

# Alternatives to the Back Squat, Barbell Bench Press and Dead...

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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Hey there, what's going on is Dr. Mike T. Nelson here. Welcome back to the flex diet podcast. I'm your host. In this podcast, we cover all things to increase your performance in the gym, add some lean body mass, and increase or improve your body composition, all without destroying your health and honor in a flexible manner. Today is another solo cast with just myself. This one will be a little bit shorter. But the main question is, do you have to do the three main power lifts, which would be back squat, barbell bench press and straight bar deadlift? So we'll answer those questions or that question today. And it is brought to you by the flex diet certification flixotide certification will open again in January 2022. It is eight different interventions to improve your body's ability to recover primarily focused on nutrition. So the different interventions are everything from intermittent fasting protein, carbohydrates, fats, and other things like neat non exercise activity, thermogenesis sleep micro nutrition, etc. And each one is broken down into a big picture. So do you understand the concepts of it, which is a mash up of flexible dieting and metabolic flexibility. Each one of these interventions has a detailed technical video where we go deep into how each one works. So for protein, we talked about different amino acids, leucine essential amino acids, muscle protein synthetic response, but we explain it in a way that makes sense to you based on the research. And then also each intervention has five different action items, and a complete system that shows you how to know which action item to apply to clients at what times. In addition, we've got expert interviews everything from like Dr. Eric helms talk about flexible dieting, Dr. Stu Phillips, and Dr. Jose Antonio talking about protein, Dr. Hunter Walden talking about insulin, and many other experts. So go to flex diet.com Get on the waitlist, that will also put you on the daily newsletter list. And as soon as it opens, you will be the first to notice or notified, I guess, January 2022, is when it opens again. So today we're talking about do you have to do the three main power lifts of a back squat, barbell bench press, and a straight bar deadlift in your program? And as you've probably already figured out, the answer is no. Unless you're a power lifter, because in a powerlifting meet, those are the lifts that you would have to do. So getting specific practice with them is going to be essential, especially if you're newer, I can probably get away with more deviation if you're more advanced. But I guess one of the mistakes I see people make is assuming that all three of those lifts have to be in their program. And I think if those lifts work well for you, then yes, you can use them. But in my experience, unless someone is powerlifting it's pretty rare, I would have them back squat. Some people like doing it. Again, it's not a bad exercise. If your body can tolerate it, and it works well for you. The main limiter with the back squat I find is external rotation in the shoulders. A lot of people just don't have that much external rotation. So they either have to take a very wide grip on the bar or kind of force

themselves into that position. This normally results in a lot of hyperextension at the low back. And over time they develop kind of some niggly injuries or issues from it. Again, if you're powerlifting then by all means practicing the back squat because that's what you're going to be tested on. If you're not I much prefer options such as, like Elite FTS, the yoke bar or safety squat bar. I know Kabuki strength has a transformer bar, but I have clients who really enjoy that. I haven't used it yet, but I've only heard good feedback from it. And if you have a straight bar, the other options I do like are a front squat. Now you can use a clean grip if you have the mobility to do that. You can also do a version with straps, I'll try to stick a video somewhere in here, you do not put your hand in the straps. But what you do is put the straps around the bar, and then hold on to the strap, don't wrap the strap around your hand, something goes wrong, you want to get out of that lift right away. So I would not wrap your hands in it, but allows you to then hold on to the strap and more of a neutral grip and keep your elbows up. So that's another version that I like. A nice part also about a front squat is if you go a little too far forward, most likely you're going to drop the bar. So it is a little bit more auto correcting is quite a bit harder for a lot of people. goblet squats, if you have kettlebells, or dumbbells are a great version, Dan John's talked a lot about that. Another version that's not used a whole lot is a Zurcher squat. So you're going to put the bar in the crux of your elbows, and then squat down and back up, you can do that from a power rack. Or if you want more of a mobility challenge, do it off of the floor, so that you would then deadlift it. And then from a deadlift position, he would set it on the top part of your quads as you squat down, then you would carefully balance it there. But your arms underneath, have it in the crux of your elbows and then stand up. So that's a great version. So those would be my favorite different ways of doing some type of squat motion. Again, you don't necessarily need to have a specialty bar to do the front squats, or the Zurcher squats. Another tip on the Zurcher squat is as it gets heavier bar pad, or sometimes using the fat grips on there. Or if you have access to a two inch axle bar does feel quite a bit better. Right as it gets heavier, the one inch kind of standard Olympic type bar will kind of eat into your forearms and your elbows a little bit more. So those are some versions I like. In reality, I wish I would have gotten the lead FTS yoke bar a lot sooner than what I did. Because that has made squatting at least for me, and the handful of clients I have fly in to do private stuff much, much much better. Because you can keep your hands in a more neutral position out in front. And with the padding and everything else as it gets a little bit heavier, it just feels like more of a natural position. So I really enjoy that. And again, there's other versions you can add of that. For the benchpress. If you can do a straight bar bench, I think that's great. A lot of people have issues with their shoulders, however, and forcing them into a straight bar can be problematic. The biggest change I'll normally make with that, if you're looking at bars would be going to a more neutral grip bar, sometimes called a football bar or neutral grip bench. I know Kabuki strength has their Cadillac bar, which I haven't used yet. But again, I've only heard good feedback about it. Putting your hands more palms facing each other or a neutral position, I find that this does feel like it hits the triceps a little bit more. But many people can bench relatively heavier weight in that position that we're unable to use a straight bar. Another great option here if you have access to them as dumbbells. I've been doing a lot more Dumbbell Bench Press this past year. And if I in that range of motion on it, you can move your hands your wrists around a little bit, especially if you've got differences in your left shoulder versus your right for mobility. It's much easier to move around with the dumbbells on to that. And as we said if you can straight bar bench, I think that can be a great exercise too. But you don't necessarily have to force yourself into that position around a straight bar. A couple of aversions that aren't really heard of all that much one of them would be from Anthony Clark is the reverse hand position. So most the time when you're grabbing the straight bar and your palms are going to be facing away, you can try to flip your hands so that your palms are facing you. Generally go with a little wider grip and play with that. It's gonna feel really weird at

first, but some people I found for whatever reason, even though it's looks weird and bizarro can benchpress from that position, but not with the standard benchpress position with a couple things to play with would be where your hand position is is



some people are a little bit too wide and going a little bit more narrow, works better for them. Again, you'll have to play around with it. Usually I would look at the changing width about the width of your finger. So if you were benching with your ring finger on the ring in a standard position, play around with going more narrow, like so bringing your hands in a little bit, so your pinky is on the ring, or sometimes going wider with the middle finger on the ring. Even that little distance can be enough for some people, you can also limit the range of motion, you could use like a board press, there's even little foam things you can stick on the bar now that if you're training by yourself will change the distance that the bar travels, you can also change the distance the bar travels by doing a floor press, you're going to lay on the floor. And by definition your elbows are going to hit and that's going to limit range of motion on that last version that I like also is in power rack, I like doing this with an axle or fat grips, but you can use a standard bar is put your feet up on the bench and a bent position, have your pelvis more flat. So you're going to flatten your low back, bring your chin down. And so you're trying to get as close to a quote unquote neutral spine as you can all start from a bottom position. So I'll have it in a power rack where the pins are right at the bottom and I've got to kind of crawl and sneak under it. So I'm starting with it at my chest from a concentric only position. And then benching up. What I like about this is it's also a really good mobility test. So if you're not able to do that with your back flat on the bench, then you can start with the pins a little bit higher. And over time keeping the weight around the same, you can work the pins a little bit lower, because it does take a fair amount of mobility to get on there at a bottom position. What I like about that is again, you're going for more of a neutral position. And you also have a way of adjusting it to your own mobility. And the last part is you're going into a concentric portion first, so you're not doing the East centric. And if the weight is too heavy, or you just don't have control, you're just not going to be able to lift it. Or a lot of times because people are stronger essentially than concentric Li. By starting with an eccentric portion first, like you would with a normal benchpress you're going to lower the bar first, they sometimes can get into positions that when they go to press up, don't feel very good. And now they're kind of stuck in that position either having to bring it all the way down to the bottom and rested on the rack itself and crawl out or hopefully have a partner grab it and hopefully not end up as one of those little failed benchpress videos that you see on the old internet. Those are some options for bench press. And of course, you can think of many other ones that you can do. Very last part two is using fat grips like the blue ones for most guys, or the black, the 1.75 for females or people have smaller hands. For whatever reason, it feels quite different. And I've noticed with some clients who had shoulder pain, even with dumbbells, no matter what positions we used, by just adding factory reps to it, their shoulder pain went away. So a lot of their pressing they did for quite some time was using fat grips. Because it's challenging your grip a little bit more, you're gonna have to go lighter on the weight. And if you haven't done it before, start very very light, it is going to stress the thumb and more of an out position. A lot of people have very weak thumbs. So if you haven't done it before, just start really, really light and then gradually work your way up. But a lot of times I found that just by adding the fat grips, people can do bench pressing without pain. Last one is a straight bar deadlift. This can be done conventional or sumo style. Again, you don't necessarily have to do a straight bar deadlift. If you're competing in powerlifting, of course, I'm a big fan of the trap bar. So when I first set up my garage gym, whoo boy going on. over 14 years ago now, I talked to Jim Wendler to lead fts. I got a two by two rack, straight

Texas power bar, flat bench. I built my own platform my dad helped me with three quarter inch plywood, two layers of that screw Liquid Nails together. And then three quarter inch farm stall rubber mat on top, the rack we countersunk through the bottom. And in addition, I also got a trap bar. What I found was teaching clients a trap, our deadlift was way easier than conventional or a sumo style, you're going to get most of the benefits from it. Again, it is a little bit more maybe quad specific than a standard deadlift, depending upon your anthropometrics how long your limbs are. But I find for most people, they're going to get the benefit that they need, which is lifting heavy weight off of the ground. With the trap bar, you can use a low handles or high handles. With some people, if they have really long femurs, not the greatest mobility, you can start even higher, you can get like the wagon wheels from Rogue, or what I've done in the past to before I had the wagon wheels, which are just oversized 45 pound plates really is the three quarter inch farmstyle mat, you can cut them into smaller pieces, and then you can stack them up to create an elevated lift. There's nothing magical about the diameter of a 45 pound weight that everybody has to start at that point. Another option is you can get a lot of farmers bars now relatively inexpensive, and a rogue sells them. I believe Lucas at arm assassins has some I bought some years ago from a welder and Pennsylvania. And those work well too because they're a little bit more neutral position, each hand is going to be more independent. So they do feel a little bit different. Lots of versions that you can do. Another version that isn't talked about a whole lot, but I've had great success with if you only have a straight bar, two versions here, one of them is going to be a Jefferson deadlift, or sometimes called a straddle deadlift, you're gonna step over the bar with one leg, your torso is going to be rotated, your legs are going to be a little bit more externally rotated, one hand will be in front of you and one hand will be behind you. And then you're going to deadlift from that position, AKA a Jefferson deadlift or a straddle deadlift. I found that if some people have low back issues, not all the time, but a pretty high percentage of time, people can Jefferson deadlift who can't sumo or conventional deadlift without pain. And I know that goes against probably every sort of ruined probably causes a lot of PTS to run screaming for the hills. But to me, if you can do an exercise without any pain, then you're probably okay doing it.



For whatever reason, it looks like a worse position. But I've just found maybe it's because of the novelty. Maybe it's the loading, who knows. But a lot of people can deadlift, pain free in that position. Again, if you haven't done it before, start super light. It's a new exercise, so you don't need to go heavy and your tissue is probably not used to that position. So be conservative, start with a lighter weight, and slowly work yourself up over time, making sure that the movement is pain free. The other version is sometimes called a hack squat or behind the back and deadlift. So now you're going to set up like you're going to do a normal straight bar deadlift. And you're gonna step in front of the bar with both legs. So the bar will then be behind your legs, and you will squat down and stand up with it. This one can be a little bit tricky, if you're not used to it, I find having some type of tights or sometimes sweatpants on, so the bar doesn't completely scrape you up entirely, is beneficial. But that's another version you can play around with. It is definitely more quad intensive, it is more difficult. But if you only have a straight bar, those would be at least a couple of different versions you can do last version which looks even more batshit crazy and something called a shovel deadlift. I can't remember who I got this from. But what you're doing is a normal deadlift, you're going to go quite a bit lighter, but you're going to purposely Miss Lou to quote unquote, one side. So let's say you're doing a normal deadlift with 135. So you've got a 45 on each side. Then on one side or the other. You would start off by just adding a 10 pound plate. So it's an asymmetrically loaded deadlift, and the cue I give people is, when you deadlift it, your hand position is the same, you're going to be

centered on the bar, and you're going to make it look like a normal deadlift. And what you'll feel instantly is that the bar is going to want to tilt right away to the rotated side. So you'll have more load on the side closer to the 10 pound weight, let's say if we put it on the right side here. And then the other hand, because your right hand becomes that pivot point, you're actually almost more pushing down on the bar. This is a good version for more core stability. And just for some variety, sometimes in cases of people that have pain doing a conventional deadlift, by going lighter, and overloading one side or the other, you can play with this yourself or do biofeedback range of motion tests. They can deadlift without pain, where a normal deadlift causes pain. Again, I don't even pretend to know the exact reason for that. But it's definitely a different activation pattern. The sometimes it's helpful, if people have one side that's a little bit more weaker than the other side. That works great. And you can also then do a symmetric lift. So let's say 135 pound deadlift, and then move your base of support. This is sometimes called, like a beast stance, or a kickstand deadlift. So I like if I'm going to have more load on my left leg as an accessory lift, I'll move my right toe to where my left heel is. So I'm going to slide it back. But I want my knees to be lined up in the same position. So in order to accomplish that, I'm going to be on the ball of my right foot, sometimes is also called a ball of foot deadlift. And also do this pattern with a squat is just another way of making it a little bit more asymmetric, and overloading more of one side or the other. So those are another couple of versions. Again, there's plenty of versions of a deadlift, such as a Reeves deadlift, or you're holding on to the plates, which is more grip based and one hand lift and many other ones. But those are some that I think are useful. Again, I'm a big fan of having a trap bar, I find it's much easier to teach the weight is going to be more centered, you could argue that the risk is a little bit less, I don't know if the research really supports that or not. Because how most people deadlift just doesn't look real good. It's harder to get completely out of position on a trap bar I found. And then conventional deadlift, just due to the positioning and the loads. There's some versions you can do of a squat, a bench press, and deadlift, you don't necessarily have to only back squat, straight bar bench press or straight bar deadlift. Even if you only have a straight bar, we gave you some other versions you can do that are not really standard that might work better for you and your clients. So hope you enjoyed this one. As always, this is brought to you by the flex diet certification. It goes on sale again, it opens up in January 2022. As of this recording, we also have CPUs from NASM and SCA eight AC E.



Hopefully CrossFit, we're still waiting to hear back, it's still under review from them right now. So if you need see us, you'll be able to get them also. Now the course is about 23 hours long divided into eight different interventions for nutrition and recovery. So go to flex diet, calm, FL exdt.com You'll be able to get on to the waitlist there. And you'll be notified as soon as it opens in addition to all the other wonderful information via the daily newsletter. And as I promised, we've got lots of guests coming up a few in December, a bunch more in January and February. We've got Dr. Eric Rawson coming to talk on creatine and brain health. Next year. We've got my good friend Dr. Lisa Lewis, talk about some of the psychological aspects of lifting, Dr. Sarah Campbell about gut interactions and exercise, and many others. So stay tuned for that. Got plenty more coming up. Thank you so much for listening. I really appreciate it. If you could hit the old subscribe button there and leave us any feedback. That would be amazing. Thank you so much. Talk to you again very soon