

# **THE TOP 16 TIPS TO INCREASE YOUR OVERHEAD SHOULDER PRESS**

**PERFECT THE OVERHEAD  
SHOULDER PRESS**

**With These 16 Tips**

**PDF BONUS**

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Thank you so much for downloading this free PDF guide. I've created it as part of the overhead press guide, which you can read [here](#). Let's get to it.

# The Top 16 Tips to Increase Your Overhead Shoulder Press

## 1. Train The Lift More Frequently

Training volume - the amount of work we do in the gym - is vital for building strength and muscle mass. Research shows that doing more work leads to more muscle growth, which, in turn, allows us to build more strength in the long run (1). A larger muscle has a greater strength capacity.

But research also shows that, independent of training volume, training frequency is vital for strength gain (2). This makes sense because the more frequently we do a specific exercise, the better we get at it, and the more we improve our neuromuscular capacity.

In other words, if you want to build a solid overhead press, you need to do it more frequently. As a rule of thumb, you should train it two to three times per week, always making sure to have at least 48 hours of recovery in between sessions.

## 2. Practice Different Overhead Press Variations

Okay, you've decided to overhead press three times per week. Now what? Well, one option is to go in and train the variation you want to improve. For most people, that's the standing barbell press.

But we can make an argument for practicing different forms of overhead pressing. This is beneficial because it allows us to vary the stress we place on our joints and connective tissues and keep our training more fun.

For example, you might choose these variations:

- Standing barbell shoulder press
- Seated dumbbell shoulder press
- Standing push-press

Inside a training week, it might look like this:

- Monday - Standing barbell shoulder press (4 sets)
- Wednesday - Seated dumbbell shoulder press (3 sets)
- Friday - Standing push-press (4 sets)

### 3. Take Advantage of Different Repetition Ranges

You've decided on a weekly training frequency, and you know which overhead presses you want to do. What's next?

Just as you do different exercises to keep your training fun and vary the stress, you should also train with different loads. This is good for further varying the stress you cause and hopefully place enough mechanical tension and metabolic stress on your muscles for growth (3).

For instance, you can reserve the heavy sets of 5-7 reps for the standing overhead press. But there is no reason why you should only lift heavy. You can do sets of 6-10 reps on the second exercise and 10-15 reps on the third.

For example:

- Monday - Standing barbell shoulder press (4 sets, 5 to 8 reps)
- Wednesday - Seated dumbbell shoulder press (3 sets, 10 to 15 reps)
- Friday - Standing push-press (4 sets, 6 to 10 reps)

### 4. Get Your Stance Right

I've seen this more times than I can count:

A fellow grabs a barbell, unracks it, and begins to do overhead shoulder presses. Everything seems fine until I take a look at the stance. In many cases, they would have their feet close together, almost touching each other. Other individuals are the opposite:

They would have their feet spread wide as if they are about to do a sumo deadlift.

But what's so wrong with something in between? Why do we have to be on one end or the other? I've found that my strongest stance is when my feet are at roughly hip-width level with the toes pointed slightly out.

Of course, you can experiment, but a hip-width stance should be great for most people. And in case you feel indifferent about your stance, remember that buildings start with a foundation, and so does a good overhead press. If you're pressing from a shaky foundation, you won't build a strong press. It's as simple as that.

## 5. Build a Solid Foundation (Proper Footwear)

I know that many people feel it's perfectly fine to lift heavy weights on a pair of running shoes, but I disagree. Most shoes, particularly those with squishy soles, create an unstable foundation.

The goal of such shoes is to absorb the striking impact and keep your joints healthy. These shoes aren't made for creating much stability, which can be problematic if you want to lift something heavy over your head.

If you're serious about building strength, I recommend investing some money in a good pair of lifting or olympic shoes. If that's not an option since, let's face it, such shoes can be expensive, the next best bet is a shoe with a flat and non-compressive sole. I use Chuck Taylor's, and I've had my most recent pair for over five years. They are cheap, comfortable, and incredibly durable.



## 6. Get Your Hands In The Right Position

Similar to stance width, people often struggle to create a good, firm grip. In most cases, folks have their grip wide, identical to that of the bench press. The problem is, while technically okay, this width prevents you from creating a tight upper body and putting your back to good use.

Sure, you can use that width for some hypertrophy work, but a narrower grip will allow you to produce much more force.

As a rule of thumb, have your arms to your sides, raise them in front of your body, and place your hands evenly on the barbell. This will be a good position for your hands.

## **7. Press The Bar In a Straight Vertical Line**

The shortest distance between two points is in a straight line. A solid overhead shoulder press occurs when you get the barbell from point A to B in the shortest and most efficient path, which is a straight line.

Besides allowing you to move the weight through a shorter range of motion, you maintain the strong position you create at the start of the set.

Many people begin to press up but find themselves bringing the barbell forward and up again to avoid hitting their face. The simple fix for this is to get your head back as you initiate each push. As you press the barbell over your body, bring your head back, so it's directly under the bar.

With each repetition, make sure to keep the barbell over your center of gravity and press it in a straight line. You'd be surprised how big of an impact this simple fix can have.

## **8. Breathe And Brace Well**

Breathing and bracing are two other crucial elements of a strong lift that many people never pay attention to.

Good breathing is essential because it allows you to do more work and thoroughly exhaust your working muscles. Some folks find themselves stopping a set short, not because they've trained the right muscles enough, but because they simply can't get enough air into their lungs. So breathe in before initiating each repetition, press up, and breathe out on your way down.

Bracing your core is also vital because it allows you to create a stable position to push off of. This means engaging your glutes, lower back, and abs. Before pressing a weight over your head, always make sure to engage these areas as best as you can.

## **9. Warm-Up Well Before Each Session**

Many people neglect a crucial element of good training - the warm-up. Taking the time to prepare your body for the workout is vital because it improves your performance, keeps your joints healthy, and improves your range of motion (4).

I'm sure you've seen this once or twice before:

A guy - wait, a bro - walks into the gym, greets his friends, asks if the bench is free and, if it is, slaps a couple of 45-pound plates to warm up. Sure, he gets to save ten, maybe fifteen minutes. Big whoop. This way of thinking (and training) is going to catch up with him, and let me be blunt:

He won't be able to train consistently and make good progress with injured shoulders.

To prevent this from happening to you, take your time to warm up nicely. First, begin with a general warm-up by doing some light cardio or dynamic stretching. This will loosen your body, prime your mind, and raise your core body temperature.

Once you've warmed up well and your shoulders are ready, it all comes down to doing a few warm-up sets before getting into the workout. For example, if you plan to overhead press with 135 pounds, it could look like this:

Set 1: 45 lbs for 10 reps (empty bar)

Set 2: 90 lbs for 2-4 reps

Set 3: 115 lbs for 1 rep

Set 4: 135 lbs (first working set)

## 10. Take Good Care Of Your Shoulder Mobility

The shoulder is certainly not a stiff joint, but you shouldn't use this as an excuse never to do mobility work. Besides warming up before every workout, it never hurts to throw some mobility exercises into the mix. This will keep your shoulders moving freely and prevent injuries.

In [this video](#), Omar Isuf shows us three tests we can do at home to determine our shoulder mobility level. I recommend starting with this one to determine how mobile your shoulders are.

After that, check out this [video](#) by Jeff Cavaliere showing two different rotator cuff stretches. Incorporating these into your warm-up can improve your mobility and keep your shoulders healthy in the long run.

## 11. Set Yourself Up For Success

I've learned a crucial lesson after spending years in the gym:

Lifting weights is not about moving the weight from point A to B for the sake of completing sets. Building muscle and getting stronger is about [being mindful](#), training with proper technique, engaging the correct muscles, and putting yourself in the best possible position for success.

Before realizing this, I thought I was training right. In reality, I was ego lifting and never setting myself up for my sets. Unsurprisingly, I saw almost no progress for a long time.

To get the most out of each set, you need to take the time to set yourself up. So, what does this mean for the overhead shoulder press? As you grab the barbell:

- Tighten your upper back and force your chest out.
- Screw your body into the barbell to create a tight upper body position. Imagine that you're trying to bend the bar with your bare hands, similar to how you would prepare for a bench press.
- Squeeze your glutes to ensure your pelvis remains in a stable position and doesn't tilt forward, which typically results in a lower back arch.
- Brace your abs even before unracking the barbell. This ensures your upper body remains stable and also prevents you from leaning back because of the load.

Taking five to ten seconds to set yourself up before each set is incredibly valuable. You'll find yourself in a much stabler and more confident position to press impressive weights over your head.

## 12. Use a Weight Belt

There are a couple of ways to approach weight training, and neither is inherently wrong. Some people prefer to train beltless all of the time, even when lifting close to their one-repetition maximum. In theory, this should allow for superior core activation and development.

On the other hand, some folks also recommend using a weight belt when handling heavier weights, and I'm one of them. When used correctly, a weight belt serves two purposes:

- It improves intra-abdominal pressure, resulting in more stability and slightly better strength output (5)
- It keeps you stable and in a stronger position, possibly reducing your risk of injury, especially when handling heavier weights (5)

For further reading on the topic, I recommend [this article](#) by Greg Nuckols, but here is the gist:

- Use a belt between 9 and 13 mm in thickness and 4 to 6 inches in width (10 to 15 cm).
- Tighten the belt well but not to the point where you can't inhale into your belly. Always leave a bit of room for a full breath.
- Breathe into the belt before initiating each repetition.
- Don't use the belt on all sets. Mostly save it for your heaviest work and do beltless sets on accessory lifts and when using lighter weights.
- Suck it up and get used to the bruising and initial pain of the belt. It should go away within a few training sessions.

## 13. Strengthen Your Triceps

Like with any other pressing exercise, your triceps play a significant role in the overhead press, seeing as they produce elbow extension.

So, if your goal is to build a solid overhead shoulder press, don't neglect direct tricep work. Two fantastic exercises you should do are the [close-grip bench press](#) and [bodyweight dips](#).

Virtually all pressing exercises will strengthen your triceps to some degree, but the above two are excellent because they emphasize them better. Plus, the overloading potential is excellent, and both exercises allow you to place significant mechanical tension on the triceps.

## 14. Leverage The Power of Visualization

Visualization might seem like some gimmick, but there is a lot of truth to it. By imagining yourself doing something, you can improve your performance and drastically increase your chances of success.

Researchers suggest that PETTLEP-based imagery can improve sports performance. PETTLEP itself stands for:

- Physical
- Environment
- Task
- Timing
- Learning
- Emotion
- Perspective

For more information on this, I strongly recommend [this](#) piece and [this](#) overview of two studies.

To avoid overwhelming yourself right from the start, you can begin with something simple. Instead of fiddling with your phone between sets of the overhead press, stand next to the barbell, close your eyes, breathe deeply, and imagine yourself doing something specific. For example, if you're aiming for a new 1 RM, imagine yourself achieving the record. If you're doing training sets, imagine yourself lifting the weight with ease.

The mind is a powerful ally, so long as we learn how to use it to our advantage.



## 15. Follow a Proven Strength Program

If you've been struggling to improve your overhead shoulder press, using a proven strength program might help.

It's easy to walk into the gym day after day, do the same things, and wonder why you aren't making any measurable progress. After all, consistency is key, right? Well, consistency is only key when you channel your efforts into productive tactics and habits.

I know plenty of people who've been training for years with little to show for it. Their results are mediocre at best. A significant reason is that they wing it when it comes to training. They go in, do a bunch of exercises and leave. There is no thought of workout structure, progression, or anything else.

This is why a proven strength program can help. Most notably, you have a timeframe and clear objectives. You have daily, weekly, and monthly numbers you need to cover. You also learn how to pay better attention to your recovery. When you look at your sheet for the next training block, you can say:

"Whoa, I'll be lifting **x** weight for **y** reps on **z** date."

If you follow the program with discipline, take care of your recovery, and eat well, you will be lifting that weight. As far as programs go, you can go down many roads because there are dozens of great programs out there. For instance, I've had great experiences with Jim Wendler's 5/3/1 and Beyond 5/3/1 back in the day. I ran the 5/3/1 program for a year and improved my main lifts by 100 to 125 percent. Mind you, I was pretty weak in the beginning, but that was a significant improvement.

There is so much to learn from others. You don't need to figure out everything through trial and error. There are plenty of great minds who've worked hard for years to produce great training systems for us. *Take advantage of that.*

Some other great programs are:

- Westside Method
- Strong Lifts 5x5
- Jonnie Candito's Six Week Program

## 16. Rest And Recover

Strength training places a lot of stress on your body, and you need time to recover well. In the context of getting stronger, this refers to two things:

- How well you recover between sets
- How well you recover between *workouts*

First - and this is especially important when lifting heavy weights - you need to rest long enough between sets (6). General guidelines recommend to rest for:

- 3 to 5 minutes on heavy sets (3-6 reps)
- 2 to 3 minutes on moderate sets (5 to 8 reps)
- 1 to 2 minutes on lighter sets (8 to 12 reps)
- 30 to 90 seconds on light work (12+ reps)

This is important for effective training because it allows you to do more repetitions on every set, get more practice with the weight, and accumulate more training volume for muscle growth.

Besides that - and this applies to everyone - is the recovery between workouts. Many lifters don't realize the fact that growth occurs *outside* the gym. The harder you train and the more work you do, the more time your body needs to recover and adapt before you can stress it again. If you constantly train in an under-recovered state, you drastically increase your risk of overtraining or injuries.

One important element for long-term improvements is to take deload weeks for every six to ten weeks of serious training. A deload week is a period you take to have less challenging workouts, which gives your body time to recover better.

Besides that, you should also make sure to eat well, get enough calories, and learn how to organize your training intelligently.

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- [Newbie Gains: 7 Steps to Maximize Your Muscle and Strength Gains](#)

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