

Useful Assistance Exercises

The greatest effect comes from the closest grip you can tolerate, and this will be controlled by your wrist flexibility. On a standard power bar, the knurl ends at between 16 and 17 inches, and this makes a good place to start. After a bench press workout, take about 50% of your 1RM out of the rack with a grip set so that your index fingers are on the line formed by the edge of the knurl. The exercise is performed the same way as the standard bench press, with the same breathing, back set, foot position, and tight upper back. Rack the set, wait a little and do another set with the grip one finger-width narrower on each side. Continue to narrow each set of five one finger-width until the wrist begins to complain at the bottom, and then widen back out one finger-width. This may have to be adjusted out a little as the weight goes up, because what doesn't hurt with light weights may very well be painful at heavier weights.

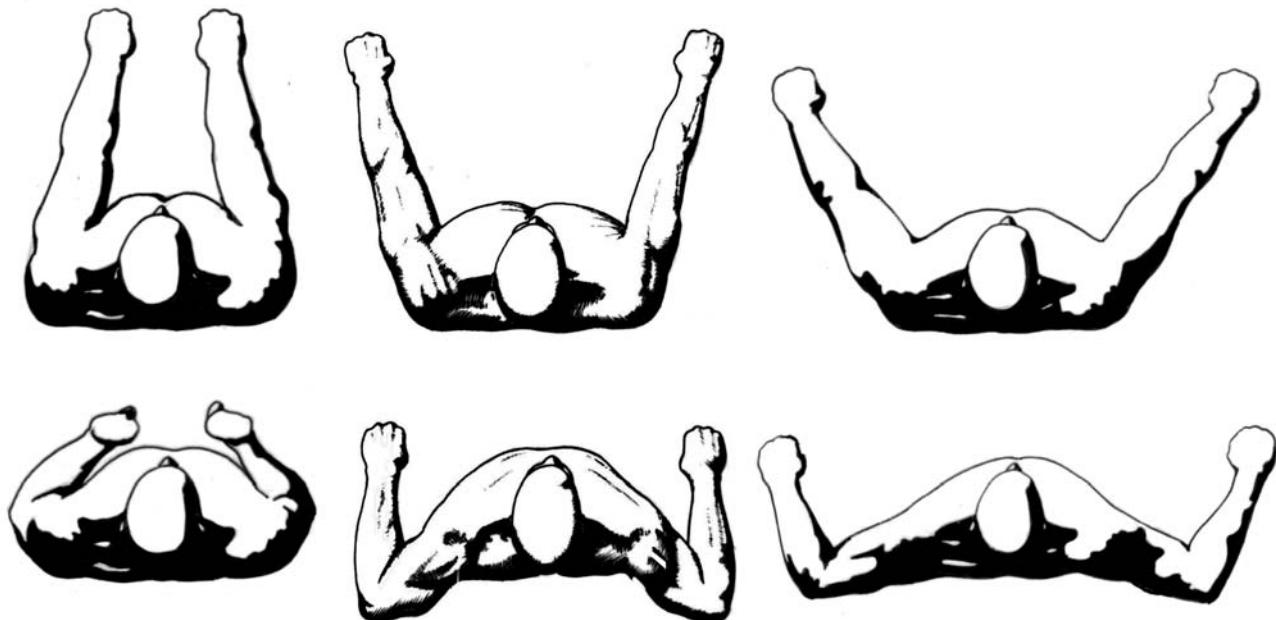


Figure 7-19. A comparison of the top and bottom position of the close grip, the standard grip, and the wide grip bench press. The longest range of motion is with the grip that allows the forearms to be vertical at the bottom. Any other forearm alignment causes the bar to touch the chest before full range of motion is reached.

Close-grips are usually used at higher reps, but this is merely tradition, and there is no reason that it must be done this way. Since they use a lighter weight than the bench press, they can be done after a bench workout, or they can be used on a separate day as a light day exercise. Care must be taken to hold the bar very tightly; the wrist position makes for a less secure grip than the conventional bench press, and it has been known to fail on the way up when the wrists "twitch" inconveniently. Close-grips are also famous for reaching failure rather suddenly, with the last completed rep giving little indication that the next one will be a partial. As a general rule, exercises that depend on less muscle mass or fewer muscle groups tend to fail more abruptly in their bar path than exercises that use more muscles. Learn to recognize this situation if you train by yourself, and rack the bar at the right time so you don't get pinned.