Foundations of Weight Training: Part 2

* Consult with your doctor before embarking on any fitness program.

Part Two of "Foundations of Weight Training" focuses on compound exercises that target the larger muscles of the upper torso: the back, the chest, and the shoulders. Compound exercises work multiple muscle groups at the same time. A good example of a compound exercise is the chest press. This exercise targets not only the chest, but also works the triceps and shoulders simultaneously.

A balanced training program must include at least one exercise targeting each of the areas of the upper torso. Do each exercise 12-15 repetitions to complete one set, rest 30-45 seconds, and then repeat the set. Note: any two, equally weighted objects can be substituted for dumbbells; milk jugs filled with liquid make excellent dumbbell substitutes.

1) Back

The bent over row is a compound exercise that primarily strengthens the muscles of the back, also affecting the shoulders and biceps.

Bent over row with dumbbells

1) Grab the dumbbells with palms facing in and then pack the shoulders (See *Foundations: Part One*).
2) Tighten up the abdominals and then bend forward from the waist, keeping the back straight, allowing the knees to bend slightly. This is the starting position of the exercise. Inhale.
3) To execute the row, pull the dumbbells back to the waist with the elbows close to the body while exhaling. Make sure that you squeeze the shoulder blades together at the end of the pulling movement. Pause.
4) Slowly return dumbbells to the starting position, keeping the shoulders packed (square).

Tips:

- Keep back straight.
- Make sure the shoulders do not droop forward.
- Keep glutes lifted.
- Keep abdominals contracted throughout.

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2) Lower back

The back extension specifically targets the muscles that run along the lower spine. The plank and the bird dog are two other exercises that work the muscles of the lower back. See Part One for these exercises.

Back extension

1) Lie on a mat, face down, with arms extended out from the shoulders along the floor. Inhale.
2) Slowly lift the torso off the floor and exhale, maintaining the alignment of the arms.
3) Pause one count, and then return slowly to the starting position.

Tip:

- Focus on lifting only the upper torso. Keep legs on the ground.
- Limit range of motion of the upper torso to limit compressive forces on the lower spine.

3) Chest

The chest press is the most important exercise for the development of the anterior muscles of the torso. This exercise also engages the shoulders and the triceps.

Chest press with dumbbells

1) Grasp two dumbbells and lay face up (supine) on the floor or a bench. Bend the knees with the feet flat, if on the floor.
2) Hold dumbbells above the body with hands facing forward and elbows extended; hands should level with the chin. Now pack the shoulders (See *Foundations: Part One*). This is the starting position.
3) Slowly lower dumbbells to mid-chest and inhale, moving the dumbbells just outside of the armpits. Elbows should flare out slightly.

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4) Exhale and press the dumbbells to the starting position. Repeat.
5) When set is completed, lower dumbbells and sit up.

Tips:

- Keep the shoulder blades on the floor at all times, with a firm core.
- Pay special attention to the alignment of the lower back. Do not arch the lower back.

4) Shoulders

Keep the core engaged. This exercise also works the triceps.

Shoulder press

1) Grab the dumbbells with palms facing forward. Pack shoulders (see *Foundations: Part* One).
2) Carefully bring dumbbells up to starting position so that the hands are shoulder width; the upper arm will be almost parallel with the floor. Inhale.
3) Exhale and press the dumbbells up until elbows are straight. Back must remain neutral during this movement.
4) Inhale and slowly bring dumbbells back to the starting position.

Tips:

- Maintain a rigid torso throughout this exercise. Do not arch back.
- Keep elbows slightly in front of body to maintain torso alignment.
- Keep knees loose, not locked.
- This exercise can also be executed in a seated position.
- Dumbbells should come slightly together during the upward press. Do not bang the dumbbells together.

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