

DELT **GROWTH** CHEAT SHEET



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What They Do

The deltoid muscles, often referred to as the "deltoids," are a group of three distinct muscle heads located in the shoulder region. The deltoids are responsible for:

- **Shoulder abduction:** The deltoids allow you to lift your arms away from your body to the sides. This motion is called shoulder abduction and is essential in exercises like lateral raises and upright rows.
- **Shoulder flexion:** The anterior (front) deltoid head is primarily responsible for shoulder flexion, which involves raising your arms in front of you. This motion is used in exercises like front raises and barbell presses.
- **Shoulder extension:** The posterior (rear) deltoid head assists in shoulder extension, which involves moving your arms behind your body. This motion is important in exercises like bent raises and rear pec-deck flys.
- **Shoulder rotation:** The deltoids also aid in shoulder rotation, which allows your arms to rotate internally and externally. This motion is involved in various weightlifting exercises and is crucial for overall shoulder health and stability.

How Delts are Unique

- Hugely impactful for aesthetics
- Big contributor to bench press
- Big contributor to 'functional' upper body strength
- Often neglected by many powerlifters and gym-goers
- Said to respond better to high reps, though all reps provide growth and should be exploited



Why They Lag



LACK OF PRIORITY

Delts are often overlooked, as general gym-goers and powerlifters both tend to put bench press front and center in their training programs. If your shoulders are struggling to keep up, there needs to be dedicated days to putting the delts front and center, if not year round than at least through specialization blocks.

Even if you don't have a 'delt day', you can still make delts a priority by making sure that the work that is scheduled is done with ball breaking effort. Cable raises and machine presses should be done with just as much intent as benching and military presses.



LACK OF PROGRESSION

No matter the workout split or exercise selection, you **MUST** know how the movement is going to progress over time. This applies to your main barbell lifts and the light cable work you do at the end. If you have heavier overhead pressing at the beginning of a workout, make sure you know the method of increasing stress. It could be as simple as adding a few lbs each workout, pushing to failure and trying to beat your previous reps, or a more complicated percentage or RPE based progression.



JUMPING AROUND

I'm a big believer that exercises should be done for as many weeks as it takes to notice progress. Ideally you leave them in for as long as they are working for you. If delts have historically been an afterthought, it was likely easy to justify moving between dumbbell, machine and cable variations week to week. While changing grips, tempo and equipment can be fun, it makes progressing more complicated and uncertain.

Find a few staple movements that are proven and spend a few months milking them for all they are worth. Whether it's a cable lateral raise or a barbell push press, improved ability in the form of more weight is the surest sign that gains have been realized.



TOO MUCH PRESSING

While it's rare that too much shoulder pressing is the real reason for no gains, attempting to stack a lot of heavy military presses on top of an aggressive bench program has certainly sidelined many people. If you try to grow everything at once, using a hammer for each of them, you're going to be left underrecovered, unable to make progress and likely wincing every time you have to lift your arm to get something off the top shelf.

BASIC GROWTH



SIMPLE RECIPE

Bigger delts just require the selection of a few established exercises and long term commitment to getting really, really good at them. This is of course, true for all muscle groups, but it bears repeating for delts as they are often put second tier behind benching or chest-dominant pressing exercises.

A standard delt workout would use a variety of reps, starting with heavier compound movements when you are fresh and moving to higher rep ranges with isolation exercises as you fatigue. 2-4 exercises for 2-4 sets of 5-20+ reps: as long as there is effort here and you are chasing more weight/work over time, it's hard to go wrong here.



BODYBUILDERS AND POWERLIFTERS

Example:

- Standing Barbell Press variation
- Seated Machine/DB Press variation
- Raise variation
- Rear delt variation

For the 'hypertrophy only' crowd, overloaded presses aren't mandatory, but whichever exercises you do choose must be approached with great effort. If you are relying on machine presses and cable raises, act like you're prepping for a cable raise powerlifting meet.

BENCH PRESSERS

Bench press specialists have a problem, as benching creates so much fatigue in the front delts and triceps as is, but might not be sufficient to stimulate delt specific growth. Adding in more overhead pressing might interfere with bench progress and lead to overtraining or overuse issues. You might consider separate 'off-season' blocks where there is less bench specific frequency, so overhead press work can temporarily be prioritized.

Or you might instead feature regular shoulder work with smaller, more recoverable movements like raises or presses with machines or dumbbells. Again, as long as you are progressing the movement like it's your job, you will grow.

Making It Yours

SHOULDER GAINS 'CHEAT SHEET'



There are, of course, more simple programs that feature almost exclusively barbell compound movements, often in whole body splits with each exercises occurring 2-3x per week. Few things will guarantee stacked shoulders capable of moving mountains than regular overhead press practice through the week. Some might find they respond better to this than others, so if your press, and thus shoulder growth, is stagnant (after months of dedicated work with this split, of course) you can always add in work with smaller movements and track results. You might find more dedicated sessions with more work, done once per week to allow more recovery, creates more growth with less inflammation or pain. When a block works well, copy it down and put it in a folder of 'shit that works' so you can come back to it.

CLUTCH EXERCISES

MACHINE PRESSES - Complete stability for maximal motor unit recruitment

PUSH PRESSES - full range of motion speed, effort and overload

BAR DIPS - deep, heavy and all-out

DUMBBELL PRESSES - Seated, Neutral, Arnold, etc.

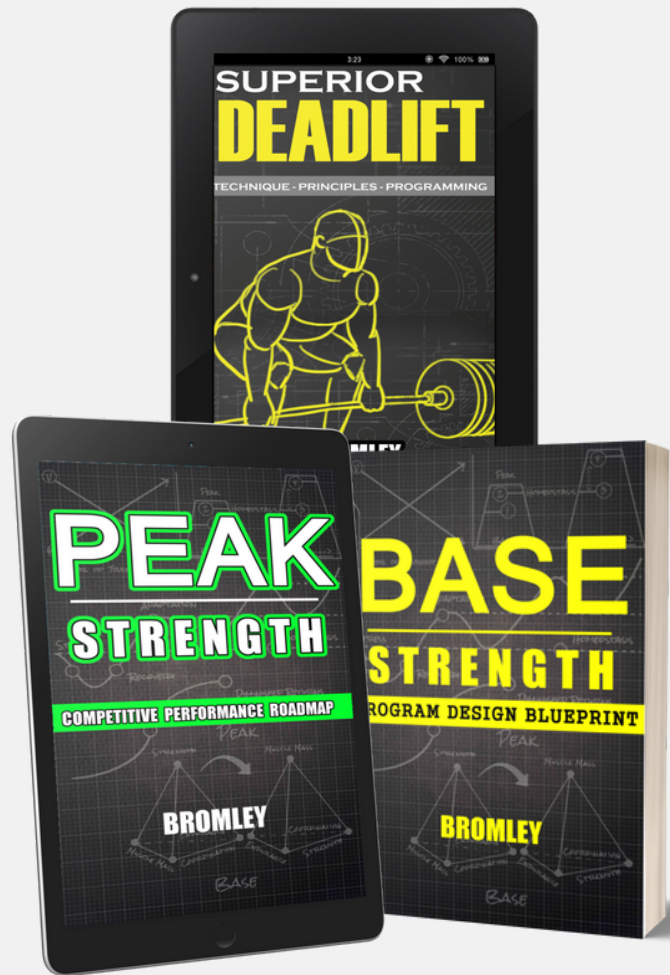
RAISES - strict, loose, dumbbells, cables... just progress

ROTATION/HEALTH - Seated db cleans, face pulls, external DB rotations, bent dumbbell raises

LEAST FAVORITE- Arm circles, plate halos/rotations/swings, upright rows, high pulls, awkward pressing like standing dumbbell presses, bent-presses and z-presses

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