

8 Cheap Additions to Your Training Program

By: Jordan Syatt

The life of a strength enthusiast is far more expensive than most of us meatheads care to admit.

From sweat-resistant clothing, to “functional” footwear, to a variety of specialty bars, we’re constantly inundated with new gear and accessories that are overpriced, but too damn awesome not to buy.

While some of this equipment is worth the cash, most products can be easily (and inexpensively) replicated with only the slightest bit of creativity. To save you both time and money, in this guide, I present eight cheap ways to improve your training program. Each recommendation can be easily utilized in nearly any gym setting and, best of all, comes at little-to-no cost to you.

I hope you enjoy the article and find the information relevant to your individual needs and goals.

1. Wrap a band around the bench to increase friction

It’s happened to all of us...

You’re benching heavy and set up in perfect position. The bar touches your chest and you immediately begin grinding the weight back up to lockout when, all of a sudden, your upper back slips up the bench and the spotter is forced to take the weight.

You missed it, not for lack of strength, but because the lack of friction on the bench forced you out of position. This is particularly common on commercial benches, as they’re overly slick, which makes it impossible to use leg drive and maintain tightness.

Fortunately, there's a simple trick that transforms even the most slippery of benches into a sticky and stable surface. All you need is a single jump-stretch band and, of course, a bench.

Watch the short video below to learn how to utilize this simple trick:

<https://vimeo.com/75402053>

(Password: syatt)

2. Use a towel to vary your chin-ups.

The best thing about chin-ups – aside from being one of the best exercises ever created – is their versatility. With even a modestly creative mindset, we can create countless chin-up variations - all of which challenge the body in unique, safe, and effective ways.

Of these variations, one of my personal favorites is *towel chin-ups*. In addition to being far more difficult than the standard chin-up, towel chin-ups drastically improve grip strength and can even draw attention to other weaknesses which otherwise may have gone unnoticed.

Best of all, you don't need special equipment. Any old towel will do and, if you don't have one of those lying around, I'll show you a neat little trick in the video demonstration below:

<https://vimeo.com/75402052>

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3. Use two tennis balls taped together for self myofascial release.

If you've read even the slightest bit of Eric's work you'll know he is one of the foremost advocates of self myofascial release (SMR). Odds are you'll also know he utilizes numerous forms of SMR, including foam rolling and even rolling with lacrosse and tennis balls.

Considering many of you already understand how to use single lacrosse and tennis balls, I want to explain how taping two tennis balls together can drastically improve the effectiveness of your SMR routine.



By taping two tennis balls together, you can target the muscles immediately lateral to the spinal column; these muscles are commonly missed with a standard foam roller. What's more, placed further up the spine you can use the two balls to perform various thoracic mobility drills, which can improve function both up and down the kinetic chain.

When utilizing this method, make sure neither of the balls are placed directly on the spinal column. Rather, your vertebrae should be resting comfortably in the

small pocket between the two balls while each ball is lightly pressing into the muscles on either side of your spine. Slowly move the balls further and further up your back until you reach the thoracic spine where you can begin performing a variety of extension based drills.

4. Use Fat Gripz for improved grip strength and variety.

It's a rare occasion when I openly endorse a mainstream fitness product. As we all know, the majority of health products offered in the mainstream are purely marketing gimmicks.

Fat Gripz are a different story. While they aren't the cheapest option on this list, they definitely aren't expensive and certainly aren't overpriced. In my opinion, Fat Gripz are one of the best investments an individual can make in their own training.

Not only are Fat Gripz great for improving grip strength and adding a new component of exercise variation, but the larger grip tends to make lifting more comfortable for individuals with wrist and elbow pain. From chin-ups and rows to bench press variations and even deadlifts, Fat Gripz can be utilized in a variety of settings to increase the difficulty of a given exercise.

If you'd like to get a pair, you can [order Fat Gripz here](#).

5. Use a backpack for weighted chins-ups and dips.

As depressing as it is to admit, many training facilities don't provide specialty belts for weighted chin-ups and dips. Maybe they don't want to spend the money. Perhaps they don't understand the benefits a weight belt has to offer. Regardless of the reason, many fitness centers don't have them and, if you find yourself stuck in this situation, I have a cheap and easy solution: put the weight plates in a backpack, put it on, and start doing weighted chin-ups or dips.

You'll want to use weight plates – not dumbbells – since dumbbells don't lie flush against your back, but a decent back pack can hold a surprising amount of weight and, worn correctly, won't disrupt lifting mechanics. Any standard

backpack should be fine, but I've used the same old Jansport for over five years now and it still works like a charm.

6. Substitute a fleece or sweatshirt for sled pushes.

Any gym with a sled is likely very well equipped. Unfortunately, though, most gyms don't have one at their disposal. Having been stuck in this situation time and time again, I knew had find a way to simulate the sled without physically using one.

After numerous bouts of trial and error, I'm happy to report that I finally found a solution. By setting a sweatshirt or fleece on the gym floor (it needs to be tile or a similarly slick surface), you can stack 45lb and 25lb plates on top of one another and push them down a cleared lane.

I'd note, if the gym floor isn't tile or something similar (even a basketball court will do) you won't be able to make this work. Fortunately, though, many commercial gyms have a slippery floor, which provides us with the perfect opportunity to replicate and reap all the benefits the sled has to offer.

7. Go shoeless on a warm-up mat for a slideboard effect.

As strange as it may seem (especially coming from a Powerlifter), the slideboard is one of my favorite pieces of equipment. Used correctly, the slideboard is great for a number of movements including variations of lunges and planks.

To my dismay, many facilities (including the one I currently use) don't carry slideboards. I knew I had to get my slideboard fix, though, so I came up with a couple innovative ways to mimic the slideboard and gain all the benefits it has to offer. To see how I incorporate slideboard lunges and planks without using a slideboard, watch the short video below:

<https://vimeo.com/75402054>

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8. Use a rice bowl to train for grip strength.

Grip strength is one of the most overlooked, but extremely important components of total body strength and performance. Those who understand its significance tend to include a variety of grip-strength drills within their programs while utilizing standard tools such as dumbbells and weight plates.

What most trainees don't realize, however, is that there are many ways to improve grip strength without standard strength implements. For example, rice bowls are one of the cheapest, most effective, and easily accessible forms of grip training available. How do we use a rice bowl? It's simple:

Fill up a large mixing bowl or small bucket with dry (uncooked) rice. From here, simply stick one or both hands in the bowl and forcefully grab and twist the rice. Go for big, heaping handfuls and grip the rice as hard as possible during each repetition. You can even add in a clockwise/counterclockwise twist to strengthen the wrists as well.

I know it sounds weird, but trust me and give it a shot. I guarantee your fingers, hands, and forearms will be shot from all the work.

Wrapping Up

Strength training can easily turn into an expensive habit. However, if you take only one lesson from this article, let it be this: just because a piece of equipment is expensive doesn't mean it's effective. As I've shown consistently throughout this piece, with the slightest bit of creativity we can mimic even the most expensive of products and reap all of the benefits for a fraction of the cost.

About the Author

Jordan Syatt is a strength training and nutritional consultant. He is an IPA World Record Powerlifter featured in publications such as Schwarzenegger.com, T-Nation.com, *Muscle & Fitness*, and *Men's Fitness* Magazines. He is Precision Nutrition and Westside Barbell Certified, has a B.S. in Health & Behavior Science, and is the owner of www.syattfitness.com. Jordan does extensive work with online training and nutrition consultations and specializes in strength gain, athletic performance, and general health. You can contact him at jordan@syattfitness.com.