

# Chins

By  
Alan Palmieri

Squats are killers but chins are seemingly impossible for the vast majority of bodybuilders. So much so that I know of more bodybuilders with great physiques that can't perform chins than I do that can. Especially if we're talking about sternum chins, the granddaddy of them all and in my opinion, the most productive. Even those who do include chins in their workouts don't usually do sternum chins.

First let's make certain we are talking about chins, not pull-ups what some people call chins, there is a difference. Pull-ups are performed with the palms facing the body while chins have the palms facing away from the body. I'm talking about chins, not pull-ups. Pull-ups are a great movement for developing the biceps even though most people don't include them in their workouts. Chins on the other hand are good power and development movements for the arms and back. Sternum chins are one of the most difficult but most rewarding of all for back development.



Hand position for pull-ups



Hand position for chins

The problem with chins is they are so darn difficult to do. You can do chin after chin every day and it seems like you can't add any additional repetitions. Eventually you give up out of sheer frustration and lack of progress. After a long absence you return only to discover the same frustration all over again. You begin by psyching yourself up, "you can do it," "just two clean reps." You jump up and grab the bar, uuuuugghh... strain with all your might and maybe, just maybe, you get half way up. Your attempt at the second rep is a total and complete failure. For a couple of months you do the same thing twice a week and the results are the same each workout. Who could blame you for hating chins?

I believe in chins and have used them in several of my routines. The problem is I'm not good at chins, never have been and never will be. I include them in some routines because I feel they are the best option for what I may be trying to accomplish. I don't like them and I include them only as a last resort. How's that for honesty!

Over the years I've tried to better my chins with various programs, none worked. I've never found a way to increase the number of chins I can perform to a level I felt satisfied with. I did however; follow a system that improved my ability to perform chins. Nothing great mind you, but at least to a number of repetitions that can tax the muscles productively. My approach is nothing new and I've read and heard about it a dozen times over the years. One day I just finally decided I needed to do something and so I started. I've had others try it and it helped them also so chances are, you can benefit too

Select two days a week to perform chins. Make certain there are at least two days between each session, Monday and Thursday for example. Include this on your normal back workout days. After you warm up lightly include the following technique first in your workout.

First Back Workout of The Week.

Step up on a bench or ladder that allows you to grab the bar and position yourself so that your head and chin are higher than the bar with the bar touching your upper chest. Now step off whatever you are standing on and hold the starting position for a count of

two. Next, slowly lower yourself down so that it takes a slow count of six to lower yourself to the bottom position. Immediately step back on the bench or ladder and repeat the process. Perform this sequence for as many reps as you can until you can accomplish at least 10 reps in perfect form. Start with one set and as you progress add another set, then another until you can perform three sets of ten reps.

### Second Back Workout of The Week.

This workout you are to perform three sets of chins for as many reps as you can.

It's not a complicated program and if you are like me, not one you will look forward to. It did help increase my chinning ability and the number of reps I was able to perform. The first time I started this technique I was able to get one and a half chins and that's all. No matter what I did I couldn't get two good chins. Little by little the technique I just outlined helped me to the point I was able to perform chins for sets of ten reps. Perhaps not outstanding but from where I came from a huge success, especially considering I weighed between 220 lbs and 270 lbs. That is another factor for consideration. The more you weigh the more difficult it will be to perform chins. Some people will increase their chinning ability simply by dropping a few pounds.

Another little trick I found helpful is by starting the movement upward with my lat muscles. Over the years I've noticed a good many people begin the chin using their arm strength and let the back come into play well after the arms have started the job. Begin the chin movement with your lat muscles first. This may be difficult to begin with. With practice and in getting the technique down you will be amazed at how much better your chinning becomes.

Now, once you are able to perform some chins, even though they may be few in number, try including some Sternum Chins for back development. I think this movement is one of the very best for the lats although it is perhaps rarely used. Some may even find them easier to perform than regular chins.

Position your hands on a chinning bar just like you would for regular chins only bring your hands closer together. Now pull yourself up and touch your sternum (lower chest) to the bar. Make certain you arch your back throughout the movement. In the top position you should be just about horizontal with the floor. Lower yourself and repeat. Even a couple of sets consisting of a few reps really work the lats. One secret to making the movement more productive is to contract the lats in the up position. If you can learn to *squeeze* them back and down while the bar is touching your sternum, I can guarantee fantastic lat development.



Sternum Chin

Don't allow discouragement to keep you from working on chinning. If you are poor at chins, perform them first in your back workouts. If you don't do them at all, try the exercises I just outlined. Practice and stay determined.

Good Luck!

*Model for all pictures: Walter Gibson*

© Copyright 2005 Alan Palmieri