

A Smith Machine is a standard piece of equipment in most fitness facilities, and a machine that I spend at least 3/4 of the time on during my workouts. At Planet Fitness where I work out in Michigan, for example, they have 4 Smith Machines and these machines are always in high demand. You Fit here in North Port has two machines that are also very popular. Frankly I think they need more during busy times. Here are the reasons these machines are so in such demand; reasons that I can personally attest to as well.

Pros:

- They are safer than using free weights because the weight bar “lockouts”.
- The weight bar lockouts eliminate the need for a spotter. You can lift more weights without worry of accidental injury.
- The machine isolates primary movers. That leads to better isolation of the muscles that leads to growth of the primary muscle being worked.
- Appropriate for use by all age groups.

Cons:

- Constant/fixed bar path that reduces your need to stabilize the weights
  - Mostly this is a complaint of body builders that use free weights

Personal Experience:

- I've been using the Smith over free weight bar for many years. With the free weights bar I would occasionally experience rotator cuff injuries, a common shoulder injury; not so with the Smith Machine.
- You can train every body part on the Smith Machine. The following are a good, but not all-inclusive list of that you can do on a Smith Machine. I do many of these in my workouts:
  - Chest:
    - Bench Press
    - Incline Press
  - Quadriceps:
    - Squats
    - Frog Squats
  - Calves:
    - Standing Calf Raises
  - Hamstrings, Gluts, and Lower Back:
    - Romanian Dead Lifts
  - Shoulders/Deltoids:
    - Overhead Press
    - Wide-Grip Upright Rows
  - Triceps:
    - Seated Triceps Overhead Extension
  - Biceps:
    - Drag Curl

#### Other Smith Machine Considerations:

- Angled vs Vertical Bar Path:

Smith machines come in two types, ones with a vertical bar path and ones with an angled bar path. I've used both angled and vertical smith machines, but prefer the angled ones personally. The angled ones just seem more natural to me for most exercises. Planet Fitness has multiple angled smith machines, while You Fit has vertical ones.

The following is a bit of information regarding both types:

The vertical bar path is best suited for exercises that have a vertical path when also done with free weights. Some examples include squats, shrugs, lunges, and standing calf raise.

The angled Smith machine is becoming the standard because it better simulates the natural bar path of pressing movements like the chest press. At the bottom position of the chest press, the bar is around mid-chest height but finishes directly above the shoulders. Using the angled Smith machine allows you to do this while a vertical path would not allow this type of movement.

That said, if you do wish to do an exercise with a vertical bar path on an angled Smith machine, you just negate the incline by leaning on the bar, so your body angle mimics the bar angle. That is, to do a squat, you would face outward and lean back onto the bar. Most reviews say this is just a personal preference and that both are very good. I agree.

- Counter Weighted Bar:

For some, the bar on the Smith Machine might be a bit heavy. Actually, I don't find this to be the case. The bars at both Planet Fitness and You Fit weigh only about 25 pounds. Nevertheless, to compensate for this, some Smith Machines have counter balances so that the bar itself only weights 10 – 15 pounds. This makes it ideal for those people that only want to lift a very small amount of weight.

- Add Ons:

Some Smith Machines offer a variety of add ons. Given the other equipment at the Fitness Center those add ons are unnecessary.

#### Some possible recommendations:

I contacted Lara Townsley, the Regional Manager at Planet Fitness and she says they use Life Fitness or Matrix at their facilities. My club in Michigan uses Life Fitness; very durable, with counter balanced bar, and excellent bar movement. You Fit in North Port has 2 Cybex vertical machines.

My experiences using the machine at both these locations are very good. It's important to get something that lasts and is durable as per these facilities. I've never seen these machines broken or in need of repair in all the time I've been going to both.