachialis, biceps

ANTAGONISTS: dorsal, teres, trapezius, deltoids (posterior)

Execution

Stand holding a bar with a weight at one end, parallel to the floor. Hold the weighted end using an underhand grip (supination) and the other using an overhand grip (pronation). This hand stays still, acting as a pivot while the other lifts the weighted end in a semicircle until the bar is vertical. After completing the movement, lower the bar gently to the starting position. Breathe in as you lower the bar and out as you raise it.



Comments

This unconventional exercise basically works the upper area of the pectoral muscle and the deltoids (anterior part). It can be useful as the last exercise in a training session to break the routine, or to train for specific (throwing) sports. As a variation, you can do the exercise seated or kneeling with the bar on the ground. Basically, the one-handed lateral barbell lift is confined to training for sports where athletes have to make similar movements.

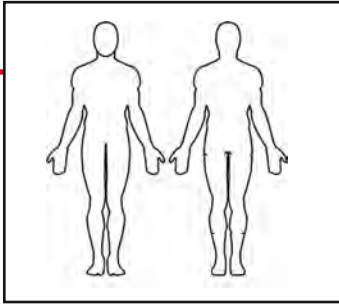


Common mistakes: too much weight, poor technique



There are no sports in which muscle training has an adverse effect, and it is highly beneficial for most.

BENCH PREEES WITH ELBOWS STRAIGHT



Muscles involved

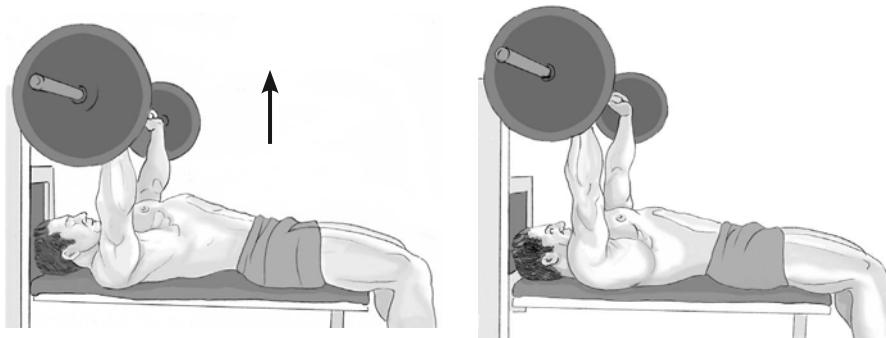
MAIN MUSCLES: serratus, subscapularis

SECONDARY MUSCLES: deltoids (anterior) and pectorals

ANTAGONISTS: dorsal, teres, trapezius, infraspinatus, deltoids (posterior)

Execution

The starting position is the same as the bench press (Ex. 1) either with barbell or dumbbells, but in this exercise the elbows are not flexed. The weight used should also be significantly lighter. The movement consists of lifting the shoulders a few centimeters to work out the serratus and subscapularis. Breathe in as you lower the bar and out as you raise it.



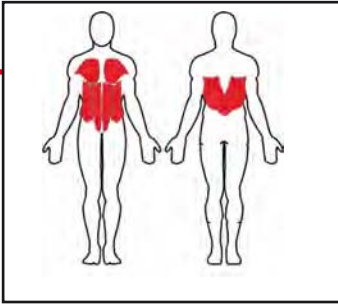
Comments

This variant provides a supplementary exercise for a complete pectoral workout, and it can also be used in the rehabilitation of “winged scapula” and similar problems due to weakness or atrophy of the subscapularis. Despite the name of the exercise, you should not extend the arm so far as to lock the elbows, which should remain very slightly flexed to ensure that the surrounding muscles, and not the ligaments, take the strain. Full extension should be confined to very light loads (e.g., the bar alone). See Ex. 6.5.



Common mistakes: bending the elbows to perform a press; incorrect travel

FLOOR DUMBBELL PULL-OVER



Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: pectoralis major, latissimus dorsi, abdominals

SECONDARY MUSCLES: teres, serratus anterior, coracobrachialis, triceps, rhomboids

ANTAGONISTS: deltoids, upper part of pectoralis major

Execution



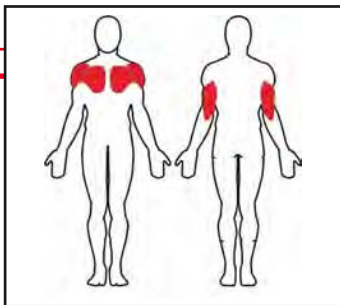
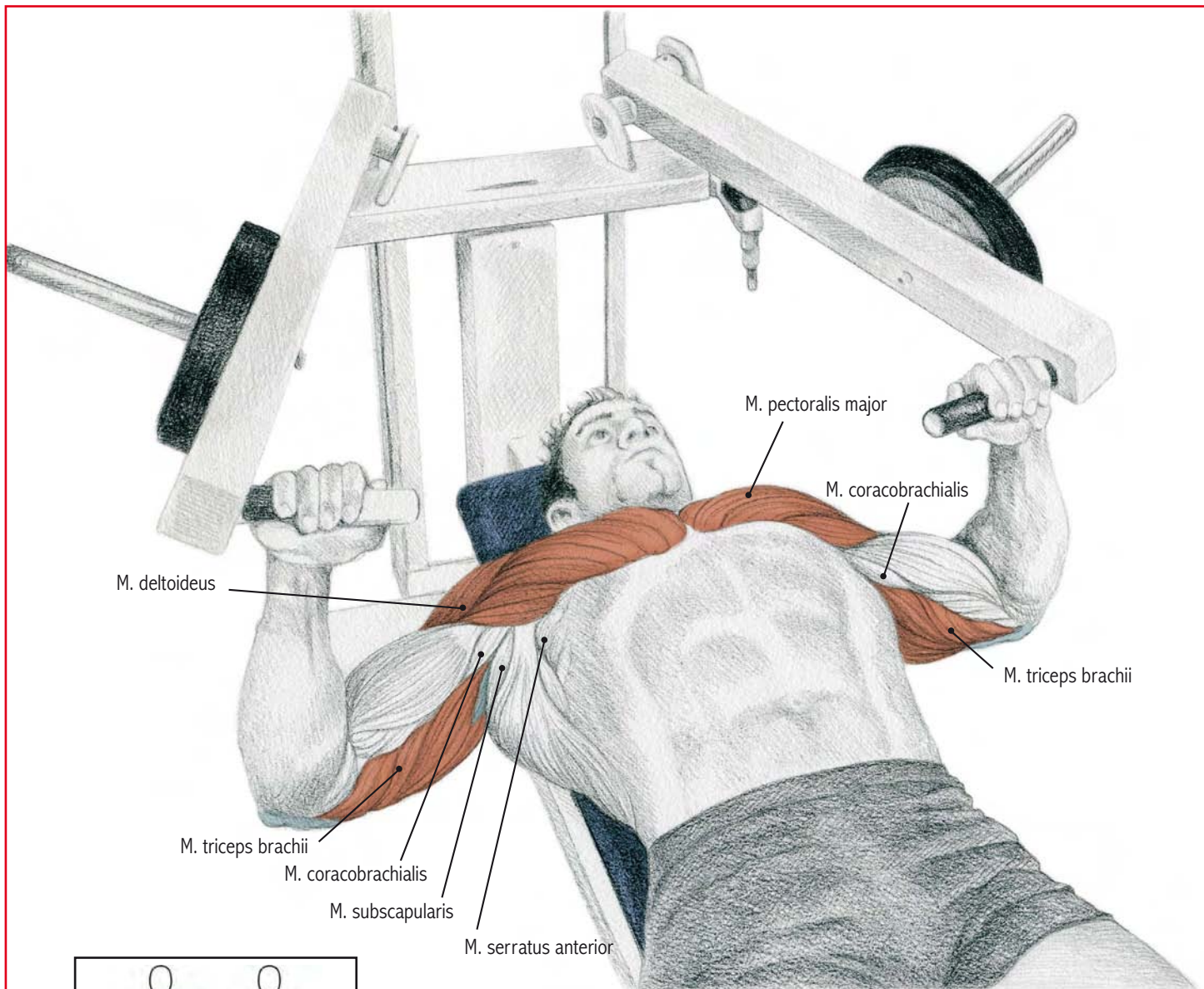
Start from the same position as in "dumbbell push-ups" (Ex. 10) but with your hands placed forward. Roll the dumbbells forward to lower your trunk toward the ground and back to raise it and return to the starting position. Breathe in as you go down, then hold your breath and exhale on completing the upward movement.

Comments

This is an advanced exercise, and it also requires a strong isometric contraction of the abdominal muscles. Overweight or very heavy people will find it very difficult, although you can try kneeling rather than supporting your legs on your toes. Floor dumbbell pull-overs do not offer any major advantages over conventional exercises. Ideally, you should use a single disc with a bar through the middle or a specially designed roller. Though this exercise has been included with the rest of the pectoral group, it also works out the back muscles.



Common mistakes: poor technique; flexing the trunk to raise the body instead of pulling with arms extended



Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: pectoralis major, triceps, deltoids (anterior)

SECONDARY MUSCLES: coracobrachialis, serratus anterior, subscapularis

ANTAGONISTS: latissimus dorsi, biceps, deltoids (posterior)

VARIATIONS

14.2 ...INCLINE

MUSCLES USED

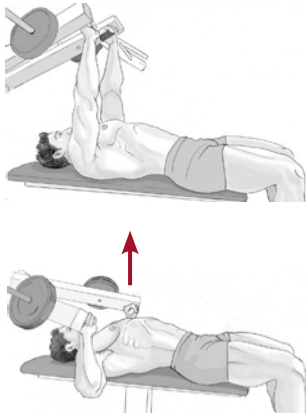
pectoralis major (clavicular area), deltoid (anterior), triceps

TECHNIQUE

The movement is the same, but the incline, or the design of the machine, shifts work to the higher (clavicular) part of the pectoral muscles, and to the anterior part of the shoulders.



Execution



Lie flat on the bench with your feet on the ground (if the bench is low) or on a step. Take hold of the grips, which should be vertically above the chest, overhand (pronation) and with your hands slightly more than shoulder-width apart. Preferably you should place your thumb below the grip.

Inhale as you lower the weight to the level of the middle of your chest and then raise it vertically. Your elbows should stay perpendicular (and away from) your body. Avoid locking the elbows when you reach the top of the movement. Exhale on completing the lift.

Comments

Basically, this exercise is the same as the barbell bench press (Ex. 1) and the dumbbell bench press. However, the weight is now guided with all the implications described in the discussion of machines versus free weights in the introduction. Tighten the pectoral muscle as you raise the weight, as if you were going to hug someone while lifting. This ensures that the deltoids and triceps do not take over most of the work. The machine bench press is appropriate for beginners. A well-designed machine will allow you to take the weight from the extension of the arms at the top of the movement.

A machine exists to do a vertical (downward) press from a seated position. This movement is very similar to that described in “parallel dips” (Ex. 7).

The bench press machine can also be used to do the elbows straight variant, as in “bench press with elbows straight” (Ex. 12) or “multi-power bench press with elbows straight” (Ex. 15.4).



Common mistakes: poor regulation of posture on the machine; excessive demand on the triceps; locking your elbows at the top of the lift; unequal force in the two arms.

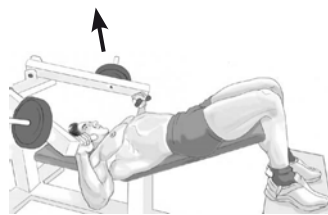
14.3 ... DECLINE

MUSCLES USED

pectorals (lower part), deltoids (anterior), triceps

TECHNIQUE

In this variant, the head is placed lower than the rest of the body, and the comments on Ex. 3 (free weights) therefore apply. The raised hips variant is not recommended. A well-designed decline press machine will ensure the head stays on the horizontal plane, and will require you to exert force diagonally toward your feet (the posture is the same as in Ex. 3 but on a horizontal bench).



14.4 ... SEATED / VERTICAL

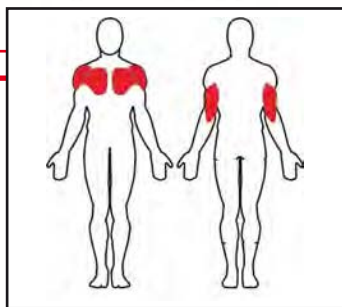
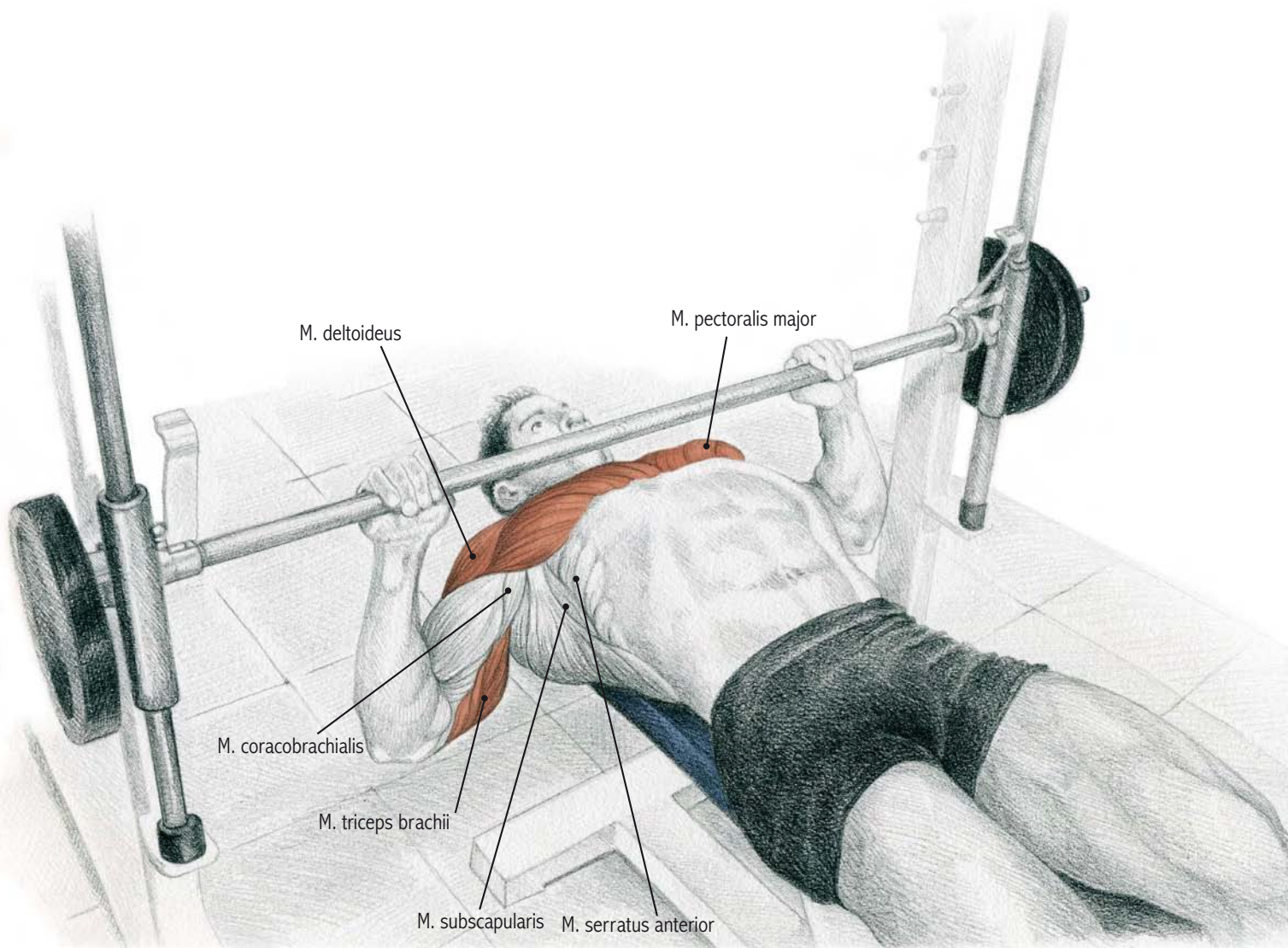
MUSCLES USED

pectorals, deltoids (anterior) and triceps

TECHNIQUE

This is a good exercise for beginners and for advanced athletes who wish to localize their pectoral workouts. In any case, there are no significant differences between this variant and the basic machine bench press. However, caution is needed when taking the weight on the first repeat if the machine does not allow you to do this with your arms extended, as it should.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: pectoralis major, triceps, deltoids (anterior)

SECONDARY MUSCLES: coracobrachialis, serratus anterior, subscapularis

ANTAGONISTS: latissimus dorsi, biceps, deltoids (posterior)

VARIATIONS 15.2 ... INCLINE

MUSCLES USED

pectorals (clavicular area), triceps, deltoid (anterior)

TECHNIQUE

The movement is the same as in the basic exercise, but the bench is set at an incline of around 30° to 45°. As in the case of the incline press with free weight (Ex. 2), the pectoral muscle remains in demand, but the work is shifted to the upper (clavicular) fibers and the shoulders.



15.2 ... DECLINE

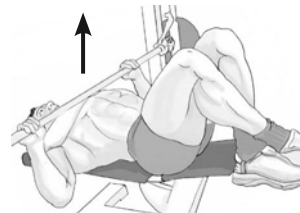
MUSCLES USED

pectorals (lower part), triceps, deltoids (anterior)

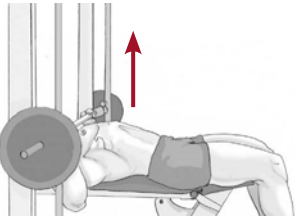
TECHNIQUE

The movement is the same as in the basic exercise, but the bench is set at a decline of around 30°. The pectoral work is more intense for the lower muscle fibers.

Working out with your head below the level of the body has serious disadvantages, as described in "decline bench press" with free weight (Ex. 3).



Execution



Lie flat on the bench of the multi-power or Smith machine (with lateral guides) with your feet on the ground if the bench is low, or on a step. Grip the bar vertically above your chest with your hands a little beyond shoulder-width apart. Always keep your thumb below the bar (in opposition to the rest of your fingers).

Take the bar off its support, twist with your hands so that the machine will not lock as you bring the bar down to touch the center of your chest, and raise it again. Keep your elbows perpendicular to and away from your body. Breathe in during the first half of the downward movement and out as you raise the bar.

Comments

Almost all of the comments on the “machine bench press” (Ex. 14) apply to this exercise, which is very similar. The main advantage of the multi-power machine is that it allows you to take the weight from above, stop at any time in the set (by twisting the bar to lock the machine) and vary the incline of the bench used. Good models of this machine also have a lock to prevent the bar from coming down farther than desired, which serves both as a guide and a safety feature.

This is possibly the most versatile machine to be found in any gym.



Common mistakes: poor regulation of posture on the machine; bouncing the bar off the chest; locking the elbows at the top of the lift; unequal exertion of force between the arms; placing the thumb together with the rest of the fingers

15.4 ... ELBOWS STRAIGHT

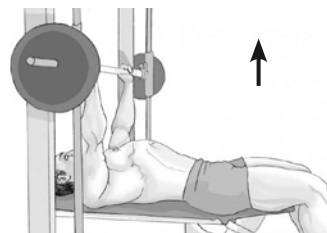
MUSCLES USED

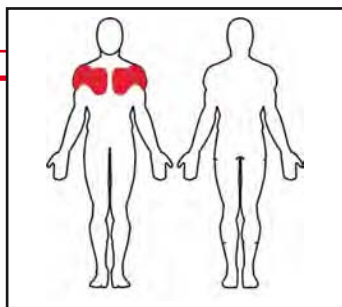
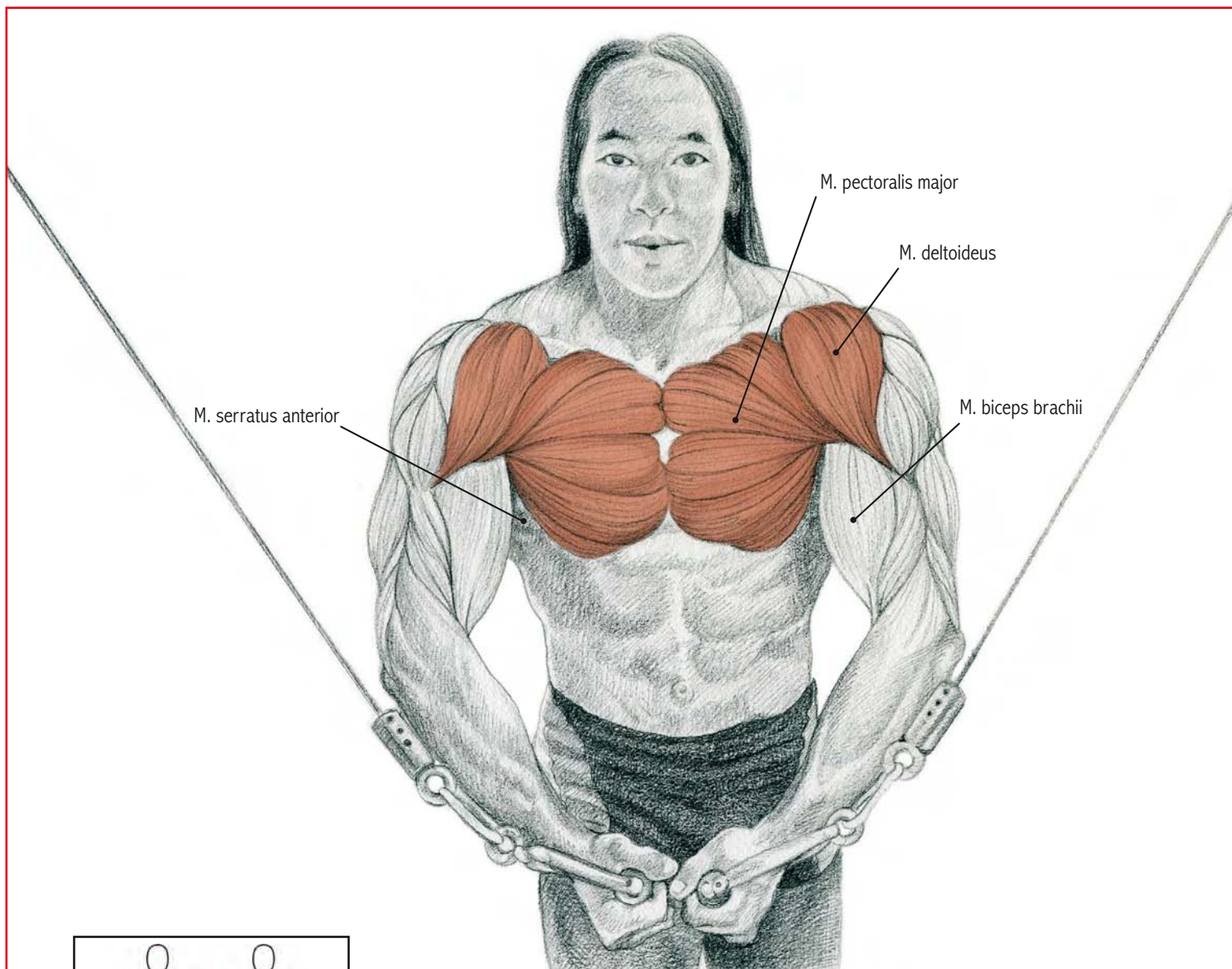
serratus, subscapularis, pectoral muscles, deltoid (anterior)

TECHNIQUE

The position is the same as for the multi-power bench press (or decline bench press with barbell or dumbbells), but the elbows are not flexed at any time and the arms remain almost completely extended. The shoulder movement is only an inch or so, but it is enough to work out the serratus and subscapularis muscles. The weight used should be much lighter than in the conventional press.

As explained above, this variant provides a supplementary exercise for a complete pectoral workout, and it can also be used in the rehabilitation of “winged scapula” and similar problems (due to weakness or atrophy of the subscapularis). The advantage of the multi-power machine is that it removes the problem of balancing the barbell or dumbbells, which can affect the success of the workout. This makes the multi-power variant enormously effective.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: pectoralis major, deltoids (anterior)

SECONDARY MUSCLES: pectoralis minor, coracobrachialis, serratus anterior, subscapularis, biceps

ANTAGONISTS: latissimus dorsi, deltoids (posterior), triceps

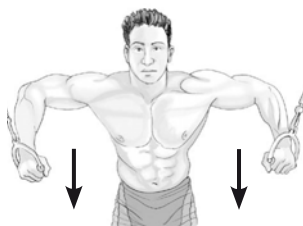
VARIATIONS 16.2 ... PRESS

MUSCLES USED

pectorals, deltoids (anterior) and triceps

TECHNIQUE

Far from being a mistake, this variant can be used to make the crossover into an excellent pectoral exercise. It requires the same posture but a different movement, in which you will need to bend your elbows as you open your arms and straighten them as you bring your hands together. This allows a heavier load without putting excess strain on the elbows and shoulders. If you use a moderate to light load and do a large number of repeats, you will achieve an excellent level of congestion in the pectoral muscle.



VARIATIONS 16.3 ... ONE-HANDED

MUSCLES USED

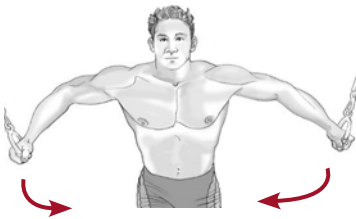
pectorals, deltoids (anterior) and biceps

TECHNIQUE

The posture is the same as in the preceding exercises, but you use only one hand and place the other on your hip. This stance is more comfortable if you place the opposite leg of the arm worked slightly forward. You can use either the flies-style movement (conventional cable crossover) or the press style. It is necessary to fix the abdominal and lumbar muscles firmly to prevent your trunk from twisting with the movement. You should use this variant only when the cable crossover apparatus is not available in the gym.



Execution



Stand between the two pulleys with your legs semi-flexed (preferably with one leg set a little farther forward) and your trunk leaning slightly forward (approximately 15° to 45°) to fix your abdominal muscles. Start with your arms out and your elbows semi-flexed and bring your hands together at the bottom (“horizontal adduction”) as if you were hugging someone. Keep your elbows still throughout the movement. Inhale as you open your arms and exhale when you complete the close.

Comments

This is a good exercise to isolate and congest the pectoral muscles. However, it is not as good if you want to work out with heavy weights (a moderate load is better) due to the strain on the elbows and shoulders. Incidentally, this is one of the few exercises for the pectoral group, along with flies, that does not make significant demands on the triceps (which operate only to fix the position) but does work the biceps, which can be compromised if technique is poor, the weight used is excessive, or you allow your elbow to straighten out too much as you open your arms.

You can easily displace the work required to the lower part of the pectoral muscle by varying the inclination of the trunk, straightening up while holding the crossover at the bottom of the movement, and vice versa.



Common mistakes: doing a press-style exercise rather than flies (due to excessive weight or poor technique); shifting the trunk to help the movement; too little weight

16.4 ...ONE-HANDED WITH LOW CABLE

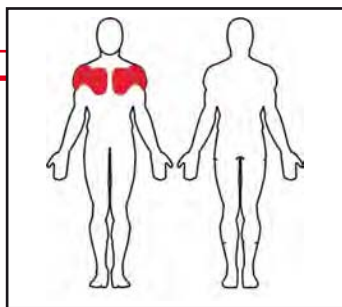
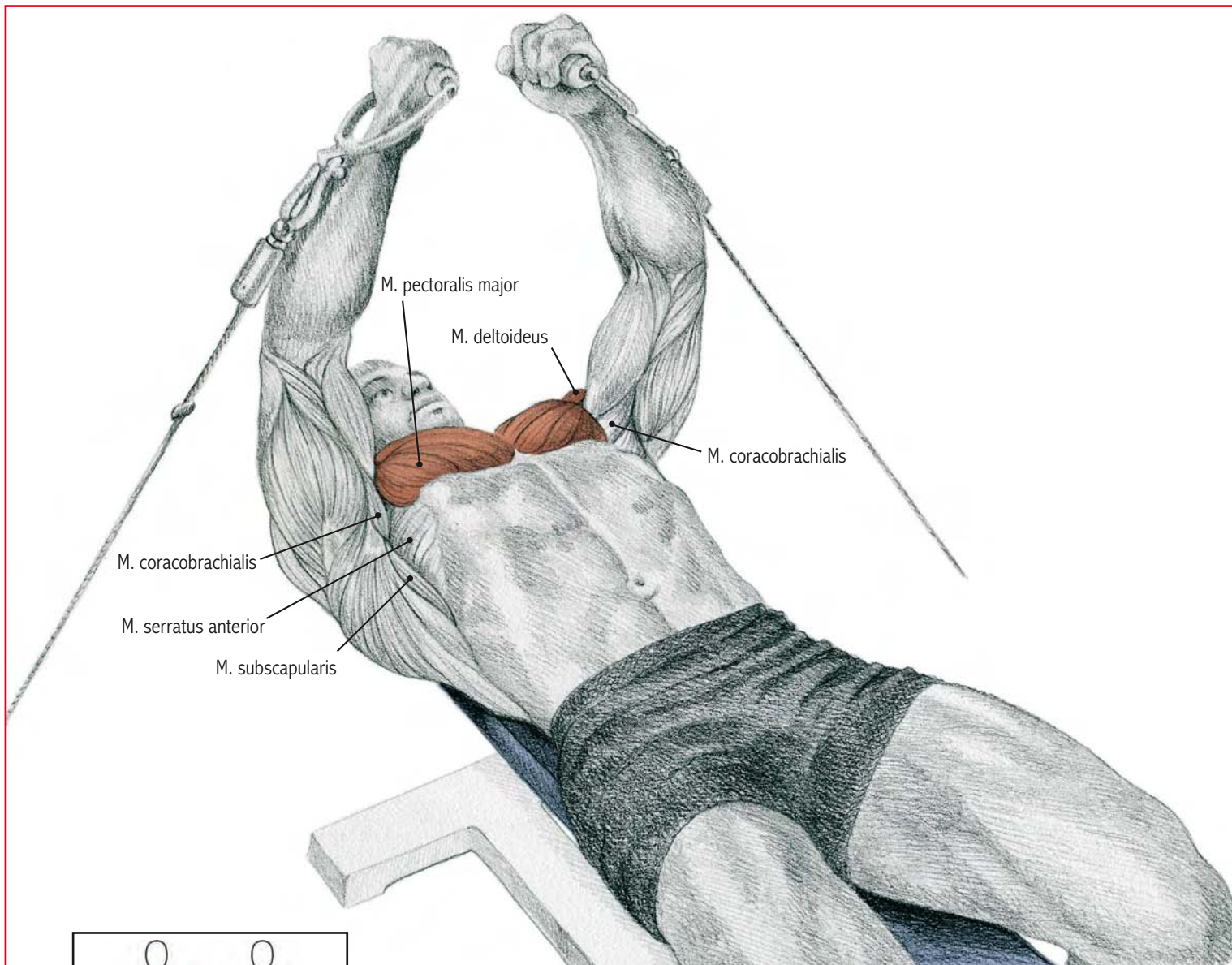
MUSCLES USED

pectorals (clavicular area), deltoid (anterior), biceps

TECHNIQUE

The posture is the same as for the “one-handed” crossover, but the cable runs from below, and you pull toward the center and up, whether performing the flies or pressstyle exercise. Your body should also be straighter. This variant works the clavicular and sternal (upper and central) part of the pectoral muscle, an area that is usually difficult to train. Do not use a heavy weight. The objective is muscular localization in just a small section of the pectoralis major, although the whole muscle will inevitably be involved to some degree (the variant also puts significant demands on the deltoids). As a variant you can use both hands at the same time, although you may find your posture is rather forced.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: pectoralis major, deltoids (anterior)

SECONDARY MUSCLES: coracobrachialis, subscapularis, serratus, M. biceps brachii

ANTAGONISTS: latissimus dorsi, deltoid (posterior), trapezius, rhomboids, teres

VARIATIONS

17.2 ... INCLINE

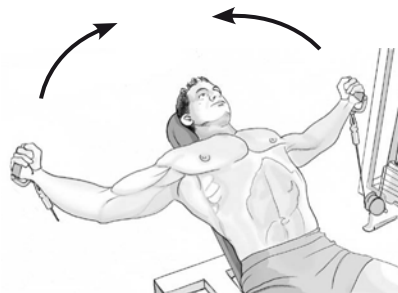
MUSCLES USED

pectoralis major (clavicular area), deltoids (anterior)

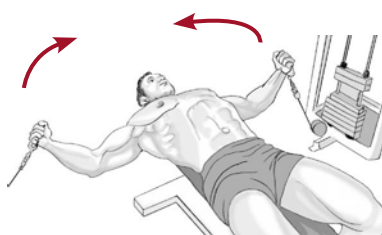
TECHNIQUE

Essentially, the technique used is the same as in the basic exercise but on a bench set at an incline of 30° to 45° (see Ex. 5.2 “incline flyes with dumbbells”).

This variant is excellent to achieve congestion of the upper part of the pectoral muscle, where dumbbell flyes are less effective. As a consequence, it works out an area of the pectoral muscles that is otherwise difficult to train, and the inclusion of this exercise (or the pressstyle variant, Ex. 17.3) in your training routines is recommended.



Execution



Lie flat on the bench with your feet on the ground (if the bench is low) or on a step. Hold the grips vertically above the chest with your elbows semi-flexed and your palms facing each other (knuckles outward).

Breathe in as you open your arms to lower the cables down to the level of your chest (depending on flexibility), keeping your elbows still, raise your arms vertically and toward the center. Keep your elbows perpendicular to and away from your body, as if you were hugging someone. Exhale on completing the lift.

Comments

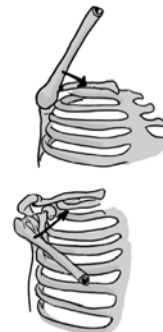
The comments made for “dumbbell flyes” (Ex. 5) apply for this exercise, except that tension remains high at the end of the movement (when your two hands come together at the top). This is one of the clearest examples that free weights are not always better than machines. Cables are very effective in this exercise.



Common mistakes: short movement because the cable is not long enough or the pulleys are too far apart; doing a press rather than flyes; deficient concentration of work on the pectoral muscle because too much of the strain is taken by the deltoids



The pectoralis major is the muscle responsible for moving the arm to an angle of about 60°. After this point, it makes the opposite movement, bringing the arm back. This is why it is involved in exercises like “front dumbbell shoulder press” (see Ex. 3 “Shoulders”) and “Palms up / biceps pull-ups” (see Ex. 1.3 “Back”).



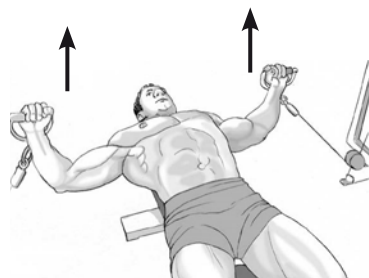
17.3 ... PRESS STYLE

MUSCLES USED

pectoralis major, triceps, deltoids (anterior)

TECHNIQUE

The only difference with the basic exercise is that you flex your elbow during the movement. This allows you to use more weight, although a part of the work shifts to the triceps. You should place your hands in a neutral position, although this is not absolutely essential. This is another excellent exercise.



17.4 ... ONE-HANDED

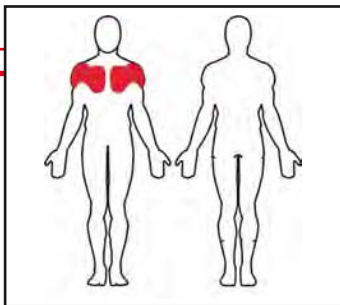
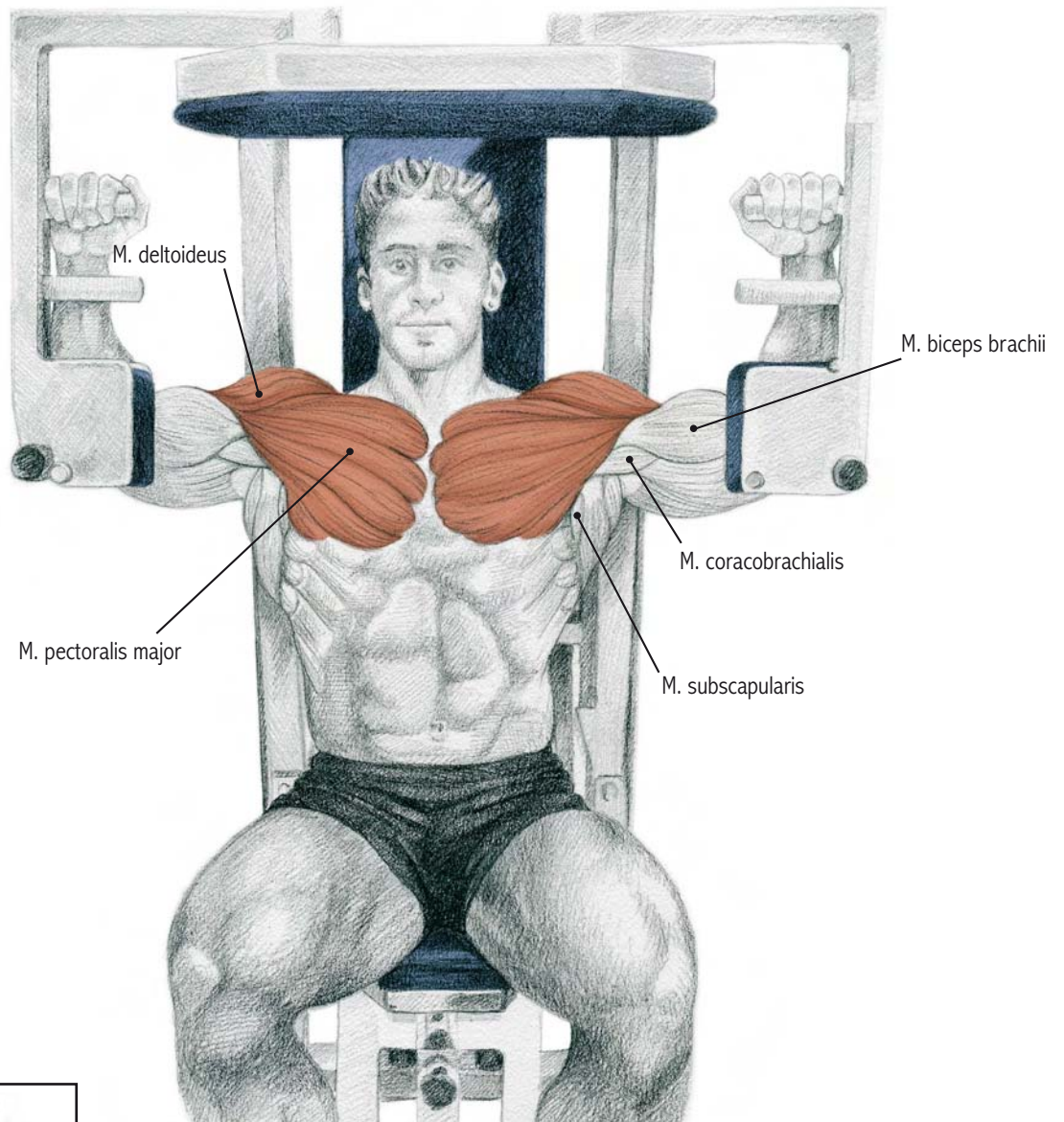
MUSCLES USED

pectoralis major, (triceps), deltoids (anterior), serratus anterior

TECHNIQUE

This variant can be done either as flyes or using the press style. In either case, you will have to use a lighter weight because of the imbalance on the other side of the bench. You can use this variant if your gym does not have opposing cable pulleys or they are too far apart or poorly aligned.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: pectoralis major, deltoids (anterior)

SECONDARY MUSCLES: coracobrachialis, subscapularis, biceps (short part)

ANTAGONISTS: latissimus dorsi, deltoid (posterior), trapezius, rhomboids, teres

VARIATIONS

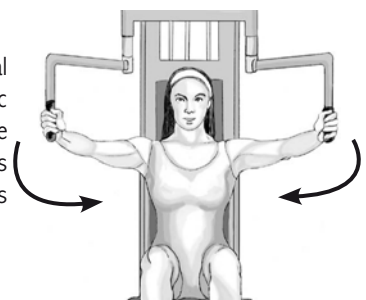
18.2 ... ARMS OPEN

MUSCLES USED

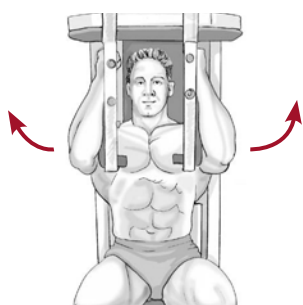
pectoralis major, deltoids (anterior)

TECHNIQUE

Straightening the arms at the elbow does not affect the pectoral muscle, and this variant is therefore the same as the basic exercise using a movement that simulates flyes or a hug. The advantage of the arms open exercise is that the tension remains more or less constant over the whole of the movement and is not lost in the closing phase.



Execution



Sit back with your elbows flexed at about 90° at the mid-chest level. Take hold of the grips and push with your elbows to bring the arms together before your face. Breathe in as you open your arms as far as your flexibility will allow (for safety's sake, you should open your arms less if you are using a heavy weight), and breathe out as you close.

Comments

This exercise provides optimum isolation of the pectoral muscles without bringing in the triceps. It allows a good level of congestion with medium to high repetition. It is recommended for beginners because of its simplicity, and for advanced athletes because of the specific recruitment of the muscles (making it an excellent complement to the bench press, Ex. 1). Inhaling deeply helps to expand the thorax (see Ex. 5, flies). This machine, like others should have a weight release lever to prevent injury when you take up and set down the load.

It has always been thought that the opening phase places greater demand on the distal (i.e., external) fibers, while the close recruits the proximal (medial and sternal) fibers. However the whole of the pectoral muscle is involved because there are no insertions between one area and the other. Finally, if you raise or lower the grip a little, you will, in theory, shift a part of the work from the upper or lower part of the pectoral muscle, but this is unnecessary.



Common mistakes: inappropriate travel (too little reduces the effect of the exercise, and too much can be harmful); separating the elbows from the bar and pushing with the hands to gain the help of the shoulders; taking up or setting down the weight without releasing the load

18.3 ... FINAL MOVEMENT ONLY

MUSCLES USED

pectoralis major (sternal and central part), deltoid (anterior)

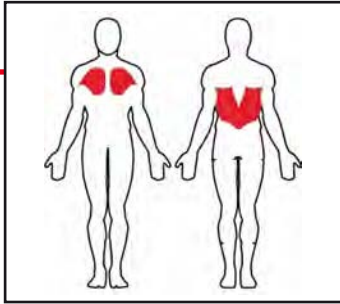
TECHNIQUE

In this variant, only the final (closing) part of the movement is performed, and you need to stop the opening phase halfway through.

Although the movement is the same, this variant deserves a separate mention because it works out the more central or proximal part of the pectoral muscle, at least in theory (see the comments on the basic exercise). Holding the close for a second (when possible) before opening the arms again will help you “feel” the contraction. The final movement only variant is usually recommended to add volume to the area around the sternum. However, we may note that a broad sternum, or one with long pectoral tendons, cannot be remedied by weight training. You cannot add muscle volume where there is no muscle, but only bone or tendon.



LOW CABLE PULL-OVER



Muscles involved

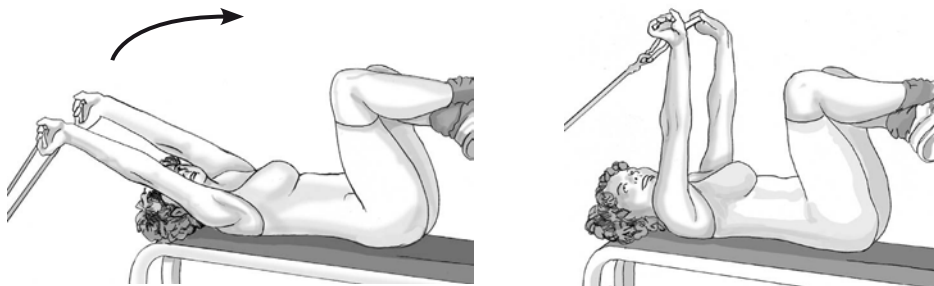
MAIN MUSCLES: latissimus dorsi, teres, pectoralis major

SECONDARY MUSCLES: serratus anterior, coracobrachialis, triceps, rhomboids

ANTAGONISTS: pectoralis major, deltoids (anterior), triceps

Execution

Lie flat on a bench with your head at the edge, and grip the bar or rope (hooked up to the low cable) above your eyes. With your elbows semi-flexed, slowly lower the weight above and behind your head at the same time as you inhale deeply. Keep your elbows still. You should feel the stretch in your pectoral muscles. Bring the bar or rope back up vertically above your eyes as you contract the pectoral muscle. Exhale on completing the lift.



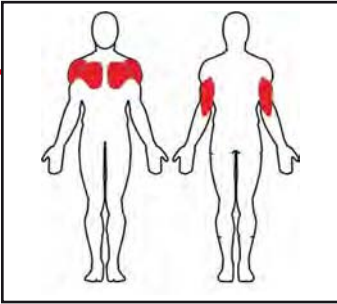
Comments

This is the same as the dumbbell or barbell pull-over (Ex. 8), and like them it involves considerable work for the back and adjacent muscles. This type of pull-over has traditionally been used to “expand” the chest and enhance the flexibility of the pectoral muscles. It is therefore important to inhale deeply during the downward movement. It should not be used to achieve hypertrophy of the pectoral muscle.



Common mistakes: too much weight; incorrect breathing; too short or too long a movement; flexing the elbow (triceps); outward rotation of the arm

ASSISTED PARALLEL DIPS



Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: pectoralis major (lower part), triceps, deltoids (anterior), pectoralis minor

SECONDARY MUSCLES: serratus anterior, coracobrachialis, subscapularis

ANTAGONISTS: latissimus dorsi, biceps, deltoids (posterior), trapezius

Execution

This is the same as free weight dips (Ex. 7) but with the assistance of a machine. Hold the parallel bars with a moderately neutral (or V) grip, keeping your trunk straight and your legs together. Inhale as you go down, flexing your trunk forward and supporting your feet or knees on the plate (this depends on the design of the machine). Your elbows should move backwards away from the trunk as you come down. Push back up again when you reach the lowest point of the movement and breathe out.



Comments

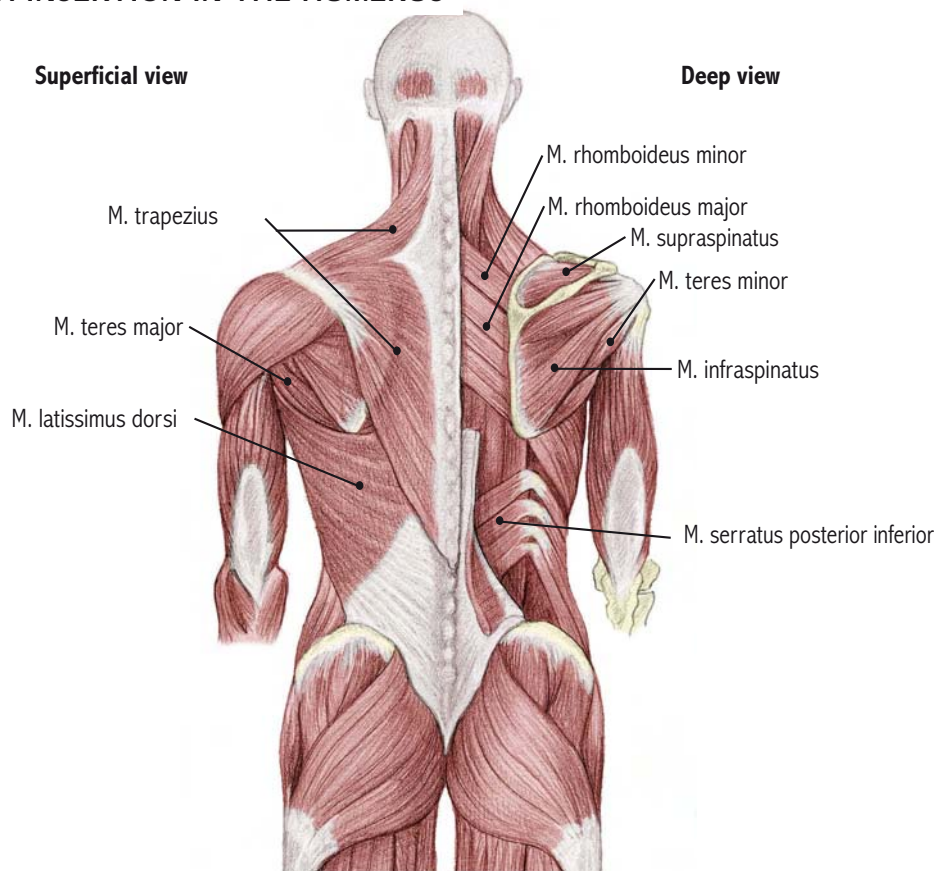
As explained for the free weight exercise, this is a better alternative than the decline press. It also has the advantage that the assistance provided by the machine allows beginners to do the dips easily. The demands placed on the triceps are considerable, but you should concentrate effort on the pectoral muscle above all. You should be able to feel the elongation as you lower your body and the contraction as you push back up against the grips. Be careful if you have suffered any elbow or shoulder injuries. Experts and advanced athletes should not be fooled. If you keep the mechanical assistance provided to a minimum and do the exercise slowly, it can be very demanding.



Common mistakes: scant travel; excessive demands on the triceps; poor positioning of the trunk during the movement

SCIENTIFIC DESCRIPTION OF THE BACK: INTRODUCTION TO THE BIOMECHANICS OF THE MAIN MUSCLES

MUSCLES WITH INSERTION IN THE HUMERUS



LATISSIMUS DORSI / "LATS" (posterior, superficial)

Origin: thoracic vertebrae (spinous processes of 7th to 12th vertebrae), thoracolumbar fascia and iliac crest (from the 10th to the 12th rib), and almost always the scapula (lower angle)

Insertion: humerus (lesser tubercle and crest)

Main functions: adduction of the arm when raised, inward rotation (though this has been questioned by some experts), also involved in extending the humerus and lowering the pectoral girdle

TERES MINOR / LESSER TERES (posterior, deep)

Origin: scapula (lateral border)

Insertion: humerus (lower facet of the greater tubercle)

Main functions: weak outward rotation and a role in the adduction of the arm

TERES MAJOR / GREATER TERES (posterior, superficial)

Origin: scapula (posterior aspect of the inferior angle)

Insertion: humerus (lesser tubercle)

Main functions: retroversion (swinging back), adduction and inward rotation of the arm

INFRASPINATUS (posterior, deep)

Origin: scapula (infraspinous fossa and vertebral border)

Insertion: humerus (middle facet of the greater tubercle)

Main functions: outward rotation of the arm and reinforcement of the shoulder joint

Comments: The latissimus dorsi is a large, flat powerful muscle that is responsible for, among other functions, movement of the arm toward the body (adduction), both vertically (as in pull-ups) and horizontally (as in rows). Although the muscle can be divided into four sections, its size means that it is, in practice, enough to include pull-down and row-type exercises to involve all of them. The teres major muscle performs a similar function as the latissimus dorsi, to such an extent in fact that it is sometimes fused with it (or may even be entirely absent). These are the middle back muscles involved in climbing.

The infraspinatus is sometimes fused with the teres minor muscle and performs a similar function.

OTHER INSERTIONS

RHOMBOID MAJOR / GREATER RHOMBOID (posterior, deep)

Origin: thoracic vertebrae (spinous processes of the first four vertebrae)

Insertion: scapula (medial border)

Main functions: adduction and retraction of the scapula towards the spinal column, anchoring the scapula to the chest wall, raising the scapula

TRAPEZIUS (posterior, superficial)

see SHOULDERS

SERRATUS POSTERIOR INFERIOR (posterior/superior, deep)

see ABDOMEN AND LOWER BACK

RHOMBOID MINOR / LESSER RHOMBOID (posterior, deep)

Origin: cervical vertebrae (spinous processes of 6th and 7th vertebrae)

Insertion: scapula (medial border)

Main functions: retraction of the scapula toward the spinal column and anchoring it to the chest wall

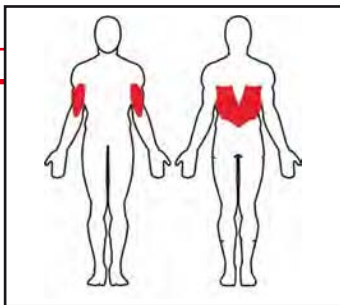
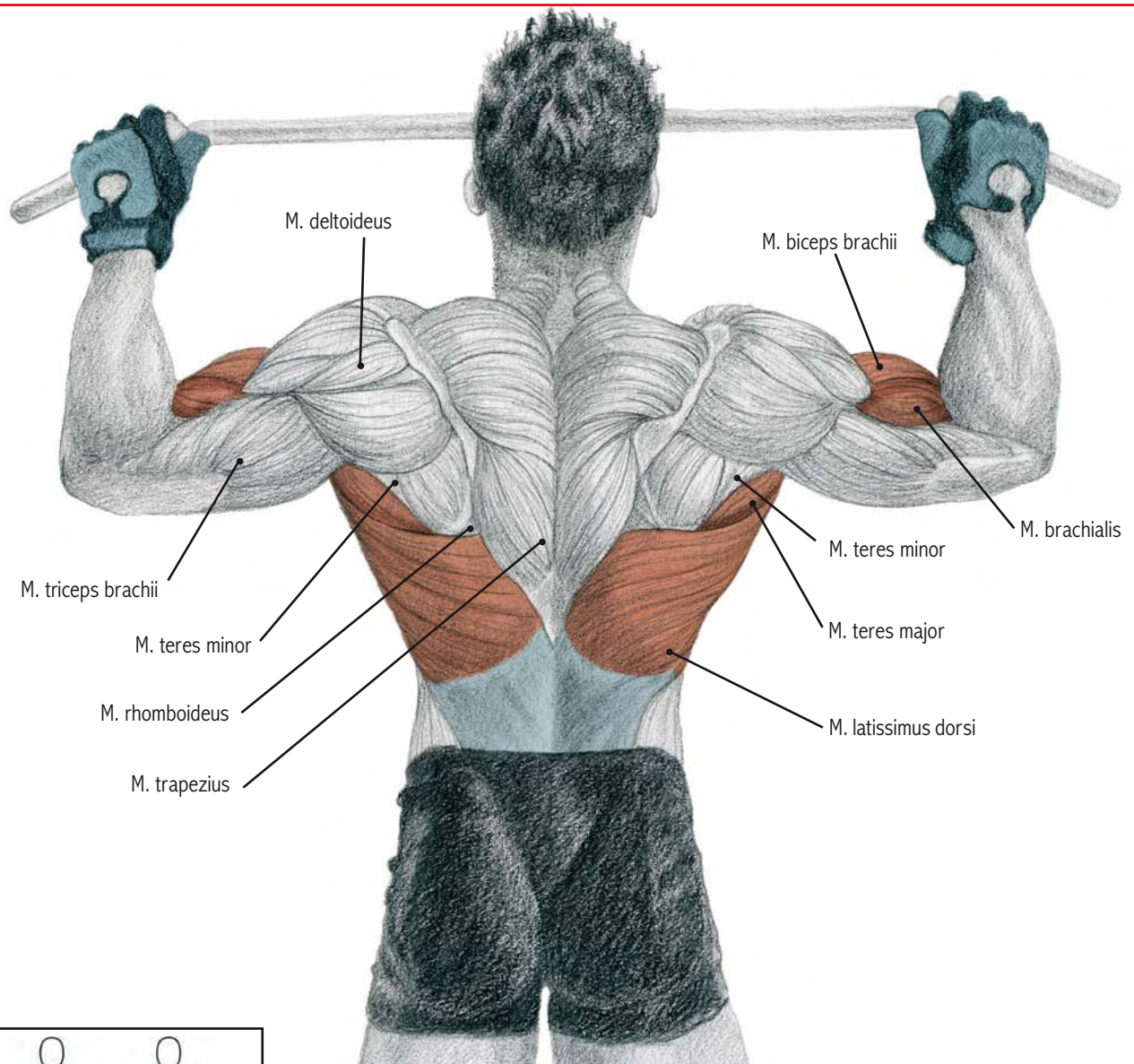
LEVATOR SCAPULAE (posterior/superior, middle)

see SHOULDERS

ILIOCOSTALIS (posterior, deep)

see ABDOMEN AND LOWER BACK

Comments: These muscles work in conjunction with large muscles like the latissimus dorsi and as anchoring muscles. Some movements, like pushing out the chest, specifically involve the rhomboids. The large number of muscles in the back and the importance of their functions make it essential to diversify your workouts, although caution is necessary.



Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: latissimus dorsi, biceps (short head), teres major

SECONDARY MUSCLES: pectoralis major (lower and outside), triceps (long head), teres minor, rhomboids, brachioradialis, biceps (long head), deltoid (front and rear)

ANTAGONISTS: deltoid, pectoralis major (upper), triceps

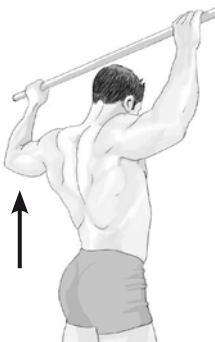
VARIATIONS 1.2 ... BEHIND-THE-NECK

MUSCLES USED

latissimus dorsi, biceps (short head), brachialis, teres major and minor

TECHNIQUE

End the chin-up with the bar behind your neck. Some studies suggest that this works the lower and outside area of the lats somewhat harder, as the upward movement must be completely vertical.



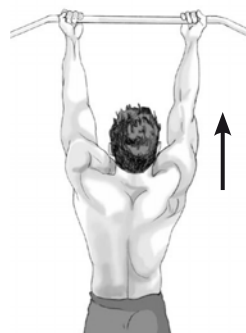
VARIATIONS 1.3 ... UNDERHAND GRIP / BICEPS

MUSCLES USED

latissimus dorsi, biceps, brachialis, teres major and minor

TECHNIQUE

Do the chin-ups with a narrower palms-up grip. This makes more demands on the biceps and may shift some work to the bottom/middle and center of the lats. Do not extend your elbows fully when you come down.



VARIATIONS 1.4 ... NEUTRAL GRIP WITH

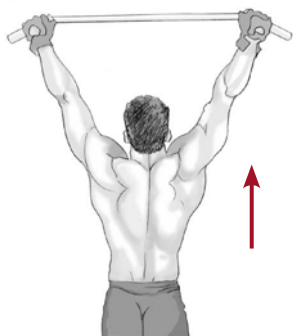
MUSCLES USED

latissimus dorsi, brachialis, biceps, teres major and minor

TECHNIQUE

Use a comfortable neutral grip (palms facing each other). Pull up and put your head between the rungs of the ladder, or alternate pulling up to the left and right to concentrate on each side of your body.

Execution



Hang by your arms from a horizontal bar using an overhand grip (knuckles facing backward). Place your hands a little more than shoulder-width apart. Use your back muscles to pull the upper part of your chest up to the level of the bar and at the same time arch your torso slightly backwards. Let your legs hang straight or cross them. You can also bend your knees if you like. Inhale during the first half of the downward movement and exhale when you reach the top.

Comments

This is an excellent, although very demanding, exercise for the latissimus dorsi and arms. It is a good way to broaden the middle back (although results will always depend on your individual physical characteristics). Make sure your movement is vertical, aligned, and complete. Horizontal wobbles and contracting the torso are signs of poor technique. Advanced athletes who are able to do many repetitions can hang a weight from a belt (see Chest, Ex. 7.2), but it is more advisable to do the exercise slower and increase the number of repetitions because too heavy a load could injure the joints, triceps, or even the spine. Beginners should opt for lat pull-down machines (Ex. 8). A narrower grip will put more strain on the arms, shifting some of the work to the center of the back. The range of motion will also be shorter. The order of difficulty for the variants described below is: 1.6, 1.4, 1.3, 1.2, 1.5.



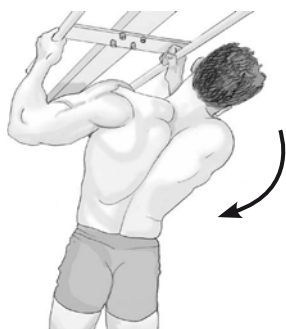
Common mistakes: doing the exercise too fast, incomplete movement, swinging the body, bending the torso and bringing the elbows forward to get help from the chest muscles, bending the knees to gain momentum, too wide a grip and extending the arms fully at the end of the downward movement.



Good quality weight training gloves are recommended. Not only are they more hygienic than your bare hands, but they also prevent callusing and injury (from contact with the bar) and stop you from losing your grip due to sweat.

LADDER / ALTERNATING

1.5 ... PULL-UP TO WAIST

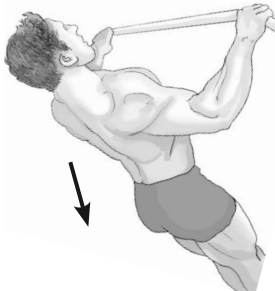


MUSCLES USED

latissimus dorsi, triceps, brachialis, teres major and minor, pectoralis major (lower part), serratus anterior

TECHNIQUE

Use a narrow grip and raise your waist (rather than your collarbone) towards the bar by curving your body backwards. The effect is similar to a Pull-over, but more intense.



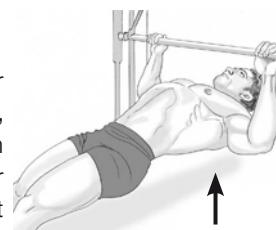
1.6 ... WITH LOW BAR

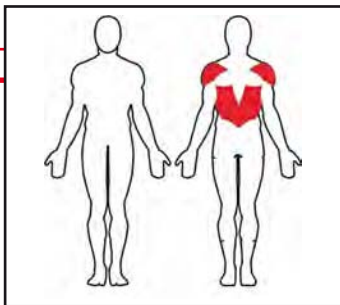
MUSCLES USED

latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, brachialis, biceps (short head), trapezius, rhomboids

TECHNIQUE

Set the bar of a Smith or similar machine low and lie under it, resting your heels on a bench or on the ground. Pull your torso up, raising your chest to the level of the bar. The effect will be halfway between a Pull-up and a Barbell Row.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, deltoid (rear)

SECONDARY MUSCLES: rhomboids, biceps, brachialis, brachioradialis, trapezius, infraspinatus, (lower back muscles)

ANTAGONISTS: pectoralis major, triceps, deltoid (front)

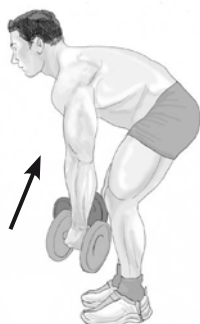
VARIATIONS 2.2 ... WITH DUMBBELLS

MUSCLES USED

latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, deltoid (rear)

TECHNIQUE

Dumbbells allow a neutral grip (palms facing each other) and a longer range of motion. They also allow you to bring the weight toward the center of gravity (which is safer).



VARIATIONS 2.3 ... UNDERHAND GRIP

MUSCLES USED

latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, deltoid (rear), biceps

TECHNIQUE

Using either a barbell or dumbbells, this variant involves the biceps more. The effect on the back muscles varies little because the change is in the forearm and not the humerus.



VARIATIONS 2.4 ... NARROW GRIP WITH

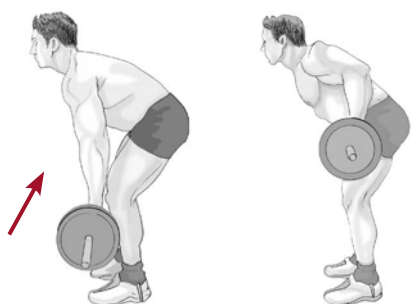
MUSCLES USED

latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, deltoid (rear), brachialis

TECHNIQUE

This variant is similar to Ex. 4 and Ex. 2.2. Use a neutral grip (palms facing inward) and keep the dumbbells close to your torso throughout the movement. The work done by the lats is to some extent shifted to the middle and lower regions of the back. This exercise can also be done using a barbell with a narrow grip.

Execution



Stand with your feet slightly apart and your back straight, hips bent around 45°, knees slightly bent. Hold your torso firmly in position. Grasp the bar with an overhand grip (palms down), hands a little more than shoulder-width apart. Pull the bar up to the top of the abdomen, keeping your elbows open. Inhale just before lifting the weight and exhale as you lower the barbell.

Comments

This is a basic yet demanding exercise. It works all of the back muscles effectively, the latissimus dorsi in particular. It is an excellent way to thicken the middle muscle fibers in this area and to gain overall strength, as it also gives the torso and legs an isometric workout.

Beginners should start by using a machine. Trained athletes can manage significant weight, but the exercise requires good technique and involves certain risks, especially to the lower back (see Deadlift, Abdomen and lower back, Ex. 9). The breathing instructions given here are atypical, but this rhythm is essential to protect the spinal column from injury. As a point of reference to enable you to learn to hold the correct position, you can rest (but not support) your forehead against the back of a bench or a post. Safer variants do exist (Ex. 2.5, Ex. 11, etc.) and they are recommended.



Common mistakes: swinging the body; incomplete set or movement; curving the back; bringing the barbell up to the chest; and improper breathing



The center of gravity is an imaginary point that represents the center of an object's mass. In humans, it is the point at which all the parts of the body are in balance. In most people, the center of gravity is located around the pelvis (assuming the individual is standing in the anatomical position), although this depends on height, limb length, body weight and distribution, and stance or posture.

DUMBBELLS

2.5 ... LYING



MUSCLES USED

latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, deltoid (rear)

TECHNIQUE

Lie face down on a bench set at a slight incline with your arms by your sides. This reduces the range of motion possible but removes the potentially hazardous strain on the vertebrae.



2.6 ... WITH T-BAR

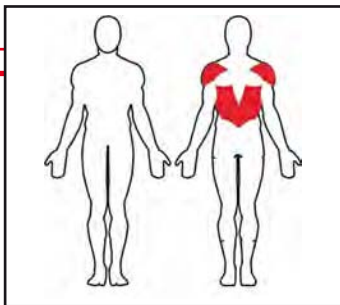
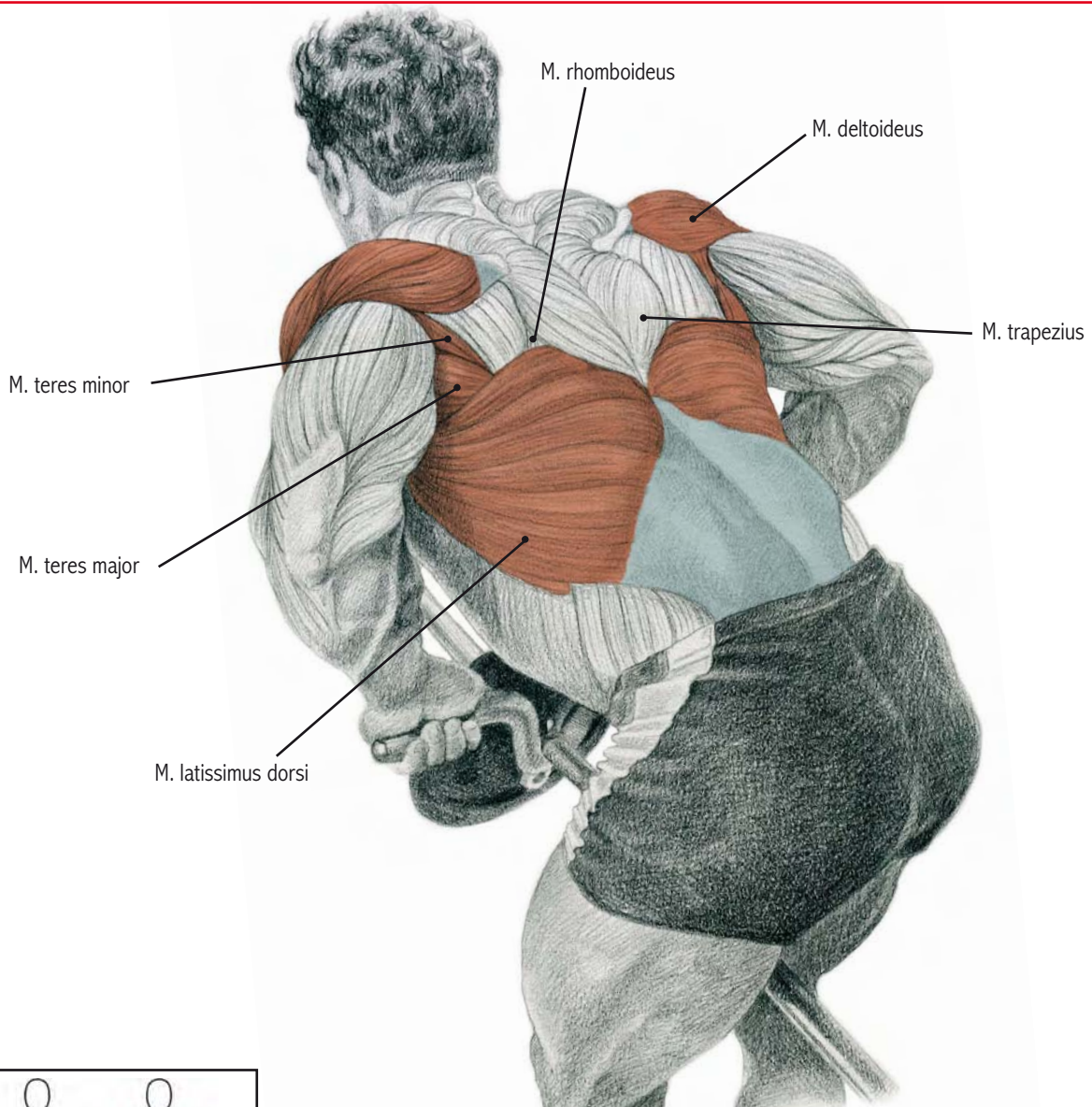
MUSCLES USED

latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, deltoid (rear)

TECHNIQUE

The use of a T-bar combines the characteristics of the Bent-over Barbell Row and Narrow-grip Dumbbell Row, although it is no better than either.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, deltoid (rear)

SECONDARY MUSCLES: rhomboids, biceps, brachialis, brachioradialis, trapezius, infraspinatus, (lower back muscles)

ANTAGONISTS: pectoralis major, triceps, deltoid (front)

VARIATIONS

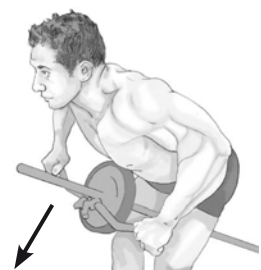
3.2 ... WIDE GRIP

MUSCLES USED

latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, deltoid (rear), rhomboids, trapezius

TECHNIQUE

The exercise is virtually the same as the Long Bar Row, but the wider grip shifts some of the work to the upper back. There is a more limited range of motion in this exercise, as is always the case when you widen your grip on the bar in traction exercises of this kind for the back (Pull-ups and Rows).



Execution



Stand with your feet slightly apart and your torso straight, hips bent around 45° and knees slightly bent. Hold yourself firmly in position. Grasp the T-bar with an overhand grip (palms down). Pull the bar up to the top of the abdomen, keeping your elbows open. You can straighten your body slightly at the same time. Because of the position for this exercise, it is necessary to inhale just before you lower the weight, then hold your breath and exhale over the last third of the upward movement without releasing all of the air.

Comments

Almost all of the comments on the Bent-over Barbell Row (Ex. 2) also apply to the Long Bar / T-bar Row. However, the effort is exerted at more of an angle, which means the position is more comfortable and not so hard on the vertebrae. If you do not have a specific bar for this exercise, you can rest the end of an ordinary long bar in a corner, loading the weights at the moving end and using a crossbar to pull up. This may reduce the range of motion in the exercise, if the weights come in contact with your torso too early. You will need thick discs with a small diameter and a U-shaped crossbar.

There is a machine for this exercise, but it is not common due to its limited versatility.



Common mistakes: swinging the body too far forward; incomplete set or movement; curving the spine and overall poor technique

3.3 ... ONE-ARM

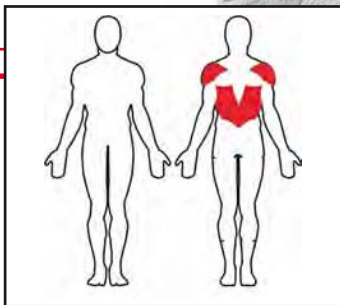
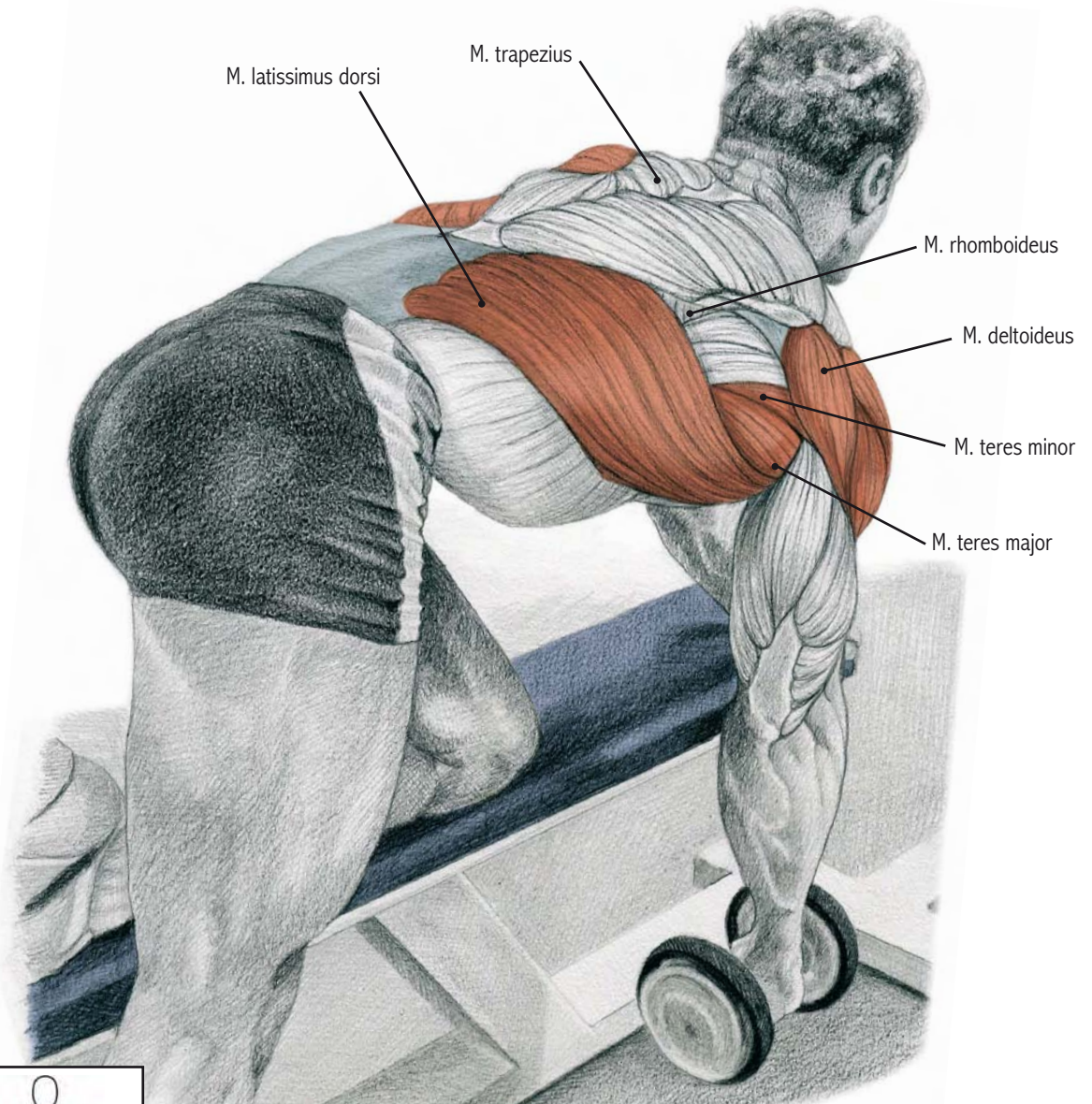
MUSCLES USED

latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, deltoid (rear)

TECHNIQUE

The technique used is the same as in the basic exercise, but the movement is performed with one arm and to the side of the body. Given the position, the weight will obviously have to be lighter if you use only one arm. The only advantage of this variant is that it concentrates the exertion on one side of the back and allows a few degrees more movement. However, this is not enough to warrant replacing the conventional exercise with the one-arm variant. The exercise can be improved by placing your free hand on something for support to relieve some of the strain on the lower back, as in Ex. 4).





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, deltoid (rear)
SECONDARY MUSCLES: rhomboids, biceps, brachialis, brachioradialis, trapezius
ANTAGONISTS: pectoralis major, triceps, deltoid (front)

VARIATIONS 4.2 ... OPEN

MUSCLES USED

latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, deltoid (rear), rhomboids, trapezius

TECHNIQUE

The only difference from the basic exercise is that you keep your elbow further away from your body. This shifts some of the work to the upper back (rear deltoid, trapezius, rhomboids, etc.).



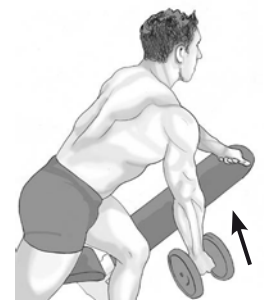
VARIATIONS 4.3 ... STANDING

MUSCLES USED

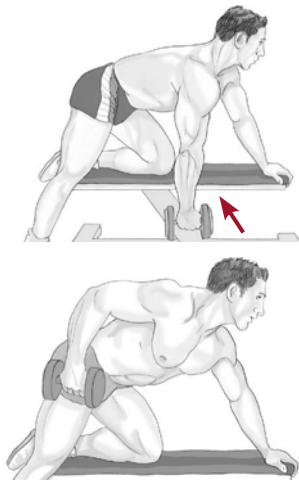
deltoid (rear), trapezius, latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, triceps (long head)

TECHNIQUE

Place your hand on the back of an incline bench. Your point of support is no longer horizontal to the floor but at an angle. Your torso will be at a diagonal angle and you should use a little less weight than in the basic exercise. This position works the trapezius and the rest of the upper back harder. The movement of the dumbbell will still be vertical, however.



Execution



Kneel with one knee on a flat bench, supporting your torso with the hand on the same side. Grasp a dumbbell in the other hand with a neutral grip. Keep your other leg straight or slightly bent with your foot on the floor. This leg should be diagonal to your body and slightly behind it (this will depend on how tall you are and the height of the bench), keeping your torso horizontal and in line. Starting from the lowest point, your latissimus dorsi will allow you to stretch and pull the dumbbell up to your waist (as if you were sawing a log). Keep your elbow close to your torso and your forearm perpendicular to the floor. Inhale just before you bring the dumbbell up, hold your breath at the top of the movement and exhale as you lower the weight.

Comments

This is a traditional exercise for beginners and experts alike and it allows you to lift considerable weight with little risk to your back. The main difficulty is ensuring that you actually work the lats. Keep the movement vertical so that the load will always be working against gravity (the key to training with free weights) and to focus the work in the lats. It is a mistake to move the dumbbell at an angle from below the head to the waist. More experienced and advanced athletes who want to work out with really heavy weight can try placing both feet on the floor, bringing the leg that rests on the bench in the basic exercise forward.



Common mistakes: lifting the weight toward the shoulder; lowering it forward rather than vertically; rotating the torso as you bring the weight up; not using enough weight; curving the torso because the supporting foot is in too vertical a position (for example, if the bench is low) and not positioning the torso horizontally



A trick to managing two or three extra repetitions at the end of a set is to “finish,” wait a few seconds without putting down the weight, breathe three or four times and then go on to try the extra reps. Bodybuilders have long done something similar, which they call rest-pause training. This technique can be used between each repetition if you are lifting really heavy weights, although you need to be careful not to lock out extended joints (e.g., in the Bench Press or Leg Press). Excellent technique and concentration are needed.

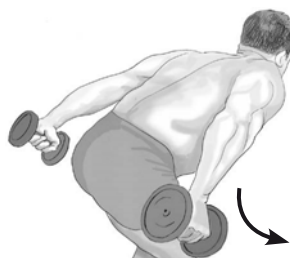
4.3 ... STRAIGHT-ARM EXTENSION

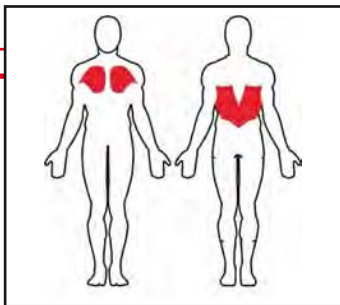
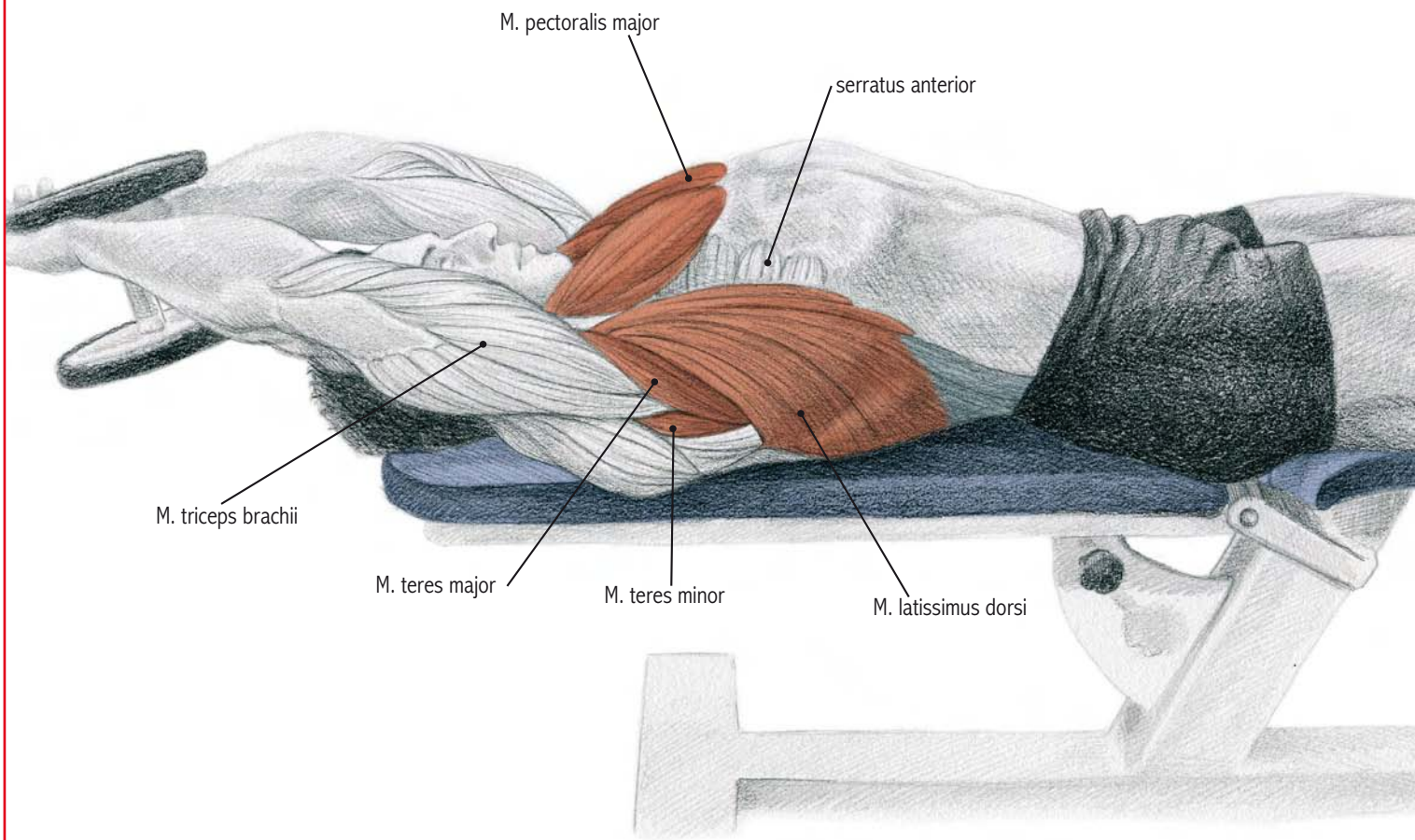
MUSCLES USED

latissimus dorsi, teres major, triceps (long head), deltoid (rear)

TECHNIQUE

Use much less weight but the same starting position as in the basic exercise. Raise the dumbbell in front of you by extending your shoulder, keeping your arm straight and close to your torso. This requires significant effort from the rear deltoid, as well as the teres major muscle. The perfect contraction of the latissimus dorsi produced by this variant makes it suitable for the end of a training session or to vary your routine. The triceps experiences a strong isometric contraction and the long head is also actively involved in the movement.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, pectoralis major
SECONDARY MUSCLES: serratus anterior, triceps (especially the long head), rhomboids
ANTAGONISTS: pectoralis major, deltoid (front)

VARIATIONS

5.2 ... ALTERNATING

MUSCLES USED

latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, pectoralis major

TECHNIQUE

The technique is the same as in the basic exercise but using two small dumbbells which you alternate. This makes it possible to focus individually on the muscles worked, although it has less effect on the chest and breathing. In general terms, this variant is no better than the basic exercise.



Execution



Lie face up on a bench with your head at the edge. Hold a dumbbell vertically between your two hands with your palms touching the inside of the upper disc. Keeping your elbows slightly bent, slowly lower the weight above and behind your head at the same time as you inhale deeply. Keep your elbows in position. Return the weight to the starting position as you contract your lats. Exhale at the end of the lift.

Comments

Despite working the chest muscles, the Dumbbell Pull-over is actually better classified as a back exercise. It has traditionally been used to “expand” the chest (so the theory goes) and to make the pecs more flexible. Once you have stopped growing, however, exercise will not lengthen nor expand any bone structure (although it does strengthen the chest). Nevertheless, the area around the ribs is rather unusual and there is evidence that it is possible to expand the chest in the area of the cartilage around the breastbone, which is more flexible than the bone structures. Given the limited scientific research in this area, these claims should be treated with caution. The demands on your muscles do not vary much between using a barbell or dumbbells, although the barbell can make balance more difficult. The work done by the biceps and the other muscles that bend the elbow is negligible. The exercise is therefore more specifically focused on the lats than Pull-downs and Rows, although this does not mean that it is necessarily more effective.



Common mistakes: using too much weight; improper breathing; too short or too long a movement; flexing/extending the elbow; and rotating the arm outward



Breathing

Main muscles: diaphragm, external and internal inter-rib muscles, rib erector muscles, serratus posterior inferior and superior, and transversus thoracis

Secondary muscles: abdominals, spinal erectors, cervical and thoracic extensor muscles, pectoralis major and minor, quadratus lumborum, scalenes, occipital sternocleidomastoid

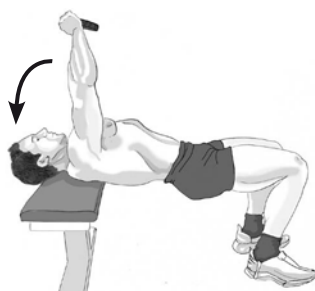
5.3 ... CROSS-BENCH

MUSCLES USED

latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, pectoralis major

TECHNIQUE

Support your body on your shoulders, placed across a bench set perpendicular to the body, your buttocks in the air. As you bring the weight down, lower your hips in a short, controlled movement to get more of a stretch. Be aware that this can be dangerous to your lower back. Begin with the dumbbell on the bench to one side of your head and replace it when you end each set (or get help from a partner).



5.4 ... WITH BARBELL

MUSCLES USED

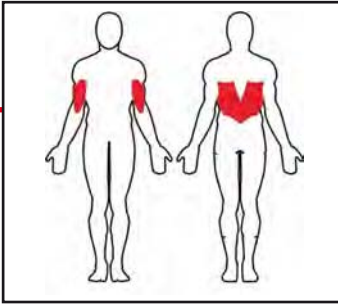
latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, pectoralis major

TECHNIQUE

Grasp a short barbell with an overhand grip (palms up) and perform the same movement as with the dumbbell. This variant is more dangerous than the others because of the chance of losing your balance. To prevent this, use less weight and keep your arms extended. This is not a “muscle mass” exercise because the strain on the joints means that heavy loads are not recommended.



ONE-ARM LATERAL PULL



Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: latissimus dorsi, biceps, brachialis, teres major

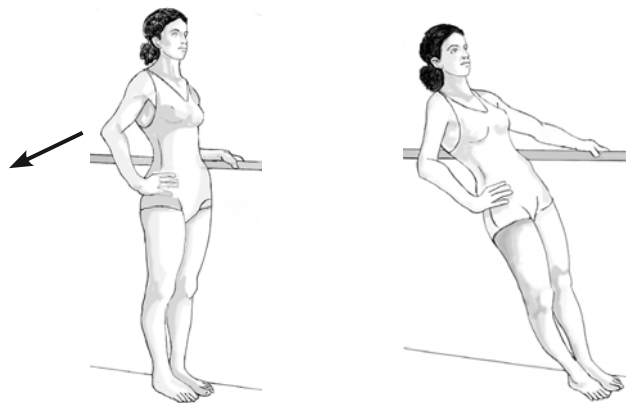
SECONDARY MUSCLES: rhomboids, pectoralis major, triceps (long head), teres minor, brachioradialis, trapezius

ANTAGONISTS: deltoid, pectoralis major, triceps

Execution

Stand beside a horizontal, or even better, vertical, fixed bar. Grasp the bar with one hand and place the other on your waist. Let yourself fall away from the bar sideways, keeping your body rigid and without moving your feet. Then pull back using your arm, bringing your elbow in to your ribs.

Inhale during the first half of the movement and exhale during the second.



Comments

This is a light exercise for beginners and it can also be used as a warm-up. Despite its simplicity, however, you will need to concentrate on working the lats, moving your body sideways throughout. If you do not, the flexor muscles in your arm will be doing all of the work. You can also hold a weight in your free hand. This exercise can be included in routines outside the gym where you lack training equipment.

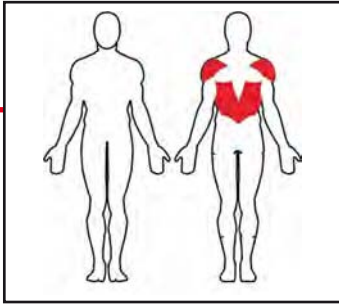


Common mistakes: stopping and starting rather than keeping the tension constant; letting your arm do too much of the work; and not keeping the body straight



Warming up can be summarized in a single word: essential.

STRAIGHT-ARM BARBELL EXTENSIONS



Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, deltoid (rear)

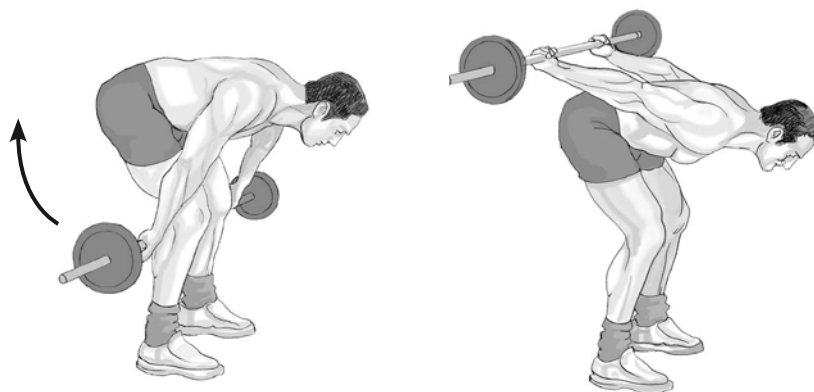
SECONDARY MUSCLES: triceps, rhomboids, trapezius, infraspinatus, lower back muscles

ANTAGONISTS: pectoralis major, triceps, deltoid (front)

Execution

The position is similar to the Bent-over Barbell Row. This time, however, you need to hold the barbell behind your legs (just below the back of the knee) and lift it by extending your shoulder behind your body.

Inhale as you begin to raise the weight, then hold your breath until you have completed the movement and lowered it again.

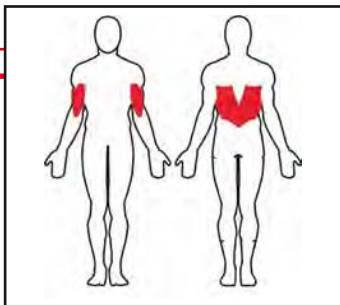
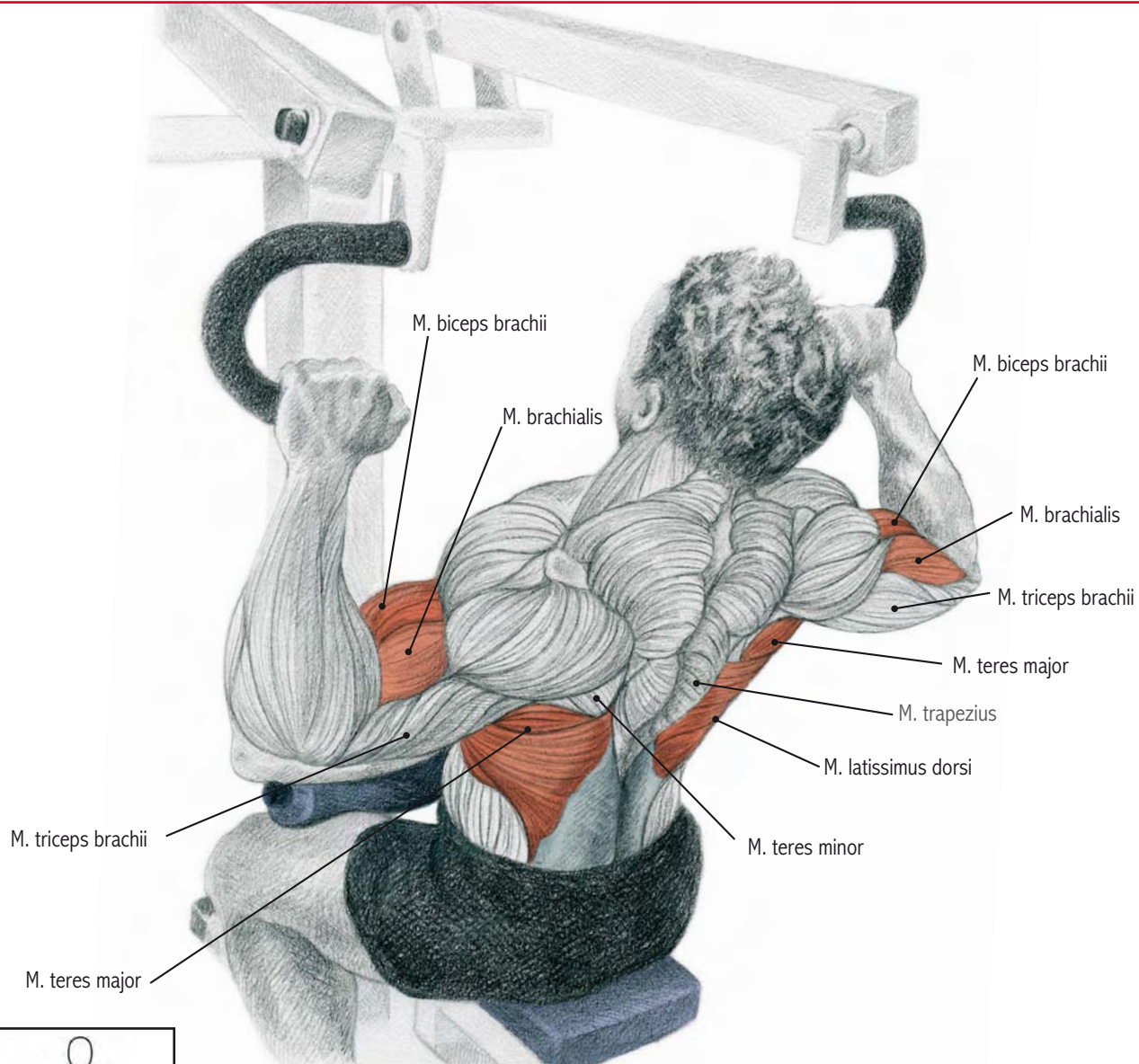


Comments

This is an unusual exercise that places considerable demand on the rear deltoid. The perfect contraction of the latissimus dorsi produced by this variant makes it suitable only for the end of a training session or to vary your routine. The triceps also experiences a strong isometric contraction, as in the straight-arm variant of the Dumbbell Row (Ex. 4.4), but the long head is also actively involved in the movement.



Common mistakes: bad position; using too much weight; and jerking the weight



Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: latissimus dorsi, biceps (short head), teres major

SECONDARY MUSCLES: pectoralis major (lower and outside), triceps (long head), teres minor, rhomboids, brachioradialis, biceps (long head), deltoid (front and rear)

ANTAGONISTS: deltoid, pectoralis major (upper), triceps

VARIATIONS

8.2 ... ONE-ARM LEVER

MUSCLES USED

latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, biceps (short head), brachialis, brachioradialis

TECHNIQUE

If the machine is equipped with independent levers, you can do the exercise one-handed (also possible with a standard machine, although the position is rather awkward). It is advisable to do while this holding one weight up in place in order to stabilize the spinal column. You can either do an entire set with one arm or alternate. In any event, you will achieve a good, long movement, providing the machine is well designed.



Execution



Sit with your back straight and grasp the grips overhand (knuckles back). Pull down vertically, keeping your elbows close to your sides. The movement should range from arms fully extended to contraction at the bottom, close to the limit. Inhale as you raise your arms and exhale as you lower them alongside your torso, without letting out all of the air. This breathing technique can be reversed if you are using a light load.

Comments

The machine allows strict work on the latissimus dorsi and adjacent muscles. It is recommended for beginners. The machine is not very versatile, which makes it relatively uncommon in gyms, in contrast to the cable pull-down machine (Ex. 9), which produces identical results but is more flexible, making it possible to use different grips. Having said this, the reason why so few gyms have this machine is entirely due to business and financial reasons and has nothing to do with its usefulness for back workouts, which is equivalent to Chin-ups. One interesting feature is that the lat machine allows you to put your head between the grips, which you cannot do with either Chin-ups or Cable Pull-downs (unless you use split bars).



Common mistakes: bending the torso forward to get help from the chest and abdominal muscles; limited range of motion; and using too little weight



Once you have finished growing, no amount of weight training will increase your height. However, the vertebral discs rehydrate when they are not under pressure (e.g., when you lie down to sleep at night) and increase slightly in size. This makes you taller in the morning than in the evening.

8.3 ... ONE-ARM WITH ISOMETRIC PAUSE

MUSCLES USED

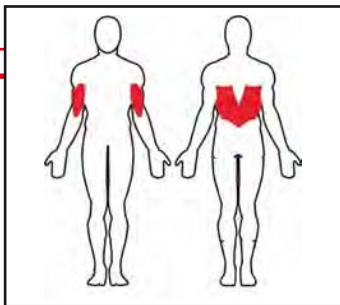
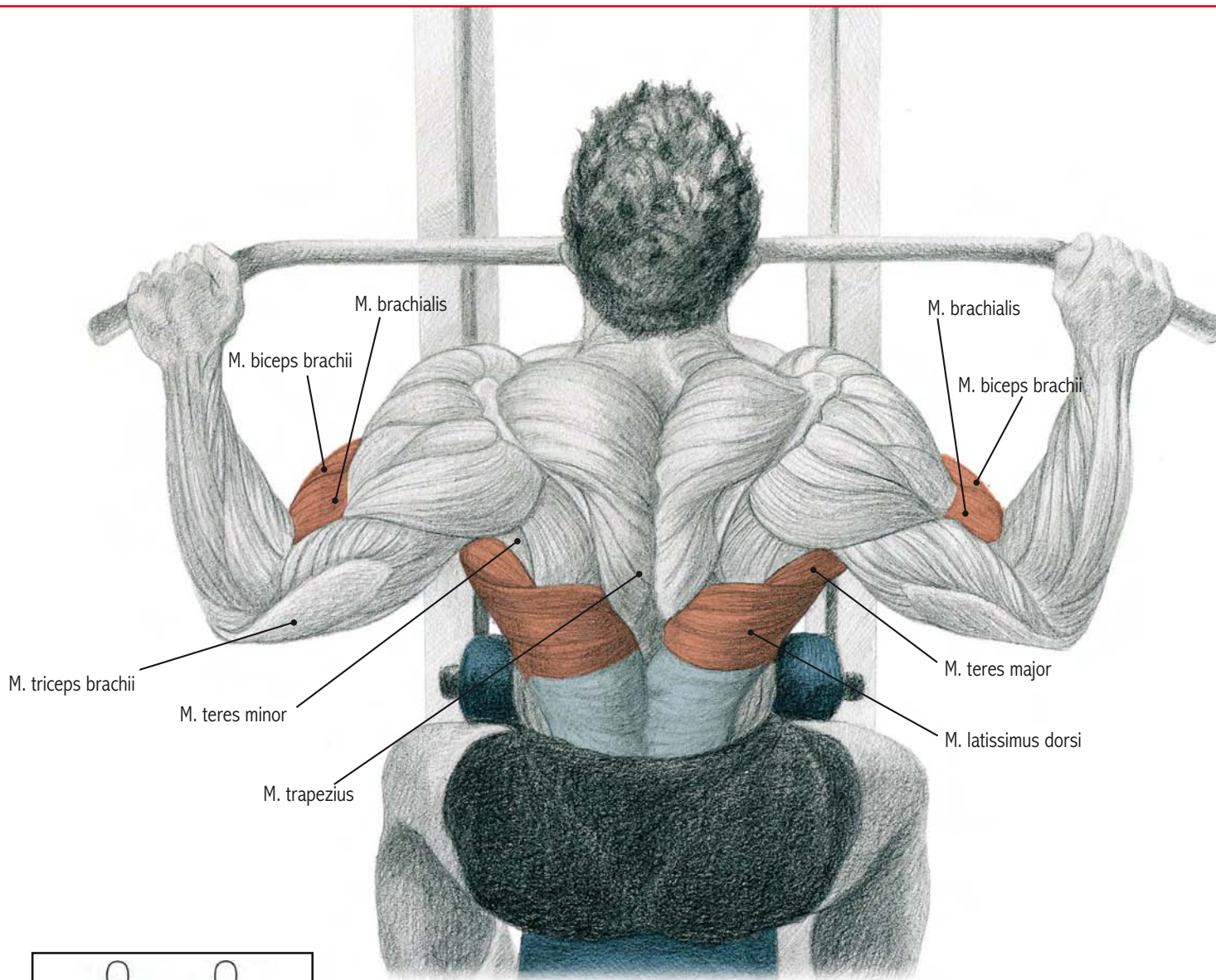
latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, biceps (short head), brachialis, brachioradialis

TECHNIQUE

A lever machine will allow you to do the exercise with a pause when the muscles are fully contracted. The technique is the same as for variant 8.2, but you begin with both hands down, holding one weight in place in this position while you do your repetitions with the other. Then change hands.

This is an intense exercise, like the Alternating Dumbbell Shoulder Press (Shoulders, Ex. 2.4). This variant can also be used in other exercises and for other muscle groups (e.g., dumbbell exercises for the biceps, Leg Extensions for the quadriceps, and so on).





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: latissimus dorsi, biceps (short head), teres major

SECONDARY MUSCLES: pectoralis major (lower and outside), triceps (long head), teres minor, rhomboids, brachioradialis, biceps (long head), deltoid (front and rear)

ANTAGONISTS: deltoid, pectoralis major (upper), triceps

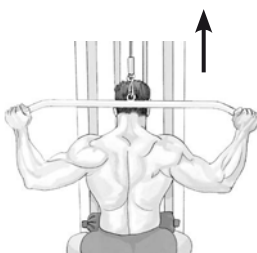
VARIATIONS 9.2 ... BEHIND-THE-NECK

MUSCLES USED

latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, biceps (short head), brachialis, brachioradialis

TECHNIQUE

Keep your torso vertical and hold your head forward to bring the bar down to the nape of your neck without touching it. It is not as easy to cheat in this exercise, even though you cannot see the bar come down, but the muscle workout is virtually the same.



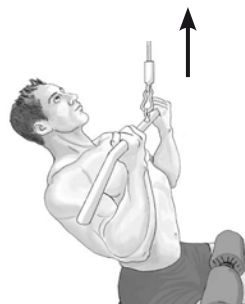
VARIATIONS 9.3 ... UNDERHAND GRIP

MUSCLES USED

latissimus dorsi, biceps, brachialis, teres major and minor

TECHNIQUE

Use a narrower underhand grip (palms up). This variant involves the biceps, brachialis, and other muscles somewhat more. It also significantly stretches the lats. Do not extend your arm completely as the bar goes up.



VARIATIONS 9.4 ... NARROW GRIP

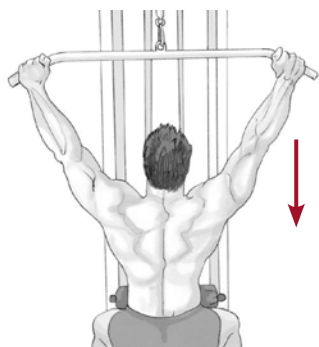
MUSCLES USED

latissimus dorsi, brachialis, brachioradialis, teres major and minor, pectoralis major (lower)

TECHNIQUE

Use a narrow, overhand grip, or a bar with a closed, neutral grip. This variant works the entire back and provides a good range of motion. It also requires considerable work from the arms and the lower area of the pectoral muscle.

Execution



Sit facing the cable pulley machine with your upper thighs under the restraints and your back straight. Grasp the bar with an overhand grip (knuckles back) and your hands a little more than shoulder-width apart. Pull the bar down toward the upper part of your chest while arching your back slightly to expand your chest and lean your body backwards a little. Your elbows should come down vertically and parallel to your sides. Inhale as you raise your arms and exhale as you lower them alongside your torso without letting out all of the air. This breathing technique can be reversed if you are using a light load.

Comments

This is an excellent exercise for both advanced athletes and beginners, who can use it in preparation for going on to Chin-ups (Ex. 1) in the future. The muscles involved are almost identical. The outside and upper back take the most strain and Cable Pull-downs thus help broaden the back. You should feel like you are bringing your elbows down to your sides, using your hands only to grip the bar. Advanced users should take care not to injure the triceps or other secondary muscles when using heavy weights. An open grip (i.e., with your thumb above the bar) is preferable, but only if you can hold on firmly.



Common mistakes: lowering the bar to the belly (not enough weight); bending the torso to get help from the chest and abdominal muscles; incomplete movement; extending the torso to bring in the lower back muscles; and an uneven or too wide grip



Traditional bodybuilders have always considered Chin-ups to be a cut above Cable Pull-downs, but this is just another example of the comparison between a free weight and machine exercise. For the user, the muscle intensity achieved is virtually identical. In Chin-ups, a beginner will find it hard to pull all the way up even once (at least with good technique) and advanced athletes tend to carry weight in the form of pounds of muscle (and bone) that stops them from doing many repetitions. Very few people can actually manage a sufficient number of well-done chins. Cable Pull-downs make a good alternative and make it possible to progressively increase the weight from a light warm-up to as heavy an exercise as you want.

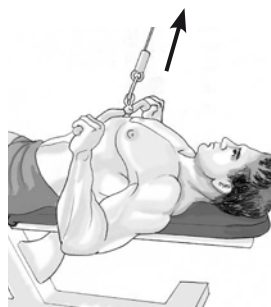
9.5 ... LYING

MUSCLES USED

latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, brachialis, biceps, trapezius, rhomboids

TECHNIQUE

Lie down on a bench with your chest under the cable and pull the bar down toward it, keeping your elbows away from your torso (Ex. 10). Contract your buttocks and lower back, or get help from a partner to help you maintain the position. You will need to reduce the weight used.



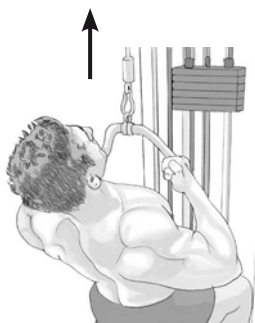
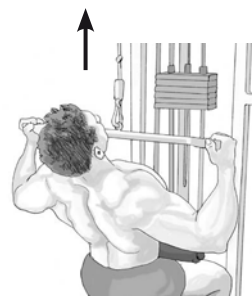
9.6 ... NEUTRAL GRIP / T-BAR

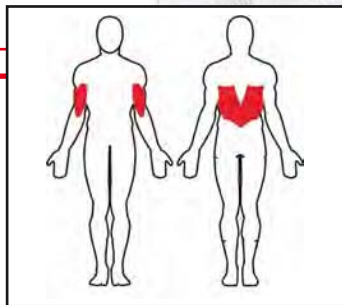
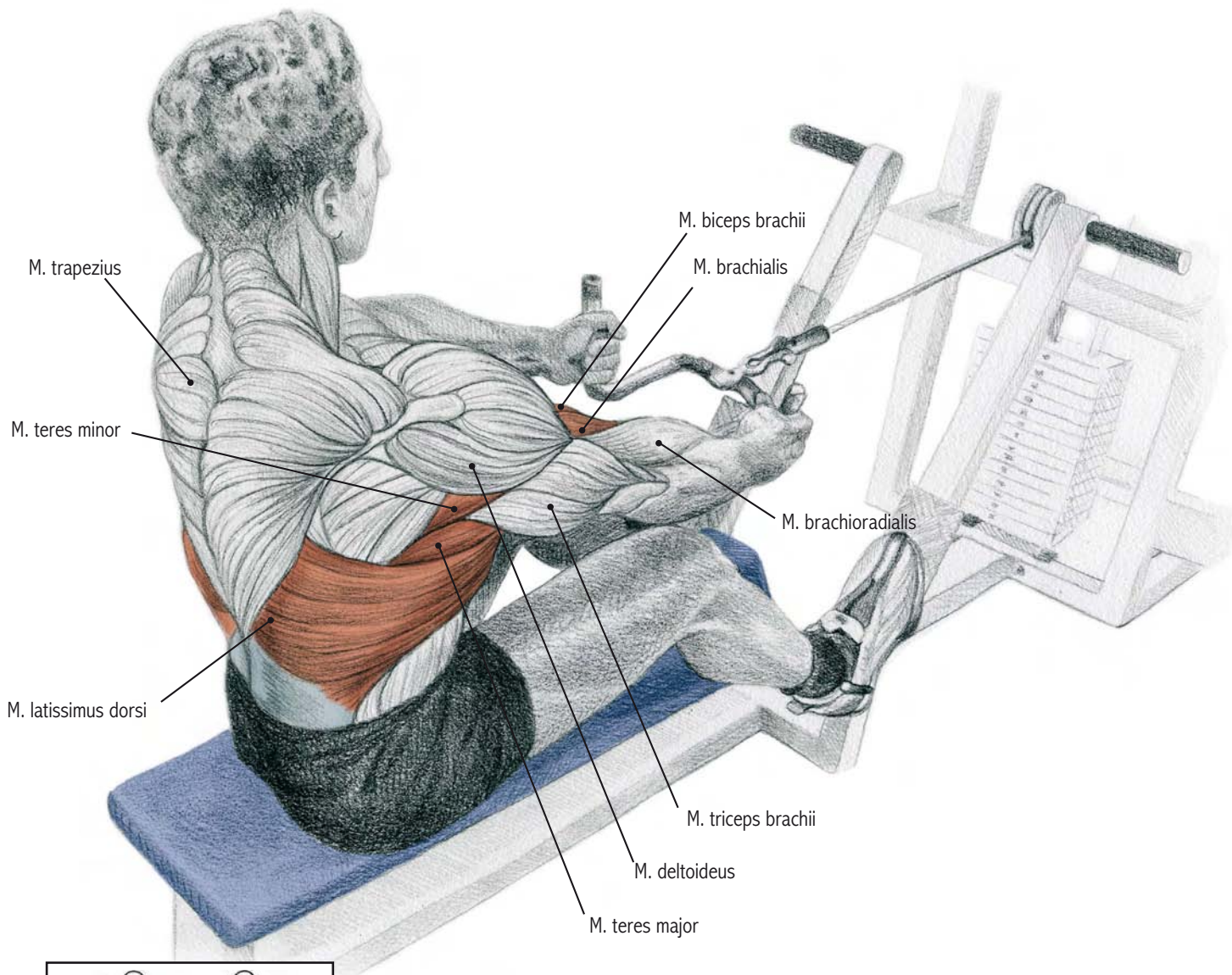
MUSCLES USED

latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, brachialis, biceps

TECHNIQUE

The T-bar is fitted with a wide grip at each end, so that you grasp it with your palms facing inward. There is no difference for the lats.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: latissimus dorsi, brachialis, biceps, teres major and minor

SECONDARY MUSCLES: rhomboids, triceps (long head), brachioradialis, trapezius (middle and lower), deltoid (rear), lower back muscles

ANTAGONISTS: deltoid (front), pectoralis major, triceps

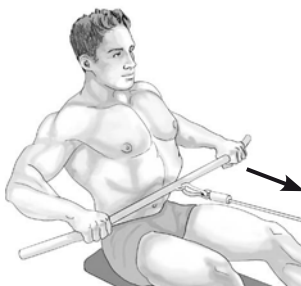
VARIATIONS 10.2 ... OVERHAND GRIP

MUSCLES USED

latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, deltoid (rear), trapezius, rhomboids, biceps, brachialis

TECHNIQUE

This variant is identical, but you use a bar held in an overhand grip with the elbows separated from the torso at all times (forearms parallel to the floor). This shifts work to the upper part of the back.



VARIATIONS 10.3 ... WITH HIGH CABLE

MUSCLES USED

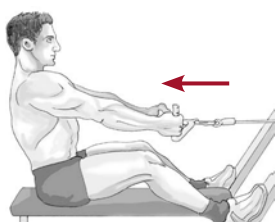
latissimus dorsi, biceps, brachialis, teres major and minor

TECHNIQUE

Pull from a high cable using less weight. This variant is halfway between a Row and a Pull-down. If you increase the load, you will need to place your feet higher to prevent your body from being lifted up by the weight. Also, you will need to avoid leaning your body back, which turns the exercise into a conventional Row.



Execution



Sit in front of the cable machine with your knees slightly bent and your feet firmly planted on the plates. Take hold of the bar in a neutral grip with your arms almost fully extended. Pull in toward your stomach at the same time as you expand your chest to contract the lats. Use your lower back to control the movement of the torso, which should be short (accompanying the pull). Breathe in as you release the cable to lower the weight and out as you pull to raise it. You can invert this breathing if you are using a light weight.

Comments

This excellent exercise for the middle back was popularized by Vince Gironda, although he did not invent it. This machine is among the oldest you will see in any gym. It allows you to lift a heavy load, providing you are careful not to hurt your lower back. It develops and broadens the latissimus dorsi very effectively, while also working the entire back. People suffering from lumbago or other lower back problems should choose the machine equivalent (Ex. 11), which provides support for the chest and abdomen.

You should feel a “pull” on the elbows as you bring them to your sides, rather than bringing your hands in to your belly. If not, involving other muscles will shift work away from the back. This is a common mistake among beginners, especially using little weight.



Common mistakes: extending the torso to get help from the lower back muscles; bringing your hands up to your chest and holding your elbows away from your body; overusing the biceps; incomplete movement; and not using enough weight

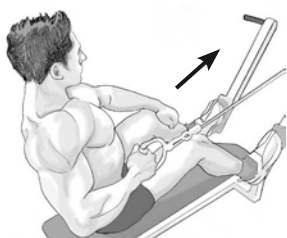
10.4 ...ONE-ARM

MUSCLES USED

latissimus dorsi, biceps, brachialis, teres major and minor

TECHNIQUE

This is the same as the basic exercise, but using only one arm. The weight used will obviously have to be much less. However, the variant makes it possible to contract the latissimus dorsi more sharply and gain better mental focus on the areas worked. The rotatores muscles in the chest should hold the position.



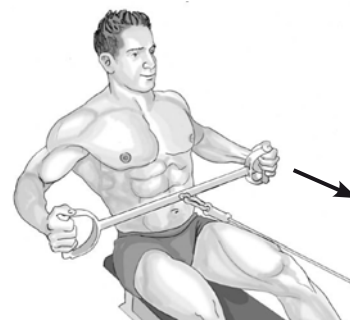
10.5 ...NEUTRAL GRIP / T-BAR

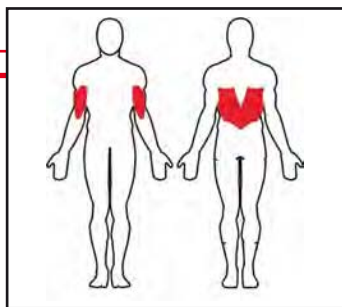
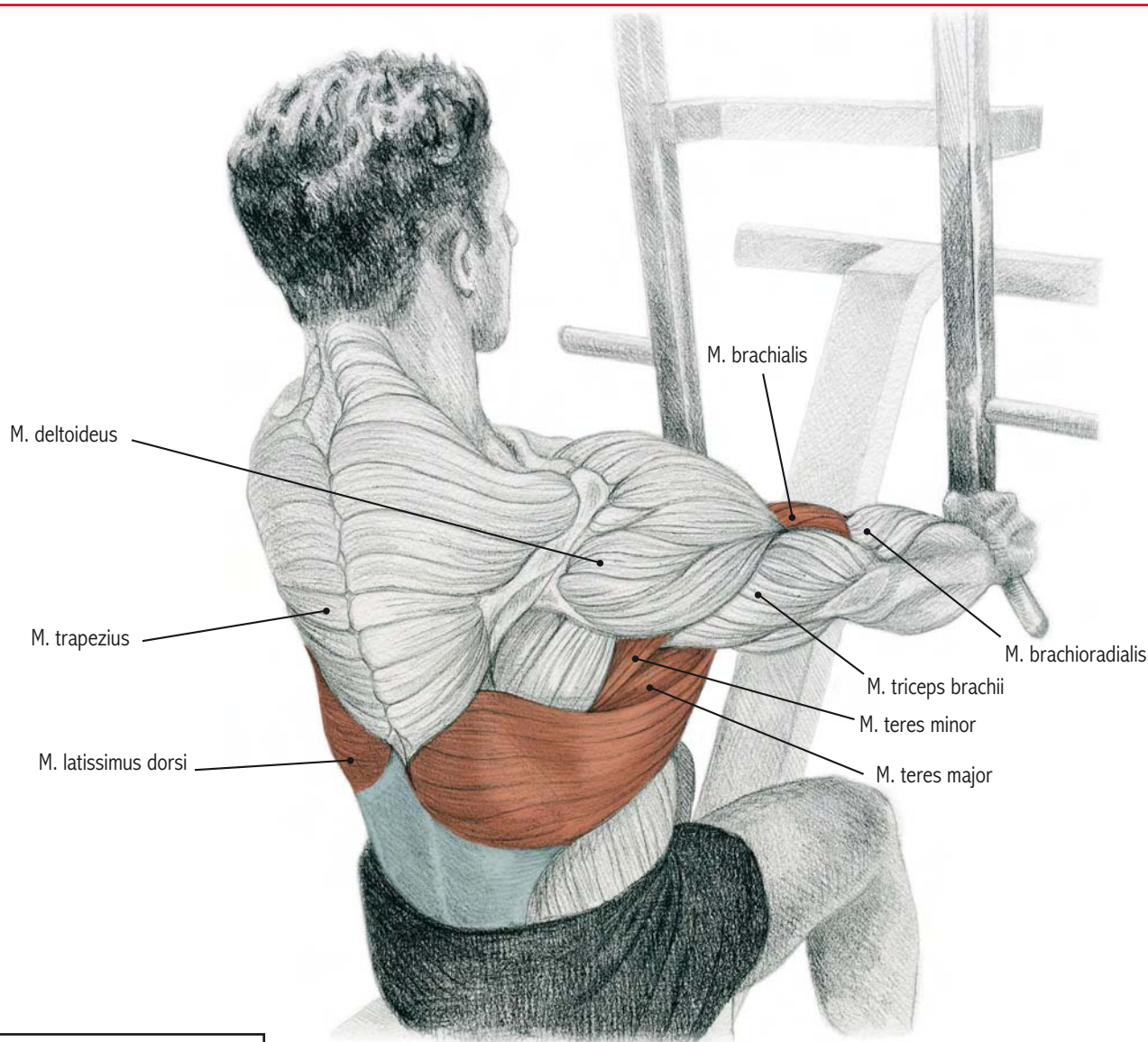
MUSCLES USED

latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, deltoid (rear), trapezius, rhomboids

TECHNIQUE

The variant is similar to the Open-grip exercise described, but uses a double T-bar, making a neutral grip possible. The arm flexors are used less.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: latissimus dorsi, brachialis, biceps, teres major and minor

SECONDARY MUSCLES: rhomboids, triceps (long head), brachioradialis, trapezius (lower), deltoid (rear)

ANTAGONISTS: deltoid (front), pectoralis major, triceps

VARIATIONS

11.2 ... WIDE GRIP

MUSCLES USED

latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, deltoid (rear), trapezius, rhomboids, biceps, brachialis

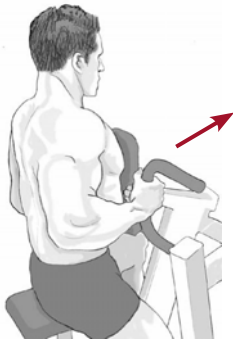
TECHNIQUE

This variant is identical to the basic exercise but uses a wide overhand grip with the elbows separated from the torso at all times (forearms moving parallel to the floor). The work is shifted to the upper back, using the deltoid (rear) and rhomboids more, in addition to the latissimus dorsi and adjacent muscles.

A few machines allow an underhand grip (see Underhand-grip Barbell Row, Ex. 2.3).



Execution



Sit with your chest and abdomen resting against the pad (do not move your body back). Take hold of the levers using a neutral grip (palms facing each other) and pull toward your stomach at the same time as you expand your chest to contract your lats. In theory, you should inhale as you lift the weight and exhale, without releasing all of the air, as you lower it. However, this is rather unnatural, because normal breathing is difficult when your chest and abdomen are resting against the machine. Also, you will need to hold your breath for a part of the movement and you should not exhale completely at any point.

Comments

This exercise is similar to the Seated Cable Row (Ex. 10) and Barbell Row (Ex. 2). Its main advantage is that it prevents overloading the lumbar region and muscles along the spinal column because your torso is supported. The downside is that the pressure from the pad on your abdomen and chest can make breathing more difficult. Well-designed machines are fitted with plates for your feet, and pushing against these will alleviate the pressure on your chest, making it a good alternative to the Barbell Row.



Common mistakes: extending the torso to get help from the lower back muscles and muscles along the spinal column; incomplete movement; and incorrect set-up (or design) of the machine

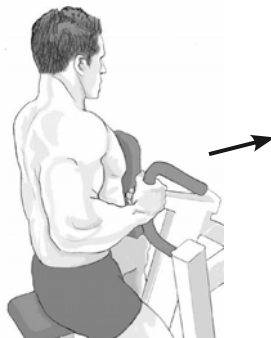
11.3 ... ONE-ARM

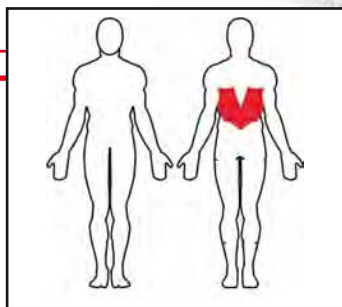
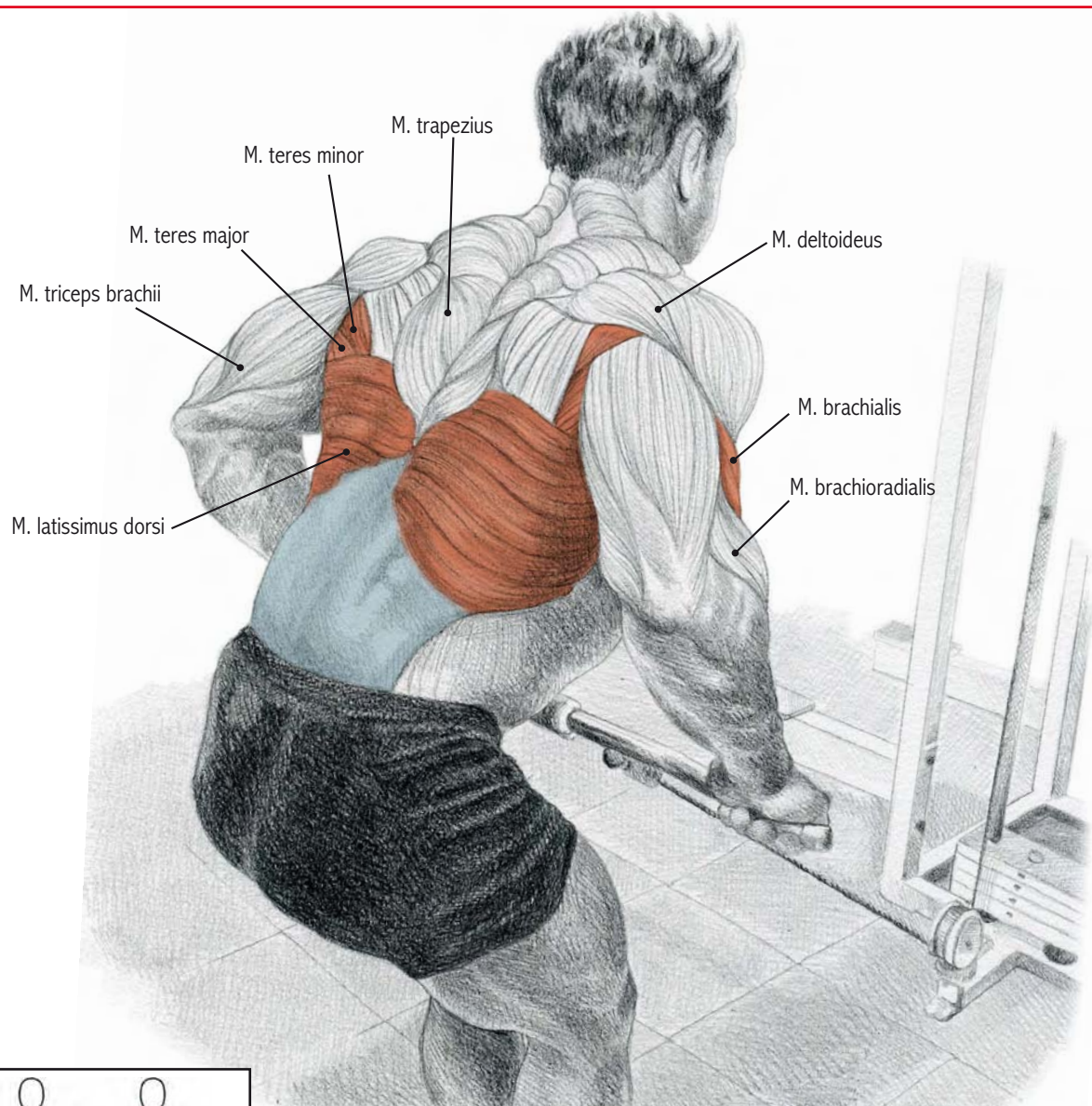
MUSCLES USED

latissimus dorsi, biceps, brachialis, teres major and minor

TECHNIQUE

This is almost identical to the basic (or wide-grip) exercise. You will obviously have to use considerably less weight, which will reduce the pressure on your chest, making a stronger contraction possible, with mental focus on the areas worked. The movement is also sometimes a little longer. You should hug the chest support with your other arm to stabilize your torso and hold it in position, which is the main difficulty with this variant.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: latissimus dorsi, brachialis, teres major and minor

SECONDARY MUSCLES: biceps, lower back (lumbar and paravertebral) muscles, rhomboids, triceps (long head), brachioradialis, trapezius, deltoid (rear)

ANTAGONISTS: deltoid (front), pectoralis major, triceps

VARIATIONS

12.2 ... WITH HIGH CABLE

MUSCLES USED

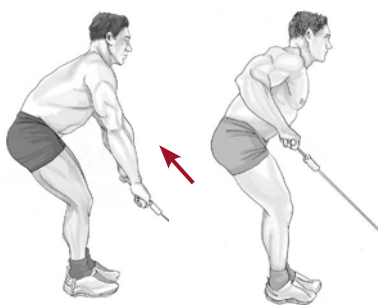
latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, deltoid (rear), trapezius, rhomboids, biceps, brachialis

TECHNIQUE

If you are pulling down from a high cable, keep your body straighter in a position that is halfway between the basic exercise described above and the Cable Pull-down (Ex. 9). This shifts the strain from the lower back, but you will in any case have to use a light load (because of the balance problem). This is a good exercise to combine with Cable Pull-overs (Ex. 13) for a superset taken to the point of muscle failure.



Execution



Stand facing the pulley with your torso bent at the hips around 45°, your knees slightly bent and your back held firmly straight. Grasp the bar hooked up to the low cable in an overhand grip and pull toward the upper abdomen, expanding your chest as you do so. Inhale as you lift the weight and exhale, without releasing all of the air, as you lower it.

Comments

This exercise is similar to the T-bar Row (Ex. 3) but using a cable. It has the advantage of a smooth movement with constant resistance if your technique is good. On the downside, you will have to use somewhat less weight to avoid losing your balance, as the pull is diagonal. The most difficult part of the exercise is holding your back and the rest of your body in position. It is not widely used because of this.



Common mistakes: extending your torso to get help from the lower back muscles; incomplete movement; and curving your spine



There is no reason why you should not achieve good results from weight training if you are a vegetarian. However, you should make sure to eat dairy products and eggs.

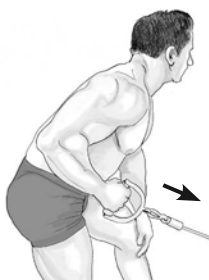
12.3 ...ONE-ARM

MUSCLES USED

latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, deltoid (rear), trapezius, rhomboids, biceps, brachialis

TECHNIQUE

Like the basic exercise, except you pull with only one hand while resting the other on something for support or on your knee. The position is similar to the One-arm Dumbbell Row (Ex. 4), although you should keep your torso straighter. Paradoxically, you will be able to use proportionally more weight on the side of the back being worked, though not in absolute terms. This is because the pressure on the vertebrae is less, although holding the torso steady to avoid rotation can be difficult.



12.4 ...UNDERHAND GRIP

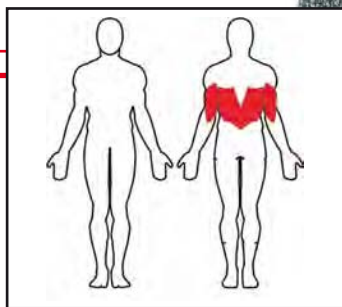
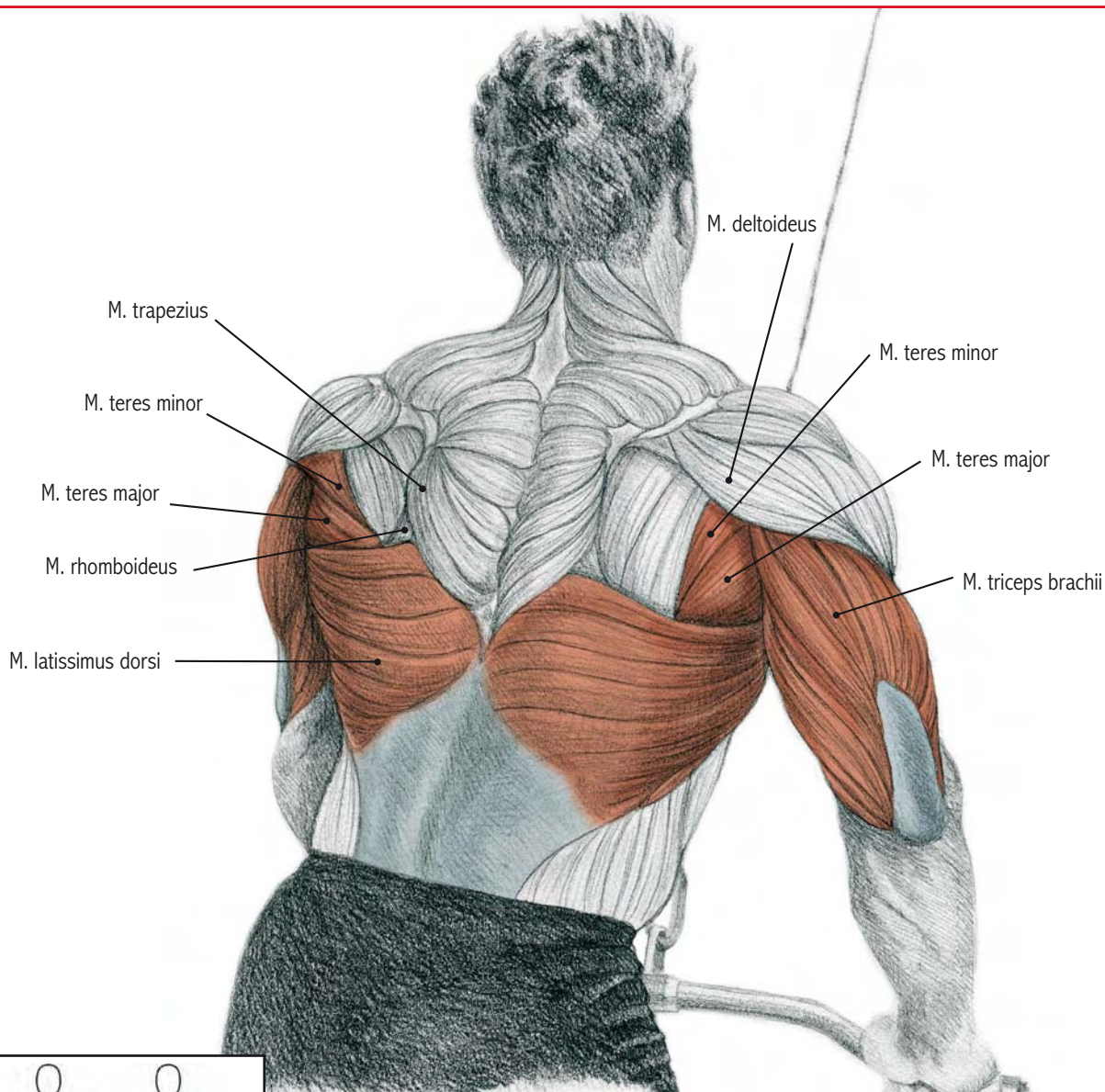
MUSCLES USED

latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, deltoid (rear), biceps, brachialis, trapezius, rhomboids

TECHNIQUE

The position and movement are the same as the basic exercise, but using an underhand grip with your palms up. This involves the biceps somewhat more and shifts the work to the lower part of the lat muscle, as your arms will be closer to your sides.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, triceps

SECONDARY MUSCLES: deltoid (rear), rhomboids, pectoralis major (lower), trapezius, serratus anterior

ANTAGONISTS: deltoid (front), coracobrachialis, pectoralis major (upper)

VARIATIONS

13.2 ... WITH ROPE

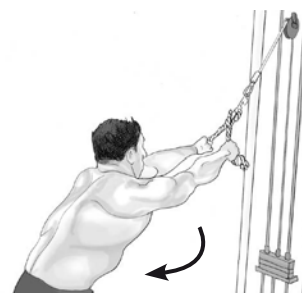
MUSCLES USED

latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, triceps

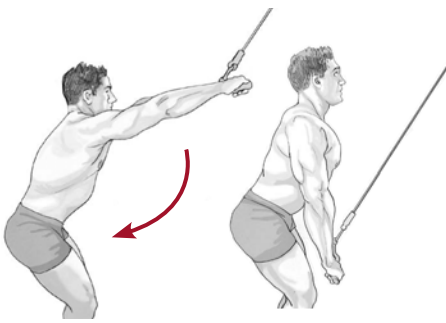
TECHNIQUE

This variant is not much different from the basic exercise, except that your grip will now be neutral (palms facing each other) or only slightly overhand. As there is no bar to strike your body, using a rope grip makes it possible to get a stronger final contraction, placing more emphasis on the rear deltoid, the latissimus dorsi and the teres muscles.

The rope will also allow you to do the Pull-over one-handed, although there is no particular advantage to this and it makes the exercise more difficult to perform correctly.



Execution



Stand facing the cable machine and bend your torso slightly forward by tightening your abdominal muscles. Grasp the bar with an overhand grip (palms down), hands approximately shoulder-width apart. Extend your arms almost fully, but with your elbow slightly bent and the angle fixed. Pull the bar down to your waist or the top of your thighs using the lats. Do not bend your elbows. Expand your chest and arch your back at the end of the movement to get more traction. Breathe in as you lift your arms and out as you end the downward movement. This breathing can be done in reverse if you are using little weight.

Comments

This is a good exercise for the middle back, but it does not allow you to load up with much weight, because the cable would pull you upward. Even so, it works the latissimus dorsi from a different angle than conventional machines. In contrast to other lat exercises, the biceps is hardly involved while the triceps holds the elbow in position isometrically and the long head is also actively involved in the effort. This muscle use is similar to certain swimming strokes. Beginners may find it difficult to achieve good technique, and the exercise is therefore recommended for experienced athletes.



Common mistakes: rocking the body forward and back; bending the torso forward to get help from the abdominal muscles and bending the elbows, which turns the exercise into a Pull-down or Row



Should Pull-overs come down to the waist or the thighs?

There is little difference; the arm movement is almost identical and it is how far the elbows and hips are bent or straight that will allow you to bring your hands down higher or lower. The muscle work does not differ between the two, because the latissimus dorsi is inserted in the humerus, which works in the same way. However, bending your hips and knees more to bring the bar down as far as the thighs will probably provide a slightly longer movement.

13.3 ... SEATED MACHINE

MUSCLES USED

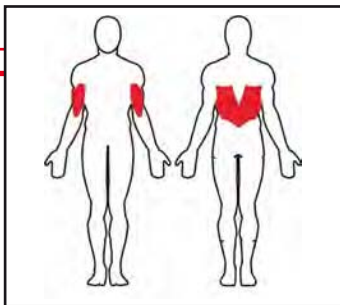
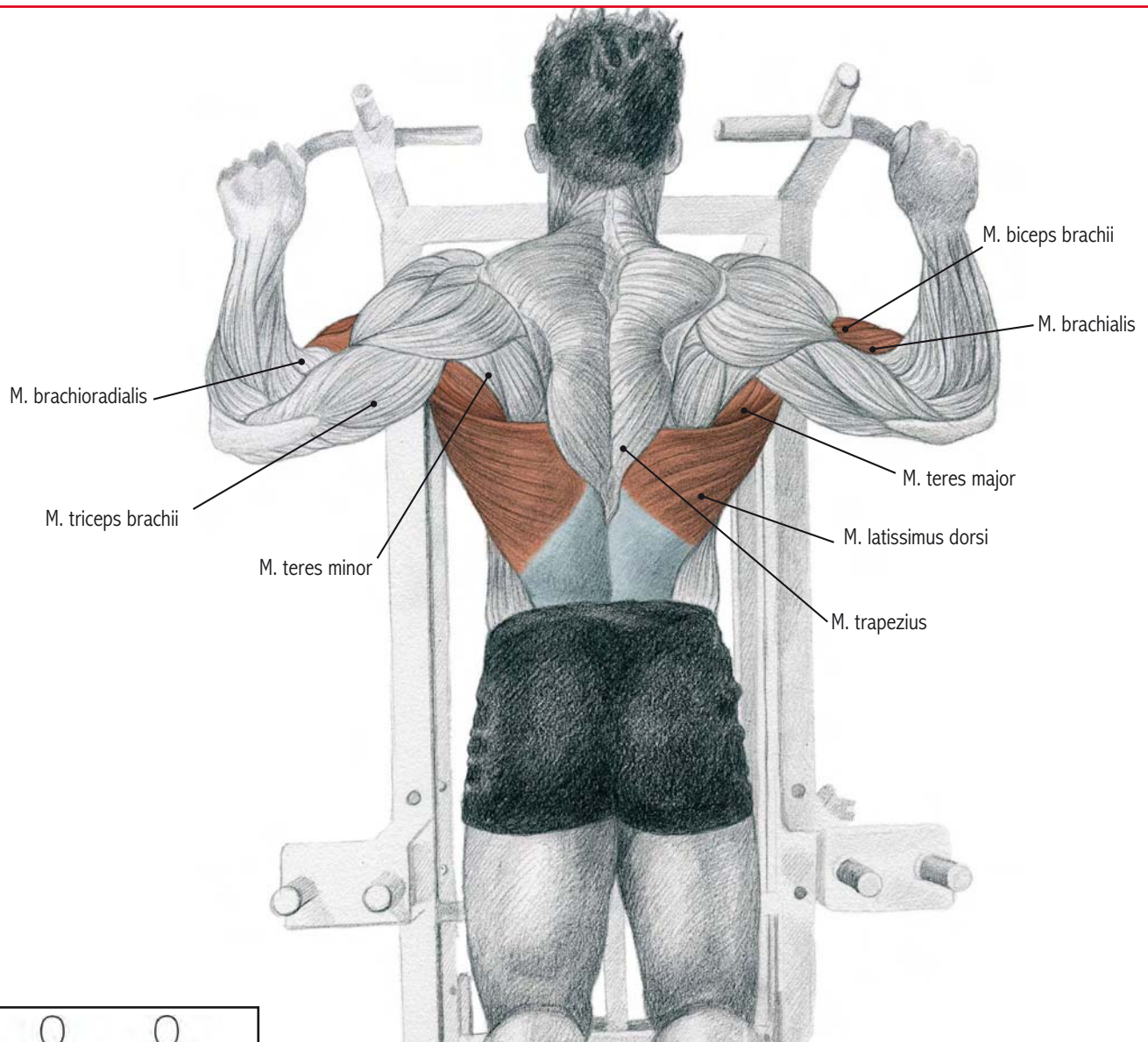
latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, triceps

TECHNIQUE

The movement is essentially the same, but a purpose-designed machine is used. This is better for beginners, as the weight and movement are guided, and for heavy sets, which can be destabilizing if a cable is used.

Unfortunately, the machine is not common in gyms because it can only be used for this exercise.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: latissimus dorsi, biceps (short head), teres major

SECONDARY MUSCLES: pectoralis major (lower and outside), triceps (long head), teres minor, rhomboids, brachioradialis, biceps (long head), deltoid (front and rear)

ANTAGONISTS: deltoid, pectoralis major (upper), triceps

VARIATIONS

14.2 ... NEUTRAL GRIP

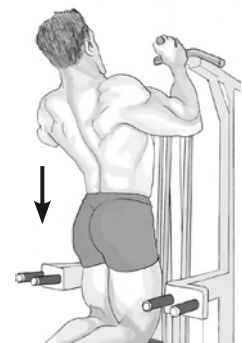
MUSCLES USED

latissimus dorsi, biceps, brachialis, teres major and minor

TECHNIQUE

If the machine is designed to allow a neutral grip (palms facing), this can be used to vary the exercise. Essentially, it will be the same as the Neutral-grip / T-bar Cable Pull-down (Ex. 9.6).

An underhand or inverted grip is also possible in some chin-up machines, though this is more unusual as the bar is normally split in two at the center, where you would need to hold on. If an underhand grip is possible on the machine at your gym, review the free-weight exercise (Ex. 1.3).



Execution



Kneel on the plate (depending on the design) with the rest of your body in the same position as for basic Chin-ups (Ex. 1). Keep your back straight and use an overhand grip with your hands slightly more than shoulder-width apart. Pull your body up while arching your back slightly to expand your chest and leaning your body backwards a little. Your elbows should come down vertically and parallel to your sides. This machine almost always allows you to pull up vertically beyond the handgrips, which are usually separated. Inhale during the first half of the downward movement and exhale when you reach the top. This breathing can be reversed, depending on your technique.

Comments

This is an excellent exercise for the middle back muscles, and it is suitable for users at all levels. For beginners, it provides a first step toward Chin-ups (Ex. 1), and it allows more advanced athletes to do more repetitions than they could in the basic exercise while perfecting technique. The external and upper parts of the latissimus dorsi are the areas most used, and Assisted Pull-ups are very effective if your aim is to broaden your back. Do not be fooled by the assistance the machine provides. The exercise can be very demanding if you want it to be (e.g., by reducing the counterweight used) because it eliminates swinging and other forms of cheating.



Common mistakes: bending the torso to get help from the chest and abdominal muscles; incomplete movement; forced position on the upward pull; and pushing off the support plate to gain momentum (i.e., the effort is not constant)



At the musculoskeletal level, weight training is the most complete physical exercise you can do, more so than swimming, athletics, martial arts or any other sport. For all around health, however, it should be supplemented by some form of aerobic exercise.

14.3 ... ONE-ARM

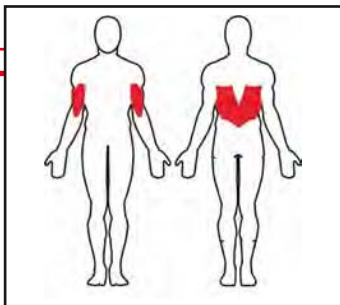
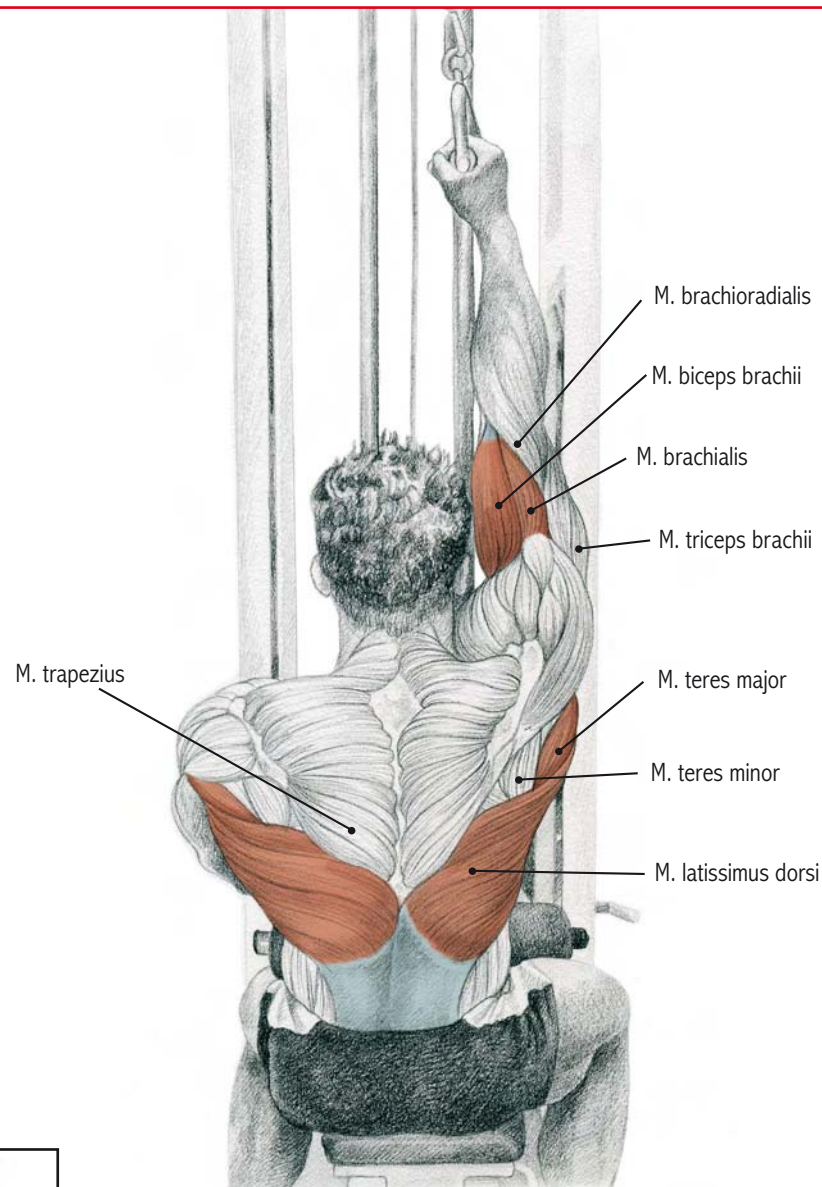
MUSCLES USED

latissimus dorsi, biceps, brachialis, teres major and minor

TECHNIQUE

This is an unusual variant that may be of interest if you are training for rock-climbing or similar activities. It is very difficult without the aid of a machine. The only difference is that you will be using only one arm. Yourself should select a heavy counterweight to help you pull up.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: latissimus dorsi, biceps (short head), teres major

SECONDARY MUSCLES: pectoralis major (lower and outside), triceps (long head), teres minor, rhomboids, brachioradialis, biceps (long head), deltoid (front and rear)

ANTAGONISTS: deltoid, pectoralis major (upper), triceps

VARIATIONS

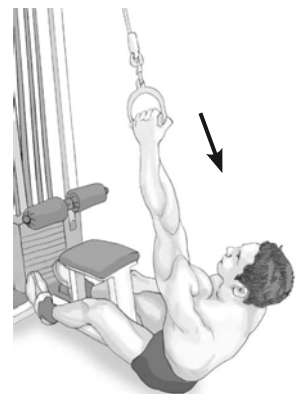
15.2 ... SEATED ON THE FLOOR

MUSCLES USED

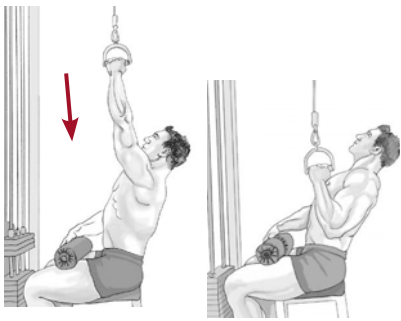
latissimus dorsi, biceps, brachialis, teres major and minor

TECHNIQUE

By sitting or kneeling on the floor, you can achieve a longer movement than in the basic exercise. However, the position will encourage you to lean back slightly, which will turn the exercise into something halfway between a Front Cable Pull-down and Low Cable Row.



Execution



Sit at the cable machine and grasp the (triangle) grip with one hand. Pull, bringing your elbow down to your side. Place your other hand on your waist, or use it to accompany the movement as if you were climbing a rope (i.e., raise your free hand to lightly touch the cable as you pull with the other). Breathe in before releasing the cable, hold your breath throughout the movement and breathe out in the last third of the downward pull. This breathing can be reversed depending on the weight used and your technique.

Comments

This exercise can be considered a variant of the Cable Pull-down (Ex. 9). It provides a perfect contraction due to the use of only one arm and the way your hand comes down to the torso. It is especially useful in training for certain physical activities that require you to climb ropes or ladders.

There is a variant in which you extend your elbow away from your body at the bottom of the movement, which allows you to lift the load an inch or so more, but this has no additional effect on the lat workout and only unnecessarily involves the triceps.



Common mistakes: bending the torso to get help from the abdomen; incomplete movement; and twisting the body on the downward pull



The back muscles determine our posture and exercising these muscles should be part of treating any deviation of the spinal column due to posture problems. Hyperkyphosis (extreme curvature of the upper back) is a common problem, usually caused by limited flexibility or excessive development of the pectoral and abdominal muscles, combined with poor muscle tone in the back.



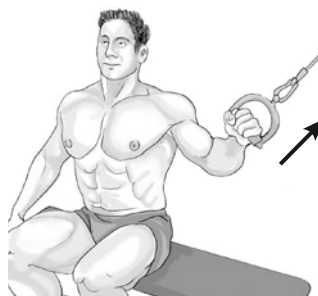
15.3 ...SEATED SIDEWAYS

MUSCLES USED

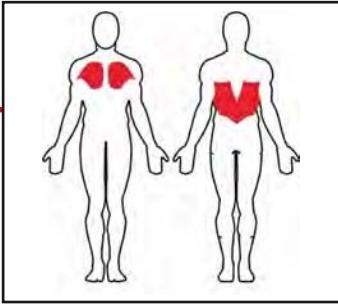
latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, brachialis, biceps

TECHNIQUE

Sit on a bench with your side of the cable pulley, and pull the cable down so that your elbow touches your side. The contraction in the lats in this variant is similar to that achieved in Chin-ups (Ex. 1), but it places extra demands on the outside (side) of the latissimus dorsi. This helps broaden the muscle and gain the characteristic V shape. It is a good exercise for advanced athletes to use at the end of a back routine. The main difficulty is not using the biceps too much in the movement. You should concentrate on contracting the lats.



BEHIND-THE-BACK-CABLE CROSSOVER



Muscles involved

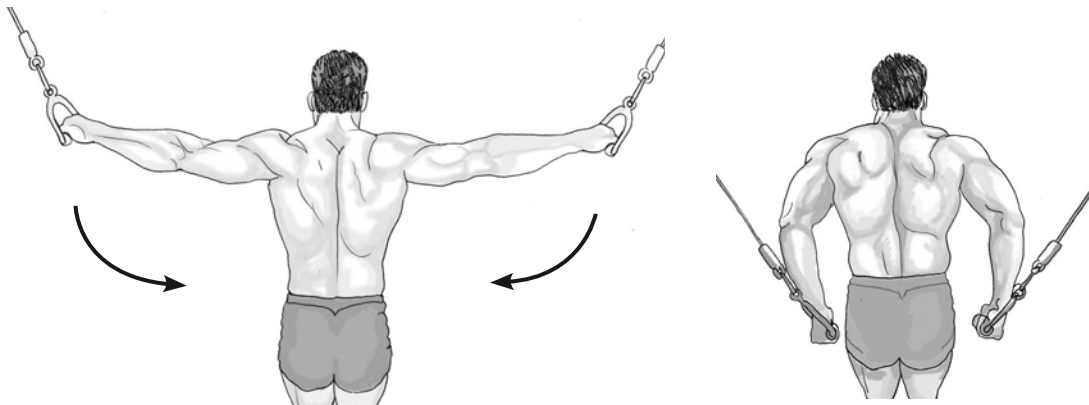
MAIN MUSCLES: latissimus dorsi, pectoralis major

SECONDARY MUSCLES: triceps (long head), teres major, biceps (short head), deltoid

ANTAGONISTS: deltoid (middle), supraspinatus

Execution

Stand between two cables with your knees slightly bent and one leg a little forward (optional). Keep your torso slightly bent, although less so than in the Cable Crossover for the pecs, and hold your body steady using your abdominal and lower back muscles. Start with your arms out and your elbows slightly bent and bring your hands together behind your back. Keep your elbows in position throughout the movement. In short, this is the same as the Cable Crossover for the pecs (Ex. 16), but behind your back. Inhale as you open your arms and exhale when you complete the movement.



Comments

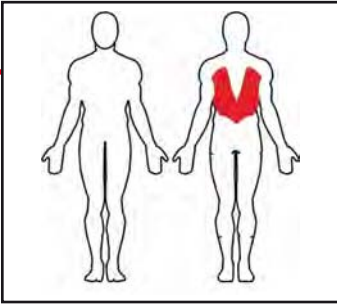
This unconventional exercise uses little weight, but it can be good to vary your back routine. You will need to control your body well and maintain awareness of the muscles worked. For this reason, it is not usually recommended for beginners.

Remember that one of the basic functions of the latissimus dorsi is to bring the arms toward the body vertically, an action that is done very strictly in this exercise.



Common mistakes: poor technique and bending the torso

MACHINE ELBOW ADDUCTION



Muscles involved

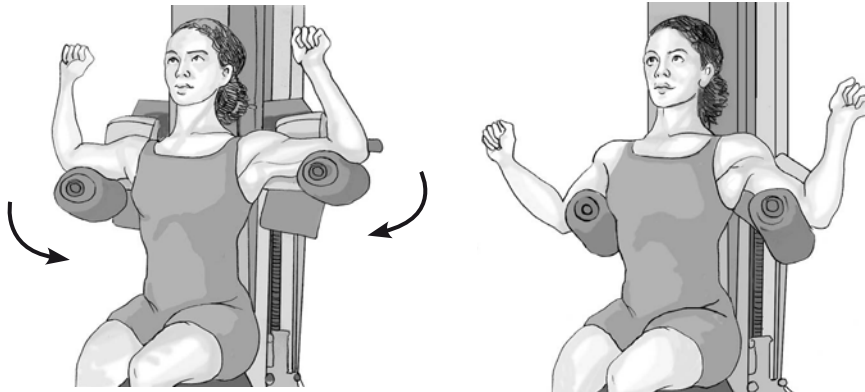
MAIN MUSCLES: latissimus dorsi, teres major, rhomboids

SECONDARY MUSCLES: pectoralis major (lower and outside), triceps (long head), teres minor, rhomboids, trapezius (lower), deltoid (front and rear)

ANTAGONISTS: deltoid (middle), supraspinatus, pectoralis major (upper)

Execution

Sit on the machine with your elbows on the rests and push down to bring your arms toward your sides (adduction). Inhale as you open your arms and exhale when you complete the movement.



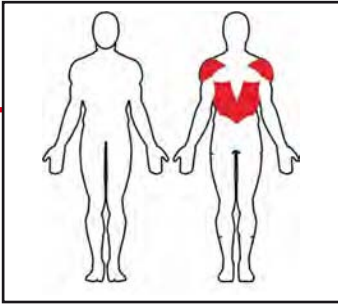
Comments

This machine is a variant of the Cable Pull-down (Ex. 9) but without involving the arms (no biceps). Unfortunately, it is rather uncommon. If it is designed well, it allows the user to work the back very effectively and with good technique. It is mainly for business reasons that the machine is difficult to find, since it lacks versatility (although it is no less useful for that reason) and is usually replaced by cable pulleys. A good gym should have this machine, especially for members who have difficulty with the hand grip required by other equipment.



Common mistakes: poor seat position; too much or too little weight; and bringing the elbows forward to get help from the pectoral muscle.

SMITH MACHINE ROW



Muscles involved

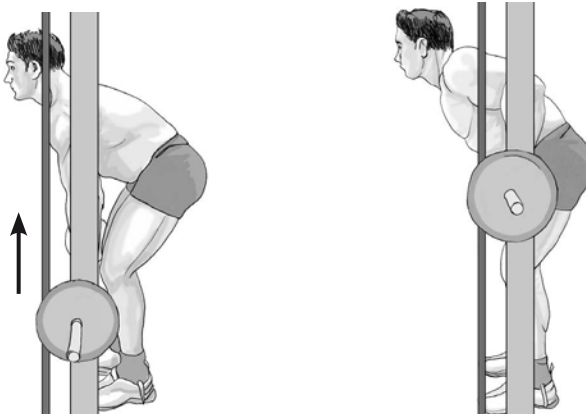
MAIN MUSCLES: latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, deltoid (rear)

SECONDARY MUSCLES: rhomboids, biceps, brachialis, brachioradialis, trapezius, infraspinatus, (lower back muscles)

ANTAGONISTS: pectoralis major, triceps, deltoid (front)

Execution

The position is the same as the free-weight exercise (Ex. 2). Stand with your torso straight, leaning forward with your knees slightly bent but locked. Grasp the bar with an overhand grip (palms down), hands a little more than shoulder-width apart. Pull the bar up to the top of the abdomen, keeping your elbows open. Inhale as you lift the weight and exhale, without releasing all of the air, as you lower it.



Comments

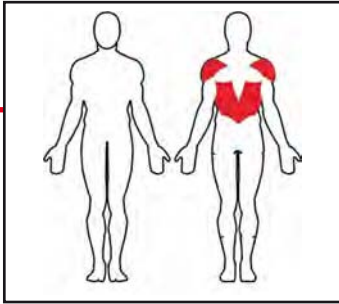
This is a basic but demanding exercise that effectively works out all of the back muscles and the latissimus dorsi in particular. It is a good way to thicken the middle fibers in this area and to gain strength in general, as it also works the torso and legs isometrically.

Beginners should start on a row machine (Ex. 11). The Smith Machine Row requires good technique to avoid injury, especially to the lower back. As a reference point to hold the correct position, you can rest (but not support) your forehead against the back of a bench or fixed vertical object. The Smith machine may be rather more uncomfortable than other variants for this exercise.



Common mistakes: rocking the body forward; incomplete set or movement; curving the back; and poor position and bringing the bar up to the chest

BENT-OVER MACHINE ROW



Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, deltoid (rear)

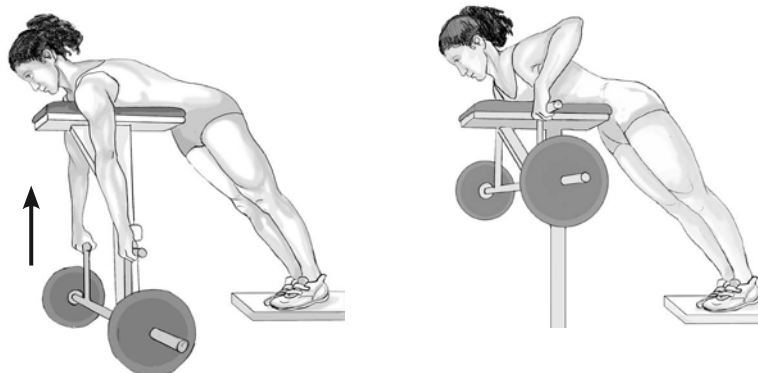
SECONDARY MUSCLES: rhomboids, biceps, brachialis, brachioradialis, trapezius, infraspinatus

ANTAGONISTS: pectoralis major, triceps, deltoid (front)

Execution

Rest your chest on the platform with your torso horizontal and your arms hanging down the sides. Pull the weight up, keeping your elbows away from your torso.

Inhale in the first half of the lift and exhale as you lower it, but without letting out all of the air.



Comments

This is the same as the free weight Bent-over Barbell Row, but with the support of this rather uncommon machine, which is similar to the seated row machine. The machine has the advantage of taking the strain off the lower back and protecting the lumbar region. The main drawback is that it puts pressure on the chest, which makes breathing more difficult. Some machines allow you to place your feet underneath, which alleviates the pressure on the chest and makes it easier to breathe because the weight is spread between the legs and the pad on which you rest your torso.



Common mistakes: incomplete set or movement; resting with the arms extended halfway through a set; and forced breathing

SCIENTIFIC DESCRIPTION OF NECK AND SHOULDERS:
A BIOMECHANICAL INTRODUCTION TO THE PRINCIPAL MUSCLES INVOLVED

MUSCLES WITH INSERTION IN THE HUMERUS

DELTOID (lateral, superficial)

Origin: clavicle, lateral third of the anterior/clavicular/front portion = fasciae 1 and 2; acromion, lateral/acromial/middle portion = fascia 3; spine of the scapula, posterior/spinal/rear portion = fasciae 4, 5, 6 and 7

Insertion: humerus (deltoid tuberosity, V-shaped)

Main functions: strong abduction of the arm from 0 to 90° (middle from 0 to 30°, then the other parts are also involved); front: anteversion (swinging) and inward rotation; rear: retroversion (swinging back) and outward rotation

CORACOBRACHIALIS (anterior, middle)

Origin: scapula (coracoid process)

Insertion: medial humerus

Main functions: swinging the arm forward, stabilizing the head of the humerus in its cavity, secondary role in adduction

SUPRASPINATUS (lateral/superior, deep)

Origin: supraspinous fossa

Insertion: humerus (superior facet of the greater tubercle)

Main functions: abduction of the arm, stabilizing the head of the humerus in the glenoid cavity and tension on the capsule

TERES MINOR / LESSER TERES (posterior, deep)

see BACK

INFRASPINATUS (posterior, deep)

see BACK

SUBSCAPULARIS (anterior, deep)

see CHEST

TERES MAJOR / GREATER TERES (posterior, superficial)

see BACK

Comments:

When the arm is moved away from the body (abduction), the deltoid muscle (from the Greek delta, meaning triangular) raises it from 0° to 90°. In this movement, the different parts of the muscle act in the following order, from front (1) to back (5):

- Pure abduction: 3, 4, 5, 2
- Abduction + 30° flexion: 3, 2, 4, 5, 1
- Abduction + outward rotation: 2 and the rest, except 4 and 5
- Abduction + inward rotation: the opposite of outward rotation

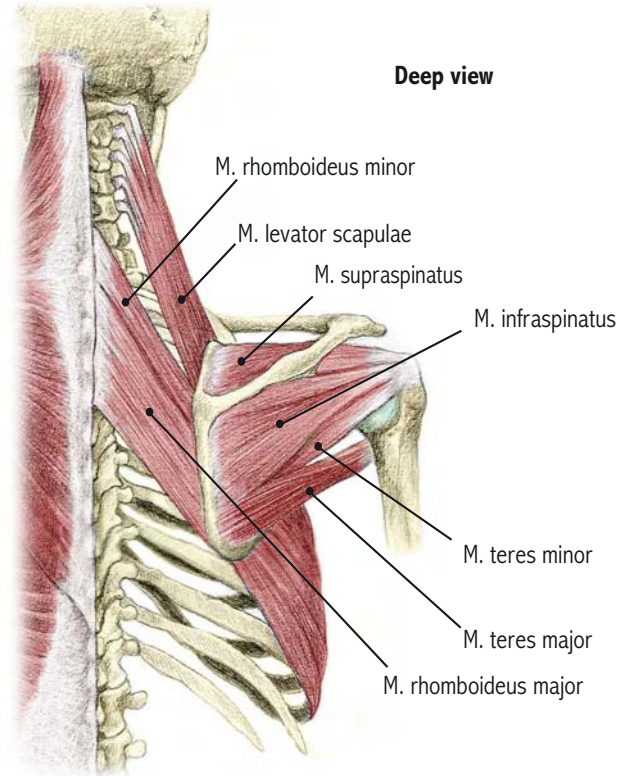
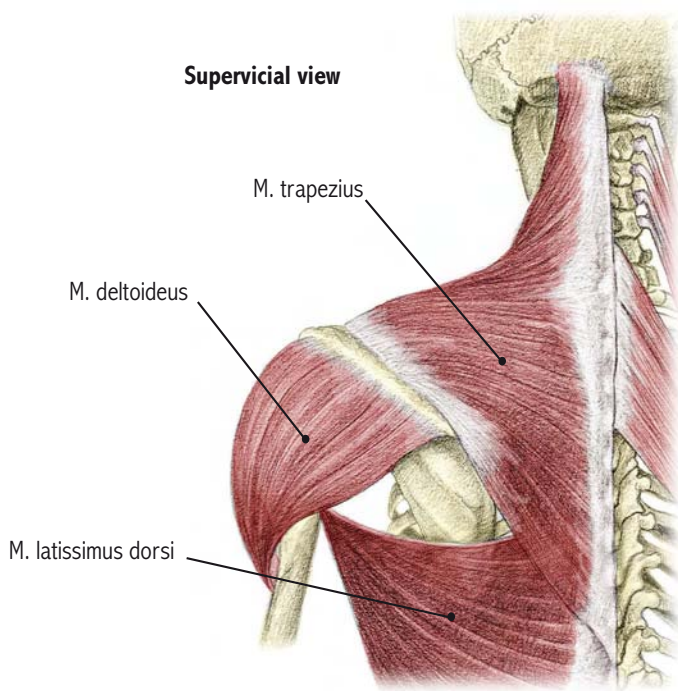
Beyond 90°, the trapezius and serratus anterior take over to 150°. From this point, tilting the spinal column is possible only if one arm is lifted, or the movement is accompanying by bending to raise both arms to the maximum vertical height.

For practical purposes, this means it is enough to reach 90° (arms extended straight out to the side) to work the deltoid and adjoining muscles in Lateral Raises. Any other muscle work can be left for different, specific exercises. Usually only three of the deltoid fascia come into play: anterior, lateral and posterior.

The supraspinatus does not initiate abduction, as some authors erroneously claim, given that this muscle could lift the humerus on its own, like the deltoid, although it is not essential for this movement.

The suprapinatus, infraspinatus, teres minor and subscapularis muscles form the rotator cuff. The infraspinatus and the teres minor may sometimes appear fused. The tendon of the supraspinatus muscle is especially delicate and is easily overloaded or injured. When it is inflamed, the calcareous deposit where it connects to the greater tubercle can be painful, especially when lifting the arm.

Finally, the back of the shoulder is usually undertrained compared to the front. This means that you need to work to compensate for this. Also, the joint formed by the scapula (shoulder blade) and the humerus is prone to dislocation, despite the attached glenoid ligament and the binding action of the surrounding muscles (providing they are equally trained). Overly tight back and chest muscles can increase the risk of dislocation, while the biceps, supraspinatus, suprascapularis, infraspinatus, teres minor and other muscles work to hold the joint together and prevent dislocation.



MUSCLES WITHOUT INSERTION IN THE HUMERUS

TRAPEZIUS (posterior, superficial)

Origin: head (descending/upper portion, posterior nuchal line, external occipital protuberance and nuchal ligament); cervical and thoracic vertebrae (transverse/mid portion, 7th to 3rd vertebrae, respectively, in the spinous processes and supraspinal ligament); thoracic vertebrae (ascending/lower portion, 2nd or 3rd to 12th vertebrae)

Insertion: clavicle (descending/upper portion, lateral third); transverse/mid portion in the acromial end and acromion; scapula (ascending/lower portion, in the triangular portion or adjacent to it)

Main functions: raising the shoulders and overcurvature with rotation to the opposite side, and bending to the same side of the head (upper portion); adduction of the scapula (shoulder blade), drawing the shoulders back (mid portion); lowering the scapula, pulling the shoulders down and inward (lower portion); stabilizing the scapula and shoulder girdle; abduction of the humerus

RHOMBOID MAJOR / GREATER RHOMBOID (posterior, deep)

see BACK

RHOMBOID MINOR / LESSER RHOMBOID (posterior, deep)

see BACK

STERNOCLEIDOMASTOID / STERNOMASTOID (anterior, superficial)

Origin: sternum (manubrium sterni, tendon head) and clavicle (internal third, muscular head)

Insertion: head (mastoid process and superior nuchal line)

Main functions: flexing the head and neck; turning the head to the opposite side and tilting it to the same side

LEVATOR SCAPULAE (posterior/superior, middle)

Origin: cervical vertebrae (transverse processes of first four)

Insertion: scapula/shoulder blade (upper angle)

Main functions: raising (and adduction) of the scapula (shoulder blade), mid-rotation of the lower portion

SERRATUS ANTERIOR (anterior, deep)

see CHEST

PECTORALIS MINOR (anterior, deep)

see CHEST

OTHER MUSCLES

RECTUS CAPITIS POSTERIOR MAJOR: axis to occipital bone. Extending the head, involved in tilting it to the side and rotation to the same side.

RECTUS CAPITIS POSTERIOR MINOR: atlas to occipital bone. Extending the head; involved in tilting it to the side.

OBLIQUUS CAPITIS INFERIOR: axis to atlas. Retracting and extending the atlas on the axis; involved in tilting the head to one side and rotation to the same side.

OBLIQUUS CAPITIS SUPERIOR: atlas to occipital bone. Extending the head; involved in tilting the head to one side and rotation to the opposite side.

SCALENES: vertebrae to ribs. Tilting and rotation to the same side.

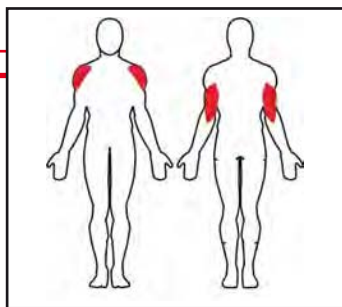
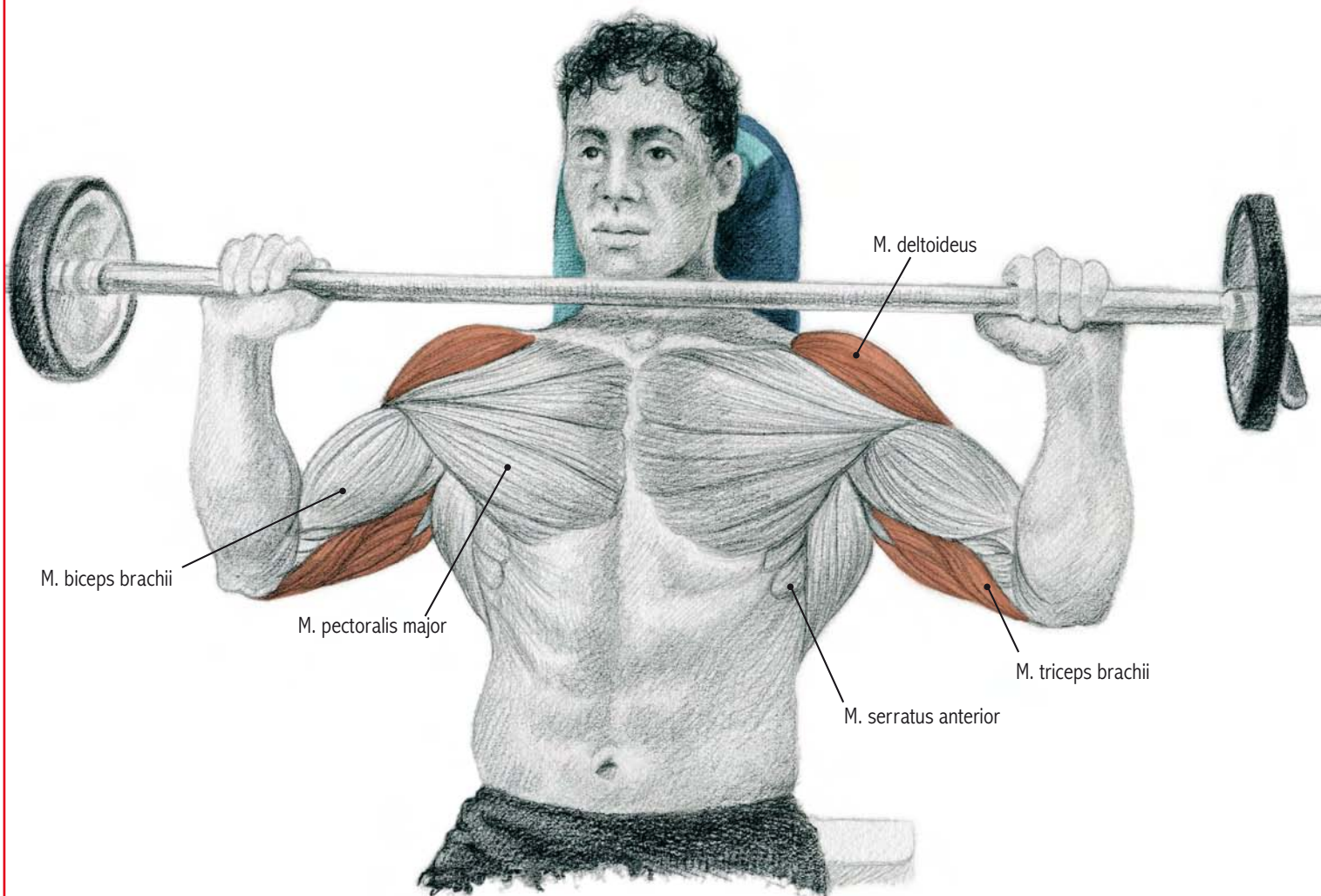
INTERSPINALES: between the cervical spinous processes. Extending the spinal column.

Comments: The insertions of the sternocleidomastoid muscle (often referred to as the SCM) and the trapezius are located close together. This helps in raising the arm (abduction), especially above 90°, although it is necessary to bear in mind that abduction of the humerus also involves some movement of the scapula (shoulder blade).

There is a prominent section of the trapezius along the side and back of the head. However, this is not the entire muscle and it should be worked from at least three angles. For practical purposes, the middle and lower portion receive significant stimulus when other muscles are exercised, especially the back muscles and rear deltoid, while the upper portion requires more specific work.

A general rule for training the neck is that head movements should be done without weights (or with a very light load), slowly and within a safe range of motion. This book does not contain any machine exercises for the smallest muscles in the neck, which are tremendously delicate. Equipment of this kind is very unusual and hard to find.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: deltoid (front, middle), triceps (except long head), supraspinatus

SECONDARY MUSCLES: deltoid (rear), pectoralis major (upper), trapezius (upper), biceps (long head), serratus anterior, triceps (long head)

ANTAGONISTS: latissimus dorsi, biceps, pectoralis major (lower)

VARIATIONS

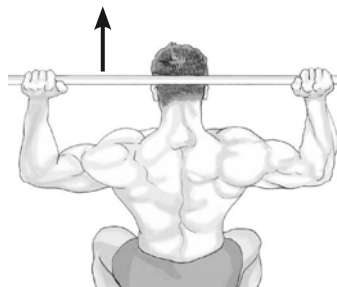
1.2 ... BEHIND-THE-NECK

MUSCLES USED

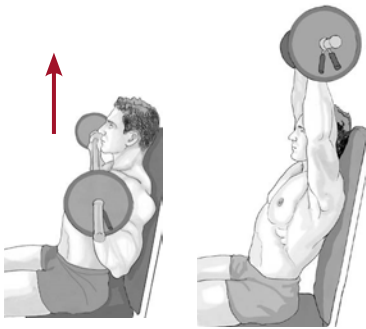
deltoid, triceps, supraspinatus

TECHNIQUE

The movement is the same, but the bench should be set at a more vertical angle. You will need to tilt your head slightly forward to lower the barbell behind it almost to the nape of your neck. This is a variant of the Seated Military Press and there is little difference. If anything, it is a worse exercise than the basic one and it can be dangerous. The rear deltoid does not receive more of a workout in a Behind-the-neck Press, despite the claims of many trainers and veteran bodybuilders. You only have to observe the position and movement of the arms in the two variants to see this. They are almost identical. Be careful not to move your elbows backwards as you lower the weight (rotating the arm inward); move them in a vertical line. Avoid heavy weights with the Behind-the-neck Press and do not bring the barbell down too far.



Execution



Sit on a bench set at a slight incline. Grasp the bar with your palms forward and your knuckles facing back (overhand grip), your hands slightly more than shoulder-width apart. Bring the barbell down to your chest at about the height of your collarbone and then raise it until your arms are almost fully extended. Your arms should be parallel to your body, moving toward your sides as you lower the weight. Breathe in as you lower the barbell and out as you complete the lift.

Comments

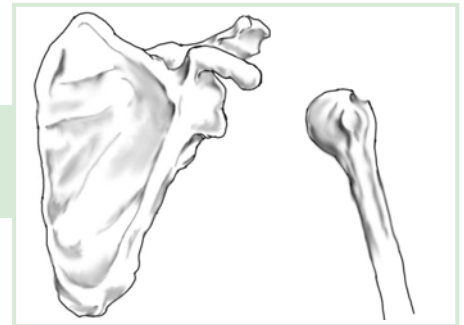
Try to concentrate the effort in your deltoid rather than your triceps (although it will inevitably be worked, especially the lateral and medial heads). It is not true that the Military Press develops the front of the shoulders and the Behind-the-neck Press develops the back of them. In fact, the entire deltoid muscle works in both exercises, especially the front and side. This error explains the muscle imbalance that can be seen in many people who may have spent years trusting in the Military Press as the basis for their shoulder routine. You can use a lot of weight in this exercise, but you should remember that the shoulder joint is relatively fragile. In this exercise, the biceps acts as both prime mover and in opposition (antagonist). This should come as no surprise, as it is used in both Presses (moving the arm away from the body - abduction) and Pull-downs (flexing the forearm). The standing variant of the Military Press is identical, although this puts the back at greater risk.



Common mistakes: starting with the weight at the lower position due to poor bench design; arching the lower back; and locking the elbows with the arms extended



The shoulder is a fairly unstable joint, making it prone to dislocation.



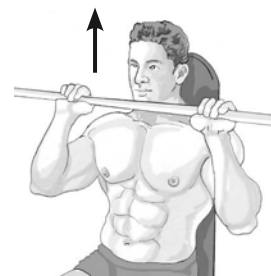
1.3 ... NARROW GRIP

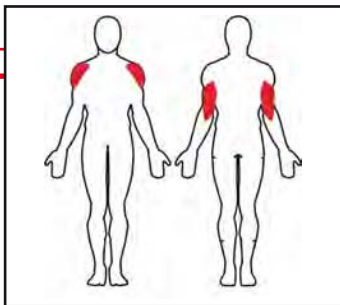
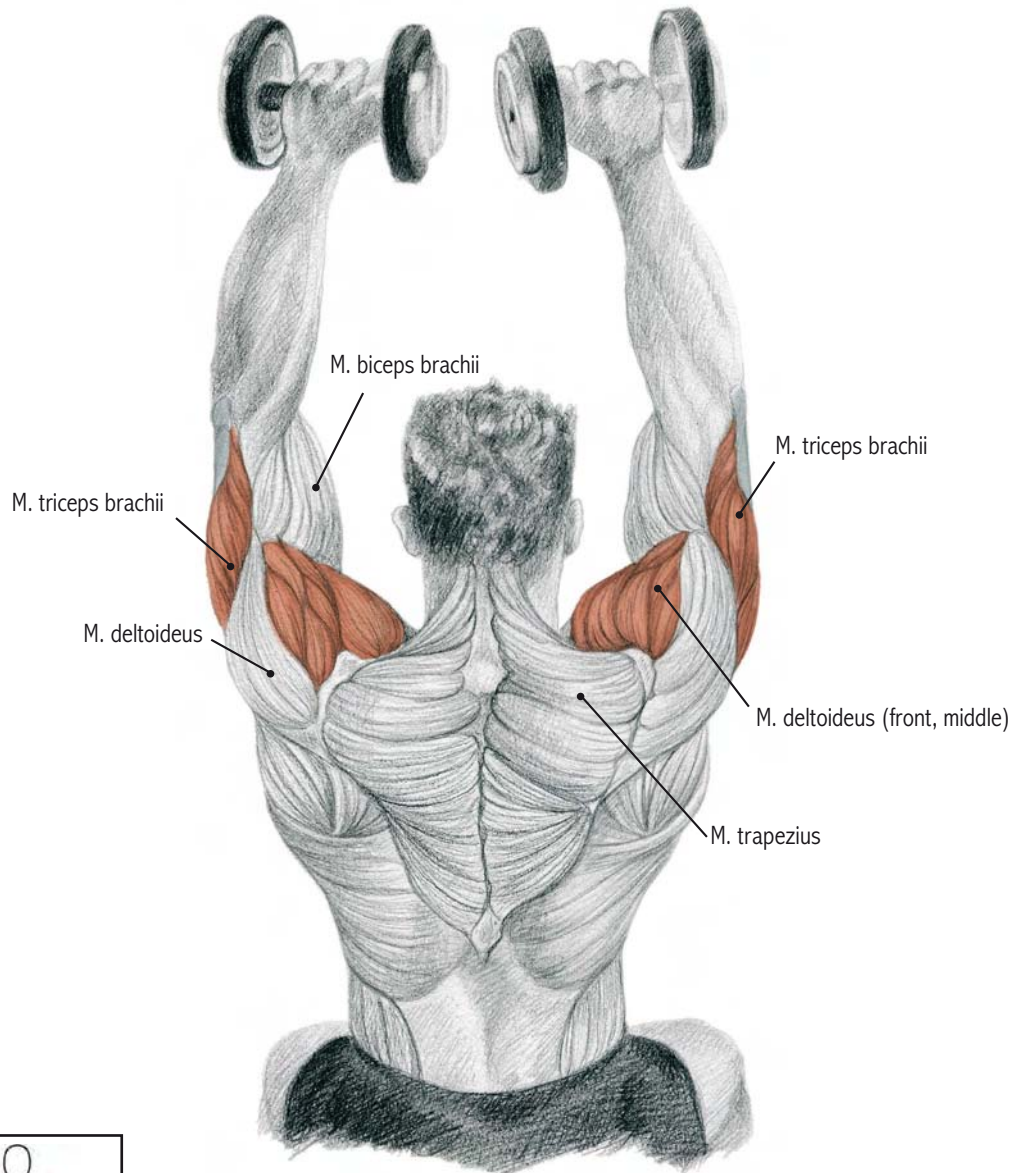
MUSCLES USED

deltoid (front, middle), triceps, coracobrachialis, supraspinatus, pectoralis major (upper), biceps (long and short head)

TECHNIQUE

The starting position is very similar to the basic exercise, but using a narrow grip (hands approximately shoulder-width apart). Your elbows will no longer be parallel to your body but should be placed farther forward, although not beyond your chest. This position means that the front of your shoulders and the upper part of the pectoral muscle will work the hardest. Although in many barbell exercises the muscles are worked in a very similar way that is equivalent to using dumbbells, in the present case the dumbbell variant is more effective. This is because the hands are in a neutral position (rather than gripping the bar overhand), allowing the elbows to face directly forward, and the weight is lifted along the mid-line of the body.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: deltoid (front, middle), triceps (except long head), supraspinatus

SECONDARY MUSCLES: deltoid (rear), pectoralis major (upper), trapezius (upper), biceps (long head), serratus anterior, triceps (long head)

ANTAGONISTS: latissimus dorsi, biceps, pectoralis major (lower)

VARIATIONS 2.2 ... STANDING

MUSCLES USED

deltoid, triceps, supraspinatus

TECHNIQUE

Standing to do the Shoulder Press allows you to use your legs to give you a bit of momentum when doing forced reps. However, poor technique can put the back at risk and it is more difficult for a partner to help.



VARIATIONS 2.3 ... ONE-ARM

MUSCLES USED

deltoid, triceps, supraspinatus

TECHNIQUE

Hold your torso firmly in place to do the One-arm Shoulder Press. The disadvantages of this variant are that the spinal column may be tilted or rotated to a dangerous extent if you use heavy weights and/or do this with a lack of proper technique.



VARIATIONS 2.4 ... ALTERNATING

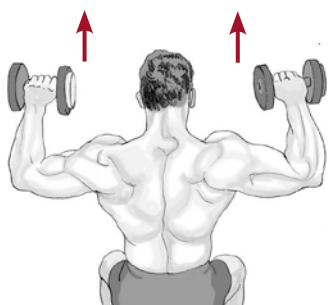
MUSCLES USED

deltoid, triceps, supraspinatus

TECHNIQUE

This is the same as the basic exercise, but alternating dumbbell lifts with a pause at the top of the movement. The variant increases the intensity of the workout because the arms support the load at all times, as the "pause" involves holding the dumbbell in place.

Execution



Sit on a bench set at a slight incline or flat. Hold the dumbbells on either side of your head with your palms forward and your knuckles facing back (overhand grip) and extend your arms almost completely without locking them, bringing your hands slightly together to maintain balance. Lower the weights to the level of your ears in a controlled movement. Your arms should be parallel to your body, moving toward your sides as you lower the dumbbells. Breathe in as you lower the weights and out as you complete the lift.

Comments

This is a simple and effective exercise for beginners and advanced athletes alike, working the muscles in the same way as the Seated Barbell Military Press (Ex. 1). It has the major advantage of being a very natural movement. On the downside, the dumbbells are more difficult to pick up and put down at the beginning and end of your set, and you should ask for help if you are working with heavy weights. The Dumbbell Shoulder Press is less likely to result in injury than the Behind-the-neck Press. In the movement in this exercise (and others of the same type), the different parts of the muscle come into play in the following order: front deltoid, closely followed by the middle and then the rear.

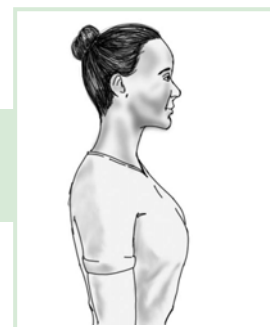
You can swing your arms to bring the dumbbells up to the starting position beside your head, bending your elbow.



Common mistakes: overarching the lower back; forcing the last few repetitions without help; and locking the elbows at the top of the movement to rest



The head and neck contain a number of small, delicate antigravity muscles that remain in constant tension throughout the day. These are the muscles that maintain posture.



WITH ISOMETRIC PAUSE

2.5 ... PALMS-IN



MUSCLES USED

deltoid, supraspinatus, triceps

TECHNIQUE

This variant does not alter the part of the deltoid worked, as the forearm and not the humerus is responsible for the rotation.



2.6 ... W PRESS

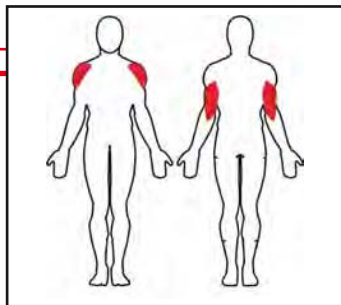
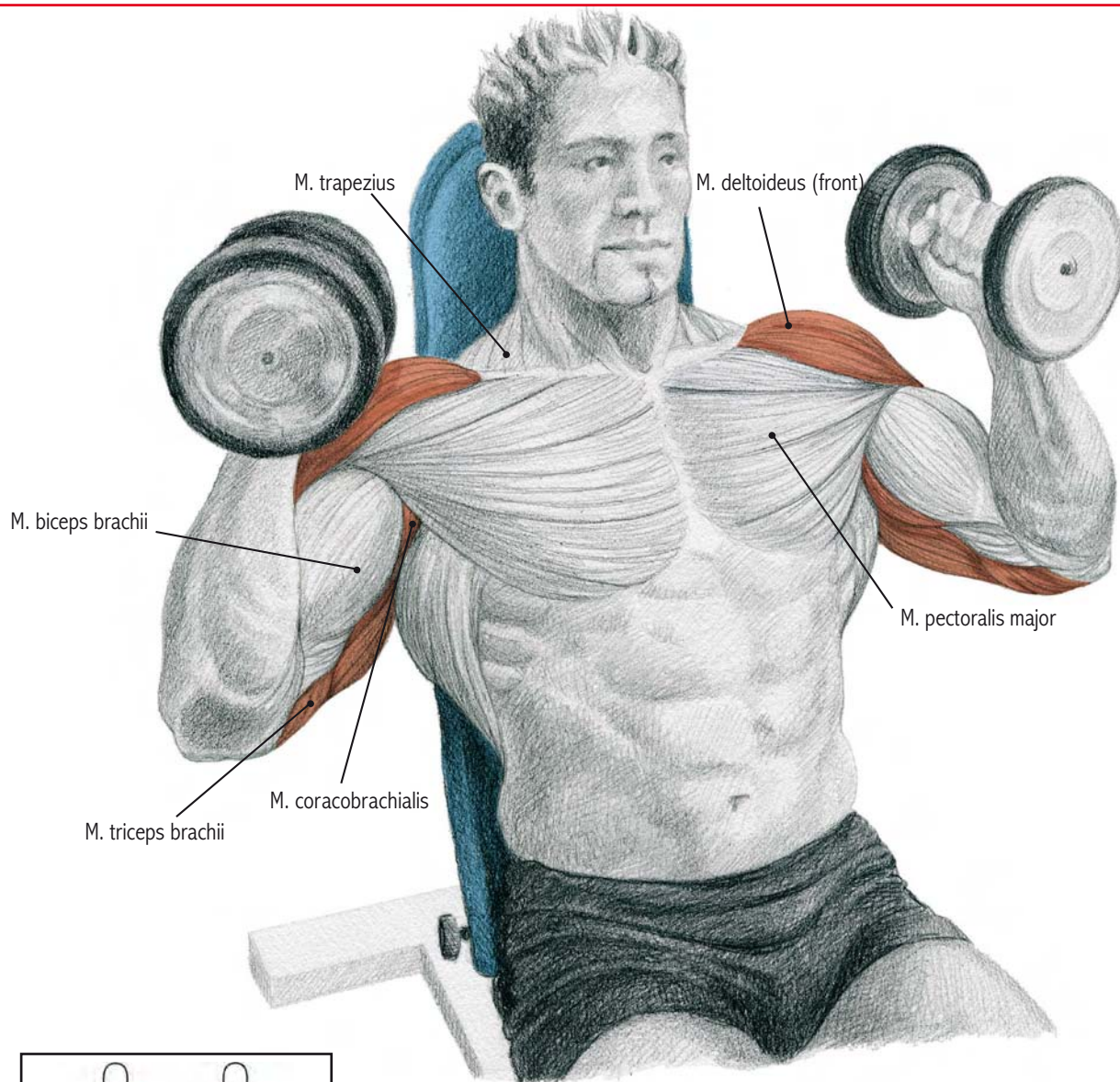
MUSCLES USED

deltoid, supraspinatus, trapezius (upper), serratus anterior

TECHNIQUE

Use less weight and start from a more open arm position (forming a W). Lift the dumbbells in an arc without changing the angle of your elbow. This variant reduces the work done by the triceps. It isolates the deltoid and produces significant congestion (accumulation of blood in the muscle), although with less weight.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: deltoid (front), coracobrachialis, triceps (except long head), supraspinatus
SECONDARY MUSCLES: deltoid (middle and rear), pectoralis major (upper), biceps (long head), trapezius, triceps (long head)
ANTAGONISTS: latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, biceps, pectoralis major (lower)

VARIATIONS

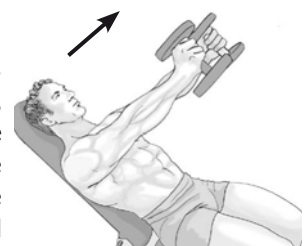
3.2 ... INCLINE

MUSCLES USED

deltoid (front), pectoralis major (upper), coracobrachialis, biceps (long head), supraspinatus

TECHNIQUE

The technique used is virtually the same as in the basic exercise, but the bench is set at a 45°-60° angle. Do the press by extending your arms diagonally forward, not completely vertical. The weight used will inevitably be less, but the exercise works the front portion of the deltoid very effectively. (There is less work for the triceps, although a bit more for the pectoral muscles.) You will achieve good muscle congestion (accumulation of blood in the muscle) from light, long sets. It is a good idea to fix your eyes on a point of reference and raise the dumbbells toward it. This stops you from slipping into a vertical Press as you tire during the set.



Execution



Sit on a bench set at a slight incline and hold the dumbbells in front of your head using a neutral grip with your thumbs facing inward. Push upward without changing the direction of your elbow (which should always face forward). Bring the dumbbells down to the level of the collarbone and raise them until your arms are almost fully extended. Breathe in as you lower the weights and out as you complete the lift.

Comments

This is a heavy exercise for the front of the deltoid. You can also do it standing up, although this puts the back at greater risk.

This exercise is often recommended to prevent potential problems with the ligaments and small muscles surrounding the shoulder caused by the classic Military (or Behind-the-neck) Press. Remember, however, that the front shoulder muscles are usually overtrained in comparison with the back ones. The body's muscular and aesthetic balance should be taken into account at all times. If your elbows face straight forward, the pectoral muscle will work harder (especially in the first few inches of the lift) than if they face slightly outward.



Common mistakes: overarching the lower back and using the triceps too much



The three basic parts of the deltoid are:

1. front, clavicular or anterior
2. middle, acromial or lateral
3. rear, spinal or posterior

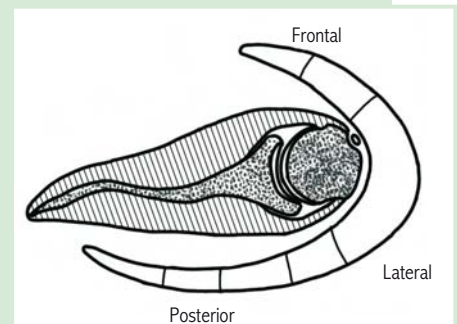
Right shoulder

(cross-section from the side)

Front

Middle

Rear



3.3 ... ARNOLD / SCOTT PRESS

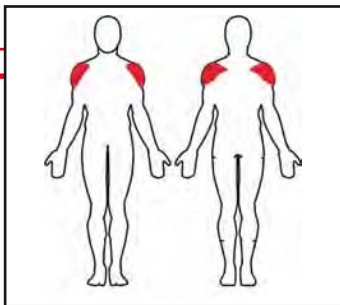
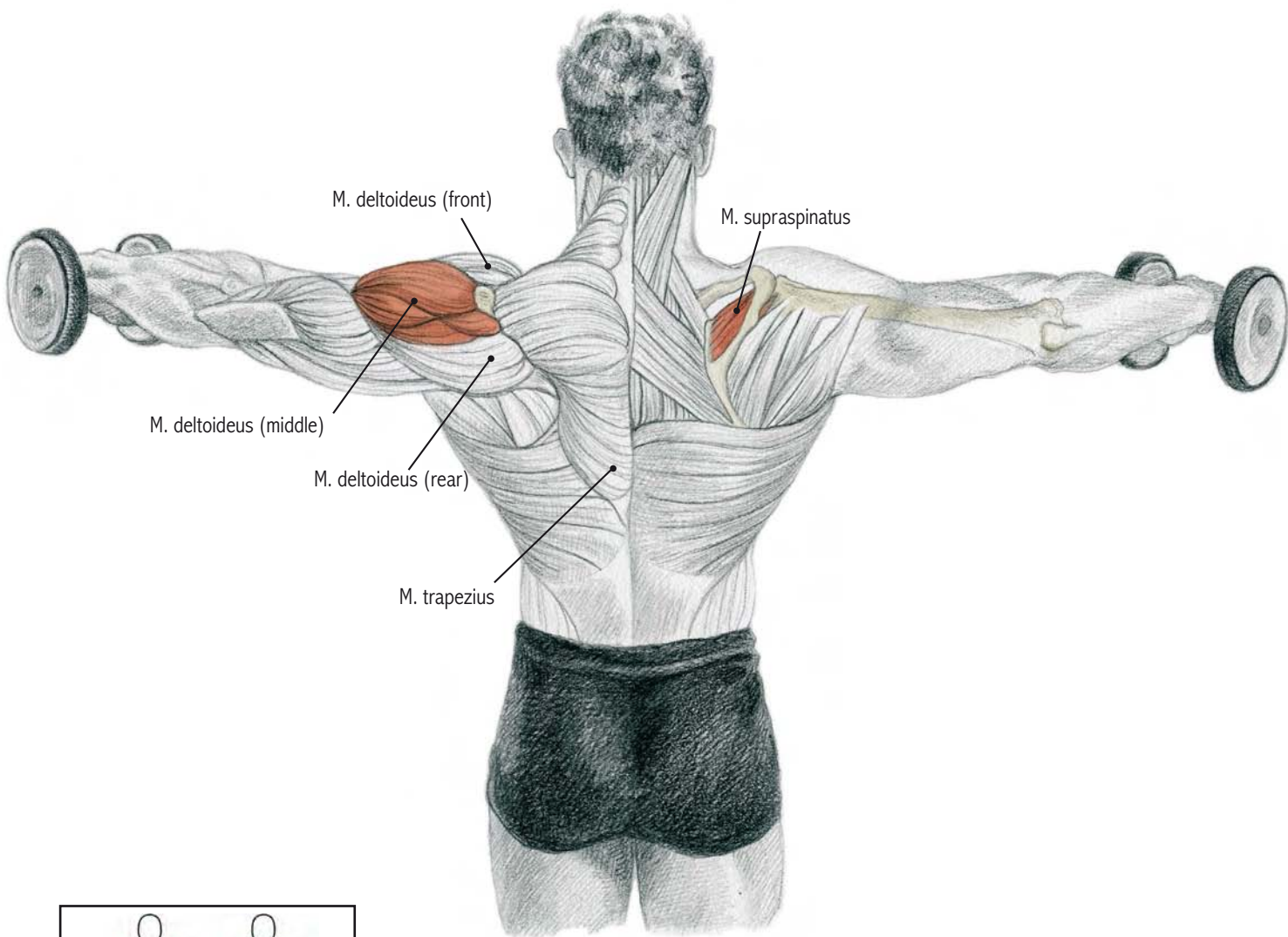
MUSCLES USED

deltoid, supraspinatus, triceps, coracobrachialis, pectoralis major (upper)

TECHNIQUE

This exercise is named after the great Arnold Schwarzenegger (though other sources claim it was popularized by Larry Scott). The starting position is similar to the basic exercise but leaning somewhat farther back and with the palms of your hands facing the shoulder. Rotate the arm and forearm as you lift, ending at the top in a conventional Press. In theory, this exercise was invented to work all three areas of the deltoid, although in practice the front and side work harder. The main advantage is that it is not as hard on the ligaments and small muscles surrounding the shoulder joint, although further research is needed to confirm this.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: deltoid (middle), supraspinatus

SECONDARY MUSCLES: deltoid (front and rear), trapezius and serratus anterior (especially from 90 to 150°), biceps (long head), subscapularis

ANTAGONISTS: latissimus dorsi, pectoralis major (lower), teres major and minor, triceps (long head), biceps (short head)

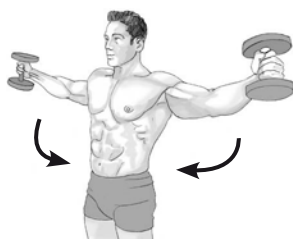
VARIATIONS 4.2 ... THUMBS-UP

MUSCLES USED

deltoid (middle and front), supraspinatus, biceps (long head), trapezius (upper)

TECHNIQUE

Turn your arm so that your thumbs face up and your elbows down (rotation of the shoulder blade and humerus). This will shift some of the work onto the front of the deltoid and to some extent the biceps, especially the long head. As a result, there is some risk to the tendinous insertion of the biceps, and you should never use a heavy weight or straighten your elbow completely.



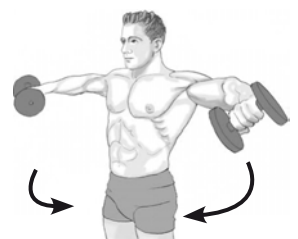
VARIATIONS 4.3 ... THUMBS-DOWN

MUSCLES USED

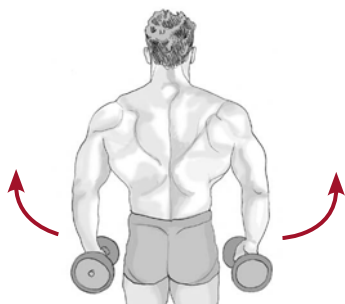
deltoid (middle and rear), supraspinatus, trapezius (upper)

TECHNIQUE

This inward rotation of the arm will allow you to isolate the work done by the middle and rear deltoid. However, in this position the biceps is no longer able to provide effective protection against the shoulder being dislocated due to internal rotation of the humerus. Do not use too much weight. It is better to lift the dumbbells starting in front of your body and not to raise them above 90° (arms straight out to the side) to avoid putting the supraspinatus and the tendons in the area at risk.



Execution



Stand with your feet apart and your knees slightly bent. Hold the dumbbells in a neutral grip (palms facing the body) with your elbows partially bent and on either side of your body. Lift your arms straight out to the side, raising your elbows to the level of your hands and shoulders. At the top of the movement, the palms of your hands should face the floor. Lower the dumbbells in a controlled movement. Inhale during the first third of the raise (or before starting the raise in heavy sets) and exhale as you lower the weights.

Comments

This is a good exercise for the deltoid, especially for the middle section of the muscle. It will help you broaden your shoulders. If you raise the dumbbells a few degrees higher than horizontal (never with heavy weights), you will call upon the trapezius and adjacent muscles (the deltoid only lifts the arms to around 90°). You can begin the movement with your hands in front of your body to complete a set or if you are using a heavy weight. If you do the exercise sitting down, you will effectively eliminate any momentum provided by the legs and torso. The biceps (especially the long head) does its fair share of the work in this exercise, accounting for up to 20-25% of the overall effort. You should take this into account when planning your training routine. The arm rotations described in variants 4.2 and 4.3 below are no better than the basic exercise.



Common mistakes: rocking your body to gain momentum; turning the forearm up when doing the raise; lifting the hands but not the elbows, or vice versa; turning the forearm down at the end of the movement; too long or too short a range of motion with too much weight; allowing the weights to drop after completing the lift; bending the elbows too much (especially with heavy weights) or keeping them too straight; doing the exercise too fast; and not lifting both sides the same



The Lateral Raise is probably the exercise that is most often done wrong. The most common error is to bend the elbows and bring the arms forward to lift more weight. (This shortens the distance to the point where force is applied and brings in the pecs and other muscles to help). This is not a heavy exercise, and weight should not be your main consideration.

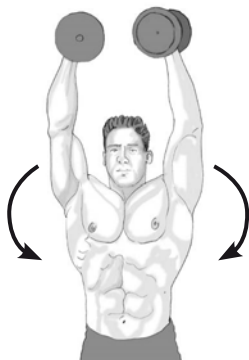
4.4 ...FULL RAISE

MUSCLES USED

deltoid, supraspinatus, trapezius, serratus anterior (90° to 150°)

TECHNIQUE

All you have to do is continue the basic movement upward, using far less weight and turning the dumbbells at the same time as you lift so that your hands are facing each other at the top of the movement. If you do not do this, you will only be able to form a V (120° to 150°). This variant more actively involves the trapezius.



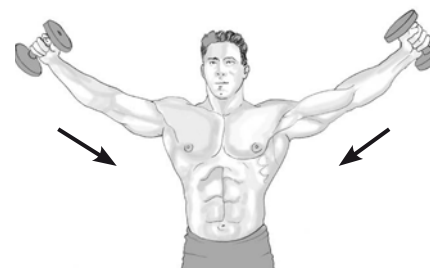
4.5 ...SHOULDER V PRESS

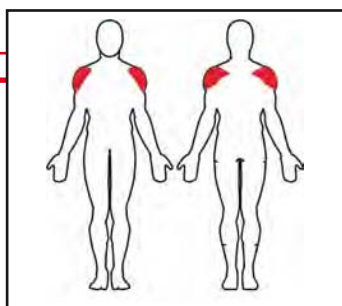
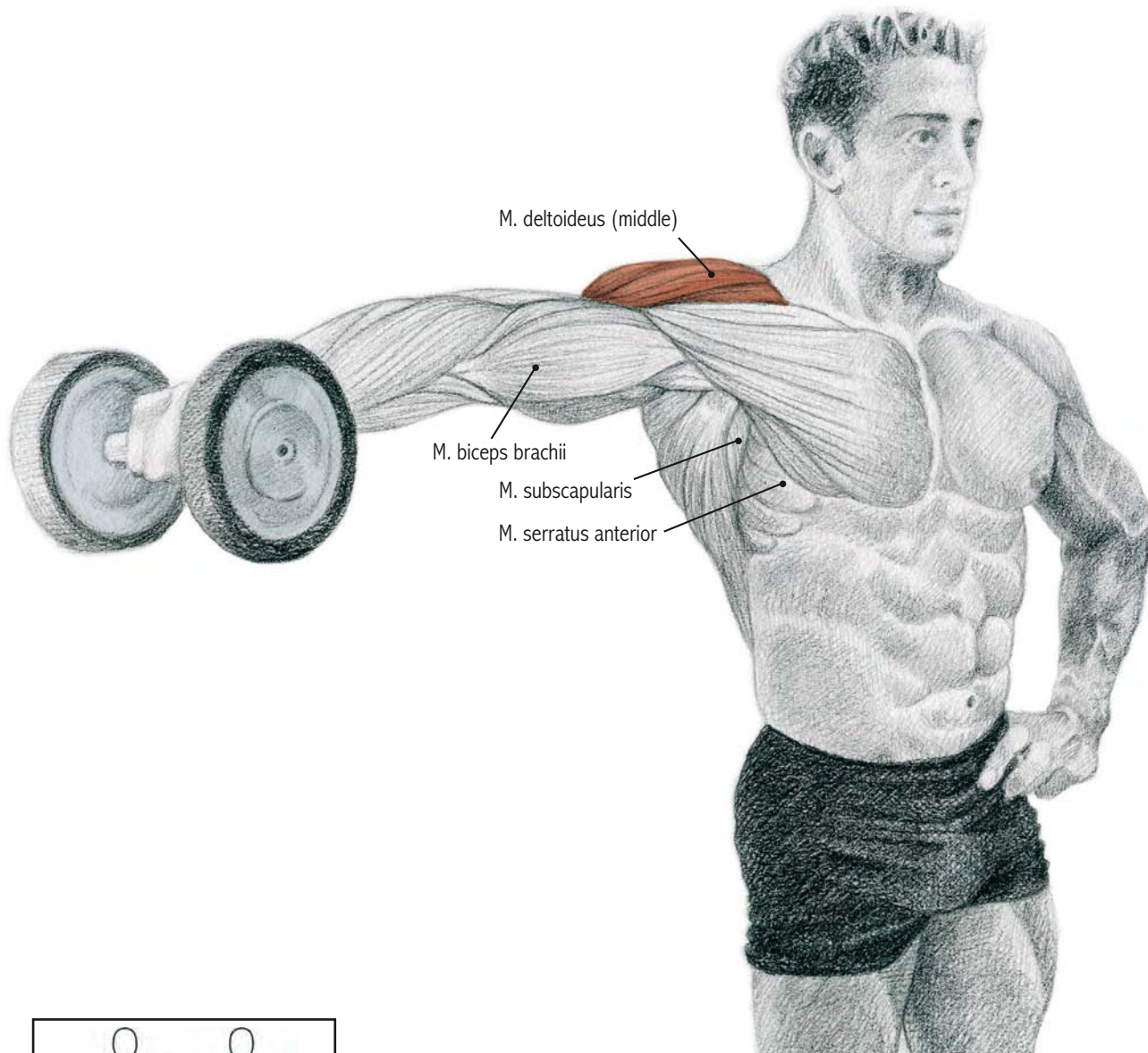
MUSCLES USED

deltoid, supraspinatus, trapezius (upper)

TECHNIQUE

Starting from the press position but with your elbows closer to your torso, do a "V" or horizontal press out to the side. You can turn your forearm to do the raise palms forward (overhand grip) or you can use a neutral grip. This variant prevents the elbows from bending, a common form of cheating in the conventional Lateral Raise.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: deltoid (middle), supraspinatus

SECONDARY MUSCLES: deltoid (front and rear), trapezius and serratus anterior (especially from 90 to 150°), biceps (long head), subscapularis

ANTAGONISTS: latissimus dorsi, pectoralis major (lower), teres major and minor, biceps (short head)

VARIATIONS 5.2 ... INCLINE

MUSCLES USED

deltoid, supraspinatus, trapezius (upper), biceps (long head)

TECHNIQUE

Lie sideways on a bench set at a 45°-60° angle. The main advantage is that you will achieve constant resistance over the entire range of movement because the position eliminates the "dead spot" at the top in a conventional raise. The variant also works the outside of the deltoid muscle, which is responsible for the first 30° of the movement, very effectively (the least intense part of the movement in the lying or decline variants).



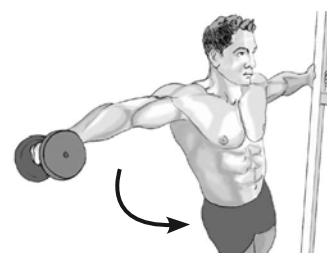
VARIATIONS 5.3 ... DECLINE

MUSCLES USED

deltoid, supraspinatus, trapezius (upper), biceps (long head)

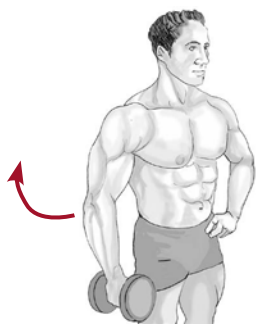
TECHNIQUE

Standing, hold on to something that will provide firm support, leaning your body away at a decline. This position allows you to achieve a strong final contraction if you perform the movement strictly. It also involves the trapezius somewhat more at the end of the upward movement due to the angle you will achieve.





Execution



Stand with your feet apart and your knees slightly bent. Hold the dumbbell in a neutral grip (palms facing) with your elbows slightly bent and beside your body. Place your other hand on your waist or hold on to something for support. Raise the arm away from the body to around 90° without changing the position of your elbows or the rest of your body. Your elbow should come up to the same level as your hand and shoulder, and the dumbbell should be parallel to the floor. You can begin the movement with your hands in front of your body, which gives you a small amount of momentum. (This is less strict, but allows you to manage a heavier weight.) Lower the dumbbells in a controlled movement. Inhale as you begin the raise and exhale at the end of the downward movement.

Comments

Like the two-arm exercise (seated or standing), this is an excellent movement for the side of the deltoid muscle and will add a few millimeters to the width of your shoulders. You can focus the work on the outside head of the deltoid even more by slightly bending your torso with your other hand holding on to something in front of you for support. This exercise is basically the same as the Two-arm Lateral Raise (Ex. 4), but it allows certain special variants that make it unique. These are discussed below.



Common mistakes: the same as for the two-arm exercise: rocking your body to gain momentum; raising the hands but not the elbows or vice versa; turning the dumbbells at the end of the movement; and too short or too long a movement with excessive weight



It can be very useful to do many of the exercises in front of a mirror, which is a good way to perfect the movements. Beginners should always use a mirror.

5.4 ... LYING

MUSCLES USED

deltoid, supraspinatus, biceps (long head)

TECHNIQUE

This is similar to variant 5.2. Lie on your side on the floor or on a bench and lift the dumbbell from your thigh to a vertical position. This variant is the least common and it is recommended that it be used only occasionally to concentrate the workout on the side of the deltoid muscle.



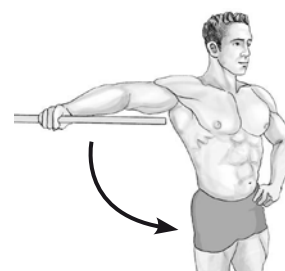
5.5 ... WITH BAR

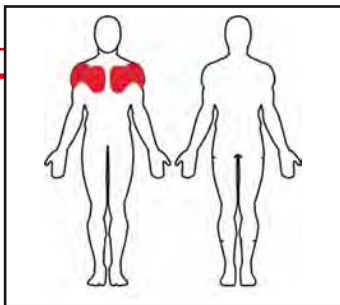
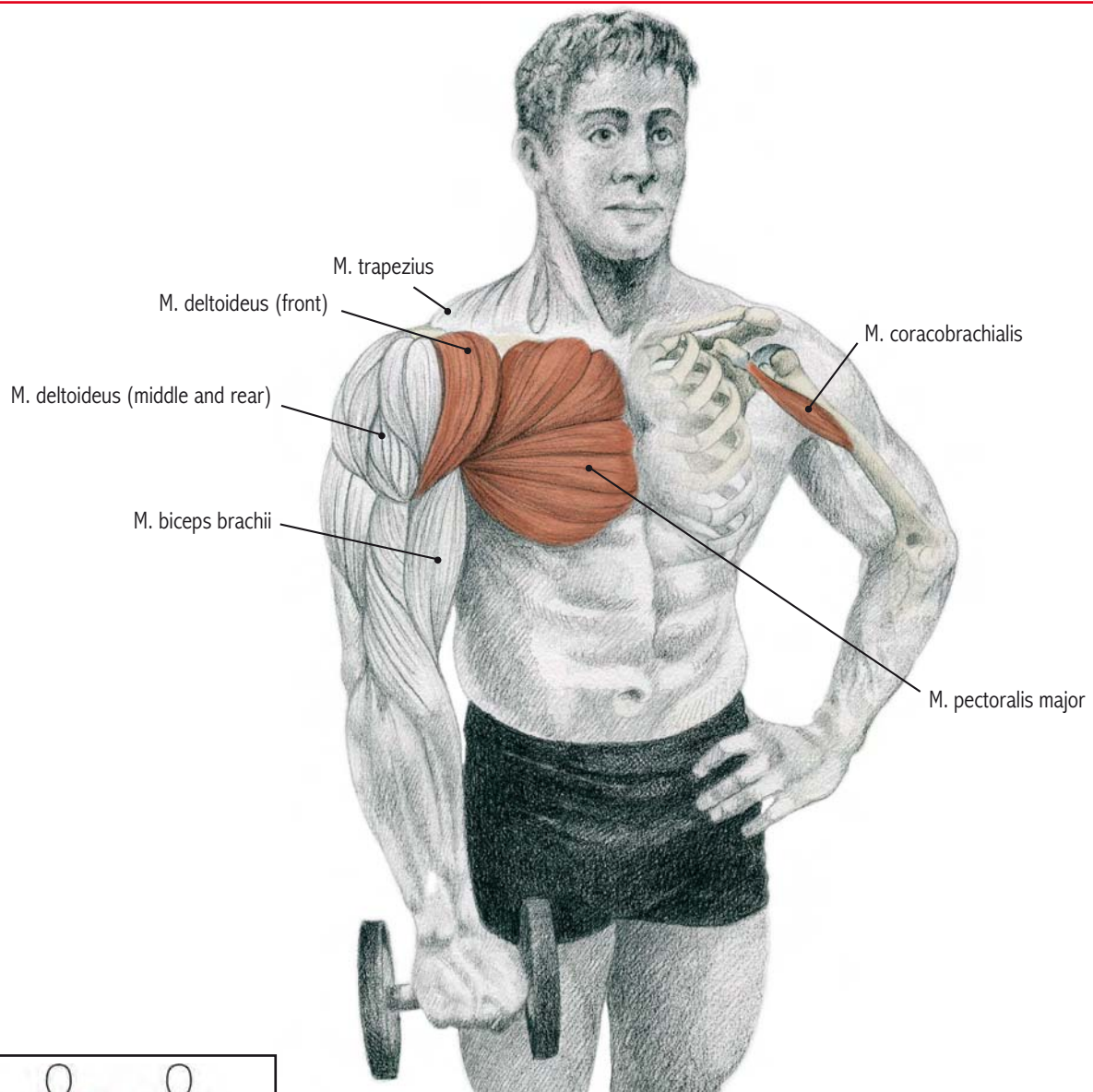
MUSCLES USED

deltoid, supraspinatus, trapezius (upper), biceps (long head)

TECHNIQUE

Grasp a short or long barbell in the center (conventional bars usually weigh between 18 and 26 lb.). Advanced athletes can add weights, but the aim of the exercise is above all to correct errors in the positioning of the arm, as the bar encourages a controlled horizontal movement. The muscle work is the same as in the dumbbell exercise. In theory, this exercise could be done with a bar in each hand, but in practice it is better to alternate.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: deltoid (front), coracobrachialis, pectoralis major (upper)

SECONDARY MUSCLES: deltoid (middle and rear), trapezius (middle and upper), biceps, serratus anterior

ANTAGONISTS: latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, pectoralis major (lower), triceps

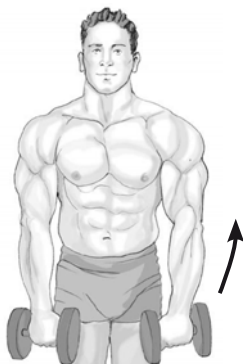
VARIATIONS 6.2 ... TWO-ARM

MUSCLES USED

deltoid (front), coracobrachialis, pectoralis major (upper)

TECHNIQUE

You will find that the strain on the lower back and muscles along the spinal column is greater and it is almost certain that you will need to cheat to complete a heavy set. If this variant has any advantage, it is to allow you to complete the exercise fractionally faster. It also gives the anchoring muscles of the torso an isometric workout.



VARIATIONS 6.3 ... NEUTRAL / HAMMER GRIP

MUSCLES USED

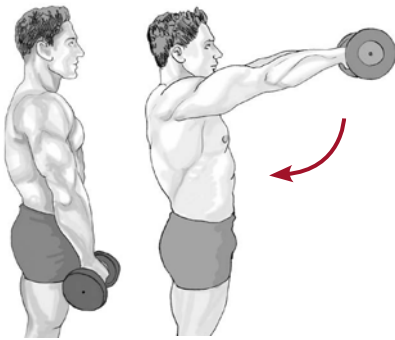
deltoid (front), coracobrachialis, pectoralis major (upper)

TECHNIQUE

This is the same as the basic exercise, but using a neutral grip (palms facing) to concentrate the workout on the front of the muscle. The grip is also more comfortable and firmer. Never extend your forearm completely.



Execution



Stand with your feet slightly apart and your torso held firmly in place. Hold the dumbbells in front of your thighs with your palms facing backward toward your body. Lift the dumbbells in front of you to head height, preferably alternating arms. Keep your elbows in position throughout the exercise and do not move them inward. Breathe in at the beginning of the movement and out as you finish lowering the weight.

Comments

This exercise can be done with two dumbbells simultaneously, but lifting one at a time reduces the strain on the lower back. You can rest your back against a wall to prevent rocking or other forms of cheating. The main muscles involved move the arm from 0° to around 55° , while the rest assist in the movement or are used to complete the raise to 120° - 180° . Remember that the front part of the shoulder is also worked when you train other parts of your body (notably the chest). Turning the forearms does not affect the work done by the shoulder, although it may involve the arm muscles. As a variant, you can use a palms-up (underhand) grip. This isolates the rear portion of the muscle, but it also causes undesirable tension in the biceps. This exercise can also be done lying face up on a bench or with your torso bent over as in the Cable Shoulder Raise. This not common and it will change the area of the shoulder worked, affecting the range of motion indicated above.



Common mistakes: rocking the body to help lift a heavy weight; lowering the weight in an uncontrolled movement; and fully straightening the elbows



The shoulder has a number of anchoring muscles, but the most important are the deep muscles like the subscapularis and the infraspinatus. To a certain extent, these mitigate the inherent instability of the joint, which is not surprising given its very wide range of movement.

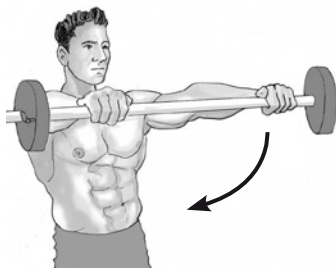
6.4 ...WITH BAR

MUSCLES USED

deltoid (front), coracobrachialis, pectoralis major (upper)

TECHNIQUE

This is the same as the Two-arm Raise (Ex. 6.2) but using a straight or EZ bar. As a variant, you can do the exercise seated with or without the bench set at an incline. This prevents you from cheating by rocking your torso and reduces the strain on the lower back, although it shortens the range of movement. (It is better to do the exercise standing with your back resting against a wall.)



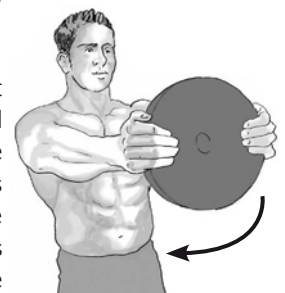
6.5 ...WITH DISC / DUMBBELL

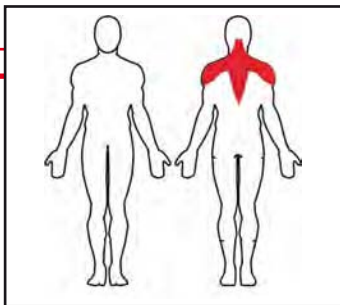
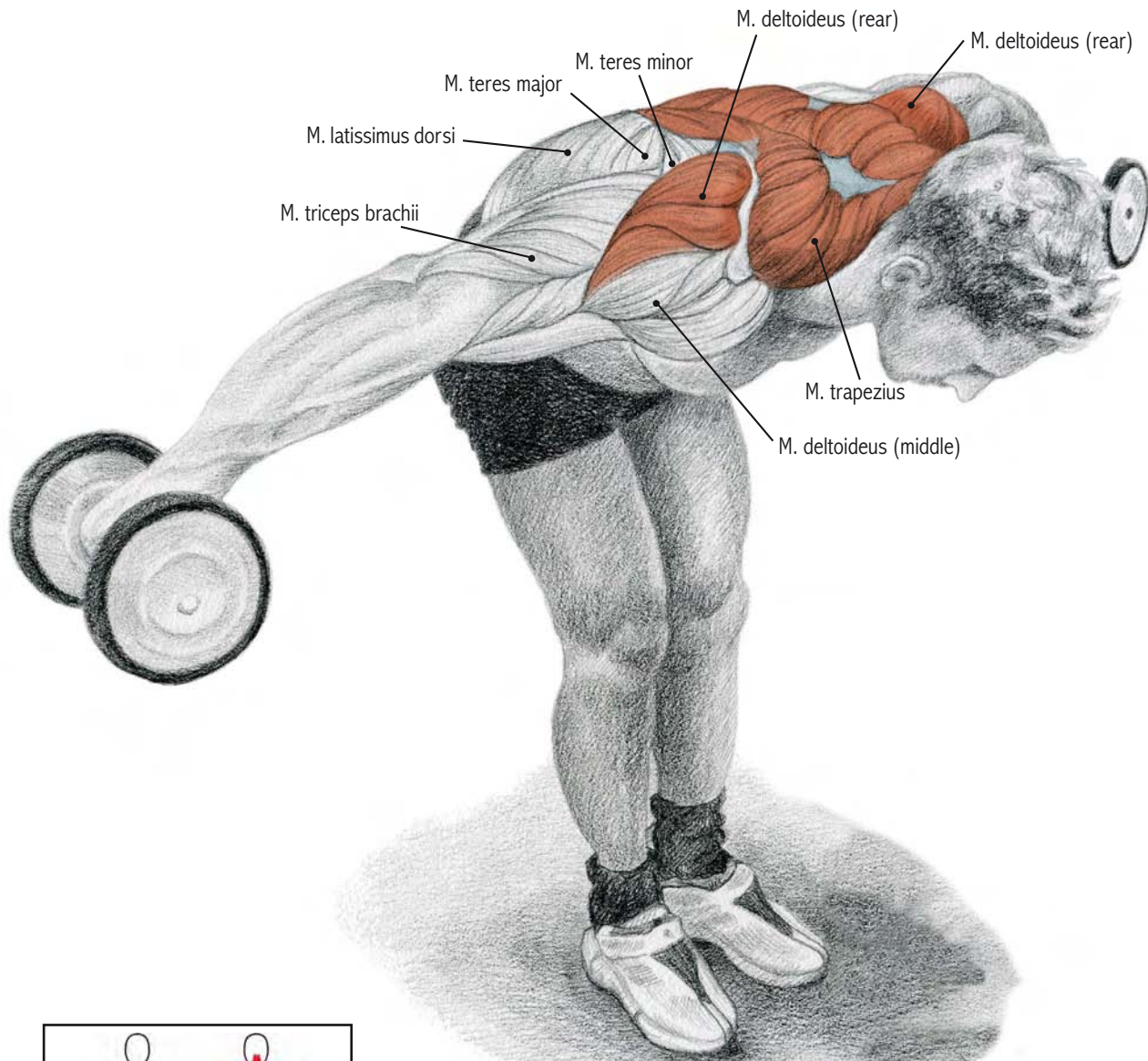
MUSCLES USED

deltoid (front), coracobrachialis, pectoralis major (upper)

TECHNIQUE

This is similar to the other variants, but you lift a disc or single dumbbell held in a neutral grip with both hands. The problems you will find are the same as when you use a bar (except for the grip). If it comes to a choice, a disc is better because the dumbbell must be held with one hand on top of the other, which causes one arm to make more effort than the other.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: deltoid (rear), trapezius

SECONDARY MUSCLES: deltoid (middle), latissimus dorsi, rhomboids, teres major and minor, triceps, infraspinatus, muscles of the lower back and along the spine

ANTAGONISTS: deltoid (front), pectoralis major, biceps

VARIATIONS 7.2 ... SEATED

MUSCLES USED

deltoid (rear), trapezius, triceps

TECHNIQUE

This is the same as the basic exercise, but you sit on the edge of a bench with the dumbbells below your legs, which should be kept together, bent at the knee and forward. Your chest should be touching your thighs. The main advantage of this position is that it provides better balance and reduces the strain on the lower back. The movement is stricter and so a little less weight is normally used.



VARIATIONS 7.3 ... LYING

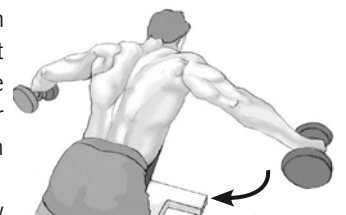
MUSCLES USED

deltoid (rear), trapezius, triceps

TECHNIQUE

This is an excellent variant. Lie face down with your chest and stomach on a bench set at a slight incline. The position will eliminate any opportunity to cheat by rocking your body and any uncomfortable (and even dangerous) strain on the lower back.

You can work the rhomboids very effectively by doing only the upper part of the movement and raising the dumbbells slightly above horizontal. This is also possible when standing or sitting.



Execution



Stand with your feet apart and your knees slightly bent. Keep your torso firm and lean forward until it is almost horizontal. Hold the dumbbells in a neutral grip, with your arms hanging down and your elbows facing backwards. Raise your arms to the side until they reach the height of your torso, maintaining the position of your elbows. It is important to keep your elbow far enough from your body to avoid using the lats too much. Breathe in as you begin the raise and out as you lower the weights back down, without expelling all the air.

Comments

This exercise is difficult to do with good technique, and it can pose a risk to your back. By keeping your arms away from your body and your torso horizontal, you will be able to isolate the rear deltoid more effectively than if you bring your arms back (which puts considerable demands on the latissimus dorsi and adjacent muscles). Inevitably the trapezius and rhomboids will move as you raise the weights, bringing your shoulder blades together. You can focus more on the mid-portion of the trapezius by rotating the arms outward as you raise them. Moving your arms diagonally forward will concentrate effort on the lower portion of the muscle. It is a good idea to do this exercise one-handed, separating your feet more and holding on to something for support with your free hand. The elbows are also separated from the body in the One-arm Row (see Back, Ex. 4) and on back machines where your arm moves away from your body (Back, Ex. 10.2, 11.2, 18 and 19).



Common mistakes: rocking your body; lowering the weight in an uncontrolled movement; keeping your elbows too close to your body; and changing the angle of the elbow during the movement



Throughout this book, we insist on good technique. Occasionally, however, the “cheating” method is justified to lift a little more weight or increase the number of repetitions. Beginners should never do this so that they avoid the risk of injury.

7.4 ... ONE-ARM LYING

MUSCLES USED

deltoid (rear), trapezius, triceps

TECHNIQUE

This is the same as variant 7.3 but using only one arm. Hug the bench with the other arm to keep your balance. The main advantage is the mental concentration you will achieve by working only one side.



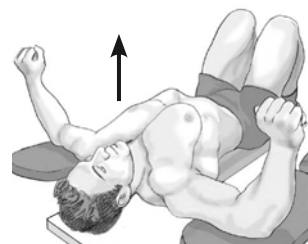
7.5 ... REVERSE TORSO RAISE

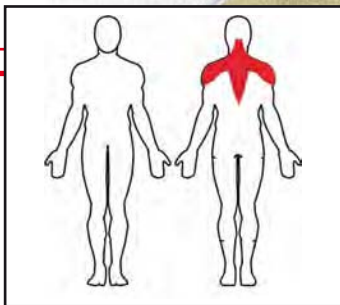
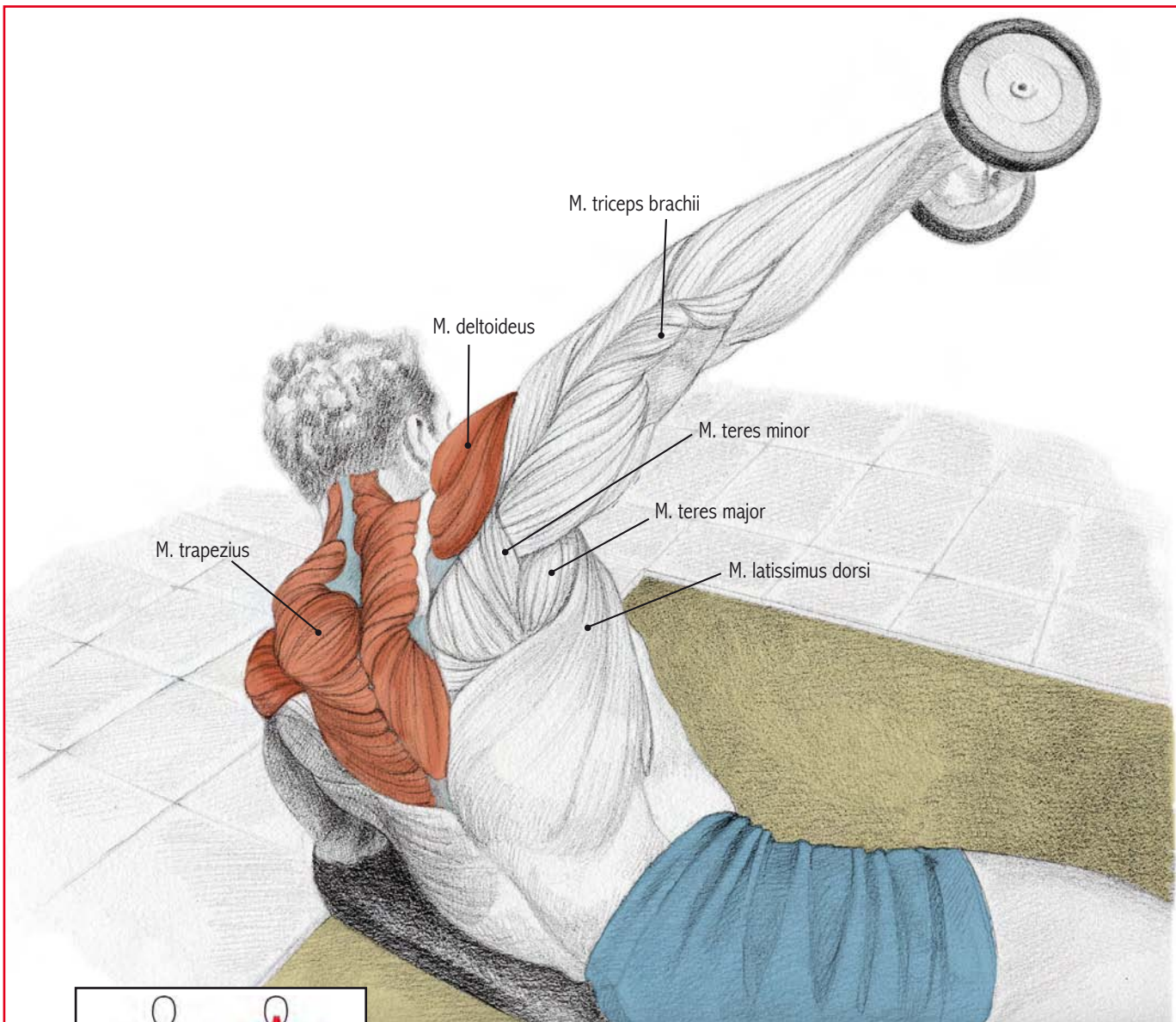
MUSCLES USED

rhomboids, deltoid (rear), trapezius

TECHNIQUE

Lie face up on a bench resting your elbows on two slightly higher benches placed on either side of the one you are lying on. (You can also do this lying on the floor between two raised platforms.) Push your arms back to raise your torso. This is hard work and the exercise is unconventional, but it is very good for the rotator muscles of the shoulder blades like the rhomboids. The equivalent machine exercise is done using a pec deck in an inverted position (see Ex. 27.2).





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: deltoid (rear), trapezius

SECONDARY MUSCLES: deltoid (middle), latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, rhomboids, triceps, infraspinatus

ANTAGONISTS: deltoid (front), pectoralis major, biceps

VARIATIONS

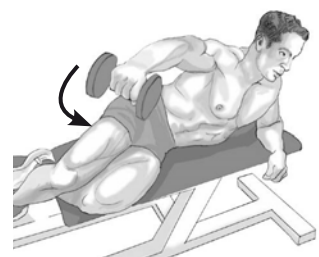
8.2 ... ELBOW-IN

MUSCLES USED

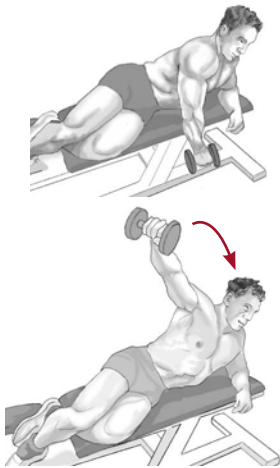
deltoid (rear), latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, triceps

TECHNIQUE

The position is the same as the basic exercise, but the elbow now moves much closer to your body. The advantage is that you can use more weight, although at the cost of involving the lats more. The deltoid muscle holds the arm up almost isometrically, preventing it from resting on your side. This effort can fool you into thinking that it is doing all the work.



Execution



Lie on your side on a bench, holding on with your free hand to keep your balance. Hold the dumbbell up vertically using an overhand grip (palm facing the ground) and lower it forward to just below the level of your body, then raise it to back up to a vertical position by contracting the rear deltoid and adjacent muscles. Your thumb may point toward the floor or your head as you grip the dumbbell. Breathe in as you begin the downward movement and out as you raise the weight.

Comments

This exercise is difficult for beginners, but it is an interesting variation on conventional Lateral Raises. It does not strain the lower back, although it may be difficult to maintain proper position on the bench.



Common mistakes: keeping your elbows close to your body to get help from the lats (much stronger than the deltoid); moving the entire torso; and bending and extending the elbow to gain momentum



The three essential elements of muscle growth are intelligent training, careful diet, and sufficient rest.

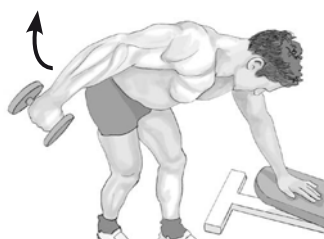
8.3 ...STRAIGHT-ARM EXTENSION

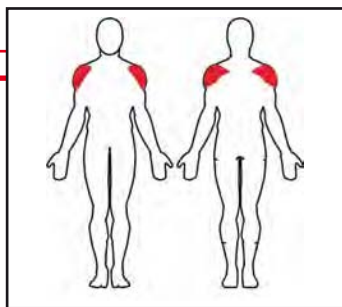
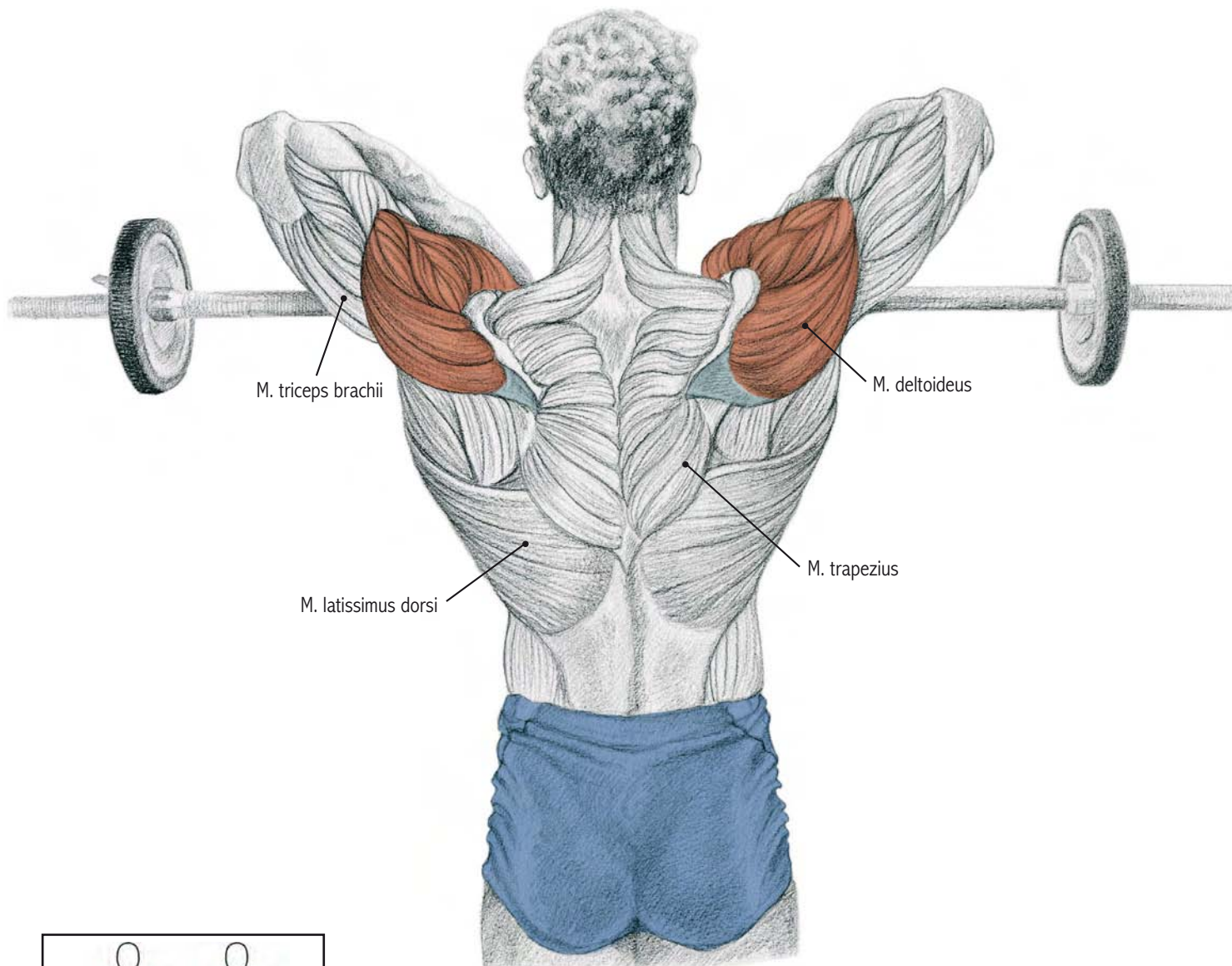
MUSCLES USED

deltoid (rear), latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, triceps

TECHNIQUE

Rest your hand on something for support and lean forward with your torso horizontal, as in the One-arm Dumbbell Row (Back, Ex. 4). Raise the dumbbell backwards, keeping your arm straight and close to your side. The lats do a lot of the work, but this effort decreases as you move your arm away from your torso. It is very small after 90°.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: deltoid

SECONDARY MUSCLES: trapezius, levator scapulae, supraspinatus, biceps, forearm flexor muscles, rhomboids, lower back muscles

ANTAGONISTS: latissimus dorsi, pectoralis major, triceps

VARIATIONS 9.2 ... WITH DUMBBELLS

MUSCLES USED

deltoid, trapezius (upper)

TECHNIQUE

This is the same as the basic exercise, but using dumbbells instead of the barbell. The shoulder workout does not differ substantially in this variant.



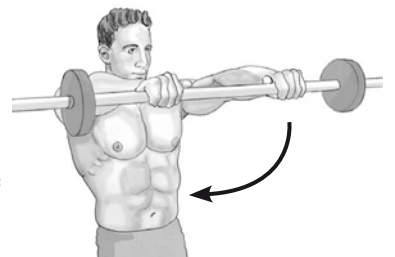
VARIATIONS 9.3 ... WITH FRONT RAISE

MUSCLES USED

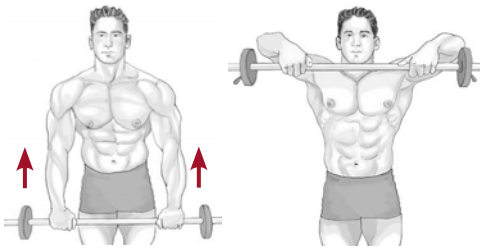
deltoid, trapezius (upper)

TECHNIQUE

The movement is the same until you reach the neck. From here you need to extend the barbell forward and lower it in an arc (the front deltoid contracting as it extends – eccentric contraction). This change does not increase the workload for the trapezius, instead it shifts it onto the front part of the shoulder. Imagine adding the second part of the Dumbbell Front Raise (Ex. 6). However, a powerful isometric contraction of the lower back muscles is necessary to maintain the position.



Execution



Stand with your feet slightly apart, your torso straight and held firmly in place. Hold the barbell against your thighs in an overhand grip (palms toward your legs) with your hands a little less than shoulder-width apart. Pull the bar up to your neck, keeping it close to your body throughout the movement. Your elbows should rise and remain higher than your hands. Breathe in as you begin to raise the barbell and out as you lower it.

Comments

This is a good heavy exercise for the deltoid, as well as the trapezius to a lesser extent. If you separate your hands further in a wider grip, you will shift even more of the work onto the deltoid. It is sometimes wrongly claimed that this is an exercise only for the trapezius, but in fact the arm makes a movement that is very similar to the Dumbbell Lateral Raise (Ex. 4), except that the elbows are bent. In practice, most people raise their shoulders (in a kind of sustained shrug) at the same time as their arms, which explains the sensation in the trapezius (see Ex. 10). To sum up, although when done properly, this is a good exercise, it is not specific to the trapezius. Beginners can do it without difficulty if they are shown how.



Common mistakes: lifting the hands higher than the elbows; rocking the body to gain momentum; and raising the bar outward and lowering it immediately on reaching the top of the movement (requiring the front deltoid to contract as it is extending – eccentric contraction – but not substantially improving the work done by the trapezius).



If you want to work the upper part of the trapezius, you can use what is possibly the easiest of all muscle training exercises. This is the Dumbbell or Barbell Shrug. Nevertheless, there are those who insist on complicated positions, variants, and equipment.

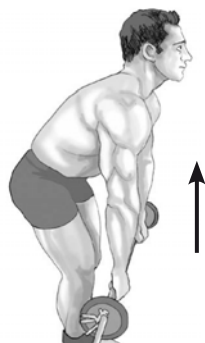
9.4 ... BENT-OVER

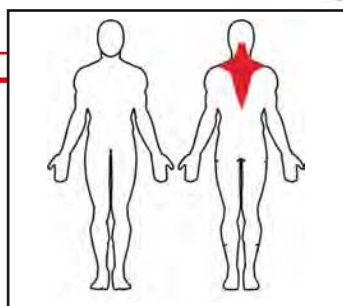
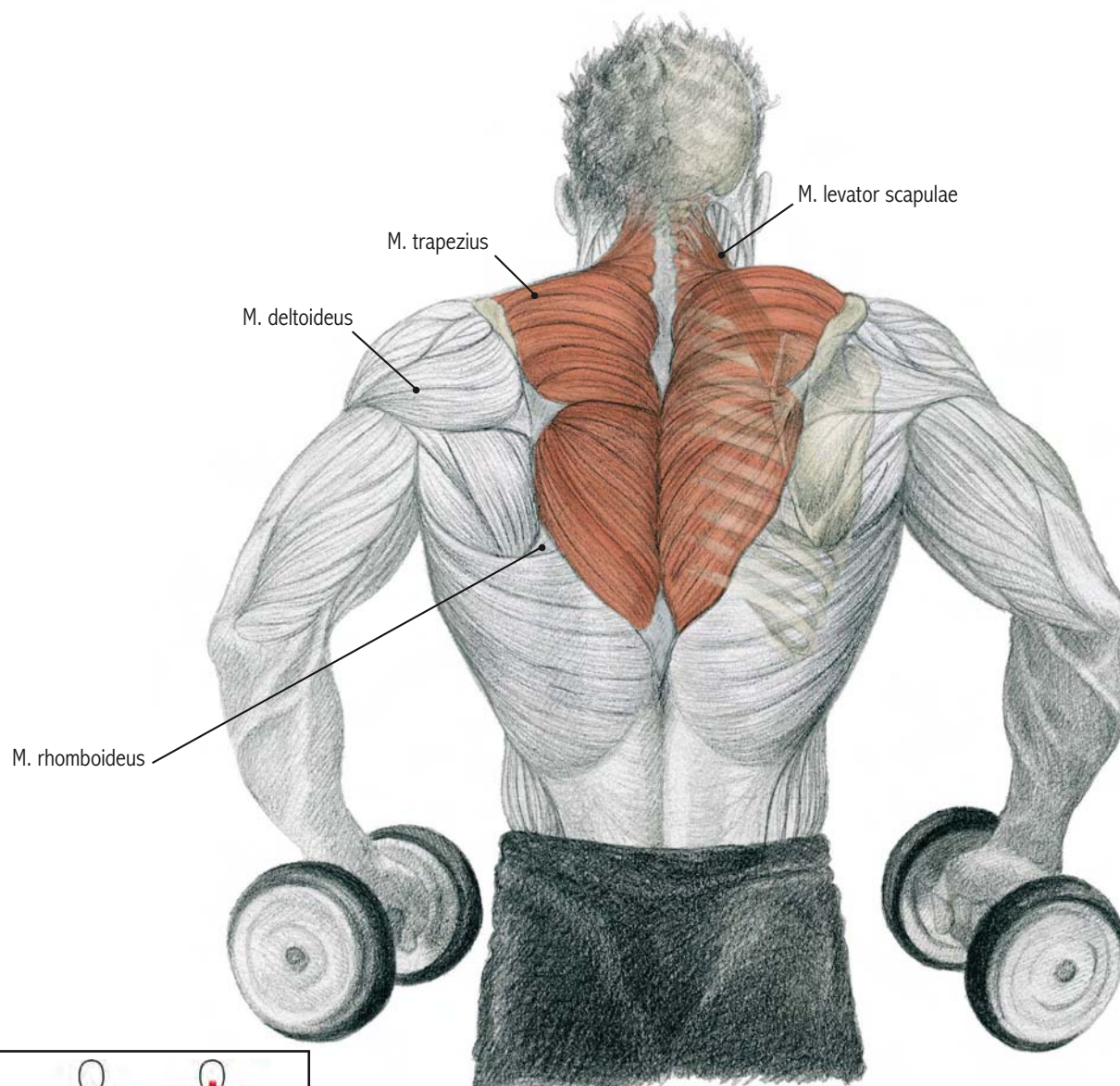
MUSCLES USED

deltoid (rear and middle), trapezius

TECHNIQUE

The movement is essentially the same as the basic exercise, but the torso is slightly bent throughout. The farther forward you lean, the harder the middle and lower parts of the trapezius and the rear deltoid have to work. At around 90°, the exercise becomes almost a Row for the latissimus dorsi and trapezius muscles.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: trapezius (upper), levator scapulae

SECONDARY MUSCLES: rhomboids, trapezius (middle), deltoid, supraspinatus

ANTAGONISTS: pectoralis minor, trapezius (lower), pectoralis major, latissimus dorsi

VARIATIONS 10.2 ... ROTATING

MUSCLES USED

trapezius (upper), levator scapulae

TECHNIQUE

This is virtually the same as the basic exercise explained above, but with a circular movement of the shoulders (forward or backwards) as you raise and lower them. You should use less weight in this variant, which is in any case not essential for working the trapezius effectively.



10.3 ... WITH BARBELL

MUSCLES USED

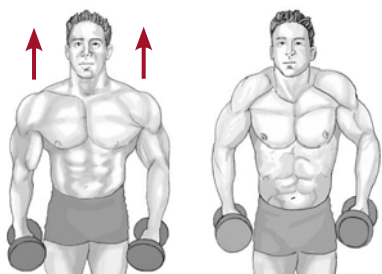
trapezius (upper), levator scapulae

TECHNIQUE

Instead of dumbbells, hold a bar in front of your waist or behind your back. This could also be the bar of a Smith machine or certain bench press machines, a row machine, and so on. The principles and movements are the same as in the basic exercise and the main reason to change is to break up your routine and add a little variety. At the same time, you will benefit from certain minor differences in the angles of the workout. However, dumbbells are the best fit for a natural grip.



Execution



Stand with your feet slightly apart, your torso straight and held firmly in place. Hold the dumbbells in a neutral grip on either side of your body. Raise your shoulders as much as possible and try to pause for a moment at the highest point. Your arms do no more than hold the weights, although the resistance is constant. Breathe in just before raising your shoulders and out as you lower them.

Comments

This is a very good heavy exercise, strictly for the trapezius and levator scapulae muscles. The workout is highly specific and effective for the upper part of the trapezius and adjacent muscles. It is also very simple and suitable for all levels. Beginners will notice rapid progress in the amount of weight they can lift.

None of the variants described below significantly improve the trapezius workout.



Common mistakes: rotating the shoulders in heavy sets; using too much or too little weight; incomplete movement; short or few sets; and flexing the shoulders to help you lift

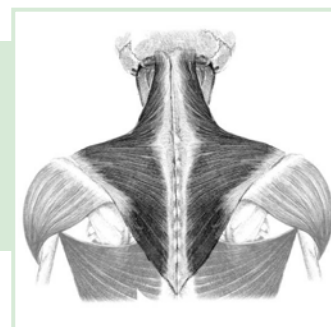


Basic functions of the trapezius:

Upper trapezius: raising the shoulder blades (e.g., Shoulder Shrug)

Middle trapezius: bringing the shoulder blades together (e.g., Cable Row with open grip)

Lower trapezius: lowering the shoulder blades and bringing them together (e.g., downward movement in Parallel Bar Dips)



10.4 .. BENT-OVER

MUSCLES USED

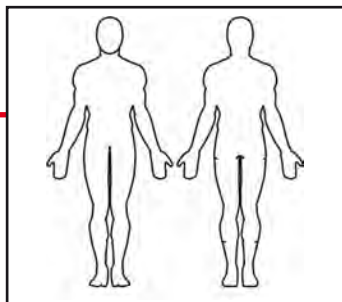
trapezius (middle), levator scapulae, rhomboids

TECHNIQUE

You can do the same movement as in the Barbell Shrug (Ex. 10.3) with your torso slightly bent, to 20° or 30°. This shifts the work to the lower parts of the trapezius and requires more effort from the rhomboids. The angle of the torso may be varied and you can even lie flat on a high bench, although it is more comfortable if a machine for doing the Bent-over Row is available (Ex. 29.5). Another useful option is to do Shoulder Shrugs in the T-bar Row position (Back, Ex. 3) using either free weights or a machine.



LYING SIDE EXTERNAL ROTATION



Muscles involved

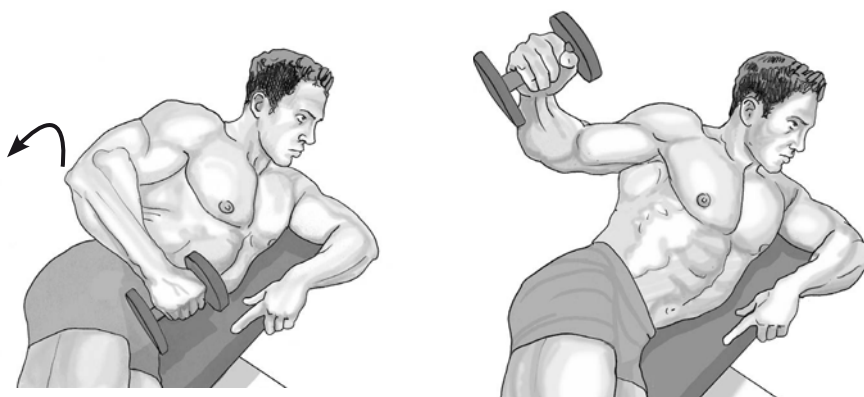
MAIN MUSCLES: infraspinatus, teres minor (sometimes fused together)

SECONDARY MUSCLES: deltoid (rear), rhomboids and trapezius

ANTAGONISTS: subscapularis, latissimus dorsi, pectoralis major

Execution

Lie on your side on a bench or floor mat and hold a dumbbell in the upper hand with a hammer grip, your hand up and elbow at a right angle resting on your side. Rotate the arm up through an 80° arc and then lower it until your forearm is parallel to the floor, or slightly farther. The angle of all of the joints remains the same throughout with only the shoulder rotating, from a side to a forward position. Breathe naturally, or inhale as you lower the weight and exhale as you reach the top of the movement.



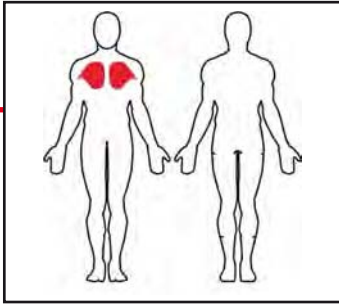
Comments

This exercise is very effective for strengthening the rotator cuff, but you should be careful not to use too much weight (outward rotation is weaker than inward movement). Do the rotations last, at the end of each shoulder workout. The movement can also be done lying face down on a bench set at an incline (see Prone Curl on Incline Bench, Biceps, Ex. 8). Do not change the angle of the elbow, which should remain at around 90°.



Common mistakes: using too much weight; too fast a movement; separating the elbow from the body; and moving the elbow to get help from the rear deltoid

LYING SIDE INTERNAL ROTATION



Muscles involved

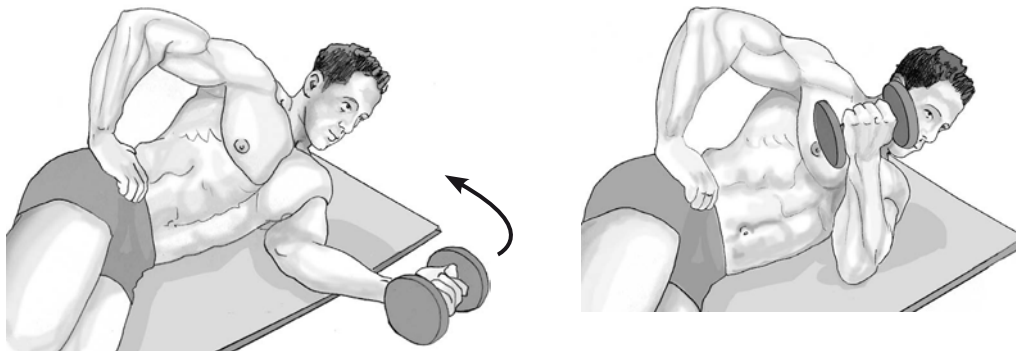
MAIN MUSCLES: subscapularis, pectoralis major

SECONDARY MUSCLES: (latissimus dorsi, teres major), deltoid (front), biceps (long head), (serratus anterior and pectoralis major)

ANTAGONISTS: infraspinatus, teres minor

Execution

The position is the same as for the outward shoulder rotation (Ex. 11), but in this case you hold the dumbbell in the lower hand. (The position is therefore rather forced.) Rotate the shoulder that is resting on the floor or bench inward. Breathe naturally.



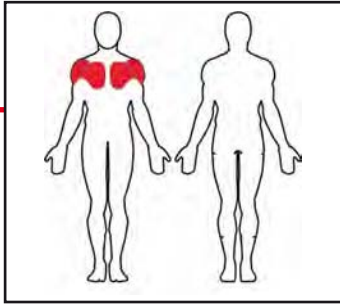
Comments

The muscles responsible for internal rotation are strong and generally well trained in contrast to those involved in outward rotation (Ex. 11). The most comfortable and effective position for this exercise is to lie on your back. Some experts question the role of the middle back muscles in this exercise. They may have a point.



Common mistakes: using too much weight; too fast a movement; giving this exercise priority over outward rotation (which is more important); and poor technique

SEATED DUMBBELL HAMMER RAISE



Muscles involved

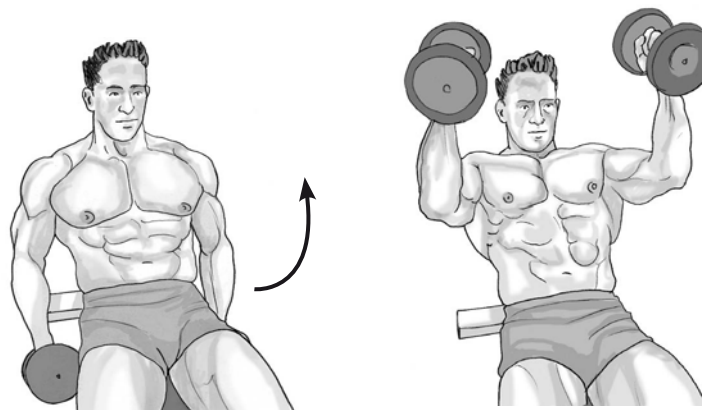
MAIN MUSCLES: deltoid (front), coracobrachialis, pectoralis major (upper)

SECONDARY MUSCLES: biceps, deltoid (middle and rear), trapezius (middle and upper), serratus anterior

ANTAGONISTS: latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, pectoralis major (lower), triceps

Execution

Sit on a bench set at an incline of 45° to 60°. Grasp the dumbbells in a neutral grip with your arms at your sides and elbows slightly bent (never straight). Lift the dumbbells in front of you to head height, preferably alternating arms. Keep your elbow in position throughout the movement. The exercise can be done either by alternating arms or on both sides simultaneously. Breathe in at the beginning of the movement and out as you finish lowering the weight.



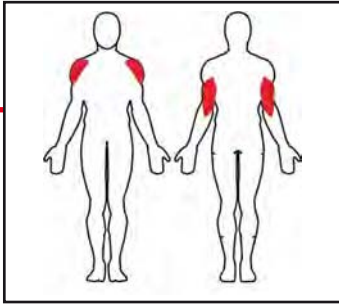
Comments

The front of the shoulder is usually worked to some extent when you train other parts of the body, as we have already explained. There is therefore no need to overuse this exercise, although this does not mean you should never do it. Using a moderate amount of weight, you will be able to achieve significant congestion (accumulation of blood in the muscle) in the front deltoid. The Press variant is explained in Ex. 3.2.



Common mistakes: bending the elbow too far; lifting the weight using momentum; varying the angle of the elbow; too fast a movement; and extending the elbow fully

HANDSTAND PUSH-UPS



Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: deltoid (front, middle), triceps, supraspinatus

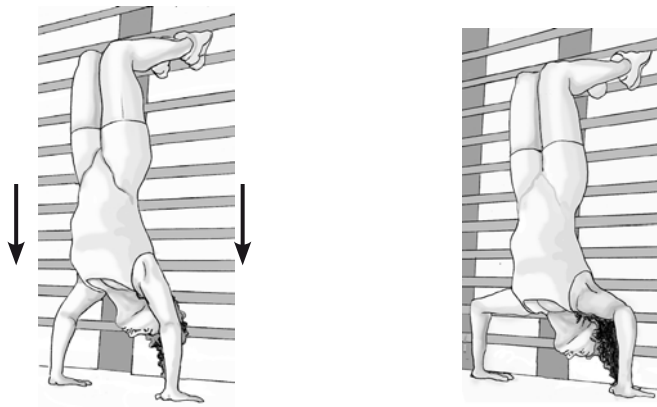
SECONDARY MUSCLES: deltoid (rear), pectoralis major (upper), trapezius (upper), serratus anterior

ANTAGONISTS: latissimus dorsi, biceps, pectoralis major (lower)

Execution

Do a handstand against a wall, keeping your body straight. Bend your elbows to lower your head to the floor and then push up again.

Breathe in at the beginning of the movement and out as you push back up.



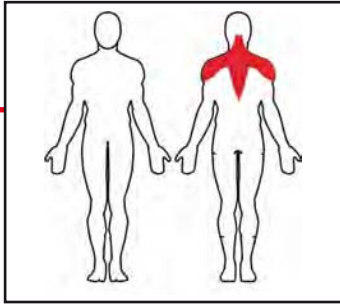
Comments

This is an exercise strictly for the advanced athlete, and even then it should be done only occasionally. Remember that exercising with the head below the level of the heart is not recommended, as explained in Chest, Ex. 3 (Decline Bench Press). Also, it does not provide any additional benefits compared to conventional exercises, and you can therefore completely do without it.



Common mistakes: doing this exercise on a regular basis; long sets; and poor technique

BENT-OVER FRONT RAISE



Muscles involved

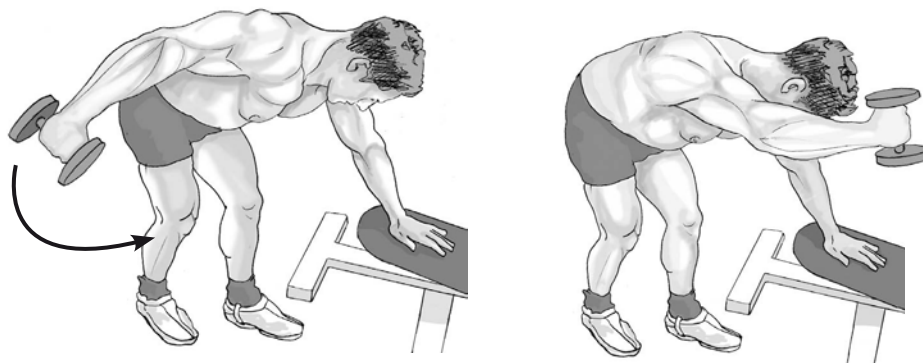
MAIN MUSCLES: deltoid (rear), trapezius

SECONDARY MUSCLES: deltoid (middle), rhomboids, infraspinatus, (lower back and along spine)

ANTAGONISTS: deltoid (rear), pectoralis major, latissimus dorsi

Execution

Position yourself in the same way as for the Bent-over Dumbbell Row (Back, Ex. 4) resting one hand and knee on a flat bench to support your body. Grasp the dumbbell in a neutral grip with your other hand. Your other foot should be placed on the floor slightly back from your body (depending on the height of the bench) and you should keep the extended leg bent a little at the knee. Bend forward from the waist so that your torso is horizontal and in line. Lift your arm forward from the shoulder to the level of your torso, keeping your elbow in position. Breathe in as you raise the weight and out as you lower it.



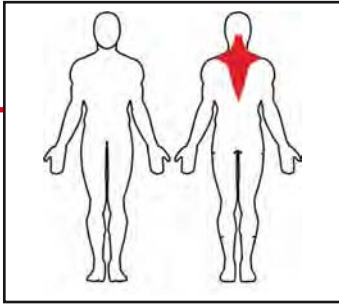
Comments

This movement is the opposite of the Straight-arm Extension (Ex. 8.3). It is sometimes believed (incorrectly) that this is an exercise for the front part of the shoulder, but the horizontal position of the torso and the passive 90° angle of the arm cause this part of the deltoid to do virtually no work. In fact, it is the middle and rear of the muscle that work the hardest.



Common mistakes: swinging the arm; lowering the weight in an uncontrolled movement; and using the torso to help lift

SHOULDER DIP



Muscles involved

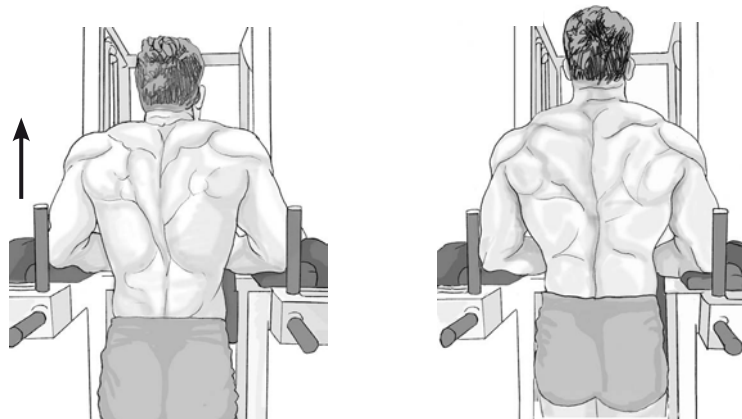
MAIN MUSCLES: pectoralis minor, trapezius (lower)

SECONDARY MUSCLES: rhomboids

ANTAGONISTS: trapezius (upper), levator scapulae

Execution

Rest your forearms and elbows on parallel dip bars and allow your body to hang free. Now raise your body by pushing straight down with your shoulders, without using your elbows. Breathe in as you lower your body and out as you raise it.



Comments

This is an unusual exercise, which works the lower part of the trapezius and the pectoralis minor, two less conspicuous muscles that are often ignored. It is easy and recommended. Be sure to complete the entire movement in a slow, controlled manner (despite the fact that it is short). Advanced athletes can hang a weight from a belt or hold a dumbbell between their feet.

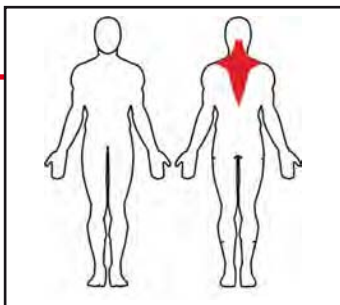


Common mistakes: doing the exercise too fast; short or easy sets; and not completing the full range of movement



The structure of fibers and insertions in the trapezius provides a good example of how a muscle can be responsible for one movement (e.g., raising the shoulder blades) as well as its opposite (lowering the shoulder blades). Because the upper part of the trapezius is more noticeable, the middle and lower portions are often ignored.

LYING NECK EXTENSION



Muscles involved

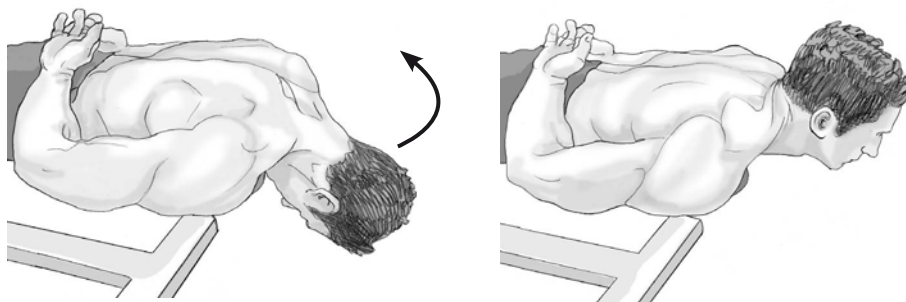
MAIN MUSCLES: trapezius (neck area), semispinalis, splenius muscles

SECONDARY MUSCLES: interspinales, spinalis cervicis, erector muscles, rectus capitis posterior major and minor, multifidus, obliquus capitis superior and inferior, levator scapulae, semispinalis capitis (complexus), etc.

ANTAGONISTS: sternocleidomastoid, scalenes (anterior, middle, posterior), longus capitis, longus colli, rectus capitis anterior

Execution

Lie with your chest and stomach on a flat bench, your breastbone resting on the edge and your head over the edge. You can hug the bench to keep your balance or put your hands behind your back. Raise your head as if looking up and slowly lower it again in a controlled movement until you are looking underneath the bench. Once you are familiar with the movement, you can do this exercise with your eyes closed. Breathe naturally.



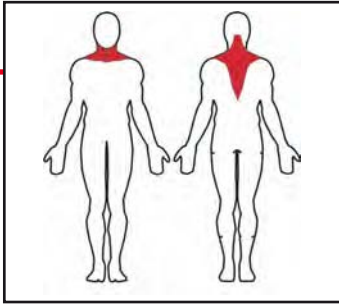
Comments

Highly trained athletes can place a weight at the base of the head to increase the resistance or use elastic belts attached to weights. This is not recommended, however, because the neck is very delicate and must be worked with care. A variant is to raise and lower the head in a linear movement by pointing your chin down toward the floor, without flexing or extending the neck. The primary and secondary muscles listed above may change depending upon how far you extend and lift the head.



Common mistakes: using too much weight and too fast or long a movement (risk of injury to the vertebrae and small muscles)

LYING LATERAL NECK FLEXION



Muscles involved

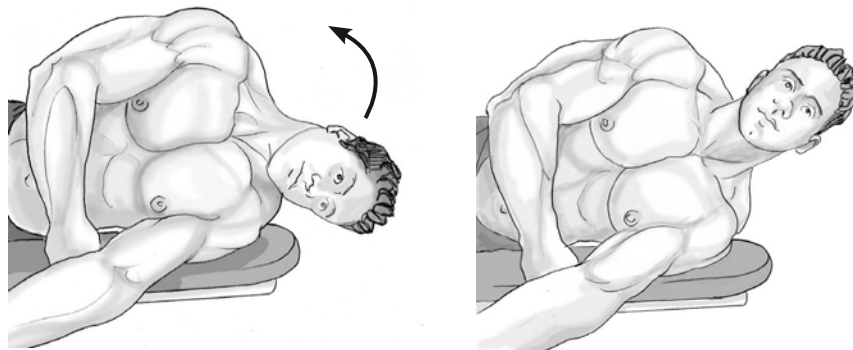
MAIN MUSCLES: those used for flexing and extending one side of the neck

SECONDARY MUSCLES: deep rear neck muscles and muscles along the spinal column (one side)

ANTAGONISTS: the same muscles on the opposite side of the neck

Execution

Lie on your side on a flat bench supported by your shoulder. Let your head drop gently onto your shoulder and then lift it back up (maximum range of motion: 90°). It may be more comfortable to do this with your eyes closed. Breathe naturally.



Comments

Fix your gaze on a point in front of you. As in other neck exercises, highly trained athletes can place a disc on the side of the head or use elastic belts to increase the resistance. This should be done with caution, however, bearing in mind that the neck is very delicate.

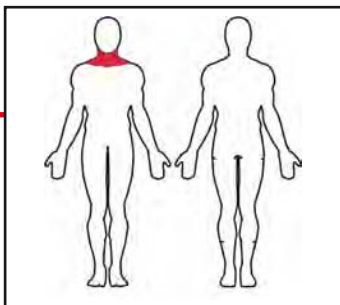


Common mistakes: using too much weight and doing the movement too fast



It is usually more comfortable to keep your eyes closed when doing neck exercises like those described here. This is an exception in muscle training, a discipline in which you will normally want to have your eyes open to maintain balance and so that you can observe your own movements.

LYING NECK FLEXION



Muscles involved

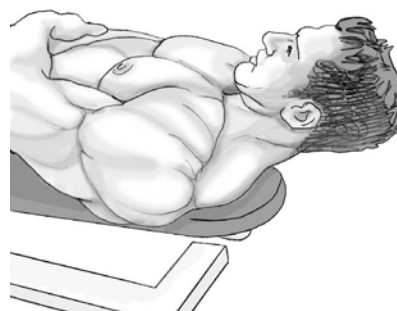
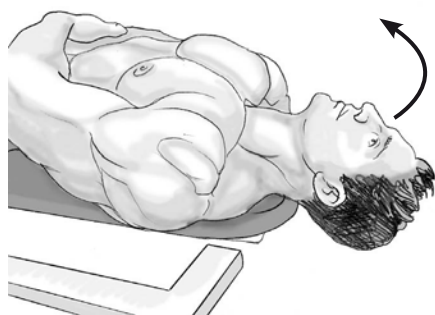
MAIN MUSCLES: sternocleidomastoid, scalenes (anterior, middle, posterior and minimus, if present)

SECONDARY MUSCLES: longus capitis, longus colli, rectus capitis anterior, mylohyoid, thyrohyoid, sternocleidomastoid, sternothyroid, omohyoid

ANTAGONISTS: trapezius (neck area), semispinalis, splenius muscles, interspinales, spinalis cervicis, erector muscles, rectus capitis posterior major and minor, multifidus, obliquus capitis superior and inferior, levator scapulae, semispinalis capitis (complexus), etc.

Execution

Lie face up on a flat bench with your head over the edge. If you want, hold on to the sides of the bench to keep your balance. Flex the head and neck, bringing them up and forward so that you are looking at your toes. Lower your head back slightly farther than the horizontal position. You can keep your eyes closed. Breathe naturally, but preferably inhaling as you lower your head.



Comments

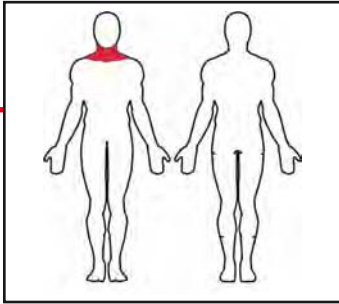
Highly trained athletes can balance a weight on the forehead or use an elastic belt to increase the resistance, but once again this should be done with caution as the neck is delicate and prone to injury. Instead of flexing the neck, you can also lift your head straight up and down.

The primary and secondary muscles listed above may change depending on how far you flex and/or lift the head.



Common mistakes: using too much weight; doing the exercise too fast; and too long a range of movement

LYING NECK ROTATION



Muscles involved

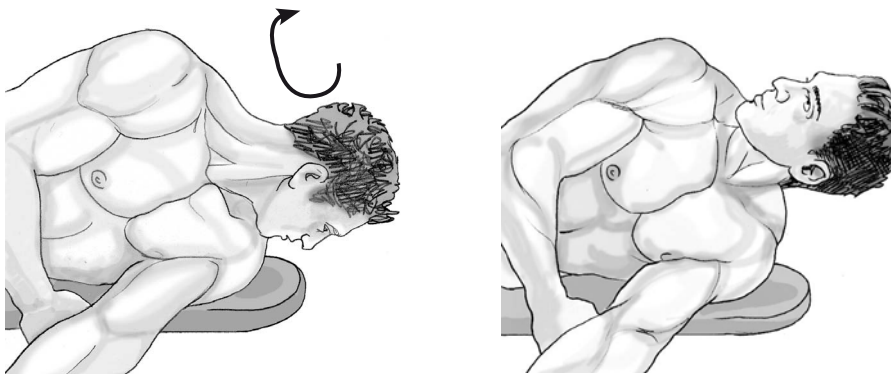
MAIN MUSCLES: splenius muscles (side turned), sternocleidomastoid (opposite side)

SECONDARY MUSCLES: scalenes, levator scapulae, rectus capitis posterior major, obliquus capitis inferior, obliquus capitis superior (opposite side), etc.

ANTAGONISTS: the same muscles on the opposite side of the neck

Execution

Lie on your side on a flat bench supported by your shoulder. Look to one side (toward the floor) and then turn your head on its axis to look in the opposite direction (toward the ceiling). Maximum range of motion: around 170°. It may be more comfortable to do the exercise with your eyes closed. Breathe naturally.

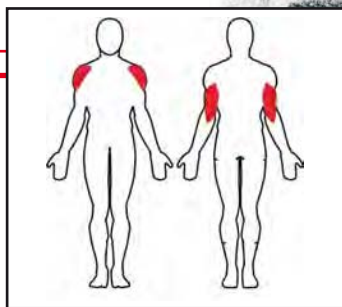
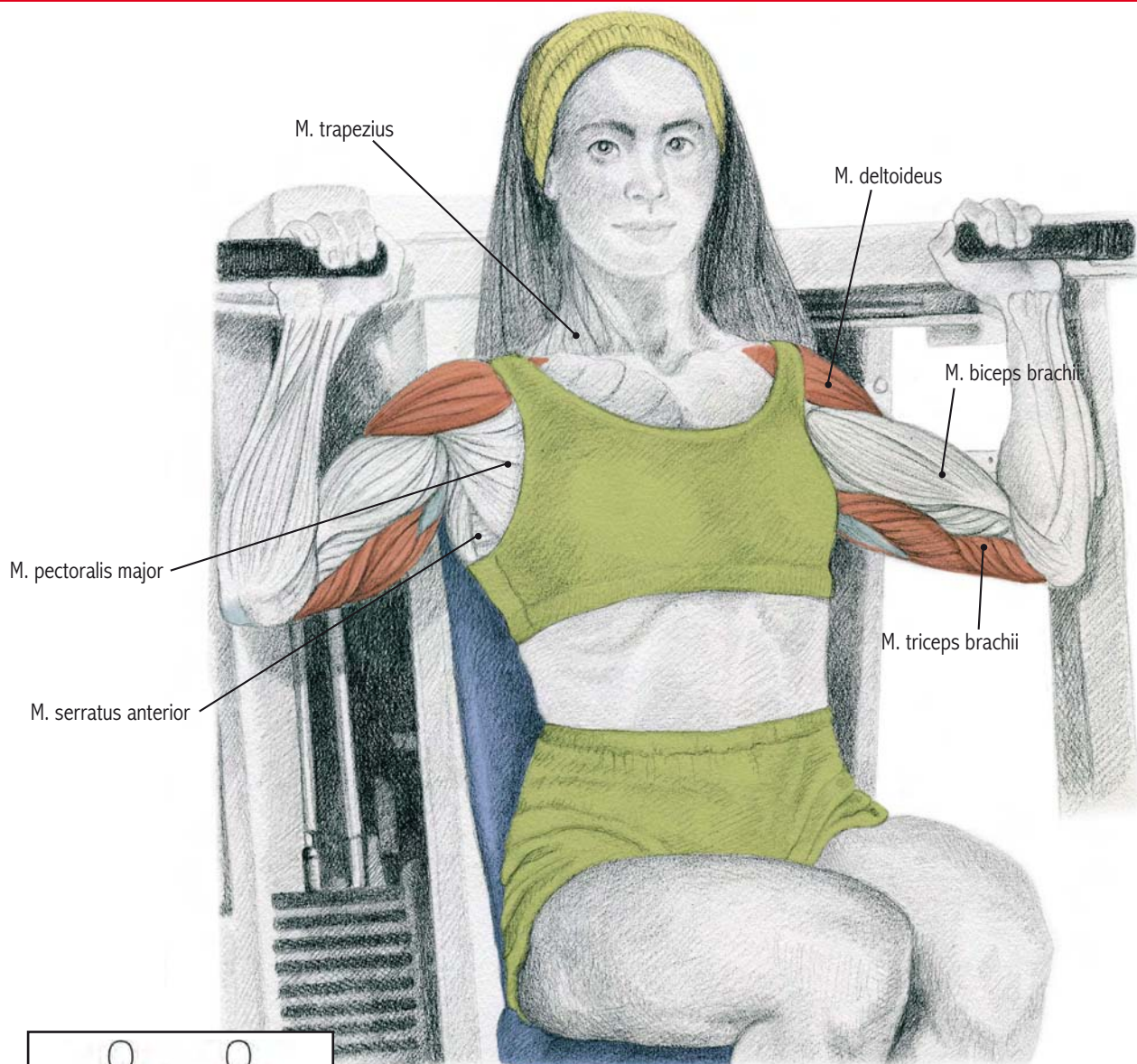


Comments

As a variant, you can do the same movement lying face down or face up (looking at the floor or at the ceiling). The exercise is easier if you lie on your back. Never use weight. If you are only trying to improve mobility, you can do this exercise seated, looking from side to side as if you were shaking your head.



Common mistakes: adding weight; doing the movement too fast; and tilting the head as you turn it



Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: deltoid (front, middle), triceps (except long head), supraspinatus

SECONDARY MUSCLES: deltoid (rear), pectoralis major (upper), trapezius (upper), biceps (long head), serratus anterior, triceps (long head)

ANTAGONISTS: latissimus dorsi, biceps, pectoralis major (lower)

VARIATIONS

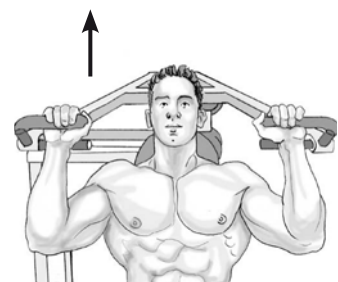
21.2 ... FRONT

MUSCLES USED

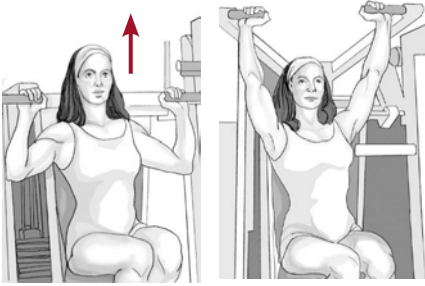
deltoid (front, middle), triceps, coracobrachialis, supraspinatus, pectoralis major (upper), biceps (long and short head)

TECHNIQUE

Use the basic position or incline the bench a little more. The movement is the same, but your elbows will come down in front of your body. The aim is to intensify the work done by the front part of the deltoid and the upper part of the pectoral muscle (especially in the first part of the lift).



Execution



Sit on the machine bench, set vertically or at a slight incline, and grasp the grips overhand (palms up with your knuckles back) and your hands slightly more than shoulder-width apart. Lower the weight until your hands are at head height and raise it until your arms are almost fully extended. Your arms should be parallel to your body, moving toward your sides as you lower the weight. Breathe in as you lower the barbell and exhale as you complete the lift.

Comments

This is the same as the Military Press and Dumbbell Shoulder Press (Ex. 1 and 2), and like those exercises you should try to concentrate on using the deltoid and not the triceps, although this muscle will inevitably have some work to do (the long head less so). Remember that the shoulder joint is relatively delicate and prone to injury. The order in which the muscles are involved in the movement is the front deltoid, followed by the side and then the rear portions of the muscle.

If the machine is equipped with independent levers, you can do the exercise in the same way as the Alternating Dumbbell Shoulder Press (Ex. 2.4).



Common mistakes: starting the exercise from the lower position due to a poorly designed machine; arching the lower back; adjusting the machine improperly (especially the seat back and height); locking the elbows at the top of the lift; rotating the arm inward as you lower the weights (moving your elbows backwards)



The rotator cuff is formed by the subscapularis, supraspinatus, infraspinatus and teres minor muscles, which play a key role as “active” ligaments, anchoring the shoulder and preventing it from being dislocated.

21.3 ... SEATED CABLE PRESS

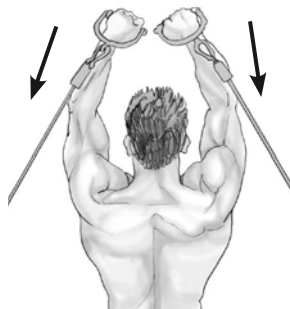
MUSCLES USED

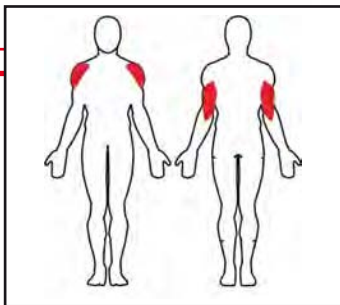
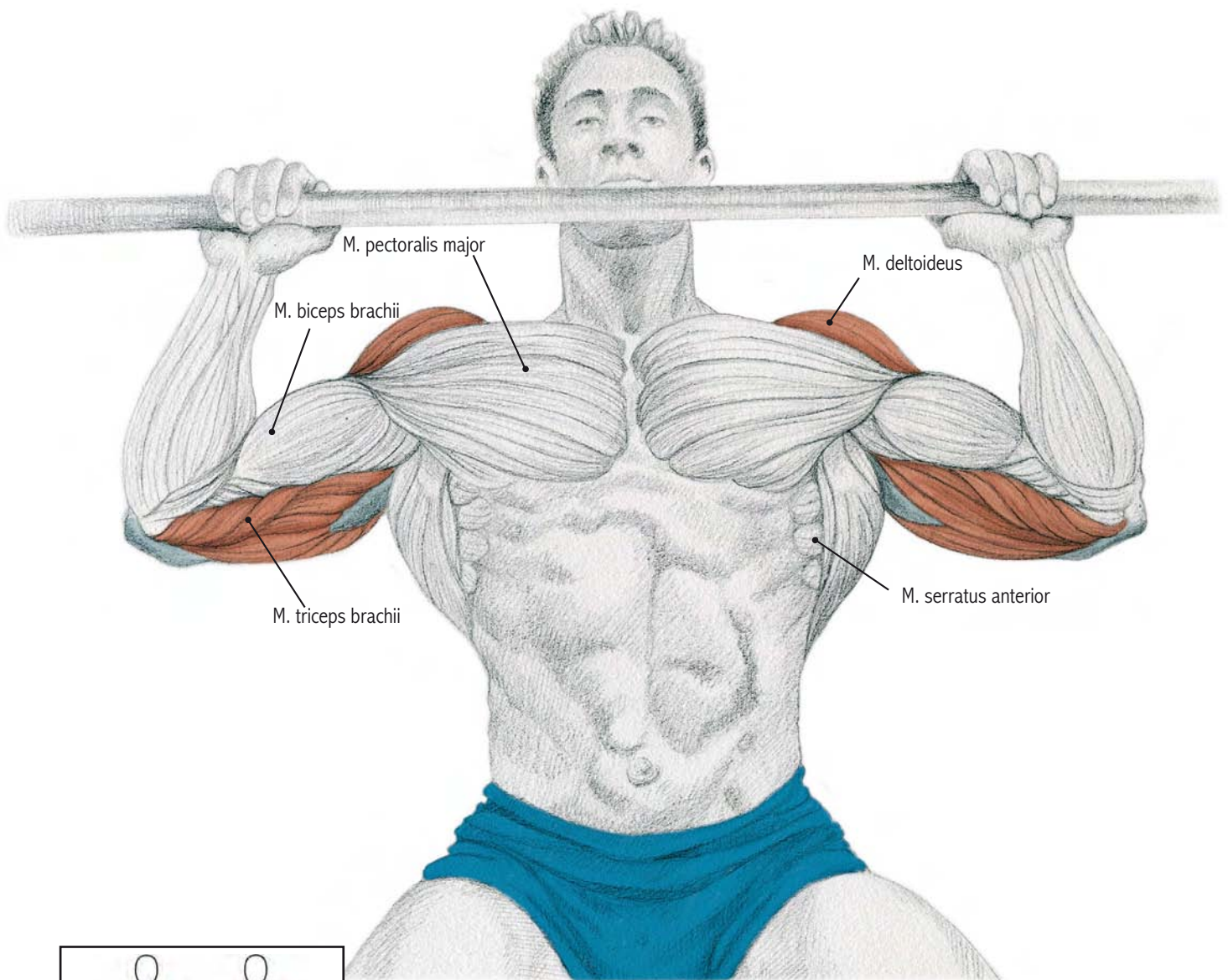
deltoid, triceps, supraspinatus

TECHNIQUE

Place a bench with a vertical back between the pulleys of two low cables, and hold the grips in the neutral position (palms facing) on either side of your head as if they were dumbbells. Pull the cables up with your arms as in the classic Press exercise.

This exercise is rarely done, despite the variety it provides for press-type exercises. Although somewhat less weight is used, in return it provides a very different kind of constant resistance, because the angle is diagonal.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: deltoid (front, middle), triceps (except long head), supraspinatus

SECONDARY MUSCLES: deltoid (rear), pectoralis major (upper), trapezius (upper), biceps (long head), serratus anterior, triceps (long head)

ANTAGONISTS: latissimus dorsi, biceps, pectoralis major (lower)

VARIATIONS

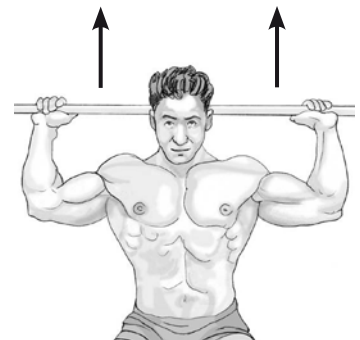
22.2 ... BEHIND-THE-NECK

MUSCLES USED

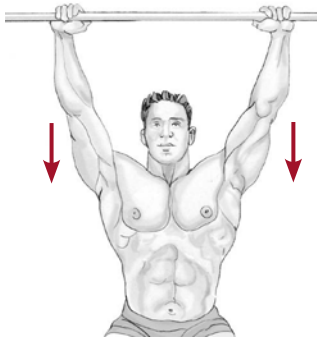
deltoid, triceps, supraspinatus

TECHNIQUE

This is almost exactly the same as the Military Press, except that you lower the bar behind your head rather than in front. This means you must set the bench vertically and bend your head slightly forward. Contrary to popular belief, this is not a specific exercise for the rear part of the shoulder. (The arm movement is in fact the same.) It works all three heads (front, middle and rear) very intensively, requiring the greatest effort from the front and middle parts of the muscle. It is trickier than the Front Press and you should therefore use less weight and shorten the downward movement. As in the barbell variant, you need to be careful not to pull your elbows back as you lower the weight.



Execution



Sit on the bench set at a slight incline under the Smith machine bar. Grasp the bar in an overhand grip (knuckles facing back) with your hands slightly more than shoulder-width apart. Lower the weight until your hands are at head height and raise it until your arms are almost fully extended. Your elbows should be parallel to your body, moving toward your sides as you lower the weight. If your head gets in the way as you lower the bar, you can turn it to one side. Breathe in as you lower the barbell and out as you complete the lift.

Comments

At first glance, this exercise may appear to be identical to the Machine Shoulder Press (Ex. 21), but it has certain advantages. First, you can start the exercise from above. You can also choose the width of your grip. And if you are training alone, all you have to do is twist the bar to lock it at any height. Finally, the movement is always vertical. On other machines, it is angled slightly.

The feeling of balance provided by the Smith machine in this and other exercises may encourage you to lock your elbows at the top of the lift with your arms fully extended. Never allow yourself to do this.



Common mistakes: arching the lower back, seat back set improperly, using too much weight (you can lift a lot with this machine) and locking the arms at the top of the lift

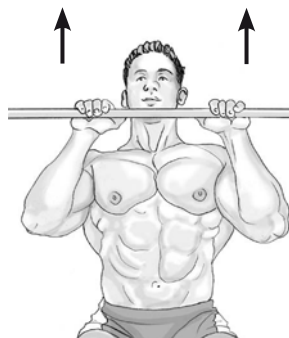
22.3 ...NARROW GRIP WITH ELBOWS FORWARD

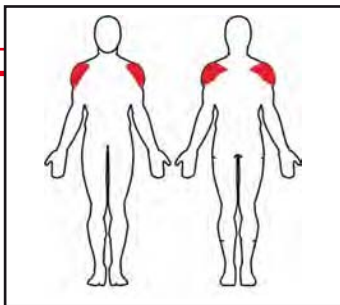
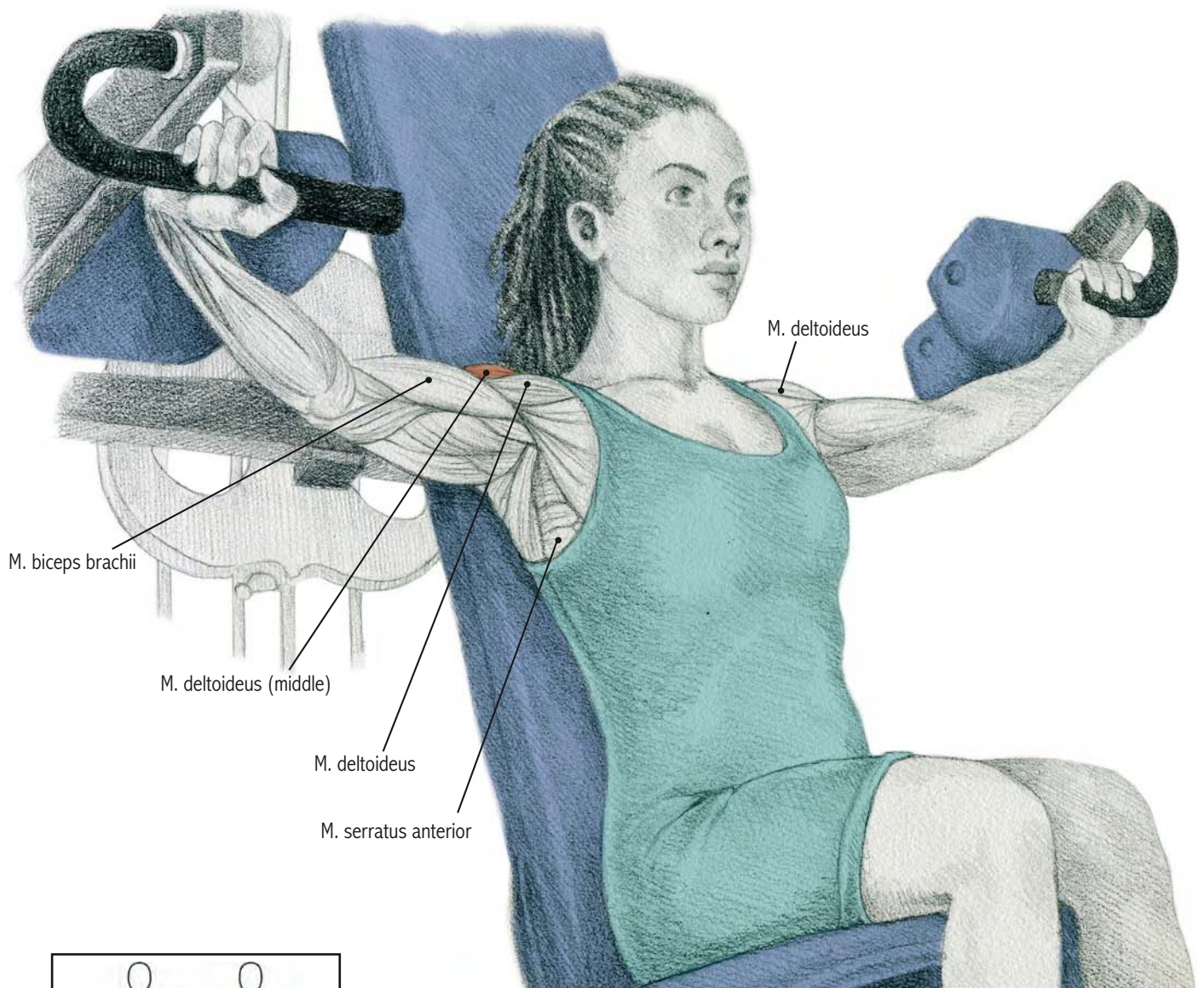
MUSCLES USED

deltoid (front, middle), triceps, coracobrachialis, supraspinatus, pectoralis major (upper), biceps

TECHNIQUE

Sit in the same position as for the Military Press, but hold the bar with a narrower grip. Your elbows should move in front of your body at all times. This shifts more work to the front of the shoulder and the upper part of the pectoral muscle. It is the machine equivalent of the Front Dumbbell Press (Ex. 3). In this variant, the tension in the triceps may be more uncomfortable.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: deltoid (middle), supraspinatus

SECONDARY MUSCLES: deltoid (front and rear), trapezius and serratus anterior (especially from 90 to 150°), biceps (long head), subscapularis

ANTAGONISTS: latissimus dorsi, pectoralis major (lower), teres major and minor, triceps (long head), biceps

VARIATIONS

23.2 ... ONE-ARM

MUSCLES USED

deltoid, supraspinatus

TECHNIQUE

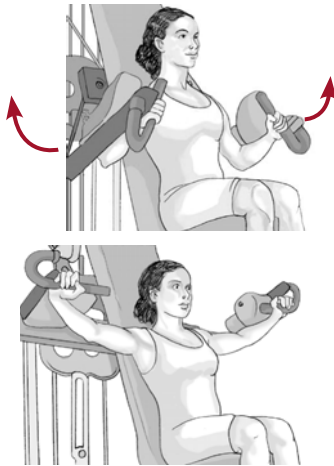
The technique is the same as the two-arm basic exercise, but raising only one arm for the entire set or alternating arms.

There is no change in the muscles involved. However, you should be careful to hold your spine and the rest of your torso steady in position, as in all one-arm exercises.

There are no special advantages to be gained from this variant compared to the two-arm version. The design of some machines does not allow you to work only one side. If your machine does, you can pause at the top of the raise (see Ex. 2.4, Alternating Seated Dumbbell Shoulder Press with isometric pause). This provides extra intensity.



Execution



Sit on the bench and grasp the grips on either side with your elbows bent (depending on the design of the machine). Push with your elbows to raise your arms straight out to the side until they are parallel to the floor. Keep your elbows and the rest of your body in position. Lower the weights in a controlled movement. Inhale as you begin the raise and exhale at the end of the downward movement.

Comments

Like the Dumbbell Lateral Raise (Ex. 4), this is a very effective exercise for training the side of the deltoid and broadening your shoulders. There is no risk in raising your arms a little above horizontal, provided that you are not using too much weight. This engages the trapezius, as the deltoid lifts the arm away from the body to only about 90°. The advantage compared to dumbbells is that the machine ensures good posture and a smooth movement. It also reduces the strain on your elbows and wrists. Any disadvantages will be due to poor design of the machine.

This machine is very useful and is recommended. Unfortunately, it is not at all versatile and for this reason few gyms have it.



Common mistakes: as the machine guides the movement, the most common errors are using too much weight and doing too short (or long) a movement



We have stressed above that you should not bend your elbow too much when doing Lateral Raise exercises with free weights (see Ex. 4), which may lead the reader to see some machines as poorly designed because they require the elbow to be bent. This is not so, because on machines using this design, the point where force is applied is usually over the elbow and not the hand (as is the case in the free weight exercise).

23.3 ... INCLINE

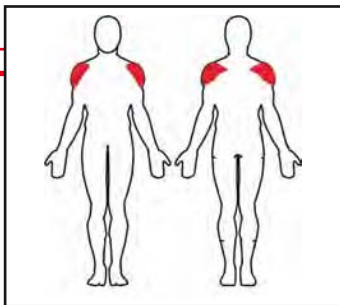
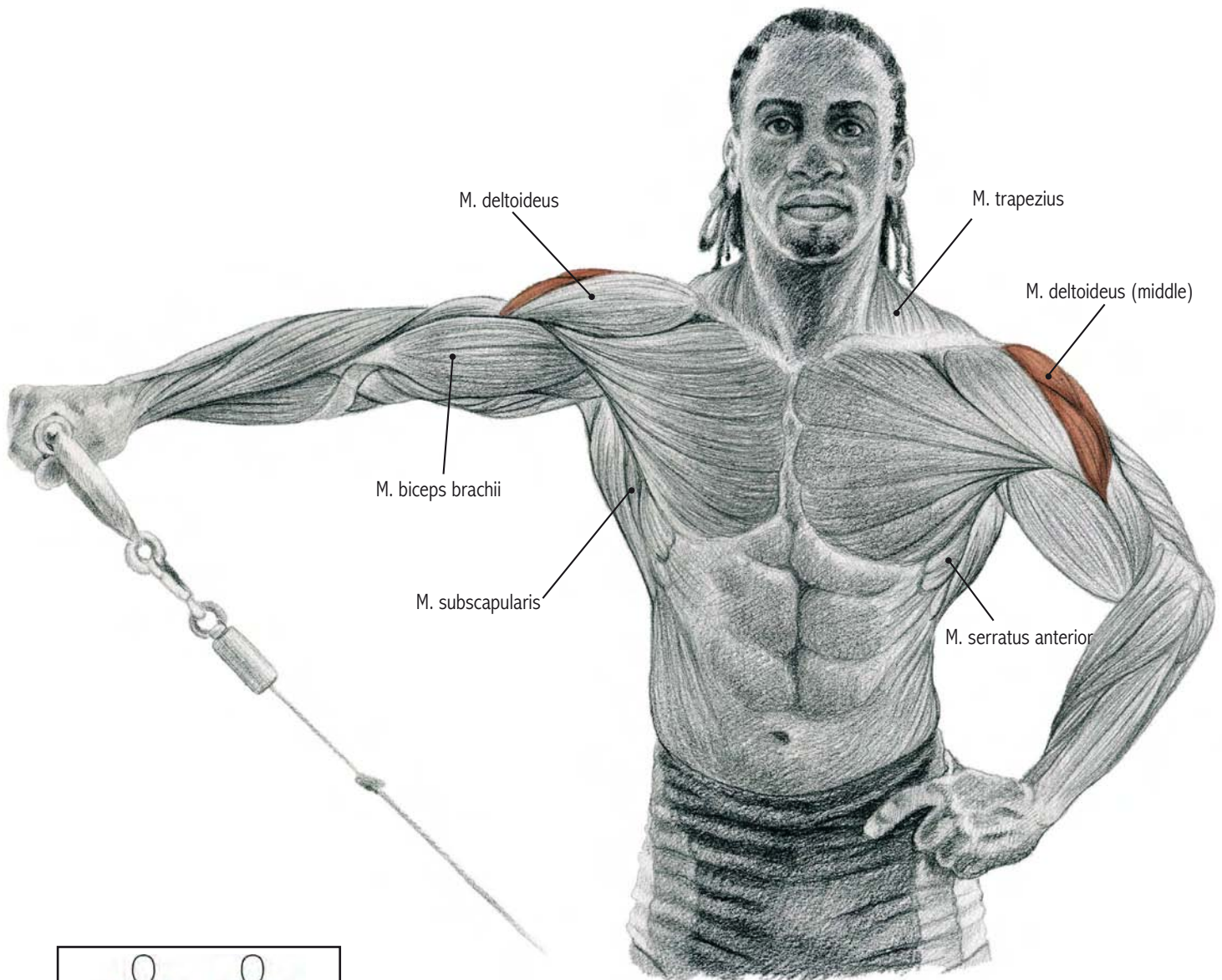
MUSCLES USED

deltoid, supraspinatus

TECHNIQUE

This variant is similar to the basic exercise, but with your body tilted farther back. (Some machines incorporate this position in their design, while others allow you to set the angle of the seat.) This shifts work onto the front part of the deltoid, although the side is still involved. This variant is not widely used and does not offer any major advantages over the standard exercise.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: deltoid (middle), supraspinatus

SECONDARY MUSCLES: deltoid (front and rear), trapezius and serratus anterior (especially from 90 to 150°), biceps (long head), subscapularis

ANTAGONISTS: latissimus dorsi, pectoralis major (lower), teres major and minor, triceps (long head), biceps

VARIATIONS

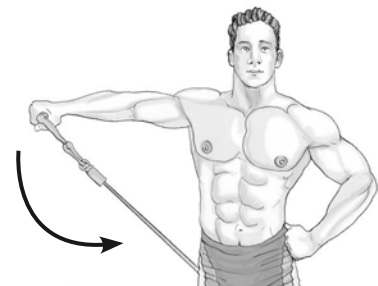
24.2 ... BEHIND-THE-BACK

MUSCLES USED

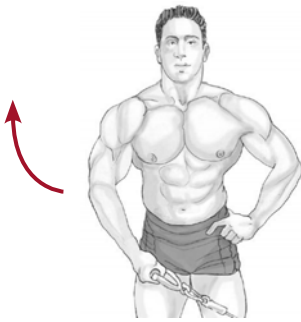
deltoid, supraspinatus

TECHNIQUE

Do the exercise in exactly the same way, but with the cable behind your body. The main difference is greater concentration on the area worked (sometimes), because you cannot let your hand drift forward as you raise the weight. (Your legs would get in the way of the cable.)



Execution



Stand with your side to the low cable, legs apart and slightly bent to help you maintain position. Grasp the grip with the hand on the opposite side of your body to the cable, elbow slightly bent and the cable running diagonally in front of your thighs. Raise your arm straight out to the side, keeping your elbow and the rest of your body in position. Your elbow should come up to the same level as your hand and shoulder. The whole exercise must be performed in a controlled movement to avoid jerking the weight. Inhale as you begin the raise and exhale at the end of the downward movement.

Comments

This is the machine equivalent to the Dumbbell Lateral Raise (Ex. 5), but the cable allows you to keep the resistance constant (if your technique is good). It is recommended for the side portion of the deltoid.



Common mistakes: rocking the body; raising the hand but not the elbow, or vice versa; too short or too long a movement with too much weight and tugging sharply with your arm to jerk the weight upward



Pain: muscle fatigue or injury?

You need to be able to distinguish between the discomfort caused by muscle fatigue (delayed muscle pain after training) and the symptoms of injury. It is most likely muscle fatigue if...

1. You feel the discomfort on both the right and left sides of your body. You are unlikely to injure both of your arms at the same time.
2. The pain appears within 24 to 48 hours of training.
3. It disappears in a few days.
4. You feel pain around the center of the muscle.
5. Discomfort is not accompanied by any bruising, swelling, or loss of movement.
6. You feel discomfort after changing your routine in some way (e.g., different exercises, change in intensity, etc.)

These are rules of thumb, of course, and you should not trust blindly in them. If you feel any pain, you should rest the area affected. If it does not go away, visit your doctor. As a final point, the idea that eating sugar or other sweets will get rid of sore muscles is an old wives' tale. The discomfort will gradually fade regardless of what you eat.

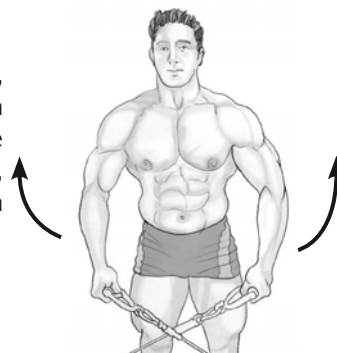
24.3 ... TWO-ARM CROSSOVER

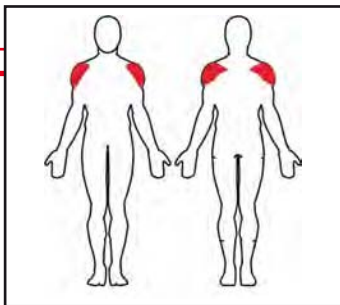
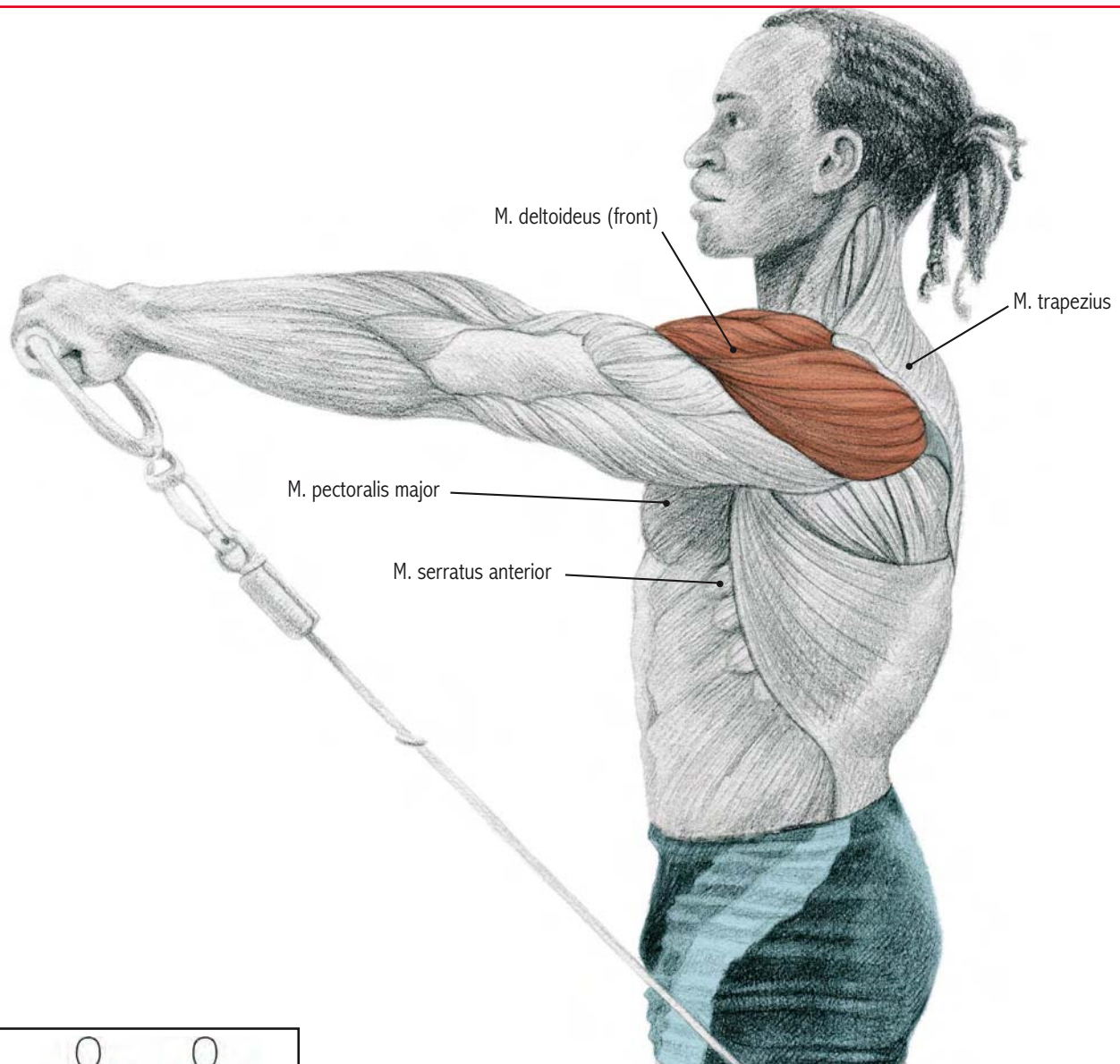
MUSCLES USED

deltoid, supraspinatus

TECHNIQUE

The position and movement are the same as the basic exercise, but you will need to stand between two cables, gripping each with the opposite hand. The cables will cross as you raise the weights. This variant is no better than the one-arm exercise, because crossing the cables tends to prevent optimum movement.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: deltoid (front), coracobrachialis

SECONDARY MUSCLES: pectoralis major (upper), deltoid (middle and rear), biceps, serratus anterior, trapezius (middle and upper)

ANTAGONISTS: latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, pectoralis major (lower), triceps

VARIATIONS

25.2 ... TWO-ARM WITH ROPE / BAR

MUSCLES USED

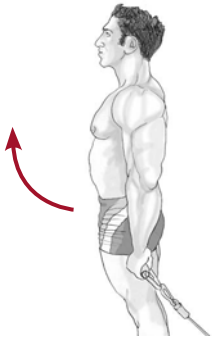
deltoid (front), coracobrachialis, pectoralis major (upper)

TECHNIQUE

The technique is the same as the basic exercise, but you will be holding a rope or bar with both hands and the cable will run between your legs. Keep your elbows slightly bent. Using two hands will save you a little time, but it puts a lot of strain on the lower back. It is not recommended for people with any problems in that area.



Execution



Stand with your back to a low cable pulley, feet slightly apart. Hold your torso steady and grasp the grip overhand (palm to the floor), placing it beside your thigh. Lift your arm straight in an arc to head height. Keep your elbow in position throughout the movement. Breathe in at the beginning of the movement (or before if you are working out with a heavy load) and out as you lower the weight.

Comments

This exercise can also be done with two arms (using a bar or rope), but using only one has the advantage of reducing the strain on your back. As is usually the case with cable exercises, the main difference from dumbbells or free weights in general is that you will achieve constant resistance throughout the movement. You can do this exercise using a rope handle, with the position of the hand neutral during the raise, which some people find helps isolate the front of the deltoid. In this case, you should never fully extend your elbow.



Common mistakes: rocking your body forward to help you lift a heavy weight and jerking on the cable, removing the resistance



Normal body temperature is approximately 98.6°F (37°C), but it will tend to rise when you exercise. Sweat is the body's natural cooling mechanism, so you should wear light, breathable fabrics to maintain your internal temperature balance. Body-hugging garments made of elasticized, synthetic fibers are not usually the best for weight training. High ambient temperatures and humidity hinder the body's own temperature-regulation mechanisms. Hydration helps, so drink plenty of water.

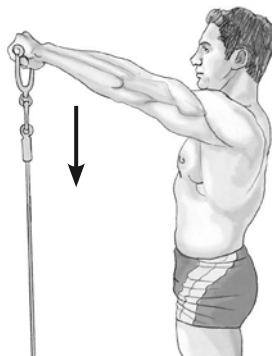
25.3 ... FRONT-FACING

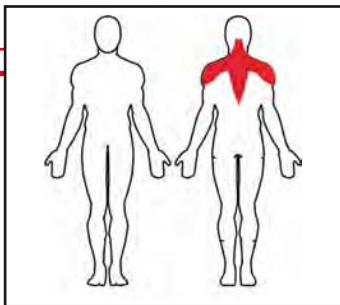
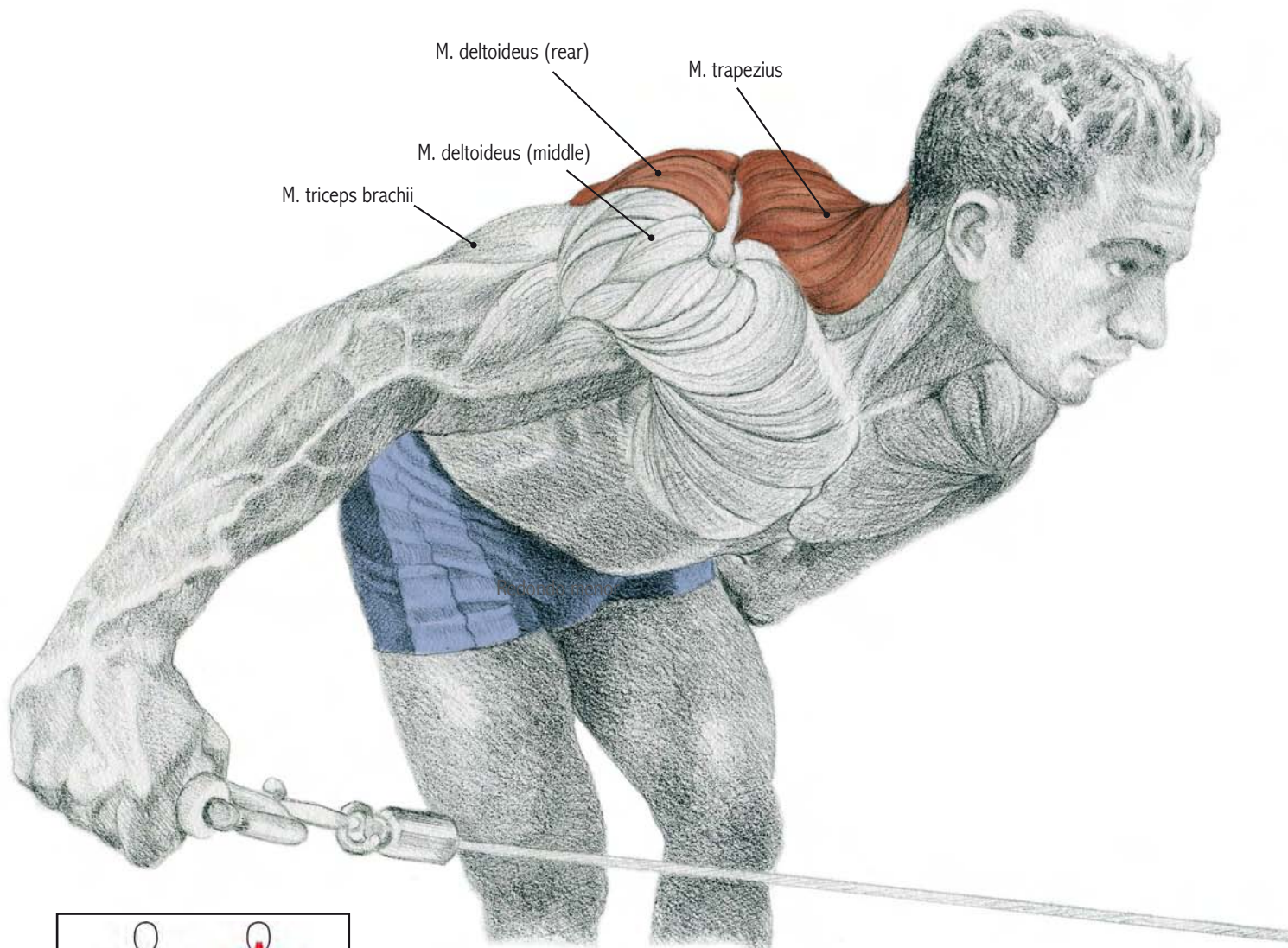
MUSCLES USED

deltoid (front), coracobrachialis, pectoralis major (upper)

TECHNIQUE

This is the same as the basic exercise. As the name indicates, however, you need to stand facing the cable pulley. The difference in position is not all that great, but it eliminates resistance during the first couple of inches (although this depends on the length of the cable).





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: deltoid (rear), trapezius

SECONDARY MUSCLES: deltoid (middle), latissimus dorsi, triceps, teres major and minor, rhomboids

ANTAGONISTS: deltoid (front), pectoral muscles, biceps

VARIATIONS

26.2 ... STRAIGHT-ARM EXTENSION

MUSCLES USED

deltoid (rear), latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, triceps

TECHNIQUE

The position is similar to the equivalent dumbbell exercise (Ex. 8.3). Face the cable pulley and step back with the foot on the side worked. Pull backwards on the grip, keeping your arm straight and close to your torso. The lats do a lot of the work, as when using dumbbells. The movement can also be done with two arms using a rope or bar.



Execution



Stand with your side to the cable, feet apart and knees slightly bent. Bend your upper body forward until it is almost horizontal. Rest the hand nearest the cable on your knee and hold the grip in front of your body with the other. Raise your arm to the side up to the height of your torso, keeping your elbow in position. It is important to keep your elbow far enough from your body to avoid using the lats too much. Breathe in as you begin the raise and out as you lower the weight.

Comments

This is the machine equivalent of the Dumbbell Rear Lateral Raise (Ex. 7), with the difference that the cable provides more constant resistance if you are careful to ensure a smooth (isokinetic) movement. Let us stress once again that the rear part of the deltoid is usually undertrained and needs special attention. As you raise the weight, you will also engage the trapezius and rhomboids, drawing the shoulder blades together. The two-arm variant is awkward.



Common mistakes: bending the elbow to get help from the triceps, jerking the weight to reach the end of the raise and bringing your arm too close to your torso to engage the lats

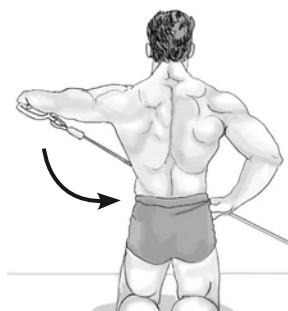
26.3 ... KNEELING

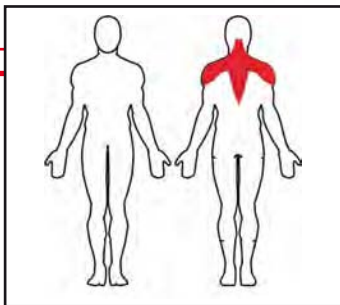
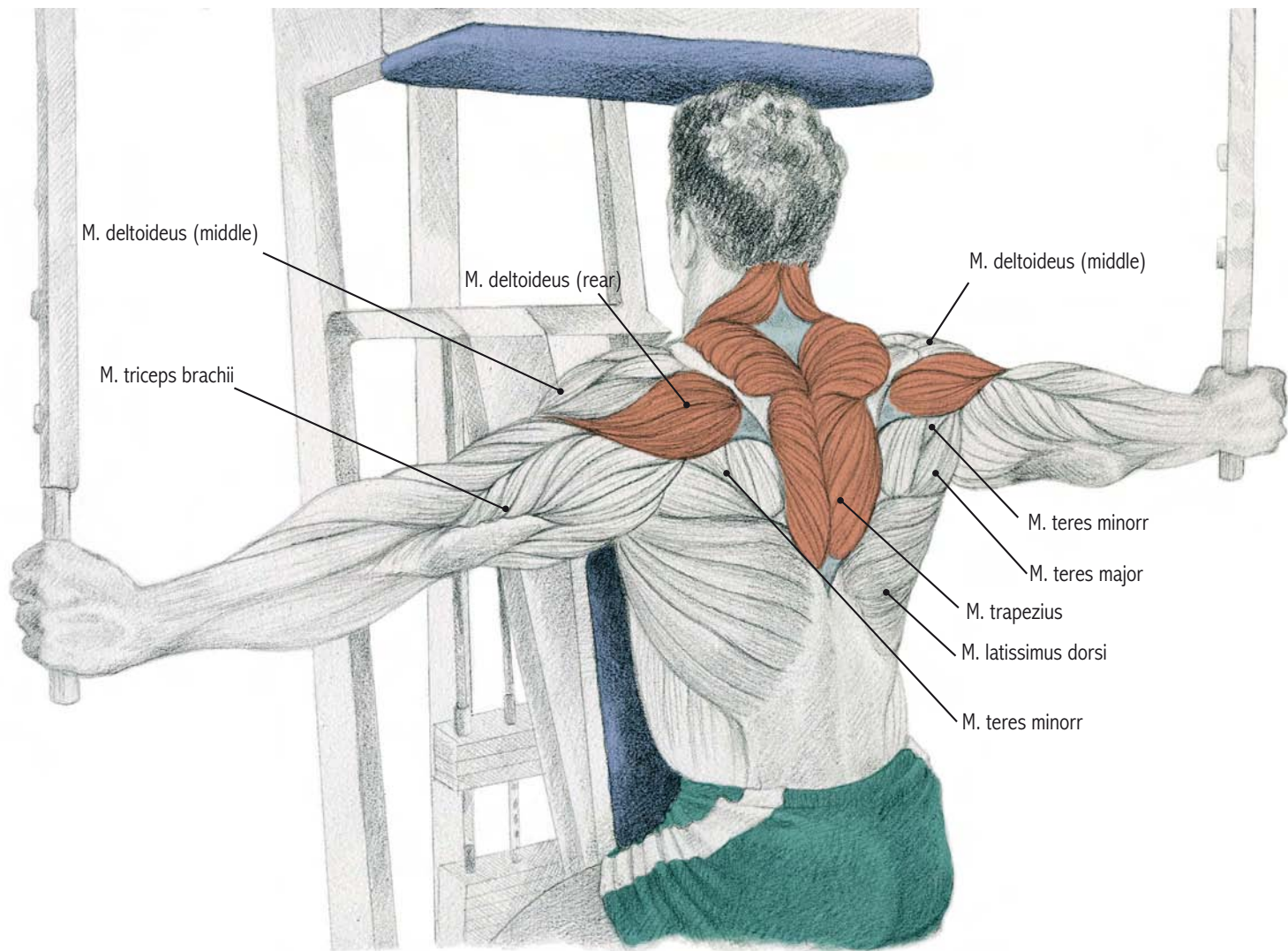
MUSCLES USED

deltoid (rear), trapezius

TECHNIQUE

The only difference from the basic exercise is that you will be kneeling and you may therefore need to bend your elbow more because the cable is closer to the floor. If you want, this will allow you to rotate your shoulder blade a little more, engaging other muscles, such as the trapezius, rhomboids, etc.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: deltoid (rear), trapezius

SECONDARY MUSCLES: deltoid (middle), rhomboids, latissimus dorsi, teres major and minor, triceps

ANTAGONISTS: deltoid (front), pectoral muscles, biceps

VARIATIONS

27.2 ...PEC DECK

MUSCLES USED

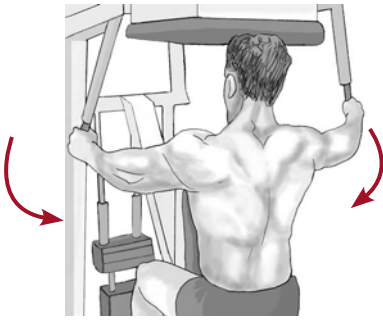
rhomboids, deltoid (rear), trapezius

TECHNIQUE

This is similar to the basic exercise, but using a pec deck machine. Sit backwards on the machine with your chest resting against the seat back and your arms at a 90° angle to your body. Depending on the design of the machine, you may be able to rest your elbows against the pads designed to be used for the forearms in the chest exercise. Contract your rear deltoid (although this will always be a partial movement). You do not need to use the pec deck if your gym has a purpose-designed machine for the rear deltoid. However, it should not be ignored if you want to work the rhomboids and neighboring muscles involved in short movements and the final part of drawing your shoulder blades together (see the next variant, Ex. 27.3).



Execution



Sit with your chest against the pad on the machine. Grasp the grips in front of you, keeping your elbows slightly bent and away from your torso so that your arms are horizontal to the floor. Open your arms backwards in a movement like a reverse hug. Do not change the angle of your elbows. Breathe in as you open your arms and out as you close them, but without expelling all of the air.

Comments

This is an excellent exercise for the rear part of the shoulder and the machine allows you to work with considerable weight without using your torso to cheat, as is often the case in the equivalent free weight exercise (Ex. 7). It is also easier on your back, which does not have to hold you in the standing position. In addition, it is used to correct posture, because it strengthens back muscles like the rhomboids. The cable variant is the same, but it has the added difficulty of requiring you to lock your elbows. If the front pad makes it hard to breathe, position your feet so that you can push with your legs to alleviate the pressure on your chest.



Common mistakes: incomplete movement and doing the exercise too fast/jerking on the weights



Alcohol, tobacco, and recreational drugs will hold back your training and are bad for your health.

27.3 ... INVERTED PEC DECK

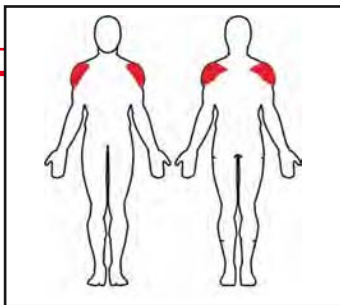
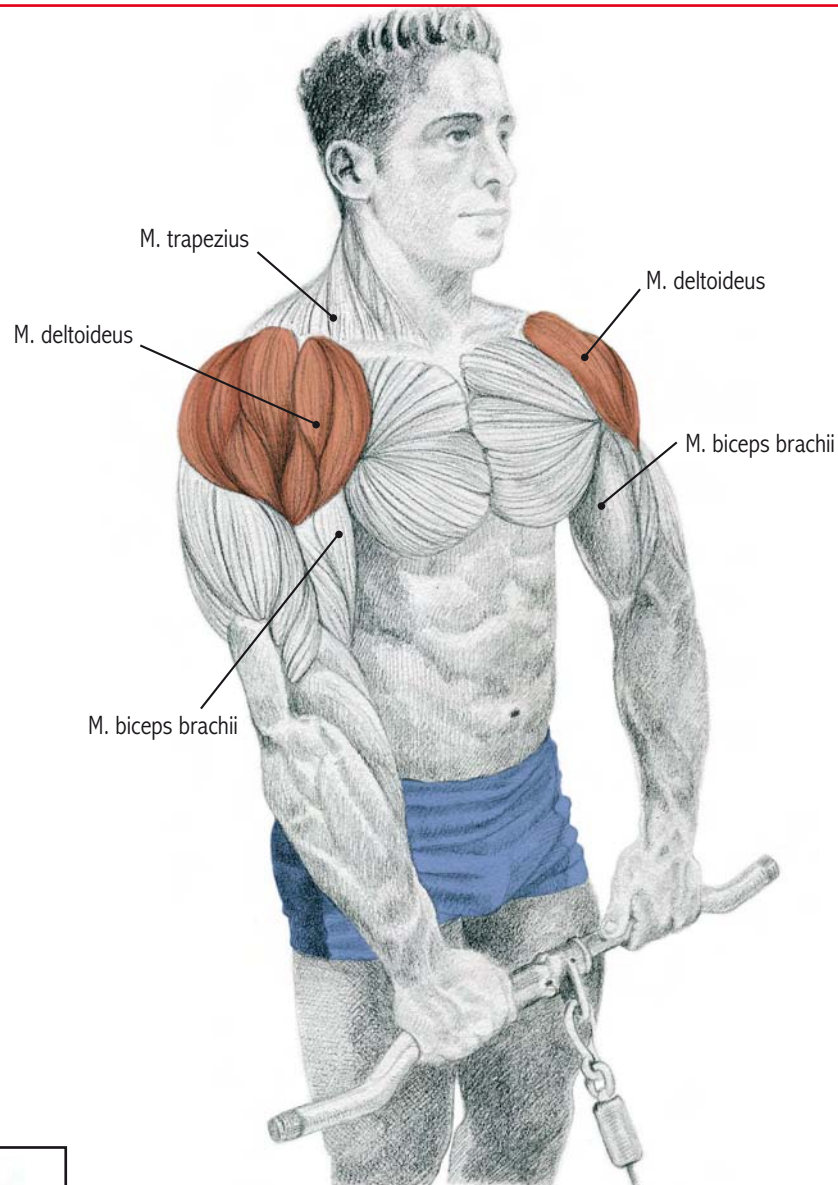
MUSCLES USED

rhomboids, trapezius, deltoid (rear)

TECHNIQUE

If you are looking for an even more specific exercise for the mid-portion of the trapezius, the movement will require rotating the arm outward (i.e., fists up). Because of the position, it will also have to be shorter, the end of the movement only. Try to bring your shoulder blades together.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: deltoid

SECONDARY MUSCLES: trapezius, levator scapulae, supraspinatus, biceps, forearm flexor muscles, rhomboids, lower back muscles

ANTAGONISTS: latissimus dorsi, pectoralis major, triceps

VARIATIONS

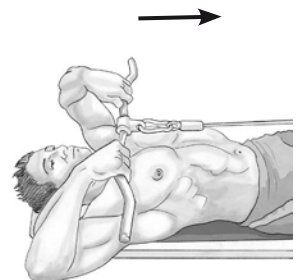
28.2 ... LYING

MUSCLES USED

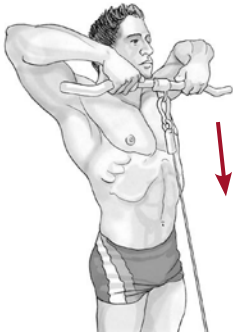
deltoid, trapezius (upper)

TECHNIQUE

The movement is the same as the Upright Row, but you lie down with your feet toward the cable pulley. This immobilizes your torso and takes strain off the lower back. The only problem may be that your cable machine is designed in a way that will not allow you to lie down.



Execution



Stand with your feet slightly apart, your torso straight and held firmly in place. Hold the bar in front of your thighs in an overhand grip (palms facing your legs) with your hands a little less than shoulder-width apart. Pull the bar up to your neck, keeping it close to your body throughout the movement. The elbows should rise and remain higher than your hands. Breathe in as you begin to raise the bar and exhale as you lower it.

Comments

This exercise is identical to the Barbell Upright Row (see Ex. 9) and most of the same comments apply. It is a heavy exercise for the trapezius and deltoid (especially the latter) and if you separate your hands (wider grip), you will shift more of the work onto the shoulders.

Contrary to popular belief, this is not a specific trapezius exercise, although it does give the muscle a good workout. Most of the effort is made by the deltoid, however, and the arm movement is in fact almost identical to the Dumbbell Lateral Raise (Ex. 4) except that you need to bend your elbows more.

As a variant, you can pull the bar forward (see Ex. 29.3, Cable Shrug with Front Raise).



Common mistakes: lifting the hands higher than the elbows, swinging the body, jerking the weight upward to gain momentum, and holding the bar too far from the body



In the Barbell Upright Row, the humerus rotates inward, and the rear and middle parts of the deltoid work hardest.

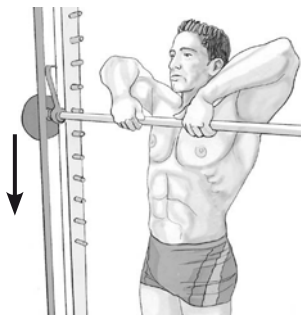
28.3 ... SMITH MACHINE ROW

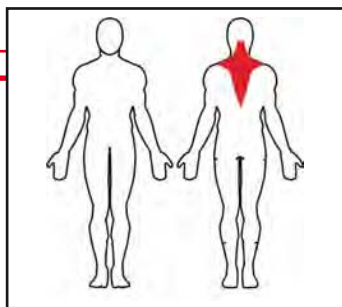
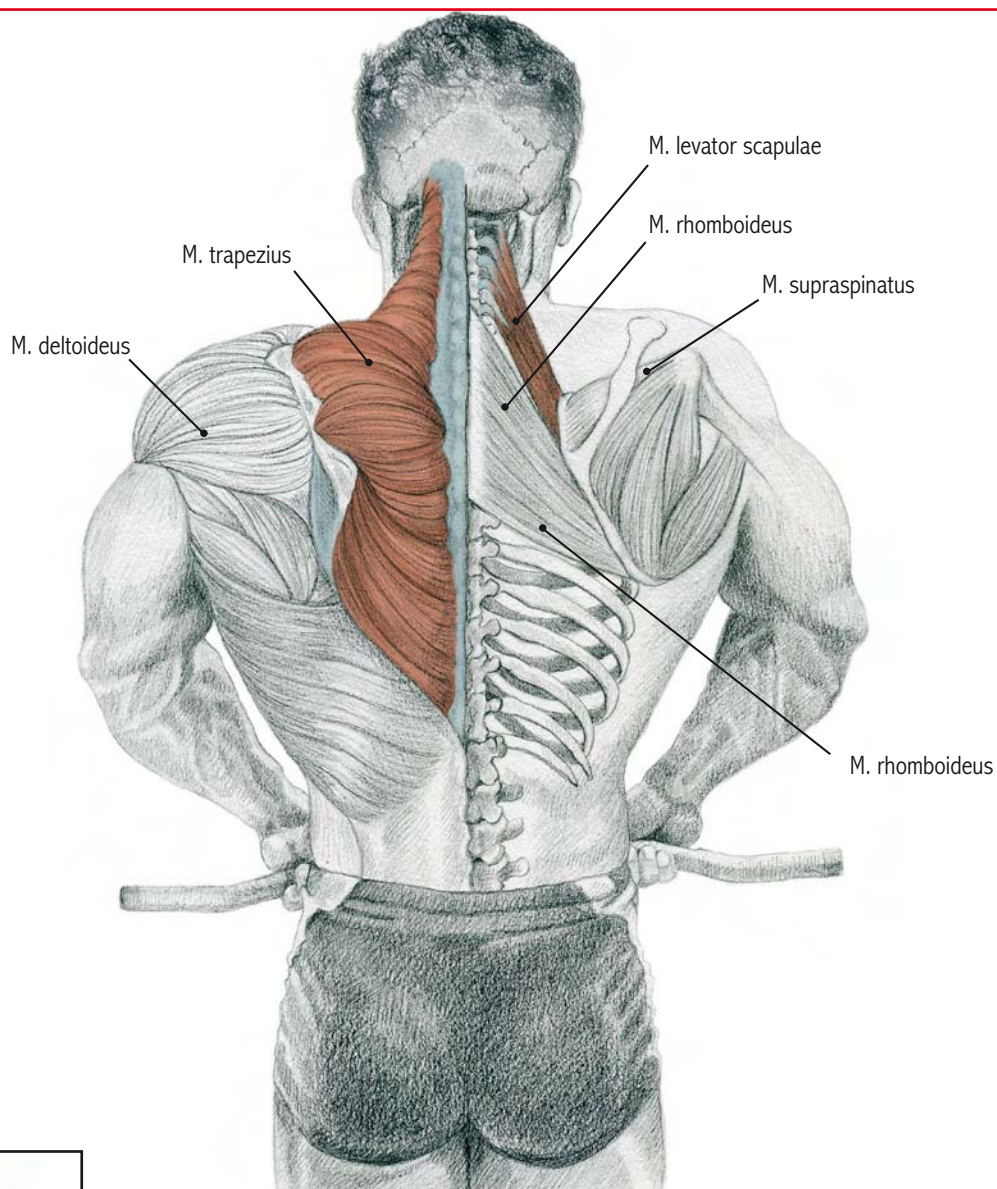
MUSCLES USED

deltoid, trapezius (upper)

TECHNIQUE

The versatile Smith machine allows you to do Upright Rows. As in the other exercises described for this machine, the main advantage is that you can concentrate on lifting the weight rather than balance, and you can do a set to failure (or an incomplete last set due to muscle exhaustion) without risk.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: trapezius (upper), levator scapulae

SECONDARY MUSCLES: rhomboids, trapezius (middle), deltoid, supraspinatus

ANTAGONISTS: pectoralis minor, trapezius (lower), pectoralis major, latissimus dorsi

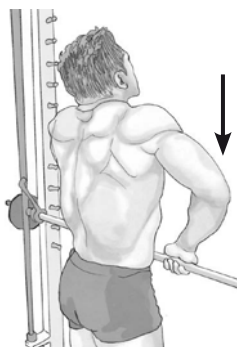
VARIATIONS 29.2 ... SMITH MACHINE

MUSCLES USED

trapezius (upper), levator scapulae

TECHNIQUE

The position and movement are the same as for Cable Shrugs. Using the Smith machine may allow you to load up more weight. You can hold the bar either in front of your body or behind. The difference between the positions is minimal.



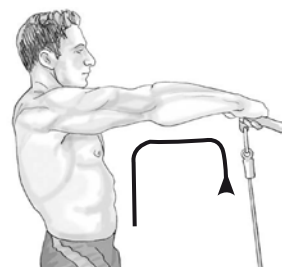
VARIATIONS 29.3 ... WITH FRONT RAISE

MUSCLES USED

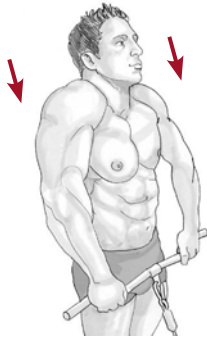
deltoid (rear), trapezius (upper), levator scapulae

TECHNIQUE

The starting position is much the same as for the Cable Upright Row (Ex. 28), and this exercise could in fact be considered a variant. When you reach the top of the movement, however, you extend your arms horizontally, lowering the weight with your elbows almost straight. This involves contracting the front deltoid when it is extended in the downward movement (eccentric contraction). It does not work the trapezius any harder or more specifically.



Execution



Stand with your feet slightly apart, your torso straight and held firmly in place. Grasp the bar in front of your thighs in an overhand grip. Raise your shoulders as much as possible and try to pause for a moment at the highest point. Your arms do no more than hold the weights, although the resistance is constant. The same exercise can be done with the bar behind your back. Breathe in as you raise the bar and exhale as you lower it.

Comments

As in the case of the Barbell or Dumbbell Shrug (Ex. 10), this exercise works the upper part of the trapezius, levator scapulae and other adjacent muscles very specifically.

As a variant, you can stand under a squat machine (see Legs, Ex. 12) and push directly with your shoulders, placing your hands on your hips or by your sides. This is a useful option if you have any problems with your hands, wrists, or elbows.



Common mistakes: rotating the shoulders in heavy sets, using too much or too little weight, incomplete movement, short or limited sets, and flexing the shoulders to help you lift



Your mental condition can boost or hinder the muscle growth.

29.4 ... ONE-ARM

MUSCLES USED

trapezius (upper), levator scapulae

TECHNIQUE

Stand with your side to the cable and use only one grip. Raise your shoulder on the side worked, complete the set and change sides. The one-arm variant will help you concentrate the effort throughout the movement, although the difference in effect is hardly noticeable.



29.5 ... BENT-OVER MACHINE ROW

MUSCLES USED

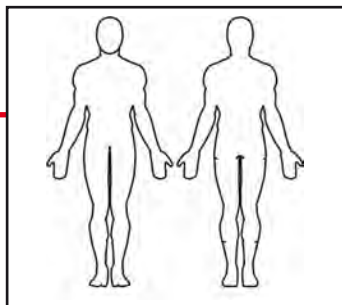
trapezius (middle), rhomboids

TECHNIQUE

The position is identical to the Bent-Over Machine Row (Back, Ex. 19), but in this case you do not bend your elbows, but pull the weight up using the upper back muscles, bringing the shoulder blades together. This is highly effective for correcting posture. The Shrug variant of the T-bar Row (see Back, Ex. 3) is very similar and equally effective.



LYING SIDE EXTERNAL CABLE ROTATION



Muscles involved

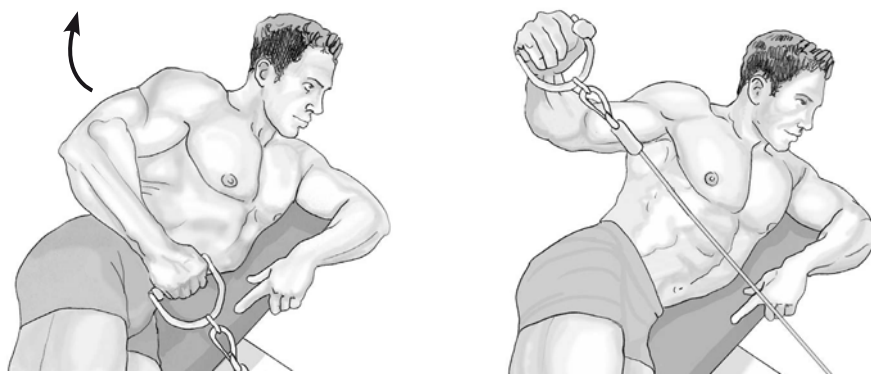
MAIN MUSCLES: infraspinatus, teres minor

SECONDARY MUSCLES: deltoid (rear)

ANTAGONISTS: subscapularis, latissimus dorsi, pectoralis major

Execution

Lie on your side on a bench or floor mat and hold the cable grip in your upper hand using a hammer grip. Keep your elbow bent at a right angle and resting on your side. Starting with your forearm parallel to the floor, rotate your shoulder up through an 80° arc. The angle of all of the joints remains the same throughout, with only the shoulder rotating, from a side to a forward position. Breathe naturally.



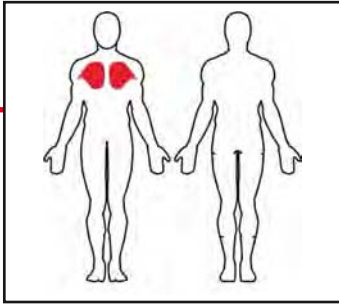
Comments

The same comments apply as in the equivalent dumbbell exercise (Ex. 11). However, using a cable will allow you to maintain constant resistance throughout the movement. The main thing (apart from selecting an appropriate weight) is to ensure a controlled movement and keep your elbow in position. You can also do this variant kneeling or sitting with your side to the cable.



Common mistakes: using too much weight, too fast a movement, separating the elbow from the body, moving the elbow to get help from the rear deltoid, and too wide an angle between the elbow and the cable

LYING SIDE INTERNAL CABLE ROTATION

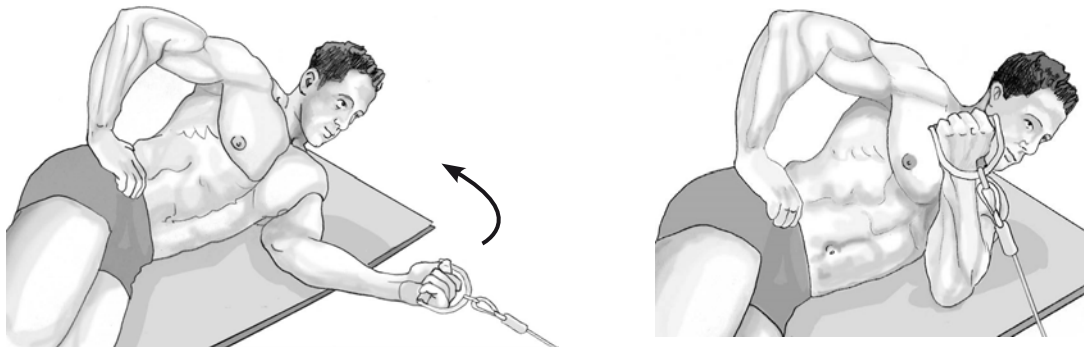


Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: subscapularis, pectoralis major, biceps (long head)
SECONDARY MUSCLES: (latissimus dorsi, teres major), deltoid (front)
ANTAGONISTS: infraspinatus, teres minor

Execution

The position is the same as for the External Cable Rotation (Ex. 30), but in this case you hold the cable grip in the lower hand. Rotate the shoulder that is resting on the floor inward. The angle of all of the joints stays the same throughout and only the shoulder rotates. Breathe naturally.



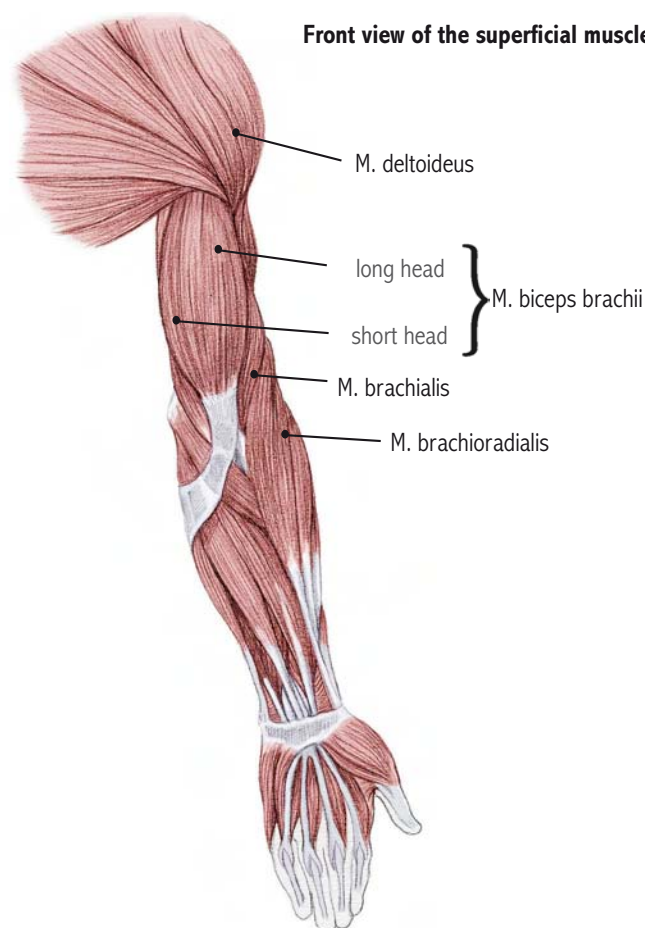
Comments

The same comments apply as in the equivalent dumbbell exercise (Ex. 12). However, using a cable will allow you to maintain constant resistance throughout the movement. You can also do this variant kneeling or sitting with your side to the cable. You may find this position more comfortable and effective, but be warned that it encourages “cheating” by moving the elbow away from your side.



Common mistakes: using too much weight, too fast a movement, moving the elbow away from the body to get help from the pectoral muscle and deltoid, and too wide an angle between the elbow and the cable

SCIENTIFIC DESCRIPTION OF THE ARM FLEXORS: INTRODUCTION TO THE BIOMECHANICS OF THE MAIN MUSCLES



BICEPS BRACHII / BICEPS (anterior, superficial)

Origin: scapula (long head: supraglenoid tubercle, short head: coracoid process)

Insertion: radius (radial tuberosity and bicipitoradial bursa, bicipital aponeurosis on the ulna side of the antebrachial fascia)

Main functions: flexion of the elbow (especially in supination, both heads) and supination of the forearm (in flexion, both heads), abduction and inward rotation of the arm (long head), adduction (short head)

BRACHIORADIALIS (lateral, superficial)

Origin: humerus (lateral supracondylar ridge) and intermuscular wall

Insertion: radius (external surface of the radial styloid process)

Main functions: flexion of the elbow (especially in the neutral and palms-down positions), returning the forearm to the neutral position from pronation or supination

BRACHIALIS / BRACHIALIS ANTICUS (anterior, medial)

Origin: humerus (distal half of the anterior surface) and interosseous membrane

Insertion: ulna (tubercle of the coronoid process) and joint capsule

Main functions: flexing the elbow (in both pronation and supination)

Comments:

The biceps is perhaps the most familiar muscle in the human body, and it is the star for those who want to show off their strength. Oddly enough, it is not actually all that strong because it has to operate three joints and is designed to react quickly with a wide range of movement. Meanwhile, the extensive literature describing how to exercise this muscle has tended to overstate the range of training required, seeking to develop parts of the biceps rather than treating it as a whole, or at most as composed of two clearly differentiated parts. Thus, exercises have been invented for the upper and lower parts, the biceps “peak,” and so on. Almost all of these exercises in fact work the same muscle fibers, in contrast to larger muscles like the pectoralis major, where a wider range of training is possible. In order to exercise the biceps successfully, you will generally need to hold your hands palms up (supination) or work on contraction. This is because from a neutral to a full palms-down position (pronation), the biceps does less work, and it is the brachialis muscle (which is a flexor in any position) that exerts most of the effort, together with other forearm muscles.

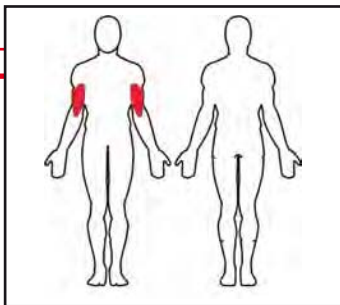
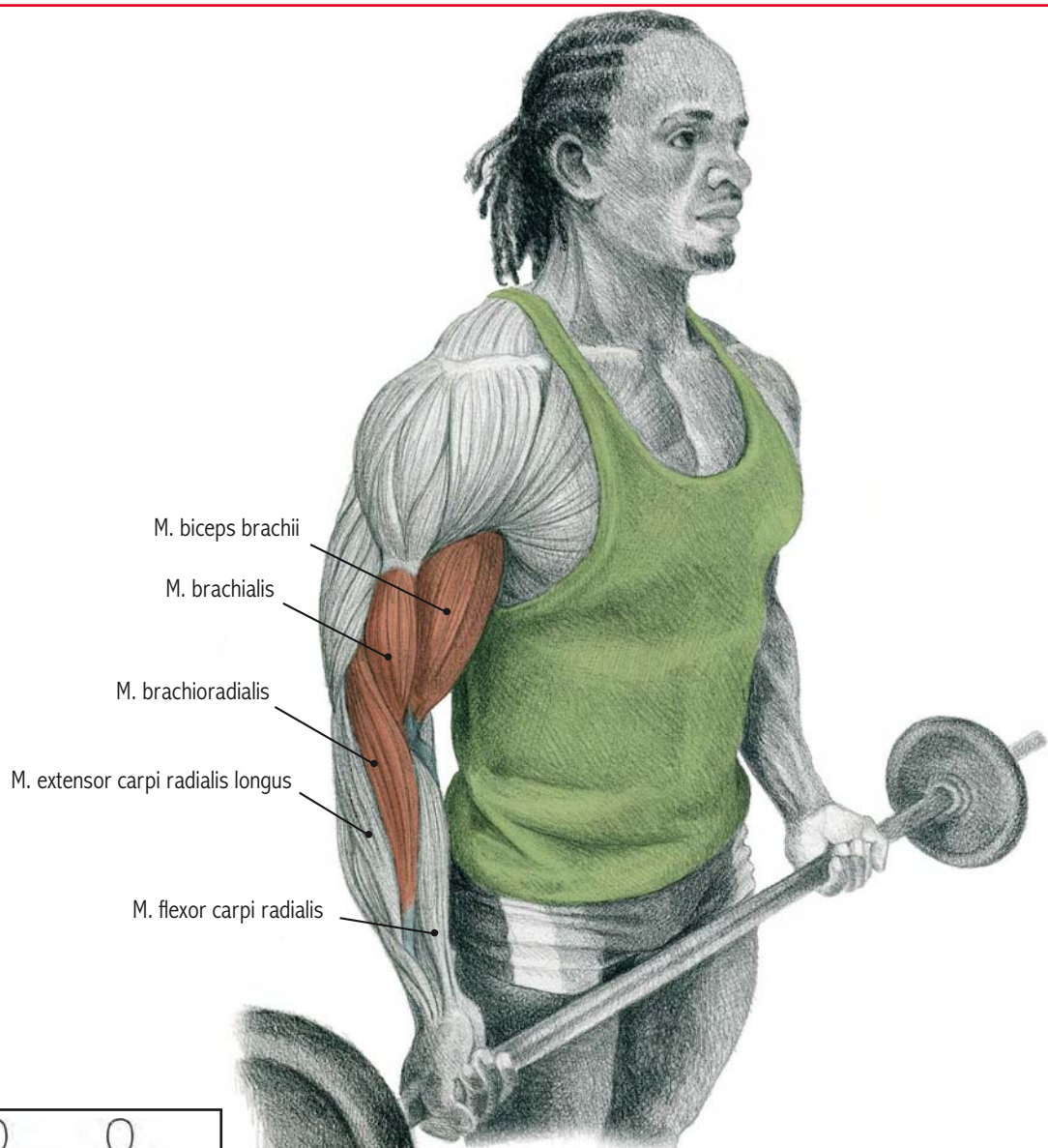
The proximal insertion of the long head of the biceps is delicate and care is needed in exercises like Shoulder Raises and Flies, or if the movement of the shoulder and arm is in any way forced. In a few people, the biceps may have a third, single-joint head from the humerus to the common tendon, which makes the biceps into a triceps.

The brachioradialis muscle is important in horizontal flexing and adjustment of the elbow.

The arm is clearly designed for eating: allowing us to pick up a piece of food (pronation/extension) and lift it to the mouth (supination/flexion). However, pronation usually involves some abduction of the shoulder, like the movement required to pour water from a jug into a glass. Supination is even stronger than pronation. It is for this reason that the twist top of a jam jar and screws are designed to turn clockwise, the direction of supination for the right-handed.

If your biceps is short (we refer to length, not the short head of the muscle), you will not be able to change this through weight training. Muscle cannot be added to a tendon, and it is therefore impossible to extend the biceps farther down toward the elbow. Only the brachialis muscle will correct the aesthetic appearance of the arm.

Finally, you should bear in mind that the biceps is smaller than the triceps, which you must also train if you want to develop strong, muscular arms.



Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: biceps, brachialis, brachioradialis

SECONDARY MUSCLES: pronator teres, extensor carpi radialis longus, flexor digitorum superficialis, flexor carpi radialis

ANTAGONISTS: triceps, anconeus

VARIATIONS 1.2 ... WITH EZ BAR

MUSCLES USED

Biceps, brachialis, brachioradialis

TECHNIQUE

The EZ bar grip is anatomically more correct, although it requires a little more work from the brachioradialis and the long head of the biceps. The main disadvantage is that the exercise is subject to the design of the bar you are using, since you cannot change the width of your grip.



VARIATIONS 1.3 ... WITH TRICEPS BAR

MUSCLES USED

brachialis, brachioradialis, biceps

TECHNIQUE

The biceps continues to work actively, especially the long head, but some of the effort shifts to the other flexor muscles. Flexing is more natural in this variant, with the radius and ulna positioned correctly.



VARIATIONS 1.4 ... 21s (3-PART CURL)

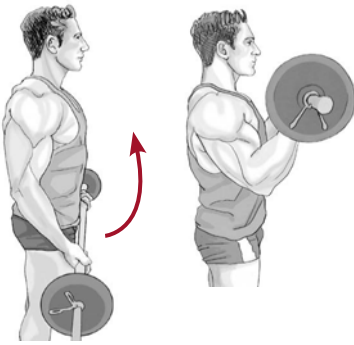
MUSCLES USED

biceps, brachialis, brachioradialis

TECHNIQUE

Do a set of 21 repetitions: 7 from the arm fully extended to halfway (horizontal/90°); 7 from 90° to fully flexed; and 7 complete curls. The muscles involved are the same, but the variant is good discipline for building strength endurance. It does not "define" the biceps in any way, as some people have claimed.

Execution



Stand with your feet apart for balance. Hold your torso, shoulders and wrists steady. Grasp the barbell with an underhand grip (palms up), hands a little more than shoulder-width apart. Lift in a controlled movement until the arms are flexed as far as possible (around 145°, although it will be less if the biceps is very large). Breathe in just before lifting and out as you lower the barbell.

Comments

This is a basic, heavy biceps exercise that is suitable for any level and makes intense use of both the long and short heads. If you use a wide grip, the short head will work harder, and if you use a narrow grip, the long head will. There is not a large difference, however. Be careful not to relax your arms when they are fully extended to avoid injuring the tendons. In statistical terms, human beings can raise the forearms around 90° in a palms-up position (supination), although this may be uncomfortable or even painful for the wrists, especially when holding a heavy weight. If this is your case, you should opt for the EZ bar variant or dumbbells. The palms-down variant (pronation) is described in the chapter on forearms (Ex. 3).



Common mistakes: rocking the body and pulling your elbows too far back to shorten the movement or get help from the back muscles, or too far forward to use the deltoid and gravity



If you have back problems or want to stop yourself from “cheating,” you can lean back against a wall, keeping your feet apart. This will provide you with a firm support that will take the strain and prevent unwanted movements. Experienced athletes will probably prefer not to adopt this position, as it stops you from using momentum from the torso to complete heavy sets.



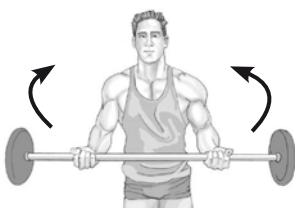
1.5 ...ONE-TWO

MUSCLES USED

biceps, brachialis, brachioradialis

TECHNIQUE

You need two people for this variant. The first athlete does one full repetition and then passes the barbell to the second (placing it on a bench between the two), who repeats the movement and gives the barbell back. The first athlete then does two reps followed by his/her partner, and so on. You can continue to a predetermined number of reps or see who holds out the longest. This variant develops strength endurance and is highly motivating.



1.6 ... SEATED

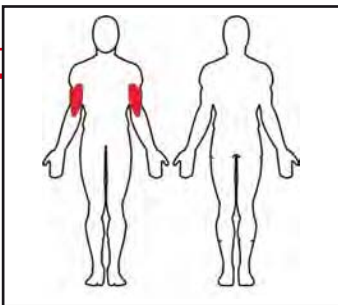
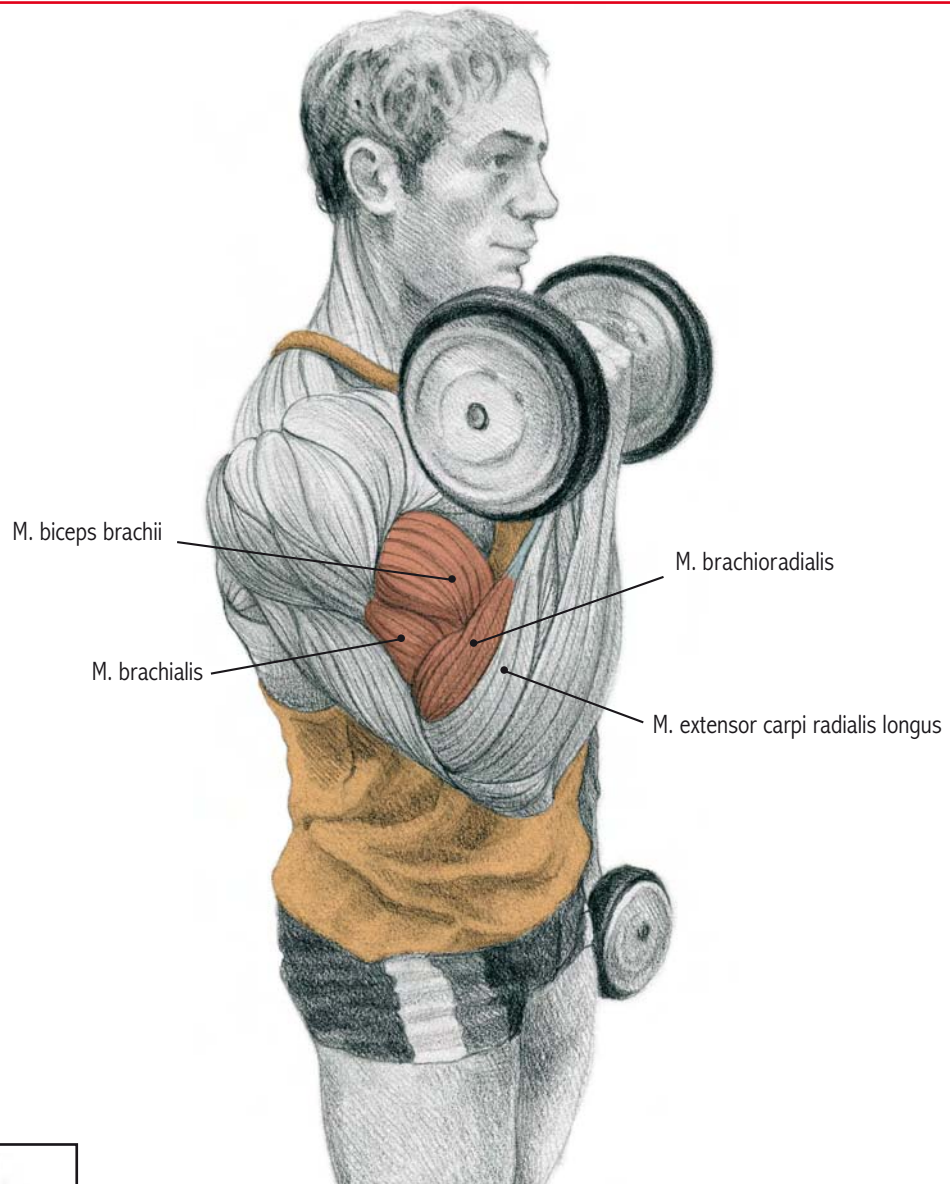
MUSCLES USED

biceps, brachialis, brachioradialis

TECHNIQUE

The movement is the same, although in a seated position it will be shorter. It is best to use less weight and concentrate on performing a strict movement. The variant has no particular advantages.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: biceps, brachialis, brachioradialis

SECONDARY MUSCLES: pronator teres, extensor carpi radialis longus, flexor digitorum superficialis, flexor carpi radialis

ANTAGONISTS: triceps, anconeus

VARIATIONS 2.2 ... UNDERHAND GRIP

MUSCLES USED

biceps, brachialis, brachioradialis

TECHNIQUE

This excellent exercise is similar to the Barbell Curl (Ex. 1), but includes alternating the arms. Take care not to straighten your arm fully and relax, as the bottom tendon of the biceps is under considerable strain when fully extended.



VARIATIONS 2.3 ... HAMMER GRIP

MUSCLES USED

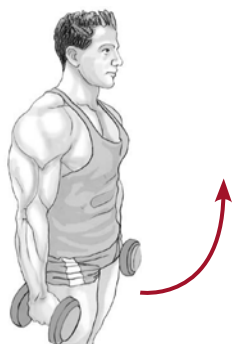
brachialis, brachioradialis, biceps

TECHNIQUE

This is similar to the Barbell Curl with triceps bar (Ex. 1.3). The biceps continues to work actively, especially the long head, but some of the effort shifts to the other elbow flexors. Flexing is more natural in this variant, with the radius and ulna positioned perfectly.



Execution



Stand with your feet apart for balance, or sit, holding your torso steady. Hold the dumbbells in a neutral grip (palms facing) on either side of your body and lift them in a controlled movement. At the same time, turn your hand inward (supination) so that your palms are facing your shoulder at the top. Twist your forearm back to the neutral position as you lower the weights. Breathe in just before lifting and out as you lower the dumbbells.

Comments

This is a simple, heavy exercise for the biceps using the basic functions of flexing and supination (the effects produced by the two heads of the biceps, especially the short head in supination). None of the movements involve any bending of the wrists (which are independent of the action of the biceps). The wrists should remain firmly in line with the forearm, contrary to what some trainers recommend, as finger pressure is up to four times weaker if the wrist is bent. If you alternate dumbbells rather than lifting them simultaneously, you will find the exercise a little less demanding, as the arms get a few seconds rest between reps. There will also be less strain on your lower back. If you pause at the top of the movement, you will make it a little more intense (see Back, Ex. 8.3 and Shoulders, Ex. 2.4).



Common mistakes: rocking the body; pulling your elbows too far back to shorten the movement and get help from the back muscles, or too far forward to use the deltoid and gravity; bending the wrists as you raise the weights; and twisting and lifting in an uncoordinated movement



When extended, the forearm tends to angle slightly outward (known as the “carrying angle”). This explains why a wider grip is more comfortable than a narrow one in the Barbell Curl. However, the angle varies from person to person.

2.4 ... OVERHAND GRIP

MUSCLES USED

brachialis, brachioradialis, biceps

TECHNIQUE

The biceps plays a secondary role in this variant, with the biggest demands being placed on the forearm flexors. You will need to use less weight, because the overhand grip is weaker. This variant is recommended at the end of a biceps routine to work the wrist extensors a little.



2.5 ... INCLINE

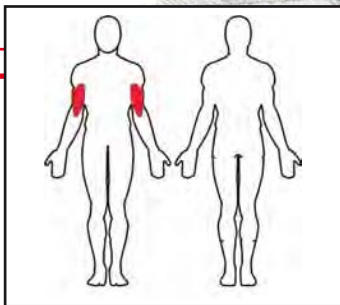
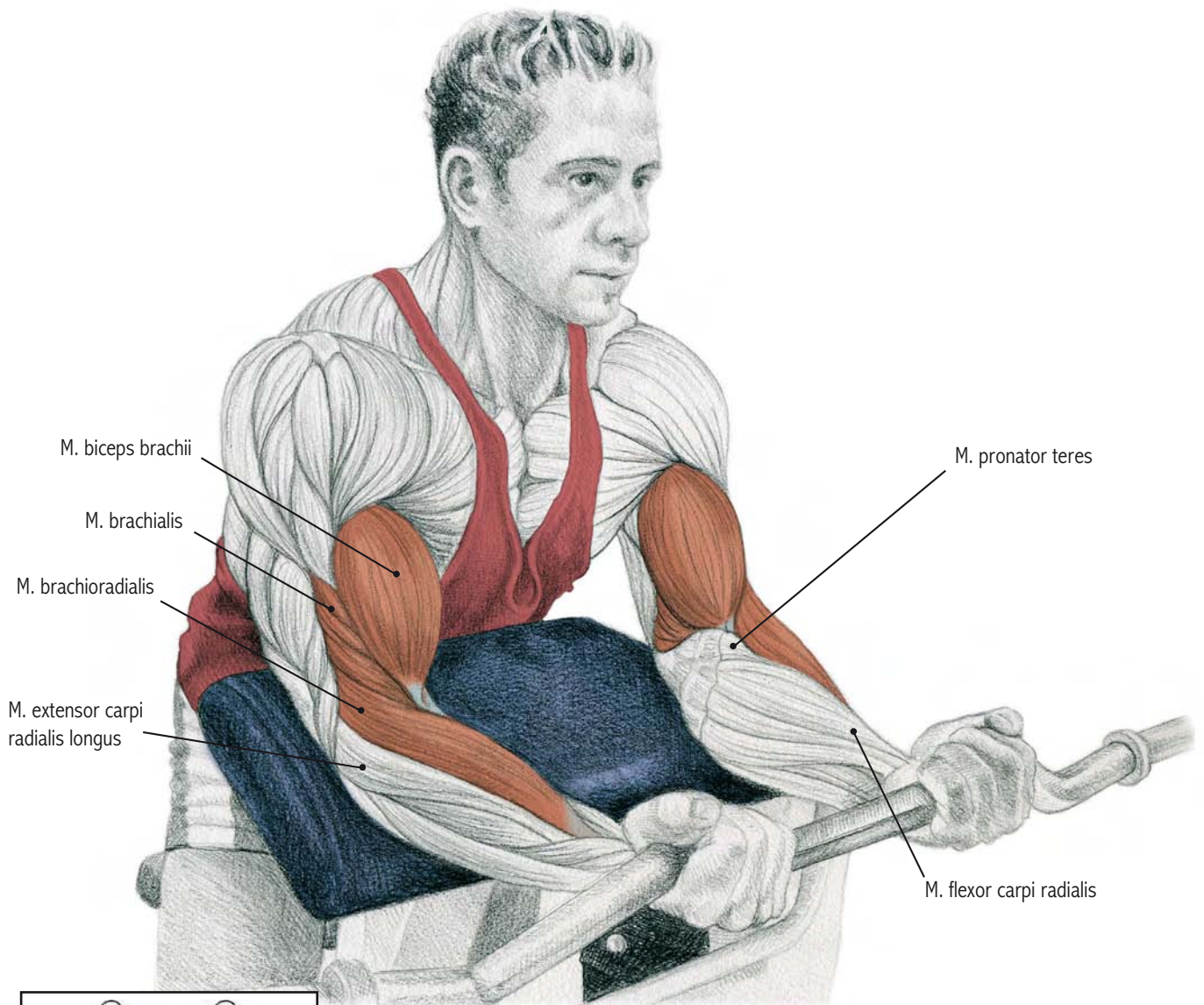
MUSCLES USED

biceps, brachialis, brachioradialis

TECHNIQUE

Sit on an incline bench set at approximately 45°. Lower your arm until it is perpendicular to the floor to stretch the biceps. This is a full curl with a twist, which works the long head in particular (i.e., the part that produces the biceps “peak,” see Ex. 4), especially if you use a hammer or semi-neutral grip (palms facing). Even so, both the long and short head contribute significantly to the movement. This should not be a heavy exercise.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: biceps, brachialis, brachioradialis

SECONDARY MUSCLES: pronator teres, extensor carpi radialis longus, flexor digitorum superficialis, flexor carpi radialis

ANTAGONISTS: triceps, anconeus

VARIATIONS

3.2 ... ONE-ARM WITH DUMBBELL

MUSCLES USED

biceps, brachialis, brachioradialis

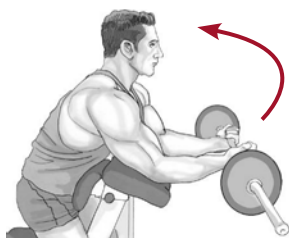
TECHNIQUE

The only difference is that you will be using one arm and holding a dumbbell. Alternate your two arms. Use your free hand to hold on to the bench and keep your balance, or to help the other hand complete extra repetitions at the end of a set.

You can also use two dumbbells at the same time, in which case the variant is basically the same as the barbell exercise.



Execution



Sit with your triceps resting on the pad of a preacher bench (set at an incline) and your underarms at the top edge. Grasp the barbell with an underhand grip (palms up), keeping your elbows bent. Lower the barbell until your arms are almost fully extended (to avoid injuring the elbow joint) and raise it again to the starting point. Breathe in during the first third of the downward movement and out at the end of the lift.

Comments

This exercise was popularized (though not invented) by Larry Scott, who adapted the bench used by his father, a preacher. Contrary to popular belief, this exercise does not help you build a biceps “peak” or gain muscle definition any more than other exercises. What it does is prevent cheating and provide a perfect biceps contraction by separating the elbow movement from the rest of the body. You can also use a triceps bar. Setting the pad at a steeper incline makes the exercise heavier and eliminates any “dead” spots when the arm is fully contracted. Ideally, you should warm up thoroughly and the pad should leave your elbows free, although many benches are badly designed. Extending the arm too far can result in injury to the olecranon, capsule, humeral artery or ligaments, but hurting the biceps itself is highly unlikely.



Common mistakes: resting the elbows on the bench pad, shifting the body downward to gain leverage in order to complete the curl, lowering the bar too far and forcing the elbows (especially when picking up and putting down the bar), and using too much weight



An injury in one part of the body should not stop you from training the rest. Seek the advice of your doctor or trainer.

3.3 ... ONE-ARM WITH TWIST

MUSCLES USED

biceps, brachialis, brachioradialis

TECHNIQUE

As with the standing exercise, this variant uses the two key functions of the biceps, flexing and supination. Start at the top with your palm facing your shoulder (supination), then lower the weight and at the same time twist your forearm, reaching a neutral position almost at the bottom of the movement. This increases the work performed by the forearm flexors, but it also requires a fair amount of effort from the two heads of the biceps.



3.4 ... HAMMER GRIP WITH DUMBBELL

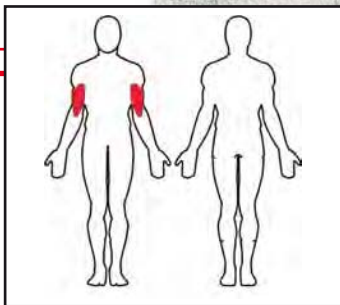
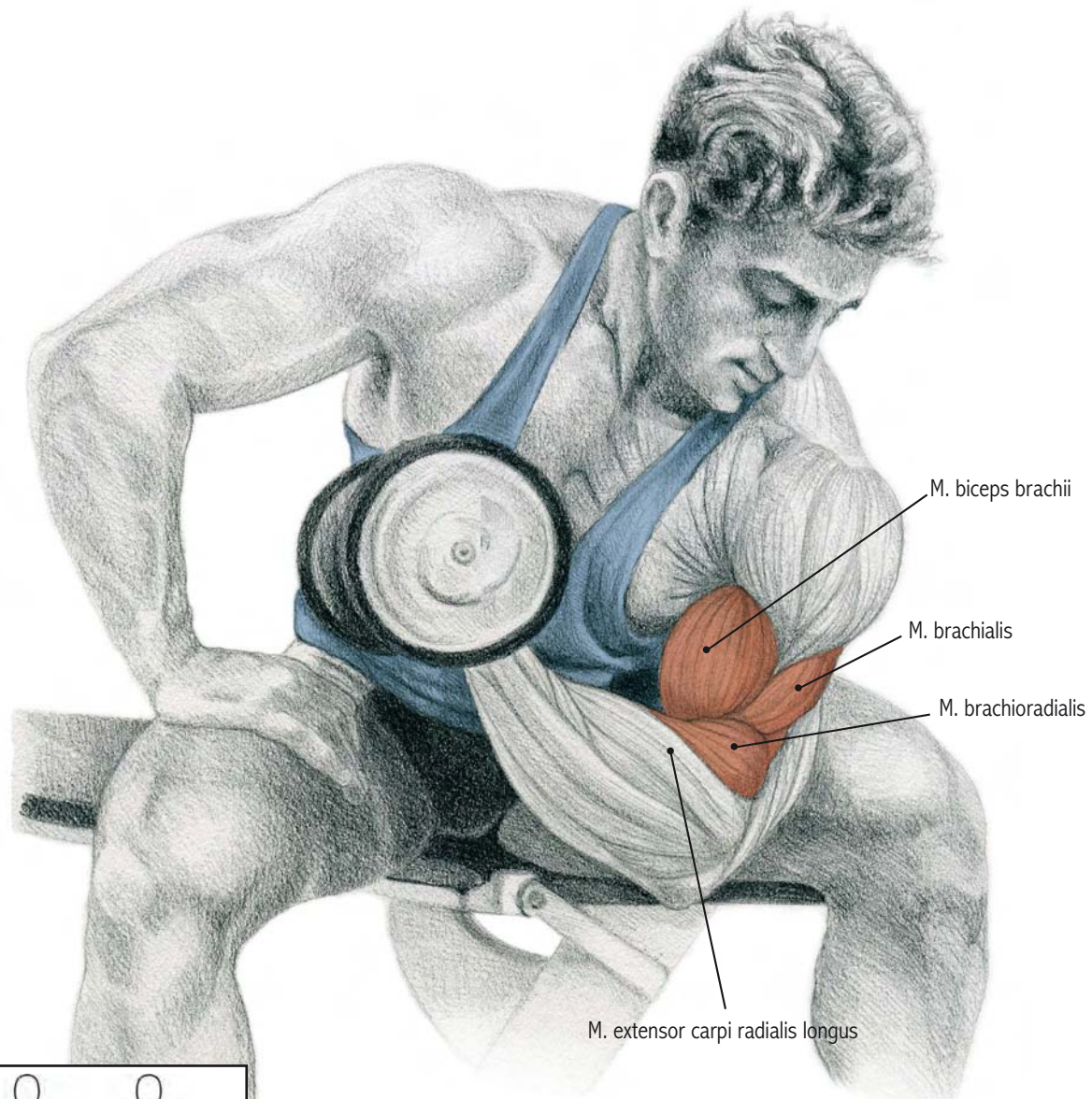
MUSCLES USED

brachialis, brachioradialis, biceps

TECHNIQUE

This is exactly the same as the Dumbbell Curl with a bench for support, but the position is neutral at all times. Flexing is more natural in this variant, with the radius and ulna positioned correctly. See the Overhand Grip Dumbbell Curl (Ex. 2.4) for the variant with pronation.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: biceps, brachialis, brachioradialis

SECONDARY MUSCLES: pronator teres, extensor carpi radialis longus, flexor digitorum superficialis, flexor carpi radialis

ANTAGONISTS: triceps, anconeus

VARIATIONS

4.2 ... STANDING

MUSCLES USED

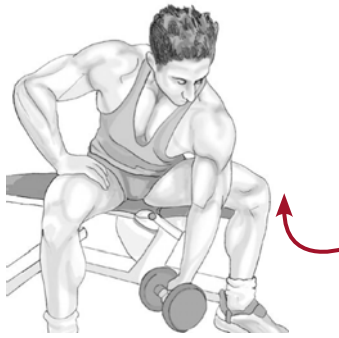
biceps, brachialis, brachioradialis

TECHNIQUE

Stand with your waist bent to 90° and one hand resting on something in front of you (or your own leg) to support the weight of the torso. Allow the other hand, which holds the dumbbell, to hang down in the neutral position. Raise it toward the opposite shoulder in a strict movement. Pause a moment before lowering the weight again. Breathing is the same as in the basic exercise. Be careful not to swing your arm unless you are trying to complete a set of forced reps.



Execution



Sit on a bench and bend your torso forward (back straight), resting your weight with one hand on your knee. Grasp the dumbbell in the other hand in an underhand grip (palm up), resting your elbow (lower part of the triceps) against the inside of your thigh. Lower the dumbbell until your arm is almost fully extended and then raise it again, keeping the movement strict at all times. Breathe in during the first third of the downward movement and out at the end of the lift.

Comments

The Concentration Curl is a strict enough exercise for the arm flexors and the biceps in particular. Take the comments on similar dumbbell exercises (Ex. 1 and following) into account and be careful not to bend your wrist. It should remain in line with your forearm. Your leg does not move, although you may give a slight push to complete the last repetition if you get stuck halfway through a set of forced reps.

Many trainers and books claim that this exercise is good for the biceps “peak.” The author once again disagrees, as the “peak” is primarily the result of three factors: genetics, definition, and a well-developed long head of the biceps. No serious studies contradict this explanation.



Common mistakes: moving your leg or torso to gain momentum to lift the dumbbell, resting your elbow on the top (rather than the inside) of the thigh to gain leverage, and bending the wrist as you raise the weight



The brachialis is a “pure” elbow flexor and one of the few muscles that basically performs only one function.

4.3 ... FLAT-BENCH

MUSCLES USED

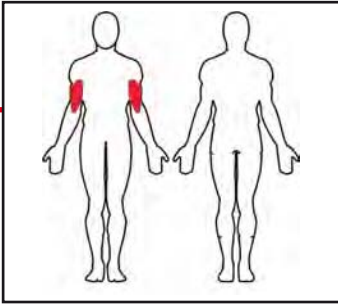
biceps, brachialis, brachioradialis

TECHNIQUE

The position and movement are the same as the basic exercise, but you sit straddling a bench and rest the back of your elbow (triceps) on the edge opposite the arm being worked. There are no significant advantages to this variant in comparison to the basic exercise and it may be less comfortable. You should use it only to stop yourself from cheating by pushing with your leg, as explained in the basic exercise.



LYING DUMBBELL CURL



Muscles involved

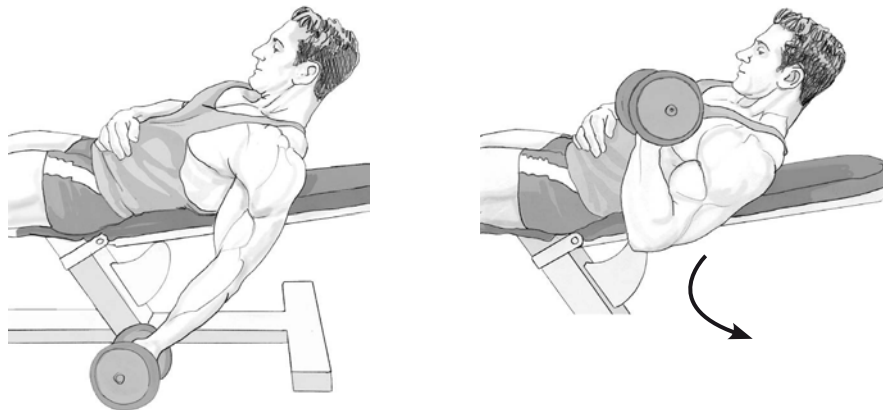
MAIN MUSCLES: biceps, brachialis, brachioradialis

SECONDARY MUSCLES: pronator teres, extensor carpi radialis longus, flexor digitorum superficialis, flexor carpi radialis

ANTAGONISTS: triceps, anconeus

Execution

Lie on your back along a flat bench holding a light dumbbell in one hand. Lower the weight as far as your flexibility will allow and then raise it by bending your elbow. Breathe naturally, or inhale as you lower the weight and exhale as you reach the top of the movement.



Comments

The position is somewhat tricky and this exercise is therefore more appropriate for stretching the biceps and shoulder than gaining strength or for muscle growth. Do not use heavy weights, instead concentrate on maintaining a strict movement. It is for advanced athletes only. If you want to do a preliminary exercise to stretch the biceps before starting work on contracting the muscle, the incline bench variant (Ex. 2.5) is preferable.

In fact, this exercise is of dubious use, and there is no good reason to include it in a conventional weight training program. It is mentioned here for information purposes only.

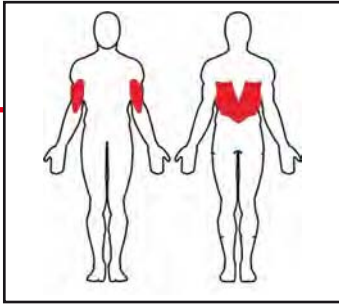


Common mistakes: using too much weight, lowering the weight too far, and moving the shoulder to lift the weight



Only two muscles extend the elbow, but several flex it. The main ones are the biceps, brachialis, and brachioradialis.

BICEPS PULL-UPS



Muscles involved

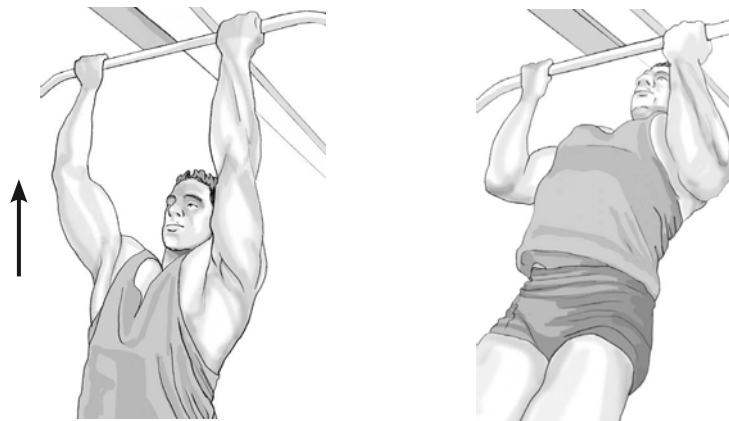
MAIN MUSCLES: latissimus dorsi, biceps, brachialis, teres major and minor

SECONDARY MUSCLES: rhomboids, pectoralis major (lower), coracobrachialis, triceps (long head), brachioradialis, trapezius (lower)

ANTAGONISTS: deltoid, pectoralis major, triceps

Execution

Hang from a horizontal bar, holding on with an underhand grip (palms facing your head) and your hands a little over shoulder-width apart. Pull the upper part of your chest up to the level of the bar, at the same time arching your torso backwards slightly. Let your legs hang straight or cross them. You can also bend your knees if you like. Your elbows should face forward throughout the movement. Breathe in before you pull up, hold your breath throughout the movement and breathe out as you lower yourself (last third of the downward movement).



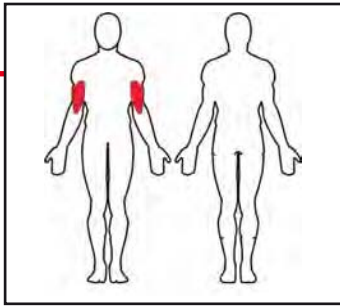
Comments

This exercise is demanding for both the back muscles and elbow flexors. Obviously, it could be considered a variant of the Chin-up. It is also highly effective if you have good physical control, however, as the arm flexors work very hard in this position. Do not relax while you are hanging from the bar, as you could strain the bottom tendon of the biceps unnecessarily. For all of these reasons, Biceps Pull-ups are not recommended for beginners, although veterans will find these Pull-ups easier than traditional Chin-ups using an open overhand grip. You can increase intensity by adding moderate (never heavy) weight, or even better, by slowing the speed of the movement.



Common mistakes: swinging your body, incomplete range of movement, and pulling up without bending the arms (using the back muscles too much)

ZOTTMAN CURL / TWIST CURL



Muscles involved

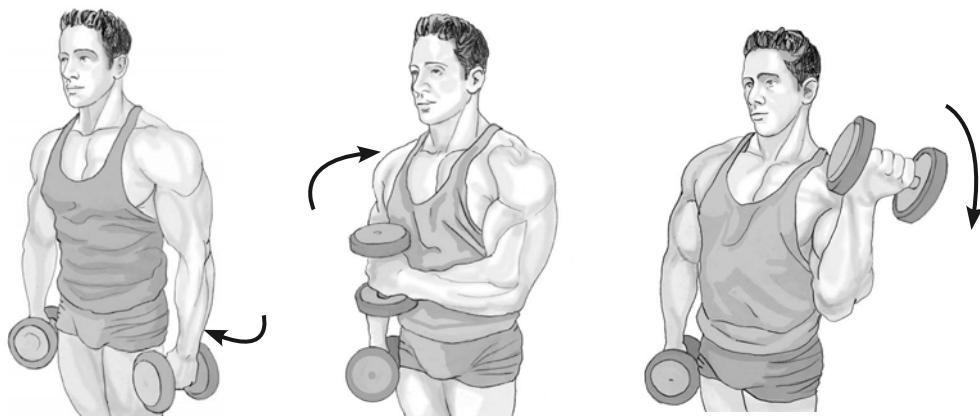
MAIN MUSCLES: biceps, brachialis, brachioradialis

SECONDARY MUSCLES: pronator teres, extensor carpi radialis longus, flexor digitorum superficialis, flexor carpi radialis

ANTAGONISTS: triceps, anconeus

Execution

Stand in the same position as for the conventional Dumbbell Curl (Ex. 2), holding the dumbbells in a neutral grip. Lift the dumbbell across your stomach, twisting your forearm at the same time. Open the twist at the top of the movement and lower the weight with a slight outward rotation of the arm. The position is neutral as you lift the dumbbell and palm up after the twist and during the downward movement. Repeat the movement with your other arm. Breathe in as you raise the dumbbell and out as you lower it.



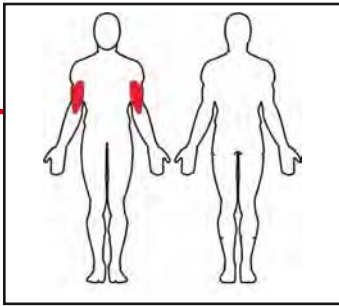
Comments

This is a secondary exercise that does not in fact offer any particular benefit, although it can add variety and help overcome boredom with your routine. Some people call the Zottman Curl a Twist Curl. It is included here by way of information.



Common mistakes: rocking your body to help lift the dumbbell and poor technique

PRONE CURL ON INCLINE BENCH



Muscles involved

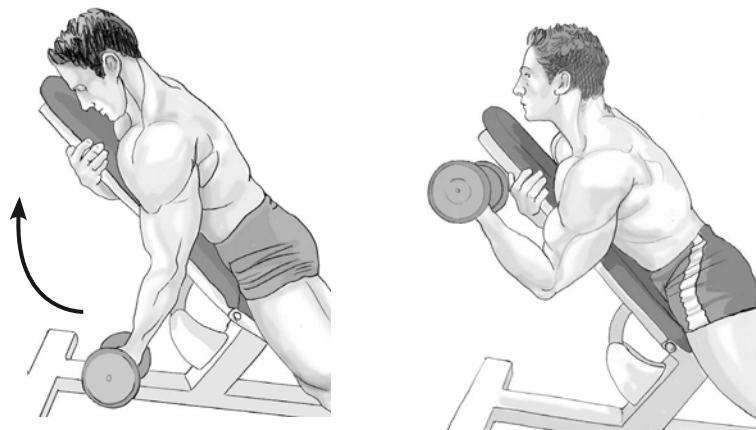
MAIN MUSCLES: biceps, brachialis, brachioradialis

SECONDARY MUSCLES: pronator teres, extensor carpi radialis longus, flexor digitorum superficialis, flexor carpi radialis

ANTAGONISTS: triceps, anconeus

Execution

Lie face down on an incline bench set to 45°. Grasp a dumbbell in an underhand or neutral grip (or use a barbell) and complete the curl without removing your chest from the bench. Inhale as you begin the lift and exhale during the downward movement.



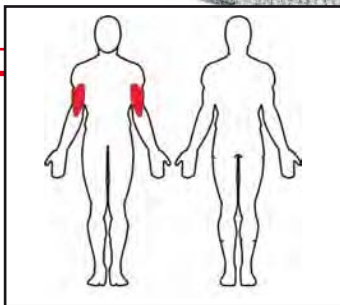
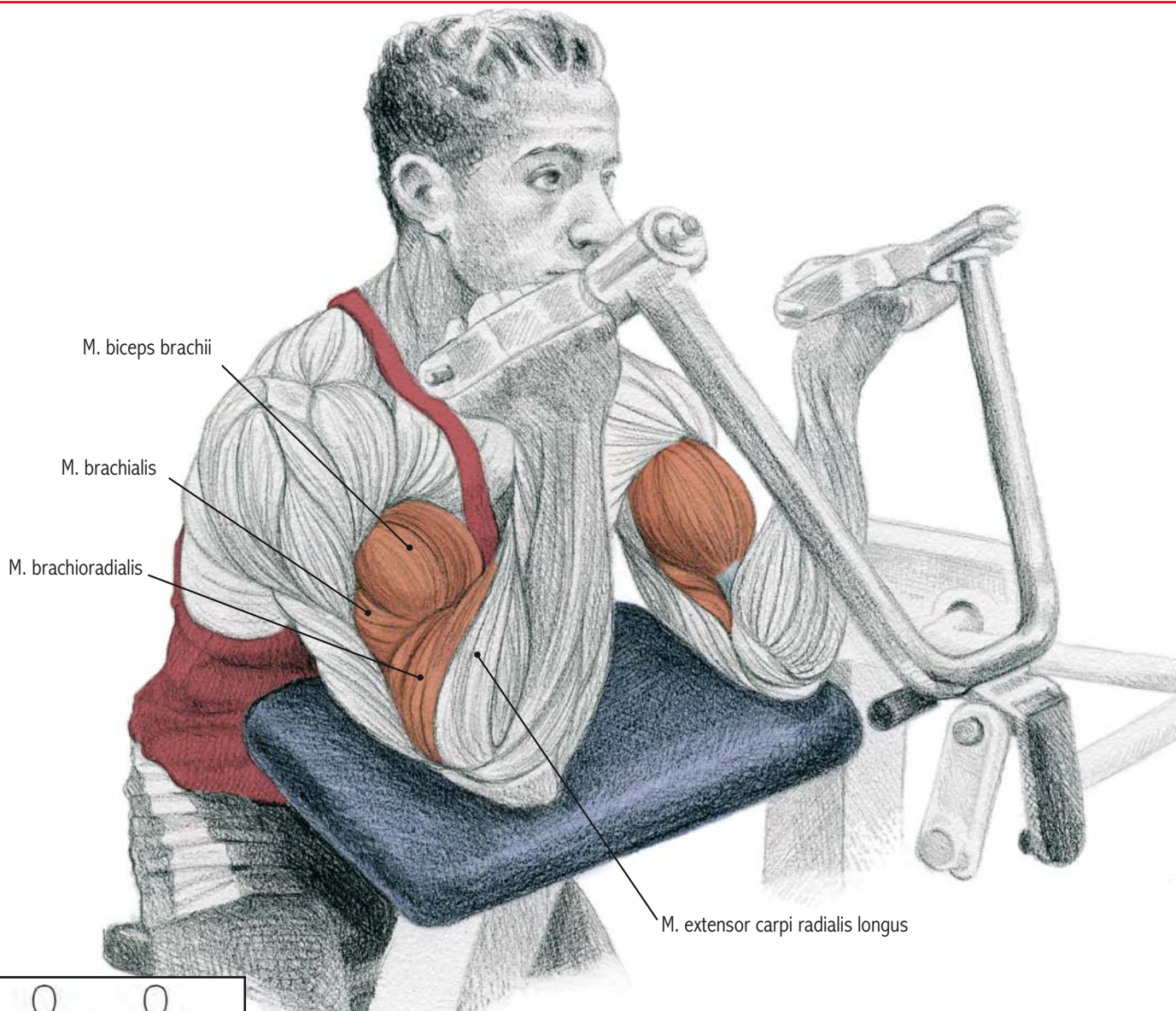
Comments

This is a rather uncommon variant that is recommended for people with back problems who need to transfer part of the weight to the bench. Otherwise, it does not provide any special advantages over other Dumbbell or Barbell Curls.

The supposedly “more open” lift obtained if you move your hand diagonally outward is unnecessary, and the movement is almost identical to the conventional Curl.



Common mistakes: incomplete range of movement and swinging your arm to gain momentum



Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: biceps, brachialis, brachioradialis

SECONDARY MUSCLES: pronator teres, extensor carpi radialis longus, flexor digitorum superficialis, flexor carpi radialis

ANTAGONISTS: triceps, anconeus

VARIATIONS

9.2 ... NEUTRAL / HAMMER GRIP

MUSCLES USED

brachialis, brachioradialis, biceps

TECHNIQUE

The design of some machines allows you to use a neutral or hammer grip. As in other exercises using the hammer grip, this makes it possible to more effectively distribute the effort toward the other elbow flexors and the long head of the biceps. Also, flexing is more natural in this variant, with the radius and ulna positioned perfectly.



Execution



Sit with your triceps resting on the pad with your underarms at the edge and your elbows in line with the axis of the machine. Grasp the grips palms up (underhand), keeping your elbows bent. Lower the weight until your arms are almost fully extended (to avoid injuring the elbow joint) and raise it again to the starting point. Breathe in during the first third of the downward movement and out at the end of the lift.

Comments

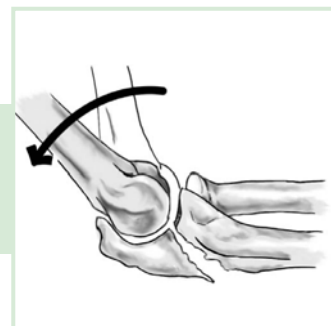
This is the same as the Preacher Curl (Ex. 3). Like its free weight equivalent, doing Machine Curls will not earn you a biceps “peak” or better muscle definition any more than other exercises. However, the exercise removes almost any opportunity to cheat and provides a perfect biceps contraction by separating the elbow movement from the rest of the body. In this regard, note that the more horizontal your arm position (shoulder flexed 90°), the more powerful the biceps contraction. It also removes the help provided by gravity on some free weight benches (especially where the slope of the pad is less steep). The machine is therefore to be recommended.



Common mistakes: placing the elbows inside the bench (due to poor design, for example), shifting the body downward to gain leverage in order to complete the Curl, and lowering the weight too far and forcing the elbows (especially on the first and last repetitions)



When you bend your elbow, the limit is determined by where the upper arm and forearm muscles meet. However, when you extend it, it is the bone configuration that establishes the extent of movement. If you go too far, you can break the olecranon, capsula or ligaments, and even injure the humeral artery. These structures are at risk in the Preacher Curl, for example, if you lower the weight as far as possible.



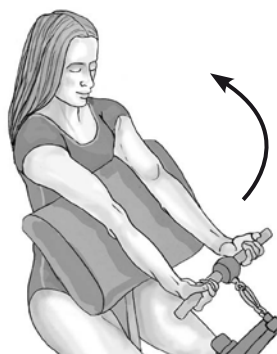
9.3 ... CABLE PREACHER CURL

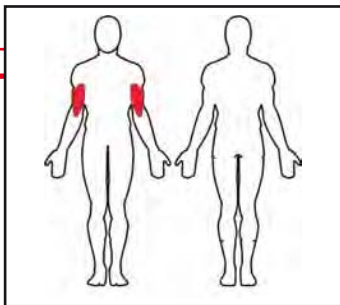
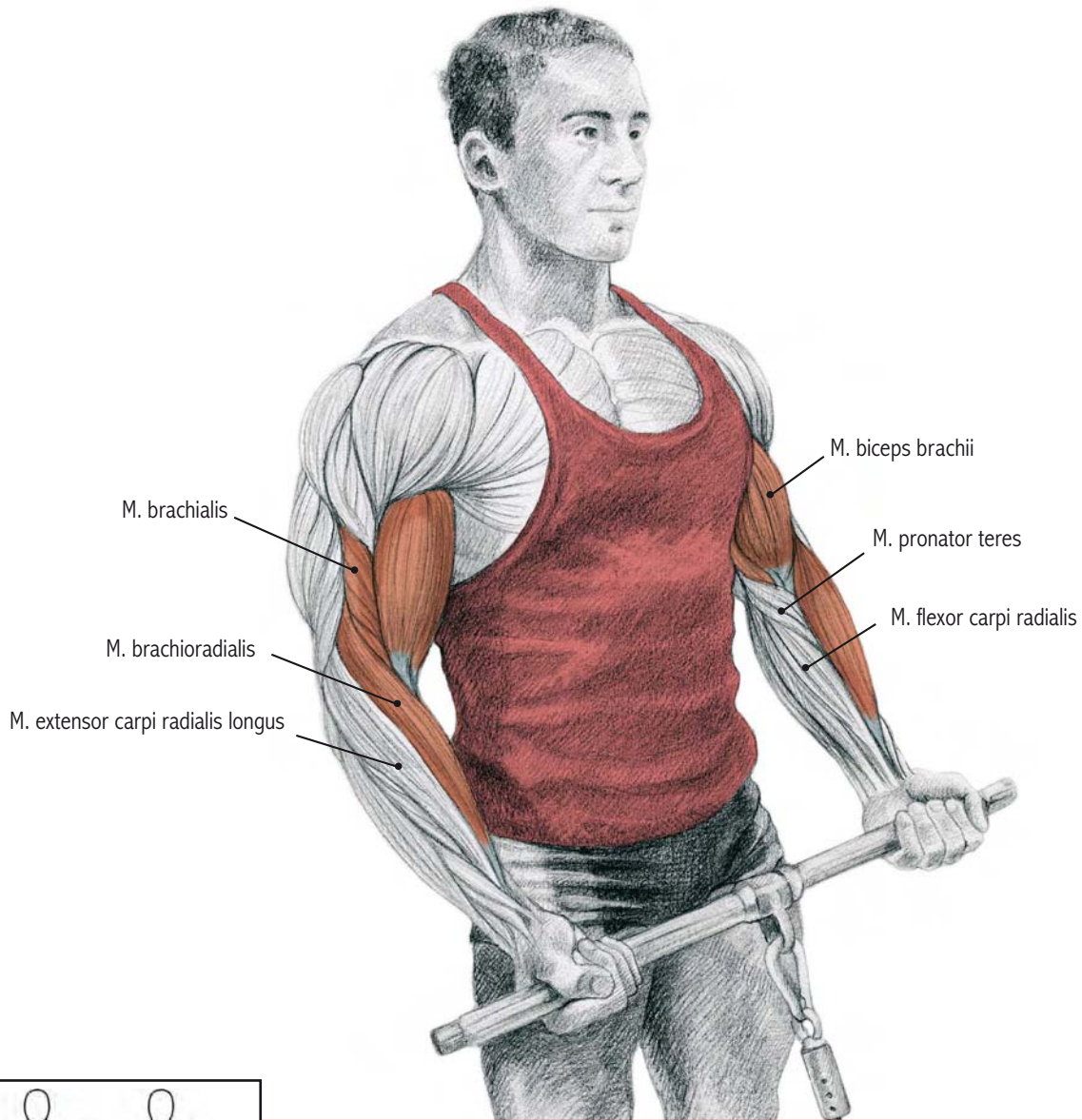
MUSCLES USED

biceps, brachialis, brachioradialis

TECHNIQUE

Place the preacher bench in front of a low cable pulley. The rest of the exercise is exactly the same as the barbell (free weight) variant. Once again, however, you will find that the cable provides more constant tension if your position is correct. Ideally, the slope of the arm rest should point toward the lower part of the pulley to prevent it from getting in the way of the cable. An Atlas cable is one that is placed at the same height as the elbow and shoulder so that the arm is horizontal. This requires more effort from the biceps than when the arm is closer to your side. Set-up can be annoying, however.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: biceps, brachialis, brachioradialis

SECONDARY MUSCLES: pronator teres, extensor carpi radialis longus, flexor digitorum superficialis, flexor carpi radialis

ANTAGONISTS: triceps, anconeus

VARIATIONS 10.2 ... WITH ROPE

MUSCLES USED

brachialis, brachioradialis, biceps

TECHNIQUE

Using a rope allows you to place your hands in a neutral position (hammer grip). As in other cases, this increases the effort made by the other elbow flexors and the long head of the biceps. Turning your hands inward (supination) at the end of the movement makes the movement more complicated, but the effect on the biceps is barely noticeable.



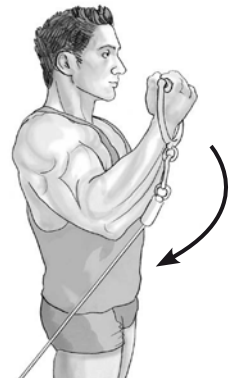
VARIATIONS 10.3 ... ONE-ARM BEHIND-THE-BACK

MUSCLES USED

biceps, brachialis, brachioradialis

TECHNIQUE

Stand with your back to the cable and hold the grip in one hand. Starting with the arm almost fully extended, bend the elbow as in the basic exercise. (You can also do this facing the cable.) The movement is usually accompanied by extending the shoulder slightly and there is a lot of resistance from beginning to end. Never straighten your elbow completely as you could injure the biceps tendon. This is a useful "pumping" exercise after you have completed the standard heavy set.



Execution



Stand in front of a low cable with your feet apart for balance and hold your torso steady. Grasp the bar in front your thighs in an underhand grip (palms up) with your hands a little more than shoulder-width apart. Lift in a controlled movement until the arms are flexed as far as possible (around 145°). Breathe in just before lifting and out as you lower the weight.

Comments

This is a basic, heavy biceps exercise suitable for any level. Both the long and the short head are worked intensely. If you use a wide grip, the short head will work harder and if you use a narrow grip, the long head will. There is not a large difference, however. In statistical terms, human beings raise the forearms around 90° in a palms-up position (supination), although this may be uncomfortable or even painful for the wrists, especially when holding a heavy weight. If so, you should opt for the EZ bar cable variant. The belief that cable exercises provide greater muscle definition or help you achieve the biceps “peak” is totally unfounded. The work done by the muscles is practically identical to the free weight variant.



Common mistakes: rocking the body to help lift, pulling your elbows back to shorten the movement and get help from the back muscles, and letting the cable fall to gain momentum



In contrast to popular belief the bending force of the elbow using an overhead grip isn't as weak as imagined.

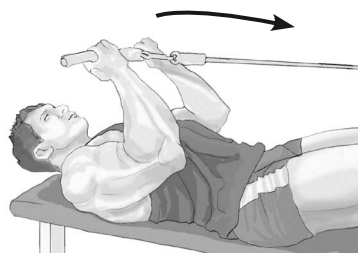
10.4 ... LYING

MUSCLES USED

biceps, brachialis, brachioradialis

TECHNIQUE

Lie down at a cable row machine or on the floor with the cable running between your legs. The variant is the same as the basic standing exercise, but relieves strain on the back (muscles of the pelvis and along the spinal column). It is ideal for people who suffer from lower back pain or who want to do the exercise as strictly as possible.



10.5 ... SQUATTING

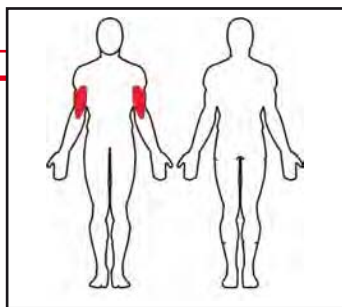
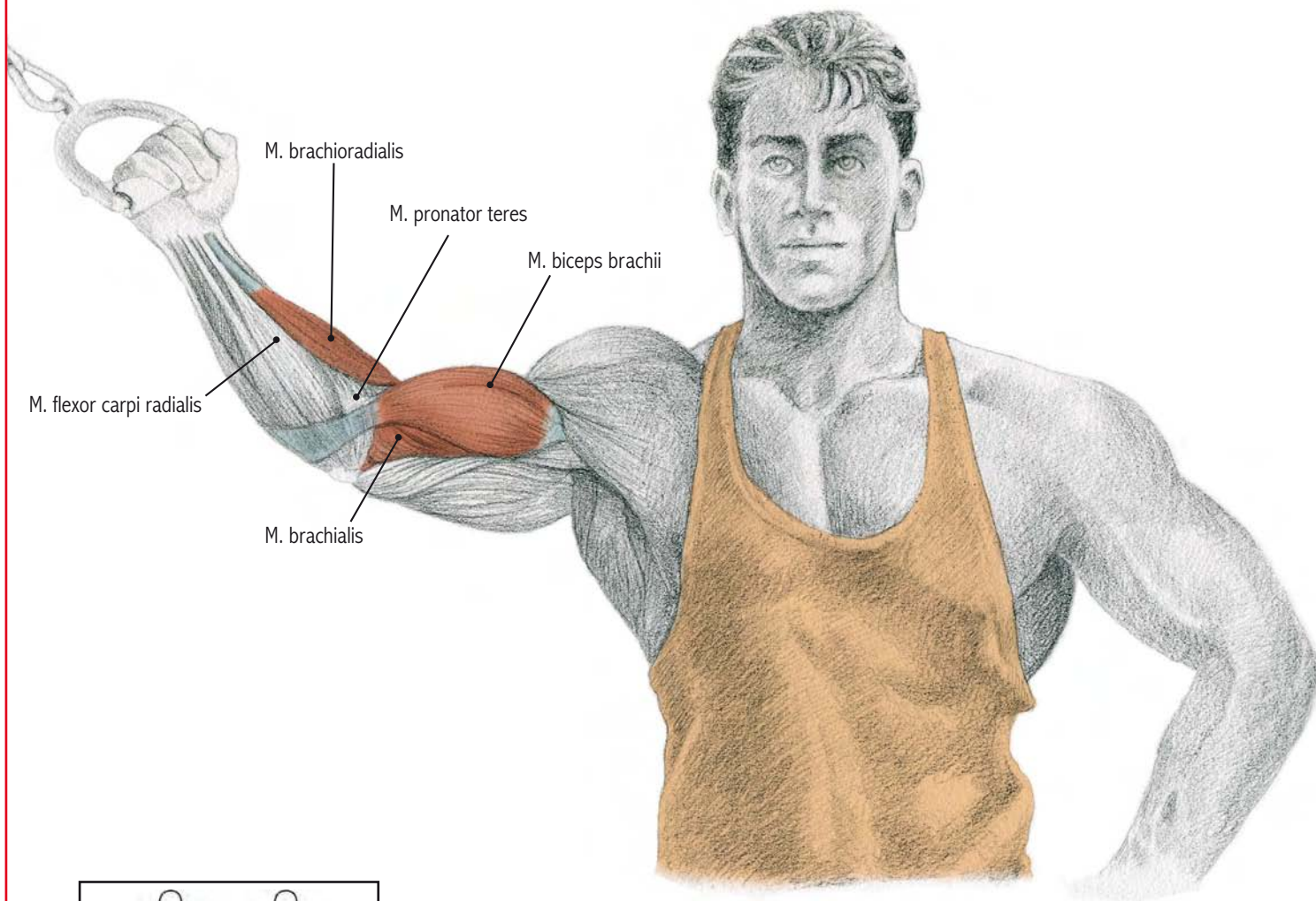
MUSCLES USED

biceps, brachialis, brachioradialis

TECHNIQUE

Place your elbows firmly on the inside of your knees. If you squat a little farther away from the pulley, you will find that you flex your shoulders, which increases the exertion of the biceps. Unfortunately, the body position is unstable, which prevents you from using much weight.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: biceps, brachialis, brachioradialis

SECONDARY MUSCLES: pronator teres, extensor carpi radialis longus, flexor digitorum superficialis, flexor carpi radialis

ANTAGONISTS: triceps, anconeus

VARIATIONS 11.2 ... TWO-ARM

MUSCLES USED

biceps, brachialis, brachioradialis

TECHNIQUE

If there is not too much distance between two high cables, you can do this exercise with both hands at the same time. Stand between the pulleys and repeat the movement described above with both arms simultaneously. The main advantage of this is to allow you to finish your set quickly.



11.3 ... LYING / VERTICAL

MUSCLES USED

biceps, brachialis, brachioradialis

TECHNIQUE

This is an unconventional variant that uses one (or better two) hands to grip a vertical cable running down just behind the head while you lie on your back. Start with your arm(s) almost fully extended and pull down toward your forehead. As with the Lying Low-cable Curl, there will be much less strain on your back than in other biceps exercises. The only problem is that you cannot use much weight, especially if you are working out alone, as it would pull your torso upward. You can also use a rope or a one-arm grip held in the opposite hand. The movement is the opposite of the One-arm Rope Push-down (Triceps, Ex. 9.5).

Execution



Stand with your side to a high cable at a short distance with your feet apart for balance and your torso held steady. Preferably, you should hold on to something with your free hand for support. Otherwise, place it on your hip. Grasp the grip underhand (palm facing your head) with your arm out to the side but not fully extended and pull toward your neck without changing the position of your elbow. Breathe in just before pulling and out as you end the movement.

Comments

The main advantage of this position is that it allows the biceps complete range of movement without any major risk of injury (in contrast to the Preacher Curl, for example). However, you should be careful not to rest the weight with your arm extended to avoid putting the bottom tendon of the biceps at risk. This exercise also offers a type of contraction that is beyond the usual range of biceps movements. You can also use a rope grip. This exercise is not always recommended for beginners, as it requires excellent technique. The weight used should not be too heavy.



Common mistakes: bringing your elbow forward during the contraction to get help from the chest muscle and front deltoid; releasing the weight to gain momentum, and resting with your arm outstretched



Comparing two different people in terms of fitness and physical strength is much less impressive than observing the change in the same person before and after training.

11.4 ... LYING CROSSOVER



MUSCLES USED

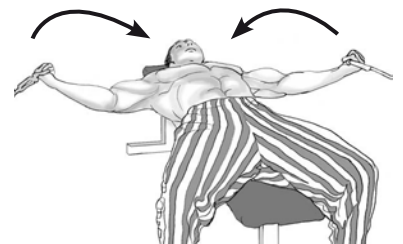
biceps, brachialis, brachioradialis

TECHNIQUE

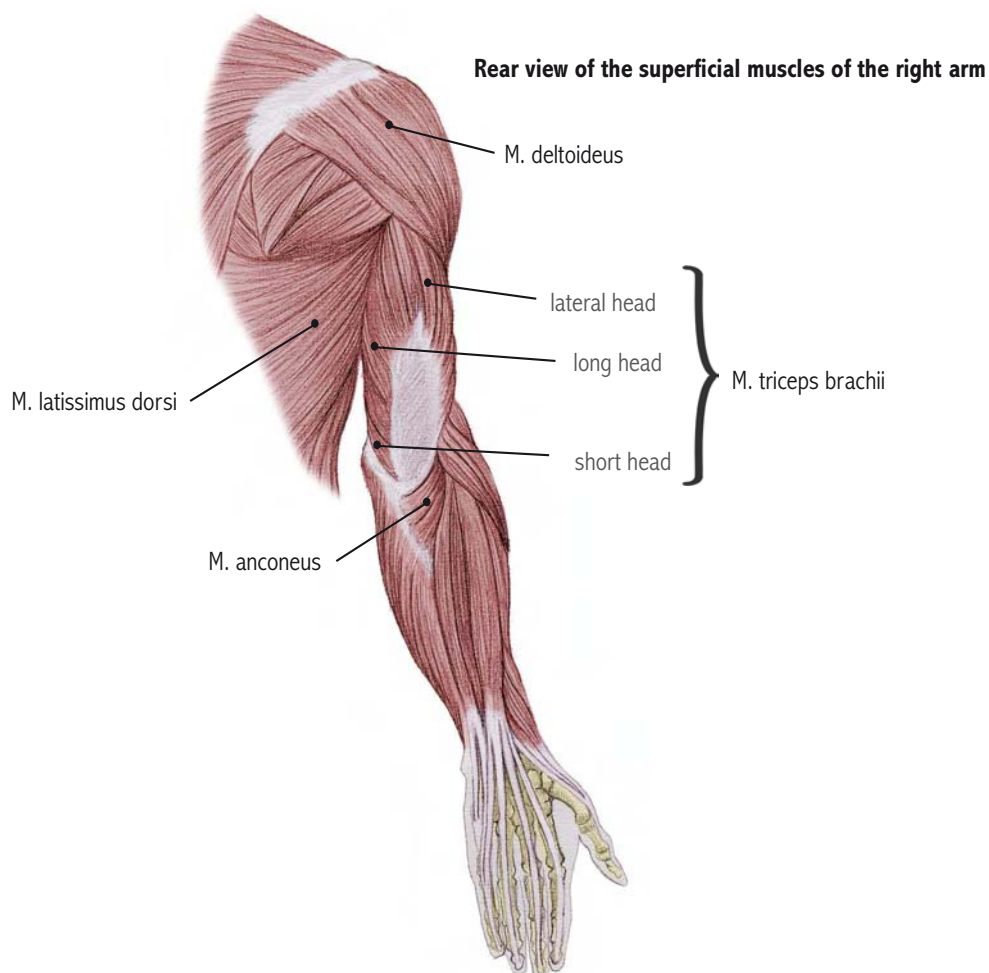
Lie on a bench between two cables, extend your arms straight out to the side and grasp the grips. Bend your elbows to bring your hands in to your shoulders. Ideally, the cable should not be too low compared to the shoulder. Do not raise your elbow in order to avoid bringing in the chest muscles and deltoid.

This variant is useful only to spice up your usual training routine. You cannot use much weight, and it has no real advantages over conventional exercises.

You can stop the cables from pulling your torso up by doing the exercise one-handed, holding on to the bench with the other.



SCIENTIFIC DESCRIPTION OF THE ARM EXTENSORS: INTRODUCTION TO THE BIOMECHANICS OF THE MAIN MUSCLES



TRICEPS BRACHII / TRICEPS (posterior, superficial)

Origin: scapula (long head, infraglenoid tubercle), humerus (medial head, below the radial groove; lateral head next to the radial groove, extending proximally to below the greater tubercle)

Insertion: ulna (olecranon process) and posterior surface of the capsule


Main functions: extending the forearm (all three heads), retroversion (swinging back) and adduction (long head)

ANCONEUS (posterior, deep)

Origin: humerus (upper surface of the lateral epicondyle) and external collateral ligament

Insertion: ulna (posterior proximal quarter beside the triceps brachii)

Main functions: weak flexion of the elbow, tensing the elbow joint capsule, and a minor role in pronation and supination



Comments: The main function of the triceps group is to extend the forearm. All three heads are involved, regardless of the position of the hands and shoulders. Training must be varied, using different positions, especially for the shoulder. This is because flexing the shoulder joint elongates and works the long head of the triceps.

Some trainers believe that exercises done with the palm down (pronation) work the lateral head more, while palm-up exercises (supination) work the long head. There may be some truth to this, but it would be a mistake to generalize or oversimplify, since few rigorous scientific studies exist. Biomechanics suggest that pronation and supination do not have a significant effect on the triceps, which is inserted in the ulna and plays a key role in rotating the radius bone. In the author's opinion, the key issue in training the triceps is grip (weak in a palm-up position), and the alignment of the joint (better in the neutral position).

The triceps is strongest when the shoulder is flexed or the elbow and shoulder are both extended (as in Pull-overs with a straight elbow). It is less powerful when the elbow is extended in combination with a flexed shoulder (as in the Front Shoulder Press and Bench Press). People have used this movement from time immemorial to hunt and throw, and continue to do so in many throwing sports.

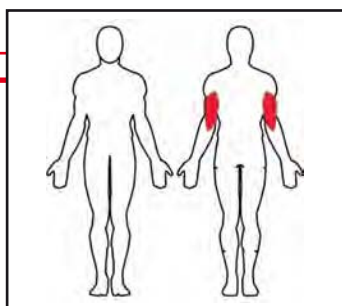
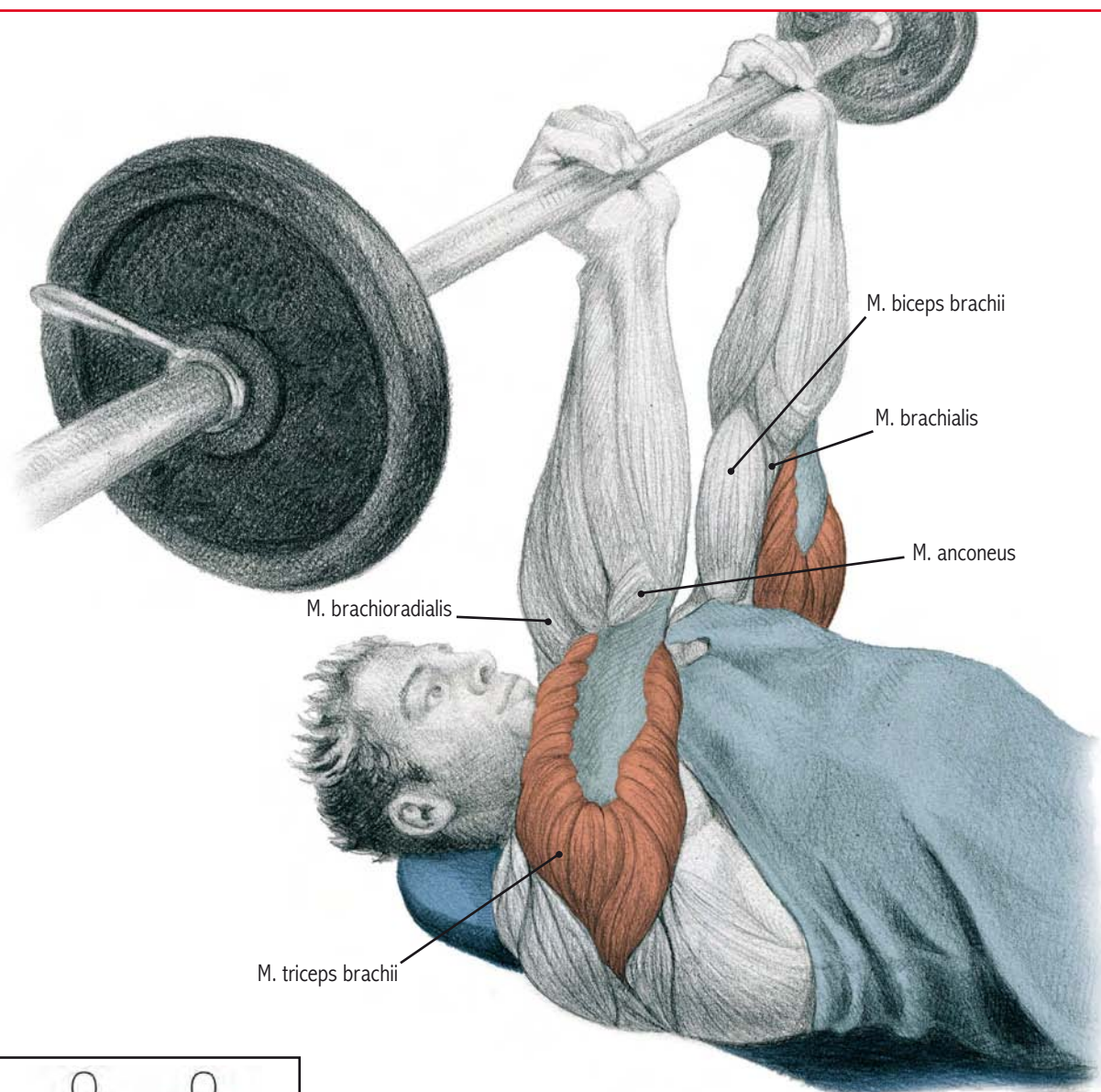
The long head also plays an active role in moving the arm toward the body (adduction). This is why the movement required in Pull-ups and similar exercises work the back muscles as powerful adductors of the arm, the biceps as an elbow flexor, and the triceps as an additional adductor of the arm. These exercises also work the forearms isometrically and the lower pectoral muscles in combination with the back muscles. They have a well-established position in weight training for these reasons.

The triceps determines the circumference of the arm somewhat more than the biceps, which means you should not ignore this rear area if you want to increase the size of your arm muscles.

The elbow joint works hard in most exercises for the torso and upper limbs and weak triceps can affect the development of other muscle groups. Allow at least one day's rest for this joint each week. Even if you do not specifically work the triceps in a given session, working other muscle groups (chest, shoulder, etc.) can put strain on the elbow joint. It is advisable to set aside one day for aerobic training only, or for the legs, in order to give the upper body a break.

In addition, a weak triceps will reduce the number of repetitions you can do in other exercises like the Bench Press or Shoulder Press and you may have to stop before the "target" muscle has had time to work to its full potential.

The only important function of the anconeus is to help the powerful triceps straighten the forearm.



Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: triceps

SECONDARY MUSCLES: anconeus

ANTAGONISTS: biceps, brachialis, brachioradialis

VARIATIONS 1.2 ... WITH EZ BAR

MUSCLES USED

triceps

TECHNIQUE

In general, the human body does not allow the forearms to descend a full 90° in this palms-up position because the radius clashes with the ulna. The maximum is about 85°. This means that you cannot hold a straight bar without your elbows deviating from the vertical line. Also, you may feel some discomfort on reaching the limit of rotation. The zigzag design of the EZ bar provides a natural grip without any significant change in muscle effort.



VARIATIONS 1.3 ... WITH TRICEPS BAR

MUSCLES USED

triceps

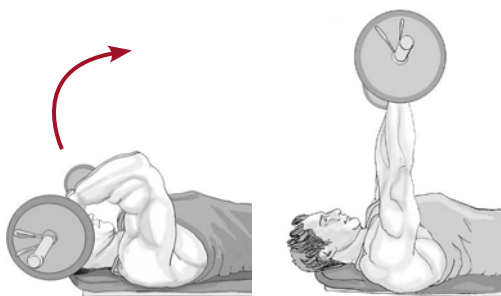
TECHNIQUE

The triceps bar provides a more comfortable neutral grip, with the radius and ulna positioned correctly. The muscle involvement is almost identical, although some studies have suggested that the lateral head works a little harder.





Execution



Lie face up on a bench, placing your feet on the floor if the bench is low, or on a step. Hold the bar in an overhand grip (palms facing up) above eye level with your elbows straight. Lower the bar by bending your elbows, but without changing their position. Extend your elbows to raise the bar and stop just before they straighten out fully, maintaining the tension. (You can also place your elbows a little farther back.) Inhale during the first part of the downward movement and exhale as you reach the top.

Comments

This is a basic, heavy exercise (within limits) for all three heads of the triceps. Caution is needed, however, and you must not change the position of your elbows. Remember that the triceps is less strong when the shoulders are flexed than when the muscle is parallel to the body (see Ex. 8, Cable Push-down and Ex. 3, Bar Dip). The anconeus is a “pure” forearm extensor (unlike the triceps, which activates two joints), but it is weak and only plays a supporting role. If you feel any discomfort in the elbow joint, you should experiment with the dumbbell variants (Ex. 2) and avoid focusing on extending the elbows fully, since a comfortable position is preferable. Begin and end the exercise by placing the bar across your stomach.



Common mistakes: moving the elbows to get help from the chest and back muscles, not positioning the elbows vertically or far enough back to counteract the effect of gravity, and opening your elbows too wide to get help from the shoulder and/or chest muscles

1.4 ... INVERTED GRIP

MUSCLES USED

triceps

TECHNIQUE

Some studies using resonance imaging data suggest the lateral head of the triceps works harder using this grip. In the author’s opinion, however, it is basically the radius that rotates over the ulna, and the demand on the triceps would therefore be almost identical (because it is inserted in the ulna). In addition, the grip is weaker and the wrist position is unnatural, so you have to use less weight.



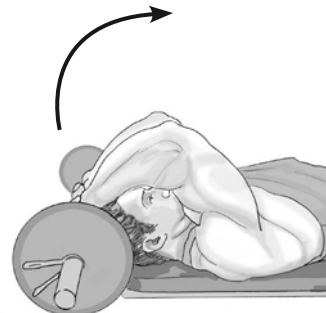
1.5 ...BEHIND-THE-HEAD

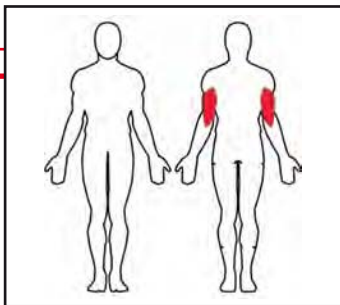
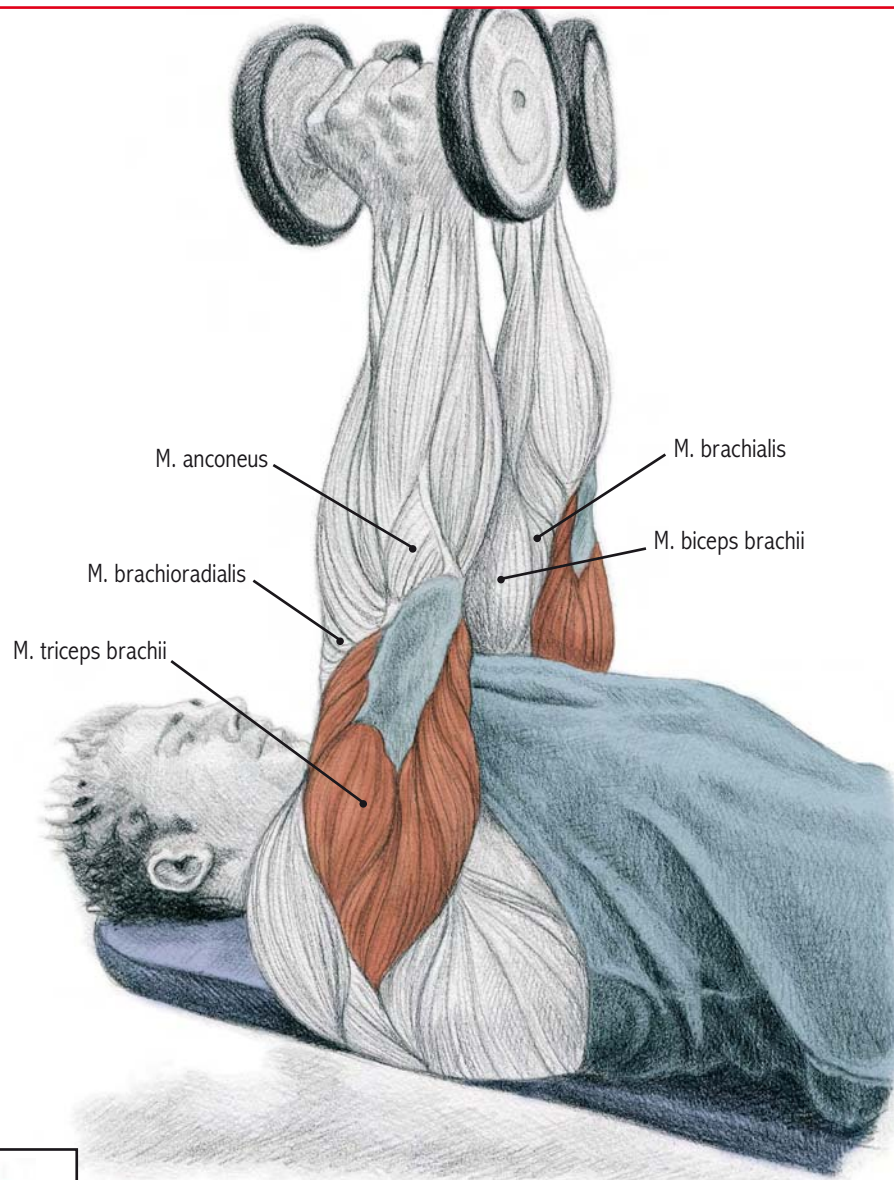
MUSCLES USED

triceps

TECHNIQUE

Place your elbows a little farther back (by flexing the shoulder farther) and lower the bar behind your head. This further elongates the long head of the triceps, increasing the work done and eliminating “dead” spots.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: triceps

SECONDARY MUSCLES: anconeus

ANTAGONISTS: biceps brachii, brachialis, brachioradialis

VARIATIONS

2.2 ... CROSS-FACE

MUSCLES USED

triceps

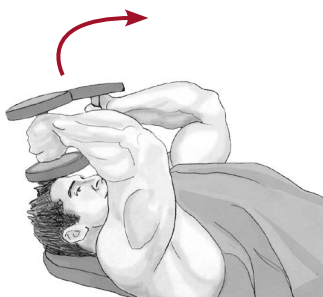
TECHNIQUE

Grasp one dumbbell in an overhand grip and use the other hand to keep the weight-bearing arm steady by holding the biceps. Lower the weight so that your thumb comes down toward the opposite shoulder. Some people will experience less discomfort using this minor variant and holding on to your arm makes balance easier. Like all triceps exercises, the variant works all three heads, although it is usually recommended for the lateral head.





Execution



Lie face up on a bench, placing your feet on the floor if the bench is low, or on a step. Hold the dumbbells in a neutral grip above eye level with your elbows straight. Lower the weights to the sides of your head without changing the position of your elbows. On reaching the bottom of the movement, straighten your arms again to raise the dumbbells to the starting point. Breathe in as you lower the weights and out as you raise them.

Comments

Like the triceps bar exercise (Ex. 1.3), this is a basic, heavy exercise for the triceps. It usually causes less discomfort in the elbow and wrist joints, however, and the radius and ulna are positioned better. Never try to set the dumbbells on the floor while you are lying down. Use the technique described for the Dumbbell Bench Press (Chest, Ex. 4).

Remember that you can train some muscles (e.g., pectoralis major, latissimus dorsi and gluteus) by working one area or another, due to the structure of the muscle fibers, but that bodybuilders tend to overstate the benefits of workouts targeting different parts of a single muscle sheath. This is often impossible, at least to the extent claimed. The long head of the triceps is activated to a greater or lesser degree depending on how you position yourself, while the lateral and medial heads always work when you straighten your elbow.



Common mistakes: moving the elbows to get help from the chest and back muscles, not positioning the elbows vertically to counteract the effect of gravity, and opening your elbows too wide



Muscle, tendon and ligament injuries

The immediate treatment for almost all traumatic injuries, sprains, and torn muscles or ligaments can be summed up in the mnemonic "RICE," which stands for rest, ice, compression and elevation. Depending on the severity of the injury, the next step is to visit your doctor.

2.3 ... ONE-ARM

MUSCLES USED

triceps

TECHNIQUE

The starting position and movement are exactly the same as in the basic (two-dumbbell) exercise, except that you alternate arms between sets, supporting the triceps with your free hand to prevent the elbow from moving. As in the triceps bar variant, the lateral head may work slightly harder.



2.4 ... SIDE

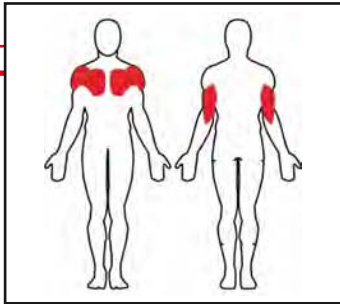
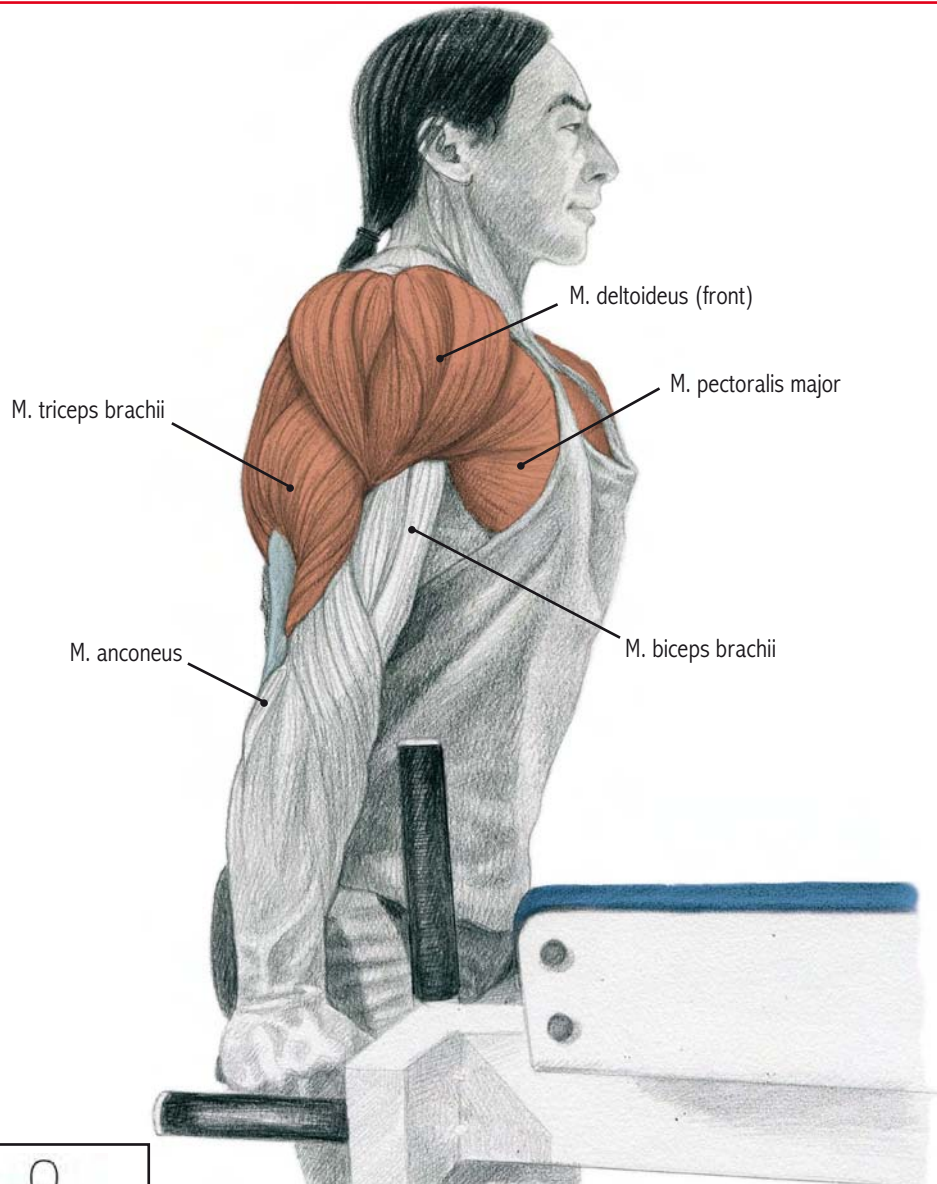
MUSCLES USED

triceps

TECHNIQUE

Lie on your side with your arm raised and holding a dumbbell in a neutral grip. Lower the weight so that your thumb comes down toward your head, then straighten your arm to complete the movement. This is an unconventional variant that provides a different contraction of the triceps, particularly the long and medial heads.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: triceps, pectoralis major (lower), front deltoid

SECONDARY MUSCLES: pectoralis minor, serratus anterior, coracobrachialis, subscapularis, anconeus

ANTAGONISTS: latissimus dorsi, biceps, rear deltoid

VARIATIONS

3.2 ... BENCH DIPS

MUSCLES USED

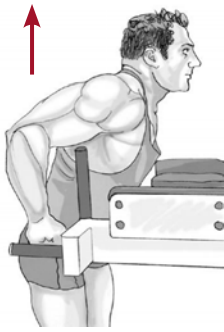
triceps, pectoralis major (lower), front deltoid

TECHNIQUE

Grasp the edge of a bench with your palms down and your legs straight, resting on your heels. Lower your torso vertically, keeping your back close to the bench by bending your elbows backwards and controlling the extension of the triceps. Push back up. You can make this exercise lighter by placing the soles of your feet on the floor rather than resting your legs on your heels.



Execution



Grasp the parallel bars in a narrow grip with your hands in the neutral position, keeping your torso straight and your knees bent. Breathe in and lower yourself without bending your torso forward to avoid using the chest muscles. You should feel like you are “straightening” your arms rather than “pushing.” To achieve this, make sure that your elbows do not move too far from your torso. Push back up again when you reach the lowest point of the movement and breathe out at the top.

Comments

Like the Bar Dip for the chest (Chest, Ex. 7), this is an excellent exercise for the triceps. Despite the involvement of the chest muscles and deltoid, you should try not to flex your shoulders (as in the Lying French Press, Ex. 1) in order to concentrate the effort in the triceps and give all three heads a good workout. You will need to be careful if you have had any injury like “tennis elbow” or shoulder problems. This exercise should be done slowly unless you are training for a specific activity, and you should slow down and/or increase the number of repetitions you do rather than adding weight. Beginners and people with weight problems should opt for variants if they find it difficult to manage enough reps.



Common mistakes: limited range of movement, opening the elbows and overusing the chest muscles, using too much weight (if applicable), poor torso position during the movement, and doing the exercise too fast



Everybody understands that you must train the right and left sides of your body symmetrically, but the symmetry of the front and back is sometimes ignored. For example, people sometimes train the biceps harder than the triceps, or the quadriceps harder than the hamstrings. This approach is wrong and affects the body’s muscular and aesthetic balance.

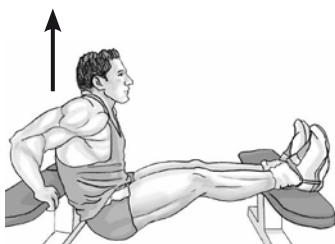
3.3 ... BETWEEN BENCHES

MUSCLES USED

triceps, pectoralis major (lower), front deltoid

TECHNIQUE

The position is the same as in variant 3.2, but with your feet elevated, resting on a bench or other support. This variant is a little more difficult and is the first step toward using weight.



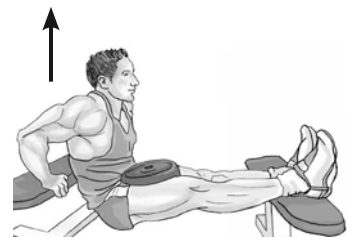
3.4 ... BETWEEN BENCHES WITH WEIGHT

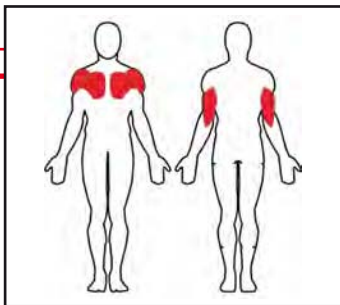
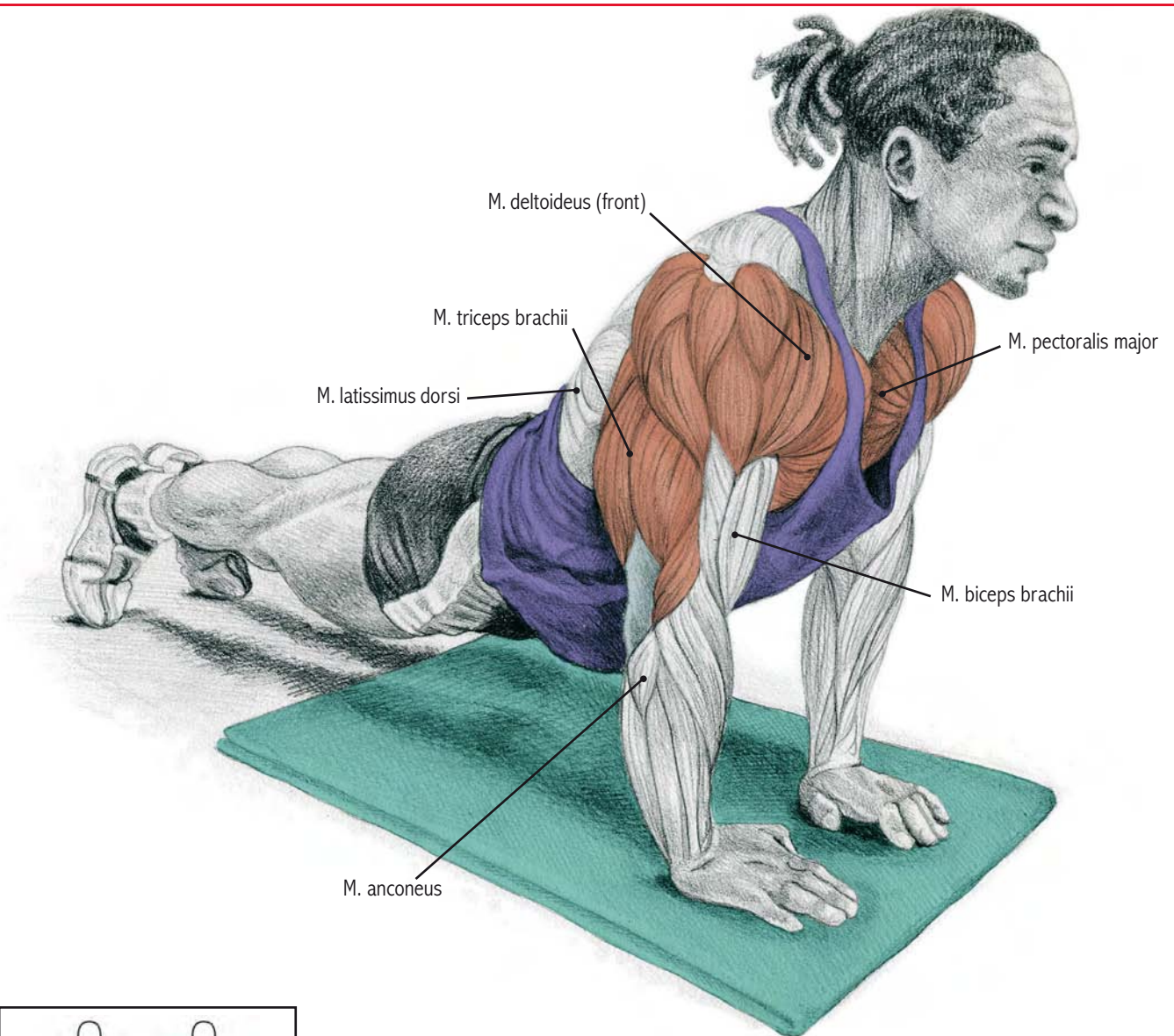
MUSCLES USED

triceps, pectoralis major (lower), front deltoid

TECHNIQUE

Position your body between two benches (see variant 3.3) and place a weight on top of your thighs. If you use several weights, you can ask a partner to remove them one by one as you approach muscle failure. This allows you to do some truly heavy and difficult sets.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: triceps, pectoralis major, front deltoid

SECONDARY MUSCLES: pectoralis minor, serratus anterior, coracobrachialis, subscapularis, anconeus

ANTAGONISTS: latissimus dorsi, biceps, rear deltoid

VARIATIONS

4.2 ... HAND-OVER-HAND

MUSCLES USED

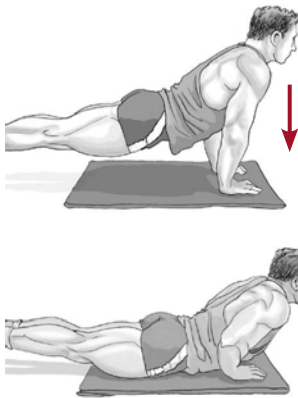
triceps, pectoralis major, front deltoid

TECHNIQUE

The movement is the same, but you place your hands one on top of the other rather than parallel to each other. The work done by the triceps is practically identical.



Execution



Lie face down on the floor with your feet together and your hands shoulder-width apart. Start with your arms straight, breathe in and bend your elbows to lower your body, keeping them close to your torso. Do not bend your hips. Exhale after straightening your arms to push yourself back up.

Comments

This is a variant of the chest Push-up (Chest, Ex. 6), but by keeping your elbows close to your body and extending your arms more like a traditional press you will work the triceps harder. Once again, you should be careful not to lower your head while leaving your hips up and vice versa. The scale of difficulty for the variants described below is the same as for chest Push-ups (Chest, Ex. 6).



Common mistakes: not lowering the shoulders and waist together, limited range of movement and/or doing the exercise too fast, and opening your elbows and hands too wide in order to get help from the chest muscles



It is essential to drink water before, during and after physical exercise to ensure that you are properly hydrated.

4.3 ... ONE-ARM

MUSCLES USED

triceps, pectoralis major, front deltoid

TECHNIQUE

The technique is like the basic exercise, but you place only one hand on the floor in line with the center of your chest, while keeping the other behind your back. You can spread your legs a little to make the position more stable. This variant is difficult and it is hard to achieve ideal position and movement. This variant is for advanced athletes only.



4.4 ... WALL

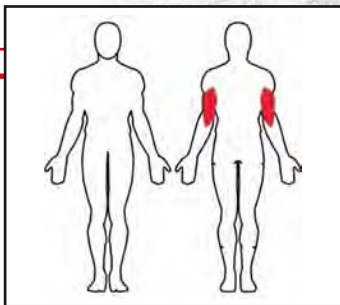
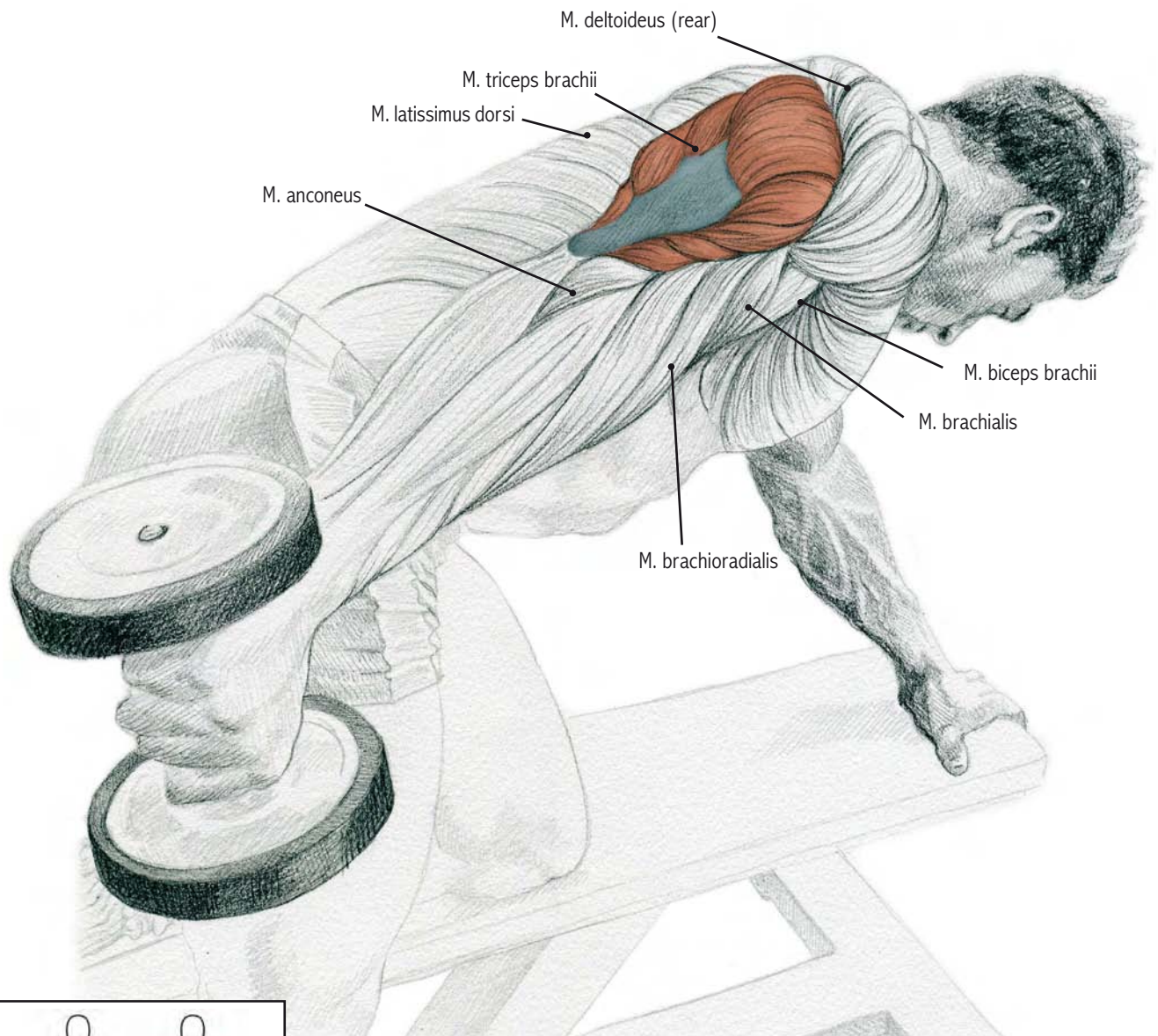
MUSCLES USED

triceps, pectoralis major, front deltoid

TECHNIQUE

The movement is the same as the basic exercise, but standing and leaning against a wall. It is a good exercise for beginners as the feet take much of the weight off the arms. More advanced athletes may want to use this as a warm-up.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: triceps

SECONDARY MUSCLES: anconeus (rear deltoid, latissimus dorsi)

ANTAGONISTS: biceps, brachialis, brachioradialis

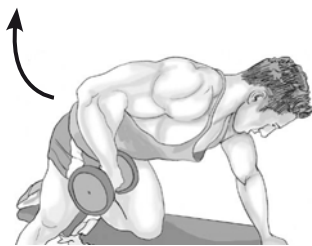
VARIATIONS 5.2 ... OVERHAND GRIP

MUSCLES USED

triceps

TECHNIQUE

Use an overhand grip with your knuckles pointing down as you raise the dumbbell. This may increase the work done by the lateral head, although any difference would be small (see Ex. 1.4).



VARIATIONS 5.3 ... UNDERHAND GRIP

MUSCLES USED

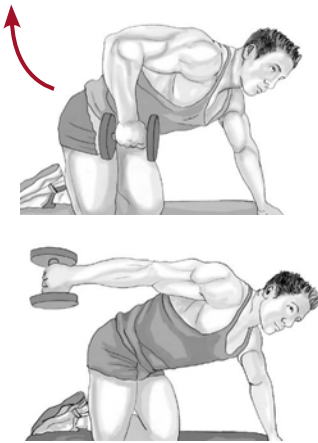
triceps

TECHNIQUE

This grip is the opposite of variant 5.2, and it is now the palm of your hand that will face the floor. This may increase the work done by the lateral head, although any difference would be small (see Ex. 1.4).



Execution



Support yourself on one hand and knee, resting on a flat bench. Grasp the dumbbell in a neutral grip in your free hand with your other leg extended diagonally back and your foot on the floor. Keep your torso horizontal and in line. Starting with your elbow bent 90°, lift the dumbbell back and up until the triceps is almost fully extended. Keep your elbow close to your torso without changing its position. Breathe in just before lifting the weight and out as you lower it.

Comments

This is a good triceps exercise that does not pose any special risk to the elbow joint. You can also stand to do this exercise, holding on to a bench or other object with your free hand for support. However, the position of the torso and hand must be the same (see Back, Ex. 4). The lateral and medial heads probably work harder to extend the arm in this variant, although the long head is also involved. If you use too much weight, your deltoid will tire too quickly, “ruining” the movement. The cable variant will solve this problem (Ex. 9.4). Beginners should be careful to maintain the position and perform the exercise with good technique, using less weight.



Common mistakes: swinging the dumbbell to gain momentum, bending the elbow more than 90° (except to complete a set), not extending fully, moving the arm out to get help from the back and shoulder muscles, and using a bench that is too high, so that neither the torso nor the arm are horizontal to the floor

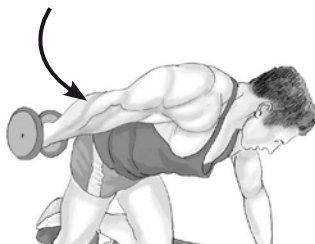
5.4 ... TWISTING

MUSCLES USED

triceps

TECHNIQUE

The technique used is the same as the preceding exercises, but you twist your arm from the starting position (neutral, for example) to the opposite (pronation or supination). This exercise is actually unnecessary.



5.5 ... TWO-ARM

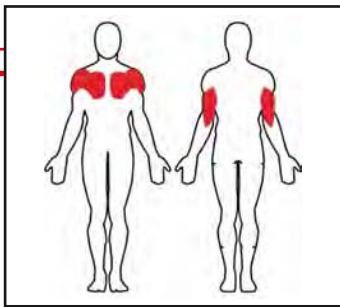
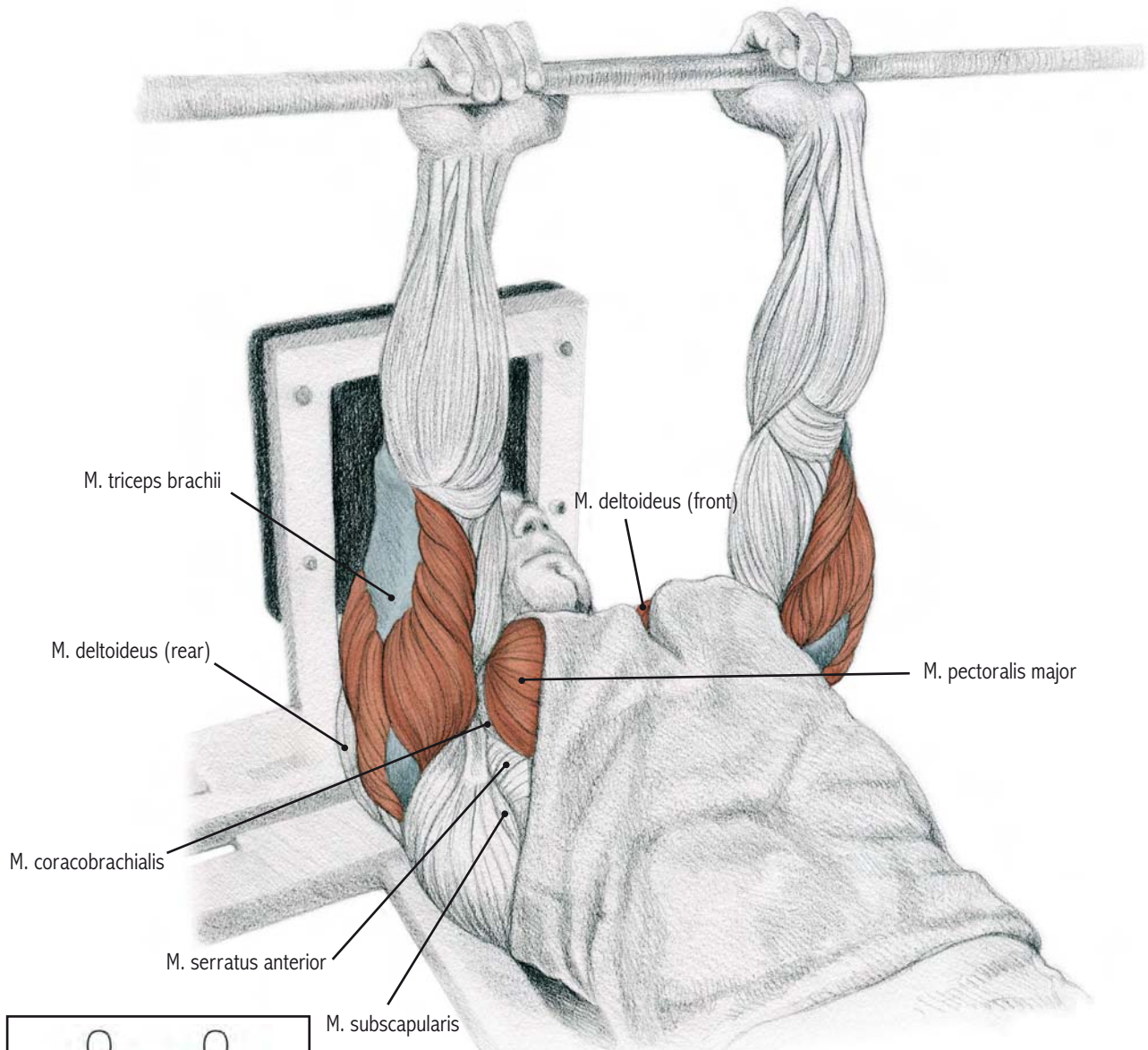
MUSCLES USED

triceps

TECHNIQUE

This is the same as the basic exercise, but using both hands. The variant is more uncomfortable, and its only advantage is to allow you to finish a few seconds faster (e.g., in circuit routines).





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: triceps, pectoralis major, front deltoid

SECONDARY MUSCLES: coracobrachialis, serratus anterior, pectoralis minor, subscapularis, anconeus

ANTAGONISTS: latissimus dorsi, biceps, rear deltoid

VARIATIONS

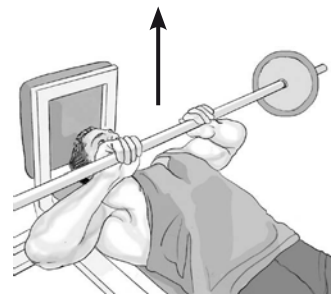
6.2 ... ELBOWS-OUT

MUSCLES USED

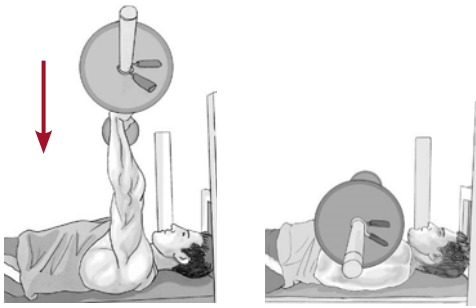
triceps, pectorals, front deltoid

TECHNIQUE

The position and grip are the same, but you need to separate your elbows from your torso as you lower the bar so that they come down perpendicular to your body. This is an intermediate stage between a Narrow-grip Press and a conventional Bench Press. The triceps still has a lot of work to do, provided you maintain a narrow grip. You may feel some discomfort in your wrists, in which case you should stop.



Execution



Lie flat (face up) with the bench supporting your head and back and your feet firmly on the ground. With the barbell directly above your eyes, grasp it with a symmetrical overhand grip (palms facing up), hands slightly less than shoulder-width apart, preferably keeping your thumb under the bar. Inhale before taking the bar down and bring it in line with your chest. Lower your elbows away from your torso until the bar is just above the middle of your chest and then raise it vertically. Breathe in as you lower the bar and exhale as you complete the lift.

Comments

This variant of the chest Bench Press (Chest, Ex. 1) provides a heavy workout for the triceps, as the movement is more similar to an extension than a press. The lateral and medial heads probably work harder than the long head, but all three are involved. As in the other exercises described, to avoid arching your back, you should rest your feet on a platform if the bench is too high. Do not do this exercise or any of its variants if you experience discomfort or pain in your wrists.



Common mistakes: arching the back or bouncing the bar off the torso, too wide a grip, and holding the elbows too far from the body



The long head of the triceps is involved in all press exercises (chest, shoulder, etc.), contracting to extend the elbow and stretching to bend it, or to move the shoulder inward. For this reason, it has been argued that it does little work in movements of this kind. More laboratory tests and measurements are needed however, given the many variables.

6.3 ... HEAVY WITH MEDIUM GRIP

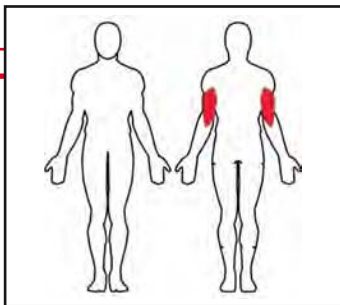
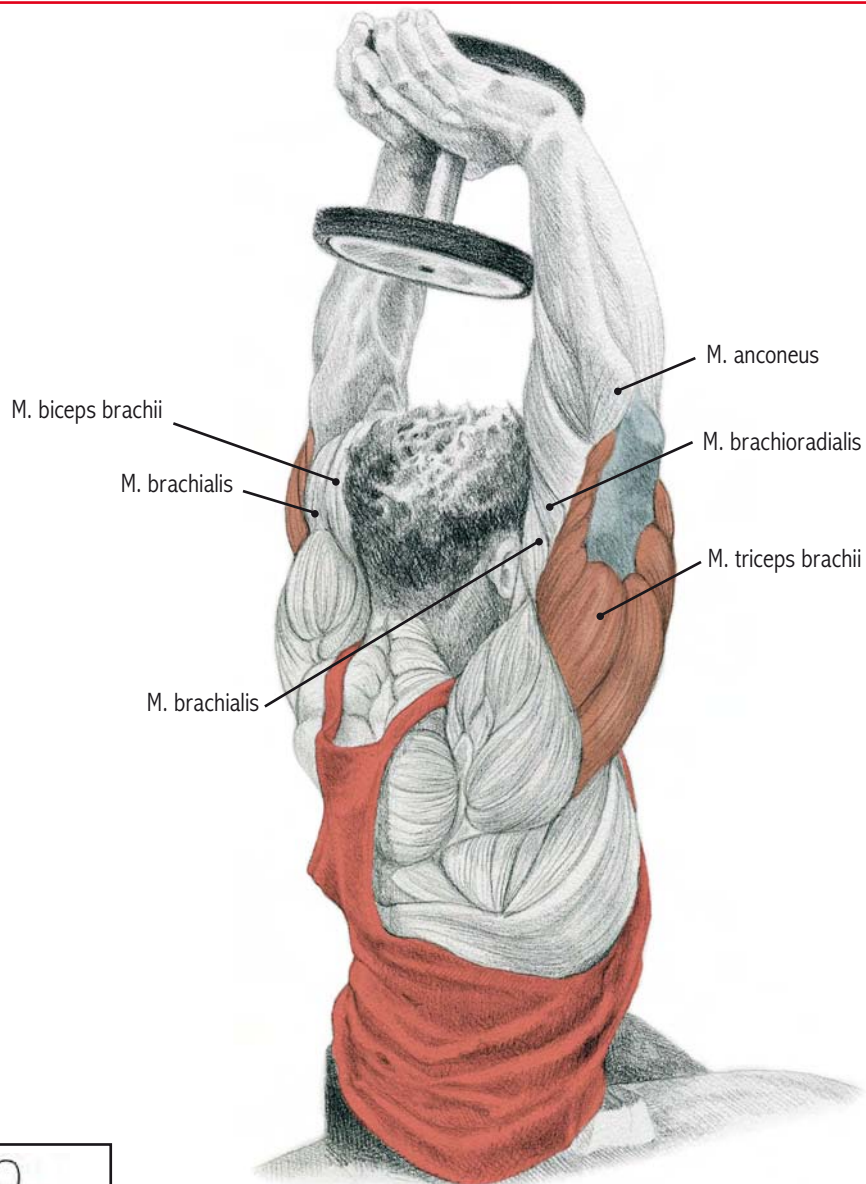
MUSCLES USED

pectorals, triceps, front deltoid

TECHNIQUE

This is the same as the conventional Bench Press (Chest, Ex. 1), but with a medium grip (approximately shoulder-width). It can be used as an intermediate step in a routine including the chest muscles and triceps, resulting in an exercise that is halfway between the two. If you want to concentrate work on the triceps, you can push outward as you raise the bar, as if you were trying to separate your grip further, although your hands do not move, of course.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: triceps
SECONDARY MUSCLES: anconeus
ANTAGONISTS: Biceps, brachialis, brachioradialis

VARIATIONS

7.2 ...WITH BAR

MUSCLES USED

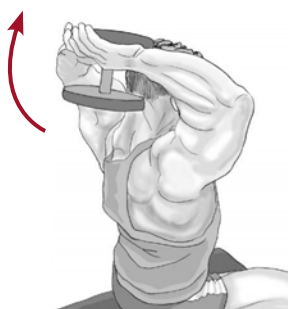
triceps

TECHNIQUE

Use a short bar held in an overhand grip with your hands around shoulder-width apart. Some NMR (nuclear magnetic resonance) studies suggest the long head of the triceps works less than the other two in this exercise. In the author's opinion, however, there can be no great difference. This variant has become increasingly uncommon, because the position is uncomfortable, and balance is difficult. It also offers no obvious advantage.



Execution



Stand, or sit leaning against a back rest that does not reach your head, and tighten your abdominal muscles to hold your torso steady. Hold the dumbbell by the inside of the disc with your thumbs on the other side of the bar and your fingers clasp the weight itself. Straighten your elbows above your head to almost their full extent and without opening them, lower the dumbbell back behind your head. Breathe in as you lower the dumbbell and out as you raise it.

Comments

If you do this exercise standing with a heavy weight, you will need to put one foot forward and lift the dumbbell in three stages: first, place the dumbbell on your thigh and lift it to your shoulder with the help of a push from the leg; second, place your hands in the position described; and third, lift it up in a final movement. If you are training alone (help is recommended), you should put the weight down in the same way. You can use considerable weight, but it is not easy for a partner to help you. This should be taken into account to avoid accident or injury.

All three heads of the triceps work hard.



Common mistakes: moving your elbows to gain momentum each time you raise the dumbbell, doing the exercise on a bench that prevents you from lowering the weight far enough without hitting the back support, opening your elbows too far, and arching your back



Training with a friend whose physical fitness and goals are similar to your own is highly beneficial in both physical and psychological terms.

7.3 ... ONE-ARM

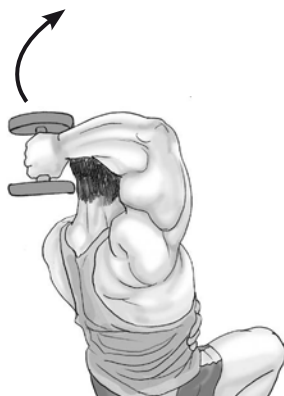
MUSCLES USED

triceps

TECHNIQUE

This is the same as the basic exercise, but using only one arm. The other is used to maintain balance, either by holding on to something for support or grasping the working arm to maintain the position. It also helps to pick up and set down the dumbbell at the beginning and end of each set.

Because less weight is used, you are less likely to suffer any injury (e.g., to the back), provided your technique is good. There is no difference in the work done by the muscles.



7.4 ... WITH TWO DUMBBELLS

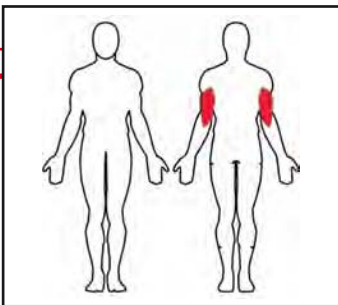
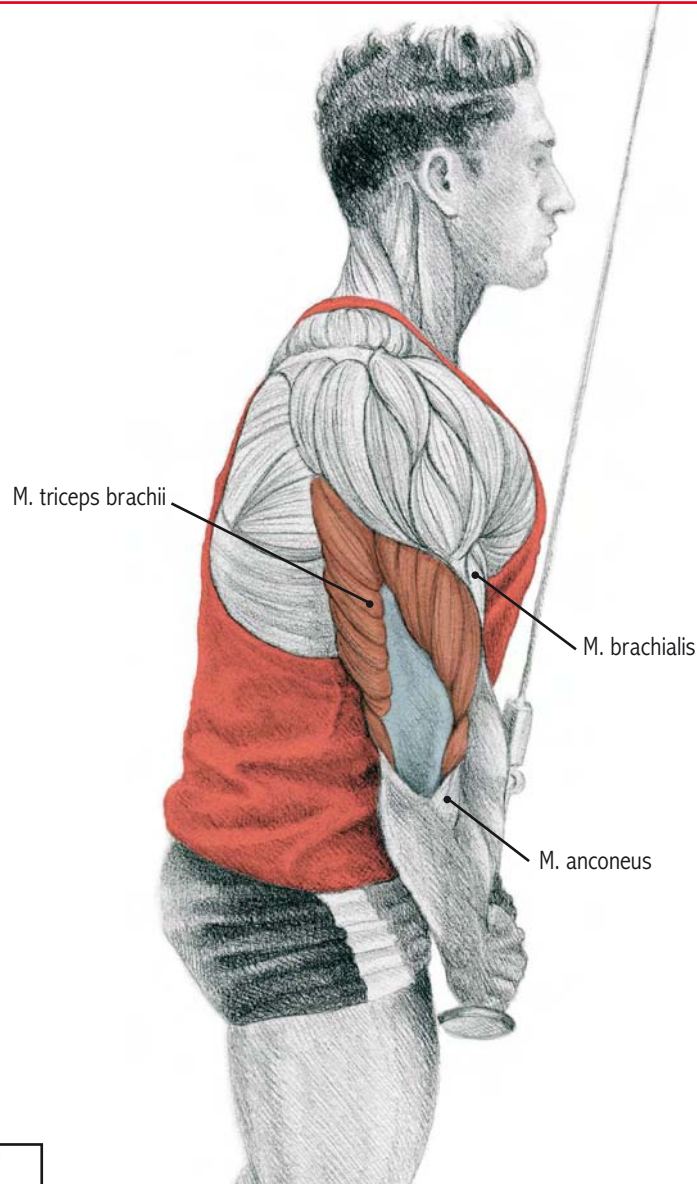
MUSCLES USED

triceps

TECHNIQUE

The same as the one-arm exercise, but using two dumbbells. There is little difference between this and the other variants. The choice of one or the other is more a matter of personal preference or comfort. However, you should not use the two-dumbbell variant if you find it difficult to complete the movement or maintain the elbow position.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: triceps

SECONDARY MUSCLES: anconeus

ANTAGONISTS: biceps, brachialis, brachioradialis

VARIATIONS 8.2 ... ONE-ARM

MUSCLES USED

triceps

TECHNIQUE

You may prefer to use an overhand grip, working each arm alternately. There is no difference in the muscle work. Most people will need to use proportionally less weight than in the two-arm exercise, given the position of the body.



VARIATIONS 8.3 ... ONE-ARM REVERSE

MUSCLES USED

triceps

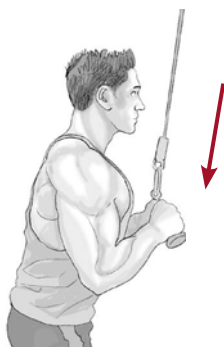
TECHNIQUE

This is the same as the one-arm variant, but using an underhand grip (palm up). It is claimed that this works the lateral head harder (a debatable point), although the weaker grip means you will have to use even less weight (see Ex. 1.4).

A variant is to position your body as in the Concentration Curl (Biceps, Ex. 4) in order to isolate the area you are working.



Execution



Stand in front of a high cable and grasp the bar in an overhand grip (palms down). You can place your thumbs either over or under the bar and your hands should be shoulder-width apart or less. Keep your feet apart and parallel, placing one slightly forward to take the weight of the body and arms. Hold your torso steady by tensing the abdomen. Extend your forearms to lower the bar without moving your elbows, which you should keep close to your sides. When the forearms are fully extended, raise them again in a controlled movement. Breathe in as you bend your elbows and out when your arms are extended.

Comments

This is a simple, effective triceps exercise for both beginners and advanced athletes. An EZ bar or V-bar is best (see Ex. 1.2). Despite what some people say, you can bend your elbows more than 90°, provided this is not to gain momentum and cheat. The exercise effectively works all three heads of the triceps, although it is a little easier on the long head. If you want to work this head more, you can flex your trunk and shoulders, and move your arms forward. Some people flex the wrist when the elbow is fully extended. This has no effect on the triceps and can be counterproductive.



Common mistakes: moving the elbows to get help from the back muscles and gain momentum, separating the elbows from the body to do a press-type movement, too short or too long a range of movement, and flexing or extending the wrists

8.4 ... TWO-ARM REVERSE

MUSCLES USED

triceps

TECHNIQUE

This is the same as the basic exercise but using the underhand grip (Ex. 8.3). The key factor in triceps extension exercises is the strength of your grip, not whether it is overhand or underhand (see Ex. 1.4).



8.5 ... ONE-ARM WITH NEUTRAL / HAMMER GRIP

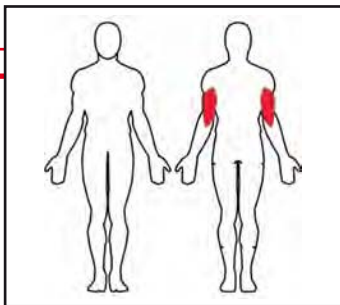
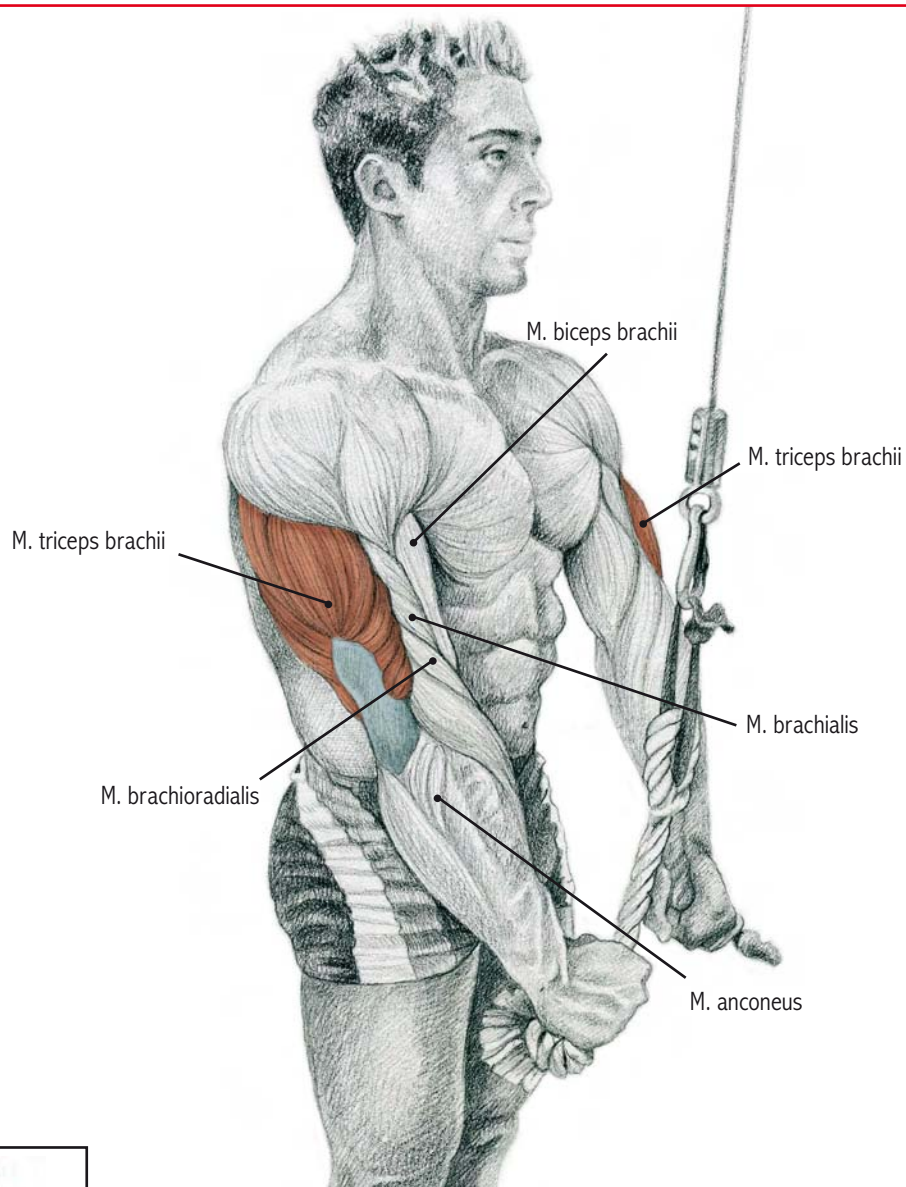
MUSCLES USED

triceps

TECHNIQUE

The technique is the same as the basic exercise but using a rope (or the cable itself if it can be gripped easily). Do a neutral, “hammer” extension standing a little farther back from the machine. Special bars also exist for a two-arm hammer grip. This variant improves on the preceding underhand variants, as it provides better joint position.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: triceps

SECONDARY MUSCLES: anconeus

ANTAGONISTS: brachialis, brachioradialis, biceps

VARIATIONS 9.2 ... OVER-THE-HEAD

MUSCLES USED

triceps

TECHNIQUE

Stand with your back to a (high or low) cable with one foot below it and the other one forward to take your weight. Hold the rope above your head with your elbows on either side and extend your forearms up and forward without changing the position. Bend your torso forward slightly, firmly contracting the abdomen.

This variant works the long and lateral heads harder than the conventional Rope Pull-down described above. You can also do the exercise with one arm or a bar.



VARIATIONS 9.3 ... ONE-ARM OVER-THE-HEAD

MUSCLES USED

triceps

TECHNIQUE

Stand in the same position as in the previous variant (and variant 7.3) but straighter, and grasp a low cable in one hand. Extend your arm upward, keeping it vertical. The two-arm version of this exercise is not recommended because of the position. Choose variant 9.2 instead. Theoretically, the exercise helps to elongate the long head of the triceps and involve it more than in 9.2, but in practice this is not so.



Execution



Stand in front of a high cable holding a thick rope in a neutral grip with your hands a little less than shoulder-width apart. Keep your feet apart, placing one slightly forward to take the weight of the body and arms. Use your abdominal muscles to hold your torso steady and extend your elbows downward without changing their position relative to your body. Breathe in as you bend your elbows and out when your arms are extended.

Comments

This is similar to the Cable Push-down (especially Ex. 8.5), but the rope will allow you the very minor advantage of a longer extension at the end of the movement. It also provides a neutral grip (rather than overhand or underhand), but your hold on the rope may be weaker and less comfortable than a bar. You can bend your elbows 90° or more, if you avoid tugging sharply and other forms of cheating. The exercise works all three heads of the triceps, but you will need to stand farther back from the cable and flex your torso and shoulders (losing power) to work the long head harder. The claim that ropes work the lateral head harder is unfounded. Some people accompany the end of the elbow extension with a twisting movement of the hands. This has no effect on the triceps and can be counterproductive.



Common mistakes: moving the elbows to get help from the back muscles and gain momentum, separating the elbows from the body to do a press-type movement, too short or too long a range of movement, and inappropriate wrist movements

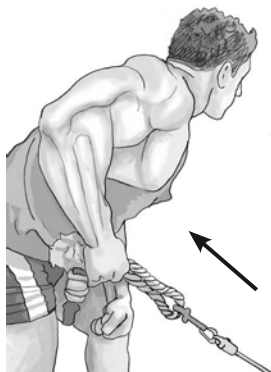
9.4 ... LOW CABLE KICK-BACK

MUSCLES USED

triceps

TECHNIQUE

The position is the same as for the Dumbbell Kick-back (Ex. 5). It is a good triceps exercise that does not involve any risk to the elbow joint. It also allows you to flex the elbow beyond 90° in a controlled movement without losing tension. Be careful not to move your arm too far from your body or the exercise will become a Row.



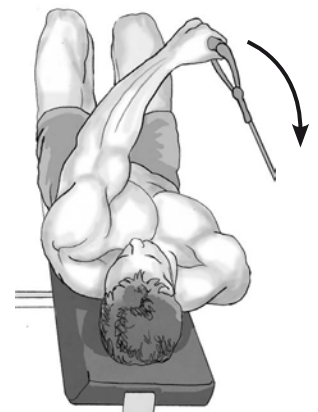
9.5 ... ONE-ARM LOW CABLE LYING EXTENSION

MUSCLES USED

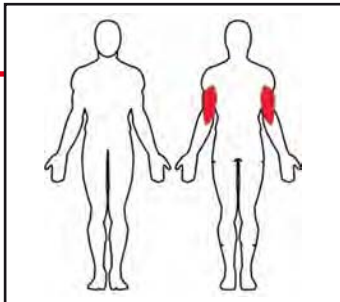
triceps

TECHNIQUE

The technique is the same as for the free weight equivalent (Ex. 2.2), but the cable maintains constant tension, which is not possible in the Cross-face Dumbbell French Press because the resistance (weight) is more closely aligned with the joint.



MACHINE EXTENSIONS

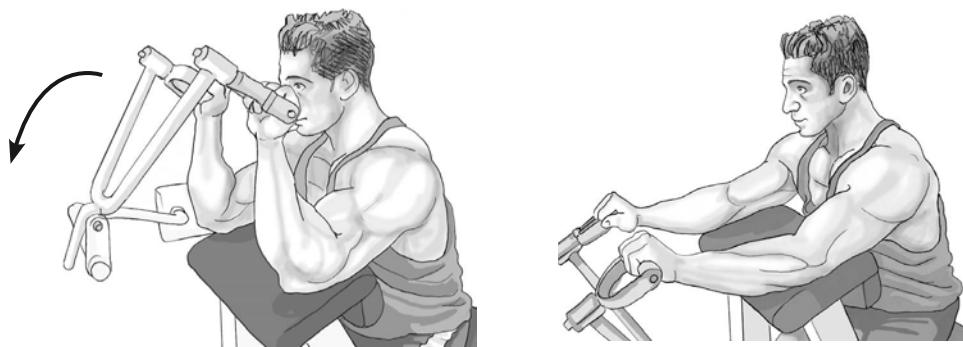


Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: triceps
SECONDARY MUSCLES: anconeus
ANTAGONISTS: biceps, brachialis, brachioradialis

Execution

This exercise is done seated at a bench similar to a preacher bench (Biceps, Ex. 3). Rest your arms on the pad with your elbows free (design permitting) and in line with the axis of the machine. Hold the grips in the neutral position (or any other grip the machine will allow) and extend your arms almost fully. Breathe in as you bend your elbows and out when you complete the extension.



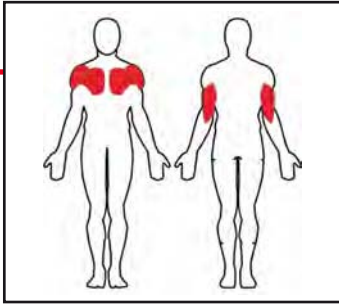
Comments

This machine is not all that common (as it is not very versatile). However, it is a good alternative for triceps workouts, especially for beginners. It is also good for advanced athletes who want to vary their training routines, even though the triceps is not particularly strong with the shoulders flexed in this position. It provides a good workout for all three heads, however. Ideally, you should use a neutral/hammer grip.



Common mistakes: using too much (or too little) weight and raising your elbows to complete a set

SMITH MACHINE PRESS WITH NARROW GRIP



Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: triceps, pectoralis major, front deltoid

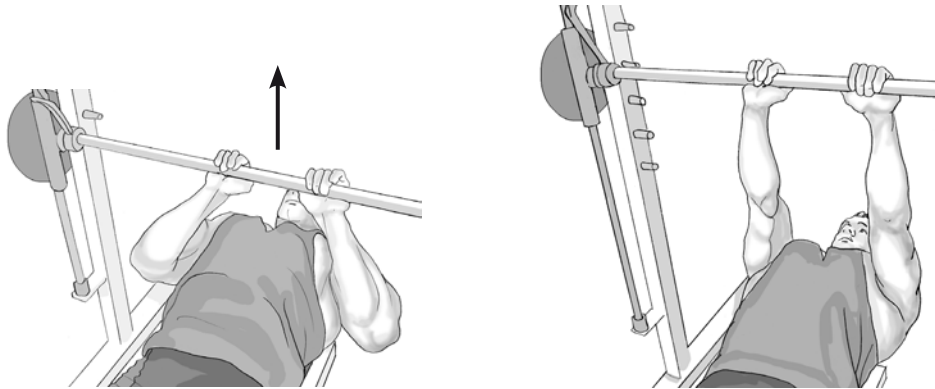
SECONDARY MUSCLES: pectoralis major, coracobrachialis, serratus anterior, subscapularis, anconeus

ANTAGONISTS: latissimus dorsi, biceps, rear deltoid

Execution

The technique used is almost identical to the Bench Press (Ex. 6). Hold the bar vertically above your chest with an overhand grip (palms facing your feet) and your hands a little less than shoulder-width apart. Keep your thumbs on the opposite side of the bar to your fingers, underneath.

Breathe in before lifting the bar. Lower the bar until it is just touching the middle of your chest and then raise it vertically. Keep your elbows in so that they come down close to your sides. Exhale on completing the lift.



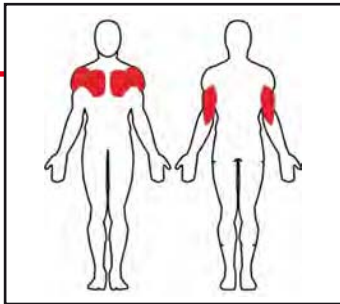
Comments

Like its free weight equivalent, this variant of the Bench Press provides a heavy workout for the triceps, as the movement is more similar to an extension than a press. The Smith machine also has the advantage of allowing you not to worry about balance, so you can concentrate on raising the bar. If you use an underhand grip (palms facing your feet) and bring the bar down to your stomach, a large part of the effort will be shifted onto the deltoid. Be careful with this variant, as the grip is weak. The long head appears to be involved in the movement the least.



Common mistakes: too narrow a grip, too much weight, and thumb in line with the fingers (not opposite)

HORIZONTAL / MACHINE PRESS



Muscles involved

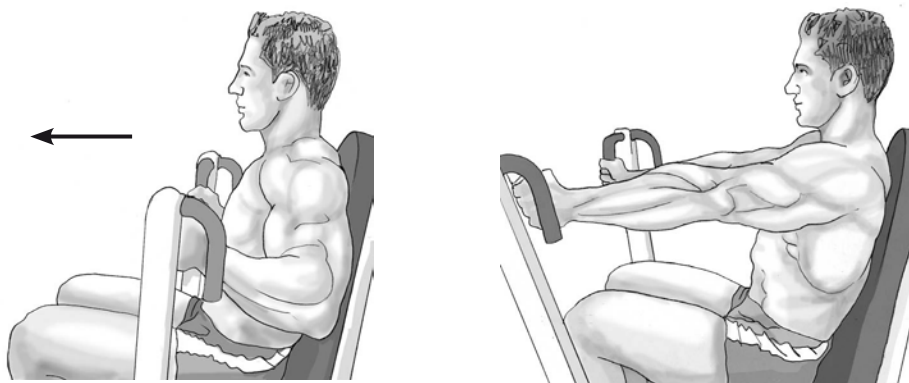
MAIN MUSCLES: triceps, pectoralis major, front deltoid

SECONDARY MUSCLES: pectoralis major, coracobrachialis, serratus anterior, subscapularis, anconeus

ANTAGONISTS: latissimus dorsi, biceps, rear deltoid

Execution

Sit at a horizontal pec/triceps press machine (your machine must have a triceps setting) and grasp the handles in a closed grip (thumb wrapped around the bar) with your elbows by your sides. Do a press/extend the arms (never lock your elbows), making sure that it is your triceps that are responsible for the main effort, not the chest and shoulders. Breathe before bending your elbows and out at the end of the extension.



Comments

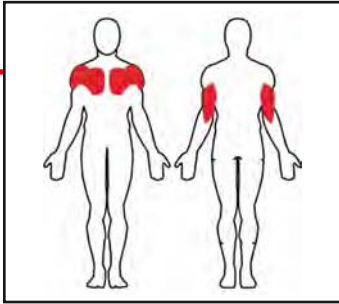
This is a good exercise at all levels. Beginners can use it as a preliminary step to Bar or Bench Dips, while advanced athletes will find it a useful alternative to their usual routine, with the simple press allowing them to load up more weight safely. You can place your thumb opposite or in line with the other fingers, whichever you find more comfortable. If you choose the latter position, however, be careful not to lose your grip or force the wrist when extending.

An even more effective variant exists for the triceps, which is to do a vertical press (downward) from a seated position. (This is because the triceps is strongest when your arms hang straight down and the shoulders are not flexed.) This movement is very similar to the Parallel Bar Dip (Ex. 3). In this case, the deltoid and chest muscles do somewhat less work, although this depends on the design of the machine and the technique used.



Common mistakes: opening the elbows to get help from the chest muscles and locking the elbows when the arms are extended

ASSISTED DIP



Muscles involved

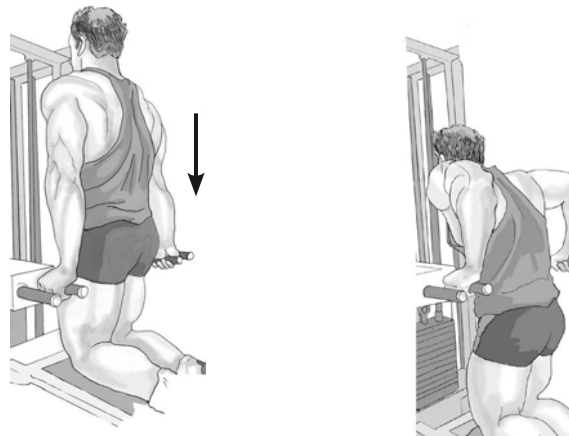
MAIN MUSCLES: triceps, pectoralis major (lower), front deltoid

SECONDARY MUSCLES: pectoralis minor, serratus anterior, coracobrachialis, subscapularis, anconeus

ANTAGONISTS: latissimus dorsi, biceps, rear deltoid

Execution

This is the same as the Bar Dip (Ex. 3), but this time with your knees or feet resting on a platform (depending on the design of the machine). Grasp the parallel bars in a narrow grip, keeping your torso straight. Breathe in and lower your body without bending the torso forward to avoid using the chest muscles. Push back up again when you reach the lowest point of the movement and breathe out.



Comments

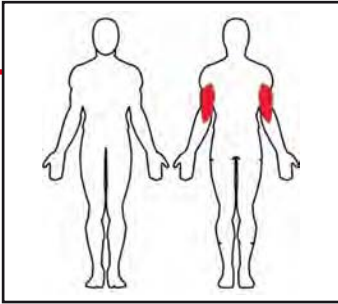
You should feel like you are “straightening” your arms rather than “pushing.” To achieve this, you need to keep your elbows close to your sides, allowing them to point back as you lower yourself.

All of the previous comments about unassisted exercise also apply. Assisted Dips are appropriate for beginners, as well as for advanced athletes who want to do a lot of reps and/or avoid swinging the body and improve their technique.



Common mistakes: too short a range of movement, getting help from the chest muscles by opening the elbows, poor torso position during the movement, and locking the elbows when the arms are extended

BEHIND-THE-BACK CABLE EXTENSION



Muscles involved

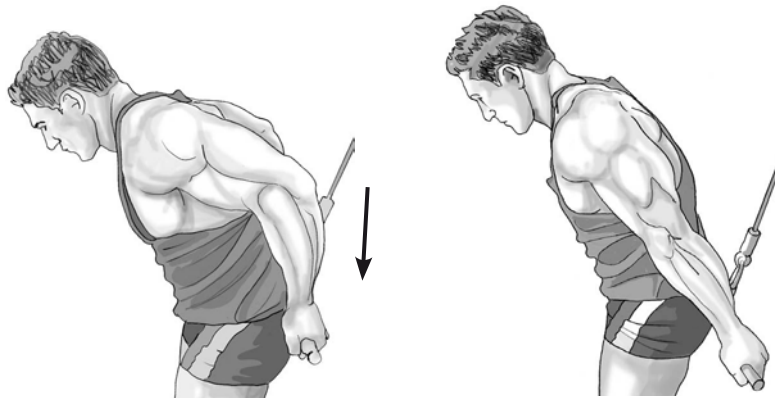
MAIN MUSCLES: triceps

SECONDARY MUSCLES: anconeus, pectorals, front deltoid

ANTAGONISTS: brachialis, brachioradialis, biceps

Execution

Stand with your back to a high cable and grasp the grip either overhand or underhand, but with your hands behind your back, as in the Bench Dip. Keep your feet a little apart and parallel. Hold your torso steady. Extend your elbows down and backwards and then raise the cable in a controlled movement. Breathe in at the end of the upward movement and out when you complete the downward extension.



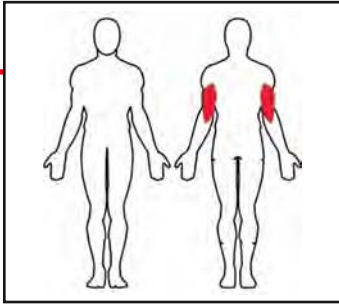
Comments

This unusual variant is halfway between the Cable Push-down and the Bench Dip. In any event, the exercise is complicated, and you should be careful not to use too much weight.



Common mistakes: moving your body to help lower the bar and poor posture

CABLE FRENCH PRESS

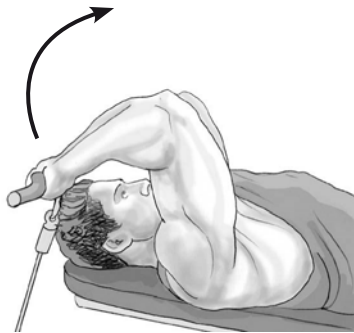


Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: triceps**SECONDARY MUSCLES:** anconeus**ANTAGONISTS:** biceps, brachialis, brachioradialis

Execution

The position is the same as the free weight French Press. Lie on a bench with your head above the low cable and grasp the bar in an overhand grip (palms toward your feet) with your arms extended over your eyes. Lower the bar toward your forehead by bending the elbows, but without moving them. Try not to open your elbows. When the bar reaches the level of your head, extend your arms to raise it back to the starting position. Breathe in as you lower the weight and out as you raise it.



Comments

This variant replicates the French Press with barbell (Ex. 1). You can also use a rope as a grip instead of the short bar. The cable provides a perfect contraction and constant tension, which is well suited to long sets. There is no danger in doing this exercise unassisted, but it is still better to use a neutral grip (e.g., rope).



Common mistakes: opening or moving your elbows to get help from the chest and back muscles

SCIENTIFIC DESCRIPTION OF THE FOREARM: INTRODUCTION TO THE BIOMECHANICS OF THE MAIN MUSCLES

Flexors

FLEXOR DIGITORUM SUPERFICIALIS / SUPERFICIAL FINGER FLEXOR (anterior, superficial)

Origin: humerus (epicondyle) and radius (medial anterior surface), often the ulna (coronoid process)

Insertion: middle phalanges of the 2nd to 5th fingers

Main functions: strong flexion of the fingers and wrist and weak flexion of the elbow

FLEXOR CARPI ULNARIS / ULNAR FLEXOR OF THE WRIST (anterior/medial, superficial)

Origin: humerus (epicondyle) and ulna (olecranon and upper two thirds of the ulna); forearm fascia

Insertion: pisiform bone, hamate bone and 5th metacarpal bone

Main functions: flexion of the wrist and adduction of the ulna, also involved in flexion of the elbow

PRONATOR TERES (anterior, superficial)

Origin: humerus (medial epicondyle), ulna (coronoid process) and medial intermuscular septum

Insertion: radius (mid-lateral surface of the radius)

Main functions: pronation of the forearm, flexion of the elbow

PALMARIS LONGUS / LONG PALMAR (anterior and medial, superficial)

Origin: humerus (epitrochlea) and sometimes forearm fascia

Insertion: palmar aponeurosis

Main functions: flexing the hand and tensing the palmar aponeurosis, also involved in flexing the elbow

FLEXOR DIGITORUM PROFUNDUS / DEEP FINGER FLEXOR (anterior, deep)

Origin: ulna (two thirds of the palm-side surface) and interosseous membrane

Insertion: 2nd to 5th fingers (base of the end phalanges)

Main functions: flexing the wrist and carpal, metacarpal and finger joints

FLEXOR CARPI RADIALIS / RADIAL FLEXOR OF THE WRIST (anterior, superficial)

Origin: humerus (epitrochlea) and superficial forearm fascia

Insertion: 2nd and sometime 3rd metacarpal bone (palm-side surface of the base)

Main functions: weak flexion and pronation, also involved in flexion and radial abduction of the hand (movement towards the thumb)

PRONATOR QUADRATUS (anterior, deep)

Origin: ulna (distal part of the anterior surface)

Insertion: radius (distal part of the anterior surface)

Main functions: pronation

FLEXOR POLLICIS LONGUS / LONG THUMB FLEXOR (anterior, deep)

Origin: radius (anterior surface)

Insertion: thumb (base of the distal phalanx)

Main functions: flexion and abduction of the thumb

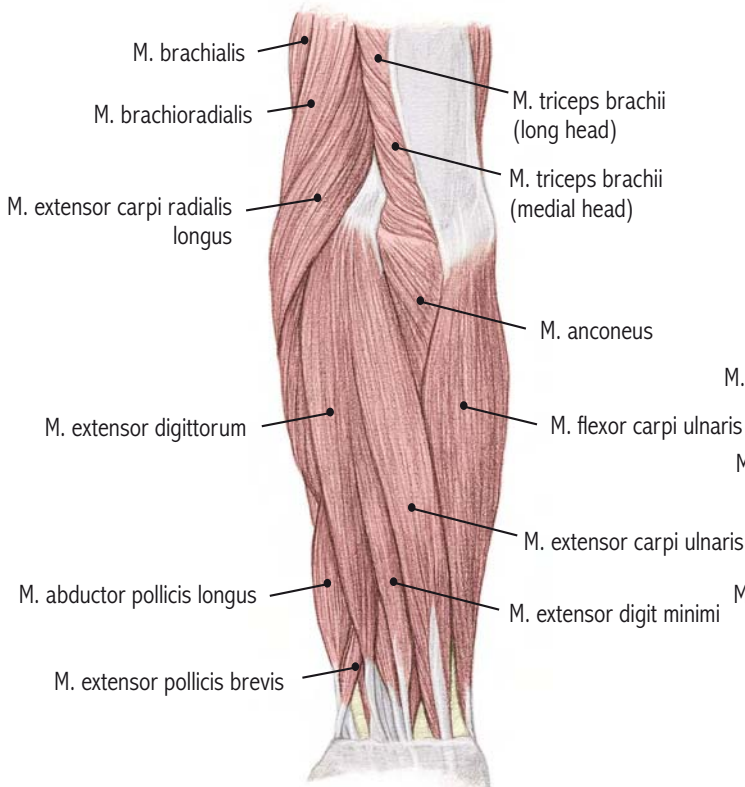
Comments: Given the complexity of the forearm, we will only mention here that the main muscles involved in grasping are the most useful for weight training, which especially works the superficial and deep flexors, muscles between bones, and adductor and long flexor of the thumb (adductor pollicis and flexor pollicis longus). This book does not describe individual workouts for the tiny muscles of the hand, which are beyond its scope. A useful exercise if you want to strengthen your hands, however, is to squeeze a soft ball.

- Origin: radius (anterior surface).
- Insertion: thumb (base of the distal phalanx).
- Main functions: flexion and abduction of the thumb.

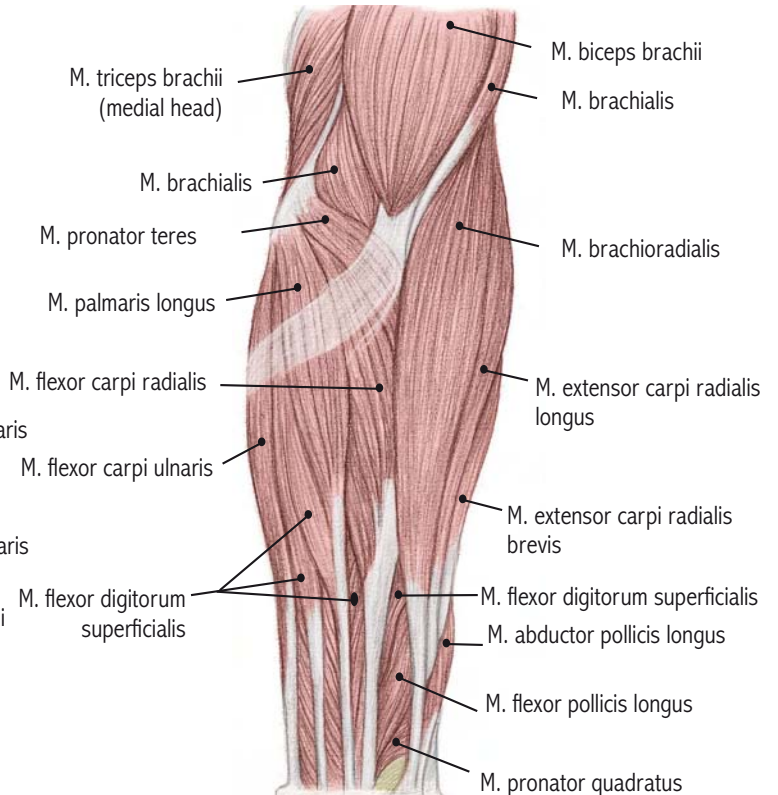


Many people see the hand as the original source of human intelligence. Capable of both a powerful grip and handling the most delicate objects, it can also transmit messages, measure temperature, texture and weight, and more.

Rear view of superficial muscles



Front view of superficial muscles



Extensors

EXTENSOR DIGITORUM (posterior and medial, superficial)

Origin: humerus (lateral epicondyle), external collateral ligament, annular ligament of the radius and forearm fascia

Insertion: 2nd to 5th fingers, extending to the base of the proximal phalanges and capsules of the joints between the metacarpal bones and the phalanges

Main functions: extending and separating the fingers like a fan, strong (backwards) extension of the wrist

EXTENSOR CARPI RADIALIS BREVIS / SHORT RADIAL EXTENSOR (posterior and radial, superficial)

Origin: humerus (common head of the muscles at the lateral epicondyle of the humerus), external collateral ligament and annular ligament of the radius

Insertion: 3rd metacarpal bone (posterior base)

Main functions: flexing the hand backward, returning it to the mid position from adduction toward the ulna, weak elbow flexor

BRACHIORADIALIS (lateral, superficial)

see BICEPS

EXTENSOR CARPI RADIALIS LONGUS / LONG RADIAL EXTENSOR (lateral, superficial)

Origin: humerus (lateral supracondylar ridge), intermuscular septum, lateral epicondyle

Insertion: 2nd metacarpal bone (posterior base)

Main functions: supination of the hand (if extended), extension and abduction of the hand, weak elbow flexor

EXTENSOR CARPI ULNARIS / ULNAR EXTENSOR OF THE WRIST (posterior, superficial)

Origin: humerus (epicondyle) and ulna (middle third of the posterior edge)

Insertion: 5th metacarpal bone (posterior base)

Main functions: adduction of the ulna, extension of the wrist

OTHER FOREARM MUSCLES

ABDUCTOR POLLICIS LONGUS / LONG THUMB ABDUCTOR Ulna to radius, crest of the supinator and interosseous membrane. Abduction of the thumb, flexion of the palm and abduction of the radius.

EXTENSOR POLLICIS BREVIS / SHORT THUMB EXTENSOR Ulna and radius to thumb. Extension and abduction of the thumb.

OPPONENS POLLICIS Trapezium and transverse carpal ligament to first metacarpal bone. Opposes the thumb.

Comments:

These pages describe only the main muscles of the forearm. The hand is a wonderfully versatile natural tool, capable of not only holding the most delicate objects but also of grasping heavy objects with great strength.

The complexity of the forearm muscles and tendons is a response to the wide range of movements and actions required. Clearly, numerous extensors and flexors are involved in such characteristic human gestures as raising a morsel of food to the mouth and the muscles responsible for supination (turning the palm up) are more numerous and stronger than those used for pronation (turning the palm down).

Some weight training enthusiasts have no trouble developing these muscles with other exercises that involve the forearm, but others find that some specific workouts are needed. These do not have to be very complicated, however, and they consist basically of flexing and extending under some kind of load, as well as incorporating flexing exercises in the palm-down position into the biceps routine.

The neutral position, halfway between pronation and supination, is recommended for the majority of these exercises, because it provides the greatest stability between the ulna and the radius. Do not allow yourself to be confused by the position of other parts of the body. For example, in the description of the Bench Press (Chest, Ex. 1), the term pronation is used with reference to the overhand grip to make the explanation more straightforward and visual. Technically, however, the grip could be understood as neutral with the shoulder abducted. In numerous places, "pronation" and "supination" are used with reference to the wrist or hand, but the reader should be aware that strictly speaking, these movements are made by the forearm. If we have sometimes used these terms with a looser meaning, it is to aid understanding.



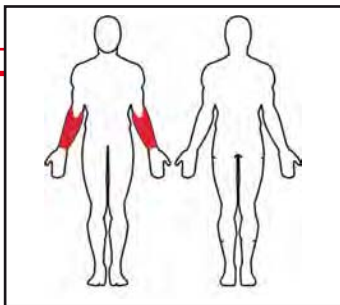
Injury: carpal tunnel syndrome

A number of nerves run through a "tunnel" in the wrist to the hand. Unsuitable or repetitive movements, flexing and extending the wrist and the kind of powerful grip necessary in weight training can inflame the membranes covering the finger tendons, putting pressure on these nerves, causing pain and numbness.

Prevention involves avoiding unnecessary flexing and extending, and keeping your wrists straight when doing exercises. Stretching the wrists and fingers also helps. Medication may sometimes be needed, however, as prescribed by a doctor.

You should also try to rest your hands two or three days each week. You can do this by planning legs-only and aerobic sessions followed by a rest day.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: flexor carpi ulnaris, flexor carpi radialis and palmaris longus
SECONDARY MUSCLES: finger flexors (deep and superficial, flexor pollicis longus)
ANTAGONISTS: extensor carpi ulnaris, extensor digitorum

VARIATIONS

1.2 ... SEATED

MUSCLES USED

flexor carpi ulnaris, flexor carpi radialis, palmaris longus, finger flexors

TECHNIQUE

Sit on a bench with your forearms resting on your thighs horizontally or tilting slightly downward with your wrists at the end of your knees and your hands free. Grasp the barbell with an underhand grip (palms up) on the tips of extended fingers. Flex your fingers and then your wrists. Open your hands in a controlled movement and roll the barbell back to the starting position. The finger flexors will work harder if you use a bar that is thick enough to prevent you from fully closing your fingers around it (assuming there is one available at your gym). This will also make it unnecessary for you to extend your fingers. Also, you will not be able to open your hand if you use a heavy weight. You can also do this variant kneeling with your forearms resting across the width of a bench and your hands free. Do not wear a watch or jewelry, which could hurt your wrists.



Execution



Stand with your feet apart for balance and hold your torso steady. Grasp the barbell behind your back with an overhand grip (knuckles toward your body), hands around shoulder-width apart. Start with the barbell almost at the tips of your extended fingers. Close your fingers and bend your wrist up toward your forearm (75-80°). Open your hand and allow the bar to roll back down to the starting point in a controlled movement. Respiration is not a key factor in most forearm exercises. Breathe naturally.

Comments

A number of muscles are involved in flexing the wrist and their structure is complex. In fact, they are involved to a greater or lesser extent depending how you open your hand. A narrow barbell and closed grip (with the thumb around the bar) will reduce the action of the finger flexors. This also happens when you are holding a heavy barbell and do not open your hand at all to avoid losing your grip. Taken together, these muscles are much stronger than the extensors because holding on is usually more important than letting go. The flexor muscles also work harder than the extensor muscles when training. Do not forget that stretching the fingers and wrists is as important as stretching any other part of the body.



Common mistakes: letting the weight fall back to the starting position, moving your shoulders or elbows to help you lift the barbell; and using too much weight, preventing strict movement



Use a thick barbell for Wrist Curls if you want to involve the finger flexors. These are often unavailable in gyms, but you can use a disc of a suitable size instead. If your aim is to strengthen the wrist flexors, you should use a thin bar that will allow you to almost close your fist.

1.3 ... SEATED WITH DUMBBELLS

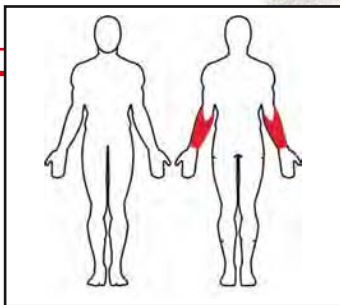
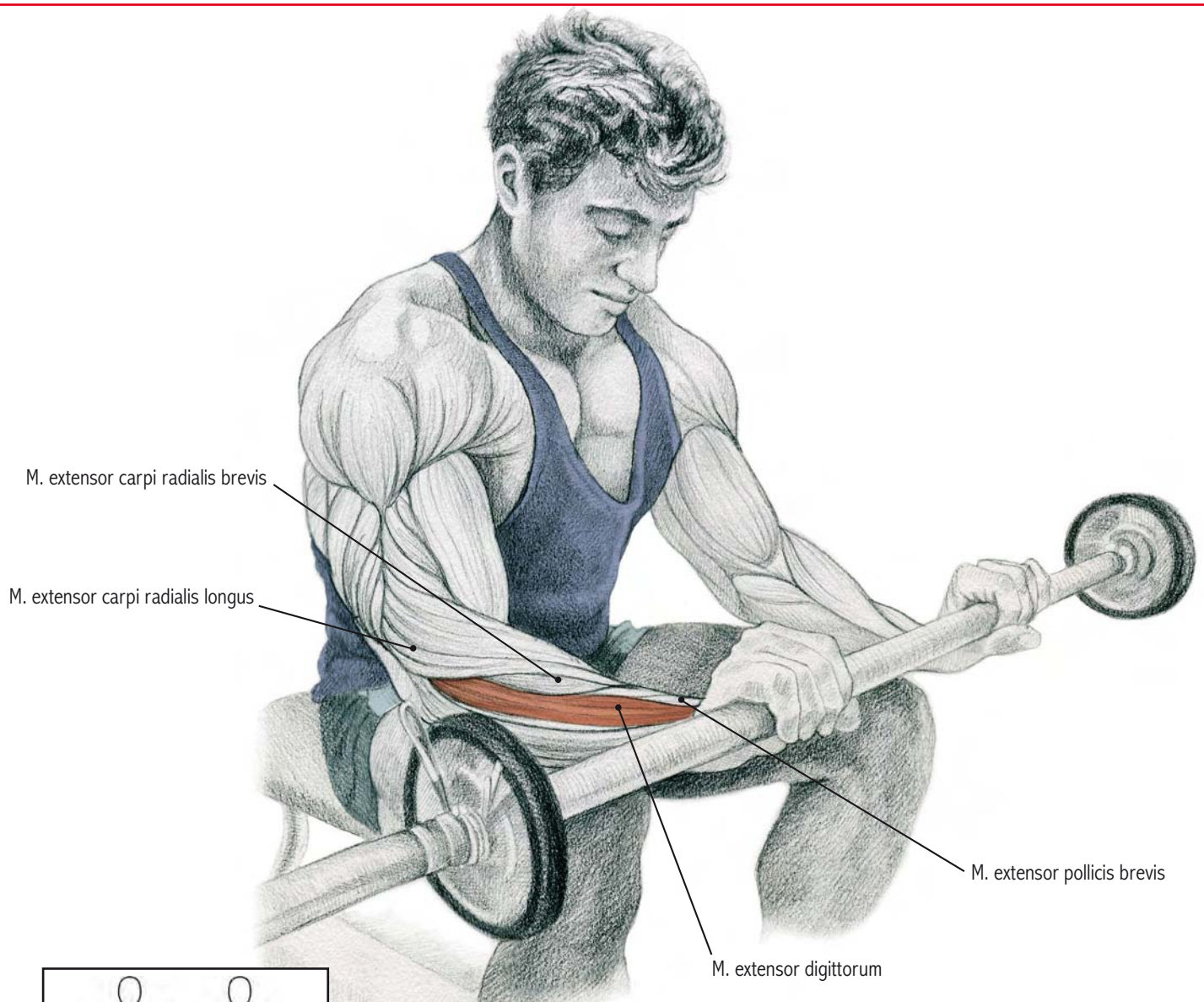
MUSCLES USED

flexor carpi ulnaris, flexor carpi radialis, palmaris longus, finger flexors

TECHNIQUE

This is the same as the barbell exercise, but your hands work independently. Grasp the dumbbells in an underhand grip (palms up). If you like, you can alternate hands.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: extensor digitorum

SECONDARY MUSCLES: extensor carpi radialis longus and brevis, extensor indicis, extensor pollicis longus, extensor minimi digiti

ANTAGONISTS: flexor carpi ulnaris, flexor carpi radialis, palmaris longus, finger flexors

VARIATIONS

2.2 ... WITH DUMBBELLS

MUSCLES USED

extensor digitorum, extensor carpi radialis longus and brevis, extensor indicis, extensor pollicis longus, extensor minimi digiti

TECHNIQUE

This is the same as the barbell exercise, but your hands work independently. Grasp the dumbbells in an overhand grip (palms down). If you like, you can alternate hands.

Some people find it more uncomfortable to maintain a balanced wrist position using only one dumbbell in Reverse Curls than in the equivalent Curls.



Execution



Sit on a bench in the same position as for the Wrist Curl, with your forearms resting on your thighs horizontally or tilting slightly downward, your wrists at the end of your knees and your hands free. Hold the barbell in an overhand grip (palms down) and extend your wrist upward (flexing a maximum of 70°-80°). Lower the barbell back to the starting position in a controlled movement. You can also do this variant kneeling with your forearms resting across the width of a bench and your hands free. Breathe naturally.

Comments

As mentioned above, wrist extensors are weaker than flexors, but to maintain physical balance, these exercises should not be ignored. Aim for a moderately long yet strict movement to work the extensor muscles effectively. Good technique is more important than weight, which should never be heavy. Remember that the wrists and hands are made up of numerous small bones and muscles, and wrist work should always be done with care, as in the case of the neck. Too much weight or too wide a range of movement can lead to injury.



Common mistakes: letting the barbell fall back after lifting it; bending the elbows to help lift; and using too much weight; preventing strict movement



Use a thin bar in Wrist Curls if you want to involve the finger extensors. If your aim is to strengthen the wrist extensors, you should use a much thicker barbell or a disc to open up your hand.

2.3 ... WITH CABLE

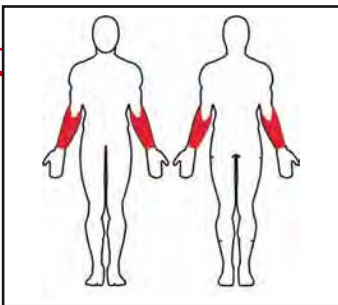
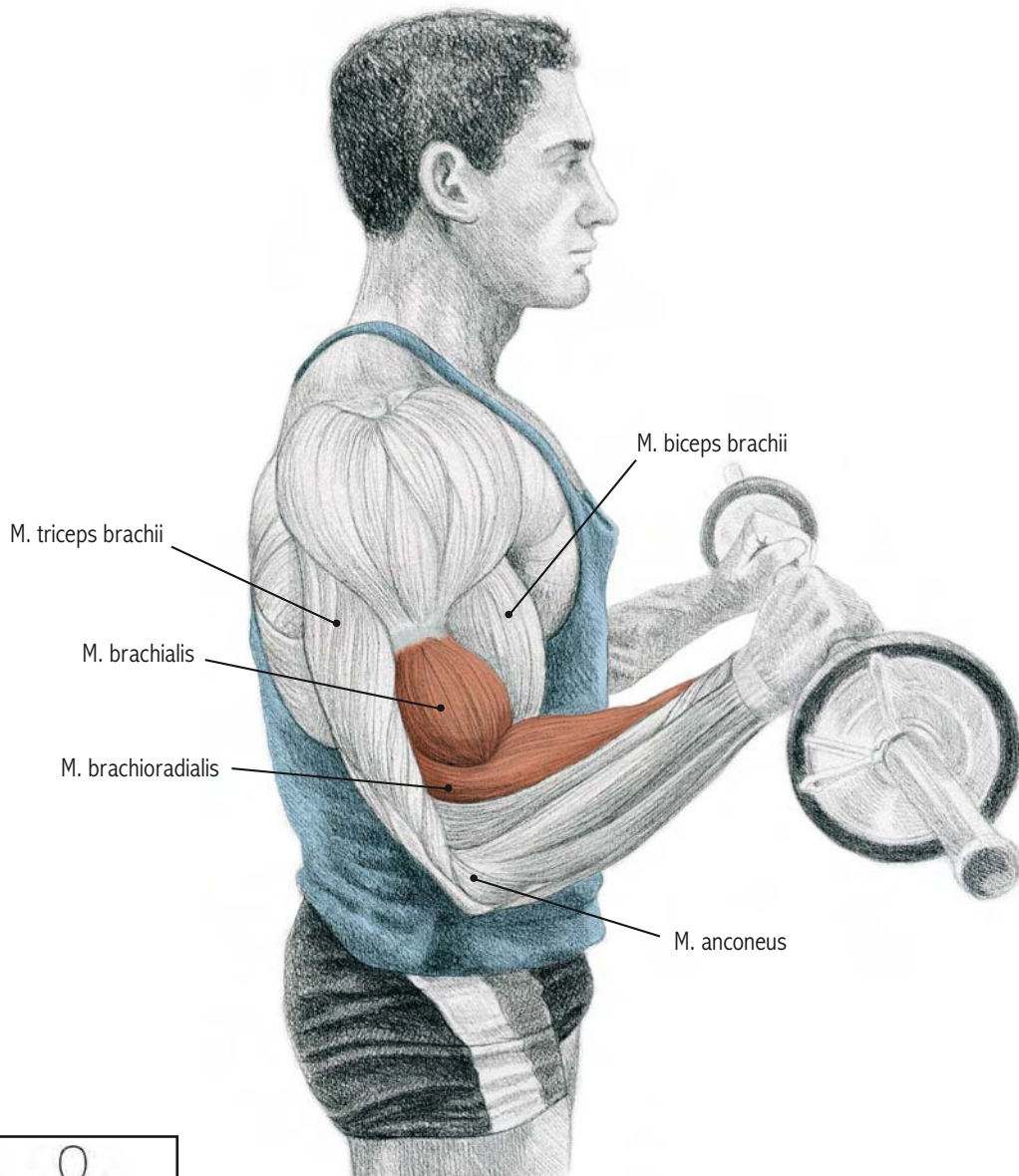
MUSCLES USED

extensor digitorum, extensor carpi radialis longus and brevis, extensor indicis, extensor pollicis longus, extensor minimi digiti

TECHNIQUE

The position is the same as the dumbbell variant but here you grip a low cable. Tension is more constant, but you need to keep the movement slow to avoid using the momentum of the cable. Otherwise, there is little difference from the preceding exercises.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: brachialis, brachioradialis
SECONDARY MUSCLES: pronator teres, biceps
ANTAGONISTS: triceps, anconeus

VARIATIONS

3.2 ... WITH TRICEPS BAR

MUSCLES USED

brachialis, brachioradialis, biceps

TECHNIQUE

The neutral hand position in this exercise means that it is less a biceps exercise than something between the biceps and the forearm, as both are involved. You can use quite a lot of weight.



Execution



Stand in the same position as for the Barbell Curl (Biceps, Ex. 1), with your feet set a little apart for balance and your torso held steady. Hold the barbell in front of your torso in an overhand grip (palms down) with your hands about shoulder-width apart. Breathe in and lift the barbell in a controlled movement until your elbows are bent as far as possible. Breathe out as you lower the barbell. You can also breathe naturally, provided the weight used is not too heavy.

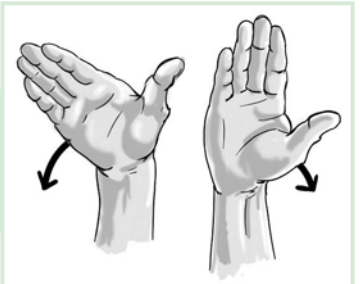
Comments

This is a variant of the biceps Barbell Curl, but the overhand grip shifts the effort from this powerful flexor to the other muscles. Most people can bring the arms up to only around 85° in the palm-down position (pronation), which means the wrist position may feel uncomfortable or even painful (especially if you are using a heavy weight). In this case, you should opt for the EZ bar or dumbbells.

Your grip may tire before the muscles you really want to train are fully fatigued if you do exercises that require a strong hand grip (e.g., Cable Pull-downs or Cable Rows) earlier in the same session.



Common mistakes: rocking the body to help lift and pulling your elbows back to shorten the movement



In addition to flexing and extending the wrist, it is also useful to work all the hand and finger joints, given their importance for grip in weight training exercises. However, the bones and muscles concerned are small and delicate, which you should take into account.

3.3 ... WITH DUMBBELLS

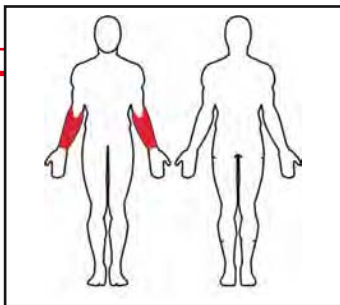
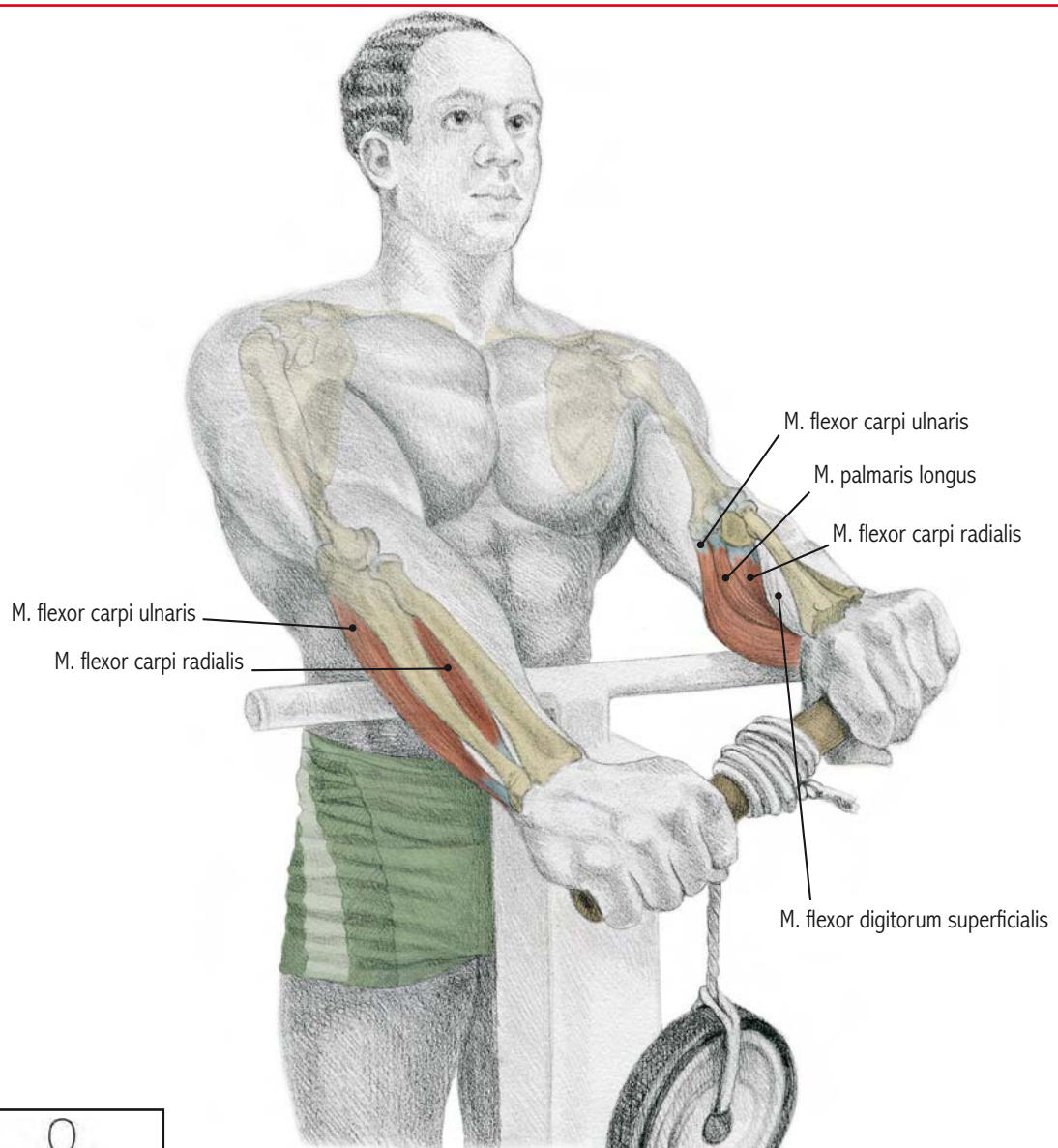
MUSCLES USED

brachialis, brachioradialis

TECHNIQUE

The technique is the same as the basic exercise, but using dumbbells. As explained above, this allows a few degrees less upward motion, making posture and movement easier. It also permits a longer downward motion as your legs will not be in the way of the bar.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: flexor carpi ulnaris, flexor carpi radialis, palmaris longus
SECONDARY MUSCLES: finger flexors (deep and superficial, flexor pollicis longus)
ANTAGONISTS: extensor carpi ulnaris, extensor digitorum

VARIATIONS

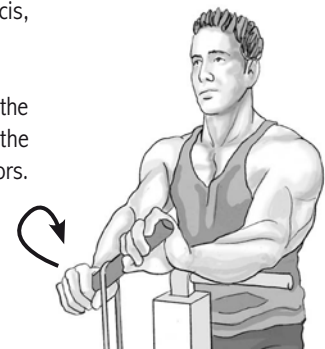
4.2 ... REVERSE

MUSCLES USED

extensor carpi radialis longus and brevis, extensor indicis, extensor pollicis longus and extensor minimi digiti

TECHNIQUE

The position is the same as the basic exercise, but you raise the weight by extending the muscles (flexing upward), rolling the rope up in the opposite direction. This works the wrist extensors.



Execution



Stand with your arms straight out resting on a cushioned support with the hands free. Hold the roller in an overhand grip (palms down). A rope or cable reaching down to the floor is tied to the roller at one end, with a weight at the other. Roll the rope/cable up to lift the weight by flexing the wrists downward, alternating between hands. When the weight reaches the top, lower it again using the opposite movement (eccentric contraction). Breathe naturally.

Comments

This exercise was popularized by the French bodybuilder Richard Andrieu. It adds an element of strength and endurance to training the forearm, as sets are not so much heavy as long. It is important to do this exercise on a cushioned support and not a bar, which would put too much pressure on the muscles worked. The thicker the roller used, the more work the finger flexors have to do (although this may make grip more difficult).

There is a machine for this movement, but it is very uncommon in gyms.



Common mistakes: using too much weight; preventing a strict movement; and swinging the arms to help lift the weight



The brachioradialis muscle not only flexes the arm but returns the forearm to the middle (neutral) position from a palms-up or palms-down position (pronation or supination). It is sometimes called the “long supinator,” but this term is incorrect, given its action.

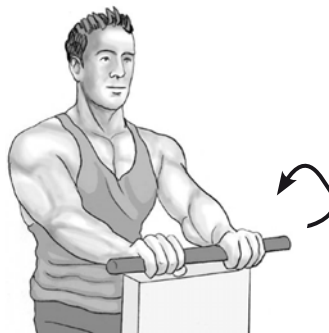
4.3 ... ROLLER MACHINE

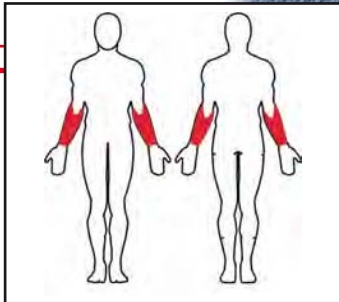
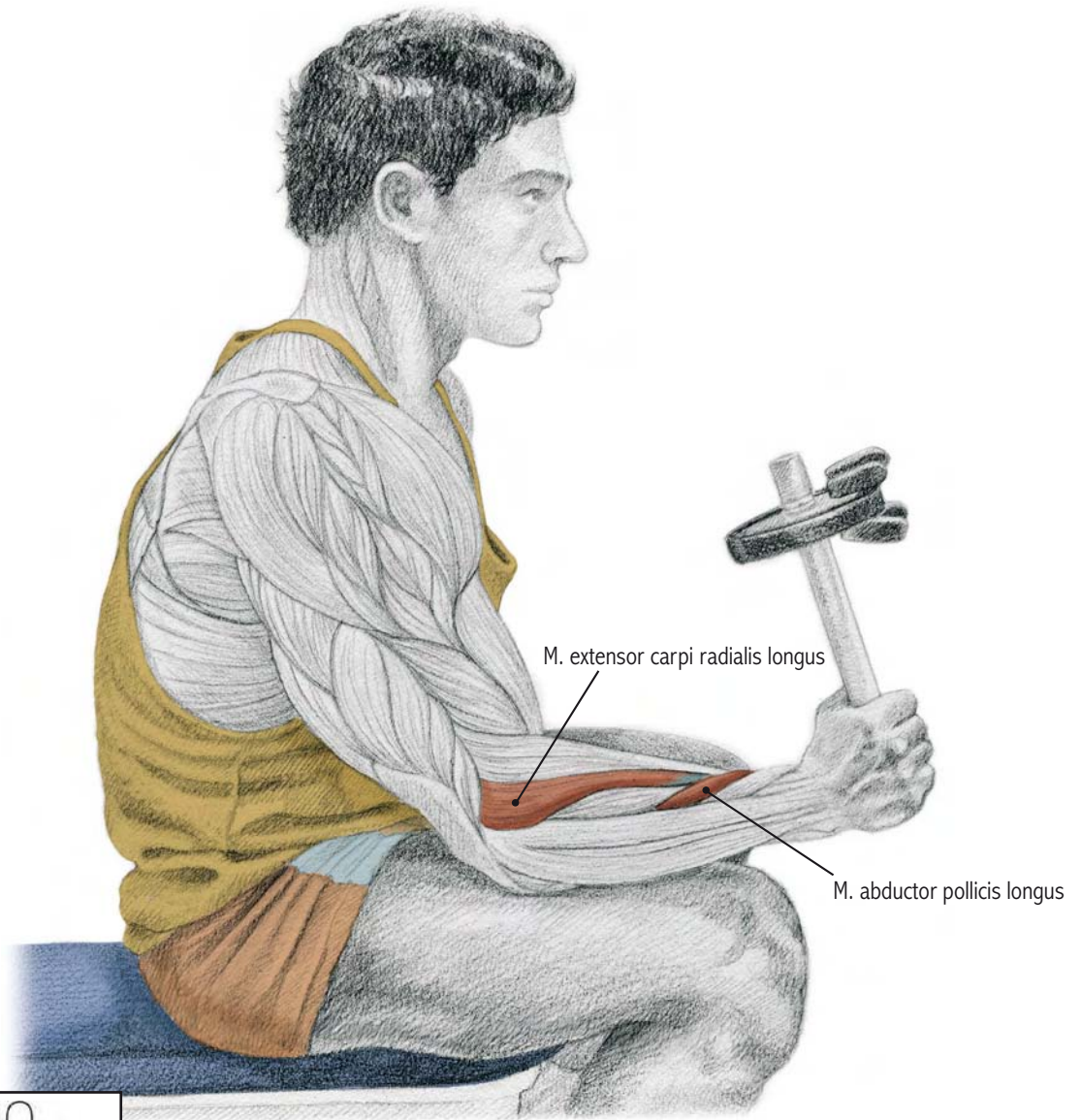
MUSCLES USED

extension: extensor carpi radialis longus and brevis, extensor indicis, extensor pollicis longus, extensor minimi digiti
flexion: flexor carpi ulnaris, flexor carpi radialis, palmaris longus, finger flexors

TECHNIQUE

There are machines, used mainly for rehabilitation, that use a roller with adjustable resistance for extension and flexion exercises. The comments on the other roller exercises apply to these machines. The most common mistake is to use your whole arm to perform the movement.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: extensor carpi radialis longus, abductor pollicis longus

SECONDARY MUSCLES: extensor pollicis longus, flexor carpi radialis, flexor pollicis longus

ANTAGONISTS: extensor carpi ulnaris, flexor carpi ulnaris

VARIATIONS

5.2 ... LYING ULNAR FLEXION

MUSCLES USED

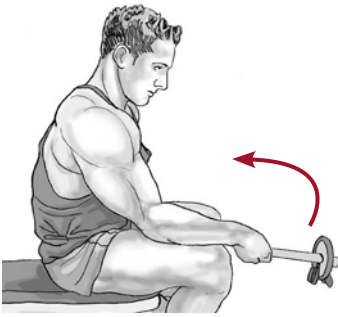
extensor carpi ulnaris, flexor carpi ulnaris, extensor digitorum, extensor digiti quinti

TECHNIQUE

If you want to work on the opposing muscles, lie on your back with your elbow bent 90° so that your forearm is horizontal, holding the half dumbbell in the same way. This allows you to flex the arm, lowering the weight down by the side of your head and then raising it in a controlled movement. Take into account that the movement involved is short, and to ensure a strict, risk-free movement, you should not use a heavy weight. A rather more uncomfortable variant is to adopt the same position as for the Triceps Kickback (Triceps, Ex. 5), but with your elbow extended, moving the forearm only.



Execution



Sit in the same position as for the Seated Barbell Wrist Curl (Ex. 1.2). Hold the unweighted end of a “half dumbbell” (i.e., a dumbbell with only one weight at one end of the central bar). Start with the weighted end pointing vertically upward and lower it forward slowly until it is almost horizontal (around 30°, depending on mobility). Flex your wrist again to raise the weight to the vertical starting position (to 0°, even though you could go some 15° farther toward your forearm, because gravity would help this additional movement unless your arm was tilted downward). Breathe naturally.

Comments

You can work the forearm flexors using the Biceps Dumbbell Curl with the hammer grip and similar exercises, but this is a good exercise if you specifically want to train the single-joint muscles running from the hand to the radius area of the forearm.

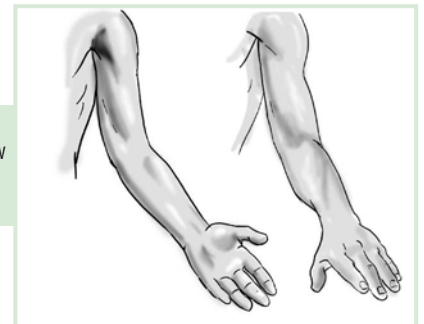
Most people do not need to do this exercise, which is normally reserved for rehabilitation or on a doctor’s advice. This is also the case with the variants described below.



Common mistakes: using too much weight, preventing a strict movement, and too short a range of movement.



Pronation and supination (inward and outward twisting movement) are easier with the elbow flexed. When the arm is straight, the movements may be confused with shoulder rotations.



5.3 . . . PRONATION/SUPINATION

MUSCLES USED

pronation: pronator teres and pronator quadratus; brachioradialis in supination (as far as the neutral position), flexor carpi radialis, extensor carpi radialis longus

supination: biceps (especially the short head when you start from a palm-down position, less so in the neutral position), supinator, abductor pollicis longus, extensor pollicis longus, brachioradialis (starting from a palm-down position)

TECHNIQUE

Sit in the same position as for the main exercise, but this time twist your wrist to lower the weight slowly inward into a palm-down position (pronation), then move back to a vertical position and beyond into the palm-up position (supination). The pronator and supinator muscles do not require much specific muscle work to stay in good shape, and this exercise is intended only to complement others. There is a machine for this movement, but it is uncommon in gyms, although often found in rehabilitation clinics.



SCIENTIFIC DESCRIPTION OF THE LEG: INTRODUCTION TO THE BIOMECHANICS OF THE MAIN MUSCLES

THIGH AND HIP MUSCLES

ADDUCTORS: MAGNUS, LONGUS, BREVIS, MINIMUS / GREAT, LONG, SHORT, SMALLEST (medial, superficial and deep)

Origin: pubis (lower arm: magnus, brevis and minimus; upper arm: longus), ischium (magnus)

Insertion: femur (linea aspera: magnus, longus, brevis and minimus; adductor tubercle of the medial epicondyle: magnus)

Main functions: adduction of the thigh; as a secondary function, outward rotation and flexion (although the adductors may act as extensor muscles at some angles); adductor magnus: extension of the hip; when the leg is fixed in position, swinging forward (1st fascia of the magnus and brevis) and back (3rd fascia of the magnus)

SARTORIUS (anterior, superficial)

Origin: ilium (anterior superior iliac spine)

Insertion: tibia (medial surface, pes anserinus) and crural fascia

Main functions: flexion of the knee (and extension in some individuals) and inward rotation of the leg when the knee is bent; flexion and outward rotation of the hip

GLUTEUS MAXIMUS, MEDIUS AND MINOR (posterior, superficial and deep)

Origin: superficial gluteus maximus: iliac crest and spine, thoracolumbar fascia, sacrum and coccyx; deep gluteus maximus: ilium and posterior sacrospinous ligament; gluteus medius: ilium (wing, crest and fascia); gluteus minor: gluteal surface of the ilium

Insertion: femur (gluteus maximus in the gluteal tuberosity; gluteus medius and gluteus minor in the greater trochanter)

Main functions: gluteus maximus: primarily extension and outward rotation of the hip, adduction and abduction (in the latter case, working the upper fascia); gluteus medius and gluteus minor (especially the former): abduction and, as a secondary function, inward rotation and flexion (especially the minor) and outward rotation and extension (especially the gluteus medius), depending on whether the front or rear fibers are involved

Comments:

Homo sapiens is one of the few mammals to walk on two legs, and the leg muscles and ligaments discussed here are among the most powerful in the body, including the gluteus maximus (even though its main function is not related to locomotion) and the immensely strong iliofemoral ligament (which can withstand over 750 lb. of tension). If humans moved on all fours like other primates, the hip and thigh joints might fit better, but this would involve re-engineering the muscles and tendons. For training purposes, the best approach is to combine heavy, basic exercises involving more than one joint with specific, single-joint work. The iliopsoas is a powerful flexor of the torso (some people also have a psoas minor muscle), and it is important not to work it instead of your abdominal muscles (e.g., in Lying Scissor Kicks). Also, overworking the iliopsoas can cause hyperlordosis, or excessive forward curvature, of the lumbar region and back pain. It can also result in lumbar kyphosis (outward curvature) when accompanied by bending the torso (lordosis when extended).



Two essential truths about weight training: working out slowly does not make the athlete “slow,” and working out fast does not make the athlete “fast.”

HAMSTRINGS: BICEPS FEMORIS, SEMITENDINOSUS, SEMIMEMBRANOSUS (posterior, superficial)

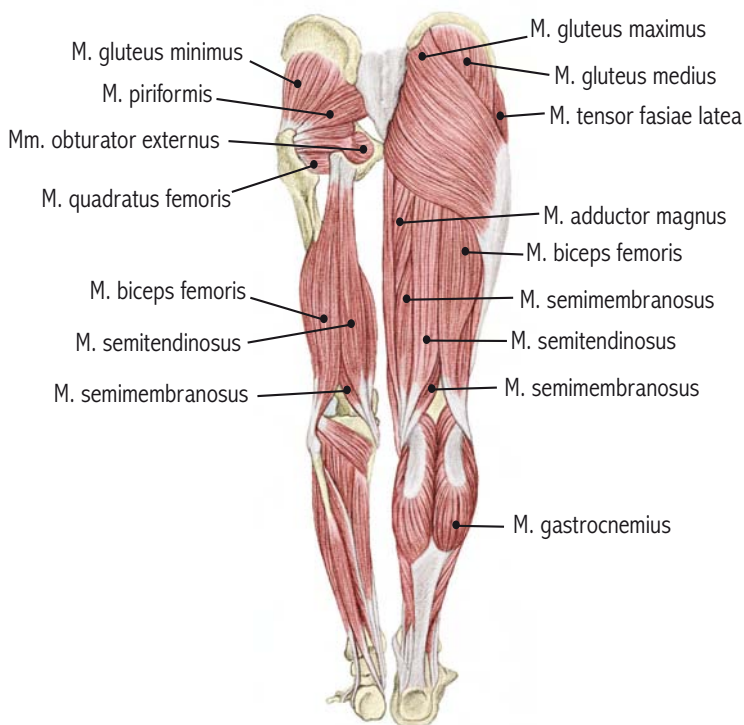
Origin: long head of the biceps, semitendinosus and semimebranosus (where it exists) in the ischium (ischial tuberosity); short head of the biceps (where it exists) in the femur (linea aspera and lateral intermuscular septum)

Insertion: fibula (biceps, in the external side); tibia (semitendinosus, superficial pes anserinus; semimebranosus, deep pes anserinus and medial condyle; biceps, in the lateral tibial condyle); capsule of the knee (semimembranosus, forming the oblique popliteal ligament, if it exists)

Main functions: extension of the hip (long head of the biceps, semitendinosus and semimembranosus, especially when the knee is extended), flexion of the knee (both heads of the biceps, semitendinosus and semimembranosus); outward rotation of the knee (both heads of the biceps) and the hip (long head of the biceps); inward rotation of the knee and hip (semimembranosus and, above all, semitendinosus). When the foot is placed firmly on the ground, the gastrocnemius is also involved in extending the knee and stabilizing the joint.

Comments:

The hamstring muscles are all too often ignored in comparison to the quadriceps, which are larger and more obvious. A well-balanced training routine should not overlook any part of the body, however, and in this case stretching is as important as muscular development for protecting the knee. The large number of small but important muscles found all over the legs means it is important to do multi-joint exercises like Squats, Presses and Lunges in training the lower body. Sticking simply to Quadriceps Extensions and Hamstring Curls will have little or no effect on the complex structure of secondary muscles. The calf is actually made up of a group of muscles, the largest of which is the gastrocnemius, a superficial muscle, and the one you see.



OTHER THIGH AND HIP MUSCLES

OBTURATOR EXTERNUS / EXTERNAL OBTURATOR: obturator foramen to femur. Stabilizing the hip, outward rotation, flexion and abduction of the hip.

OBTURATOR INTERNUS / INTERNAL OBTURATOR: coxa (hip) to femur. Stabilizing the hip, strong outward rotation, flexion and abduction of the hip.

GRACILIS: pubis to tibia. Abduction of the hip and weak flexion and inward rotation of the knee, may also be involved in flexion and inward rotation of the hip.

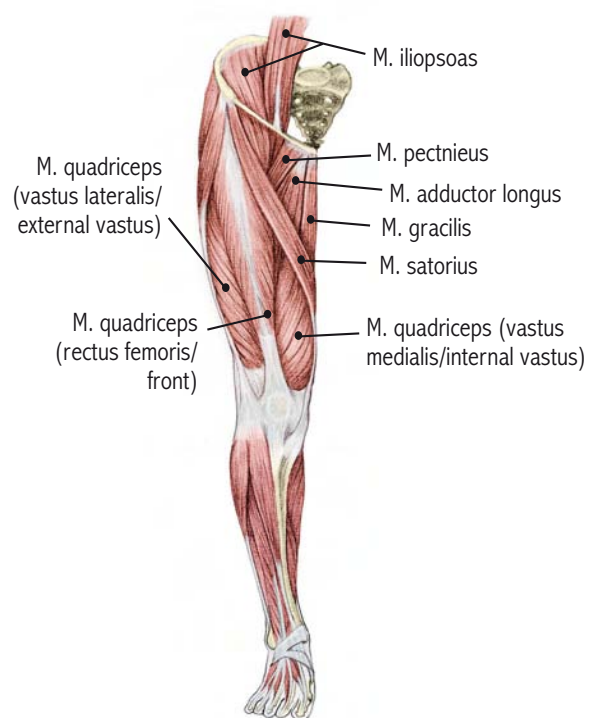
PECTINEUS: pubis to femur. Flexion of the hip (tilting). Weak abduction and inward rotation (and outward rotation according to some studies and in specific cases of insertion).

QUADRATUS FEMORIS: ischial tuberosity to femur. Outward rotation, adduction and extension (or flexion depending on the angle).

TENSOR FASCIAE LATAE: iliac crest to tibia. Abduction and inward rotation, flexion of the hip.

PIRIFORMIS: sacrum to femur. Outward rotation and abduction, with extension as a secondary function (depending on the angle).

INFERIOR GEMELLUS AND SUPERIOR GEMELLUS (GEMELLI): sciatic spine and ischial tuberosity to femur. Outward rotation.



SCIENTIFIC DESCRIPTION OF THE LEG: BIOMECHANICAL INTRODUCTION TO THE MAIN MUSCLES

LEG AND FOOT MUSCLES

TIBIALIS ANTERIOR (anterior, superficial)

Origin: tibia (condyle and lateral surface), interosseous membrane and crural fascia

Insertion: medial cuneiform bone and base of the first metatarsal bones

Main functions: dorsiflexion (upward flexion) of the foot, supination, and adduction

EXTENSOR HALLUCIS LONGUS / LONG EXTENSOR OF THE GREAT TOE (anterior, deep)

Origin: fibula (medial surface) and interosseous membrane

Insertion: big toe (distal phalanx) and first metatarsal bone in some people

Main functions: dorsiflexion (upward flexion) of the big toe (especially the first phalanx), dorsiflexion of the foot, also some contribution to pronation and supination, depending on the position of the foot

EXTENSOR DIGITORUM LONGUS/LONG TOE EXTENSOR (anterior, medial)

Origin: tibia (lateral condyle), fibula (head and anterior edge), crural fascia and interosseous membrane

Insertion: 2nd to 5th toes (dorsal aponeurosis)

Main functions: dorsiflexion (upward flexion) of the foot (involving pronation) and extension of the toes

OTHER LEG AND FOOT MUSCLES

EXTENSOR DIGITORUM BREVIS / SHORT TOE EXTENSOR: calcaneus to the first four toes. Extension and dorsiflexion (upward flexion) of the toes.

EXTENSOR HALLUCIS BREVIS / SHORT EXTENSOR OF THE GREAT TOE: calcaneus to big toe. Dorsiflexion (upward flexion) of the big toe.

DORSAL INTEROSSEOUS MUSCLES: between the five toes, separating them

PLANTAR INTEROSSEOUS MUSCLES: last three metatarsals to 1st phalanx of the last three toes on each foot. These muscles hold the toes together.

LUMBRICALS: between the toes. Flexion of the first phalanx and extension of the other two.

QUADRATUS PLANTAE: calcaneus to the tendon of the long toe flexor (flexor digitorum longus). Supplements and corrects the flexor muscle.

Comments:

The front leg muscles are quite possibly the most likely to be forgotten in weight training. In any case, workouts and exercises almost always favor their rear counterparts (basically, the calf muscles). This is clearly an error. Although some parts of the body may be moderately undertrained, they should never be completely ignored. Having said this, the tibialis anterior can become painful if it is overworked and fatigued.

In this book, we have omitted specific exercises for pronation/supination of the foot, as injury can result if weights are used.

OTHER LEG AND FOOT MUSCLES

PERONEUS (LONGUS AND BREVIS): fibula to 1st metatarsal and cuneiform (peroneus longus), 5th metatarsal (peroneus brevis). These muscles hold up the arch of the foot and are also responsible for strong pronation and plantar (downward) flexion.

POPLITEUS: femur to tibia. Flexion of the knee (or extension, according to some authors) and internal rotation of the leg. It also acts as an “active” knee ligament.

TIBIALIS POSTERIOR: tibia, fibula and interosseous membrane to navicular and cuneiform bones (sole of the foot). Plantar (downward) flexion, adduction, supination and arch support.

PLANTARIS: femur to Achilles tendon. Plantar (downward) flexion of the foot.

FLEXOR HALLUCIS LONGUS / LONG FLEXOR OF THE GREAT TOE: fibula, interosseous membrane and posterior intermuscular septum to distal phalanx of the big toe. Flexion, adduction and supination of the big toe and the sole of the foot, and arch support.

FLEXOR DIGITORUM LONGUS / LONG TOE FLEXOR: tibia to terminal phalanges of the last four toes. Flexion, adduction and supination of the big toe and the sole of the foot, and arch support.

FLEXOR DIGITORUM BREVIS / SHORT TOE FLEXOR: calcaneus to last four toes. Flexion of the 2nd phalanx of the toes above the 1st.

FLEXOR HALLUCIS BREVIS / SHORT FLEXOR OF THE GREAT TOE: 2nd and 3rd cuneiform and cuboids to 1st phalanx of big toe. Flexion of the 1st phalanx and extension of the 2nd.

ADDUCTOR HALLUCIS / ADDUCTOR OF THE GREAT TOE: calcaneus to big toe. Adduction and flexion of the 1st phalanx, and extension of the 2nd.

ABDUCTOR HALLUCIS / ABDUCTOR OF THE GREAT TOE: cuboids, 3rd cuneiform and 3rd and 4th metatarsal to big toe. Abduction of the big toe and arch support.

TRANSVERSE MUSCLE OF THE GREAT TOE: glenoid ligament of the joints between the 3rd, 4th and 5th metatarsal bones and the 1st phalanx to the big toe

SOLEUS (posterior, medial)

Origin: fibula (head and superior and dorsal ends), tibia (soleal line) and tendinous arch of the soleus (between the fibular head and the tibia)

Insertion: calcaneus (posterior tuberosity)

Main functions: flexion of the sole of the foot (more isolated when the knee is flexed), flexion of the knee and supination of the foot

GASTROCNEMIUS (posterior, superficial)

Origin: femur (medial and lateral head of the femoral condyles), capsule of the knee joint

Insertion: calcaneus (posterior tuberosity)

Main functions: flexion of the sole of the foot (especially when the knee is extended), flexion of the knee and supination of the foot, with the foot fixed in position, works with the hamstring muscles in extending the knee.

Comments: The powerful muscles forming the calf (gastrocnemius and soleus) need frequent, heavy, specific training with a full range of movement, as these muscles have a second-class lever (with resistance between the axis and force). In addition, these muscles are called upon all the time in everyday life, whenever you walk or run. The ideal workout for the calf muscles (and neighboring muscles) will involve downward flexion with the knee extended and flexed. Increasing the size of the soleus may be a goal for people who have “high” calves. Finally, a good tip for strengthening the sole of the foot and toes is to go barefoot whenever possible. High-heeled and narrow shoes are bad for your feet.



M. adductor longus

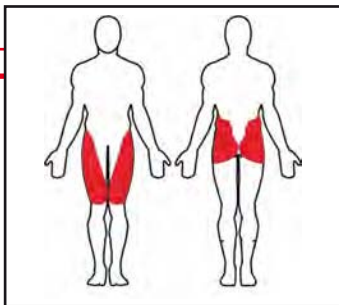
M. quadriceps (rectus femoris/front)

M. quadriceps (vastus lateralis/external vastus)

M. quadriceps (vastus medialis/internal vastus)

M. gastrocnemius

M. gastrocnemius



Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: quadriceps, gluteus maximus

SECONDARY MUSCLES: hamstrings, adductors, gastrocnemius, muscles of the lower back and along the spine

ANTAGONISTS: iliopsoas, sartorius

VARIATIONS 1.2 ... WIDE

MUSCLES USED

quadriceps, gluteus maximus,
hamstrings, adductors

TECHNIQUE

Place your legs wider apart and open them farther as you squat, with your feet pointing outward. This variant increases the workload for the adductors.



1.3 ... FRONT

MUSCLES USED

quadriceps, gluteus maximus,
hamstrings

TECHNIQUE

Place the bar on the front part of the deltoid. You can cross your forearms in front of your chest if you want. Puff out your chest and keep your elbows up. Less weight is used in this exercise, but it protects your back by stopping you from bending forward. The quadriceps work hard, but the effect is similar to the basic exercise. This variant is not commonly used.



1.4 ... SINGLE-LEG

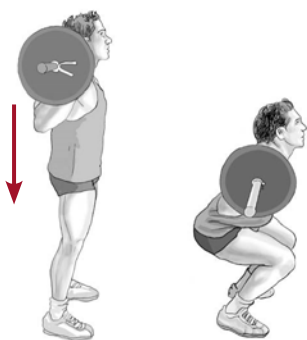
MUSCLES USED

quadriceps, gluteus maximus,
hamstrings, iliopsoas

TECHNIQUE

Bend one knee behind yourself and place your instep on a bench. The leg you are standing on will now take almost all of the weight of the Squat. This variant helps improve coordination and balance.

Execution



Stand looking forward with your feet a little wider apart than your hips and pointing slightly outward (rotating the leg 20° - 30°). Grasp the bar overhand (palms up) and hold it behind your head, resting on your trapezius and deltoid. Bend your knees outward (in line with your feet) until your thighs are almost parallel to the floor. Contract your abdominal and lower back muscles. Do not lift your heels off the floor. If necessary, you can place something low under your heels for support. (One inch is usually enough.) Inhale as you begin bending your knees, then hold your breath and exhale as you reach the top of the movement. Take a deep breath and repeat the movement.

Comments

Some people call this a “Half” Squat. In this author’s opinion, however, supporters of the “Full” or “Deep” Squat ignore the intense strain the movement places on the knee if heavy weights are used, with the accompanying risk of serious or chronic injury. If you are unsure, you should ask a sports doctor, physiotherapist or trainer. Beginners should use only the bar, without additional weight. You can also use a bench, just touching it with your buttocks at the bottom of the movement, as if you were about to sit down. Note that the calf and hamstrings help extend the knees if your feet are fixed in position, but they bend the knees if the feet are free (Ex. 15).

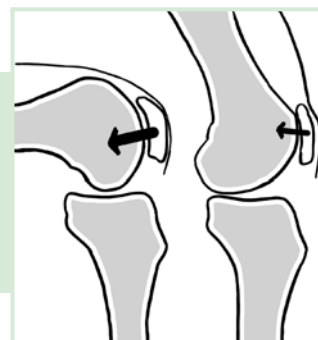


Common mistakes: arching your back forward or backward; moving the knees outside their natural axis of movement; ending the Squat too low, or doing the exercise using heavy weights without a partner; stretching your arms along the bar; resting the bar on bone and not muscle; bouncing on the downward movement; locking the knees at the top of the movement; straining your back as you remove the bar from its support or putting it back and bringing your knees too far forward beyond your feet in the downward movement



Over 850 pounds per square inch of pressure has been recorded in Deep Squats, even without using weights. Although the cartilage behind the kneecap is very thick, this shows that Full Squats can cause injury if heavy weights are used (e.g., joint or cartilage damage).

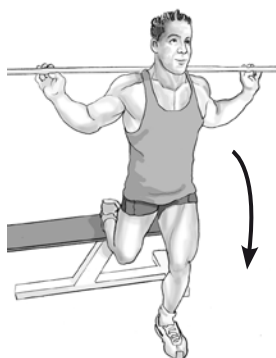
Numerous scientific studies confirm this. For further information, see studies by Kapandji, Morehouse, etc.



SPLIT / BULGARIAN

1.5 ... WITH DUMBBELLS

1.6 ... HACK



MUSCLES USED

quadriceps, gluteus maximus, hamstrings

TECHNIQUE

This variant is ideal for people with back problems (especially cervical damage), or who find it difficult to grip a barbell securely. It can also be used for the sake of variety. Hold the dumbbells in a neutral grip (palms facing) on either side of your body.



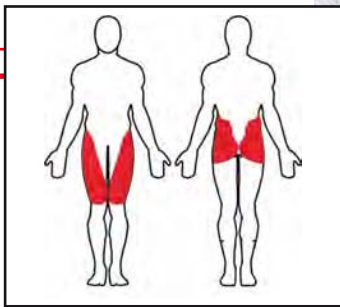
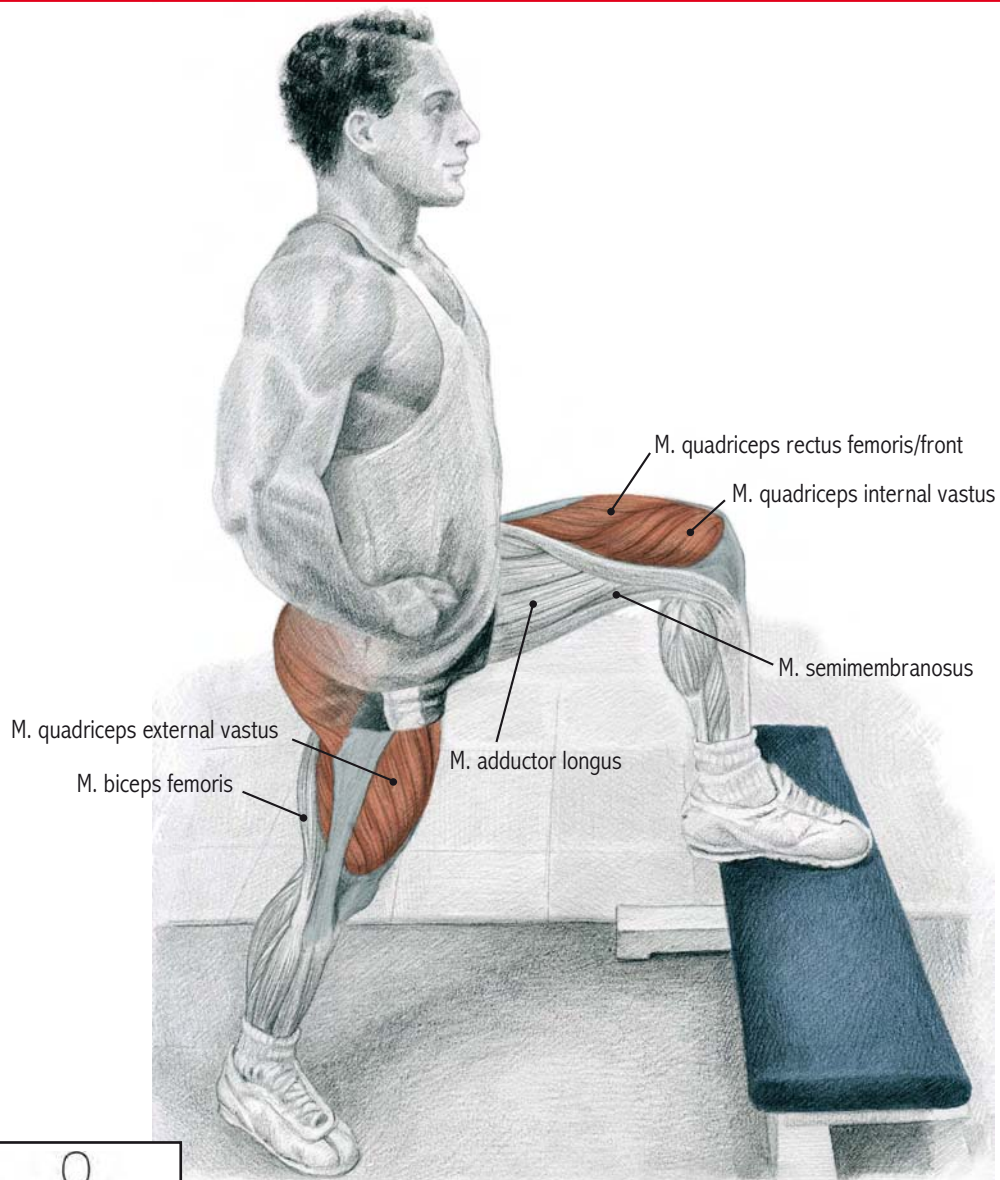
MUSCLES USED

quadriceps, gluteus maximus

TECHNIQUE

Stand in the position required for the rather improperly named Sissy Squat (Ex. 11), with the bar behind your body. A reverse grip is normally used. Bend your knees while raising your heels slightly, not moving the bar away from your buttocks. This variant requires more work from the entire quadriceps and less from the hamstrings and adductor muscles (depending on the technique used).





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: gluteus maximus, quadriceps
SECONDARY MUSCLES: hamstrings, adductors
ANTAGONISTS: iliopsoas, sartori

VARIATIONS

2.2 ... SINGLE-LEG

MUSCLES USED

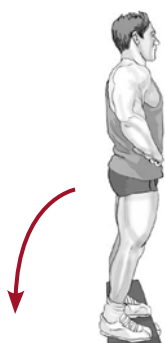
gluteus maximus, quadriceps, hamstrings

TECHNIQUE

The technique used is exactly the same as in the basic exercise, but you do not change feet to step down. Instead, keep the same foot up until you have completed the set. This is somewhat more demanding, as it removes the brief periods of rest between steps.



Execution



Stand in front of the step holding a dumbbell in one hand. (Use the other to keep your balance.) Place one foot on the step, which should be slightly below knee height, and step up onto it using only the strength of the raised leg. Keep your back straight. Change feet to step down and repeat the movement. Breathe in just before stepping up and out as you step down. You can also breathe naturally.

Comments

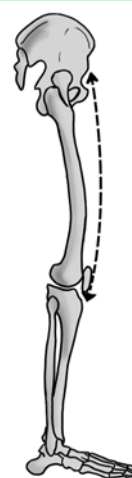
This is an excellent, straightforward exercise that provides an intense workout for the gluteus maximus if your technique is good. Beginners should do it without using weights, hands on hips. A good alternative is to climb stairs carrying a load, although you lose the part of the exercise that extends the muscle (the down step), which is also useful.



Common mistakes: using your back foot (calf muscles) to give you a boost or, if you hang on to something for balance, pulling yourself up with that hand; bouncing before stepping up to gain momentum; leaning too far forward as you step up and poor balance



The front quadriceps extends the knee and flexes the hip.



2.3 ... LATERAL

MUSCLES USED

gluteus medius, gluteal deltoid (superficial fibers of the gluteus maximus, tensor fasciae latae), quadriceps and hamstrings

TECHNIQUE

The technique is very similar to the other exercises described, but this time you step up to the side. The first leg moves away from your body, and you bring your legs together when you complete the Step-up. This works the adductor and abductor muscles harder than the other variants.



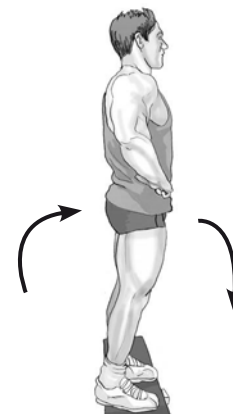
2.4 ... OVER-THE-TOP

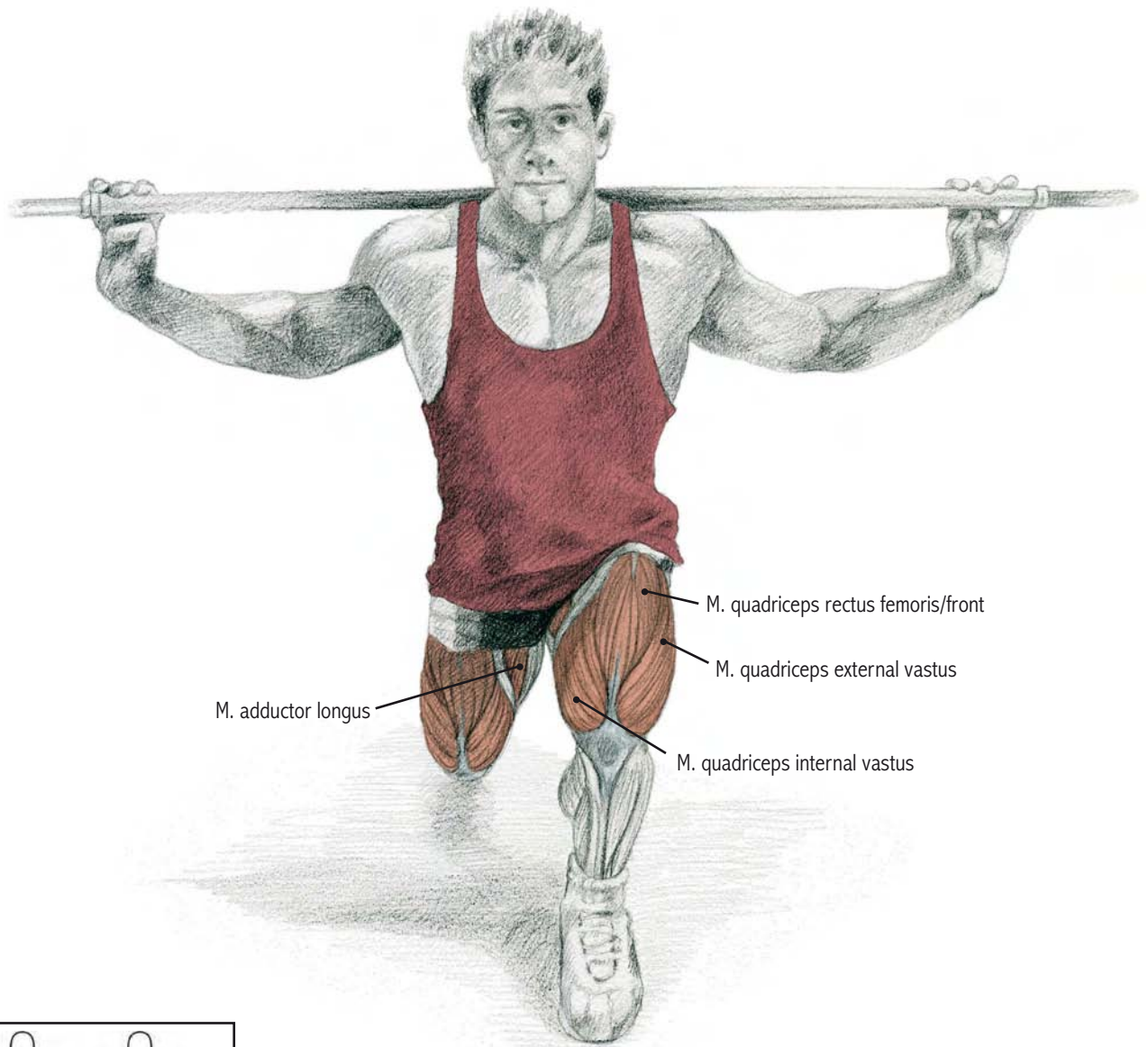
MUSCLES USED

quadriceps, gluteus maximus

TECHNIQUE

The Over-the-top variant is the same as the basic exercise, but continuing over the step. Return by stepping backwards. If you do the exercise slowly, it will work the quadriceps hard. The height of the step should be halfway between the floor and your knee



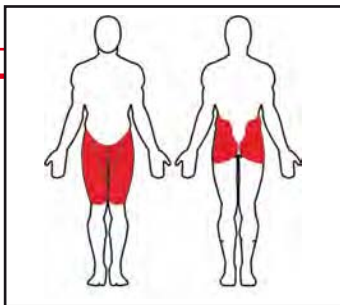


M. adductor longus

M. quadriceps rectus femoris/front

M. quadriceps external vastus

M. quadriceps internal vastus



Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: quadriceps, gluteus maximus, adductors

SECONDARY MUSCLES: hamstrings, front quadriceps

ANTAGONISTS: iliopsoas, sartorius

VARIATIONS

3.2 ... REAR

MUSCLES USED

gluteus maximus, quadriceps, adductors, hamstrings

TECHNIQUE

The technique is similar to the basic exercise, but in this case the leg you are working stays in the same place, and you step backwards with the other. Bringing the weight forward rather than backward as you straighten up allows you to focus more of the effort in the gluteus muscles (if your technique is good). You can do this variant by tying a rope around your waist and attaching it to a low pulley, although this is more uncomfortable than using free weights.



Execution



Stand holding a barbell in an overhand grip, resting it on your trapezius and deltoid (as in Ex. 1, Squat). Take a long step forward and allow your weight to fall on the forward leg, at the same time bending your back knee down toward the ground. Keep your back straight and concentrate on balancing. Your front foot should be in line with your knee vertically. Straighten up again by pushing back on your front foot. Breathe in as you step forward and out as you complete the backward step.

Comments

This exercise requires good coordination and balance and you cannot use as much weight as in Squats and similar exercises. Fixing your gaze on a specific point in front of you will help you keep your balance. You can use either a barbell or dumbbells. The barbell will help you keep your torso straight throughout the movement. Beginners should do this exercise with the bar only, or with hands on hips. The demands placed on the different muscle groups will depend on your technique, but the gluteus maximus will work hard, as well as the quadriceps and adjacent muscles.



Common mistakes: bringing your knee further forward than your foot, arching your back as you lower your torso, bouncing and not lowering your torso enough.



If you cannot avoid doing aerobic exercise and weights on the same day, it is a good idea to do them at different times. If you have to include both in the same session, it is usually preferable to do strength training first. Otherwise you may find that fatigue will affect your technique and routine (due to weakness, lack of balance, etc.).

3.3 ... WALKING

MUSCLES USED

gluteus maximus, quadriceps, adductors, hamstrings

TECHNIQUE

Rather than stepping back, walk forward with long steps. As in the Rear Lunge, the gluteus muscles work harder than in the basic exercise, provided you make sure to push up vertically. It is a good idea to imagine a finishing line for your set of lunges and fix your eyes on it. This will help you keep your balance and provide a place to rest before turning around and starting the next set.



3.4 ... SIDE

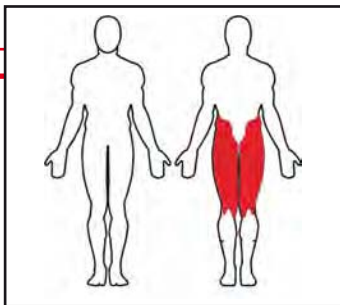
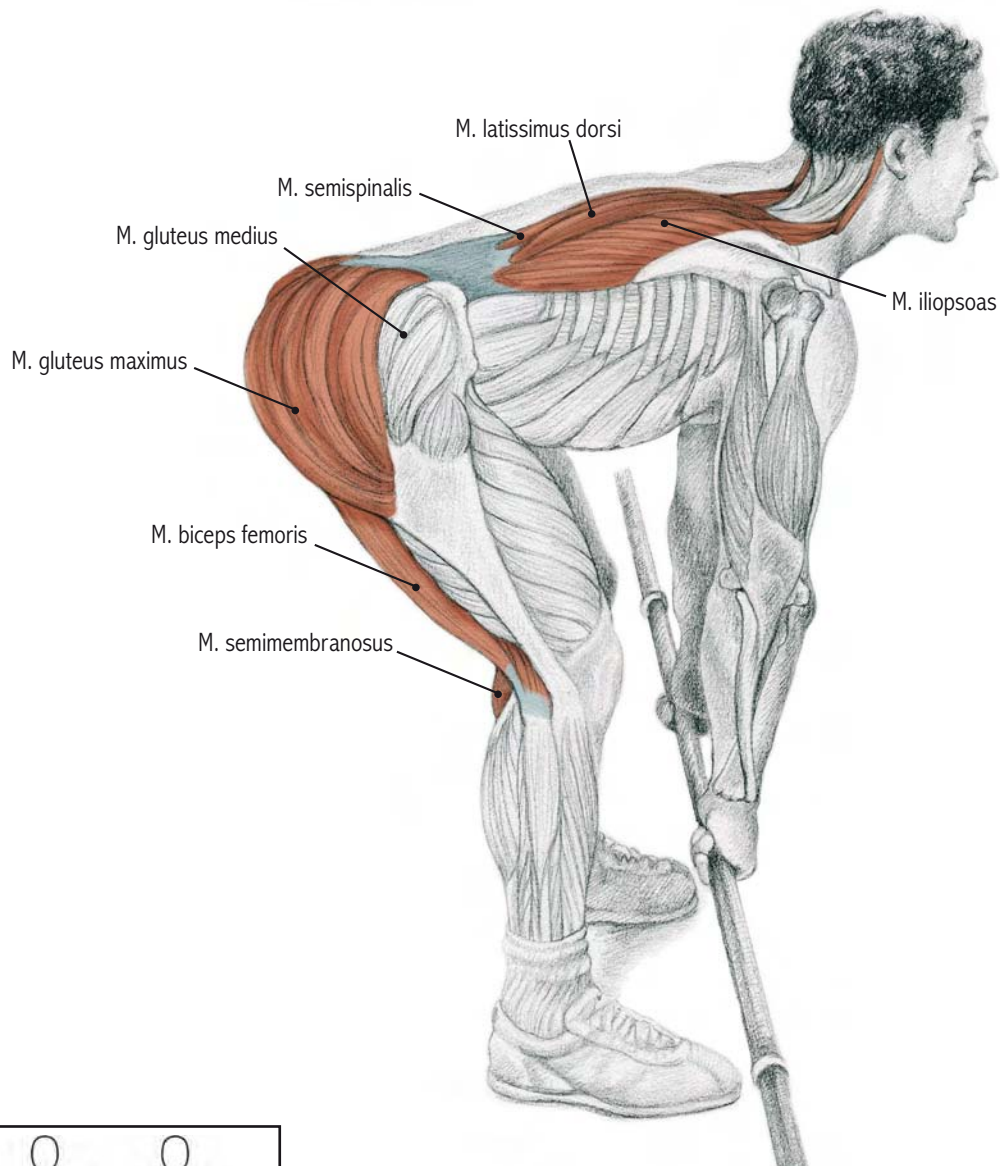
MUSCLES USED

quadriceps, gluteal deltoid (superficial fibers of the gluteus maximus, tensor fasciae latae), gluteus maximus, adductors, hamstrings

TECHNIQUE

The starting and finishing positions are the same, but you move sideways, taking a big step sideways and shifting the weight onto that leg. Step back to return to the starting position. This variant works out the abductor muscles and requires greater coordination





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: gluteus maximus, hamstrings (semimembranosus, semitendinosus and long head of the biceps femoris), (muscles of the lower back and along the spine)

SECONDARY MUSCLES: gluteus medius (rear), great adductor, smallest adductor, piriformis

ANTAGONISTS: iliopsoas, front quadriceps, tensor fasciae latae, pectineus, sartorius

VARIATIONS 4.2 ... WITH DUMBBELLS

MUSCLES USED

gluteus maximus, hamstrings (semimembranosus, semitendinosus and long head of the biceps femoris), (muscles of the lower back and along the spine)

TECHNIQUE

The only difference is that you use one dumbbell held in both hands, or two, one in each hand. The variant in which you bring the dumbbell sideways toward the other foot (rotating the torso) is not recommended.



VARIATIONS 4.3 ... GOOD MORNING

MUSCLES USED

gluteus maximus, hamstrings (semimembranosus, semitendinosus and long head of the biceps femoris), (muscles of the lower back and along the spine)

TECHNIQUE

The movement is similar, although it is more technically difficult and can be risky. Place the bar in the same position as for Squats (Ex. 1) but using a much lighter weight because the point where force is applied is farther from the axis of movement.



Execution



Stand with your feet slightly apart and your legs almost straight, holding the barbell overhand (palms down) across your thighs and looking straight ahead. Bend forward at the hips to lower your torso without arching your back or separating the barbell from your body. You should feel pressure on your heels as you come down, but not on your toes. Concentrate on focusing the effort in the hip extensor muscles at the back of your thighs and not in your back. Inhale as you begin to lower the weight and exhale as you raise it. Breathe deeply before repeating the movement.

Comments

The hamstrings and gluteus muscles need to straighten the hip after you lower the weight. By holding your breath and tightening your lower back and abdominal muscles, you will create a natural girdle. Although the gains in terms of flexibility offered by this exercise cannot be ignored, there are other variants that provide a more effective stretch without strain or abrupt movements (which is complicated in the Deadlift by the contraction produced by the stretch reflex). Deadlift machines are not common.

This exercise requires technical advice and it may sometimes be inadvisable, given the strain on the spinal erector muscles and the intervertebral discs (see the Deadlift exercise in Abdomen and Lower Back, Ex. 9). In addition, it may not be the best choice to develop the hamstrings. You can use a “reverse power” grip to stop the bar from rolling, although this can pose a risk to the muscles of the forearm, which is rotated outward.



Common mistakes: arching your back, bending your knees and using the incorrect weight



While the Deadlift is not dangerous per se, it is technically difficult and the weight used can cause problems. Nevertheless, it is a very good exercise if done properly.

Do not arch your back or breathe out while under strain (only when you complete the lift). Do not move the weight away from your center of gravity or twist your spine. Keep your eyes forward at all times for balance. In the Bent-leg variant, raise your hips and shoulder at the same time (like a Squat). Do not do forced reps or cheat in any way that changes your technique. The effort should be distributed by the body under strain. Do not allow your back to take the entire load.

4.4 ... RAISED

MUSCLES USED

gluteus maximus, hamstrings (semimembranosus, semitendinosus and long head of the biceps femoris), (muscles of the lower back and along the spine)

TECHNIQUE

In a standard Deadlift, the weights (or the unweighted bar) may touch the floor at the end of the downward movement. To prevent this, you can stand on a platform. You will need to use a lighter weight because the aim in this variant is to achieve a long range of movement. If your goal is to make your hips and hamstrings more supple and flexible, you should do specific stretching exercises and not the Deadlift.



4.5 ... HAMSTRING RAISE

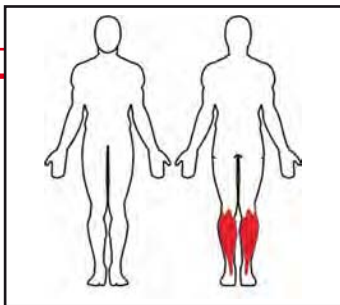
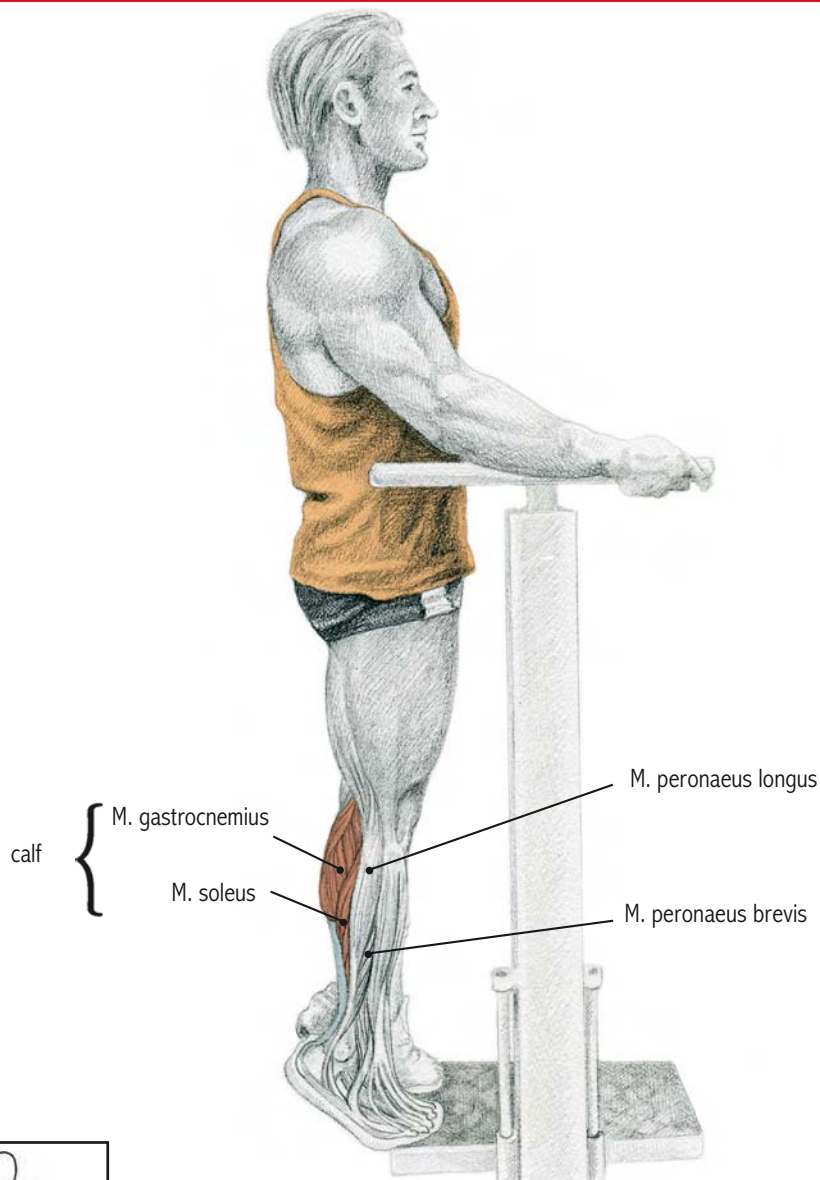
MUSCLES USED

hamstrings (semimembranosus, semitendinosus and long head of the biceps femoris), gluteus maximus, (muscles of the lower back and along the spine)

TECHNIQUE

Kneel on a flat ab bench with your heels under the rollers (or get a partner to sit on your heels), hands crossed in front of your chest. Bring your torso forward in a slow, controlled movement toward the bench, and then raise it back to the starting position. This exercise is uncommon but useful. It is suitable for advanced athletes only and will lend variety to your training sessions. You can hold a weight between your hands to increase intensity.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: calf (soleus and gastrocnemius)

SECONDARY MUSCLES: peroneus longus and brevis, tibialis posterior, flexor digitorum longus

ANTAGONISTS: tibialis anterior, extensor digitorum

VARIATIONS 5.2 ... SINGLE-LEG

MUSCLES USED

calf muscles

TECHNIQUE

In terms of intensity, this is an intermediate step between doing the exercise with both feet and using weights. Otherwise, it is identical.



5.3 ... DONKEY

MUSCLES USED

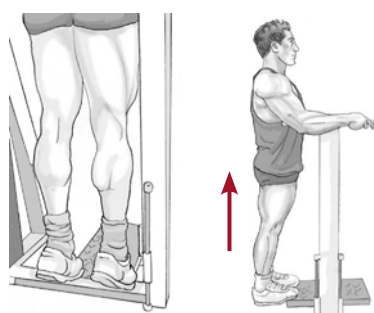
calf muscles

TECHNIQUE

In this traditional bodybuilders' exercise, a partner acts as the weight by sitting on the athlete's hips (not on his/her back). To do this, bend your body forward to almost 90° and hold on to something for support to keep your balance. The position of the torso does not change the work done by the calf muscles.



Execution



Stand with your feet apart, about hip-width, and the balls of your feet on the edge of a step. Lower yourself in a controlled movement. Keep your knees slightly bent to protect them. You can breathe naturally, although it helps maintain rhythm if you inhale as you lower your body and exhale at the top of the movement.

Comments

The calf muscles are strong and do not tire easily, as they have to work hard in walking or running, basic human activities since the dawn of time. The secondary muscles in this exercise are much weaker than the calves, which also work as a second-class lever (strength), a function that is not common in the human body. Because of this, sets need to be heavy and long (depending on your objectives).

It is sometimes incorrectly stated that pointing your toes outward or inward (see Ex. 16) will work the external or internal part of the calf muscles harder. This is actually possible only by tilting the foot slightly so that the sole is facing inward (for the tibialis posterior) or outward (for the peroneus). In this case, you should use only a very light weight, as these movements can cause injury under strain. These movements do not change the work done by the triceps, as it is the hip that rotates and not the knee, where the muscles are inserted. (The knee cannot be rotated when it is extended.) It is advisable to use a low step (about two inches), so that you can rest your heels on the ground if you go down too far.



Common mistakes: bouncing without controlling the weight, not enough repetitions and/or weight, standing on your toes rather than the ball of your foot, twisting your feet and shifting your position.



It is a universal principle that a muscle will not grow stronger if the usual weight or resistance used is not increased. This means that you will not make any gains if you do not change the weight and intensity of the exercise for weeks on end. Some people ignore this and hope to increase their strength without adding an ounce of weight from one month to the next.

5.4 ... ALTERNATING TO 15

MUSCLES USED

calf muscles

TECHNIQUE

This exercise aims to develop strength resistance by raising the heel of each foot alternately. Do one strict repetition on one foot while keeping the other in the air, then change feet. Stand on the first foot again and do two repetitions, then two on the other foot, and so on until you reach fifteen/fifteen on each foot. Then reduce the number of repetitions: fourteen/fourteen, etc., until you reach one/one. You can do sets of this kind for many muscles groups (e.g., biceps). The technique is included here because of the nature of the muscles worked (see Ex. 5). If you are not in very good shape, you can do the same thing with a smaller number of reps (eight or ten, for example).



5.5 ... WITH WEIGHTS

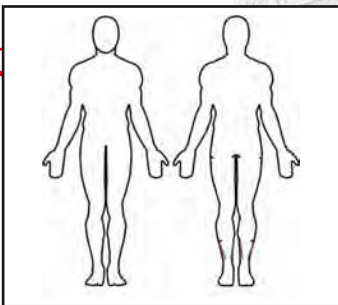
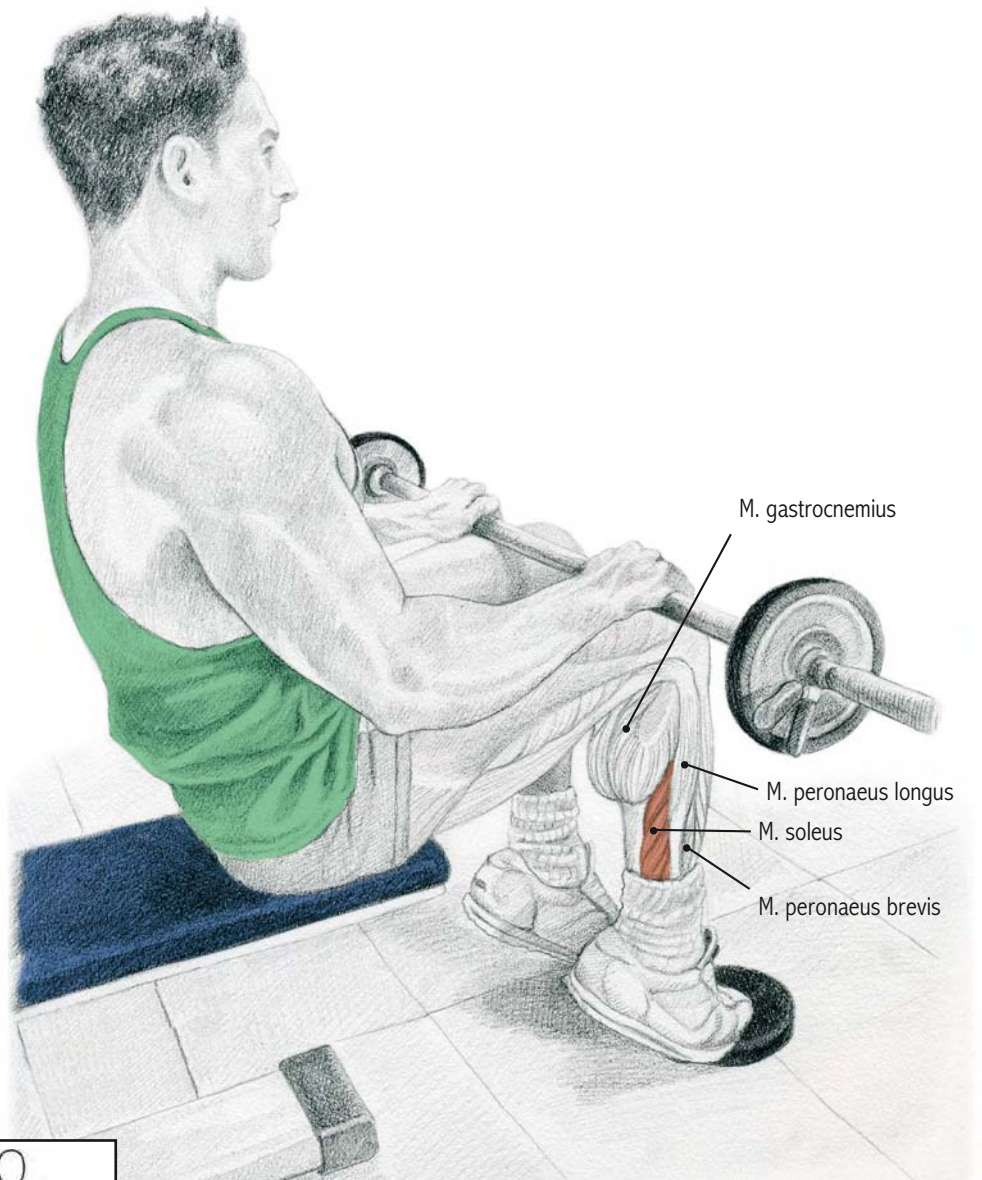
MUSCLES USED

calf muscles

TECHNIQUE

The technique is the same as the basic exercise, but with a weight hanging from your waist (preferably behind your back and not in front of your stomach). This is an alternative to the Donkey Calf Raise that you can do on your own. It also has the advantage of allowing you to select the weight used. Too much weight can cause injury to the load-bearing area.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: soleus

SECONDARY MUSCLES: peroneus longus and brevis, gastrocnemius, tibialis posterior, plantar flexors

ANTAGONISTS: tibialis anterior, extensor digitorum

VARIATIONS

6.2 ... WITH DUMBBELLS

MUSCLES USED

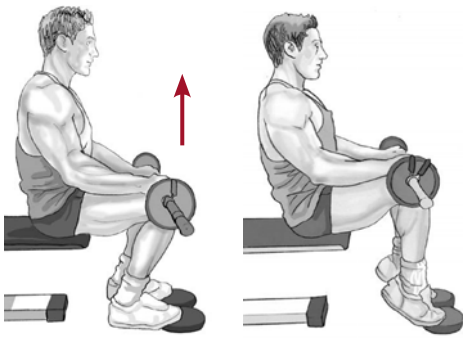
soleus

TECHNIQUE

The technique is the same as the barbell exercise, but in this case dumbbells are used and the flat part of the disc is placed just above the knee instead of the bar. The only difference is a matter of personal preference, perhaps because you find the bar hurts your legs or that the dumbbells are easier to handle at the beginning or end of the exercise.



Execution



Sit with your knees bent at a 90° angle and the balls of your feet resting on a low step, leaving your heels free. Place a cushioned bar with the desired weight across your thighs just above the knee and raise your heels as high as possible. Hold the position for a moment and then lower your heels without letting them rest on the floor. Breathe naturally.

Comments

Because your knees are bent, the gastrocnemius does less work and the effort is taken over in part by the soleus, which is almost as strong. The weaker peroneus longus also takes some of the strain, although its main function is pronation. This exercise can also be done without weights, although some load is almost always necessary as this is a powerful muscle (see Ex. 18). It is a good idea to use a platform around two inches high, which will support your heel if you bring the movement too far down, allowing you to rest before removing the weight.

This exercise is highly recommended for people who have “high” calves.



Common mistakes: bouncing without controlling the weight, not enough repetitions and/or weight and standing on your toes rather than the ball of your foot.



Five (or sometimes six) meals a day is a good number for most weight training enthusiasts. In general, these should include proteins, carbohydrates and fats, the three basic nutrients.

6.3 ...SINGLE-LEG

MUSCLES USED

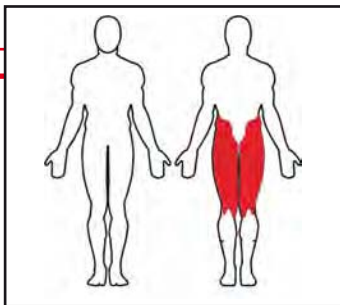
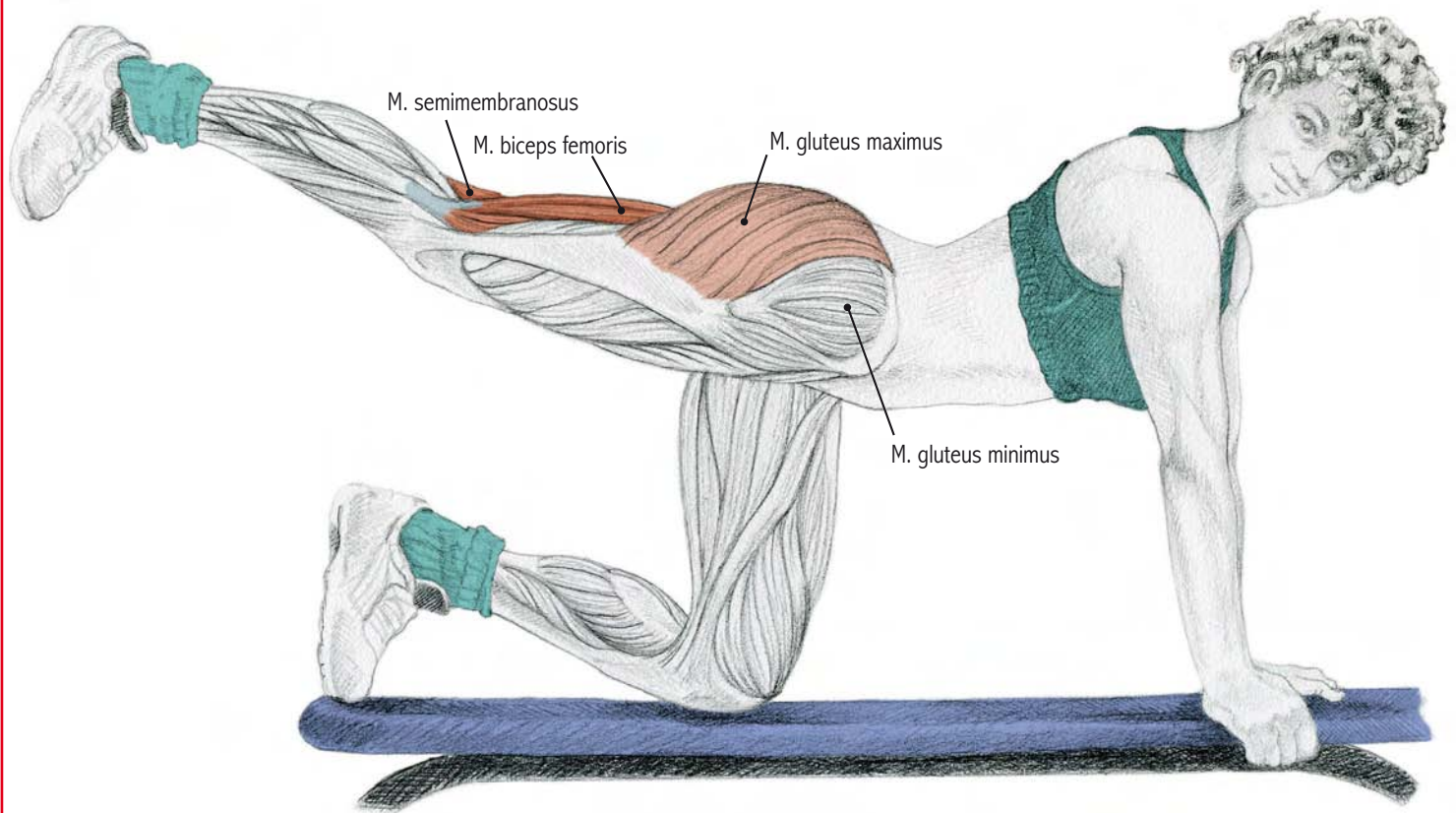
soleus

TECHNIQUE

The technique is exactly the same as in the previous variant, but in this case using a single dumbbell on one leg at a time. Obviously, the muscle work will be the same and the only difference is that you concentrate on one side of your body and then switch to the other.

Variants that involve turning the knees are not explained here, as they do not work a substantially different part of the soleus.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: semimembranosus, semitendinosus, biceps femoris (long head)

SECONDARY MUSCLES: gluteus maximus and medius (rear) (and gluteus minimus), great adductor, piriformis, quadratus femoris

ANTAGONISTS: iliopsoas, sartorius, front quadriceps

VARIATIONS

7.2 ... TWO-LEG BENCH

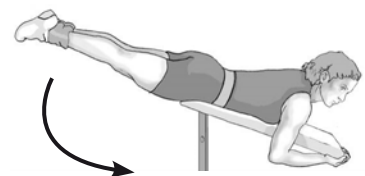
MUSCLES USED

gluteus maximus, hamstrings, lower back muscles

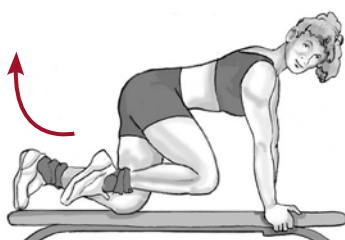
TECHNIQUE

Lie face down on a bench and wrap both arms around it to hold on. Leave your legs completely free and bent at the knees. Lift both legs at the same time, hold the position for a moment, and then lower them.

This variant is rather more demanding than the basic exercise, although the main muscle (gluteus maximus) does not work much harder. The difficulty in fact comes from the intense isometric contraction of the lower back muscles to hold the hip joint in position.



Execution



On all fours (kneeling and supporting your body on your hands or elbows), lift one knee and kick backwards. Keep the movement controlled, lifting your leg a little higher than horizontal but without arching your back too far. This is easier if you support your body on your elbows instead of your hands. As you extend your hip, you can also extend your leg to shift some of the work to the hamstrings. Breathe naturally or breathe in as you kick back.

Comments

This is a simple exercise that is suitable for beginners. Ankle weights are often used because the movement is easy and the muscles involved are strong. (In fact, they are among the strongest in the body.) Much of the work is done by the hamstrings. The gluteus maximus will do more of the work if you keep your knee bent the entire time (i.e., without extending your leg fully at any point). The gluteus minimus is not involved to any great extent if the other muscles are able to function normally. Incorrect information leads many athletes to believe that this exercise helps reduce volume or burn fat in this area (see the Foreword and Introduction, as well as Ex. 21).



Common mistakes: bringing the upper leg further forward than vertical in the downward movement to gain momentum, arching your back too far when the leg is in the air, too short a movement and not enough repetitions.



Cellulite is an abnormal accumulation of liquid and fat below the skin. It has various causes, but the main ones are unquestionably poor nutrition and a sedentary lifestyle.

Regular physical exercise and a careful diet can have a spectacular effect on this problem. As always, however, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Unfortunately, weight training exercises have little effect on localized cellulite. You need to adopt a holistic lifestyle and approach.

7.3 ... HALF

MUSCLES USED

gluteus maximus, hamstrings

TECHNIQUE

In this variant, you do only the last part of the movement, lifting and lowering your leg while keeping it in the air. This provides a much stricter workout for the muscles involved, largely eliminating the part of the movement that does not work against gravity and serves mainly to provide momentum.

If you do this exercise with your knee bent, you will work the gluteus maximus harder. If the knee is extended, the hamstrings do most of the work.



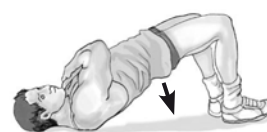
7.4 ...HIP BRIDGE

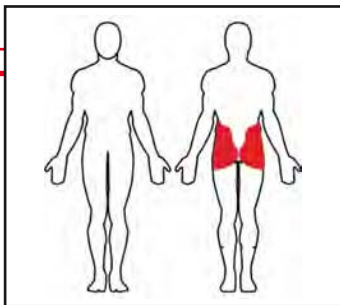
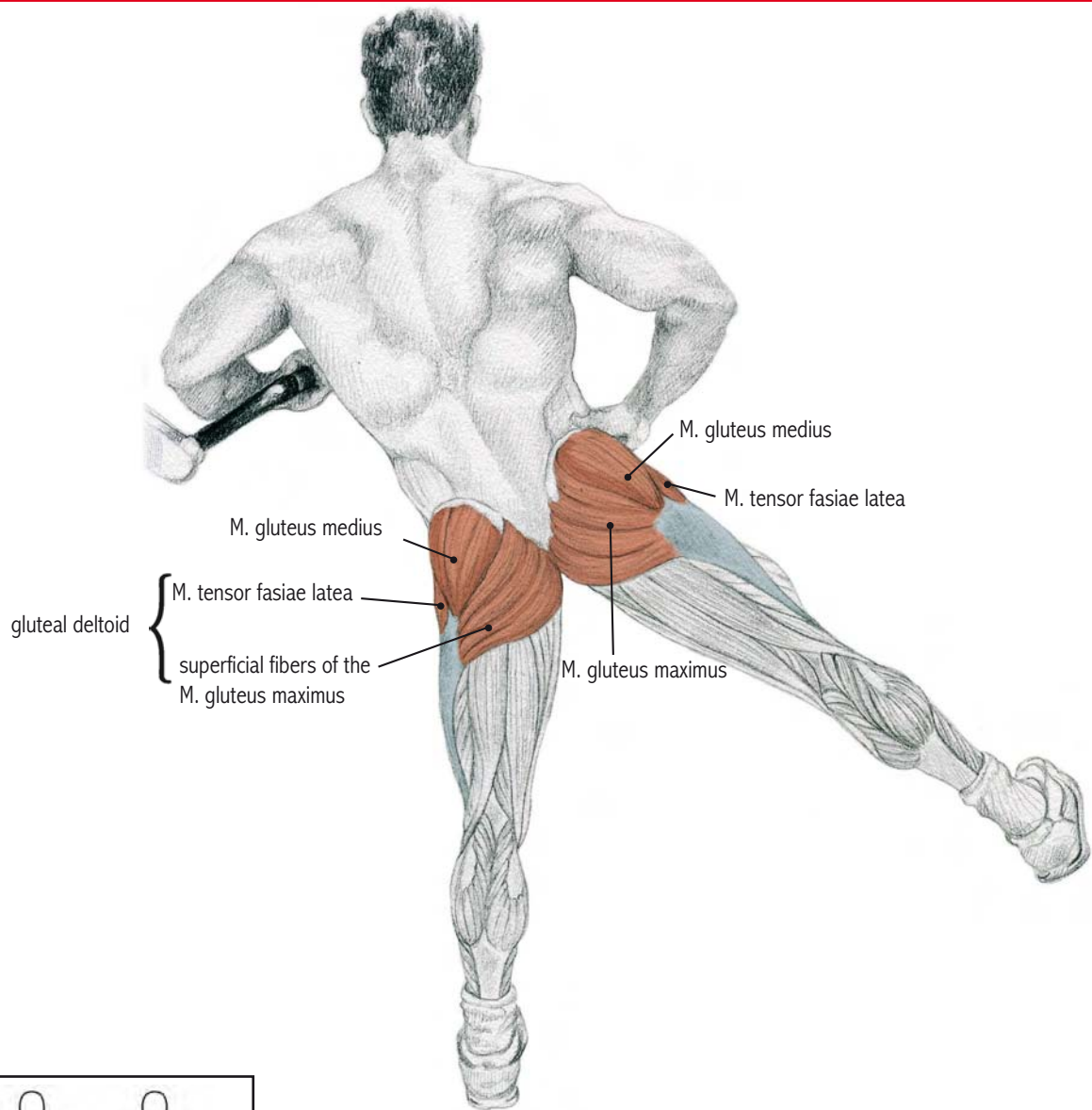
MUSCLES USED

gluteus maximus, hamstrings, lower back muscles

TECHNIQUE

Lie on your back (face up) with your knees bent and your feet planted firmly on the floor. Lift your hips until your body is resting on your feet and shoulders only. This is an easy exercise for beginners, or it can be used as a safe, comfortable warm-up, as no weights can be used. If you want to increase intensity, you can extend one leg and lift your torso and upper legs using one leg only.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: gluteus medius, gluteal deltoid (tensor fasciae latae and superficial fibers of the gluteus maximus)

SECONDARY MUSCLES: gluteus minimus, piriformis, internal obturator, gemelli, gastrocnemius, sartorius

ANTAGONISTS: adductors (great, long, short, smallest), pectineus

VARIATIONS

8.2 ... LYING

MUSCLES USED

gluteus medius, gluteal deltoid

TECHNIQUE

You can do this movement lying on your side and raising the leg in the same way. Be careful not to bend at the waist, which will make the exercise flexion rather than abduction. The advantage of lying on the floor is that it forces you to work against gravity for the entire exercise, which does not happen in the lower part of the standing movement. As in the basic exercise, it is almost always advisable to use ankle weights.



Execution



Stand holding on to a fixed object with one hand for stability. Lift one leg up sideways (abduction) from vertical to the highest point you can manage without moving your torso. Lower your leg to a little above the starting point. Breathe in as you raise your leg and out as you lower it.

Comments

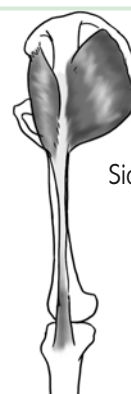
Like Ex. 7, this is a simple exercise that is suitable for beginners. Using an ankle weight may be advisable to increase intensity. The highest point you can raise your leg to is determined by where your bones meet in the hip. This will vary from person to person, and you should be careful not to reach this point every time. Though it may seem obvious, it is worth repeating once again that this exercise does not slim or reduce fat in the area worked (see the Foreword and Introduction). The variants described below are useful for increasing intensity, as the basic exercise is not very demanding.



Common mistakes: resting your foot on the floor after lowering your leg, leaning sideways to raise your leg further, bringing your leg back beyond vertical in order to gain momentum, flexing (rather than abducting) the hip (i.e., raising your leg forward and not sideways) and repeatedly reaching the upper limit of the movement



Some studies suggest that a little-known function of the gluteus maximus is to help extend the quadriceps, together with the tensor fasciae latae.



Side view of the left leg

8.3 ... LYING BENT-KNEE

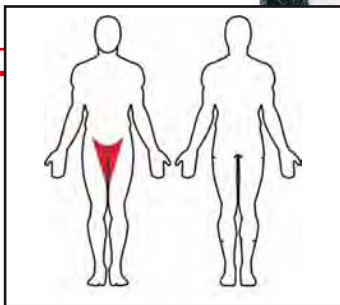
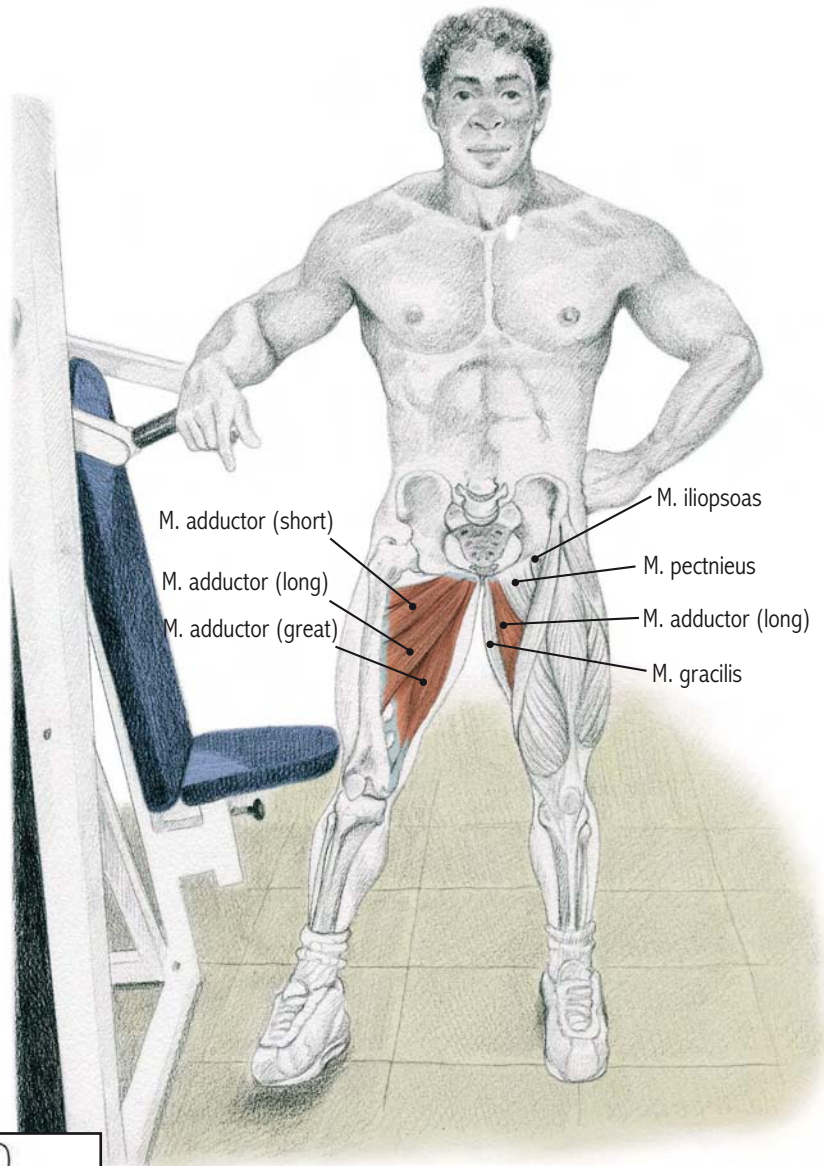
MUSCLES USED

gluteus medius, gluteal deltoid, gluteus maximus, quadratus femoris, internal obturator

TECHNIQUE

Lie down in the same position but bend your knees almost 90°. The abduction is now accompanied by outward rotation, involving another family of muscles (external rotators). The movement therefore not only separates one leg from the other but includes making a small arc with the knee as you lift your leg. You can do a similar movement on all fours.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: adductors (great, long, short and smallest)

SECONDARY MUSCLES: deep gluteus maximus, gracilis, pectineus, quadratus femoris, external obturator, iliopsoas, hamstrings (primarily semitendinosus)

ANTAGONISTS: gluteus medius, gluteal deltoid (superficial fibers of the gluteus maximus and tensor fasciae latae)

VARIATIONS

9.2 ... LYING

MUSCLES USED

adductors

TECHNIQUE

The exercise can also be done lying down. To do this, place the foot of the upper leg on the floor and bend your hip slightly. The advantage of lying on the floor is that all of the work is done against gravity, unlike the lower part of the movement if you are standing. This variant also forces the iliopsoas to work harder. As in the basic exercise, it is almost always advisable to use ankle weights.



Execution



Stand holding on to a fixed object with one hand for stability. Lift one leg sideways across the other leg (adduction) from vertical to the highest point you can manage without moving your torso. Lower your leg to a little above the starting point. You can breathe naturally or inhale as you raise your leg and exhale as you lower it.

Comments

Like other similar exercises, this is simple and suitable for beginners. It is advisable to use an ankle weight to increase intensity. Even so, only part of the movement is made against gravity and you may therefore want to try the lying variant or use a machine. You will need to move the leg you lift slightly forward or back (e.g., one set on each side) so that it does not hit the other as you lift it.

Try not to let the leg extension become a flexion, in which the iliopsoas and the front quadriceps do almost all of the work.



Common mistakes: swinging your leg to gain momentum



The ligaments and cartilage play a key role in keeping the knee joint healthy. Some sports like football, skiing, tennis and some martial arts can result in knee damage, even for highly trained athletes.



9.3 ... LYING SPLITS

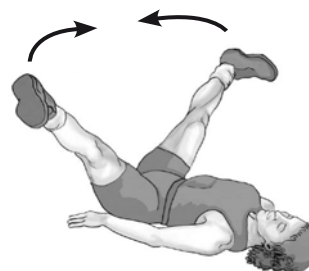
MUSCLES USED

adductors, pectineus, gemelli, iliopsoas and front quadriceps

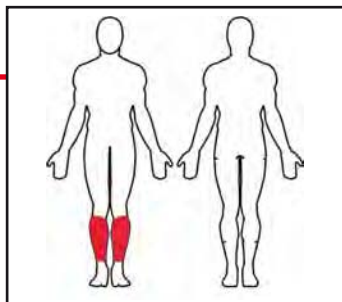
TECHNIQUE

Lie on your back with your legs vertical (hips on the floor) and your feet together. Place your hands by your sides for stability. Open both legs (abduction) simultaneously as far as your flexibility will allow and close them to return to the starting position. This is the most effective free weight variant of those described here. The hip flexors work isometrically to prevent the legs from falling.

As in the basic exercise, it is almost always advisable to use ankle weights.



CALF EXTENSION

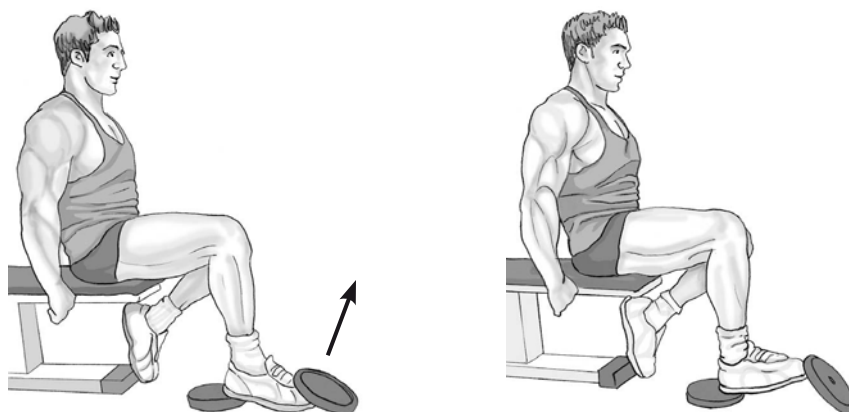


Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: tibialis anterior, extensor digitorum longus
SECONDARY MUSCLES: flexor hallucis longus
ANTAGONISTS: calf muscles

Execution

Sit with your knee bent 90° and your heel resting on a low object. Place a disc or similar weight on your instep and lift your foot as far as possible (approximately 30°). Hold the position for a moment and then lower your foot again. Breathe naturally.



Comments

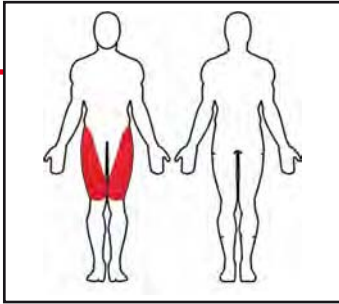
This is an uncommon exercise that is intended to work an area that does not get much training compared to the calf muscles. However, the equivalent seated cable exercise is more effective and comfortable (Ex. 18.3).

A variation is to sit on a high bench with your heel on the edge of something raised and tie a weighted rope around the instep to flex/extend the foot. This provides a longer movement. Alternatively, you can hold a dumbbell between your feet. Finally, you can place your heels on a press machine, leaving your toes free, and flex your feet upward (dorsiflexion). This requires some practice to hold the position.



Common mistakes: incomplete movement and doing the exercise too fast

SISSY SQUAT



Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: quadriceps

SECONDARY MUSCLES: gluteus maximus, gastrocnemius

ANTAGONISTS: iliopsoas, sartorius

Execution

Stand with your feet hip-width apart. Hold on to something for support with one hand and place the other on your waist or, if you choose, across your chest holding a weight. Lower your entire body with a deep knee bend while leaning your body back. Do not bend at the waist. Your heels will rise. In the return movement, bring your body forward and up, concentrating on using the quadriceps. Breathe in as you go down and out as you complete the upward movement.

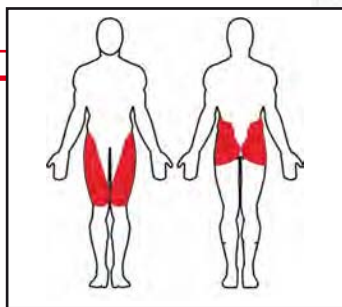
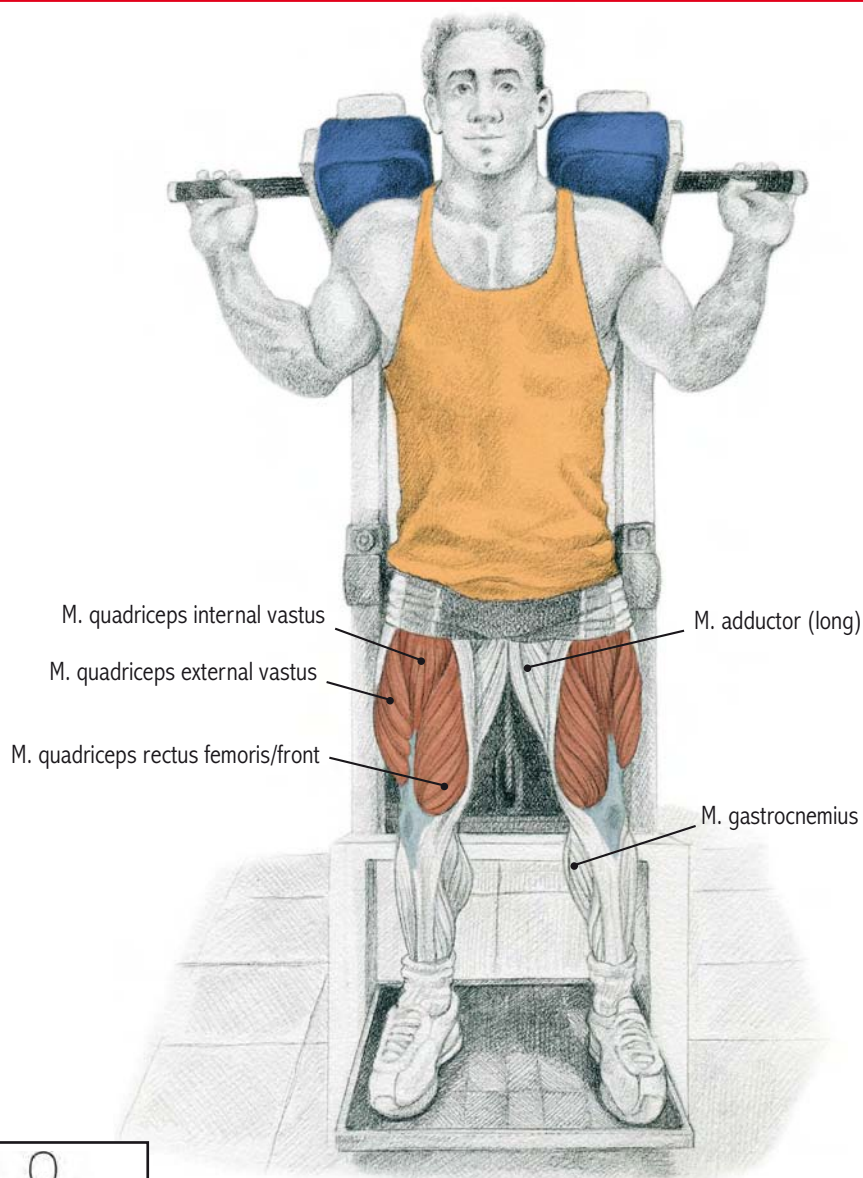


Comments

Despite its rather unfortunate name, the Sissy Squat is very intense and the movement is technically difficult. It is suitable for advanced athletes only. While it does not provide any special advantages over more conventional exercises, it will provide variety in your training routine. It should be avoided if you have knee problems. The main muscle involved is the entire quadriceps. The role of the adductors and hamstrings is secondary. Leg supports exist to help with this exercise.



Common mistakes: flexing the hip to do the classic Squat and failing to concentrate on working the relevant muscles



Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: quadriceps, gluteus maximus

SECONDARY MUSCLES: hamstrings, adductors, gastrocnemius, muscles of the lower back and along the spine

ANTAGONISTS: iliopsoas, sartorius

VARIATIONS

12.2 ... SMITH MACHINE, FEET-FORWARD

MUSCLES USED

gluteus maximus, quadriceps, adductors, hamstrings

TECHNIQUE

This is exactly the same as the sled machine, but using a barbell as in the conventional free-weight Squat with your feet slightly farther forward (there is no danger of falling backward). The Smith machine is excellent for Squats, as it allows you to concentrate on lifting the weight without worrying about balance. Also, by placing the feet farther forward the gluteus maximus gets a more intense workout and the strain on the kneecap is reduced. The position in this variant allows you to squat lower than the classic free-weight exercise.



Execution



Stand facing forward with your feet pointing slightly outward and a little over hip-width apart. Rest the pads on your trapezius and deltoid. Bend your knees outward (in line with your feet) until your thighs are almost parallel to the floor. Keep your back straight, although you can allow the lower back to arch slightly. Your knees should be almost above your feet at the bottom of the movement. Do not raise your heels. To avoid this, place your feet slightly farther forward if necessary. Breathe in before you squat, then hold your breath and exhale as you reach the top of the movement. Take a deep breath and repeat.

Comments

This is the machine equivalent of the free weight Squat (Ex. 1). However, the balance problem is reduced, which allows you to keep your back straight, taking the strain off the lower back. It is a basic, heavy exercise for the entire leg and especially for the quadriceps (the front less so) and the gluteus muscles. It is a good way for beginners to start doing squats, but only advanced athletes should use much weight. The machine helps prevent the knee from going farther forward than the foot, and it therefore puts less strain on the knees than the free weight version. Never rest while supporting the weight with your legs straight and your knees locked.



Common mistakes: bending the torso and forcing the back, going too far down (Deep Squat) under a heavy load, locking the knees at the top of the movement (resting the weight on the ligaments instead of the powerful leg muscles can be dangerous) and not pushing with both legs equally



The gluteus maximus is the largest and strongest muscle in the human body. It is for this reason that heavy weights are needed to develop it. It is not really involved in normal walking, however.

12.3 ...SMITH MACHINE, FEET-BACK

MUSCLES USED

quadriceps, gluteus maximus, adductors, hamstrings

TECHNIQUE

Almost all of the comments regarding the preceding variant also apply. In this case, however, you need to place your feet in line with your body vertically, if necessary putting a wedge under your heels to prevent them from rising as you squat. The aim is to increase the effect on the quadriceps. The disadvantage is that this variant places greater strain on the knees and heels, and it is therefore not recommended.



12.4 ...SMITH MACHINE, FRONT SQUAT

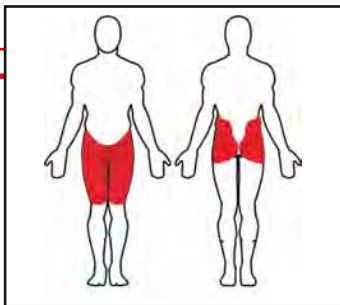
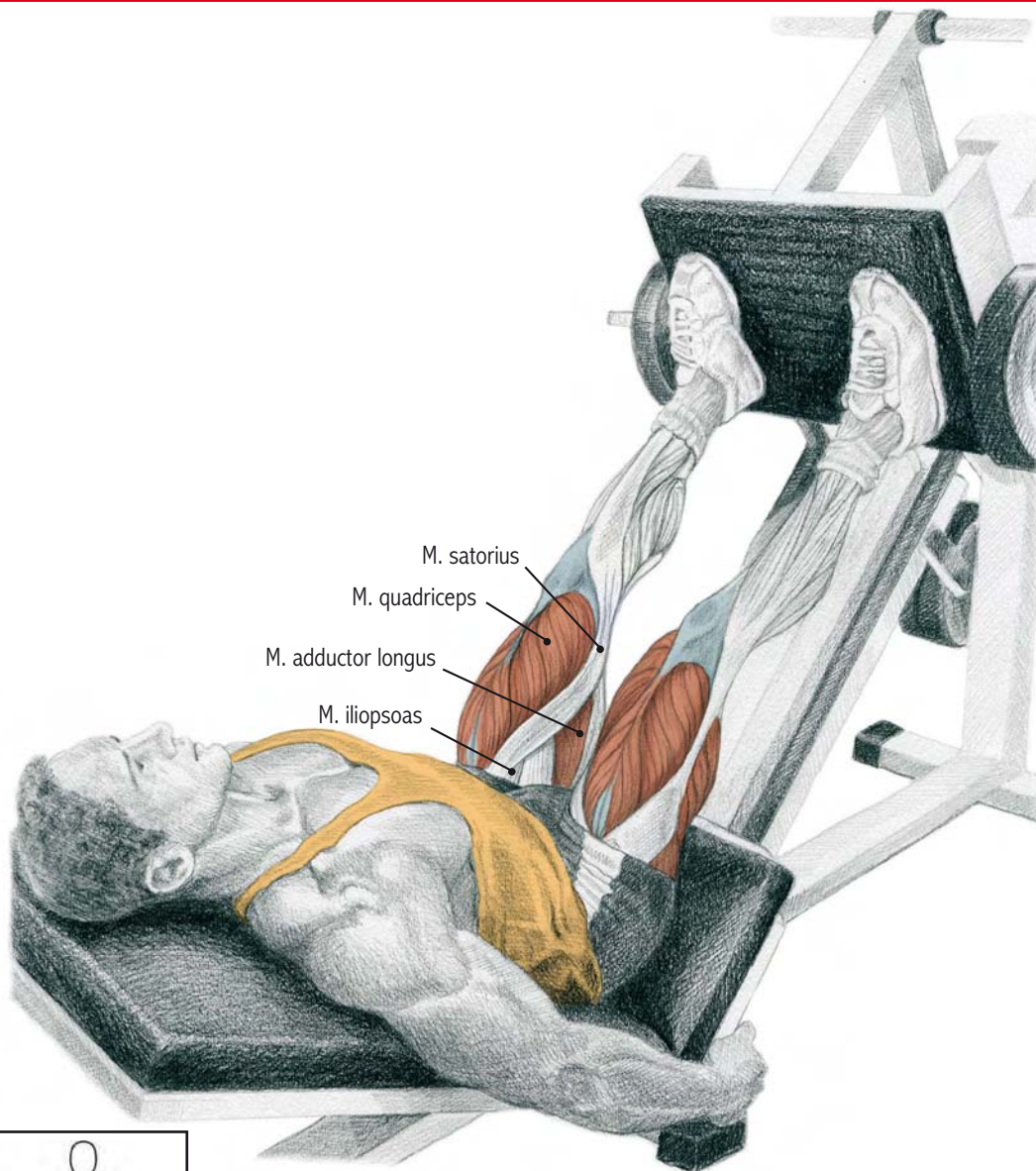
MUSCLES USED

quadriceps, gluteus maximus, adductors

TECHNIQUE

Place the bar on the front part of the deltoid. You can cross your forearms in front of your chest if you want. Puff out your chest and keep your elbows up. Less weight is used in this exercise, but it protects your back by stopping you from bending forward. The quadriceps work hard, but the effect is similar to the basic exercise. The position is more uncomfortable and may even be painful for the shoulders, which is why this variant is rarely used.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: quadriceps, gluteus maximus, adductors

SECONDARY MUSCLES: hamstrings

ANTAGONISTS: iliopsoas, sartorius

VARIATIONS 13.2 ... FEET-HIGH

MUSCLES USED

gluteus maximus, quadriceps, adductors, hamstrings

TECHNIQUE

Place your feet on the upper part of the foot plate. This will shift a considerable part of the effort onto the gluteus maximus by extending the hip. Some studies suggest that the hamstrings are barely involved, especially if the load is light. There is conflicting data regarding the front quadriceps, but this muscle would not appear to be used much. This variant is safer for the knees than the others, although you need to be more careful not to raise your hips.



VARIATIONS 13.3 ... FEET-LOW

MUSCLES USED

quadriceps, gluteus maximus, adductors, hamstrings

TECHNIQUE

Place your foot lower than usual. Some studies show that the long adductor muscle is used less, as the effort shifts to the biceps femoris. What is clear is that the quadriceps is worked harder. However, the variant is not usually recommended because of the strain it places on the ankles and knees.



Execution



Lie on the incline leg press machine with your entire back and hips supported. Place your feet on the foot plate a little more than hip-width apart with your toes pointing slightly outward. Lower the platform until your thighs approach your torso but without raising your hips from the bench. Lift the weight with a controlled but energetic push until your legs are almost fully extended. Breathe in during the first third of the downward movement and out at the end of the lift.

Comments

Despite its rather unnerving name, this a basic, heavy exercise for the entire leg and especially for the quadriceps (the front less so) and the gluteus muscles. It is just as good as the Squat for building strength and developing the muscle, but it will also protect your back as long as you hold it in position. Beginners will quickly be able to increase the load used (which helps motivation). In this, as in other compound leg exercises, the accumulation of lactic acid will be felt in intense workouts, resulting in hyperventilation to get rid of carbon dioxide and take in more oxygen. During the rest period, when your panting decreases, it is time to start a fresh set. Variants with the feet placed wide apart or close together should not be used as they break the knee's natural line of movement. Never lock your knees with your legs fully extended. The design of the press may either be a V-shape or almost horizontal. Both are fine, but the horizontal design is a very good option.



Common mistakes: lifting your hips as you lower the weight, locking your knees at the top of the movement, incomplete or exaggerated movement, using too much or too little weight and not pushing with both legs equally



Compound exercises are necessary to develop the quadriceps properly, as one head (rectus femoris) crosses two joints. As a result, it cannot be fully worked by doing Leg Extensions alone.

13.4 ...HACK PRESS

MUSCLES USED

quadriceps, adductors (the adductor longus less so), gluteus maximus

TECHNIQUE

Stand on a hack sled with your shoulders under the supports. This is safer for the back than the conventional Squat. The quadriceps work very hard, especially the outer and inner heads, and the hamstrings are also involved, although less so. The front quadriceps plays a secondary role compared to the rest of the muscles. If you want to work it more intensely, you will need to place your feet farther back, although this puts additional strain on the knees. Poorly designed machines stop you from placing your feet far enough forward, and your knees will extend beyond them as you squat, putting them under excessive strain.



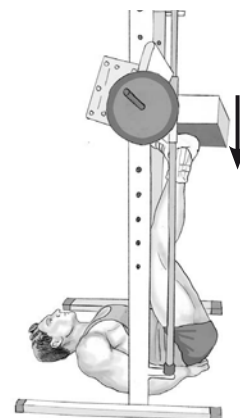
13.5 ...VERTICAL

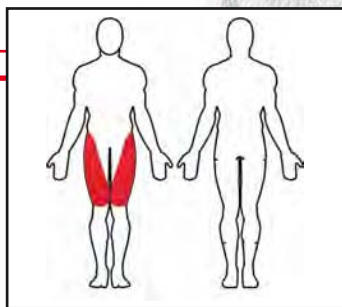
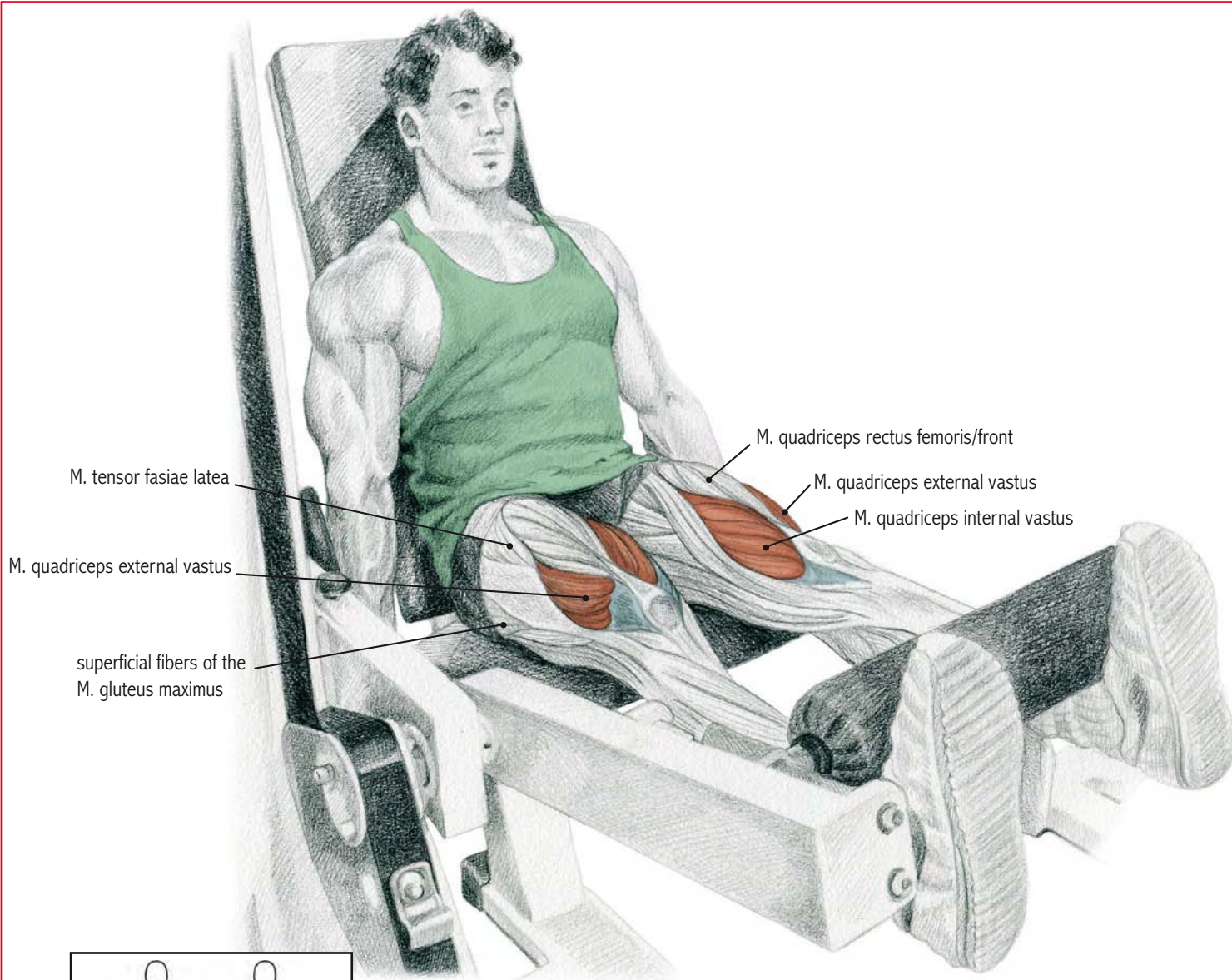
MUSCLES USED

quadriceps, gluteus maximus, hamstrings, adductors

TECHNIQUE

This machine is becoming increasingly uncommon (although it takes up less space than the incline machine). It is a modified version for vertical workouts. Be very careful not to arch your back or lift your hips off the ground. Obviously, the effort required is much greater for the same weight.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: quadriceps (vastus internus, externus, intermedius)

SECONDARY MUSCLES: front quadriceps, gluteal deltoid (tensor fasciae latae and superficial fibers of the gluteus maximus)

ANTAGONISTS: hamstrings, biceps femoris (short head), gracilis, sartorius, gastrocnemius

VARIATIONS

14.2 ... TOES-IN

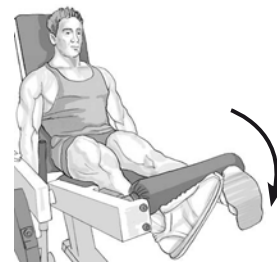
MUSCLES USED

quadriceps

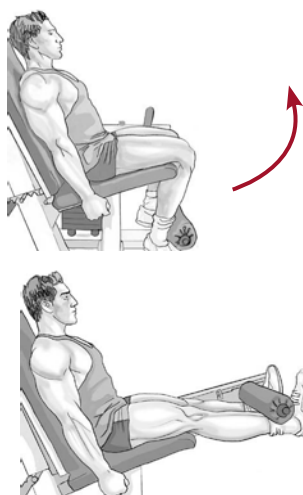
TECHNIQUE

When the knee is bent it can be rotated slightly, although the main rotation is in the hips and ankles. In this variant, which uses less weight, the toes are pointed inward and the mid-part of the thigh rests on the bench. This shifts more effort to the external vastus of the quadriceps. The rest of the muscles also work, but less intensely.

Do not extend the leg fully. The variant is recommended only for rehabilitation exercises where there are weak ligaments or medial deviations of the kneecap (unusual), and so on. Remember that the kneecap tends to dislocate outward, especially with hyperextension (a rather unfortunate term), because the "fit" is less tight, making this variant inadvisable.



Execution



Sit on the specially designed bench with the front part of your ankles under the padded lever. The back of the knee should be resting on the edge of the bench and the knee joint should be in line with the axis of the machine. Lift the weight from approximately 90° to the leg almost fully extended and then lower it in a controlled movement. It is usually recommended to not bend the knee far under very heavy loads or in rehabilitation. Breathe in as you lower the weight and out as you finish the lift.

Comments

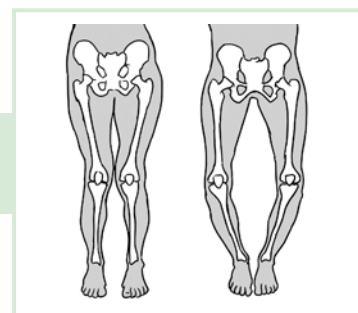
Although wrongly called Quadriceps Extensions by some people, including influential trainers, this exercise is indeed highly specific and can benefit the quadriceps enormously with little risk. The three heads of the muscle, which run across only one joint, work together at all times, and the work done by the front quadriceps (which crosses two joints) can be increased by reclining the back rest farther (to extend the hip). A standing quadriceps extension machine would make a good design, working first one leg and then the other, but surprisingly, this system is only to be found for the hamstrings (see Ex. 15.5). Flexing or extending the foot does not change the work done by the quadriceps. Some well-designed machines include a manual weight release lever, which allows users to position themselves before beginning and at the end of the exercise.



Common mistakes: fast movements to gain momentum, lowering the weight to the machine's limit and twisting the hips/knees as you move the weight.



Knock-knees (genu valgum) and bow-legs (genu varum) cannot generally be corrected by weight training.



14.3 ... TOES-OUT

MUSCLES USED

quadriceps

TECHNIQUE

This variant also uses less weight, but the rotation is outward, shifting most of the effort onto the internal vastus of the quadriceps. The external vastus still contributes, although less intensely.

As in the preceding exercise, this variant is only recommended for rehabilitation purposes. The internal vastus is, and always should be, stronger than the external vastus, to prevent the kneecap from outward dislocation when the leg is extended. This variant is for special cases under supervision.



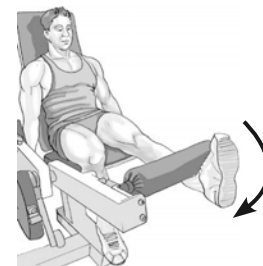
14.4 ... SINGLE-LEG

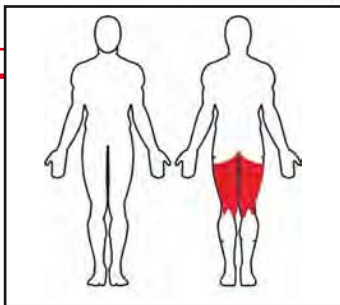
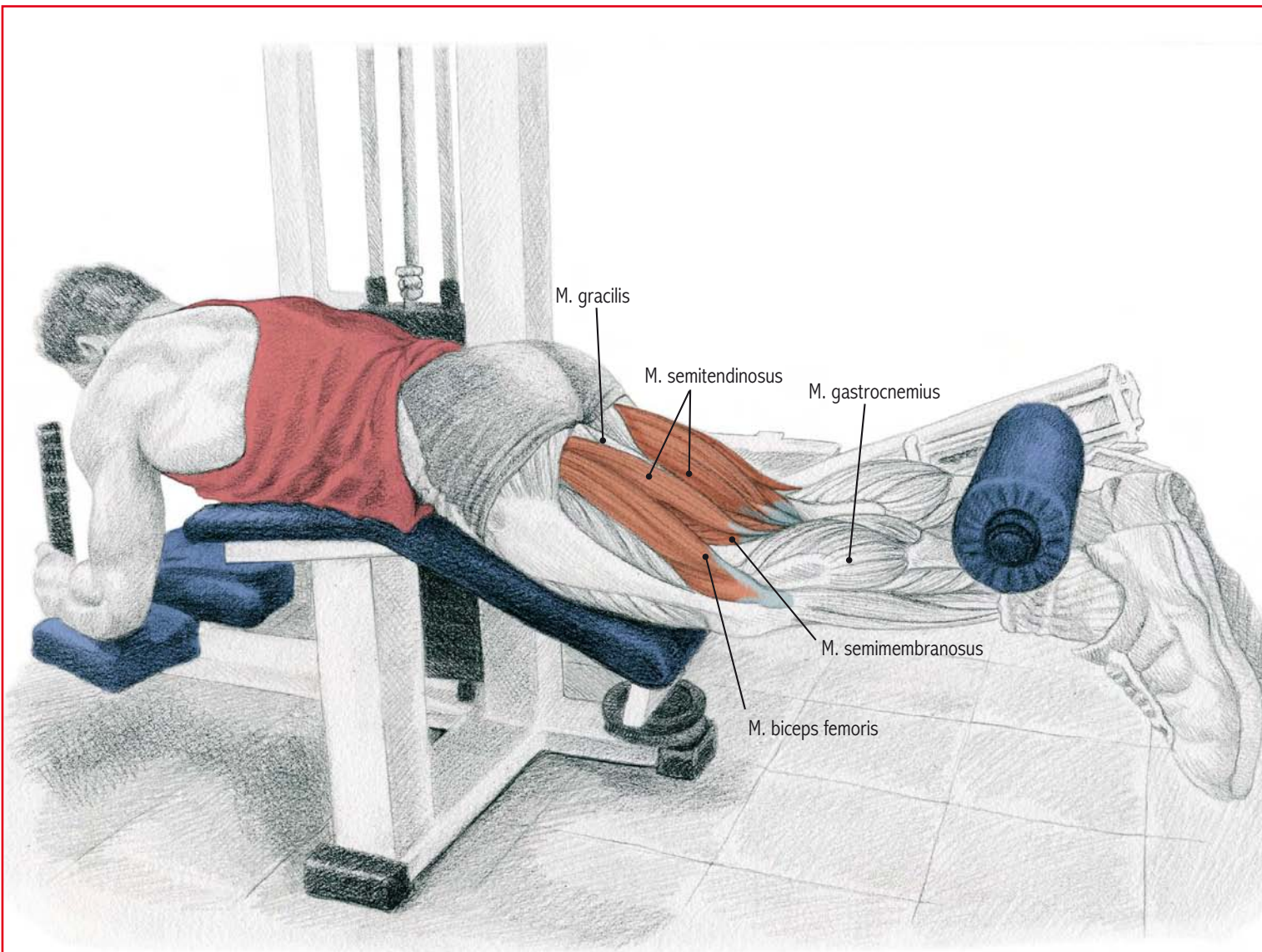
MUSCLES USED

quadriceps

TECHNIQUE

This variant is identical to the basic exercise, but the legs are worked alternately. You can either do a whole set on the same leg or alternate repetitions (this is easier because of the short rests). There is no change in the demands placed on the muscles, but the variant is useful for rehabilitation. It also prevents the stronger leg from helping the weaker one, which can happen in the basic exercise, as machines tend to be poorly designed for working both legs at the same time. This is one of the few exercises where it may be better to alternate work on the two sides rather than doing both together.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: biceps femoris (short head), hamstrings (semimembranosus, semitendinosus, long head of the biceps femoris)

SECONDARY MUSCLES: gracilis, sartorius, gastrocnemius, popliteus

ANTAGONISTS: quadriceps

VARIATIONS 15.2 ...TOES-IN

MUSCLES USED

hamstrings

TECHNIQUE

If you use less weight, you can turn your toes inward and place the side of your leg under the roller (rotating the leg and hips outward), shifting a little more of the effort onto the semimembranosus and semitendinosus. In practice, however, all of the muscles are involved (See Ex. 14).



15.3 ...TOES-OUT

MUSCLES USED

hamstrings, biceps femoris (short head)

TECHNIQUE

In contrast to the preceding exercise, point your toes outward. This shifts a part of the work onto the biceps femoris (side of the thigh) (See Ex. 14).



15.4 ...SINGLE-LEG

MUSCLES USED

hamstrings, biceps femoris (short head)

TECHNIQUE

You can either do a whole set on the same leg or alternate repetitions (this is easier due to the short rests) (See Ex. 14.4). Once again, in this case, working one side only is better than both at the same time.

Execution



Lie face down on a bench (which should be slightly bent at the hip) and hold on to the grips or bench to stabilize yourself. Place your legs under the rollers at the Achilles tendon with your toes pointing toward the floor, knees off the bench and in line with the axis of the machine. Starting with your legs almost straight, lift the weight by bending your knees as far as you can (around 120°) in a controlled movement. Never lower the weight until your legs are fully extended. Breathe in as you begin to lower the weight and out when you complete the flexion.

Comments

This is the best exercise for developing the hamstrings in isolation. This muscle group should never be ignored in favor of the quadriceps, even though it is 60 to 70% weaker. You will be able to lift a little more weight or complete a set by flexing your foot toward your leg, which brings in the calf muscles. A well-designed bench will be angled at the hip, allowing you to flex your hips, which both provides an initial hamstring stretch and reduces the strain on the front quadriceps. When the hips are flexed, the knee will bend to around 140° , a gain of about 20° compared to the traditional flat bench. Your feet will not touch your buttocks, as it should when stretching, because the thigh and calf muscles meet. You should get on and off the machine with your knees slightly bent.



Common mistakes: extending the knee too far as you lower the weight, lifting the weight too fast in order to use momentum, not placing the knees in line with the axis of the machine and not getting on and off the machine carefully.



The Deadlift is no better as an exercise for the hamstrings than the Curl (either lying or standing), even though the Curl uses less weight. The reason for this long-standing misconception is that the Deadlift allows you to work with heavy weights because other muscles are also involved. The Curl is more specific and safer, but no less effective.

15.5 ... STANDING SINGLE-LEG

MUSCLES USED

biceps femoris (short head), popliteus, hamstrings

TECHNIQUE

Stand with your torso straight or bent 90° (this will stop you from tensing the front quadriceps, making the movement easier), grasp the grips and place your foot under the roller. Your knee should be aligned with the axis of the machine. The muscles worked are almost identical to the bench machine.



15.6 ... SEATED

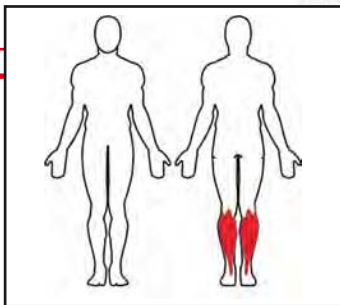
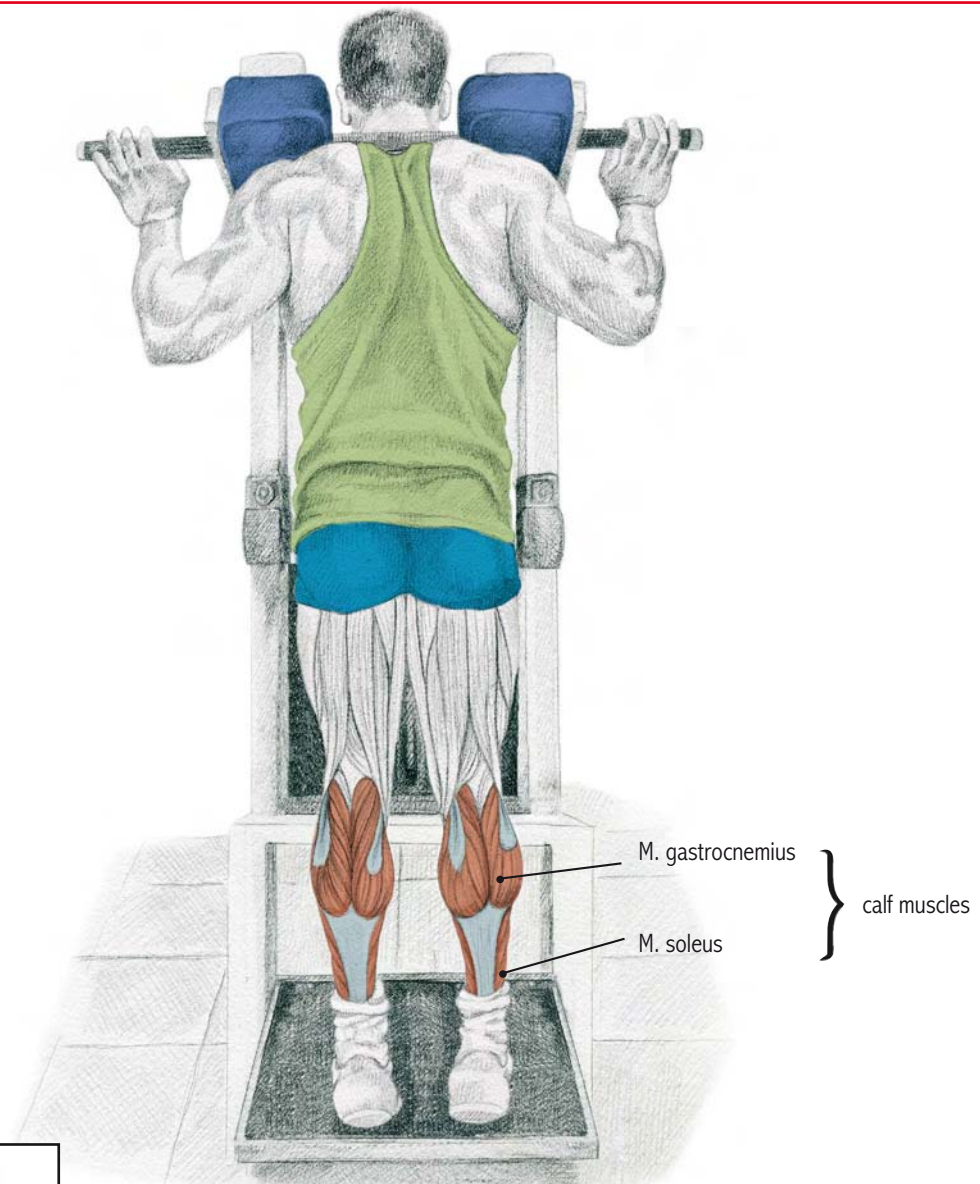
MUSCLES USED

hamstrings, biceps femoris (short head)

TECHNIQUE

This is the same as in exercise 14, but you place the roller under your heels and your thighs are held in place by a cushioned bar. Some studies suggest that this variant works the sartorius harder and the biceps less, although not significantly. These benches can trap the muscles worked under the support, which is not advisable.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: calf muscles (soleus and gastrocnemius)

SECONDARY MUSCLES: peroneus longus and brevis, flexor digitorum longus, tibialis posterior

ANTAGONISTS: tibialis anterior, extensor digitorum

VARIATIONS

16.2 ... TOES-IN

MUSCLES USED

calf muscles

TECHNIQUE

The work done by the outside the calf muscles can be intensified by rotating the leg inward with a slight outward tilt of the foot (supination). Use very little weight and only do this variant if you are suffering from a muscular imbalance on this side of the calf muscle.



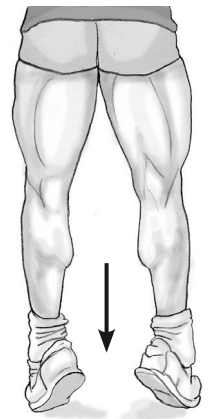
16.3 ... TOES-OUT

MUSCLES USED

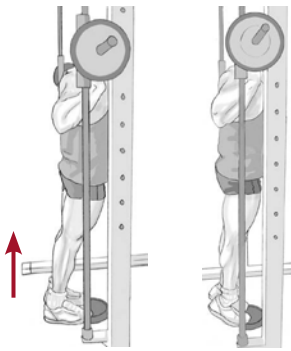
calf muscles

TECHNIQUE

The work done by the inside of the calf muscles can be intensified by rotating the leg outward with a slight inward tilt of the foot (pronation). Use very little weight and only do this variant if you are suffering from a muscular imbalance on this side of the calf muscle.



Execution



Stand with the balls of your feet on the edge of the platform and your feet about hip-width apart. Starting from the lowest position, flex your feet to raise your heels, and with them your whole body, as high as you can. Come down again in a controlled movement. Bend your knees slightly to protect the joint. You can breathe naturally, although it helps maintain rhythm if you inhale as you lower your body and exhale at the top of the movement.

Comments

See the comments for the equivalent free-weight exercise (Ex. 5). The secondary muscles involved in this exercise are very weak compared to the immensely strong calf muscles. Once again, it has been wrongly believed that pointing the toes inward or outward increases the work done by the inner and outer parts of the calf muscles. The truth is that this is only possible by tilting the foot slightly inward or outward (supination or pronation). This can cause injury, however, and does not significantly alter the workout because the main rotation is made by the hip and not the knee (which is impossible with the legs straight). Rotating the ankle under a load can cause injury.



Common mistakes: bouncing without keeping the weight under control, not enough repetitions, using too much weight, stepping down with one foot and then the other at the end of the set (you should bend both knees and remove the weight), moving the knees and/or hips and not placing enough of the foot on the step.



There is no reason not to spread training of the leg muscles over more than one day, as is commonly done to train the torso and arms. Likewise, you can take one day to concentrate exclusively on the legs.

16.4 ... MACHINE DONKEY

MUSCLES USED

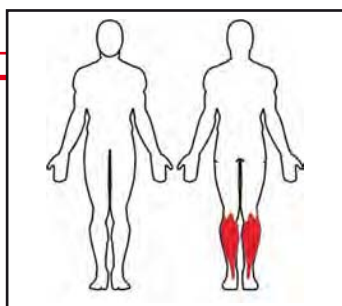
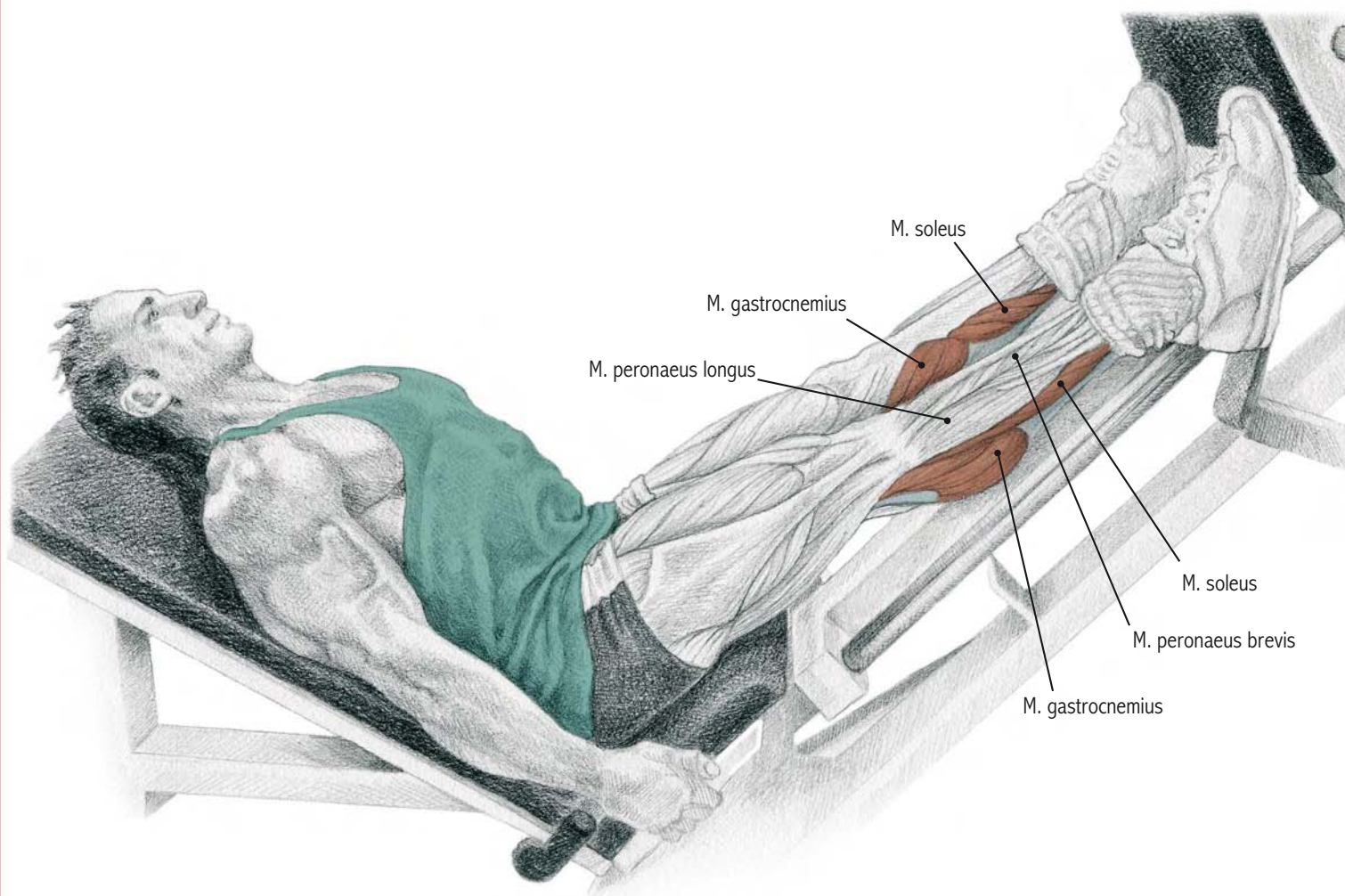
calf muscles

TECHNIQUE

Bend your torso forward with the weight resting on your hips (not the back) and attached to a support for balance. Some studies suggest this variant involves the inner part of the calf somewhat more, and the soleus, peroneus longus and other foot extensors less. In this author's opinion, the position of the torso does not affect the work done by the calf muscles. Be careful to remove the weight before taking your foot away, or the other foot will take all the strain.

Similar equipment exists to work the calves (incline, vertical and hack, etc.), but they do not involve any essential change in the muscle work. Rather, they are a response to the manufacturers' business interests.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: calf muscles (soleus and gastrocnemius)

SECONDARY MUSCLES: peroneus longus and brevis, flexor digitorum longus, tibialis posterior

ANTAGONISTS: tibialis anterior, extensor digitorum

VARIATIONS

17.2 ... LYING CALF PRESS

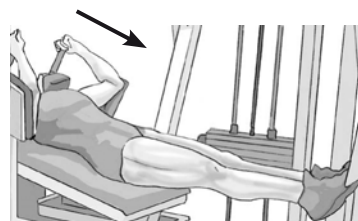
MUSCLES USED

calf muscles

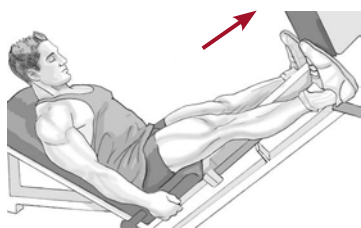
TECHNIQUE

The movement is the same in this variant, but this time you lie on a horizontal bench using plates rather than discs and levers. The advantage is the command over the movement it provides, which is easier to do slowly and with control. This is a good variant for heavy sets, protecting your back while using strict technique and avoiding the mistakes mentioned above.

A variant is to use a hack machine, seated facing the backrest. Place the balls of your feet on the foot plate in the usual way and raise your body, which supports the weight. This does not produce any significant change in the muscles worked compared to other machines.



Execution



Position yourself in the same way as for the Leg Press explained above (Ex. 13), but with only the balls of your feet resting on the foot plate. Keep your knees slightly bent to protect them. Flex your foot, trying to ensure a full range of the movement. When you are finished, bend your knees to remove the weight before you take either foot away. Breathe naturally.

Comments

As in other similar exercises, you should be careful not to allow the ligaments that stabilize the knees to take the entire weight, even if the calf muscles do less work when the knees are bent. A slight knee bend and the resulting contraction of the muscles surrounding the knees will help prevent injury. See the comments for Ex. 16 and similar exercises with regard to tilting and pointing the toes inward or outward.



Common mistakes: bouncing without controlling the weight, not enough repetitions, using too much weight and not resting enough of the foot on the platform (danger of slipping).

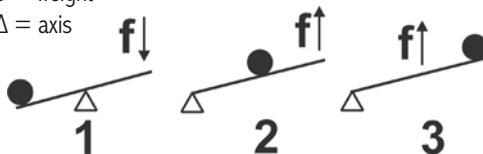


Types of lever

F = force

● = weight

Δ = axis



17.3 ...KNEES-BENT

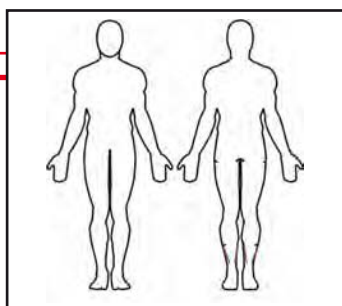
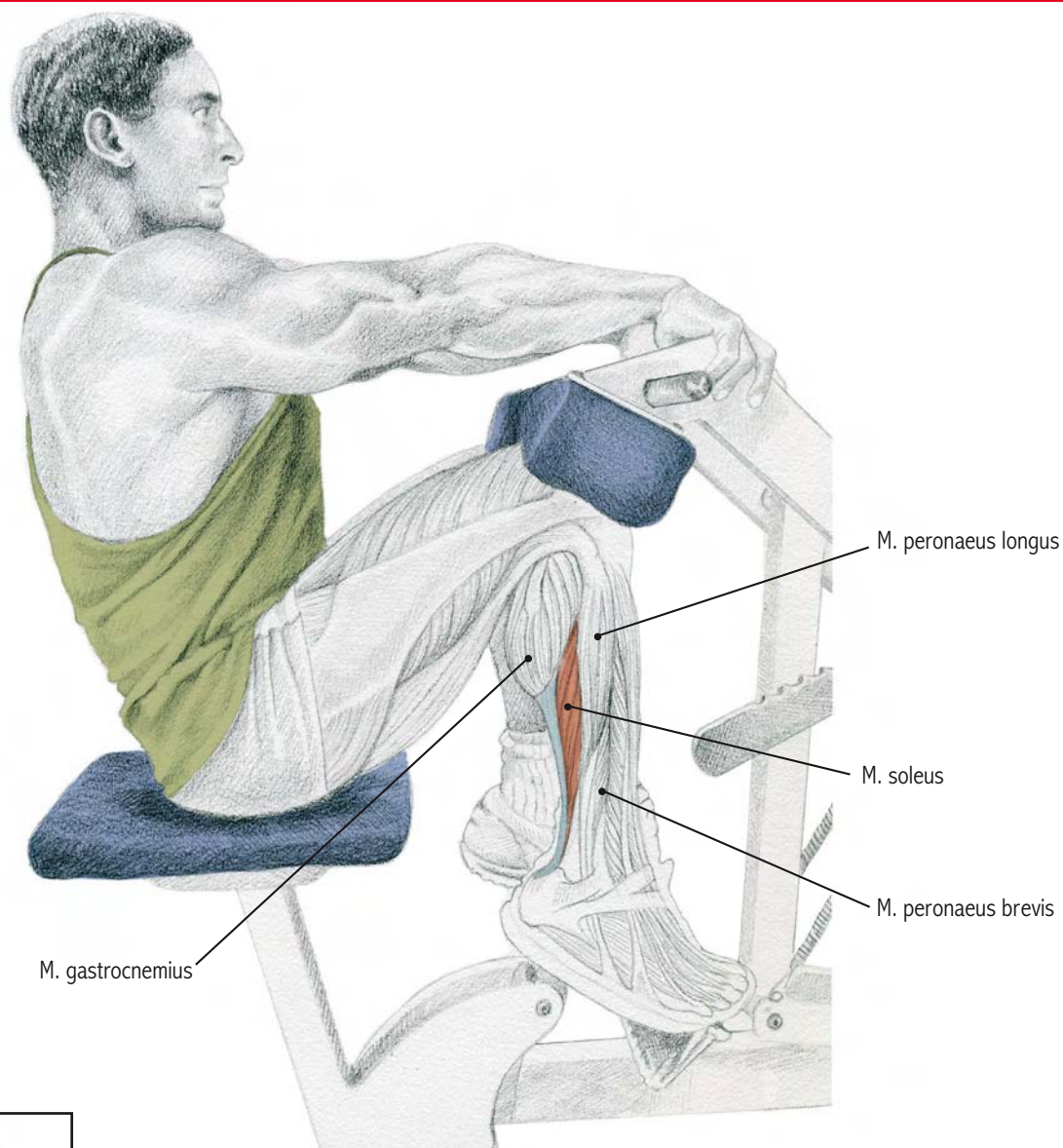
MUSCLES USED

soleus

TECHNIQUE

This unconventional variant is identical to those already described, although the technique is more difficult, except for the isometric (sustained) flexion of the knees. This means more of the work is done by the soleus than the gastrocnemius. Placing your hands on your legs helps you maintain the position.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: soleus

SECONDARY MUSCLES: peroneus longus and brevis, gastrocnemius, tibialis posterior, plantar flexors

ANTAGONISTS: tibialis anterior, toe flexors

VARIATIONS

18.2 ... WITH MOVING FOOT

MUSCLES USED

soleus

TECHNIQUE

This is the same as the basic exercise, except for the design of the machine, with the toes descending as the foot is flexed.

There is no difference in the muscle work, although it is not common to find well-designed machines of this kind (due to the limited range of movement). Remove the weight before taking your feet away.



Execution



Sit with your knees bent at a right angle (90°) and the balls of your feet on the foot rest, leaving your heels free. Position the pad over the lower part of the quadriceps and raise your heels as high as possible. Hold the position for a moment and lower your heels. Breathe naturally.

Comments

Like its free-weight equivalent (Ex. 6), the work done by the gastrocnemius is secondary because your knees are bent. Some of the effort shifts to the soleus, the lower calf muscle, and to the peroneus longus, although this muscle acts primarily to tilt the leg inward. The name Seated Calf Raise may therefore be considered incorrect.

Variants with the toes pointing inward or outward do not affect the involvement of the soleus, because the slight rotation required takes place in the knees and hips, where the muscle has no insertion (See Ex. 16). However, turning the feet outward brings in the peroneus longus (you should lighten the load). Remove the weight before taking your feet away. This exercise is highly recommended for people who have “high” calves.



Common mistakes: bouncing without keeping the weight under control, not enough repetitions and/or weight, taking one foot off before the other at the end of the set (remove the weight first) and not placing enough of the foot on the foot plate.



Like other sports, competitive bodybuilding is not actually good for your health. Each individual needs to decide whether or not to train the body to these levels. However, moderate weight training is highly beneficial throughout adult life.

18.3 ... SEATED CABLE FOOT FLEXION

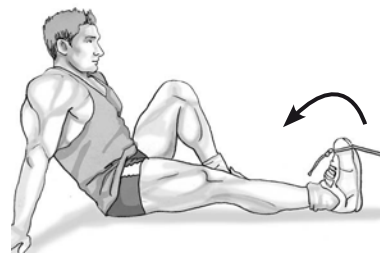
MUSCLES USED

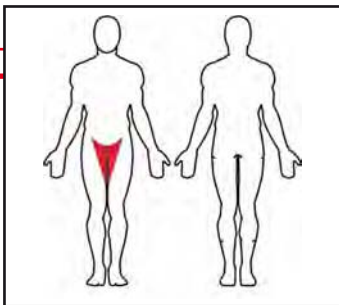
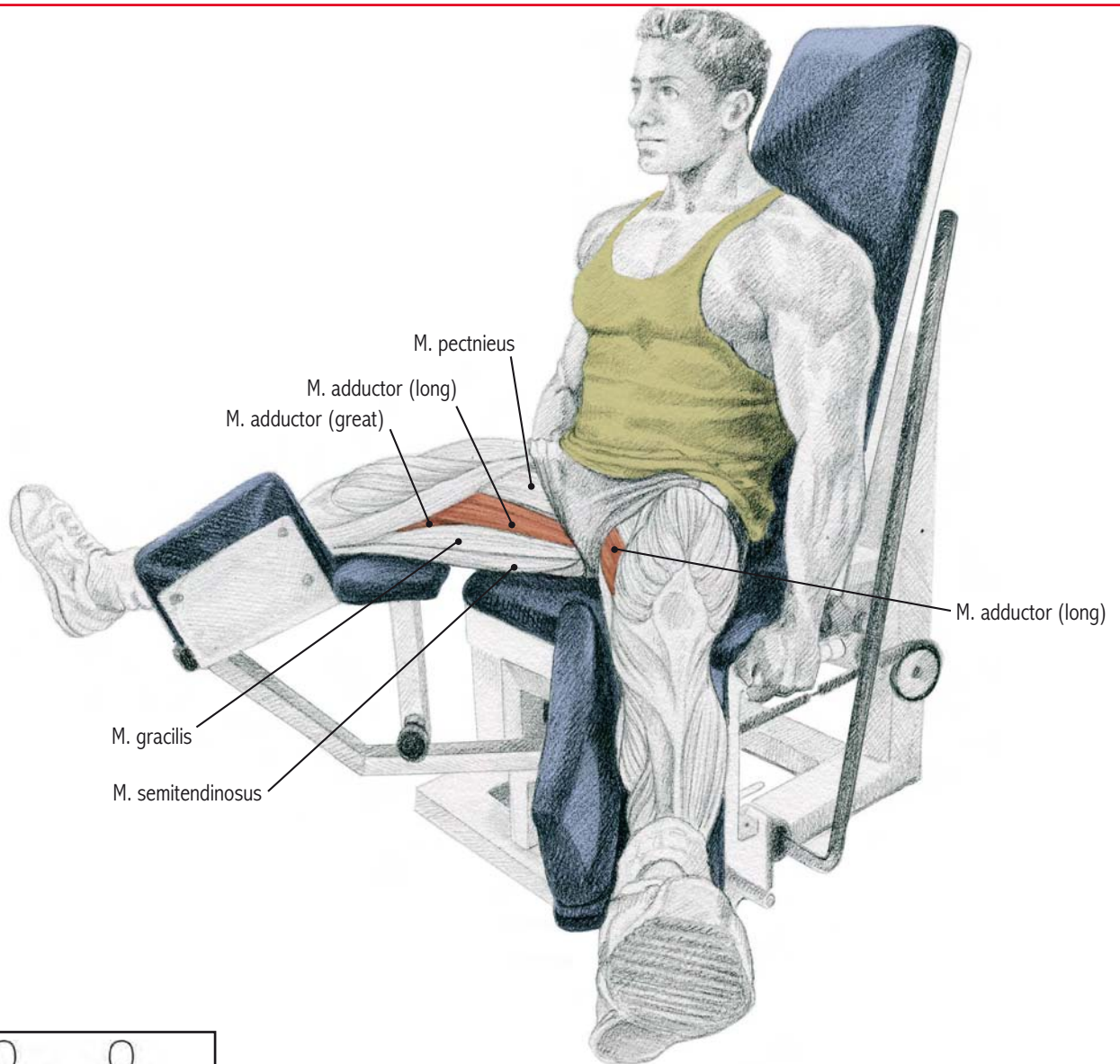
tibialis anterior, extensor digitorum longus, flexor hallucis longus

TECHNIQUE

Sit on the floor in front of a low cable with your knees slightly bent and your heels on the floor. Tie the cable around your instep. Flex and extend your foot, using the longest, most controlled movement possible.

Strictly speaking, this is not a variant of the Calf Raise, as it involves the antagonist muscles, but it is included here because it makes an excellent complement to these exercises. Also, this area is clearly underworked, and it can be trained more effectively in this way than using free weights. A highly effective machine does exist for this exercise, but it is not common.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: adductors (great, long, short and smallest)

SECONDARY MUSCLES: deep gluteus maximus, pectineus, gracilis, quadratus femoris, external obturator, iliopsoas, hamstrings (primarily semitendinosus)

ANTAGONISTS: gluteus medius, gluteal deltoid (superficial fibers of the gluteus maximus and tensor fasciae latae)

VARIATIONS 19.2 ... INCLINE SEAT

MUSCLES USED

adductors, gemelli, hamstrings (particularly the semimembranosus and semitendinosus), pectineus

TECHNIQUE

This is exactly the same as the basic exercise, but the backrest is tilted back. The result is to shift some of the work to the rear leg muscles used in adduction. This design would make a very good machine if it were possible to put the seat back in an almost horizontal position, although this is not common, either due to ignorance on the part of manufacturers or other business priorities (the machine would take up more space).



VARIATIONS 19.3 ... WITH LOW CABLE

MUSCLES USED

adductors, gemelli, pectineus

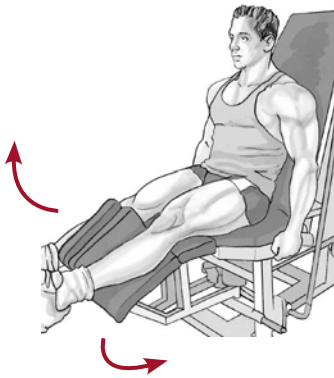
TECHNIQUE

Stand with your side to a low cable. Hold on to the machine but position yourself far enough away from the pulley to allow a good range of movement before the weights meet as you lower them. Attach the cable to an ankle band and pull your leg toward your body (adduction) until you reach a vertical position or a little farther (max. 30°). This is best done by moving your leg behind your body.

Some studies suggest the role of the pectineus is reduced with the hips extended.



Execution



Sit in the hip adduction machine with the pads resting on the inside of your ankles or knees (depending on the design). Open your legs as wide as you can and then close them again (adduction). Breathe naturally, or if you are using a lot of weight, breathe in as you open your legs and out when you finish closing them.

Comments

This is a specific exercise for the leg adductors, especially the long adductor. It is suitable for both beginners and advanced athletes. To avoid injury, be sure to warm up properly and not open your legs wider than your own flexibility will easily allow. Flexion combined with adduction makes the hip position unstable. A careful manufacturer will design the machine to allow the seat back to be tilted backwards almost to a horizontal position. The alternative is adduction from 30°-45° to where the legs meet, as explained in the low cable variant (see below). Machines that bend the knee in this exercise reduce the work done by the gracilis.



Common mistakes: not using enough weight, doing the movement too quickly and opening the legs too wide.



Despite its name, the iliopsoas consists of two muscles rather than just one. Both perform the same function in terms of the hip, however.

19.4 ...WITH MULTI-PULLEY

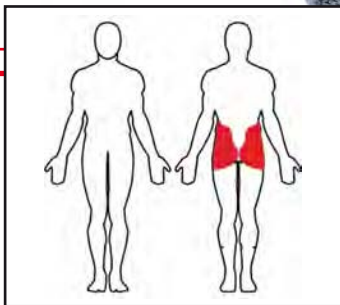
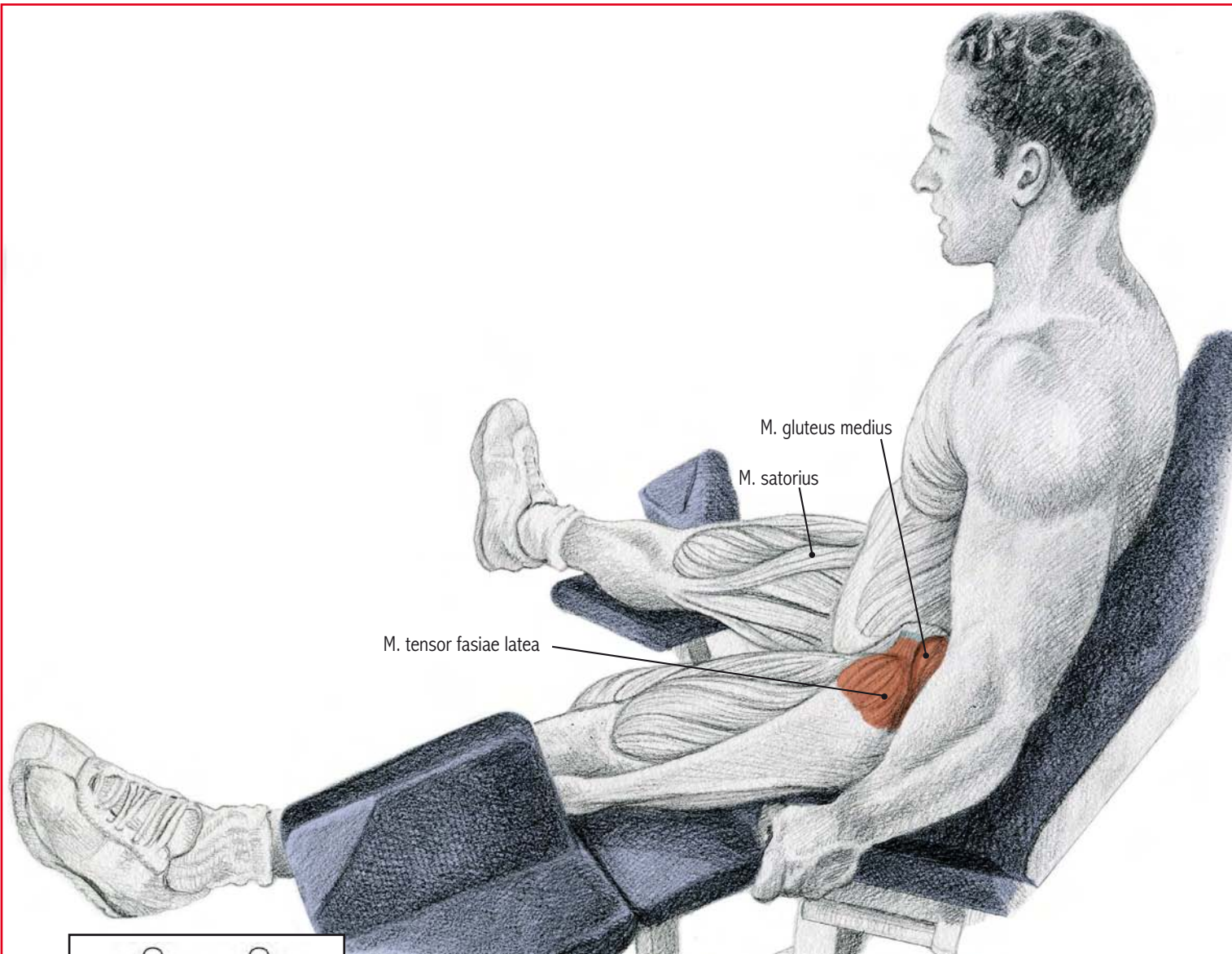
MUSCLES USED

adductors, gemelli, pectineus

TECHNIQUE

Stand on the multi-pulley machine facing forward. Hold on to the machine and position the roller on the inside of your leg just above your ankle. Move your leg toward your body (adduction) until you reach a vertical position or a little farther (max. 30°). There is no difference in the muscle work required compared to the cable variant, although this machine makes it possible to achieve a somewhat more precise exercise if it is well designed. It is not advisable to raise your leg more than a few degrees from the horizontal, as explained in the preceding variant (cable). Although the variant described here is the most commonly used, it is actually preferable to stand backwards on the machine and perform the adduction behind your body for the reasons explained above.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: gluteus medius, gluteal deltoid (tensor fasciae latae and superficial fibers of the gluteus maximus)

SECONDARY MUSCLES: gluteus minimus, piriformis, internal obturator, gemelli, gastrocnemius, sartorius

ANTAGONISTS: adductors (great, long, short, smallest), pectineus

VARIATIONS 20.2 ... WITH LOW CABLE

MUSCLES USED

gluteus medius, gluteal deltoid

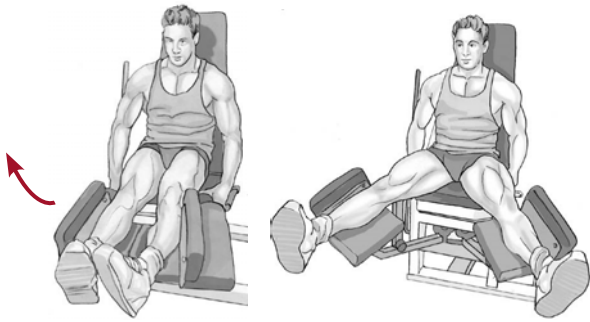
TECHNIQUE

Stand with your side to a low cable. Hold on to the machine but position yourself far enough away from the pulley to allow a good range of movement before the weights meet as you lower them. Attach the cable to the ankle of the leg that is farthest from the pulley and pull, lifting the leg away from the body (abduction) as far as possible without causing the hip bones to clash. Be careful to flex the hip as little as possible and ensure that you keep your side to the machine so that you abduct the leg rather than flexing it.

Remember that under normal conditions, when you abduct one leg, the other will take on half of the movement (especially above 30°) even when it acts as an anchor. This exercise allows you to increase the range of motion more easily than on the seated machine because you can start from a position that is beyond horizontal by bringing the leg worked close to the pulley.



Execution



Sit in the rather improperly named “abductor machine” (there are no “abductor” muscles as such in this region, only muscles that perform this function) with the pads resting on the outside of your ankles or knees (depending on the design). Open your legs as far as you can and then close them again. Breathe naturally or, if you are using a lot of weight, breathe in as you open your legs and out when you finish closing them.

Comments

This exercise works a set of muscles that perform the function of moving your legs away from the central axis of the body (abduction), but once again, it does not reduce any fat in this area, despite some ill-informed claims. It is suitable for both beginners and advanced athletes and there is no particular risk of any contact between the hip bones, unlike the more common standing variant (Ex. 8, 20.2 and 20.3). Tilting the backrest backwards will increase the work done by the gluteus medius (the “abductor muscle” par excellence). Positioning the back horizontally is ideal for stabilizing the hips, although this reduces the range of motion by a few degrees. This machine is sometimes the same as the hip adduction machine, simply changing the position of the legs. For business reasons, many manufacturers prefer to sell the two machines separately.



Common mistakes: not using enough weight and doing the movement too quickly



It is possible to injure the adductor muscles if abduction is performed too abruptly. This is a good reason to do the exercise slowly with a controlled movement.

20.3 ... WITH MULTI-PULLEY

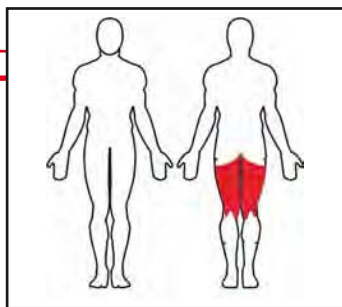
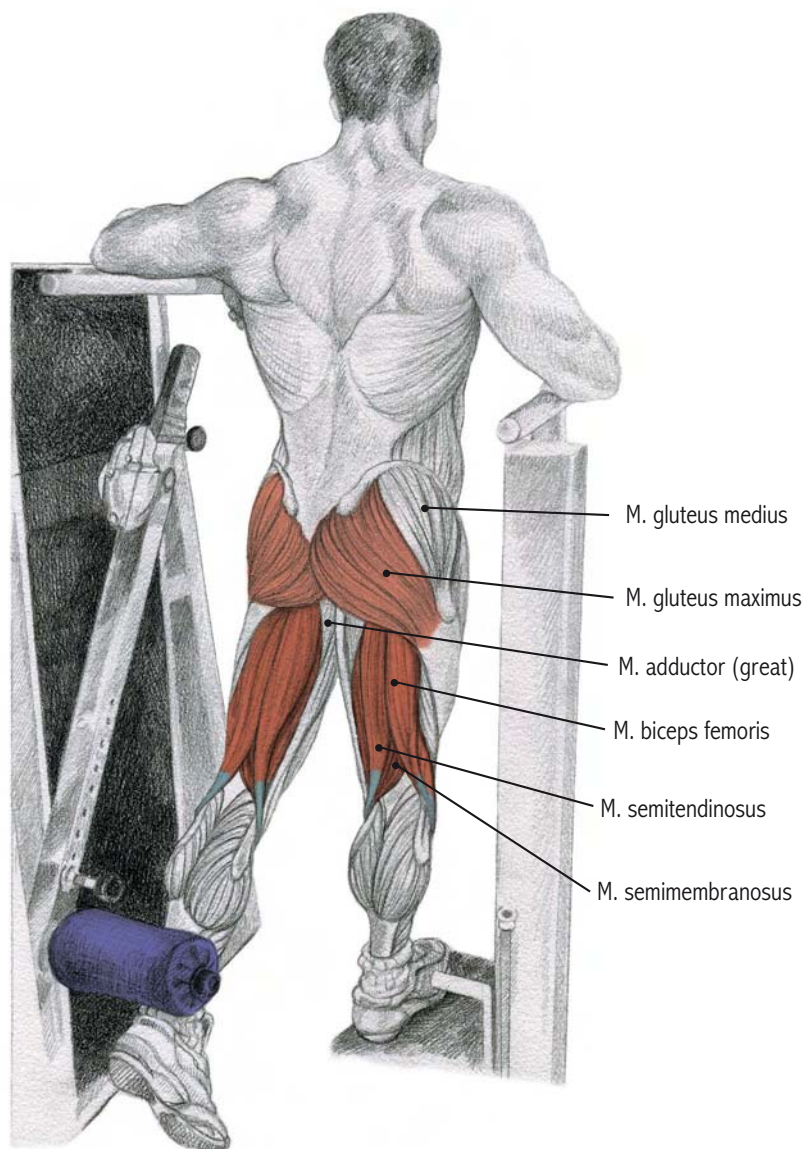
MUSCLES USED

gluteus medius, gluteal deltoid

TECHNIQUE

Stand on the multi-pulley machine facing forward. Hold on to the machine and position the roller on the outside of your leg just above your ankle. Raise your leg to the side as far as possible (just before the bones in your hip come into contact). There is no difference in the muscle work required compared to the cable variant, although this machine makes it possible to do the exercise a little more strictly if it is well designed. If you want to reduce the involvement of the tensor fasciae latae and increase that of the gluteus, turn your body a few degrees so that the movement is diagonal and behind you, halfway between this and a Kick-back (Standing Hip Extension, Ex. 21).





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: hamstrings

SECONDARY MUSCLES: gluteus maximus and medius (rear), great adductor, piriformis, quadratus femoris and gluteus minimus

ANTAGONISTS: iliopsoas, sartorius, front quadriceps

VARIATIONS

21.2 ... WITH LOW CABLE

MUSCLES USED

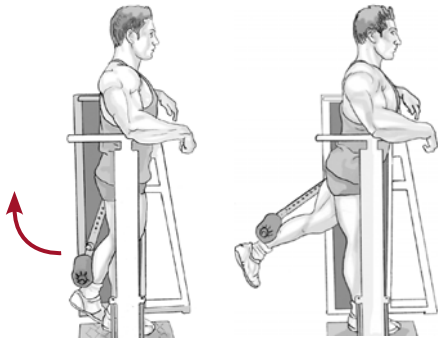
hamstrings, gluteus muscles

TECHNIQUE

Stand facing a low cable with your body bent slightly forward and hold on to the machine with your hands. Attach the ankle band to the cable and kick backwards, keeping your leg straight, following the same principles as in the machine exercise explained above. In general, you will not be able to manage as long or strict a movement as with the multi-pulley machine.



Execution



Stand with your side to the multi-pulley, the axis of the machine in line with your hips, which should be flexed slightly. Grasp the machine with your hands and hold your body steady. Depending on the design of the machine, place the cushioned roller over your lower calf or behind your knee (preferred). Keep your knee slightly bent. Lift your leg back a little beyond vertical and return to the starting position. Breathe in as you start the movement and out when you complete it.

Comments

This exercise is the subject of two widespread misconceptions. In fact, it does not reduce localized fat and it barely works the gluteus maximus at all. What the exercise does is simulate walking, which involves this muscle very little. The first of these misconceptions is due to a lack of information about how the body's energy systems work. The second is perhaps more forgivable, as the main function of the gluteus maximus is indeed to extend the femur, but not when the knee is extended, and still less so when not under a load. To make up for this as much as possible, you will need to contract the gluteus maximus on the side you are working, bend your knee and increase the weight you lift. However, this muscle responds better to compound exercise like Squats, Step-ups and Lunges.



Common mistakes: rocking the body to help the movement, bouncing the weight at the bottom of the movement and failing to concentrate on the area worked

21.3 ... LYING TWO-LEG

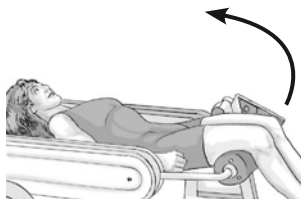
MUSCLES USED

hamstrings, gluteus and lower back muscles

TECHNIQUE

Lie on your back on a machine designed for this exercise, held in position with a belt or band at the waist. Extend both legs at the same time, pushing the roller downward. Use your hands to stabilize the rest of your body.

Although this machine is not at all versatile, it has the advantage of protecting your back more than other machines for exercising the gluteus maximus. Also, if it allows you to place the roller under your bent knees, it will isolate the gluteus maximus more easily and take some of the work away from the hamstrings.



21.4 ... MACHINE KICK-BACK

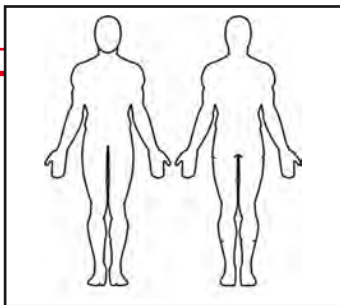
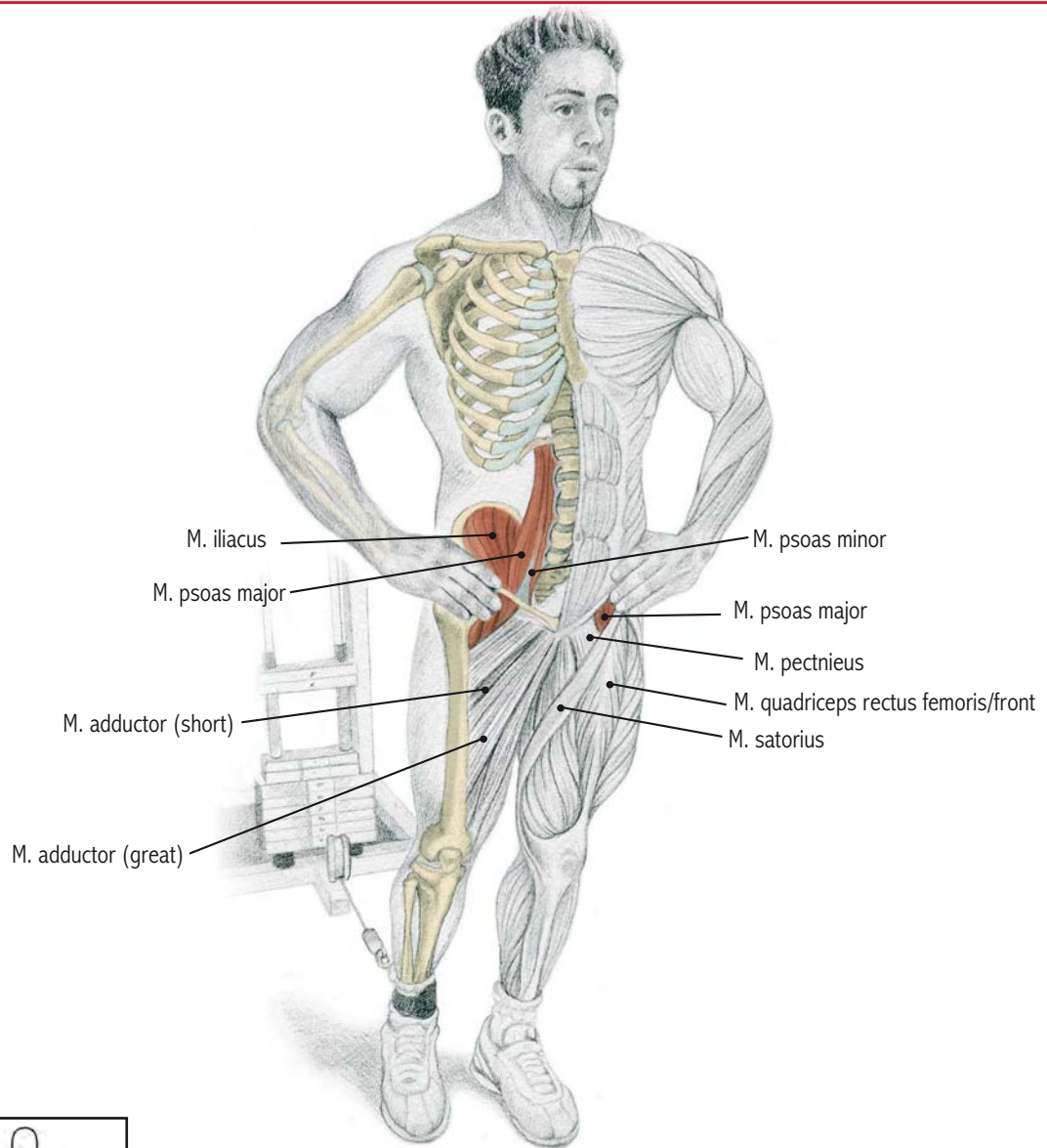
MUSCLES USED

hamstrings, gluteus muscles

TECHNIQUE

The position and movement are similar to the previous exercises (standing on the machine), with your body bent slightly forward and your hands holding on to the machine. In this case, however, you need to push with the sole of your foot, not changing the slightly bent position of your knee. Tense the gluteus maximus on the side worked.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: psoas (major and minor), iliacus

SECONDARY MUSCLES: front quadriceps, tensor fasciae latae, sartorius, pectineus, adductors (long and short), gluteus minimus, (gluteus medius - front fibers), obturators

ANTAGONISTS: gluteus maximus, hamstrings

Variations

22.2 ... WITH MULTI-PULLEY

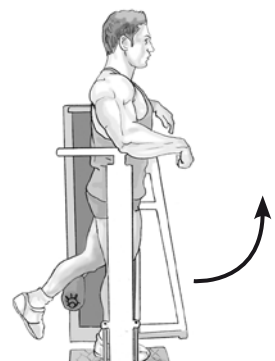
MUSCLES USED

iliopsoas

TECHNIQUE

The position is similar to the Standing Hip Extension (Ex. 21). However, depending on the design of the machine, you will now need to place your shin or lower thigh behind the roller, which you need to bring forward. Lift the leg approximately 45-60° and then return to the starting position. Keep your knee almost fully extended and locked.

As in other similar cases, it is generally not possible to obtain as long or strict a movement using a cable as on a purpose-designed machine.



Execution



Stand with your back to a low cable with your body bent slightly forward. Hold on to something for support or place your hands on your hips. Attach the ankle band to the cable and bring your leg forward. It is usually easier to bend your knee if you want to focus on the front quadriceps. Nevertheless, the iliopsoas remains the most powerful hip flexor.

If you turn your leg outward (from the hip), you will make the adductors work harder. In contrast, if you accompany the movement with an inward rotation, the muscles involved in abduction will contribute.

Breathe in as you start the movement and out when you complete it.

Comments

This exercise is less common than those described above, and it works an area that is in any case normally overtrained (e.g., in some abdominal exercises). However, this does not mean that you should not do it occasionally or to prepare for specific sports. (For example, the exercise replicates the movement made in kicking a soccer ball.) You can extend the movement beyond the axis of the body, but be careful not to do this to gain momentum.

If you want to concentrate more on the front quadriceps, you will need to bend your knee and hold the position during the exercise. The gluteus medius is not involved to any great extent if the other muscles are able to function normally.



Common mistakes: rocking the body to help the movement, bouncing the weight at the bottom of the movement and using too much weight.



If you decide to set aside a day to exercise the entire leg, do not train any other muscle groups. A full workout for the lower limbs is hard and long enough on its own.

22.3 ... LYING WITH LOW CABLE

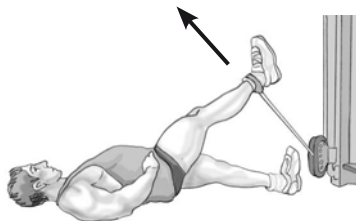
MUSCLES USED

iliopsoas

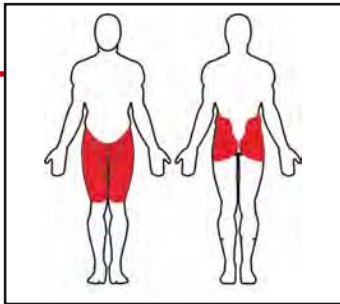
TECHNIQUE

Lie on your back with your feet to the cable. Lift your foot without changing the angle of your knee. As in the previous case, if you turn your leg outward or inward from the hip, you will add work for other muscles (Ex. 22.2).

The movement is fairly wide in this variant, and the floor provides support for your back at all times.



SMITH MACHINE SPLIT SQUAT



Muscles involved

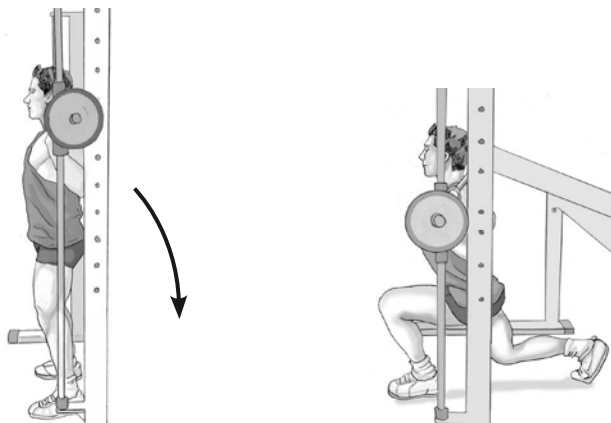
MAIN MUSCLES: gluteus maximus, quadriceps, adductors

SECONDARY MUSCLES: hamstrings, front quadriceps

ANTAGONISTS: iliopsoas, sartorius

Execution

Stand holding the bar in an overhand grip, resting it on your trapezius and deltoid as in the Smith Machine Squat (Ex. 12.2). Step back and down with one leg, bringing your knee close to the ground, as if you were walking backwards, and allow the weight to fall on the leg. Keep your back straight and ensure that your front foot stays under your knee. Lift the bar again by pushing on your front foot. Breathe in as you go down and out as you complete the upward movement.



Comments

The Smith machine variant reduces the risk of losing your balance. Beginners can do this exercise using only the bar.

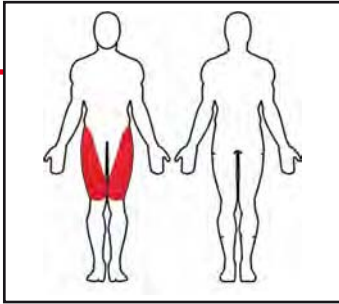


Common mistakes: bringing your knee farther forward than your foot, arching your back and bouncing



Exercises to work the tiny muscles in the toes go beyond the scope of this book. They are nonetheless important and are often weakened by our footwear, which squeezes and immobilizes them. In view of this, we should note a simple but effective exercise: wrinkle up and spread out a piece of cloth by flexing and extending your toes only. Another tip is to go barefoot whenever possible.

PRONE LEG EXTENSION



Muscles involved

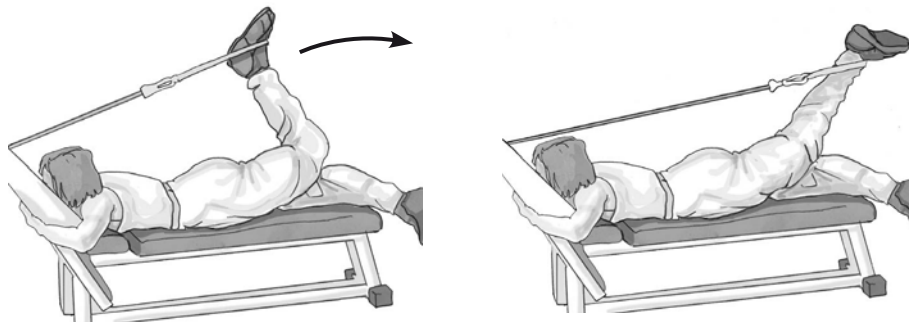
MAIN MUSCLES: quadriceps (all three vasti)

SECONDARY MUSCLES: gluteal deltoid (tensor fasciae latae and superficial fibers of the gluteus maximus)

ANTAGONISTS: hamstrings, biceps femoris (short head), gracilis, sartorius, gastrocnemius

Execution

Lie face down with your head toward the pulley of a low cable and extend the leg you are working without shifting the position of your knee. Breathe normally if the load used is light. If you are using a heavy weight, you should breathe in during the first third of the effort and out when you complete it.



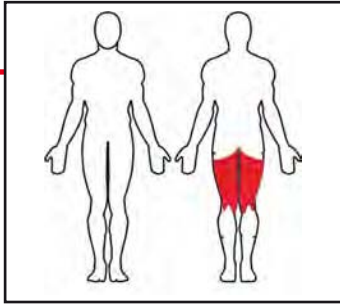
Comments

This is a rarely used variant that concentrates more on the front quadriceps, which crosses two joints. You can also do this exercise lying on your back with your knee bent 90° and the cable at your feet (a similar position to Ex. 22.3), or even standing or sitting with your back to the pulley (and your leg bent at a right angle). Another variant is to sit on a bench with your back to the low cable. These variants are all more uncomfortable than conventional Machine Leg Extensions (Ex. 14).



Common mistakes: doing the movement too quickly to gain momentum and “hyperextending” the lower back

CABLE LYING LEG CURL



Muscles involved

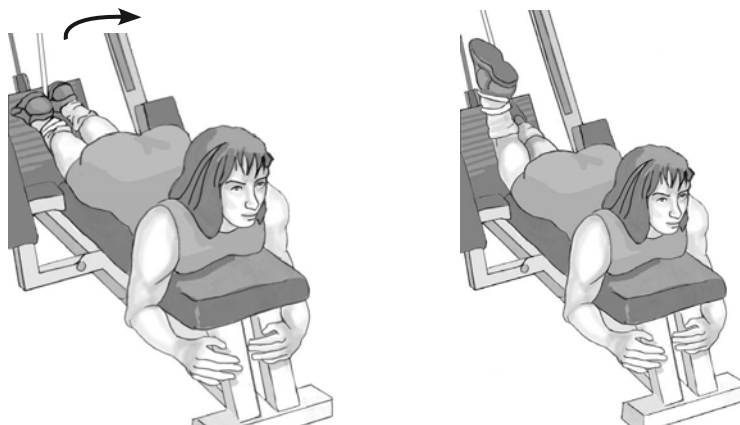
MAIN MUSCLES: biceps femoris (short head), hamstrings (semimembranosus, semitendinosus, long head of the biceps femoris)

SECONDARY MUSCLES: gracilis, sartorius, gastrocnemius

ANTAGONISTS: quadriceps

Execution

Lie face down on a bench or on the floor if the cable is low enough (you will need to find something to hold on to in this case) with your feet pointing toward the cable pulley. Starting with your legs almost straight, bend your knee to as far as you can (around 120°) in a controlled movement. Breathe normally if the load used is light. If you are using a heavy weight, you should breathe in as you begin to lower the weight and out when you complete the lift.



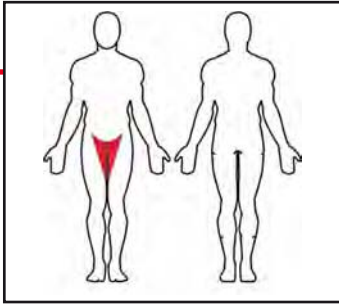
Comments

This is a rather unconventional variant of the machine exercise (see Ex. 15), and it does not provide any significant advantages.



Common mistakes: doing the movement too quickly to gain momentum, “hyperextending” the lower back and not keeping your knee in line with the cable

CABLE LYING HIP ADDUCTION



Muscles involved

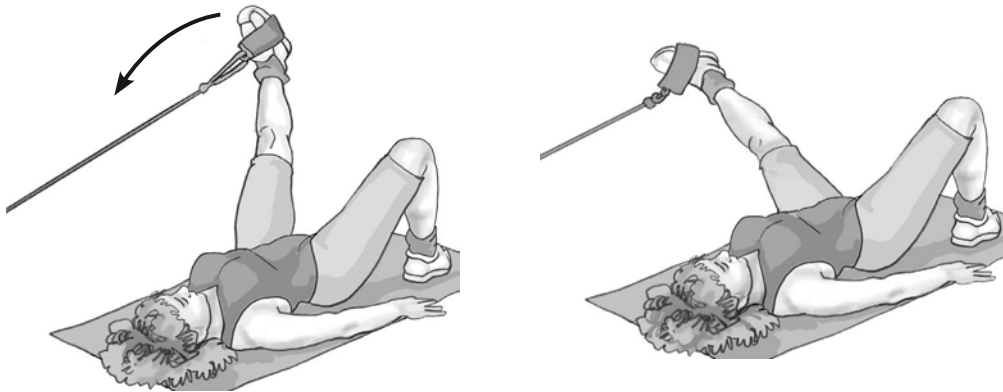
MAIN MUSCLES: adductors (great, long, short and smallest)

SECONDARY MUSCLES: deep gluteus maximus, gracilis, pectineus, quadratus femoris, external obturator, iliopsoas, hamstrings (primarily semitendinosus)

ANTAGONISTS: gluteus medius, gluteal deltoid

Execution

Lie face up on your back with your side to the cable. Put your leg straight up in the air. Lower it sideways toward the pulley and then bring it back to the vertical. Extend your arms straight out to the sides to stabilize your body. Breathe in as you lower your leg and out as you complete the lift.



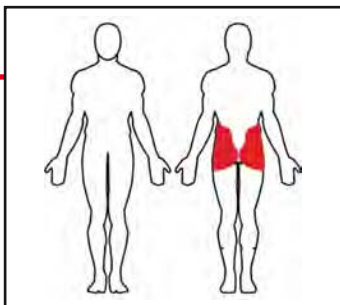
Comments

This is a single-leg version of the Lying Splits (Ex. 9.3). It is useful only to avoid the gravity-free areas that occur in that exercise. The seated machine variant is preferable because the position in this exercise is uncomfortable and more difficult.



Common mistakes: using momentum and twisting the body

CABLE LYING HIP ABDUCTION



Muscles involved

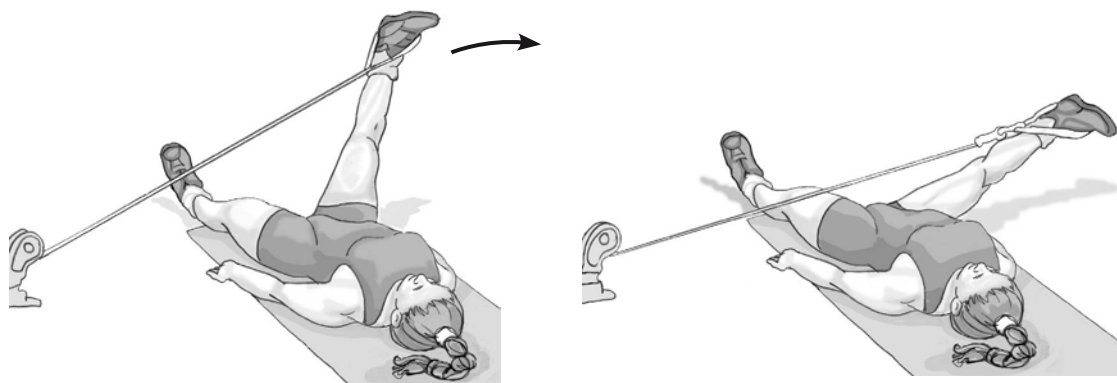
MAIN MUSCLES: gluteus medius, gluteal deltoid (tensor fasciae latae and superficial fibers of the gluteus maximus)

SECONDARY MUSCLES: gluteus minimus, piriformis, internal obturator, gemelli, gastrocnemius, sartorius

ANTAGONISTS: adductors (great, long, short, smallest), pectineus

Execution

Lie in the same position as for Ex. 26, but with the cable on the opposite side to provide resistance when lowering the leg away from your body (abduction). Breathe naturally or, if you are using a lot of weight (not common), breathe in as you begin the lift and out when you complete it.



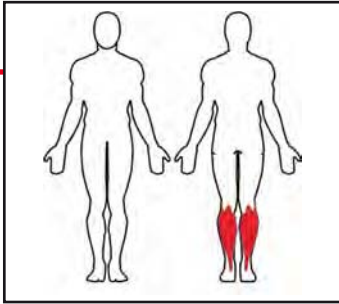
Comments

This variant is somewhat uncomfortable if you want to use more than a little weight. Once again, it is useful only to avoid the gravity-free areas that occur in the free-weight exercise. It is also preferable to exercise the muscles used in abduction while seated at a machine, again because the position is more uncomfortable and difficult.



Common mistakes: using momentum and twisting the body

CABLE CALF RAISE



Muscles involved

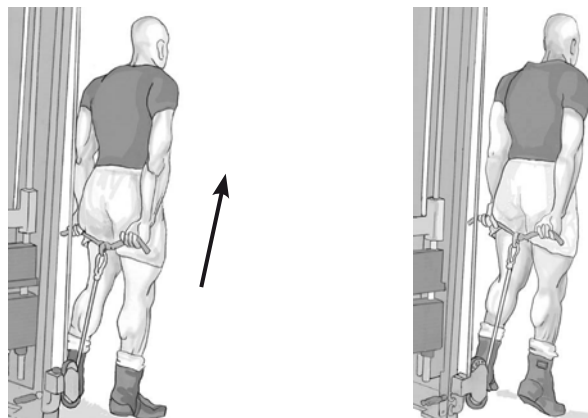
MAIN MUSCLES: calf muscles (soleus and gastrocnemius)

SECONDARY MUSCLES: Peroneus longus and brevis, flexor digitorum longus, tibialis posterior

ANTAGONISTS: tibialis anterior, extensor digitorum

Execution

As in the free-weight exercise, stand with the balls of your feet on the edge of something raised and your feet about hip-width apart. Hold the grip attached to the cable behind your back to help you keep your balance. Flex your feet to raise your heels (and therefore your whole body) as high as you can manage. Come down again in a controlled movement. Keep your knees slightly bent to protect them. Breathe naturally.



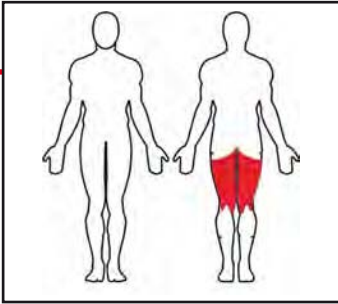
Comments

Like the equivalent exercises (Ex. 5 and 16), this technique works a very strong, fatigue-resistant muscle group. This variant is usually used for a lot of repetitions rather than heavy weights and to provide variety in your routine. It does not provide any major benefits except to leave your shoulders free of the weight of the bar.



Common mistakes: bouncing without controlling the weight, not doing enough repetitions and moving your knees and/or hips

SEATED CABLE EXTERNAL KNEE ROTATION AND HIP ROTATION



Muscles involved

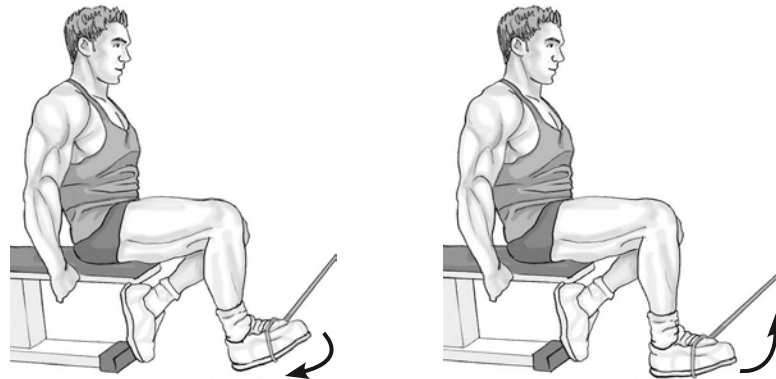
MAIN MUSCLES: biceps femoris

SECONDARY MUSCLES: tensor fasciae latae (sometimes, limited involvement), various synergist muscles of the leg and foot

ANTAGONISTS: semimembranosus, semitendinosus, popliteus, gracilis, sartorius

Execution

Sit with your side to the cable. Tie a rope to the end of the far foot. Slowly rotate your knee outward in a strict movement (max. 40°) with your heel pivoting on the ground and your toes in the air. Breathe naturally.



Comments

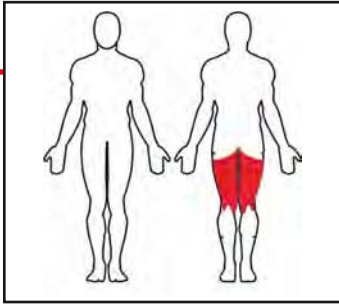
Remember that the knees can rotate very little when they are bent. You must use a light weight and keep the movement completely under control. This exercise is normally unnecessary, and you should only do it when instructed by a doctor.

There is a variant that involves sitting on a high bench with your foot hanging in the air. Rotate the femur inward around 30° (by tilting the foot outward). This works the weak internal rotator muscles of the hip, mainly the tensor fasciae latae, gluteus minimus and gluteus medius.



Common mistakes: moving the hip or only the foot instead of rotating the knee, using too much weight, doing the exercise too fast and poor technique

SEATED CABLE INTERNAL KNEE ROTATION AND HIP ROTATION



Muscles involved

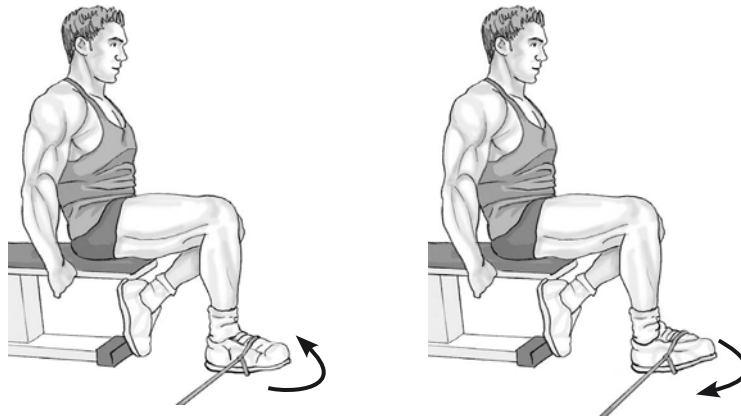
MAIN MUSCLES: semimembranosus, popliteus, gracilis, sartorius

SECONDARY MUSCLES: various synergistic muscles of the leg and foot

ANTAGONISTS: biceps femoris

Execution

Sit with your side to the cable. Tie a rope to the end of the near foot. Slowly rotate your knee inward in a strict movement (max. 30°) with your heel pivoting on the ground and your toes in the air. Breathe naturally.



Comments

As in the previous exercise, the knees can rotate very little when they are bent. You must use a light weight and keep the movement completely under control. This exercise is normally unnecessary, and you should only do it when instructed by a doctor. There is a variant that involves sitting on a high bench with your foot hanging in the air. Rotate the femur outward around 60° (tilting the foot inward). This works the strong external rotator muscles of the hip, mainly the piriformis, internal and external obturators, gemelli, quadratus femoris, pectineus, great adductor and gluteus muscles.



Common mistakes: moving the hip or only the foot instead of rotating the knee, using too much weight, doing the exercise too fast and poor technique

SCIENTIFIC DESCRIPTION OF THE ABDOMEN: INTRODUCTION TO THE BIOMECHANICS OF THE MAIN MUSCLES

FLEXORS

RECTUS ABDOMINIS (anterior, superficial)

Origin: 5th, 6th and 7th ribs, xiphoid process of the sternum

Insertion: pubis (pubic symphysis and arms)

Main functions: bending the torso forward

OBLIQUUS EXTERNUS ABDOMINIS / EXTERNAL OBLIQUE (anterior, superficial)

Origin: ribs (7th or 8th and last)

Insertion: iliac crest, inguinal ligament

Main functions: flexion of the torso, bending to same side and turning to opposite side (acting on one side only), (lowering the ribs)

ILIOPSOAS (anterior, deep)

see LEGS

TRANSVERSUS ABDOMINIS / TRANSVERSE ABDOMINAL (anterior/lateral, deep)

Origin: lumbar vertebrae (vertex of the transverse apophyses)

Insertion: pubis (upper edge of the pubic symphysis and pubis)

Main functions: compression of the natural abdominal girdle

OBLIQUUS INTERNUS ABDOMINIS / INTERNAL OBLIQUE (anterior, medial)

Origin: ribs (last 4)

Insertion: inguinal ligament, iliac crest, lumbodorsal fascia

Main functions: flexion of the torso, bending and turning to same side (acting on one side only), (lowering the ribs)

Comments: The abdominal muscles are the main muscles involved in flexing the torso, but no amount of training will significantly reduce fat in this area, as is sometimes claimed.

Since these muscles tense powerfully in many exercises for other parts of the body, these are often confused with specific workouts for the abdomen. The first point to note is that the rectus abdominis joins the ribs and the pubis and that movements used in training therefore bring these areas closer together. If the legs are moved, this is mainly as a weight, and the effect on the abdominal muscles of any movement that does not involve the pelvis will be basically isometric. The abdominal muscles do no work in any movement caused by inertia generated by the hips flexors, a fact that has been known since Newton formulated his laws in the 17th century, but surprisingly, is still ignored today.

The transverse and oblique abdominal muscles form an excellent natural girdle, compressing the abdomen, but they are normally relatively untrained.

If you need to choose which part of the abdomen to train first, start with the external and internal obliques.

Finally, it is not necessary to stretch the muscles of the abdomen. They do not need it, and it is not recommended (they are relaxed when standing normally).

EXTENSORS

SCIENTIFIC DESCRIPTION OF THE LOWER BACK: INTRODUCTION TO BIOMECHANICS OF THE MAIN MUSCLES

ERECTOR SPINAE / SPINAL ERECTORS (posterior, deep)

Origin: cervical vertebrae (transverse process of the last five vertebrae)

Insertion: sacrum and iliac crest, expansions to the last ten ribs

Main functions: extension of the torso, bending to the side (acting on one side only)

LONGISSIMUS DORSI (posterior, deep)

Origin: dorsal and lumbar vertebrae (transverse process)

Insertion: sacrum and iliac crest

Main functions: extension of the spinal column, bending and turning to the same side (acting on one side only)

TRANSVERSUS SPINALIS (posterior, deep)

Origin: vertebrae (vertebral laminae)

Insertion: vertebrae (transverse processes of the four underlying vertebrae)

Main functions: extension, bending to the side, turning the torso, active ligament

SERRATUS POSTERIOR INFERIOR (posterior/superior, deep)

Origin: ribs (lower outside edge of the last three or four ribs)

Insertion: lumbar and dorsal vertebrae (spinous processes of the first three)

Main functions: extension, bending to the side, turning the torso

LATISSIMUS DORSI (posterior, superficial)

see BACK

ILOCOSTALIS CERVICIS, ILOCOSTALIS THORACIS AND ILOCOSTALIS LUMBORUM (posterior, deep)

Origin: angles of the 3rd to 6th ribs (iliocostalis cervicis); angles of the last six ribs (iliocostalis thoracis; sacrum, iliac crest, and 11th and 12th and lumbar spinous processes (iliocostalis lumborum)

Insertion: iliocostalis cervicis: cervical vertebrae (transverse processes of R4-6); iliocostalis thoracis: cervical vertebrae (transverse process of R7) and ribs (angles of the first six ribs); iliocostalis lumborum: last ribs (angles of the six or seven last ribs)

Main functions: extension of the spinal column, bending and turning to the same side (acting on one side only)

QUADRATUS LUMBORUM (posterior, deep)

Origin: iliac crest (mid-posterior third of the internal lip)

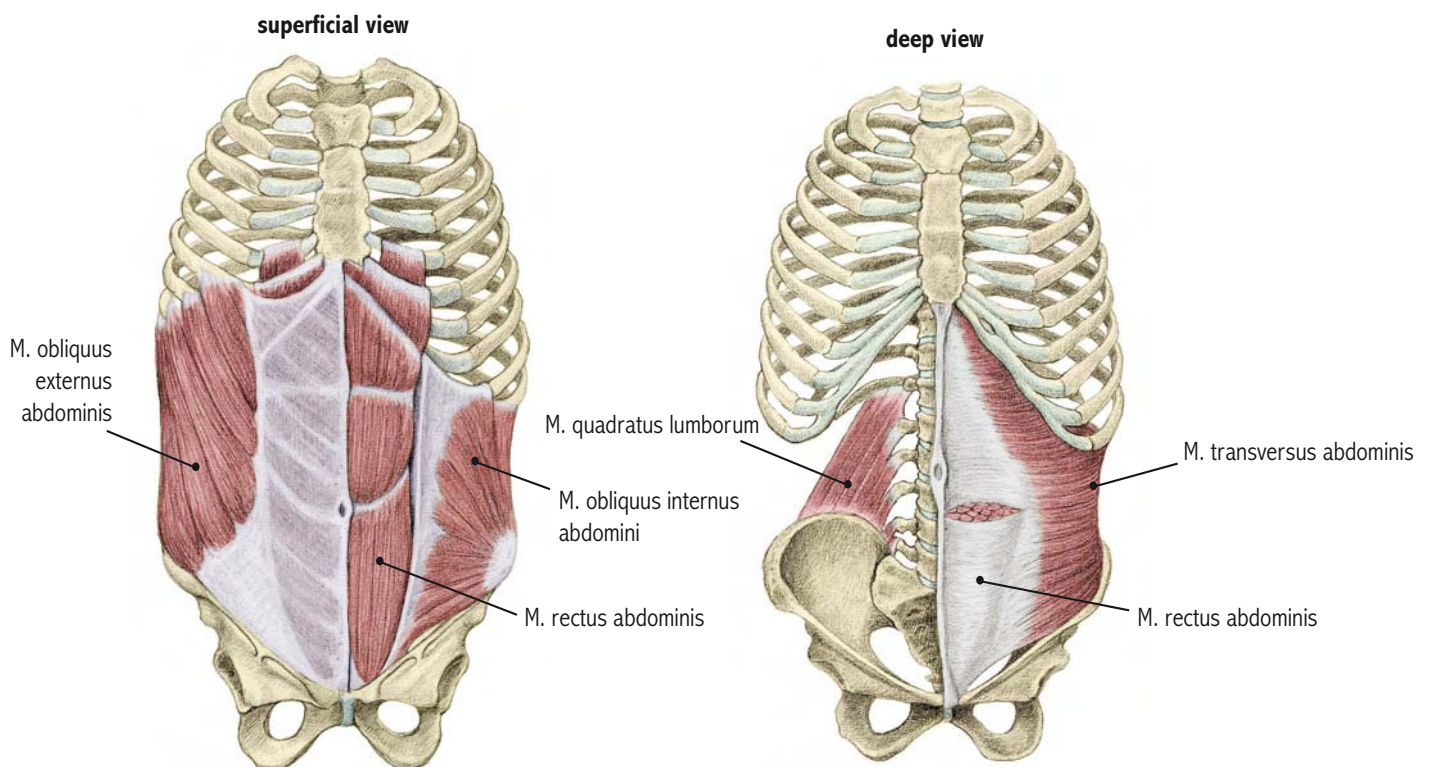
Insertion: 12th rib (lower edge) and costal processes

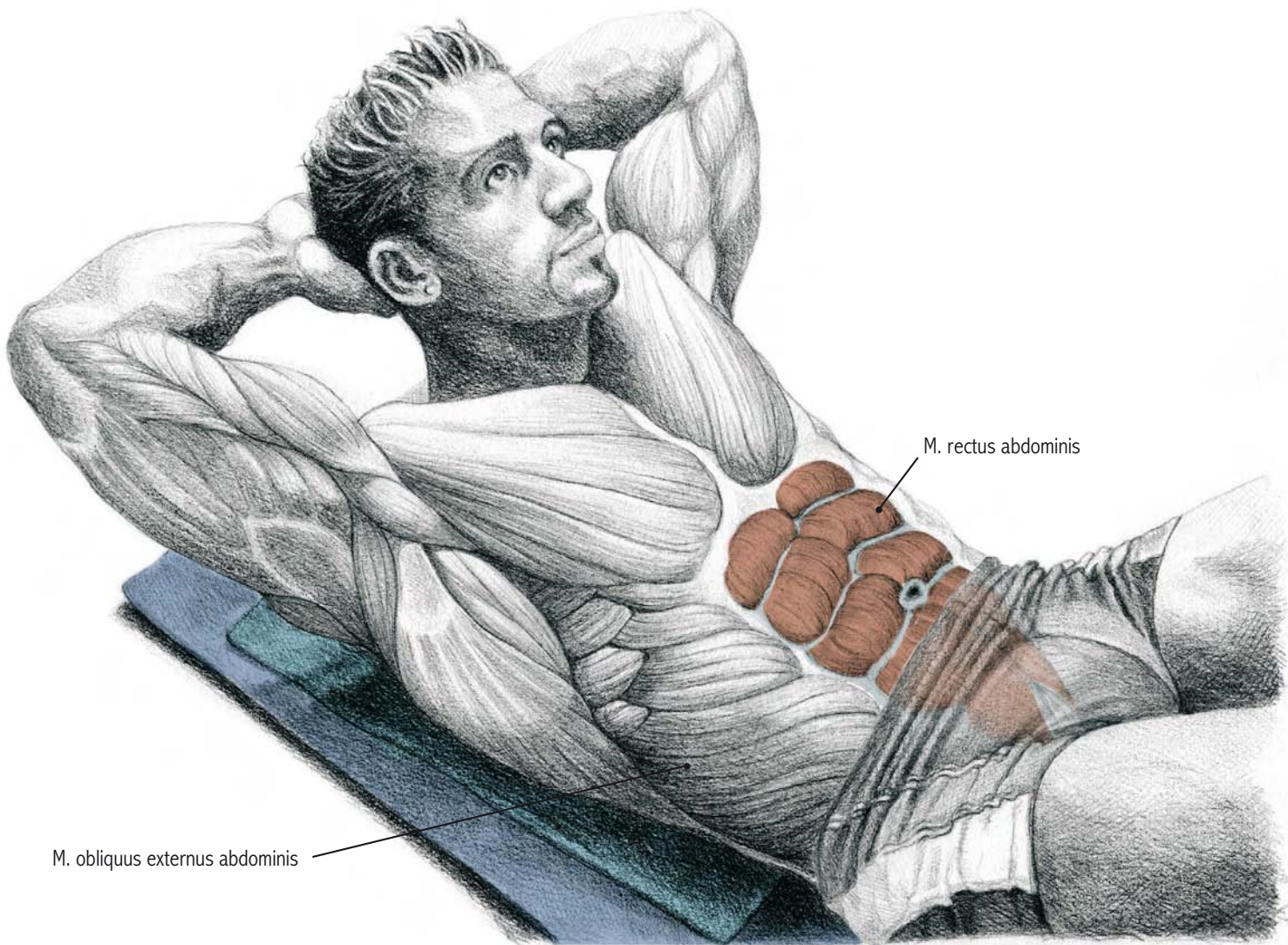
Main functions: bending the torso to the side, also involved in flexion and extension of the torso, and raising the pelvis to the side

Comments: The muscles of the lower back are “posture muscles,” due to the fact that the design of the human body is off-center at the front. It is for this reason that the feet point forward and not backward. This posture function does not mean that these muscles work to maintain the body’s position at all times (this depends on the situation). The lower back muscles are usually undertrained compared to the abdominal muscles at the front, partly because they are more difficult to work and partly because they are less obvious in the mirror. This error is all too frequent.

Technique is crucial in training this group of muscles because the musculoskeletal system in the vertebral region is made up of numerous joints and includes vital nerve endings, making it highly delicate. Finally, good posture is vital (both at rest and during workouts) for the health of the intervertebral discs and the cardiorespiratory system.

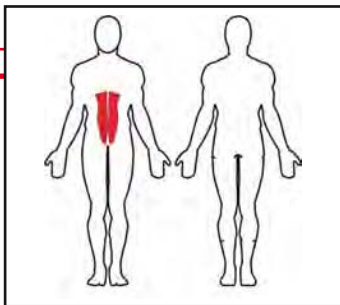
A strong back is a health back.





M. obliquus externus abdominis

M. rectus abdominis



Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: rectus abdominis

SECONDARY MUSCLES: external and internal obliques, transverse abdominal, (pyramidal)

ANTAGONISTS: spinal erectors

VARIATIONS

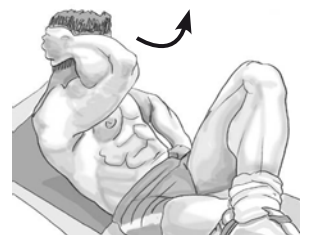
1.2 ... TWISTING

MUSCLES USED

external and internal obliques, rectus abdominis

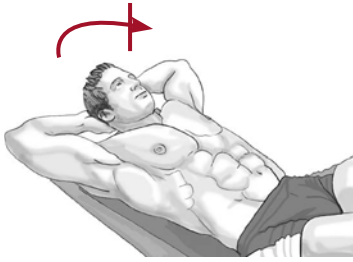
TECHNIQUE

The technique is the same as the basic exercise, but with one leg crossed over the other (as a guide) and the same arm held out straight to stabilize the body. Touch the back of your head with your other hand and try to bring your elbow up to the opposite knee (i.e., of the leg that is crossed over) in a movement that combines flexing and rotating. This is not a specific exercise for the oblique muscles, although the internal oblique works on the side twisted and the external oblique on the opposite side. It is the rectus abdominis that does most of the work, as you will feel from the burn if you do enough repetitions. As mentioned in the discussion above, well-toned oblique muscles will mold your waist, but muscle growth could broaden it. The variant is more risky for the back than the basic exercise (which does not involve rotation), and it may therefore be inadvisable in some circumstances.





Execution



Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet on the floor or on a bench. Fold your hands across your chest or place them behind your head (just touching but not holding it). Lift your shoulders by contracting your abdomen in a short, controlled movement while rounding your back slightly. The lower back should remain in contact with the bench or floor at all times. Try to shorten the space between the pelvis and the chest. Breathe in as you lower your torso and out as you lift it. (This will allow you a few more degrees of movement.)

Comments

This is an excellent exercise for the rectus abdominis. The abdominal muscles are strong, but this means they are likely to be overtrained compared to others. It is not necessary to work your abs any more frequently than other muscle groups, unless specific sports training requires this. Furthermore, the belief that doing ab exercises reduces fat around the waist is unfounded (see the Foreword and Introduction).

The entire rectus abdominis works in this exercise, although it is most demanding for the upper sections. This is because there are between two and four tendinous intersections (bands of fiber) crossing the muscle, in spite of the absence of any bone structures.



Common mistakes: lifting your entire torso with the help of the hip flexors, working out too fast using momentum and bouncing, overflexing the head and neck, pushing your head up with your hands, and extending the hips and legs.



Raw and boiled vegetables are good diet option if you want to reduce your calorie intake to lose weight. However, you should not give up all proteins and carbohydrates (for example, you could eat fish and eggs or potatoes and grains).

1.3 ... DECLINE

MUSCLES USED

rectus abdominis, external and internal obliques

TECHNIQUE

This is exactly the same as the basic exercise, but is done lying on a decline bench with your feet held in place by a cushioned roller or similar support. Obviously, the main difference is that this position makes the exercise more difficult. It is highly recommended for advanced athletes.

Another alternative is to do the classic crunch on an incline bench facing downward. Obviously, this will only be useful if the basic exercise is impossible due to rehabilitation and/or extreme abdominal weakness.



1.4 ... WITH ARMS FORWARD

MUSCLES USED

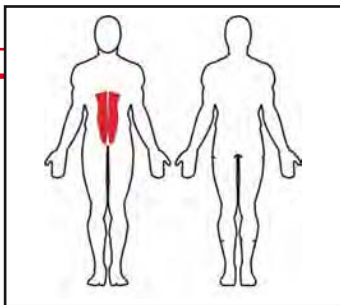
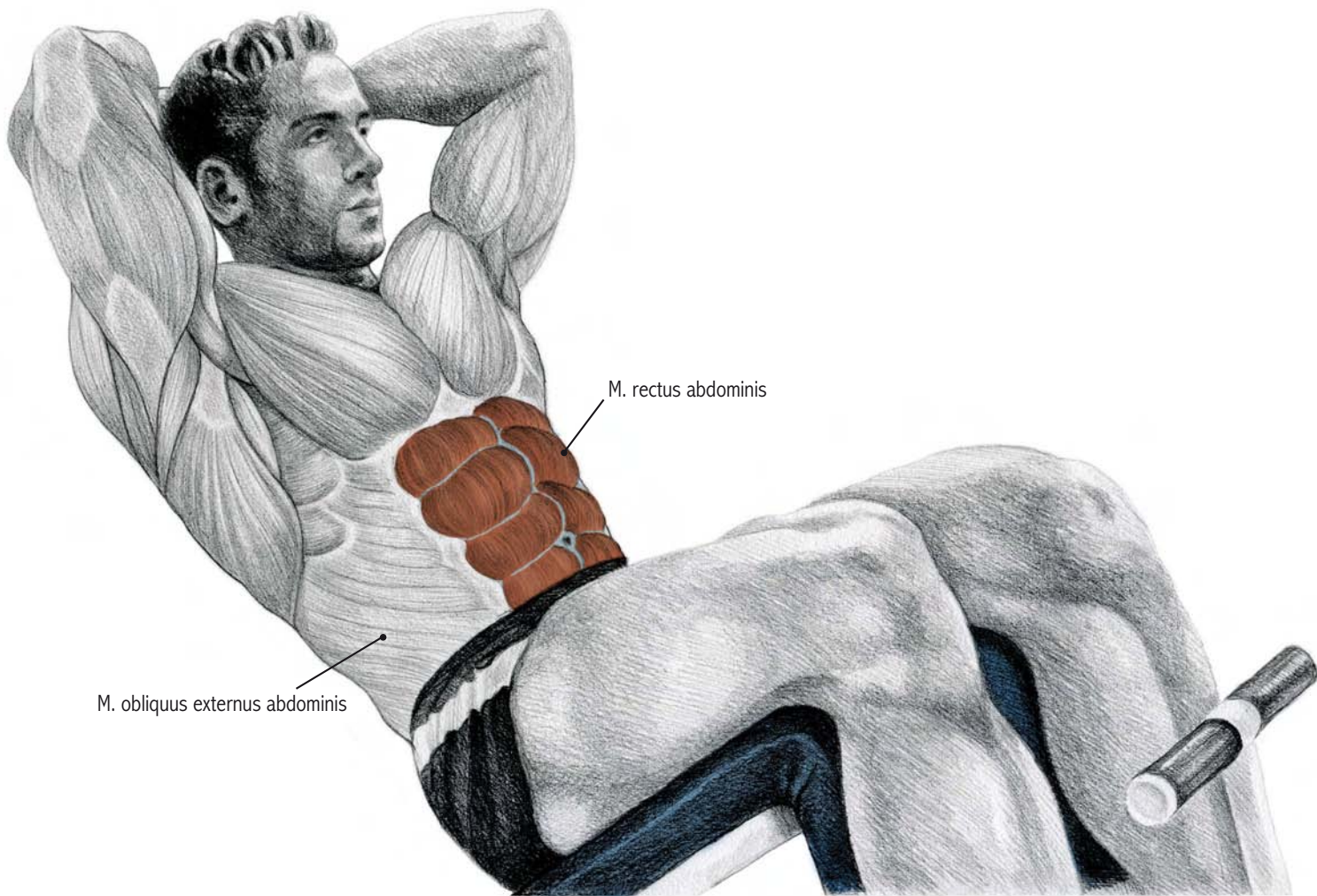
rectus abdominis, external and internal obliques

TECHNIQUE

This is essentially the same as the basic exercise. In this variant, you extend your arms forward toward your knees, either keeping them still as a guide or stretching them with each crunch to gain momentum.

This appears to be exactly the same exercise, but in fact this small change makes it easier. This variant may therefore be useful for beginners.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: rectus abdominis

SECONDARY MUSCLES: external and internal obliques, psoas, quadriceps (front), transverse abdominal, (pyramidal)

ANTAGONISTS: spinal erectors, longissimus dorsi and other muscles along the spinal column, lower back muscles, gluteus maximus

VARIATIONS

2.2 ... TWISTING

MUSCLES USED

external and internal obliques, rectus abdominis, psoas

TECHNIQUE

The technique is similar to the basic exercise, but you twist the torso as you raise it to bring in the internal oblique on the side contracted and the external oblique on the other side (as well as the other flexors). While raising and rotating the torso, you also need to bring the ribs and the pelvis closer together. The combination of flexing and rotating the torso may be inadvisable in some cases. Review the comments on the Twisting Crunch (Ex. 1.2).



2.3 ... WEIGHTED

MUSCLES USED

rectus abdominis, external and internal obliques, psoas

TECHNIQUE

In this variant, you cross your arms in front of your chest holding a disc or other weight against it. Using a weight may be inadvisable in some cases (especially if you also do a twist). An alternative is to increase the angle of the bench, if possible.



Execution



Sit on a bench set at an incline of around 45° (in the shape of an inverted V) with your feet under the rests and your hands touching (but not holding) your head or across your chest. Lift your torso in a longer movement than the crunch by contracting your abdominal muscles while trying to shorten the distance between the pelvis and the chest. Keep your back slightly arched throughout the movement. It is not necessary to lower your torso farther than horizontal to the floor or raise it beyond 90°. Breathe in as you lower your torso and out as you raise it.

Comments

This exercise also causes the hips to flex, bringing in the muscles that work this area, especially the psoas and the front part of the quadriceps. It is therefore less specific than the crunch (Ex. 1), and it is important to feel the muscles you are working, which you will not do if you make the range of movement too wide. For this reason, it is not recommended for early beginners, even though they are often keen to ask their trainers to include it.



Common mistakes: too short and/or rapid movements; keeping the torso rigid throughout the movement, which uses the hip flexors more than the abdominal muscles; and too many repetitions not concentrating enough on the abdominal muscles



Most machines are designed to imitate or improve on the movements made in exercises using free weights, but ab benches can encourage poor technique and are no better than doing the same exercises on the floor. For example, many people keep their torso too rigid on the Roman chair and put their heads back as they extend their hips, while others do twists while holding weight or make movements that are too short with the body almost fully extended (shoulders close to the floor).

2.4 ... INCLINE BENCH

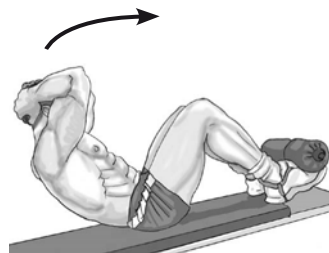
MUSCLES USED

rectus abdominis, external and internal obliques, psoas

TECHNIQUE

This is basically the same as the preceding exercises (with or without twist), but on a flat bench with your knees elevated.

The advantage of using a bench is that you can choose the angle, depending on the design, and therefore the difficulty and intensity of the exercise.



2.5 ... VERTICAL BENCH

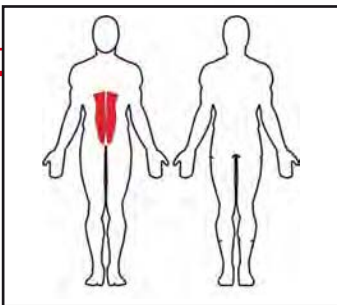
MUSCLES USED

rectus abdominis, external and internal obliques, psoas

TECHNIQUE

Some ab benches suspend the legs vertically. This makes the workout much more intense, but it also involves a risk of using the hip flexors too much. These benches are therefore better used only by advanced athletes whose strength and technique are up to it.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: rectus abdominis

SECONDARY MUSCLES: external and internal obliques, transverse abdominal, iliopsoas, (pyramidal)

ANTAGONISTS: spinal erectors

VARIATIONS

3.2 ... BENT-KNEE

MUSCLES USED

rectus abdominis, external and internal obliques

TECHNIQUE

The position is the same as in the basic exercise, but this time you need to hold on to something behind your head for support. Bend your knees and hips as far as you can. (This will depend on your athletic level.) Resting your entire back on the floor, lift your legs up and back to bring your knees toward your shoulders without changing the angle of your hips (i.e., without changing the distance between your thighs and your abdomen), otherwise the powerful hip flexors will take over almost all of the work. This variant is best done on an incline bench, but beginners can use a flat bench or lie on the floor. Although it is treated as a variant here, it is as effective as the basic exercise.



Execution



Lie on your back with your legs straight out, either parallel or crossed, your arms by your sides and your hands under your buttocks, or holding on to a bench behind your head. Lift your pelvis by pushing your legs upward in a vertical movement, raising your lower back slightly with each contraction. If your abdomen is not strong enough, you may be tempted to rock slightly, but ideally the movement should be slow and controlled, like any other exercise. Breathe in as you lower your legs and out as you raise them.

Comments

This is an excellent exercise if it is done properly. It works the entire lower part of the rectus abdominis, although the other torso and hip flexors are also involved. Unfortunately, many people make the mistake of diverting all the effort to the iliopsoas and the front quadriceps, as well as using counterproductive momentum. If you want to increase the intensity of the exercise, use ankle weights or an incline bench. Do not raise your entire torso when lifting. Movements that lift the pelvis are enough.



Common mistakes: short movements using jerking motions to gain momentum and bounce, raising the hips too far so that you are resting only on your shoulders, and gaining momentum by flexing and extending the legs.



The entire rectus abdominis contracts when you bring your knees toward your pelvis or vice versa. In the former case, however, most of the work is done by the upper sections, and in the latter, the lower sections.

3.3 ...FLUTTER KICK

MUSCLES USED

iliopsoas, front quadriceps

TECHNIQUE

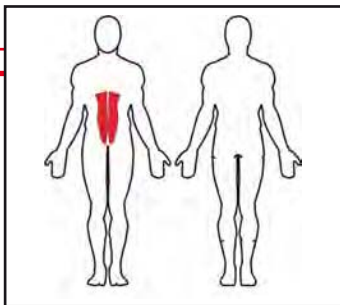
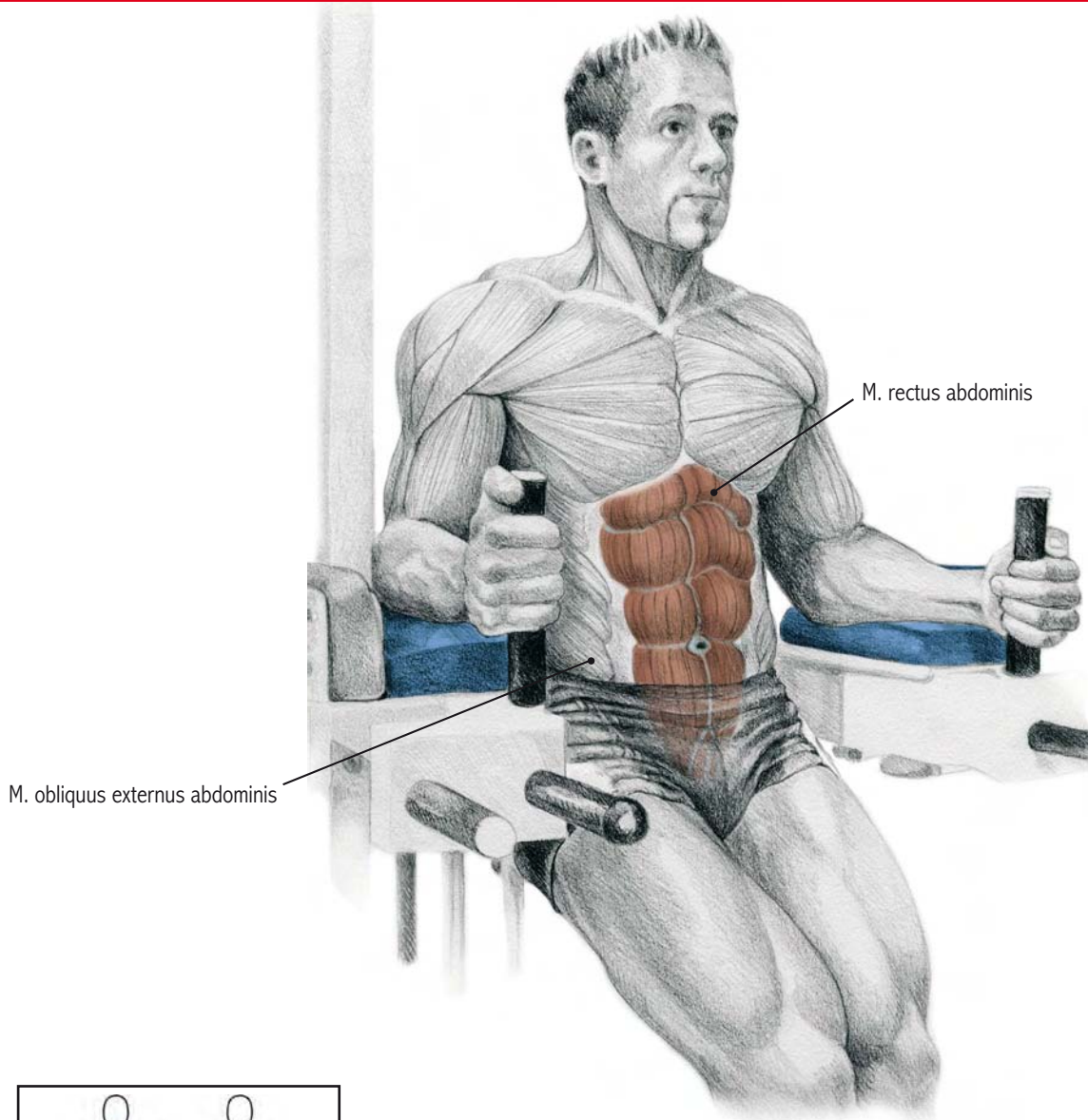
Lie in the same position. Keeping your legs straight, lift, alternating legs (with the hips as the axis of movement).

This exercise is included here due to its similarity to other ab exercises, although the rectus abdominis in fact works only isometrically (to maintain the position), and it is the hip flexors that perform the movement.

It is only possible to involve the abdominal muscles more by lifting both legs at the same time, due to the slight rotation of the hip in each movement. This is not recommended, however, as the psoas causes the lumbar region to curve inward unnaturally (hyperlordosis), which is dangerous for the discs between adjacent vertebrae and the fifth lumbar vertebra.

Exercises of this kind are not normally recommended for training the abdomen, and they are included in this section of the book only because they may be useful for certain kinds of specific physical training and as a warning to athletes who have received bad advice.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: rectus abdominis

SECONDARY MUSCLES: external and internal obliques, iliopsoas, front quadriceps, transverse abdominal, (pyramidal)

ANTAGONISTS: spinal erectors, longissimus dorsi and other muscles along the spinal column, and lower back muscles

VARIATIONS

4.2 ... HANGING

MUSCLES USED

rectus abdominis, external and internal obliques, iliopsoas, front quadriceps

TECHNIQUE

Grasp an overhead bar in an overhand grip and hang from it. This variant is more difficult than the basic exercise because it is hard to keep your body vertical at all times and stop it from swinging. As far as the muscle work is concerned, the same comments apply as for the bench exercise. A very advanced variant is to hang from your ankles using specially designed supports and bend your torso until you touch the bar. You should remember, however, that exercises in which the head is placed lower than the heart are not generally recommended, and this variant does not provide any special advantages.



Execution



Hang with your elbows and forearms resting on the supports provided by the machine and your back against the rest. Flex your knees and hips 90° or more and raise your legs while maintaining this position, so that your torso rolls up, lifting the lumbar region.

The idea is to bring the pelvis closer to the chest. Breathe in as you lower your legs and out as you raise them.

Comments

The difficulty with this exercise is concentrating the work in the torso flexor muscles rather than the hip flexors. To achieve this, you must be aware that the abdominal muscles are not inserted in the legs but in the pubis and pelvis. The main difficulty will be to lift your hip starting from a 90° angle (i.e., with your legs at a right angle to your torso). This is an exercise for advanced athletes, and it is perhaps the one that you will most often see performed incorrectly at gyms. Paradoxically, the momentum from the legs when the exercise is done incorrectly also activates the rectus abdominis because the pelvis swings with respect to the sacrum, and the legs also help to complete the final crunch correctly. Any movement caused by the momentum of the hip flexors will not involve the abdominal muscles. The height of error is to make a “flutter” movement with the legs or to alternate legs.



Common mistakes: moving the legs but not the pelvis as you lift



The pelvis tends to swing if you lift and lower your legs at the same time (in a “flutter” movement) when lying on your back. Try to avoid this. In order to maintain position (isometric), the rectus abdominis contracts strongly and may even contract slightly when extended (eccentric contraction). This is why many people feel tension in the abdomen and believe (wrongly) that merely lifting the legs with the hips flexed (without closing the gap between the pelvis and the ribs) constitutes a specific exercise for the lower part of the rectus abdominis. Considering the biomechanics of the hip flexors and especially the iliopsoas, however, it is clear that this places unnecessary strain on the lumbar region. The variant in which the legs alternate (Ex. 3.3) is even less effective for the abdominal muscles, as it limits the rotation of the pelvis. If you add weight to this movement (for example, by holding a dumbbell between your feet), you will be putting your spine at greater risk.

4.3 ... WITH WALL LADDER

MUSCLES USED

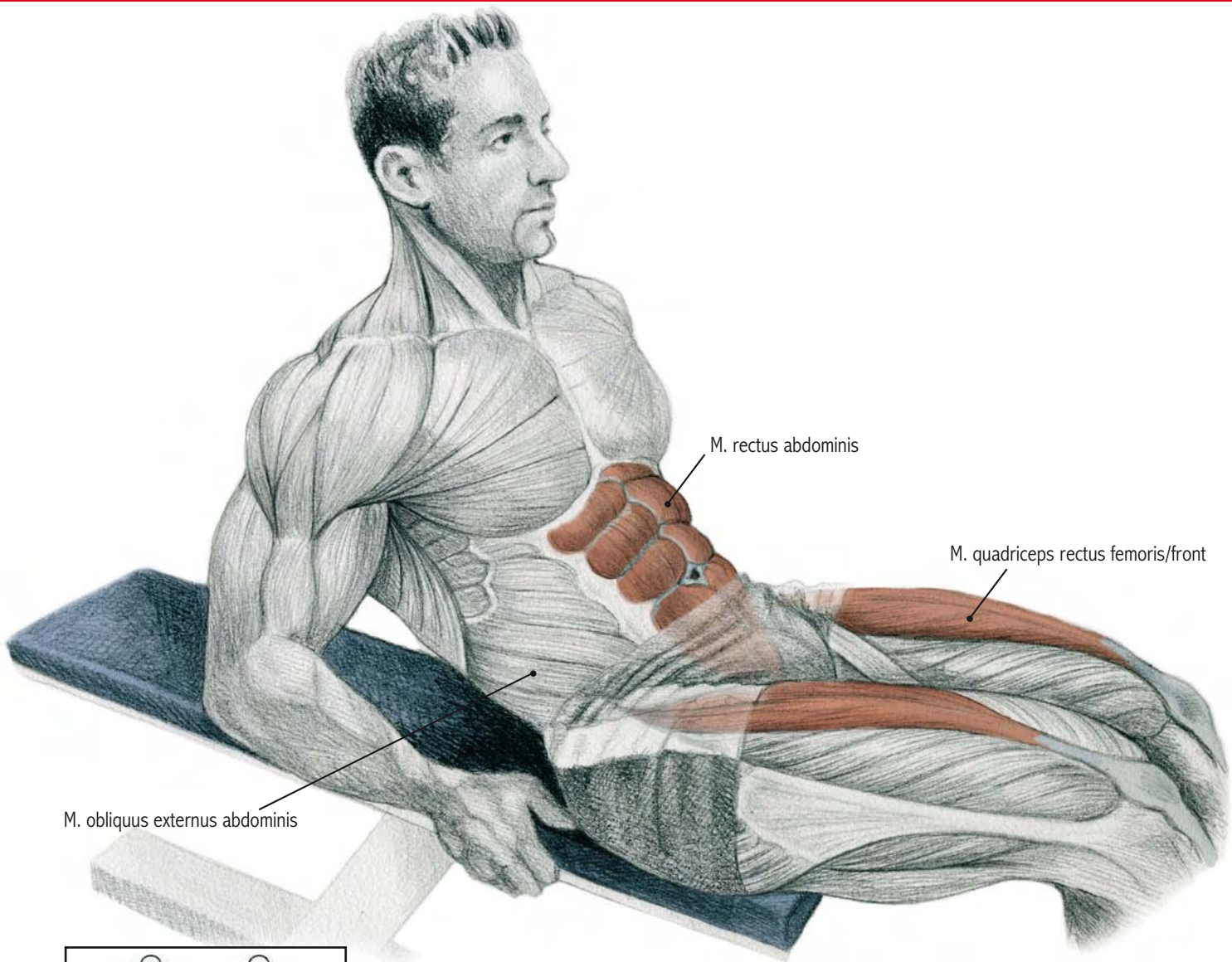
rectus abdominis, external and internal obliques, iliopsoas, front quadriceps

TECHNIQUE

Hang from your arms with your back against the wall ladder or similar apparatus. Flex your knees and hips, and raise your legs while maintaining this position so that your torso rolls up, lifting the lumbar region.

The advantage of the ladder is that it stops your body from swinging, which can easily happen if you use a bar.

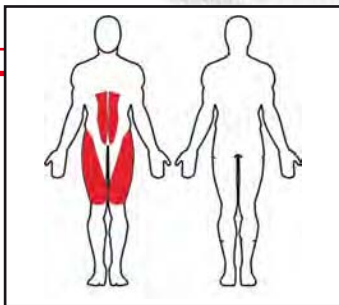




M. obliquus externus abdominis

M. rectus abdominis

M. quadriceps rectus femoris/front



Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: rectus abdominis, iliopsoas, front quadriceps

SECONDARY MUSCLES: external and internal obliques, transverse abdominal, (pyramidal)

ANTAGONISTS: spinal erectors, longissimus dorsi and other muscles along the spinal column, and lower back muscles

VARIATIONS

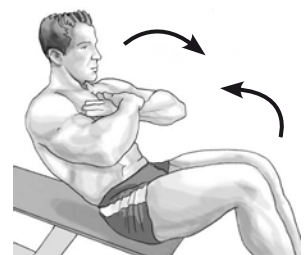
5.2 ... WITH HANDS-FREE

MUSCLES USED

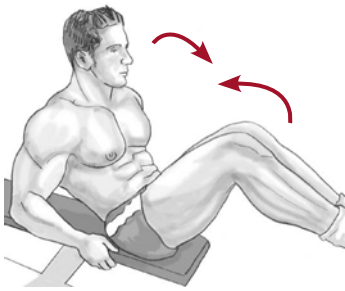
rectus abdominis, iliopsoas, front quadriceps, external and internal obliques

TECHNIQUE

This is exactly the same as the basic exercise, but crossing your hands in front of your chest or extending your arms forward (whichever is easier). This variant is more demanding, however, provided that the movement of the torso and legs is the same. Nevertheless, the strain it places on the lower back means it is not recommended.



Execution



Sit on a flat bench (or on the floor), hands just behind your buttocks. Flex your legs and hips to bring your thighs up toward your chest. Your torso should curve slightly forward. Extend your legs while at the same time leaning back and straightening your torso. Do not allow your feet to touch the floor, although they should stay close to it at all times. Complete the movement by bringing your legs and torso back up and together. Breathe in as you lower your torso (opening up the body) and out as you raise it (closing the body).

Comments

In reality, this is a variant of the Roman Chair Sit-up, but it also brings in the hip flexors. The leg movement is not intended to “work out the lower abdomen,” as is sometimes claimed, but to act as a counterweight for the backward movement of the torso. This puts strain on the lower back, and the exercise may not be advisable for this reason.

Beginners can do the exercise without extending and lowering the legs all the way or by placing the hands a little farther back.

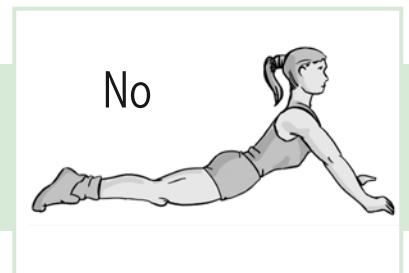
Although it works out the rectus abdominis and oblique muscles, this is not the most specific exercise for the abdominal region.



Common mistakes: moving your legs but not your torso and using your hands to help



Specific abdominal stretching exercises are not recommended except in a few specific cases. In general, hanging vertically from a bar will provide all the stretch you need. It is especially unwise to lie face down and extend your arms, lifting your shoulders without moving your hips off the floor.



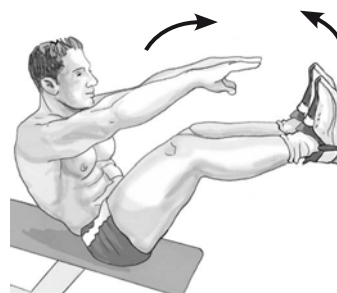
5.3 ... TOUCHING YOUR TOES

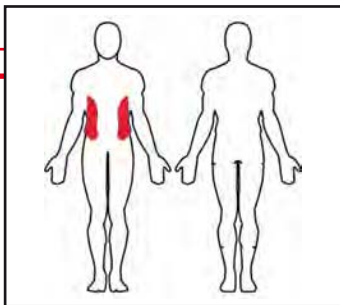
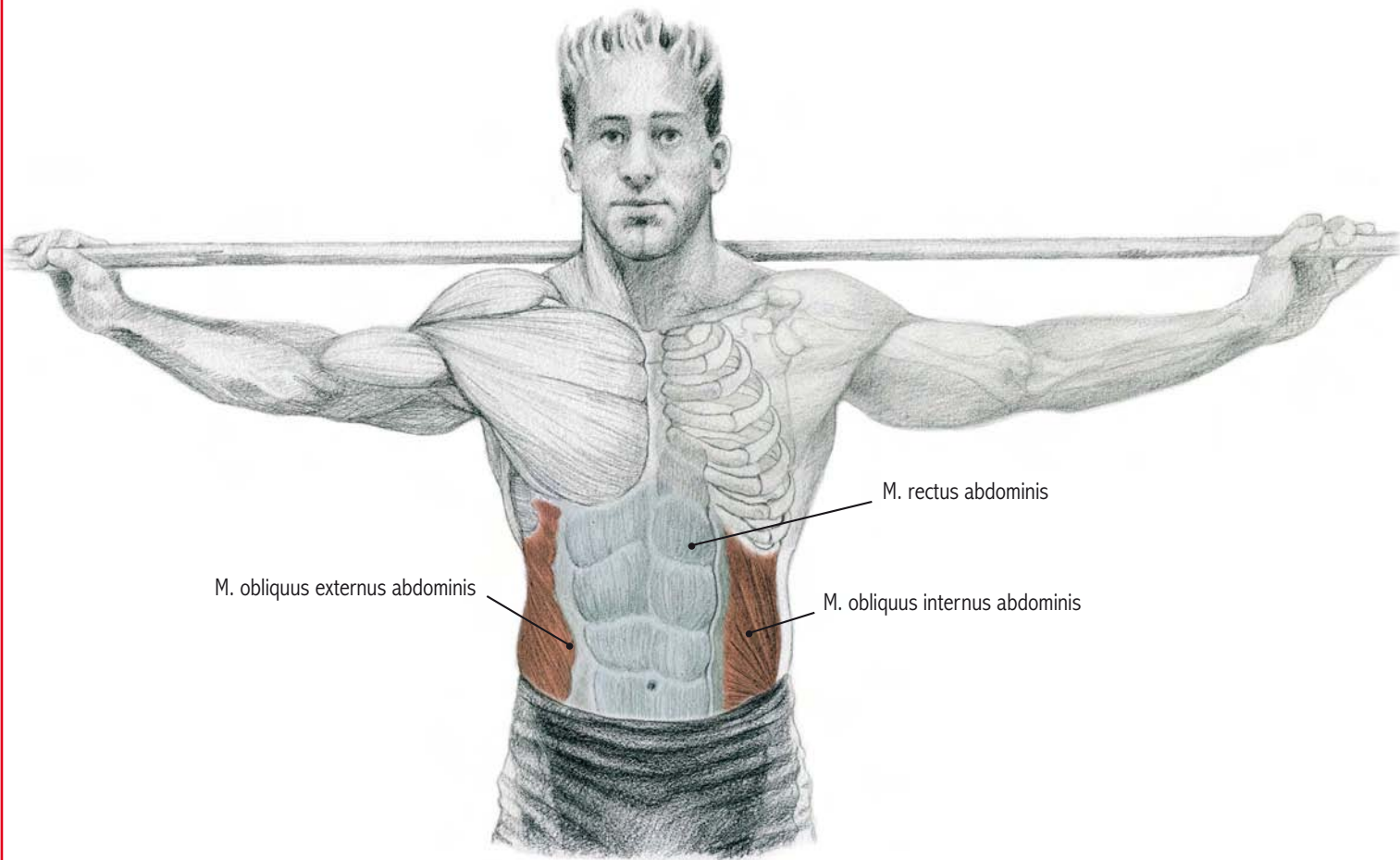
MUSCLES USED

rectus abdominis, iliopsoas, front quadriceps, external and internal obliques

TECHNIQUE

This is similar to the basic exercise, but with a more pronounced “jack-knife” movement without changing the extension of the knees. Your legs should move in an arc (rather than in a line as above) with the torso. When you open up the position, your shoulders and feet should come close to the floor without touching it, and when you close it, you should move your arms forward as if to touch your toes. The variant is more demanding than the basic and hands-free exercises, as it makes more intense demands on the hips due to the movement of the legs. In principle, this exercise is not recommended (see Ex. 3.3).





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: internal and external obliques

SECONDARY MUSCLES: rectus abdominis, transverse abdominal, quadratus lumborum, (pyramidal)

ANTAGONISTS: the same muscles on the other side of the body

VARIATIONS

6.2 ...INCLINE BENCH

MUSCLES USED

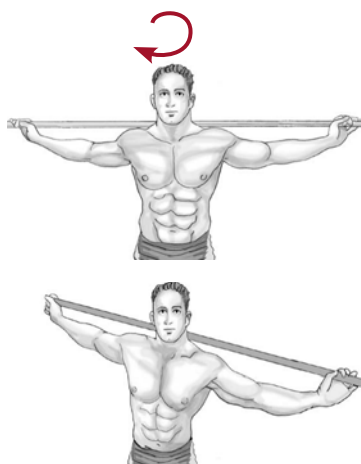
internal and external obliques, rectus abdominis

TECHNIQUE

Sit on an incline bench like a Roman chair and tilt your body back a little to contract the abdominal girdle. This variant ensures constant abdominal work so that your torso does not fall backward as you do the twists with the bar. However, it can be dangerous for the discs between adjacent vertebrae, and it should therefore generally be avoided. It is mentioned here for information purposes only.



Execution



Stand facing a mirror with your feet apart for balance. Fix your gaze in front of you. Place a wooden or other bar behind your head and grasp it in an overhand grip, resting it on your trapezius and rear deltoid. Firmly contract your abdominal muscles and twist from one side to the other using your abs to control the range of movement. Each twist should move through a full arc of around 90°, but never as far as 180°. (The end of the bar should never point straight forward and back.) Breathe in short intervals. Normally, you should inhale as you move forward and exhale as you turn to the side.

Comments

This is not a good exercise if your goal is to build muscle, but if it is correctly executed, it can be acceptable to achieve mobility. As a result, you will need to do more and faster repetitions than for other exercises. Do not relax either your abdominal or lower back muscles. If you do so, the ligaments around your spine will take over the job of halting the sharp twists, which is dangerous. The exercise works the internal oblique muscle on the side twisted and the external oblique on the other side. It does not significantly reduce any fat in the area (although the oblique muscles form a natural girdle). Never do this exercise if you have suffered any back injury and do not do it too often.



Common mistakes: doing the movement too fast or too slowly, turning through too wide an arc, not concentrating on the muscles worked, failing to keep your gaze fixed forward, not holding the hips steady, and resting the bar on the cervical vertebrae.



Any nutrient (fat, protein or sugar) can be stored as fat by the body if it is not used for other purposes (structural, as energy, and so on). Consequently, eating too much protein or carbohydrates can result in adding fat. The main culprits of weight gain are fatty foods, however, because of their high calorie content.

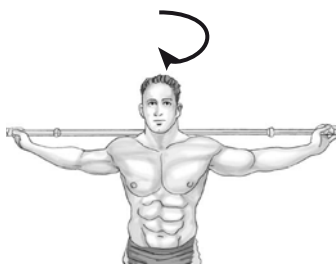
6.3 ... WITH BARBELL

MUSCLES USED

internal and external obliques, rectus abdominis

TECHNIQUE

If you use a metal bar (16-324 lb.) instead of the wooden pole, you will increase the intensity of the conventional exercise. However, you should take the utmost precautions to avoid injuring your back, making sure to restrain the range of movement using your abdominal muscles. This is the least advisable of this group of twists, given the high risk of injury. Remember that your vertebrae rotate under pressure as you perform the twists.



6.4 ... SEATED

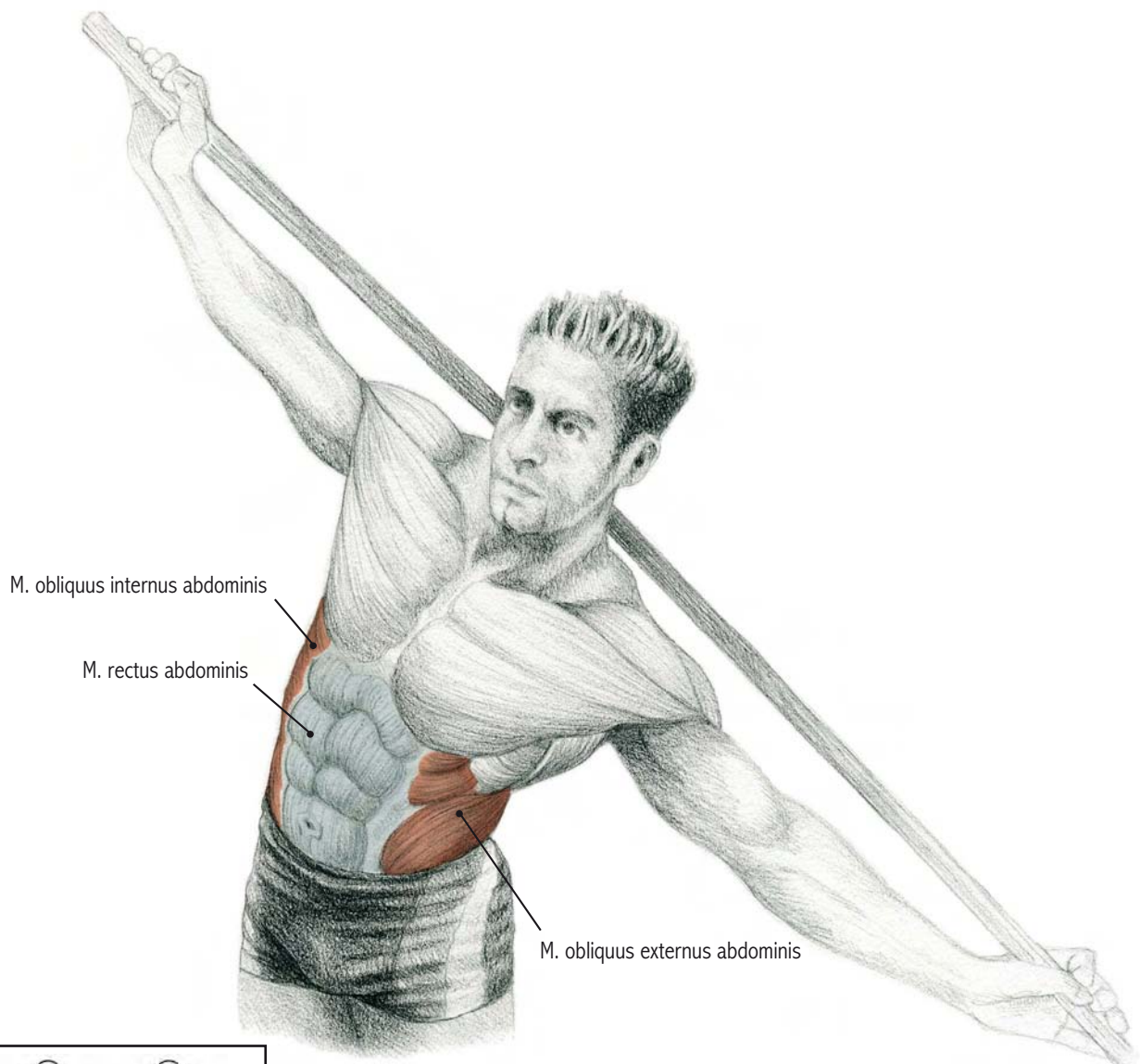
MUSCLES USED

internal and external obliques, rectus abdominis

TECHNIQUE

Sit straddling a flat bench and close your legs to hold your hips in position using your knees. The workout is the same as in the basic, standing exercise but with the hips held steady. This is the best variant of all the twists, but the comments made with regard to the basic exercise still apply.

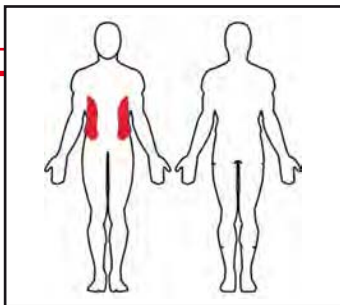




M. obliquus internus abdominis

M. rectus abdominis

M. obliquus externus abdominis



Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: quadratus lumborum, internal and external obliques

SECONDARY MUSCLES: muscles of the spine, rectus abdominis, psoas

ANTAGONISTS: the same muscles on the other side of the body

VARIATIONS

7.2 ... WITH DUMBBELLS

MUSCLES USED

quadratus lumborum, internal and external obliques

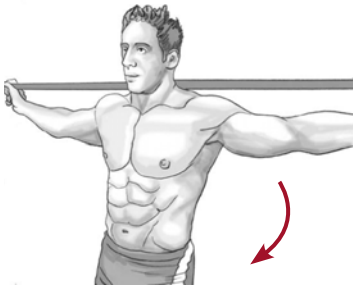
TECHNIQUE

In this variant, hold a light or medium dumbbell (never a heavy one) with a neutral grip on one side of the body. Leave your other hand free or place it on your waist (without weight). The movement is the same. It is best performed slowly, and you should concentrate on the oblique muscles on the side holding the weight. Remember that it is the quadratus lumborum that does most of the work on the other side.

There is little point in using two dumbbells, one in each hand, because they cancel each other out like a set of scales.



Execution



Stand facing a mirror with your feet apart for balance. Place a barbell behind your head and grasp it in an overhand grip, resting it on your trapezius and rear deltoid. Firmly contract your abdominal muscles and bend left and right to the side, using the same muscles to control the range of movement (maximum of approximately 40°). Breathe in short intervals, inhaling as you straighten up and exhaling as you bend.

Comments

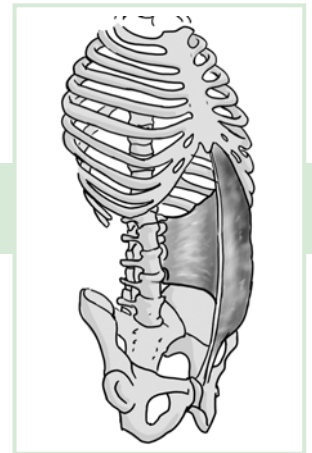
Like Twists, you need to do a lot more repetitions than for other exercises because the work is light. Do not relax your abdominal muscles at any time, and ensure that your lower back muscles are somewhat contracted. Remember that the vertebrae also rotate when you bend sideways, and a heavy weight together with a deep side bend can cause injury. This exercise works the internal and external oblique muscles on the side of the torso you bend, although most of the effort is actually made by the quadratus lumborum.



Common mistakes: too short a range of movement, poor spinal column alignment, and not concentrating on the muscles being worked.



The abdominal muscles do not just cover the stomach, they reach up as far as the ribs and around to the vertebrae. As a result, they form a natural girdle.



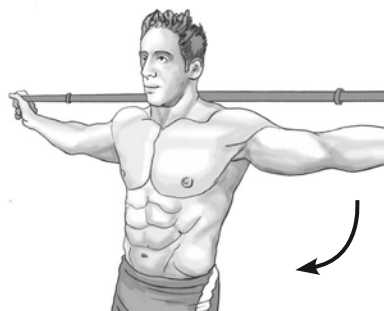
7.3 ... WITH BAR

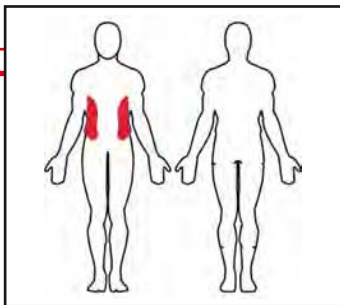
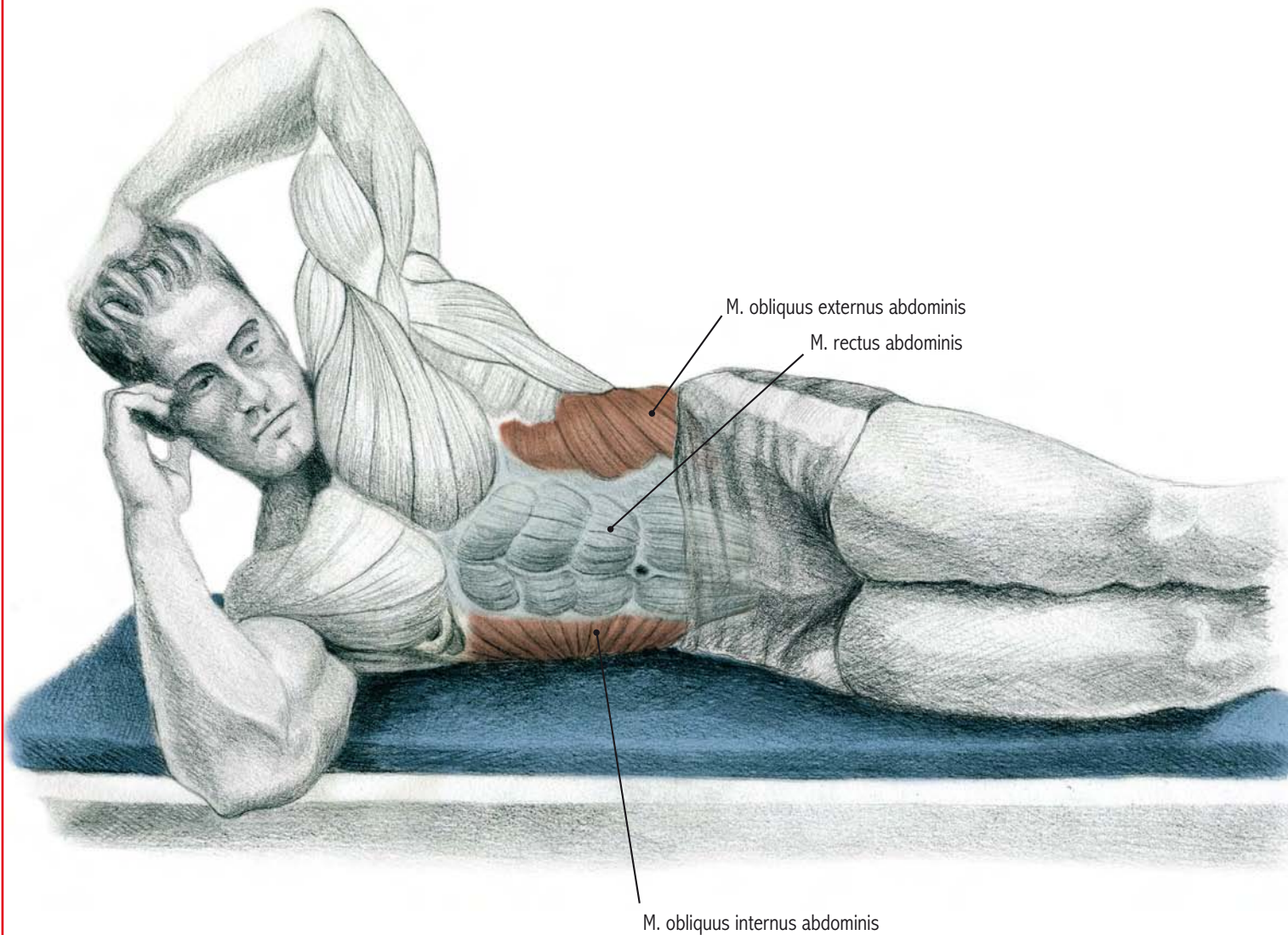
MUSCLES USED

quadratus lumborum, internal and external obliques

TECHNIQUE

As in Twists, you can use a bar weighing 16-24 lb. instead of wooden pole. This increases the intensity of the exercise, but it also increases the potentially dangerous pressure between vertebrae. This is for advanced athletes, although it is not an essential exercise.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: internal and external obliques

SECONDARY MUSCLES: rectus abdominis, quadratus lumborum, muscles along the spinal column

ANTAGONISTS: the same muscles on the other side of the body

VARIATIONS

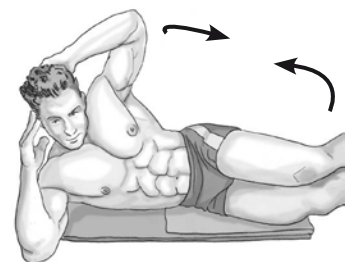
8.2 ... WITH LEG LIFT

MUSCLES USED

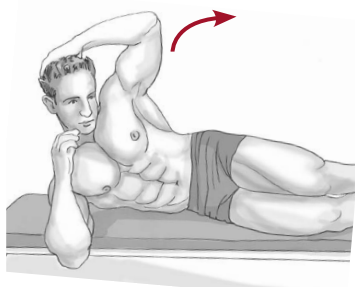
internal and external obliques, iliopsoas

TECHNIQUE

The starting position is similar to the basic exercise but without crossing your legs. Instead, place one leg on top of the other and lift them, flexing and moving the upper leg slightly upward. Basically, you need to bring your torso and legs toward each other at the same time. The abdomen does not lift the legs at all, but the movement helps some people feel the muscles exercised being worked.



Execution



Lie on your side leaning slightly forward with your legs crossed and, if possible, held in place under the supports of a flat ab bench. Place your upper hand on your head and the lower arm across your chest (more difficult). Contract your abdominal muscles to raise your shoulders sideways a couple of inches from the floor by flexing your torso. Breathe in as you raise your torso and out as you lower it.

Comments

This exercise is similar to the crunch, but it works the internal and external oblique muscles along the side of the torso. However, if you maintain a very strict sideways position, most of the work will actually be done by the quadratus lumborum.

It is not necessary to raise the torso very much when contracting, and it is actually preferable to feel the area worked and not to bounce. Using weights is not recommended.



Common mistakes: bouncing off the floor to gain momentum, doing the movement too fast, and helping with your free end (except to complete a set).



Some supposedly specific exercises do exist for the obliques, but these muscles in fact also work in exercises that flex the torso, such as those used to exercise the rectus abdominis.

8.3 ...LYING LEG TWISTS / ABDOMINAL PENDULUM

MUSCLES USED

internal and external obliques, iliopsoas, transverse abdominal

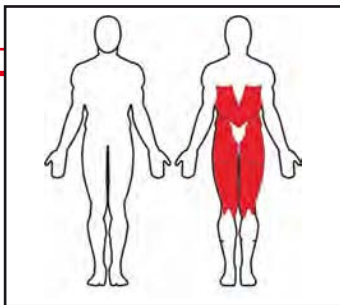
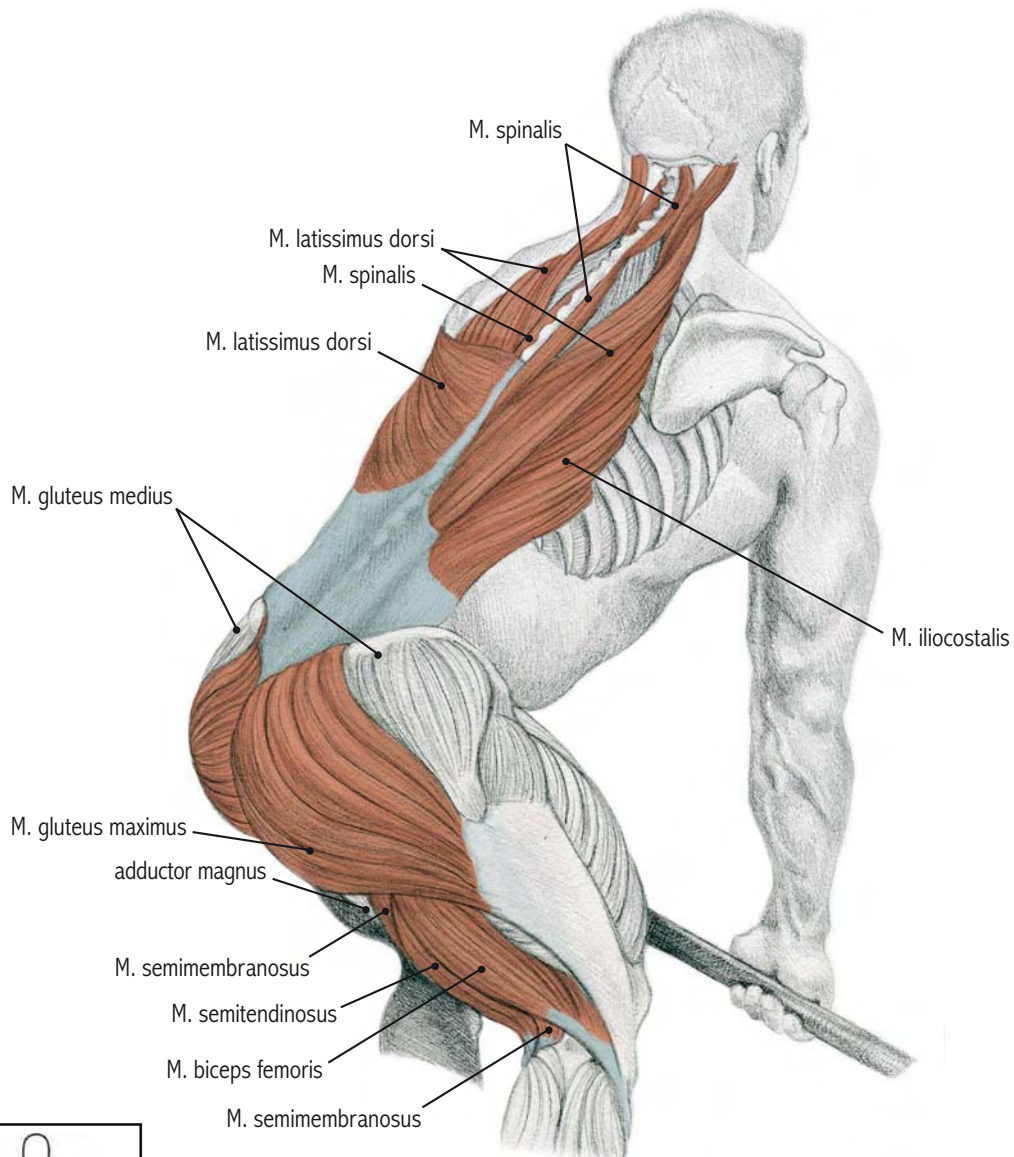
TECHNIQUE

Lie on your back with your legs pointing straight up and your arms straight out to the side. Allow your legs to fall to one side, at the same time rotating your torso. When your knees reach the floor (this will depend on how flexible you are), lift them up again and continue the movement to the other side. People with spinal problems should not use this variant.

To make the exercise a little more intense, you can do a whole set to one side and then a whole set to the other. You can also use ankle weights.

A very demanding exercise involves doing the Twists hanging from a bar with your legs bent at a 90° angle or more. However, this puts a lot of strain on the iliopsoas.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: spinal erectors, longissimus dorsi, quadratus lumborum, iliocostalis, latissimus dorsi, spinalis, multifidi, gluteus maximus, hamstrings (semimembranosus, semitendinosus and long head of the biceps femoris)
SECONDARY MUSCLES: serratus posterior inferior, gluteus medius (rear fibers), adductor magnus, piriformis
ANTAGONISTS: rectus abdominis, iliopsoas, obliques, front quadriceps, tensor fasciae latae, pectineus, sartorius

VARIATIONS

9.2 ... WITH DUMBBELLS

MUSCLES USED

spinal erectors, longissimus dorsi, quadratus lumborum, iliocostalis, latissimus dorsi, spinalis, multifidi, gluteus maximus, hamstrings

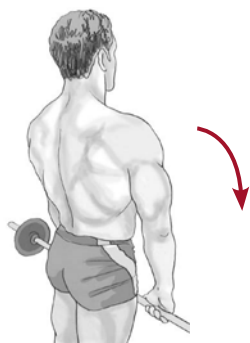
TECHNIQUE

The technique is the same as the basic exercise, but holding two dumbbells in a neutral grip, one on each side of the body. Bring the dumbbells a little forward as if you were holding a barbell when you lower your torso.

There is no difference in the muscles involved, although dumbbells allow a more anatomically comfortable grip. The variant in which the dumbbell is brought toward the opposite foot by twisting the torso is absolutely not to be recommended, although it is often seen in gyms (and even in schools, though without weights).



Execution



Stand with your knees slightly bent and grasp the barbell with an overhand or neutral grip, resting it against your thighs. Your feet should be about hip-width apart. Lean your torso forward without separating the barbell too far from your body. Focus mentally on the erector muscles of the lower back and not on the backs of the thighs. Ensure that you lower your torso in a natural position. You should feel pressure on your heels and not on your toes. Breathe in at the starting position, hold your breath as you lower the bar, and breathe out when you complete the lift. Breathe deeply before repeating the movement.

Comments

The bad news for bodybuilders who are traditionalists is that this exercise is dangerous and may be inadvisable. If performed incorrectly, it will live up to its name. An example will make this clear. Lifting the weight of your own torso (without weight) from a flexed position places over 400 lbs. of pressure on the erector muscles of the spine and compresses the 5th lumbar vertebra even more. Some biomechanical studies have found that a heavy load would put over 2,000 lbs. of pressure on the discs between adjacent vertebrae, and in theory it could break at around 1,750 lbs. (or less in people over the age of 40). The only way to prevent this is to hold your breath and spread the pressure out over the vertebrae, making the torso into a pillar. Unfortunately, this also creates unwelcome changes in circulation. Keeping your legs slightly flexed will reduce the workload for the hamstrings. The neutral grip is safer than overhand because you are less likely to drop the barbell, but it can damage the lower tendon of the biceps in the forearm. Older athletes should avoid this exercise, and the young should be fully aware of the risks involved. Review the comments on the leg Deadlift (Legs, Ex. 4)



Common mistakes: arching your back as you lower the weight, straightening your knees, using too much weight (this is a delicate area), and improper breathing (serious).



The Deadlift basically consists of two movements:

1. Starting from the anatomical position, flexing the hips with the legs straight (see Legs, Ex. 4).
2. A movement similar to a Squat (see Legs, Ex. 1) as you perform the power lift from the floor.

Both movements place intense demands on the muscles, but the first is riskier for the back and should be avoided by anybody suffering from lower back problems or any spinal injury in general. The second movement is safer but not easier, and poor technique may lead to injury.

The legs and back are the two key muscles groups in both variants.

9.3 ...GOOD MORNING

MUSCLES USED

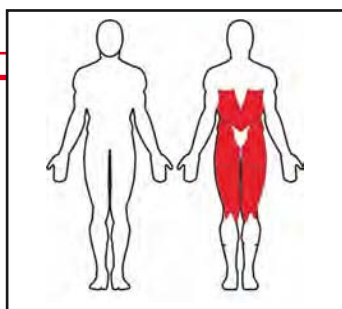
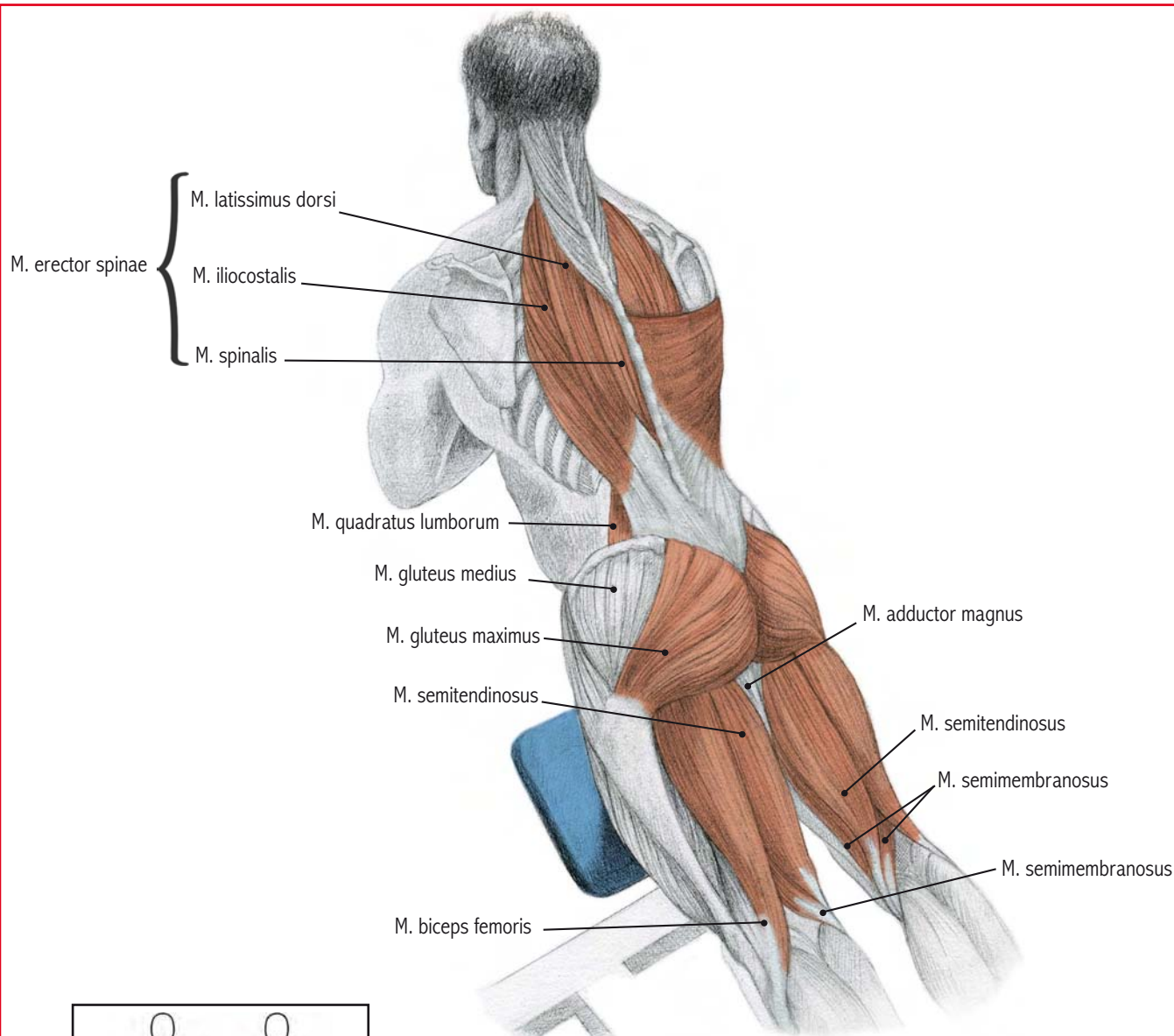
spinal erectors, longissimus dorsi, quadratus lumborum, iliocostalis, latissimus dorsi, spinalis, multifidi, gluteus maximus, hamstrings

TECHNIQUE

This is similar to the preceding exercises, but the barbell is placed across the trapezius and rear deltoid (as in Squats for the legs). You need to shift your hips back a little as you lower your body to keep your balance.

This variant can be even more dangerous than the conventional Deadlift.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: spinal erectors, longissimus dorsi, quadratus lumborum, iliocostalis, latissimus dorsi, spinalis, multifidi, gluteus maximus, hamstrings (semimembranosus, semitendinosus and long head of the biceps femoris)
SECONDARY MUSCLES: serratus posterior inferior, gluteus medius (rear fibers), adductor magnus, piriformis
ANTAGONISTS: rectus abdominis, iliopsoas, obliques, front quadriceps, tensor fasciae latae, pectineus, sartorius

VARIATIONS

10.2 ... WEIGHTED

MUSCLES USED

spinal erectors, longissimus dorsi, quadratus lumborum, iliocostalis, latissimus dorsi, spinalis, multifidi, gluteus maximus, hamstrings (semimembranosus, semitendinosus and long head of the biceps femoris)

TECHNIQUE

The technique is the same as the basic exercise, but holding a weight against your chest with your arms crossed. If the weight you are using is light, it can also be placed on the back of the neck, although this is not recommended. This is obviously a variant for fit athletes, and some precautions are necessary – basically a good warm-up. Never do twists. If you want to increase the intensity of the workout, it is better to do the exercise more slowly than to add weight.



Execution



Stand on a back extension bench set at around 45° with your feet under the support and your pelvis resting against a cushion. Bend your torso around 90° and then lift it in a straight line before descending again. Arch your back slightly as you lower your torso, as this will ensure that all of the adjacent muscles work when you straighten up again. Breathe in just before the downward movement and out (without letting out all of the air) when you come back up.

Comments

Back Extensions (sometimes incorrectly called “hyperextensions”) make an excellent exercise for the entire lower back and the muscles along the spine, both areas that tend to be undertrained compared to the abdomen. It is a good substitute for the Deadlift (Ex. 9). Try to keep your gluteus muscles and hamstrings relaxed so that they do not do too much of the work in straightening the pelvis. If you change your breathing to the opposite pattern to that explained above, you will be able to bend your trunk as you lower it, although the lumbar vertebrae are less protected.



Common mistakes: raising your torso beyond the line of your body, using momentum and bouncing, twisting as you raise your torso (dangerous), and resting the entire hip on the cushion without leaving enough room to bend.



Hip Raises (see Lets, Ex. 7.4) are also an effective way of training the lower back muscles. This is an easy movement, and it can be very useful for beginners and people who do not want to do Extensions on a horizontal or incline bench.

10.3 ... FLAT BENCH

MUSCLES USED

spinal erectors, longissimus dorsi, quadratus lumborum, iliocostalis, latissimus dorsi, spinalis, multifidi, gluteus maximus, hamstrings (semimembranosus, semitendinosus and long head of the biceps femoris)

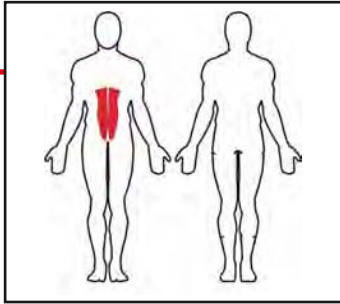
TECHNIQUE

All of the comments about the basic exercise are valid for this variant. By lying on a flat bench, you will make the exercise harder, although the position reduces the strain in the first few part of the movement. The variant is good for intermediate and advanced athletes. See the comments regarding weight on the preceding variant (Ex. 10.2).

Once again, the reader is reminded that any rotation of the spinal column puts the vertebrae at risk.



HANGING SIT-UP



Muscles involved

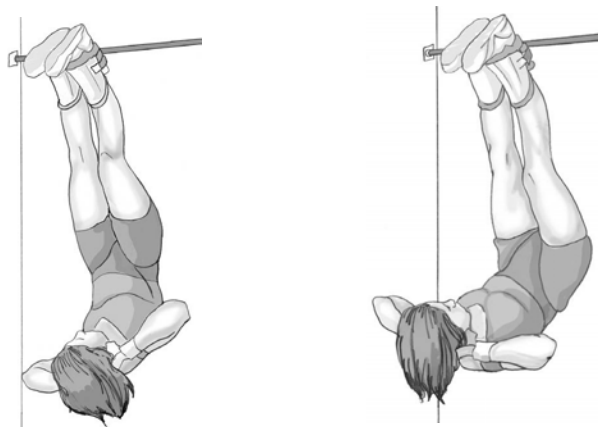
MAIN MUSCLES: rectus abdominis

SECONDARY MUSCLES: external and internal obliques, psoas, front quadriceps, transverse abdominal

ANTAGONISTS: spinal erectors, longissimus dorsi and other muscles along the spinal column, lower back muscles, gluteus maximus

Execution

Hang upside down from a bar using ankle straps. Lift your torso by flexing from the hip and arching your back. Breathe naturally.



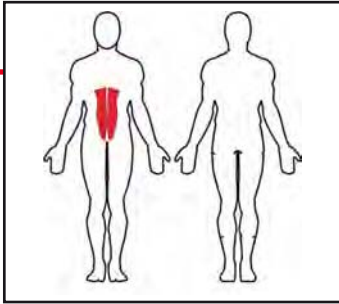
Comments

This exercise is only for advanced athletes and is in any case not recommended (see Decline Bench Press, Chest, Ex. 3). It is not unknown for people to faint when doing exercises in which the head is lower than the heart because the human body is not designed to exert effort in an upside-down position. Also, the exercise provides no special advantage over other abdominal exercises, if performed properly. If you insist on doing this, it is recommended that you get help from a partner to position yourself on the bar and get off of it, and to look out for any problems (as the position is rather risky).



Common mistakes: using weights, swinging and doing the exercise too often

INVERTED LEG DROP



Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: rectus abdominis, iliopsoas

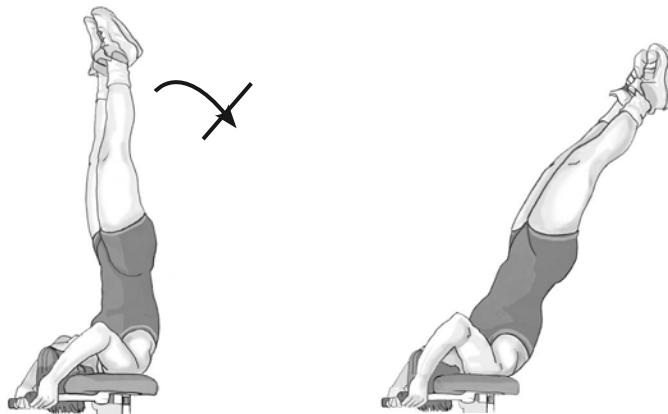
SECONDARY MUSCLES: external and internal obliques, front quadriceps, transverse abdominal

ANTAGONISTS: spinal erectors, longissimus dorsi and other muscles along the spinal column, lower back muscles, gluteus maximus

Execution

Do a shoulder stand on a lower back bench, keeping your body straight, and allow your legs to drop a few degrees before raising them again.

Breathe in, hold your breath as you lower your legs, and breathe out when you raise them.

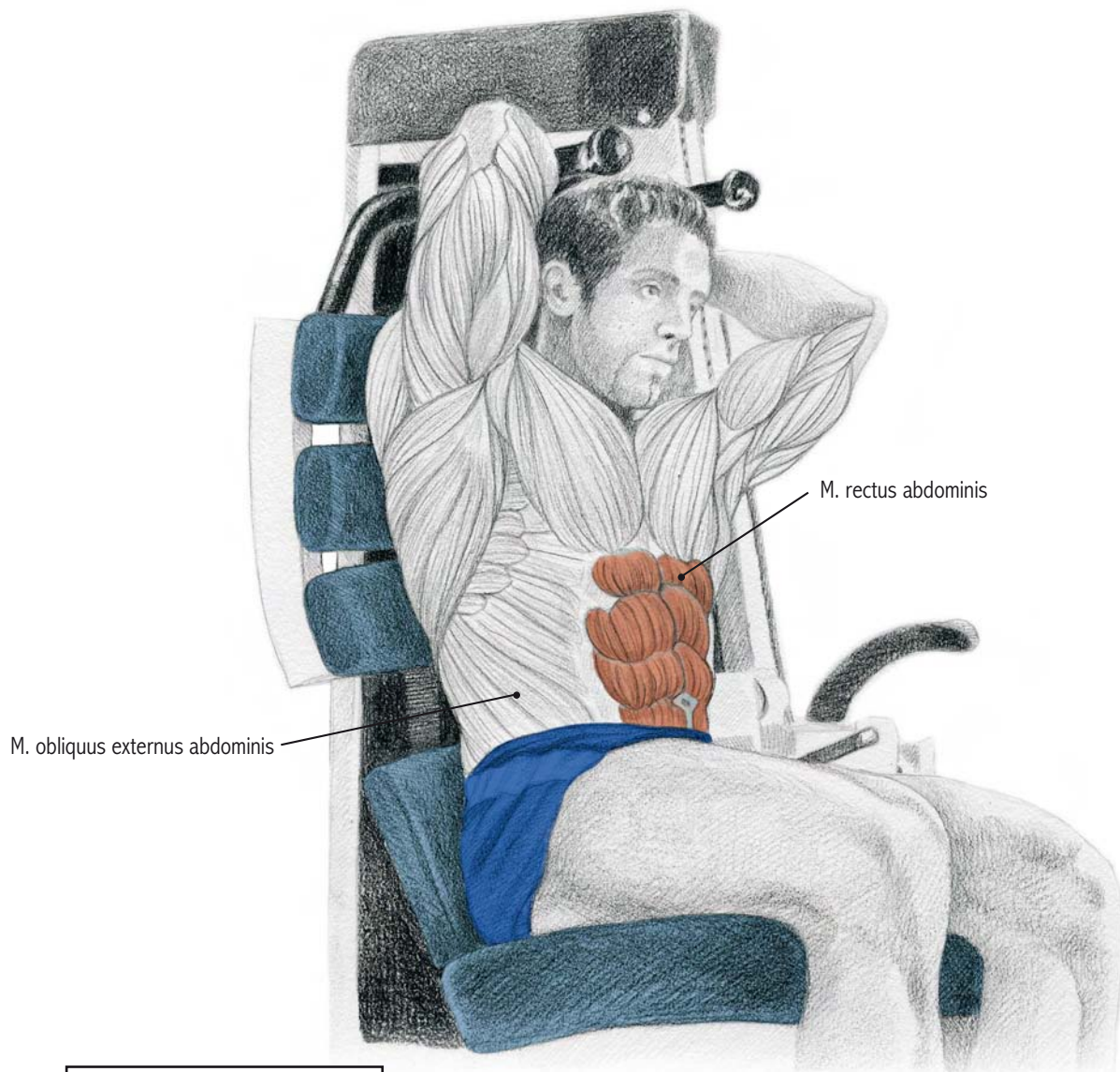


Comments

This is an unusual exercise. It is of dubious use compared to other conventional exercises and is in any event suitable only for advanced athletes. It involves a whole group of anchoring muscles, but it is not recommended outside the sport of gymnastics.

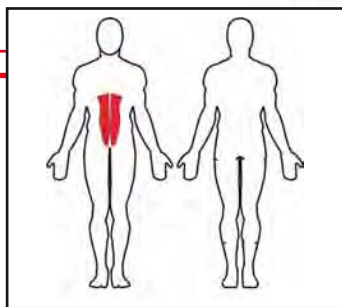


Common mistakes: lowering your legs too far (risk of losing your balance) and abnormal curvature of the spine



M. obliquus externus abdominis

M. rectus abdominis



Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: rectus abdominis

SECONDARY MUSCLES: external and internal obliques, psoas, front quadriceps, transverse abdominal

ANTAGONISTS: spinal erectors, longissimus dorsi and other muscles along the spinal column, and lower back muscles

VARIATIONS

13.2 ... LOW AB MACHINE

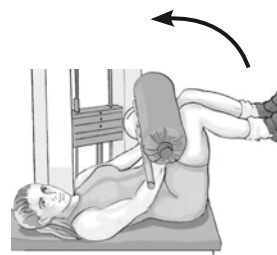
MUSCLES USED

rectus abdominis, iliopsoas, external and internal obliques

TECHNIQUE

Lie on your back with your torso held in place by the bands or holding on with your hands. Rest the roller against your feet or thighs (depending on the design) and raise it by flexing your hips.

This works the hip flexor muscles and the iliopsoas or the front part of the quadriceps. However, if the machine is well designed, it will also allow you to perform an abdominal crunch, bringing your pelvis up toward your ribs. The lower abs work harder, although the whole of the rectus abdominis is involved.



Execution



Sit on the machine with your feet under the supports and hold on to the overhead grips. Bend your torso forward while pulling on the grips or pushing with your chest, depending on the design of the machine. Breathe in as you raise your torso and out as you lower it.

Comments

Some machines of this type are well designed to allow you to bend your torso and crunch your abdomen, but others only flex the hips, sometimes requiring you to raise your legs. In this light, let us again stress that the basic function of the rectus abdominis, the muscle trained in this exercise, is to shorten the gap between the chest and the pubis. In movements of this kind, it can be difficult for a beginner to feel whether they are contracting and shortening the abdominal muscles, or merely contracting and immobilizing them (isometric contraction), which depends on the design of the machine.

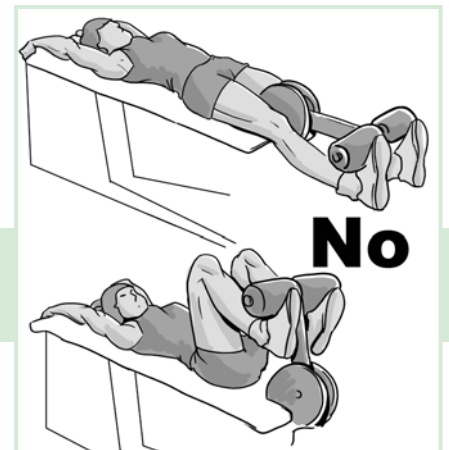
The main advantage is that it is easy to select the weight for the level and objectives of the individual.



Common mistakes: too much or too little weight and a poorly designed machine



Example of a poorly designed ab machine.



13.3 ... SEATED BENCH PRESS MACHINE

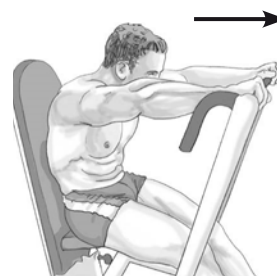
MUSCLES USED

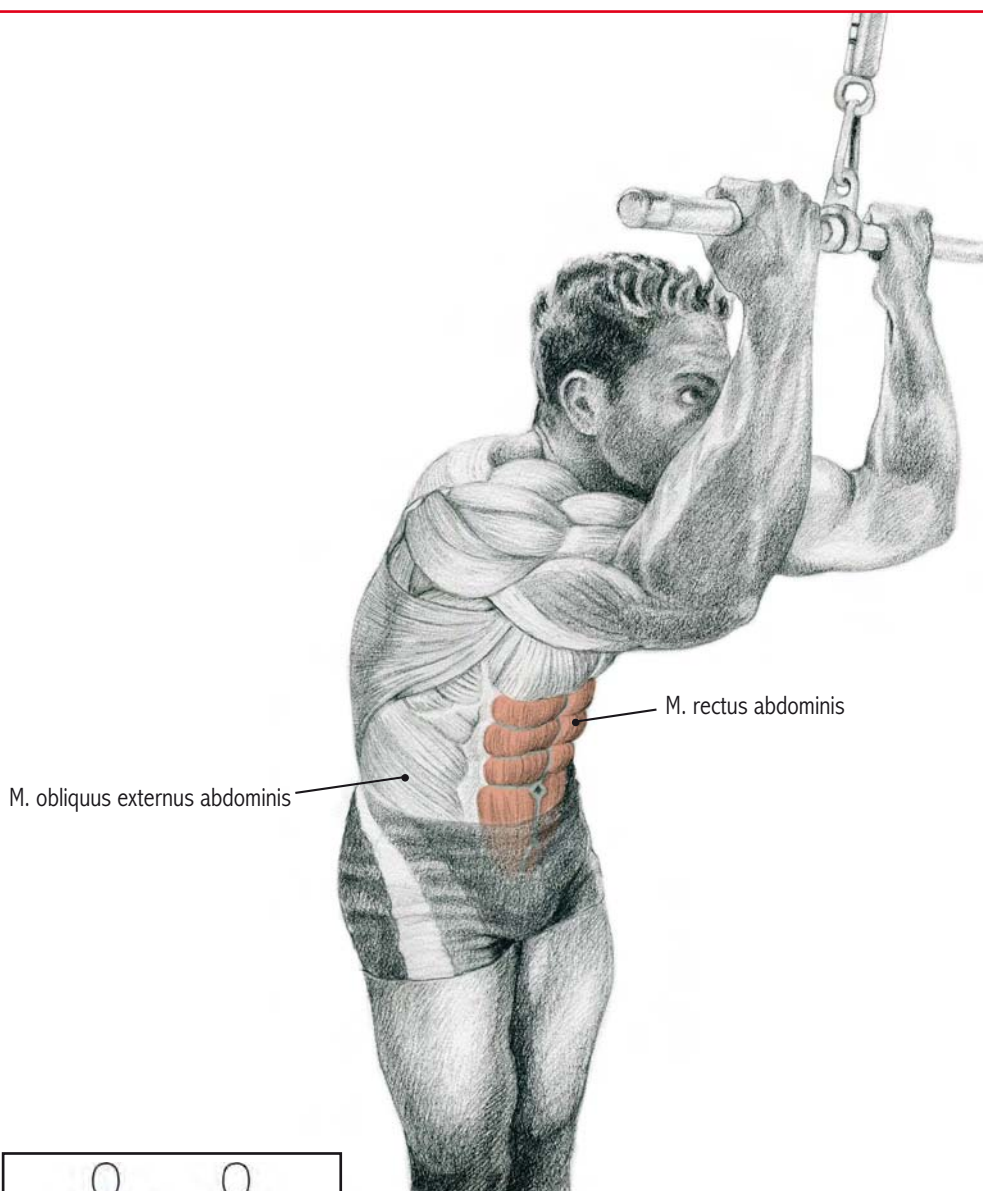
rectus abdominis, external and internal obliques

TECHNIQUE

Sit in the same way as for the Seated Machine Bench Press (Chest, Ex. 14.4) and keep your arms and elbows almost straight out in front of you (isometric position). Contract and bend your torso to lift the weight. The movement should be short but controlled, and you should feel the abdominal muscles working (basically the rectus abdominis) to shift the upper part of the torso forward.

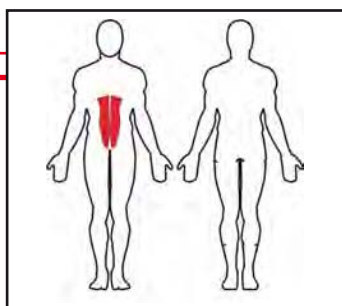
This is a good, though unconventional, variant of machine exercises for the abdomen, and it will provide advanced athletes with variety in their routines and beginners with an opportunity to gain strength.





M. obliquus externus abdominis

M. rectus abdominis



Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: rectus abdominis

SECONDARY MUSCLES: external and internal oblique muscles, transverse abdominal

ANTAGONISTS: spinal erectors, longissimus dorsi and other muscles along the spinal column, and lower back muscles

VARIATIONS

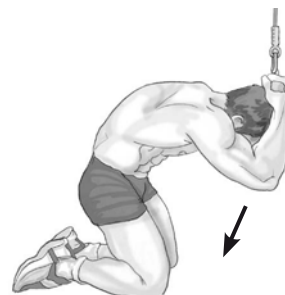
14.2 ... KNEELING

MUSCLES USED

rectus abdominis, external and internal obliques

TECHNIQUE

Also known as the “Prayer” Crunch, this variant requires you to kneel in front of the cable (preferably set at the height for Triceps Extensions). Grasp the bar or rope and perform the movement in the same way as the standing exercise. You will need to be especially careful not to flex your hips without working the rectus abdominis enough because the posture encourages this error. This means you need to hold your body steady from the pelvis down (so that there is no change in the distance between your thighs and abdomen, or between your thighs and calves). To stop yourself from cheating, you can sit on a ball, which makes it easier to keep your hips and legs still.



Execution



Stand in front of a high cable (preferably the one used for Cable Pull-downs) holding the bar behind your head with an underhand grip (without pressing on your neck). Hold your arms steady so that the bar does not change position and contract your abdomen to bring your ribs down toward your pelvis, using the whole of your back. You should feel like you are “rolling up” your torso, not flexing it. Keep your hips still. Breathe in as you raise your torso and out as you lower it.

Comments

This excellent abdominal exercise is highly recommended for intermediate and advanced athletes. However, the technique is a little difficult, and beginners therefore tend not to do a Crunch but to flex their hips, which have powerful flexor muscles that are easier to activate than the abdominal muscles. The exercise allows you to use considerable weight with little risk. If you prefer, you can use a rope rather than a bar. The variant in which you stand or kneel with your back to the cable is not recommended and does not provide any significant advantage.



Common mistakes: flexing the torso using primarily the iliopsoas and flexors rather than the abdominal muscles, doing the movement too fast or making it too short and raising the pelvis rather than bringing the ribs down.



Bodybuilders have more “active tissue” than people who do not train. Their bodies therefore consume more calories than a sedentary lifestyle would require as their metabolism is faster. The thyroid hormone plays a key role in regulating the metabolism.

14.3 ... SIDE CRUNCH

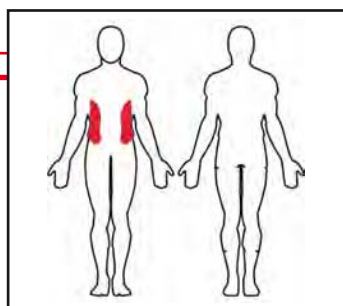
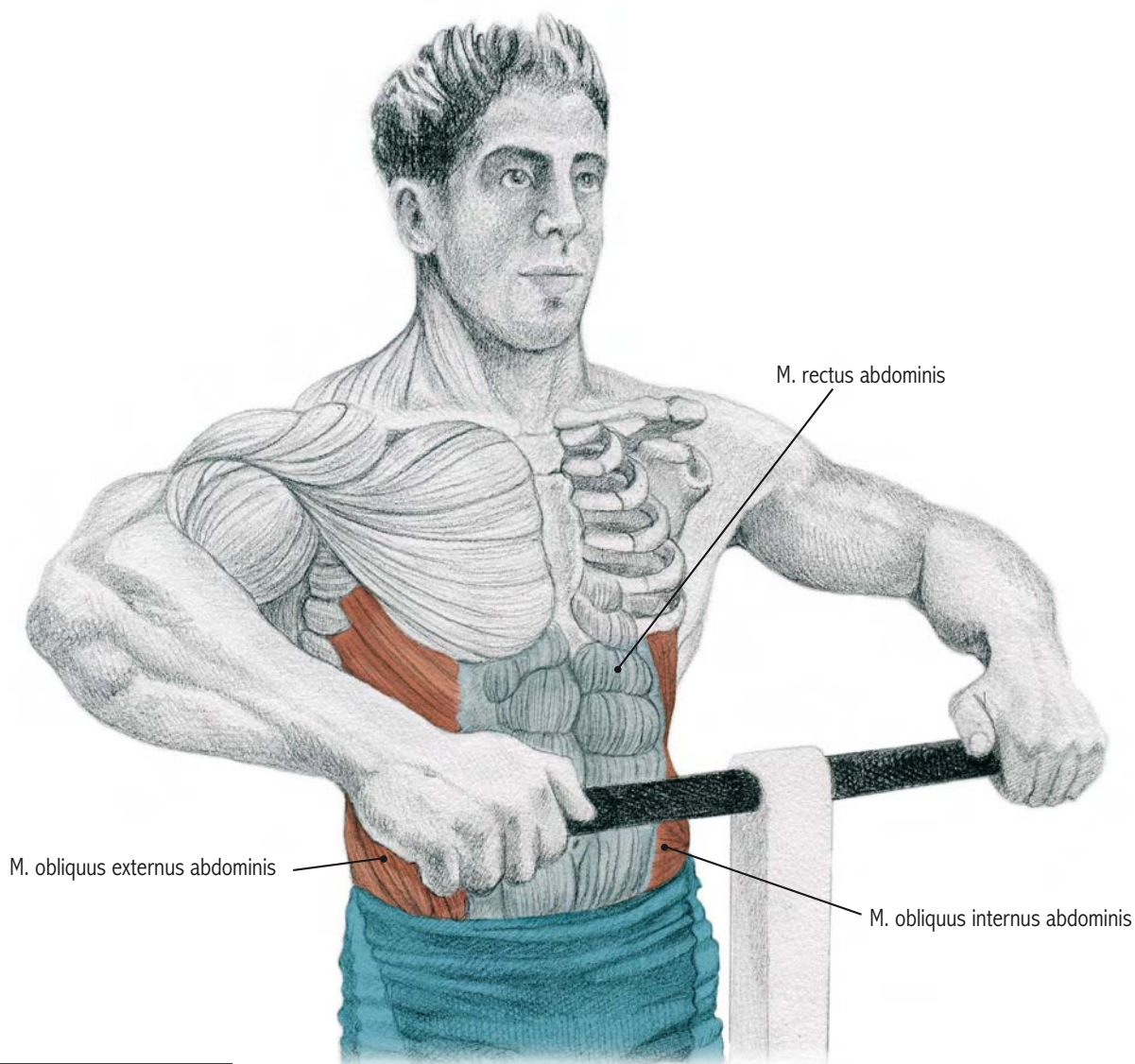
MUSCLES USED

external and internal obliques, rectus abdominis, quadratus lumborum

TECHNIQUE

Stand with your side to the cable, holding the grip (preferably a rope or stirrup handle) in one hand. Lean your torso sideways, flexing slightly at the same time. Focus on the oblique muscles. You can do this exercise either standing or kneeling. It is preferable to the free-weight variants (Ex. 7), for the reasons explained above.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: internal and external obliques

SECONDARY MUSCLES: rectus abdominis, transverse abdominal, quadratus lumborum

ANTAGONISTS: the same muscles on the other side of the body

VARIATIONS

15.2 ... SEATED

MUSCLES USED

internal and external obliques, rectus abdominis

TECHNIQUE

Sit on the machine after selecting the weight and hold your body steady from the waist down. Twist one way and then the other, lifting the weight in controlled movements.

This machine is not usually found at gyms because it is more expensive than the standing disc. However, it focuses the work on the desired muscles more safely and effectively. It is also more specifically suited to working the oblique muscles. However, caution is needed with any twisting movement, even if it is not vertical (as in Barbell Twists, Ex. 6.3). Strong oblique muscles around the abdomen provide a natural girdle and shape the waist attractively, but too much volume will make your waist broader.



Execution



Stand on the twist disc with your feet apart and your knees slightly bent. Grasp the grips with your hands. Firmly contract your abdominal muscles and rotate from one side to the other using your abs to control the range of movement. Twist through an arc of around 90°. Breathe naturally in short intervals.

Comments

This exercise can be dangerous if performed without adequate abdominal control. It is easy to let the momentum of the twist take over, with the ligaments and smaller muscles of the spine restraining the movement. This must be avoided. It is also unnecessary, and the exercise is a quick route to knee and back injuries. Moreover, it is completely useless if your aim is to reduce fat around your waist or increase the size of the muscles in this area. Sadly, many trainers allow their students to do this exercise without proper supervision.



Common mistakes: too fast or too slow a movement, twisting in too wide a range of motion, and not concentrating on the muscles worked.



Perspiration and weight loss

Aerobic exercise will generally cause considerable sweating, especially on a warm day. At the same time, the body consumes a certain amount of the energy obtained from food or previously stored as fat. The supposed link with perspiration leads many poorly informed people to believe that you lose fat whenever you sweat. However, this is as false as believing that you sweat whenever you lose fat (the effects of dieting show that this is not the case). Both abundant perspiration and fat burn occur with enough aerobic exercise. However, the circumstantial weight loss involved in prolonged aerobic exercise, if it sufficiently intense, is usually due mainly to losing liquids, which you will soon replace. It is therefore virtually useless to wear thick or warm clothing to “shed fat,” whether you do physical exercise or not. In fact, such garments can actually be harmful if you are doing exercise, because they hinder the body’s natural temperature regulation mechanisms.

15.3 ... WITH CABLE

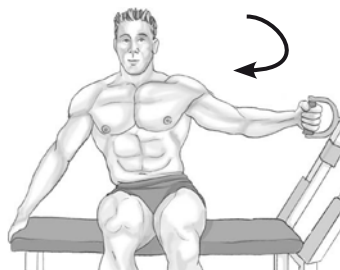
MUSCLES USED

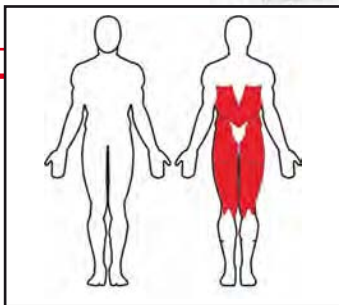
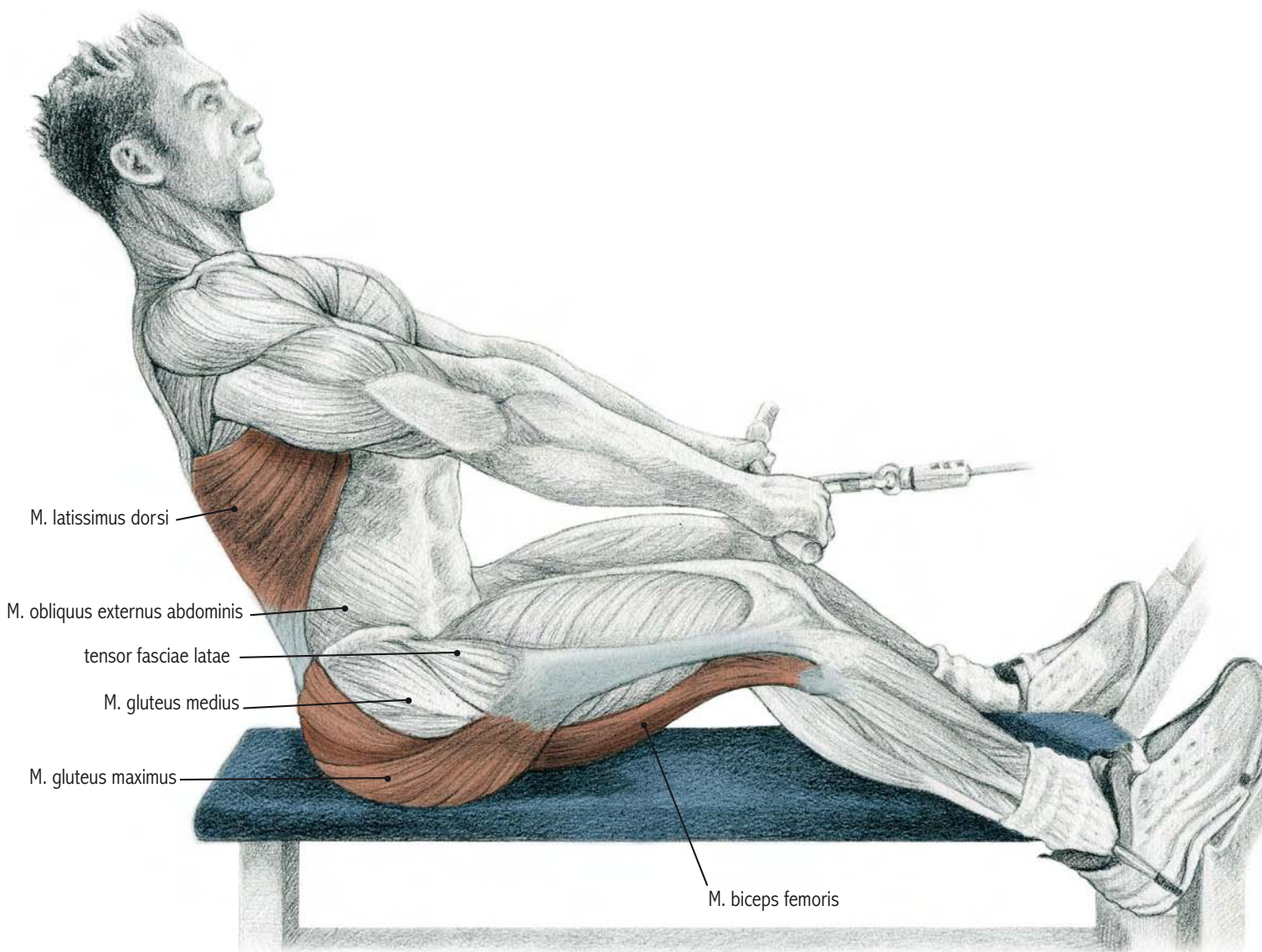
internal and external obliques, rectus abdominis

TECHNIQUE

Sit sideways and with your back slightly to a cable set at a medium height (between high and low). Keeping your elbows bent and close to your body, grasp the handle attached to the cable with one or both hands and set your body in this position. Twist your torso in the opposite direction to lift the weight slowly in a controlled movement.

You can also do this exercise standing. Like the other variants discussed here, this exercise is only for advanced athletes.





Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: spinal erectors, longissimus dorsi, quadratus lumborum, iliocostalis, latissimus dorsi, spinalis, multifidi, gluteus maximus, hamstrings (semimembranosus, semitendinosus and long head of the biceps femoris)

SECONDARY MUSCLES: serratus posterior inferior, gluteus medius (rear fibers), adductor magnus, piriformis

ANTAGONISTS: rectus abdominis, iliopsoas, obliques, front quadriceps, tensor fasciae latae, pectineus, sartorius

VARIATIONS

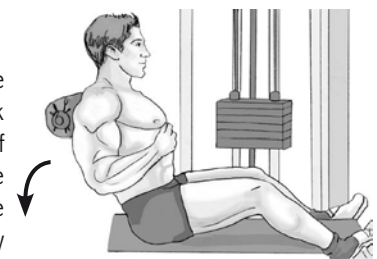
16.2 ... LOWER BACK MACHINE

MUSCLES USED

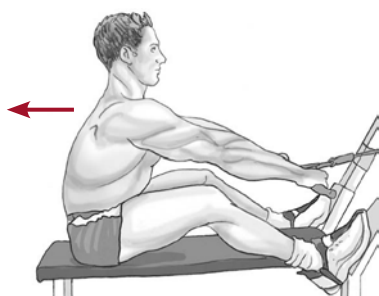
spinal erectors, longissimus dorsi, quadratus lumborum, iliocostalis, latissimus dorsi, spinalis, multifidi, gluteus maximus, hamstrings

TECHNIQUE

Sit with your upper back against the padded backrest and move your torso backwards to a horizontal position. Arch your back slightly as you lower your torso, as this will ensure that all of the adjacent muscles work when you straighten up again. If the machine is well designed, problems with technique are unlikely. The movement is a fairly strict hip extension and is not accompanied by any straightening of the spine, which means the muscles used the most are in the lower back and not along the spine.



Execution



The position is the same as the Seated Cable Row (Back, Ex. 10), sitting facing the machine with your arms out in front of you and your elbows slightly bent and locked in position. Keep your legs straighter than in the Cable Row, but still slightly bent at the knee.

Starting with your torso straight and your back slightly curved, lean backwards in a slow, controlled movement, extending the hips and spine. Once you reach an angle of a little over 45°, return to the vertical starting position. Inhale just before releasing the weight, hold your breath, and exhale (without letting out all of the air) when you reach the top of the lift. Breathe deeply and repeat.

Comments

As much as possible, try to keep your gluteus muscles and hamstrings relaxed so that they do not do too much of the work straightening the pelvis. Remember that the movement should be slow and controlled, maintaining resistance at all times. This may be a good exercise for people who cannot do Back Extensions on the lower back bench (see Ex. 10), because of muscle weakness, rehabilitation and so forth, although it is necessary to learn proper technique.



Common mistakes: using too much weight, quick movements using momentum (the tension should be constant), and moving the weight with your arms and not your back (Row).



Discomfort in the lower back region can result if your hamstrings are not supple, and problems of this kind can even affect the natural curve of the lower back. Stretching exercises are essential to prevent this.

16.3 ... DEADLIFT WITH LOW CABLE

MUSCLES USED

spinal erectors, longissimus dorsi, quadratus lumborum, iliocostalis, latissimus dorsi, spinalis, multifidi, gluteus maximus, hamstrings

TECHNIQUE

Stand facing the low cable and perform a movement like the Barbell Deadlift (see Ex. 9). If the weights touch, preventing you from lowering them far enough, stand on a bench or take a step to gain a wider range of motion.

The precautions indicated for the other machine extension exercises also apply to this variant.



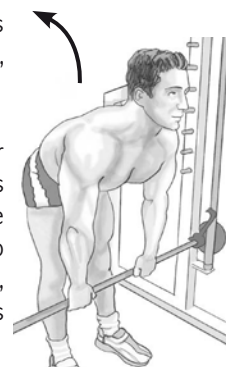
16.4 ... SMITH MACHINE DEADLIFT

MUSCLES USED

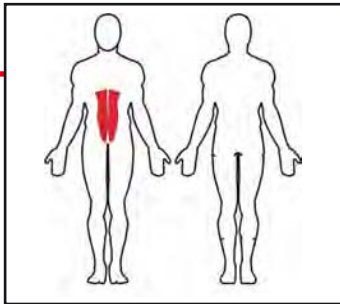
spinal erectors, longissimus dorsi, quadratus lumborum, iliocostalis, latissimus dorsi, spinalis, multifidi, gluteus maximus, hamstrings

TECHNIQUE

You can do the Deadlift more safely using the bar of the versatile Smith machine in the same way as for the equivalent barbell exercise (see Ex. 9). The precautions described also apply here. You can also do Good Mornings (Ex. 9.3) on the Smith machine, although the technique is more difficult and requires a longer range of movement for the hip.



CABLE SIT-UP



Muscles involved

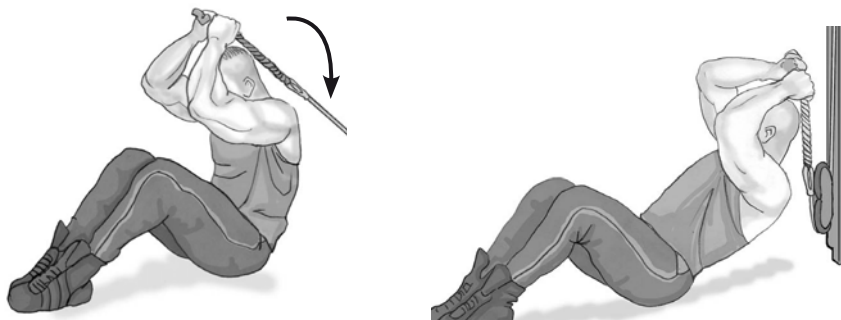
MAIN MUSCLES: rectus abdominis

SECONDARY MUSCLES: external and internal obliques, psoas, front quadriceps, transverse abdominal

ANTAGONISTS: spinal erectors, longissimus dorsi and other muscles along the spinal column, lower back muscles, gluteus maximus

Execution

Sit on the floor as in the free weight exercise (Ex. 2), grasping the grip attached to the cable behind you. Lift your torso by contracting the abdominal muscles, trying to reduce the gap between the pelvis and the chest. Do not lean too far back, but use short movements to avoid straining the lower back. Breathe in as you lower your torso and out as you raise it.



Comments

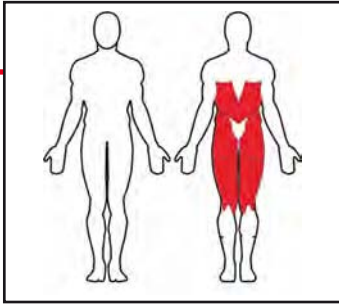
Once again, the hip movement in this exercise flexes the psoas, front quadriceps and other flexor muscles. However, it is not especially recommended, because the difficult position and technique can put the lower back at risk.

If you lie on your back with your feet beside the pulley and tied to the cable, you will be able to raise your pelvis with greater resistance than in the free-weight exercise. The tension you feel clearly demonstrates the role of the hip flexors in supposed abdominal exercises that involve lifting the legs.



Common mistakes: movements that are too quick and/or wide; holding your torso rigid throughout the movement, which makes the hip flexors work harder than the torso muscles; using too much weight

LOW CABLE BACK EXTENSION



Muscles involved

MAIN MUSCLES: spinal erectors, longissimus dorsi, quadratus lumborum, iliocostalis, latissimus dorsi, spinalis, multifidi, gluteus maximus, hamstrings (semimembranosus, semitendinosus and long head of the biceps femoris)

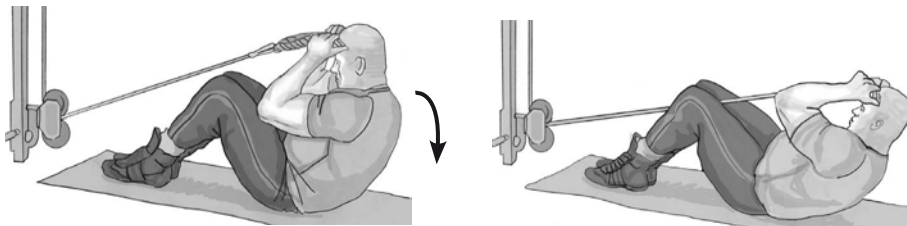
SECONDARY MUSCLES: serratus posterior inferior, gluteus medius (rear fibers), adductor magnus, piriformis

ANTAGONISTS: rectus abdominis, iliopsoas, obliques, front quadriceps, tensor fasciae latae, pectineus, sartorius

Execution

This exercise is similar to Seated-row Back Extensions (Ex. 16). Sit facing the pulley with your arms bent and holding the grips near your head. Keep your legs slightly bent.

Starting with your torso straight and your back slightly curved, lean backwards in a slow, controlled movement, extending the hips and spine. Straighten up again when you reach an angle of a little more than 45°. Breathe in as you pull the weight and out as you release it.



Comments

Try to keep your gluteus muscles and hamstrings relaxed so that they do not do too much of the work in straightening the pelvis. It helps to keep your knees slightly bent. This variant is no better than other basic exercise for the lower back.



Common mistakes: using too much weight, too fast a movement using momentum (keep the tension constant), and using the head and neck to support the weight.

APPENDIX 1

JOINT MOVEMENTS AND PRIMARY AND SECONDARY MUSCLES INVOLVED

SHOULDER

- ABDUCTION. Deltoid (middle). Deltoid (front and rear), supraspinatus, biceps brachii/biceps (long head). From approximately 90°, serratus anterior, trapezius, etc.
- HORIZONTAL ABDUCTION. Deltoid (rear), etc.
- ADDUCTION. Latissimus dorsi. Teres major/Greater teres, pectoralis major, triceps brachii/triceps (long head), biceps brachii/biceps (short head), deltoid (front and rear), coracobrachialis.
- HORIZONTAL ADDUCTION. Pectoralis major. Deltoid (front), coracobrachialis.
- FLEXION. Deltoid (front). Coracobrachialis, biceps brachii/biceps (long head), pectoralis major (clavicular head), serratus anterior.
- EXTENSION. Latissimus dorsi. Deltoid (rear), teres major/greater teres, triceps brachii/triceps (long head), pectoralis major (flexion >90°)
- EXTERNAL/LATERAL ROTATION. Infraspinatus. Deltoid (rear), teres major/greater teres.
- INTERNAL/MEDIAL ROTATION. Subscapularis. Pectoralis major, deltoid (front), latissimus dorsi, teres major/greater teres.

ELBOW

- FLEXION. Biceps brachii/Biceps. Brachialis, brachioradialis, extensor carpi radialis longus/long radial extensor, pronator teres, palmaris longus/long palmar, flexor carpi radialis/radial flexor, flexor carpi ulnaris/ulnar flexor.
- EXTENSION. Triceps brachii/Triceps. Anconeus.

FOREARM and HAND

- FLEXION OF THE WRIST. Superficial and deep flexors of the fingers. Flexor carpi radialis/Radial flexor, flexor carpi ulnaris/ulnar flexor, palmaris longus/long palmar, flexor pollicis longus.
- EXTENSION OF THE WRIST. Extensor digitorum. Extensor carpi radialis longus and brevis/Long and short radial extensor, extensor indicis/index finger extensor, extensor pollicis longus/long thumb extensor, extensor digiti minimi/extensor muscle of little finger.
- SUPINATION. Biceps brachii/Biceps. Brachioradialis (from pronation), supinator, abductor pollicis longus/long thumb abductor, extensor pollicis longus/long thumb extensor, extensor carpi radialis/radial extensor (sometimes).
- PRONATION. Pronator teres and quadratus. Brachioradialis (from supination), flexor carpi radialis/radial flexor, extensor carpi radialis longus/long radial extensor.
- RADIAL FLEXION/ABDUCTION OF THE WRIST. Extensor carpi radialis longus and brevis/Long and short radial extensor. Abductor pollicis longus/Long thumb abductor and extensor pollicis longus/long thumb extensor, flexor carpi radialis/radial flexor, flexor pollicis longus/long thumb flexor.

- CUBITAL FLEXION/ADDUCTION OF THE WRIST. Extensor carpi ulnaris/Ulnar extensor and flexor carpi ulnaris/ulnar flexor. Extensor digitorum.

HIP

- ABDUCTION. Gluteus medius. Gluteus minimus and maximus (superficial), tensor fasciae latae, sartorius, piriformis, obturator internus.
- ADDUCTION. Adductor magnus, longus and brevis/Great, long and short adductor. Gracilis, pectineus, iliopsoas, gluteus maximus, quadratus femoris, obturator externus, semitendinosus.
- FLEXION. Iliopsoas. Quadriceps (rectus femoris), sartorius, tensor fasciae latae, pectineus, gluteus minimus (and sometimes medius), adductor magnus, longus and brevis/great, long and short adductor, gracilis.
- EXTENSION. Gluteus maximus. Semimembranosus, semitendinosus, biceps femoris (long head), gluteus medius, adductor magnus/great adductor (rear), piriformis.
- EXTERNAL/LATERAL ROTATION. Gluteus maximus. Quadratus femoris, gluteus medius (rear), obturator internus, iliopsoas, biceps femoris (long head), adductor magnus/great adductor, sartorius, piriformis.
- INTERNAL/MEDIAL ROTATION. Semitendinosus, semimembranosus. Gluteus minimus, tensor fasciae latae, adductor magnus/great adductor (partially), pectineus (when the hip is abducted), gluteus medius (sometimes front fibers).

KNEE

- EXTENSION. Quadriceps. Gluteus maximus (superficial) and tensor fasciae latae.
- FLEXION. Semimembranosus, semitendinosus and biceps femoris. Gracilis, gastrocnemius, sartorius, popliteus, tensor fasciae latae (according to some studies).
- EXTERNAL ROTATION. Biceps femoris. Some help from the tensor fasciae latae.
- INTERNAL ROTATION. Semimembranosus and semitendinosus. Gracilis, popliteus, sartorius.

ANKLE AND FOOT

- DORSAL FLEXION. Tibialis anterior. Extensor digitorum longus/Long toe extensor, peroneus tertius, extensor hallucis longus.
- FLEXION. Gastrocnemius. Soleus, peroneus longus and brevis, flexor digitorum longus/long toe flexor, tibialis posterior, flexor hallucis longus.

APPENDIX 2

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

The following terms are necessary to understand the explanations given in this book.

Abduction: A movement that draws a limb away from the imaginary central plane dividing the body into two symmetrical parts. The term is generally used to refer to a movement that moves the arm away from the torso or one leg away from the other.

Adduction: A movement that brings a limb toward the imaginary central plane dividing the body into two symmetrical parts. The term is generally used to refer to a movement that moves the arm toward the torso or one leg toward the other.

Agonist (muscle): The muscle responsible for a movement.

Anatomical position: Standing position with the head straight and the legs slightly apart, arms to the side with palms facing forward.

Antagonist (muscle): The opposite muscle to that responsible for a movement.

Anterior area: Front

Articular mobility: The range of movement of a joint, limited by the impact of bones or muscles.

Atrophy: Loss of size in the tissues forming an organ, due to poor nutrition or digestive problems, resulting in a decrease in volume, weight, and functionality. In muscles, this is a direct consequence of a drop in or lack of physical activity.

Biomechanics: The science that studies the biological mechanics of living beings (see Mechanics).

Center of gravity: The imaginary point that represents the central point of the weight of a body or object around which all of the other parts are balanced.

Concentric/positive phase: The movement that contracts and shortens a muscle.

Curl: Flexion of a limb with the joint acting as a hinge. The term is normally used to refer to flexion of the arms and legs.

Distal area: Located away from the torso or point of origin.

Dumbbell: A metal bar with discs (or some other kind of weight) at the ends. Dumbbells are usually held in one hand.

Eccentric/negative phase: The movement that extends and elongates a muscle.

Endurance: Effort prolonged over time.

Exercise: Any voluntary physical activity intended to work the muscles. In this case, an exercise consists of one or more sets.

Exhalation: Expelling air from the lungs, blowing.

Extension: The act of straightening out a bent joint.

Fibula: The outer and narrower of two bones of the human lower leg, extending from the knee to the ankle.

Flexibility: The quality of being flexible, with the ability to bend.

Flexion: The action and effect of bending the body or a limb. From the anatomical position, it is the action of bringing all of the front parts of the body closer together, except for the legs, for which this is a backwards movement.

Force: Capacity to move a weight or overcome resistance. $\text{Force} = \text{mass} \times \text{acceleration}$.

Horizontal plane: see Transverse plane.

Hyperextension: Extension beyond the anatomical position.

Hypertrophy: Increase in the volume of an organ or growth in the size of a muscle.

Inhalation: Breathing air into the lungs.

Intensity: The percentage of effort in relation to the maximum force applied to specific muscle work. This term may also refer to any variable that makes an exercise quantitatively more difficult.

Isometric: A muscle contraction that fixes and immobilizes a joint and increases tone.

Isotonic: A movement that maintains the same muscle tone throughout. This is impossible in sports. Often confused with anisometric/dynamic.

Joint: The point at which one bone is joined to another. Most joints move.

Kyphosis: Outward curvature and rounding of the upper back.

Lateral area: Located away from the mid-sagittal plane.

Longitudinal plane: Perpendicular to the ground (i.e., the plane that divides the body into front and back).

Lordosis: Inward curvature of the lumbar and cervical regions.

Mass: The physical scale that expresses the amount of matter contained in a body. The international unit of mass is the kilogram (kg). Mass is sometimes confused with weight, although this is acceptable in everyday language.

Maximum force: Total force required for a single repetition.

Mechanics: The science that studies the equilibrium and movement of bodies subjected to forces (see Biomechanics).

Medial area: Close to the mid-sagittal plane.

Muscle fiber: The muscle cells capable of contraction and elongation.

Muscle failure: The point in a set where local muscle exhaustion is reached, making it impossible to complete another full repetition with proper technique.

Neutral position: Halfway between pronation and supination. It is the natural standing position with the palms of the hands facing the thighs.

NMR/Nuclear magnetic resonance: A technique for studying muscles using harmless waves to view the contrasting involvement of each muscle in an exercise.

Posterior area: Rear, back.

Press: A movement involving a push or extension of the limb concerned.

Pronation: The movement of the forearm that turns the hand inward so that the back is visible. This is the position the hand takes when you pick an object up off a table.

Proximal area: Close to the torso or point of origin.

Reflex: An involuntary movement made in response to a stimulus.

Repetition (rep): A complete movement involving contraction and extension, consisting of a concentric and eccentric (positive and negative) phase.

Rotation: Twist or turn.

Sagittal plane: The plane that is perpendicular to the longitudinal and transverse planes. It divides the body into two almost symmetrical halves, right and left.

Set: Group of one or more continuous repetitions of a movement in a given exercise until a rest is taken.

Smith machine: A versatile apparatus including a weighted bar that moves within guide rails along the sides. The weights used are normally discs.

Superset: A set consisting of two exercises or one exercise using different weights on some repetitions.

Supination: The movement of the forearm that turns the hand outwards so that the palm is up. This is the movement used to pick up food and place it in the mouth.

Synergist (muscle): A muscle that moves in concert with others to complete the same action.

Transverse plane: The plane that is perpendicular to the longitudinal plane, dividing the body into upper and lower halves.

Vertical plane: See Longitudinal plane.

Weight: The force with which the earth attracts a body. In this book, the term “weight” is used to refer to “mass” because it is more widely used and will not confuse the reader.

EZ bar: An anatomically designed bar with angles to ensure a comfortable grip for the hands.

APPENDIX 3

TABLE OF PERCENTAGES AND REPETITIONS

The following table will allow you to calculate the approximate number of repetitions you can do moderately (slowly) with strict technique before reaching muscle failure.

Example:

Let us assume that the maximum weight at which we can do a single, slow, full repetition of the Bench Press with good technique is 100 kg (approx. 220 lb.). The 80% mark for the Bench Press would therefore be 80 kg (approx. 176 lb.). Looking this up in the table, we find that we could do between 6 and 7 moderately slow repetitions at this weight with good technique.

The table has three uses:

1. As it is not always possible, or advisable, to do a maximum strength test to find out how much weight we can manage in each case (imagine such a test with a hazardous exercise like the Deadlift), the table shows that we should do 6 or 7 moderately slow, strict repetitions (i.e., with good technique).
2. This also works the other way around. If we can do 6 or 7 repetitions before local muscle failure, we know that the weight used is 80% of the maximum (100%).
3. Quick calculation of the approximate percentage for a given weight. For example, 65% of 75 kg is 56.25 kg (124 lb.).

The table is only approximate, as it does not take into account the specific muscle insertions of each individual (“biomechanical advantage”), motivation, ergogenic (external) aids, fatigue, and so on. Also, the number of repetitions suggested becomes less accurate below a certain threshold, around 65%.

Table for calculating weight based on the percentage required													
Kg	40%	45%	50%	55%	60%	65%	70%	75%	80%	85%	90%	95%	100%
5	2	2,25	2,5	2,75	3	3,25	3,5	3,75	4	4,25	4,5	4,75	5
10	4	4,50	5,0	5,50	6	6,50	7,0	7,50	8	8,50	9,0	9,50	10
15	6	6,75	7,5	8,25	9	9,75	10,5	11,25	12	12,75	13,5	14,25	15
20	8	9,00	10,0	11,00	12	13,00	14,0	15,00	16	17,00	18,0	19,00	20
25	10	11,25	12,5	13,75	15	16,25	17,5	18,75	20	21,25	22,5	23,75	25
30	12	13,50	15,0	16,50	18	19,50	21,0	22,50	24	25,50	27,0	28,50	30
35	14	15,75	17,5	19,25	21	22,75	24,5	26,25	28	29,75	31,5	33,25	35
40	16	18,00	20,0	22,00	24	26,00	28,0	30,00	32	34,00	36,0	38,00	40
45	18	20,25	22,5	24,75	27	29,25	31,5	33,75	36	38,25	40,5	42,75	45
50	20	22,50	25,0	27,50	30	32,50	35,0	37,50	40	42,50	45,0	47,50	50
55	22	24,75	27,5	30,25	33	35,75	38,5	41,25	44	46,75	49,5	52,25	55
60	24	27,00	30,0	33,00	36	39,00	42,0	45,00	48	51,00	54,0	57,00	60

Kg	40%	45%	50%	55%	60%	65%	70%	75%	80%	85%	90%	95%	100%
65	26	29,25	32,5	35,75	39	42,25	45,5	48,75	52	55,25	58,5	61,75	65
70	28	31,50	35,0	38,50	42	45,50	49,0	52,50	56	59,50	63,0	66,50	70
75	30	33,75	37,5	41,25	45	48,75	52,5	56,25	60	63,75	67,5	71,25	75
80	32	36,00	40,0	44,00	48	52,00	56,0	60,00	64	68,00	72,0	76,00	80
85	34	38,25	42,5	46,75	51	55,25	59,5	63,75	68	72,25	76,5	80,75	85
90	36	40,50	45,0	49,50	54	58,50	63,0	67,50	72	76,50	81,0	85,50	90
95	38	42,75	47,5	52,25	57	61,75	66,5	71,25	76	80,75	85,5	90,25	95
100	40	45,00	50,0	55,00	60	65,00	70,0	75,00	80	85,00	90,0	95,00	100
105	42	47,25	52,5	57,75	63	68,25	73,5	78,75	84	89,25	94,5	99,75	105
110	44	49,50	55,0	60,50	66	71,50	77,0	82,50	88	93,50	99,0	104,50	110
115	46	51,75	57,5	63,25	69	74,75	80,5	86,25	92	97,75	103,5	109,25	115
120	48	54,00	60,0	66,00	72	78,00	84,0	90,00	96	102,00	108,0	114,00	120
125	50	56,25	62,5	68,75	75	81,25	87,5	93,75	100	106,25	112,5	118,75	125
130	52	58,50	65,0	71,50	78	84,50	91,0	97,50	104	110,50	117,0	123,50	130
135	54	60,75	67,5	74,25	81	87,75	94,5	101,25	108	114,75	121,5	128,25	135
140	56	63,00	70,0	77,00	84	91,00	98,0	105,00	112	119,00	126,0	133,00	140
145	58	65,25	72,5	79,75	87	94,25	101,5	108,75	116	123,25	130,5	137,75	145
150	60	67,50	75,0	82,50	90	97,50	105,0	112,50	120	127,50	135,0	142,50	150
155	62	69,75	77,5	85,25	93	100,75	108,5	116,25	124	131,75	139,5	147,25	155
160	64	72,00	80,0	88,00	96	104,00	112,0	120,00	128	136,00	144,0	152,00	160
165	66	74,25	82,5	90,75	99	107,25	115,5	123,75	132	140,25	148,5	156,75	165
170	68	76,50	85,0	93,50	102	110,50	119,0	127,50	136	144,50	153,0	161,50	170
175	70	78,75	87,5	96,25	105	113,75	122,5	131,25	140	148,75	157,5	166,25	175
180	72	81,00	90,0	99,00	108	117,00	126,0	135,00	144	153,00	162,0	171,00	180
185	74	83,25	92,5	101,75	111	120,25	129,5	138,75	148	157,25	166,5	175,75	185
190	76	85,50	95,0	104,50	114	123,50	133,0	142,50	152	161,50	171,0	180,50	190
195	78	87,75	97,5	107,25	117	126,75	136,5	146,25	156	165,75	175,5	185,25	195
200	80	90,00	100,0	110,00	120	130,00	140,0	150,00	160	170,00	180,0	190,00	200
205	82	92,25	102,5	112,75	123	133,25	143,5	153,75	164	174,25	184,5	194,75	205
210	84	94,50	105,0	115,50	126	136,50	147,0	157,50	168	178,50	189,0	199,50	210
215	86	96,75	107,5	118,25	129	139,75	150,5	161,25	172	182,75	193,5	204,25	215
220	88	99,00	110,0	121,00	132	143,00	154,0	165,00	176	187,00	198,0	209,00	220
225	90	101,25	112,5	123,75	135	146,25	157,5	168,75	180	191,25	202,5	213,75	225
230	92	103,50	115,0	126,50	138	149,50	161,0	172,50	184	195,50	207,0	218,50	230
235	94	105,75	117,5	129,25	141	152,75	164,5	176,25	188	199,75	211,5	223,25	235
240	96	108,00	120,0	132,00	144	156,00	168,0	180,00	192	204,00	216,0	228,00	240
245	98	110,25	122,5	134,75	147	159,25	171,5	183,75	196	208,25	220,5	232,75	245
250	100	112,50	125,0	137,50	150	162,50	175,0	187,50	200	212,50	225,0	237,50	250
255	102	114,75	127,5	140,25	153	165,75	178,5	191,25	204	216,75	229,5	242,25	255
260	104	117,00	130,0	143,00	156	169,00	182,0	195,00	208	221,00	234,0	247,00	260
265	106	119,25	132,5	145,75	159	172,25	185,5	198,75	212	225,25	238,5	251,75	265
270	108	121,50	135,0	148,50	162	175,50	189,0	202,50	216	229,50	243,0	256,50	270
	> 30	> 30	25-21	20-17	16-15	14-12	11-10	9-8	7-6	5-4	3-2	2-1	1
Maximum number of slow repetitions													O.M.E.

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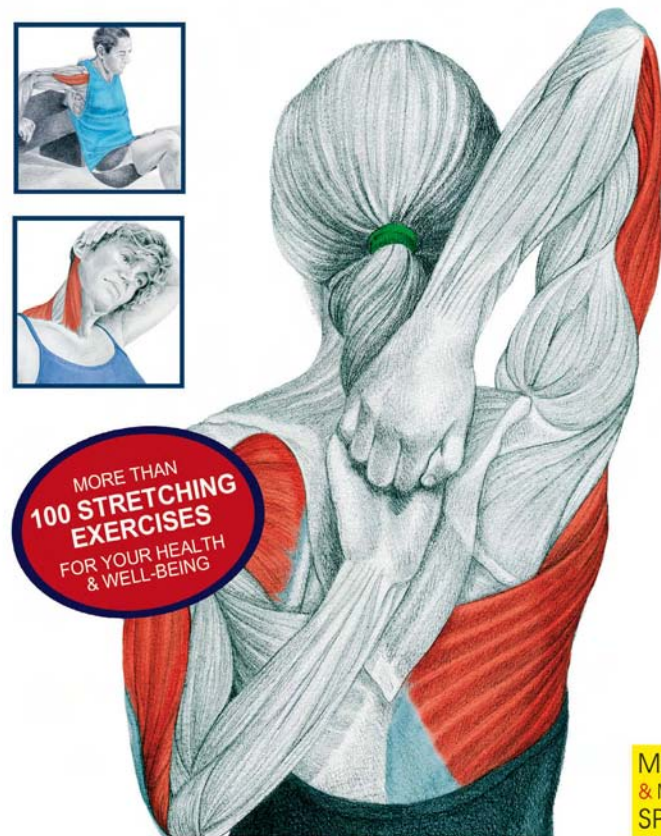
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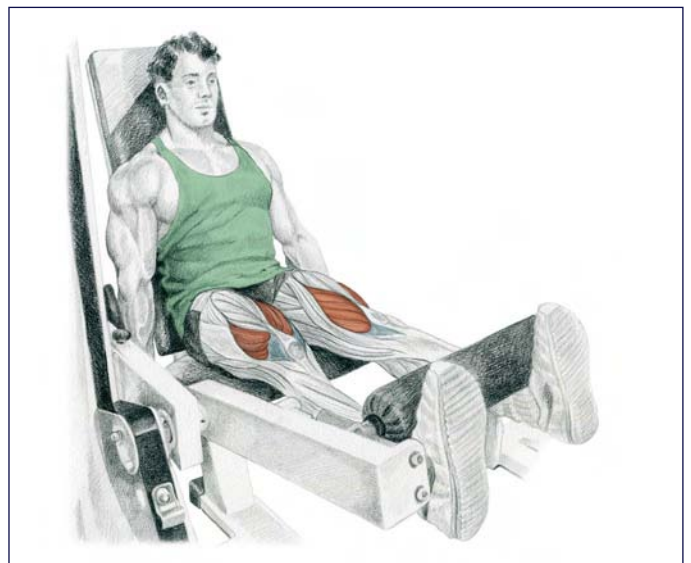
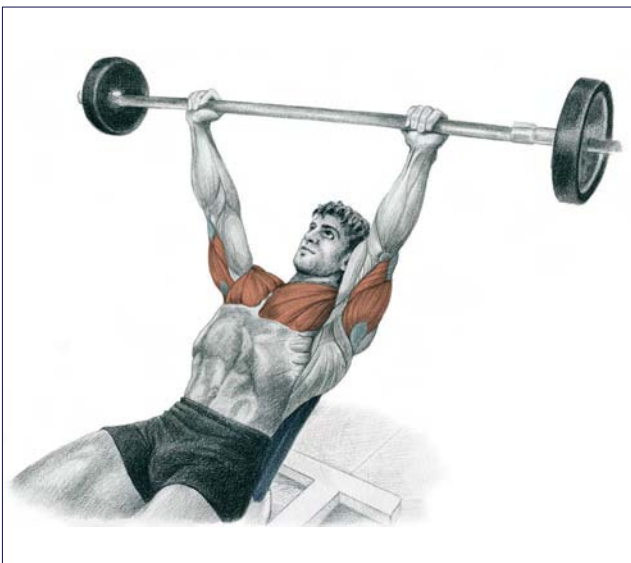
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This book offers a general theory of muscle stretching. Anatomical illustrations explain the different muscle groups involved in the exercises. Furthermore, each exercise includes information about the movement one needs to perform, the posture that one must adopt, common mistakes that should be avoided, the principal and secondary muscles worked with this exercise, as well as a series of very useful tips and advice.

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- After reading this book, any athlete, and even those who are not athletes, will realize how regular stretching can improve their physical body shape and their quality of life.

This Encyclopedia is intended as a work of reference both for the beginner and the advanced athlete, for the enthusiast or the fitness professional, whatever the user's level.

This book describes over 440 exercises with comments and illustrations based on empirical know-how and scientific research. It includes all of the basic and numerous less common exercises with comments and anatomic illustrations. It is thus an authentic encyclopedia of exercises and biomechanical information, but the language used is easily comprehensible at all times.



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