

Incline....

by

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Sometime in the mid 60's I advanced from the wooden bench I used for my workouts to the "Weider Professional 3-in-1 Adjusto Bench." The bench was advertised monthly in "Mr. America" and "Muscle Builder." I'll never forget the day Mason - Dixon, the freight company, delivered the unit. It was assembled and came in a cardboard box. I wanted it because it had racks and I could use it for incline work as well as many other movements. Man, what a bench. Years later I had a man tell me he heard Weider benches were not very well constructed back in those days. Well I can tell you one thing, the bench I got not only looked great with its gold painted steel frame and red leatherette padding, it was one of the best built units I've ever owned. In fact it was better than some pieces a few of the gyms I frequented had.

As well built and sturdy as the unit was, it did have two main problems. Problems in design not uncommon for benches built back then or even today for that matter. When you set the bench to incline, the racks would never be in the right position or high enough. The other problem was the racks were not tall enough for you to get under to do squats. My father worked with a man who made an extra set of racks that fitted into the bench and I could easily do squats but still could not perform certain degrees of inclines.

When I started to visit and train at various gyms in the 60's, I noticed their inclines were mostly stationary. Some had seated inclines with racks that were pitched at about 45-degrees. The first time I used one of these inclines I discovered soreness the next day in some of my upper pec area but mostly in my delts and triceps. Surprising to me as I thought I was going to really feel it more in the upper pec's, and that is where I wanted to feel it. My disappointment set me out to explore all I could find out about incline benches and how to work the upper pec's

Watching others train and reading all the magazines I could, it looked to me like everyone was performing inclines on a 45-degree angle. How could this be? That steep an incline just didn't seem to feel right! As with almost all my training I began reading, asking questions, watching and experimenting. I soon discovered, and I'm not the first to find it out, various degrees of incline will work muscles differently. Aren't you surprised at this finding? You can tell my education on this subject came early on in my bodybuilding efforts.

I really like performing front dumbbell raises while in a 45-degree angle but I don't use the 45 for any chest work because for me it's too steep. After years of fooling around with a 45-degree bench, I just never did feel or see any benefit in relation to pec development. Delts and triceps received the majority of the work as well as the benefits.

What I learned was this: a much less degree of incline produced the most favorable results. In some instances simply placing a 2 x 4 or a 45 lbs plate under one end of a flat bench worked great. So did inclines of 15 – 20 – 25 and 30 degrees. I prefer a 20 to 25 degree angle and it does hit my upper pec's, especially if I am performing presses to the neck or dumbbell flies in a manner that keeps the hands and dumbbells up high.

This brings up a point often overlooked when discussing an incline movement. The affect on the muscle being worked does not only rest in the angle or degree of the bench but also in the position and placement of the hands and arms throughout the movement. Even on a flat bench, presses to the neck will work the upper chest more while bringing the bar down lower to the sternum will work the lower part of the pec's. The same holds true for dumbbell flies.

It's nice to add variety to a workout and benches with different angles can certainly do that. Don't fall into a rut where you find yourself performing the same movements at the same angle. Mix it up. Your muscles will respond favorably.