

Dumbbell Bent Over Rowing

by

Alan Palmieri

Bent over rows of any type are gruesome movements. While the lats are the target muscle group more often than not it seems the lower back becomes the intended victim. As with full back squats, I find more people turn away from bent over rows than embrace them. Placing legitimate issues aside, such as severe back problems, spine and disc related situations, bent over rows, as do full back squats, usually separate the men from the boys. They are tough movements and physically demanding. They also require a certain degree of technique to perform or else you can easily cause yourself some serious injuries. Most people, especially the novice, discover they are using more biceps than lats in executing the movement. Everything has it up side as well as it's down side. All in all, bent over rows are one of if not the very best exercise for developing a wide, thick and massive back.

Now with my obvious and wordy support of bent over rows out of the way let me move on to the main topic, bent over dumbbell rows. I'm not talking about single arm rows rather two arm dumbbell rows. If you have never performed the movement you are in for a real but taxing treat. If you haven't done the movement in sometime it might just be the point in your training to start using them again. Bent over dumbbell rows are different from barbell bent over rows in several ways. Just as dumbbell bench presses are different from barbell presses, the movement takes on a completely different feel. It also works the muscles from a slightly different angle.

Although some like to perform the movement while lying stomach down on a flat bench or an incline bench, I prefer to do them without the support of a bench. Bending over just as I would for a standard bent over barbell row. This method taxes the lower back but I also feel it helps strengthen it. Any rowing movement will

be difficult and I'm not looking for the easy way out or ways to remove the stress... I'm looking for results and movements that can produce them.

Assume a position just as you would for a normal bent over barbell row only instead of gripping a barbell you will hold a dumbbell in each hand. I start with the palms facing my legs and as I pull up I rotate the hands so that the palms are facing my sides. I force myself to raise my elbows as high as possible while trying to raise the dumbbells as high as I can for a full contraction. Lower slowly rotating the hands back to the starting position and repeat for the desired number of reps, usually I do 4 to 5 sets of 6 to 12 reps. You can increase the intensity by holding the contracted position for a slow count of three to six. Of course any exercise held in a contracted position increases the intensity on almost every movement. Make sure to keep your knees slightly bent and arch your back, it makes a difference and can help prevent injury.

If you have never attempted the dumbbell row, I suggest starting with very light dumbbells and keeping the legs in a more straight position as illustrated below. This often allows those new to the movement the ability to feel it more in the lat area. When performing the bent over dumbbell row using your normal workout poundage, make certain to keep the knees bent. Beginners often will use more weight and form suffers causing the biceps to do the majority of the work instead of the lats. Knees bent, head up, back arched, and concentrate on pulling the dumbbells using your back, not the hands or biceps.

Do not rush to see how much weight you can use. As with all back exercises, the biceps play a very dominating role. The objective is to eliminate the biceps from being the recipient of the movement, it's the back you are training not the biceps. Another tip is to make certain you keep your wrists straight and locked throughout the movement. I've noticed some will bend the wrist in the top position. This also takes the stress off the lats.

Professionals and advanced trainees understand the importance of performing movements so they work the selected muscles. Beginners and

intermediate trainees consciously or unconsciously do things to make movements easier in order to use heavier weights. They don't realize this only hinders their progress. Back work is one muscle group that is a prime candidate for poor form and technique due to the overwhelming desire to use heavier weights. Resist.... form and technique.... feel and work the muscle, this is an absolute for increasing the width and thickness of the back.



Start



Finish

Notice how the knees are not bent and the legs are straight. This is how those attempting the movement for the first time should start. After a couple of warm up sets with a light weight to get the feeling down, move to heavier weights, bend the knees, arch the back at the beginning of the movement and row – row – row away to lat width and thickness.

Exercises illustrated by Bart Miller. Photographer Bob Miller.

The two hand dumbbell bent over row is a great change of pace for those times when back work seems to be going stale. Give 'em a try – you may like 'em.

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