



*Franco Columbu*

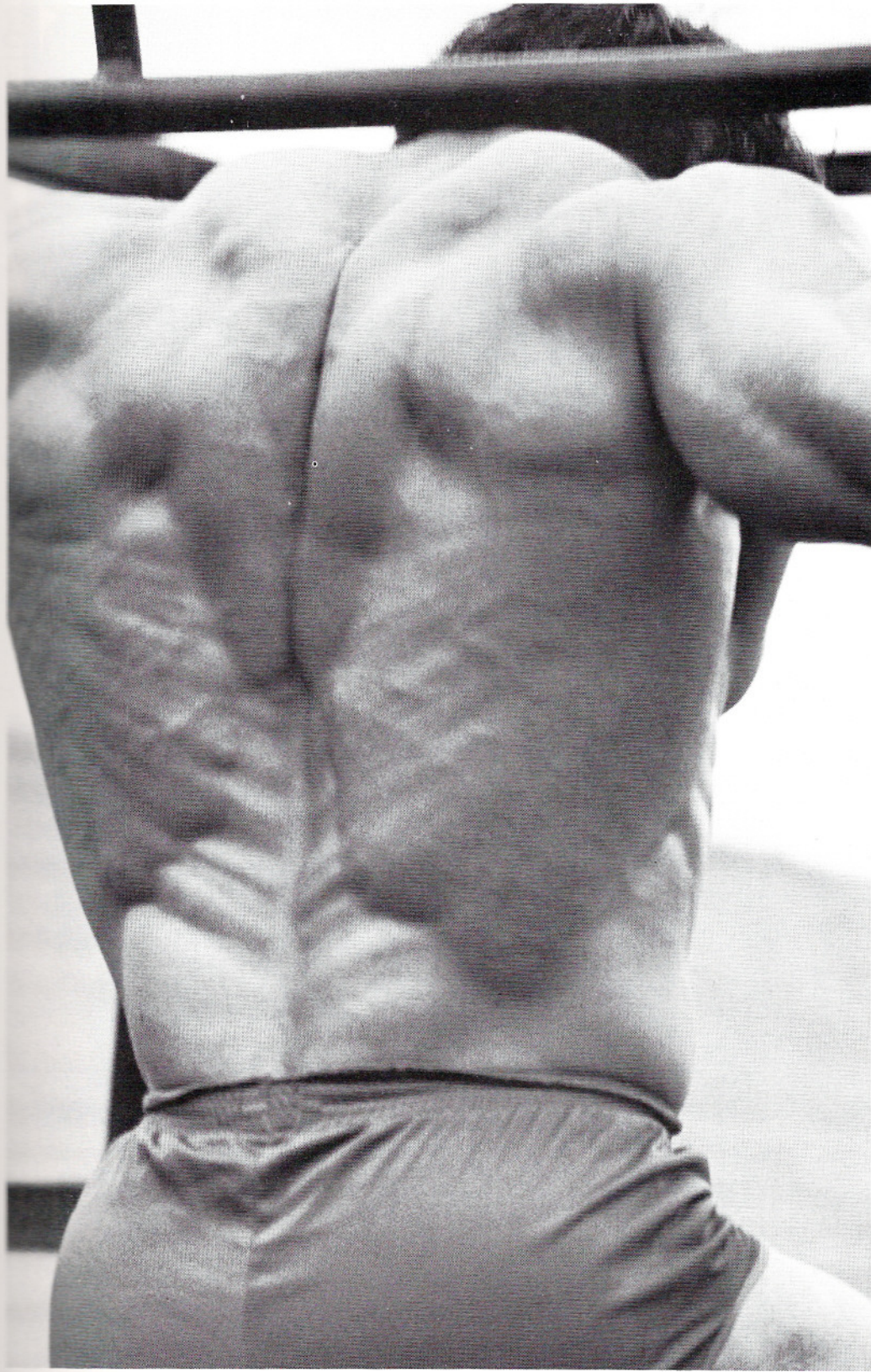
## Back Exercises

### WIDE-GRIP CHINS BEHIND THE NECK

**PURPOSE OF EXERCISE:** To widen the upper back and create a full sweep in the lats.

Wide-Grip Chins widen the lats and develop the entire shoulder girdle. This exercise is primarily for the upper and outer regions of the lats and also spreads the scapula, making it easier to flare the lats.

**EXECUTION:** (1) Take hold of the chinning bar with an overhand grip, hands as wide apart as practicable. (2) Hang from the bar, then pull yourself up so that the back of your neck touches the bar. This is a strict exercise, so try not to help your back by kicking up with the legs. At the top of the movement hold for a brief moment, then lower yourself slowly back to the starting position. Chins involve your entire body weight, so some beginners may not be able to do the requisite number of repetitions for each set. I recommend they do what I used to do: Instead of trying to do 5 sets of 10 reps each, do as many reps as possible at a time—maybe only 3 or 4 until a total of 50 reps is achieved. The stronger you get, the fewer sets it will take to get to 50 reps and the shorter the time it will take to do it.





## **WIDE-GRIP CHINS TO THE FRONT (OPTIONAL)**

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**PURPOSE OF EXERCISE:** To widen the upper back and create a full sweep in the lats.

Chinning yourself so that you touch your chest to the bar rather than the back of the neck gives you a slightly longer range of motion and is less strict, allowing you to cheat slightly so you can continue your reps even after you are tired.

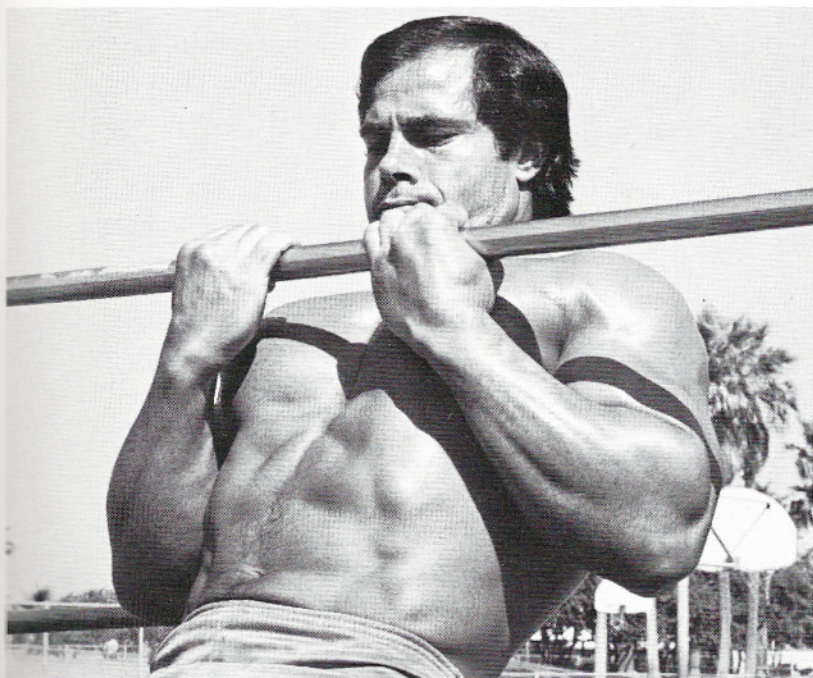
**EXECUTION:** (1) Take hold of the chinning bar with an overhand grip, hands as wide apart as practicable. (2) Hang from the bar, then pull yourself up, trying to touch the top of your chest to the bar. At the top of the movement, hold for a brief moment, then lower yourself back to the starting position.

## CLOSE-GRIP CHINS

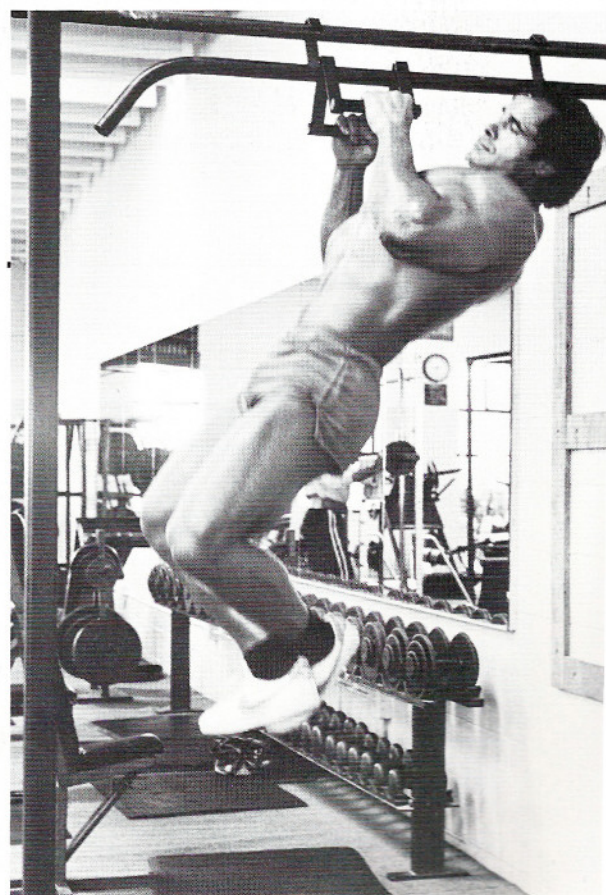
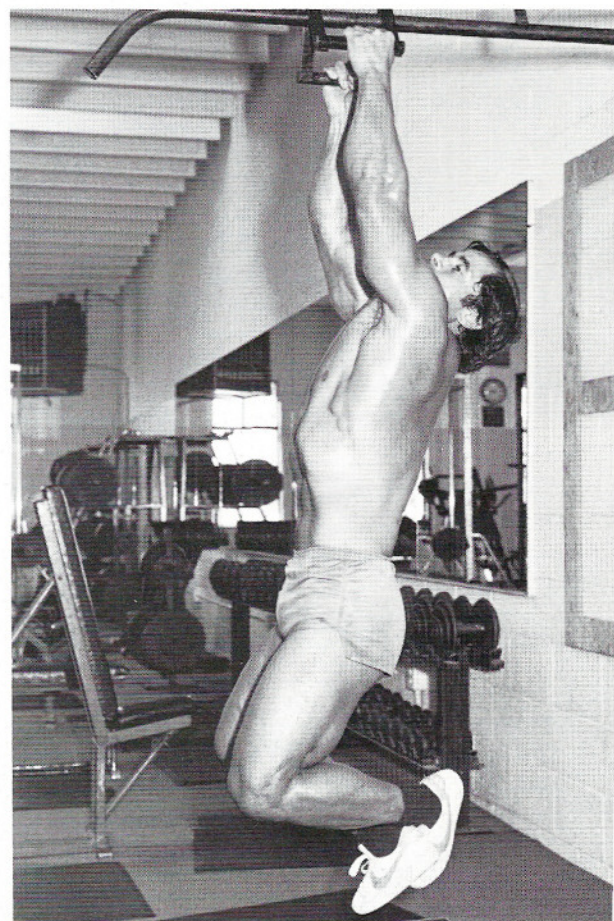
**PURPOSE OF EXERCISE:** To work the back muscles, widen the lower lats, and develop the serratus.

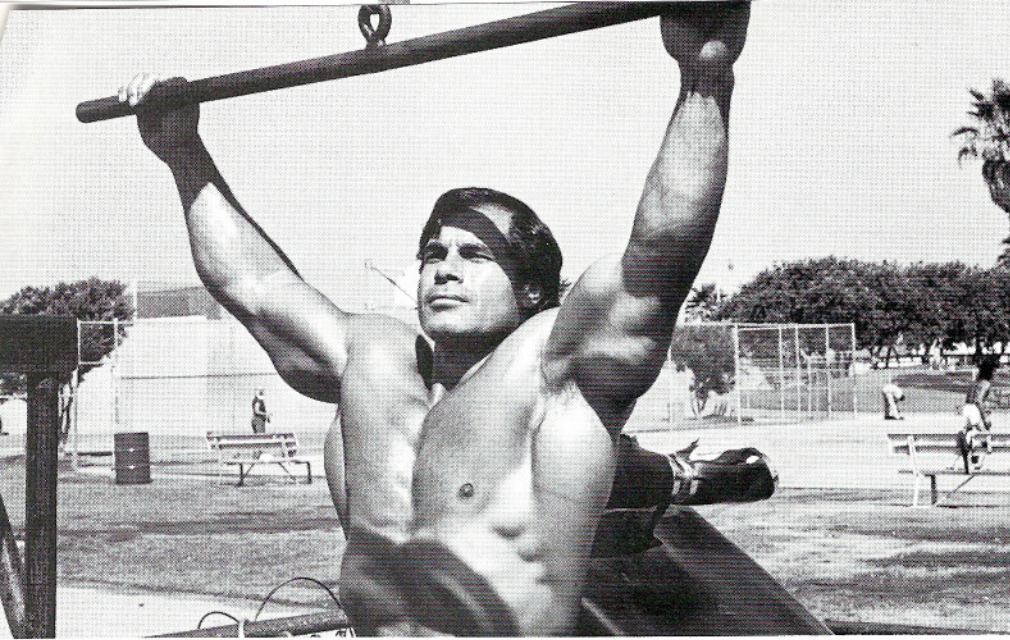
This exercise is great for widening and lengthening the appearance of the lats. It also develops the serratus anterior, those little fingers of muscle that lie under the outside of the pecs, which add so much to front poses such as double-biceps or any other overhead pose.

**EXECUTION:** (1) Take hold of the chinning bar (or close-grip triangle device found in many gyms) with your hands close together, one hand on either side of the bar. Hang below the bar. (2) Then pull yourself up while leaning your head back slightly so that the chest touches (or nearly touches) your hands; lower the body slowly for a full stretch of the lats. Work for the fullest range of motion.



*You can also do Close-Grip Chins by pulling on a straight bar instead of a double handle.*





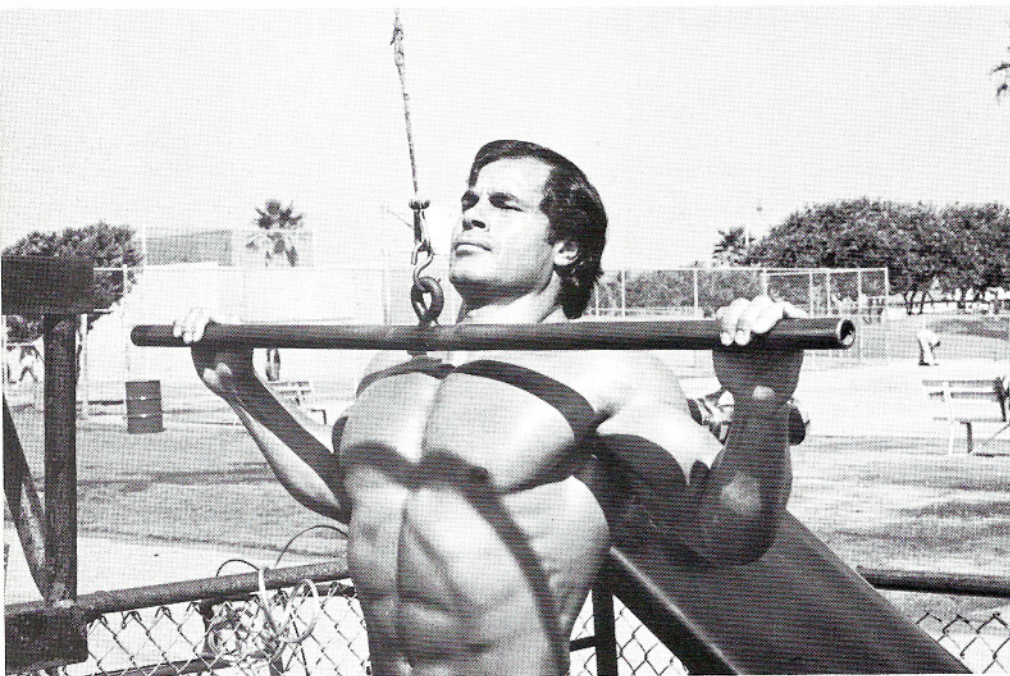
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## LAT MACHINE PULLDOWNS

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**PURPOSE OF EXERCISE:** To widen the upper lats.

This exercise allows you to do Chins with less than your total body weight, so you can do a lot of extra reps for the upper back if you feel you need more work in that area (but it should not replace Chins as the standard exercise for widening the upper lats).



**EXECUTION:** (1) Using a long bar, grasp it with a wide, overhand grip and sit on the seat with your knees hooked under the support. (2) Pull the bar down smoothly until it touches the top of your chest, making the upper back do the work and not swaying back to involve the lower back. Release, extend the arms again, and feel the lats fully stretch.

**VARIATION:** Try doing Lat Pull-downs behind the neck instead of in front.



## CLOSE- OR MEDIUM-GRIP PULLDOWNS

**PURPOSE OF EXERCISE:** To work the lats, especially the lower lat area.

Again, working with an overhead cable and weight stack allows you to do the chinning movement with less than body weight.

**EXECUTION:** (1) Grasp the handles or a bar using a narrow- or medium-close grip and pull down to your upper chest. Don't sway backward, but try to concentrate on using the lats to do the movement. (2) Draw the shoulders down and back and stick the chest out. Let the handles go upward again until your lats are fully stretched out.





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## BENT-OVER BARBELL ROWS

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**PURPOSE OF EXERCISE:** To thicken the upper back.

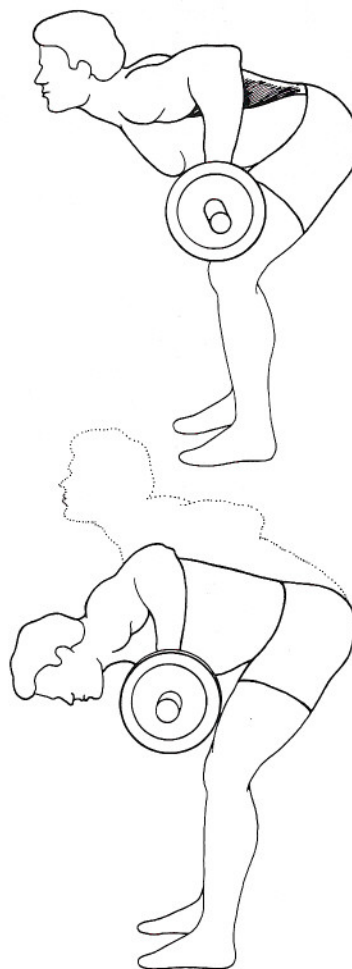
This exercise also helps widen the upper back and, to a lesser degree, adds density to the lower back.

**EXECUTION:** (1) Standing with feet a few inches apart, grasp the bar with a wide, overhand grip. With your knees slightly bent, bend forward until your upper body is about parallel to the floor. Keep your back straight, head up, and let the bar hang at arm's length below you, almost touching the shinbone. (2) Using primarily the muscles of the back, lift the bar upward until it touches the upper abdominals, then lower it again, under control, back to the starting position; then immediately start your next rep. It is important to make the back work so as not to make this a biceps exercise. Think of the arms and hands as hooks, a way of transmitting the contraction of the lats to the bar. Don't bring the bar up to the chest area itself; bringing it only to the abdomen reduces the role of the arms. Make sure your first set of any rowing exercise is relatively light to let your back get warmed up. By the time you get to your last set, a little bit of cheating is all right to get you through it, but keep it to a minimum.



*In Bent-Over Barbell Rows, you pull with the lats but don't lift with the lower back. Keep your upper body parallel to the floor all through the exercise. Notice how the bar is pulled up to the abdomen rather than up toward the chest.*

*This drawing illustrates two major mistakes: If you don't hold your body steady when doing Bent-Over Barbell Rows, you involve the lower back muscles rather than isolating the lats. And if you lift the bar up toward the chest instead of the abdomen, you involve the arms, so that the biceps are doing a lot of the work you are trying to get the lats to do.*



*When you do Rows with an Olympic barbell set with its larger plates you need to stand on a block or a bench so that you can lower the bar all the way down without the plates touching the floor. With your head up, back straight, and knees flexed, you are in a position similar to an Olympic lifter about to clean a heavy barbell.*



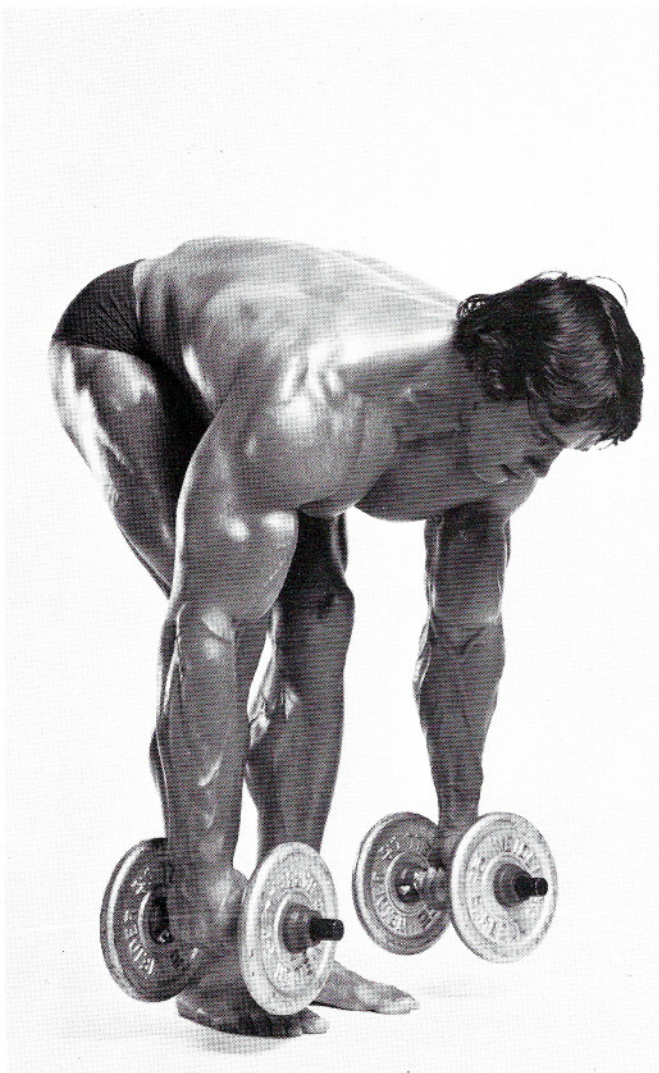


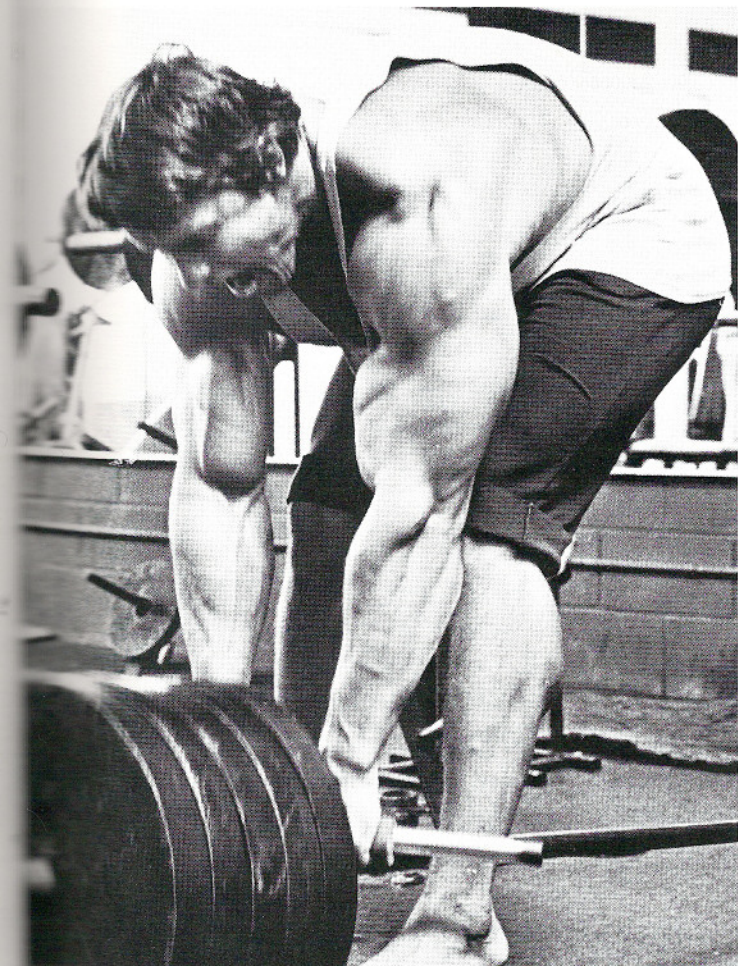
## BENT-OVER DUMBBELL ROWS

**PURPOSE OF EXERCISE:** To work each side of the upper back independently.

You can still work heavy and give your back a good workout using dumbbells, but by using them you force each side of the body to work up to its own capacity, rather than running the risk of having the stronger side help out the weaker one. This is a good weak point exercise for anyone lacking upper back symmetry.

**EXECUTION:** (1) Grasp a dumbbell in each hand, bend your knees slightly, then bend forward from the waist, keeping your head up and your back straight. Let the weights hang at arm's length below the shoulders. (2) Simultaneously lift both weights up as far as possible to your sides, holding your upper body steady to avoid involving the lower back (the weights should come up to your sides, not your chest, in order to keep biceps involvement to a minimum). Then lower the weights again, slowly.





## T-BAR ROWS

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**PURPOSE OF EXERCISE:** To thicken the middle and outer back.

**EXECUTION:** (1) Standing on a block with your feet close together, knees slightly bent, bend down and grasp the handles of the T-Bar machine with an overhand grip. Straighten your legs slightly and lift up until your body is at about a 45-degree angle. Without changing this angle, lift the weight up until it touches your chest, (2) then lower it again to arm's length, keeping the weight off the floor.

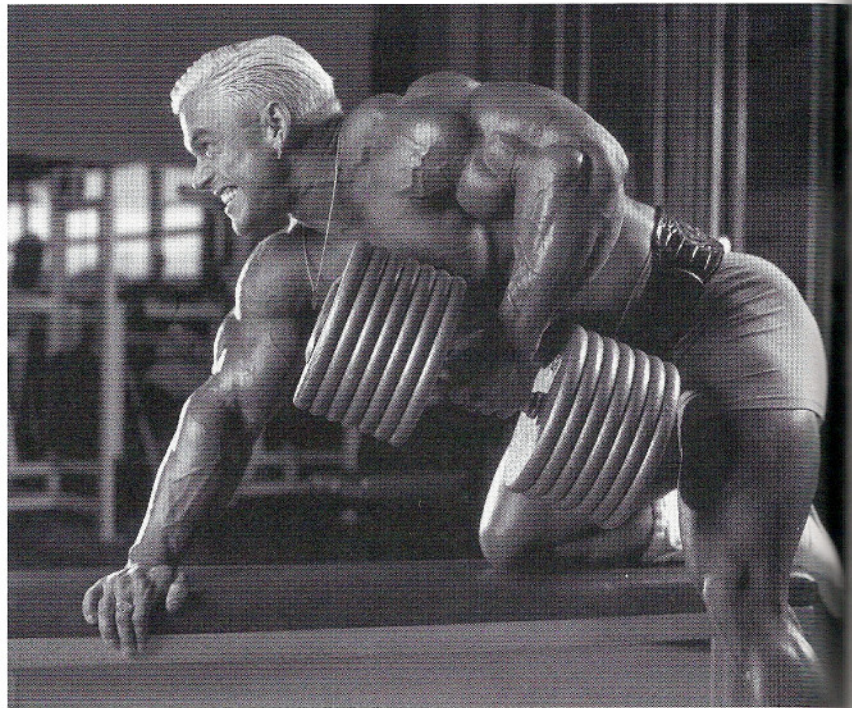
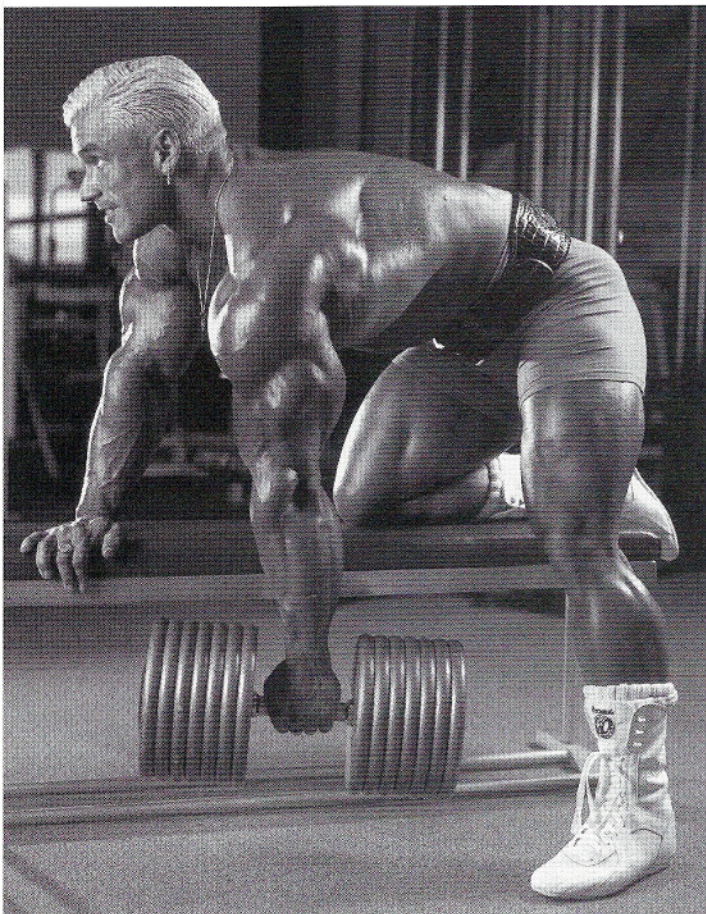
Remember that this is an upper back exercise—you are not supposed to do much lifting with the lower back or legs. If you find you are not able to do this lift without swaying and lifting up with your back to an excessive degree, you are simply using too much weight and should take off a plate or two. However, a small amount of movement is inevitable. But be certain to keep your back straight or even slightly arched and never to bend over hunchback fashion, which could result in injury. By using a narrow grip, this exercise will work mostly the outer lats because you cannot get the range of motion to fully involve the inner back muscles. However, this limited range of motion means that you will eventually be able to lift more weight than when doing Barbell Rows, which makes this a good power movement.

## ONE-ARM DUMBBELL ROWS

**PURPOSE OF EXERCISE:** To independently work each side of the back.

Rowing one side at a time with a dumbbell has two unique advantages over Barbell Rows: It isolates the latissimus muscles on each side, and it allows you to lift the weight higher and therefore get a more complete contraction. Using heavy weight in this exercise is less important than getting the fullest range of movement, which will help develop and define the center of the back.

**EXECUTION:** (1) Taking a dumbbell in one hand, bend forward from the waist until your upper body is nearly parallel to the floor. Place your free hand on the bench for support. Begin with the weight hanging down at arm's length, feeling the fullest possible stretch. Turn your hand so that the palm faces toward your body. (2) Keeping your body steady, lift the weight up to your side, concentrating on doing the work with the back rather than the arm. Lower the weight, keeping it under control. Finish your repetitions with this arm, then repeat with the other arm.



*Lee Priest*

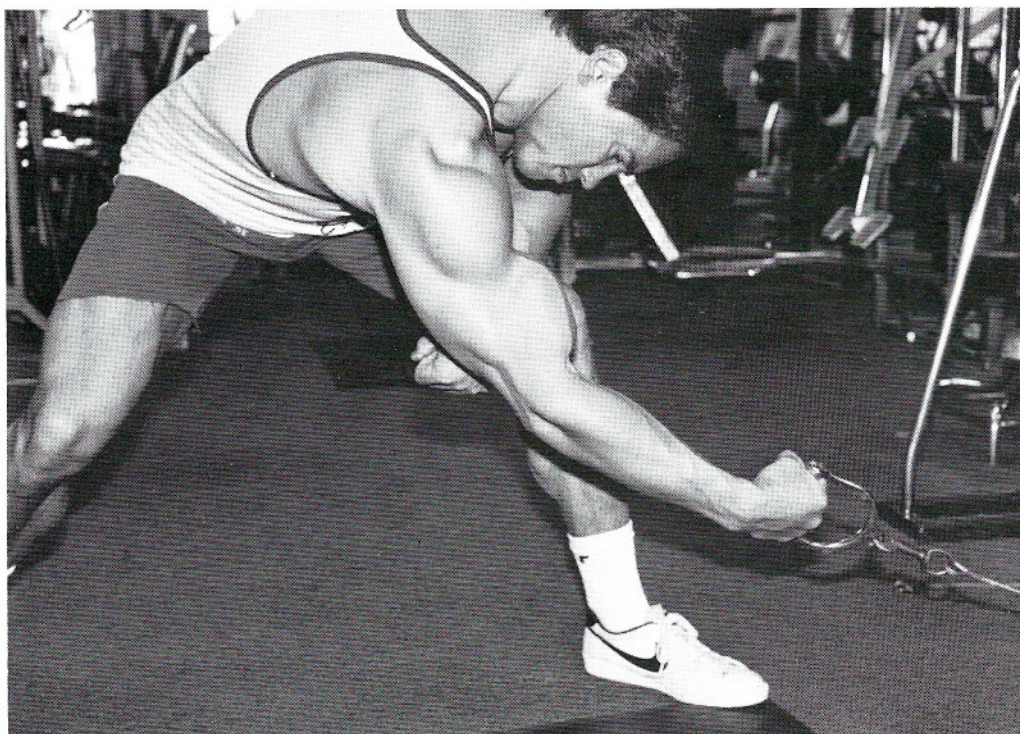
## ONE-ARM CABLE ROWS

**PURPOSE OF EXERCISE:** To develop the lower lats.

This is an especially good movement for tying in the lower lats to the waist.

**EXECUTION:** (1) Using a floor-level pulley, take hold of a handle with one hand. If done standing, assume a balanced stance, the leg opposite the arm you will be using in the exercise forward, other leg back. (This can also be done while seated.) Begin with your arm fully extended in front of you; you may even want to twist your hand inward so that the thumb is lower than the little finger to create the fullest possible stretch. (2) Pull the handle back by your side as far as you can, twisting your hand outward so that the thumb ends up on the outside, feeling the back muscles contract. Release and extend your arm and twist your wrist back to the starting position. Complete your repetitions, then repeat the exercise using the other arm.

The secret to success doing One-Arm Cable Rows is range of motion. When you pull the cable, bring your elbow as far back as possible—which is a lot farther than you can go doing regular Cable Rows. Also, as you release and lower the weight again, make sure you stretch your arm and lats as far as possible.





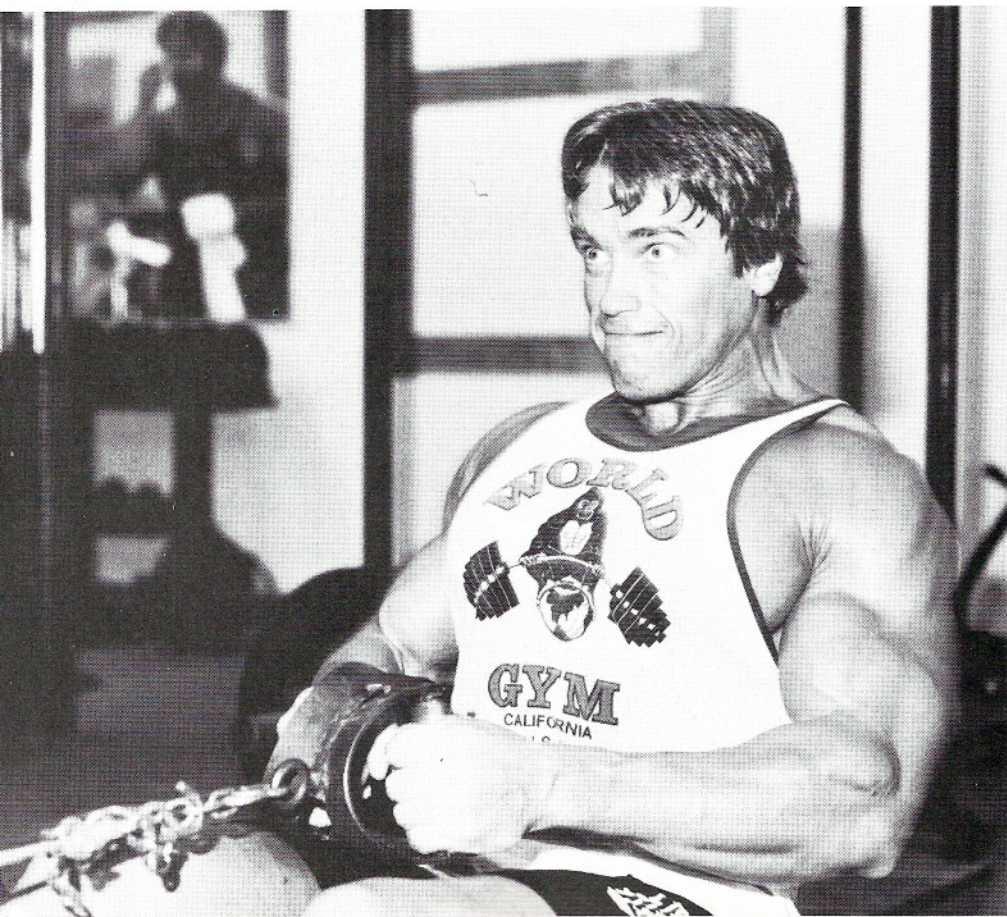
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## SEATED CABLE ROWS

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**PURPOSE OF EXERCISE:** To develop the thickness of the back and the lower lats. This movement also works the lower sections of the lats.

**EXECUTION:** (1) Take hold of the handles and sit with your feet braced against the crossbar or a wooden block, knees slightly bent. Extend your arms and bend forward slightly, feeling the lats stretch. You should be situated far enough away from the weight stack so that you can stretch like this without the weight touching the bottom. (2) From this beginning position, pull the handles back toward your body and touch them to your abdomen, feeling the back muscles doing most of the work. Your back should arch, your chest stick out, and try to touch the shoulder blades together as you draw the weight toward you. Don't involve the lower back muscles by swaying forward and back. When the handles touch your abdomen you should be sitting upright, not leaning backward. Keeping the weight under control, release and let the handles go forward again, once more stretching out the lats.



## SEATED CABLE ROWS (OPTIONAL)

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Using separate handles as pictured here allows you to get your hands and elbows farther back, putting more of the stress on the center of your back.

## MACHINE ROWS

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Many gyms are equipped with a variety of specialized rowing machines. Some duplicate the effect of Seated Rows, while others allow you to do a rowing motion by pushing back with the elbows and not involving the contraction of the biceps. Each of these hits the back a little differently, and all are useful devices to include occasionally in your workouts to provide variety and to surprise the muscles.



## BENT-ARM PULLOVERS WITH BARBELL

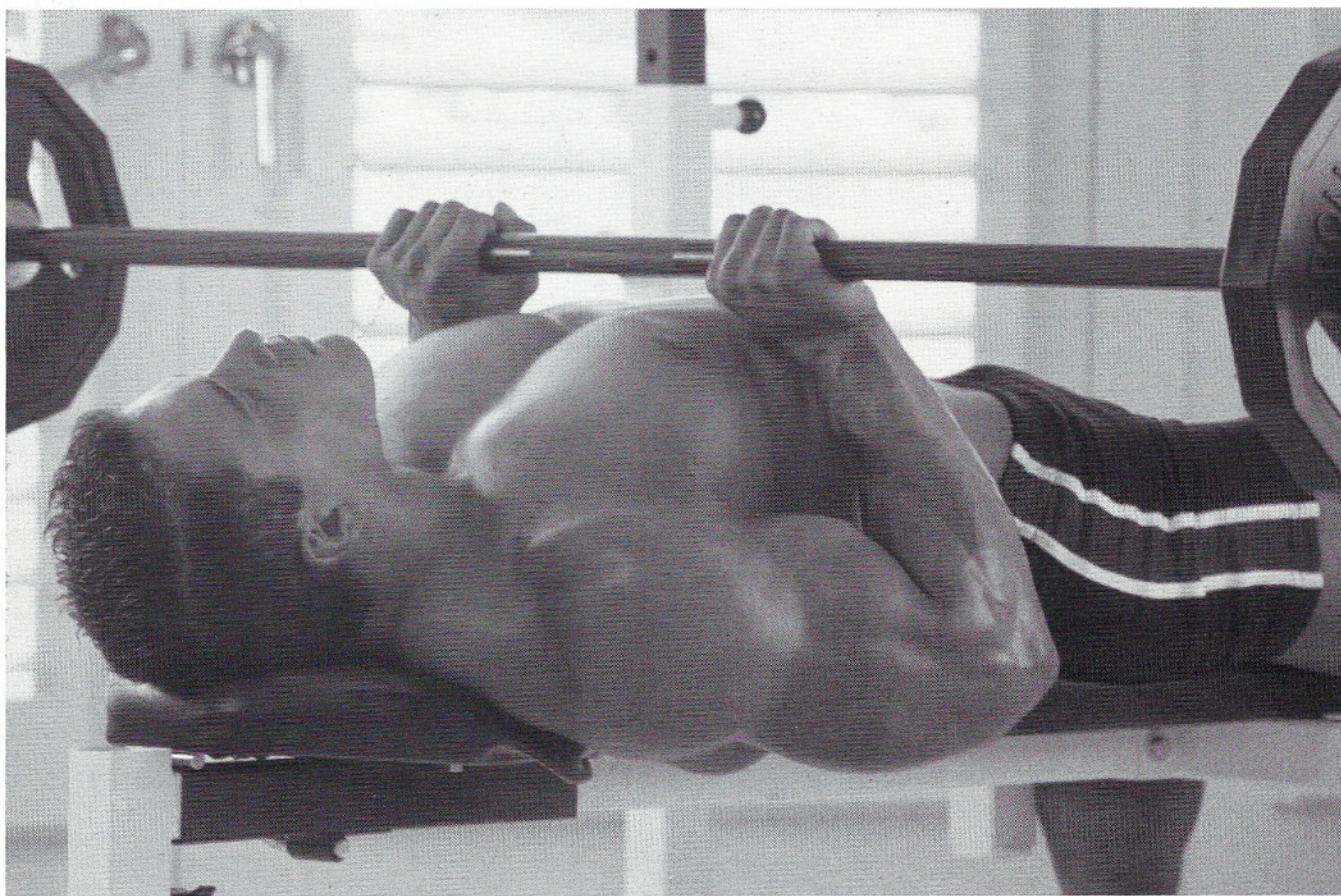
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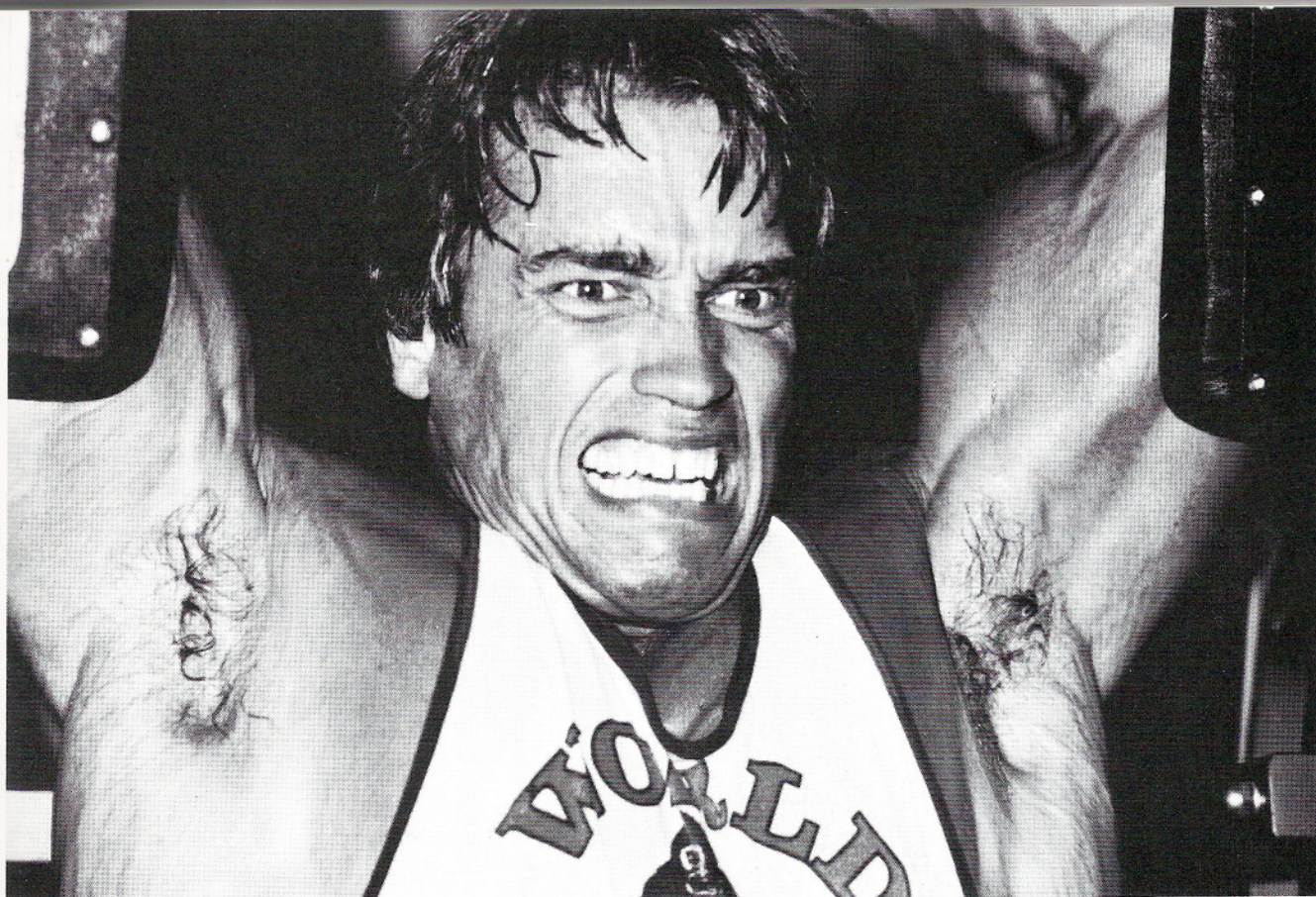
**PURPOSE OF EXERCISE:** To work the lower lats and the serratus. It also stretches the pectorals and helps widen the rib cage.

**EXECUTION:** (1) Lie on your back along a flat bench. Place a barbell (or an E-Z curl bar) on the floor behind your head. Reach back and grasp the bar.

(2) Keeping your arms bent, raise the bar and bring it just over your head to your chest. Lower the bar slowly back to the starting position without touching the floor, feeling the lats stretch out to their fullest. When using a heavy weight for this movement, I have someone sit on my knees to stabilize me so that I can put all my effort into lifting the bar.

*Mark Erpelding*





## MACHINE PULLOVERS

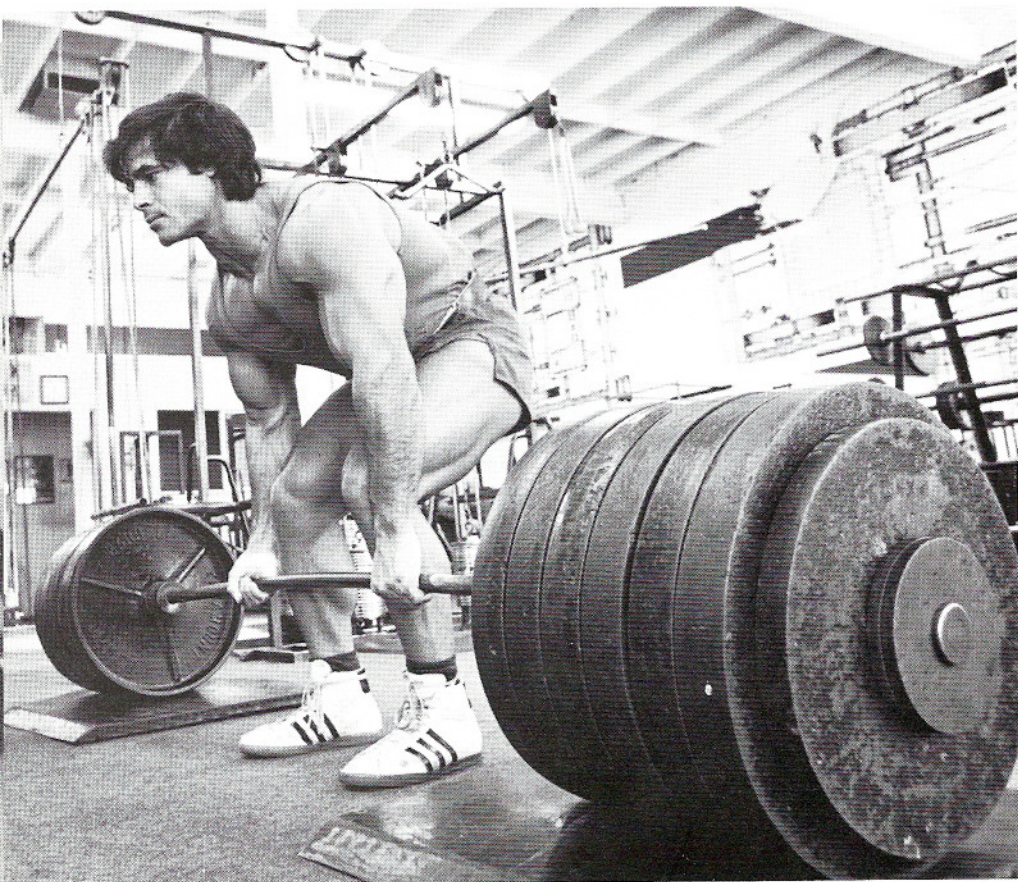
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The Pullover is actually a circular motion, and it is often difficult to work the muscles through a full range of motion using free weights (although advanced bodybuilders learn to do this purely by experience). Some pullover machines are valuable in that they allow you to work against variable resistance, and some also provide for training one arm at a time, giving you the opportunity for additional isolation. In fact, in my opinion, Pullover machines are among the most valuable exercise machines you will find in a gym.

**EXECUTION:** (1) Grasp the bar over your head, and (2) drive it down, feeling the lats contract. At the end of the movement the bar should be jammed against your abdomen.



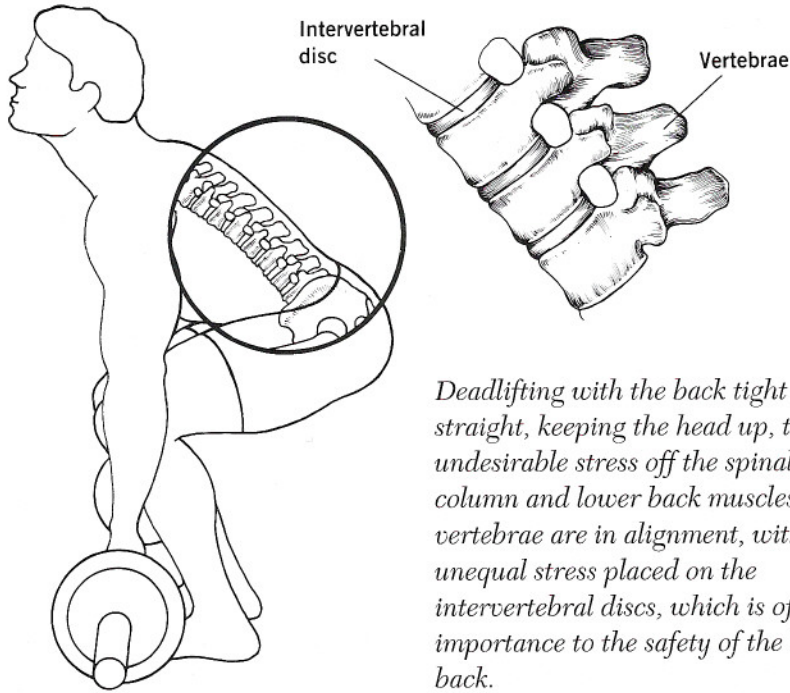




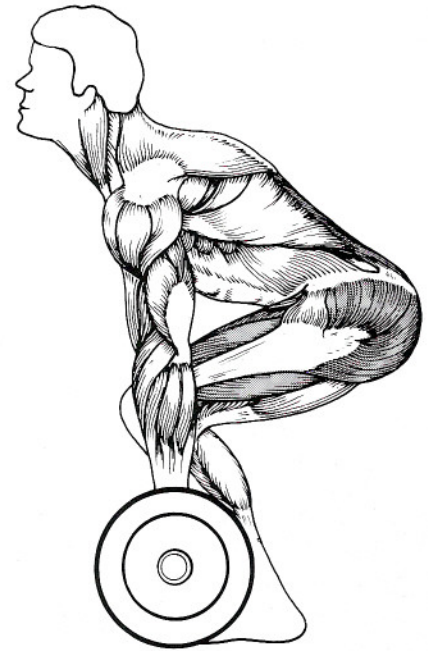
## DEADLIFTS

**PURPOSE OF EXERCISE:** To work the lower back. Deadlifts are an overall power exercise that involves more muscles than any other exercise in your routine, including the lower back, upper back, and trapezius muscles, the buttocks, and the legs. A strong lower back is especially important when doing movements like Bent-Over Rows and T-Bar Rows, which put a lot of strain on this area.

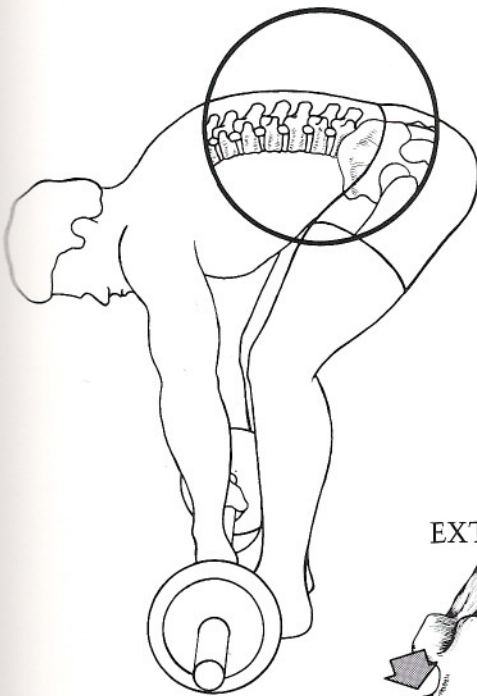
**EXECUTION:** (1) Place a barbell on the floor in front of you. Bend your knees, lean forward, and grasp the bar in a medium-wide grip, one hand in an overhand grip, the other in an underhand grip. Keep your back fairly straight to protect it from strain. If you curve your back you risk injury. (2) Begin the lift by driving with the legs. Straighten up until you are standing upright, then throw the chest out and shoulders back as if coming to attention. To lower the weight, bend the knees, lean forward from the waist, and touch the weight to the floor before beginning your next repetition.



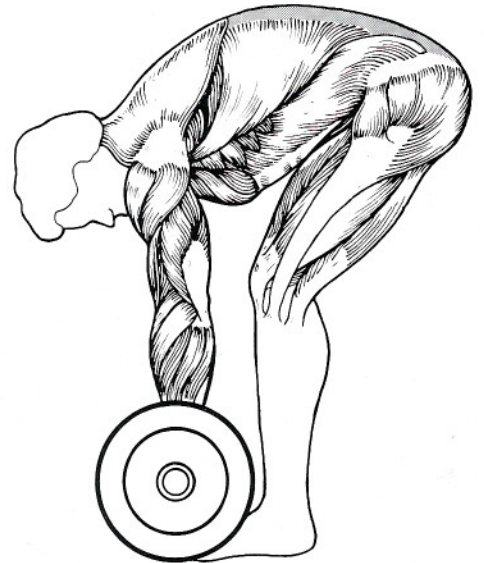
*Deadlifting with the back tight and straight, keeping the head up, takes undesirable stress off the spinal column and lower back muscles. The vertebrae are in alignment, with no unequal stress placed on the intervertebral discs, which is of vital importance to the safety of the lower back.*



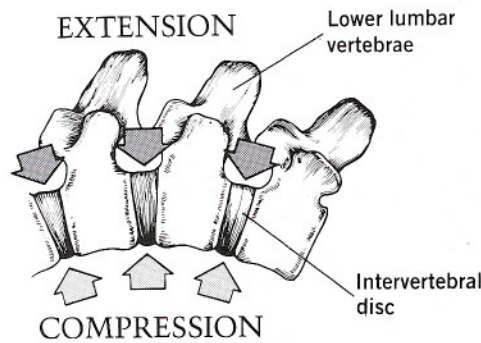
*When you begin the Deadlift with your head up and back straight, you allow the glutei, leg muscles, and lower back to drive the bar upward with maximum force.*



*Deadlifting with the back in a rounded position with the head down places unequal pressure on the delicate intervertebral discs and lower back muscles. The discs are simultaneously compressed on one side and extended on the other. Keeping the head up and the back straight distributes the stress and reduces the chance of injury.*



*Starting a Deadlift with your back bent forward means that the lower back is going to have to do most of the initial work to get the bar moving. This is dangerous.*



## GOOD MORNINGS

PURPOSE OF EXERCISE: To work the lower back in isolation.

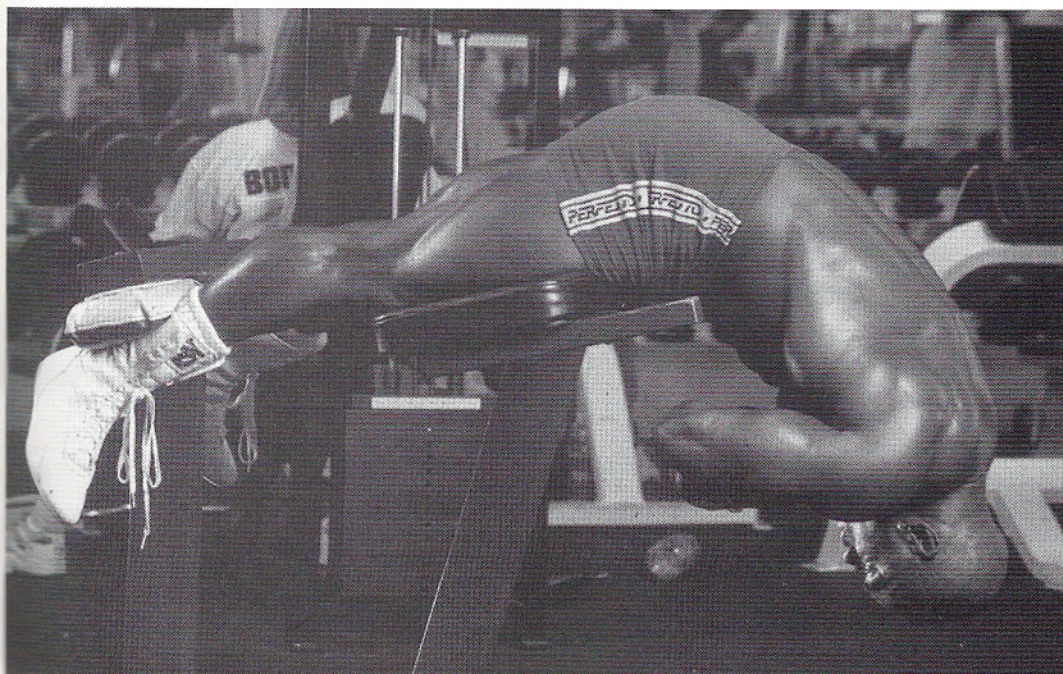
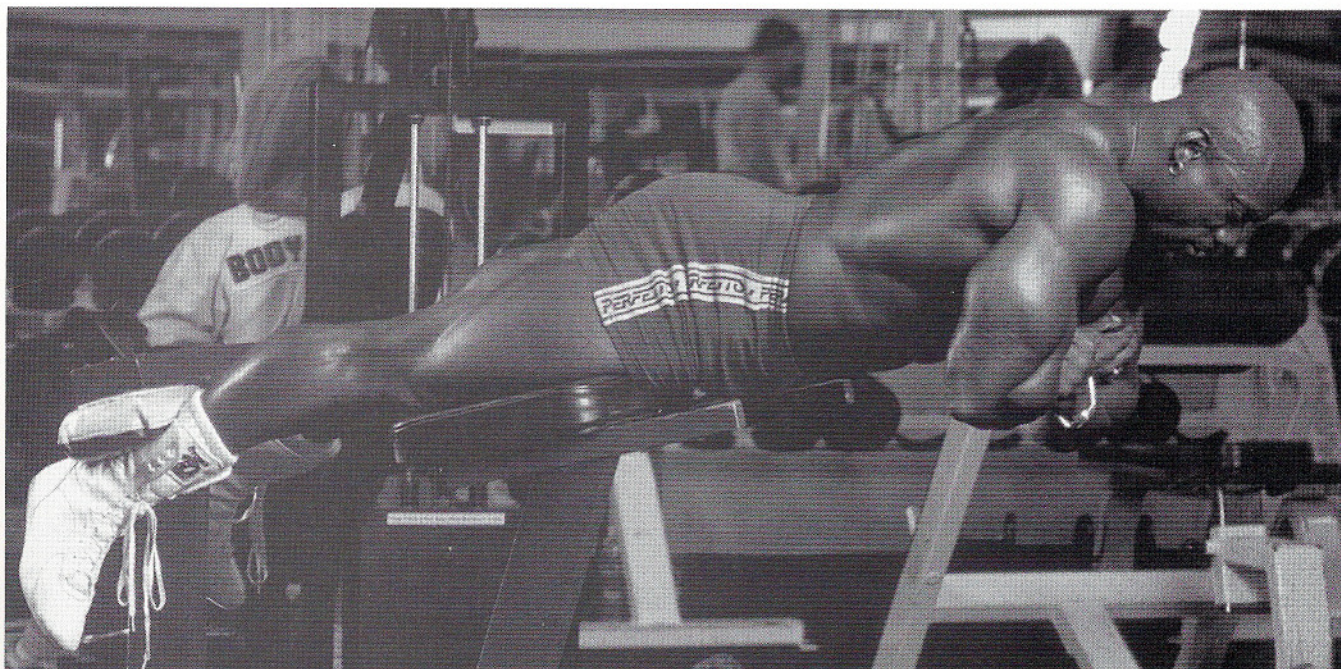
EXECUTION: (1) Standing with feet a few inches apart, hold a barbell across the back of your shoulders as for Squats (see page 497). (2) Keeping your legs locked and your back straight, bend forward from the waist, head up, until your torso is about parallel to the floor. Hold for a moment, then come back up to the starting position.



## HYPEREXTENSIONS

**PURPOSE OF EXERCISE:** To develop the spinal erectors of the lower back.

**EXECUTION:** (1) Position yourself facedown across a hyperextension bench, with your heels hooked under the rear supports. Clasp your hands across your chest or behind your head and bend forward and down as far as possible, feeling the lower back muscles stretch. (2) From this position, come back up until your torso is just above parallel. To prevent hyperextension of your spine don't lift up any higher than this.



*Flex Wheeler*