

## The “Pyramid” Technique

Let’s take a look at a standard “pyramid” type of program using the bench press, a maneuver that concentrates on the chest muscles. You should begin by using a light weight. Even if it’s just a bar without weight stacked on either side or light dumbbells, make sure you can perform 10 to 15 repetitions without fatigue. This will dilate the arteries and warm up all of the involved muscle groups. In your next set you should complete 6 to 8 repetitions of a heavier weight—enough to elicit a major effort on the last two repetitions. Follow this set with two sets of 3 to 5 repetitions with even more weight (closer to your “max”).

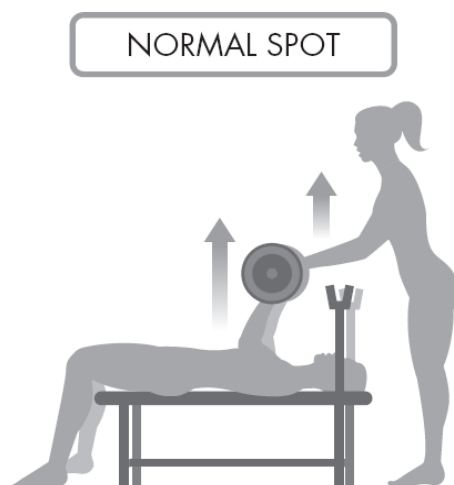
Return to the weight used in your second set. More developed muscles can handle more resistance and more resistance requires more developed muscles with the same 6 to 8 repetitions, and then do a final set of 10 repetitions with a lighter weight. It’s a tried and true format and is very simple to follow. Use the same progression for each of the muscle groups you want to work, making sure you give each muscle group adequate recovery time—three to four days or until it is not sore—before working it again.

The table below illustrates a traditional “pyramid” muscle building workout example with an optional “burn out” set at the end:

### Sample Pyramid Muscle Building Technique

Set	Weight	Repetitions
Warm up	Light	10-15
1	Moderate	6-8
2	Heavy	3-5
3	Heavy	3-5
4	Moderate	6-8
*Warm down	Light	10 or burn out

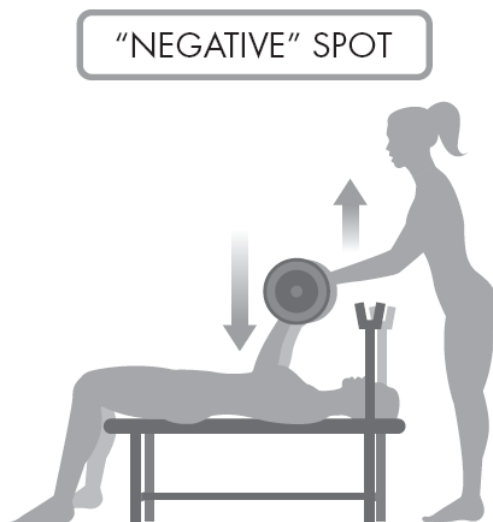
\*A “burn out” set is optional and represents the number of repetitions you can perform until muscle fatigue.



Although resistance training to the point of “muscular failure” is a proven technique that maximizes muscle strength and size, you should aim for just “muscle fatigue” and let your spotter know if you require more assistance. A good spotter offers just enough assistance to allow you to continue moving the weight while maintaining a natural path of movement (proper technique) so you don’t get thrown off balance or injured.

## Accentuate the Negative

Another technique to augment size and strength is called a negative. This building exercise is actually backwards from the usual technique and it requires the assistance of a spotter.



The object is to slowly lower (or decelerate) the weight against gravity until you come to the end of the particular range of motion. The spotter helps you maintain a slow, steady speed while you give your maximum effort resisting the force of gravity during this focused muscle release and lengthening (EC).

A true muscle building negative involves enough weight to inhibit you from performing a tightening and shortening contraction (CC) on your own after the long, controlled “negative” (EC) contraction. After you finish with the negative portion, you are ready to begin your CC and a spotter is necessary to assist you with enough force to keep the weight moving at a steady pace, to return you to the starting position and get you ready to perform another negative repetition.

Unless building strength and size are your top priorities and your spotter is experienced in this technique, I recommend you start and continue with a moderate amount of weight and less intensity. This advanced negative technique is most commonly utilized by the younger aspiring athletes and serious weight lifters, but you can take advantage of it too as long as you promise me that you will be cautious.

Negatives can be performed as an individual exercise or also at the end of a difficult set of more traditional resistance training as well. After you perform the last two difficult repetitions (CC) at the end of a set, you can perform one to three more negatives with a spotter and really stimulate those muscle fibers.