

Snatch Grip Deadlifts for Greater Gains

By Joe Giandonato, MS, CSCS

Joshstrength.com

What's a long forgotten strength exercise that can be credited for explosive starts and has tremendous carryover to increased performances on squats, deadlifts, and Olympic lifts?

What strength exercise was chosen by renowned coaches, Charles Poliquin and Alwyn Cosgrove, as hypothetically being the sole exercise in one's program?

What strength exercise hammers the posterior chain harder than deadlifts, due to its increased range of motion?

If you answered the snatch grip deadlift, you're right. Like the girl next door, the snatch grip deadlift gets no love, as many coaches and athletes are opting for *sexier* exercises, such as chained speed squats, reverse hypers, and one of my personal favorites - the box front squat. What happens if I told you that the snatch grip deadlift reigns superior over all of those exercises, because you'll not only get similar training effects, but yield far better results!

We're all well aware of the benefits of the deadlift, as it develops total body strength, incorporating nearly every muscle in the body from head to toe. The gluteus maximus, erector spinae, lateral and medial aspects of the hamstrings, quadriceps, trapezius, rhomboids, deltoids, finger flexors, and forearms are all called upon (1,4,5) to pick the bar up and (if your gym lacks bumper plates, or you're a courteous member of a commercial gym that prohibits dropping any weights) put it down. Simple, right? In theory, yes, but a lot of researchers and coaches have dedicated their lives to improving sport performance, and more specifically, with regards to powerlifting, deadlifting performance.

Figuring out your snatch grip

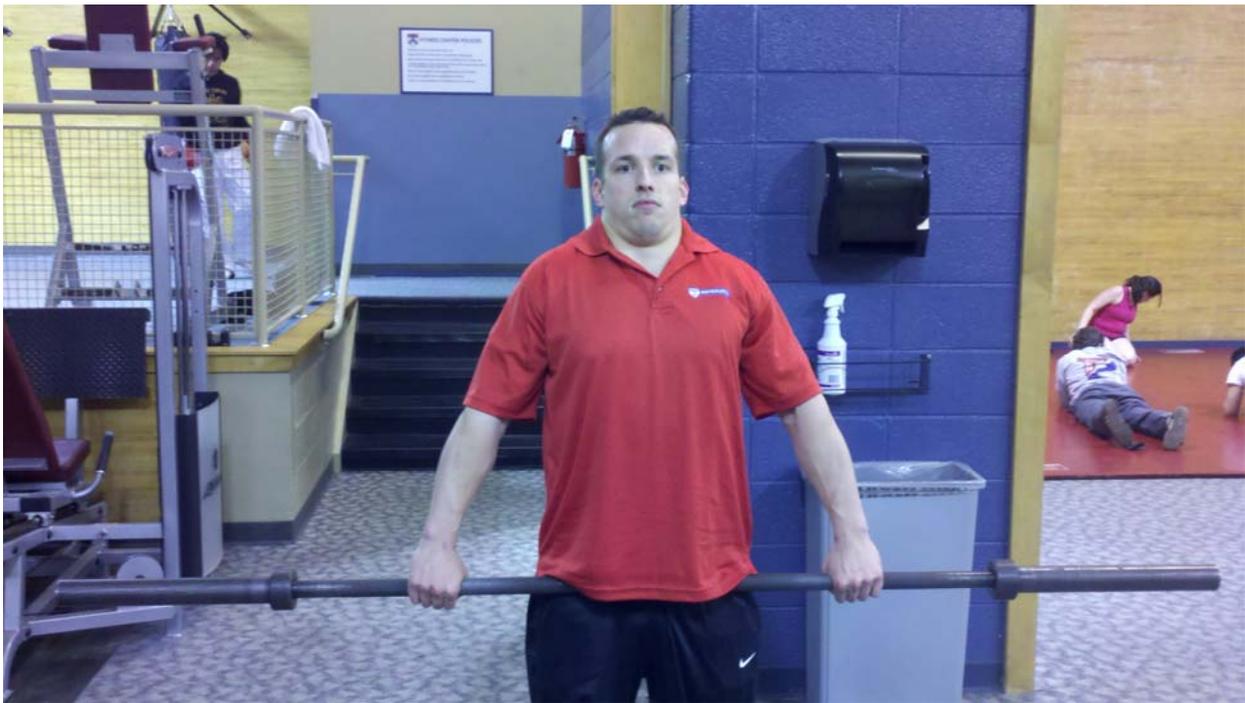
Because no two trainees/athletes are alike, a proper snatch grip must be figured out, before proceeding to snatch grip deadlifts. Characteristics such as shoulder and wrist flexibility, as well as arm length and hand size will influence one's snatch grip. Injury history, specifically, that of the shoulder or wrist, may also impact one's snatch grip. Given the aforementioned factors, protocols must be followed to determine a person's snatch grip.

To determine one's optimal snatch grip width, strength coach Harvey Newton suggests that you take a measurement from the lateral deltoid to the first knuckles of the closed fist of the opposite arm that is abducted from the body at 90 degrees (2).



Once you've established a comfortable snatch grip, you can move onto the snatch grip progression exercises below, or if you already possess sufficient hip mobility and scapular the stability, skip to the set up section.

Snatch Grip Shrug



This is very similar to the snatch pull, which is employed by Olympic lifters as they progress to snatches, however, you won't be performing these explosively, instead you'll use these to familiarize yourself as you grip a loaded bar. At first, perform these in a power rack slightly below hip height and shrug away. It'd be best if you performed these early in the workout, either between sets or as a part of a barbell complex as you get warmed up.

Snatch Grip Rack Pull



Though rack pulls have little carryover to deadlifting performance, due to pulling from a fixed range of motion, performing them with the snatch grip with a substantial load, will undoubtedly fry your rear delts, rhomboids, and forearms to hell, which will set you up perfectly for the heavy weights you'll be pulling from the floor ahead.

Snatch Grip Isometric Deadlift



Perform these in a power rack, pulling an unloaded Olympic bar against the catches. This will help teach proper torso position during the concentric portion of the lift, forcing you to keep high and tight, keeping the bar closer to your body.

Snatch Grip Deadlift from Floor



The set ups between a conventional deadlift and snatch grip deadlift differ slightly. First you'll assume a foot placement between shoulder to hip width. You'll keep the shoulders above the bar and over the arms, but you'll have to sink your hips a little lower in order to keep your upper back from rounding. Retract the scapulae and keep a big chest. Pull. Next, you'll extend the knees, with the bar in close contact with the kneecaps, continue to extend the knees, until the bar clears them, and then focus on extending the hips. During early hip extension, the knees and hips will extend simultaneously. When the hip extension has concluded, get into thoracic extension. Tip: If you catch yourself rounding your upper back, decrease the load, or work on strengthening the scapular stabilizers.

Snatch Grip Deadlifts from Deficit



You'll perform these your feet affixed on an aerobic stepper, two 45 pounds plates stack on top of each other, or preferably, a raised platform. Essentially the set up is the same, but since the bar is further from the body's midline, you'll have to sink your hips even lower than you would on a standard snatch grip deadlift. Basically, you'll be pulling from a deep squat position, which is why hip mobility and a stable core are necessary to properly execute this lift.

Alternatively, you can perform this exercise with smaller plates to elicit the same effect. Though you'll inevitably get some weird looks from fellow your fellow gym goers because you're loading the bar 10's or 25's, you're still deadlifting, which earns a lot of perplexed stares anyways. I mean, who deadlifts? Maybe 10% of lifters?

Snatch Grip Deadlifts with small plates



Snatch Grip RDL

This version of the snatch grip deadlift has the most carryover to the Olympic lifts than any the other variations. An RDL with a snatch grip becomes a preparatory movement for performing the power snatch (3).

Considerations

A guideline that I've always followed is that your Snatch Grip Deadlift from the floor should be roughly 70% of your conventional deadlifts. I'd suggest being conservative at first, increasing the load as you master the movement.

Initially, you should keep the volume real low, unless you want to miss work or school the next day. If you do too much work, you'll be paying the price with tear inducing soreness of your spinal erectors, traps, and rhomboids. Trust me, err on the side of caution with these.

References

1. Graham JF. Exercise: deadlift. *Strength Cond J* 2000;22:18-20.
2. Newton H. *Explosive Lifting for Sports*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics; 2006: 86.
3. Bird S, Barrington-Higgs B. Exploring the deadlift. *Strength Cond J* 2010;32:46-51.
4. Escamilla RF, Francisco AC, Fleisig GS. A three-dimensional biomechanical analysis of sumo conventional style deadlifts. *Med Sci Sports Exerc* 2000;32:1265-1275.

5. Escamilla RF, Francisco AC, Kayes AV. An electromyographic analysis of sumo and conventional style deadlifts. *Med Sci Sports Exerc* 2002;34:682-688.

Joe Giandonato, MS, CSCS, is a Philadelphia-area healthcare support professional and personal trainer, he holds an M.S. in Exercise Science with a specialization in Performance Enhancement and has nearly a decade of personal training experience. Presently, he is employed as a Fitness Specialist with the University of Pennsylvania, Department of Recreation and also trains clients Broad Street Fitness in Philadelphia, PA. He is also pursuing a MBA with a concentration in Healthcare Administration, is a Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist (CSCS) through the National Strength and Conditioning Association and a Performance Enhancement Specialist (PES) through the National Academy of Sports Medicine and a Level 1 Sports Performance Coach through USA Weightlifting. He is also a professional member of the American Society of Exercise Physiologists. Giandonato has authored nearly 50 articles, featured on T-Nation.com, EliteFTS.com, JoshStrength.com, BeyondStrengthPerformance.com, and PersonalTrainersUnited.com. Two of his articles are presently under peer review for publications in scholarly journals. Above all else, he loves helping people achieve their fitness goals!