

TRAINING GUIDE

The Chest Training Guide

Build real chest strength and size without shoulder pain

Chest training goes wrong in two ways; either too much flat bench with no variation, or so much volume that shoulders start hurting. This guide covers the balanced approach that builds size and strength safely.

8 Best Exercises

Weekly
Programming

Progressive
Overload

Do's & Don'ts

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PT · Dad of 2

WHY BALANCED CHEST TRAINING MATTERS

The chest is one of the most trained muscles in the gym, and one of the most poorly programmed. Overemphasis on flat bench alone leaves the upper chest underdeveloped and increases the risk of shoulder issues over time.

VOLUME & FREQUENCY

- **FREQUENCY**

2x per week, ideally with some variation between the two sessions.

- **WEEKLY SETS**

12-16 working sets is the sweet spot for growth without overuse injuries.

- **REP RANGE**

6-8 for strength-focused pressing, 10-15 for accessory and isolation work.

THE FOUNDATION RULE

Include an incline pressing variation every week. Flat bench alone consistently leaves the upper chest underdeveloped, this is one of the most common imbalances in the gym.

8 BEST EXERCISES TO BUILD YOUR CHEST

Barbell Bench Press

COMPOUND

3-4 × 6-8

The foundation for chest strength and size.

Incline Dumbbell Press

COMPOUND

3 × 8-10

Targets the upper chest, which is often underdeveloped.

Dumbbell Bench Press

COMPOUND

3 × 8-12

Allows a greater range of motion and reduces shoulder strain versus barbell.

Weighted Dip

COMPOUND

3 × 8-12

Excellent for lower chest development and overall pressing strength.

Cable Crossover

ISOLATION

3 × 12-15

Builds the stretch and contraction that pressing movements alone miss.

Dumbbell Flye

ISOLATION

3 × 10-12

A classic isolation movement for chest width and definition.

Push-Up (weighted if needed)

COMPOUND

3 × 10-20

Still highly effective, especially for dads training at home with minimal equipment.

Machine Chest Press

COMPOUND

3 × 10-12

A joint-friendly way to add volume without the stabilisation demand of free weights.

HOW TO FIT THIS INTO YOUR WEEK

Pick the structure that matches the days you can realistically commit to, not the one you wish you had.

2-3 Days Available — Full Body

One pressing movement per session, alternating flat and incline focus across the week.

4 Days Available — Upper/Lower

Both upper days include chest work. Day 1: heavier flat pressing. Day 2: incline focus plus isolation work.

5-6 Days Available — Push/Pull/Legs

Chest is the primary focus of your Push day(s). Lead with the heaviest press, finish with flyes or crossovers.

SAMPLE FULL BODY CHEST SESSION

1. Barbell Bench Press — 3 × 8
2. Incline Dumbbell Press — 3 × 10
3. Cable Crossover — 2 × 15 (finisher)

PROGRESSIVE OVERLOAD — HOW TO GET STRONGER

Doing the same weight for the same reps forever is why most people stop seeing results. Progress needs to be tracked and deliberate. Use these methods, in this order of priority.

- 1 Add reps first (double progression)**
Work within a rep range, e.g. 8-12. Add a rep each week before adding weight, once you hit the top of the range for all sets, increase the load.
- 2 Add weight**
Once reps are maxed out, add a small amount of weight and drop back to the bottom of your rep range. Repeat the cycle.
- 3 Add sets**
Increase total volume gradually across a training block — e.g. 3 sets in week 1, building to 4-5 sets by week 4.
- 4 Improve technique and range of motion**
Better control and a fuller range at the same weight is genuinely harder and drives more progress than people realise.
- 5 Manipulate tempo**
A slower 3-4 second lowering phase increases time under tension without touching the weight on the bar.

EXAMPLE: 4-WEEK BENCH PRESS PROGRESSION

Week	Target
1	3 × 8 @ moderate working weight
2	3 × 9 @ same weight
3	3 × 10 @ same weight
4	Add weight, reset to 3 × 8, repeat cycle

DO

- ✓ Include an incline variation weekly. Flat bench alone leaves the upper chest underdeveloped.
- ✓ Control the eccentric (lowering) phase. Most people rush this and lose growth stimulus.
- ✓ Warm up your shoulders properly before heavy pressing, this is where most chest injuries start.

DON'T

- ✗ Don't flare your elbows to 90 degrees on bench press, this is a common cause of shoulder pain.
- ✗ Don't only train flat bench, you'll build a chest that's strong in one direction only.
- ✗ Don't ego lift on bench press, a partial rep with too much weight builds bad patterns, not muscle.

WANT THE FULL SYSTEM, NOT JUST ONE PIECE?

This guide is one piece of the puzzle. The Fit Dad Challenge brings training, nutrition and mindset together into one 6-week programme built around a dad's actual life.

[Join the Fit Dad Challenge — £99](#)