

THE ULTIMATE
CALISTHENICS
GUIDE

SAIAN MUREAU

RISE FROM NOTHING AND BECOME AN ELITE

04 LEARNING THE FRONT-LEVER



1- The Theory

In this section, we'll tackle the second of the three key movements. There are a lot of similarities between how you train the front lever and the planche. In fact, if you know how to make progress on the planche, you'll also know how to progress on the front lever.

Overall, you'll need to follow the same rules as with the planche, namely:

- The mindset aspect
- The volume/form, form/volume cycle rule
- Respecting the training structure

In short, it's the same training format as for the planche, just applied to the front lever.

Of course, I'll explain everything in detail, but to avoid repeating myself, I strongly recommend reading the previous chapter on the planche if you haven't already.

Let's start by talking about the theory:

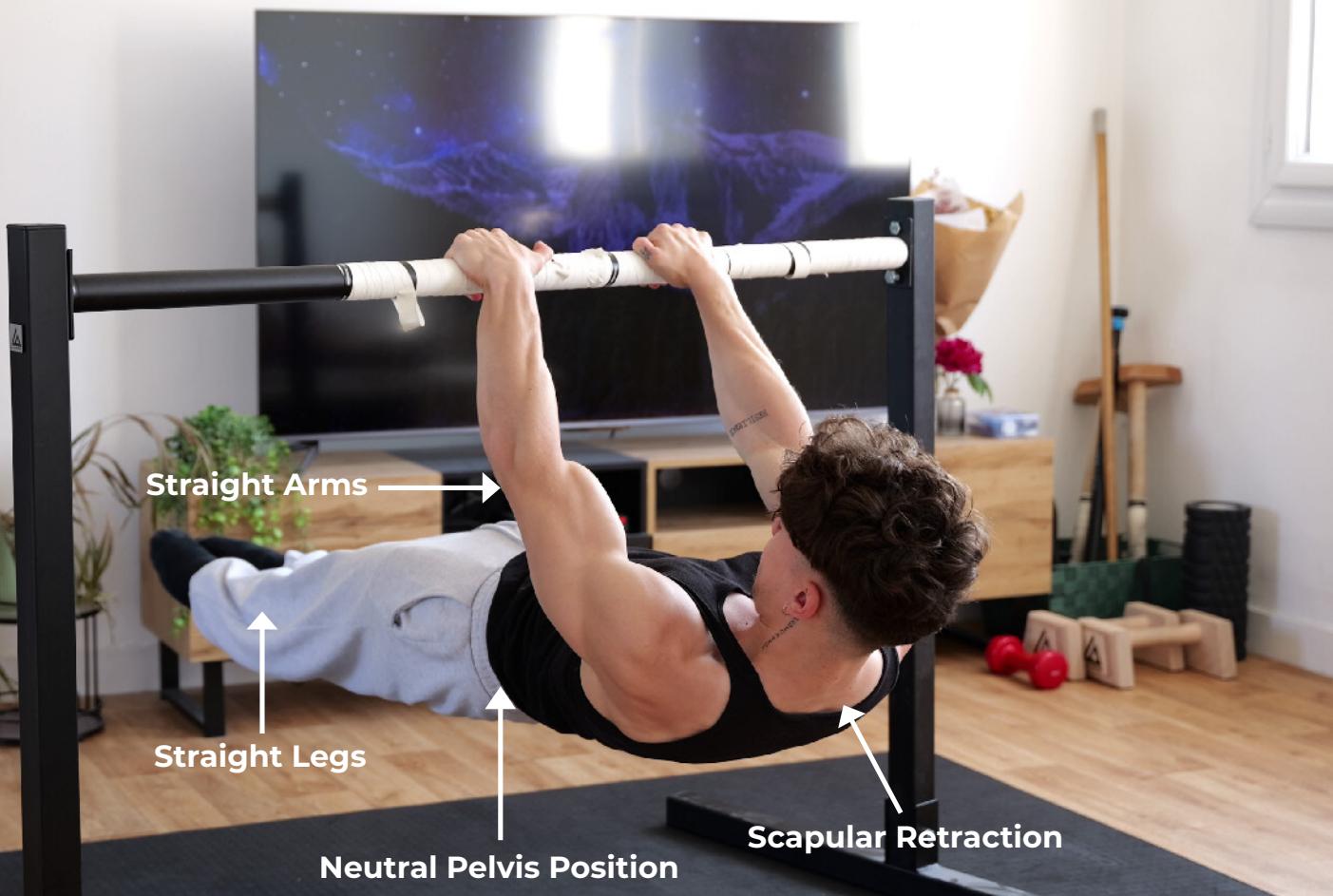
FORM

To understand how to perform a front lever, it's essential to grasp its basic mechanics. The front lever is a static hold that relies on three key principles:

01 Scapular Retraction

02 A Neutral Pelvis Position

03 A Fully Tensed Body



COMMON MISTAKES IN FRONT LEVER

It's normal for your form not to be perfect at the beginning. Some mistakes can actually help you progress, while others must be avoided to prevent developing bad habits.

The longer a mistake is repeated, the harder it will be to correct later on.

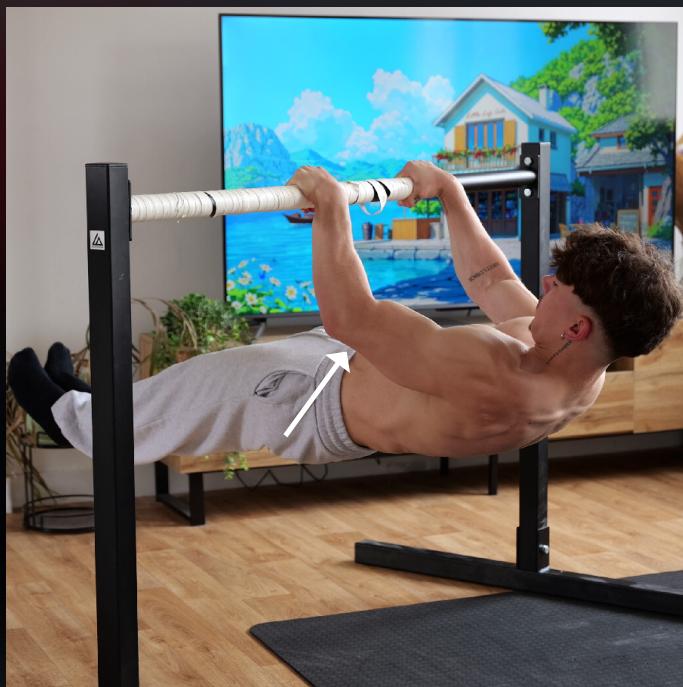
"Spoon" form



Protraction



Bent arms



THE RIGHT GRIP TO USE

NO FALSE



Ideal for learning the front lever, but the most difficult for the variations.

FALSE GRIP



Perfect for learning the touch and future combos.

STRONG GRIP



A middle ground to use as an intermediate step to learn the touch and no-false pull-ups.

THE PRESSES



Presses in the front lever are less technical than in planche. It's a movement where, thanks to leverage, you rotate your body until your legs reach the bar.

To perform this exercise, you must keep your elbows fully locked so that the load is primarily supported by the lats.



To lift yourself, you need to have the intention of “pulling the bar down” with your straight arm. This force then transforms into a circular momentum that brings your legs up to the bar. It's a pretty intuitive movement.

Just remember to continuously push your pelvis forward to keep a nice straight line; otherwise, you'll end up doing a spoon-shaped press. On top of that, point your toes upward and you'll be able to press naturally.

Tips: You can help initiate the press by giving a slight nod of your head backward to make the start easier.

THE PULL-UPS



A front lever pull-up consists of bending the elbows without losing alignment, with the goal of touching the bar with your hips.

When holding a front lever, the shoulders are internally rotated, but at the start of the pull-up, they gradually rotate externally until the biceps face the bar.

A valid pull-up is characterized by the following:

- 1- You stayed retracted from start to finish
- 2- You pull up until your hips touch the bar
- 3- No jerks — you stayed straight throughout the entire movement

Of course, we're talking about "perfect form" here, but in the beginning, you'll inevitably have to sacrifice some form to make progress.

"Half Reps"

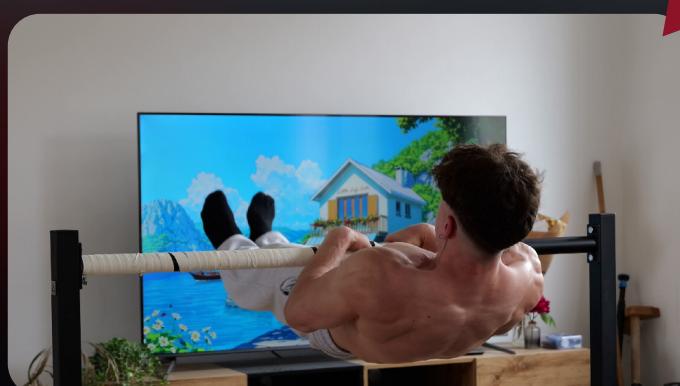


Half reps are a good way to approach pull-ups at first. It's okay if you don't touch the bar right away — it helps you build strength and understand the movement.

You can perfectly complement this with tuck pull-ups through the full range of motion (full ROM*), allowing you to effectively work on different parts of the movement.



The pull-ups "kipping"



As the name suggests, it involves doing a little kip with your legs when you do your pull-up. It's useful for gaining a bit more range of motion, but I advise you not to overuse it.

It's the same principle as using momentum in push-ups — keep in mind that these reps are only meant to increase your volume. In the long run, aim to perform strict pull-ups.

False grip pull-ups



Using a false grip in the front lever changes absolutely EVERYTHING about performance—the difficulty is greatly reduced.

Doing a pull-up with or without a false grip not only affects the range of motion but also influences the involvement of the rear shoulder (posterior deltoid) during the final phase.

Without a false grip, the deltoids have to take care of that last part of the movement, making the pull-up harder than it needs to be.



Until you start learning the front lever, there's no point in training your false grip. But once you begin working on the touch and full pull-ups, it becomes absolutely necessary.

THE TOUCH



The touch is the static position resulting from maintaining tension at the highest point of a pull-up, when the hips touch the bar. To achieve this, you need to work well on the final portion of the movement, where, in addition to the triceps, the posterior deltoid acts as the main muscle.

This is the most difficult of the three elements and also the most important because it has the best transfer of strength.

Strong in front touch = strong in the classic front lever and pull-ups.

The reverse doesn't work. Once you unlock the front lever, you must make it your absolute priority if you want to progress effectively. Don't waste time trying to hold a classic front lever for 30 seconds, for example, and expect to have big front lever combos.



Same principle as with the planche: if you want to do combos and be complete, just holding the position isn't enough.

"Short" touch



The short touch can be compared to “half pull-ups.” This term is used when, in intent, you want to do a touch but you’re not fully close to the bar. The short touch can be more or less pronounced depending on how far your hips are from the bar.

It’s an essential step in learning your front touch; it teaches you to engage the right way and understand the movement. As with pull-ups, I recommend combining this with tuck front touches where you can get closer to the bar, allowing you to work on all parts of the movement.



Tuck touch w/false



Tuck touch no false



Light "short"

WIDE TOUCH & SAT



To understand the wide touch and the SAT, it's useful to draw a parallel with the wide planche and maltese. It's exactly the same learning method (see chapter 3).

You first need to have certain prerequisites (+3/4 seconds of classic touch).

Like with maltese, when you start learning SAT, it's likely that you'll feel unable to exert force in this position. Because of this, you will have to start with wide holds.

Get used to taking a grip slightly wider than shoulder-width on some of your tries, and gradually widen it as you get used to these sensations.

After a while, you will eventually reach true wide touches. The goal, as with the classic touch, is to progress in volume on it, always trying to improve your hold time.

To move from wide touch to SAT, it's literally the same principle as moving from a wide planche to maltese. You have to get used to a certain width until it feels natural for you, so that you can effectively increase volume on it (for example, being able to chain 2 presses in wide touch).

Example: Let's say you have a 5-second wide touch.

The idea will be to increase your volume — try to reach double your seconds so that you have enough strength to validate a bad-form SAT start. You then progressively increase until you succeed in your first holds in SAT, then unlock it cleanly, etc.

2- Training Rules

Short and Long Combos

A short combo (about 10 to 15 seconds), very intense, is mainly focused on muscle development and allows optimal strength gains. For this type of effort, a rest time of 1 to 3 minutes is generally sufficient.

On the other hand, a longer combo (between 20 and 40 seconds) is more like a neural endurance workout. It therefore requires longer breaks: 4 to 5 minutes, or even up to 7 to 8 minutes if you go to failure.

In summary: the longer and more intense the effort, the longer the rest period should be.

Listen to your body

Progress means regularly stepping out of your comfort zone. But beware: you can't constantly push at high intensity without risk. It's crucial to understand how your body reacts and adapts.

Even if you quickly master a new movement, it doesn't mean your body is ready to handle an immediate increase in intensity or volume. That's why it's essential to proceed with caution.

When you hit a new milestone (a new skill, better control, big improvement), it's tempting to go all out at 100% intensity. But your body needs time to absorb this progress. If you push too hard too soon, you risk injury.

Even when everything seems perfect, take a step back and listen to your body.

Managing Plateaus

Plateau is an integral part of the learning process; indeed, you cannot progress constantly.

However, if you've been stuck for a long period (1 month or more) while not injured and fully dedicated to your training, then something is off. In that case, review your management of volume, intensity, frequency, and rest. (see chapters 2 and 7).

Moving to the next level

The program I'm going to propose is structured into levels, each including:

- A prerequisite to meet (baseline level)
- A final exam to pass

Prerequisites must always be met with a CLEAN form. If I ask you to hold a +3-second front-lever to start level 2, then I expect a clean front-lever, with none of the errors listed on pages 3.

For the final exam, the same principle applies. I use this method to force you to alternate between strength cycles and form cycles.

During your training period, you can focus less on form to build strength, and when you feel ready for the final exam, you must dedicate time to clean up the volume you've gained, so you can advance to the next level.

Rules for combos

Creating an effective exercise combo is not just about chaining moves randomly. To maximize training volume, it's essential to follow certain rules.

Here are three fundamental principles to follow, along with suggestions to adapt them to your level and strengths:

The order of elements in your combo should decrease in difficulty. Start with the most demanding skills—both neurologically and muscularly—when your body is still fresh. Then gradually transition to easier variations.

Intensity is relative to execution quality, so execution quality should also decrease throughout the combo. This prevents you from falling back too quickly to simple variations. Incorporating some “bad form” is essential for progression, but make sure to do it intelligently.

Manage fatigue by alternating muscle groups.

For example, alternate a pushing movement (like a planche) with a balance-focused move such as a handstand flag or one-arm handstand.

You can also use skills you already master as “active rest” without fully relaxing the tension. These active rests allow you to keep the combo going while slightly recovering, increasing volume without overloading a single muscle group.

03 - FROM LEVEL 0 TO FRONT



Final goal: Front lever clean +3sec

LEVEL 0 – OBJECTIVE: MASTERING THE TUCK FRONT LEVER

EXERCISE 01

TUCK FRONT-LEVER
MAX HOLD BAD FORM
> 3sec

EXERCISE 02

NEGATIVE TUCK
FRONT LEVER

EXERCISE 03

PULL-UPS / WEIGHTED
PULL-UPS

→ **TAKE BETWEEN 3 AND 5 MINUTES OF REST BETWEEN EACH SET**

From the moment you have a solid tuck front, the learning method is literally the same as for the planche. You will therefore need to:

- 1- Alternate volume / form cycles
- 2- Start with your maxs then adapt your session (bands or combos)
- 3- Choose variations suited to your level, challenging enough to progress and avoid stagnation, and manageable so you don't drop immediately.
(hold >3 sec under tension and < 10 sec)

Coherent Training Plan:

01

Front Lever Training

Perform 2–4 sets of your current max reps.

MAX reps should always be performed at the beginning of the session in order to gauge your daily capacity and then adjust your workout accordingly.

It's up to you to adapt them according to your level (see difficulty order in chapter 2).

- Tuck level : Max tuck hold; Max straddle hold bad form or band
- Straddle level : Max press, max hold straddle (same in one-leg)

02

Negative Reps Training

Like with the planche, negatives are an interesting exercise at the beginning to gradually get into the movement, the goal being to control the descent as much as possible until you reach parallel to the ground.

It's up to you to adapt them according to your level.

- Tuck level : Negative tuck or straddle bad form / with band
- Straddle level : Negative straddle or full bad form

03 Doing combos?

It's difficult to do combos when you're a beginner in front lever, so it's not necessarily something I would recommend. Putting enough intensity into your max holds and negatives will be more than enough to progress and reach your front lever.

In front lever training, you don't have handstand push-ups, impossible dips, one-arm handstands, etc., to maximize combo volume and rest. For this reason, I advise you to focus on your touch and pull-ups before starting combos. You'll have more volume and elements available to really work your combos effectively.

Instead, you can do strength training and band-assisted attempts to work on your trajectories and negatives.

04 Band-Assisted Training

2–3 sets of perfect form front lever. You can also do presses or negatives, with the goal of focusing your attention on your proprioception.

BONUS: Pull-ups? Not necessarily a strength transfer (see chapter 2), but interesting to increase session intensity if you want.

04 - FROM FRONT LEVER TO FRONT TOUCH



**Final Objective : Front touch +3sec; Pull-up to touch;
+5 Pull-ups**

If you're at this level, it means you've achieved your front lever; you now have the strength needed to work on the touch and pull-ups.

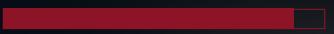
Just like with planche, simply holding a position doesn't necessarily make you strong. You could hold a front lever for 40 seconds but still not be able to do a wide touch, for example.

The most important thing is to diversify your training by focusing your energy on what will truly make you progress. Just like with the planche where push-ups and presses are prioritized, here we will prioritize learning the touch and pull-ups. Indeed, holding a front lever for 40+ seconds won't get you anywhere, whereas improving your touch will automatically improve your front lever hold. (Same principle as holding a planche vs combo presses + push-ups)

Furthermore, at this stage, you can start integrating combos and working on volume. You now have a solid foundation to create interesting combinations while gradually reducing the difficulty of the skills.

(see combo rules)

Coherent Training Plan:

CHOICE 01  + strength / - control

01

Volume Improvement



Repetition Work (Focus on Weak Points)

- max touch hold (Start with short holds if it's too hard at first, until you can do real touch.)
- max pull up to touch
- max pull-ups



X-X-X (Adapt according to your level and goals.)

Option 1 – “Easy”

Pull-ups / Press / Hold

Option 2 – “Medium”

Touch / Press / Hold

Option 3 – “Hard”

Touch/ Pull-ups / Press

Play with form and level levers to increase volume.

You can also include one-leg variations to keep progressing on your X-X-X, for example, to train moving from 1/1/1 to 2/2/2, you can do:

1 pull ups ; 1 press; +1 press one-leg ; +2sec front hold

02

Short Combos & Specific Work – Focused on Control



Corresponds to more muscular work, tailored to each person based on their current goals.

- Transition work (pull-up to touch, touch press..)
- work on a powermove(One arm front, victorian..)
- Short combos with a specific goal (improving a weak point, assessing a skill)

03

Elastic band training – "Perfect form"



This corresponds to work focused on form, movement trajectories, and physical sensations.

- Focus on scapular retraction during the touch, rebound control in the pull-up to touch, and overall fluidity in pull-up movements, etc.

04

BONUS Work – Strengthening



This corresponds to strengthening work focused on exercises you enjoy doing

Weighted pull-ups, muscle-ups, forearm exercises, curls, etc..

01

Short Combos & Specific Work – Focused on Control



Corresponds to more muscular work, tailored to each person based on their current goals.

- Transition work (pull-up to touch, touch press..)
- work on a powermove(One arm front, victorian..)
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05 - FROM FRONT TOUCH TO ELITE



Final goal: 10–15 pull-ups to touch; +20 seconds touch hold; multiple mastered variations (wide grip, supinated touch, no false grip, etc.)

The progression method doesn't change drastically — you just need to adapt your work to your new level. At this stage, you can:

- 1- Completely stop training the classic front — it's no longer truly useful at this stage. Focus your energy on increasing your volume in touch and pull-up to touch.
- 2- Start truly investing in power moves (SAT, one-arm front, victorian, etc.).
- 3- Begin short, specific cycles where you specialize in one element or focus area before returning to volume-based cycles.

At this level, you're expected to have understood:

- The principle of volume vs. form
- The different progression methods
- All the theory behind the front lever and its variations
- How to optimize your training

Now it's up to you to do what you enjoy — as long as you follow a structure similar to the previous level and stick to the principles I've explained so far.

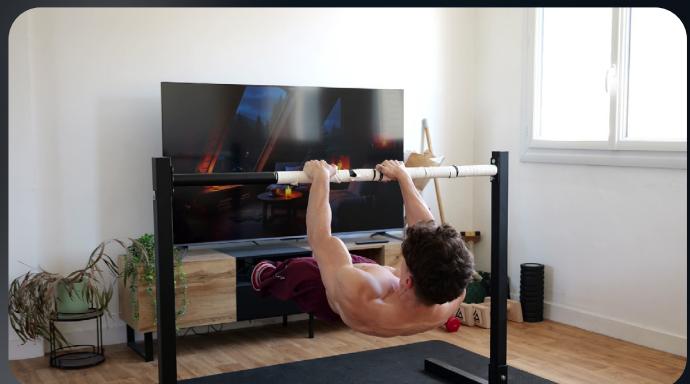
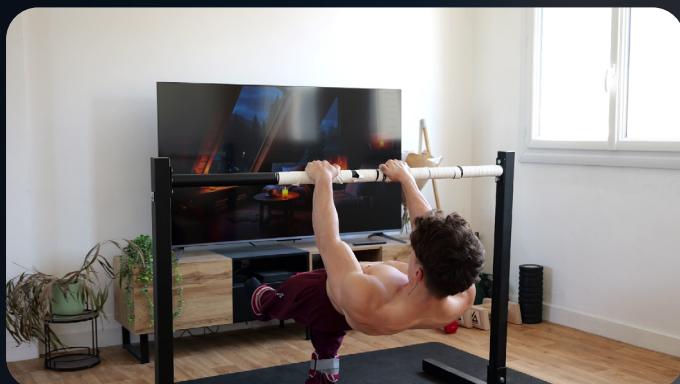
(See Chapters 3 and 7 to learn more about training structure.)

PROGRESSION TOOLS (Minimum Level 3)

1- POTENTIATION (WEIGHTED TRAINING)

Adding ankle weights at the start of a session, or during a full training, is effective for increasing your power. It also allows you to simulate a feeling of lightness for the rest of your workout, as if your body feels more 'free' once the weights are removed.

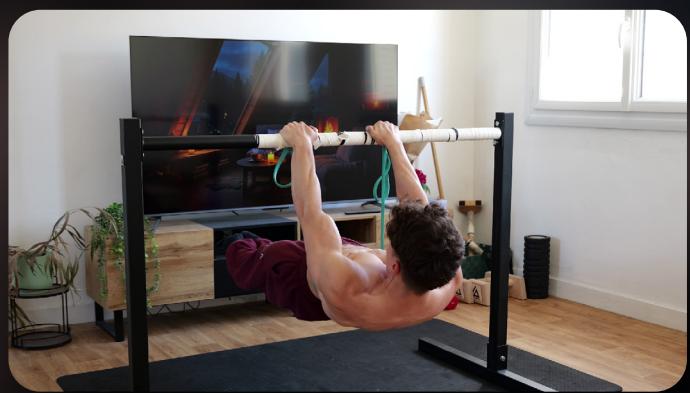
However, it's very tiring for the nervous system, so you need to rest well afterward and, above all, use it wisely. There's no need to overdo it — it's a tool to use occasionally, for example to break through a plateau or to jumpstart your progress



2- MENTAL ELASTIC BAND (~2/3kg)

The mental elastic works like a psychological aid. It barely reduces your actual load but is ideal during periods of low self-confidence or performance dips.

Perfect for gradually regaining your level. It's effective over both short and long periods, as long as you keep applying progressive overload.



3- ISOLATION WORK

Breaking down a movement or a transition. Very useful when you're working on a specific combo or want to perfect a trajectory.

It allows you to understand each phase, correct the details, and make the whole sequence much smoother.