

Dumbbell Fly

Bilateral flat-bench fly with a neutral grip

Key positions



1. Start: above chest, elbows softly bent



2. Open: stop within a controlled range

Muscles worked

Main muscles

- Pectoralis major brings the upper arms together in front of the chest.

Supporting muscles

- Anterior deltoids assist the shoulder movement.
- Biceps and triceps contribute to elbow stability; forearm muscles maintain grip and wrist position.

What makes it useful

A single-joint chest exercise that opens and closes the arms while elbow bend stays nearly constant. Each dumbbell is controlled independently. Use a light load and smooth arcs rather than bending and straightening the elbows as in a press.

Movement & technique

Dumbbell Fly | Keep a soft elbow bend as you open the arms under control.

Before you start

Use a stable flat bench and two matching light dumbbells. Clear the area and use a spotter for handoff if needed. Keep head, shoulders and buttocks supported on the bench, with both feet on the floor or a stable riser.

1 Set up above the chest

Hold the weights above your chest with palms facing each other and thumbs wrapped. Keep wrists in line with your forearms, gently set the shoulder blades back and down, and soften both elbows.

2 Open with a steady elbow bend

Inhale and lower both weights out to the sides at the same pace. Move in broad arcs from the shoulders, keeping elbow bend nearly unchanged and all support contacts stable.

3 Stop within a controlled range

Use chest or shoulder height as a guide and stop within a comfortable, controlled range. Keep the opening shallower if needed; do not force your shoulders into a deeper stretch.

4 Bring the arms back together

Exhale and bring the arms together over the chest along the same arcs. Keep the gentle elbow bend throughout. Stop with the weights close together without letting them collide or drift over your face.

Form reminders

- Keep elbows softly bent; repeated elbow flexion and extension turns it into a press.
- Keep grip and dumbbell orientation consistent without excessive wrist extension.
- Keep head, shoulders, hips and both feet stable; avoid bouncing or an excessive back arch.
- Prioritize control over load or depth; keep both arms moving evenly within a stable shoulder position.

Finish safely

- Finish by controlling the weights and handing them securely to a spotter if needed. Do not throw them aside or sit up abruptly with arms open.
- Stop for pain or dizziness. Reduce load or range if grip or elbow position cannot stay controlled.

References

1. ACE - Lying Chest Fly (www.acefitness.org)
2. Western Illinois University - Flat Dumbbell Fly checklist (www.wiu.edu)
3. Solstad et al. (2020) - Bench Press and Dumbbell Flyes (www.jssm.org)
4. ScottHermanFitness - Flat Bench Fly (played and visually reviewed) (www.youtube.com)