

A high-angle photograph of a woman in a black tank top and shorts lifting a dumbbell. A man in a blue shirt is leaning over her, providing guidance. The background is dark, and the lighting highlights the woman's form and the dumbbell.

# THE GYM MISTAKES

**YOU DIDN'T KNOW YOU WERE MAKING**

**A GUIDE FROM A  
PROFESSIONAL STRENGTH COACH**

Written by  
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Special thanks to Olivia Hageman for typesetting and editing this guide.

Disclaimer

Thanks for taking the time to read this short eBook on gym mistakes.

Chances are you have been training or thinking about exercise or getting a gym membership, this short guide is designed to help you avoid making common gym mistakes and help you get more out of your gym training.

This eBook is a general educational information product for healthy adults over age 18.

There may be risks associated with physical activity in relation to gym training and exercise and if you choose to participate you do so of your own free will knowingly and voluntarily assuming all risks associated with such activities.

\*\*\*Please note that it is always recommended that you consult a professional before beginning gym training.

You should be in good health and if in any doubt consult your doctor or healthcare provider before engaging in any physical activity in or out of the gym\*\*\*

During training sessions if you are unsure about how to perform an exercise or your safety during an exercise you should approach the gym's trained staff for further guidance.

# Contents

## INTRODUCTION

## PART ONE GENERAL GYM MISTAKES

Mirror Mistakes

Dropping Weights

Chalk or Gloves?

Footwear Mistakes

Do I Need A Lifting Belt?

Breathing and Bracing

Balance

Picking Things Up and Putting Them Down

Gym Hygiene

Housekeeping

Resistance Machines or Free Weights?

Warming Up For Gym Training (Weight Training)

## PART TWO

Weight Training Mistakes

The Major Compound Lifts (Performed with Barbells)

The Squat (Low bar Variant)

The Deadlift

[The 5 Point Deadlift Set Up](#)

[The Bench Press](#)

[The Shoulder Press](#)

[Conclusion](#)

[About The Author](#)

## INTRODUCTION

Thanks for checking out my short EBook on Gym Mistakes and how to correct them! You will find accompanying videos and further discussion on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

This book is perfect if you are totally new to the gym and want to know how to avoid some really common mistakes.

It is by no means an exhaustive guide for everything you need to know, but it is a very good starting point if you are beginning gym training.

In part 1 of this book I guide you through some of the really common general gym mistakes to avoid and then in part 2 we go into some of the most common exercises you'll see and how to avoid making mistakes or fix form errors you might be making.

In some cases I'll help you avoid risking injury with your gym training and in others I have some simple tips that are just plain useful to know.

### Need To Skim Read This Guide?

If you're in a hurry and want to skim this guide, then just go after the main points listed as:

### The Mistake & The Fix

If you have more time to read, you can click on any of the highlighted links in the text that will take you to handy explainer videos and other [linked content](#) as well as reading the sections marked *explanation*.

I am a big advocate of gym training and especially with free weights (barbells, dumbbells and kettlebells) as it has huge value to proper results based gym training, but I also understand from speaking to many people that exercising with this kind of equipment can be unfamiliar and so they steer away from it.

If you're an experienced gym goer, then maybe you even know someone who wants to start, is a little daunted about making mistakes and this guide is just what they need.

I'll steer you through avoiding the most common mistakes in the gym and if you do get stuck you can always reach out to ask me any questions via my website or social media.

Good luck with your gym training!

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# PART ONE

## GENERAL GYM MISTAKES

### Mirror Mistakes

#### The Mistake

Only using the mirrors on the gym floor to check out how "pumped" you're getting.

#### The Fix

Use the mirrors for form checking your lift. Is your body correctly positioned to perform an exercise? And use them to reverse a weight out of a rack without stepping into someone behind you.



## Explanation

I guarantee that this first one will have you rolling your eyes and I bet you already have a bunch of people come to mind, when you imagine the local gym bro's, strutting around tensing up their biceps and giving themselves a fierce stare into the gym mirror and a thumbs up from the latest bout of bicep pumping.

Well, as you've probably already guessed, this is not the purpose of the gym mirrors, so that's a thumbs down from the pro's in the know ; )

Here is what you should be using mirrors for on the gym floor.

1. **Form Checks:** As a coach I want to stand close enough to you that you can hear my cues during your lifting. But, I also need to be far enough away that I can see you perform the exercise. I'll look directly at you and occasionally look in the mirror to see a different angle whilst standing in the same spot.
2. **Reversing with Weights:** Sometimes people stride across the gym floor, totally oblivious to what is happening around them, even when heavy weights are being moved about. If you are about to bench press with dumbbells you may well have your bench placed near the rack. Go ahead and unrack the dumbbells, then right before you reverse back to the bench, check the mirror to make sure no one has stepped in between you and the bench risking a collision.

# Dropping Weights

## The Mistake

Intentionally dropping or losing control of a weight on the gym floor. Attention seeking...



## The Fix

Don't train to prove yourself, train to improve yourself. Maintain good form when lifting, that will get you more respect.

## Explanation

Generally speaking we do not drop weights as this represents a loss of control and bad form in most gym exercises.

There are some legitimate times to drop a weight, but when one of the dudes who craves attention drops a barbell at the top of a locked out deadlift that isn't one of them.

Legitimate reasons to drop a weight:

1. For your safety, if your form is compromised and you need to make an escape to prevent injury to yourself. This is rare and I give you tips later in this book about how to avoid this kind of situation.
2. You're Olympic lifting with bumper plates. This usually happens at specific facilities where the equipment, layout of the gym and training ethos is geared towards weights being dropped. Even then, the drop is a controlled one. The chances are if you are reading this book you're not doing that kind of training and you shouldn't drop your weights.

## Chalk or Gloves?

### The Mistake

Using gloves when you don't need to, or not using chalk when you do need to!

### The Fix

You'll most likely need chalk for your workouts, it's also cheap to purchase and makes for better contact with the weights.

### Explanation

Just about the first purchase I recommend anyone I am coaching to make is a [chalk ball and bag](#) (the kind used by rock climbers that saves the chalk from ending up on the floor). We use chalk because it keeps the hands dry, prevents excess callus formation on the hands and enables a good solid connection between you and the free weights ( barbells, dumbbells etc.).

It's not good practice on a hot sweaty day in the gym to ever lose grip and let a barbell or dumbbell fall from your control.

Gloves are used if you have a cut on your hand. With a cut, you would put a plaster on over it as normal then put a glove over that to protect the area. Apart from that it's advised against using lifting gloves as it reduces the connection between you and the free weights.

## Footwear Mistakes

### The Mistake

Using trainers or running shoes (with a very soft sole) for weight training sessions.





### The Fix

Pick up some weight training shoes that have a firm sole for best results in the gym.

### Explanation

If you've had a few sessions training and are serious about gym training for the future then it's advisable to spend a little bit of money on a good pair of shoes to lift in.

Most people make a mistake when they wear running shoes and then weight train. Here's why...

Running shoes or most sports shoes used for cardiovascular activity have a soft squishy sole. This is exactly what you don't want when you are gym training with weights.

You want a solid sole, enabling force transmission from the ground upwards to the weight you are trying to move. Any energy expenditure that is sent out through a soft deformable shoe represents a power leak between you and the ground.

So if you are enjoying your gym training invest a little more in a good pair of shoes. Your coach or personal trainer should be able to give you some guidance here. Personally I use and like [Adidas Powerlift](#) shoes.

*What about no shoes at all?*

You may have seen some people pulling barbells off the floor in their socks. This is a personal preference with some lifters. If you are new to gym training I wouldn't start with lifting in your socks for now and leave it for later on when you have had more experience and perhaps with a coach or personal trainer.

Generally I advise [lifting in shoes](#) as they are designed to support the arch of your foot.

## Do I Need A Lifting Belt?

### The Mistake

Adding a lifting belt too soon, before you have learned to properly breath and brace during exercises.



### The Fix

Read below to find out how to properly breath and brace during weight training, the belt is a great addition when needed, but becomes irrelevant if added too soon.

### Explanation

If you are currently new to the gym and uninjured you would normally start training with no belt. If your coach, personal trainer or medical professional advises you otherwise you should follow their guidance.

There are some cases where a person has an historic back injury where they may begin using the belt early on into their training progression. For now if you are new to the gym, uninjured, healthy and training just fine, then there is no immediate need to add the belt.

In time, you will add the belt to your lifts and this is discussed in great detail by top strength coach Mark Rippetoe in this [article](#).

When you do add a belt to your training avoid tapered belts (they don't provide even pressure all the way around you) and do use a good leather lever belt or single prong belt. I personally like [Inzer lever belts](#) and [Dominion Strength single prong belts](#).

## Breathing and Bracing

### The Mistake

Inhaling and exhaling at the wrong time during an exercise. Not properly bracing (tensing) the abdominal muscles whilst lifting weights.

### The Fix

Learn to Valsalva and brace accordingly, details below.

### Explanation

Take a big held breath and tense up your abs/core muscles before each performed rep. Do this with the weight locked out in a safe position or on the ground if deadlifting.

An important element to safe weight training is the correct breathing and bracing. The purpose of correct breathing and bracing is to fill the lungs with air and help apply intra abdominal pressure within the upper body to effectively stabilise the spine during lifting.

Correct bracing facilitates the transmission of force (moving a heavy object) through the body while minimising the risk of injury to the back.

It is commonplace in the gym and definitely on the Internet, to see a lifter pick up a heavy weight and with the weight in motion exhale and lose all their tightness and bracing mid movement, or at least exhale at an inopportune moment during the weighted movement.

The correct way to breath and brace is as follows. Take in a large breath and hold it in (the [Valsalva technique](#)), as you do so don't push your belly button out, instead draw the abdomen inwards as though your belly button is moving back towards your spine.

Then contract and tense up the muscles (abdominal wall) that you know as your abs. Do this firmly as though someone was going to slap you in the tummy. That is firm robust bracing. It helps you prevent rounding (flexion) over your back during lifting, when good form is to the [keep the back in extension](#).

The breath is reset in between reps. As examples, in the barbell deadlift the breathing and bracing is reset with the bar on the ground and stationery. In the squat it is done with the weight locked out in the standing position.

As a rule, you set your breathing and bracing when the weight is not in motion.

So the next time you go to pick up something heavy off the floor, even at home or holiday, remember to breath and brace correctly.

## Balance

### The Mistake

Rocking into the toes or heels (getting off balance)

### The Fix

Stay mindful of being balanced over the middle of your foot (middle of the arch).

### Explanation

Our strongest balance point when standing is over the middle of the foot. Think of the arch of your foot and the middle of that. It's approximately where the knot of your shoelaces is as you look down.

When I am coaching, I will sometimes highlight this balance point by having the lifter drift their weight into their toes, then back into the heels, before returning to mid foot balance.

You can imagine with carrying weights and weight training why it's therefore important to keep in balance over the middle of the foot.

## Picking Things Up and Putting Them Down

### The Mistake

Losing all form and lifting discipline at the start or end of a set, or outside of the gym!

### The Fix

Correct form isn't just for during the set, rack and unrack safely and use your good technique to pick up any object off the ground.

## Explanation

I see this a lot in gyms. The lifter may have very good form during the exercise, but right at the start or end of it as they go to pick up their weights off the floor or to rack them, they seem to forget everything they know about safe lifting and typically round over their back into flexion, or worse go into a rounded over (flexed) back and twist or rotate to one side as they do it. **This is a major no no.**

Maintain strict form from the time you approach the weight to when you finish and rack it and this discipline will go a long way to keeping you injury free.

Ideally you should combine this strictness of picking up and putting down with proper breathing and bracing as discussed above both in and out of the gym.

Lots of back tweaks and muscle pulls and strains don't happen in the gym. They happen at the DIY store lifting something off a low rack, or in the back garden moving lawn furniture, or lifting luggage or furniture. You get the picture!

Do use the hard work you put in at the gym to benefit how you move outside of the gym.

## Gym Hygiene

Unfortunately not everyone is as hygienic as they could be, and gym equipment and facilities can be a great place to pick up sickness bugs.

As many people will sadly not change their habits for cleaning down equipment after they use it, your best strategy to avoiding sickness from the gym is to wash your hands immediately after training and during training try to avoid touching your face.

## Housekeeping

Clearly this isn't a guidebook written by the nice people at Good Housekeeping magazine, but please *please* after using your weights and plates re rack them where they are supposed to be. If you have left chalk marks or sweat patches a quick wipe down is all it needs to be.

I've encountered otherwise good gyms that have started banning chalk use, no doubt because of people not cleaning up after themselves. I also advocate not using a gym that does not allow chalk use. So the best compromise has to be a very quick clear up after you lift, that way everyone gets what they want.

# Resistance Machines or Free Weights?

## The Mistake

Missing out on using some of the most effective equipment at your gym.

## The Fix

Book a session with a fitness professional or read further into books like this. I also highly recommend you check out the book [Starting Strength](#).

## Explanation

From a professional point of view the best results come from the correct use of the most effective tools and those tools are barbells. But there's a catch. Not everyone knows how to lift with correct form right off the bat.

Ideally if you have a budget and if you are serious about getting a training result, [book a few sessions with a good coach](#) or personal trainer to get the correct form with your lifts and skip resistance machines altogether.

Resistance machine workouts are ultimately a gym mistake in many people's training because of the following points:

They typically only work certain body parts, rather than train large areas of muscle mass (the body responds better to training the compound lifts which are big multi-joint involved exercises like the squat)

The weight increments on the plate stack might be too greater leaps. You can only increase what the machine will let you increase, which may be too much of a leap. This results in people going to the gym and lifting the same weight for months on end with no progress being made.

With barbells, the weight can be increased down to very small fractions, enabling progress for years.

The machines are bolted to the structure of the building and frequently involve you using them seated. This creates a problem as it removes the opportunity for you to train balance.

With free weights you can stand up and lift and as you progress your strength and form you get better at being in balance with heavier weights.

This may not be significant to you now if you are young and fit, but consider the importance of strength and the ability to be able to balance as a person ages. The effects of frailty and loss of mobility have big consequences on the independence of older people.

If you only take away one thing from this book, let it be this. The biggest mistake you can make is that you don't spend your time in the gym as productively as you could.

By training in the ways I am pointing you toward, the physique outcome you most likely want will arrive, and riding alongside as a passenger will be a long-term health outcome for a long, well lived active life.

## Warming Up For Gym Training (Weight Training)

### The Mistake

Taking too long to warm up with activities that don't contribute to your training session.

### The Fix

Warm up with the exercises themselves at lower weights, gradually building up to your working weight for that session.

### Explanation

Most people hit the gym, do a bunch of cardio machines, perhaps 2 or 3, then a round of stretching for 10 minutes, and finally they begin their workout with weights.

In most cases [the warm up you should do](#) is the exercise itself at lighter intensity, with a percentage increase of intensity up to the point you are ready for your working weight sets for that day.

For example if you are about to squat and your working weight that day is 100kilos:

- Start with the empty bar for 1 x 5 (1 set of 5 reps)
- Then come to 50% so 50k for 2 x 5.
- Then come to 70% (70k) for 1 x 4.
- 80% (80k) for 1 x 2.
- 90-93% for 1 x 1.

Then rest for a few minutes and go on to proceed with your working weight set for that day.

The exception here is if the gym is freezing cold, in that instance I'd instruct a client to get warm on the rower or cross trainer for 3-5 mins, before proceeding with the actual warm up as listed above.

Excessively long warm ups, followed by stretching are not necessary prior to lifting weights, and [don't reduce injury rates](#) but may [diminish your capability in your performance](#) during that session.

Proper warming up with a percentage of working weight will help you get warm, and prevent injury and is most likely all the stretching you need, unless otherwise prescribed by a professional.

## Part Two

# Weight Training Mistakes

Now I'll guide you through some mistakes that can occur with specific exercises or equipment.

Please note that in respect of the movement pattern, there are different models/approaches on how to perform certain lifts.

I have based my guidance in most part along the lines of [The Starting Strength](#) model, although if you have a coach they make modifications applicable to you.

## The Major Compound Lifts (Performed with Barbells)

### The Squat (Low bar Variant)

#### Setting up mistakes

##### The Mistake

Having the bar set too high up on the hooks.

##### The Fix

Set the bar to be in line with the middle of your sternum (breast bone).





### Explanation

This will enable you to set your back good and tight from the get go. A tight set up makes for a good set.

With the bar too high up this means as you get under the bar you cannot get as tight in your set up, and a loose back that is not set properly leads to problems during the movement.

### The Mistake

Walking the bar out forwards and having to reverse it in after the set.

### The Fix

Squat inside the squat rack and walk it out by reversing back a couple of steps.

## Explanation

ALWAYS walk the bar out by reversing just one to two paces, and rack it by walking it in moving forwards. This is a safe way to unrack and rack.

At the end of the set you are going to be fatigued. It's best to just walk the bar in straight ahead to rack it. If you had to reverse the bar onto hooks you could miss them altogether and lose control of the bar.

## The Mistake

Not setting/using the safeties or having them set too high to use.

## The Fix

Set the safety catcher arms in the rack to just below the height of your squat at correct depth.



### **Explanation**

On your warm-up reps with the empty bar, notice the height you squat down to, set the safety arms just under this height, so if you fail a rep you can set the bar down easily and bail out under it. Bottom picture is correct height for the safeties.

### **The Mistake**

Spotting the squat with a person stood right behind you.

### **The Fix**

Rely on safety arms to catch the bar. If you do have to use spotters, have two people, one at each end of the bar.

### **Explanation**

You'll frequently see spotters stood right behind the lifter, crouching down as they squat. This is not optimal as it is quite distracting to the lifter's proprioception and could risk a collision or interruption to the movement pattern for fear of bumping into the spotter.

As a coach I do not spot my clients on the squat because I am standing too far away to do this.

My position is what is best for me to see them perform the lift and to coach and cue them with form corrections during the lift, which is what I get paid for.

Ultimately, the safeties are there for a failed rep.

I don't programme my clients to fail a set, but I do always have them set the safeties just in case it happens.

## **The Squat Movement Mistakes (The back squat – Low bar position)**

### **The Mistake**

Not squatting down to correct depth.

### **The Fix**

Aim to squat below parallel. This is when the crease of your hip drops just below the top of you knee.



### Explanation

Squatting too high is a very common mistake. People fear they may not be able to get back up from a correct depth squat (safeties are set if this happens) they also worry about their knees in the squat. It's important to note that a [correctly performed squat is better for the knees](#) and a squat with only partial depth is more risky.

### The Mistake

Taking a stance too wide/narrow.

### The Fix

Position your heels under your shoulders.



## Explanation

Start with a stance width that has your heels under your shoulders and your toes turned out to 30°

Pictured: Left is too wide, centre too close and right panel is correct with heels under shoulders.

A stance too wide, means that you may struggle to hit depth as your leg muscles reach the limit of their extensibility before you get to correct depth. A too close stance can mean the knees also block you from squatting down to depth.

## The Mistake

Knees buckling/caving inwards at the bottom of the squat.

## The Fix

Intentionally shove your knees out inline with your toes and don't let them cave inwards.



## Explanation

The knees caving inwards mostly happens as we come up out of the bottom of the squat.

So, think about shoving your knees out and holding them there firmly.

Pictured: Left is correct with knees out, right shows knees coming inwards.

By controlling what you want your legs to do under a load you are actively strengthening the movement pattern with correct form and strengthening those muscles that hold your knees in that position.

In some cases it is worth lowering the weight you lift to get this correct. Then working the weight back up over time to get build strength and control at the bottom of the squat.

## The Mistake

### Back Rounding Over (Flexion)



## The Fix

Breathe and brace correctly before each rep.

## Explanation

Rounding over the back (pictured in right panel) is often due to a loss of tightness in the back.

It's important to keep the back in extension (straight and pictured in left panel) and this is set with correct breathing and bracing from the time you unrack the weights.

During the lift you must keep your muscles tensed to control this spinal extension. Careful progression of this exercise with a straight back is what builds a strong back.

If you're not sure ask a member of the gym team to check you are doing this correctly as there is a safety concern to improper lifting with an overly rounded back.

## The Deadlift

### Setting up mistakes

#### The Mistake

The bar not set to the correct height off the ground.

#### The Fix

Use bumper plates or artificially raise the height of the bar.





## Explanation

When you start learning to deadlift you may be using smaller (diameter) lighter plates to make weight on the bar up to your working weight set for the day (see top picture).

In some gyms they do not have lighter weighted plates that are the correct height for deadlifting. If you're not sure ask the staff if they have the lighter weight bumper (Middle panel above, shows a 5k bumper plate to correct deadlift height) plates and you'll soon find out.

It's common to see people trying to lift the bar off the ground with plates that are too small, but because the bar is too low to the ground this compromises their set up for the pull.

The bar height should be at your shins and just under 9" or 20cm off the ground for the correct starting height.

If you're working with smaller diameter plates see below:

The fix is to load the bar as you need it with the smaller plates then to artificially raise the height of it for the set (see bottom panel picture). There are two common ways to do this.

1. Put something under the plates, this could be a step up box or some more plates stacked on top of each other.
2. Pull in the power rack. So set the safeties very low to your shin height and pull the bar from that height and set it back down to the safeties for each rep.

## The Mistake

Starting with the bar too far away from your shins.

## The Fix

Stand up straight and bring the shins to just 1" away from the bar.

## Explanation

The [pulling mechanics](#) for the deadlift put your shins just 1" away from the bar as you set up. This means that when you look down, the bar is just about over the knot of your shoe laces/the middle of the arch of your foot.

You'll see many lifters position the bar too far away to start the pull and then have problems with the bar's path afterwards.

The reason we keep the bar over middle of the foot (1" away from shins) is that when standing upright we maintain a natural sense of balance in the body when we are centred in middle of the foot. Not the heels, not the toes, but the middle of the arch of the foot.

### The Mistake

Dropping the hips too low.

### The Fix



Follow the deadlift 5 point set up carefully and your hips will be in the right position to pull from. The left panel pictured above is the correct height for the hips.

### Explanation

As people go to pull they often drop their hips (pictured in right panel), and just after this happens you will see their hips shoot back up to where they were before they can make any progress. Again, this is an issue that can be fixed by a simple set up for the deadlift. It has [5 points to remember](#), here they are:

## Deadlifting With Perfect Form

### The 5 Point Deadlift Set Up

1. Position the bar over the mid foot point (1" away from shins)
2. Keep your legs straight and reach down and grab the bar
3. Now, bend the knees and hips and bring the shins in contact with the bar, when this happens freeze the hips at that height.
4. Take a big held breath (the Valsalva technique) and set your back into extension by squeezing up your chest.
5. Start the bar moving by pressing the ground away with your feet and drag the bar up your legs.

Left panel is the back in flexion, right panel lifter squeezes the chest up, to set the back into firm extension before the pull.



## Sumo Or Conventional?

Sumo means that the foot stance will be very wide, and conventional places the heels closer together with the hands gripping the bar outside of the legs.

To me this is a lifter preference.

There are reasons to sumo deadlift but generally in my coaching I have people use the conventional stance deadlift. I might use the sumo stance if the person would like to use it for competition purposes.

## The Bench Press

This is one of the most popular lifts you will see at the gym. Given a choice between skipping leg day, or skipping chest day I can more or less guarantee you that most people (guys I'm looking at you...) will skip leg day every darn time.

Interestingly the bench press with all its popularity is the one lift that can get you [seriously hurt](#) if you do not respect it. There is a legitimate [safety concern](#) that I'd like to address with you, so that a bench press accident never happens to you or anyone you are training with.

I wrote a separate article about it [here](#) if you wanted to share this kind of info.

## Setting up mistakes

### The Mistake

Collaring the barbell and bench-pressing without safeties or a spotter.

### The Fix

Bench press without collars on the bar. Tilt the bar to slide off the plates if you fail a rep.

### Explanation

If you do ever get stuck with the bar on your chest and you cannot lift it, you will tilt the bar to the side and the plates will slide off freeing you, provided you have not collared the bar.

Ideally you will also bench with safeties set, or with a spotter if the station does not have safeties.

It is also highly recommended that you grip the barbell with your thumbs around the bar. There are still lifters who use a thumbless grip, and in certain conditions they could let slip of the barbell with it coming down on them hard and fast.

Now that we have the main concerns out of the way, here is how you can optimise your benching and avoid some common mistakes.

## Bench Pressing Movement Mistakes

### The Mistake

Pressing and hitting the hooks on the way up.

### The Fix

You're too far up the bench with your eye gaze on the wrong side of the bar, slide down and set up with your eye gaze on the other side of barbell (foot end) as you look up at the bar on the hooks.

### The Mistake

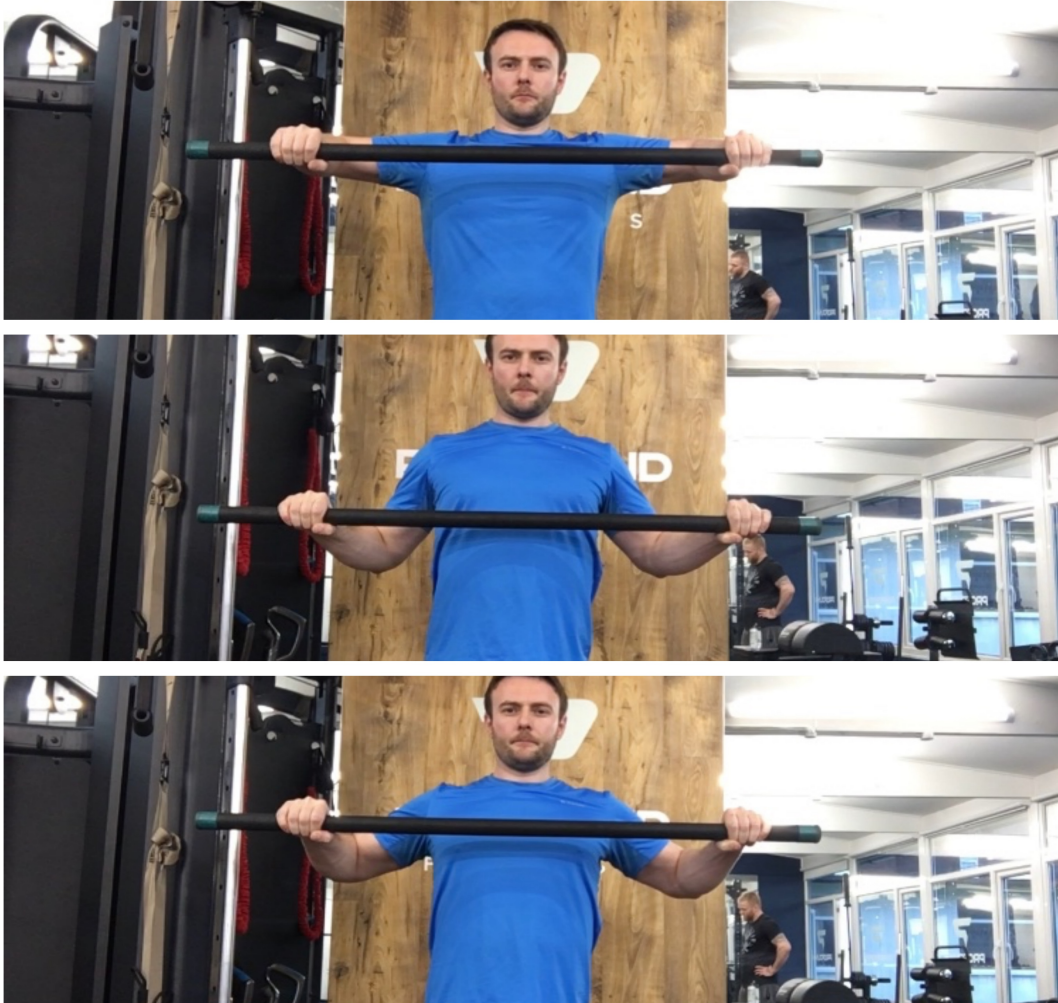
Incorrect elbow position used, leading to shoulder pain.

### The Fix

Set your elbows to the correct angle as the bar touches your chest, don't let them flare out. (Pictured in bottom panel below)

### Explanation

You may be benching with your elbows flared out too far to the sides (top panel), this causes an impingement of tendons and ligaments in the shoulder joint . The fix is to bring the angle of the elbows inwards slightly.



The middle photo is too close and notice the bar touched much lower on the chest.

The bottom panel picture is correct and puts the bar approximately in line with the nipple level and over the sternum (breastbone). At the same time the elbows are low enough to not cause the impingement problem at the shoulder joint.

### **The Mistake**

Spotter steps in too soon.

### **The Fix**

Remind the spotter only to assist on unracking, racking and if the bar gets stuck.



### Explanation

This happens when the spotter (person assisting with racking and un racking and there for safety) steps in too soon to get their hands on the bar and assist the lifter with completing reps.

This effectively robs the lifter of those reps when they could have completed them themselves.

The fix is to instruct your spotter to only help with unracking and racking the bar and then to only step in if the bar starts to descend towards you when it should be going up.

Technically speaking an assisted rep is a rep that would not be counted as complete.

## The Shoulder Press

Although I prefer to shoulder press standing up and with the barbell I note that many people in the gym prefer to shoulder press with dumbbells and from a seated position, so that is the variant I will cover here.

### Setting up mistakes

#### The Mistake

Taking too many steps from rack to bench

#### The Fix

It's optimal to put the bench a short distance from the rack, then unrack, do a mirrors check and step into position for sitting down and pressing.

## Explanation

I personally like to clear a space on the upper shelf of the dumbbell rack so the weights are at hip height and easier to control on and off the rack for a heavy set.

But in a busy gym, I understand that the set up above is not always an option, so in that instance I recommend you keep the dumbbells near your bench and deadlift them up off the ground then go into your seated pressing.

At the end of the pressing, deadlift them back to the ground and resist the temptation to just round your back over and flop them down to the ground!

## Shoulder Pressing Movement Mistakes

### The Mistake

Pressing away from you.





## The Fix

When you shoulder press you need to press directly UP (see left hand panel), so the inside edge of your elbows are right beside your ears.

## Explanation

You'll see people pressing up but the dumbbells will actually be out away from the forehead (pictured in right hand panel). The best angle to check this from is the side angle pictured above.

This creates an unneeded downwards pulling force on the shoulder which is not part of a proper lockout, but will fatigue you and limit the effectiveness of the exercise.

If you see yourself doing this, then think about pressing upwards but slightly backwards and this will get the weights back in balance over the shoulder joint.

## The Mistake

Not finishing the rep properly (elbows still bent).

## The Fix

Lock the elbows out securely every time you press a rep.

If you rush to press, then you may not lock the elbows out safely and you may not be squeezing up to finish the lift. Go for a full lock out of the elbows and then squeeze your traps ([trapezius muscle](#)) muscles like you are shrugging your shoulders.

# Conclusion

I hope you've enjoyed this short guidebook. It is by no means everything that you need to know, but it is some of the most common mistakes you now know how to avoid.

As a coach it's my first job to teach my clients how to lift safely and I watch out for just these kind of mistakes and many others as well.

If in doubt about something you are doing you can always reach out to me to ask, or hopefully any of the team in your local gym should be able to give you good guidance.

I coach people in the correct way to strength train with barbells in person and online.

You can find more content on my website and view training clips and other short articles on my social media pages.

[www.StrengthRevolution.org](http://www.StrengthRevolution.org)

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## About The Author

Byron Johnston is a strength and conditioning coach, based in Guildford, Surrey in the United Kingdom.



He delivers high quality personal training sessions using mostly barbells and some other free weights, he also presents health and wellbeing talks to community and corporate groups.

Much of his approach is based upon the simple science of getting people into great shape and helping them channel their hard work in the gym into results week by week.

He focuses on the correct type of programme for each person he trains with an intelligent approach to nutrition accompanying it. His results vary from assisting athletes to become more powerful and faster in competition, to everyday mums and dads who want to shed body fat and be healthy and strong for a well lived, long and active life.

He has trained in gyms for more than ten years and works with people one-to-one to help them become strong and healthy as well as coaching people around the world on with his online membership platform.

[www.StrengthRevolution.org](http://www.StrengthRevolution.org)

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