ZERO TO HERO GUIDE TO STRENGTH, HEALTH & FLEXIBILITY

ULTIMATE ATHLETICISM

BY MAX SHANK

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"Absorb what is useful, discard what is useless."
-BRUCE LEE

When it comes to strength training, and exercise in general, the one limiting factor is always going to be time investment. Elite level athletes typically have a great deal more time available to dedicate to training than the average pursuer of strength. In order for us mere mortals to achieve the strength and power of a demi-god with a reasonable time investment, we must be more efficient. That is the primary goal of this book; Complete strength in less time.

"It is not the daily increase but the daily decrease.
Hack away the unessential."
-BRUCE LEE

"To me, the extraordinary aspect of martial arts lies in its simplicity. The easy way is also the right way, and martial arts is nothing at all special; the closer to the true way of martial arts, the less wastage of expression there is."
-BRUCE LEE

MY PROPOSAL FOR STRENGTH IS 4 MOVEMENTS

L-Press to Handstand

Deadlift

Front Lever

Airborne Lunge

CARRYOVER

The beautiful simplicity of this training philosophy lies in the carry-over of these exercises. You will find that the ability to perform these moves will have a much greater carryover to other similar exercises than vice-versa. For example: The L-Press to handstand will improve your military press far, far better than training the military press would improve your L-Press to handstand. You will find very soon that the same is true for the deadlift, front lever, and airborne lunge. If you are looking for bang-for-your-buck, look no further.

COMPLETE ATHLETICISM

The main exercises can be easily categorized to satisfy certain requirements that I find necessary in a training program:

L-PRESS TO HANDSTAND

Category: Upper Body Push Hybrid

Benefits:

Shoulder, Pec, & Triceps Strength

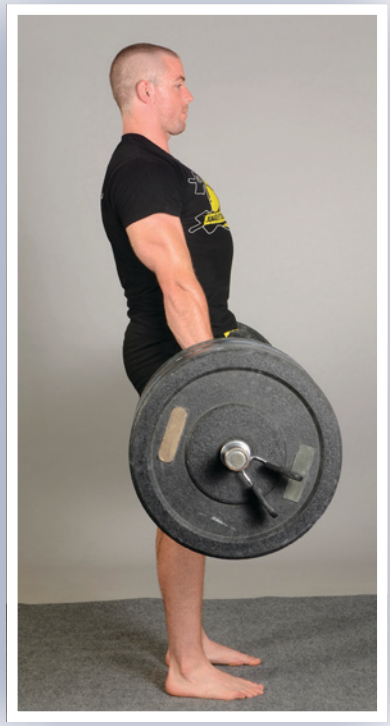
Dynamic Core Strength

Shoulder Stability

Enhanced Proprioception (body awareness)

Improved Posture

DEADLIFT



Category: Lower Body Pull

Benefits:

Core Stability (helps protect spine)

Grip Strength

Easy To Learn and Safe Way to Use Heavy Loads in Training (Awesome!)

Arguably the King of Overall Strength

Postural Benefit (Think opposite of sitting down)

Strengthens Every Muscle in Your Body

FRONT LEVER

Category: Upper Body Pull Hybrid

Benefits:

Lat, Triceps and Upper Back Strength

Massive Core Strength Demand

Grip Strength

Shoulder Stability

Total Body Coordination

AIRBORNE LUNGE

Category: Lower Body Push

Benefits:

Single Leg Stance (Athletic, Balance-oriented, Flexibility building)

Joint Friendly Squatting Movement

Requires and Enhances Lower Body Flexibility

Just reading the list above, it is very clear that focusing on these few movements will yield massive all-around strength, flexibility, and overall athleticism. These moves make up the bulk of my own training regimen which has allowed me to excel in multiple martial arts, sports, gymnastics, and highland games with a very modest amount of time invested.

RELATIVE STRENGTH OR STRENGTH-TO-WEIGHT RATIO

Take two individuals Pete and Tom. Pete weighs 250lbs and can deadlift 500. Tom weighs 180 and deadlifts 490. Who is stronger? The answer is simple; Tom has more relative strength, and Pete has more absolute strength (strength without regard to body-weight). We can all agree that Tom is the better athlete and that relative strength is a better measure of athleticism. Aim for a 3x bodyweight deadlift, my friend.

GOALS

Not only are the four exercises fantastic drills for your training, but they are enviable demonstrations of impressive strength and athleticism.

ULTIMATE GOALS

	Women	Men
L-Press to Handstand	1	10
Deadlift	2x Bodyweight	3x Bodyweight
Lever	3 second half Tuck Lever	5 second full Front Lever
Airborne Lunge	.5x Bodyweight	.75x Bodyweight

A goal is not always meant to be reached, it often serves simply as something to aim at.

-BRUCE LEE

These goals are achievable for some but not all. However the journey will yield huge benefits in strength, flexibility & athleticism for anyone.

FITNESS, HEALTH, AND PERFORMANCE

There are basically only three reasons a person chooses to exercise:

- Lose Fat (Aesthetics)
- Feel Better (Health)
- Perform Better (Performance)

Let's start off by understanding that 99% of exercisers are not professional athletes (i.e. earn a wage by competing in a sport or event). In professional sports, often health and aesthetics are sacrificed for more performance, because there is money on the line. If you aren't making a significant living through your athletic performance, you should never sacrifice health for more performance. In fact, let's look at the order of importance for the average person.

1. Health
2. Aesthetics
3. Performance

Now, on a personal level, I like to think that you and I put performance above aesthetics, but let's be honest, we all want to look good too.

Given the above, we can comfortably say it's a good idea to focus the lion's share of our time on feeling good above all else. This should include flexibility work and balanced strength. We can call this movement quality.

WHAT IS ATHLETICISM?

"The ability to move uninhibited in any range of motion with strength, speed, and coordination."
-MAX SHANK

Specifically, the ability to be thrown into any situation and come out on top. Whether that be a game of pick-up basketball, boxing, wakeboarding, or a potato sack race; I want to win. We all want to win.

A lot of guys are "strong."

A lot of guys are "flexible."

A lot of guys are "fast."

The difficulty with any pursuit, is that you typically have to give up in one area, to gain in another. There are only so many hours in the day.

You've all heard the stories of the powerlifter who gets a nose-bleed while nearly passing out, just from walking up and down his stairs while chasing the squat record. The man is seriously strong, but I would never want to trade places with him. I may piss off a lot of people with this, but I also wouldn't even consider him to be "athletic."

THE PYRAMID SHOWS HOW TO LAY A FOUNDATION FOR ATHLETICISM

As you can see, athleticism is built on a foundation of solid quality movement, strength, speed, and eventually endurance. This is also the order in which these physical qualities should be acquired for best results. Placing endurance, speed, or even strength as the foundation for your training program is going to leave you with a broken foundation. This creates problems to the tune of "athletes" who are always breaking themselves due to poor movement quality. You must lay a solid foundation of quality movement to realize your potential as an athlete and a human being.

Any movement issues are going to be overloaded with strength training, snapped with speed, and worn down with endurance

training. However, if you build the pyramid properly, you will find that the progressively higher levels are even easier to acquire than the one before it.

Movement quality is by far the toughest thing to acquire in your athletic pursuit–in fact, it is a lifelong endeavor. However, once you have laid the foundation, the strength, speed, and endurance come quite easily, if you put the work in. Ask any trainer in the world to describe the "ideal beginner," and they will describe someone who is flexible, coordinated, and doesn't have any pre-existing injuries. By giving yourself a solid foundation of movement quality, you are not only ensuring your orthopedic (and mental) health, but you are setting yourself up to get the optimal benefits from any exercise you perform.

Performing well and looking good typically go hand-in-hand when we are training for all-around athleticism. Feeling good has some other benefits that have a dramatic effect on how you look as well though. Pain, stiffness, stress, and general fatigue are cortisol producing which cause you to store body fat and lose muscle. You can ameliorate many of the causes of excessive cortisol production just by feeling good and moving well, so all the more reason to take care of the bottom layer of the pyramid.

NUTRITION

If you insist here are a couple guidelines:

1. Cook your own food more often.
2. Try to start with foods that have one ingredient (i.e. apple, sweet potato, spinach, steak, etc)
3. Increase your fat intake, most people don't get enough.
4. Remove any food-related stress–just try to relax and enjoy food.
5. If you want a freakin' cookie, have it. Don't have 30.

BALANCE IN LIFE AND IN TRAINING

Life, like many other things, swings back and forth like a pendulum. We ignore our physical bodies, then we abuse them with the latest 3 hour workout. What I propose is a return to center, with an emphasis on movement, strength, education, and on having fun while you do it. I propose a plan for physical fitness that is sustainable for a lifetime. This is much bigger than these four movements. What I'm giving you is a new paradigm for exercise, and a template that can be used to achieve any goal you may have.

On the wall of my gym are the words "Movement, Strength, Education." These three words are the summation of my approach to training, and to life. Movement is the opposite of stagnancy, it is also the core of our physical capabilities. Strength is synonymous

with will. The strength to pursue goals and achieve them, the strength to lift a heavy weight or to lift someone up with you. Education means taking pride in who you are as a human being and committing yourself to being better every single day.

You are a unique, beautiful snowflake, and you should be happy with who you are right now. But EVERYONE is capable of more. Taking charge of your life and constantly improving defines who you are as a man or woman. Wherever you start your day, finish it a little better.

"Better Every Day."

MOBILITY MEDICINE

CHAPTER 2

In the athleticism pyramid, movement quality is the foundation for everything. So it is imperative to dedicate as much time as you can afford to your flexibility and movement. Doing this should enhance your strength, power, and athleticism, not detract from it.

Flexibility and coordination make up your movement quality. Can you move and control all ranges of motion in all your joints? Then you have good movement quality.

GET IT, THEN KEEP IT

Flexibility is a subject that has been covered by literally hundreds of very smart people who all have "the" different answer. The truth is, that on a very simple level, moving is significantly better than not moving. Moving consistently and progressively over the long term is going to be the most important factor as to whether you become flexible, or just frustrated.

IDENTIFYING TRENDS

It is safe to assume that anyone reading this right now spends more time sitting down than they are designed for. Most people spend 8+ hours every day seated in a chair, and this has severe consequences to movement quality.

IF WE BREAK DOWN THIS SEATED POSITION, WE HAVE A FEW MAJOR PROBLEMS

1. Hips are constantly flexed
2. Glutes are shut off
3. Thoracic spine is caved forward
4. Head is pitched forward
5. Pecs are overly tight and pulled together

Rather than look at each reader individually, we can identify these trends and apply them to anyone looking to improve their movement quality. If you are a coach, understanding these movement dysfunctions and correcting them is going to give you much more

bang for your buck when it comes to seeing improvement in your athletes.

PRIMARY MOVEMENTS

DEEP LUNGE WITH ROTATION AND PRYING

Set up in a pushup position and step your right foot outside your right hand. Drive knee outward back and forth to pry open the hip. Then after a sufficient amount of prys to the side, start with the rotations. From the deep lunge, drop right elbow to the floor and then reach it up to the ceiling. Repeat for a few reps and then repeat both on the other side.

GLUTE BRIDGE

One of the most chronically hypoactive muscles of untrained individuals, the glutes are the key to being a strong and explosive athlete. Wake them up from their slumber with a generous dose of Glute Bridges either before training or spliced into your time blocks as a "mobility" drill. Set up lying flat on the back, drive through the heels and lift the hips as high as possible focusing on contracting your glutes. Hold the top position for a 2 count and repeat.

*If you're up for a challenge try a few Single Leg Bridges. Set up the same way, but with one knee pulled to your chest and the other foot on the floor with only the heel touching. Contract that glute and lift your hips high!

TABLETOP BRIDGE

Combining the benefits of a normal Glute bridge and adding in some shoulder extension (important for V-Sits) to the equation. Great bang for your buck, take care not to pair this movement with L-Press to Handstand or your arms will be too fatigued. Set up seated with both hands behind you and feet flat on the floor in front of you with legs bent. Squeeze the glutes and lift the hips up as high as possible. Arms and lower legs should be vertical with the torso and thighs parallel to the floor.

THORACIC BRIDGE

There are many ways to set up for a thoracic bridge. The easiest is to start in a side plank on the hand. From here take the top leg and reach it behind you to plant the foot flat on the floor. The other leg will still be on the floor on the outside edge of the foot. Move this foot until you are in a squat stance with the chest still facing the wall and the bottom shoulder locked in the socket. Bridge the hips up high, facilitating the trunk rotation. Focus on the same side hip of the arm that is posted on the floor, this will have a tendency to drop when the spine is not flexible, the hips are tight, or the glute is weak.

LEG RAISE WITH ROTATION

From a supine position on floor with arms out to side and palms up, lift one leg up as high as possible and drop it over toward the opposite hand while keeping the shoulders on the floor. Alternate sides and add some ankle circles at the top for extra benefit.

DEEP SQUAT WITH PRYING

Using an anchor point (door frame, power rack, rings, compliant partner), drop into a deep squat. From this position alternate driving a knee out to the side, pumping up and down in the last few inches range of motion, and moving forward/backward. The Squat is such a vital pattern and demonstration of flexibility that this drill is simply a tool to really own the position.

JOINTS LOVE CIRCLES

Rather than map out how to draw circles with your joints over the next 50 pages, let's just understand that your joints love circles, and any time you can mobilize your joints by doing circles in a pain free range of motion is going to yield positive results.

NECK STAYS RELAXED

Whenever you are doing your mobility work (and strength work) it is imperative that you relax the neck. Most people have a tendency, through poor posture and breathing patterns, to utilize the musculature of the neck to assist in exercises. This creates extra tension and eventually pain in the neck, which will inhibit the rest of your strength and flexibility training. Practice this by relaxing the neck and doing a couple neck rotations throughout your training to make sure your neck is relaxed. **Check Your Neck**

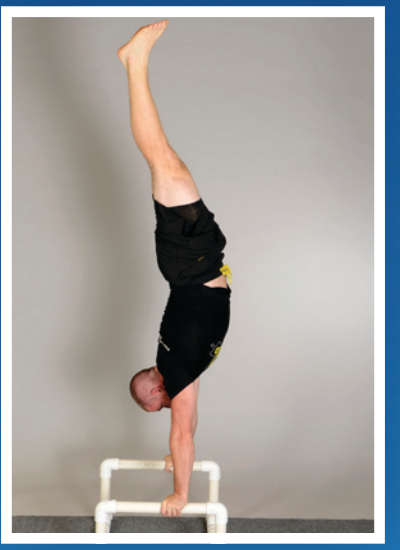
MEASURE SOMETHING

Whatever you decide to do for mobility, it should be something that has a positive effect. Some benefit should be seen instantaneously. This is just a clue that there are even more benefits to be had from long-term dedication and training. It doesn't matter exactly what you are measuring. You just want to be sure that you are progressing instead of regressing. Get in the habit of measuring so you can see the improvements in the quality of the movements.

Two easy things to measure are an overhead squat and a toe touch. Do you feel comfortable in a squat with your arms overhead? Is it improving? Can you put your palms comfortably on the floor during a toe touch before you are warmed up? These flexibility measures should be improving concurrently with your four main movements.

CHAPTER 3

L-PRESS TO HANDSTAND



The beauty of this move lies in building strength not only in the starting and ending positions, but also building the strength to transition smoothly and seamlessly between the two. There is a tremendous amount of upper body strength and core control required to achieve this feat and dedicating time to its training will yield impressive, resilient strength.

This being said, it is doubtful, unless you are an exceptional athlete or ex-gymnast, that you will be able to perform this feat initially for even one repetition. For this reason we must break it down into smaller, more manageable pieces.

THE L-SIT

The start position. This is great because it requires a lot of flexibility and core strength. If you lack either component, this full L-position will not be possible. If that is the case, there are many ways to work up toward the full L.

It may be easy to move quickly through the progressions, however, many will find that their shoulders will want to pop up rather than stay down. I have found that many people will actually have to move back a step to fix an undesirable shoulder position. In the long term this ends up being very helpful not only for health but also for strength. Only move onto the next progression when you can comfortably hold the current step for 10 seconds.

The Simple Progression:

Support Position

Tuck Sit

1/2 Tuck Sit

Low L-Sit

L-Sit

V-Sit

SUPPORT POSITION

Learning to support your bodyweight is an important starting point. Set up on the parallettes with legs hanging down straight. This is the best chance to learn the proper shoulder position with the lats engaged. Be sure to keep the shoulders down and the neck long by engaging the lats.

TUCK SIT

Same as the support position, bring both knees up toward the chest with legs bent.

1/2 TUCK SIT

Begin in a tuck sit and slowly extend one leg out straight.

LOW L-SIT

Starting in a ½ tuck sit, extend the bent leg until both legs are even, but slightly below parallel to the floor

L-SIT

Starting in a ½ tuck sit, extend the bent leg until both legs are parallel to the floor. If the legs aren't perfectly parallel to the floor, it is okay to keep working on it even with the legs below parallel.

V-SIT

Once you've mastered the L-Sit, it is time to start working to improve the flexibility in the hips and shoulders. Start in a normal L-Sit and bring the legs up toward a 45 degree angle. This will really challenge your strength and flexibility.

ASSISTANCE DRILL

SEATED FLOOR LEG LIFT

The hip flexibility and abdominal strength part of the L-sit are best done by alternating between a forward fold stretch for 5 seconds and an isometric leg lift for 5 seconds. Seated on the floor, place hands next to knees on floor and lift legs up in the air as high as possible for a 5 count. Then stretch forward as in a forward bend stretch for 5 seconds before alternating back to the leg lift.

THE HANDSTAND

The handstand is often revered as the mark of a man or woman who possesses complete control of their own body. It requires a delicate blend of strength and balance that few put in enough time into to truly own. The road to a solid handstand can be time consuming, but it is well worth the effort; the journey itself will take your strength and resilience to new levels.

Tips:

Bailing out: While in a handstand facing the wall, bring one leg away from wall. You will feel your body want to rotate to that side. Follow the momentum of that leg and allow yourself to pirouette forward.

Balance: The freestanding handstand will be more easily achieved on parallettes or dumbbell handles. This is due to the fact that you can apply more leverage through your wrist strength and grip than you can with palms on the floor. It is highly recommended that you train both variations but keep this in mind.

Progression:

Crowstand

Wall Split to handstand

Face the wall walk in

Kick Ups against wall

Kick Ups away from wall

Freestanding Balance

CROWSTAND

The Crowstand is an important step in teaching you how to use the hands to balance the same way you already use your feet. Experiment with shifting the weight forward and backward and

using the fingertips as the driver for your front-to-back balance. This step is also a nice easy lead-in to going upside down soon.

Set up in a deep squat with the triceps touching the inside of the thighs near the knees. Place your hands on the floor shoulder width apart and slowly shift the weight forward until the toes come off the ground. You may want to place a yoga block or pillow where your head will be just in case you fall forward the first time!

WALL SPLIT TO HANDSTAND

Set up by facing away from the wall with feet against the wall and hands on the floor in a downward dog pose. Extend one leg up onto the wall and plant it so you can remove the other leg from the floor up to the wall alongside it. This is the easiest variation, and removes most of the fear involved with going inverted.

FACE THE WALL WALK IN

Set up by performing a Wall Split to Handstand and walk your hands in so you can get closer to vertical.

KICK UPS AGAINST WALL

Set up with hands about a foot away from the wall and feet planted behind as if you were to start a race. Swing up one leg straight and push off the leg still on the floor. Repeat the kick-up with increasing intensity, building confidence. On the final kick-up, the top leg should swing all the way up to the wall. Once stable then bring the second leg alongside it. Work up to holding the wall handstand for a minute before moving on.

KICK UPS AWAY FROM WALL

Once you've mastered the wall handstand, you can start practicing away from the wall. It is extra important to start with progressive kick-ups so you don't go flying over the top.

FREESTANDING BALANCE

Other than kick-ups away from the wall, you can also start working your balance from the wall handstand. Once in a wall handstand, start pushing through the fingertips until the feet lightly come away from the wall. It is important to not swing your legs away from the wall as that will just send you straight back to the ground. Use the fingertips the same way you would use your toes to balance if you leaned too far forward.

THE TRANSITION:

The transition from an L-sit to a handstand can be even further broken down into two more pieces: L-Pull Through, Press to Handstand. Locking down both of these movements is necessary to own the full move.

L-PULL THROUGH

The L-Pull through is going to place a lot of emphasis on the shoulder; specifically the anterior delts and, hopefully, the lats. This is also going to be a nice introduction to moving your torso through space without the initial fear associated with being upside down. The L-Pull through is going to start from a standard L-sit at whatever level you are currently training and maintain that position until your torso is parallel to the floor. As you move backward it is going to be tempting to allow your shoulders to dip all the way down to your hands. Do not do this–it will put you in a very disadvantaged position that will be very difficult to press up to a handstand from. Instead strive to keep the arms semi-straight (no more than 90 degrees at the elbow). This will be harder initially to perform the pull through, but will make the press up to handstand much easier. If you can get your torso parallel with elbows only

slightly bent, it will put you in a very strong and balanced position to press up to your handstand.

TIPS

- **Momentum:** When just starting out, it may be (or seem) impossible to do the movement with any success at a slow and controlled pace. In this case it is acceptable to sometimes utilize some momentum to further the range of motion that you can do.
- **Knees to chest:** When performing the pull through, it is also important to keep the knees tucked tightly to the chest, regardless of the variation you are doing and think about sending the hips up rather than shooting the legs back.
- **U Shape:** In the front of the movement the hips should be up and forward, and when you pull through the hips should go up and back—think of your belt buckle tracing out a "U" shape during the movement.

Progression:

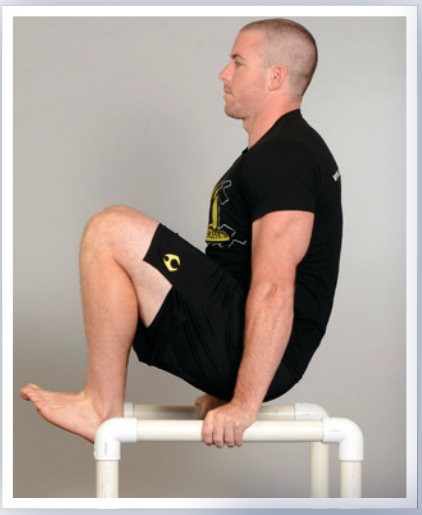
Tuck Pull Through

Tuck Pull Through and hold (Tuck Planche with bent arms)

1/2 Tuck Pull Through

Straight Leg Pull Through

TUCK PULL THROUGH



Begin in a tuck sit. With straight arms, lean forward until hips go up and backward as far as possible. Keep the knees close to the chest. It is acceptable for the arms to bend as the hips go up and back. Ideally the torso will be above parallel in the finish position.

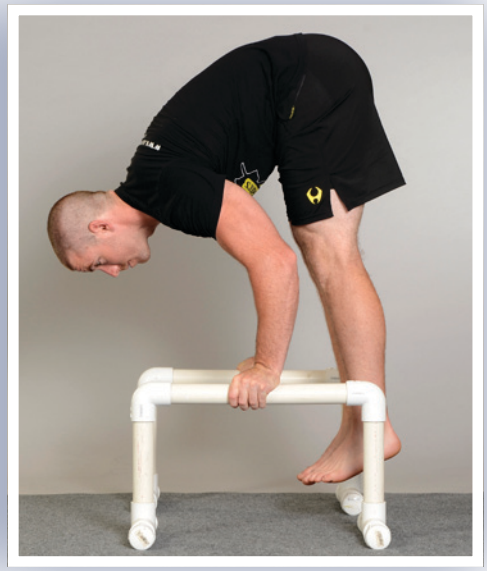
TUCK PULL THROUGH AND HOLD (TUCK PLANCHE WITH BENT ARMS)

The same movement as the tuck pull through except the top position will be held for a longer duration to develop the strength required to go inverted.

1/2 TUCK PULL THROUGH

From a ½ tuck sit, bring the hips through until the torso is parallel to the ground or higher. Maintain the ½ tuck leg position.

STRAIGHT LEG PULL THROUGH



From an L Sit, pull through with straight legs until the torso is parallel to the floor or higher.

PRESS TO HANDSTAND

The press to handstand begins where the L-Pull through ends. When performed by itself, it begins with the weight shifting from your feet to your hands. This is the most difficult portion and requires a great deal of strength even just to avoid face-planting. When performing a press to handstand be sure not to rush the press. Own the position with bent arms and straight body before trying to press up. I recommend you work some static holds (3-5 seconds) in the bent arm inverted position with straight legs before trying to press up. Pressing up to finish is the #1 area where people lose their balance.

Progression:

Split Stance from High Box

Split Stance from Low Box

Crowstand leg lifts

Split Stance from Floor

Straddle from Box

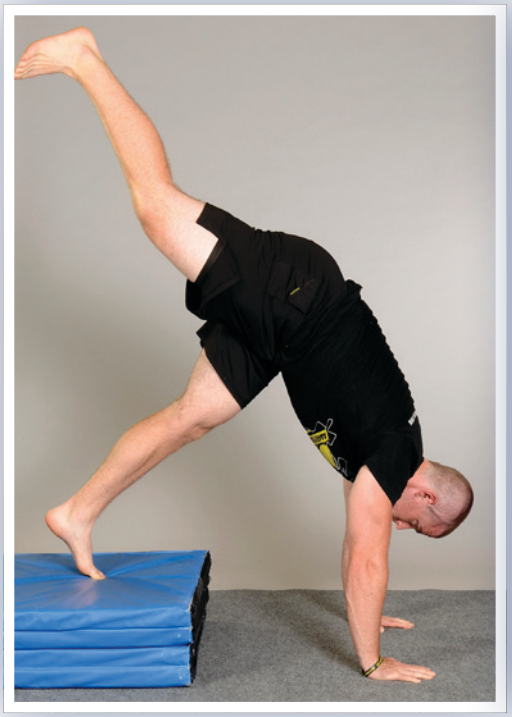
Straddle from Floor

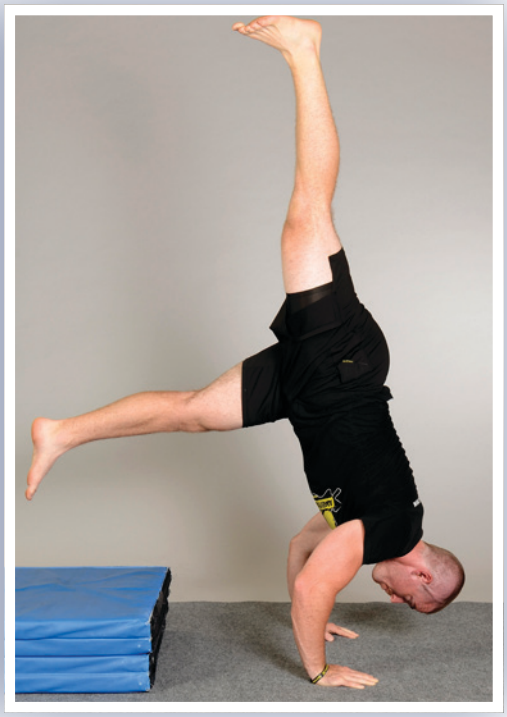
Straight Arm Press to Handstand

SPLIT STANCE FROM HIGH BOX

Set up with hands on the floor and both feet on a box. Bring one leg up to vertical and without kicking, transition the weight from the feet to the hands fully. It is okay to bend the arms to make the transition.

SPLIT STANCE FROM LOW BOX



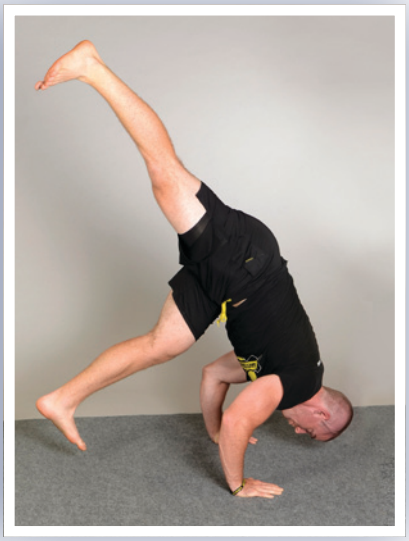


Same as above, but lower the height of the box. This requires more arm strength and/or flexibility.

CROWSTAND LEG LIFTS

Begin in a deep squat with upper arms inside the thighs. With hands planted on the floor, lean forward until the feet come up off the ground with the thighs supported on the arms. Once in a strong crowstand, lift one leg up off of the thigh. Once you can lift both legs at the same time while maintaining the handbalance you are ready for the next step.

SPLIT STANCE FROM FLOOR

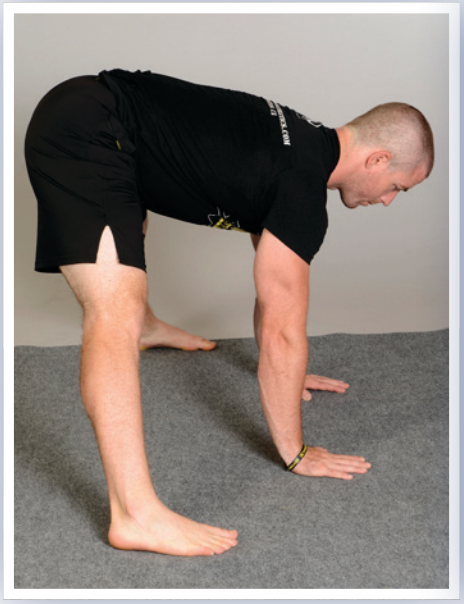


Start in the bottom of a single leg deadlift position with both hands planted. Lean forward and reach the back leg up into the air as you transition the weight into your hands. It is okay to bend the standing leg and the arms to make the transition. Be sure to straighten out body and legs before pressing up.

STRADDLE FROM BOX

Starting with hands on floor and feet wide on a box, slowly transfer weight from toes to hands completely. Keep legs wide as you slowly bring them overhead and once steady, bring legs together. The higher the box, the easier this movement will be.

STRADDLE FROM FLOOR



From a standing straddle stretch with hands on the floor in front of you, lean forward and slowly transition the weight into your hands as you lift the legs. Doing partial reps of this movement is helpful initially.

STRAIGHT ARM PRESS TO HANDSTAND

All of the above progressions can be done with the arms completely straight. This will require much more shoulder strength and hip flexibility as well as confidence in your balance and positioning. It's very important to be able to eventually do both the bent-arm and straight arm variations.

Variations:

Planche

Weighted

Uneven

PLANCHE

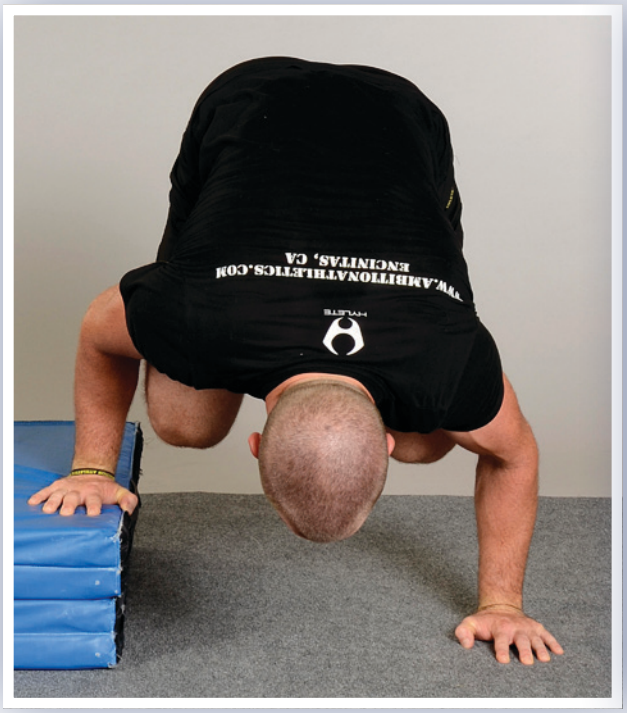
The Planche is the pinnacle of pushups. It actually seems to defy gravity. Doing the Planche on parallettes is best done by starting in a handstand and slowly lowering down with straight arms until the body is parallel (or as close as you can get).

This position is effectively an isometric front raise with your entire bodyweight so get your Lats involved and keep the shoulders down to help with some of the work that your shoulders and Pecs are about to do. Progressing in the Planche can be done using the same leg positions as the front lever (tuck/half tuck/etc).

WEIGHTED

Adding weight to the L-Press to handstand is a great way to overload the movement. Use a weight vest or belt around the chest. Ankle weights change the balance too much and are not as effective.

UNEVEN



Set up with one hand on a low box and the other on the floor and press up to a handstand. You'll notice a strong bias toward the lower hand as you press up. This one is cool because you can L-sit and press up to handstand sideways on a chair.

THE FULL MOVEMENT

L-PRESS TO HANDSTAND

Starting in an L-Sit, tuck knees to chest and reach hips up and back as chest goes forward. Continue until body is inverted, arms are slightly bent and legs are still tucked. It is important here to maintain balance and be patient rather than trying to quickly kick legs up to straight. Slowly extend legs while maintaining balance. Once legs are straight press up with the arms to the handstand.

Variations:

L-PRESS TO HANDSTAND (STRADDLE)

Start in an L-sit and keep legs straight. Pull back through until the legs clear the parallettes and then bring the legs out through a straddle to a handstand.

L-PRESS TO HANDSTAND (PIKED)

Start in an L-Sit and keep the legs straight and feet together all the way up to a handstand. Piked will be the most difficult variation.

STRAIGHT ARM VS. BENT ARM

There are two ways to perform the L-Press to Handstand. The easy way, and the hard way. All joking aside though, there is a massive difference between straight arm and bent-arm strength. Learning the movement and allowing the elbows to bend is going to allow you to evenly distribute the load of your body throughout the arms and shoulders. Doing the movement with straight arms is going to force you to have more strength in the shoulder girdle (delts/lats) and your leverage is going to be working against you more in this variation. I recommend learning the movement with bent arms and progressing to doing it with straight arms. You can follow the same progressions above for either bent arm or straight arm variations.

ARCH VS HOLLOW

Over the years there have been several different schools of thought on the handstand. In fact, in the early days of gymnastics they used a much more arched position relative to the hollow position they use today. One main reason for this is body alignment and scoring points (for style). This body alignment is also good for proprioception. I personally believe that the arched position is going to be much stronger with a faster learning curve for beginners as it puts the shoulders in a stronger position and allows you to spot the floor between your hands more comfortably.

That being said it makes the most sense to practice both variations to completely own the handstand. A great drill for the hollow body position is to set up in a chest facing the wall handstand and

walk your hands in until your chest and feet are the only things touching the wall. Owning this hollow body handstand position will also improve shoulder flexibility but won't be as strong of a position for freestanding handstand pushups when compared to the arched handstand.

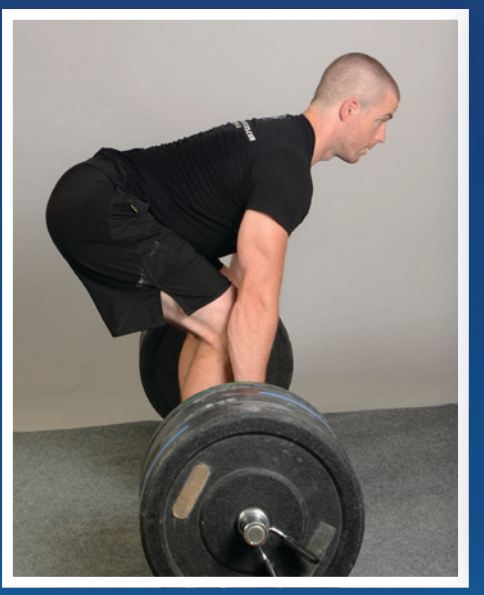
The L-Press to Handstand is very versatile because it can be programmed anywhere as an upper body pushing exercise. Properly utilized it will give you strong and resilient shoulders and awesome core strength and coordination.

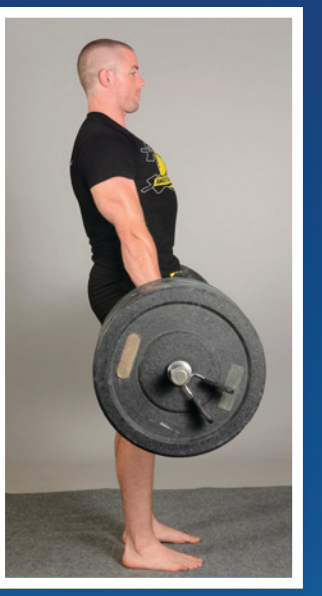
TIPS TO REMEMBER

- During all phases of the movement outer spiral the arms (elbow pits forward) to engage the lats and protect the shoulder
- Position before progression: Own the position before attempting to move on to the next step
- This is especially critical for the finish of the movement. Own the bent arm handstand position with straight legs before trying to press up
- Do not extend the legs behind you as you pull through, keep the knees as close to the chest as possible and send the hips up, not back
- Don't allow the arms to bend more than 90 degrees on the L Pull Through--you might get stuck
- **PRO TIP:** To enhance the flexibility and core strength demands, start practicing the Pike L Press to Handstand on progressively lower parallettes
- **PRO TIP:** If you are having trouble with the balance during the final press up, do some isometric holds at various positions to help own the positions
- **PRO TIP:** Work on engaging the glutes and abs to give you handstands a more stable structure
- Make it look easy

CHAPTER 4

DEADLIFT





Don't settle for average when it comes to the deadlift. I want you to aim higher. Anyone can deadlift a small amount of weight and make it look good, but it takes a man to pull 3x their bodyweight off the floor. The deadlift is the most awesome display of total body strength; you can't fake a heavy deadlift. The other great part of the deadlift is how easy it is to learn. Bottom position: reach down and grab bar while staying tall. Top position: Stand up tall. The end. Increase weight until difficult.

DEADLIFT OR SQUAT?

Many people regard the Squat as the king of weight training exercises. I think they are awesome. Front Squat, Back Squat, Overhead Squat; I love them all. That being said, it is more challenging to learn, and to get perfect. The reality is that many athletes don't have the flexibility required to do it properly or pain free. Full range of motion goes out the window and you have some twisted nightmare of what a squat actually should look like. This is one reason to train the deadlift hard; much better ratio of risk to reward. The other is the demand on the arms and grip. Simply holding massive weights in your hands makes you stronger and this stimulus during the deadlift will take your overall strength to new heights. In a perfect world, I choose both. If I have to pick just one, it's the deadlift every time.

THE HIP MOVEMENT CONTINUUM

On one end of the spectrum we have a stiff leg deadlift (lots of hip movement with little to no knee movement). On the other we have a Olympic style front squat (lots of knee and hip flexion). Your deadlift should be somewhere in the middle, but you will have to find your own personal deadlift stance and positioning that suits you best.

If you'd like to read more on this topic, Dan John has written about a similar idea of hip movement calling it the hip displacement continuum—emphasizing the importance of differentiating between squatting and hinging movements and how it pertains to jumping, and overall power development.

SETUP

The deadlift can be broken down into two positions; a strong set-up and a solid finish.

When you set up for the deadlift in the bottom position, try to go through a mental checklist to make sure you are properly prepped to lift a heavy weight.

DEADLIFT BOTTOM POSITION

1. Full foot planted on the floor

2 Big chest, this will help keep the back straight

3 Eyes on a spot 10 feet away on the floor. This helps to keep the neck neutral, making you stronger and less likely to strain your neck.

4 Lats engaged with shoulders set down and back, helps to stabilize the upper body so your legs can get to work.

5 Full breath of air into belly. This helps you protect the spine by creating extra intra-abdominal pressure.

6 Take out the slack. The deadlift is just like pushing a car, you don't want to go from relaxed into slamming into it. To take out the slack, grab the bar and initiate the pull with 5% effort, you will feel and probably hear the bar clink into position. Once you are here then you can explode into the weight.

DEADLIFT VARIATIONS

Conventional

Romanian

Sumo

Trap Bar

Deficit

Rack Pull

Snatch Grip

Single Leg

Kickstand

If you stick with the movements above and the basic checklist for technique you are good to go! However, if you want to take an in-depth look at everything the deadlift has to offer, my good friend Dave wrote an entire book dedicated to this one movement here: Off The Floor.

CONVENTIONAL

The most common variation of the deadlift. The stance is going to range anywhere from 6 to 12 inches apart with knees slightly flexed and arms outside the legs.

ROMANIAN

This variation will have the same stance as a conventional deadlift but the legs will be nearly straight at the bottom position. This is more hamstring work and will need to be done with a lighter weight. This also requires more flexibility to be done properly.

SUMO

Some people are going to find that a sumo stance is significantly stronger, better, or easier than the standard stance. With the feet outside the hands, the sumo deadlift is going to help many people use the glutes more effectively. Those who have low back hyper-activity issues during deadlifts can often benefit from this.

TRAP BAR

If you have access to a Trap Bar, it is an awesome variation that makes it much easier to get into a solid position. This along with the rack pull are the best variations for someone who lacks flexibility because they are the easiest positions to get into. This will allow you to work the quads more than the regular deadlift.

DEFICIT

Increase the range of motion, increase the difficulty. This is my personal favorite deadlift variation. Each rep will enhance your flexibility and also your strength. The abs have to work hard to move the weight from such a disadvantaged position. It also makes every other deadlift variation seem much easier. Simply stand on plate (or several) so that the bar is lower than normal. You may go as low as bar nearly touching the top of the feet at the start position.

RACK PULL

The opposite of a deficit deadlift, shortening the range of motion allows you to use more weight and focus on the top portion of the deadlift (the lockout). Set-up the same as a normal deadlift with the bar resting on blocks or a rack to bring the bottom position higher.

SNATCH GRIP

A great variation that will give some of the same benefits of the deficit deadlift. It will also require the upper back to work a lot harder just to stabilize the weight. Simply perform the standard deadlift with hands spaced wider on the barbell for all these benefits. The grip will be much more difficult at first.

SINGLE LEG

The single leg deadlift, like the airborne lunge, offers a host of flexibility and balance benefits that are pivotal for cultivating the ultimate athlete. It is a good idea to pepper in some single leg deadlifts as part of your training. Start with a hands at shoulder width on the bar with one foot planted on the floor. The free leg should be extended behind with the glute contracted. This will help activate the glute of the standing leg to help lift the weight.

KICKSTAND DEADLIFT

Some are going to find the full single leg deadlift a bit too difficult from a balance perspective. To help with that, simply set up the non-working leg next to the standing leg with the toe on the floor to assist in balance only, like a kickstand. The working side will be doing the majority of the work in lifting the weight.

DOUBLE OVERHAND OR MIXED GRIP?

The deadlift is a great grip strengthener all by itself and should be done for as long as possible in each session with both palms facing toward you. Once you get to a point in the session where the grip is the limiting factor, only then will you flip one palm to face forward–this will prevent the bar from rolling out of your hands. On maximum attempts you will certainly be using this mixed grip. Utilize both variations for the most overall benefits.

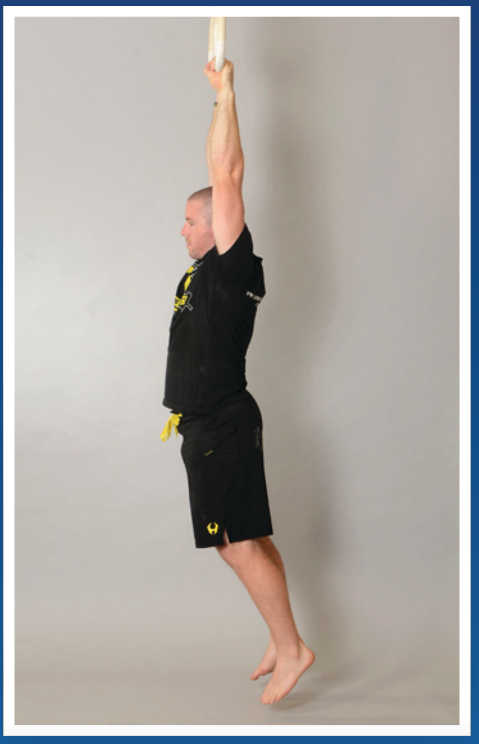
One of the main advantages of the deadlift is in its simplicity in learning and implementation. Anyone can learn how to deadlift at their level of fitness. The deadlift used to actually be called the "health lift" because it strengthened the legs and back so effectively and improved posture. Continue to deadlift safely and progressively over the years and it will yield you incomparable benefits to posture, strength, and health.

TIPS TO REMEMBER

- Always take the slack out of the bar before pulling
- Keep the arms straight and the shoulders set down and back, outer spiral the arms to engage the lats and protect the shoulder
- Show the logo on your T-shirt to the camera in front of you
- Full breath of air before you initiate your pull
- Focus on the glutes and the hips, this is not a squat!
- Make every rep look the same
- Make it look easy

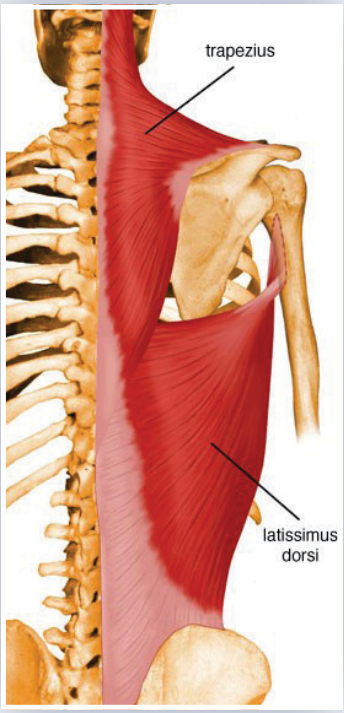
CHAPTER 5

FRONT LEVER



The Front Lever takes the most challenging core stability drill and combines it with the most challenging, disadvantaged straight arm lat pull down you can imagine. I chose the Front Lever because I found that it had an impressive carryover to all pulling exercises as well as core strength moves. The reverse not being the case, we will train our front levers strongly and consistently, and enjoy massive gains in all areas of pulling and core strength.

LATS



The term "Trap-dominant" is something that gets thrown around more and more frequently when it comes to strength and fitness. This is because people use their Traps far too much and rely on them heavily to help them lift, move and breathe. The same is not true for the Lats. Though the Lats are the biggest muscles in your upper body, people generally have a more difficult time engaging the Lats. The Lats provide structural integrity for the upper body, as well as help stabilize and protect the shoulder. They are also instrumental in transferring energy between the upper and lower body. The front lever and it's variations will light the Lats up and help build up your shoulder integrity in a big way. A strong pair of Lats from a healthy dose of front levers will also improve your deadlifts, squats, or any other time you'd like to move a very heavy weight.

SETUP

When performing the front lever, take care to own the correct body and arm position early on; bad habits will be much harder to break later, trust me:

1. Keep the arms straight and the shoulders down away from the ears.

2. Keep the trunk neutral, slight flexion or "hollow" position is okay here.

3. Eyes down towards chest.

You won't be able to jump straight into doing the most difficult progression. As a good rule of thumb you'll want to be able to really own the position for 5 seconds minimum before progressing on to the next more challenging variation.

You won't be able to do the most challenging variation every time you train–be comfortable doing an easier progression for a longer duration on some days and just dial in your technique and positioning.

Furthermore, you might find that even if you are very strong at the previous step for upwards of 15 seconds, the next step might still be too big of a gap to make the transition. So rather than start with body parallel to the floor on the next step , start at a 45 or more degree angle upward to take some of the pressure off. As you build up strength, start to bring the torso back toward parallel

to the floor. See inverted negatives in the assistance section to give you an idea of how to work this in.

PROGRESSION

Floor Isometric with Hip Lift

Tuck Lever

Flat Tuck

Quarter Tuck

Half Tuck

Half Flat Tuck

Bent Knee Straight Body

Straddle Front Lever

Full Front Lever

FLOOR ISOMETRIC WITH HIP LIFT

The first progression is going to be on the floor. This allows you to dial in the position without having to support your entire bodyweight. This is a critical step in establishing a solid shoulder and trunk position. Lay down on the floor and pull downward isometrically on rings or a martial arts belt attached to a pullup bar or door behind you. Keep the arms straight and focus on using the lats. Slowly begin to lift hips and lower back off the floor until you are able to perform the exercise with shoulders touching the floor only.

TUCK LEVER

Moving from the floor to the bar can be difficult. In this progression set up by grabbing the bar and bringing the knees to the chest and leaning back until your ankles touch the bar. Reset here and lock the shoulders into position and contract the lats. Lower down until the trunk is parallel to the floor and hold.

FLAT TUCK

In the first progression of the tuck lever, it's better to not worry about whether or not the spine is curved. In this next phase is where we dial in the relationship between the spine and shoulder position. The back should be flat and the hips should be flexed 90 degrees.

QUARTER TUCK

The next progressions sees the legs start to inch outward toward the 1/2 tuck. Start in a flat tuck and lower one leg parallel to the floor while keeping the knee bent. The opposite knee will stay close to the chest. Every inch that your center of gravity moves away from your hands is an exponential increase in difficulty so own this step before moving forward.

HALF TUCK

Same as the Quarter tuck but now the bottom leg will be completely straight.

HALF FLAT TUCK

Same as the half tuck but with the top thigh at 90 degrees.

BENT KNEE STRAIGHT BODY

Finding the straight body position in the front lever is the most challenging step. Starting from a Quarter Tuck, lower the top leg until both thighs are parallel to the floor, but the knees are bent 90 degrees.

STRADDLE FRONT LEVER

Set up with a flat tuck lever. Extend the legs so they are pointed straight up toward the ceiling. Slowly bring the legs as far apart as possible before lowering forward so that the hips are extended.

FULL FRONT LEVER

From a straddle front lever, bring legs together and squeeze using the inner thigh muscles and glutes to help provide stability.

Of course, in theory it would be fantastic to simply progress from one level to the next seamlessly. Unfortunately that is usually not the case, so use the variations and assistance exercises below to help you continue progressing.

VARIATIONS AND ASSISTANCE EXERCISES

Hanging Leg Raise + Hip Lift

Inverted Negatives from all positions

Ice Cream Makers

Front Lever Pulls from all positions

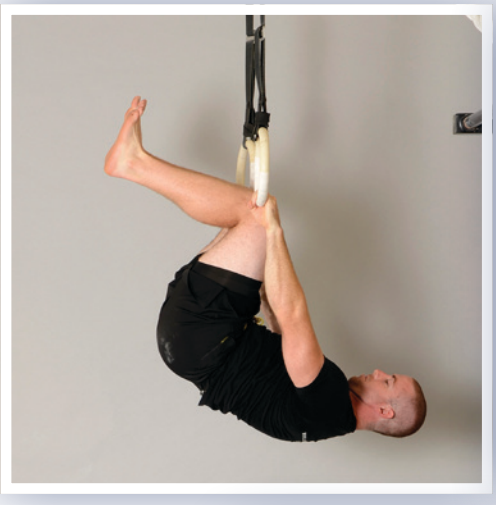
Chin-ups

Skin the Cats

HANGING LEG RAISE + HIP LIFT

One of the best assistance exercises for the front lever, combines a hanging leg raise with a front lever pull. Start by hanging from the bar and bringing the ankles to the bar with straight arms. Once there, perform a straight arm pulldown movement using the lats to bring the hips to the bar. You will now be in an angled version of a full front lever.

INVERTED NEGATIVES FROM ALL POSITIONS



Within each of the above progressions lies this progression within a progression. By starting in any of the main positions above in a full inverted position and lowering down, you dramatically reduce the necessary strength to hold that position. This will give you a chance to own the position and build the confidence slowly to hold that position parallel to the floor. This variations is possible on a bar or rings, but is significantly more effective on the rings.

ICE CREAM MAKERS

Another excellent variations that also allows you to briefly go in and out of position that may be too challenging for a static hold. Begin by pulling up to the top of a pullup position. Using the appropriate leg position, lower into a front lever briefly before returning to the top of the pullup. Maintain the leg position throughout the exercise. Can be done from a full tuck all the way to a full front lever.

FRONT LEVER PULLS FROM ALL POSITIONS

Starting from a standard hang with any leg position, pull with straight arms to a front lever (or higher). Can be done on bar or rings, though with rings you can go to completely inverted and back and forth through a wider range of motion.

CHIN-UPS

Through front levers, you are going to notice a huge improvement in your ability to do pullups and chinups due to the improved lat and back strength. Pepper in some chinups into your program and be amazed at your progress without practicing them frequently.

SKIN THE CATS

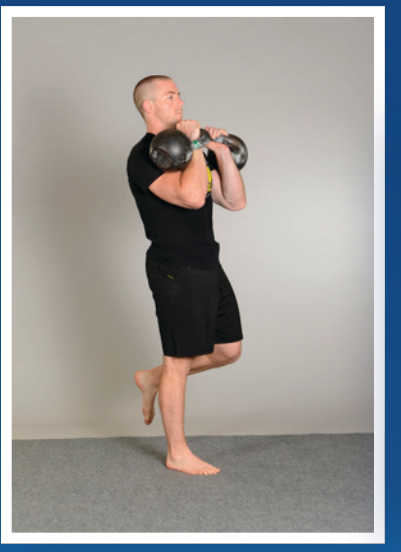
Shoulder flexibility, core strength, you can't go wrong with skin the cats as a mainstay as far as accessory work is concerned. Begin from a hang and pull with straight arms all the way until the chest is now facing toward the floor. Using the pecs and shoulders, pull back through to a hang. This drill is best done repeated for repetitions and can be done with legs straight or knees bent depending on the ability of the athlete.

A full front lever is something that few people achieve. It takes time, effort, and smart training. If one has the dedication to attain the front lever, they will be handsomely rewarded with improved posture and core strength–and a pair of lats that will block out the sun.

TIPS TO REMEMBER

- Outer spiral the arms to help engage the lats and protect the shoulder
- Lats, Lats, Lats
- When you move on to the next progression, start out angled upward to make the transition easier
- Imagine pushing the bar (or rings) into your hips rather than pulling with the arms
- Keep the arms straight and contract the triceps
- Vary between dynamic exercises like ice cream makers and static holds like front levers for maximum benefit
- Look down toward your feet and point your toes, you should barely be able to see them
- Take a video or have a partner make sure your alignment is good
- Hold easier progressions for longer durations (15+ seconds) to help wake up the right muscles
- Make it look easy

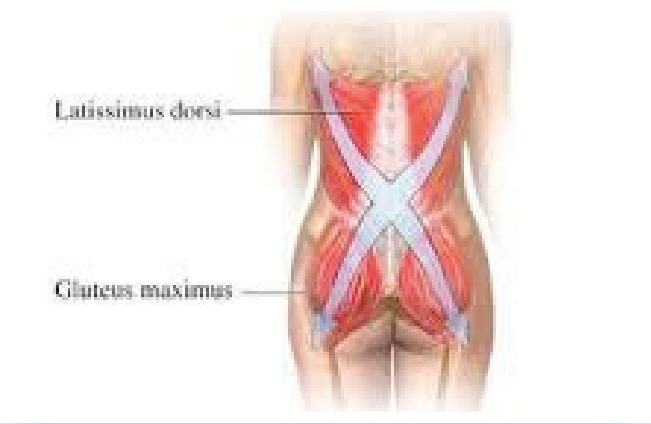
AIRBORNE LUNGE



This move is like the weird cousin of the single leg squat that no one seems to remember around the holidays. The single leg squat, or pistol, is revered by many as the supreme single leg strength exercise. I believe this opinion is shortsighted in terms of strength and athleticism.

Number one; I think that any well-rounded program needs to include single leg work. Not only that but I believe it is better to perform that single leg movement in an asymmetrical stance (one hip in flexion and one in extension like running and walking) as this has a stronger carryover to flexibility, athleticism, and an ideal gait. It fills the gap in athleticism left by doing deadlifts in a symmetrical stance.

Number two is about safety and application. The airborne lunge requires good flexibility, but does not put excessive strain on the knee as can be the case in the single leg squat. The pistol is nearly impossible to perform without excessive lumbar movement (which can put undue strain on the low back), this makes it more of a balance and flexibility trick that isn't really practical for heavy loading. The airborne lunge however, can be performed easily with a neutral spine and effectively loaded in a safe way using a barbell, dumbbells, chains, or kettlebells. In all my years coaching I have yet to meet someone who was "Lat dominant" or "Glute dominant." Keep this in mind and realize that these muscles are especially highlighted in the this book; The glutes play a much bigger role in the airborne lunge than in the pistol, which is one more reason to choose the airborne lunge.



Note that the Lats and Glutes are the two largest muscles in the upper and lower body respectively. If you emphasize them during all of the movements, and strengthen the "X" you are guaranteed to be a stronger, faster, and better moving athlete.

TROUBLE SPOTS

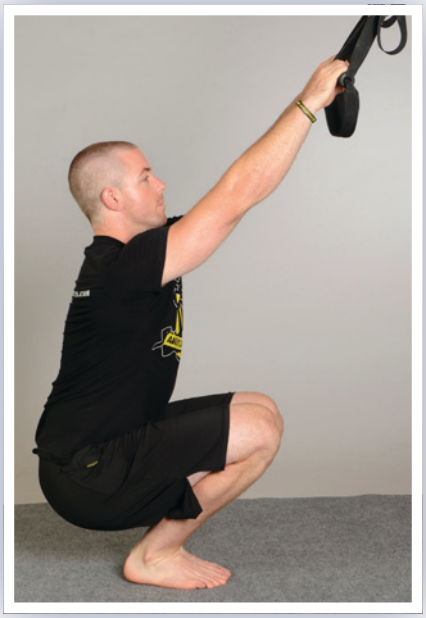
The airborne lunge requires a decent level of flexibility in the hips and ankles that may not allow you to initially perform the full movement. This is quite common so I have put together a few quick fixes for common mobility problems.

ANKLE MOBILITY

Doing the airborne lunge properly requires a good amount of ankle dorsiflexion (shin forward) in order to do the movement with the foot flat. If you have extremely tight ankles, it is okay to perform the movement with a slight heel lift as you work to improve your ankle mobility.

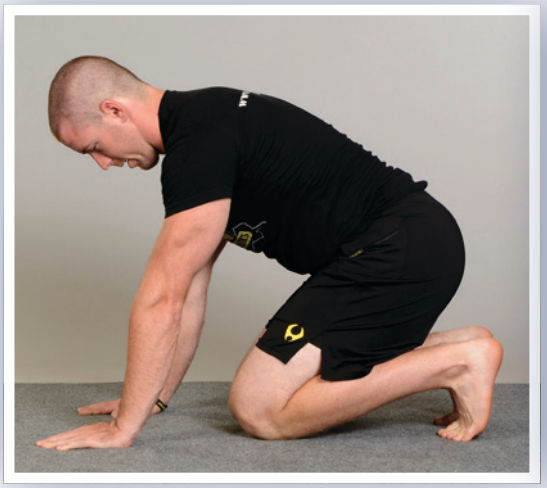
Improving your ankle mobility can be done with a few simple movements:

ASSISTED CLOSE STANCE SQUAT



Grabbing on to a rack, bar, rings, or doorknob, drop down into a full squat with feet together. Put as much weight as possible onto the balls of the feet and move side to side and front-to-back to increase and change the stretch.

DEEP KNEELING TO DOWN DOG



One major factor in ankle mobility is toe extension. This next movement doubles as an ankle dorsiflexion drill as well as a way to improve toe extension, thereby improving overall ankle mobility. With both feet and toes tucked underneath you in a kneeling posture, sit back on your heels. Then reach hands forward onto floor and lift up into a downward dog pose. Return to kneeling and repeat for repetitions, holding for a second or two in each position.

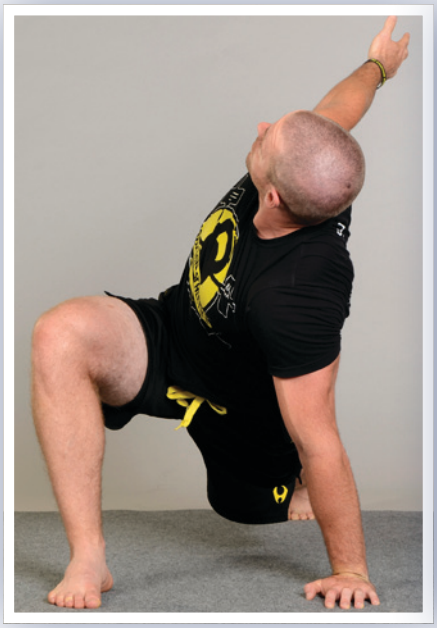
LACROSSE BALL FOR ANKLE MOBILITY:

One thing that can dramatically improve your ankle dorsiflexion is releasing the soft tissue on the bottom of the feet. Simply roll out your feet on a lacrosse or tennis ball for a nice massage for a minute or so per foot. After this, do an ankle mobility drill and see how much improvement you get.

HIP MOBILITY

One of the primary reasons to do the airborne lunge is that you have one hip in extension while the other is in flexion. This is much more similar to the positions you will end up in during most athletics.

DEEP LUNGE WITH ROTATION AND PRYING



One movement that has a huge bang for your buck, and is especially helpful with the airborne lunge is the Deep Lunge with Rotation and Prying from the mobility section.

Set up in a pushup position and step your right foot outside your right hand. Drive knee outward back and forth to pry open the hip. Then after a sufficient amount of prys to the side, start with the rotations. From the deep lunge, drop right elbow to the floor and then reach it up to the ceiling. Repeat for a few reps and then repeat both on the other side.

EYE POSITION

One problem that many people have with the airborne lunge is that the knee falls inward or they are unable to sufficiently flex at the hip. Changing the position of your eyes can help make this significantly easier. By focusing your eyes downward and slightly toward the side that you are standing on, you will be able to balance and keep the knee from going into valgus collapse (inward collapse of the knee). Aim 2-4 feet diagonally across the standing leg.

PROGRESSION

Split Squat

Kickstand Squat

Rear foot flat Split Squat

Assisted (don't stay here too long, can be a crutch)

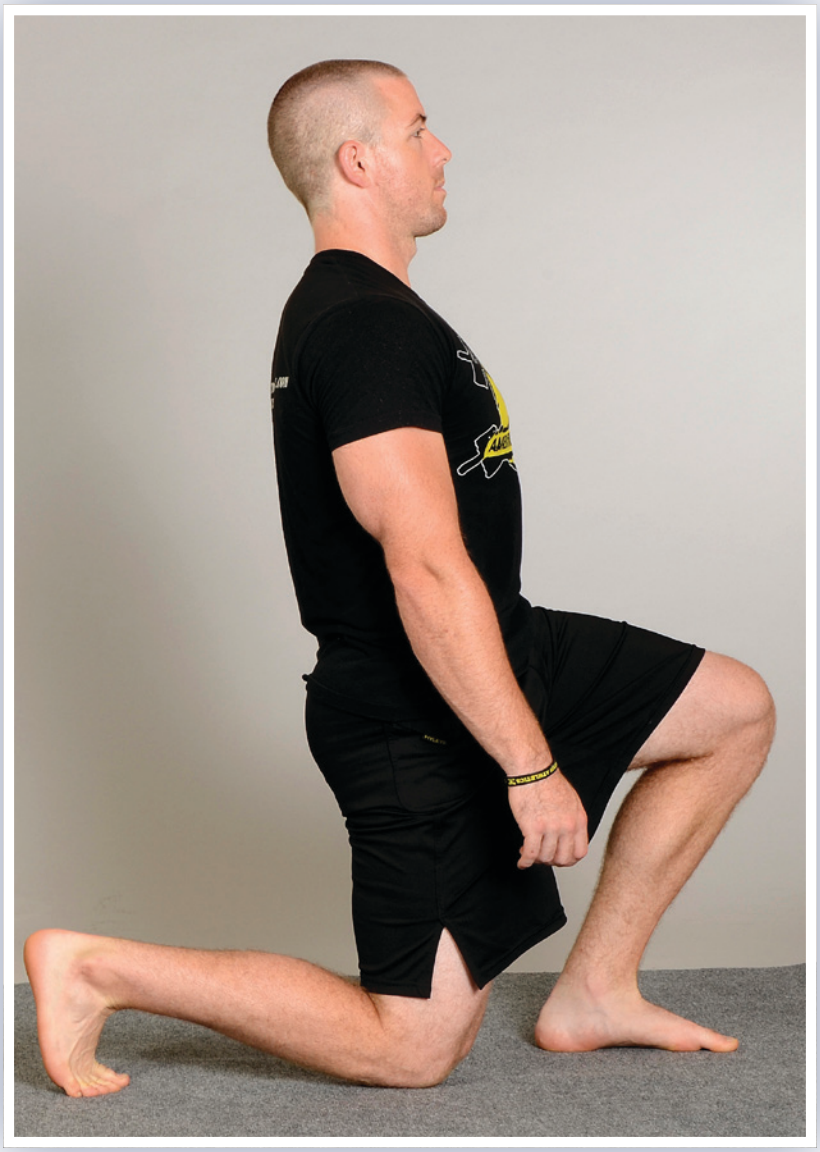
Decreased ROM (to a yoga block)

Counterweight

Unweighted

Deficit

SPLIT SQUAT



The standard split squat is the best place to start in your journey toward the airborne lunge. It will start teaching you how to differentiate one hip from the other (one in extension, with one in flexion), improve your flexibility and get your balance dialed in on a single leg.

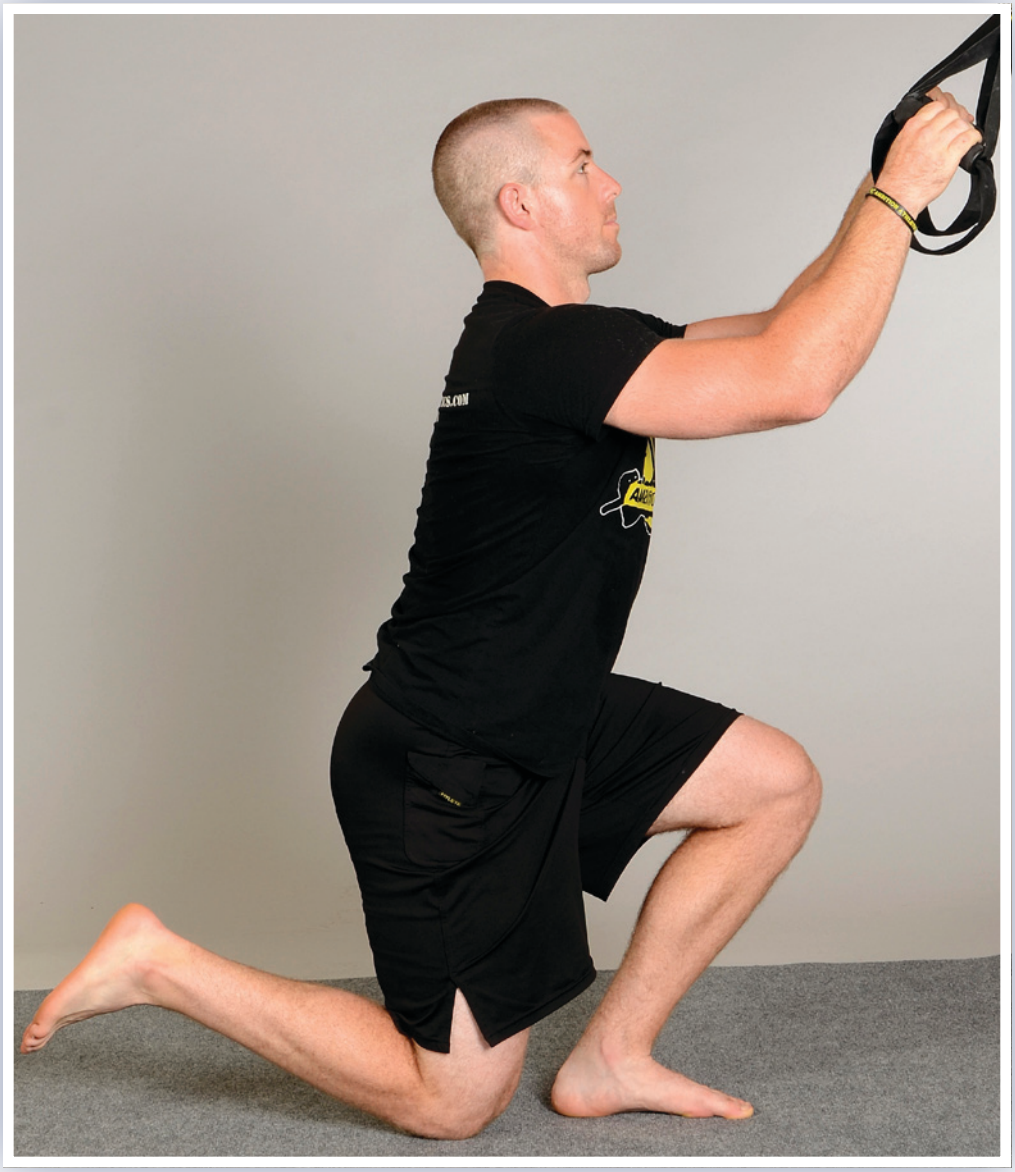
KICKSTAND SQUAT

The kickstand squat is a step forward in flexibility requirements and a terrific exercise in it's own right. Start with the ball of your back foot next to the heel of your front foot and drop down into a full squat. Try to keep most pressure on the front leg. Stand up and repeat.

REAR FOOT FLAT SPLIT SQUAT

Standing strong on one leg, curl the toes of your other leg underneath with the foot just behind the front heel. Drop down into a full single leg squat until the shin of the back leg is flat on the floor. This is a great drill not only to improve range of motion in the working leg squat pattern, but also to open up the ankle and knee of the back leg.

ASSISTED (DON'T STAY HERE TOO LONG, CAN BE A CRUTCH)



While standing on one leg and holding on to a rack or set of rings, reach the opposite knee to the floor without touching the foot to the floor. The right spot should be about 3-6 inches behind the standing heel depending on your body type and leverages.

DECREASED ROM

Using a yoga block or a stack of weight plates just behind the inside of your standing side heel, drop down into a lunge until the knee only gently touches the block before return to top position. At the top position, you may set your free leg on the floor to reset balance or bring the knee up to facilitate better glute activation through extra hip extension of the working leg. Be sure to always fully extend the hip at the top and squeeze the glute regardless.

USING A COUNTERWEIGHT

As flexibility is the main limiting factor for most people learning the airborne lunge, it can be made easier by using a counterbalance. With a pair of dumbbells or light weight plates extended in either arm, all of the above progressions will be made easier from a balance and flexibility standpoint.

UNWEIGHTED

Standing on one leg, drop down until the free knee touches the floor before standing up. Make sure the heel stays on the floor. Forward lean is encouraged to help facilitate extra glute activation. When progressing to this movement, it is important to remember to not touch the back foot to the floor.

DEFICIT AIRBORNE LUNGE

Rather than only adding weight, increasing the range of motion of the airborne lunge is a great way to improve flexibility and strength. Standing on a block or stack of weight plates, drop the free knee all the way to the floor before returning to standing.

LOADED VARIATIONS

Weight Vest

KB Racked or Goblet Style

Zercher

WEIGHT VEST

The easiest way to load up the airborne lunge is with a weight vest and counterbalance weights in the hands. Though this requires a weight vest it is an easy progression.

KB RACKED OR GOBLET STYLE

A kettlebell or pair of kettlebells is a more challenging variation because the weight is much closer and can't be used as a counterbalance. The same movement can also be done without kettlebells by holding a weight plate in front of you.

ZERCHER

Once you get to a certain level of strength in this movement, it gets tougher to load up. The normal front squat and back squat bar positions don't tend to work very well. In order to get the most bang for the buck while keeping the balance, the zercher position works the best for loading up the airborne lunge with some real weight. Start with a barbell in the crooks of the arms with good posture and perform the normal airborne lunge.

ASSISTANCE DRILLS

Feet Together Squat

Cossack Squat

Rear foot Elevated Split Squat

Squats

FEET TOGETHER SQUAT

For active flexibility and joint conditioning, feet together squats are a great assistance exercise. Simply stand with feet together and perform standard squats. Be sure to keep the heels flat on the floor - you may use a counterweight if necessary. Do not bounce out of the bottom position and try to be smooth.

COSSACK SQUAT

A great variation with extra flexibility benefits. This movement can also be loaded up with plates, kettlebells, or a barbell, just as in the airborne lunge. Set up with a very wide stance and both feet pointed straight ahead. Keeping one leg straight, descend into a squat on the other leg while externally rotating the straight leg until the toe points to the ceiling. Alternate sides each rep for either flexibility or strength. Be sure to keep the heels on the floor and do not let the knee fall inward of the toes on the bent leg. That half of your body should look exactly like a proper squat.

REAR FOOT ELEVATED SPLIT SQUAT

Great for developing active flexibility, it will really help for those having trouble getting full hip extension of the rear leg. Set up with one ankle on a chair or bench and the other about 2 feet in front on the floor. Drop down until the rear leg touches the floor while maintaining good posture and emphasize contracting both glutes and facilitating a stretch in the rear leg. Stand up strongly focusing on the front glute to bring you back up. Repeat for reps.

SQUATS

In the same way it can be a good idea to cycle between deadlifts and single leg deadlifts, it is also a good idea to pepper in some squatting into the plan. Back Squats, Front Squats, or Zercher

squats are all equally good, just find a variation that works best for you. The only rules are that the hips knees and toes must point the same direction with feet fully flat on the floor and the spine should remain neutral.

The airborne lunge is a terrific display of single-leg stability, strength, athleticism, and flexibility. When properly executed it is a perfect complement to the deadlift in helping you achieve maximum strength, flexibility, and athleticism.

TIPS TO REMEMBER

- Keep the standing heel down at all times
- Reach the knee down and back
- Look down toward the side you are standing on, it will help you get into the bottom position more easily and prevent the knee from falling inward. You can also reach your arms in that direction
- If you have an easy time getting into the bottom position but posture tends to collapse, bring your gaze up a little higher and keep your T-shirt logo on that camera
- Finish with the hip fully extended and squeeze the glute to emphasize good hip extension
- Make it look easy

STOP RIGHT THERE!

These four moves will take you a long way if you spend the time to get adequate *practice*. Practice is the key to maximizing the effectiveness of the four main movements.

Skill acquisition is a daily endeavor if the goal is excellence. This is especially true with the front lever, and any kind of handbalancing movements.

So without complicating things any further here is what you should do now:

Skill Acquisition (3-7 times per week)

20 minutes:

L-Sit to Handstand Practice

Deadlift Practice

20 minutes:

Front Lever Practice

Airborne Lunge Practice

Stick with progressions on skill movements like L-Sit to Handstand and Front Lever that are 1 or 2 levels below your best. The goal here is to make it consistently easy to lock down the movements.

EXAMPLE 1:

20 minutes
Tuck Sit
Handstand against wall
Deadlift

20 minutes:
Tuck Lever
Kickstand Squat

The next day you might step it up a notch.

EXAMPLE 2:

20 minutes:
Tuck Pull Through
Single Leg Deadlift

20 minutes:
Quarter Tuck Lever
Airborne Lunge with counterweight

Daily Practice

Like any other skill acquisition, it behooves you to practice more frequently. This will lead to a much faster (and better) adaptation. Before you can start *training* you have to acquire the basic skill set. One way to approach this is to practice some components of the movements throughout the day. The beauty is that some of the movements require no equipment at all and can be done as practice anywhere, anytime.

EXAMPLE 1:

Every day throughout the day, kick up into a Handstand or a Crowstand to work on balance. Keep the intensity low enough that it can be repeated frequently. Handbalancing in general will improve the most with very frequent practice.

EXAMPLE 2:

Make kickstand squats part of your daily routine, do several sets throughout the day or as part of your morning ritual mixed with some Deep Lunge with Rotation and other mobility drills.

EXAMPLE 3:

If you have access to a pull-up bar, do a Tuck Lever every 30 minutes even if you can already do a more difficult progression. Focus on making the posture perfect and engaging the lats effectively.

Practice, practice, practice. The key is to be consistent. Every exceptional athlete in the world has ONE thing in common: **They have been consistent for a long time.**

Recognize that the four main movements are the meat and potatoes of the program. Spend the time to dial in your skills.

Once you've acquired the necessary movement skills, read on to take your athleticism to the next level...

CHAPTER 7

FULL BODY POWER AND OLYMPIC WEIGHTLIFTING

I could hardly claim this book to be complete without the addition of power work and the Olympic Lifts. There are so many reasons to move explosively that it is almost difficult to know where to begin.

INTERMUSCULAR COORDINATION

All of your muscles working in unison towards the same goal.

CNS PRIMER

Moving explosively lights up your central nervous system, making the rest of your lifting session better.

ATHLETICISM (HIP EXTENSION)

Explosive hip extension is one of the single most important factors in being athletic and powerful. The Olympic lifts and other power movements are the best way to train this quality.

MOVEMENTS

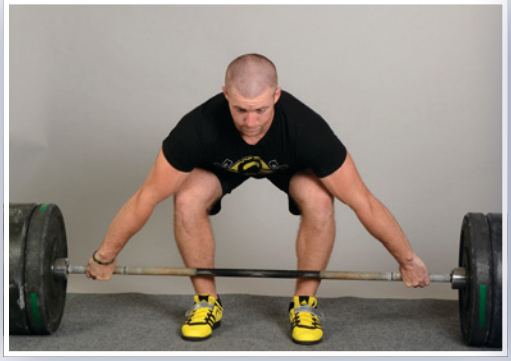
The Hang Power Snatch:

This is my favorite of the Olympic lifts. As far as bang for your buck goes, this is my go-to. It will also leave you a little fresher and prepped for the rest of your session. Snapping a weight overhead at high speed will make you feel cool, and improve your athleticism greatly.

I am far from the best Olympic lifting coach, so if you want to get really, really good at the lifts, stop reading here and go find a good coach to work with in person. However, I've helped a lot of people

get competent in the Olympic lifts to the point where they can see all the benefits without breaking themselves. Learning from the hang position is also the easiest way to learn the movement. The best way to break it down is by focusing on the positions:

BAR ON FLOOR



DEADLIFT FINISH

HANG

OVERHEAD

By hitting each of these positions, it will enhance your learning and remind you to get full extension on each rep.

Step 1: Snatch Grip (taller person, wider grip)

Step 2: Stand up (deadlift finish)

Step 3: Reach hips back to power position (bar touching mid thigh)

Step 4: Jump

Step 5: Catch and Stand up

Make sure you have enough time to recover between sets and be explosive each time. Pair your power work with an easy mobility or glute activation exercise such as glute bridges.

Do you have the required amount of skill and mobility to do the lift safely and effectively? This is an honest question you must ask yourself when contemplating your method of power work.

When it comes to the Olympic lifts, I cannot stress enough how important it is to start out light (45lbs) and dial in your technique, making sure your hips and legs are doing the lion's share of the work. If you don't feel 100% confident, don't load it up and break yourself. My friend Will Fleming, who is an outstanding all-around athlete himself, has put together a great video and manual on the Olympic lifts that I highly recommend. You can find it here: Complete Olympic Lifting.

What I love about the book is that it talks about the Olympic lifts as a tool for improved overall athleticism, rather than a complete answer to the athleticism puzzle.

Equipment requirements are also higher for Olympic Weightlifting. Bumper plates and a platform (or resilient floor) are a generally a must if you plan on getting serious with it. A motivated individual will be able to bring it down under control without damaging the floor, but it's not recommended.

If you have all these things set up for you, you can safely dedicate some time to the Olympic lifts as they are a worthwhile pursuit. If that is not the case, however, there are many other alternatives.

CLEAN OR SNATCH PULLS

The main benefit of the Olympic lifts lies in the pull, rather than the catch. That explosive, loaded triple extension is what we are looking for. It may be worthwhile to do some clean or snatch pulls with heavier weights prior to your deadlifting even if you don't plan on doing the full variations. The other benefits are that the learning curve is very short, especially when pulling from the hang position, and you don't need bumper plates.

SINGLE ARM DUMBBELL OR BARBELL SNATCH

This seems to have a very short learning curve as well, a much less technical variation that has many of the same benefits of the full Olympic lifts, as well as some rotational components that are unique to the single arm variation.

Set-Up:

The barbell or dumbbell should be either touching the shins or on the floor between your feet, respectively. The closer the weight is to your center of gravity, the more easily you can enact force upon it.

SINGLE ARM SNATCH SETUP AND FINISH

Execution: Once in the bottom deadlift position, drive forcefully upward by extending the hips, knees and ankles as in a jump. As you reach full extension, finish the movement by guiding the weight overhead with the arm. This is a movement that requires a good amount of practice to get comfortable with. I highly recommend starting out very light while dialing in the technique.

JUMPING

Jumping Technique:

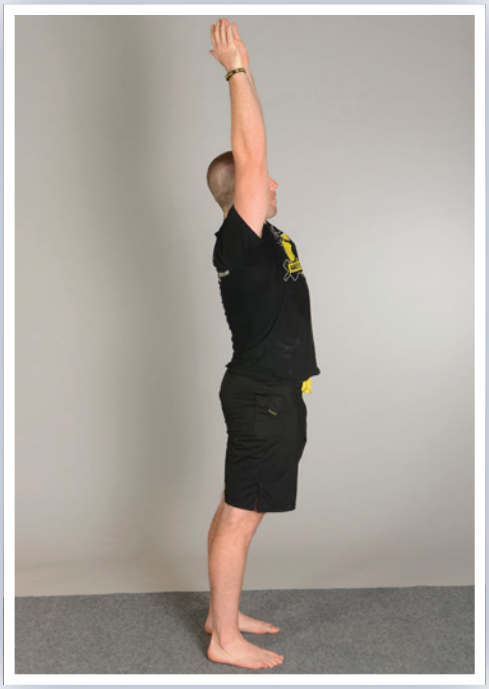
1-2-3...

Top Position

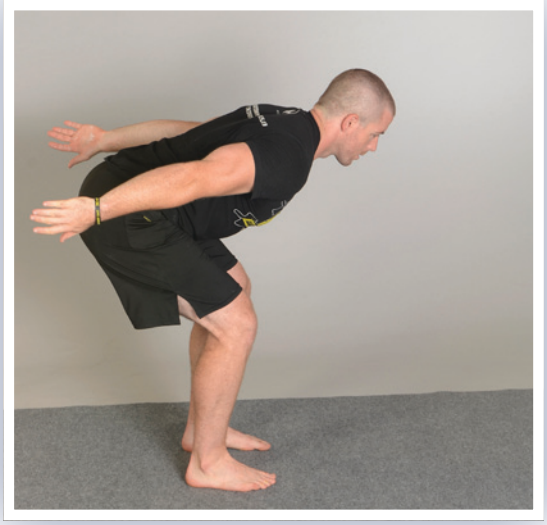
Bottom Position

Explode

1) TOP POSITION STANDING TALL WITH ARMS OVERHEAD

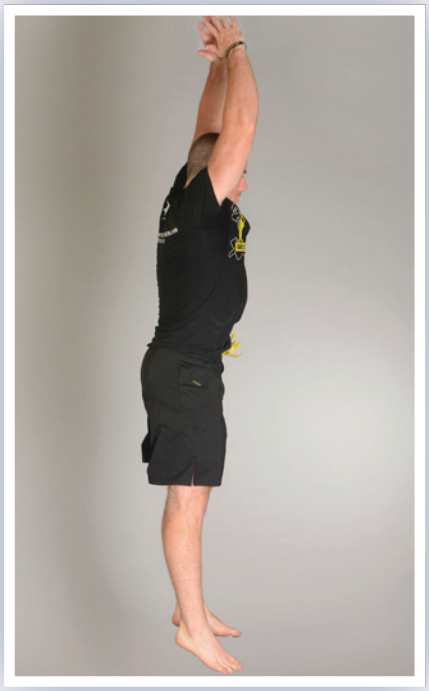


2) BOTTOM POSITION HIPS BACK, KNEES BENT, ARMS REACHING BACK

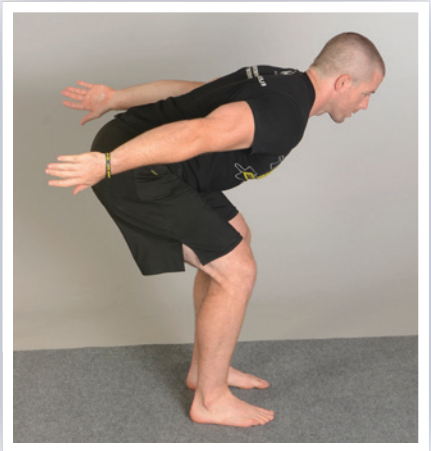


Explosively extend upward with the arms and legs in unison. The arms contribute up to 30% to your jumping power.

3) JUMP



4) LANDING FINISH POSITION WILL BE THE SAME AS THE BOTTOM POSITION OF THE JUMP



It should go without saying that you should not only be able to jump easily without weight, but also land softly before you ever attempt to put weighted jumps in the routine. A good landing should start with the ball of your foot making first contact with the floor, followed by the full foot. The knees, hips, and ankles share the absorption of force equally, as your final position should be a half squat with hips, knees and toes pointing the same direction.

VERTICAL OR BROAD?

The two most common types of jumping that are measured in sports and athleticism are the vertical jump and the broad jump. They are both valuable measurements in determining a person's relative explosiveness. I think there is tremendous value in practice and improving your skill in both of these. When starting out, just keep in mind that it is going to be more difficult to absorb the force from landing a broad jump so there will be a greater shock upon landing. Approach both with steady and careful progress and you'll be flying like the birdman soon enough.

WEIGHTED JUMPS

A simplistic view of the Olympic lifts could say that the snatch is jumping a bar overhead. Overloading your jumping pattern holding a pair of kettlebells or dumbbells (or a weight vest if you have one) is awesome power work. You also don't have to worry about holding back and preparing to catch a massive weight overhead, just let 'er rip.

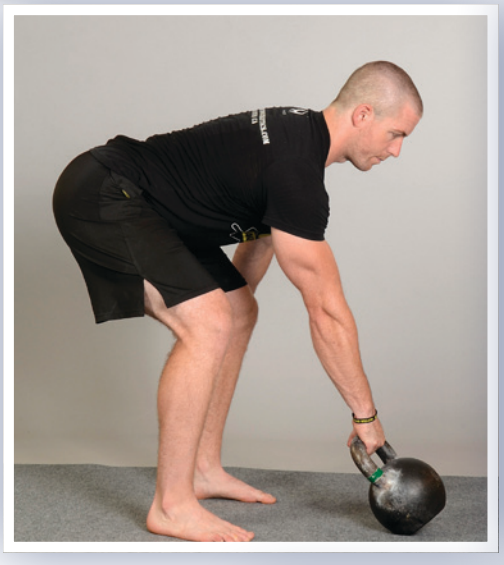
TRAP BAR JUMPS

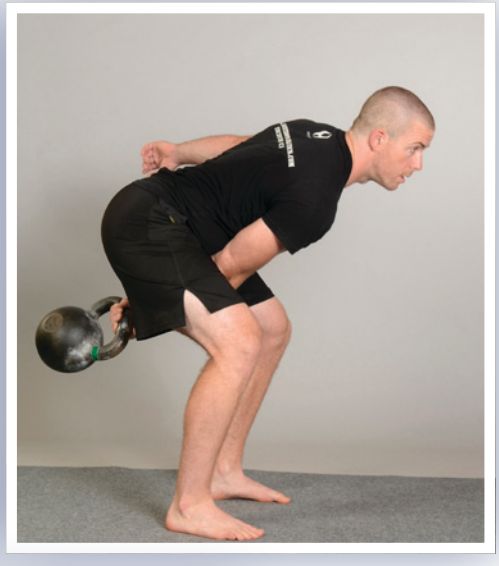
At the risk of giving you yet another piece of equipment to buy, I feel like I need to take a stand to defend the completely under-utilized exercise called the Trap Bar Jump. Sure, Olympic lifts are a lot sexier, but if you aren't interested in developing that specific skill required to perform them correctly, the trap bar jump offers all the same benefits with a significantly shorter learning curve. Just like in the weighted jump, there is no need to hold back, just grab and jump. There is also a difference between a throw pattern (Olympic lifts) and a jump pattern (Trap Bar Jumps). In the first example, you are moving a weight while you stay stationary, in the second, both you and the weight are moving as a single unit, much more similar to a jump. This is not to say that the Olympic lifts won't improve your vertical jump, but overloading the jump pattern might be a better way to achieve that end. The other advantage of the trap bar jump is that it's very comfortable and easy to load up with lots of weight. You can take the trap bar jump and load it to 45lbs and go for max height or load it up to 315 and still go for max height. Changing weight in the trap bar jump makes the type of strength you are building different but the pattern always remains the same. You can get all the benefits of the strength-speed continuum by just using different weights with the same exercise.

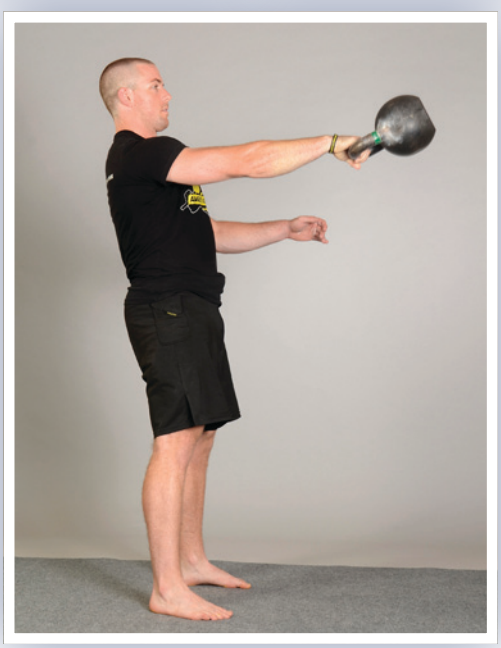
TRAP BAR JUMP

KETTLEBELL SWINGS

It would hardly be fair for me to leave out one of my favorite tools in this list of power developing exercises. The kettlebell swing is a great choice for power development. The single arm kettlebell swing especially (you will outgrow 2-arm kettlebell swings with the 48kg quickly) gives a great bang for your buck with a set of 3-5 per side focusing on explosiveness. It also does a great job of solidifying your hinge pattern and encouraging the glutes to be the driver. The two edged sword is the grip component, you are going to need a grip like a vice to rein in the incredible amount of force that you generate during a powerful kettlebell swing, so it could be potentially limiting the full-body-power you could be expressing. On the other hand, no one's ever had a grip that was too strong. Use the kettlebell swing in conjunction with all of the other tools mentioned for maximum benefits. For more instruction on Kettlebells check out my book, **MASTER THE KETTLEBELL**.



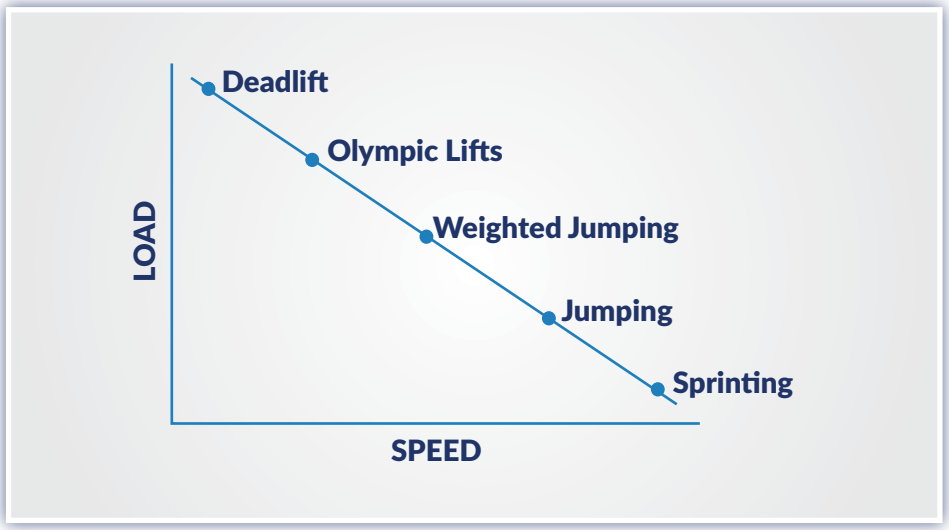




SPRINTING

No one can claim that they are athletic without impressive sprinting ability. This is non-negotiable, and at the end of the day, the prey you have to run down doesn't care how well you can stand in one place and lift a weight. Sprinting can be used for either power work or endurance work. When used for power work it is recommended that you use short distances (<40m) and vary between sprinting on flat ground (in multiple directions) and on hills. I recommend everyone start by sprinting on hills because it is actually significantly safer and teaches better sprint mechanics. Normally when a person gets injured sprinting, it is on the deceleration part of the gait cycle. By sprinting uphill you are eliminating a lot of the risk. You are also forced to stay on your toes (good technique) and drive forward (also good technique). It's important to practice both though, because the top speed will be significantly higher on flat ground and you want to be able to control the speed. With sprinting, especially if it has been a long time or you are new to it, it is extremely important to follow the 80% rule and ramp up slowly. Sprint a couple days a week for huge benefits to your strength, explosiveness, fat loss, and good hormone production (growth hormone and testosterone).

STRENGTH/SPEED CONTINUUM



CONCLUSION

At the end of the day it almost doesn't even matter what you do for power work, just that you do it. If you want to get the most bang for your buck, practice a variety of the above movements along the strength-speed continuum for all-around athleticism. If you have any interest in improving a specific skill, such as Olympic weightlifting, it would behoove you to choose that for the lion's share of your power work.

CHAPTER 8

ACCESSORY AND GRIP WORK

There are always going to be gaps to fill in your strength. Fortunately, the main four movements are very well balanced with the exception of high repetition elbow flexion. Adding in some extra work at the end of your sessions can help increase the health of your joints (15+ rep range) and also build some additional musculature in ze arms.

Rows: Rows are great for postural benefits and pattern retention, high reps can also help build biceps and upper back musculature. Perform a variation of rows for best results. This can include barbell rows, TRX rows, Single arm rows, etc depending on preference and equipment available.

Dips: One of the best bread and butter upper body pushing exercises, it can sometimes aggravate a person's shoulders. If you can do these pain free, use full ROM and gain extra shoulder extension as well as build up the chest, triceps, and shoulders.

Pushups: Same as dips in a different plane, simple enough to do at the end of a session for a couple sets to near-failure. Also a standard metric for fitness in many circles.

Curls: It's almost as if curls have become the unloved stepchild of fitness in the past few years. As the pendulum swings back and forth, we find ourselves in a position where isolation work is heresy–a far cry from the nautilus machine era. However, curl variations have a place in any program for improving elbow health and doubling for grip strengtheners.

A couple of my favorite curl variations:

PLATE CURL

KETTLEBELL PITCHER CURL

MIXED GRIP BARBELL CURL

GRIP STRENGTH

It's hardly appropriate to call a person strong if they do not possess an equally strong grip. In fact, you will never find someone who has good pound for pound strength, who does not also have a freakishly strong grip. There are a couple reasons why it is so imperative to have a strong grip and why it makes such a difference.

The first is through improved muscle activation and neural drive of the neighboring muscle groups, including the rotator cuff. This is terrific for two reasons; All surrounding muscles become

stronger (sweet!) and the rotator cuff can do it's job of centrating the humerus in the joint properly. This will allow the nervous system to give even more juice to your arm and shoulder because there is no instability causing the nervous system to implement the governor to prevent you from injuring yourself.

The Homunculus Man shows what the body would look like if the size of the body parts matched the amount of real estate in the brain dedicated to that area.

You'll notice that the hands are **by far the largest.** It only stands to reason that there would be a high amount of neural focus to the hands, they require the most dexterity and attention from the brain for our survival. Realize the potential benefit for overall neural strength if your biggest weapon is finely tuned.

A couple ways to put this into practice very easily:

Single Arm Pullup Bar Hangs

Hang on a pullup bar with one arm and alternate when necessary, see how long you can hang out up there. Not only good for the grip strength but also for scapular health.

Single Hand Deadlifts

Overload the deadlift pattern with a single hand and it becomes more of a grip exercise than a full-body exercise. Similar benefits to the pullup bar hangs, but it will be more difficult due to the

spinning bar. This can be done with the barbell in front, as in a normal deadlift, or out to the side like a suitcase. If you choose the latter, say hi to your obliques for me.

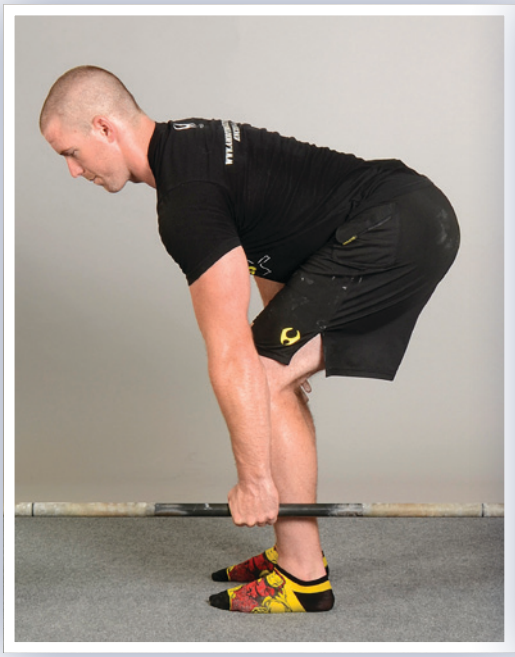


Plate Curls

Pinch a plate between your thumb and fingers and curl to your hearts content. This can be difficult at first, so progress lightly. The easiest progression is to start with a 10lb plate and then to two-10lb plates pinched together. After that you can move up to a 25lb plate. Be warned that the later progressions from 25lb and beyond are a huge jump! This will hit your thumb much better than the pullup bar hangs or the single hand deadlifts.

Reverse Curls

Similar to mixed grip curls with a focus on the extensor muscles. An imbalance of flexors to extensors is a common cause of elbow

issues that can be alleviated by strengthening the extensors. Use the mixed grip curls and reverse curls interchangeably.

Thick Grip Pullup (towels wrapped)

Wrap a towel around the pullup bar (like pigs in a blanket) and perform pullups, or if you're a grip maniac, single arm alternating hangs. Much tougher because the towel will spin. A couple of decent sized dish towels and tape are all you need for a killer grip strengthener.

Vertical Grip Pullups (towels looped)

Loop a rolled up towel over the pull-up bar and you are good to go. Make sure you don't bang your head on the bar when you pull up! Similar to a rope climb, and a great way to train your ability to crush your grip down with the wrists in a different position which will further challenge your overall grip and wrist strength.

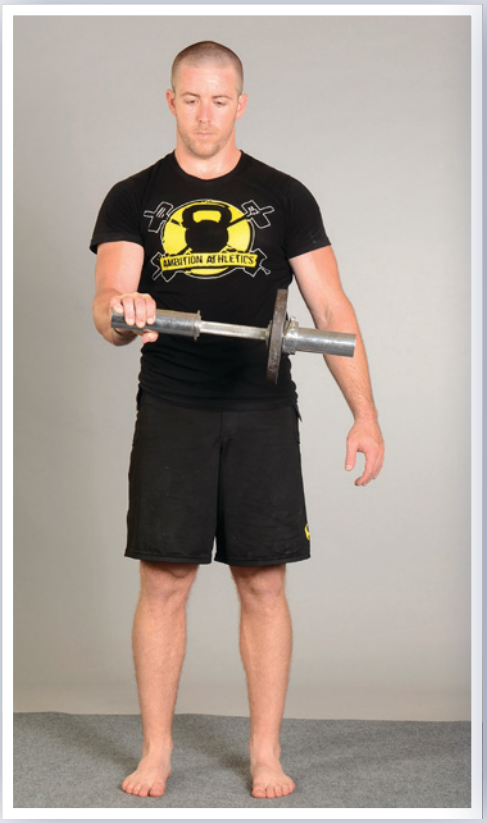
Wrist levering

Grip strength shouldn't be done just in a single plane. Just like everything else, we want to be balanced and prepared for anything. Wrist levering is one of the single best bang for your buck in developing some strength and flexibility in the wrists, hands and forearms.

A length of PVC pipe is perfect for wrist levering as you can progress in difficulty by moving your hand further toward the end. If you're lucky you'll be moving on to a sledgehammer for some of these drills, but that will take some time!

WRIST LEVERING FRONT AND BACK CIRCLES

WRIST LEVERING PRONATION AND SUPINATION



Freestyle:

Grip the ends of the PVC pipe and twirl them around until your grip and forearms are tired.

The longer the PVC pipe, the more difficult it will be. You may also play around with different thicknesses to challenge the grip or wrists more. A thicker grip will usually fatigue the grip more than the wrists and a thinner grip will fatigue the wrists more.

CHAPTER 9

PATTERN RETENTION AND "SWEATING"

Our preferred method of overall physicality is to focus on flexibility, low rep strength training and use recreation to take care of our cardiovascular and pulmonary development. However, there are almost endless ways the body can move and it can be beneficial to do some higher repetition, lower rest movements. This can be used as a gentle "finisher" that provides a lot of bang for your buck in terms of movement improvement. The higher repetitions will also help to strengthen and fortify your tendons and ligaments.

Squats

Side Planks

Hindu Pushups

Carries

Running

Simply throw a few of these together at some higher repetitions (8-20) with little to no rest and a moderate pace for a while. You should get a good sweat going as well as make your joints and muscles happy. It should go without saying that you should be fully competent in these movements before trying to do them in a fatigued state.

Another way to implement this is to perform a wide variety of movements (such as those above, and more) in a warm up before proceeding to the main strength movements. You will have to decide where this best fits into your routine; it could be before, after, on a rest day, or periodically throughout the day depending on your schedule. In Martial Arts we find ourselves performing a

very wide variety of movements that can in some cases satisfy the requirement of this pattern retention.

The purpose of this is mainly to address the reality that your body can move in a nearly infinite amount of ways. It is impossible to concisely catalogue all those movements in a way that is useful. Instead recognize that you should move "All your joints, every day, in every way." This includes strength training and therefore will be a great compliment to our main strength work.

Squat:

The Squat is an absolutely essential movement for retaining proper physical ability. A proper deep squat requires and enhances mobility, stability, and coordination of the ankles, knees, hips, and trunk.

Begin standing tall with feet about shoulder width apart descend into the squat by sitting down and back. Think as if you are trying to get your hips between your heels. The heels should remain in contact with the floor. Experiment with a wider or narrower foot placement to find the best bottom position. The main rule is that the hip, knee, and toe should point the same direction. Drive through the full foot and come back to standing. Emphasize good hip extension (hips forward) at the top to help reinforce glute contraction.

Side Plank:

Many physical dysfunctions start and end with the core—especially the lateral chain. This includes the Obliques, Glute Medius and Quadratus Lumborum. When a person lacks coordination or strength in any of the three, it can cause many serious problems. Fortunately many experts have found that a properly performed, simple side plank is a great shotgun approach to correcting many potential dysfunctions.

Laying on your side, supported on only one forearm and feet, lift up so that only the bottom foot and forearm are touching the ground. Be sure to keep the shoulders down and engage the lats. You may do this with back up against a wall at first to ensure proper alignment. To make this drill even better, add neck rotations while in the side plank position. This will help you keep the neck out of the movement and enhance the shoulder positioning.

Hindu Pushups

Start in a downward dog position with chest reaching toward knees to open up the thoracic spine. Bend the arms as if you are trying to sneak under a barbed wire. As your chest lightly brushes the floor begin to press up as the hips stay down. From here lift the hips up and back while keeping the arms straight to return to the start position. Coordinate the breathing by inhaling as you press up and exhaling as you reach back to the downward dog (start) position.

These are included primarily due to their excellent bang for the buck. A Hindu Pushup is a perfect way to improve hip, spine and shoulder mobility, enhance your posture, and coordinate breathing with movement. These are also best done for high repetitions and will give your triceps some additional work.

Carries:

One important factor in being a complete athlete is the ability to MOVE under any scenario. Moving in a coordinated fashion while under load is a great way to build up your overall strength and athleticism. Apart from that, loaded carries will strengthen the "X". That is, the opposite shoulder through the abs and low back to the opposite hip and glute. This connects the two largest muscles in the body (Lats and Glutes) and provides not only strength and power, but structural integrity. If you can maintain great posture while keeping the spine stable and moving the hips, we have ourselves an athlete.

Suitcase: Loading up one side of the movement will encourage even more recruitment of the lateral chain, which can be beneficial for muscle balance and oblique/glute medius strength. Just pick up a dumbbell or kettlebell at your side and take a walk while keeping good posture.

Farmers Walk: Grab a pair of dumbbells, kettlebells, or farmers bars (bars specially designed for this movement) and take them for a walk. Maintain good posture and your rewards will be improved rotator cuff strength, grip strength, and posture.

Overhead: With a weight overhead, taking a walk will help to build stability and strength in the shoulder, while allowing your core to stabilize while the hips move. Best done with light loads, though if you are diligent with your handbalancing, not necessary.

Zercher: Don't have any extra equipment? Put the barbell in the crooks of your elbows and take it for a walk. Great for core and spine strength.

Loaded carries for anyone not planning to compete in a competition that demands it are best done with medium, to medium-heavy weights as the Risk/Reward ratio drops off unfavorably with very heavy weights.

Running:

Running typically gets a bad rap for being a muscle-killing, estrogen producing, trudge through the streets in short shorts and a tanktop. Slow, sloppy running is, admittedly worthless, but being able to retain the ability to move quickly in all directions and to change direction is the hallmark attribute of a good athlete. This is an ability that needs to be maintained, cultivated, and improved over time. Moving on two legs is a large part of what makes us human, do not let your ability to run, in any-direction deteriorate.

Check out my article: **Running Doesn't Suck**

CHAPTER 10

ENDURANCE

FUN THINGS OVER RANDOM BS

The primary reason people exercise in this country is to lose fat. Because the conventional wisdom suggests that fat loss is best achieved by endurance training, we live in a cardio-happy world. Unfortunately this means that other physical qualities get left uncultivated. This is unfortunate because endurance is actually the easiest physical quality to acquire and should only be pursued after a solid foundation of movement quality, strength, and speed are built before it. The other interesting thing about endurance training is that you are building up a very specific type of endurance relative to what activity you are doing.

A great example of this was a man named Lance Armstrong, he was really good at riding a bike, arguably the best endurance athlete on the planet at the peak of his career. Then Lance decided that he would try to run a marathon, and the results were predictable. He finished, but he got crushed by the actual runners who had built up endurance from actually running.

The take home message here is this: if you are trying to compete in a specific endurance event, then you should practice that specific thing and acquire that specific type of endurance. If you are planning to run a marathon, best get running. If you plan on entering a jiu jitsu tournament, better be grappling. Don't waste your time doing a 45 minute run if you're going to be doing 3 five-minute rounds in the ring when that time could be better spent on other things like improving your actual skills at whatever you plan on competing in.

The other side is that if you are just trying to stay healthy and strengthen your heart and lungs, it really doesn't matter what you do for your "cardio" as long as it gets you breathing, sweating, and your blood pumping.

This being the case, I think the best thing you can do for endurance work is something fun. Pick something for your conditioning work that doesn't require you to use your willpower to do. For me this includes Jiu Jitsu, Muay Thai (heavy bag or sparring), basketball, tennis, wakeboarding, etc. It's really easy to talk yourself out of doing conditioning–mainly because it's hard and doesn't necessarily feel that awesome, so set yourself up for success and choose things that you find fun–you'll have much better success in being consistent.

It all sounds good on paper but you may find yourself in a situation where none of these are a real option and you just need a quick finisher to give you your cardio fix at the end of your training session. The trick here is to make sure that your finisher at the end satisfies two requirements:

1. Fun
2. Safe

It is best to choose movements that you as an individual would consider "low skill." What I mean by this is that you should be able to do something forwards/backwards/in your sleep for it to be a good choice for conditioning. We are looking to minimize the risk of injury due to fatigue at the end of a session.

If you look at a training session all laid out, it should go from the highest skill maneuver at the beginning of the session to the lowest skill at the end of the session. So put your clapping handstand pushups near the beginning and your stationary bike at the end.

Apart from staying safe while under fatigue, it is also a good idea to double dip toward your goals. If one of your goals is increasing your deadlift and you still want to do some conditioning, then kettlebell swings might be a good option because they will not only work you cardiovascularly, but also provide great accessory work for your posterior chain and help your deadlift.

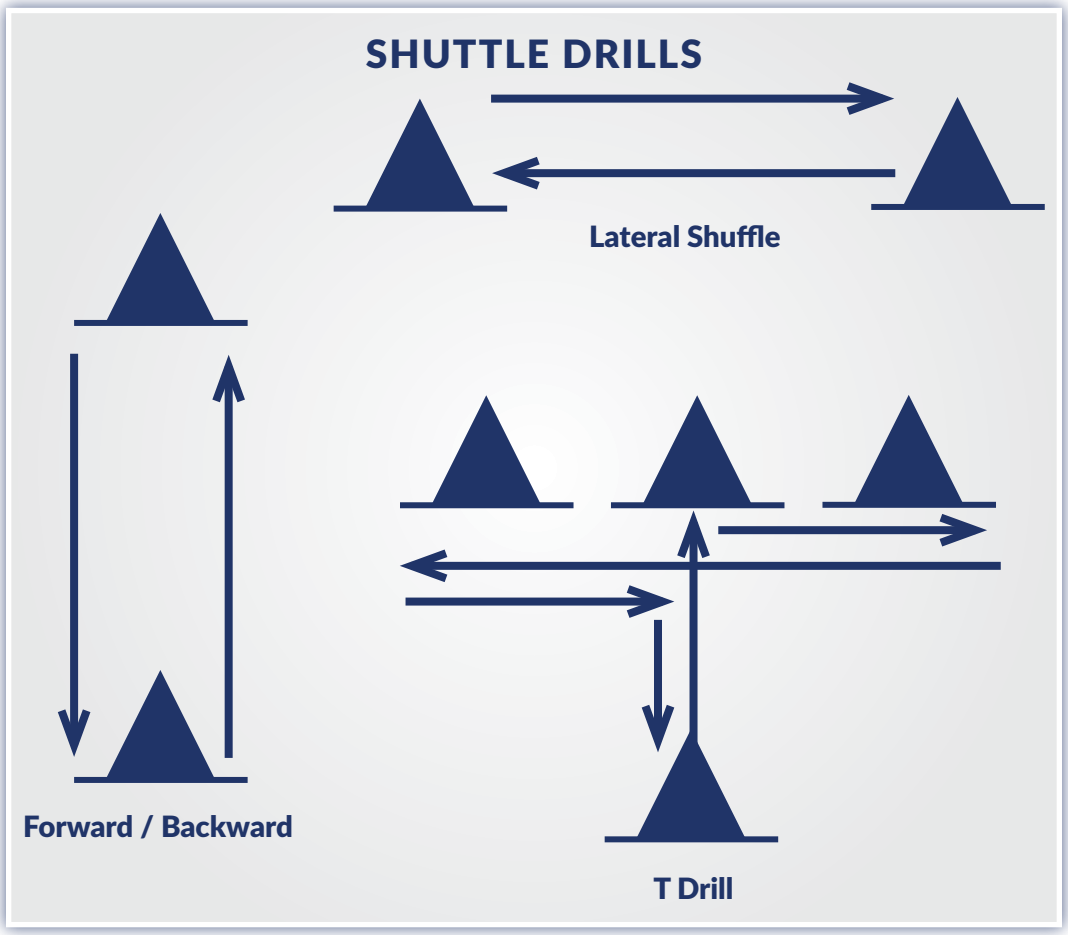
BEST ALL-AROUND CONDITIONING OPTIONS

As mentioned before, the best thing you can do for cardiovascular health is something fun, however if that's not an option here are suggestions to focus on if ultimate athleticism is your goal.

Shuttles

Shuttles are a cornerstone of almost every athlete's training program for good reason. You get a ton of strength gain and improvement in your ability to absorb and deliver force through the ground. This is vital to be a complete athlete, and to stay healthy when it comes time to run around. Shorter distance shuttles can be done as part of a warm up for power work, but don't do too many or you'll burn yourself out for the rest of the training session. If running and changing direction is a brand new thing for

you, do them at the beginning of the session at 50-80% effort as a skill practice.



Forward-Backward:

Set two cones apart and run forwards to the first cone and backwards to the start.

Lateral Shuffle:

Set two cones 5 yards apart and try to see how many touches you can get.

Freestyle:

Simply combine forward, backward, and lateral shuttles and keep it fun. Could set up 4 cones in a "T" and lateral shuffle back and forth along the top of the T and forward and back down the long strip.

Sprints:

200m, 400m, 800m: These are conditioning like you've never experienced unless you have participated in field athletics. Sprint and walk back to start, that is your recovery.

Hill Sprints:

Just as in the power and pattern retention sections, hill sprints make a great finisher for conditioning. The hill limits speed and chance of injury.

Jump Rope

One of the simplest, cheapest, and best tools for improving conditioning and coordination. Simple rope skips will go a long way.

Heavy Bag

Maybe it's because I have a personal affinity for martial arts, but I hardly think an athlete is complete unless he can do a little boxing. The heavy bag is one of the single most effective power and conditioning tools money can buy. It will not only give your lungs and body a beatdown, but you're also working on a new skill. Learning how to kick and punch is a very worthwhile goal and kickboxing

on the heavy bag is my preferred method of "cardio" if I had to pick just one.

Being a well rounded athlete isn't only about being able to do something difficult once. It's about being able to adapt to any situation, and having endurance is a huge factor in becoming a total athlete.

Intervals and Rest Ratios

Many of the drills seen here are best done interval style--that is, a period of hard work followed by a period of rest, and repeated. This allows better body mechanics and higher intensity which is great for fat loss and anaerobic conditioning. You will find that the ratio of work to rest is going to dictate the difficulty. The higher the work to rest ratio the more difficult it will be, and the more challenging the exercise, the more rest you will need. Start out with a short work period followed by a longer rest and build up from there. With sprinting or shuttles you'll want to keep the work periods relatively short with longer rest periods. My usual go-to for starting out is 15 seconds of work and 45 seconds of rest, then building up from there. Just like with the strength-speed continuum, there are different types of endurance that are trained at different intervals--the complete athlete is going to hit the full spectrum.

CHAPTER 11

PROGRAM DESIGN

"Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication."
-LEONARDO DA VINCI

I know what you're thinking. You're expecting to delve into the world of periodization, sets and reps, tempo, etc; let's just stop right there. The goal of this book is not to confuse you or over-complicate things. The goal is to empower you to master your own body through simple philosophies and ideas combined with a healthy dose of much needed common sense.

FOUR MOVES STRUCTURE

The beautiful simplicity of the "program" lies in the ease of implementation and frequent practice.

By following the principles in this book you should be able to train anywhere from 1 to 7 days per week. What you do on a given day is your choice as long as you include the following:

IN A PERFECT WORLD THIS IS GOING TO BE:

High Skill

3 ROUNDS

Power Exercise (Hang Power Snatch) 1-5 reps
Glute Activation (Glute Bridges) 10 reps

15-30 MINUTES

Strength Block 1:
Upper Push (L-Press to Handstand Variation) 1-5 reps
Lower Pull (Deadlift Variation) 1-5 reps
Mobility Drill (Leg Raise with Rotation) 1-5 reps

15-30 MINUTES

Strength Block 2:
Upper Pull (Front Lever Variation) 1-5 reps
Lower Push (Airborne Lunge Variation) 1-5 reps
Mobility Drill (Thoracic Bridge) 1-5 reps

2 ROUNDS

Accessory:
Hindu Pushups 10-25 reps
Rows x 10-25 reps

8 ROUNDS

Conditioning:
Hill Sprints: 40 yards

Low Skill

Prioritization Plan:

Sometimes when the first time block goes long, or you simply want to dedicate more time to a specific movement, you have to modify the training plan a little bit.

Let's say you want to prioritize L Press to Handstands and Deadlifts.

40 minute block:
L Press to Handstand x1-5 reps
Deadlift x1-5 reps
Leg Raise with Rotation x5/side

3 rounds:
Rows x10-25 reps
Squats x1-5 reps
Thoracic Bridge x5/side

Then the next session you can easily reverse it:

40 minute block:
Front Lever x1-5 reps or time for holds
Airborne Lunge x1-5 reps
Thoracic Bridge x5/side

3 rounds:
Hindu Pushups x10-25 reps
Deadlifts x1-5 reps
Leg Raise with Rotation x5/side

By doing this, you still get to prioritize whichever movements you like, but by adding the 3 rounds of additional work you are still hitting all the main movement patterns.

This most important thing, remember, is to include an upper body push and pull, and a lower body push and pull in every training session—even if that means modifying the amount of time spent on each to better suit the goals.

Doing the exact same thing every day can become rather monotonous and possibly injurious due to repetitive overuse.

You will find a lot of variations, progressions, and regressions for the above movements. Your current level will be the primary factor in determining which progression you are working on. However, as was made clear earlier, it is imperative that you have balance in your program.

> Where do single leg deadlifts fit?
>
> Should I sumo deadlift or conventional? Or from a deficit?
>
> Squats?
>
> When would I choose a handstand pushup over an L pull through?

This is where biofeedback can sometimes be helpful in gaining the most out of your training.

BIOFEEDBACK

Using feedback from your central nervous system to determine which action is going to benefit you the most. Your nervous system is responsible not only for how strong you are, but also how flexible. If we can learn to assess a movement based on your neural response to it, we can guarantee that we are always doing the optimal movements on a given day. The easiest way to implement this is to assess Range of Motion (ROM).

The nervous system will modify your flexibility based on how well it responds to the stimulus (exercise). If a movement makes you less flexible, you should avoid it or find a variation that makes you more flexible in your ROM test. Because your nervous system receives input from your body at 300mph, the result should be instantaneous.

This should be a simple endeavor:

Test toe touch

Deadlift 1 rep

Re-test toe touch

More flexible=good exercise

Less flexible = try a different variation

The basic ROM tests that are easiest to implement:

Toe Touch

Unweighted Arms Overhead Squat

The nervous system considers your body one cohesive unit and does not differentiate between upper and lower body testing. You do not need to do a shoulder assessment to measure an upper body exercise. Likewise you may assess toe touch to determine upper and lower body exercises interchangeably.

This works because your nervous system is designed to protect you from harm–including harm to yourself by you. Your nervous system compensates for threat by giving you weakness, stiffness, or pain. Think like a governor in a car that prevents you from driving too fast to protect the car. Thus it would stand to reason that anything that removes threat brings you closer to operating at an uninhibited level. This ensures that you move well, and your neural limits on strength and flexibility are lifted. If you can convince the

nervous system, through smart training, that there is no threat; it will allow you to utilize all of your strength and flexibility.

This means that your training sessions are guaranteed to have the optimal effect. Let's look at an example:

> You are set up to deadlift today. You test conventional deadlift and it makes you worse.
>
> You test sumo and it is neutral. You test deadlifts from a deficit and it makes you better.

The choice is now obvious as to what will make you the best, strongest, and most flexible. With the amount of options and variations available to you within this text, and the understanding as to how to implement them; unlimited, sustainable progress is achieved.

MORE SETS, LESS REPS

The chief aim of this book is to make you move better, and get stronger, in the most intelligent way possible. To achieve this, we must focus on the nervous system. Think of your nervous system like a governor in a car that prevents you from driving too fast and breaking the car. Your nervous system performs the same job, preventing you from contracting too hard, and shattering your own bones. An example of this is a lightning strike. The electrical impulse of a lightning strike causes all of the muscles of the victim to contract at 100%. This actually shatters bones, snapping your tendons and ligaments. Most regular folk can only consciously contract their muscles at a very low percentage of maximum. Our goal is to arrive somewhere in between being regular and bone snapping.

The best way to enhance the efficiency of our nervous system, and allow it to release some of your strength is through repetition. We want to have repeated success in our training to convince the nervous system that the situation is safe enough to add some more juice! We want to work at a high level while maintaining good postural alignment, breathing, and skill.

By doing less repetitions per set, we can keep a much higher level of focus, and therefore, a much better, and faster, adaptation.

For strength purposes, 10 sets of 3 is far superior to 3 sets of 10.

This is why we are going to use time blocks instead of predetermined sets and reps. Having a set in stone number of sets can be limiting or exhausting to your training. So rather than give a

number, we use a time block to be most efficient. In each time block, just do 80% effort for repetitions (still in the 1-5 range) for as many sets as is comfortable. If it gets too hard, do less, if it's too easy add difficulty through reps, weight, or progression level of the exercise. Just knowing that there is no pressure on any "last set" is going to allow you to approach the exercise with a greater level of skill and precision, increasing your gains.

Take the following example:

15-30 MINUTES

Strength Block 1:
L Press to Handstand
Deadlift
Mobility

In this example you are practicing these three movements in order, and repeating for the designated time block. You will find that the mobility drill serves as a decent amount of rest from the strength movements in and of itself, but don't be afraid to take more rest if necessary.

How many reps you do in a given set can have a huge impact on what type of quality you are acquiring with each exercise. The ranges below are a vastly simplified, though valid idea of what each rep range will give you. Obviously on the very high end you

are going to be closer to endurance and sets of 1 are going to focus primarily on strength.

Strength 1-5

Muscle 6-12 (though all rep ranges have the potential to build muscle)

Joint and Endurance 15+

IF IT HURTS, DON'T DO IT.

One common misconception about physical training is the idea that pain or extreme soul-crushing fatigue is not only an indicator of, but a necessity in achieving results. You've heard it before:

"Pain is weakness leaving the body."

"Feel the burn!"

"Walk it off."

Or my personal favorite from a brainless personal trainer:

"It's supposed to hurt a little bit."

This is absolutely ridiculous and will not only damage your body–it's the only one you've got–but dramatically hinder your potential gains. Let's take a step back and take a very brief overview of your body, nervous system, and pain.

Your body itself is just a collection of tissue; Organs, bones, muscles, tendons, ligaments, etc. Individually they are quite useless. For the sake of strength training, muscles are especially useless by themselves. In order for them to function your brain has to send the signal. From here on out, there is no muscular. There is only *neuromuscular*.

Given that, it would only make sense for us to focus on enhancing the ability of our nervous system to send a good strong signal to our muscles to do stuff. To do this, we must first realize that our nervous system's primary goal is not to lift the most weight; it is to make sure you don't damage your body, and above all, survive. Just like a governor in a car that prevents you from driving

too fast, your brain prevents you from hurting yourself when it perceives there is threat. (This is actually a good thing because if you contract your muscles at 100%, you tend to break your own bones with the force–this is very common when people are struck by lightning and the muscles are stimulated to fire without having to be signaled and regulated through the brain). The most obvious and common form of this threat is pain. To be very simple and clear; **Pain will cause some level of neural shutdown to protect you.** This will decrease your ability to perform at a high level. Pain not only hurts, but makes you weaker and move worse. Ouch. If you want to increase your strength and performance instantly, get rid of your pain.

So how does one ensure they are allowing their nervous system to operate at an optimal level?

THE 80% RULE

I realized in my own training that lifting as heavy as possible, while staying as fresh as possible (read: as easily as possible), really does the trick for anyone–and I think this is a fact that is sometimes forgotten by many. I can't physically stand over each of my students and tell them to stop when I feel they've done the "perfect" amount of reps. Not only that, but that perfect number of reps is going to change from set to set. Shocking I know.

I think that having a set number of reps as a goal can be a good thing, but it can also force people into reps they shouldn't even have attempted in the first place. You can plan to do a set of 5, but stop at 4 reps because you want your body mechanics to be solid. You'll still be a good person if you don't do 5 reps–and what's wrong with taking a break and coming back for another set? You have nothing to lose and everything to gain.

My students constantly were asking me how many reps to do–and my classic response used to be 5-8 or 3-5 or whatever matched what I had planned. But of course, they would start out with a set of 8 and their last set they would FORCE a set of 6 well beyond their own ability, which would contribute to bad mechanics, breathing, tension, scrunchy-face, etc.

So giving them a set number didn't work except as a jumping off point–it was an incomplete instruction. This is how the 80% rule came about.

Effort and Exercise seem to go hand in hand. However, the perception is that one must exceed 100% effort to elicit a positive

outcome (We'll call it a training effect). The purpose of exercise is, of course, to make one better; whether that be movement, strength, flexibility, resilience to injury, etc. When a trainee approaches the 100% threshold of effort, certain undesirable consequences tend to occur:

- Poor body alignment
- Poor body mechanics
- Poor breathing mechanics
- Development of compensatory movement patterns
- Central nervous system fatigue

All of these contribute, in short, to poor health, movement dysfunction, and a lower level of fitness.

No Pain no Gain right?!?! Good news is you are now going to utilize the 80% rule of training. Which simply states: "When you reach 80% effort on a given exercise, stop." This means that if you can do 10 pushups maximum (with poor mechanics), just do 8 crisp, good ones.

Things to avoid during exercise (telltale signs you have exceeded 80%):

- Posture change
- Neck protracting forward
- Holding breath for multiple reps.
- Deviation from proper biomechanics (Shoulder popping up toward ear or excessive sideways lean during a press)

- ”Scrunchy Face” – If you look like you’re about to have an aneurysm, it’s too heavy or too many, bottom line.

Basically, your last rep should look like the first one, only slightly slower.

80% is about that sweet spot when it comes to neuromuscular adaptation. Enough to elicit a positive change, but not so much to elicit a negative one. 80% is not in reference to a % of your 1-Rep Max Lift. It means you can still lift a heavy single, provided you can do it well. Say your maximum deadlift was 500lbs for 1 (with 100% effort). The goal then is to use a weight that will allow you to do it better, faster, but still heavy. This could range anywhere from 450-480lbs. You will still get a positive change, but without the negative side effects. This way you stay fresh, work some mobility, and then come back and hit it hard again. Do as many sets as you like, as long as it looks and feels good.

Your body adapts to whatever you do with it (Read: SAID below), so I suggest you give it positive stimulus. Keep this in mind when you are training.

SAID PRINCIPLE

Specific Adaptation to Imposed Demand means that your body adapts specifically to whatever you do with it. It means that if you run all day, your body will adapt to be more efficient at running. It means that if you sit down in a chair all day, your body will adapt to do that better, too.

Do you FAIL your lifts all the time? You're just adapting to fail all the time. Do you succeed strongly every time? You're adapting to succeed. You're letting your nervous system know, "It's cool, I got this– you can take off the brakes and let me do my thing."

LIFESTYLE APPROPRIATE VS IDEAL

Finding the right approach when it comes to time of day to train, number of days per week and length of workout is actually not very difficult. First describe your typical day/week/month. Now figure out where your training best fits. I have large open spaces in my days on Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Saturday, so that's when I train. It makes sense with the rest of my schedule and is easy to be consistent. Don't make the mistake of putting your training session in a place that is easy to skip. I have had countless people try to train in the evenings and after a long day of work at a high-stress job, sometimes you just don't have the will to drive to the gym. If this is the case, don't set yourself up for failure, try morning or lunch and see what works.

SUSTAINABILITY

The key to any lifestyle change is to make it sustainable. Programs, plans and behaviors that require an extreme, unrealistic action do not work in the long run. “What’s the best workout program?” I get asked all the time. The answer is the one you’ll actually do, more importantly maybe is the one that you’ll enjoy doing. However you decide to structure your training, make it sustainable enough so that you can enjoy consistent gains for periods of years instead of weeks–that’s when the real magic happens.

USE YOUR STRENGTH FOR SOMETHING

Being strong is a privilege you gain through persistent, smart training. I have always been of the mindset that you should use your abilities and constantly refine them. Being strong is much better than the alternative; but being physically strong with no purpose can be very unfulfilling after a period of time. All aspects of life will improve with physical and mental strength, but competition can be very valuable. Some great options are martial arts, sports, highland games, etc. It can be nice to see all of your hard work improve tangibly outside the gym.

CHAPTER 12

CONCLUSION

It's been quite a journey and you and I are not done yet. The commitment to being "better every day" is a lifelong pursuit.

I strongly believe in the idea that if you give a man a fish, he'll eat for a day. If you teach a man to fish, he'll thrive for a lifetime. This was always my main intention with this book, to teach you how to fish yourself. To give you a framework and a set of ideas that you can use for a lifetime, no matter how your goals and aspirations change as the years turn over. It is my sincerest hope that the information you've learned will not only help you to personally uncover strength that you have inside, but to increase your confidence, abilities, and quality of life.

I leave you with one final bit of advice: enjoy the process. Relish in the daily increases and appreciate every moment of training and practice. You'll be amazed at the things you can accomplish, and how much fun it is to get there.

Better Every Day

CHAPTER 13

SAMPLE PROGRAMS

REMEMBER!

The rep and set ranges in the following programs are just guidelines, to help you find the optimal training session. Keep in mind that the main factor in determining how many repetitions you do in a given set should be following the 80% rule and making it look easy.

*Front Levers and L-Sit options can be done as dynamic movements for reps or static holds for time

"BARE BONES"

Only the bare essentials. This is a great program for those who are short on time, or those who are also training other sports frequently.

3 ROUNDS

Power:
Vertical Jump x5
Glute Bridge x10

20 MINUTES

L-Sit to Handstand x1-5
Deadlift x1-5
Leg Raise with Rotation x5/side

20 MINUTES

Front Lever x1-5 or for time*
Airborne Lunge x1-5
Thoracic Bridge x5/side

Done! Repeat 3 times per week with hill sprints (8 x 40 meters) on two of your off days.

"NOTHIN BUT TIME"

Day 1:

3 ROUNDS

Power:
Hang Power Snatch x3
Glute Bridge x10

15-30 MINUTES

Block 1:
L-Sit to Handstand x1-5
Deadlift x1-5
Leg Raise with Rotation x5/side

15-30 MINUTES

Block 2:
Front Lever x1-5 or for time*
Airborne Lunge x1-5
Deep Lunge with Rotation x5/side

3 ROUNDS

Hindu Pushup x15
Bent over row x15
Rear Foot Elevated Split Squat x8/side

Day 2:

3 ROUNDS

Power:
Weighted Jump x5
Deep Lunge with Rotation x5/side

15-30 MINUTES

Block 1:
Handstand Pushups x1-5
Single Leg Deadlift x1-5/side
Leg Raise with Rotation x5/side

15-30 MINUTES

Block 2:
Ice Cream Makers x1-5
Squat x1-5
Thoracic Bridge x5/side

3 ROUNDS

Reverse Curl x15
L-Sit x1-5 or for time
Cossack Squat x5+/side

Day 3:

3 ROUNDS

Broad Jump x5
Thoracic Bridge x5/side

15-30 MINUTES

Block 1:
L-Sit to Handstand x1-5
Deadlift x1-5
Leg Raise with Rotation x5/side

15-30 MINUTES

Block 2:
Front Lever x1-5 or for time*
Airborne Lunge x1-5
Thoracic Bridge x5/side

3 ROUNDS

Chinups x10
Dips x10

3 ROUNDS

Wrist Levering x10/side

6-8 ROUNDS

Sprint x40 yards

Day 4: REST

Day 5: Repeat day 1

Day 6: Repeat day 2

Day 7: REST

With this program, you may work on freestanding hand balance and do extra shuttles on the off days if you've got the energy to do so.

"OLD FAITHFUL"

Day 1:

3 ROUNDS

Power:
Hang Power Snatch x3
Glute Bridge x10/side

15-30 MINUTES

Block 1:
L-Sit to Handstand x1-5
Deadlift x1-5
Leg Raise with Rotation x5/side

15-30 MINUTES

Block 2:
Front Lever x1-5 or for time*
Airborne Lunge x1-5
Deep Lunge with Rotation x5/side

3 ROUNDS

Hindu Pushup x15
Bent over row x15

6-8 ROUNDS

Hill Sprints x40 yards

Day 2:

3 ROUNDS

Power:
Weighted Jump x5
Thoracic Bridge x5/side

15-30 MINUTES

Block 1:
Handstand Pushup x1-5
Single Leg Deadlift x1-5/side
Leg Raise with Rotation x5/side

15-30 MINUTES

Block 2:
Chinup x1-5
Squat x1-5
Thoracic Bridge x5/side

4 ROUNDS

Skin the Cat x1-5+
Cossack Squat x5+/side

Day 3: Hill Sprints

Day 4: Repeat day 1

Day 5: Repeat day 2

Day 6: Hill Sprints

Day 7: REST

"NEW IN TOWN"

Day 1:

3 ROUNDS

Power:
L-Sit x1-5 or for time*
Vertical Jump x5

15-30 MINUTES

Block 1:
Handstand x80% effort
Deadlift x1-5
Leg raise with rotation x5/side

15-30 MINUTES

Block 2:
Front Lever on Floor x1-5 or for time*
Kickstand Squat x5/side
Deep lunge with rotation x5/side

3 ROUNDS

Rows x8-15
Squats x8-15

Day 2:

3 ROUNDS

Power:
Handstand x80% effort
Vertical Jump x5

15-30 MINUTES

Block 1:
L-Pull through x1-5
Single Leg Deadlift x5/side
Leg Raise with Rotation x5/side

15-30 MINUTES

Block 2:
Chinup x1-5
Rear Foot Elevated Split Squat x5/side
Deep Lunge with Rotation x5/side

3 ROUNDS

Pushup x8-15
Hanging Leg Raise x5-10

Day 3: Rest or Sprints

Day 4: Repeat day 1

Day 5: Repeat day 2

Day 6: Rest or Sprints

Day 7: Rest or restart cycle again at day 1

"CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE"

Remember those books where you got to choose your own adventure? This is like that, but for your training sessions. The idea with this one is to give you more freedom to do things outside the scope of this text, while still improving and focusing on the main movements. Stay in that 80% zone and make sure that what you're doing is FUN, and you will see huge improvements. Repeat 1-7 days/week (following 80% rule).

3-5 ROUNDS

Pick a Power Exercise x1-5 reps
Pick a mobility drill x5-10 reps

15-30 MINUTES

Block 1:
Pick an Upper Push x 1-5 reps
Pick a Lower Pull x 1-5 reps
Pick a Mobility Drill x5 reps

15-30 MINUTES

Block 2:
Pick an Upper Pull: x 1-5 reps (or time for front levers)
Pick a Lower Push: x 1-5 reps
Pick a Mobility Drill x5 reps

Endurance: 10 minutes of your choice

You may choose the exercises based on personal preference, biofeedback, or the phases of the moon. As long as you include an exercise from the 4 main categories (push and pull for upper and lower) and stick with the above layout, you are going to have a balanced session and sustained progress.