

## **Strong Grip vs. False Grip: Which is Best for You?**

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Have you ever taken a look at how you hold the bar? Not just where your hands line up relative to one another, but how the bar actually sits in your hand and how your fingers wrap around it? This is a variable that could and should be manipulated for you to get the best results from your training.

In regards to your grip, there are traditionally two types of grip that are used—a “strong grip” and a “false grip”. A strong grip is where your thumb wraps around the bar in the opposite direction as your fingers. Conversely, you perform a false grip by keeping the thumb on the same side of the bar as the fingers. Try these two variations out the next time you are in the gym. You will most certainly be able to feel the difference, but what else is going on here? What is the actual advantage to using one grip over the other?

As you can probably feel, the strong grip is a much more stable grip. In this instance, I am using stable to define how securely the bar fits in your hand while using this grip. With the hands locked onto the bar like this, there are a couple more variables that come into play. The first variable is the strength of the muscles that control the thumb and the subject’s ability to pull with their thumb while pushing with the rest of their hand. This would normally force the bar to spiral or twirl, but because it is being done with both hands at the same time, the result is a very, very solid grip. This also activates the forearm muscles and provides the sensation of squeezing the bar.

The second variable at play is friction between the surface of the hand and the bar. This variable is also evident when using a false grip, but, for reasons I’ll get to later, it carries a lot more weight (no pun intended) while using a strong grip. In the bench press, especially, manipulating the friction between the surface of the hand and the bar is vital to achieving correct technique and pushing maximum weight. For example, a technical cue during the bench press is to have somebody “tuck their elbows” during the eccentric part of the lift. In order to do this, the hands have to push out along the length of the bar without actually moving along the bar. This outward pushing of the hands means friction on the bar is pushing in, which in turn changes the respective moment arms of all the muscles involved in the lift. This happens because another force is added into the equation to accompany the force of the bar traveling straight down, which changes the line of force altogether. Being able to manipulate friction properly during a movement is both an effective training means and may also make the movement more efficient, depending on the person’s limitations.

Aside from the setup, the biggest difference of using a false grip is the ability of the wrist to perform ulnar or radial deviation. While this may seem negligible, it is actually a huge variable to consider, especially if you have any history of shoulder or elbow injuries or range of motion imbalances in the shoulders, specifically in regards to internal rotation. If someone is limited or has asymmetrical internal rotation in either shoulder, I would have them use a false grip if I had them perform

a press with a barbell. Why? As you lower the weight, the shoulder will internally rotate. However, if this cannot be done evenly on both sides or cannot be done enough to get the bar as low as you or the person desires, then this extra range of motion has to be provided by other joints. One option is the elbow; another is the spine. If you see odd movement in either of these areas, it may be because the muscles surrounding the shoulder are not firing properly. But, in order to give a little more leeway with this motion, a false grip can be used. This will allow ulnar deviation of the wrist, which will, in turn, allow the shoulder to internally rotate better. Will it allow there to be perfectly symmetrical internal rotation? That should be decided on a case-by-case basis, but it should, assuming there is normal function of the muscles surrounding the wrist, allow for *better* internal rotation at the shoulder.

Personally, my right shoulder usually doesn't internally rotate as well as my left shoulder. In light of this, I perform a range of motion assessment and low-intensity isometrics on myself before I begin to bench. Upon achieving symmetry, I will use a strong grip. I like the fact that I am able to use friction to my advantage—the extra mobility of the wrist while using a false grip doesn't allow for friction to be used the same way unless the wrist is fully deviated to either side—so this is my grip of choice when it comes to benching. With military press, however, I find a false grip to be much more suitable based on my limitations. The false grip doesn't just allow for more range at the shoulder into internal rotation, it allows it into any direction the shoulder can move. This adds up to a much cleaner and comfortable press for myself. For rows, deadlifts, and other pulls I use a strong grip because I am able to hold more weight, and subsequently move more weight, using this grip.

If you haven't considered the grip you are using for barbell movements, start thinking about it. Take into consideration your individual limitations at the shoulder and other joints, and choose which grip to use based on your needs and abilities.

Get big or die tryin'.

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