

- Meta Description: Learn the different benefits, muscles worked, types, and purposes for dumbbells vs barbells and which ones grow more muscle.
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Barbells Vs Dumbbells | Which Ones Grow More Muscle?

Dumbbells and barbells are some of the most commonly seen equipment in every gym. Though they look different, they can be used for similar exercises so you may wonder what the difference is between both. Each choice has its own benefits, types, and purposes, which we'll get into further in this article to answer the common question, which is better: barbells or dumbbells?

What Is The Difference Between Dumbbells And Barbells?

A dumbbell has a short handle (usually about 20 inches long) with a weight on each end. They're handheld free weights that are added to muscle building workouts to increase intensity.

A barbell is a long bar (around 60 inches long) with removable weights at each end. Barbells are also free weights that are used for maximizing muscle growth in your biggest muscle groups.

While both the barbell and dumbbell are used for muscle growth, **dumbbells are better for isolation exercises, endurance, and stability and barbells are better for heavier lifts.**

Benefits Of Dumbbells

Dumbbells have lots of advantages for beginner, advanced, and expert gym goers. They're an essential addition to every fitness routine and here's why:

More Comfortable

Since dumbbells are disconnected, they allow you to work out with more freedom than barbells. You can be flexible with the form you take and the angles with which you hold the

dumbbell weight. Barbells are more awkward to hold because the long bar has to move around the body. With barbells, your chest, shoulders, head, and pelvis can get in the way of the bar, unlike with dumbbells.

Avoid Muscle Imbalances

Due to the fact that you can use one dumbbell in one hand, you have the ability to target only one side of the body to fix muscle imbalances. If you have one side that's stronger than another, you can isolate the weight independently to one side.

With barbells, your stronger side will likely [compensate](#) for the weaker side of the body, which, in a way, limits the growth of the weaker side and can even exacerbate the imbalance. Consequently, it's important to incorporate dumbbells into your exercises to correct muscle imbalances.

Stabilization Muscles

Dumbbells are slightly harder to use because they're unattached and there's a greater range of motion. The body has to control form and movement with increased effort when using a dumbbell, thus putting increased resistance on your stabilizing muscles than with a barbell. These muscles are usually less used and weaker because they're harder to reach in your typical fitness program. Working your stabilizing muscles makes for greater [balance, posture, and alignment](#).

Greater Range of Motion

We've mentioned how the dumbbell provides a bigger range of motion. The increased range of motion not only targets stabilization muscles, but it also targets additional muscles that a barbell could not. For example, in a lift with barbells, your shoulders are only as far apart as your hand placement allows. In a lift with dumbbells, you can put your hands closer together, further apart, or move your arms in a nonlinear path.

Time Savers

Unless you're using an [adjustable or loadable dumbbell](#), there's no time needed to prepare for your workout, you can just take it directly off the rack and start your reps. Barbells, on the other hand, need to be loaded up to your desired weight and you can lose time in your workout.

Benefits Of Barbells

Like dumbbell training, barbell training has lots of benefits of its own. There's a reason why you see huge weightlifters and powerlifters training with barbells!

Big Results on Big Muscles

Barbells are more stable and easier to control because of the long connecting bar. This means that there's less strain on smaller, weaker stabilizing muscles and more focus on the main big muscles. As a result, barbells allow you to lift heavier weights since you prioritize your strongest muscles.

Progressive Overload

Barbells are better for progressive overload, which is a strategy where you slowly increase the weight load in your workouts to efficiently build muscle mass. The reason for this is because with barbells, you have the ability to add more weight in 2.5 lb increments, whereas with dumbbells, you can increase them typically by 5 lbs minimum.

No Weight Load Limitations

Dumbbells are limited in their weight load and can only go up to their fixed weights. With barbells, you can increase the load as much as you want by adding more and more plates as you see fit.

When Should I Use Dumbbells Vs Barbells?

It's best to use dumbbells when you have imbalanced muscles or limited joint mobility. Since they are disconnected, you have a bigger range of motion and freedom to move in a more natural way. You should also use dumbbells in your workouts to build posture, stability, and balance. In contrast, use barbells when you are looking to build muscle mass with progressive overload and when you're ready to move to heavier weights.

Should I Do Dumbbells Or Barbells First?

In most workouts, you should use barbells first. With barbell exercises, you can maximize the overload on the big muscles. Following with dumbbell exercises allows your body to shift its focus on building strength in the smaller muscles and isolation work.

Do Barbells Build More Muscle Than Dumbbells?

Neither dumbbells or barbells are better than the other for muscle building. Both have their advantages, it just depends on *how* and *where* you want to build that muscle.

Types Of Dumbbells

There are two types of dumbbells: fixed and adjustable. Within these two types, there are various styles of each, all with their own benefits and purposes.

Fixed Dumbbells

Fixed dumbbells are the traditional type of dumbbell, where there's only one weight option per pair of dumbbells. Fixed dumbbells often come in sets with various pairs of dumbbells with different weight loads. They are often made of rubber, urethane, or cast iron.

Hex Dumbbells



The weight on a [hex iron dumbbell](#) is a fixed weight in the shape of a hexagon. This shape makes the dumbbells more stable on the ground and in the hands because they won't spin or rattle. They're also quick to change; if you want to increase or decrease the weight, you simply need to switch them. With adjustable or loadable weights, you need to adjust the weight yourself.

The downside of these fixed weights is that you need a whole set if you want to employ progressive overload. They're less ideal for a home gym and are more commonly found in public gyms.

Studio Dumbbells

Studio dumbbells are fixed weight dumbbells that are used for beginners and cardio workouts. They're typically coated in rubber or neoprene for strong grip. The weight will typically go no higher than 20 lbs in studio dumbbells.

Adjustable Dumbbells

Adjustable dumbbells are metal rods with removable weight plates for each side. Adjustable dumbbells are far better for the home gym than fixed ones because of their compact size. The weights are usually stackable and you only need two rods (one for each hand)

Selectorized Dumbbells



[Selectorized dumbbells](#) are a type of adjustable dumbbell, but they come in a set of two dumbbells with a dial that allows you to choose the weight. When you turn the dial, the weights are added or removed according to your selection. Selectorized dumbbells completely eliminate the need to do any weight calculations. They also eliminate time spent loading and unloading sides of the dumbbells.

Selectorized dumbbells are great for a home gym because you only need one set, and they take up the least amount of space than any other dumbbell type because of their compact size and style.

Nuo Style Dumbbells



With [Nuo Style dumbbells](#), you can adjust the desired weight by turning the handle in its stand or case. As you turn the handle and change your selected weight, the dumbbell clips in the appropriate amount of weight plates to connect to your handle.

Nuo style dumbbells are very similar to selectorized dumbbells, the only difference is the way you choose your desired weight load. As such, the benefits are the same for both types.

Pro-Style Dumbbells

Pro Style dumbbells are another type of adjustable dumbbell. These are commonly found in public gyms, with round weight plates that can be added to the ends of a metal rod. In comparison to standard adjustable dumbbells, the pro style is more compact on the ends. A pro style dumbbell set will come with a number of different handle lengths that only allow for a certain weight load to be added on the ends of it. A shorter handle will accommodate for a smaller weight and vice versa. This is how they achieve a more compact style and avoid any issues of metal sticking out at the ends of the weights.

CTA: Shop Montreal Weights [Adjustable Dumbbells](#)

Types Of Barbells

Barbells come in many shapes and sizes that all provide a wide variety of benefits. Some are designed specifically for weightlifting, powerlifting, squatting, etc.

Olympic Bars vs. Standard Bars



Olympic and standard barbells are straight and very similar in appearance. [Olympic bars](#) are heavier than standard bars, however, weighing up to 45 lbs and 26 lbs, respectively. Standard barbells have a diameter of 1 inch on the ends, while olympic barbells are 2 inches in diameter. Olympic barbells are also longer than standard ones (2.1 meters and 1.5-1.8 meters long, respectively) and can therefore hold more weight (up to about 2000 lbs).

Weight plates with 2 inch diameter holes are far more common than those with 1 inch diameter holes and they can't be used interchangeably on both bars. Therefore, when

deciding on which bar you'd like to purchase, you'll need to think long-term. Otherwise, you'd have to replace your entire set of plates.

While standard barbells are cheaper, olympic barbells are better in quality. They're designed to handle much more weight load and more hours worth of daily use. They're more stable and easier to use because of their spin. The spin is when the handle and the ends are independent of each other, making them safer on the wrists and joints. Some standard bars have a spin, but are not as good in quality.

If you're deciding between an olympic or standard bar and you're serious about lifting, we recommend investing in an olympic bar for its superior quality.

EZ Bars

As opposed to olympic and standard bars, EZ bars are short in length (1.2 meters) and weigh between 17 and 25 kgs. EZ bars are in a "w" shape in order to reduce strain on wrists and joints and offer more grip options. Lifters are able to use their wrists, shoulders, and elbows in a more natural movement, so EZ bars are [safer](#) for people with injuries or joint pain.

Powerlift Bars

Powerlift bars are straight bars that are more [rigid and stiff](#) to accommodate for heavier weights. They are best used in the deadlift, squat, and bench press. Powerlift bars are not great for weightlifting movements because of the rigidity as well as the gripped texture that is specifically placed and designed for powerlift movements.

Deadlift Bars

The deadlift barbell is longer than any other barbell and has more [whip](#) than other powerlifter bars. The increased whip means it bends more before it comes off the floor, giving you some momentum at the start of the lift, allowing you to lift more with this bar type.

Swiss Bar

The Swiss bar has multiple grip options in the shape of a ladder in the shaft of the barbell. It allows weightlifters to have a neutral wrist angle with the palms facing each other. Like the EZ bar, the swiss bar is better to use for [injury prevention and joint mobility](#) in the upper body. With the hand position on a swiss bar, elbows are naturally more tucked, putting more emphasis on the triceps.

Other:

Trap bars: these are constructed in a large hexagonal shape for the lifter to stand inside and lift weights at their sides. These are used most commonly in deadlifts, and have greater muscle activation in the lower body than other powerlifter bars.

Buffalo barbells: these bars are shaped with a slight curve along the middle which reduces the strain on shoulders in the squat and bench press.

Cambered barbells: these are used for the same purpose as the buffalo bar, but have a bigger curve/bend.

Safety squat bars: weights in a safety squat bar are slightly lower than the rest of the bar. The shaft of the bar has a pad in the middle and vertical handles to hold with your hands beside your chest and palms facing together. It allows you to focus more on your squat and lower body muscles than your upper body form.

Axle bars: the shaft of the axle bar is thicker than other barbells, measuring 2 inches in diameter. They also offer no grip texture or spin. These bars are good for building muscle in the forearms and hands, since they're more difficult to grip.

CTA: [Shop Montreal Weights barbells, plates, and more.](#)

Barbell and Dumbbell Exercises

Most weighted exercises can be performed with your choice of dumbbell or barbell. Selecting your exercises for your routine is not so much a question of “which exercise is better with which weight” but rather alternating between both weights in the same exercise for a full range of muscle growth.

3 Dumbbell Exercises To Try

While most exercises are good to perform with both dumbbells and barbells for the best results, some are just a little more fun to use with dumbbells instead of barbells. Here are a few of my favorites:

Dumbbell Bench Press

Both the dumbbell and the [barbell bench press](#) are effective in strength training, it just depends on what you want to target. With the dumbbell bench press, your chest is the major focus.

Dumbbell Curl

Dumbbell curls are a unilateral exercise (one side of the body at a time), which is great for evening out muscle imbalances. Since muscle imbalances are [extremely common](#), especially in the arms, it's important to incorporate weighted unilateral exercises like the dumbbell curl into your workout routine.

One Arm Dumbbell Row

The one arm dumbbell row is a unilateral exercise for muscle activation in the back, shoulders, and arms. This dumbbell exercise focuses on the muscle fibers along the spine.

3 Barbell Exercises To Try

I love using barbells because they give me a good challenge of how heavy I can get. The more weight I add, the more impressive I feel. Though dumbbells are great for complete muscle activation, who doesn't love seeing just how heavy you can lift?

Barbell Bench Press

While the dumbbell bench press focuses on the chest, the barbell bench press focuses on the [triceps](#). Both styles of bench presses are great for muscle building and are very common across all trainers.

Barbell Squats

I prefer the barbell squat to the dumbbell squat because of the heavier weights possible. While dumbbells are great to incorporate into your squat, I love the barbell squat because it allows me to add more weight and the results show in my legs.

Deadlifts

Big compound lifts are a great exercise for a total-body workout. Deadlifts work muscles across the entire body: upper and lower back, hamstrings, glutes, and quads, to name a few.

Barbells vs Dumbbells: What's The Best Choice?

The final answer is both. Dumbbells and barbells both have their own benefits, the better choice depends on what your fitness goals are. Dumbbells are a better choice if you're

looking for overall muscle definition, whereas barbells are a better choice if you're looking for higher muscle mass and strength.

Neither option is better than the other, the best choice is to incorporate both weights into your training routine. Dumbbell workouts and barbell workouts are both effective for muscle growth across the entire body; arms, shoulders, back, [legs](#), and chest.

CTA: Ready to get lifting with high-quality weights? Shop Montreal Weights' [Dumbbells](#) and [Barbells](#) for your home gym.