

# **Presses For Shoulder Development**

**by**

**Alan Palmieri**

While some find various forms of lateral raises good for developing the delts, I have found presses to be the most productive for adding size. Naturally I favor both presses and lateral raises for overall development but for pure size alone, experience has taught me presses, with both dumbbells and barbells are superior.

The shoulders, or deltoids - delts as they are referred to in bodybuilding circles, consists of three separate heads. The first is the Anterior or frontal delt. The second is the Lateral or side delt. The third is the Posterior or rear delt. For complete development all three heads must be developed proportionately. It is far too common to see people with overly developed frontal delts and underdeveloped side and or rear delts.

Some prefer lateral raises to presses but I can assure you of one thing, no one has ever developed massive shoulders without employing presses as part of their workout. No matter how many lateral raises you do or how you do them, I don't believe you can acquire massive size solely by performing lateral raises. Some of bodybuilding greats with the best developed shoulders, Draper, Howorth, Scott, Oliva, and those of more recent time, all credit presses for their superb delt development.

Lateral raises are definitely a required movement for overall development and lateral raises are needed to sculpture and define the delts but as for size... well, you need to press and you need to press heavy and frequently.

I personally prefer dumbbell presses to barbell presses for several different reasons. One of the main reasons is barbell presses restrict movement while dumbbells allow a more unrestricted movement and I feel I also get a better range of motion from

working with dumbbells. I have also learned to avoid a much advocated and used movement, the barbell press behind the neck. For me, this movement places my joints in an awkward position and on more than one occasion I have hurt my shoulder joints while performing it. Front barbell presses do not cause the same problem for me however, and I do use them from time to time but I still prefer dumbbell presses.

You can't use as heavy a weight with dumbbells as you can a barbell but, if executed properly, I've learned I can get better results with dumbbells. I've also learned most people perform dumbbell presses in a way that places more emphasis on the triceps than it does on the delts thus keeping the delts from responding and growing as they could. Another thing I've noticed over the years is people tend to favor barbell pressing instead of pressing with dumbbells. After talking to a great many people I've concluded the main reason is two-fold. First, as already noted, barbells allow more weight to be used and second, dumbbells require bringing into play stabilizer muscles not used when performing lateral raises or barbell presses. So the natural tendency for using more weight and the difficulty of using dumbbells often keep people from employing perhaps the best shoulder developing movement from their workouts, the dumbbell press.

As far as the execution of the dumbbell press I prefer to use, it takes some practice to get it down correctly but the rewards are well worth the effort.

1. Start by taking a shoulder width stance. Bend the knees slightly.
2. Bring the dumbbells up to your shoulders with your palms facing away from your body.
3. The plates next to your thumb should be to the outside of your shoulders. Most people make the mistake of bringing the dumbbells in too close to the body or too far away.
4. The end of the dumbbells closest to your delts should be lower than the end farther away from your delts. In other words, they should be somewhat tilted downward.
5. Now press the dumbbells upward and as you do also pull your elbows backward. In other words your hands will not travel in a straight path upward but will make

an arch as your elbows are pulled backward. This is somewhat difficult to explain and execute unless you work primarily on form first and poundage after you have mastered the technique.

6. Do not allow the elbows to lockout in the top position. This removes the stress from the delts. Also do not allow the delts to rest when you lower the dumbbells. Keep constant tension on the delts at all times.

Personally I have found going up and down the rack the most productive method when working with dumbbell presses. Start with a weight you can perform 12 reps with, after your last rep immediately set the dumbbells down and pick up a pair 5 pounds heavier. Now perform 10 reps. Set these dumbbells down, pick up a pair 5 pounds heavier and perform 8 reps and so on and so on up the rack. Once you have performed all you can, rest for about three minutes and begin the process in reverse order. Start with the heaviest dumbbells you can and work your way down the rack.

A modified version of the above is to start with the lightest dumbbells I could perform 12 reps with. Immediately after the 12 rep I would set the dumbbells down and pick up a pair 5 pounds heavier and perform 10 reps. After the last rep I would set the dumbbells down and immediately pick up a pair 5 pounds heavier and perform 8 reps and so on until I could only perform 2 reps. I would then rest for about three minutes and then proceed in reverse order starting with the heaviest dumbbells first for the fewest reps working down to the lightest weight for the most reps.

When training to increase the size and shape of my delts I like the following routine consisting of working them twice a week. Monday's I would perform the up and down the rack dumbbell presses as described above. On Thursday I would perform standing side lateral raises and front lateral raises. 3 to 6 sets of each for around 8 reps. On the days I train back I would perform bent over lateral raises for 3 to 6 sets of 8 reps. This routine has always been a good one for me and produced excellent results. I made certain to use the maximum poundage I could handle in good form. I did allow slight cheating for the last couple of reps of each set if necessary. Care has to be given however,

as the shoulders are actually delicate joints. Anyone who has ever injured their shoulder can attest to this fact.

There were times when I would push myself to total failure performing maybe six to ten sets of each movement, presses and laterals. I would incorporate this type of training sporadically on days I had the additional energy for a more intense workout. Care has to be given in the frequency one uses this method as over training is a definite payback. In my case, I would use this method maybe once a month, occasionally twice a month but that would be it. The benefit and results would show up for several weeks afterwards.

As with all my training after about four to six weeks I would change things around but my basic routine of choice has always been the one I just outlined.

Happy Delt Building!

[www.PalmieriBodybuilding.com](http://www.PalmieriBodybuilding.com)

© 2005 Alan Palmieri