

Men's Fitness
GUIDE

Ultimate Training Bible

- The best exercises to burn fat and build lean muscle
- Simple advice for creating your own workout plan
- For beginners and experts – at home and in the gym

82

exercises shown in detail for your best ever body



Detailed form guides



Extra training tips



Workout plans explained



Expert advice



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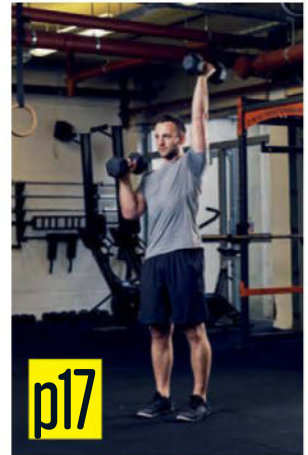
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Editor's letter

Hello! And welcome to the guide that's going to change your lifting life for the better. We're teach-a-man-to-fish types here at *MF*, which means that as well as assembling every key dumbbell and barbell move you need to build muscle, burn fat, proof your body against injury and the effect of ageing, impress potential romantic partners and look good naked, this guide offers advice on how to use them. That might mean assembling them into your own bespoke workout (which we explain how to do on p60), but it could also mean improving the training you're already doing, filling in gaps with a sprinkling of new moves, or just finding a fun new way to train – which, after all, is half the battle...



Joel Snape Editor
@JoelSnape



Introduction

The *MF Ultimate Training Bible* is divided into two sections, based on two key pieces of kit: dumbbells and a barbell. This is partly for ease of browsing, but also for another good reason: you'll get full-body gains from using both pieces of kit, but the benefits will differ slightly. That's why we recommend reading the introduction to each section first, including the FAQs, to make sure you are not missing out on any benefits or top injury-prevention tips. For more

detail, read the 'Why' section included with each move, for advice on incorporating it into what you already do, or for mini-challenges to try.

As you look through the guide, you'll notice we haven't suggested specific workout plans. Instead, from p60, we explain the key variables in building your own plans, so you can create endless programmes of your own design, using a selection of the moves detailed in each workout section, for the ultimate personalised workout.

Five ways to smash every session

1

Go in with a plan. It's not always going to work perfectly, but just having your exercises, sets and reps figured out in advance will eliminate dithering and keep you focused from the start. Turn up, warm up and get it done.

2

Keep track of your personal bests. Having a note of your records in a few key lifts (bench press, squat, deadlift, pull-up) will give you something to aim for, and remind you that you're making progress.

3

Switch your phone off. It's only an hour – you don't need to check your messages and you'll go back to the office more productive after a good session. If you need it for the tunes, put it on airplane mode.

4

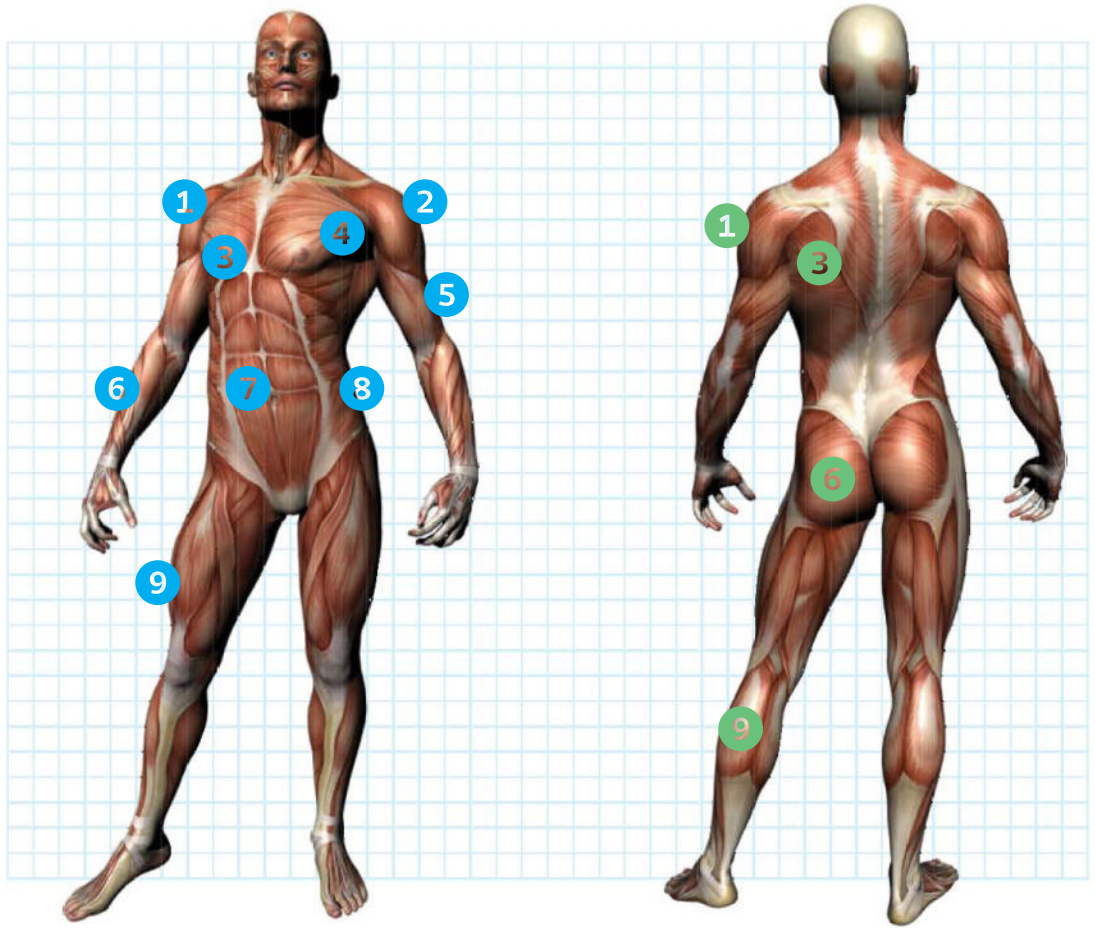
Find a fast warm-up you like. Treadmills are boring and won't get your system firing. Instead, warm up with some skipping, sprinting, band pull-aparts and box jumps. Do it regularly and it'll switch your brain to training mode.

5

Don't expect every session to be a belter. Maybe only one in five will be. But focus on putting in a solid effort every time, and you're more likely to experience great sessions – and get the results you are after.



Introduction



Know your muscles

Anterior (front of body) muscles

- 1** Anterior deltoid (front shoulder)
- 2** Medial deltoid (middle shoulder)
- 3** Pectoralis major
- 4** Pectoralis minor (under pec major)
- 5** Biceps
- 6** Brachioradialis
- 7** Rectus abdominis (the six-pack muscle)
- 8** Obliques
- 9** Quads

Posterior (back of body) muscles

- 1** Posterior deltoid (rear shoulder)
- 2** Trapezius (traps)
- 3** Rhomboids
- 4** Latissimus dorsi (lats)
- 5** Triceps
- 6** Gluteus maximus
- 7** Gluteus medius
- 8** Hamstrings
- 9** Calves



How to use this guide

1

Check the form guides (starting on p14) – these will help you do each move as effectively as you can, as well as giving advice and variations on the move that you might not have considered. Every move you learn is a new weapon in your workout arsenal, so when you're in the gym you'll have a huge array of moves at your disposal. The 'Why' sections explain which muscles each move is most effective for, as well as advanced strategies on how to use them for specific goals like strength, hypertrophy or fat loss.

2

Once you've got to grips with the moves, use the Workouts section, from page 60, to learn how to create your own training plans. Here, you'll learn about sets, reps, rest periods and tempo, and will be able to put together training plans based on your own current level of fitness, as well as being able to choose the exercises you want to focus on from the form guides. This means you can create either full-body workouts, or a series of workouts that each have a specific focus, for example, upper body, shoulders and back, or legs.

3

If you've hit a plateau – whether because the moves you're doing aren't working or because you're getting bored with training – use this guide as inspiration to shift things up. Incorporate new accessory moves into your lifting, learn new skills like the Olympic lifts, or just shift your focus entirely – this guide is great if you usually focus on cardio, as you can take a couple of months off to work on strength instead. Remember, the most effective training regime is the one you look forward to doing.

Exercise icons

Here's what they mean

Next to each exercise, you'll see a set of five icons. The brightly coloured ones apply to the move. Here's what each one of the five icons stands for.



Compound move

These hit multiple muscle groups, making them great bang-for-your-buck moves.



Isolation move

These are better for building a specific muscle or isolating a weakness.



Stability move

More useful for injury prevention than building muscle. Keep good form.



Explosive move

A move that builds power and fast-twitch muscle – ideal for sportsmen.



Watch your form

A move that's tricky to master or risky if it's done wrong. Keep your focus.





DUMBBELLS

Use this simple bit of kit to build solid foundations

Exercises outlined in this chapter

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Simple, effective, classic. Almost every man starts his fitness journey with a set of dumbbells – and for good reason: small enough to buy and tuck underneath your bed or sofa, they are also non-threatening to handle and easy to use, as well as being massively versatile.

But while they may be beginner-friendly, that doesn't mean they're basic. For the man with a bit of training knowledge, they offer much more than endless cheat curls. By incorporating smart training techniques, like tempo, time under tension or technical drop sets, you can use dumbbells to build just as much muscle as more fashionable fitness kit – and often more efficiently. And, of course, if they're tucked under your bed, you're never far from your next workout.



Dumbbell FAQ

WHAT ARE DUMBBELLS BEST FOR?

Building muscle. The nature of dumbbells means they're well suited to isolation movements (like, yes, the biceps curl) which, used in tandem with big, compound moves, can maximise your muscle gains. "Technical" drop sets, where you hit failure on a move, then shift to an easier variation rather than reducing the weight, are one good example: switching from biceps curls to hammer curls, or from overhead presses to push presses, will push your muscles to their limit.

WHAT AREN'T THEY SO GOOD FOR?

Building strength. Because you are forced to hold them in your hands rather than, say, balancing them across your back, you'll be limited by your grip strength on lower-body moves, such as the back squat. Of course, on the flipside, they're a great way to work on your grip endurance alongside other qualities.

HOW HEAVY DO I NEED TO GO?

If you're buying a set for the home, 20kg is more than enough: by using tricks like variable tempo (the speed at which you lift) you will be able to put your muscles under the stress they need to grow, even if you're already fairly strong. Checking out a new gym? Heavier is always better: you're unlikely to ever graduate to chest pressing a set of 60kg DBs, but they might come in handy for one-arm rows if you get strong enough.



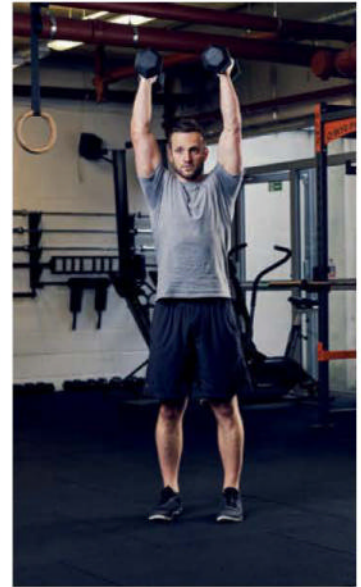
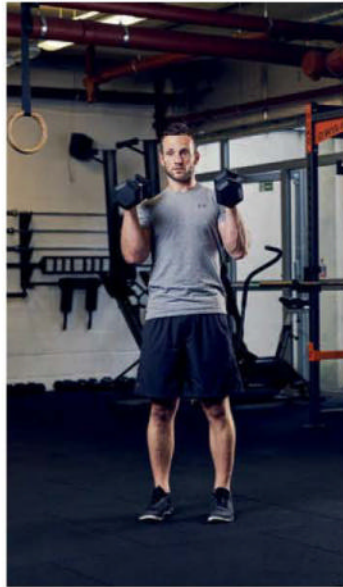
Overhead press



Primary target muscles **Shoulders** Secondary target muscles **Triceps**

WHY This classic shoulder-builder is slightly easier on your rotator cuffs (the small stabilising muscles around the shoulders) with a set of dumbbells, because your hands can rotate naturally. The 'military' version of this (done with your feet together, as if you were on parade) is slightly tougher on your core.

HOW With your feet shoulder-width apart, hold a dumbbell in each hand at shoulder height. Keep your chest upright and your core muscles braced. Press the weights directly upwards, keeping your core braced, until your arms are extended overhead. Lower and repeat.



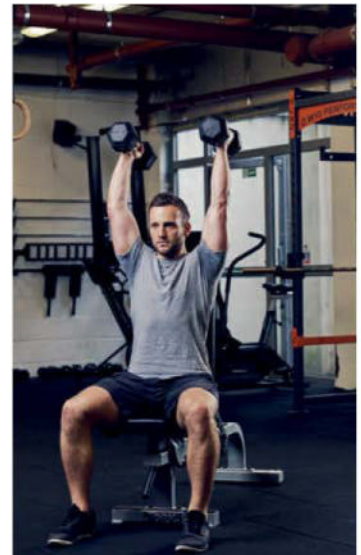
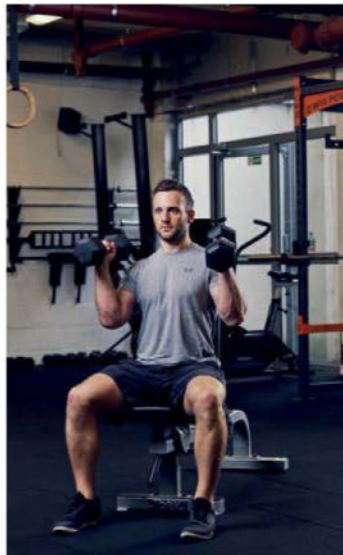
Seated overhead press



Primary target muscles **Shoulders** Secondary target muscles **Triceps**

WHY The seated version of the overhead press takes your legs completely out of the equation, forcing you to keep the form strict and slightly reducing the focus on your core, so your shoulders get more of a hit.

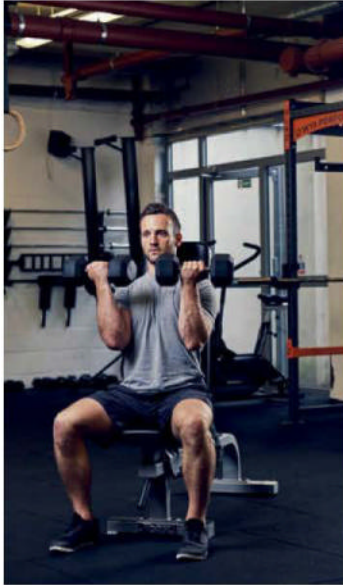
HOW Sit with your back against the upright part of a bench, holding a pair of dumbbells at your shoulders. Press them slowly overhead, allowing your arms to rotate naturally. Pause at the top, then lower under control.





Arnold press

Primary target muscles **Shoulders**



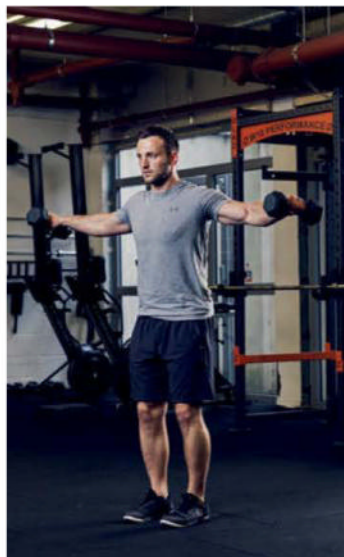
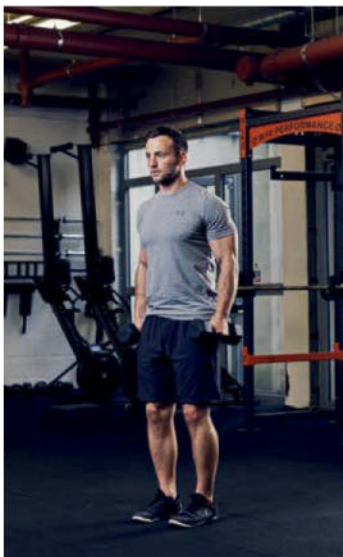
WHY This variation of the overhead press - popularised by the Governor himself - hits all three heads of the deltoids, adding thickness and width to your shoulders. It will also stabilise your shoulder joints, for use in bigger lifts.

HOW Start at the top position of a biceps curl, with your elbows by your torso. Allow your palms to rotate as you press the dumbbells overhead, finishing with your palms facing forwards. Reverse the movement as you lower the dumbbells.



Lateral raise

Primary target muscles **Middle shoulders**



WHY This isolation move shifts all the focus to your lateral deltoids, which move your arms away from your body. To make sure they're working their hardest, angle your hands so your pinkies are slightly higher than your thumbs.

HOW Stand tall with your abs braced and feet close but not together, holding a light dumbbell in each hand by your sides, with your palms facing one another. Keeping a slight bend in your elbows, raise the weights out to the sides, making sure you use your muscles and not momentum. Stop just below shoulder height, then lower.

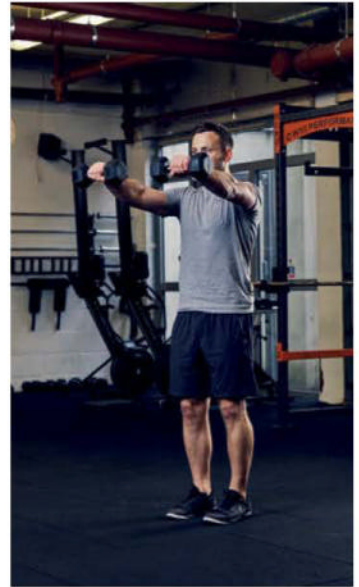
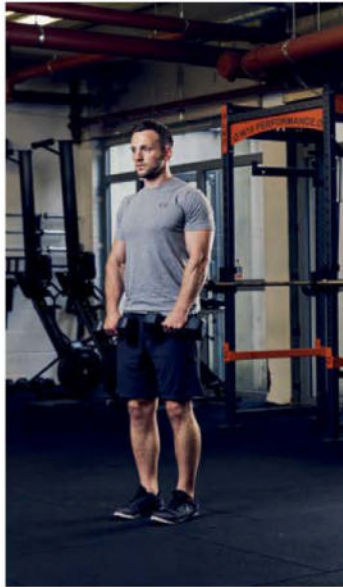
Front raise

Primary target muscles **Front shoulders**



WHY This move targets the anterior delts, which is why many lifters use it in conjunction with the lateral raise to build bigger shoulders.

HOW Stand tall with your abs braced and feet apart, holding a light dumbbell in each hand by your sides, with your palms facing one another. Keeping a slight bend in your elbows, raise the weights in front of you using your muscles and not momentum. Stop at shoulder height, pause for a second, then slowly return to the start.



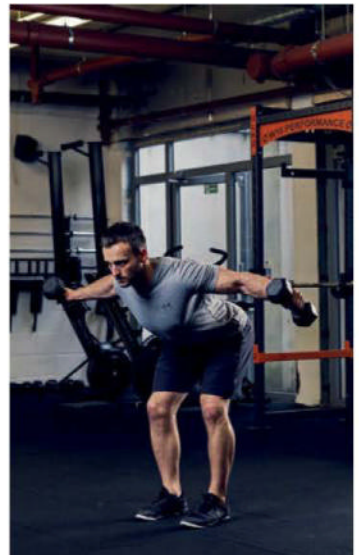
Reverse flye

Primary target muscles **Rear shoulders**



WHY This move targets your rear delts, while building stability through your shoulder region and rotator cuffs. Use it in tandem with lateral or front raises, for a shoulder-building superset.

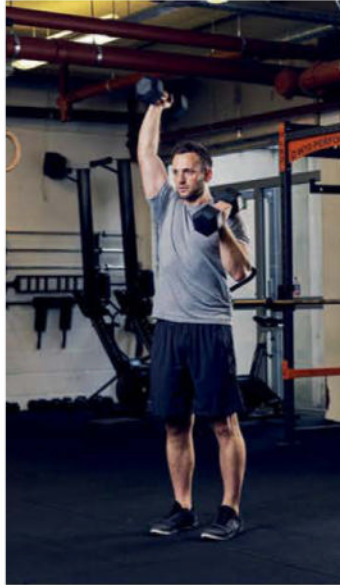
HOW Leaning forwards at the hips with a weight in each hand, keep your back flat and bring the weights upwards as if you were spreading your wings, aiming to bring your shoulder blades together at the top of the move.





Alternating press

Primary target muscles **Shoulders** Secondary target muscles **Core**



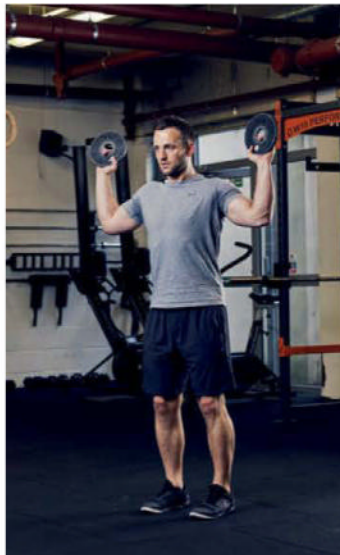
WHY This move targets your shoulders, while also forcing your core to work as you stabilise the weight. Because you're pressing one dumbbell at a time, you should also be able to handle slightly more weight in each hand.

HOW Stand tall with your chest up and core braced, holding a pair of dumbbells at shoulder height. Press one overhead, pause and lower, then press the other.



Cuban press

Primary target muscles **Shoulders** Secondary target muscles **Traps**



WHY This move, which combines an upright row, external shoulder rotation and press, will strengthen your rotator cuffs, making you stronger and less injury-prone in other pressing variations. Do it for recovery on off days.

HOW Hold a set of light dumbbells or weight plates by your sides, palms facing behind you. Raise your arms to the sides until your elbows are bent at 90° and the weights are hanging straight down. Keeping your upper arms horizontal, rotate your arms until your hands point up. Press the weights directly overhead. Reverse the movement back to the start.

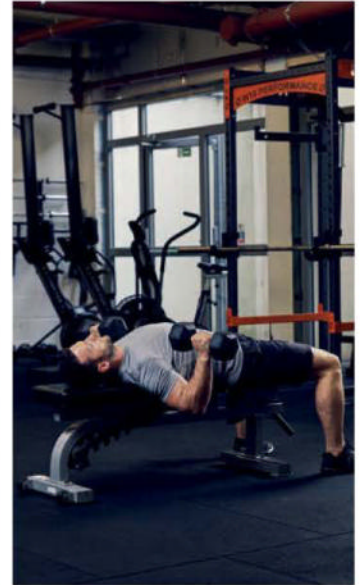
Bench press



Primary target muscles **Chest** Secondary target muscles **Triceps**

WHY Using dumbbells for this classic chest-builder emphasises your pecs more than the barbell version, because the dumbbells move slightly inwards throughout the rep and also go through a greater range of motion.

HOW Lie on a bench with your feet on the floor directly underneath your knees. Hold the dumbbells above your chest, then lower them to your chest. Drive your feet hard into the floor and push the dumbbells back strongly to the start position.



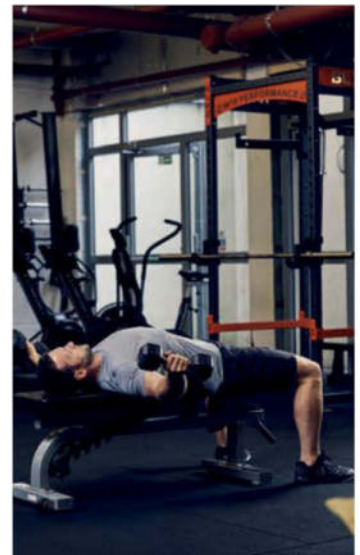
Chest flye



Primary target muscles **Chest**

WHY Because your pecs' primary role is to move your arms inwards, this move puts much more emphasis on them than pressing variations, even though you'll have to do it with much lighter weights. For best results, superset a press and a flye together.

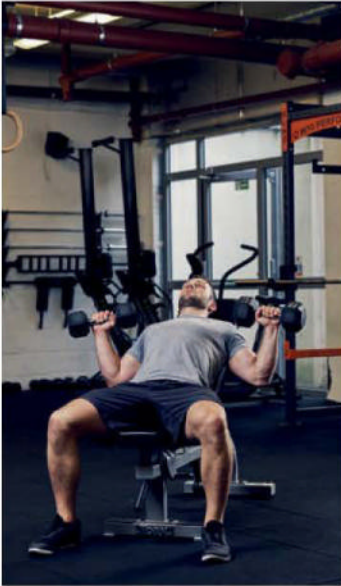
HOW Lie on a flat bench holding a dumbbell in each hand above your chest, with your palms facing each other. Keeping a slight bend in your elbows, slowly lower the weights to the sides as far as is comfortable. Squeeze your chest to reverse the movement and raise the weights back to the top.





Incline bench press

Primary target muscles **Chest** Secondary target muscles **Shoulders**



WHY This variation of the flat bench puts less stress on the pecs and rotator cuffs. It'll also give your shoulders some work.

HOW Lie on a bench set at an angle, holding a dumbbell in each hand at chest level. Keep your feet flat on the floor and your back against the bench. Press the weight directly above your head, but don't lock out your elbows at the top. Slowly lower the weights back to chest level.



Decline bench press

Primary target muscles **Chest** Secondary target muscles **Triceps**



WHY This bench variation targets your lower chest better than other versions, which will help to fix imbalances and build a well-rounded chest. It also takes your shoulders out of the equation, putting more emphasis on your chest.

HOW Lie on a bench set at an angle (if your gym doesn't have a decline bench, prop a weight plate under a regular bench), holding a dumbbell in each hand at chest-level. Keep your feet flat on the floor and your back against the bench. Press the weight over your head but don't lock out your elbows at the top. Slowly lower the weights back to chest level.

Bent-over row



Primary target muscles **Upper back** Secondary target muscles **Traps**

WHY This move will build all the muscles of your back, creating stability in your shoulder region, improving your posture and balancing out all the pressing work you're doing. The dumbbell variation allows your wrists and shoulder to move more freely than the barbell version, improving your range of motion.

HOW Stand with your core braced, your back straight and your shoulder blades retracted, holding a set of dumbbells, then bend your knees slightly and lean forwards from the hips. Pull the dumbbells up to just below chest level. Pause, then lower under control.



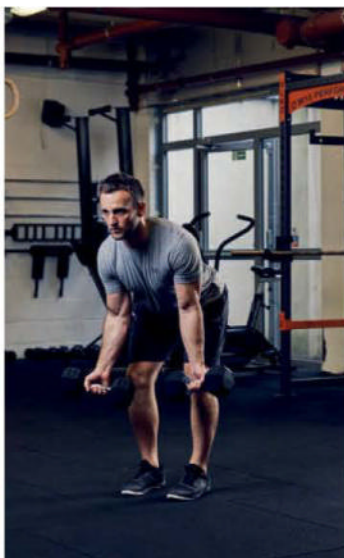
Reverse-grip bent-over row



Primary target muscles **Upper back** Secondary target muscles **Biceps**

WHY This variation puts extra emphasis on your biceps, making it ideal for adding some extra arm size while you work your back.

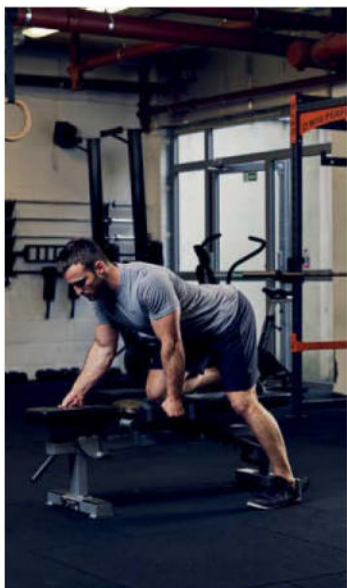
HOW Stand with your core braced, your back straight and your shoulder blades retracted, holding a set of dumbbells with your palms facing away from you, then bend your knees slightly and lean forwards from the hips. Pull the dumbbells up to just below chest level. Pause, then lower under control.





Single-arm row

Primary target muscles **Back** Secondary target muscles **Forearms**



WHY This isolation move works one side of your body at a time, allowing you to shift more weight as you focus on one arm.

HOW Set up with one knee resting on a bench and the other foot on the floor, leaning forwards slightly and holding a dumbbell in one hand. Row the dumbbell towards your hip, hold for a brief count, then lower.



Shrug

Primary target muscles **Traps** Secondary target muscles **Shoulders**



WHY As well as being one of the only moves that directly targets the trapezius muscles, the shrug is a rare excuse to use some of your gym's heaviest dumbbells. Done without straps, it'll also give you a grip workout.

HOW Hold a set of heavy dumbbells, with your palms facing your sides. Keeping your core braced, chest up and a natural arch in your back, shrug your shoulders up towards your ears, keeping your arms straight. Hold at the top briefly, then lower back to the start position.

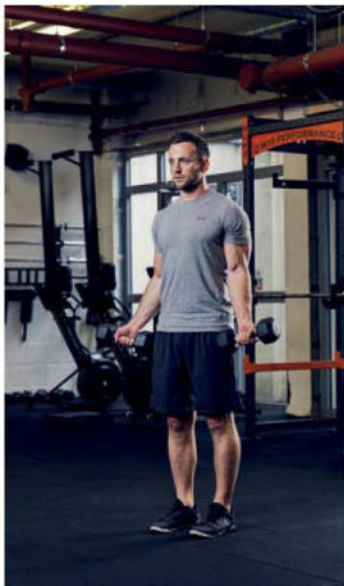
Biceps curl

Primary target muscles **Biceps**



WHY It's the classic. Done correctly, a slow, controlled biceps curl is one of the best ways to put your biceps under the extended tension needed for growth. For best results, don't let the tension off your muscles at any point during the move.

HOW Stand with your shoulders back and your feet close together, holding a pair of dumbbells with your palms facing forwards and hands just outside your hips. Keeping your elbows tucked into your sides, curl the dumbbells up towards your chest, stopping just before your forearms reach vertical. Lower under control to return to the start position.



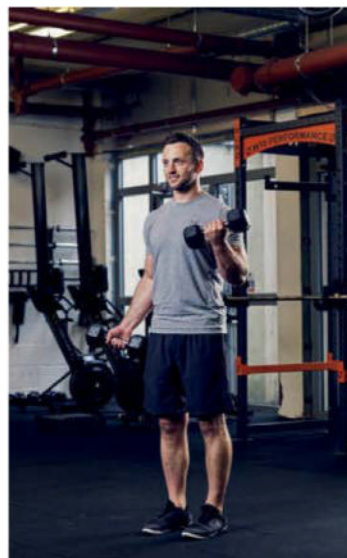
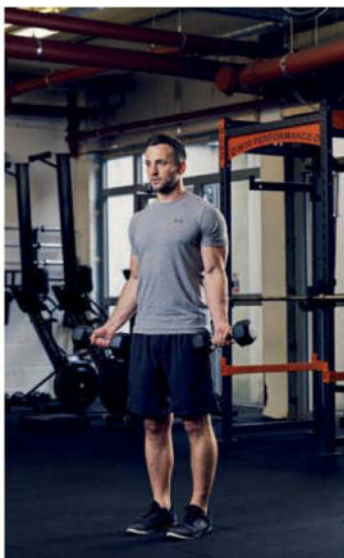
Alternating biceps curl

Primary target muscles **Biceps**



WHY Done at the end of a set of biceps curls, these can let you squeeze out a few extra reps, increasing the damage to the muscle and the growth you'll see afterwards. Using them on their own is less advisable, because they'll give your biceps too long to rest between reps.

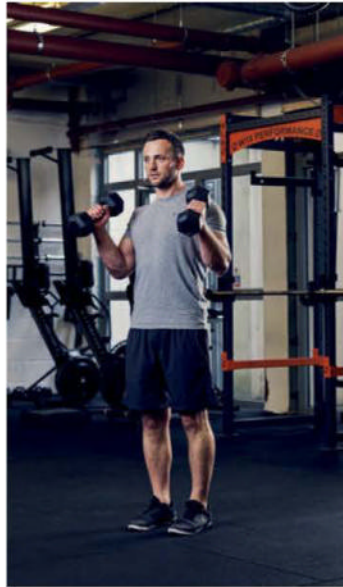
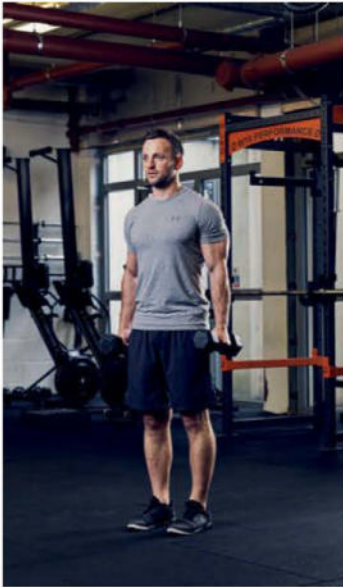
HOW Stand tall with your shoulders back and feet close together, holding a pair of dumbbells with your palms facing forwards. Keeping your elbows tucked into your sides, curl one dumbbell up towards your chest, then lower it and raise the other.





Hammer curl

Primary target muscles **Biceps** Secondary target muscles **Forearms**



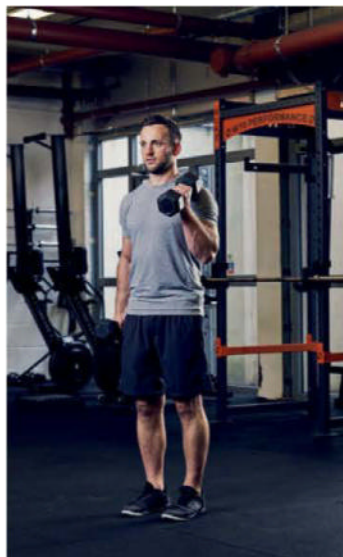
WHY Although it works similar muscles to the biceps curl, the hammer curl puts extra emphasis on the brachioradialis, which pushes up on your biceps to make the muscles appear bigger. They'll also work well in combination with biceps curls, for a technical drop set that takes your biceps past failure.

HOW Stand with your shoulders back and feet close together, holding the dumbbells with your palms facing your sides. Keeping your elbows tucked in, curl the dumbbells to your chest, stopping just before your forearms are vertical. Lower under control to return to the start position.



Alternating hammer curl

Primary target muscles **Biceps** Secondary target muscles **Forearms**



WHY Done at the end of a set of biceps or hammer curls, these can let you squeeze out a few extra reps, increasing the damage to the muscle and the growth you'll see afterwards. For a triple drop set, go to failure on first biceps curls and then hammer curls, and finish with alternating hammer curls.

HOW Stand tall with your shoulders back and feet close together, holding a pair of dumbbells with your palms facing your sides. Keeping your elbows tucked into your sides, curl one dumbbell up towards your chest, then lower it and raise the other.

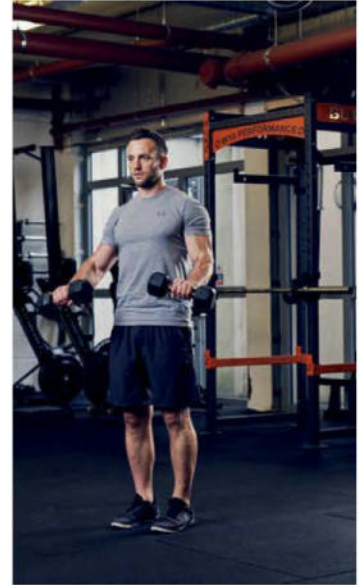
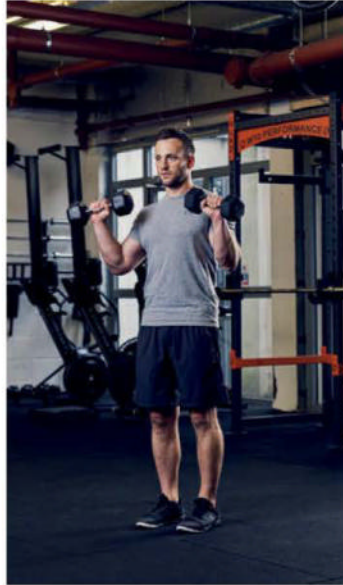
Zottman curl

Primary target muscles **Biceps** Secondary target muscles **Forearms**



WHY This move targets all the muscles on the fronts of your upper arms in every rep, using both heads of the biceps (brachii and brachialis) on the way up, and the brachioradialis when you go palms-down for the descent. The twist also adds some extra stimulation, for an all-round arm builder.

HOW Hold a dumbbell in each hand and curl them up to chest height, then twist your palms to face downwards before you lower, shifting the focus to your forearms.



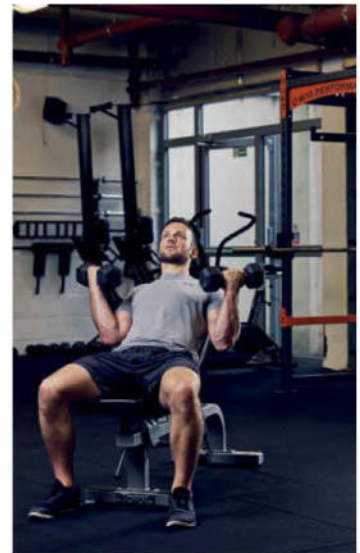
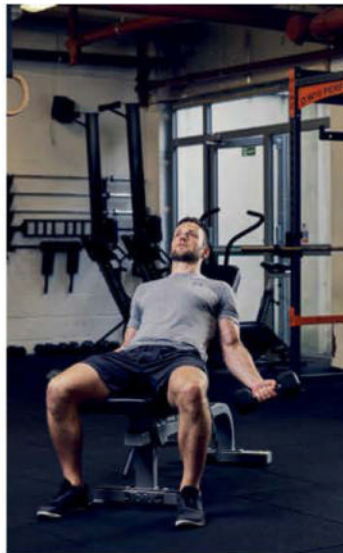
Incline biceps curl

Primary target muscles **Biceps**



WHY This move places more emphasis on the brachii, which is the largest and most visible of the biceps muscles. You will probably need to use less weight than you would on the standing curl, but it's worth the effort.

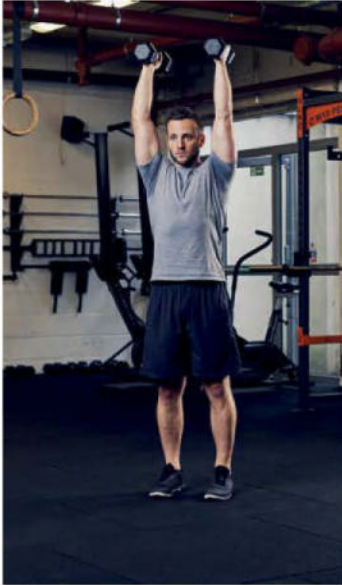
HOW Sit on a bench set to an incline between 30° and 45°, holding a dumbbell in each hand. Keeping your back flat against the bench and your elbows close to your sides, curl both dumbbells up to shoulder height. Squeeze your biceps at the top of the move, then slowly return the start position.





Triceps extension

Primary target muscles **Triceps**



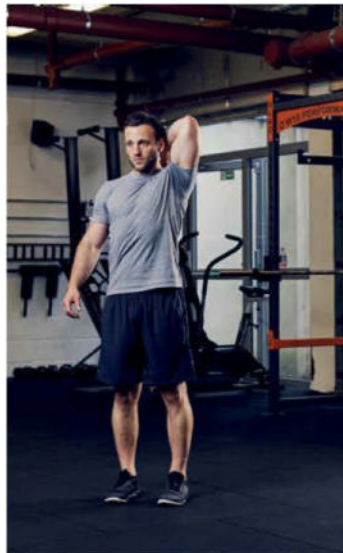
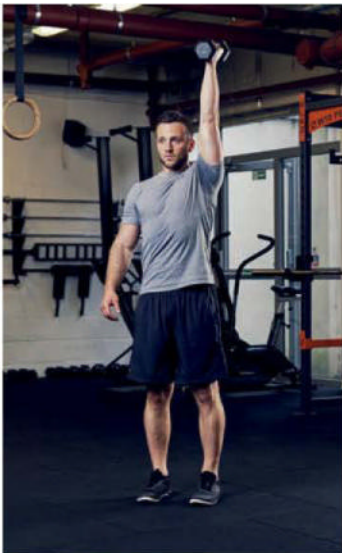
WHY As well as working the largest muscle in your arms, the standing triceps extension forces your core to stabilise you, giving you some extra six-pack work as you lift.

HOW Stand tall, holding a pair of dumbbells above you with straight arms. Slowly lower the dumbbells towards the back of your head by bending your elbows, keeping your upper arms as still as possible.



Single-arm triceps extension

Primary target muscles **Triceps** Secondary target muscles **Core**



WHY Used as part of a drop set, the single-arm triceps extension places your triceps under extra tension, forcing further growth.

HOW Stand tall, holding a dumbbell above you with one straight arm. Slowly lower the dumbbell towards the back of your head by bending your elbow, keeping your upper arm as still as possible.

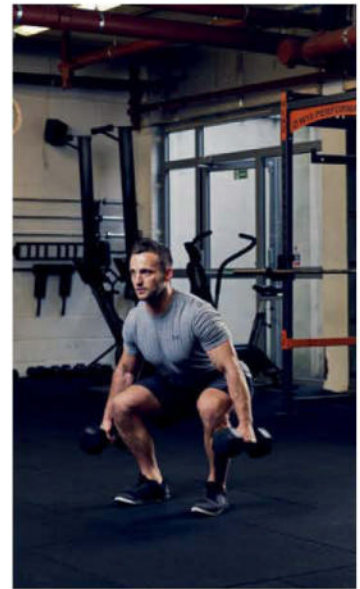
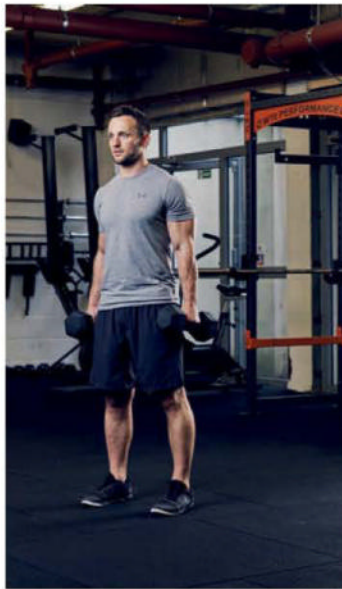
Dumbbell squat



Primary target muscles **Quads** Secondary target muscles **Glutes**

WHY As well as being ideal for home workouts, the dumbbell squat keeps the weights in a back-friendly position, making it (almost) fatigue-proof. It'll also work your forearms and grip.

HOW Hold a dumbbell in each hand and squat down, keeping your chest up, until your hip crease is below the level of your knees. Drive back up through your heels.



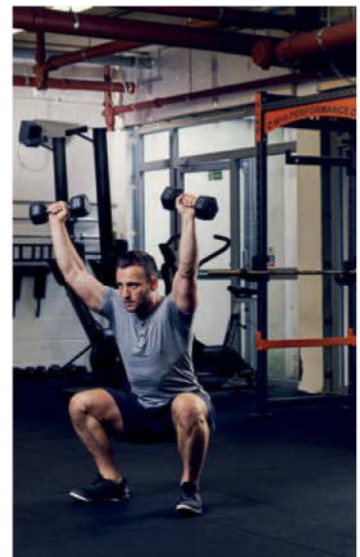
Overhead squat



Primary target muscles **Quads** Secondary target muscles **Glutes, shoulders**

WHY This is upper- and lower-body flexibility rolled into one move – and it's much tougher than the barbell version, because the weights tend to wander. If all you have is a brace of ultra-light dumbbells, try staying in the bottom position for a set of overhead presses – known as the Sots press.

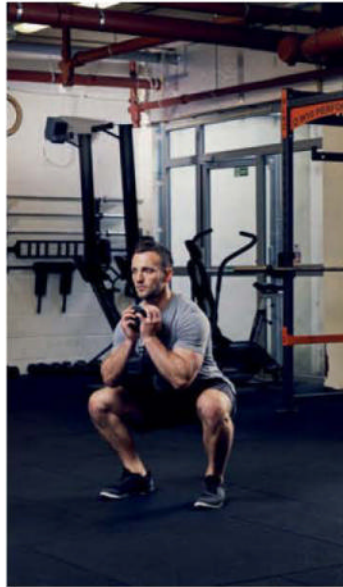
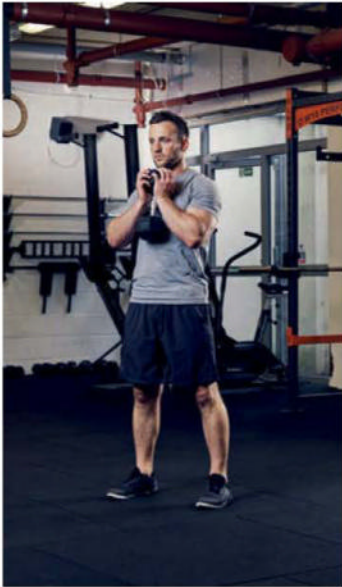
HOW Press a set of dumbbells overhead, keeping your upper arms just behind the line of your ears and over your centre of gravity. Keep your weight over your heels as you squat down and drive back up, trying not to let the weights stray forward.





Goblet squat

Primary target muscles **Quads** Secondary target muscles **Glutes**



WHY It's a near-foolproof squat variation: the position of the dumbbell forces you to keep your chest up and your weight on your heels. If you've got hip, groin or ankle mobility issues, spend some time in the bottom position during your warm-up, for a helpful weighted stretch.

HOW Hold a dumbbell at chest height with both hands - like a goblet - then squat down until your elbows brush the insides of your knees. Keep your weight on your heels as you stand up.



Jump squat

Primary target muscles **Quads** Secondary target muscles **Glutes**



WHY Holding a pair of dumbbells is the simplest way to add weight to a jump squat, so this variation will let you add power once you've topped out on the no-weight version.

HOW Holding a dumbbell in each hand, squat down, then explode upwards, aiming to get as much height as possible. Reset between reps for maximum power generation.

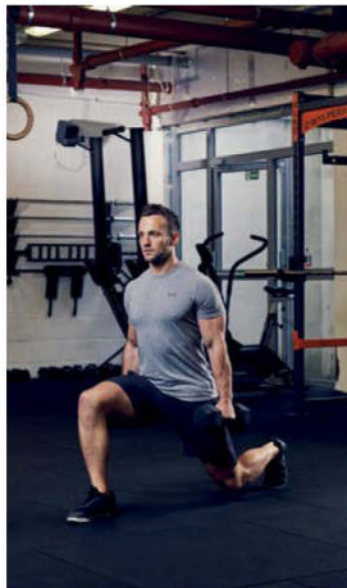
Lunge



Primary target muscles **Quads** Secondary target muscles **Hamstrings**

WHY Working one leg at a time builds unilateral strength and also ensures you don't have any weaknesses from imbalances in your body. If you're limited by your grip, hold the dumbbell in front of your chest, goblet-squat style (see p27).

HOW Holding a dumbbell in each hand, take one step forwards and lower your body until both knees are bent at 90°. Push off your front foot to reverse the movement.



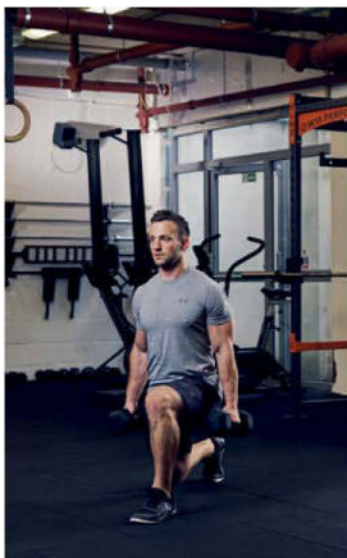
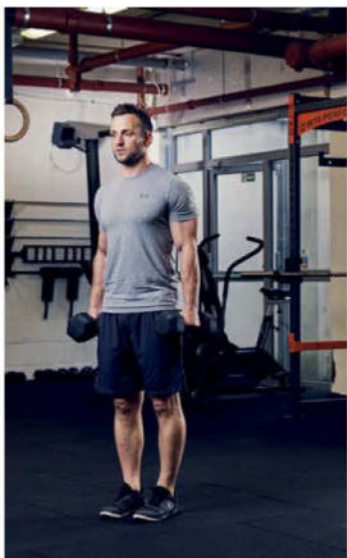
Reverse lunge



Primary target muscles **Hamstrings** Secondary target muscles **Glutes**

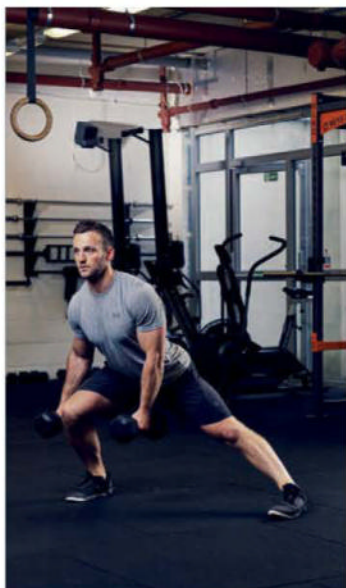
WHY Stepping backwards instead of forwards shifts the emphasis to your glutes, but also makes the lunge slightly safer, because it's easier to stop your front knee from wobbling off-line. If you're fatigued, do these: you'll still get a forearm hit from holding the dumbbells.

HOW Holding a dumbbell in each hand, take a big step backwards and lower your body until both knees are bent at 90°. Push off your rear foot to reverse the movement.



Side lunge

Primary target muscles **Glutes** Secondary target muscles **Quads**

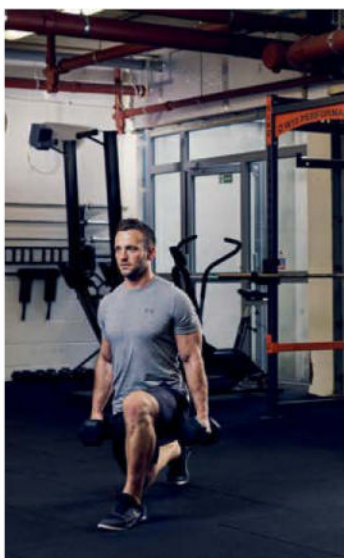
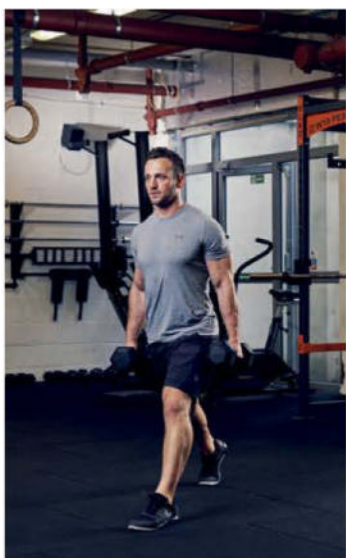


WHY This move's tricky to do with anything but dumbbells, but it works the inner and outer thighs as well as the usual muscles involved in the lunge, so it's well worth including in your training plan.

HOW Holding a dumbbell in each hand, take one step sideways and lower your body until one of your knees is bent at a right angle, feeling a slight stretch in your groin. Push off your foot to reverse the movement.

Split squat

Primary target muscles **Quads** Secondary target muscles **Hamstrings**



WHY Simply repeating the lunge motion removes some of the coordination aspects from a heavy lunge, making this a safer variation for beginners, or for including in supersets where you're likely to be fatigued.

HOW Start in a split stance, with one foot in front of the other, holding a dumbbell in each hand. Bend both legs until your trailing knee touches the floor. Straighten both legs to return to the start, then go straight into the next rep.

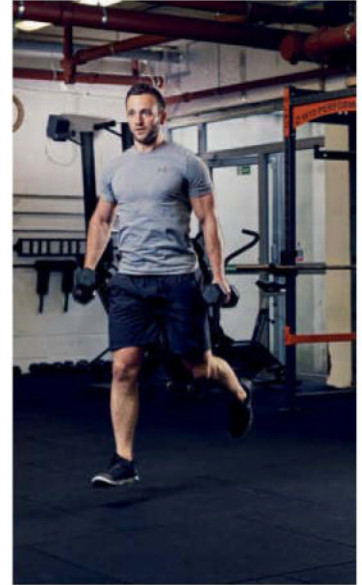
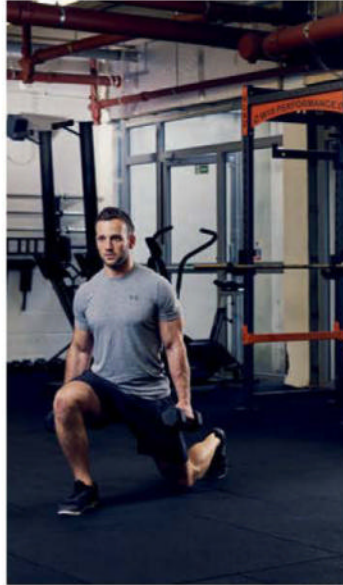
Jump lunge



Primary target muscles **Glutes** Secondary target muscles **Hamstrings**

WHY It's tough with dumbbells, but the lunge jump will build explosive power off one leg – essential for sprinting or tackling.

HOW Stand tall holding a dumbbell in each hand. Lunge forward, then explode into the air, switching legs in mid-air and aiming to land softly.



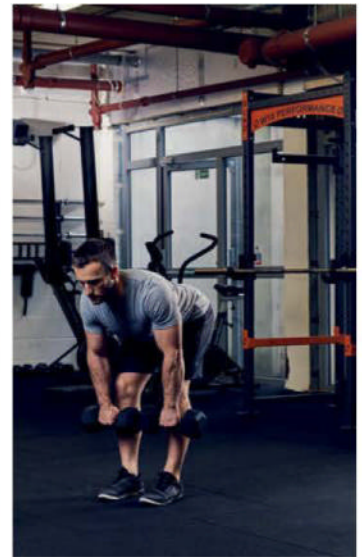
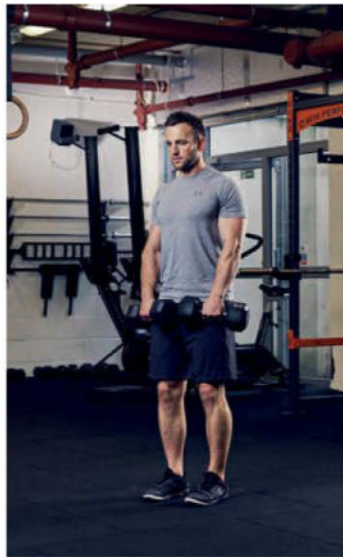
Romanian deadlift



Primary target muscles **Hamstrings** Secondary target muscles **Glutes**

WHY This deadlift variation shifts the emphasis to your hamstrings, making it an ideal accessory exercise to the normal deadlift. Doing it with dumbbells will ensure each arm gets to hold its share of the weight.

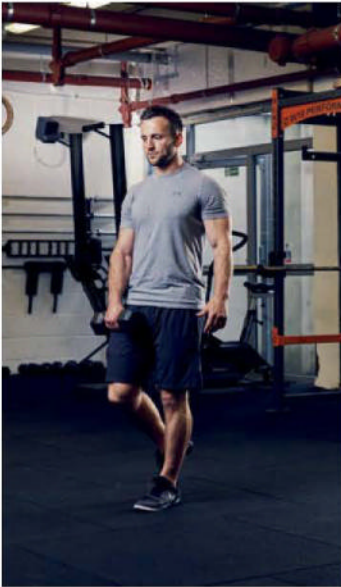
HOW Stand tall with feet shoulder-width apart, holding a dumbbell in each hand. Keeping your legs straight, lean forward from the hips, not the waist, and lower the weights down the fronts of your shins until you feel a good stretch in your hamstrings. Reverse the move to the start and push your hips forward.





Single-leg Romanian deadlift

Primary target muscles **Hamstrings** Secondary target muscles **Glutes**



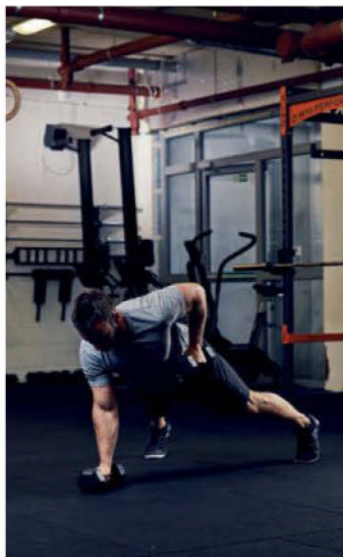
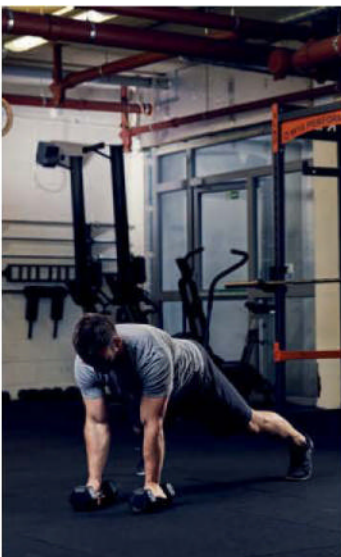
WHY This move challenges your balance and proprioception while firing up your hamstrings, making it the ideal warm-up for conventional deadlifting.

HOW Stand on one leg, holding a dumbbell in the opposite hand. Bend forward until you feel the stretch in your hamstrings, then straighten up.



Renegade row

Primary target muscles **Upper back** Secondary target muscles **Core**



WHY This move works your back muscles while challenging your stabilisers to keep you level. Think of it as a brutal version of the plank. It's even tougher on rounded dumbbells.

HOW Start in a press-up position holding the handles of a pair of dumbbells. Row one dumbbell upwards and then the other, so that your thumb touches your armpit. Try to stay parallel to the floor - don't twist.

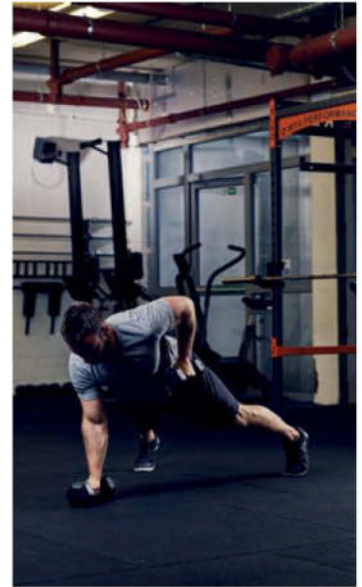
Press-up renegade row



Primary target muscles **Upper back** Secondary target muscles **Chest**

WHY Adding a press-up to the move engages your chest – especially if you use the extra height to descend further into the move. It's pulling and pushing in one move, making this great bang for your buck.

HOW Start in a press-up position, holding the handles of a pair of dumbbells. Do a press-up. At the top of the move, row one dumbbell upwards and then the other, so that your thumb touches your armpit. Try to stay parallel to the floor – don't twist.



Halo



Primary target muscles **Obliques** Secondary target muscles **Upper abs**

WHY This move engages all the muscles of your core and, because you're doing it from a standing position, teaches them to fire in practical situations.

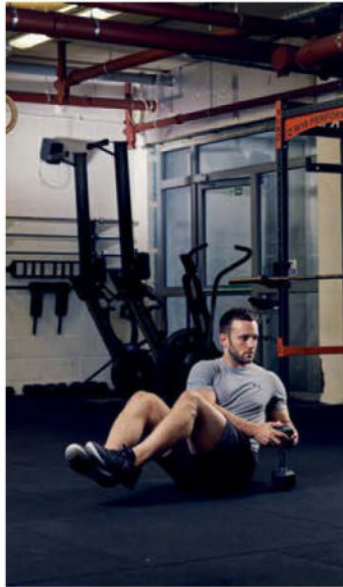
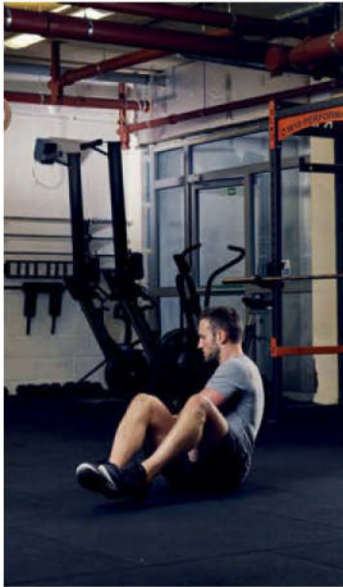
HOW Holding a dumbbell in both hands, move it around your head, engaging your core as you circle it around. After one complete circle, reverse the direction.





Russian twist

Primary target muscles **Obliques** Secondary target muscles **Lower abs**



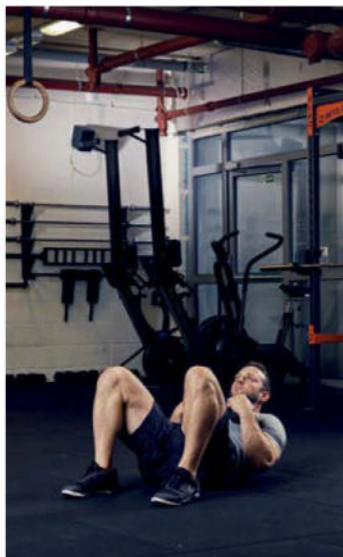
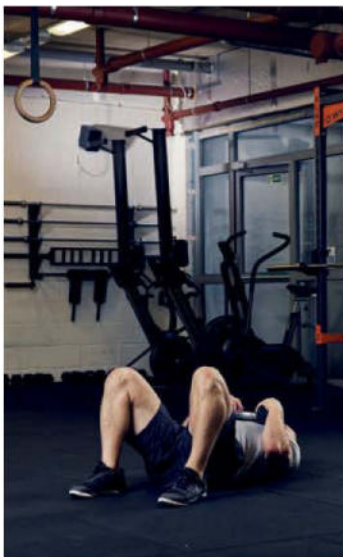
WHY Training rotation is vital for sports performance and a well-rounded physique, and this is one of the safest ways to do it effectively.

HOW Sit on the floor with your knees bent and feet slightly raised, holding a dumbbell in front of you. Twist to one side, pause, and then twist to the other. That's one rep.



Crunch

Primary target muscles **Upper abs** Secondary target muscles **Lower abs**



WHY In lab testing, weighted crunches activate the abs more than almost any other isolation move. Using a dumbbell (or weight plate) for slow, controlled reps is a great way to work your whole core.

HOW Lie flat on your back with knees bent and a dumbbell held at chest level. Contract your abs to lift your shoulders off the floor and curl your chest towards your knees. Pause at the top of the move and squeeze your abs, then lower slowly to the start.

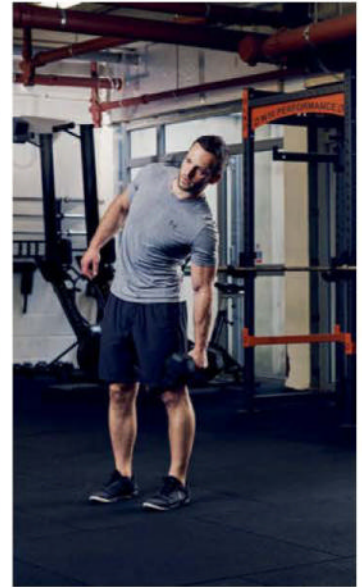
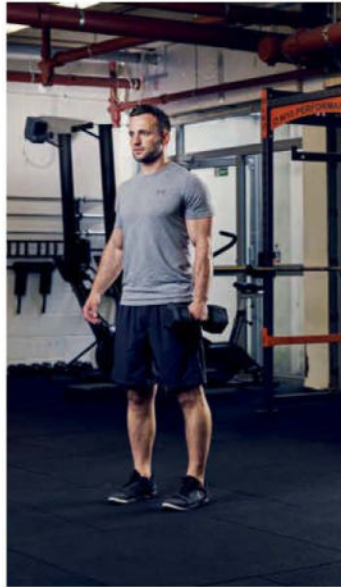
Side bend



Primary target muscles **Obliques** Secondary target muscles **Lower back**

WHY As well as your obliques, the side bend also works the muscles of your lower back, safeguarding your core.

HOW Hold a heavy dumbbell in one hand and bend your torso towards your weighted hand. Pause when you feel a stretch up your opposite side, then straighten up without leaning forwards or backwards.



Crunchreach



Primary target muscles **Upper abs** Secondary target muscles **Lower abs**

WHY Leading with the dumbbell discourages you from jerking, ensuring that the focus stays on your abs while safeguarding your lower back.

HOW Lie flat on your back with your knees bent and a dumbbell held above your chest, with your arms straight. Crunch upward, pausing at the top of the movement, then lower back to the start.





The trick with single-arm rows is to row the weight towards your hip, rather than your armpit. Doing so will recruit your lat, rather than your bicep.





BARBELL

Get seriously strong and work every major muscle in your body

Exercises outlined in this chapter

Overhead press	p40	Overhead squat	p49
Push press	p40	Split squat	p49
Seated overhead press	p41	Lunge	p50
Bench press	p41	Reverse lunge	p50
Narrow-grip bench press	p42	Clean pull	p52
Incline bench press	p42	Romanian deadlift	p52
Decline bench press	p43	Stiff-leg Romanian deadlift	p53
Guillotine bench press	p43	Glute bridge	p53
Bent-over row	p44	Landmine	p54
Reverse-grip bent-over row	p44	Barbell roll-out	p54
Shrug	p45	Clean and jerk	p55
Biceps curl	p45	Power clean	p56
Reverse curl	p46	Hang clean	p56
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Deficit deadlift	p47	Thruster	p58
Squat	p48	EZ-bar biceps curl	p59
Front squat	p48	EZ-bar reverse curl	p59



Barbell moves are among the most efficient for building muscle and strength for one simple reason: they'll allow you to lift more weight than any other bit of kit. Of course, you can also use them for other things: complexes (performing several moves in sequence without putting down the bar) will build cardio and torch fat, while almost any barbell lift will test your coordination and grip.

A good-quality barbell is a thing of beauty. Look out for how well the 'sleeves' on the bar spin, as well as the 'knurling' on the bar where you grip it. But use the moves in this section and you'll get results from even the most basic bar in your local gym.



Barbell FAQ

WHERE SHOULD I START?

It's a good idea to nail the basics in what many lifters call the 'Big Three': bench press, squat and deadlift. These are the lifts used in competitive powerlifting, and if all you did was these three moves, you would build a great base of full-body strength. After that, you'll want to learn the overhead press and bent-over row for a more balanced physique, plus the power clean, because it's always a good idea to have an explosive movement in your repertoire.

WHAT ABOUT OLYMPIC LIFTS?

The snatch along with the clean and jerk are fashionable, thanks to CrossFit, and they're excellent at building full-body explosive power and coordination - but since they are most safely practised in the one-to-five rep range, they're not ideal for building muscle. If you want to learn them for sport or fun, you should, but if they're intimidating, then you can get similar results by learning less complex explosive variations, like the power snatch or hang clean.

SHOULD I GET ON A PROGRAMME?

It's not a bad idea. There are dozens of barbell lifting templates available, but some of the most popular include Starting Strength (best for beginning lifters), 5/3/1 (a very simple template for intermediate/advanced lifters) and the Texas Method (another intermediate plan that includes more volume and builds more size). Research your options, commit to one and do it for at least a couple of months, then reassess.



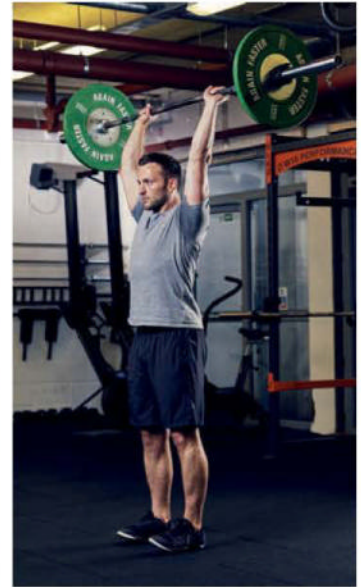
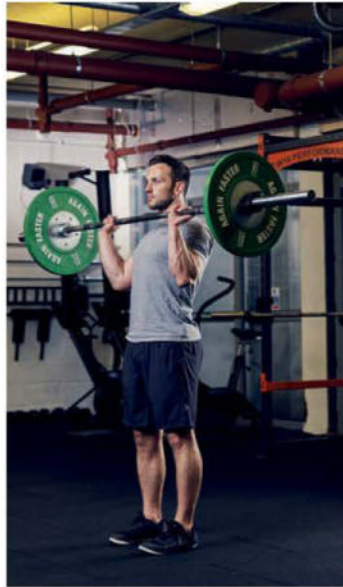
Overhead press



Primary target muscles **Shoulders** Secondary target muscles **Triceps**

WHY The strict overhead press builds full-body muscle and coordination, bringing your abs into the equation to stabilise the weight overhead. The 'military' version - done with your heels together - is even tougher.

HOW With feet shoulder-width apart, position a bar on your upper chest, gripping it with hands just wider than shoulder-width apart. Brace your abs, glutes and quads, then press the bar up. Pause at the top, then lower. You may find you can lift more weight by wrapping your thumbs around the same side as your fingers, to keep your arms in a more favourable position.



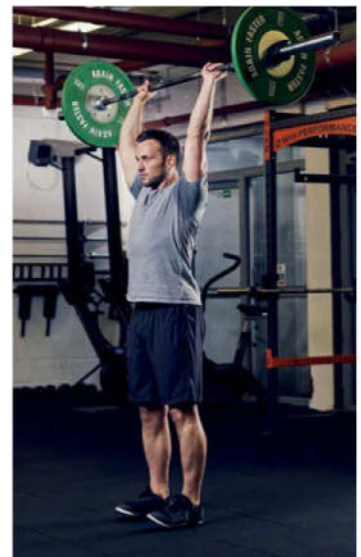
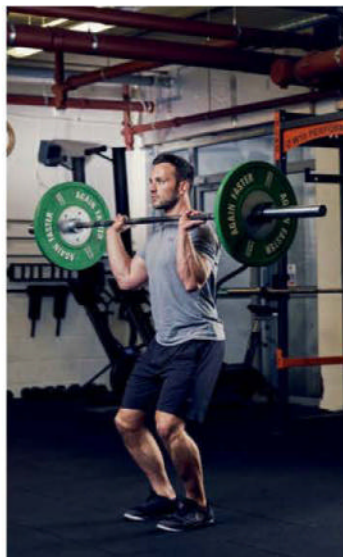
Push press



Primary target muscles **Shoulders** Secondary target muscles **Triceps**

WHY Adding explosive drive to the strict press mimics real-life movement - imagine putting a really heavy bag into an overhead locker - and allows you to shift more weight than a strict press, while building full-body explosiveness and coordination.

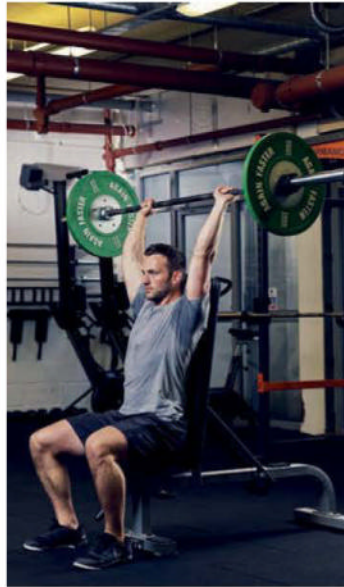
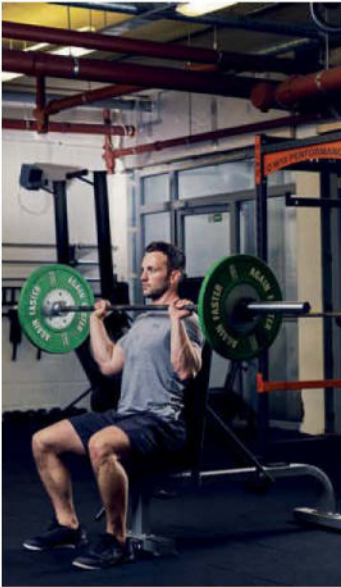
HOW Set up in the same position as the overhead press, then do a quarter-squat and press the bar overhead as explosively as possible, using the momentum to drive the bar upwards. Do it properly and you shouldn't be pushing the bar until it's almost over your head.





Seated overhead press

Primary target muscles **Shoulders** Secondary target muscles **Triceps**



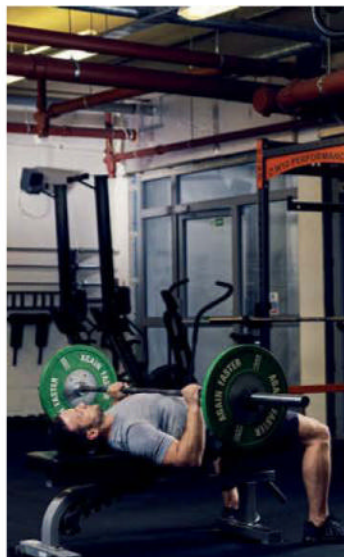
WHY In contrast to the push press, the seated version takes any leg drive out of the move, shifting all the emphasis to your shoulders.

HOW Sit on an upright bench with a barbell on your upper chest, gripping it with hands shoulder-width apart. Keep your chest upright and your core muscles braced. Press the bar directly upwards, until your arms are extended overhead.



Bench press

Primary target muscles **Chest** Secondary target muscles **Triceps**



WHY It's a classic for a reason: a properly executed bench press (your feet should press into the floor) will tax your whole body and allow you to use heavy weights to maximise upper-body development.

Ensure your form is correct to avoid injury and maximise growth.

HOW Grip the bar slightly wider than shoulder width and squeeze your lats, then take the bar out of the rack. Watching the ceiling, not the bar, lower to your chest, aiming to brush your T-shirt without bouncing. Press up powerfully, pause, then do your next rep.

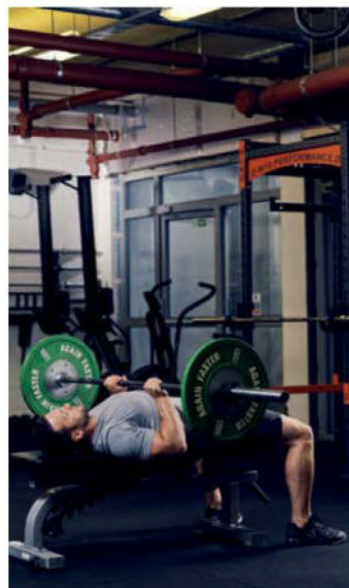
Narrow-grip bench press



Primary target muscles **Triceps** Secondary target muscles **Chest**

WHY Benching with a narrow grip shifts the emphasis to your triceps while safeguarding your shoulders. It's a good way to work on weakness in your regular bench press, or just get a bit more work in on arms day.

HOW Grip the bar with your hands roughly shoulder-width apart, then bring it down to your chest, keeping your elbows tucked into your sides. Pause, then press it back to the starting position.



Incline bench press



Primary target muscles **Chest** Secondary target muscles **Triceps**

WHY Setting the bench to an incline will mean you need to reduce the weight, but it'll hit your chest from a new angle and - according to some coaches - build more functionally transferable strength for sports such as rugby or boxing than the traditional flat bench does.

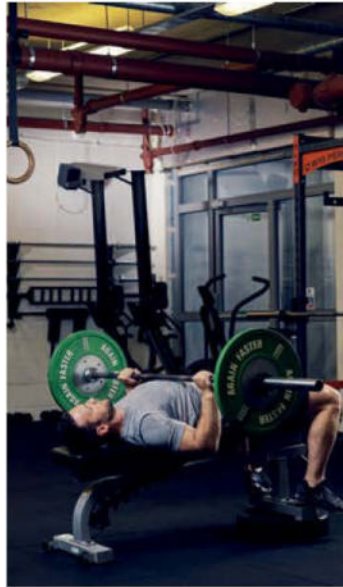
HOW Lie on a bench set at a 45° incline, holding a bar over your chest with your grip just wider than shoulder width. Lower the bar until it's touching your chest, then press it back up.





Decline bench press

Primary target muscles **Chest** Secondary target muscles **Triceps**



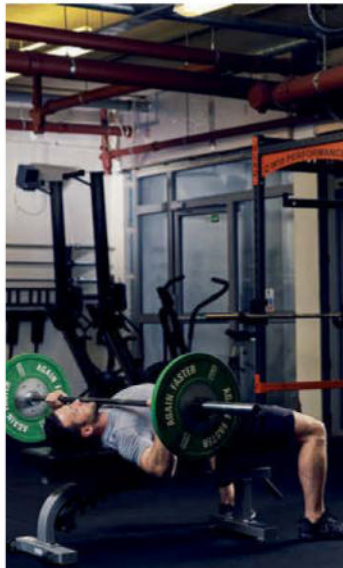
WHY You'll hit your chest from a different angle, targeting the lower part of your pecs for all-around development.

HOW Lie on a decline bench (so your head is lower than your legs) with your feet hooked under the supports, holding a bar over your chest with your grip just outside shoulder width. Lower the bar until it touches your chest, then press it back up.



Guillotine bench press

Primary target muscles **Chest** Secondary target muscles **Triceps**



WHY Yes, it sounds - and looks - scary, but for pure chest development, bodybuilders agree that the guillotine press beats the flat bench hands down. It takes some shoulder stability though, so make sure your rotator cuffs are in good shape before you try it.

HOW Lie on a bench holding a bar with your hands just wider than shoulder width. Keeping your elbows tucked, lower the bar until it's just above your neck, then press back up. Keep the reps controlled.

Bent-over row



Primary target muscles **Upper back** Secondary target muscles **Biceps**

WHY It's the best back-builder bar none – but it'll also even out your pressing and give you a stable base for pushing-based moves. For a variation, try the Pendlay row, where each rep starts on the floor.

HOW Hold the bar with a shoulder-width grip, bending your knees slightly. Bend at the hips until you're at a roughly 45° angle to the floor. Pull the bar up to touch your sternum and then lower under control. If you're moving your upper body to shift the bar, the weight's too heavy.



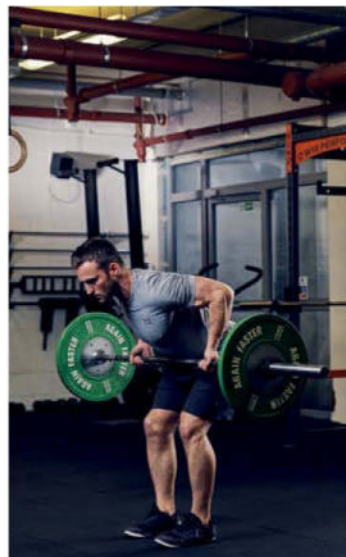
Reverse-grip bent-over row



Primary target muscles **Upper back** Secondary target muscles **Biceps**

WHY This rowing variation targets the biceps much more than the traditional row. Lifters with elbow or wrist mobility issues might find it a bit more forgiving than the usual barbell row.

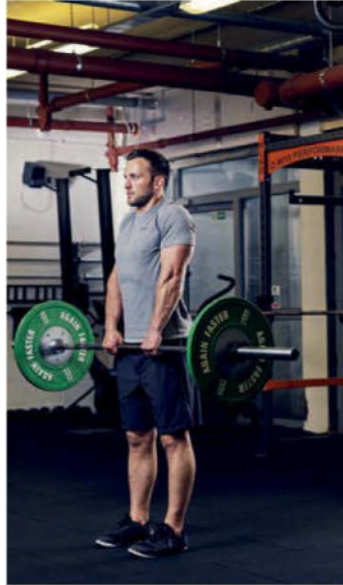
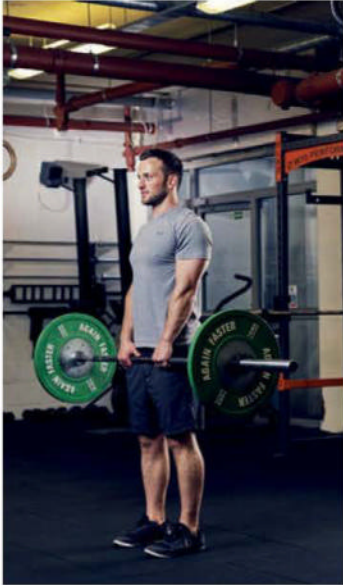
HOW Using a palms-away grip – as in a biceps curl – hold the bar with your hands at shoulder-width, bending your knees slightly. Bend at the hips until you're at a roughly 45° angle to the floor. Pull the bar up to touch your sternum and then lower under control.





Shrug

Primary target muscles **Traps**



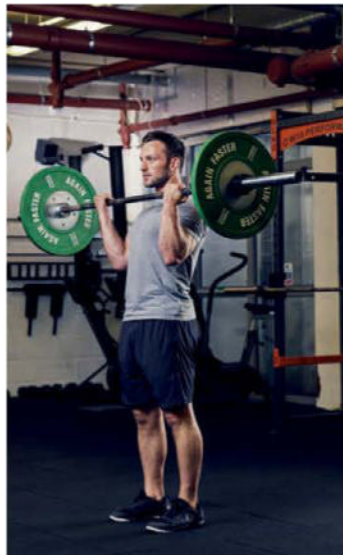
WHY One of the few moves that directly targets your traps is also one of the best excuses to use lifting straps - you'll work your grip without them, but using them will allow you to work your traps harder. It's also a good idea to take the bar out of a rack, so that you can use a heavier weight than you can deadlift.

HOW Stand tall holding a barbell with a shoulder-width grip. Shrug your shoulders, then lower. Straight up and down is the key - don't roll your shoulders.



Biceps curl

Primary target muscles **Biceps**



WHY It can be tough on your elbows, but this classic move will let you shift heavier weight than the dumbbell version, forcing your guns to grow.

HOW Stand tall with your shoulders back and feet close together, holding a barbell with an underhand grip, with your hands just outside your hips. Keep your elbows tucked into your sides, then curl the bar up to your chest, stopping just before your forearms reach vertical. Lower back slowly to the start. Avoid rocking back and forth to generate momentum, which takes the emphasis away from the biceps.

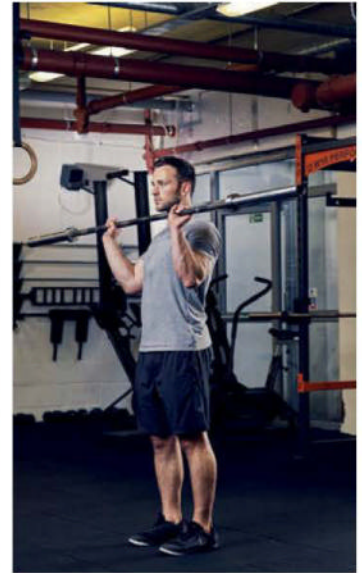
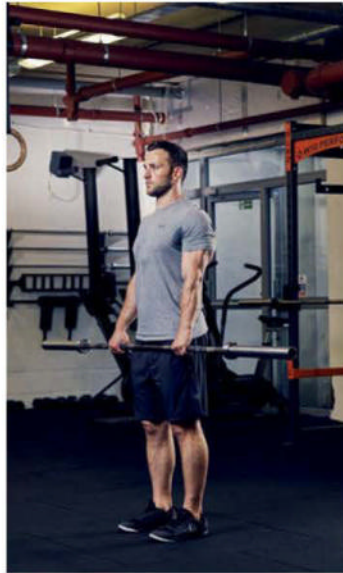
Reverse curl

Primary target muscles **Biceps** Secondary target muscles **Forearms**



WHY This curling variation is slightly easier on the elbows and – though you'll have to use less weight – works your forearms as well as hitting your biceps from a different angle.

HOW Stand tall holding a bar with an overhand grip. Curl it upwards until your forearms are vertical, pause and then lower under control.



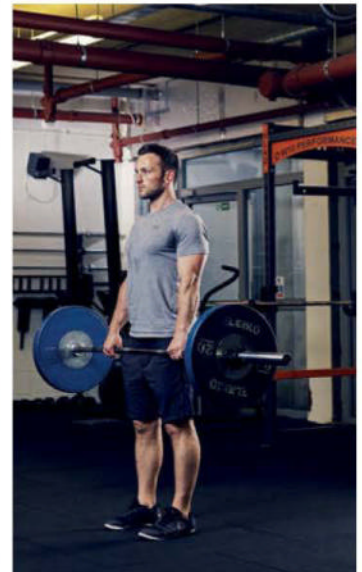
Deadlift

Primary target muscles **Glutes** Secondary target muscles **Back**



WHY It's the best full-body move bar none: if this was all you did, you'd still build enviable arms and a core of steel. It'll flood your body with testosterone and growth hormone, and let you lift heavier than almost any other move. A double-bodyweight deadlift is the goal.

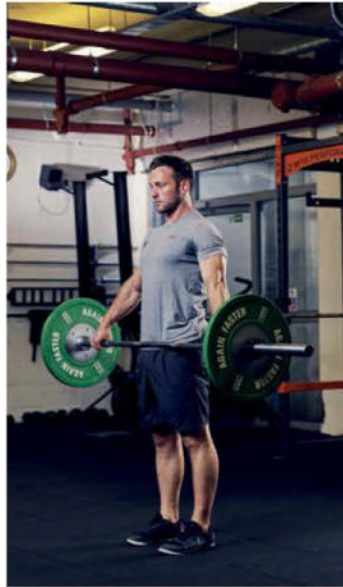
HOW Standing with your feet shoulder-width apart, grasp the bar with your hands just outside your legs. Lift the bar by driving your hips forward, keeping a flat back. Lower the bar under control – though once you get up to really heavy weights, it's OK to drop the bar on your final rep.





Snatch-grip deadlift

Primary target muscles **Upper back** Secondary target muscles **Glutes**



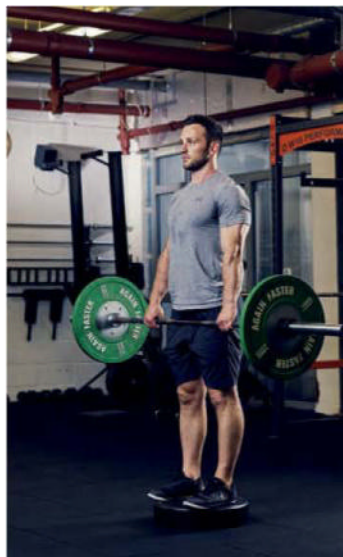
WHY Because your grip's wider in this move, you'll need to move the bar through a larger range of motion, increasing the growth hormone hit. It'll also prepare you for Olympic-style weightlifting.

HOW Hold a barbell with your hands roughly double shoulder-width apart. Push through your heels and keep your chest up as you drive forward with your hips to lift the bar.



Deficit deadlift

Primary target muscles **Upper back** Secondary target muscles **Glutes**



WHY Lifting from a 'deficit' (an artificially lower start position) will fix any weakness in your normal deadlift, forcing you to keep a flat back and engaged shoulders to get the bar off the ground. Use this as a 'de-load' from regular deadlifts, to carry on making gains.

HOW Stand on a weight plate or low box and grasp the bar. Engage your shoulders and take the strain, then lift the bar by driving your hips forward, keeping a flat back.

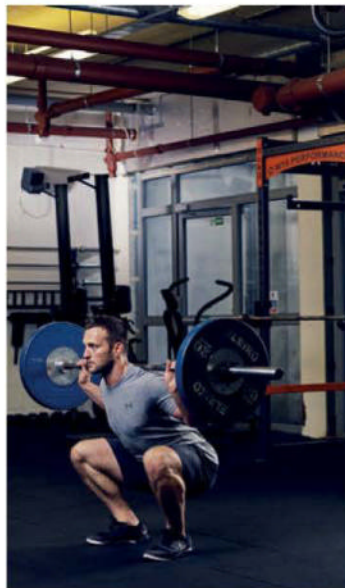
Squat

Primary target muscles **Glutes** Secondary target muscles **Quads**



WHY Squatting big weights will build full-body muscle, thanks to the huge growth hormone hit it prompts. It works not just your legs, but also your core, back and everything else below the bar.

HOW Rest the bar on your trapezius muscles and place your feet roughly shoulder-width apart, toes pointing out slightly. Keep your spine in alignment by looking at a spot on the floor about two metres in front of you, then sit back and down as if you're aiming for a chair. Descend until your hip crease is below your knee. Keep your weight on your heels as you drive back up.



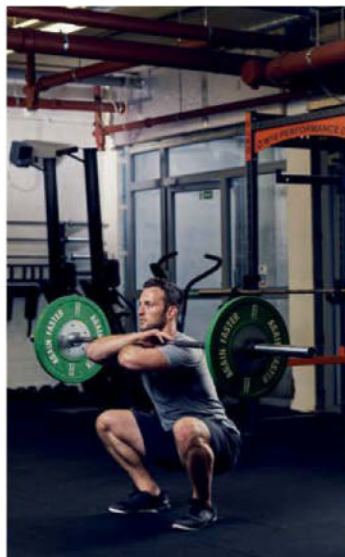
Front squat

Primary target muscles **Quads** Secondary target muscles **Hamstrings**



WHY Shifting the bar in front of you moves the emphasis to your quads and makes the move safer - you'll be less likely to tip forward and hurt your lower back. If you haven't got the elbow mobility to do the Olympic lifters' version (bar on your fingertips), use this variation.

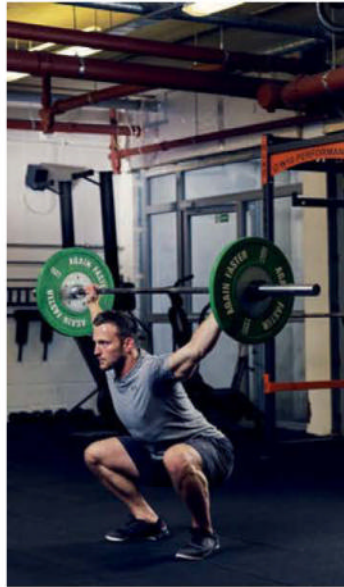
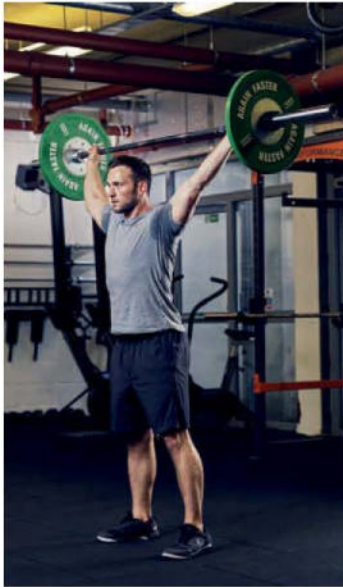
HOW Take the bar out of the rack with your hands crossed over your chest, supporting it across the front of your shoulders. Squat down, keeping your chest up, then drive up through your heels to stand.





Overhead squat

Primary target muscles **Core** Secondary target muscles **Quads**



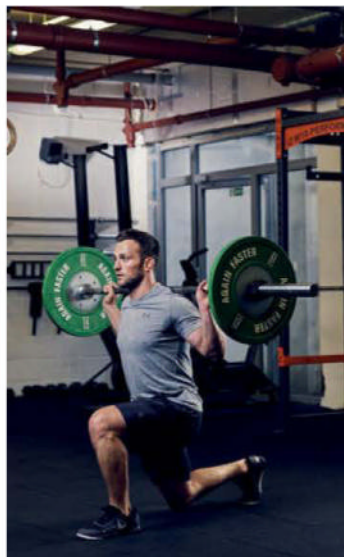
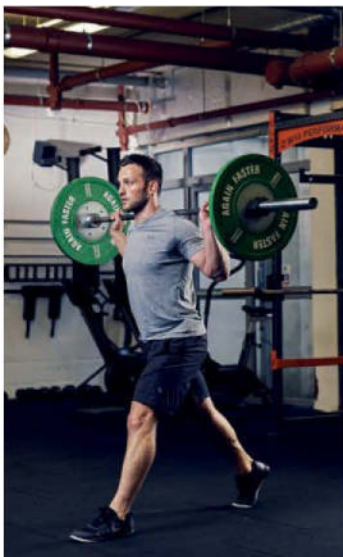
WHY As a bare minimum, you should be able to do this with a barbell - it's a key test of mobility in your shoulders, ankles and hips. Start adding weight and you'll find it's a serious core builder that'll also prepare you for the rigours of Olympic weightlifting.

HOW Either press a bar overhead with your hands at double shoulder-width, or take it out of a rack. Think about pulling the bar apart to keep it stable as you squat down, keeping your weight over your heels.



Split squat

Primary target muscles **Quads** Secondary target muscles **Hamstrings**



WHY Simply repeating the lunge motion removes some of the coordination aspects from a heavy lunge, making this a safer variation for beginners or including in supersets where you're likely to be fatigued.

HOW Start in a split stance, with one foot in front of the other, holding a bar across the back of your shoulders. Bend both legs until your trailing knee touches the floor. Straighten both legs to return to the start, then go straight into the next rep.

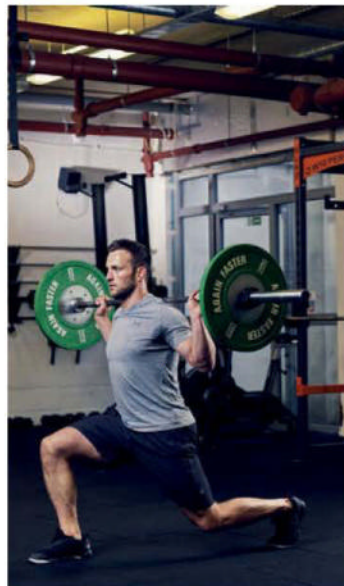
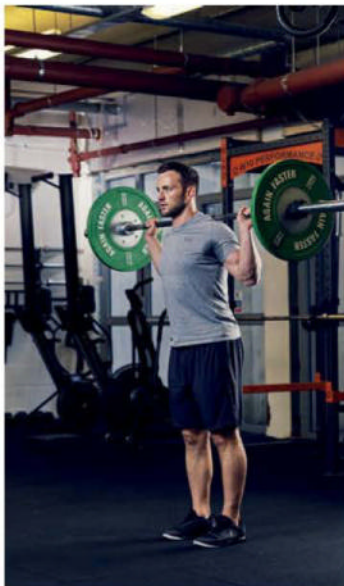
Lunge



Primary target muscles **Quads** Secondary target muscles **Hamstrings**

WHY Working on one leg at a time builds the unilateral strength you need for most sports, and also ensures you don't have any weaknesses on one side of your body.

HOW Stand tall with a barbell resting across your back and shoulders. Point your elbows behind you to retract your shoulder blades, and keep your back upright and core braced throughout. Take a big step forwards and lower your body, until both knees are bent at 90°, then push off your front foot to return to the start position.



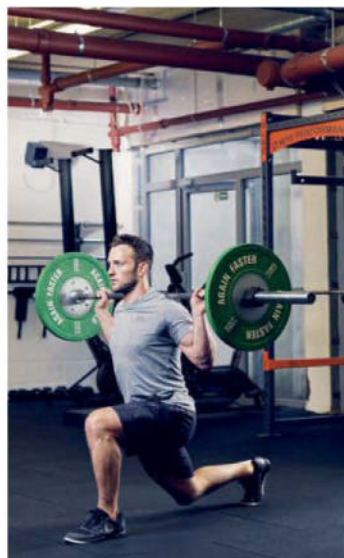
Reverse lunge



Primary target muscles **Glutes** Secondary target muscles **Hamstrings**

WHY Stepping backwards instead of forwards shifts the emphasis to your glutes, but also makes the lunge slightly safer, because it's easier to stop your front knee from wobbling off-line. If you're fatigued, do these.

HOW Stand tall with a barbell resting across your back and shoulders. Point your elbows behind you to retract your shoulder blades, and keep your back upright and core braced throughout. Take a big step backwards and lower until your back knee touches the floor, then press off your back foot to return to the start position.





“Barbells will allow you to lift more weight than any other bit of kit”

Clean pull



Primary target muscles **Hamstrings** Secondary target muscles **Lats**

WHY This is a great exercise for targeting hamstrings, which are underdeveloped in most men – particularly those with desk jobs. Strengthening your hamstrings is also likely to reduce your chances of developing lower back pain.

HOW Start in the same position that you would begin a deadlift. Without changing the angle of your torso, straighten your legs until you feel a strong stretch in your hamstrings.



Romanian deadlift



Primary target muscles **Hamstrings** Secondary target muscles **Lower back**

WHY This deadlift variation shifts the emphasis to your hamstrings, making it an ideal accessory exercise to the normal deadlift. Do a couple of sets after a heavy deadlift.

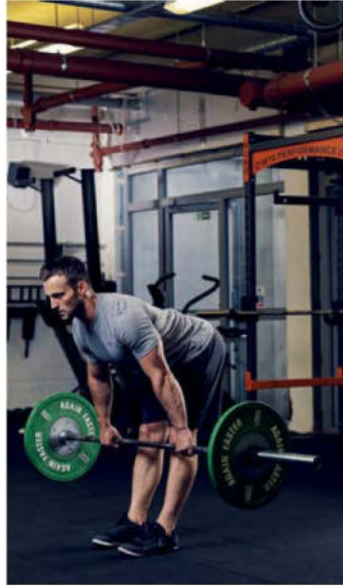
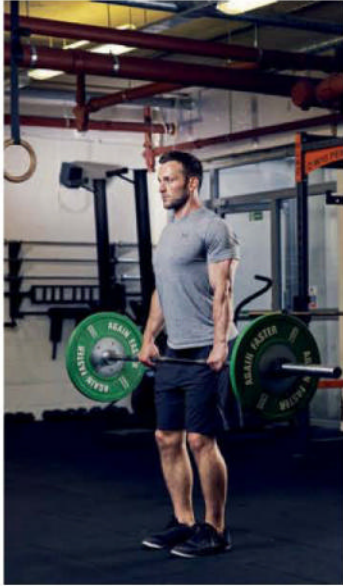
HOW Stand tall with your feet shoulder-width apart, holding a barbell with an overhand grip just outside your thighs. Keeping a slight bend in your knees, bend forwards from the hips – not the waist – and lower the bar down the front of your shins, until you feel a good stretch in your hamstrings. Reverse the move back to the start by pushing your hips forwards.





Stiff-leg Romanian deadlift

Primary target muscles **Hamstrings**



WHY Keeping your legs straight and locked at the knees works your hamstrings even harder, although it does put more pressure on your lower back.

HOW Stand tall with your feet shoulder-width apart, holding a barbell with an overhand grip just outside your thighs. Keeping your knees locked and back straight, bend forwards from the hips and lower the bar down the front of your shins, until you feel a good stretch in your hamstrings. Push your hips forwards to finish the move.



Glute bridge

Primary target muscles **Glutes** Secondary target muscles **Hamstrings**



WHY This variation of the bodyweight hip thrust allows you to move big weights for increased glute activation - and it'll teach your glutes to 'fire' during squat variations. Do it once a week, on a different day from your squats.

HOW Position yourself with a barbell across your hips, your shoulders on the floor and your feet close to your glutes. It's OK to use a barbell pad, or wrap the bar in a towel. Raise your hips until they're in line with your shoulders. Hold for a second in the top position, then lower.

Landmine



Primary target muscles **Obliques** Secondary target muscles **Shoulders**

WHY Using this move, so called because of the bit of kit sometimes used to slot the barbell into, allows you to build strength from unusual angles, including the rotational power you'll need to throw a punch or a ball.

HOW Wedge a barbell into a weight plate or corner. Hold one end and twist on your back foot as if you're throwing a punch, then push the barbell away. Do all your reps on one side, then switch to the other.



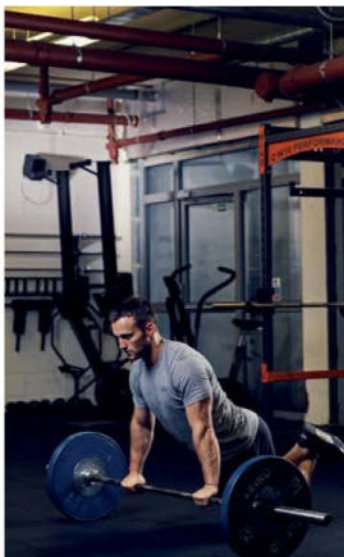
Barbell roll-out



Primary target muscles **Upper abs** Secondary target muscles **Lower abs**

WHY This variation on the classic abs wheel roll-out is much tougher because of the added weight – although the extra stability provided by the bar means it isn't completely impossible. Once you can do more than ten reps, increase the weight.

HOW Get on your knees with your arms extended, holding a barbell with a shoulder-width grip. Slowly roll the barbell away from your body, keeping your core braced throughout. Extend until your torso is parallel to the ground, then contract your abs to pull the bar back towards your body to return to the start.

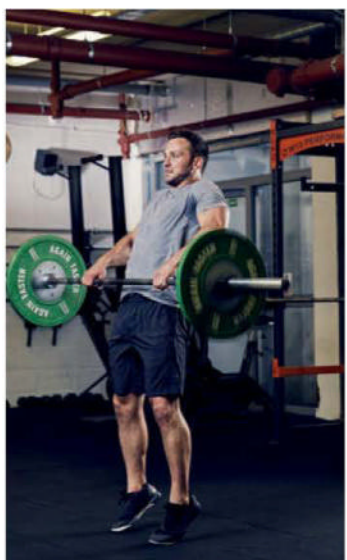
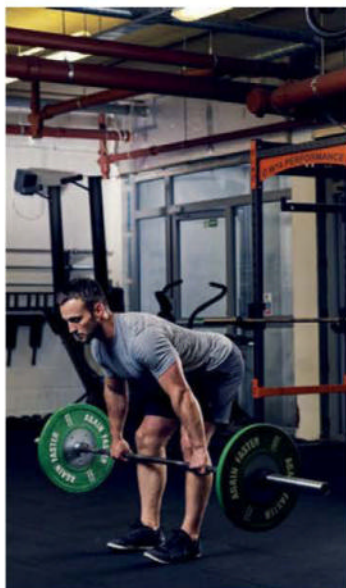




Clean and jerk

Primary target muscles **Full body**

WHY This move – one of the two used in Olympic competition – technically comes in two parts. First there's the clean, which involves lifting the bar and then dropping underneath it. Then there's the jerk – an explosive drive where you catch the bar overhead. Put them together and they'll build full-body explosive muscle.



HOW Start with the barbell on the floor, holding it with a shoulder-width grip. Drive through your heels to lift it, then explode up as it passes your knees, using momentum to help pull it upwards until you can drop underneath it into a squat, catching it across your shoulders. Stand up, then do a quarter-squat to gather momentum for the jerk and drive upwards explosively, pressing the bar overhead. Then drop into a lunge as it goes upwards, catching the bar with straight arms. Bring your feet together and stand upright to complete the rep.

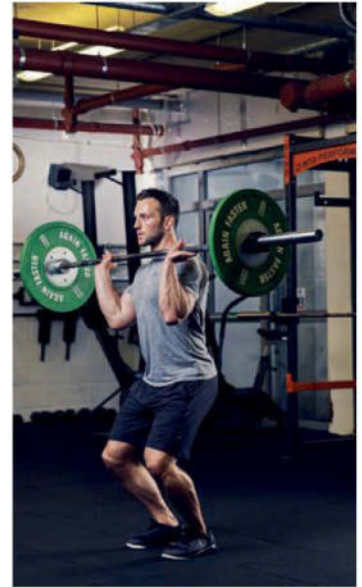
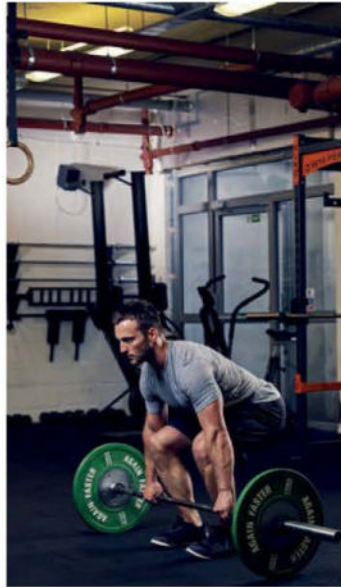
Power clean

Primary target muscles **Full body**



WHY This simplified version of the full clean won't allow you to use as much weight, but it's much simpler to learn and allows you to build comparable amounts of power because you're pulling the bar higher to catch it.

HOW Start with the barbell on the floor, holding it with a shoulder-width grip. Drive through your heels to lift it off the floor, then explode up as it passes your knees, using the momentum to help pull it up to chest height and catching it on your chest. Pause for a second, then lower (or drop) the barbell for the next rep.



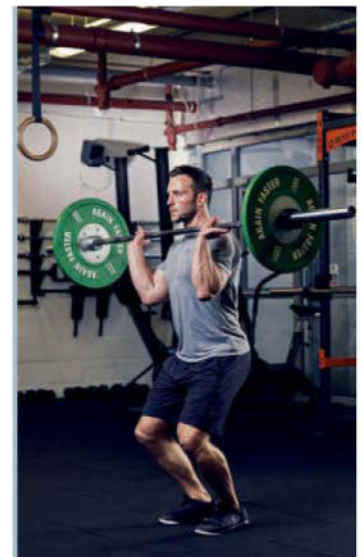
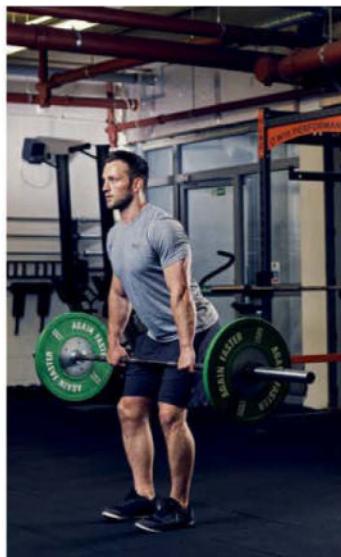
Hang clean

Primary target muscles **Full body**



WHY Starting the clean from a hang position makes it simpler, making it ideal for beginner lifters, or as part of a fat-burning barbell complex. Experienced lifters will also use this variation to build explosiveness.

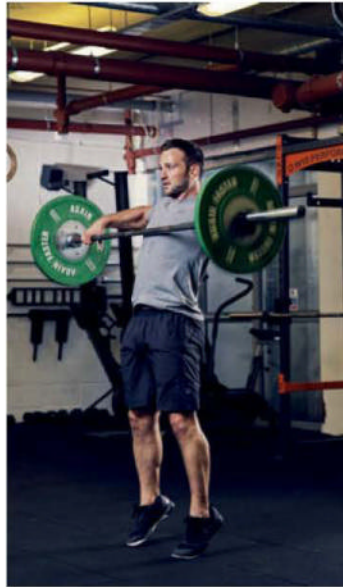
HOW Start by holding the bar with a shoulder-width grip in front of your thighs. Squat down slightly, then drive through your heels to explode upwards, using the momentum to help pull it up to chest height and catching it on your chest. Pause for a second, then lower the bar back to the start position.



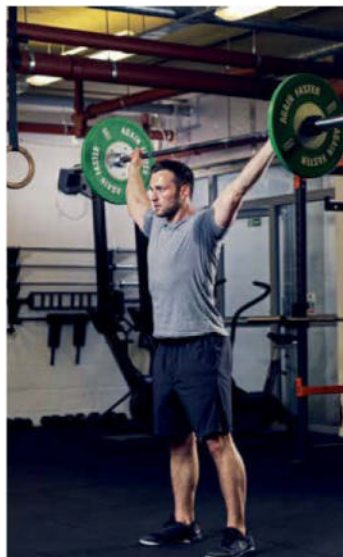


Snatch

Primary target muscles **Full body**



WHY The most explosive move in lifting sees you take the bar from the floor to overhead in one movement, and builds huge amounts of power. It's one of the most complex moves to learn and, because shifting big weights is as much about refining your technique as building strength, it's a good challenge if you're bored with your regular routine – and, of course, it's a hugely satisfying move to nail successfully. Make sure you're comfortable doing overhead squats (see p49) before you do this one, though.



HOW Start with the bar on the floor, gripping it with your hands roughly double shoulder-width apart – your feet should be slightly closer than shoulder width, with your heels pointing inwards. Drive through your heels to lift the bar, then – as it reaches your hips – drive forward to bounce it off your upper thighs, giving it more momentum as you pull it upward. Drop into an overhead squat and catch the bar overhead, then stand up to finish the move.

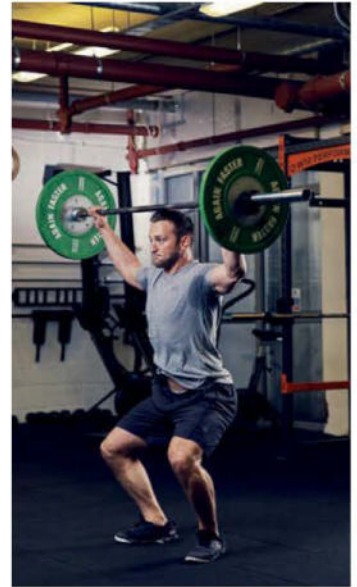
Power snatch

Primary target muscles **Full body**



WHY Since you don't include a squat, this move's less tricky to master than the full snatch, while still keeping most of its other benefits. It's a good variation to use for higher reps than the full snatch, or as accessory work.

HOW Start with the bar on the floor, gripping it with your hands roughly double shoulder-width apart - your feet should be slightly closer than shoulder width, with your heels pointing inwards. Drive through your heels to lift the bar, then - as it reaches your hips - drive forward to bounce it off your upper thighs, then dip very slightly to catch it overhead.



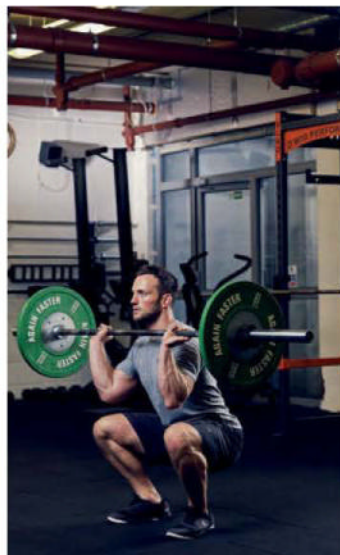
Thruster

Primary target muscles **Glutes** Secondary target muscles **Shoulders**



WHY This move won't let you move as much weight as a push press, but because it combines a squat and press, it's ideal to do for moderate reps to build cardio or burn fat.

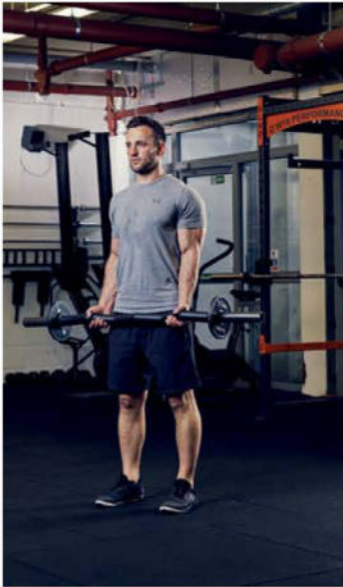
HOW Holding a barbell with a shoulder-width grip, squat down until your thighs are parallel to the floor. Drive up quickly, using the momentum to help press the bar overhead. Go straight into the next rep.





EZ-bar biceps curl

Primary target muscles **Biceps**



WHY The EZ-bar combines the benefits of dumbbells and a barbell. Shifting the grip position makes things easier on your elbows, while still letting you use heavy weights.

HOW Stand tall with your shoulders back and feet close together, holding an EZ-bar with an underhand grip, with your hands just outside your hips. Keeping your elbows tucked into your sides, curl the bar up towards your chest, stopping just before your forearms reach vertical. Lower slowly back to the start.



EZ-bar reverse curl

Primary target muscles **Biceps** Secondary target muscles **Forearms**



WHY Like the standard EZ-bar curl, this move's gentle on your wrists and elbows, but hits your biceps from a different angle while also testing your forearms.

HOW Stand tall with your shoulders back and feet close together, holding an EZ-bar with an overhand grip, with your hands just outside your hips. Keeping your elbows tucked into your sides, curl the bar up towards your chest, stopping just before your forearms reach vertical. Avoid rocking to generate momentum.

Create your own workouts

Putting together your own workout plan is less complicated than you might think, if you follow a few basic principles. In this part of the book, we explain the set, rep, rest and tempo ranges that suit each kind of training – although do feel

free to tinker with these ranges to suit your own goals and fitness level. You're almost ready to dive in! But before you do, take a moment to go through the questions below: they'll give you a steer on where to start.

How long have you been training?

If you're a beginner, good news: you'll make progress fast. To maximise results, focus on a few key compound movements and keep isolation moves to a minimum until you've built up a decent base of strength and a tolerance to training volume. If you're more experienced in the gym, it might be time to switch up your movements to undo imbalances (concentrating on unilateral movements for a few weeks, for instance) or to target neglected areas (say, by doing Romanian deadlifts if your hamstrings are a weak spot in your squatting). Don't try to train like a Mr Olympia athlete if it's your first day in the gym.

What do you want to achieve?

Be honest about it now, and you'll save time. Realistically, you can probably improve in a couple of areas at once – losing fat and building muscle, for instance, or building muscle and strength – but trying to hit more will lead to frustration and failure. If you just want to look good shirtless, that's fine: tailor your training to that, and you'll be more motivated in the long run. If your ultimate goal is long-term health, you can probably get results with minimal time in the gym and more long walks or sports sessions. Pick a goal – you can always change it later.

How often are you realistically able to train?

Don't commit to a six-day-a-week workout plan if you've never hit the gym before. You'll fail – and probably feel bad for trying. It's possible to get great results with three (or even two) sessions a week, provided you hit it hard when you're there, and pay attention to nutrition and recovery when you're not. If you can realistically only make it to the gym twice a week, for instance, focus on hitting every area of your body with big compound movements, bin off the isolation lifts and work hard on both days.



W10 PERFORMANCE

ELEIKO
25
SWEDEN

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25
SWEDEN

Key workout variables

Here's what you need to know

REP

Short for repetition, and one rep is one performance of a move from start to finish. The number of reps you do in a set (see 'Set', right) will vary depending on your goals. As a general rule, lower reps (three to five) done with heavy weights build strength or power, while rep counts in the eight to 12 range are more geared to hypertrophy, or building muscle. Anything beyond that is normally in the territory of muscular endurance. Most workout plans prescribe a certain number of reps or a range to aim for, but occasionally you'll see the instruction 'To failure' or 'To near failure', indicating that you should just do as many as you can. Finally, if you're doing exercises for a set time or with a certain weight, it's still worth keeping track of how many reps you do to give yourself a target for next time.

SET

A group of reps done non-stop, with the number, as with reps, depending on what you want out of your workouts. The usual prescription for most goals is three to four, but you might go higher (if you're training for volume, for instance, or doing lots of low-rep sets to build strength or power) or lower (doing one all-out set to failure). You'll also encounter supersets (two sets of complementary or contrasting moves done without resting between them), tri-sets (the same method but with three moves that usually hit the same body part) or giant sets (four or more moves, no rest).

REST

Probably the most-misused workout variable. The time you take between sets can have a huge impact on your progress, and too little can be just as bad as too much. For fat loss, for instance, shorter rests - anywhere from 60 seconds down to 10 - will keep your cardio output and metabolism high, while snatching a few extra seconds will give you a chance to recover. Conversely, if you're training for strength, you might need to take anywhere from three to five minutes between sets, to allow your nervous system to fully recover. Keep your watch or phone with you and be strict with your rest periods, whether they're long or short.



TEMPO

When it comes to building muscle, some trainers maintain that sets and reps aren't as important as time under tension, or just how long your muscle spends straining under the weights. A handful of slow, controlled reps can often beat a dozen high-speed ones, and for that reason many growth-focused programmes include a prescription for the tempo of each move. This is usually laid out in a four-digit format, for example 4120, which means you'd take four seconds for the eccentric/muscle-lengthening portion of the lift (normally the lowering part), pause at the bottom for a second, take two seconds to raise the weight, then go into the next rep with no pause. If you see an X on your tempo instructions, move through this part of the move as explosively as possible.



Advanced variables

FREQUENCY

How often you train a muscle group in a given period: a week or a month, say. Traditional bodybuilding “splits”, for instance, work one area (eg chest or legs) incredibly hard once a week – not an ideal template for beginners or intermediate lifters, who might get better results with two or even three sessions a week for each muscle group. If a body part's proving resistant to change, consider increasing the frequency with which you train it.

VOLUME

The amount of work you do for a given body part (or for your entire body) in a given period. As a general rule, high volume – like German Volume Training, which uses 10 sets of 10 reps – is better for muscle, while it's possible to build strength or power with much lower volume. It's also worth noting that higher-volume workouts tend to take longer to recover from.

FAILURE

The point at which your muscles momentarily stop working and won't let you do another rep. If building muscle is your main goal, hitting failure is encouraged – bodybuilders also employ techniques like the drop set (hitting failure, then reducing the weight and going again) or forced reps (getting a spotter to help) to go beyond failure. One warning: training to failure constantly places a lot of demand on your nervous system, so it isn't always beneficial.

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