

The Calisthenics Workbook

Anatomy, skills and programming for bodyweight strength

A reference and a training log

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The muscle figures in this book are animated. In Adobe Acrobat they rotate; in every other PDF viewer they show a single still frame, which is the intended fallback and loses nothing but the rotation.

How to use this book

This is four books stapled together, and they are meant to be read in different ways.

Part I, *How the Body Produces Force*, is a reference. Do not read it front to back. When a skill in Part II names a muscle you cannot place, look it up here, then go back to the skill.

Part II, *The Skills*, is the core. Forty skills across five levels, each with the standard that defines it, the muscles that drive it, the cues that fix it, the faults that stall it, and the progression that gets you there. Skills are ordered by difficulty, not by the order you should train them.

Part III, *Programming*, turns the catalogue into a week. It explains how to select a handful of skills, how often to train them, and how to progress when progress stops.

Part IV, *The Logbook*, is where you write. Photocopy the sheets or print the pages again. A programme you do not record is a programme you cannot debug.

The standard is the point

Every skill in Part II carries a *standard*: an objective, unambiguous description of what owning that skill means. Twenty seconds. Chin over the bar. Hips level with the shoulders. Standards exist because bodyweight training has no loadable barbell to tell you where you are, and the honest answer to “can you do a front lever” is otherwise a matter of opinion.

Treat the standard as a gate. Do not train the skill above it until the standard below it is met on a bad day, not on your best one.

A note on risk

READ THIS ONCE

Calisthenics loads connective tissue at long lever lengths, and tendon adapts far more slowly than muscle. The strength to attempt a front lever arrives months before the elbows are ready to absorb it. Nearly every injury in this sport comes from that gap, not from a single dramatic failure.

Three rules follow. Warm up the joint you are about to load at its end range. Progress by lever length or by leverage, not by grinding more repetitions of something that already hurts. And treat elbow or shoulder pain that persists past a session as information, not as weakness.

Nothing here is medical advice. If something hurts in a way that does not resolve, see a professional who can examine you.

Contents

I	How the Body Produces Force	4
1	Principles of bodyweight force	5
1.1	Leverage is the load	5
1.2	Straight arms change everything	5
1.3	The three jobs a muscle can hold	5
1.4	Contraction types and what they cost	5
1.5	The scapula is a joint you have to learn	5
1.6	Reading the muscle reference	5
2	Muscle reference	6
2.1	Chest	6
2.2	Shoulders	6
2.3	Arms	8
2.4	Back	9
2.5	Core	10
2.6	Hips	12
2.7	Legs	13
2.8	Forearms	15
II	The Skills	16
3	The catalogue	17
3.1	Beginner	19
3.2	Basic	21
3.3	Intermediate	25
3.4	Advanced	30
3.5	Extreme	34
III	Programming	39
4	Selecting what to train	40
4.1	The six patterns	40
4.2	Choosing six	40
5	Preparing to load	41
5.1	Wrists	41
5.2	Elbows	41
5.3	Shoulders	41
5.4	Grip, and the four ways to hold a bar	41
5.5	Skin	41
6	Building the session	42
6.1	The shape of a session	42
6.2	Sets, reps and holds	42
6.3	Frequency	42
7	Progressing and stalling	43
7.1	Which variable to move	43
7.2	When progress stops	43
7.3	How long this actually takes	43
7.4	A twelve-week block	43
IV	The Logbook	44
8	The logbook	45
9	Progression tracker	47
10	Benchmark sheet	52
A	Glossary	53
B	Image Credits and Licence	54

Part I

How the Body Produces Force

Chapter 1

Principles of bodyweight force

A barbell athlete changes the load and keeps the movement. A calisthenics athlete keeps the load — their own body, which changes only slowly — and changes the movement. Everything distinctive about this sport follows from that one constraint.

1.1 Leverage is the load

If you cannot add weight, you move the weight further from the joint that has to resist it. A tucked front lever and a full front lever are the same muscles doing the same job; what differs is the distance from the shoulder to the centre of mass. Double that distance and you double the torque the latissimus dorsi must produce.

This is why progressions in Part II are written as lever lengths — tuck, advanced tuck, one leg, straddle, full — rather than as repetition counts. Adding repetitions to a tuck front lever builds endurance in a position you have already mastered. Lengthening the lever is what makes you stronger.

KEY POINT

Torque, not weight, is the variable you control. Every progression in this book is a way of changing the moment arm.

1.2 Straight arms change everything

Bend your elbow and the biceps, brachialis and brachioradialis share the job of resisting gravity. Lock it straight and the elbow flexors must hold an isometric contraction against a lever that runs the whole length of the forearm, while the shoulder does all the work of moving the body.

Straight-arm strength is roughly an order of magnitude harder to build than bent-arm strength, adapts more slowly, and is where the sport's serious skills live: front lever, back lever, planche, press handstand. It is also where the sport's injuries live, because the biceps tendon and the elbow joint capsule take loads that no bent-arm movement ever asks of them.

1.3 The three jobs a muscle can hold

Any muscle in any position is doing one of three things, and Part II labels them.

Prime mover

Produces the force that creates the movement. In a pull-up, the **LATISSIMUS DORSI**.

Assisting

Contributes to the same movement with less mechanical advantage. In a pull-up, the **BICEPS BRACHII** and the **RHOMBOIDS**.

Stabilising

Produces force that creates no movement at all, holding a joint in the position the prime mover needs. In a pull-up, the **ROTATOR CUFF** keeping the humeral head centred, and the **RECTUS ABDOMINIS** stopping the legs from swinging.

Stabilisers are invisible and decisive. A skill rarely fails because the prime mover gave out; it fails because a stabiliser did, the position degraded, and the prime mover found itself working at a mechanical disadvantage it was never strong enough for.

1.4 Contraction types and what they cost

Isometric

Length does not change. Every hold in this book: the L-sit, the planche, the handstand. Builds strength strongly at the trained joint angle and weakly elsewhere, which is why holds must be trained at the angle you want.

Concentric

The muscle shortens under load. The way up in a pull-up.

Eccentric

The muscle lengthens under load. The way down. Produces the most force of the three, causes the most muscle damage, and is the reason negatives

are the highest-yield tool available to an athlete who cannot yet do the full movement.

NEGATIVES

If you cannot do the skill, do the last part of it slowly. A five-second lower is the single most reliable progression in calisthenics, and it works precisely because eccentric force production exceeds concentric.

1.5 The scapula is a joint you have to learn

The shoulder blade is not bolted to the ribcage; it floats on muscle and moves in six directions — elevation, depression, protraction, retraction, upward rotation, downward rotation. Nearly every upper-body skill in Part II specifies a scapular position, and beginners routinely ignore it because nothing in ordinary life demands conscious control of it.

Three positions carry most of the load. **Depression** — pulling the shoulders away from the ears — is the starting position for every hang and every support hold. **Protraction** — pushing the shoulder blades apart — is what the **SERRATUS ANTERIOR** does at the top of a push-up and throughout a planche. **Upward rotation** is what lets the arm reach fully overhead, and its absence is why a handstand with tight lats becomes an arched banana no amount of core work will straighten.

1.6 Reading the muscle reference

The chapter that follows lists every muscle this book names, grouped by region. Each entry gives origin, insertion and action — the three facts that let you reason about what a muscle must be doing in a position you have never seen before — and a note on what it does specifically in calisthenics.

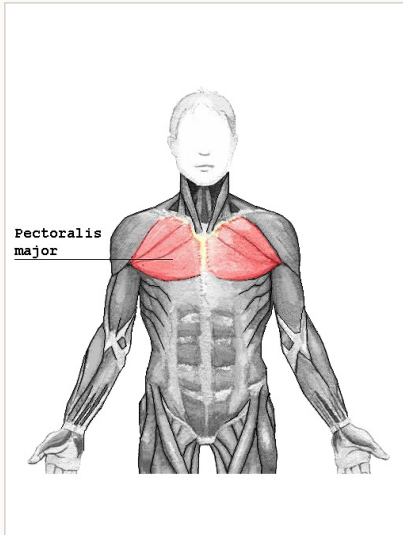
Origin and insertion are worth the effort. A muscle can only pull its insertion toward its origin; knowing both ends tells you what any muscle does without memorising a list. The **LATISSIMUS DORSI** runs from the pelvis and lower spine to the front of the upper arm, so it must pull the arm down and back and rotate it inward — which is a pull-up, and also a front lever, and also the straight-arm pulldown that trains both.

Chapter 2

Muscle reference

2.1 Chest

Pectoralis major

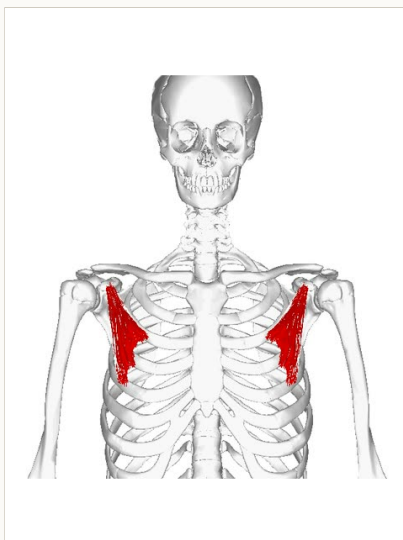


ORIGIN	Medial clavicle, sternum, costal cartilages 1–6
INSERTION	Lateral lip of the bicipital groove of the humerus
ACTION	Shoulder horizontal adduction, flexion (clavicular head), internal rotation, adduction

IN CALISTHENICS

The prime mover of every push. The sternal head dominates the flat push-up and the dip; the clavicular head takes a large share only as the press angle rises toward vertical, which is why a pike push-up feels like a different exercise rather than a harder one. Planche loading is largely isometric adduction against gravity.

Pectoralis minor

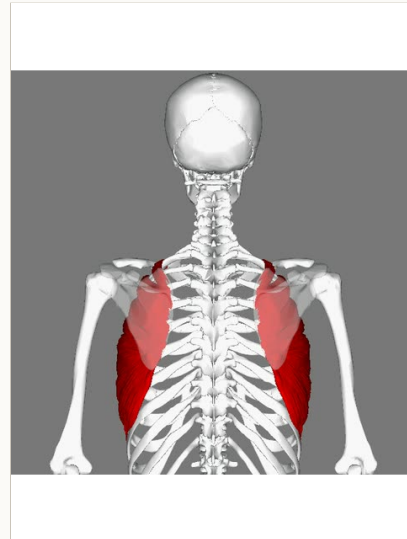


ORIGIN	Ribs 3–5
INSERTION	Coracoid process of the scapula
ACTION	Scapular protraction, depression, downward rotation

IN CALISTHENICS

Chronically short in desk-bound athletes, which drags the scapula forward and steals the overhead range a handstand needs.

Serratus anterior



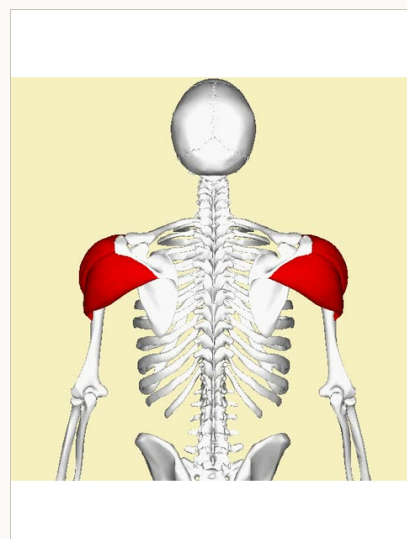
ORIGIN	Ribs 1–9, lateral surface
INSERTION	Medial border of the scapula, anterior surface
ACTION	Scapular protraction and upward rotation

IN CALISTHENICS

The muscle that makes a handstand feel light. Without upward rotation the shoulder cannot stack over the hand, and the athlete compensates by arching the lumbar spine.

2.2 Shoulders

Anterior deltoid



ORIGIN	Lateral third of the clavicle
INSERTION	Deltoid tuberosity of the humerus
ACTION	Shoulder flexion, internal rotation, horizontal adduction

IN CALISTHENICS

Takes the brunt of the pike and handstand push-up, and holds the lean in a planche.

Lateral deltoid

ORIGIN	Acromion of the scapula
INSERTION	Deltoid tuberosity of the humerus
ACTION	Shoulder abduction

IN CALISTHENICS

Primary stabiliser in the ring support hold, where the rings want to travel outward and the arm must resist abduction. Shares the plate above: the deltoid is one muscle with three lines of pull, not three muscles.

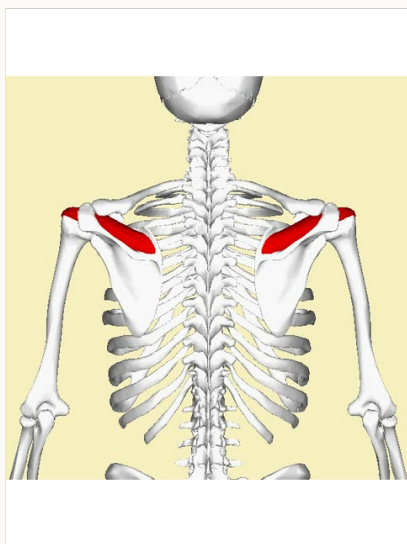
Posterior deltoid

ORIGIN	Spine of the scapula
INSERTION	Deltoid tuberosity of the humerus
ACTION	Shoulder extension, external rotation, horizontal abduction

IN CALISTHENICS

Under-trained relative to the anterior head in most pushing-heavy programmes. Rows and back lever work restore the balance.

Supraspinatus

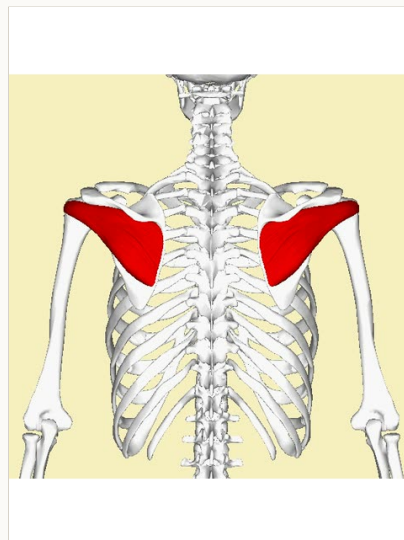


ORIGIN	Supraspinous fossa of the scapula
INSERTION	Greater tubercle of the humerus
ACTION	Initiates shoulder abduction; stabilises the humeral head

IN CALISTHENICS

The first 15 degrees of abduction and the reason a cold shoulder should never meet a maximal false-grip pull.

Infraspinatus

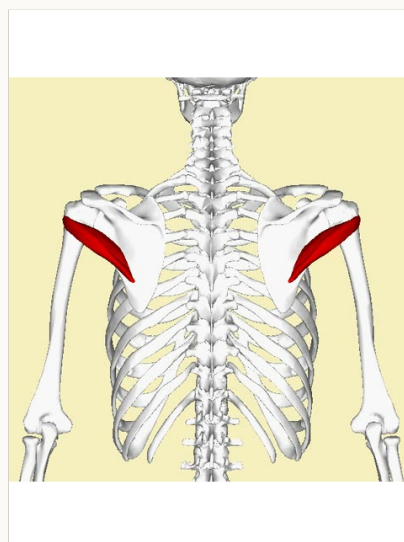


ORIGIN	Infraspinous fossa of the scapula
INSERTION	Greater tubercle of the humerus
ACTION	Shoulder external rotation

IN CALISTHENICS

Holds the rings turned out. The RTO support hold is, functionally, an infraspinatus endurance test.

Teres minor

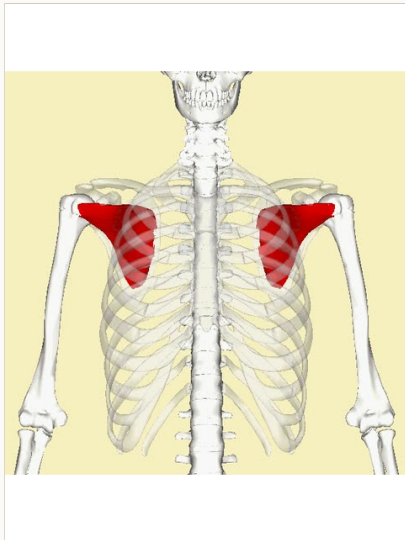


ORIGIN	Lateral border of the scapula
INSERTION	Greater tubercle of the humerus
ACTION	Shoulder external rotation, adduction

IN CALISTHENICS

Works with infraspinatus to keep the humeral head centred under load in every hang.

Subscapularis



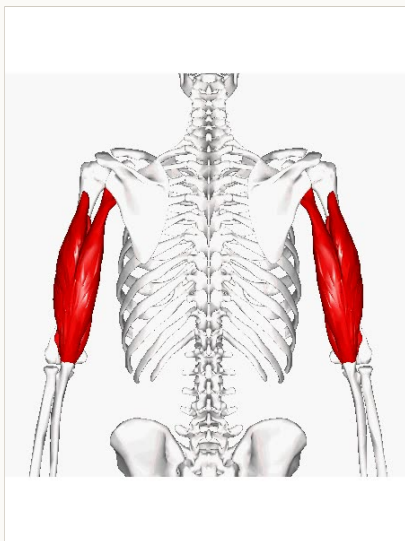
ORIGIN	Subscapular fossa of the scapula
INSERTION	Lesser tubercle of the humerus
ACTION	Shoulder internal rotation

IN CALISTHENICS

The rotator cuff's only internal rotator, and the one that resists the humeral head sliding forward at the bottom of a dip.

2.3 Arms

Triceps brachii



ORIGIN	Infraglenoid tubercle of the scapula (long head); posterior humerus (lateral, medial heads)
INSERTION	Olecranon of the ulna
ACTION	Elbow extension; shoulder extension (long head)

IN CALISTHENICS

Two thirds of the upper arm and the limiting factor in dips, handstand push-ups and the lockout of a muscle-up.

Biceps brachii



ORIGIN	Supraglenoid tubercle (long head); coracoid process (short head)
INSERTION	Radial tuberosity, bicipital aponeurosis
ACTION	Elbow flexion, forearm supination, shoulder flexion

IN CALISTHENICS

Loaded hardest in the supinated chin-up and in the straight-arm work of front lever, where it resists elbow extension isometrically.

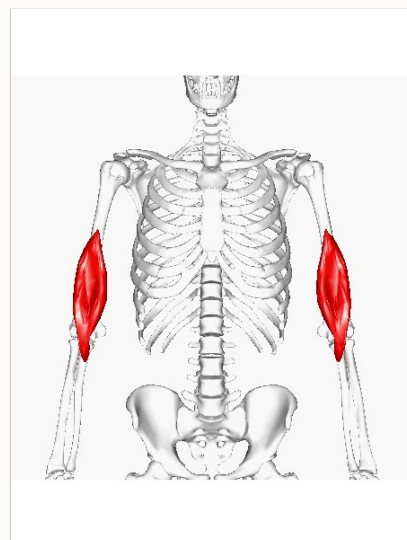
Coracobrachialis

ORIGIN	Coracoid process of the scapula
INSERTION	Medial surface of the humeral shaft
ACTION	Shoulder flexion and adduction

IN CALISTHENICS

Deep to the biceps and easy to forget. It assists shoulder flexion and adduction, which is exactly the demand of a straight-arm front lever pull and of holding the top arm tight to the body in a human flag.

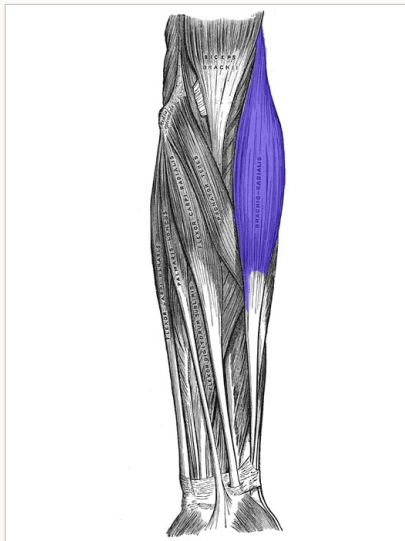
Brachialis



ORIGIN	Distal anterior humerus
INSERTION	Coronoid process of the ulna
ACTION	Elbow flexion

IN CALISTHENICS

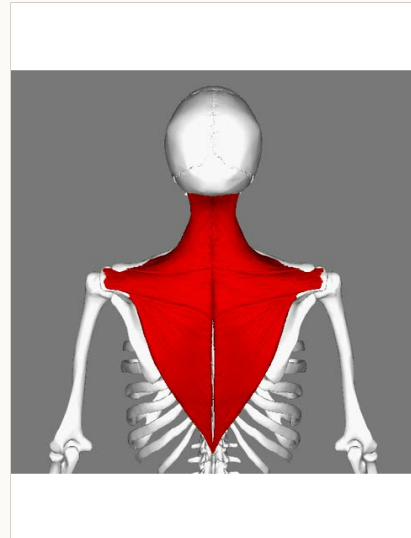
The strongest pure elbow flexor, unaffected by forearm rotation. It is what pulls a neutral-grip or false-grip pull.

Brachioradialis

ORIGIN	Lateral supracondylar ridge of the humerus
INSERTION	Styloid process of the radius
ACTION	Elbow flexion in the neutral forearm position

IN CALISTHENICS

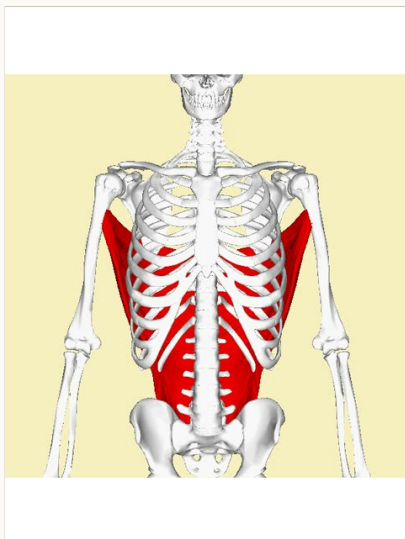
Dominates the hammer-grip pull and takes over when the biceps fatigues on high-volume ring work.

Trapezius

ORIGIN	Occipital bone, nuchal ligament, spinous processes C7–T12
INSERTION	Lateral clavicle, acromion, spine of the scapula
ACTION	Scapular elevation (upper), retraction (middle), depression and upward rotation (lower)

IN CALISTHENICS

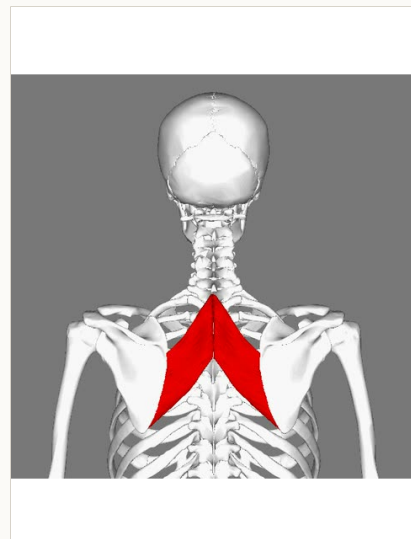
All three parts matter and they matter separately. Lower traps upward-rotate for the handstand; middle traps retract for the row.

2.4 Back**Latissimus dorsi**

ORIGIN	Spinous processes T7–L5, thoracolumbar fascia, iliac crest, ribs 9–12
INSERTION	Intertubercular groove of the humerus
ACTION	Shoulder adduction, extension, internal rotation

IN CALISTHENICS

The engine of the pull-up and the muscle that holds a front lever. Its attachment on the pelvis is why a front lever collapses when the core lets go.

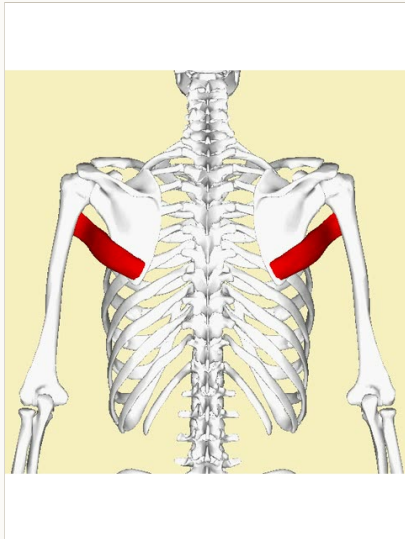
Rhomboid major and minor

ORIGIN	Spinous processes C7–T5
INSERTION	Medial border of the scapula
ACTION	Scapular retraction, elevation, downward rotation

IN CALISTHENICS

Retract and set the scapula at the top of a row. Weak rhomboids show up as a shoulder that shrugs instead of pulling.

Teres major

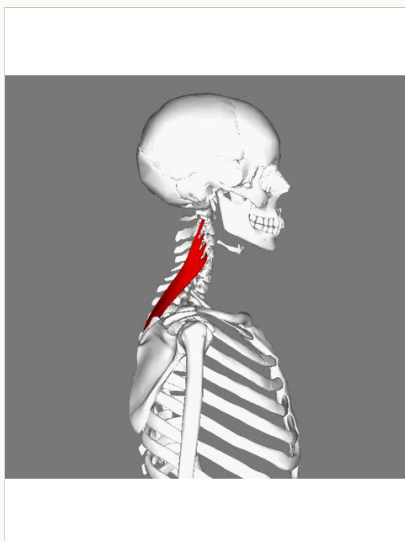


ORIGIN	Inferior angle of the scapula
INSERTION	Medial lip of the intertubercular groove
ACTION	Shoulder adduction, extension, internal rotation

IN CALISTHENICS

Works alongside latissimus dorsi in every vertical pull; often called the lat's little helper.

Levator scapulae



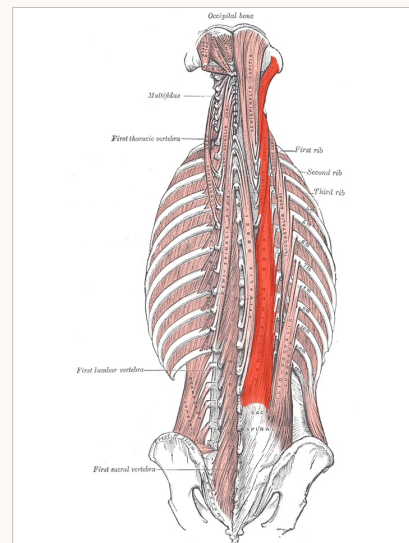
ORIGIN	Transverse processes C1–C4
INSERTION	Superior medial border of the scapula
ACTION	Scapular elevation, downward rotation

IN CALISTHENICS

Overactive in athletes who shrug into a hang instead of hanging from a depressed scapula.

2.5 Core

Erector spinae

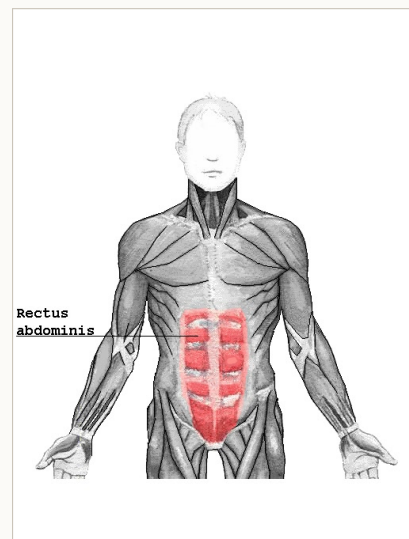


ORIGIN	Sacrum, iliac crest, spinous processes of the lumbar vertebrae
INSERTION	Ribs, transverse and spinous processes, mastoid process
ACTION	Spinal extension, lateral flexion

IN CALISTHENICS

Holds the bridge and the back lever. Trains isometrically in almost every calisthenics hold and rarely needs isolation work.

Rectus abdominis

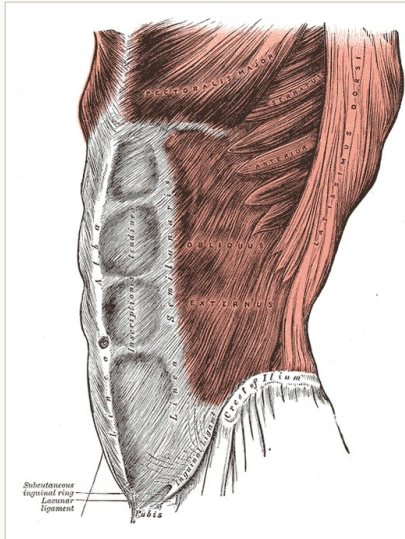


ORIGIN	Pubic crest and symphysis
INSERTION	Xiphoid process, costal cartilages 5–7
ACTION	Trunk flexion, posterior pelvic tilt

IN CALISTHENICS

The hollow body is a rectus abdominis endurance position, and the hollow body is the prerequisite for the L-sit, the front lever and a straight handstand.

External oblique

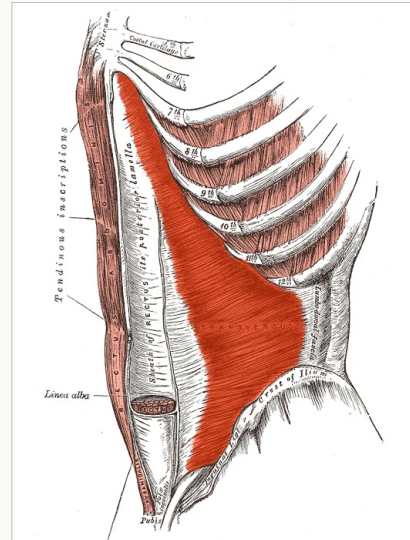


ORIGIN	Ribs 5–12, external surface
INSERTION	Iliac crest, linea alba
ACTION	Trunk flexion, contralateral rotation, lateral flexion

IN CALISTHENICS

Resists the trunk twisting open in a human flag or a one-arm push-up.

Transversus abdominis

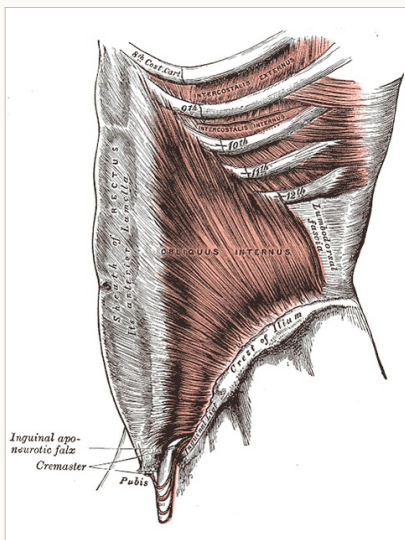


ORIGIN	Iliac crest, inguinal ligament, thoracolumbar fascia, costal cartilages 7–12
INSERTION	Linea alba, pubic crest
ACTION	Compresses the abdomen; raises intra-abdominal pressure

IN CALISTHENICS

Creates the pressure that lets the spine stay rigid under a dragon flag. Cannot be seen, cannot be skipped.

Internal oblique

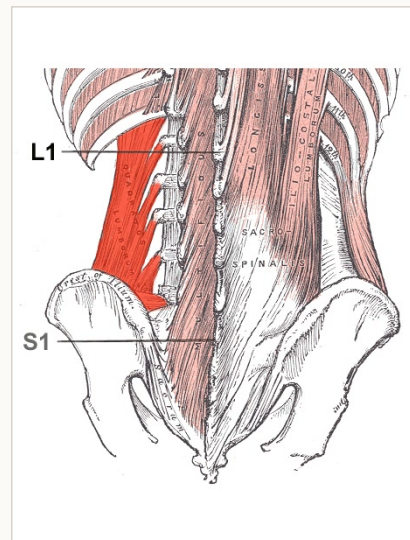


ORIGIN	Thoracolumbar fascia, iliac crest, inguinal ligament
INSERTION	Ribs 10–12, linea alba
ACTION	Trunk flexion, ipsilateral rotation, lateral flexion

IN CALISTHENICS

Pairs with the opposite external oblique. Anti-rotation, not rotation, is what calisthenics asks of it.

Quadratus lumborum



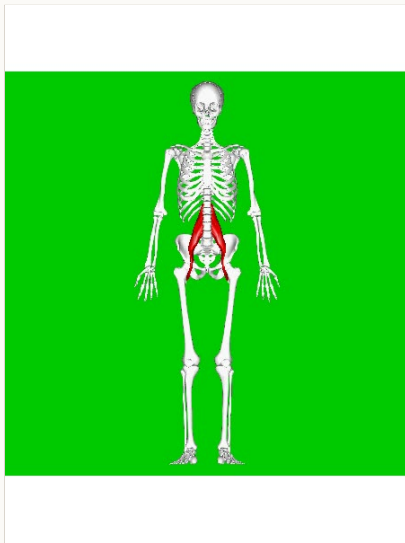
ORIGIN	Iliac crest, iliolumbar ligament
INSERTION	Rib 12, transverse processes L1–L4
ACTION	Lateral flexion of the trunk; stabilises rib 12

IN CALISTHENICS

The muscle that holds the bottom side of a human flag, and the one that cramps first when it is not ready.

2.6 Hips

Psoas major

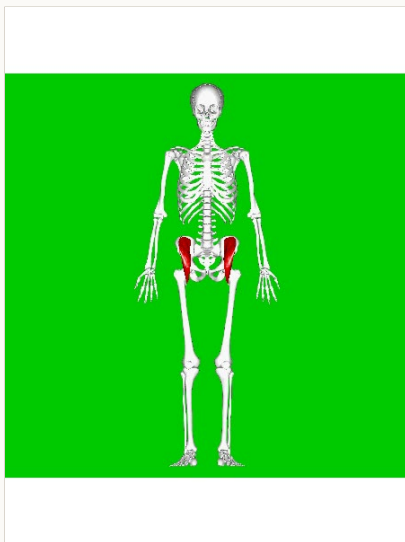


ORIGIN	Transverse processes and bodies T12–L5
INSERTION	Lesser trochanter of the femur
ACTION	Hip flexion, external rotation; lumbar stabilisation

IN CALISTHENICS

Holds the legs up in an L-sit and a V-sit. Compression strength, not hamstring flexibility, is usually what limits the V-sit.

Iliacus

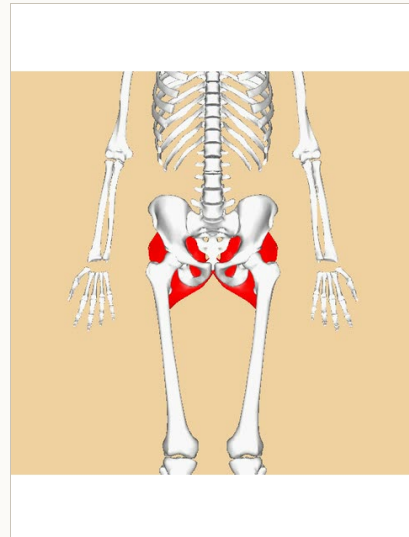


ORIGIN	Iliac fossa
INSERTION	Lesser trochanter of the femur, with psoas major
ACTION	Hip flexion

IN CALISTHENICS

With psoas major it forms iliopsoas, the deepest and strongest hip flexor. Trains directly in the toes-to-bar.

Gluteus maximus

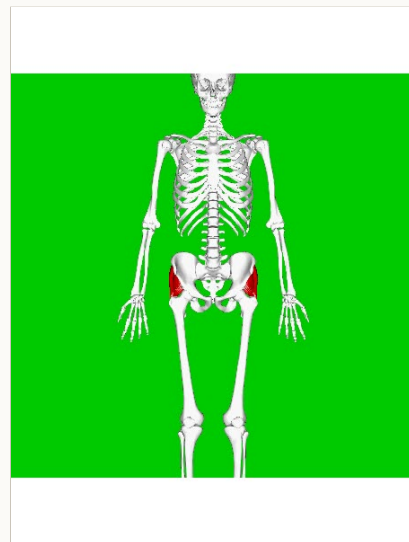


ORIGIN	Posterior ilium, sacrum, coccyx, sacrotuberous ligament
INSERTION	Iliotibial tract, gluteal tuberosity of the femur
ACTION	Hip extension, external rotation, abduction (upper fibres)

IN CALISTHENICS

Squeezing it is the single fastest fix for a banana handstand: hip extension pulls the pelvis into a posterior tilt and stacks the line.

Gluteus medius

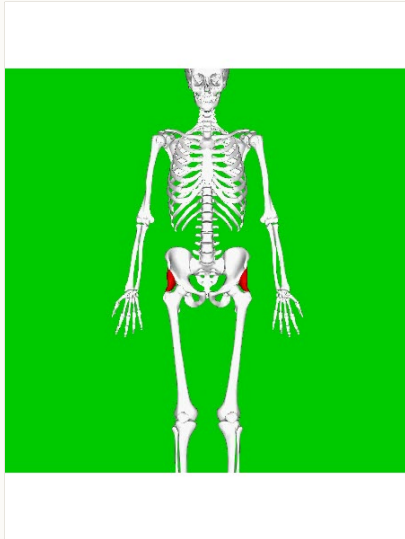


ORIGIN	External surface of the ilium
INSERTION	Greater trochanter of the femur
ACTION	Hip abduction; stabilises the pelvis in single-leg stance

IN CALISTHENICS

Prevents the standing hip dropping in a pistol squat. Its weakness reads as a knee that dives inward.

Gluteus minimus

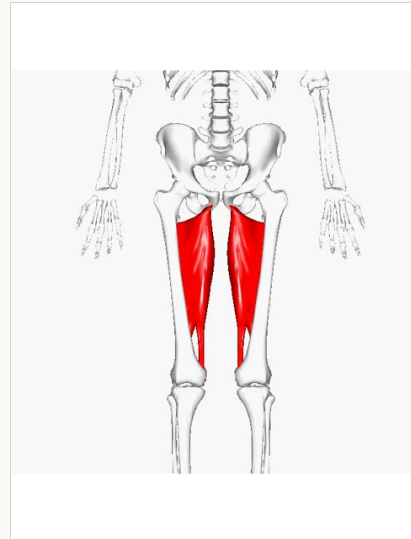


ORIGIN	External surface of the ilium, below gluteus medius
INSERTION	Greater trochanter of the femur
ACTION	Hip abduction, internal rotation

IN CALISTHENICS

Deep pelvic stabiliser working under gluteus medius through every single-leg movement.

Adductor magnus

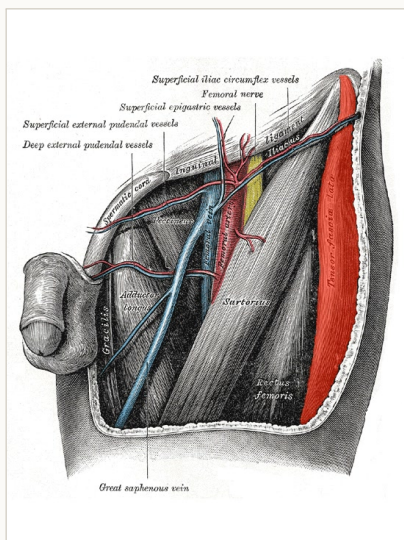


ORIGIN	Inferior pubic ramus, ischial tuberosity
INSERTION	Linea aspera and adductor tubercle of the femur
ACTION	Hip adduction; extension (posterior fibres)

IN CALISTHENICS

The tissue that must lengthen for a side split, and the one that must contract to hold the legs together in a straight-body front lever.

Tensor fasciae latae



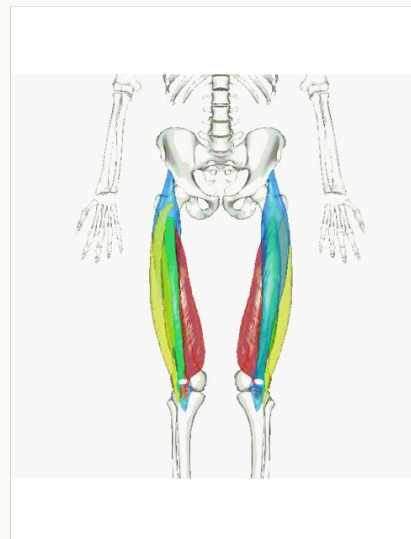
ORIGIN	Anterior superior iliac spine
INSERTION	Iliotibial tract
ACTION	Hip flexion, abduction, internal rotation

IN CALISTHENICS

Takes over abduction when gluteus medius is weak, and the iliotibial band complains about it.

2.7 Legs

Quadriceps femoris

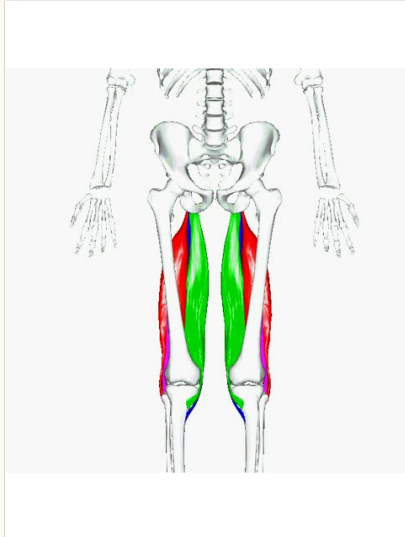


ORIGIN	Anterior inferior iliac spine (rectus femoris); femoral shaft (three vasti)
INSERTION	Tibial tuberosity via the patellar ligament
ACTION	Knee extension; hip flexion (rectus femoris)

IN CALISTHENICS

Pistol and dragon squats load it through a range most gym lifters never visit. Rectus femoris crosses two joints, which is why the reverse nordic bites so hard.

Hamstrings

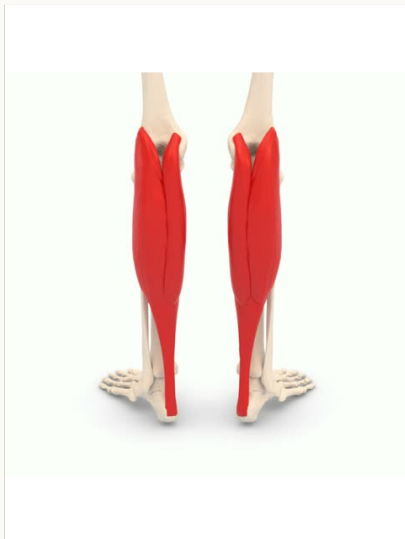


ORIGIN	Ischial tuberosity (all); linea aspera (biceps femoris short head)
INSERTION	Head of the fibula, medial tibia
ACTION	Knee flexion, hip extension

IN CALISTHENICS

Actively shortens to hold the legs down in a bridge and passively lengthens in a pancake. Both qualities are trainable and neither transfers to the other.

Gastrocnemius



ORIGIN	Femoral condyles
INSERTION	Calcaneus via the Achilles tendon
ACTION	Plantar flexion; assists knee flexion

IN CALISTHENICS

Points the toes. A pointed foot is what turns a correct front lever into a good-looking one, and judges score it.

Soleus

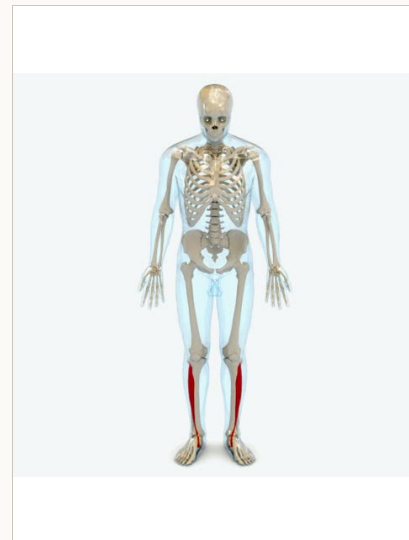


ORIGIN	Posterior tibia and fibula
INSERTION	Calcaneus via the Achilles tendon
ACTION	Plantar flexion

IN CALISTHENICS

Works independently of knee angle, so it carries the load in the deep bottom of a pistol squat where gastrocnemius is slack.

Tibialis anterior



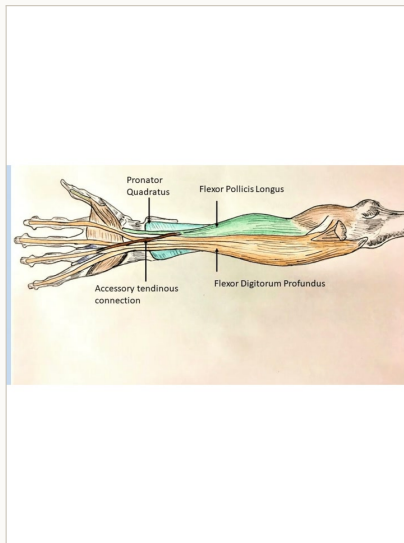
ORIGIN	Lateral condyle and proximal shaft of the tibia
INSERTION	Medial cuneiform, first metatarsal
ACTION	Dorsiflexion, foot inversion

IN CALISTHENICS

Dorsiflexion range decides how far the knee can travel forward, and that decides whether a pistol squat is possible at all.

2.8 Forearms

Forearm flexors

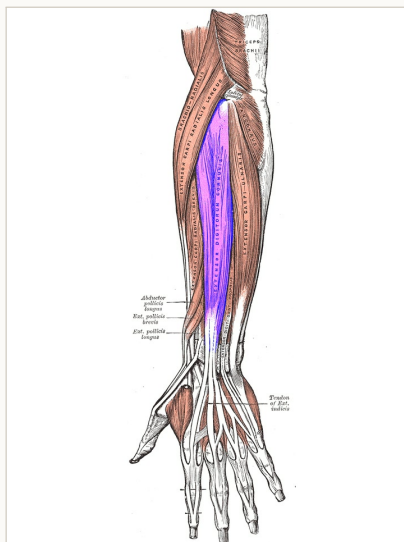


ORIGIN	Medial epicondyle of the humerus, anterior radius and ulna
INSERTION	Carpals, metacarpals, phalanges
ACTION	Wrist and finger flexion

IN CALISTHENICS

Grip is the first thing to fail on high-volume bar work and the last thing most programmes train on purpose.

Forearm extensors



ORIGIN	Lateral epicondyle of the humerus, posterior radius and ulna
INSERTION	Carpals, metacarpals, phalanges
ACTION	Wrist and finger extension

IN CALISTHENICS

Loaded in compression during handstands. Neglecting them is the shortest route to wrist pain on the floor.

Part II

The Skills

Chapter 3

The catalogue

Forty skills, ordered by the level at which most athletes can first hold them. The level is a rough guide to difficulty, not a schedule: nobody trains all six beginner skills before touching a basic one, and several extreme skills are reachable long before others at the same level if you specialise.

How to read an entry

Prerequisite

The skill immediately below it. Meet that standard first.

Standard

What owning this skill means, objectively. This is the gate.

Prime movers

The muscles producing the force. Cross-referenced to Part I.

Assisting

Muscles contributing meaningfully but not driving the movement.

Execution

The cues that make the difference between the movement and its imitation.

Common faults

What goes wrong, and what it usually means when it does.

Progression

An ordered path. Each step is a skill in its own right.

PREREQUISITES ARE A GRAPH, NOT A LADDER

Some skills have two prerequisites and some have none. The coverage matrix on the following page shows which muscle groups each skill actually drives, which is the fastest way to spot that a programme is all push and no hinge.

Coverage matrix. ■ prime mover □ assisting
 A programme that never fills a column has a hole in it.

	Chest	Shoulders	Arms	Back	Core	Hips	Legs	Forearms
BEGINNER								
Passive Hang				□				■
Support Hold	■	■	■	□	□			
Hollow Body Hold					■	□		
Squats					□	■	■	
Push Ups	■	■	■		□	□		
Row		□	□	■				
BASIC								
Pull Ups			■	■				□
Crow Pose	■	□	■		□	□		■
Dips	■	□	■	□				
Toes To Bar				□	■		□	□
Skin The Cat	■	■		■	□			
Reverse Nordic					□	□	■	
Pike Push Ups	□	■	■	□				
INTERMEDIATE								
L-Sit	□		□	□	■	■	■	
RTO Ring Support Hold	□	■	■					
Archer Push Ups	■	□	■		□			
Pistol Squats						■	■	
Bulgarian Push Ups	■	■	□		□			
One Arm Push Ups	■	□	■		□			
Weighted Dips	■	□	■	□				
Bridge Hold	□	□			■	■	□	
Archer Pull Ups			■	■	□			□
Bulgarian Dips	■	□	■					
Pancake					□	■	■	
ADVANCED								
Dragon Squats						■	■	
Ring Muscle Ups	■		■	■				□
Handstand	■	■	□	■	□	□		□
Dragon Flag				□	■	□		
Human Flag		■	□	■	■	□		□
Bar Muscle Ups	■		■	■	□			
Back Lever	■	■	□	■	□	□		
EXTREME								
Front Lever			□	■	■	□		
Handstand Push Ups	□	■	■	□				□
One Arm Chin Up			■	■	□			□
Side Split						■	□	
V-Sit	□		□		■	■	■	
Press Handstand	■	■	□	□	□	■		
Back Lever Pulls	□	■		■	□	□		
Front Lever Pulls			□	■	■	□		
Planche	■	■	□		□	□		□

3.1 Beginner

Passive Hang

BEGINNER

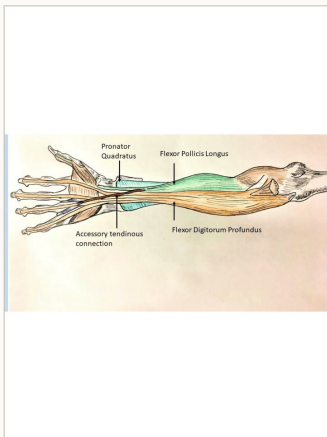


PREREQUISITE None

STANDARD 60 seconds unbroken, feet clear of the floor, breathing through the nose.

PRIME MOVERS **FOREARM FLEXORS**

ASSISTING Trapezius, Levator scapulae, Latissimus dorsi



Prime mover: *Forearm flexors*

Execution

- Let the shoulders travel up toward the ears; this one is meant to be passive.
- Ribs down, no arch. The hang decompresses the spine, it does not extend it.
- Breathe out slowly. Grip fails faster when you brace against a held breath.
- The lats and lower traps stay quiet here; that is what makes it passive. Step 4 of the progression is where they switch on.

Common faults

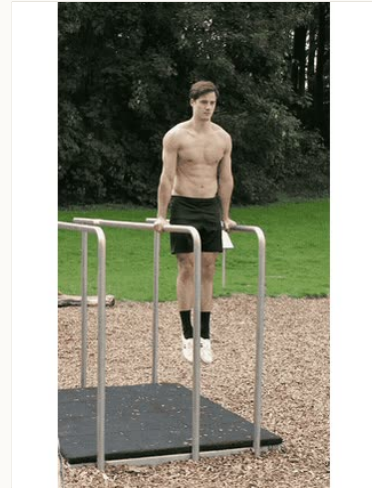
- Death-gripping the bar from the first second, which burns the forearms before the tissue adapts.
- Kicking or swinging to steal time.
- Chasing the 60 seconds in one session instead of accumulating it across five.

Progression

1. Feet-supported hang, taking half your weight through the floor.
2. Single 20-second hangs, five sets, two minutes rest.
3. One unbroken 60-second hang.
4. Active hang: from the passive position, pull the shoulders down without bending the elbows.

Support Hold

BEGINNER

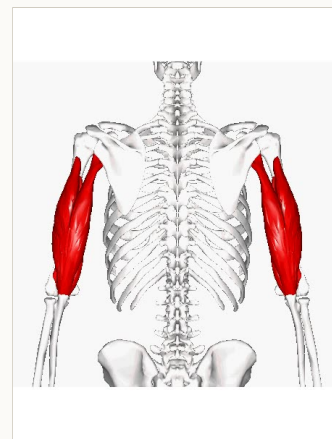


PREREQUISITE None

STANDARD 60 seconds on parallel bars, elbows locked, shoulders depressed, no shrug.

PRIME MOVERS **TRICEPS BRACHII, PECTORALIS MAJOR, ANTERIOR DELTOID**

ASSISTING Trapezius, Serratus anterior, Rectus abdominis



Prime mover: *Triceps brachii*

Execution

- Push the floor away. The shoulders should be as far from the ears as you can get them.
- Squeeze the glutes and hollow slightly; the legs hang under you, not behind.
- Lock the elbows completely. A soft elbow is a triceps endurance test, not a support hold.

Common faults

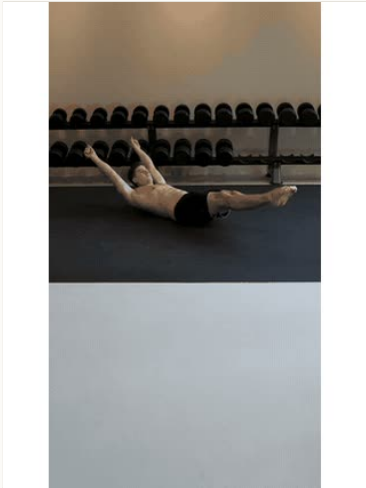
- Shrugged shoulders, which is the position that makes dips hurt later.
- Piked hips with legs drifting forward.
- Bars set too narrow, forcing the elbows out.

Progression

1. Support on a low bar with toes touching down.
2. 3 x 20 seconds with strict shoulder depression.
3. 60 seconds unbroken.
4. Progress to rings, which adds an order of magnitude of stability demand.

Hollow Body Hold

BEGINNER

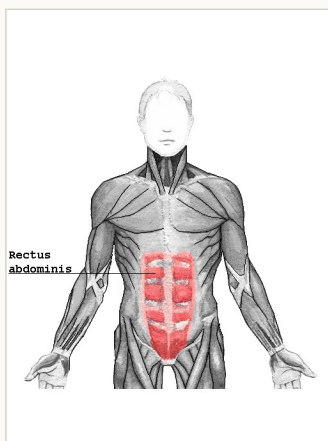


PREREQUISITE None

STANDARD 60 seconds with the lumbar spine flat on the floor, arms overhead, legs straight and low.

PRIME MOVERS **RECTUS ABDOMINIS, TRANSVERSUS ABDOMINIS**

ASSISTING External oblique, Internal oblique, Psoas major



Prime mover: *Rectus abdominis*

Execution

- Press the low back into the floor first, then lower the legs only as far as that contact survives.
- Arms by the ears, not in front of the face.
- Exhale hard and pull the ribs toward the pelvis.

Common faults

- A gap under the low back, which converts the hold into a hip flexor exercise and a lumbar problem.
- Chin tucked to the chest, straining the neck.
- Legs so low that the position breaks in the first ten seconds.

Progression

1. Tuck hollow: knees to chest, arms at the sides.
2. One leg extended at a time.
3. Full hollow with arms at the sides.
4. Full hollow with arms overhead.
5. Hollow body rocks, which teach the position to hold under motion.

Squats

BEGINNER

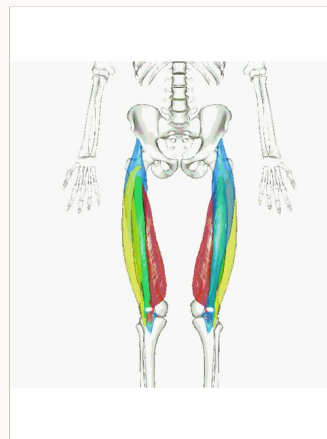


PREREQUISITE None

STANDARD 30 controlled repetitions, hip crease below the knee, heels down throughout.

PRIME MOVERS **QUADRICEPS FEMORIS, GLUTEUS MAXIMUS**

ASSISTING Hamstrings, Erector spinae, Soleus, Gluteus medius



Prime mover: *Quadriceps femoris*

Execution

- Screw the feet into the floor to create external rotation torque at the hip.
- Descend for three seconds. Depth is earned slowly.
- Knees track over the second toe, and are allowed to pass the toes.

Common faults

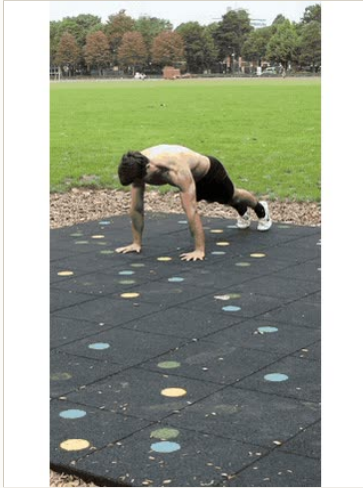
- Heels lifting, which is almost always an ankle dorsiflexion limit rather than weakness.
- Knees collapsing inward at the bottom.
- Rushing to depth and bouncing out of it.

Progression

1. Box squat to a chair.
2. Bodyweight squat to full depth.
3. Tempo squat: 3 seconds down, 2 second pause, up.
4. Add a pause at the bottom, then move toward the pistol progression.

Push Ups

BEGINNER

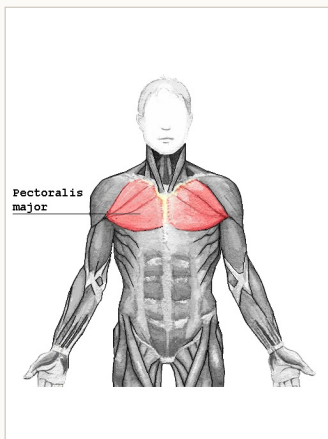


PREREQUISITE None

STANDARD 20 strict repetitions, chest to fist height, body in one line from heel to head.

PRIME MOVERS **PECTORALIS MAJOR, TRICEPS BRACHII, ANTERIOR DELTOID**

ASSISTING Serratus anterior, Rectus abdominis, Gluteus maximus



Prime mover: *Pectoralis major*

Execution

- Elbows at roughly 45 degrees to the torso, not flared to 90.
- Protract at the top: push the upper back toward the ceiling. That is the serratus doing its job.
- Squeeze the glutes so the hips do not sag.

Common faults

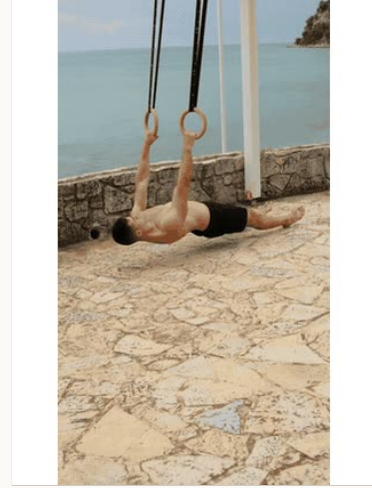
- Hips leading or sagging, turning it into a lumbar exercise.
- Head reaching for the floor ahead of the chest.
- Partial range at the bottom once fatigue arrives.

Progression

1. Incline push-up against a wall, then a bench.
2. Knee push-up with a rigid torso.
3. Full push-up.
4. Tempo push-up, 3 seconds down, 1 second pause at the bottom.

Row

BEGINNER



PREREQUISITE None

STANDARD 20 repetitions with the body horizontal, chest touching the bar or rings, no hip sag.

PRIME MOVERS **LATISSIMUS DORSI, RHOMBOID MAJOR AND MINOR, TRAPEZIUS**

ASSISTING Biceps brachii, Brachialis, Posterior deltoid



Prime mover: *Latissimus dorsi*

Execution

- Start each rep from a fully extended, protracted scapula and finish fully retracted.
- Pull the elbows past the ribs, not the hands to the chest.
- Hollow the body and hold it; the row is a plank that moves.

Common faults

- Hips dropping as fatigue arrives.
- Shrugging the shoulders to the ears at the top.
- Pulling with the arms while the shoulder blades never move.

Progression

1. Steep incline row, feet under the body.
2. Horizontal row, feet on the floor.
3. Feet elevated to the same height as the anchor.
4. Rings with a false grip, preparing the muscle-up.

3.2 Basic

Pull Ups

BASIC

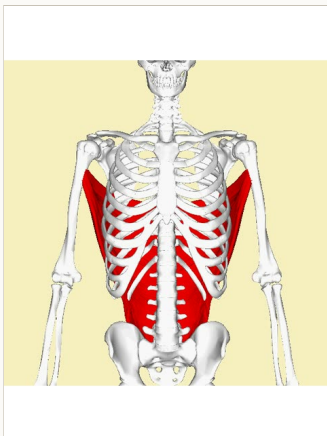


PREREQUISITE Passive Hang

STANDARD 10 strict repetitions from a dead hang, chin clearly over the bar, no kip.

PRIME MOVERS **LATISSIMUS DORSI**, **BICEPS BRACHII**, **BRACHIALIS**

ASSISTING Trapezius, Rhomboid major and minor, Teres major, Forearm flexors



Prime mover: *Latissimus dorsi*

Execution

- Begin with a scapular pull: depress the shoulders before the elbows bend.
- Drive the elbows down and back toward the floor.
- Finish every rep at a full dead hang. Half a bottom is half a rep.

Common faults

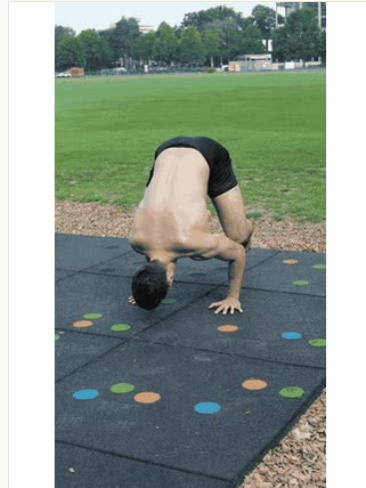
- Kipping to make up the last two reps.
- Never reaching full extension at the bottom, which is where the tissue actually adapts.
- Chin craned over the bar while the chest stays low.

Progression

1. Scapular pull-ups: 3 x 8, elbows straight.
2. Negative pull-ups: jump to the top, lower for 5 seconds.
3. Band-assisted pull-ups.
4. Full pull-up, then build to 10.
5. Weighted pull-ups once 10 are clean.

Crow Pose

BASIC

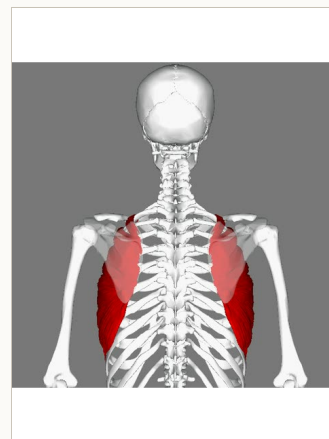


PREREQUISITE None

STANDARD 30 seconds balanced, knees resting on the upper arms, feet off the floor.

PRIME MOVERS **SERRATUS ANTERIOR**, **TRICEPS BRACHII**, **FOREARM FLEXORS**

ASSISTING Rectus abdominis, Anterior deltoid, Psoas major



Prime mover: *Serratus anterior*

Execution

- Grip the floor with the fingertips; balance is corrected at the hands, not the shoulders.
- Round the upper back and look slightly forward, not straight down.
- Knees high on the triceps, close to the armpit, not sliding toward the elbow.

Common faults

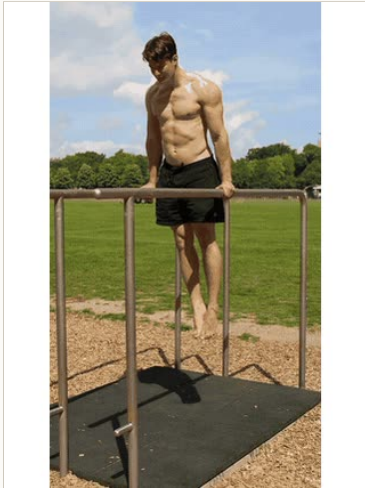
- Elbows flaring wide, which drops the platform out from under the knees.
- Looking backward between the hands, which pitches the weight behind the base.
- Fear of the face-plant producing a half-committed lean.

Progression

1. Squat with hands down, one foot lifted.
2. Both feet lifted for 3 seconds.
3. 30-second hold.
4. Crow to headstand, then crow to handstand as a press progression.

Dips

BASIC

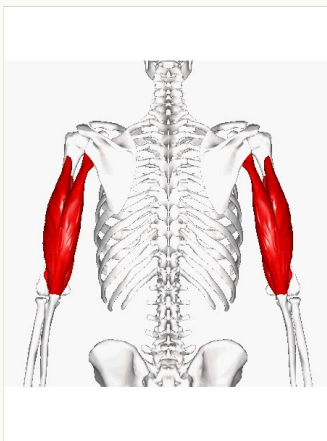


PREREQUISITE Support Hold

STANDARD 10 strict repetitions to the shoulder-below-elbow depth, full lockout at the top.

PRIME MOVERS **TRICEPS BRACHII, PECTORALIS MAJOR**

ASSISTING Anterior deltoid, Rhomboid major and minor, Serratus anterior



Prime mover: *Triceps brachii*

Execution

- Depress the shoulders before descending, and hold that depression at the bottom.
- A slight forward lean loads the chest; vertical loads the triceps. Pick one on purpose.
- Lock out completely at the top without shrugging.

Common faults

- Sinking into a shrug at the bottom, which is the position that irritates the shoulder.
- Quarter-depth reps.
- Bouncing out of the bottom on tendon rather than muscle.

Progression

1. Bench dip with feet on the floor.
2. Band-assisted parallel bar dip.
3. Negative dips, 5 seconds down.
4. Full dips, build to 10.
5. Ring dips, then weighted.

Toes To Bar

BASIC

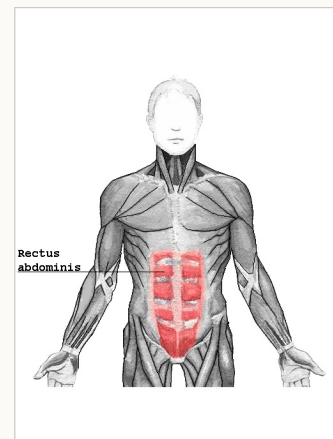


PREREQUISITE None

STANDARD 10 strict repetitions, toes touching the bar, legs straight, no swing.

PRIME MOVERS **RECTUS ABDOMINIS, PSOAS MAJOR, ILIACUS**

ASSISTING Latissimus dorsi, Forearm flexors, Quadriceps femoris



Prime mover: *Rectus abdominis*

Execution

- Start from an active hang with the lats engaged, not a passive dangle.
- Initiate with a posterior pelvic tilt, then lift the legs.
- Lower under control; the negative is where the compression strength is built.

Common faults

- Swinging and using momentum, which trains timing rather than the abdominals.
- Bending the knees to reach the bar.
- Dropping the legs and letting the shoulders swing back.

Progression

1. Hanging knee raises.
2. Hanging leg raises to 90 degrees.
3. Hanging leg raises above 90.
4. Strict toes to bar.

Skin The Cat

BASIC

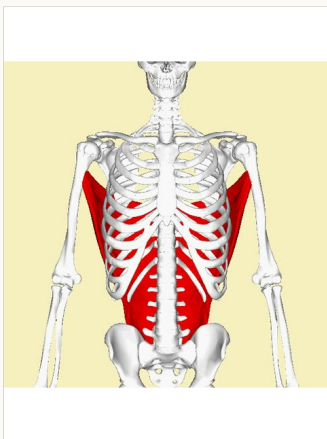


PREREQUISITE None

STANDARD 5 controlled repetitions through full shoulder extension and back, no drop.

PRIME MOVERS **LATISSIMUS DORSI, POSTERIOR DELTOID, PECTORALIS MAJOR**

ASSISTING Rectus abdominis, Teres major, Infraspinatus



Prime mover: *Latissimus dorsi*

Execution

- Move slowly. This is a shoulder mobility drill under load, and load punishes speed.
- Keep the arms straight throughout.
- Exhale on the way through the bottom.

Common faults

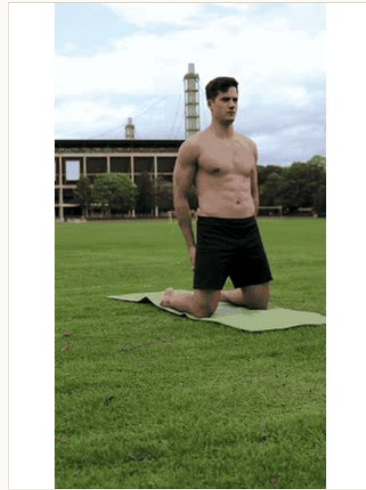
- Dropping through the bottom position instead of lowering into it.
- Attempting it before the shoulder has the passive range.
- Rings set too low, leaving no room for the legs.

Progression

1. German hang from a low bar with feet supported.
2. Tuck skin the cat, knees to chest.
3. Straddle skin the cat.
4. Full straight-leg skin the cat.

Reverse Nordic

BASIC

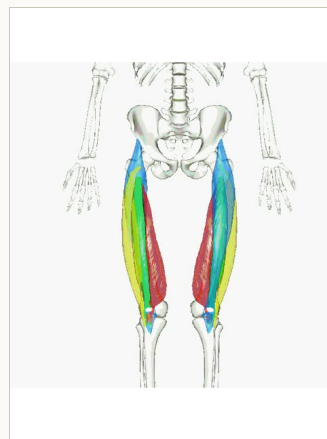


PREREQUISITE None

STANDARD 8 controlled repetitions leaning to 45 degrees, hips extended throughout.

PRIME MOVERS **QUADRICEPS FEMORIS**

ASSISTING Psoas major, Rectus abdominis, Tibialis anterior



Prime mover: *Quadriceps femoris*

Execution

- Hips stay open. The moment they hinge, the quadriceps stop being loaded.
- Squeeze the glutes to hold the pelvis in neutral.
- Lower for 4 seconds; the eccentric is the whole point.

Common faults

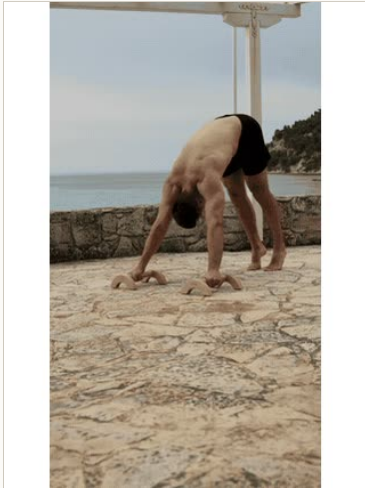
- Breaking at the hip so the torso and thigh fold together.
- Going too deep too early and finding the bottom with the knees.
- Arching the low back to fake the range.

Progression

1. Small lean with hands on the thighs.
2. Lean to 30 degrees.
3. Lean to 45 degrees under control.
4. Full reverse nordic to the floor.

Pike Push Ups

BASIC

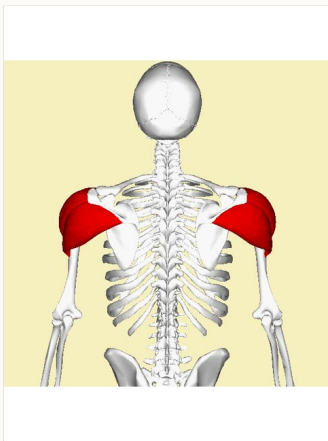


PREREQUISITE Push Ups

STANDARD 10 repetitions, head touching the floor ahead of the hands, hips stacked high.

PRIME MOVERS **ANTERIOR DELTOID, TRICEPS BRACHII**

ASSISTING Serratus anterior, Trapezius, Pectoralis major



Prime mover: *Anterior deltoid*

Execution

- Walk the feet in until the torso is close to vertical; the closer to vertical, the closer to a handstand push-up.
- Head travels to a point in front of the hands, forming a triangle.
- Elbows track forward and slightly out, not flared to the sides.

Common faults

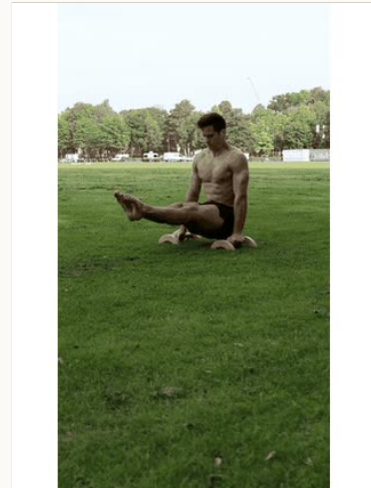
- Hips too low, converting it into a decline push-up.
- Head going straight down between the hands, which shortens the range.
- Feet slipping as the hips rise.

Progression

1. Pike push-up with feet on the floor.
2. Feet on a low box.
3. Feet on a bench, torso near vertical.
4. Wall-supported handstand push-up.

L-Sit

INTERMEDIATE

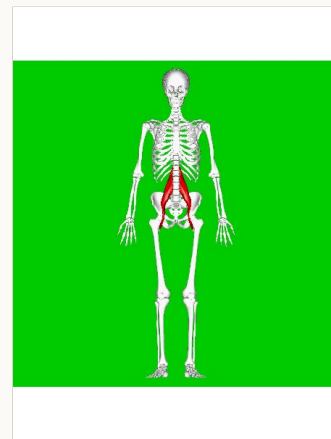


PREREQUISITE Hollow Body Hold

STANDARD 20 seconds on parallelles, legs straight and horizontal or above, shoulders depressed.

PRIME MOVERS **PSOAS MAJOR, RECTUS ABDOMINIS, QUADRICEPS FEMORIS**

ASSISTING Triceps brachii, Latissimus dorsi, Serratus anterior



Prime mover: *Psoas major*

Execution

- Depress the shoulders first. Most failed L-sits are shoulder depression failures, not core failures.
- Push the hands down hard and lean very slightly back.
- Point the toes and squeeze the quadriceps to lock the knees.

Common faults

- Shrugged shoulders, which makes the legs impossible to lift.
- Bent knees hiding a hamstring flexibility limit.
- Holding the breath; 20 seconds is long enough to need air.

Progression

1. Foot-supported L-sit, heels on the floor.
2. Tuck L-sit, 20 seconds.
3. One leg extended.
4. Full L-sit on parallelles, then on the floor, which is far harder.

3.3 Intermediate

RTO Ring Support Hold

INTERMEDIATE

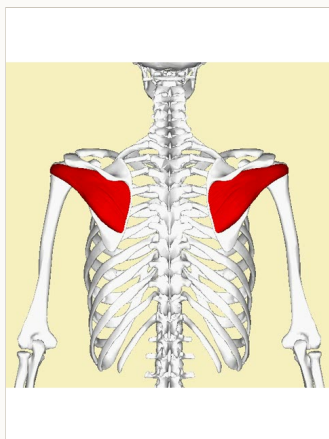


PREREQUISITE Support Hold

STANDARD 30 seconds with the rings turned fully out, elbows locked, shoulders depressed.

PRIME MOVERS **INFRASPINATUS, TERES MINOR, TRICEPS BRACHII**

ASSISTING Pectoralis major, Lateral deltoid, Serratus anterior



Prime mover: *Infraspinatus*

Execution

- Turn the thumbs out and hold them there; the rings will fight to rotate back in.
- Press down and slightly in, keeping the rings against the hips.
- Do not let the elbows unlock, even by a degree.

Common faults

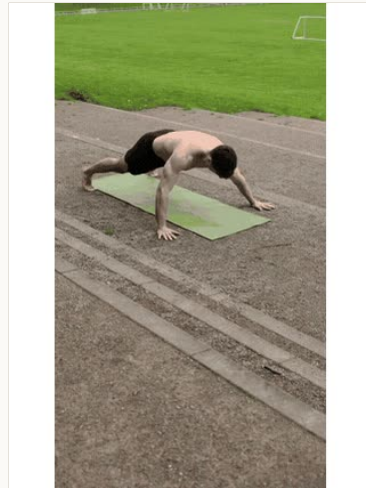
- Partial turnout that quietly reverts over the hold.
- Rings drifting wide, which is the position that strains the biceps tendon.
- Attempting RTO before a clean 60-second parallel bar support.

Progression

1. Ring support with rings neutral, 30 seconds.
2. Partial turnout, 15 seconds.
3. Full turnout, 3 x 10 seconds.
4. 30 seconds unbroken.

Archer Push Ups

INTERMEDIATE

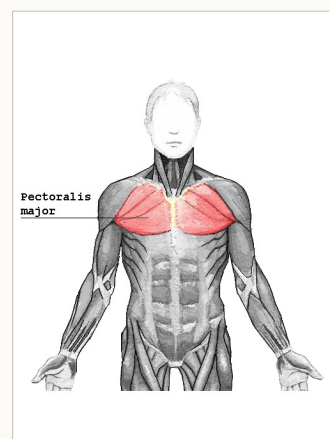


PREREQUISITE Push Ups

STANDARD 8 repetitions per side, extended arm straight, chest to the working hand.

PRIME MOVERS **PECTORALIS MAJOR, TRICEPS BRACHII**

ASSISTING Anterior deltoid, External oblique, Serratus anterior



Prime mover: *Pectoralis major*

Execution

- The extended arm is a kickstand, not a pressing arm.
- Keep the hips square; the torso wants to rotate toward the working side.
- Chest touches beside the working hand, not between the hands.

Common faults

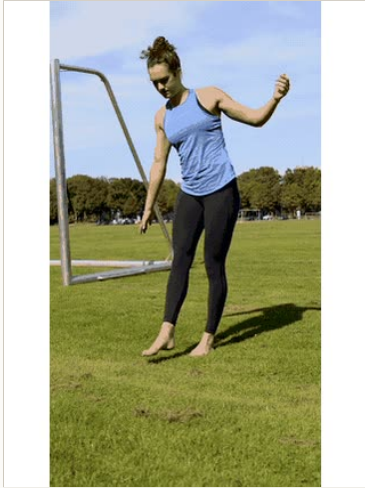
- Bending the extended arm and turning it into a wide push-up.
- Rotating the trunk to shorten the range.
- Hands too close together to create real asymmetry.

Progression

1. Wide push-ups with a slight weight shift.
2. Archer with the extended hand on a low box.
3. Full archer push-up.
4. Archer with the extended arm on fingertips, moving toward the one-arm.

Pistol Squats

INTERMEDIATE



PREREQUISITE Squats

STANDARD 5 repetitions per leg to full depth, free leg off the floor throughout, no hand support.

PRIME MOVERS **QUADRICEPS FEMORIS, GLUTEUS MAXIMUS**

ASSISTING Gluteus medius, Hamstrings, Tibialis anterior, Soleus



Prime mover: *Quadriceps femoris*

Execution

- Reach the arms forward as a counterweight.
- Keep the free heel off the floor from start to finish.
- Push the knee out; if it dives inward, the gluteus medius is the limit, not the quadriceps.

Common faults

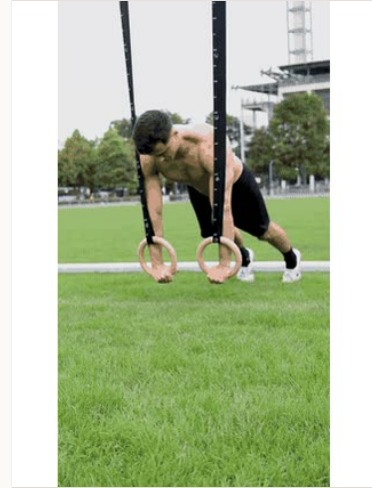
- Collapsing into the bottom instead of controlling it.
- Heel lifting, which is a dorsiflexion range problem.
- Free leg touching down to cheat the balance.

Progression

1. Box pistol to a high surface.
2. Pistol holding a support with one hand.
3. Negative pistol, 5 seconds down, stand with two legs.
4. Full pistol, then build to 5 per side.

Bulgarian Push Ups

INTERMEDIATE

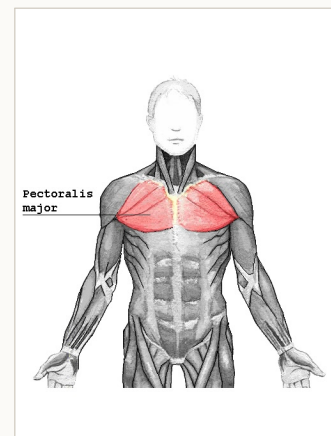


PREREQUISITE Push Ups

STANDARD 8 repetitions on rings with a wide, deep bottom position and a controlled turnout at the top.

PRIME MOVERS **PECTORALIS MAJOR, ANTERIOR DELTOID**

ASSISTING Triceps brachii, Serratus anterior, Rectus abdominis



Prime mover: *Pectoralis major*

Execution

- Let the rings travel wide at the bottom, then squeeze them back together.
- Keep the elbows soft but never collapsed.
- Hollow the body hard; the rings punish a sagging hip immediately.

Common faults

- Going too wide too soon, which loads the anterior shoulder capsule.
- Losing the hollow and arching.
- Rings set too high for the available strength.

Progression

1. Ring push-ups with rings neutral and close.
2. Small ring fly with feet on the floor.
3. Bulgarian push-up at partial width.
4. Full width, 8 repetitions.

One Arm Push Ups

INTERMEDIATE

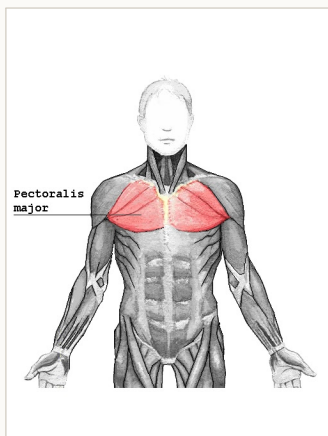


PREREQUISITE Archer Push Ups

STANDARD 3 repetitions per side, feet no wider than shoulder width, minimal trunk rotation.

PRIME MOVERS **PECTORALIS MAJOR, TRICEPS BRACHII**

ASSISTING External oblique, Internal oblique, Quadratus lumborum, Anterior deltoid



Prime mover: *Pectoralis major*

Execution

- Widen the feet only as much as you must; the stance width is the difficulty dial.
- Brace the obliques hard against rotation.
- Hand under the centre of the chest, not under the shoulder.

Common faults

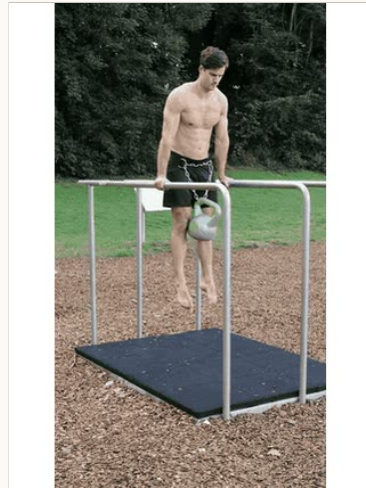
- Wide-stance rotation that turns it into a side press.
- Hips twisting toward the free arm.
- Skipping the archer progression and arriving with the shoulder unprepared.

Progression

1. Elevated one-arm push-up on a bench.
2. One-arm on a low box.
3. One-arm on the floor with wide feet.
4. Feet at shoulder width, 3 repetitions.

Weighted Dips

INTERMEDIATE

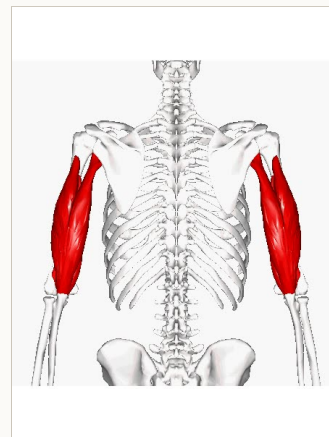


PREREQUISITE Dips

STANDARD 5 repetitions with 25 percent of bodyweight added, full depth and lockout.

PRIME MOVERS **TRICEPS BRACHII, PECTORALIS MAJOR**

ASSISTING Anterior deltoid, Rhomboid major and minor, Serratus anterior



Prime mover: *Triceps brachii*

Execution

- Add load only after 10 strict bodyweight dips are effortless.
- Keep the depth honest; weight tempts a shorter range.
- Control the descent. The eccentric with load is where tendons adapt, and where they get injured.

Common faults

- Adding weight to cover for a shallow range.
- Jumping load in large steps rather than 2.5 kg at a time.
- Ignoring elbow discomfort, which with added load rarely resolves on its own.

Progression

1. 10 strict bodyweight dips.
2. 10 percent bodyweight added, 5 reps.
3. 25 percent bodyweight, 5 reps.
4. 50 percent bodyweight for the ambitious, built over months.

Bridge Hold

INTERMEDIATE

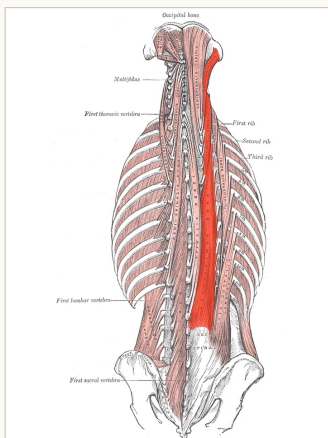


PREREQUISITE None

STANDARD 30 seconds with straight arms and legs, shoulders stacked over the hands.

PRIME MOVERS **ERECTOR SPINAE, GLUTEUS MAXIMUS**

ASSISTING Anterior deltoid, Hamstrings, Quadriceps femoris, Pectoralis major



Prime mover: *Erector spinae*

Execution

- Push the chest through toward the wall behind you.
- Extension should come from the thoracic spine and the hips, not only the lumbar.
- Squeeze the glutes; the bridge is a hip extension exercise that looks like a back exercise.

Common faults

- All the range coming from the low back, which is how bridges earn their bad reputation.
- Bent arms leaving the shoulders unstacked.
- Feet turned out and knees splayed.

Progression

1. Glute bridge with shoulders on the floor.
2. Table-top bridge.
3. Full bridge with bent arms.
4. Full bridge, straight arms and legs, 30 seconds.

Archer Pull Ups

INTERMEDIATE



PREREQUISITE Pull Ups

STANDARD 5 repetitions per side, extended arm straight, chin over the working hand.

PRIME MOVERS **LATISSIMUS DORSI, BICEPS BRACHII, BRACHIALIS**

ASSISTING Teres major, Rhomboid major and minor, External oblique, Forearm flexors



Prime mover: *Latissimus dorsi*

Execution

- The extended arm stays straight and provides almost nothing.
- Pull toward the working hand, not toward the middle of the bar.
- Keep the torso from rotating away.

Common faults

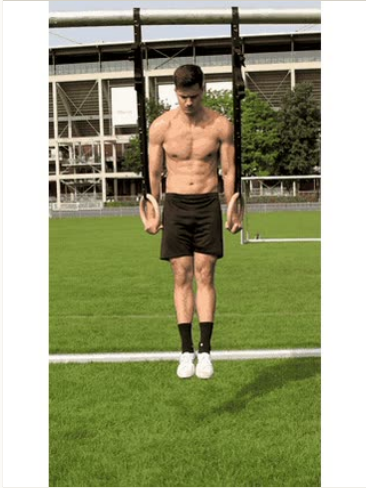
- Bending the support arm and splitting the load evenly.
- Pulling to the centre, which is just a wide pull-up.
- Losing the dead hang at the bottom.

Progression

1. Wide pull-ups.
2. Pull-up with a weight shift to one side.
3. Archer with the extended hand on a towel or ring.
4. Full archer, 5 per side, then move toward the one-arm chin.

Bulgarian Dips

INTERMEDIATE

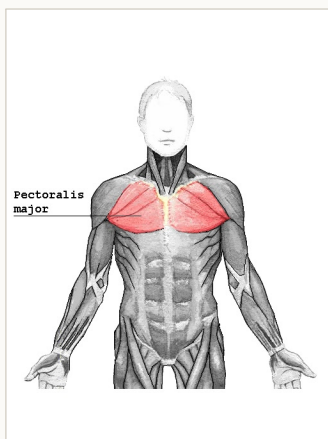


PREREQUISITE Dips

STANDARD 5 repetitions on rings, arms travelling wide at the bottom, turnout restored at the top.

PRIME MOVERS **PECTORALIS MAJOR, TRICEPS BRACHII**

ASSISTING Anterior deltoid, Infraspinatus, Serratus anterior



Prime mover: *Pectoralis major*

Execution

- Let the rings drift out under control, then pull them back to the hips.
- Maintain a hollow body; do not let the legs swing.
- Restore full turnout at every lockout.

Common faults

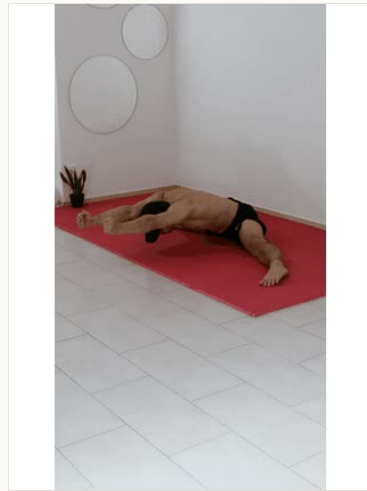
- Letting the rings fly wide without control, which strains the pectoral insertion.
- Skipping ring dips and going straight here.
- Losing shoulder depression at the bottom.

Progression

1. Strict ring dips with rings neutral.
2. Ring dips with turnout at the top.
3. Small-amplitude Bulgarian dip.
4. Full amplitude, 5 repetitions.

Pancake

INTERMEDIATE

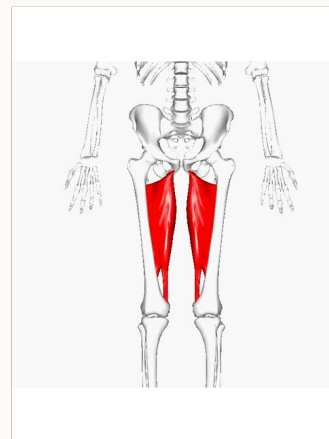


PREREQUISITE None

STANDARD Chest resting on the floor with legs straddled wide and knees facing the ceiling.

PRIME MOVERS **ADDUCTOR MAGNUS, HAMSTRINGS**

ASSISTING Erector spinae, Gluteus medius, Psoas major



Prime mover: *Adductor magnus*

Execution

- Rotate the pelvis forward first; the fold happens at the hip, not in the spine.
- Knees point at the ceiling throughout. If they roll in, narrow the straddle.
- Work actively: press the legs into the floor for 5 seconds, relax, gain a centimetre.

Common faults

- Rounding the back to get the chest lower, which trains nothing useful.
- Straddling wider than the hip can control.
- Passive stretching only; the range gained is not usable without active work.

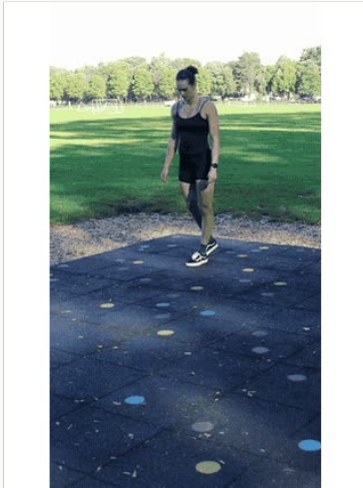
Progression

1. Seated straddle with hands forward, back straight.
2. Elevated pancake with the torso on a bolster.
3. Active pancake lifts: lift the chest off the floor and hold.
4. Full pancake, chest down, held for 60 seconds.

3.4 Advanced

Dragon Squats

ADVANCED

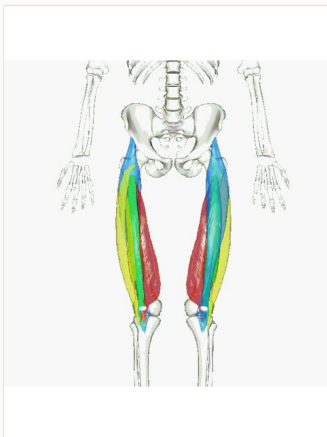


PREREQUISITE Pistol Squats

STANDARD 3 repetitions per side, free leg crossed behind and hovering, full depth.

PRIME MOVERS **QUADRICEPS FEMORIS, GLUTEUS MAXIMUS, GLUTEUS MEDIUS**

ASSISTING Hamstrings, Adductor magnus, Tibialis anterior



Prime mover: *Quadriceps femoris*

Execution

- The free leg threads behind and stays off the floor; that is the whole difficulty.
- Keep the standing knee tracking out over the toe under heavy rotational demand.
- Move slowly. Balance failures here happen fast.

Common faults

- Resting the free leg on the floor at the bottom.
- Standing hip collapsing inward.
- Attempting it before the pistol is genuinely comfortable.

Progression

1. Clean pistol squats, 5 per side.
2. Dragon squat to a box.
3. Dragon squat with a light hand support.
4. Full dragon squat, 3 per side.

Ring Muscle Ups

ADVANCED



PREREQUISITE Pull Ups, Dips

STANDARD 3 strict repetitions from a false grip, no kip, controlled transition.

PRIME MOVERS **LATISSIMUS DORSI, PECTORALIS MAJOR, TRICEPS BRACHII**

ASSISTING Biceps brachii, Brachialis, Rhomboid major and minor, Forearm flexors



Prime mover: *Latissimus dorsi*

Execution

- The false grip is not optional for a strict muscle-up. Build the wrist tolerance first.
- Pull the rings to the sternum, then drive the elbows back and rotate the wrists.
- The transition is a movement, not a moment; practise it separately.

Common faults

- Kipping through the transition, which hides the exact weakness that needs work.
- Losing the false grip halfway up.
- Insufficient dip strength, so the rep dies at the top.

Progression

1. False grip hangs, 3 x 20 seconds.
2. False grip pull-ups to the sternum.
3. Transition drills from a low ring with feet down.
4. Negative muscle-ups, 5 seconds through the transition.
5. Full strict muscle-up.

Handstand

ADVANCED

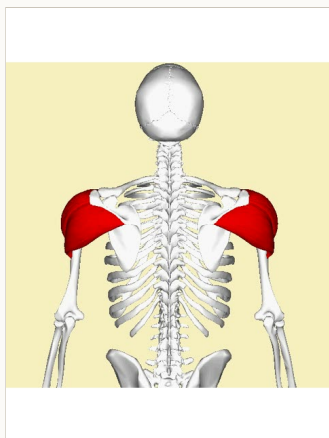


PREREQUISITE Hollow Body Hold

STANDARD 30 seconds freestanding, straight line from wrist to heel, no wall.

PRIME MOVERS **ANTERIOR DELTOID, SERRATUS ANTERIOR, TRAPEZIUS**

ASSISTING Triceps brachii, Forearm extensors, Gluteus maximus, Rectus abdominis



Prime mover: *Anterior deltoid*

Execution

- Push the floor away and reach tall; a compressed shoulder cannot stack.
- Posterior pelvic tilt and glutes on. That is what removes the banana.
- Balance with the fingers. Ankles correct nothing up here.

Common faults

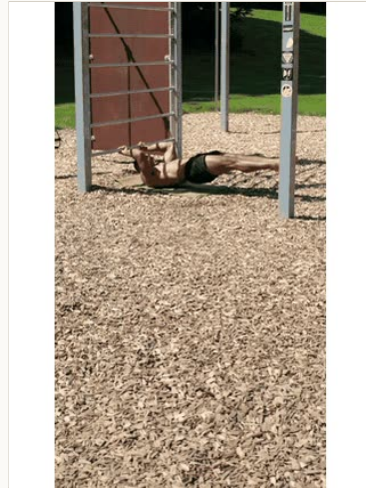
- Arched banana back, almost always a glute and abdominal issue rather than a balance issue.
- Elbows bending, which shortens the line and doubles the effort.
- Practising only against the wall, which never teaches the correction.

Progression

1. Wall plank with feet high, shoulders stacked.
2. Chest-to-wall handstand, 60 seconds.
3. Heel pulls and toe pulls off the wall.
4. Freestanding attempts, 20 sets of a few seconds.
5. 30-second freestanding hold.

Dragon Flag

ADVANCED

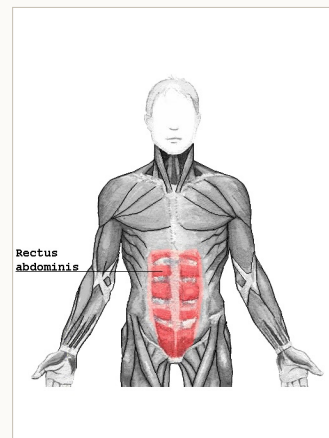


PREREQUISITE L-Sit

STANDARD 5 repetitions with the body straight from shoulder to heel, lowering under control.

PRIME MOVERS **RECTUS ABDOMINIS, TRANSVERSUS ABDOMINIS**

ASSISTING Latissimus dorsi, Erector spinae, Gluteus maximus, Adductor magnus



Prime mover: *Rectus abdominis*

Execution

- Only the shoulders and upper back stay on the bench. Everything else is one rigid lever.
- Squeeze the glutes and legs together; a straight body is a stronger lever than a floppy one.
- Lower for 4 seconds. The negative is the exercise.

Common faults

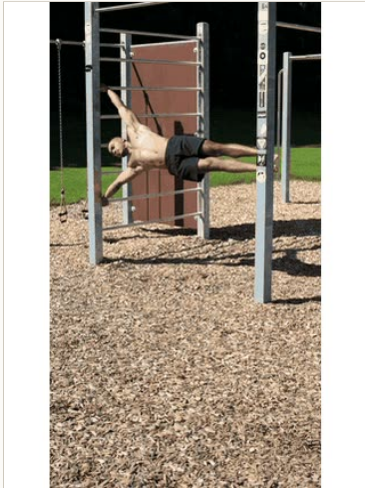
- Piking at the hip to shorten the lever without admitting it.
- Arching the low back, which is what makes dragon flags hurt.
- Dropping the last portion of the range.

Progression

1. Tuck dragon flag negatives.
2. Single-leg extended negatives.
3. Straddle dragon flag.
4. Full dragon flag negatives, 5 seconds.
5. Full dragon flag, 5 repetitions.

Human Flag

ADVANCED

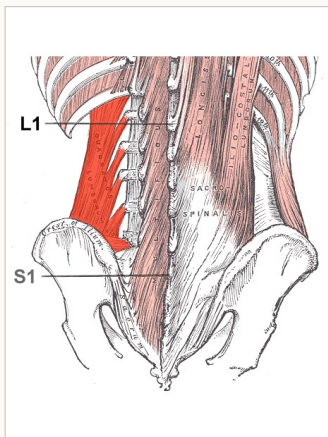


PREREQUISITE None

STANDARD 10 seconds horizontal, body straight, both legs together and level with the shoulders.

PRIME MOVERS **QUADRATUS LUMBORUM, EXTERNAL OBLIQUE, LATISSIMUS DORSI, LATERAL DELTOID**

ASSISTING Coracobrachialis, Internal oblique, Gluteus medius, Forearm flexors



Prime mover: *Quadratus lumborum*

Execution

- The bottom arm pushes as hard as the top arm pulls. Beginners forget the push.
- Stack the shoulders vertically over each other.
- Keep the hips level; the bottom hip wants to sag.

Common faults

- Treating it as a pulling exercise only and neglecting the pressing arm.
- Twisting so the chest faces the pole.
- Legs split for balance and never brought together.

Progression

1. Vertical flag hold, body pointing up.
2. Chamber hold, knees tucked.
3. Single-leg extended flag.
4. Straddle flag.
5. Full flag, 10 seconds.

Bar Muscle Ups

ADVANCED



PREREQUISITE Pull Ups

STANDARD 3 strict repetitions, no kip, chest to bar then over.

PRIME MOVERS **LATISSIMUS DORSI, PECTORALIS MAJOR, TRICEPS BRACHII**

ASSISTING Rhomboid major and minor, Trapezius, Biceps brachii, Rectus abdominis



Prime mover: *Latissimus dorsi*

Execution

- Pull explosively to the sternum, not to the chin. Height above the bar is what buys the transition.
- Lean the chest over the bar as the elbows come up.
- Finish the rep with a full elbow lockout in support.

Common faults

- Pulling only to chin height and stalling.
- Kipping, which is legal in some sports but is a different skill.
- Skinned forearms from a transition rushed rather than learned.

Progression

1. Explosive pull-ups to the sternum.
2. Jumping muscle-up from a low bar.
3. Negative bar muscle-ups.
4. Strict bar muscle-up, 3 repetitions.

Back Lever

ADVANCED

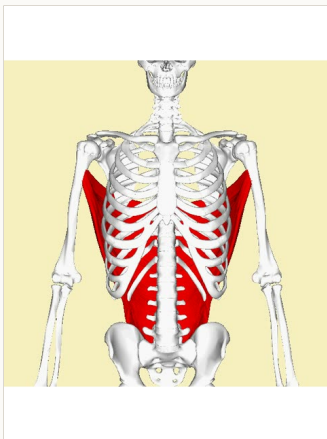


PREREQUISITE Skin The Cat

STANDARD 10 seconds horizontal with straight arms and a straight body, face down.

PRIME MOVERS **LATISSIMUS DORSI**, **POSTERIOR DELTOID**, **PECTORALIS MAJOR**

ASSISTING Erector spinae, Biceps brachii, Gluteus maximus, Rectus abdominis



Prime mover: *Latissimus dorsi*

Execution

- Arms locked straight throughout. This is a straight-arm strength skill.
- Protract the shoulders slightly and hollow rather than arch.
- Build up through the tuck. The biceps tendon does not forgive a rushed back lever.

Common faults

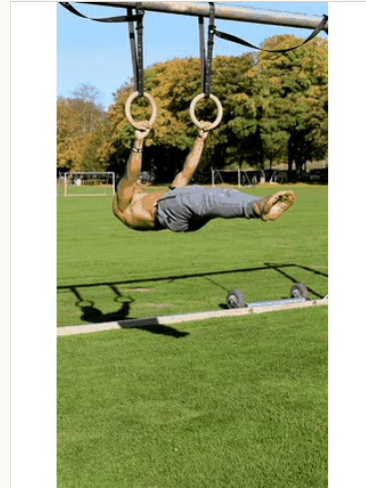
- Bending the arms, which is both a fault and an injury risk.
- Arching the low back to fake horizontal.
- Skipping straight from tuck to full.

Progression

1. German hang, 30 seconds.
2. Tuck back lever, 20 seconds.
3. Advanced tuck, 15 seconds.
4. Straddle back lever, 10 seconds.
5. Full back lever, 10 seconds.

Front Lever

EXTREME



PREREQUISITE Hollow Body Hold, Pull Ups

STANDARD 10 seconds horizontal, face up, arms and body straight, hips level with the shoulders.

PRIME MOVERS **LATISSIMUS DORSI**, **RECTUS ABDOMINIS**, **TERES MAJOR**

ASSISTING Triceps brachii, Rhomboid major and minor, Gluteus maximus, Adductor magnus



Prime mover: *Latissimus dorsi*

Execution

- Push the bar down and away with straight arms; think of a straight-arm pulldown.
- Posterior pelvic tilt. A front lever is a hollow body that happens to be hanging.
- Squeeze the legs together and point the toes.

Common faults

- Bent arms, which converts it into an easier and different skill.
- Hips sagging below shoulder height.
- Progressing by time in one position rather than by lever length.

Progression

1. Tuck front lever, 20 seconds.
2. Advanced tuck, 15 seconds.
3. One leg extended, 10 seconds per side.
4. Straddle front lever, 10 seconds.
5. Full front lever, 10 seconds.

3.5 Extreme

Handstand Push Ups

EXTREME

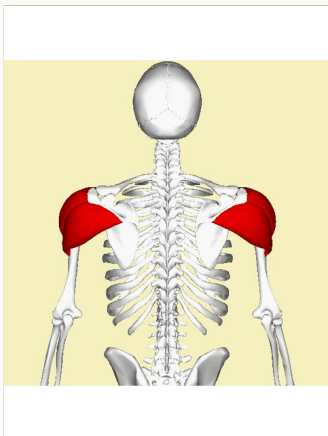


PREREQUISITE Handstand, Pike Push Ups

STANDARD 5 repetitions freestanding, head touching the floor, full lockout at the top.

PRIME MOVERS **ANTERIOR DELTOID, TRICEPS BRACHII**

ASSISTING Trapezius, Serratus anterior, Pectoralis major, Forearm extensors



Prime mover: *Anterior deltoid*

Execution

- Head lands in front of the hands, forming a tripod triangle.
- Keep the body hollow; the temptation is to arch and press with the low back.
- Press evenly. A drifting handstand push-up ends on the floor.

Common faults

- Arching into an unstable banana at the top.
- Partial range that stops well above the head.
- Attempting freestanding before a solid 30-second handstand.

Progression

1. Pike push-ups with feet elevated.
2. Wall handstand push-up, back to the wall.
3. Chest-to-wall handstand push-up, which is stricter.
4. Deficit handstand push-ups on parallettes.
5. Freestanding, 5 repetitions.

One Arm Chin Up

EXTREME



PREREQUISITE Archer Pull Ups

STANDARD 1 repetition per side from a dead hang, chin over the bar, no kip and no assistance.

PRIME MOVERS **LATISSIMUS DORSI, BICEPS BRACHII, BRACHIALIS**

ASSISTING Teres major, Forearm flexors, External oblique, Rhomboid major and minor



Prime mover: *Latissimus dorsi*

Execution

- Build elbow and connective tissue tolerance for months before the strength work.
- Let the body rotate naturally; fighting the rotation wastes energy.
- Train the negative far more than the concentric.

Common faults

- Rushing the timeline. This is the skill with the highest elbow injury rate in the sport.
- Neglecting the one-arm hang, which is the actual prerequisite.
- Using a band so heavy it changes the movement pattern.

Progression

1. One-arm hang, 30 seconds per side.
2. One-arm scapular pulls.
3. Assisted one-arm chin, gripping the wrist of the working arm.
4. Band-assisted one-arm chin, reducing band thickness over months.
5. One-arm negatives, 10 seconds.
6. Full one-arm chin-up.

Side Split

EXTREME

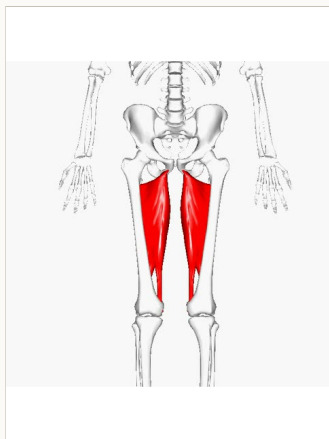


PREREQUISITE Pancake

STANDARD Hips fully down with legs in a straight line and kneecaps facing the ceiling.

PRIME MOVERS **ADDUCTOR MAGNUS**

ASSISTING Hamstrings, Gluteus medius, Psoas major



Prime mover: *Adductor magnus*

Execution

- Keep the pelvis neutral. Tucking it under is how people fake a split and stall for years.
- Feet flat or toes up, not rolled forward.
- Load the end range with active contractions, not only passive time.

Common faults

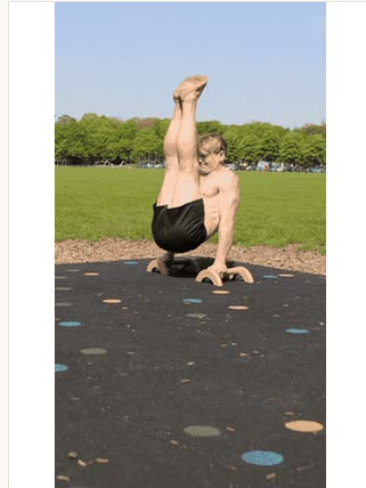
- Anterior pelvic tilt hiding the last 20 degrees.
- Turning the feet forward and rotating the femur to gain false depth.
- Stretching cold, or bouncing.

Progression

1. Cossack squats, full range.
2. Wide-stance good mornings.
3. Elevated side split with hands on blocks.
4. Frog stretch, 2 minutes.
5. Full side split.

V-Sit

EXTREME

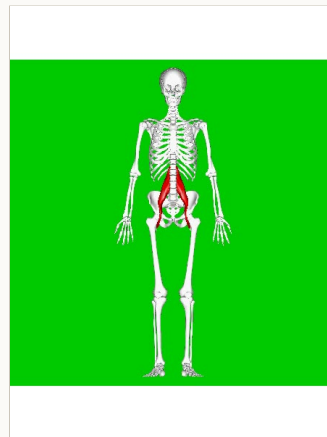


PREREQUISITE L-Sit, Pancake

STANDARD 10 seconds with the legs above horizontal, ideally past 45 degrees, arms straight.

PRIME MOVERS **PSOAS MAJOR**, **RECTUS ABDOMINIS**, **QUADRICEPS FEMORIS**

ASSISTING Triceps brachii, Serratus anterior, Adductor magnus, Hamstrings



Prime mover: *Psoas major*

Execution

- Lean the shoulders back over the hands and push down hard.
- Compression, not flexibility, is usually the limit. Train active compression sitting on the floor.
- Keep the legs dead straight and the toes pointed.

Common faults

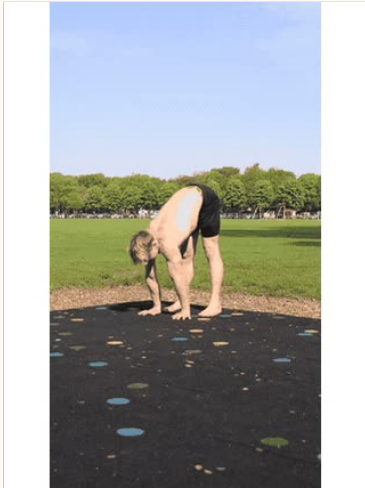
- Bent knees.
- Rounding the back to lift the legs, which loses the shape.
- Training only passive hamstring flexibility and wondering why the V-sit never arrives.

Progression

1. Solid 20-second L-sit.
2. Seated compression lifts, hands on blocks.
3. Low V-sit, legs just above horizontal.
4. V-sit at 45 degrees, 10 seconds.

Press Handstand

EXTREME

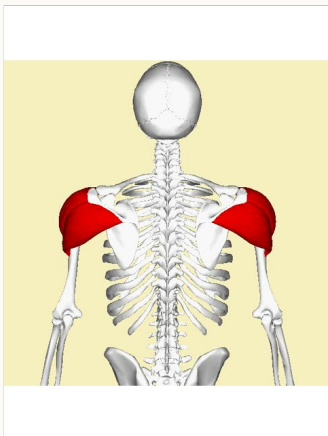


PREREQUISITE Handstand, Pancake

STANDARD 3 repetitions pressed from a straddle stand to a handstand with straight arms, no jump.

PRIME MOVERS **ANTERIOR DELTOID, SERRATUS ANTERIOR, PSOAS MAJOR**

ASSISTING Trapezius, Rectus abdominis, Adductor magnus, Triceps brachii



Prime mover: *Anterior deltoid*

Execution

- Lean the shoulders forward past the hands before the feet leave the floor.
- The hips rise first; the legs follow as passengers.
- Straight arms throughout. A bent-arm press is a different skill.

Common faults

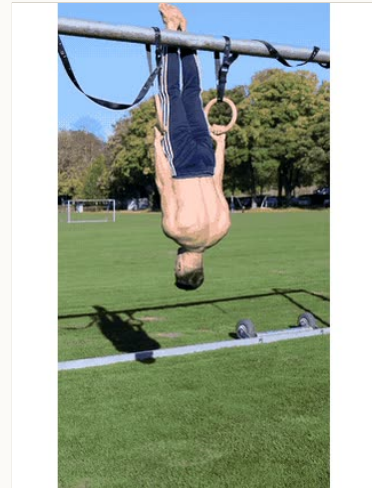
- Jumping instead of pressing.
- Bending the arms to muscle through the middle.
- Attempting it without the pancake range, which makes the lever impossible.

Progression

1. Solid 30-second handstand and a chest-down pancake.
2. Straddle stand with hips high, toes light.
3. Negative press: lower from a handstand to a straddle stand.
4. Band-assisted press.
5. Full straddle press, 3 repetitions.

Back Lever Pulls

EXTREME



PREREQUISITE Back Lever

STANDARD 3 repetitions pulling from a back lever toward an inverted hang with straight arms.

PRIME MOVERS **LATISSIMUS DORSI, POSTERIOR DELTOID, TERES MAJOR**

ASSISTING Pectoralis major, Erector spinae, Rhomboid major and minor, Gluteus maximus



Prime mover: *Latissimus dorsi*

Execution

- Arms stay locked. All the movement happens at the shoulder.
- Keep the body rigid; the shape must not change as the lever moves.
- Control the descent back to horizontal.

Common faults

- Bending the elbows to make the pull possible.
- Losing the body line halfway.
- Training these before a 10-second full back lever is solid.

Progression

1. Full back lever, 10 seconds.
2. Tuck back lever pulls.
3. Straddle back lever pulls.
4. Full back lever pulls, 3 repetitions.

Front Lever Pulls

EXTREME

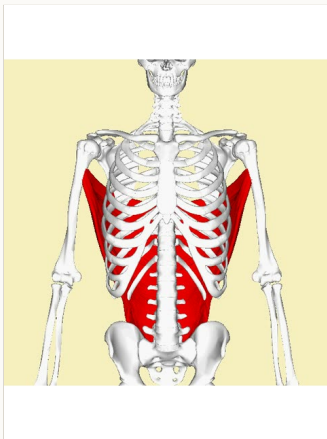


PREREQUISITE Front Lever

STANDARD 3 repetitions from a hang to a full front lever and back, arms straight throughout.

PRIME MOVERS LATISSIMUS DORSI, TERES MAJOR, RECTUS ABDOMINIS

ASSISTING Coracobrachialis, Rhomboid major and minor, Triceps brachii, Gluteus maximus



Prime mover: *Latissimus dorsi*

Execution

- Straight-arm pulldown mechanics: push the bar toward the hips.
- Hold the hollow shape constant; the shape must not change as you move.
- Lower to the hang under control rather than dropping.

Common faults

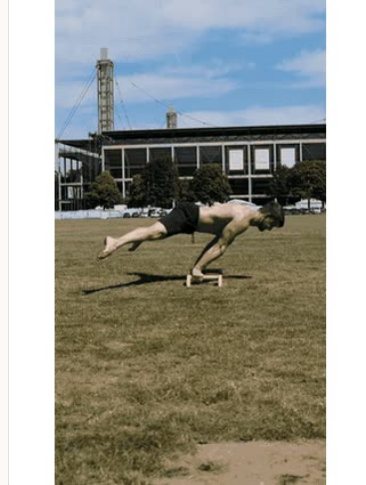
- Elbows bending under fatigue.
- Piking to make the top position reachable.
- Training pulls before the static hold is owned.

Progression

1. Full front lever, 10 seconds.
2. Tuck front lever pulls.
3. Straddle front lever pulls.
4. Full front lever pulls, 3 repetitions.

Planche

EXTREME

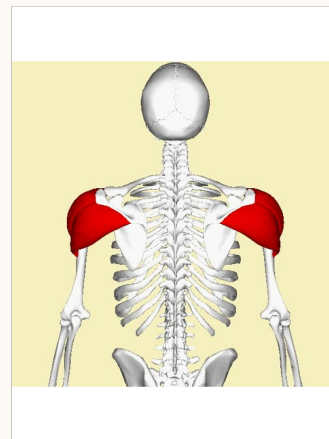


PREREQUISITE Support Hold, L-Sit

STANDARD 10 seconds horizontal, arms straight, body parallel to the floor, feet off the ground.

PRIME MOVERS ANTERIOR DELTOID, PECTORALIS MAJOR, SERRATUS ANTERIOR

ASSISTING Biceps brachii, Triceps brachii, Rectus abdominis, Gluteus maximus, Forearm extensors



Prime mover: *Anterior deltoid*

Execution

- Lean forward until the shoulders are well past the hands. The lean is the skill.
- Protract hard and hold a posterior pelvic tilt.
- Straight arms, always. Bent-arm planche is a different and easier skill.

Common faults

- Insufficient forward lean, so the feet never leave the floor.
- Arched back with the hips high.
- Wrist pain from skipping months of preparation; parallettes reduce the extension demand.

Progression

1. Planche lean, shoulders past the hands, 30 seconds.
2. Tuck planche, 20 seconds.
3. Advanced tuck planche, 15 seconds.
4. Straddle planche, 10 seconds.
5. Full planche, 10 seconds.

Part III

Programming

Chapter 4

Selecting what to train

The catalogue has forty skills. A training week has room for perhaps six. The whole job of programming is choosing which six, and the choice is not a matter of taste — it is a matter of covering the patterns that the body can produce, so that none of them becomes the weak link that stalls everything else.

4.1 The six patterns

Every skill in Part II belongs to at least one of these. A week that omits one will eventually stall, and the stall will show up somewhere else entirely.

Vertical pull

Pull-ups, archer pull-ups, one-arm chin-up, muscle-ups. Driven by **LATISSIMUS DORSI** with the elbow flexors assisting.

Vertical push

Pike push-ups, handstand push-ups, press handstand. Driven by **ANTERIOR DELTOID** and **TRICEPS BRACHII**.

Horizontal pull

Rows, front lever, front lever pulls. The most commonly neglected pattern, and the one whose absence produces the rounded-shoulder posture that then blocks the vertical push.

Horizontal push

Push-ups, dips, archer and one-arm push-ups, planche. Driven by **PECTORALIS MAJOR** and **TRICEPS BRACHII**.

Legs

Squats, pistol squats, dragon squats, reverse nordic. Ignored by most calisthenics athletes at a cost they discover later.

Core and straight-arm

Hollow body, L-sit, V-sit, dragon flag, human flag, levers. This pattern is the one that gates the advanced skills.

THE PUSH-PULL AUDIT

Count your weekly hard sets of pushing and pulling. If pushing exceeds pulling, fix it before adding anything. The shoulder tolerates a pull-heavy programme far better than a push-heavy one.

4.2 Choosing six

Take one skill from each pattern, at a level where you can meet roughly half the standard today. A skill you cannot hold for a third of its standard is too hard to train productively: you will practise failing, not the skill.

A worked example for someone with clean pull-ups and push-ups but no static holds:

Pattern	Skill
Vertical pull	Archer pull-ups
Vertical push	Pike push-ups (feet elevated)
Horizontal pull	Tuck front lever
Horizontal push	Dips
Legs	Pistol squat negatives
Core	L-sit on parallettes

Chapter 5

Preparing to load

Part III's session template opens with eight to ten minutes of joint preparation, and that line is doing more work than its length suggests. This chapter is what it means.

Joint preparation is not stretching. Stretching asks a tissue to lengthen passively; preparation asks a joint to move through the range you are about to load, under light control, until the tissue around it is warm and the nervous system has rehearsed the position. Static stretching before hard training reduces force production for up to an hour. Do it at the end of the session, where Part III puts it.

THE ONE RULE

Prepare the joint you are about to load, at the end range you are about to load it in. A handstand session begins at the wrists. A front lever session begins at the elbows.

5.1 Wrists

Handstands, plances and every parallel hold put the wrist in loaded extension — a position ordinary life never demands. Wrist pain is the most common reason athletes abandon handstand training, and it is almost entirely preventable.

Work through this on the floor, thirty seconds each, before any hand-supported session.

1. **Palms down, fingers forward.** Rock the weight forward over the hands and back. Keep the palms flat.
2. **Palms down, fingers backward.** The same rock. This is the position that hurts first, so go gently and never force it.
3. **Backs of the hands down, fingers backward.** Loads wrist flexion, the opposite range, which is the one nobody trains.
4. **Fists down, knuckles flat.** Rock forward. Prepares the wrist for the neutral column position.
5. **Fingertip pushes.** Press into the fingertips with the palm lifted, ten slow repetitions. This is what actually balances a handstand.

IF THE WRISTS ALREADY HURT

Train on parallel bars or on fists, both of which keep the wrist neutral, while you build tolerance on the floor separately. Working through wrist pain in a handstand does not build tolerance; it builds a longer layoff.

5.2 Elbows

The elbow is the joint that pays for straight-arm ambition. Prepare it with load, not with stretching: tendon responds to tension, and a warm tendon is a more compliant one.

Before any straight-arm session — levers, planche, skin the cat — take two minutes: slow, straight-arm scapular pulls from a hang; a short German hang held with the arms locked and the shoulders relaxed into extension; and ten slow pronation-supination rotations under a light load. Finish with a thirty-second hold of the easiest lever position in the session, well short of your maximum.

5.3 Shoulders

Two things need preparing: the scapula's ability to move, and the rotator cuff's ability to hold the humeral head still while it does.

Scapular preparation is direct. From a hang, ten slow depressions without bending the elbows. From a support, ten slow elevations and depressions. In a push-up position, ten slow protractions and retractions. That is the **SERRATUS ANTERIOR**, the **TRAPEZIUS** and the **RHOMBOIDS** rehearsing exactly what the session will ask.

Cuff preparation is about time under low load, not effort. External rotations with a light band, fifteen slow repetitions each side, and a thirty-second

hold at the end range. The **INFRASPINATUS** and **TERES MINOR** are small and they fatigue early; loading them heavily before a session costs you the session.

5.4 Grip, and the four ways to hold a bar

Grip is named constantly in Part II and rarely explained. There are four positions and they load different tissue.

Pronated (overhand)

Palms facing away. The default for pull-ups, levers and bar muscle-ups. Puts the **BRACHIALIS** and **BRACHIORADIALIS** ahead of the biceps and is the weakest of the pulling grips, which is why it is also the most useful to train.

Supinated (underhand)

Palms facing you. The chin-up grip. Adds the **BICEPS BRACHII** at full mechanical advantage — typically worth two or three repetitions over pronated — and concentrates load on the biceps tendon at the elbow, which is where one-arm chin-up injuries happen.

Neutral

Palms facing each other, on rings or parallel handles. The kindest position for the shoulder, because the humerus is free to rotate as it travels. Where to start if a pronated pull-up bothers your shoulder.

False grip

The wrist flexed over the top of the ring or bar so the heel of the hand takes the load and the forearm can pass over without regripping. Non-negotiable for a strict ring muscle-up, and brutal on the wrist flexors at first. Build it with hangs alone, weeks before you need it.

GRIP IS A TRAINABLE CEILING

On high-volume bar work the hands fail before the back does, and most programmes never train grip on purpose. Two sets of hangs to failure at the end of a pulling session, or a heavy carry twice a week, removes the ceiling within a couple of months.

5.5 Skin

Calluses tear, and a torn hand costs a week of pulling. File them flat whenever they stand proud of the palm, keep them dry rather than moisturised before training, and use chalk to reduce friction rather than to increase grip. Rings are kinder to the skin than a knurled bar; a bar with a smooth sleeve is kinder still.

Chapter 6

Building the session

6.1 The shape of a session

Order matters, because the nervous system is freshest at the start and skill work is the most neurologically expensive thing you will do.

1. **Joint preparation, 8–10 minutes.** Wrists, elbows, shoulders, hips — whatever you are about to load, taken through its full range under light control. Not a stretch session; a rehearsal.
2. **Skill practice, 10–15 minutes.** Handstand balance, false grip hangs, crow. Short sets, long rests, stop well before failure. You are teaching a movement, not fatiguing a muscle.
3. **Strength work, 20–30 minutes.** The hard sets. Three to five sets of the progressions you selected, taken close to failure.
4. **Accessory, 10 minutes.** The weak link you identified: rotator cuff, scapular work, grip, hamstrings.
5. **Mobility, 10 minutes.** Pancake, side split, bridge, shoulder extension. Placed last because it reduces stiffness, and stiffness is useful during the hard sets.

6.2 Sets, reps and holds

For dynamic skills, three to five sets of three to eight repetitions, stopping one or two repetitions short of failure. For static holds, accumulate 30 to 60 seconds of total hold time in sets of no more than two thirds of your maximum hold.

That last rule is the one people break. If your maximum tuck front lever is 15 seconds, train sets of 10, not sets of 15. Holds taken to failure degrade the position, and a degraded position is a different skill.

REST IS PART OF THE PRESCRIPTION

Two to three minutes between hard sets. Straight-arm work needs more, not less — up to five minutes — because the limiting factor is neural and connective rather than metabolic. A rushed rest turns a strength session into a conditioning session.

6.3 Frequency

Skills respond to frequency more than to volume. Two to three exposures a week per skill beats one long session. Handstands and other balance skills tolerate — and prefer — daily short practice.

Work	Frequency	Per session
Balance skills	5–7×/week	10 min, low fatigue
Straight-arm	2–3×/week	30–60 s total hold
Bent-arm strength	2–3×/week	3–5 hard sets
Legs	2×/week	3–4 hard sets
Mobility	4–6×/week	10 min

Chapter 7

Progressing and stalling

7.1 Which variable to move

When a session goes well, exactly one thing should change next time, and there is an order of preference.

1. **Add hold time or a repetition** until you reach the top of the prescribed range.
2. **Lengthen the lever** — tuck to advanced tuck, one leg to straddle. This is the real progression, and everything else is preparation for it.
3. **Add external load** only for bent-arm skills that have run out of leverage progressions: dips, pull-ups.
4. **Add a set** last, when the others have stopped working.

7.2 When progress stops

A plateau is information. Read it before you react.

The position degrades before the muscle fails

A stabiliser is the limit. Train the shape in an easier variation rather than pushing the hard one.

The same set feels heavier week to week

Accumulated fatigue. Take a deload: one week at roughly half the usual volume, same frequency, same movements.

One side is visibly stronger

Train unilaterally and lead with the weak side, matching the strong side's volume to it rather than the reverse.

A joint aches for more than a day after

Stop progressing that skill. Regress one step, train the step below at full volume, and reassess in two weeks.

THE STRAIGHT-ARM TRAP

Straight-arm strength adapts faster in muscle than in tendon. The classic injury pattern is an athlete whose front lever improves for six weeks and whose elbows then give out, because the connective tissue never had the six months it needed. If you are progressing straight-arm work quickly, slow down on purpose.

7.3 How long this actually takes

Published progressions rarely put a number on the calendar, and the silence does more damage than an honest range would. The figures below are typical for a healthy adult training the skill deliberately two or three times a week, starting from the stated prerequisite. Individual variation is enormous — bodyweight, limb length, training age and sleep all move these by a factor of two — but the *order of magnitude* is reliable, and it is the order of magnitude that people get wrong.

Skill	From	Typical
First pull-up	no pulling strength	2–4 months
Ten pull-ups	first pull-up	6–12 months
Ten dips	first dip	3–6 months
Pistol squat	bodyweight squat	3–9 months
L-sit, 20 s	hollow body	2–5 months
Handstand, 30 s	wall handstand	6–18 months
Tuck front lever	ten pull-ups	3–6 months
Full front lever	tuck front lever	1–3 years
Back lever	German hang	6–18 months
Strict muscle-up	ten pull-ups, dips	6–18 months
Full planche	tuck planche	2–5 years
One-arm chin-up	archer pull-ups	3–6 years

Two things fall out of that table. The straight-arm skills at the bottom are measured in years, not weeks, and no programme changes that — connective

tissue adapts on its own schedule. And the gap between a tuck and a full lever is longer than the gap from nothing to the tuck, which is the opposite of what the progression list looks like on the page.

THE USEFUL CONSEQUENCE

Choose skills whose timeline you are willing to accept, and judge a training block by whether the *intermediate* steps moved, not by whether the skill arrived. A block that took your front lever from tuck to advanced tuck was a successful block.

7.4 A twelve-week block

Three four-week phases. Volume climbs, then a deload resets fatigue and lets the adaptation surface.

Week	Focus	Sets	Intensity
1–3	Accumulation	3–4	2 reps from failure
4	Deload	2	4 reps from failure
5–7	Intensification	4–5	1 rep from failure
8	Deload	2	4 reps from failure
9–11	Realisation	3–4	at the standard
12	Test	–	attempt the standards

In week 12, test the standards from Part II and record them on the benchmark sheet in Part IV. Then choose the next six skills and start again — with at least one skill carried over, because a pattern dropped entirely regresses faster than you expect.

Part IV

The Logbook

Chapter 8

The logbook

A programme you do not record is a programme you cannot debug. When a skill stalls, the useful question is what changed six weeks ago, and memory is a poor witness.
These sheets are meant to be printed and written on. Four of them:

The session log
One page per training day. Record what you actually did, not what you planned.

The week planner
One page per week. Fill it in before the week starts.

The progression tracker
One line per progression step of every skill in Part II. Tick a box only when the step is clean, and date it.

The benchmark sheet
Test days only, at the end of a twelve-week block.

Session log

DATE WEEK SLEEP / READINESS

EXERCISE / PROGRESSION	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	NOTES
	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
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	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	

WHAT FELT WRONG TODAY

Week planner

Fill this in *before* the week starts. Reps and holds go in the session log, not here.

DAY	PLANNED	ACTUAL
Mon		
Tue		
Wed		
Thu		
Fri		
Sat		
Sun		

PATTERN AUDIT — PULLING SETS

PUSHING SETS

LEG SETS

STRAIGHT-ARM SECONDS

Chapter 9

Progression tracker

Tick a step only when it is clean on a bad day. The dated column is what turns this page into evidence six months from now.

Beginner

SKILL	PROGRESSION STEP	DONE	DATE
Passive Hang	Feet-supported hang, taking half your weight through the floor.	☐	
	Single 20-second hangs, five sets, two minutes rest.	☐	
	One unbroken 60-second hang.	☐	
	Active hang: from the passive position, pull the shoulders down without bending the elbows.	☐	
	<i>Standard: 60 seconds unbroken, feet clear of the floor, breathing through the nose.</i>	☐	
Support Hold	Support on a low bar with toes touching down.	☐	
	3 x 20 seconds with strict shoulder depression.	☐	
	60 seconds unbroken.	☐	
	Progress to rings, which adds an order of magnitude of stability demand.	☐	
	<i>Standard: 60 seconds on parallel bars, elbows locked, shoulders depressed, no shrug.</i>	☐	
Hollow Body Hold	Tuck hollow: knees to chest, arms at the sides.	☐	
	One leg extended at a time.	☐	
	Full hollow with arms at the sides.	☐	
	Full hollow with arms overhead.	☐	
	Hollow body rocks, which teach the position to hold under motion.	☐	
	<i>Standard: 60 seconds with the lumbar spine flat on the floor, arms overhead, legs straight and low.</i>	☐	
Squats	Box squat to a chair.	☐	
	Bodyweight squat to full depth.	☐	
	Tempo squat: 3 seconds down, 2 second pause, up.	☐	
	Add a pause at the bottom, then move toward the pistol progression.	☐	
	<i>Standard: 30 controlled repetitions, hip crease below the knee, heels down throughout.</i>	☐	
Push Ups	Incline push-up against a wall, then a bench.	☐	
	Knee push-up with a rigid torso.	☐	
	Full push-up.	☐	
	Tempo push-up, 3 seconds down, 1 second pause at the bottom.	☐	
	<i>Standard: 20 strict repetitions, chest to fist height, body in one line from heel to head.</i>	☐	
Row	Steep incline row, feet under the body.	☐	
	Horizontal row, feet on the floor.	☐	
	Feet elevated to the same height as the anchor.	☐	
	Rings with a false grip, preparing the muscle-up.	☐	
	<i>Standard: 20 repetitions with the body horizontal, chest touching the bar or rings, no hip sag.</i>	☐	

Basic

SKILL	PROGRESSION STEP	DONE	DATE
Pull Ups	Scapular pull-ups: 3 x 8, elbows straight.	☐	
	Negative pull-ups: jump to the top, lower for 5 seconds.	☐	
	Band-assisted pull-ups.	☐	
	Full pull-up, then build to 10.	☐	
	Weighted pull-ups once 10 are clean.	☐	
	<i>Standard: 10 strict repetitions from a dead hang, chin clearly over the bar, no kip.</i>	☐	
Crow Pose	Squat with hands down, one foot lifted.	☐	
	Both feet lifted for 3 seconds.	☐	
	30-second hold.	☐	

SKILL	PROGRESSION STEP	DONE	DATE
Dips	Crow to headstand, then crow to handstand as a press progression.	☐	
	<i>Standard: 30 seconds balanced, knees resting on the upper arms, feet off the floor.</i>	☐	
	Bench dip with feet on the floor.	☐	
	Band-assisted parallel bar dip.	☐	
	Negative dips, 5 seconds down.	☐	
	Full dips, build to 10.	☐	
	Ring dips, then weighted.	☐	
Toes To Bar	<i>Standard: 10 strict repetitions to the shoulder-below-elbow depth, full lockout at the top.</i>	☐	
	Hanging knee raises.	☐	
	Hanging leg raises to 90 degrees.	☐	
	Hanging leg raises above 90.	☐	
	Strict toes to bar.	☐	
Skin The Cat	<i>Standard: 10 strict repetitions, toes touching the bar, legs straight, no swing.</i>	☐	
	German hang from a low bar with feet supported.	☐	
	Tuck skin the cat, knees to chest.	☐	
	Straddle skin the cat.	☐	
	Full straight-leg skin the cat.	☐	
Reverse Nordic	<i>Standard: 5 controlled repetitions through full shoulder extension and back, no drop.</i>	☐	
	Small lean with hands on the thighs.	☐	
	Lean to 30 degrees.	☐	
	Lean to 45 degrees under control.	☐	
	Full reverse nordic to the floor.	☐	
Pike Push Ups	<i>Standard: 8 controlled repetitions leaning to 45 degrees, hips extended throughout.</i>	☐	
	Pike push-up with feet on the floor.	☐	
	Feet on a low box.	☐	
	Feet on a bench, torso near vertical.	☐	
	Wall-supported handstand push-up.	☐	
	<i>Standard: 10 repetitions, head touching the floor ahead of the hands, hips stacked high.</i>	☐	

Intermediate

SKILL	PROGRESSION STEP	DONE	DATE
L-Sit	Foot-supported L-sit, heels on the floor.	☐	
	Tuck L-sit, 20 seconds.	☐	
	One leg extended.	☐	
	Full L-sit on parallettes, then on the floor, which is far harder.	☐	
	<i>Standard: 20 seconds on parallettes, legs straight and horizontal or above, shoulders depressed.</i>	☐	
RTO Ring Support Hold	Ring support with rings neutral, 30 seconds.	☐	
	Partial turnout, 15 seconds.	☐	
	Full turnout, 3 x 10 seconds.	☐	
	30 seconds unbroken.	☐	
	<i>Standard: 30 seconds with the rings turned fully out, elbows locked, shoulders depressed.</i>	☐	
Archer Push Ups	Wide push-ups with a slight weight shift.	☐	
	Archer with the extended hand on a low box.	☐	
	Full archer push-up.	☐	
	Archer with the extended arm on fingertips, moving toward the one-arm.	☐	
	<i>Standard: 8 repetitions per side, extended arm straight, chest to the working hand.</i>	☐	
Pistol Squats	Box pistol to a high surface.	☐	
	Pistol holding a support with one hand.	☐	
	Negative pistol, 5 seconds down, stand with two legs.	☐	
	Full pistol, then build to 5 per side.	☐	
	<i>Standard: 5 repetitions per leg to full depth, free leg off the floor throughout, no hand support.</i>	☐	
Bulgarian Push Ups	Ring push-ups with rings neutral and close.	☐	
	Small ring fly with feet on the floor.	☐	
	Bulgarian push-up at partial width.	☐	
	Full width, 8 repetitions.	☐	

SKILL	PROGRESSION STEP	DONE	DATE
One Arm Push Ups	<i>Standard: 8 repetitions on rings with a wide, deep bottom position and a controlled turnout at the top.</i>	☐	
	Elevated one-arm push-up on a bench.	☐	
	One-arm on a low box.	☐	
	One-arm on the floor with wide feet.	☐	
	Feet at shoulder width, 3 repetitions.	☐	
Weighted Dips	<i>Standard: 3 repetitions per side, feet no wider than shoulder width, minimal trunk rotation.</i>	☐	
	10 strict bodyweight dips.	☐	
	10 percent bodyweight added, 5 reps.	☐	
	25 percent bodyweight, 5 reps.	☐	
	50 percent bodyweight for the ambitious, built over months.	☐	
Bridge Hold	<i>Standard: 5 repetitions with 25 percent of bodyweight added, full depth and lockout.</i>	☐	
	Glute bridge with shoulders on the floor.	☐	
	Table-top bridge.	☐	
	Full bridge with bent arms.	☐	
	Full bridge, straight arms and legs, 30 seconds.	☐	
Archer Pull Ups	<i>Standard: 30 seconds with straight arms and legs, shoulders stacked over the hands.</i>	☐	
	Wide pull-ups.	☐	
	Pull-up with a weight shift to one side.	☐	
	Archer with the extended hand on a towel or ring.	☐	
	Full archer, 5 per side, then move toward the one-arm chin.	☐	
Bulgarian Dips	<i>Standard: 5 repetitions per side, extended arm straight, chin over the working hand.</i>	☐	
	Strict ring dips with rings neutral.	☐	
	Ring dips with turnout at the top.	☐	
	Small-amplitude Bulgarian dip.	☐	
	Full amplitude, 5 repetitions.	☐	
Pancake	<i>Standard: 5 repetitions on rings, arms travelling wide at the bottom, turnout restored at the top.</i>	☐	
	Seated straddle with hands forward, back straight.	☐	
	Elevated pancake with the torso on a bolster.	☐	
	Active pancake lifts: lift the chest off the floor and hold.	☐	
	Full pancake, chest down, held for 60 seconds.	☐	
	<i>Standard: Chest resting on the floor with legs straddled wide and knees facing the ceiling.</i>	☐	

Advanced

SKILL	PROGRESSION STEP	DONE	DATE
Dragon Squats	Clean pistol squats, 5 per side.	☐	
	Dragon squat to a box.	☐	
	Dragon squat with a light hand support.	☐	
	Full dragon squat, 3 per side.	☐	
	<i>Standard: 3 repetitions per side, free leg crossed behind and hovering, full depth.</i>	☐	
Ring Muscle Ups	False grip hangs, 3 x 20 seconds.	☐	
	False grip pull-ups to the sternum.	☐	
	Transition drills from a low ring with feet down.	☐	
	Negative muscle-ups, 5 seconds through the transition.	☐	
	Full strict muscle-up.	☐	
Handstand	<i>Standard: 3 strict repetitions from a false grip, no kip, controlled transition.</i>	☐	
	Wall plank with feet high, shoulders stacked.	☐	
	Chest-to-wall handstand, 60 seconds.	☐	
	Heel pulls and toe pulls off the wall.	☐	
	Freestanding attempts, 20 sets of a few seconds.	☐	
Dragon Flag	30-second freestanding hold.	☐	
	<i>Standard: 30 seconds freestanding, straight line from wrist to heel, no wall.</i>	☐	
	Tuck dragon flag negatives.	☐	
	Single-leg extended negatives.	☐	
	Straddle dragon flag.	☐	
	Full dragon flag negatives, 5 seconds.	☐	
	Full dragon flag, 5 repetitions.	☐	

SKILL	PROGRESSION STEP	DONE	DATE
Human Flag	<i>Standard: 5 repetitions with the body straight from shoulder to heel, lowering under control.</i>	☐	
	Vertical flag hold, body pointing up.	☐	
	Chamber hold, knees tucked.	☐	
	Single-leg extended flag.	☐	
	Straddle flag.	☐	
	Full flag, 10 seconds.	☐	
	<i>Standard: 10 seconds horizontal, body straight, both legs together and level with the shoulders.</i>	☐	
Bar Muscle Ups	Explosive pull-ups to the sternum.	☐	
	Jumping muscle-up from a low bar.	☐	
	Negative bar muscle-ups.	☐	
	Strict bar muscle-up, 3 repetitions.	☐	
	<i>Standard: 3 strict repetitions, no kip, chest to bar then over.</i>	☐	
Back Lever	German hang, 30 seconds.	☐	
	Tuck back lever, 20 seconds.	☐	
	Advanced tuck, 15 seconds.	☐	
	Straddle back lever, 10 seconds.	☐	
	Full back lever, 10 seconds.	☐	
	<i>Standard: 10 seconds horizontal with straight arms and a straight body, face down.</i>	☐	

Extreme

SKILL	PROGRESSION STEP	DONE	DATE
Front Lever	Tuck front lever, 20 seconds.	☐	
	Advanced tuck, 15 seconds.	☐	
	One leg extended, 10 seconds per side.	☐	
	Straddle front lever, 10 seconds.	☐	
	Full front lever, 10 seconds.	☐	
	<i>Standard: 10 seconds horizontal, face up, arms and body straight, hips level with the shoulders.</i>	☐	
Handstand Push Ups	Pike push-ups with feet elevated.	☐	
	Wall handstand push-up, back to the wall.	☐	
	Chest-to-wall handstand push-up, which is stricter.	☐	
	Deficit handstand push-ups on parallettes.	☐	
	Freestanding, 5 repetitions.	☐	
	<i>Standard: 5 repetitions freestanding, head touching the floor, full lock-out at the top.</i>	☐	
One Arm Chin Up	One-arm hang, 30 seconds per side.	☐	
	One-arm scapular pulls.	☐	
	Assisted one-arm chin, gripping the wrist of the working arm.	☐	
	Band-assisted one-arm chin, reducing band thickness over months.	☐	
	One-arm negatives, 10 seconds.	☐	
	Full one-arm chin-up.	☐	
	<i>Standard: 1 repetition per side from a dead hang, chin over the bar, no kip and no assistance.</i>	☐	
Side Split	Cossack squats, full range.	☐	
	Wide-stance good mornings.	☐	
	Elevated side split with hands on blocks.	☐	
	Frog stretch, 2 minutes.	☐	
	Full side split.	☐	
	<i>Standard: Hips fully down with legs in a straight line and kneecaps facing the ceiling.</i>	☐	
V-Sit	Solid 20-second L-sit.	☐	
	Seated compression lifts, hands on blocks.	☐	
	Low V-sit, legs just above horizontal.	☐	
	V-sit at 45 degrees, 10 seconds.	☐	
	<i>Standard: 10 seconds with the legs above horizontal, ideally past 45 degrees, arms straight.</i>	☐	
Press Handstand	Solid 30-second handstand and a chest-down pancake.	☐	
	Straddle stand with hips high, toes light.	☐	
	Negative press: lower from a handstand to a straddle stand.	☐	
	Band-assisted press.	☐	
	Full straddle press, 3 repetitions.	☐	
	<i>Standard: 3 repetitions pressed from a straddle stand to a handstand with straight arms, no jump.</i>	☐	

SKILL	PROGRESSION STEP	DONE	DATE
Back Lever Pulls	Full back lever, 10 seconds.	☐	
	Tuck back lever pulls.	☐	
	Straddle back lever pulls.	☐	
	Full back lever pulls, 3 repetitions.	☐	
	<i>Standard: 3 repetitions pulling from a back lever toward an inverted hang with straight arms.</i>	☐	
Front Lever Pulls	Full front lever, 10 seconds.	☐	
	Tuck front lever pulls.	☐	
	Straddle front lever pulls.	☐	
	Full front lever pulls, 3 repetitions.	☐	
	<i>Standard: 3 repetitions from a hang to a full front lever and back, arms straight throughout.</i>	☐	
Planche	Planche lean, shoulders past the hands, 30 seconds.	☐	
	Tuck planche, 20 seconds.	☐	
	Advanced tuck planche, 15 seconds.	☐	
	Straddle planche, 10 seconds.	☐	
	Full planche, 10 seconds.	☐	
	<i>Standard: 10 seconds horizontal, arms straight, body parallel to the floor, feet off the ground.</i>	☐	

Chapter 10

Benchmark sheet

Test at the end of a block, not when you feel like it.

Protocol. Test on a rest day or after at least forty-eight hours of easy training — a benchmark taken on tired arms measures your fatigue, not your strength. Work through the joint preparation in Chapter 5 in full, then two or three progressively harder warm-up sets of the first movement only. Test in the order printed: holds before dynamic work, hardest before easiest, because each attempt costs you the next one. **One attempt per benchmark.** A second attempt after a failure measures how well you recover, which is a different question. Record what actually happened, including a failed attempt — a block with three failures and one breakthrough is more informative than a page of optimistic numbers.

BENCHMARK	STANDARD	BLOCK 1	BLOCK 2	BLOCK 3
Pull Ups	10 strict repetitions from a dead hang, chin clearly over the bar, no kip	_____	_____	_____
Dips	10 strict repetitions to the shoulder-below-elbow depth, full lockout at the top	_____	_____	_____
Push Ups	20 strict repetitions, chest to fist height, body in one line from heel to head	_____	_____	_____
Hollow Body Hold	60 seconds with the lumbar spine flat on the floor, arms overhead, legs straight and low	_____	_____	_____
L-Sit	20 seconds on parallettes, legs straight and horizontal or above, shoulders depressed	_____	_____	_____
Pistol Squats	5 repetitions per leg to full depth, free leg off the floor throughout, no hand support	_____	_____	_____
Handstand	30 seconds freestanding, straight line from wrist to heel, no wall	_____	_____	_____
Front Lever	10 seconds horizontal, face up, arms and body straight, hips level with the shoulders	_____	_____	_____
Back Lever	10 seconds horizontal with straight arms and a straight body, face down	_____	_____	_____
Planche	10 seconds horizontal, arms straight, body parallel to the floor, feet off the ground	_____	_____	_____
Human Flag	10 seconds horizontal, body straight, both legs together and level with the shoulders	_____	_____	_____
V-Sit	10 seconds with the legs above horizontal, ideally past 45 degrees, arms straight	_____	_____	_____

BODYWEIGHT

DATE

NEXT BLOCK'S SIX SKILLS

WHAT THE NUMBERS SAY

Appendix A

Glossary

Terms used throughout Parts II and III, in the sense this book uses them.

Active hang

A hang with the shoulders pulled down away from the ears and the elbows straight. The starting position of a strict pull-up. Contrast *passive hang*, where the shoulders are allowed to rise.

Advanced tuck

A lever position with the knees drawn in but the hips open to roughly ninety degrees and the back flat. Harder than a tuck, easier than a straddle.

Compression

Active strength that pulls the legs toward the torso, as opposed to the passive flexibility that allows them to get there. What limits most V-sits.

Deficit

Performing a movement from a raised hand position so the range is longer than the floor allows — deficit handstand push-ups on parallettes, for instance.

Depression

Pulling the shoulder blades down away from the ears. The scapular position that starts every hang and every support hold.

Eccentric

The lowering phase, where the muscle lengthens under load. Also called a *negative*. Produces more force than the lifting phase, which is why it is the highest-yield tool for a skill you cannot yet perform.

False grip

The wrist flexed over the top of the ring or bar so the heel of the hand bears the load, allowing the forearm to pass over without regripping. Required for a strict ring muscle-up.

German hang

A hang behind the body with the arms straight and the shoulders in full extension. The entry position for skin the cat and back lever work.

Greasing the groove

Training a skill in many short, easy sets spread across the day rather than in one session to failure. Effective for skills limited by coordination, such as the handstand.

Hollow body

A supine position with the lumbar spine pressed flat, ribs down and pelvis tucked under. The shape that every straight-body skill in this book is built on.

Kip

Using a swing of the hips to generate momentum through a sticking point. A legitimate skill in its own sport; treated here as a fault, because it hides the weakness the training is meant to address.

Lever

Any position where the body is held horizontal on straight arms. The *lever length* — how far the mass sits from the shoulder — is the load.

Negative

See *eccentric*.

Protraction

Pushing the shoulder blades apart, away from the spine. What the **SERRATUS ANTERIOR** does at the top of a push-up and throughout a planche.

Retraction

Drawing the shoulder blades together toward the spine. The finish position of a row.

RTO

Rings turned out: the rings rotated so the palms face forward at the top of a support hold. An external rotation demand on the shoulder, not a wrist trick.

Straddle

Legs spread wide apart. Used in levers and presses to shorten the effective lever without bending the knees.

Tuck

Knees drawn to the chest. The shortest lever, and the first step of every lever progression.

Upward rotation

The scapula rotating so the shoulder socket points more upward, which is what allows the arm to reach fully overhead. Its absence is why tight lats produce an arched handstand.

Appendix B

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brachioradialis

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deltoid-anterior

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erector-spinae

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external-oblique

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forearm-extensors

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forearm-flexors

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gastrocnemius

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gluteus-maximus

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gluteus-medius

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gluteus-minimus

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hamstrings

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iliacus

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infraspinatus

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internal-oblique

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latissimus-dorsi

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levator-scapulae

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pectoralis-major

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pectoralis-minor

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psoas-major

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quadratus-lumborum

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quadriceps

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rectus-abdominis

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rhomboids

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serratus-anterior

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soleus

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subscapularis

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supraspinatus

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tensor-fasciae-latae

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teres-major

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teres-minor

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tibialis-anterior

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transversus-abdominis

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trapezius

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triceps-brachii

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human-flag

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planche

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pull-ups

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push-ups

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support-hold

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