



Gymnasts from the Olympus School of Gymnastics in Sandy, Utah, know the importance of dips. Shown left to right are Kylie Sharp, Summer Raymond, Stormy Julius, Annie Butterfield, and Madison Tueller.

Rediscover Dips

Get back to the basics with this super auxiliary exercise

BY RICK ANDERSON, VICE PRESIDENT, BFS

Powerlifting equipment and techniques have evolved to the level where not only the 700-pound absolute record in the bench press has been broken, but so have the 800-, 900- and even the 1,000-pound milestones. And those bench-press shirts and other gear are not just for men, as powerlifting phenom Becca Swanson has exceeded the 500-pound mark in this lift. It's no surprise that the 225-pound bench press for reps until failure is a mainstay of the NFL combine tests. With all this attention given the bench press, somewhere along the way it seems we have forgotten about other amazingly effective upper-body exercises, one in particular being dips.

What is interesting is that not so long ago, many top bench pressers considered dips as the key auxiliary exercise for the bench press. One of the most famous proponents was Pat Casey, a powerlifter who in 1967 became the first man to officially bench press 600 pounds.

At a bodyweight of 305 pounds, Casey did 380 pounds. But as impressive as this feat was, even more amazing were his marathon dipping sessions. In one 7-hour workout session alone, he used a 250-pound dumbbell for a total of 200

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repetitions, starting with sets of 5 and working down to singles. On many other occasions, often taking up to 8 hours, he did 100,000 pounds of total weight in dips.

Another amazing dipper was Marvin Eder, a strength athlete who competed in powerlifting, Olympic lifting and bodybuilding. At a bodyweight of 198 pounds, Eder was reported to have performed a single repetition in this exercise with 434 pounds. And in the category of strength endurance, the Guinness World Record for the most parallel bar dips performed in one hour goes to Simon Kent, who in 1998 completed 3,989 repetitions.

One of the few sports for which you'll find dips performed these days is gymnastics, as the exercise trains the upper-body muscles in the manner required by the events, especially those featuring rings and parallel bars. The exercise is seldom found in physical education classes because, as with pull-ups and chin-ups, it is considered too difficult an exercise for today's young people. At BFS, however, we look at dips as a challenge that many athletes should consider tackling.

The Anatomy of a Dip

Dips affect many of the same muscle groups as the bench press: anterior shoulder,

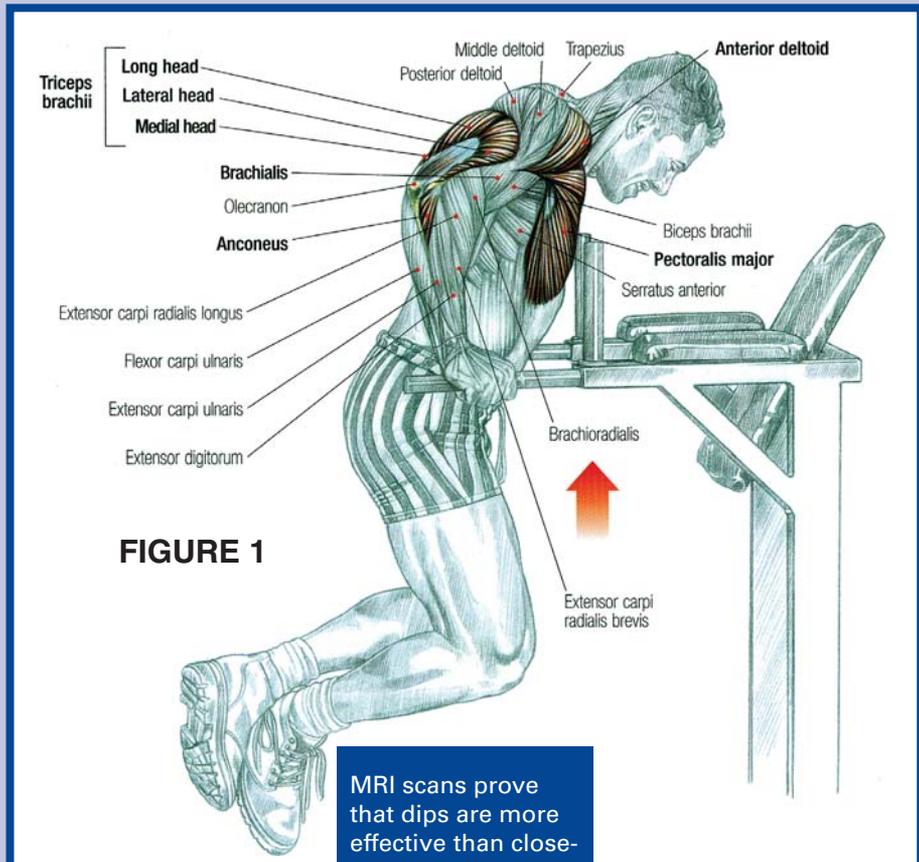


FIGURE 1

MRI scans prove that dips are more effective than close-grip bench presses for overall triceps development.

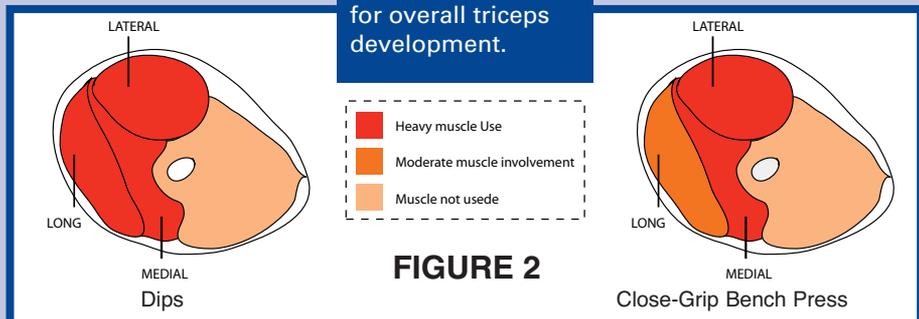


FIGURE 2

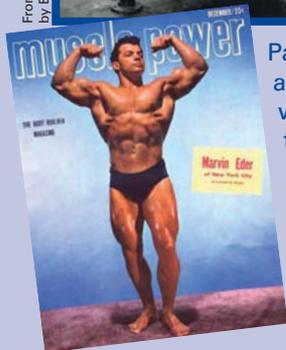
and pectorals and triceps. They also strengthen upper back muscles, such as the trapezius, as they are involved in providing stability as the exercise is performed. Obviously, if dips are performed on pull-up trainer machines, the involvement of these muscles is decreased.

In terms of bodybuilding, the dip is probably the best single exercise to develop the triceps. The triceps consists of three heads: lateral, long and medial. In his book *Target Bodybuilding*, Per A. Tesch, PhD, used magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans to determine how active specific muscles are when used in

60 exercises. Figure 2 compares the parallel bar dips to what many bodybuilders consider the best overall triceps builder, the close-grip bench press. As you can see from Dr. Tesch's research, both exercises strongly affect the lateral and medial heads of the triceps, but the close-grip bench press does not work the long head of the muscles as strongly as does the dip. The conclusion is that if you only have time to perform one exercise for the triceps, dips are the exercise of choice.

Besides their use in gymnastics, dips are a great exercise for swimmers to increase power in their stroke, the arm

From Pat Casey: King of the Powerlifters by Bruce Wilhelm, Bruce Wilhelm Exercise Equipment, P.O. Box 2289, Daly City, CA 94017.



Pat Casey (top) and Marvin Eder were among the greatest dippers of all time.

drive in sprinting, and shoulder flexibility. BFS Founder/CEO Dr. Greg Shepard believes that dips are a great exercise for football linemen to increase their upper-body strength for blocking and tackling. And Coach Shepard walks the walk on this subject, as he was able to perform 5 reps in this exercise with 225 pounds.

One reason dips are avoided by some coaches is that they believe it is hard on the shoulders. This is true for some individuals, especially those with poor posture or a history of shoulder injuries, but many athletes experience no such problems in performing the exercise through a full range of motion. However, as with the squat, at BFS we believe that if an athlete goes to parallel in this exercise, or slightly lower, they will achieve maximum benefits from this exercise. Another option is to perform a warm-up set of dips with full range of motion and just bodyweight to develop and maintain

shoulder flexibility, and then perform your remaining sets to parallel with additional resistance.

Another reason dips are often avoided by some athletes is that, like chin-ups, they simply may be too difficult to perform, especially for women. For these individuals, having a spotter lift up on one or both ankles of the person performing the exercise will enable an athlete to perform the exercise until they can do it on their own. If no spotter is available, bending your back leg and resting the top of your foot on a large box positioned behind you will make the exercise easier to perform.

A Primer on Dipping

One of the best pieces of equipment for dips is the BFS straight V-dip, which has a parallel dip section and a V-dip section. There are basically two types of dips: the shoulder dip and the chest dip. The shoulder dip should be performed on the parallel dip section and

emphasizes the triceps and shoulders, whereas the chest dip should be performed on the V-dip section and emphasizes the pectorals and the lateral head of the triceps. Heavier weights can usually be used in the chest dip, which is the type preferred by most coaches and athletes.

With the chest dip you should position yourself on the V-handle bars so that your hands are a few inches wider than shoulder-width apart, with your elbows slightly flared out. As you begin the exercise, lean forward; then as you come up, focus on pulling your elbows to your sides and squeezing your pectorals.

With the shoulder dip you should use the parallel handles. If you're performing it on a V-dip, then position your body so that your hands are about hip width apart. Instead of leaning forward, as you perform the exercise you stay upright during the entire movement, keeping your elbows close to your sides.

With both variations, always keep



The Chin-Dip V.K.R. (top) enables athletes to perform these two effective resistance training exercises. The Straight V-Dip (right) is the best unit for performing both chest and shoulder dips.





Beginners can use a spotter as shown until they can perform the exercise on their own. Carlee Ciraulo is shown spotting Ashley Peterson; both girls are outstanding athletes from Hunter High School in Salt Lake City, Utah.

your wrists in line with your forearms; often a thumbless grip encourages proper positioning, and many individuals find this more comfortable. Experiment to find the most effective technique. Also, crossing your ankles as you perform the exercise will increase stability and minimize the rare risk of injuring the muscles of the inner thigh.

As you get stronger you will need to increase resistance by holding a dumbbell between your ankles or using a chin/dip belt. Holding a dumbbell securely is more difficult to coordinate compared to using the belt, and eventually the weights you will use on this exercise will become

too heavy to hold in this manner. Another great variation is to attach lifting chains to a chin-dip belt, as the chains will make the exercise more difficult at the top of the movement where you are strongest.

Although dips will probably never create the attention that the bench press has enjoyed, it's a valuable exercise that should be considered in the training program of serious athletes. At least give this "old school" exercise a chance – you might just love it!

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Attaching a chain to a chin/dip belt increases the intensity of the exercise.

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