

Dumbbell Shoulder Press

Seated, with back support

Three key positions



A Shoulder height



B Mid-press



C Overhead

Press from A to C; return to A slowly along the same path.

PRIMARY MUSCLES

Anterior and middle deltoids (front and side of the shoulder)

ASSISTANCE & STABILITY

Triceps assist elbow extension. Trapezius and serratus anterior assist scapular motion; rotator cuff and trunk muscles stabilize.

What this exercise trains

A vertical press from shoulder height to overhead. Back support helps steady the torso while each arm controls its own dumbbell.

Equipment: Two equal dumbbells and a stable upright bench

FOUR CUES TO REMEMBER

01

Feet planted

02

Wrists over elbows

03

Elbows slightly forward

04

Keep ribs stacked

Technique and form checks

Dumbbell Shoulder Press | Seated, with back support

Before you start

Set the backrest nearly upright. Support your upper back and buttocks; plant both feet. Keep your head neutral and brace your abdomen. Rehearse with light weights. Arrange help with the handoff when needed.

How to perform it

01 Set up

Wrap your thumbs around the handles. Hold the weights at shoulder height, palms forward and elbows slightly forward of your sides. Stack wrists over elbows.

02 Press

Exhale and press both weights overhead together. Extend your elbows smoothly without arching your lower back or colliding the dumbbells.

03 Lower

Inhale and lower to shoulder height with control. Keep forearms roughly vertical, wrists straight and both sides even. Use a comfortable, pain-free range.

Common errors and fixes

1. Arching the back: reduce the load and brace.
2. Bent wrists or elbows drifting behind: restore a stacked forearm.
3. Uneven timing: use a lighter load and match both sides.

A general starting example

Try 2 light sets of 8-12 controlled reps, resting 1-3 minutes. Finish with a few good reps still available. Stop the set before your form breaks down.

Sources & movement reference | Accessed 2026-10-17

1. ACE: Seated Overhead Press
<https://www.acefitness.org/resources/everyone/exercise-library/45/seated-overhead-press/>
2. NSCA: Exercise Technique (pp. 8, 19-20)
<https://www.nscs.com/contentassets/24f7e187e9aa4a588439c9612231c7fd/tsac-module-3.0--3.3.pdf>
3. Overhead reaching: scapular motion study
<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC2841046/>
4. ACSM (2026): Resistance Training Prescription
<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12965823/>
5. ScottHermanFitness: How To: Dumbbell Shoulder Press
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qEwKCR5JCog>

Stop for sharp shoulder, neck or back pain. Use a load you can control. Images are AI-generated exercise illustrations.