

The Handstand

The complete training guide

Version 1

Compress body

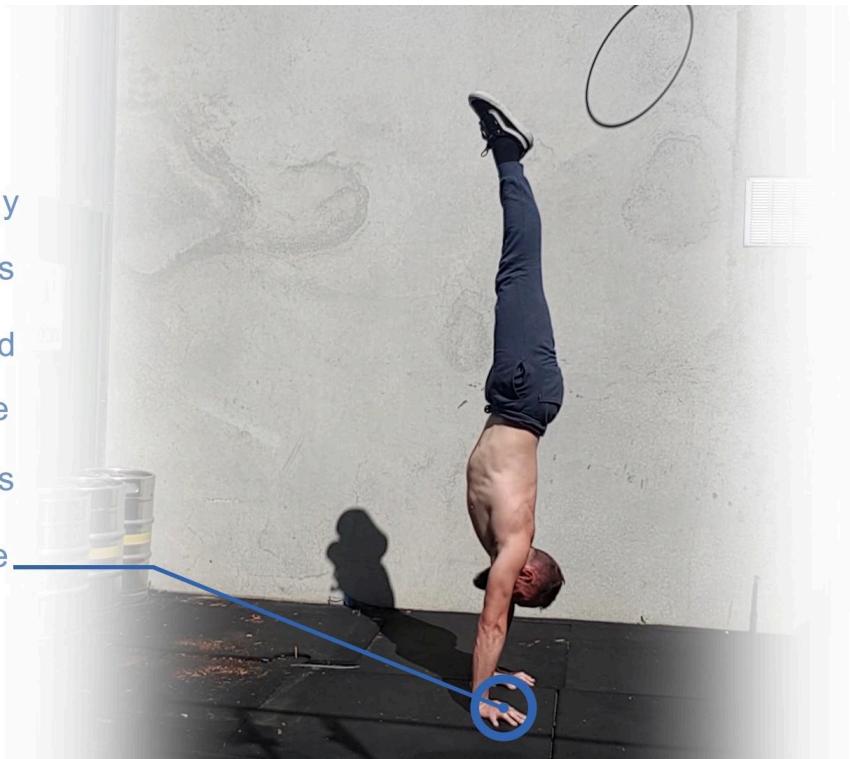
Hips over hands

Push hard

Extend spine

Open shoulders

Balance





Disclaimer

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The Bodyweight Gym advocates the learning of skills with strict movements.

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Introduction

The handstand is an exercise that involves standing still on your hands with your arms straight and body stacked above your hands. At a casual glance the handstand may seem like a simple or easy movement. On closer inspection most people find the handstand a very challenging expression of strength, mobility, focus and balance. In my experience the handstand is one of the most difficult exercises for an adult to learn.

Learning the handstand is a combination of skill work and conditioning. Most people need to re-establish shoulder health with respect to overhead mobility and build the strength needed to be comfortable upside down on their hands for an extended time. Finally you will need to learn to balance.

This guide will break down handstand progression into 6 different levels. Each level will have a graduation testing requirement. In order to progress smoothly, I strongly recommend that you satisfy each graduation test before progressing to the next level.

For many people the handstand presents both a mobility and strength challenge. If you are reading this guide it is likely that you will have to get stronger and develop more mobility to complete a handstand.

For the sake of clarity, by referring to a handstand I mean developing the ability to stand on your hands, with locked out shoulders, not moving for at least 1 minute

The most common question I hear is - "How long will it take?" It can take the average adult anywhere from 6 months to 2 years to learn to balance on their hands. It takes consistent effort over a long period of time, practicing 4 - 7 days per week for at least 30 minutes a day to make any appreciable progress.

The handstand demands strength, and is expressed through the entire upper body chain. It requires the back, shoulders, upper and lower arms to function together. If you have spent time training these muscles in isolation you may need to step back and assess and strengthen any weak links in the chain. It is likely that your shoulder and elbow and wrist joints and the associated connective tissue will need to strengthen and improve.

The goal of training for the handstand (and all strength training) is to stress your body such that you can recover within a few days. Then do it again. If you stress your body too much this is called an injury. Injuries may occur if you train for long enough, but with an appreciation for strength training basics you can minimize the risk of injury. You



can only progress as fast as the weakest link in the chain you are aiming to strengthen. Soft tissue will adapt to stress at different rates:

Muscles replace themselves approximately every 3 months. Tendons and ligaments replace themselves approximately every 9 months and bone replaces every 14-15 months. So if you are getting strong and your wrists are killing you. Slow down. Your wrists can't keep up with the rate of progress.

Benchmarking

If you are completely new to handstand training you will begin at Level 1. However if you have some experience in training handstands you will first need to figure out what level is appropriate to you. Use this benchmarking test to find an appropriate level:

- **Level 1:** Zero experience or unsure.
- **Level 2:**
 - Protracted plank on hands - 1 minute,
 - hang - 1 minute,
 - Bodyline drill - 30 seconds,
 - Complete these 3 exercises for 5 sets and find it relatively easy.
- **Level 3:**
 - Chest to wall handstand - 1 minute,
 - Hang - 1 min,
 - Hollow body - 1 minute,
 - Complete these 3 exercises for 5 sets and find it relatively easy.
- **Level 4:** Can find balance consistently for 3 - 5 seconds.
- **Level 5:** Can kick up and find balance consistently for 10 to 15 seconds.
- **Level 6:** Have a handstand but yet to achieve a 1 minute handstand.

Loading, deloading and how to progress.

Your training should be planned and arranged in blocks of effort. The following is an example about how you can train and recover such that you give your body enough stress to grow and enough time to recover.

Block 1:

Pick a level and a set range that is appropriate to your strength and endurance. If you are in doubt be more conservative. An injury is the worst outcome. Work hard for 4 weeks. Take the 5th week off as stated above.

Block 2:

Add a set to each exercise you completed in block 1. Work hard for 4 weeks, Take the 5th week off. Repeat this process of loading, deloading and adding volume until you have reached the upper set range prescribed for your workout.

Block 3:

Test yourself for the next level entry requirements (refer Benchmarking section). If you are now capable of the next level, begin the process again with the next level of exercise, slowly increasing volume over 5 week cycles.



Block 4:

Continue developing your training program based on your progress.

Remember: Learning a handstand from scratch may take more than 12 months, so patience is key.

The workouts

This workout program offers 6 different levels in order to safely progress you from the beginning to a strong, stable clean handstand.. Each level requires you to possess greater strength and mobility. Be conservative and start with a level that is achievable. If you find you are not progressing at a particular level, drop back to the previous level for 1 block of training before moving forward again.

Before each workout, be sure to warm yourself up adequately. 5 - 10 minutes of any light cardio, running or skipping etc of your choice. Anything to get a light sweat on.

Level 1

As a level 1 practitioner you are right at the beginning of developing your handstand. This is something that should not be rushed. Everyone will progress at their own rate. Do the work necessary to make this level feel easy before progressing to level 2. This workout is all about developing wrist and shoulder strength and mobility and core strength.

Wrist heel raises



Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uo4qAzodPlM&t=14s>

Reps: x 10 hold last rep (hlr) 10 seconds

Fin pushups



Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uo4qAzodPlM&t=14s>

Reps: x 10 hlr 10 seconds

Sets: complete wrist heel raises and fin pushups for 3 -5 sets

Desk stretch with external rotation

Pulse or move in and out of this stretch 10 or more times before moving as low as possible into the stretch, breathing for 1 - 2 minutes.



Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Toe5JOHztek>

Reps: x 10 pulses hlr for 1 - 2 minutes.

Overhead desk stretch

Pulse or move in and out of this stretch 10 or more times before moving as low as possible into the stretch, breathing for 1 - 2 minutes.



Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G4wqA_e9r3I

Reps: x 10 pulses hlr for 1 - 2 minutes.

Hang

Hang from a bar any way you can. Don't let go. Build to 1 minute.



Reps: Initially accumulate 1 minute. Aim to complete 1 minute unbroken.

Sets: Complete 1 -2 minutes in each stretch and 1 minute hanging on a bar for 3 - 5 sets.

Plank

Place your hands under your shoulders, lock your elbows, protract your shoulders. This means lift your rib cage up by sliding your shoulder blades apart. Tuck your butt under by tilting your hips and contracting your abs. If necessary, regress the movement by placing your knees on the ground.



Reps: Initially accumulate 1 minute. Aim to complete 1 minute unbroken.

Sets: x 3 - 5. Work with a 1 minute work and 1 minute rest ratio.

Level 2

As a level 2 practitioner you have started to develop some strength and mobility. You are still right at the initial stages of learning a handstand though. You will now begin inverting your body, loading significantly more weight into your shoulders, arm and wrists. It is very important to take care of your wrists at this stage and use common sense. If it hurts, the movement is probably not good for you at this stage. Work at this level until a 1 minute chest to wall handstand is relatively easy. Building a solid foundation in strength at level 2 will enable you to progress smoothly through later, more difficult levels.

Wrist heel raises



Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uo4qAzodPlM&t=14s>

Reps: x 10 hold last rep (hlr) 10 seconds

Fin pushups



Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uo4qAzodPlM&t=14s>

Reps: x 10 hlr 10 seconds

Sets: complete wrist heel raises and fin pushups for 3 -5 sets

Desk stretch with external rotation

Pulse or move in and out of this stretch 10 or more times before moving as low as possible into the stretch, breathing for 1 - 2 minutes.



Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Toe5JOHztek>

Reps: x 10 pulses hlr for 1 - 2 minutes.

Overhead desk stretch

Pulse or move in and out of this stretch 10 or more times before moving as low as possible into the stretch, breathing for 1 - 2 minutes.



Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G4wqA_egr3I

Reps: x 10 pulses hlr for 1 - 2 minutes.

Hang

Hang from a bar any way you can. Don't let go. Build to 1 minute.



Reps: Initially accumulate 1 minute. Aim to complete 1 minute unbroken.

Sets: Complete 1 -2 minutes in each stretch and 1 minute hanging on a bar for 3 - 5 sets.

Chest to wall handstand

Maintain a handstand or chest to wall handstand, if this is not possible scale to a protracted plank position, lower your knees if further scaling is required. In the chest to wall handstand focus on the following points:

- Grip the ground
- Push tall, your shoulders should touch your ears
- Maintain posterior pelvic tilt
- Keep your legs pressed firmly together
- Point your toes



Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f1yLxNMq23A>

Video 2: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tfVN5t_QykI

Reps: Initially accumulate 1 minute. Aim to complete 1 minute unbroken.

Sets: x 3 - 5. Work with a 1 minute work and 1 minute rest ratio.

Hollow body

Beginner hollow body, ensure lower back is pressed into the ground and your shoulder blades are off the ground.



Advanced hollow body, ensure lower back is pressed into the ground and your shoulder blades are off the ground.



Reps: Initially accumulate 1 minute. Aim to complete 1 minute unbroken.

Sets: x 3 - 5. Work with a 1 minute work and 1 minute rest ratio.

Level 3

As a Level 3 practitioner you have now developed some comfort with being upside down. You are now strong enough to have a conversation while holding a 1 minute chest to wall handstand. It is time to begin learning to balance. On casual observation a handstand appears to be still with very little movement. The reality of a beginner learning to balance is that there will be lots of movement. You will make continuous errors in your balance and you will have to use your strength to correct these errors. Level 3 will build on your strength and introduce two new exercises - heel pulls and toe pulls. Work hard to build control and strength before moving to the next level.

Wrist heel raises



Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uo4qAzodPLM&t=14s>

Reps: x 10 hold last rep (hlr) 10 seconds

Fin pushups

Reps: 10



Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uo4qAzodPLM&t=14s>

Reps: x 10 hlr 10 seconds

Sets: complete wrist heel raises and fin pushups for 3 -5 sets

Desk stretch with external rotation

Pulse or move in and out of this stretch 10 or more times before moving as low as possible into the stretch, breathing for 1 - 2 minutes.



Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Toe5JOHztek>

Reps: x 10 pulses hlr for 1 - 2 minutes.

Overhead desk stretch

Pulse or move in and out of this stretch 10 or more times before moving as low as possible into the stretch, breathing for 1 - 2 minutes.



Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G4wqA_egr3l

Reps: x 10 pulses hlr for 1 - 2 minutes.

Hang

Hang from a bar any way you can. Don't let go. Build to 1 minute.



Reps: Complete 1 minute unbroken.

Sets: Complete 1 -2 minutes in each stretch and 1 minute hanging on a bar for 3 - 5 sets.

Heel pulls

Focus on maintaining body tension and gripping the ground. Exert a large amount of force through your fingertips. Resist the urge to pull the feet off the wall. Just observe the weight through your heels getting lighter as you push your fingers into the ground. Eventually your feet will float free of the wall due to the force generated by your hands and forearms.



Video 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xm26KPUA7OI>

Video 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5t796EGmdn8>

Reps: x 8 - 12

Toe Pulls

Reps: 8 - 12

Focus on maintain full body tension. Move your shoulders forward over your wrists keeping your core locked. Initially look for your feet sliding down the wall, as you get stronger with this exercise your feet may momentarily leave the wall.



Video 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xm26KPUA7OI>

Video 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IBnOiDCXVKs>

Reps: x 8 - 12

Sets: Complete 8 - 12 reps of heel pulls followed by 8 -12 reps of toe pulls for 5 sets

Box assisted balance game

This exercises will bring together toe pull and heel pulls and requires you to fight for balance using these skills. You will be aided with a small box that you can press your forearms into to assist you to catch a fall. This will 'scale' the difficulty of balance and provide a mechanism to extend the time under tension experienced fighting for balance.

The 'game' requires you to set a 10 minute countdown timer. Your job is to accrue time balancing away from the wall. Initially you will count every hold over 3 seconds. Once you have achieved a 3 second hold record this event and resume work accumulating as many 3 second holds as possible within the 10 minute window. Once you can achieve 15 x 3 second holds increase your target balance time to 4 seconds.



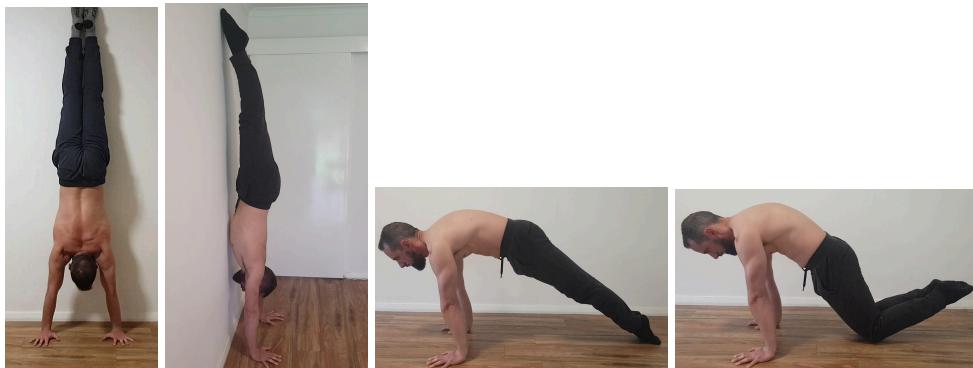
Video: <https://youtu.be/huCWZYfvVYY>

Reps: begin accruing 3 seconds holds, Once you have accumulated 15×3 seconds hold within the 10 minute window, increase to 4 seconds holds. Continue increase the time of the holds until a 10 second hold is easily repeatable.

Chest to wall handstand

Maintain a handstand or chest to wall handstand, if this is not possible scale to a protracted plank position, lower your knees if further scaling is required. In the chest to wall handstand focus on the following points:

- Grip the ground
- Push tall, your shoulders should touch your ears
- Maintain posterior pelvic tilt
- Keep your legs pressed firmly together
- Point your toes



Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f1yLxNMq23A>

Video 2: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tfVN5t_QykI

Reps: Initially accumulate 1 minute. Aim to complete 1 minute unbroken.

Sets: x 3 - 5. Work with a 1 minute work and 1 minute rest ratio.

Level 4

As a level 4 practitioner you will be becoming comfortable finding some balance. You are probably kicking up into a handstand and playing with balance but probably not yet sustaining any significant holds. This level will continue to develop your strength and skill and will keep playing a 10 minute game this time without a box to develop your freestanding balance.

Wrist heel raises



Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uo4qAzodPlM&t=14s>

Reps: x 10 hold last rep (hlr) 10 seconds

Fin pushups

Reps: 10



Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uo4qAzodPlM&t=14s>

Reps: x 10 hlr 10 seconds

Sets: complete wrist heel raises and fin pushups for 3 -5 sets

Desk stretch with external rotation

Pulse or move in and out of this stretch 10 or more times before moving as low as possible into the stretch, breathing for 1 - 2 minutes.



Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Toe5JOHztek>

Reps: x 10 pulses hlr for 1 - 2 minutes.

Overhead desk stretch

Pulse or move in and out of this stretch 10 or more times before moving as low as possible into the stretch, breathing for 1 - 2 minutes.



Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G4wqA_egr3I

Reps: x 10 pulses hlr for 1 - 2 minutes.

Hang

Hang from a bar any way you can. Don't let go. Build to 1 minute.



Reps: Complete 1 minute unbroken.

Sets: Complete 1 -2 minutes in each stretch and 1 minute hanging on a bar for 3 - 5 sets.

15 minute balance game

Box assisted balance sets

Chest to wall handstand

Maintain a handstand or chest to wall handstand, if this is not possible scale to a protracted plank position, lower your knees if further scaling is required. In the chest to wall handstand focus on the following points:

- Grip the ground
- Push tall, your shoulders should touch your ears
- Maintain posterior pelvic tilt
- Keep your legs pressed firmly together
- Point your toes



Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f1yLxNMq23A>

Video 2: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tfVN5t_QykI

Reps: Aim to complete 1 minute unbroken.

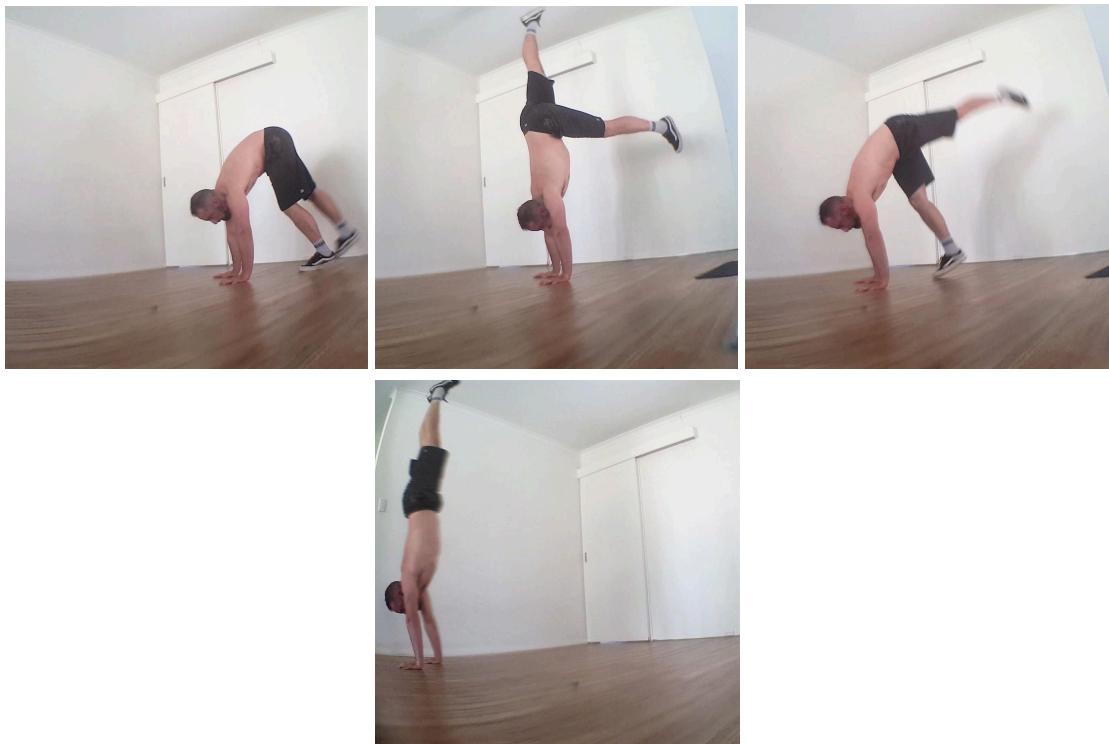
Sets: x 5 Work with a 1 minute work and 1 minute rest ratio.

Kick up sets

Kick up practice

Reps: 10 kick ups per leg

Practice kicking up. Use alternating legs, even though one leg will feel terrible compared to the other leg. Catching the handstand is nice, but don't get hung up on this. Just work through your kick ups. Trust the process, it will take time for the kick ups to become consistent and predictable. Focus on creating tension as you swing a leg up, point your toe. The less moving parts or floppy limbs you have to deal with the easier it will be to catch the handstand.



Video: <https://youtu.be/7defUKA3D3w>

Sets: 5 - 10

Level 5

As a level 5 practitioner you will be becoming comfortable finding balance. You are kicking up into a handstand and sustaining 20 - 40 second holds regularly. This level will develop your endurance and prepare you to graduate with a 60 second free standing handstand

Wrist heel raises



Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uo4qAzodPlM&t=14s>

Reps: x 10 hold last rep (hhr) 10 seconds

Fin pushups

Reps: 10



Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uo4qAzodPlM&t=14s>

Reps: x 10 hlr 10 seconds

Sets: complete wrist heel raises and fin pushups for 3 -5 sets

Desk stretch with external rotation

Pulse or move in and out of this stretch 10 or more times before moving as low as possible into the stretch, breathing for 1 - 2 minutes.



Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Toe5JOHztek>

Reps: x 10 pulses hlr for 1 - 2 minutes.

Overhead desk stretch

Pulse or move in and out of this stretch 10 or more times before moving as low as possible into the stretch, breathing for 1 - 2 minutes.



Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G4wqA_egr3I

Reps: x 10 pulses hlr for 1 - 2 minutes.

Hang

Hang from a bar any way you can. Don't let go. Build to 1 minute.



Reps: Initially accumulate 1 minute. Aim to complete 1 minute unbroken.

Sets: Complete 1 -2 minutes in each stretch and 1 minute hanging on a bar for 3 - 5 sets.

Chest to wall handstand

Reps: 1 minute hold

Maintain a handstand or chest to wall handstand, if this is not possible scale to a protracted plank position, lower your knees if further scaling is required. In the chest to wall handstand focus on the following points:

- Grip the ground
- Push tall, your shoulders should touch your ears
- Maintain posterior pelvic tilt
- Keep your legs pressed firmly together
- Point your toes



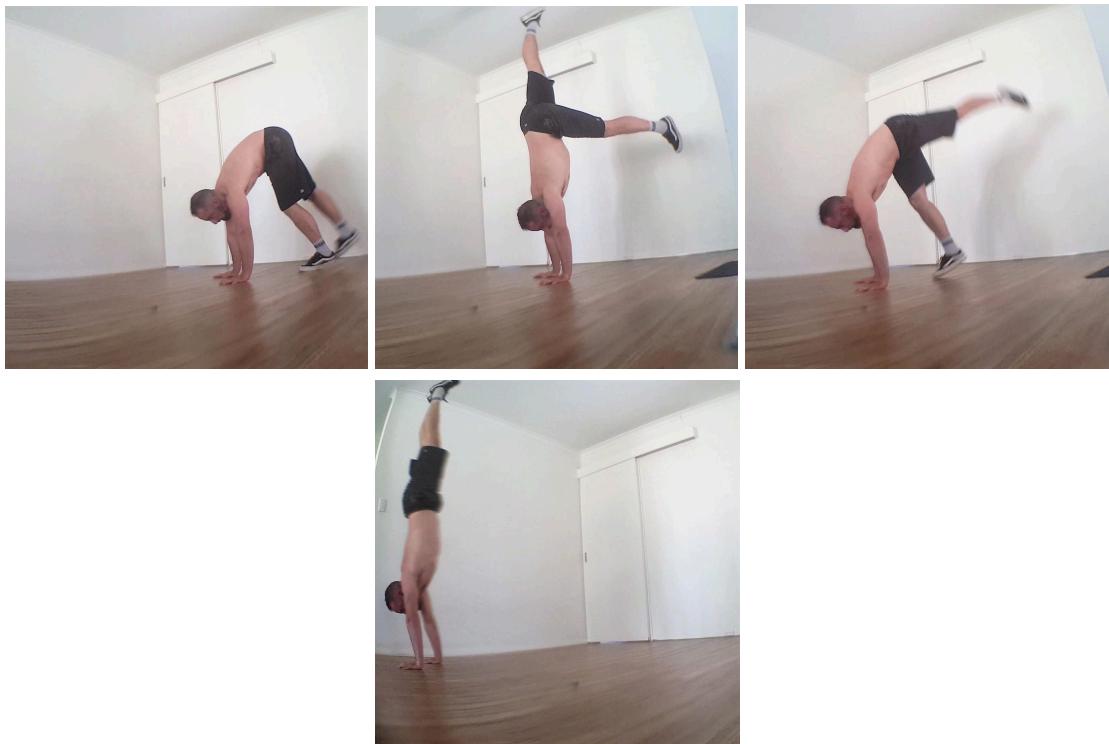
Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f1yLxNMq23A>

Video 2: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tfVN5t_QykI

Kick up practice

Reps: 10 kick ups per leg

Practice kicking up. Use alternating legs, even though one leg will feel terrible compared to the other leg. Catching the handstand is nice, but don't get hung up on this. Just work through your kick ups. Trust the process, it will take time for the kick ups to become consistent and predictable. Focus on creating tension as you swing a leg up, point your toe. The less moving parts or floppy limbs you have to deal with the easier it will be to catch the handstand.



Video: <https://youtu.be/7defUKA3D3w>

Sets: 5 - 10

Handstand shoulder tap

Being in a chest to wall handstand position. Shift your weight to one arm, elevate strongly with your supporting arm before touching your shoulder with your free arm.



Level 6

As a level 6 practitioner you are chasing a 60 second, freestanding handstand. Its a grind, you have to practice most days. You will probably have many videos of 50 - 59 second holds. Once you record your 60 second handstand free standing you are ready to graduate. Welcome to the world of handbalancing. You are now a beginner.

Freestanding handstand

Reps: 1 minute hold

Maintain a handstand if this is not possible scale to a chest to wall handstand.

Focus on the following points:

1. Don't fall over
2. Grip the ground
- 3. Push tall, your shoulders should touch your ears**
4. Maintain posterior pelvic tilt
5. Keep your legs pressed firmly together
6. Point or flex your toes



Video: https://youtu.be/fBiYbkG_Uqk

1 minute freestanding handstand

1 minute rest

5 rounds