



*Building Strong Shoulders*

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When you are looking to improve shoulder strength and size the single best exercise is the overhead press (shoulder press). The overhead press is a multi-joint (shoulder and elbow) exercise that involves a large degree of stabilization, which makes it a great functional movement. I believe in functional multi-joint exercises for the shoulders over isolated exercises like the lateral and front raise. Always do exercises that will give you the most bang for your buck – the overhead press is the one for the shoulders.

There are a variety of ways to change up your overhead press to make it more challenging. Let us start with your lower body position. I know this seems odd because we are talking about developing shoulder strength, but I recommend always performing exercises in a standing position to improve core and leg strength as well as stability. A strict military press would require your legs to be locked out and use only upper body strength to lift the weight overhead. However, I use various stances with my athletes and clientele, for example, the push press where your feet are shoulder width and use your legs to initiate the movement to press the

weight overhead. You can also perform the push press in a split stance (lunge) position or even in a single leg stance to increase the level of stability.

Along with your stance, you can also perform the overhead press unilaterally and bilaterally or change the direction of the press to provide a different stimulus to your body. One obvious variation would be to do a single arm overhead press to isolate each side of the body. This is particularly useful when you see a weakness in one side of the body. If you notice your left arm is weaker in overhead press movements I would recommend performing an extra set or two on the weaker side. The overhead press should also be done in the frontal (side-to-side movements) and transverse (rotational movements) planes. Add overhead presses outward to your right and left with a dumbbell or kettlebell to your routine. Also, try incorporating backward rotational presses or forward rotational presses (like an uppercut). Whenever I design a shoulder routine, it will always include overhead presses in multiple planes to provide a different stimulus to the body (shoulder, core, and legs).

Here are a few tips on injury prevention in the shoulder and ways to enhance your overhead press: First, take a tight grip on the weight that you are going to press overhead. Gripping the weight tightly will activate those deep shoulder stabilizer muscles (rotator cuff), which will improve your shoulder stability and press strength. Secondly, when performing an overhead press be sure to keep your scapula (shoulder blade) retracted and depressed (down and back). You do not want your shoulder up by your ear on the top of the press. This will also help improve your press movements and save stress on your shoulder by increasing your scapular

stability. These two tips should help improve your shoulder strength and ensure your movements are efficient.