

INCREASE YOUR MUSCLE NOT YOUR GUT

TRAIN TO GAIN

● THE RACK BARBELL ROW

By Brian Carroll

Most of you are very familiar with the barbell row. In gyms all across the country, you see guys and girls sloppily swinging a barbell to their abs as if they are doing some weird deadlift/row/clean combo. They are totally missing out on the benefits of what a strict row can offer.

A safer and more effective version is the barbell rack row. In this exercise, you row inside the power rack from a low pin and squeeze the weight up instead of swinging it. With each rep, pause at the sternum with full contraction for a second, then slowly lower the bar to the rack and reset. This is a great movement to bring up a weak or underdeveloped upper, middle, and even lower back (remember, the lats run from the arms to the hips.)

Swinging the bar not only cheats you out of the potential benefits but also increases the risk of herniated discs and a litany of other issues as well. As someone who has a serious history of back injury (broken sacrum, multiple endplate fractures from L3-down, as well as not having any disc in L4-L5 and L5-S1,) I can speak on this subject with authority.

Since the traditional barbell row already puts you in a compromising position (hinged at the waist), you don't want to be swinging the bar, especially when you're in flexion and under a load. Instead, you want to be braced, stiff, and get a strong contraction with a full range of motion to enjoy the full benefit from this often-bastardized exercise.

Certain movements should be performed as explosively as possible, but this row is not one of them. The squat, bench press, deadlift, clean, and snatch should be done with speed and power. For exercises like the rack barbell row, which actually supplement the moves above, you should use control and try to focus on working the muscle rather than the movement.

To help make the exercise more efficient, I have made a few changes to it that will not only help you get bigger and stronger, but will also

develop your core strength and enhance your longevity, in and out of the gym.

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1. As with the squat, bench, and dead, you want to get into the position known as the "lifter's wedge" or the "gorilla lean." I learned this from renowned spinal expert Dr. Stuart McGill. You want your head up, lats down, and your trunk braced even before taking on a load. This will be the key for you in any movement.

2. Use a grip depending on your weakness. If you want to attack your lats a little bit more, go wider. If you want to hit the middle or the meat of your back, then you'll want your hands a little bit closer. This is personal preference. I prefer somewhere in the middle because that allows me to get the best squeeze.

3. Start from a good stretched position while in the lifter's wedge and not lower. Set the pins low, but not too low. At the same time, you don't want it so high that you have no range of motion either.

4. Before you initiate the row, push your stomach out as if you're about to take a gut punch. Make sure to brace your core. I don't care if it's 45 pounds or 450 pounds, one wrong move while being too "casual" (as Dr. McGill calls it) can end your days in the weight room. You must treat every rep as if it's the hardest lift you will ever try.

5. Once you break the bar from the pins—using your back muscles rather than momentum—pull it to your sternum and contract your muscles as

hard as you can for a second or two. Pull your elbows back and squeeze the bar into you. Then release the squeeze and lower the bar back onto the pins.

6. Pause in the bottom and reset the grip. Each rep will begin from a dead stop. You will not be using momentum the way you would with a squat or bench press or overhead press. You will be working the muscles required for this movement and not just the movement itself.

7. Don't swing the bar, even when the reps get hard. Too many people have the habit of doggedly finishing sets even after their form has completely fallen apart. You do not get a badge of honor by resorting to anything possible to finish a set. This is about working the muscle, not hitting the number of reps you have in your head.

8. Focus on the movement not the weight. Weight will come. To piggyback off of number seven, this is not a movement that you should use to gauge true strength. This is more of an isolation-compound exercise. In other words, it has much more benefit than a side lateral or a lat-pulldown, but it's still an accessory lift. Treat it as such.

9. I suggest not wearing straps in an effort to build up your grip strength. People throw around the phrase "functional training" a lot these days, and I can't think of anything more functional than one's grip. Once again, this is personal preference.

10. Keep the reps under 10 on this movement. I actually prefer five to six reps, as that range allows me to handle good weight but with perfect form. Any more than 10 reps and I've found it's too hard to keep my form pristine. The goal is for each rep to be a mirror image of the last. Maintaining the integrity of the lift is the top priority.



● WINNING THE SORE WAR

by Amanda Burrill

Beat post-workout muscle pain with these cutting-edge interventions

- For those of us who crush the iron—and life in general—the “I’ve fallen and I can’t get up” feeling the day after a squat workout is all too familiar. I’ve been immersing my body in balms, patches, and high-tech devices to bring you products that soothe sore muscles, promote recovery, and hopefully get you back in the gym (or at least up off the toilet) pain-free and feeling good.

THE PRODUCT: Marc Pro

Price: \$650

The claim: Marc Pro conditions muscles by stimulating tissue with strong but non-fatiguing muscle contractions that set off a series of physiologic events called Muscle Activated Recovery Cascade that flush out waste and move nourishment into the treated area. Muscles recover faster and feel better after strenuous activity.

The verdict: This is the best thing to ever happen to my traps and upper back. The device is user-friendly with two independent channels, each with two self-adhesive electrodes (four total). Each channel can be used on specific muscles or multiple muscle groups at the same time. A short 10- to 20-minute session serves as a good warm-up. For recovery, I used the Marc Pro right after my workout or, if I didn’t fit it in, at the end of the day for about 30 minutes. Since I spend my time between writing at a laptop hunched up like Quasimodo, working out, or cooking like a banshee, I now find myself repeatedly turning to Marc Pro to help release the tension I carry in my traps.

Drawbacks: The price is steep but 150 percent worth it.

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Marc Pro



THE PRODUCT: Hyperice Vyper

Price: \$200

The claim: Vyper is a fitness and recovery device/roller that uses pressure and vibration to improve the body’s overall performance. Three different speeds are powered by rechargeable lithium ion batteries, delivering over two hours of use per charge.

The verdict: I use the Vyper exactly as I would a traditional foam roller, but the pressure and vibration make

for a much more satisfying experience. I have seen significant improvements along my ITB, up and down my spinal column, and most notably in my two “deep six” areas: the group of small hip muscles, deep inside the hip that laterally rotate the leg. I just sit on the Vyper, find the “sweet spot,” and grind into it.

Drawbacks: Again, the price is a little steep, but it’s worth it. I’m hoping they introduce a slightly longer version.

Hyperice Vyper



THE PRODUCT: WellPatch

Price: \$6 for a four-pack

The claim: WellPatch claims their topical pain-relief solutions can safely address sore and stiff muscles. Unlike internal analgesics, which require time to be absorbed by your body and deliver non-specific pain relief, these patches are placed directly on the spot that ails you and begin working immediately. The Capsaicin Pain Relief Patch uses the ingredient that makes chili peppers hot to provide up to eight hours of heat. The large Backache Pain Relief Patch is designed for the lower back and has a cooling combination of menthol and aloe.

The verdict: I like having a combination of the Capsaicin and Backache patches on hand at all times. At least one muscle on my body is always sore, and having the choice between heating or cooling relief at a moment's notice gives me a warm and fuzzy feeling. Also, they are great for traveling, make no mess, are odor-free, and can easily be cut to fit different areas or address smaller muscles.

Drawbacks: They can start to fall off if you're too active or get sweaty or wet. I recommend wearing them after your workout rather than during.



WellPatch

BFF Miracle Body Buffer



THE PRODUCT: BFF Miracle Body Buffer

Price: \$300

The claim: The BFF directs random orbital oscillation and intensive vibration therapy to accelerate healing and wellness. With durable engineering and ergonomic handling, it's easy to incorporate into daily life and touts efficacy across multiple fitness planes: muscle and pain treatment, hair removal, and skin moisturization.

The verdict: At first glance, the BFF looks awkward, but I decided to give it a "whirl." The muscle relief (a plush white cover is stretched over the oscillating disc) feels like a foam roller, but the difference is that the weight of the machine does the work for you, so you avoid the awkward flopping around on the floor. I was able to address shoulder-muscle pain pretty easily, and using the edge along my ITB was very effective, especially near the attachment points. Bonus: The fine-grit sandpaper-like sticker made my legs not only hairless but totally smooth. Last but not least, there is a blue cover and an included body cream that allows you to take your newly relaxed muscle and smooth, hairless skin and moisturize the hell out of it.

Drawbacks: The BFF is slightly heavy, but if you're not utilizing all three of its capabilities back-to-back, your arms won't get tired. To address back muscles or hard-to-reach areas, you will need help, and the hair-removal stickers eventually need to be replaced, but they are inexpensive and available on the website.

These aids will hopefully get you back in the gym (or at least up off the toilet) pain-free and feeling good.

THE PRODUCT: Nano Foot Roller

Price: \$25

The claim: The Nano is designed to increase flexibility and relieve minor muscular aches and pains associated with the foot. It comes in two densities and can also be used to address pain in the forearm. Trigger Point, the manufacturer, claims the textured surface provides a systematic approach to blood flow by channeling nutrients directly into the tissue.

The verdict: If you run, wear heels, or spend a lot of time on your feet, this is 25 dollars you can't afford not to spend. I have a mild case of plantar fasciitis that was relieved in that "hurts so good" way. I also found relief by rolling out my forearms after an intense back or bicep day where my grip was heavily utilized. This is the perfect desk companion if you're a typing fiend.

Drawbacks: It doesn't come in pink, purple, or teal, but I can live with that.

Nano Foot Roller

