

Calisthenics

Bodyweight strength from zero. Push, pull, core, legs, and dips. Progress through 5 levels covering every movement pattern.

by the Progresspedia community

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Start Here - How to Use This Course

Chapter 1 · Foundations



Source: marmati.com

Welcome. This course takes you from zero to the big calisthenics skills (muscle-ups, pistol squats, handstand push-ups, one-arm push-ups, front-lever work) in five levels. Every level covers all seven movement patterns so you build a balanced body, not a lopsided one.

Progress is **per pattern**, not per level. It's normal to sit at Level 2 on legs while still on Level 1 for pulling - train each pattern where it actually lives.

A few tips before you start

Consistency beats intensity. Stick to a schedule you can actually maintain, focus on clean form by improving tempo and range of motion, rest about 48 hours between hard sessions, and track your reps so progress becomes visible over time.

Don't skip the unglamorous basics. Exercises like scapular work, hangs, and deep squats may look simple but are key to long-term progress.

Not everyone is motivated by the same goals. Some prefer fewer, heavier reps, while others enjoy lighter work with higher repetitions. Find what suits you and keeps you consistent.

If your goal is strength, treat rep targets as minimums and make movements harder once they feel easy, keeping most sets in a low rep range.

If you're aiming for skills, muscle growth, or endurance, adjust accordingly: train skills fresh with low reps, use moderate reps near failure for hypertrophy, or go for high reps and time-based sets for endurance.

If you just want to feel good and stay healthy, a balanced routine done consistently over years will matter far more than any single workout.

What to do next

Head to [Your program](#). It gives you a warm-up and one exercise per movement pattern, chosen from what you've already ticked off on this course page. Tick an exercise as completed when you can hit its goal cleanly, and the next step for that pattern shows up automatically.

Big smiles, big energy. Let's do this!

Wall Push-Up

Chapter 1 · Foundations



Source: [Anytime Fitness - North Peoria & Germantown Hills · channel](#)

The gentlest way into horizontal pushing. You stand facing a wall, place your hands on it at shoulder height, and do a [push-up](#) against the wall. Because your body is almost vertical, only a small fraction of your bodyweight loads the arms, which makes this the perfect starting point if regular push-ups feel impossible or painful.

Don't dismiss this as too easy until you've done it with good form. Wall push-ups train the exact same pattern as a real push-up, but at a load you can actually control. Build the habit here and every future push variation gets easier.

How to do it

Stand about an arm's length from a wall. Place your palms flat on the wall, slightly wider than your shoulders, at chest height. Step your feet back until your arms are straight and your body forms one straight line from head to heels. Bend your elbows and lower your chest toward the wall, then press back to the start.

If wall push-ups are starting to feel too easy, but standard floor push-ups are still too hard, you can bridge the gap with incline push-ups. Simply lower your angle by using a sturdy table at home, a plyo box at the gym, or a low bar at an outdoor fitness park.

More information here:

■ [Watch on YouTube](#)

Video by [Anytime Fitness - North Peoria & Germantown Hills](#)

Target

3 sets of 10 reps with a smooth tempo. 2 seconds down, 1 second up.

Key tips

- Keep your body rigid like a [plank](#). No sagging hips, no piking
- Elbows at roughly 45° from your torso, not flared straight out
- Touch your chest (not your face) to the wall at the bottom
- Fully straighten your arms at the top of each rep

Downward Dog Hold

Chapter 1 · Foundations



Source: [experiencelife.lifetime.life](https://www.experiencelife.lifetime.life)

Your first vertical-push exercise. Borrowed from yoga, the downward dog is an upside-down "V" shape: feet on the floor, hands on the floor, hips piked high in the air. Holding this position teaches your shoulders how to support your bodyweight overhead, the exact pattern you'll use later for pike push-ups and eventually handstands.

Overhead pressing strength is often the weakest link for beginners because most day-to-day life doesn't require it. Start here and you'll build the shoulder mobility, wrist conditioning, and overhead stability that every later vertical push exercise relies on.

See more help here:

■ [Watch on YouTube](#)

Video by [SarahBethYoga](#)

How to do it

Start on your hands and knees. Spread your fingers wide, press firmly through your palms, and lift your hips up and back until your body forms an inverted V. Straighten your legs as much as your hamstrings allow and push your chest toward your thighs. Your ears should end up between your biceps.

Target

- **Sets:** 3
- **Hold:** 30 seconds
- **Rest:** 90 seconds between sets
- **Advance when:** 3x30s with straight arms and active shoulders

Key tips

- Push the floor away. Don't let your shoulders collapse toward your ears
- Weight mostly through the palms, not the fingertips
- Heels don't need to touch the floor; reach them down as far as they go
- Keep a slight engagement in the core so your lower back doesn't sag

Vertical Row

Chapter 1 · Foundations



The easiest pulling exercise and a huge confidence-builder. You stand facing a vertical anchor like a door frame, pole, sturdy pillar, TRX strap, or gymnastic rings. Grab it with both hands at chest height, lean back with straight arms, and pull yourself upright. The more upright you stand, the easier it is. The further back you lean, the harder.

Most beginners can't do a single [pull-up](#), but nearly everyone can do a vertical row. That's the point. It trains exactly the same muscles (lats, rhomboids, biceps, rear delts) at a load you can actually control, so you can build pulling volume from day one instead of just hanging there hoping something happens.

More information here:

■ [Watch on YouTube](#)

Video by [Antranik Kizirian](#)

How to do it

Grip your anchor at about chest height with an overhand or neutral grip. Walk your feet forward and lean back until your arms are straight. Keep your body in a straight line (head, hips, heels stacked) and pull your chest toward your hands. Lower back out to straight arms with control.

Target

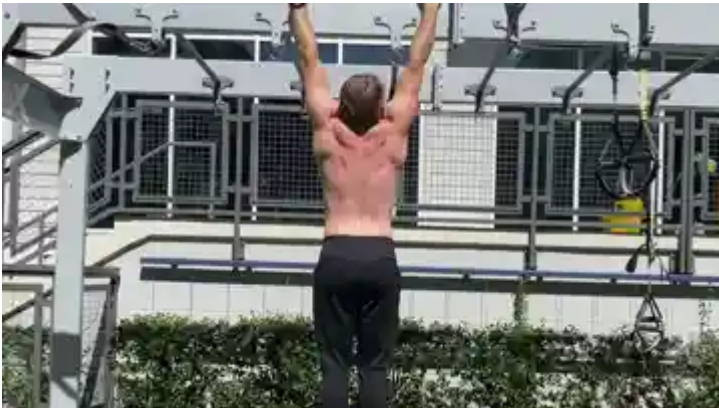
- **Sets:** 3
- **Reps:** 10
- **Rest:** 90 seconds between sets
- **Advance when:** 3x10 with controlled movement and a full squeeze at the top

Key tips

- Keep your body in a straight line as you lean back. No piking at the hip
- Pull with your back muscles (think "elbows to back pockets"), not just your arms
- Squeeze your shoulder blades together at the top
- To make it harder, walk your feet closer to the anchor so you lean back more

Scapular Pulls

Chapter 1 · Foundations



Source: [Zack Henderson](#) · [channel](#)

The first step toward a [pull-up](#), and the step most people skip. You hang from a bar with completely straight arms, then pull your shoulder blades down and together (without bending your elbows) to rise a few centimeters. It looks like almost nothing is happening, but it's training the exact muscle action your shoulders need to start every future pull-up, [muscle-up](#), and front lever.

Without strong scapular control, pull-ups feel shaky and shoulders end up cranky. Spending a couple of weeks owning this movement pays off later, both in strength and in staying injury-free.

More information here:

■ [Watch on YouTube](#)

Video by [Zack Henderson](#)

How to do it

Hang from a pull-up bar with an overhand grip, arms fully straight, body relaxed. Without bending your elbows at all, pull your shoulder blades down and together. Imagine pointing your chest up toward the ceiling and tucking your shoulder blades into your back pockets. Pause briefly at the top, then let the shoulder blades shrug back up into a passive hang.

Target

- **Sets:** 3
- **Reps:** 10
- **Rest:** 90 seconds between sets
- **Advance when:** 3x10 with a brief 1-2 second hold at the top of each rep

Key tips

- Keep your arms completely straight. This is all shoulder blades, not biceps
- Think about pulling the bar down toward your hips rather than lifting your body up
- Hold the top position for 1-2 seconds to really feel the mid-back working
- If you can't hang yet, do the same pattern from a low bar with your feet on the ground

Plank

Chapter 1 · Foundations



The foundation of every core exercise you'll ever do. You get into a [push-up](#) position but rest on your forearms instead of your hands. Your body forms one straight line from head to heels, and you squeeze everything (abs, glutes, quads) to keep that line rigid while gravity tries to bend it.

The plank teaches your core to do its real job. Not crunching, but *resisting* movement to keep your spine stable. Every advanced calisthenics move depends on this same skill. Getting 30 solid seconds here buys you stability that pays off everywhere.

More information:

■ [Watch on YouTube](#)

Video by [Get Exercise Confident](#)

How to do it

Place your forearms on the floor with your elbows directly under your shoulders. Extend your legs back so you're balanced on your forearms and toes. Squeeze your glutes, brace your abs, and hold a perfectly straight line from the crown of your head to your heels. Breathe normally, don't hold your breath.

Target

- **Sets:** 3
- **Hold:** 30 seconds
- **Rest:** 90 seconds between sets
- **Advance when:** 3x30s with no sagging or piking

Key tips

- Elbows directly under your shoulders
- Don't let your hips drop. Squeeze your glutes hard
- Tuck your tailbone slightly so your lower back stays flat, not arched
- Look at the floor slightly ahead of your hands, neck neutral
- Breathe normally throughout

Assisted Squat

Chapter 1 · Foundations



Source: [Champion Physical Therapy and Performance](#)

The squat is the king of leg movements, but some adults have lost the ability to sit comfortably in the bottom position. The assisted squat fixes that. You hold onto a door frame, pole, or TRX strap for balance, squat down as deep as you can, and use your arms to take just enough weight off your legs to control the depth.

Treat this less like a "weaker squat" and more like a mobility-and-strength combo. You're buying back the ankle, knee, and hip range of motion that most people have lost, while at the same time building the exact pattern they'll need for full squats, pistol squats, and everything beyond.

More information:

■ [Watch on YouTube](#)

Video by [K boges](#)

How to do it

Stand facing a sturdy door frame, pole, post, or pair of rings. Grip it with both hands at about chest height. Place your feet shoulder-width apart, toes slightly turned out. Squat down as deeply as you can, using your arms to lightly pull yourself down and stand back up. Aim to get your hips below your knees every rep.

Target

- **Sets:** 3
- **Reps:** 10
- **Rest:** 90 seconds between sets
- **Advance when:** 3x10 going as deep as comfortable, using as little arm assistance as possible

Key tips

- Feet shoulder-width apart, toes slightly out
- Push your knees out in line with your toes (don't let them cave in)
- Keep your chest up and your spine neutral
- Heels glued to the floor the whole time
- Use less and less arm support as you get stronger

Bench Dip

Chapter 1 · Foundations



Source: [OPEX Fitness](#)

The friendliest way into the dip pattern. You sit on the edge of a sturdy bench, chair, or step, place your hands next to your hips, slide your butt off the edge, and lower yourself by bending your elbows. Because your feet stay on the floor, only a portion of your bodyweight loads the arms, making this a perfect starting point for a movement that would otherwise be too heavy for most beginners.

Bench dips look casual but train exactly the pattern you'll need for full parallel-bar dips: elbows bending backward under load, shoulders staying packed, and triceps extending your arms against resistance. Own 3x10 here and the next step suddenly feels reachable.

How to do it

Sit on the edge of a bench or sturdy chair. Place your hands on the edge next to your hips, fingers pointing forward. Slide your butt off the edge, keeping your arms straight and your body close to the bench. Walk your feet out so your legs are straight (or keep them bent for an easier version). Bend your elbows straight back to lower your body, stopping when your upper arms are parallel to the floor. Press back up to straight arms.

Target

- **Sets:** 3

- **Reps:** 10
- **Rest:** 90 seconds between sets
- **Advance when:** 3x10 with clean form

Key tips

- Keep your body close to the bench. Don't let your hips drift forward
- Elbows track straight back, not flared out to the sides
- Lower until your upper arms are parallel to the floor, no deeper
- For an easier version, keep your knees bent and feet closer to the bench
- For a harder version, straighten your legs or elevate your feet on a second bench

Building Strength

Chapter 2

7 articles

Push-Up

Kneeling Pike Push-Up

Row

Pull-Up Negative

Hollow Hold

Full Squat

Band-Assisted Dip

Push-Up

Chapter 2 · Building Strength



Source: [Calisthenicmovement · channel](#)

The classic, and for good reason. The push-up hits chest, shoulders, and triceps at the same time while demanding full-body tension from your core, glutes, and quads to keep you in a rigid line. Done properly, it's one of the single best exercises you can do. No equipment, no excuses.

Most beginners do push-ups with sagging hips, flared elbows, and a shortened range of motion. Slow down and do them right and 10 clean reps will feel harder than 30 sloppy ones. This is also where you learn elbow tracking, the roughly 45° tuck you'll reuse in diamond push-ups, archer push-ups, and one-arm push-ups down the line.

If a full push-up is too hard right now, build up with the [wall push-up](#) first.

How to do it

Set up in a high [plank](#) with hands shoulder-width apart, directly under your shoulders. Squeeze your glutes and brace your core so your body is one straight line. Bend your elbows (tracking at about 45° from your torso) and lower your chest to just above the floor. Press back up to full arm extension.

In depth guide here:

■ [Watch on YouTube](#)

Target

- **Sets:** 3
- **Reps:** 10
- **Rest:** 90 seconds between sets
- **Advance when:** 3×10 with chest touching (or nearly touching) the floor each rep

Key tips

- Elbows at roughly 45°, not flared straight out to the sides
- Full range of motion. Chest to floor, arms fully extended at top
- Keep your core tight and glutes squeezed. No sagging hips, no piked bum
- If 10 is too hard, do as many strict reps as you can and finish the set with incline or knee push-ups

Kneeling Pike Push-Up

Chapter 2 · Building Strength



Source: [THATLIFESTYLECOACH · channel](#)

Your first real vertical pressing movement. You set up on your knees with your hips piked high and your hands planted on the floor in front of you, like a mini downward-dog on your knees. From there, you bend the elbows to lower your head toward the floor, then press back up. Because your knees are down, only a portion of your bodyweight is loaded through the shoulders, making this a manageable bridge between the static [Downward Dog hold](#) and a full [Pike Push-Up](#).

This is where you start building the vertical pressing strength that eventually leads to pike push-ups, elevated pike push-ups, and handstand push-ups. It also teaches the head-between-the-hands position that every handstand relies on.

How to do it

Kneel on the floor and place your hands flat, about shoulder-width apart, a comfortable distance in front of you. Pike your hips up high so that your torso is angled and your arms are roughly overhead. Keeping your knees on the ground, bend your elbows and lower the top of your head toward the floor between your hands. Press back up to straight arms.

See some tips here:

■ [Watch on YouTube](#)

Video by [THATLIFESTYLECOACH](#)

Target

- **Sets:** 3
- **Reps:** 10
- **Rest:** 90 seconds between sets
- **Advance when:** 3×10 with your head nearly touching the floor

Key tips

- Keep your hips piked high the whole set. Don't collapse into a [push-up](#)
- Lower your head *between* your hands, not in front of them
- Elbows tracking at roughly 45° from your torso
- Pause for a beat at the bottom to remove any bounce

Row

Chapter 2 · Building Strength



Source: [REP](#) · [channel](#)

The horizontal row (sometimes called an "Australian [pull-up](#)") is the bodyweight equivalent of a barbell row and the core horizontal pulling exercise of calisthenics. You lie under a low bar, rings, or a sturdy table edge, grip with straight arms, and pull your chest up to meet your hands while your body stays rigid like a reverse [plank](#).

This is where you build the mid-back, lat, and rear-delt strength that balances out all the pressing you're doing in Level 2. Strong horizontal pulling is also what protects your shoulders long-term. Most shoulder aches come from a lack of pulling volume, not a lack of pressing.

If horizontal rows feel out of reach today, build the basic pulling pattern first with the [vertical row](#).

How to do it

Set a bar or rings at around hip height. Lie on your back underneath and grab with hands slightly wider than your shoulders, palms facing away or neutral. Position your feet so that with straight arms your body hangs with shoulder blades off the floor. Brace your core, squeeze your glutes, and pull your chest to the bar by driving your elbows back and down. Lower with control.

Watch more here:

■ [Watch on YouTube](#)

Video by [REP](#)

Target

- **Sets:** 3
- **Reps:** 10
- **Rest:** 90 seconds between sets
- **Advance when:** 3×10 with chest touching (or nearly touching) the bar

Key tips

- The lower the bar, the harder it is. Adjust by raising or lowering the bar to dial in difficulty
- Squeeze your shoulder blades together at the top, pause briefly
- Keep your body rigid like a reverse plank with heels, hips, and shoulders in one line
- Don't let your hips sag or pike up during the set
- If this is too hard, bend your knees and put your feet on the floor for help

Pull-Up Negative

Chapter 2 · Building Strength



Source: [Calixpert · channel](#)

The secret weapon for your first [pull-up](#). You jump or step up to the top of a pull-up (chin above the bar) and then lower yourself as slowly as possible, ideally 5 seconds or more. This "negative" (eccentric) phase is the part you'd skip if you just dropped off the bar, but it's also the part where most of the strength is built.

Eccentric training works so well because muscles can produce roughly 20-30% more force lowering than they can lifting. That means you can build true pull-up strength long before you can pull yourself up. Most people who follow a disciplined negative program get their first pull-up within 4-8 weeks.

Before starting these, make sure you've spent time on [scapular pulls](#) so your shoulders are loaded safely from a dead hang.

How to do it

Step onto a sturdy box, chair, or low bar so that your chin is above the pull-up bar and your arms are bent as if you'd just finished a pull-up. Grip the bar firmly, pick your feet up, and resist gravity. Lower yourself as slowly as you can until your arms are fully extended. Step back up to the top and repeat.

Learn more here:

■ [Watch on YouTube](#)

Video by [Calixpert](#)

Target

- **Sets:** 3
- **Reps:** 10
- **Rest:** 90 seconds between sets
- **Advance when:** 3x10 with a slow, controlled 5-second descent per rep

Key tips

- You can also use band-assisted pull-ups as a variation, varying the strength of the band. Not everyone is motivated by negatives.
- Use a box or chair to get into the top position. Don't burn energy jumping
- Lower slowly.
- Stay engaged the whole way down. If you start falling fast, you're done
- Once you can do 3x5 at 5 seconds, test a pull-up. You're likely very close

Hollow Hold

Chapter 2 · Building Strength



Source: images.cifassets.net

The hollow hold is *the* core position of gymnastics and calisthenics. You lie on your back, press your lower back flat into the floor, and lift your shoulders and legs off the ground so your body forms a shallow banana shape. It looks gentle. It is not gentle. Thirty seconds will humble anyone who thinks their core is strong.

Why it matters: every advanced skill (front lever, L-sit, [muscle-up](#), handstand) is basically a hollow hold in a different orientation. Locking in this shape now saves you months of re-learning it on the bar or in a handstand later. Think of it as the [plank](#)'s more demanding cousin.

How to do it

Lie flat on your back. Press your lower back hard into the floor so there's no gap between your lumbar spine and the ground. Lift your shoulders and legs off the floor at the same time, arms extended overhead by your ears and legs straight. Point your toes. Your body should form a slightly curved "banana" with the floor as a tangent point at your lower back.

Target

- **Sets:** 3
- **Hold:** 30 seconds
- **Rest:** 90 seconds between sets

- **Advance when:** 3x30s with lower back flat on the floor throughout

Key tips

- Press your lower back into the floor. If you see a gap, tuck your pelvis more
- Start with knees bent and arms at your sides; straighten legs and raise arms overhead as you get stronger
- Breathe shallowly. Don't hold your breath
- If your lower back pops off the floor, stop the hold. Quality over time

Full Squat

Chapter 2 · Building Strength



Source: [Hinge Health · channel](#)

An unassisted bodyweight squat to full depth, hips clearly below your knees. No holding onto anything, no half reps. Feet shoulder-width apart, arms out for balance, squat down as deep as you can while keeping your heels glued to the floor and your chest upright.

Most people dismiss bodyweight squats as "easy" but then can't do 15 with correct full depth. That's because a real squat is as much a mobility expression as a strength movement: you need open hips, mobile ankles, and a spine that stays proud. Owning 3x15 means your hinges are healthy and you're ready to start loading each leg on its own.

If reaching full depth without falling over feels rough, build the pattern first with the [assisted squat](#).

How to do it

Stand with feet a bit wider than shoulder width, toes turned out 10-20°. Reach your arms forward for counterbalance. Push your hips back and down while driving your knees out over your toes. Go all the way down, hip crease below knee crease. Drive through your whole foot to stand back up, finishing with hips and knees fully locked.

Video here:

■ [Watch on YouTube](#)

Target

- **Sets:** 3
- **Reps:** 10
- **Rest:** 90 seconds between sets
- **Advance when:** 3×10 with full depth (hip crease below knee crease)

Key tips

- Feet shoulder-width, toes slightly turned out
- Push your knees out in line with your toes. Don't let them cave in
- Keep your heels on the ground. If they lift, work on ankle dorsiflexion separately
- Chest proud, spine neutral. No rounding into the bottom
- Reach arms forward or clasp them at the chest for counterbalance

Band-Assisted Dip

Chapter 2 · Building Strength



Source: [GCP Fitness](#)

The step that gets you onto the parallel bars for real. You loop a resistance band across the tops of two parallel bars, hook one foot or knee into the loop, and do dips as normal. The band stretches most at the bottom of the dip, exactly where the movement is hardest, giving you assistance where you need it and forcing you to earn the top portion on your own.

This is a far better bridge than jumping straight from [bench dips](#) to full dips. Bench dips train the pattern but the load is light and the geometry is different. Band-assisted dips put you in the real position, on the real bars, with the real range of motion, just with some of your bodyweight taken off.

How to do it

Loop a resistance band across the tops of two parallel bars so it hangs between them. Step up onto the bars into a support position with straight arms. Hook one foot (or one knee, for more assistance) into the loop of the band. Lower yourself by bending your elbows until your shoulders are at or below elbow height. Press back up to the starting support position. Keep your torso slightly forward-leaning and your elbows tracking back.

Target

- **Sets:** 3
- **Reps:** 10

- **Rest:** 90 seconds between sets
- **Advance when:** 3x10 with clean form

Key tips

- Thicker band = more assistance. Start heavy, graduate to thinner bands over weeks
- Keep your elbows tracking back, not flared wide
- Go to full depth: shoulders at or below elbow height
- Stay engaged throughout. Don't rest your weight on the band at the top
- If you don't have a band, substitute with a box or chair under your feet to push off from

Getting Strong

Chapter 3

7 articles

Diamond Push-Up

Pike Push-Up

Feet-Elevated Row

Pull-Up

Hanging Knee Raise

Bulgarian Split Squat

Negative Dip

Diamond Push-Up

Chapter 3 · Getting Strong



Source: [Marcus Filly · channel](#)

The diamond push-up takes the standard [push-up](#) and cranks up the triceps demand. You bring your hands in under your chest so your thumbs and index fingers touch, forming a diamond (or triangle) shape. From there, it's a normal push-up, but with a much shorter lever for the triceps and a bigger reach for the elbows.

Strong triceps matter for every pressing progression that follows: dips, handstand push-ups, and eventually planche. The diamond push-up is how you start building that tricep strength without having to find parallel bars.

How to do it

Set up in a push-up position and slide your hands in until your thumbs and index fingers touch, forming a diamond under your sternum. Keep your body long and tight. Bend your elbows and lower your chest to your hands. Your elbows will flare somewhat outward, more than a standard push-up. Press back up to full extension.

Target

- **Sets:** 3
- **Reps:** 10
- **Rest:** 90 seconds between sets

- **Advance when:** 3x10 with full range of motion (chest touching hands)

Key tips

- Hands directly under your chest, not under your face
- Elbows will flare slightly more than a regular push-up. That's expected
- Keep your core tight and body in a straight line. No sagging hips
- If 3x10 on the floor is too hard, do diamond push-ups on an incline (hands elevated)

Pike Push-Up

Chapter 3 · Getting Strong



Source: [Paul Twyman · channel](#)

The pike push-up is the main stepping stone toward a handstand [push-up](#), and therefore toward every freestanding-handstand skill. You start in a push-up position on your toes, then walk your feet in toward your hands until your hips pike up high and your body forms a sharp inverted V. From that bent-over position, you lower your head to the floor and press back up.

Because a larger share of your bodyweight is over the shoulders in this position, pike push-ups demand serious overhead pressing strength. Treat it as the bridge between "I can press a little" ([kneeling pike push-up](#)) and "I can handstand push-up" (full HSPU). It's where you actually start to feel overhead strength stacking up.

How to do it

Start in a high [plank](#). Walk your feet toward your hands until your hips are stacked almost directly over your shoulders and your body is in a tight inverted V. Keep your legs as straight as possible. Bend your elbows to lower the top of your head toward the floor between your hands, then press back up.

Some helpful tips here:

■ [Watch on YouTube](#)

Video by [Paul Twyman](#)

Target

- **Sets:** 3
- **Reps:** 10
- **Rest:** 90 seconds between sets
- **Advance when:** 3x10 with head lightly touching the floor

Key tips

- The closer your feet are to your hands, the harder it gets
- Lower your head *between* your hands, not in front of them
- Keep your legs as straight as possible. Bending hides the load
- Elbows track at roughly 45°, flaring slightly back in line with your torso

Feet-Elevated Row

Chapter 3 · Getting Strong



Source: [Glute Lab · channel](#)

A harder variation that takes the plain [row](#) and adds 20-30% more load by changing your body angle. You keep your hands on a low bar or rings and put your feet up on a box, bench, or chair. Now your body is perfectly horizontal (or even slightly inverted), which means your lats, mid-back, and biceps have to pull a larger fraction of your bodyweight toward the bar.

Feet-elevated rows are the bridge between the standard row and one-arm or front-lever work. They're also the cleanest way to add volume to your horizontal pull without changing equipment. Just grab a higher surface for your feet.

How to do it

Set a bar or rings at around hip height and put a sturdy box, step, or chair behind you at about the same height as your hands. Lie under the bar, grip it with hands slightly wider than your shoulders, and place your heels on the elevated surface. Brace your body into a straight line and pull your chest to the bar. Lower with control.

Target

- **Sets:** 3
- **Reps:** 10
- **Rest:** 90 seconds between sets

- **Advance when:** 3x10 with chest touching (or nearly touching) the bar

Key tips

- Heels on the box, body in one rigid line. No sagging hips, no piking up
- Squeeze your shoulder blades together at the top of each rep
- The higher the feet, the harder the row. Start at bar height and raise over time
- If grip is the limiter, use a thicker-grip bar occasionally to build it up

Pull-Up

Chapter 3 · Getting Strong



Source: [Calisthenicmovement · channel](#)

The real deal. You hang from a bar with completely straight arms, pull yourself up until your chin clears the bar, and lower back down under control. Five clean reps is a milestone that a surprising majority of adults never reach. Hit it and you've passed a genuinely meaningful strength checkpoint.

The pull-up is one of the few upper-body movements that hits lats, biceps, rear delts, and core all at once. It's also the gateway to everything else on the bar: muscle-ups, front levers, and L-sit pull-ups all assume you can do a clean strict pull-up. Skip the kipping and swinging. Strict is what buys you the next level.

If you can't get your chin over the bar yet, grind the [pull-up negative](#) until 5-second descents feel routine, then test a strict rep.

How to do it

Grip the bar with your hands shoulder-width apart, palms facing away (overhand). Let yourself hang with arms fully extended and shoulder blades active (not shrugged up). Pull your elbows down and back, keeping your chest proud, until your chin is clearly above the bar. Lower yourself all the way back to a dead hang under control.

More information here:

■ [Watch on YouTube](#)

Video by [Calisthenicmovement](#)

Target

- **Sets:** 3
- **Reps:** 10
- **Rest:** 90 seconds between sets
- **Advance when:** 3×10 dead hang to chin over bar, no swinging

Key tips

- Start every rep from a dead hang, arms fully extended
- Pull your elbows down and back, not just your hands up toward the bar
- Chin clearly above the bar at the top. No cheating with a neck crane
- Lower yourself with control. Don't just drop
- No kipping, swinging, or leg kicks

Hanging Knee Raise

Chapter 3 · Getting Strong



Source: [FitnessFAQs · channel](#)

Core training, but now you're hanging. You grab a [pull-up](#) bar with straight arms and pull your knees up to your chest without swinging. The hanging position makes it much harder than a floor exercise: gravity wants to swing your body, your grip has to hold your entire weight, and your shoulders have to stay packed the whole time.

This is also where grip strength quietly becomes a factor. Building a solid hanging knee raise habit now pays off massively later. It's the foundation for hanging leg raises, toes-to-bar, L-sits, and eventually front-lever work.

The core bracing pattern here is the same one you grooved in the [hollow hold](#). Just rotated 90° and hanging from a bar.

How to do it

Grip the pull-up bar with hands shoulder-width apart. Let yourself hang with active shoulders (not shrugged) and a still body. Without swinging, bend at your hips and knees and pull your knees up toward your chest, curling your pelvis slightly under you at the top. Lower your legs slowly back to a still dead hang before the next rep.

Video tutorial here:

■ [Watch on YouTube](#)

Target

- **Sets:** 3
- **Reps:** 10
- **Rest:** 90 seconds between sets
- **Advance when:** 3×10 with controlled movement, no swinging

Key tips

- Start from a dead hang with a still body
- Raise your knees to chest height, not just hip height
- Tuck your pelvis at the top. The hip flexors shouldn't do all the work
- Lower your legs slowly. Don't just let them drop
- If you're swinging, you're using momentum. Pause between reps

Bulgarian Split Squat

Chapter 3 · Getting Strong



Source: [Men's Health · channel](#)

The Bulgarian split squat is the bridge between the regular [full squat](#) and true single-leg strength. You stand a couple of feet in front of a bench, rest the top of one foot on it behind you, and squat down on the front leg. Because your rear leg is supported but not really pushing, the front leg ends up doing around 80% of the work. That's close enough to a single-leg squat that you can build the strength needed for pistol squats without needing their balance demands yet.

Expect these to humble you. Most people who can rep out 20 bodyweight squats will gas out at 8 Bulgarians per side. That's the point. You're finally loading one leg at a time.

How to do it

Stand about a leg's length in front of a bench, chair, or couch. Place the top of one foot behind you on the bench. Your front foot should be far enough ahead that your shin stays roughly vertical at the bottom of the squat. Squat down on the front leg until your back knee lightly kisses the floor, then drive through the whole front foot to stand back up.

Learn more here:

■ [Watch on YouTube](#)

Video by [Men's Health](#)

Target

- **Sets:** 3
- **Reps:** 10 per leg
- **Rest:** 90 seconds between sets
- **Advance when:** 3x10 per leg with full depth (back knee to the floor)

Key tips

- Front foot far enough forward that your knee doesn't drift past your toes at the bottom
- Lower under control until your back knee nearly touches the ground
- Keep your torso upright, chest proud. Don't fold forward
- If balance is hard, hold onto a wall or doorframe lightly with one hand at first
- Feet roughly hip-width apart (laterally), not stacked on a tightrope

Negative Dip

Chapter 3 · Getting Strong



Source: [BARNATURALS](#)

The same trick that worked for your first [pull-up](#), applied to dips. You jump or step to the top of the parallel bars, lock your arms out in support, and lower yourself as slowly as possible, ideally 4-5 seconds or more. You skip the concentric (the push back up) entirely and focus on the eccentric, where the strength is built.

Eccentric training works because your muscles can produce roughly 20-30% more force lowering than they can lifting. That means you can build true dip strength long before you can press out of the bottom. Most people who grind through a disciplined negative program are doing full dips within 3-6 weeks.

You should already be comfortable on the parallel bars from your [band-assisted dip](#) work before stepping up to negatives.

How to do it

Step or jump onto the parallel bars into a support position with your arms locked straight. Brace your core, lean slightly forward, and bend your elbows to lower yourself as slowly as you can, ideally 4-5 seconds or more. Go all the way down until your shoulders are at or below elbow height. Step back up to the top and repeat. Don't try to press back up under your own power yet.

More information here:

■ [Watch on YouTube](#)

Video by [BARNATURALS](#)

Target

- **Sets:** 3
- **Reps:** 10
- **Rest:** 90 seconds between sets
- **Advance when:** 3x10 with a 5-second descent and clean form

Key tips

- Use a box or low platform to step to the top. Don't waste energy jumping
- Count "one thousand one, one thousand two..." to 5 minimum on the way down
- Stay engaged the whole way down. If you start falling fast, you're done for that set
- Keep your elbows tracking back, not flared wide
- Once 3x10 at 5-second descent is clean, try a full dip. You're probably there

Intermediate

Chapter 4

9 articles

Archer Push-Up

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Skin the cat

Archer Push-Up

Chapter 4 · Intermediate



Source: [Andrew Alinda · channel](#)

The archer push-up is the bridge between a regular [push-up](#) and a true [one-arm push-up](#). You set up in a wide push-up position, then shift your body sideways as you lower so nearly all the load lands on one arm while the other stays extended out to the side (mirroring an archer drawing a bow). This is how you start building the heavy single-arm pushing strength that one-arm push-ups and advanced planche work require.

Done properly, it trains a lot more than just the pressing muscles. It demands huge amounts of shoulder stability, core anti-rotation, and elbow control. Expect your first few attempts to feel nothing like a regular push-up.

Make sure your [diamond push-up](#) is clean and strong before you start loading one arm at a time. The triceps and shoulder strength carry over directly.

How to do it

Set up in a wide push-up position, hands about twice shoulder-width apart, body in one long rigid line. Bend one elbow deeply while straightening the other arm out to the side, shifting your chest toward the bending arm. Go as low as you can control, ideally chest close to the hand, then press back up to the starting position. Alternate sides or finish all reps on one side first.

Learn more here:

■ [Watch on YouTube](#)

Video by [Andrew Alinda](#)

Target

- **Sets:** 3
- **Reps:** 10 per side
- **Rest:** 90 seconds between sets
- **Advance when:** 3×10 per side with chest close to the working hand

Key tips

- Keep the extended arm straight. It's a kickstand, not a helper
- Shift most of your weight directly over the working arm
- Core tight, no twisting. Shoulders and hips rotate together
- Elbow tracks back toward your ribs, not flared out to the sky
- If 5 per side is too hard, start with your hands on an incline (counter or bench)

Elevated Pike Push-Up

Chapter 4 · Intermediate



Source: [Tom Peto Training · channel](#)

The elevated pike push-up is the final checkpoint before handstand push-ups. You take the normal [pike push-up](#) and raise your feet onto a chair, box, or bench. Because your hips stack more directly over your shoulders, an even bigger fraction of your bodyweight loads the press. This is the closest you can get to a handstand [push-up](#) without actually being inverted.

The higher you elevate the feet, the more it approaches a true handstand press. Most people need to work up from a low step to a full-height chair over several weeks. Do this patiently and the [wall handstand push-up](#) will feel like a natural next step.

How to do it

Place a sturdy chair, bench, or box behind you. Set up in a high [plank](#) and walk your feet back onto the elevated surface. Walk your hands in toward the base of the box so your hips are stacked high, directly over your shoulders, in a tight inverted V. Keep your legs straight. Bend your elbows and lower the top of your head to the floor between your hands. Press back up to full extension.

Watch more here:

■ [Watch on YouTube](#)

Video by [Tom Peto Training](#)

Target

- **Sets:** 3
- **Reps:** 10
- **Rest:** 90 seconds between sets
- **Advance when:** 3x10 with head lightly touching the floor

Key tips

- The higher the feet, the harder. Start with a low step and raise gradually
- Keep your hips stacked over your shoulders, not behind them
- Head lands *between* the hands, not in front. This mirrors a handstand push-up
- Core tight, legs straight. Don't let your body fold at the hips mid-rep
- Wedge a pillow or soft mat under your head while you learn the range

Archer Row

Chapter 4 · Intermediate



Source: [Marcus Filly · channel](#)

The archer row is where you start building one-arm pulling strength. You set up just like a regular [feet-elevated row](#) on rings or a bar, but as you pull you extend one arm straight out to the side along the bar (like drawing a bow, hence "archer") and do most of the pulling work with the other arm. The extended arm gives a bit of balance and grip, but the working arm is carrying the vast majority of the load.

This exercise is the last common stop before true one-arm work and front-lever progressions. It also bulletproofs your shoulders against left and right imbalances that two-arm exercises tend to hide.

How to do it

Set up under a pair of rings (ideal) or a bar that lets you spread your hands wide. Grip with your hands out wide and your body in a rigid, horizontal line. Pull to one side: bend one elbow and drive it back past your ribs while the other arm stays long and extended out to the side. Your chest should end up near the working hand. Lower under control and alternate, or finish all reps on one side first.

Target

- **Sets:** 3

- **Reps:** 10 per side
- **Rest:** 90 seconds between sets
- **Advance when:** 3x10 per side with full range of motion

Key tips

- The straight arm provides balance, not pulling force. Resist the urge to pull with it
- Pull your working elbow back toward your hip, not up toward the ceiling
- Keep your body rigid. No twisting or hiking a hip to help
- Start with a higher bar or ring angle if 8 reps per side is too hard

Muscle-Up Negative

Chapter 4 · Intermediate



Source: [Train Your Weakness](#) · channel

The muscle-up negative is the single most useful drill for building a first [muscle-up](#). You jump, step, or kip to the top of a muscle-up (arms straight, chest above the bar in a support position) and then lower yourself as slowly as possible. First you control the transition (lowering your chest to the bar), then you finish with a slow [pull-up negative](#) down to a dead hang.

This is the exact eccentric of the muscle-up. Because muscles are stronger in the lowering phase than in the lifting phase, this drill lets you build the specific strength and body awareness for the transition long before you can muscle-up concentrically. Most people who drill muscle-up negatives consistently get their first muscle-up within a couple of months.

How to do it

Set up a box or step next to a pull-up bar so you can step into the top support position: chest above the bar, elbows locked, bar at your waist. From there, squeeze the bar and lower yourself slowly, first leaning back and letting the bar travel up your chest, then through the sticking point in front of your face, then finishing as a controlled pull-up negative down to arms straight. Count five seconds minimum.

Target

- **Sets:** 3
- **Reps:** 10
- **Rest:** 90 seconds between sets
- **Advance when:** 3x10 with a slow, controlled 5-second descent each

Key tips

- Use a box to step into the top support. Don't burn energy with sloppy kips
- The transition (bar at chest level) is the hardest part. Slow down there especially
- Keep the bar close to your body throughout, not drifting out in front
- You need solid [Pull-Ups](#) and [Dips](#) before attempting this
- If you fall fast through the transition, you're not ready. Drop back to more pull-ups and dips

Bar Pullover

Chapter 4 · Intermediate



Source: [Simonster Strength](#)

The bar pullover is the classic way to get *onto* a bar from a dead hang. You pull the bar toward your hips while rotating your body up and over it, finishing in a support position on top. It's a foundational bar skill: once you can pull over, the whole world of bar work above the bar opens up.

It's a good way to get into a position to train [Muscle-Up Negative](#).

It looks intimidating, but it's mostly about coordination and committing to the rotation rather than raw strength. If you can hold a solid [dead hang](#) and you've started working [pull-ups](#), you have enough to begin learning the pullover with a little leg drive to help you around.

How to do it

Start in a hang with an overhand grip, hands around shoulder width. Pull the bar down toward your waist and at the same time lift your hips and bring your knees up toward the bar, so your body starts to rotate around it. As your hips reach the bar, keep pulling and let your upper body rotate forward and over the top. Finish by pressing your arms straight so you end in a support position, arms locked, hips resting against the bar. Reverse the movement under control to come back down.

If you can't get over from a dead hang yet, build up to it in stages:

- **Kicking pullover** - drive one leg up hard to give yourself momentum around the bar while you learn the rotation.
- **Lift-ups** - from a hang, practice pulling your hips up to the bar without going all the way over, to build the pulling strength.
- **Modified ice cream maker** - lower slowly from the support position back to a hang to train the rotation in reverse.
- **Dead hang pullover** - the full version with no leg kick, pulling over from a still hang once you're strong enough.

More information here:

■ [Watch on YouTube](#)

Video by *Simonster Strength*

Key tips

- Pull the bar toward your hips, not just down - it's the hips meeting the bar that lets you rotate over
- Keep the bar close to your body throughout. Letting it drift away kills the rotation
- Use a leg kick to learn the movement, then gradually remove it as you get stronger
- Lower slowly on the way back down to build the strength for the dead hang version
- Keep a firm grip and locked arms in the support position at the top

Tuck L-Sit

Chapter 4 · Intermediate



Source: [More Than Lifting · channel](#)

The tuck L-sit is where your core stops being a floor-only thing and starts being a "hold your whole body off the ground with your arms" thing. You sit between two parallettes, yoga blocks, chairs, or even on a pair of [push-up](#) bars. You press down hard through straight arms to lift your hips off the floor, then tuck your knees to your chest. The tuck position shortens the lever, making it a manageable bridge to a full L-sit.

Beyond being a jaw-dropping party trick, the tuck L-sit trains three things at once: aggressive shoulder depression (push the blocks *down*), deep core bracing (hold the knees high), and straight-arm strength (lock the elbows). All three are prerequisites for L-sits, V-sits, and presses.

The "pull your knees high" cue is the same one you used in the [hanging knee raise](#). If that still feels shaky, build it up first.

How to do it

Sit on the floor with a pair of parallettes, yoga blocks, chairs, or push-up handles placed just outside your hips. Plant your hands on top of them with locked elbows. Press hard into the blocks to lift your hips off the floor, and at the same time tuck your knees up toward your chest. Your shins should be roughly parallel to the floor. Hold the position with shoulders pushed away from your ears.

Some tips here:

■ [Watch on YouTube](#)

Video by [More Than Lifting](#)

Target

- **Sets:** 3
- **Hold:** 15 seconds
- **Rest:** 90 seconds between sets
- **Advance when:** 3x15s with your butt clearly off the ground

Key tips

- Push the floor away. Fully lock out your arms
- Lift your knees as high as you can. The higher the knees, the easier the balance
- Depress your shoulders. Push them down away from your ears the whole hold
- If you can't lift off yet, practice one foot at a time, then both for a second at a time

Pistol Squat

Chapter 4 · Intermediate



Source: [Squat University · channel](#)

A full single-leg squat with the opposite leg held straight out in front of you. You stand on one leg, extend the other forward, squat all the way down until your hamstring kisses your calf, and stand back up. No hands, no assistance. The pistol squat is the benchmark of bodyweight leg strength and mobility. Very few adults can do one cold, and owning 3x5 per leg is a serious achievement.

It's hard for three reasons at once: (1) one leg is carrying everything, (2) you need deep ankle dorsiflexion to keep the heel down at the bottom, and (3) balance is a real skill. That's exactly why the benefits carry over to running, jumping, and anything else involving one leg.

The single-leg strength comes from the [Bulgarian split squat](#). Own 3x10 per leg there before attempting pistols cold.

How to do it

Stand on one leg with the other leg lifted slightly in front of you. Reach your arms forward for counterbalance. Slowly squat down on the standing leg while your free leg extends out in front. Keep going until your hamstring touches your calf, free leg hovering just above the floor. Drive through the whole standing foot to come back up, free leg returning to where it started.

Learn more here:

■ [Watch on YouTube](#)

Target

- **Sets:** 3
- **Reps:** 10 per leg
- **Rest:** 90 seconds between sets
- **Advance when:** 3×10 per leg with full depth and no hand assist

Key tips

- Start by squatting onto a low bench or box and standing back up. Lower the box over weeks
- Extend your arms forward for counterbalance; point the free leg's toes
- Keep your standing heel flat on the ground. If it lifts, work ankle mobility
- If mobility is the limiter, drill deep-squat holds 2-3 min per day
- Hold onto a doorframe or TRX strap lightly while building the balance and strength

Dip

Chapter 4 · Intermediate



Source: [Jeff Nippard · channel](#)

The dip is one of the most productive upper-body pushing movements in calisthenics. You support yourself between two parallel bars (or the corners of a kitchen counter, two sturdy chairs, or a pair of parallettes), lower your body by bending the elbows, and press back up. Depending on your torso angle, dips load your chest heavily (leaning forward) or your triceps (upright), which is why they work so well alongside push-ups.

Dips are also the second half of the [muscle-up](#). You cannot get a muscle-up without being strong in the dip, and a clean set of 8 full-depth dips is the usual checkpoint before even attempting muscle-up work. Bonus: the same dip bars become the perfect home for future tuck L-sits and L-sit presses.

How to do it

Support yourself on two parallel bars with your arms straight and your body between them. Lean your torso slightly forward and bend your elbows to lower your body until your upper arms are at least parallel to the ground (shoulders at or below elbow height). Keep your elbows from flaring wildly outward. Press back up to full arm lockout.

Learn more here:

■ [Watch on YouTube](#)

Video by [Jeff Nippard](#)

Target

- **Sets:** 3
- **Reps:** 10
- **Rest:** 90 seconds between sets
- **Advance when:** 3×10 full depth, shoulders at or below elbow height

Key tips

- Lean slightly forward to emphasize the chest; stay upright to emphasize triceps
- Go deep. Shoulders at or below elbow height
- Keep your elbows tracking back, not flared wide to the sides
- If 8 reps are too hard, do [negative dips](#): jump to the top and lower slowly for 5 seconds
- If your shoulders complain, don't go deeper than you can control

Skin the cat

Chapter 4 · Intermediate



Source: [Simonster Strength](#)

The skin the cat is where hanging stops being passive and starts building real shoulder strength. You start in a hang, pull your body up and rotate backward through your arms, then lower as far as you can into a deep shoulder extension stretch under your own bodyweight. On the way up, it's first transitions to a front lever, then toes to bar. At the way down and bottom, first you go to back lever then to the stretched position commonly known as the German hang.

It's a foundational skill with a lot of carryover. It builds strength through the core and shoulders, opens up shoulder extension range, and gives you the rotational control and end-range strength that the "front and back levers" are built on. Broken down, the skin the cat is really a combination of lever movements: the pull from hanging to inverted is the positive of a tuck front lever raise, and lowering into shoulder extension is a back lever negative with a compressed, shortened body.

One thing to respect: loaded shoulder extension is a vulnerable position for the shoulders. Progress gradually, keep the legs available to bail, and never push into pain.

Prerequisites

You're ready to start learning this when you can do:

- 5 [pull-ups](#) (or chin-ups)
- 5 [dips](#)

Rings or bar

This skill can be done on rings or a bar, and rings are generally easier. There's more room to clear your legs, and you can rotate your hands or keep a neutral grip throughout. On a single bar you're locked into a pronated or supinated grip — a pronated (overhand) grip is easier and kinder on the biceps. Start on rings, or on a bar with a pronated grip, and only progress to a supinated grip once you feel confident.

How to do it

Start in a hang. Pull your knees toward your chest and, at the same time, pull your body up and let it rotate backward through your arms until you're inverted. From there, keep lowering under control into shoulder extension — your arms travel behind you and your shoulders open up — going only as far as feels comfortable. Hold the bottom briefly if you want the German hang stretch, then reverse the movement and rotate back to the hang.

Progressions

Set the rings low so you can put your feet down and exit safely if you can't get back around.

1. **Foot-assisted reps** — rings low (or a box/bench under higher rings). Kick through into shoulder extension and take some of your weight through your legs as you lower. Only descend as far as is comfortable. Build to 3 sets of 5.
2. **Reducing assistance** — gradually take less weight through the legs as you get stronger.
3. **Full reps with a spot** — start each rep full and only use the feet to finish the set once you fatigue.
4. **Full skin the cat** — unassisted through the whole range, building to more reps over time.

Learn more here:

■ [Watch on YouTube](#)

Video by [Simonster Strength](#)

Key tips

- Progress gradually and never push into pain — loaded shoulder extension is a vulnerable position
- Start on rings, or a pronated grip on a bar, before trying a supinated grip
- Keep the rings low while learning so you can always put your feet down to bail
- Only lower as far as your shoulder mobility comfortably allows; range comes with time
- Tucking tight shortens the lever and reduces the demand on your shoulders — use it while building strength

Advanced

Chapter 5

7 articles

One-Arm Push-Up

Wall Handstand Push-Up

Tuck Front Lever Row

Muscle-Up

Toes to Bar

Shrimp Squat

Ring Dip

One-Arm Push-Up

Chapter 5 · Advanced



Source: [Andry Strong](#)

The top of the horizontal pushing ladder. You do a [push-up](#) with one arm behind your back, controlling the full bodyweight on a single side. It's the move that still impresses in a crowded gym, and it takes years of pushing work to own strictly. Expect your first clean rep to feel like a different exercise from anything you've done before.

Getting here means your shoulders are stable, your core resists rotation under heavy unilateral load, and your elbow has plenty of tendon conditioning. This is not a move you rush. Spend real time in the [archer push-up](#) first, then progress through elevated one-arm push-ups before going floor-level.

Watch more here:

■ [Watch on YouTube](#)

Video by [Andry Strong](#)

How to do it

Set up in a push-up position with your feet wide apart (wider stance = more base stability). Place one hand under your shoulder, slightly angled inward, and put the other hand behind your back or along your side. Brace your entire body like a [plank](#). Bend your working elbow to lower your chest toward the floor, keeping your body rigid and resisting any twisting. Press back up to full arm

lockout. Complete all reps on one side, then switch.

Target

- **Sets:** 3
- **Reps:** 10 per side
- **Rest:** 90 seconds between sets
- **Advance when:** 3×10 per side with clean form, no twisting

Key tips

- Feet wide. A narrow stance is elite-level; start with wide
- Keep your hips square to the floor. No rotating into the working shoulder
- Elbow tracks back toward your ribs, not flared wide
- Core rock-solid. The hardest part is resisting rotation, not the press itself
- If floor-level is too hard, do them with your hand on a countertop, then lower benches over months
- Don't skip the archer push-up. This movement is built from that base

Wall Handstand Push-Up

Chapter 5 · Advanced



Source: [Jacked Gymnastics · channel](#)

The wall handstand push-up is the peak vertical push of bodyweight training. You kick up into a handstand against a wall, lower your head to the floor under control, and press back up. It's basically a full overhead press with 100% of your bodyweight. Few exercises are as satisfying, and few build shoulder strength like this one does.

There are two common versions: *facing away* from the wall (easier to kick up, but you can arch your back to cheat) and *facing toward* the wall with belly on the wall (harder to kick up but enforces a clean, stacked handstand shape). Work toward the belly-to-wall version. It transfers directly to a freestanding handstand [push-up](#) later.

You should already be strong overhead from the [elevated pike push-up](#) before kicking up against a wall.

How to do it

Place a pillow or thin mat on the floor where your head will land. Kick up into a handstand against the wall, belly facing the wall if possible. Lock out your arms, squeeze everything, and keep your body in one long line heel-to-hand. Bend your elbows to lower the top of your head to the floor between your hands. Press back up to a full handstand lockout.

Target

- **Sets:** 3
- **Reps:** 10
- **Rest:** 90 seconds between sets
- **Advance when:** 3x10 with head touching the floor

Key tips

- When starting out, get a friend to hold your feet, to help a slow descent and pulling you up again. After a few sessions, the friend should apply less and less help as you progress
- Face the wall (belly in) for better form; face away for easier kick-ups while learning
- Lower under control. Don't just drop onto your head
- Keep your core tight and body in one long straight line, don't banana-back
- Place a folded mat, pillow, or pad under your head while learning the range
- Bail safely: cartwheel out if you feel yourself falling, don't collapse onto your head

Tuck Front Lever Row

Chapter 5 · Advanced



Source: [Matheus Frugeri · channel](#)

The tuck front lever row is where horizontal pulling stops being just "stronger rows" and starts becoming real gymnastic strength. You hang under a bar in a tucked front-lever shape (body horizontal, back parallel to the floor, knees pulled tight to your chest) and pull your chest to the bar while staying in that horizontal position. It's an inverted row, but with most of the work done by the lats keeping your body off the floor.

This movement directly trains the scapular strength and lat engagement needed for a full front lever, one of the big static skills in calisthenics, while also giving you serious mid-back and biceps strength.

Build solid one-arm pulling first with the [archer row](#) before attempting these. The lat strength carries over directly.

How to do it

Hang from a [pull-up](#) bar with a shoulder-width overhand grip. Pull your knees tightly to your chest and, at the same time, pull with your lats so your hips and back tilt up and your body rotates into a horizontal position, back parallel to the floor, knees glued to your chest. From this tuck front lever shape, pull your chest up toward the bar without letting your body drop back to vertical. Lower with control, staying tucked.

Target

- **Sets:** 3
- **Reps:** 10
- **Rest:** 90 seconds between sets
- **Advance when:** 3x10 while holding the horizontal tuck position throughout

Key tips

- Start by holding a tuck front lever for time (3x15s) before trying rows
- Keep your back parallel to the floor. If it tilts up, you're losing the shape
- Pull your chest to the bar, not your chin. The movement is rowing, not pull-up
- Knees glued to your chest the whole time. Letting them drift forward cheats
- If 5 reps is too hard, do 3x as many reps as possible while still horizontal

Muscle-Up

Chapter 5 · Advanced



Source: [Adam Frater · channel](#)

The king of bar exercises. The muscle-up is a pull-up that keeps going. You pull yourself up explosively, transition through the bar at chest level, and press out to a support position with straight arms above the bar. One flowing movement from dead hang to top.

Done strictly (no kipping), the muscle-up is one of the most satisfying skills in all of calisthenics. It's also a genuine unlock: once you own it, every other advanced bar skill (L-sit pull-up, front-lever-to-muscle-up, bar-to-back-lever) feels a lot more accessible.

The transition is what stalls most people, and the cleanest way to drill it is the [muscle-up negative](#). Slow descents through the transition teach your body the path long before you can press up through it.

The three sub-skills are: (1) a chest-to-bar pull-up, you need to pull the bar low enough on your chest that you can roll your wrists over it, (2) the transition, the moment where your chest passes over the bar, which is where most people stall, and (3) a clean dip at the top to press out.

How to do it

Grip the bar with a slightly-wider-than-shoulder-width overhand grip (a "false grip" with wrists over the bar can help while learning). Pull explosively, aiming to bring the bar low on your chest or your ribs, not just your chin. As the bar reaches your sternum, lean forward aggressively and roll your wrists so your chest comes over the bar. Finish by pressing out with straight arms into the support

position. Lower under control.

See more here:

■ [Watch on YouTube](#)

Video by [Adam Frater](#)

Target

- **Sets:** 3
- **Reps:** 10
- **Rest:** 90 seconds between sets
- **Advance when:** 3x10 from dead hang to full lock-out, no kipping or swinging

Key tips

- You need solid [Pull-Ups](#) (at least 8-10) and [Dips](#) (at least 8-10) first
- The secret is the transition. Practice pulling the bar to your chest or ribs, not your chin
- Keep the bar close to your body and lean forward over the bar during the transition
- A "false grip" (wrists on top of the bar) makes the transition much easier while learning
- Many people start with a small kip to feel the transition, then clean it up to strict

Toes to Bar

Chapter 5 · Advanced



Source: [The Movement Collective · channel](#)

Toes to bar is the full-range, straight-leg version of the hanging leg raise. You hang from a bar, keep your legs completely straight, and raise them all the way up until your toes touch the bar above your head. It's a humbling jump in difficulty from knee raises: straight legs dramatically lengthen the lever, so your abs, hip flexors, and grip all have to work much harder for much longer.

This exercise doesn't just build a very strong core, it also teaches compact, coordinated movement. Hitting the bar cleanly without swinging, using pure core strength, is what separates a strong gymnast-style core from a crunch-builder.

How to do it

Hang from a [pull-up](#) bar with a shoulder-width overhand grip and a still body. Without swinging, keep your legs glued together and completely straight. Drive your toes up in a big arc toward the bar, tucking the pelvis under at the top so the toes meet the bar (or as close as you can get). Lower slowly back to a still dead hang before the next rep.

See more here:

■ [Watch on YouTube](#)

Video by [The Movement Collective](#)

Target

- **Sets:** 3
- **Reps:** 10
- **Rest:** 90 seconds between sets
- **Advance when:** 3x10 with straight legs, toes touching the bar

Key tips

- Keep your legs straight. Even a slight bend makes it much easier
- Tuck your pelvis under at the top; it's not just hip flexors, it's core
- Control the descent, don't just let your legs swing down
- Minimize swinging between reps; pause and reset if you start kipping
- Progression path: [hanging knee raise](#), then [tuck L-sit](#) for straight-arm core, then L-raise (legs parallel to floor), then toes to bar

Shrimp Squat

Chapter 5 · Advanced



Source: [Flow Motion Fitness · channel](#)

The shrimp squat is often considered harder than a [pistol squat](#), not because it requires more strength, but because it demands more flexibility and balance. You stand on one leg, reach behind you to grab the opposite foot (like a quad stretch), and squat down on your standing leg until your free knee taps the ground. Then you stand back up without letting go of the foot.

The shrimp trains a different side of single-leg strength than the pistol: it loads the quad heavily, demands an upright torso, and punishes any slop in balance. It also stretches the hip flexors and quad of the free leg at the bottom, which many people find more challenging than the pistol's hamstring-heavy depth.

How to do it

Stand tall, then lift one foot behind you and grab it with the same-side hand (so right hand holds right foot). Keep your torso as upright as you can and squat down on the standing leg, letting your free knee travel toward the floor behind you. Touch the free knee gently to the ground, then drive through the standing foot to stand back up while still holding the foot.

See more here:

■ [Watch on YouTube](#)

Video by [Flow Motion Fitness](#)

Target

- **Sets:** 3
- **Reps:** 10 per leg
- **Rest:** 90 seconds between sets
- **Advance when:** 3x10 per leg with back knee touching the ground

Key tips

- Start with the beginner version. Don't grab your foot, just bend the back leg and reach the back knee to the floor
- Keep your torso upright, don't fold forward at the waist
- Touch your back knee gently, don't slam it
- Ankle dorsiflexion and quad or hip-flexor flexibility matter a lot; stretch both regularly
- Use a wall or post for balance with your free hand while learning

Ring Dip

Chapter 5 · Advanced



Source: [The Movement Collective](#)

The capstone of the dip track, and a genuinely different exercise from a parallel-bar [dip](#). You hang two gymnastic rings at the right height, press yourself up into support, and do dips on this notoriously unstable surface. The rings rotate freely, so alongside the pressing work you're doing on a parallel bar, you now have to keep the rings from flying out to the sides, which recruits a massive amount of stabilizer strength around the shoulders and triceps.

Most people who can do 15+ parallel bar dips cleanly can do maybe 2-3 ring dips on their first attempt. That's normal. The stability demand is the whole point. Build this and every ring skill (muscle-ups on rings, ring L-sits, ring dips with leans) opens up.

How to do it

Hang a pair of gymnastic rings at shoulder height, shoulder-width or slightly narrower apart. Jump or press up into a support position with the rings turned slightly out (palms facing each other or slightly forward). Brace hard and keep the rings from flaring out. Bend your elbows to lower yourself until your shoulders are at or below elbow height, keeping the rings pressed tight to your body. Press back up to lockout, turning the rings out at the top for maximum stability.

Tutorial here:

■ [Watch on YouTube](#)

Target

- **Sets:** 3
- **Reps:** 10
- **Rest:** 90 seconds between sets
- **Advance when:** 3×10 full depth, rings under control

Key tips

- Keep the rings pressed tight to your ribs. If they drift, you lose control
- Turn the rings out at the top. This cues full lockout and shoulder stability
- Go for depth: shoulders at or below elbow height
- Build up with ring support holds first. Hold the top for 30 seconds before attempting reps
- If full reps are too hard, do ring dip negatives: jump to the top, lower over 5 seconds

Mastery

Chapter 6

2 articles

Dragon Flag

Dragon Squat

Dragon Flag

Chapter 6 · Mastery



Source: [Kevin Zhang](#)

The dragon flag is the showpiece core skill of calisthenics: you grab something solid behind your head, lie back, and hold your entire body off the floor in one rigid line, supported only by your upper back. Of all the static skills in calisthenics, it's among the easier ones to learn — yet it looks every bit as impressive as the hard ones. You can train it almost anywhere: a bench, a bed, a pole, indoors or out.

It's also a genuine compound movement. Your lats and triceps work to anchor your upper body, while your quads and glutes stay flexed to keep your legs rigid. This full-body tension is the same quality you need for harder skills like the front lever, so the dragon flag is a perfect gateway.

Prerequisites

Don't jump straight into this — the biggest mistake you can make. You're ready to start the first progression when you can do:

- 10–20 [hanging leg raises](#)
- a 30-second [hollow hold](#)

How to do it

Lie on a bench or the floor and grip something sturdy behind your head. From the top down:

- **Scapula:** retracted and depressed — pulled back and down, like most strength skills
- **Lats:** fully engaged; this is what lets you fully engage your core
- **Core:** hold a hollow body. Never arch your back
- **Glutes and quads:** flexed, so your legs stay dead straight

The goal is to be completely rigid from your shoulders to your feet, lowering and raising your body as one piece with only your upper back on the support.

Progressions

If the full dragon flag is too difficult, scale it with:

1. **Tucked dragon flag** — knees fully tucked. Practice scapular and lat engagement here
2. **Advanced tuck** — legs extended slightly forward; much more core engagement
3. **One leg extended** — one leg straight, one bent; brings the quads and glutes into play
4. **Straddle** — both legs straight, spread wide
5. **Full dragon flag** — legs straight and together

See more here:

■ [Watch on YouTube](#)

Video by [Kevin Zhang](#)

Key tips

- A "banana back" — legs bending upward out of line — means you're not strong enough for your current progression. Drop back one
- Same if you can't hold a progression for at least 5 seconds, or the bottom half of the movement just falls to the floor
- Meet the prerequisites first. None of this works without the foundational basics

Dragon Squat

Chapter 6 · Mastery



Source: [Summerfunfitness](#)

The dragon squat is one of the hardest calisthenics leg exercises, demanding an exceptional mix of strength, balance, and mobility at the same time. You squat down on one leg while the free leg wraps behind and across the standing leg, hovering just off the ground. Even people who can do [pistol squats](#) and [shrimp squats](#) with ease — plus front splits, side splits, and bridges — often struggle hard the first time they try it.

What makes it so unusual is the combination of keeping the lower leg off the ground while finding the right center of gravity. Neither pistols nor shrimps prepare you for that specific balance problem, so it has to be trained directly.

How to do it

Stand on one leg. Sweep the free leg behind and across your standing leg as you squat down, keeping the free lower leg hovering off the floor the whole way. Sink as deep as your mobility allows, then drive back up through the standing foot without letting the free leg touch down.

Progressions

Break the movement into easier steps and work your way up:

1. **Hand-supported dragon squat** — hold on to something solid. Your hands take weight off the legs; over time, decrease the support so the legs work more and more
2. **Leg-supported dragon squat** — let the free leg rest lightly on the ground or a support
3. **Elevated dragon squat** — stand on a box or step so the free leg has room to swing through; great for combining the mobility and balance work
4. **Full dragon squat**

If you're stuck at a progression, attack the specific weak point holding you back:

- **Strength:** go back to pistols — elevated pistols or assisted pistols on a door frame
- **Ankle mobility:** deep squat work, kneeling flows, and lunge variations
- **Hip mobility:** the figure-four stand-up-and-switch and the shin-and-instep leg raise
- **Balance:** elevated dragon squats plus regular single-leg balance work

See more here:

■ [Watch on YouTube](#)

Video by [Summerfunfitness](#)

Target

- **Sets:** 3
- **Reps:** 5 per leg
- **Rest:** 90 seconds between sets

Key tips

- Always train both sides, even if you only want the skill on one. The weak side prevents imbalances — and research shows strengthening one limb even improves the other
- The balance is the hardest part. Practice finding your center of gravity with light hand support before chasing depth
- Reduce hand support gradually rather than dropping it all at once
- Don't skip the mobility work; strength alone won't get you into the bottom position

Appendix

About this book

This book was compiled from Progresspedia, an open learning platform where anyone can contribute. Every article here was written, edited, and voted on by the community - the content lives as open markdown, free to read, share, and improve. Spotted a mistake or want to add something? Open the course online and suggest an edit.

by the Progresspedia community

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