

The Ring Muscle Up

The complete training guide

Version 1





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

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Introduction

The ring muscle up is an exercise that involves moving from below a set of rings to the support position above a set of rings. In the sport of Gymnastics it's called getting on the rings and isn't even a thing. For many fitness enthusiast the ring muscle up is a highly sought after expression of strength and mobility.

Often the ring muscle up is referred to as a skill. I prefer to think of the ring muscle up as an expression of strength and mobility. Skill exercises are difficult to develop and often require elements that are harder to train, such as balance or novel movement e.g. press handstand. The ring muscle up contains neither of these things. It is easy to learn with a solid series of progressions, hard work and persistence.

This guide will break down your ring muscle up 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 ring muscle up 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 ring muscle up

For the sake of clarity, by referring to a ring muscle up I mean a strict ring muscle up, with minimal pike in the hips and no momentum generated by a swinging or kipping

The most common question I hear is - "How long will it take?" This is impossible to answer, it depends entirely on your current and historic strength and mobility level. If you learn to use the gymnastic rings as a child you will redevelop the movement faster than an adult with limited or no exposure to this kind of upper body strength training.

The ring muscle up 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 joints and the associated connective tissue will need to strengthen and improve.

The goal of training for the ring muscle up (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 itself every 14-15 months. So if you are getting strong and your elbows are killing you. Slow down. Your elbow joint can't keep up with the rate of progress.

Training for your ring muscle up should be no more than once every 2 days. Give yourself time to recover between efforts. If you are training intensely or very regularly take a planned deload week every 5 weeks. In a deload week you will still train however you will only complete 1 set of everything rather than the usual volume.

Benchmarking

If you are completely new to training upper body strength you will begin at Level 1. However if you have some experience in training upper body strength 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: 3 x pull ups, 3 x bar dips
- Level 3: Experience with false grip, 3 x false grip pull ups, 3 x ring dips
- Level 4: Reasonably comfortable with false grip, 5 x false grip pull ups, 5 x ring dips
- Level 5: Can do a ring muscle up but want to clean it up

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 muscle up from scratch may take more than 12 months, so patience is key.

The workouts

This workout program offers 5 different levels in order to safely progress you from the beginning to a clean, safe, strict ring muscle up. 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 athlete you are right at the beginning of developing bent arm strength. 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 strength and mobility, shoulder extension and basic pushing and pulling strength.

Mobility work

False grip stretch

False grip requires flexibility through the back of the forearm (extensors) and strength through the inside of the forearm (for gripping). This mobility exercises will develop the required strength and mobility to become comfortable in false grip.



Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fPrirk5JELI>

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

Arm extension stretch

The transition phase of a muscle up, moving from the top of the pull up to the bottom of the dip, requires the upper arms to move strongly into extension. For many people this range of motion is lacking. This stretch will build the required mobility to stay safe while practicing ring muscle ups.



Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=85yAKJCh5sg>

Reps: x 5 per side, HLR per side 10 seconds

Strength work

Ring hang

Hanging is the fundamental strength expression needed to build more powerful movements such as pull ups and eventually muscle ups. While simple, even the shortest periods of time hanging from a set of rings will challenge most people. Keep this one simple. Hold the rings, feet off the ground, don't let go.



Reps: 1 minute hang

Sets: Complete 3 - 5 sets of false grip stretch, arm extension stretch and ring hang

False grip

False grip is a method of holding the rings (or bar) that places your wrist on top of the ring. It requires your wrist to bend at 90 degrees while still being able to grip the ring with your fingers. Yes it hurts your wrists. They will toughen. It takes a long time to become comfortable with false grip. Take your time. Chalking the heel of the hand and wrist where primary contact is made with the rings will make it easier.



Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C1tlcRAsKLC>

False grip ring rows

Hold the rings in false grip lean back holding the rings at arm's length. Maintain false grip. Row the rings in towards your body pulling until your thumbs touch your chest. Return **to** the straight arm position slowly. If you find it too hard to complete all the reps walk backwards to reduce the resistance



Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wC5LeDNJ1ro>

Rep: x 15

Ring push ups with turn out

Hold yourself in a plank position supported on the rings in front of you. Keeping your elbows in tight, lower down to the bottom position until the ring touches your shoulder. Push back up to the beginning position and externally rotate the rings for a moment.



Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rLTVcV6KlQ8>



Reps: x 15

Sets: Complete 3 - 5 sets of 15 x false grip ring rows and 15 x ring pushups

Level 2

As a level 2 athlete you now have some strength in bent arm pulling and pushing. You should feel comfortable performing a pull up or a dip. As you progress your strength pay attention to how your shoulders and elbows feel. If they begin to hurt or feel less than great, consider dropping back to level 1 to build a larger foundation.

Mobility work

False grip stretch

False grip requires flexibility through the back of the forearm (extensors) and strength through the inside of the forearm (for gripping). This mobility exercises will develop the required strength and mobility to become comfortable in false grip.



Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fPrirk5JELI>

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

Arm extension stretch

The transition phase of a muscle up, moving from the top of the pull up to the bottom of the dip, requires the upper arms to move strongly into extension. For many people this range of motion is lacking. This stretch will build the required mobility to stay safe while practicing ring muscle ups.



Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=85yAKJCn5sq>

Reps: x 5 per side, HLR per side 10 seconds

Strength work

False grip hang

This takes the hang as practiced in level one and builds on it by adding false grip. Maintaining false grip is your priority, hang from a set of rings for the prescribed period of time.

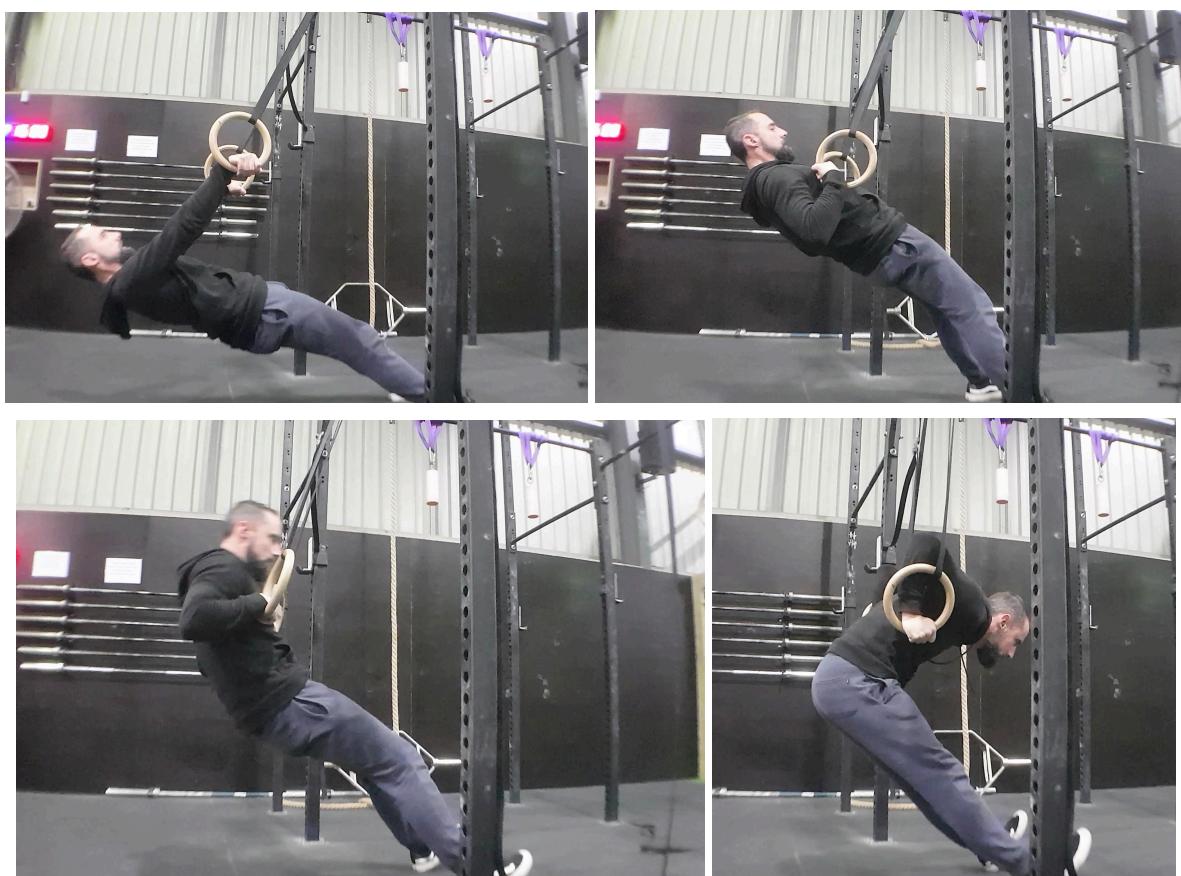


Reps: x 30 seconds

Sets: Complete 3 - 5 sets of false grip stretch, arm extension stretch and false grip hang

Transition ring rows

This variation of the ring row begins as a false grip ring row and incorporates the transition movement at the top of the row. Begin the movement leaning back holding the rings with straight arms. Row the rings into your body until your thumb touches your chest. At this point drop your hips aggressively at the same time pulling the rings across your chest and into your armpits. Catch your balance with the rings supporting your weight. Reverse this process till you are in the beginning position to complete the movement.



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

Reps: x 8

Sets: complete 3 - 5 sets of transition ring rows

Pull up

Holding the rings (or bar) from below, using a normal grip complete a pull up. Begin from a dead hang, depress and retract your shoulder blades (pull your shoulders down). Then

bend your elbows pulling your chin over the rings. Return to a dead hang slowly in control to complete the repetition.



Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J1tA_KvAa6o

Reps: x 5 reps

Bar dip

Using a set of parallel bars, complete bar dips. Begin in a support position with your shoulders depressed (keep your shoulders away from your ears) dip down as low as you can control before pressing back into support position.



Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cc42gTpLlms>

Reps: x 5 reps

Sets: Complete 3 sets of pull ups and bar dips

Level 3

As a level 3 athlete you should feel very comfortable with normal pull ups and dips using rings and bars. As you progress to integrating your false grip into higher power expressions of pulling and pushing pay attention to how your wrists and elbows feel. The skin on your wrists will take a beating, you can tolerate this. However if the joints are beginning to hurt or feel less than great, consider spending more time at level 2.

Mobility work

False grip stretch

False grip requires flexibility through the back of the forearm (extensors) and strength through the inside of the forearm (for gripping). This mobility exercises will develop the required strength and mobility to become comfortable in false grip.

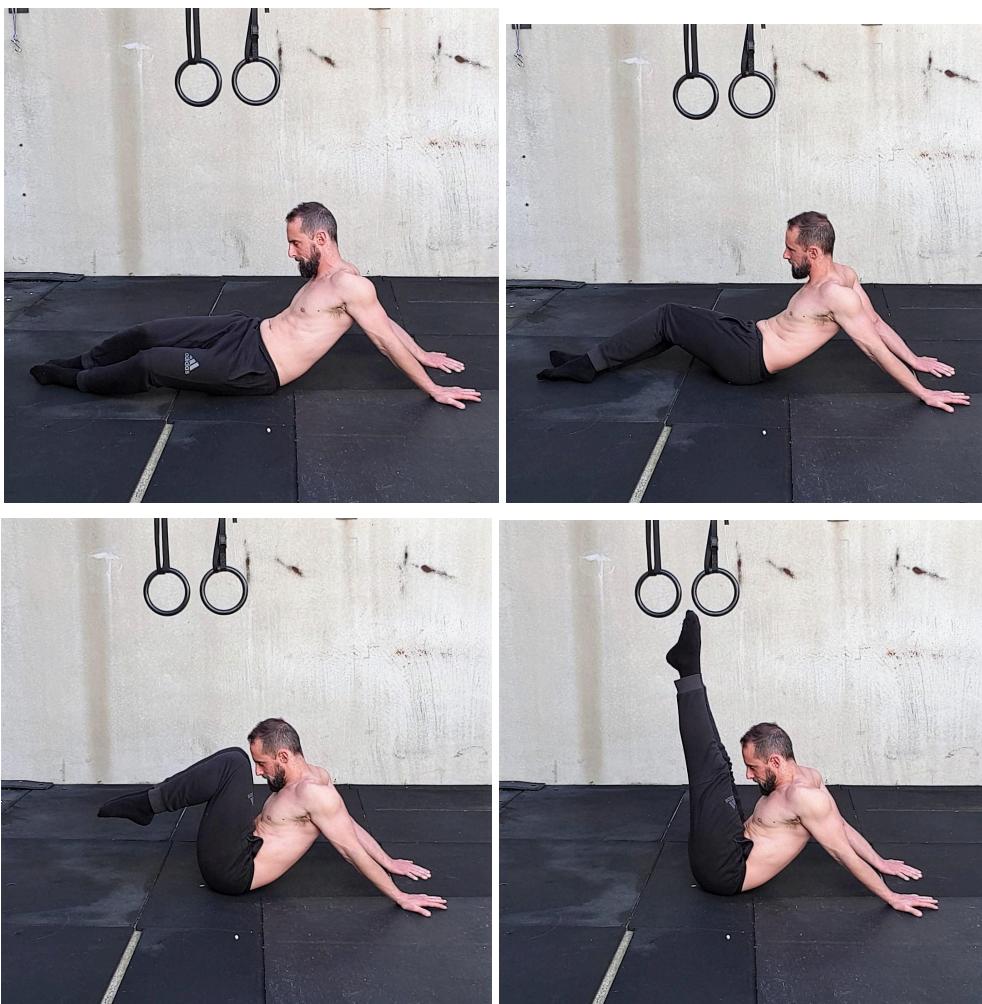


Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fPrirk5JELI>

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

Arm extension stretch

The transition phase of a muscle up, moving from the top of the pull up to the bottom of the dip, requires the upper arms to move strongly into extension. For many people this range of motion is lacking. This stretch will build the required mobility to stay safe while practicing ring muscle ups.



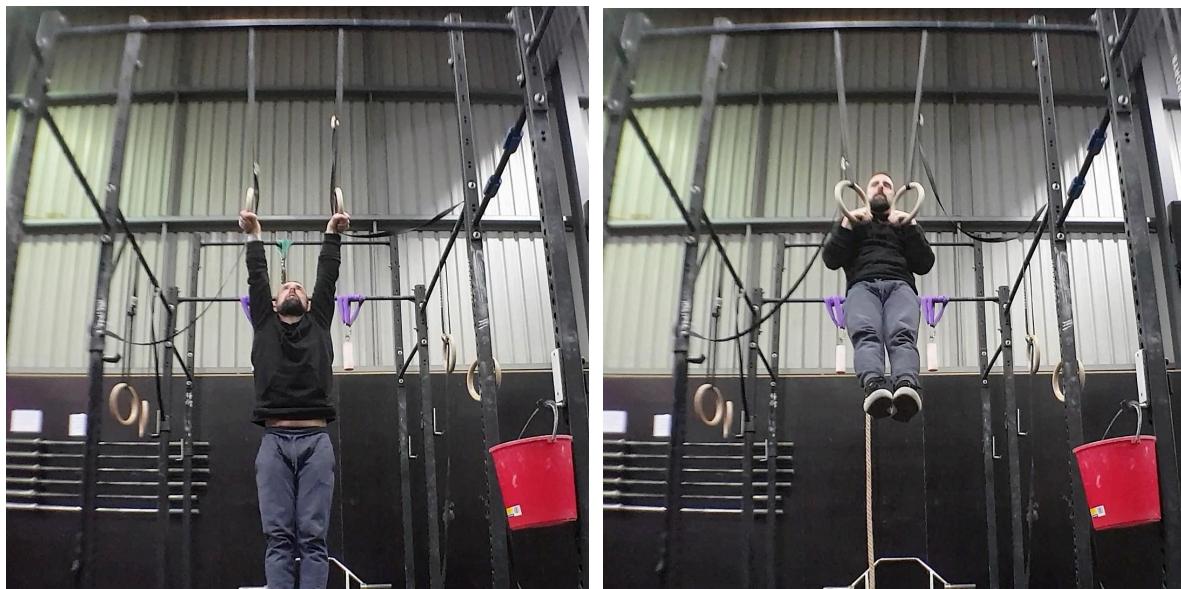
Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=85yAKJCn5sg>

Reps: x 5 per side, HLR per side 10 seconds

Strength Work

False grip pull ups

Begin the false grip pull up from a false grip hang. Initiate the movement by pulling your shoulders down and back before bending your elbows and pulling yourself up. Continue until your thumbs touch your chest. This range of motion is very important as it sets up the position to complete the transition.



Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Ro7lItgEY>

Reps: x 5

Ring dips with turn out

Begin in support position above the rings with the rings turned out (palms facing forward). As a beginner, make sure you keep the rings very close to your body. The further away from you they move the harder you will have to work. Turn the rings back to parallel and lower down through the dip. Continue until the rings touch your shoulder. For many people this will feel like a very deep dip. From here push back up to support and turn the rings out to finish the rep.



Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wf8tAi6sfps>

Reps: x 5

Sets: Complete 3 - 5 sets of 5 x false grip pull ups and 5 x ring dips

Bent arm false grip hang

For most people the pull up is hardest when your hands get close to touching your body. This exercise is in place to strengthen this range of motion. Pull up, or jump up into position such that your thumbs touch your chest. Hold this position with your feet off the ground.



Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3PbCufQo_Yc&t=2s

Reps: 10 second hold

Set: 5 sets with 1 minute rest between each repetition.

False grip ring rows

Hold the rings in false grip lean back holding the rings at arm's length. Maintain false grip. Row the rings in towards your body pulling until our thumbs touch your chest. Return to the straight arm position slowly. If you find it too hard to complete all the reps walk backwards to reduce the resistance



Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wC5LeDNJ1ro>

Rep: x 15

Ring push ups with turn out

Hold yourself in a plank position supported on the rings in front of you. Keeping your elbows in tight, lower down to the bottom position until the ring touches your shoulder. Push back up to the beginning position and externally rotate the rings for a moment.



Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rLTVcV6KlQ8>

Reps: x 15

Sets: Complete 3 - 5 sets of 15 x false grip ring rows and 15 x ring pushups

Level 4

As a level 4 athlete you should now be feeling quite strong on the rings. Your pull ups and dips should feel strong and you should be developing some strength in your false grip and transition. As you begin working eccentric muscle ups pay particular attention to retaining control through the transition. This is the most difficult part of the movement.

Mobility work

False grip stretch

False grip requires flexibility through the back of the forearm (extensors) and strength through the inside of the forearm (for gripping). This mobility exercises will develop the required strength and mobility to become comfortable in false grip.

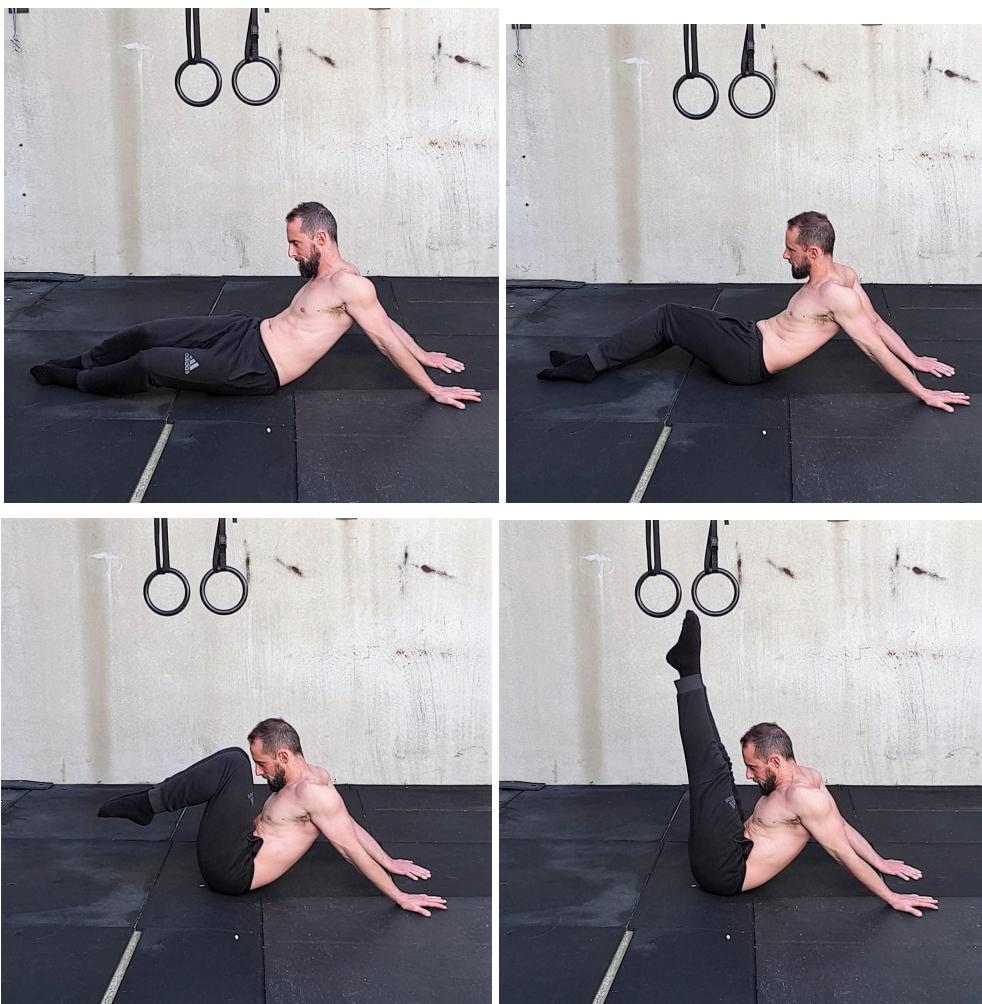


Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fPrirk5JELI>

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

Arm extension stretch

The transition phase of a muscle up, moving from the top of the pull up to the bottom of the dip, requires the upper arms to move strongly into extension. For many people this range of motion is lacking. This stretch will build the required mobility to stay safe while practicing ring muscle ups.



Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=85yAKJCn5sg>

Reps: x 5 per side, HLR per side 10 seconds

Strength Work

Tempo eccentric ring muscle up (down)

Begin the movement above the rings (jump or use a box to get into position). Lower through the dip slowly for a count of 4. Once you reach the bottom of the dip, lean back slowly bringing your thumbs around your chest until you are hanging at the top of the pull up position in false grip. This part of the movement is the hardest portion of the exercise. From here slowly lower down to a hang position in the rings while maintaining false grip. You have completed 1 rep.



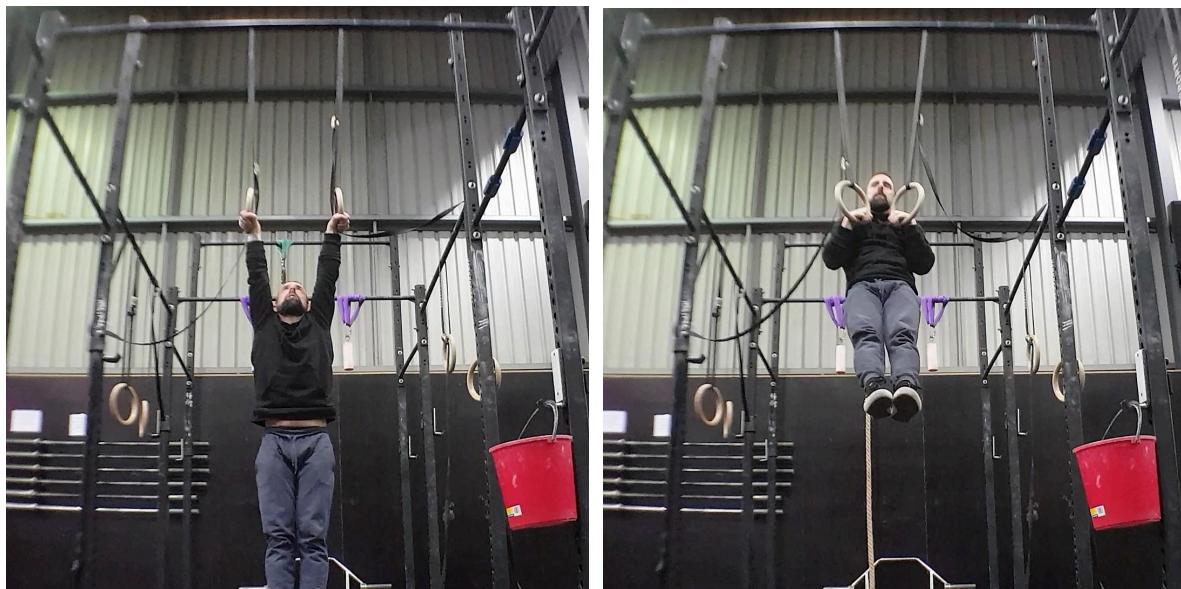
Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vSv_TOU3fhk

Reps: Maintain a tempo such that each rep takes 10 seconds

Sets: Complete 10 single reps, rest as much as needed between reps to ensure the movement quality is maintained.

False grip pull ups

Begin the false grip pull up from a false grip hang. Initiate the movement by pulling your shoulders down and back before bending your elbows and pulling yourself up. Continue until your thumbs touch your chest. This range of motion is very important as it sets up the position to complete the transition.



Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Ro7lItt9EY>

Reps: x 5

Ring dips with turn out

Begin in support position above the rings with the rings turned out (palms facing forward). As a beginner, make sure you keep the rings very close to your body. The further away from you they move the harder you will have to work. Turn the rings back to parallel and lower down through the dip. Continue until the rings touch your shoulder. For many people this will feel like a very deep dip. From here push back up to support and turn the rings out to finish the rep.



Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wf8tAi6sfps>

Reps: x 5

Sets: Complete 3 - 5 sets of 5 x false grip pull ups and 5 x ring dips

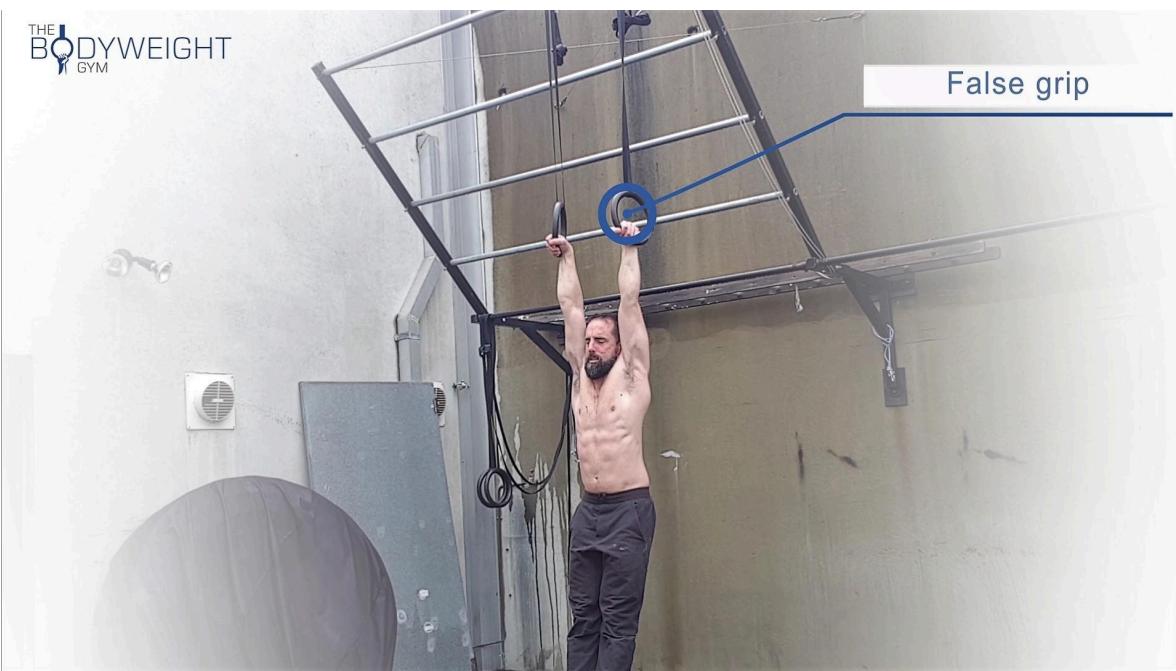
Level 5

By now you should have or almost be ready to attempt your first full ring muscle up. When you prepare to complete the muscle up, practice the key positions you need to hit. You have practiced them during your time working at level 4. It is tempting to begin the transition early, this is natural as it is the hardest part of the movement so you want to get it done. Resist this urge, rather ensure you complete the pull up completely with your thumbs touching your chest before pulling through the transition into the bottom position of the dip. For most people it is not easy to push out of the dip. If you are unable to push out of the dip, don't be tempted to throw your legs around and swing wildly to finish your first muscle up. Return to an earlier level and work at correcting your technique.

Strength Work

Ring muscle up

Begin hanging under the rings in false grip. Pull up to the rings until your thumbs touch your chest. Pull the rings apart leaning forward and pulling the rings into your armpits. Once you are stable at the bottom of the dip position push up to support. Finally turn the rings out at the top. Then lower down through dip, transition and finally pull up to complete the rep hanging in false grip under the rings







Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1_ClqS7CfwE

Reps: x 10 single reps

Level 6

By now you are probably stoked that you can do a ring muscle up and keen to practice the movement as often as possible. Be cautious. Just because you can do something doesn't mean you should. Many people over do the high power work (ie muscle up) and neglect the foundational work that got them to this point. This will increase your chance of getting injured dramatically. With this in mind, it is now time to condition yourself to the muscle up movement so that it becomes something that is easy to do. I would recommend completing the following workout every 2 or 3 days.

Strength work

Muscle up conditioning

Complete the following:

1 x ring muscle up, 3 x dips, muscle down, 3 x pull ups

Work up to completing 10 sets of this within a 30 min window. Once that is easy move to:

2 x ring muscle up, 6 dips, muscle dow, 6 pull ups.

Work up to completing 10 sets of this within a 30 min window.

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6JcvbbIgvwc>

The Wrap Up

At this stage the ring muscle up should feel easy. Congratulations, you have mastered the ring muscle up. Now onto bigger and better things.