

CALISTHENICS PLAYBOOK

Learn Bodyweight Fitness Visually

FOREWORD

Looking back at the earliest days of [Gravgear](#), I realized our approach was flawed. Posting product images on Instagram felt intrusive, almost like spam. It went against my central belief: to offer value before asking for anything in return.

Growing up, I found two passions that ignited my spirit - calisthenics and drawing. The former unlocked the impressive capabilities of our bodies, and the latter brought my creative ideas to life. Suddenly, it hit me: why not blend these passions?

Thus, Yellow Dude was born - a fusion of fitness insights and playful sketches. The response was astounding. The content resonated so strongly that I devoted myself to creating these pieces for two years, rarely mentioning Gravgear. Yellow Dude didn't generate revenue, but it brought immeasurable joy.

The affection that Yellow Dude received indicated it was time for him to evolve into his own brand. This book marks that transformation. It is a curated compilation of our shared social media content, enhanced with refined illustrations and valuable insights from experienced coaches, offering a guide that is both enjoyable and actionable.

CONTRIBUTOR CREDITS



Meet William Soo ([@wsoo_mvmt](#)), a fitness coach with over 17 years' experience in calisthenics, mobility, handstands, and strength and conditioning. Starting off as a bodybuilder, William transitioned to calisthenics, sacrificing 7kg of muscle for improved bodily freedom. Nowadays, William displays an emphasis on exploration, focusing on gaining more ranges of motion to push the limits of the body and mind. Throughout his journey of setbacks and success, William uses his experience to guide others achieve their goals by providing simple, realistic, and thought-provoking advice.



Marcus Wong ([@mrwong_sw](#)) is a seasoned calisthenics athlete and coach. He has honed his skills for over five years and has a knack for the challenging Planche movement. Marcus found calisthenics at 15, a gym-less fitness enthusiast looking for a way to work out. Despite hurdles and injuries, he persisted and mastered the basics, then advanced skills like handstands and planche. Today, Marcus leverages his hard-earned insights to guide others on their fitness journey. He underscores safe and efficient training, helping others avoid the pitfalls he encountered. He sees his role as a coach as a way to share knowledge, which he views as the most rewarding part of his journey.

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DISCLOSURE

This content is here to help you make progress in your health and fitness journey. But remember, it's a general guide. We've based the advice on personal experiences, government guidelines, and scientific research.

But here's the thing - it's not a replacement for professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. All workouts should be performed without pain. If you experience discomfort or have health issues, injuries or any other problems that could get worse with exercise, you should get in touch with a doctor or a personal trainer.

The content does not promote unhealthy body image or extreme workout routines. We've put a lot of work into providing accurate and clinically proven training recommendations and educational resources. But how you interpret and use this information is ultimately up to you.

We're proud of our work, and we hope it helps you. But we're not responsible for how you use the information. And just like any other resource, it may not have the most recent information. We've tried to make the advice in this content as helpful as possible, based on personal experience, government guidelines, and scientific research where we can.

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TL;DR: This is a fitness guide, not medical advice. Workouts should be pain-free. Seek professional help if needed. Exercise has risks. Content copyrighted by Gravgear Pte. Ltd.

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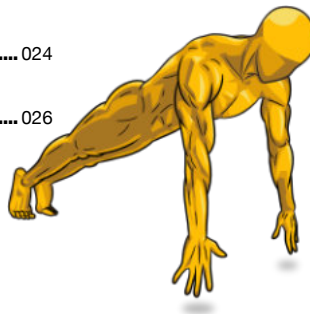
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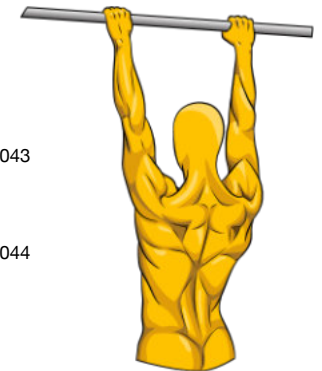


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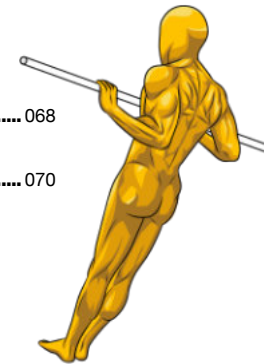
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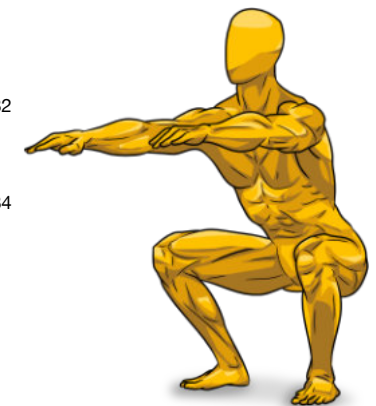


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OVERVIEW

The book unfolds with three key sections, each designed to help master a unique skill: one-arm push-ups, pull-ups, and pistol squats.

Each section is filled with at least seven workouts, progressing from straightforward to more challenging ones. Detailed tips accompany these workouts, with some even based on scientific research. Since many individuals tend to neglect pull-oriented workouts, the book introduces warm-up exercises specifically for the pull-ups section. These workouts prime your back muscles and prepare them for the main routines.

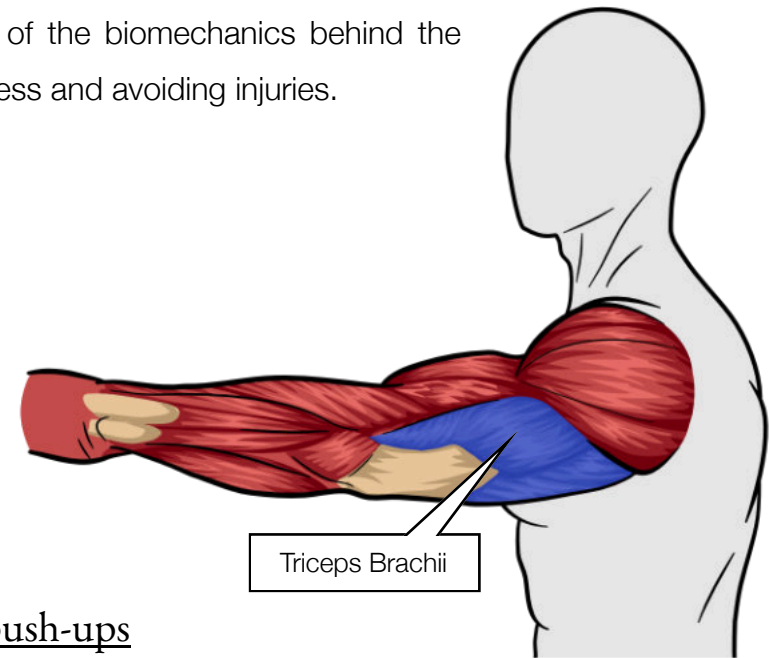
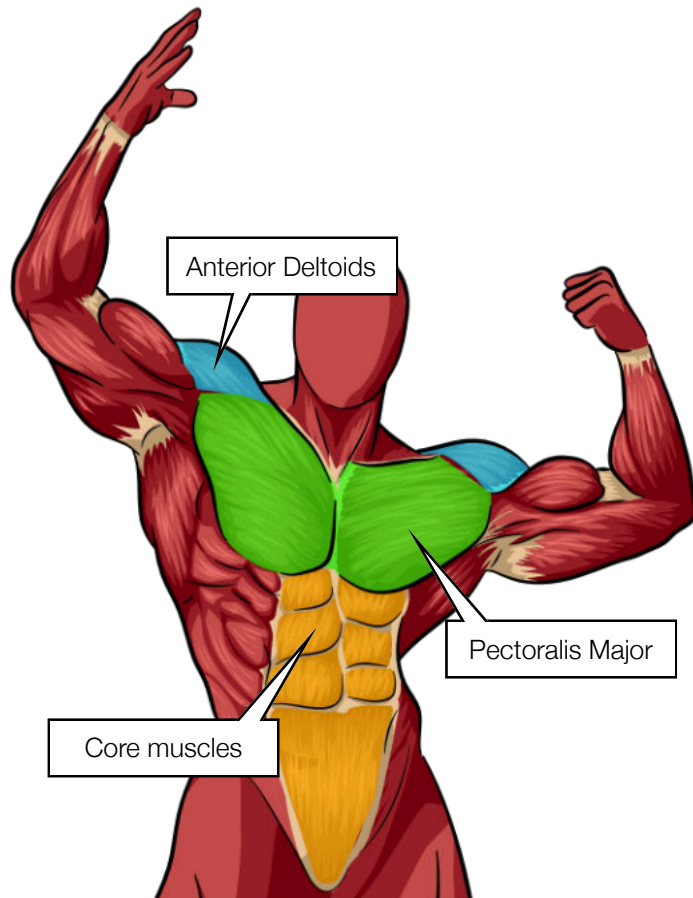
In the end, the Routine section lays out a gradual progression for all the workouts across each section. It provides a clear, step-by-step plan that makes mastering each skill more manageable.



ONE-ARM PUSH-UPS

ONE-ARM PUSH-UPS PROGRAM INTRODUCTION

This program will help you learn to do a one-arm push-up. Regardless of your current fitness level, the plan is structured to guide you through each progression. It begins with the most fundamental exercise, the plank hold, which sets the foundation for all push-up variations to follow. By the end of this program, not only will you have learned to perform a one-arm push-up, but you will also have built a solid understanding of the biomechanics behind the movement. This understanding, we believe, is the key to maintaining long-term fitness and avoiding injuries.



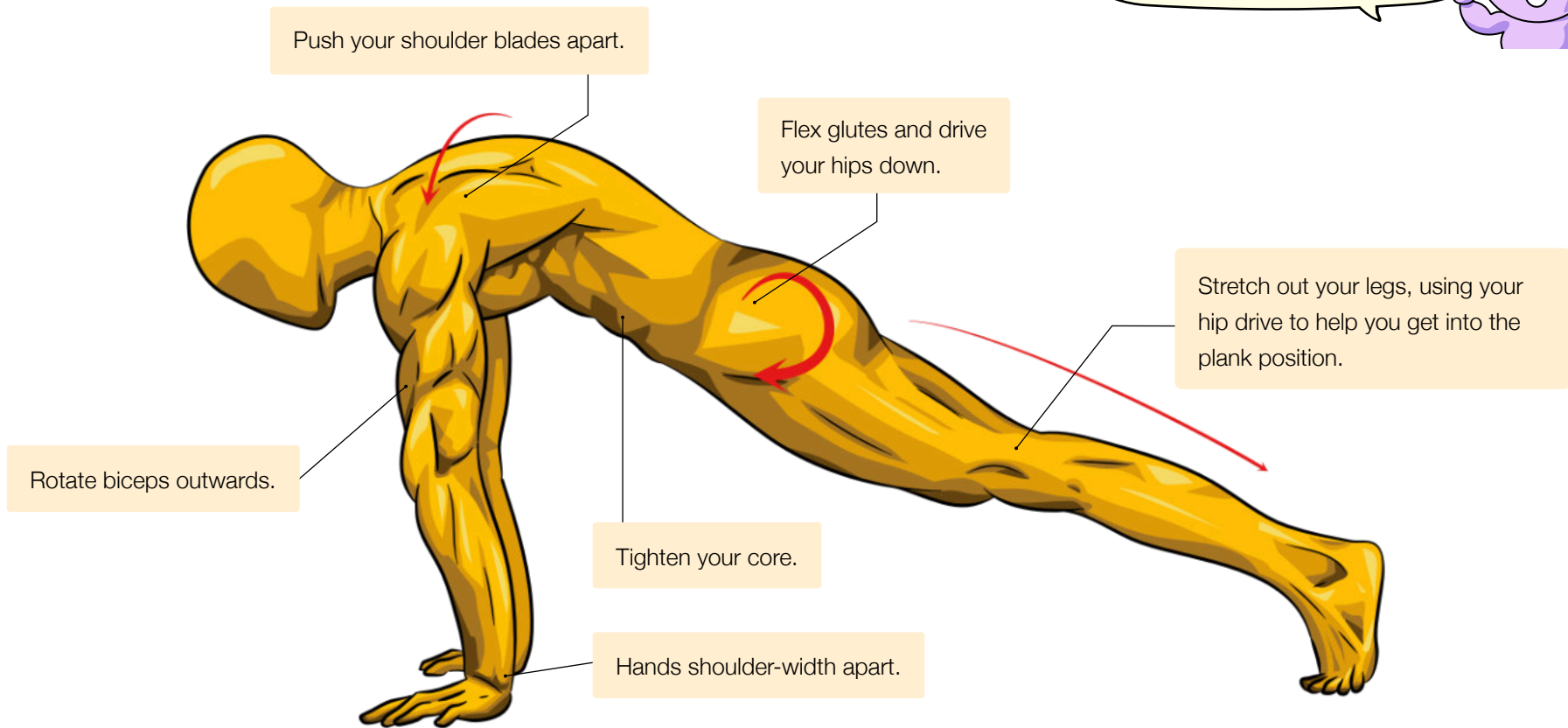
Targeted muscles in push-ups

The critical muscles put to work during push-ups are the pectorals (chest muscles), deltoids (shoulder muscles), and triceps (back of the arms). These muscles serve as the primary movers in the push-up action. However, it's important to remember that push-ups are a compound exercise, meaning they engage multiple muscle groups simultaneously. Additional muscle groups like the core and legs are also involved in maintaining proper form. Still, they aren't the main drivers of the movement.

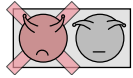
PLANK HOLD

The plank hold is a foundational exercise that builds endurance and strengthens various muscle groups, including your core, shoulders, and glutes. It's an isometric exercise, meaning you maintain a single position for a specified duration. Mastering the plank hold teaches body control and stability, two vital elements of successful push-ups.

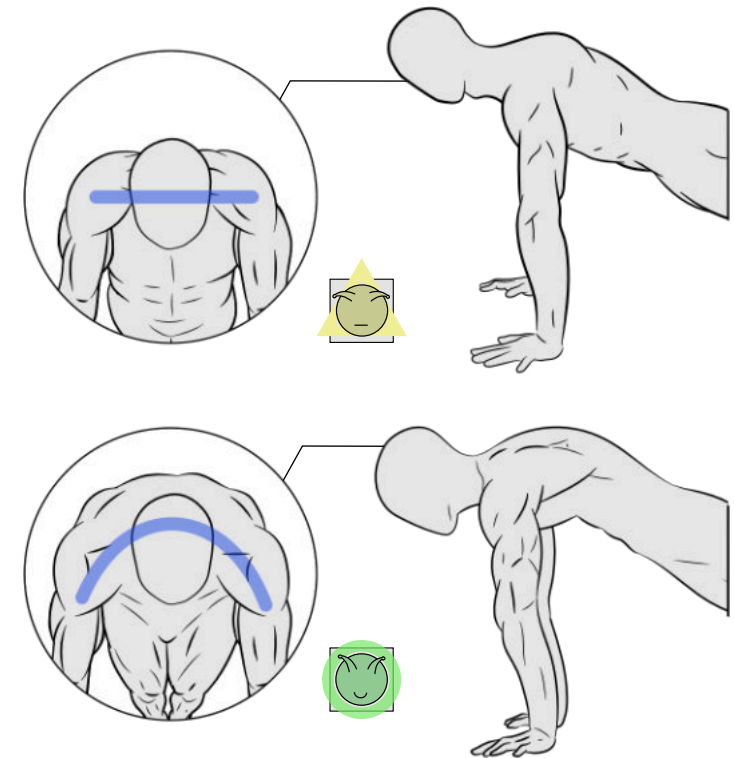
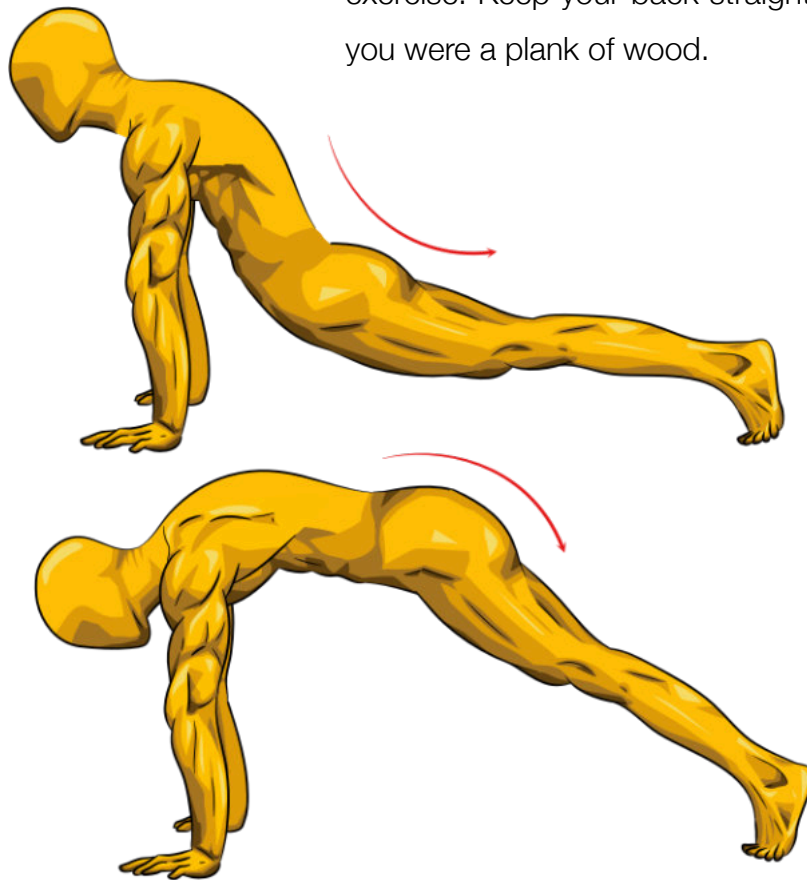
Remember to breathe. Try to keep your breath steady and even as you hold the plank. Holding your breath can increase blood pressure. It might even make you feel dizzy or light-headed.



NOTE Allowing the lower back to sag/pike



Sagging your lower back or lifting your hips too high (piking) can stress your back. It reduces the effectiveness of the exercise. Keep your back straight, as if you were a plank of wood.



Push scapula outwards

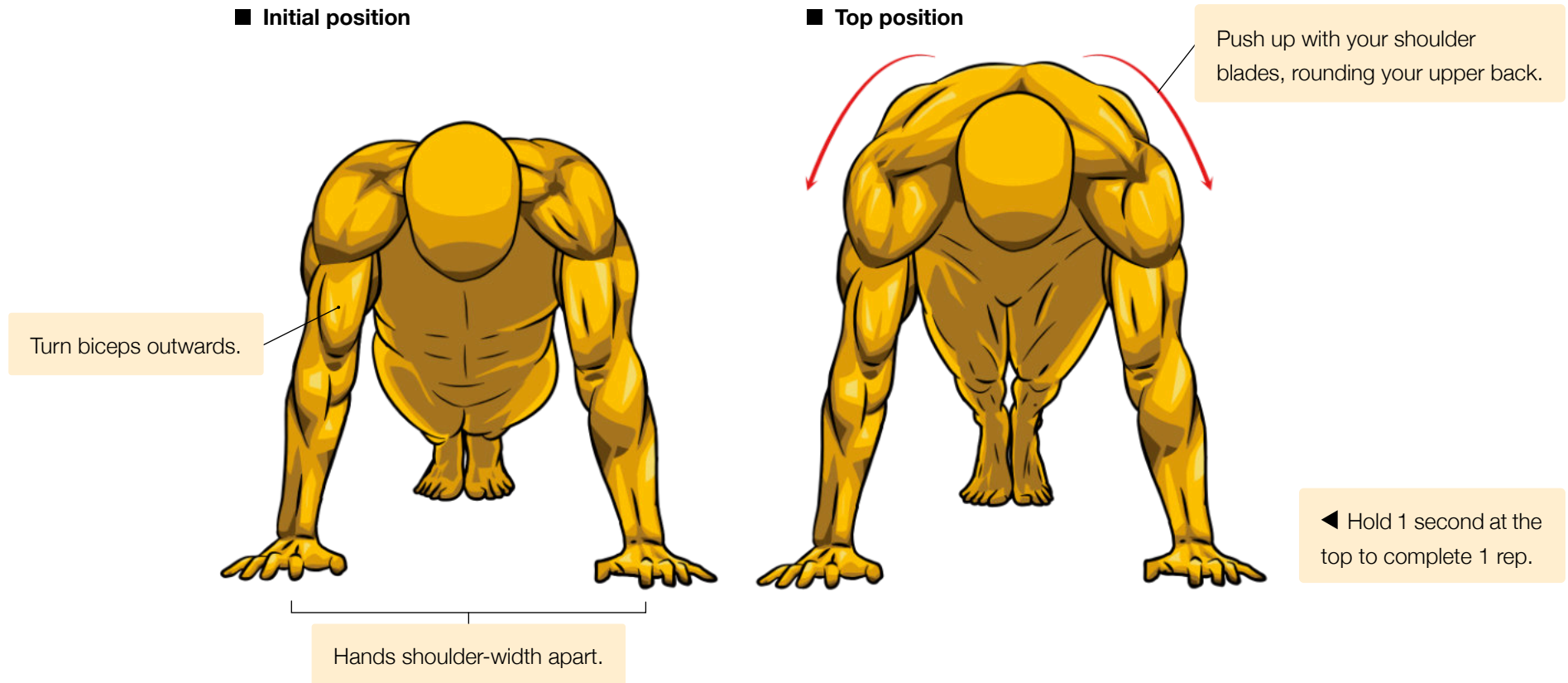
In a standard plank hold, many adopt a neutral shoulder position. Yes, it's doable and acceptable, but it could be better.

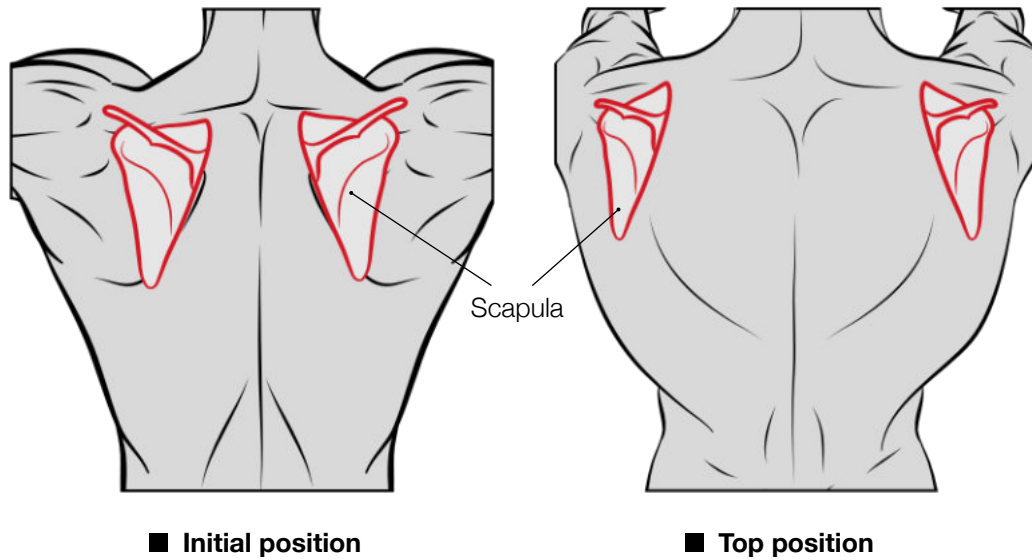
The scapula should be actively pushed outwards as much as possible, creating an inverted U shape when viewed from the front. This is for more than just form's sake. The chest muscles are contracted more intensely, leading to a stronger push. They are laying a solid foundation for advanced skills like the planche push-up or even the full planche (not included in this program).

SCAPULA PUSH-UPS

Scapula push-ups are all about the shoulder blades. The goal is to strengthen your scapular muscles. These muscles often get less attention but play a significant role in stabilizing your shoulder during push-ups.

In a scapula push-up, you maintain a plank position but focus on moving your shoulder blades in and out while keeping your arms straight. Remember, it's not a regular push-up. The elbow bending isn't involved here. It may feel tricky at first, but once you get the hang of it, you'll start noticing the improved shoulder stability in your push-ups.

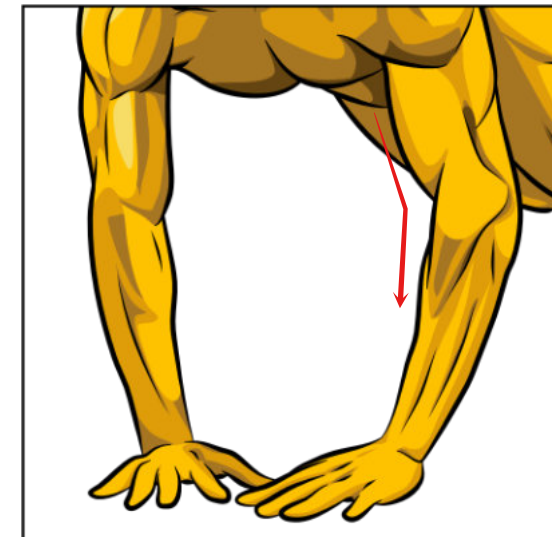




NOTE Bending the Arms



Bending the arms redirects the stress from the scapula to the triceps and pectorals, morphing the exercise into a traditional push-up. For scapula-focused push-ups, the arms must stay straight.



Scapula action

Initial position: Start with your shoulder blades lowered and squeezed together as tightly as possible. Keep your arms straight and your whole body engaged.

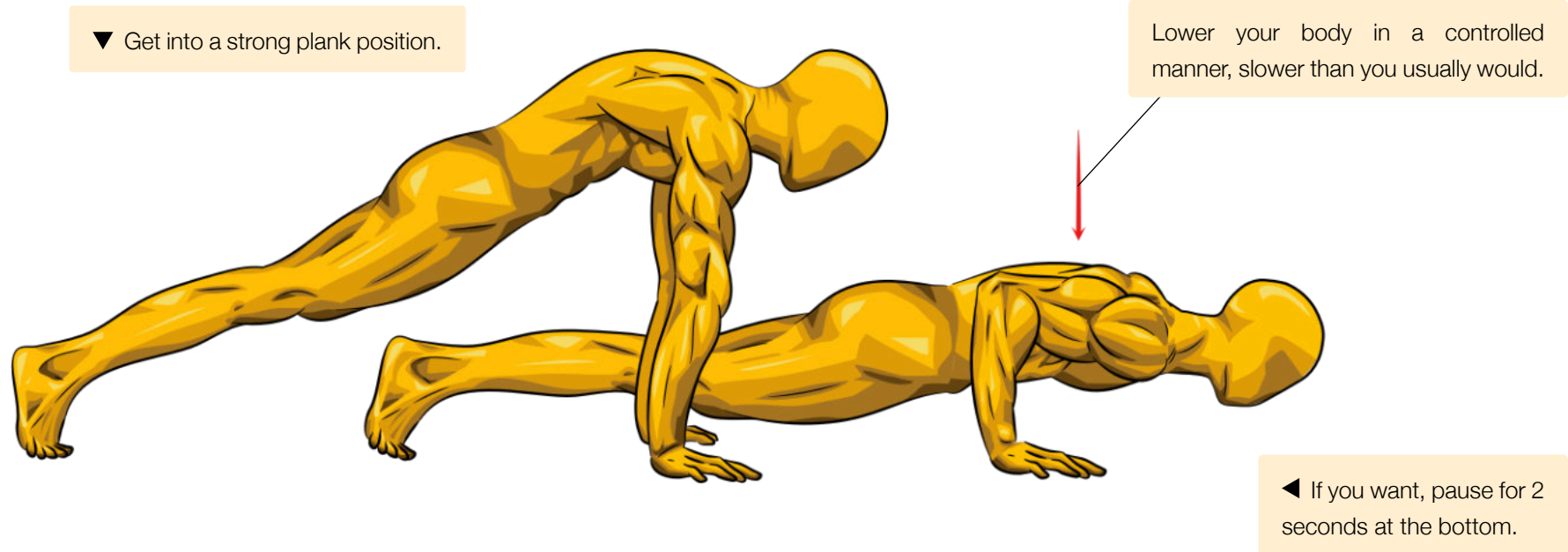
Top position: Aim for the maximum spread of your shoulder blades at the top. Why does this matter? The further the travel distance of your scapula, the more it works your stabilizing muscles.

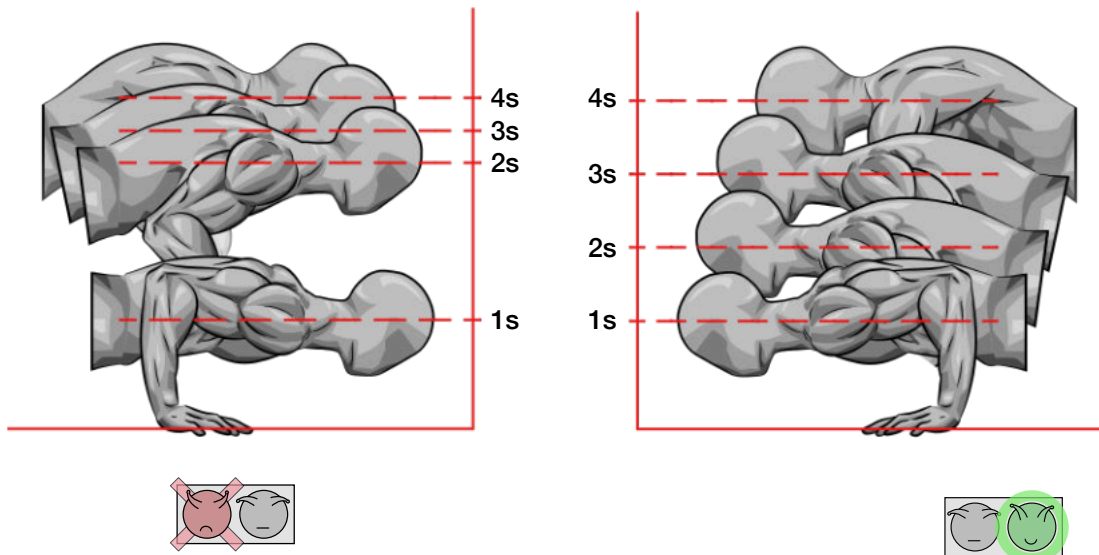
Half-hearted scapula movements shortchange your progress. To boost strength gains, go all in with each rep - from the most profound depression to the fullest protraction of your shoulder blades.

NEGATIVE PUSH-UPS

How about turning the push-up world upside down? Welcome to negative push-ups, the unsung heroes of strength training. These are about focusing on the lowering phase - the 'negative' half of the push-up - and performing it slower than usual.

Negative push-ups are all about controlled resistance. They're not just push-ups done in reverse. They train your muscles differently, teaching them to control the eccentric contraction - when your muscles lengthen while still under tension. This eccentric focus is not only a game-changer for muscle growth but also greatly boosts your overall push-up performance.



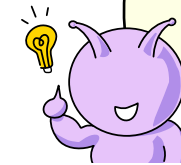
NOTE Controlled descent

The target is a steady, controlled descent that lasts between 3 to 5 seconds for each rep. Avoid rushing through the lowering phase. Instead, evenly distribute your descent throughout this time. For instance, if the aim is a 4-second descent, plan to lower about 25% each second.

This detailed approach requires more control and trains muscles to maintain strength as they lengthen. The slow, measured lowering keeps muscles under tension for longer, stimulating muscle growth and enhancing overall push-up strength.

Uncontrolled drop

An uncontrolled drop during a push-up often indicates a weak point in the eccentric phase. If you find yourself dropping suddenly instead of lowering smoothly, it's likely that you're spending too much time at one phase of the movement.



To get better, try to work more on the point where the sudden drop happens. It can also shorten the overall time you take to lower yourself.

Negative push-ups may feel more challenging than regular ones. But that's where the magic happens. Stick with it, and you'll soon see a marked improvement in your strength and push-up proficiency.

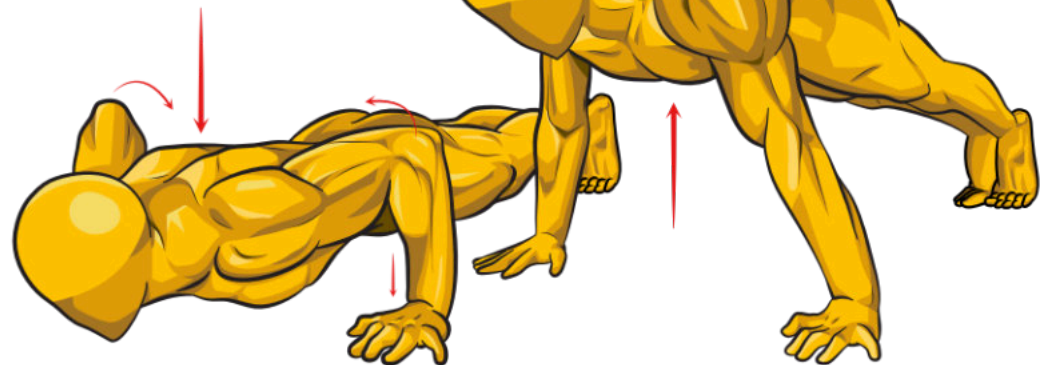
NORMAL PUSH-UPS

Having mastered the earlier push-up variations, you're ready for the gold standard of bodyweight exercises: the normal push-up. This classic move is a comprehensive body workout, enhancing strength and muscle definition. It's not just an upper body exercise; it also challenges your core. The power of the normal push-up lies in its simplicity. Although it may appear straightforward, it is the foundation for advanced exercises. Thus, mastering this respected move is crucial.

Positioning: Akin to a strong plank position: hands shoulder-width apart, core engaged, body straight from head to heels, and legs extended.

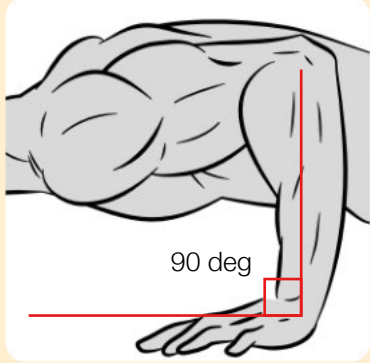


Descending: Start a controlled descent, maintaining elbow position close to the body and chest directed towards the floor. Your forearm should be nearly perpendicular to the ground at the bottom, with your chest just above the floor.

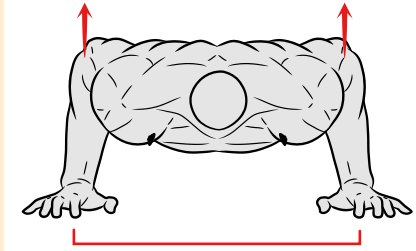
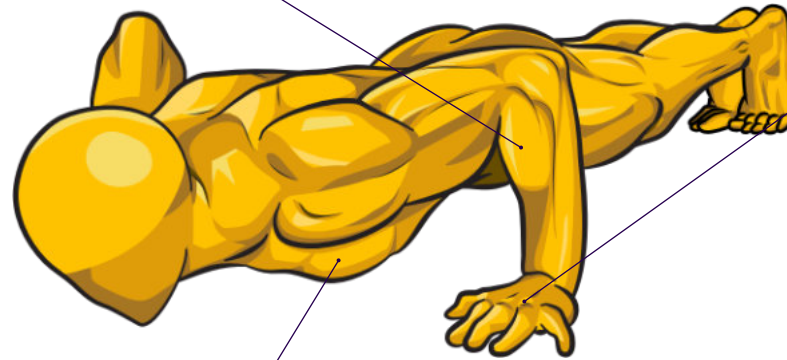


Ascending: Engage your chest, shoulder, and arm muscles to push your body back to the initial plank position. Remember to maintain full-body tension and controlled movement throughout the rep.

Descending



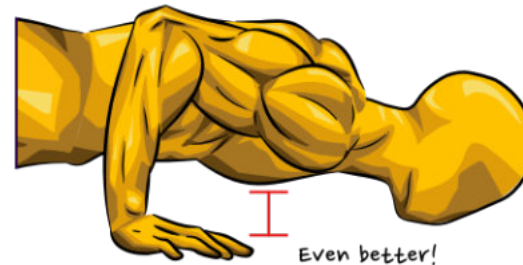
Forearms should align nearly perpendicular to the ground for a comfortable wrist position and to prevent elbow flaring.



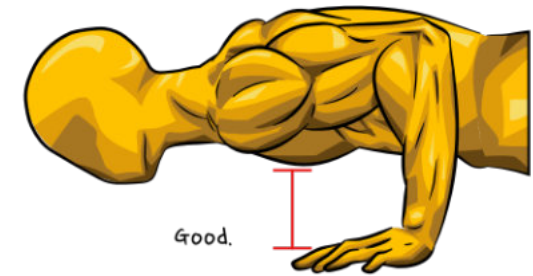
Place hands apart at shoulder width. From the front, forearms should appear straight up.

Optimal Chest Activation

Strive to lower your chest just above the ground at the bottom of the push-up.

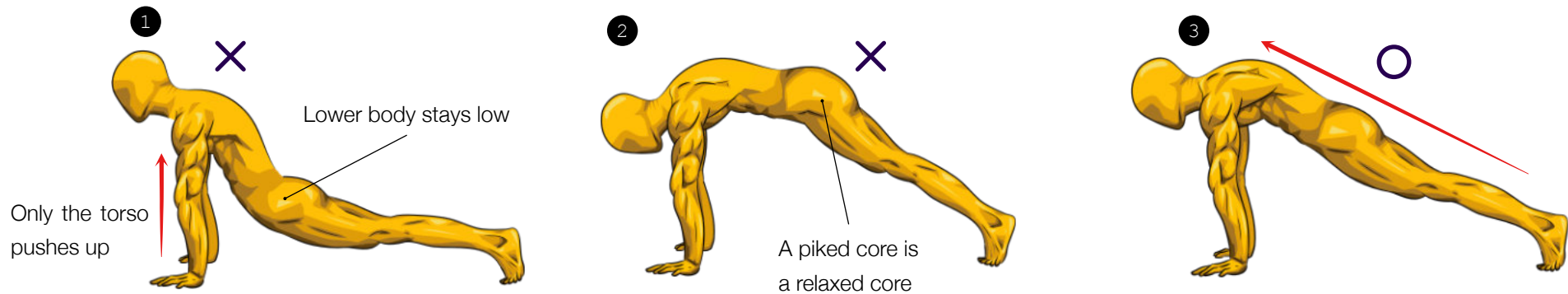


Even better!



Good.

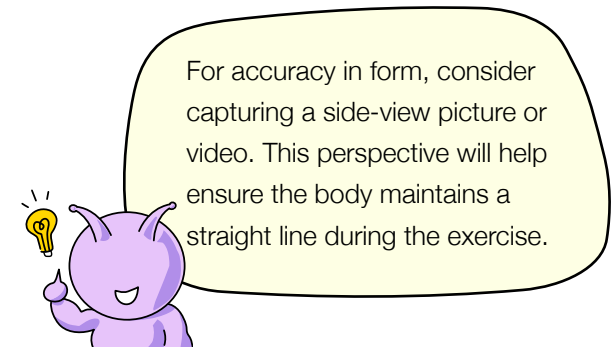
Ascending

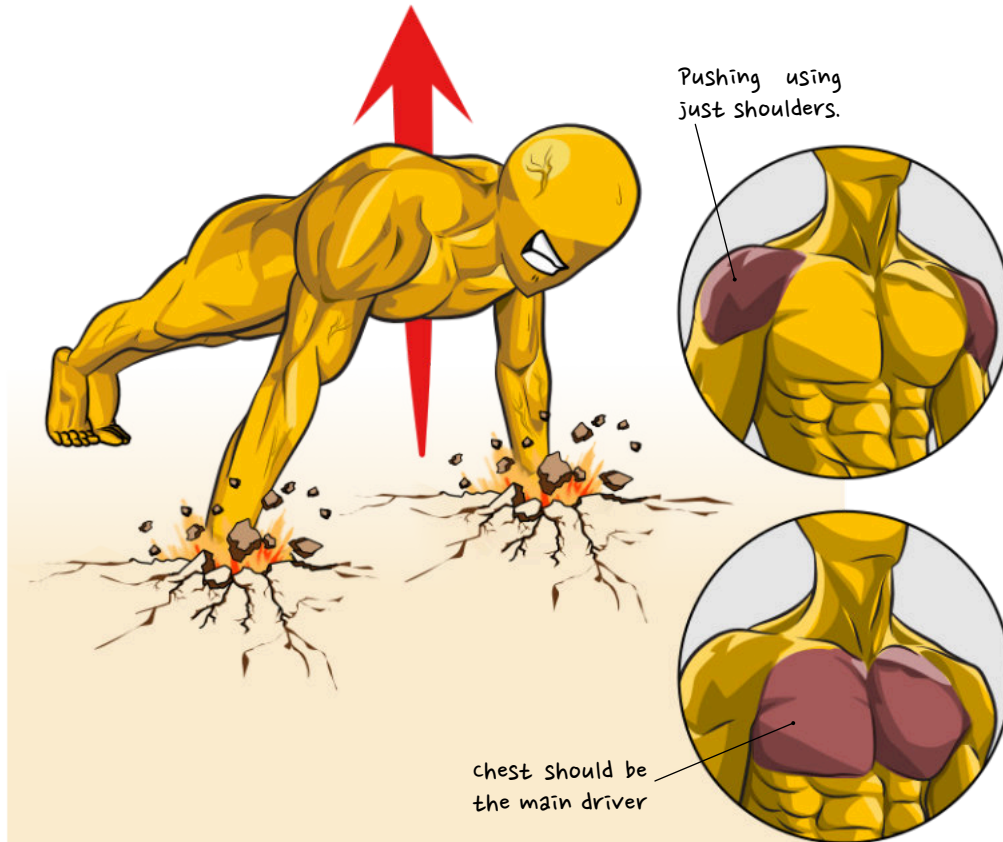


❶ Sagging the core occurs when the midsection drops towards the ground. It is a default body mechanism as fatigue sets in, seeking to conserve energy. But sagging disrupts the proper push-up form, potentially straining the lower back and leading to an imbalance in strength development.

❷ Piking is when the hips lift too high, making the body resemble an inverted V shape. It's usually a sign of core weakness or another energy-saving tactic during fatigue. While piking might feel more manageable, it diverts the focus from the main muscles - chest, shoulders, and triceps - and unnecessarily strains the lower back.

❸ The golden rule for push-ups is to mimic a plank throughout the movement. The body should form a straight line from the head to the heels. It ensures the exercise is safe and effective, optimally working the intended muscles. It may be challenging, particularly when tired, but maintaining this form is essential for reaping the full benefits of push-ups.

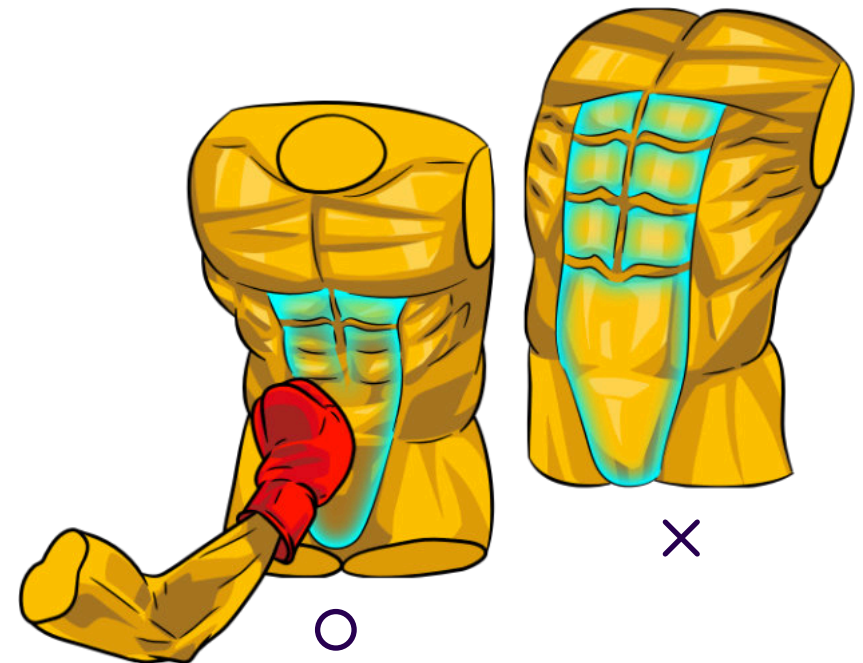


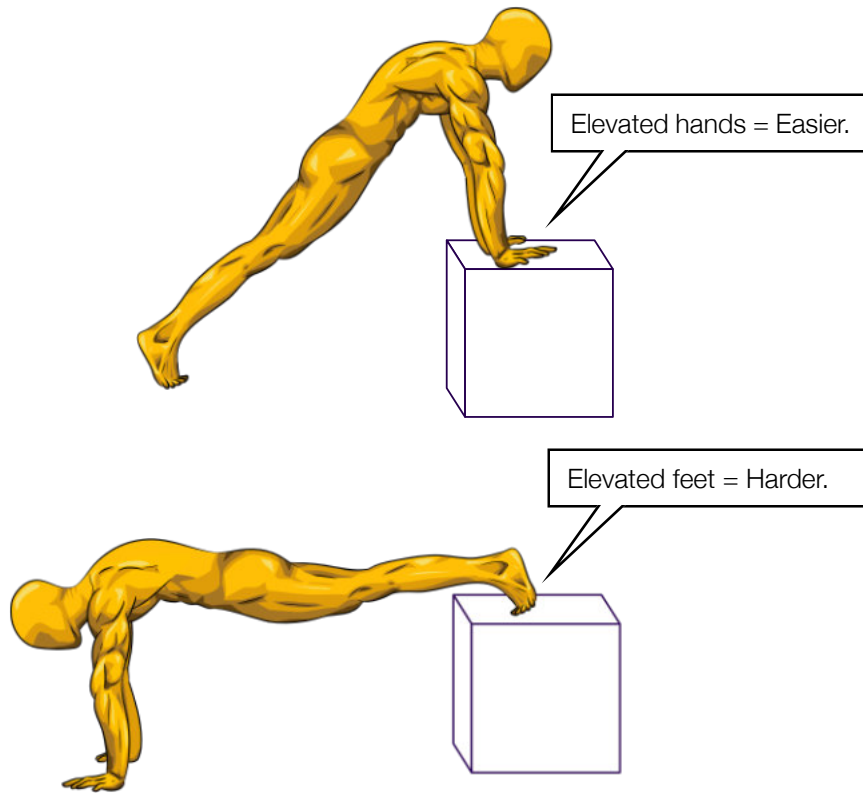


It's easy to rely too much on the shoulders when doing push-ups. This means the chest, a key muscle in push-ups, might not get enough work. A simple change can fix this. Instead of just lifting the body, push it hard against the ground. By doing this, we put the chest muscles to work naturally. Adding a quick, powerful push can make this even more effective. This way, the chest muscles are used more, which helps to do the push-up properly.

Embrace the core

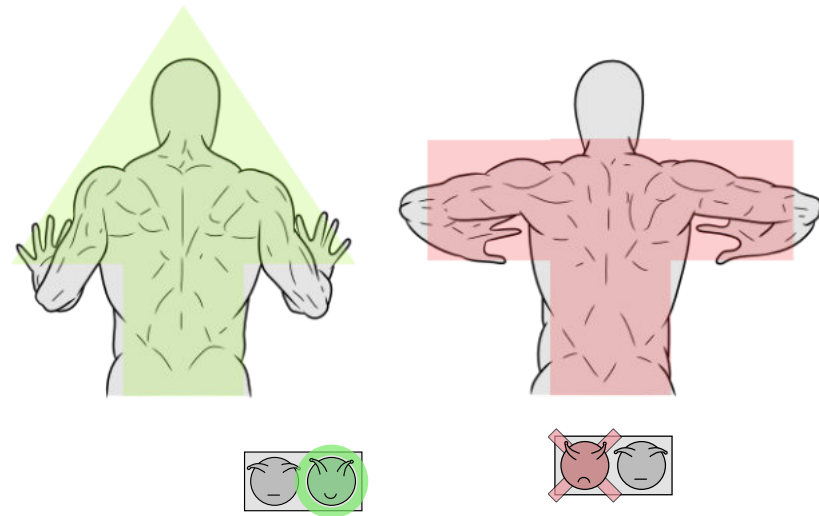
Core engagement in a push-up is fundamental. It ensures proper form and amplifies the exercise's impact. The 'core' extends beyond the abs. It encompasses the entire torso - back, sides, and pelvis. Visualize a punch heading toward the stomach. Instinctively tenses the abs, activating the core. Remember, also tighten the glutes. These tips, when combined, lead to a successful push-up execution.





Incline and decline push-ups change how hard your push-up workout is. When you do an incline push-up with your hands on a higher surface, it's easier. It targets your lower chest and upper arms more. Decline push-ups, with your feet higher, are tougher. They put more work on your upper chest and shoulders.

NOTE Be an arrow



Picture your body from a bird's-eye view as you prepare for a push-up. Ideally, your upper body should resemble an arrow, with your torso as the shaft and your elbows tucked in to form the tail. This configuration ensures your elbows stay close to your body.

If your elbows flare out to the sides, your upper body would instead form a 'T' shape. This isn't desirable, as it places undue strain on your shoulders. Stay arrow-like, not T-shaped, for a safer and more effective push-up.



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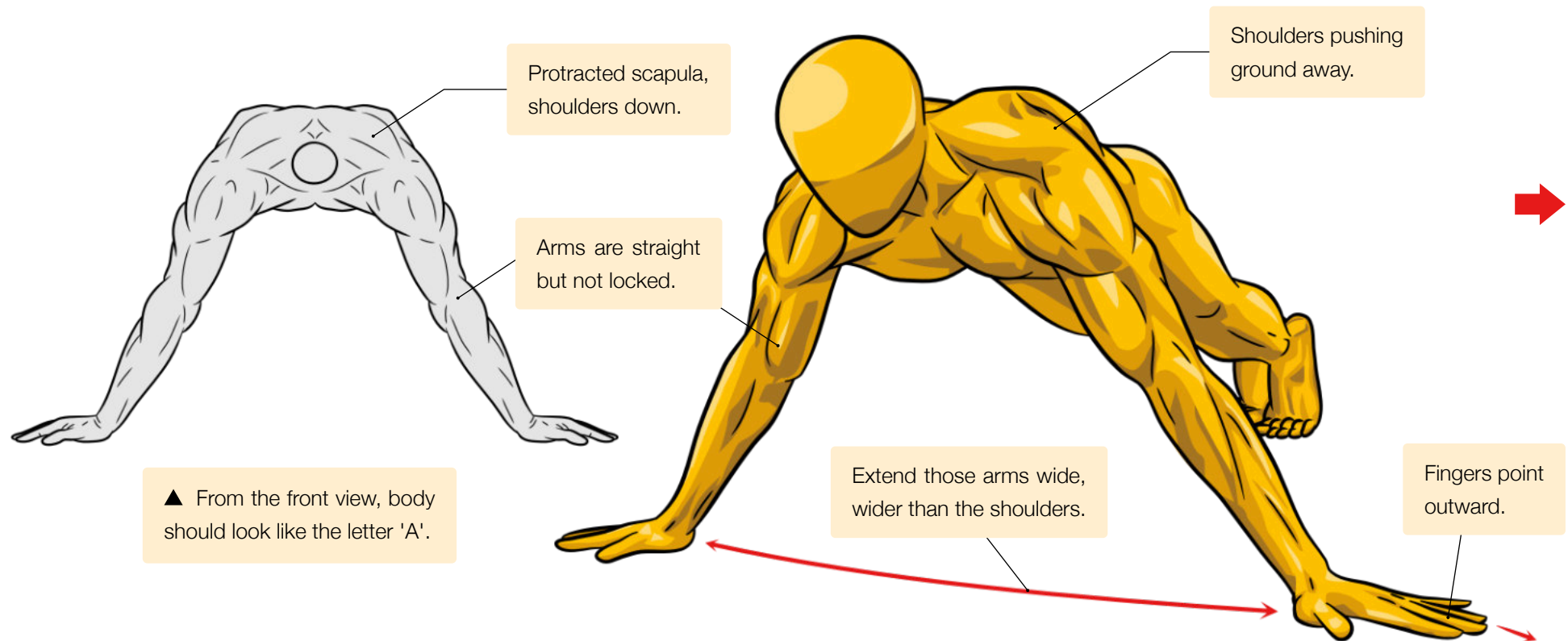
Achieving ten push-ups

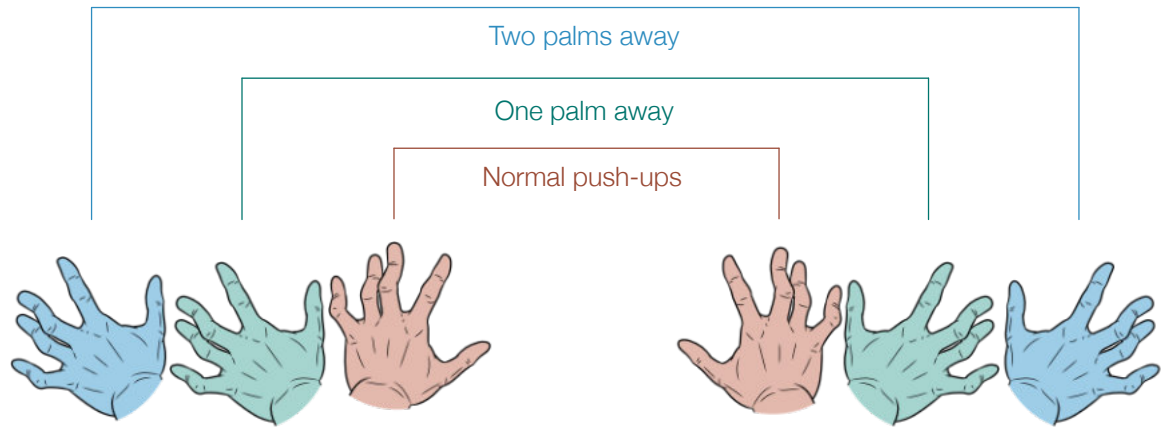
Aim to complete ten standard push-ups in a row with good form. Once you achieve this, you can continue with higher reps to build strength and endurance. However, since our goal is to master the one-arm push-ups, and you've established the basics, we should shift towards unilateral push-up variations that exert more pressure on each arm individually.

Consider exercises like wide, diamond, tricep extensions, explosive, and archer push-ups. It's essential to have balanced both arms' involvement in previous push-ups. Otherwise, the upcoming workouts will highlight any weaknesses.

WIDE PUSH-UPS

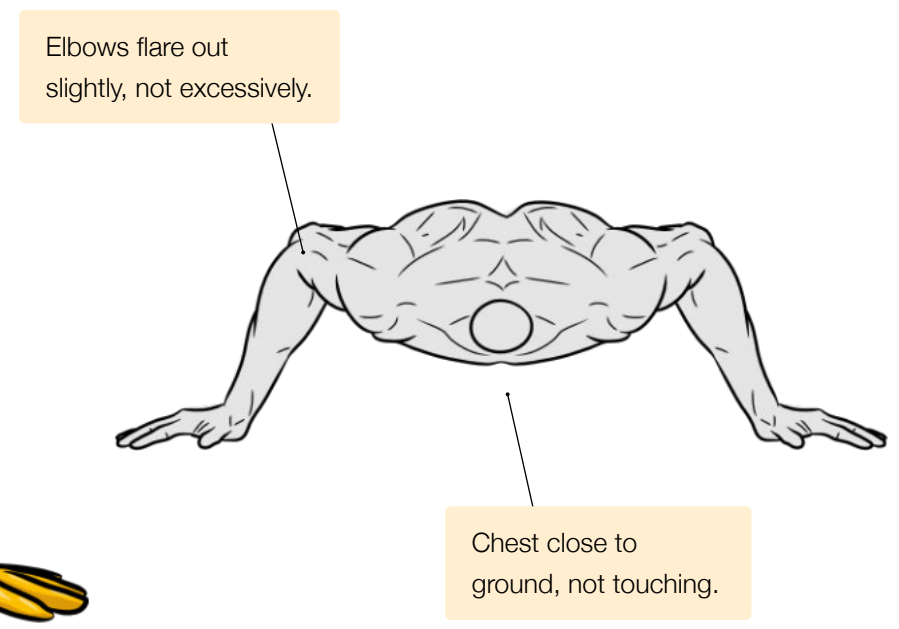
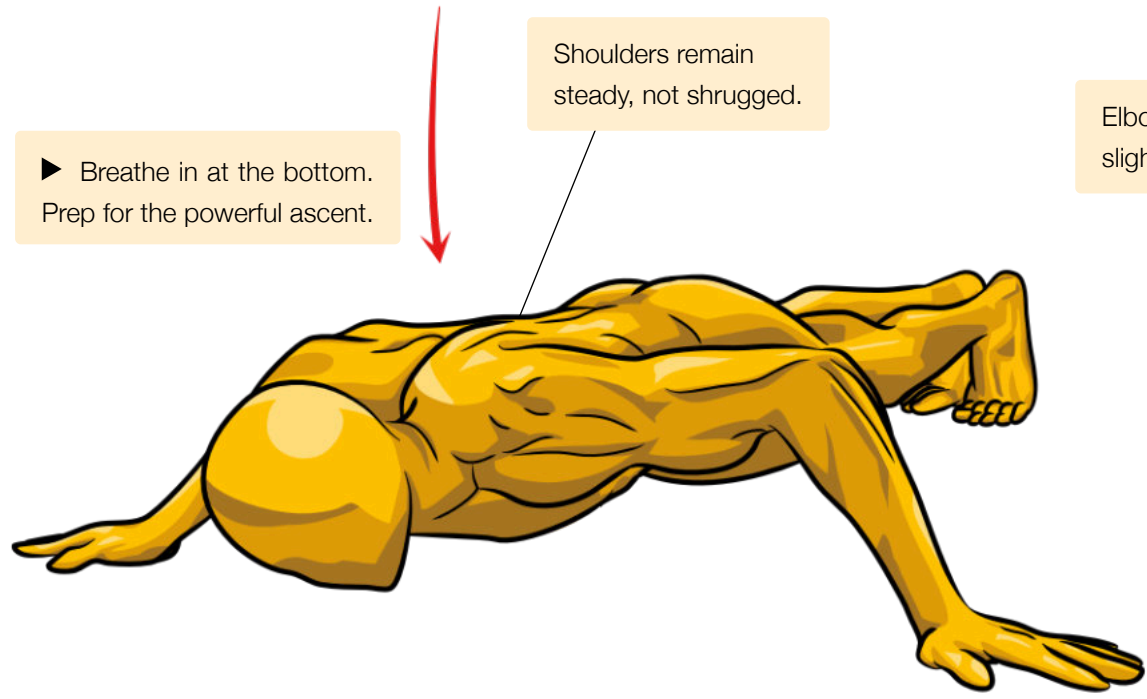
As you become proficient with the standard push-up, it's time for a new challenge - wide push-ups. Simply by broadening the hand placement, the emphasis shifts towards the chest and shoulders, enhancing their strength and endurance. You might be surprised how a minor adjustment to the classic form can result in a completely different experience.





Stretching arms wider intensifies the push-up, but overdoing it invites shoulder strain. Aim for a balance: challenging but feasible, with hands beyond shoulder-width.

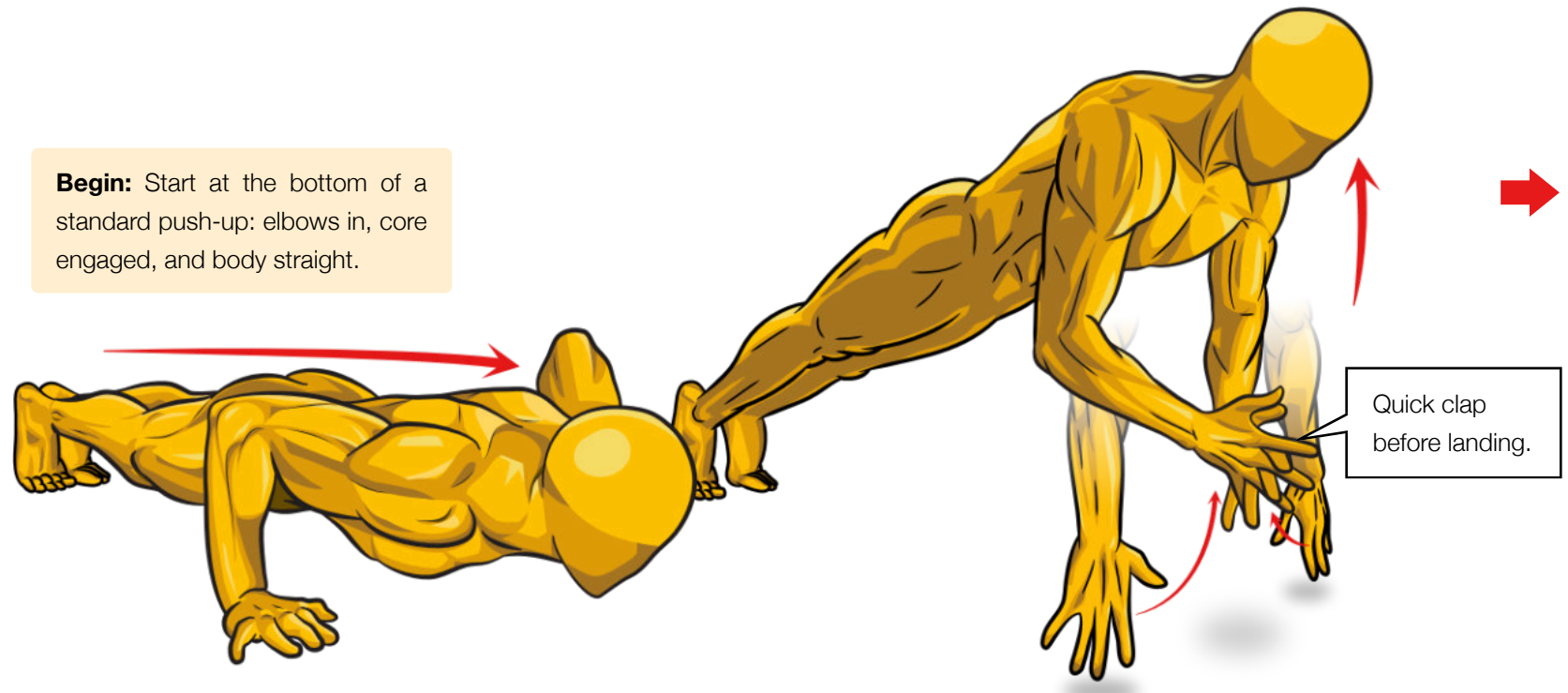
Measuring by feel may lead to inconsistency in hand placement. Instead, use the palm as a unit of measurement from the normal push-up position for precision and consistency.



EXPLOSIVE PUSH-UPS

Explosive or plyometric push-ups introduce a thrilling element of power and speed to our program. These push-ups demand an explosive push from the bottom position, so forceful that it lifts your hands off the ground. This move isn't just about raw strength, explosive power, and swift reaction time.

Plyometric training such as this improves neuromuscular efficiency, essential in athletic performance. The strength, speed, and power developed through explosive push-ups equip you to take on more dynamic and challenging athletic adventures.



Begin: Start at the bottom of a standard push-up: elbows in, core engaged, and body straight.

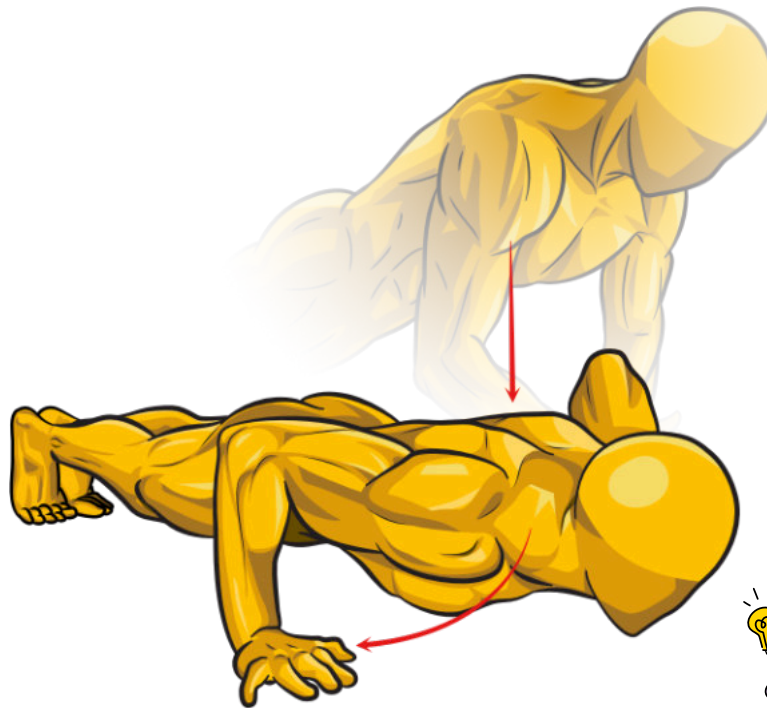
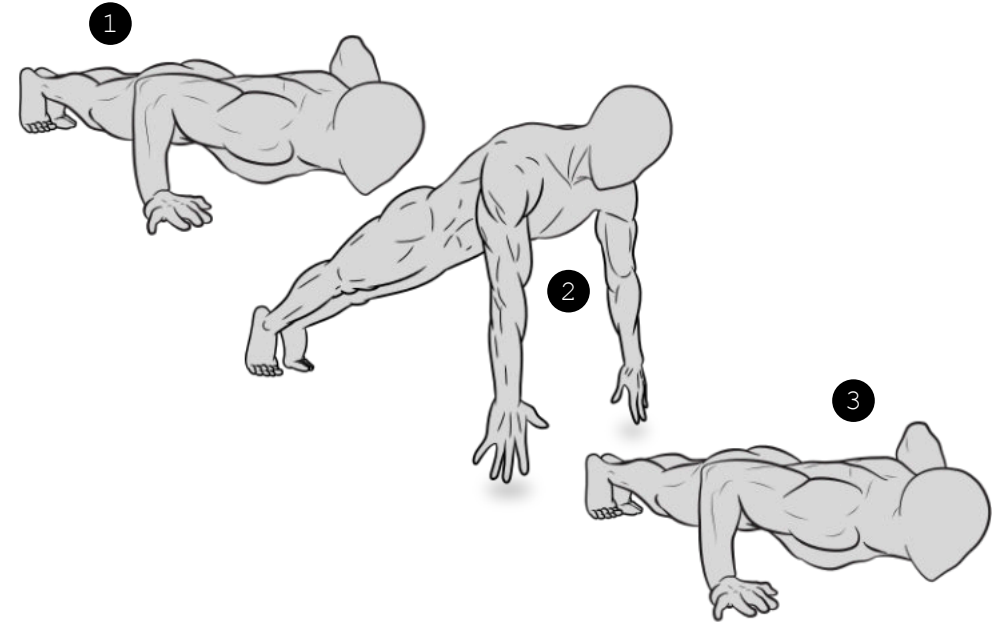
Explode up: Powerfully drive your hands into the ground, catapulting your body upwards.

Quick clap before landing.

Start gradually

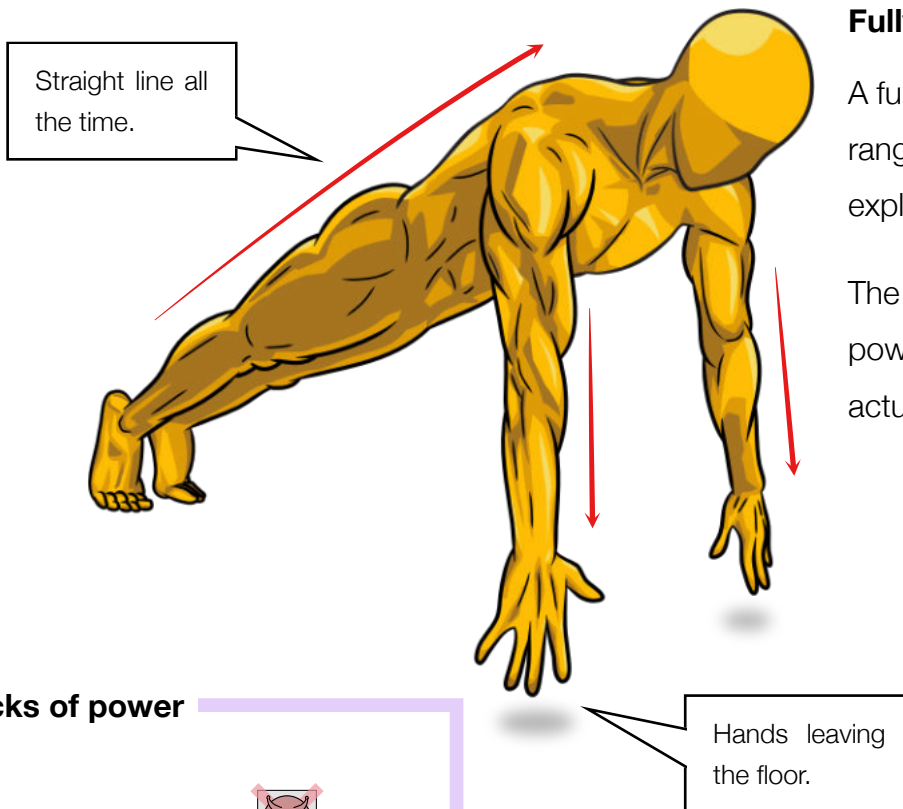
If you're new to this move, start by simply trying to push off the ground without the clap.

Landing: After the clap, swiftly spread your hands apart in preparation for landing. Aim to absorb the impact with your arms slightly bent. Carry the momentum to perform multiple reps.



Here's the thing - most workouts in this book don't advocate using momentum, but explosive push-ups are the exception. It lets you channel that power and carry it to the next rep. Just make sure you go as low as possible before launching again.

The exploding



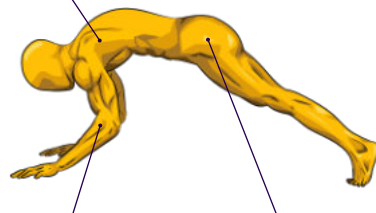
Fully extend arm in the air before the clap

A full-extension ensures that you're using your arms' complete range of motion, allowing you to generate the most power and explosiveness.

The clap itself is a bonus, a testament to your generated power. But the push-up and the full extension are doing the actual work in building strength and power.

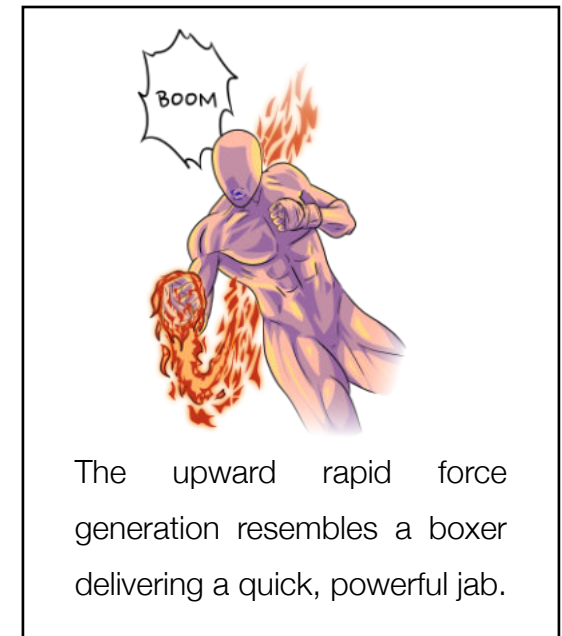
NOTE Lacks of power

Shrugged shoulders.

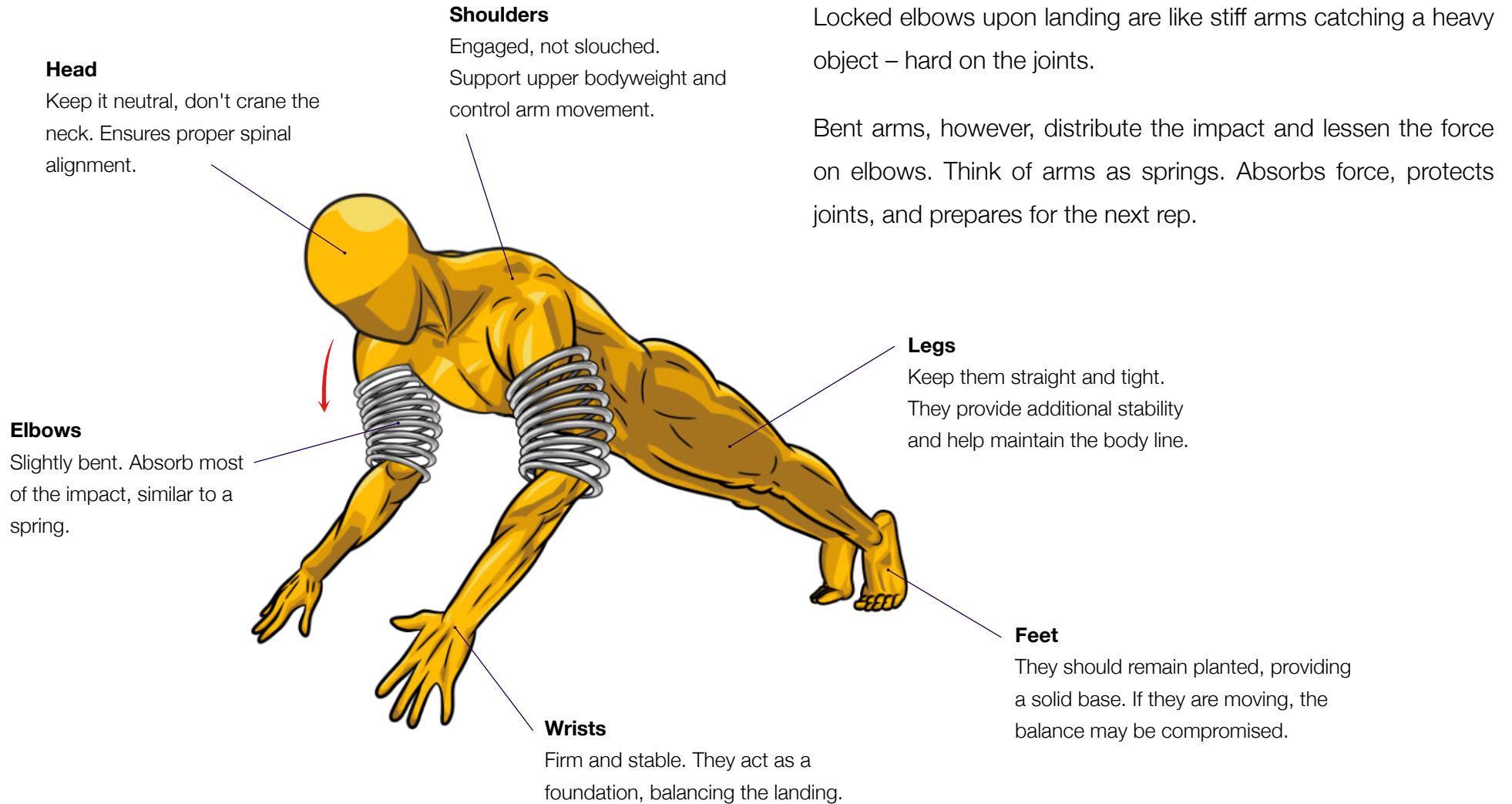


Try to clap without straight arms.

Piked hips to make the elevation easier.



The landing



Land with bent arm

Incorrect landing after an explosive push-up can risk injury. Locked elbows upon landing are like stiff arms catching a heavy object – hard on the joints.

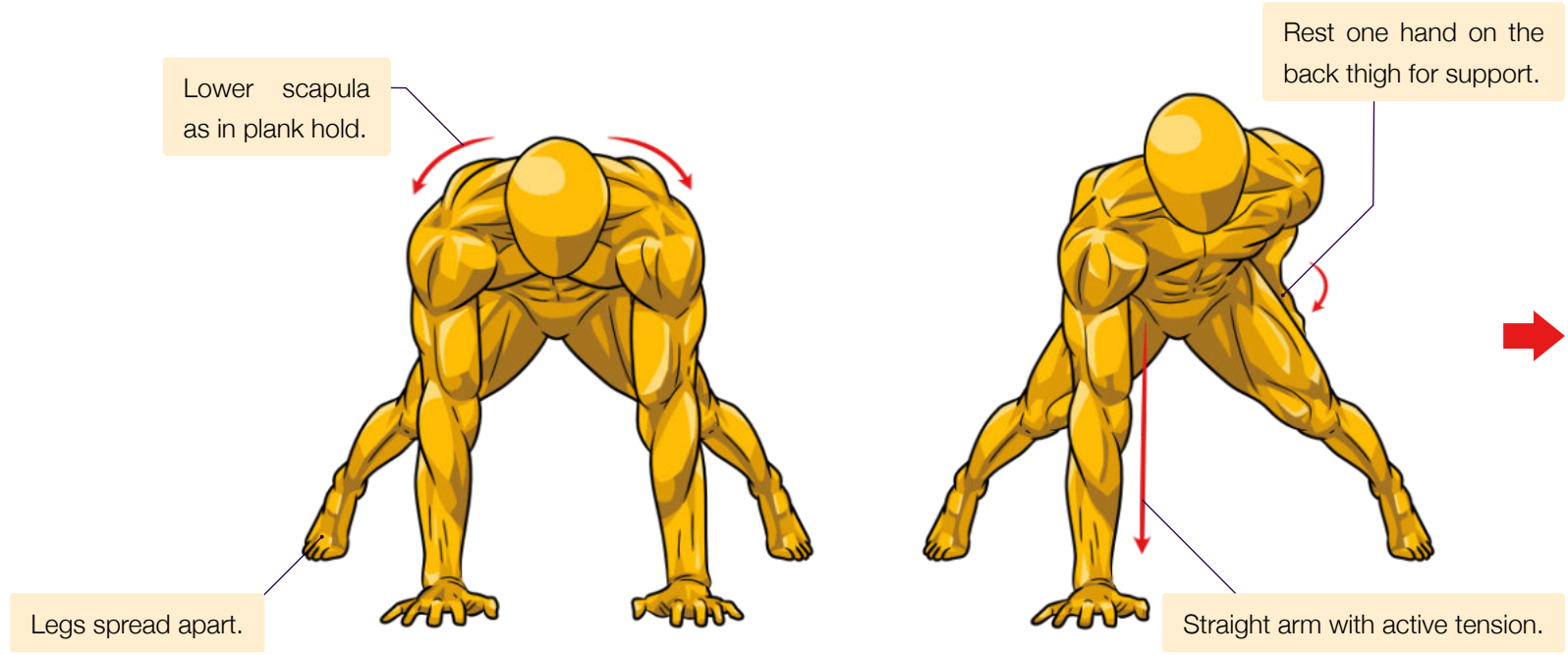

Bent arms, however, distribute the impact and lessen the force on elbows. Think of arms as springs. Absorbs force, protects joints, and prepares for the next rep.

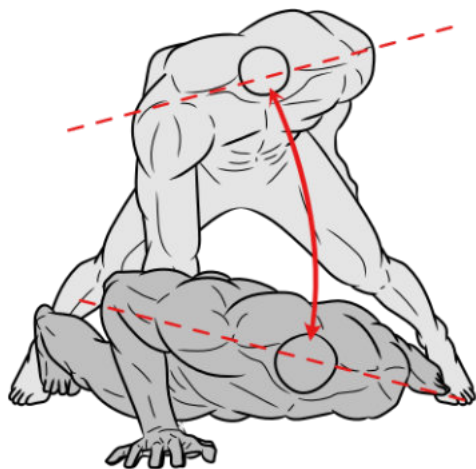
ONE ARM PUSH UP

Once you have a good foundation and mastery over the variations, we conclude our push-up series with the ultimate test: the One-Arm Push-Up (OAPU). This variant demands substantial strength, stability, and balance. It tests your arm and chest strength while engaging your core and honing your balance.

The OAPU isn't just the endgame of this series. It symbolizes strength, a testament to your progress, and a challenge for the full future. At this point, this would be a matter of technique to achieve the skill. Attempt is vital, so keep trying until you understand how to execute the movement correctly.

If it still feels too hard, start high with a wall, then use tables and chairs. Go lower each time. Soon, you'll be able to do it on the floor.



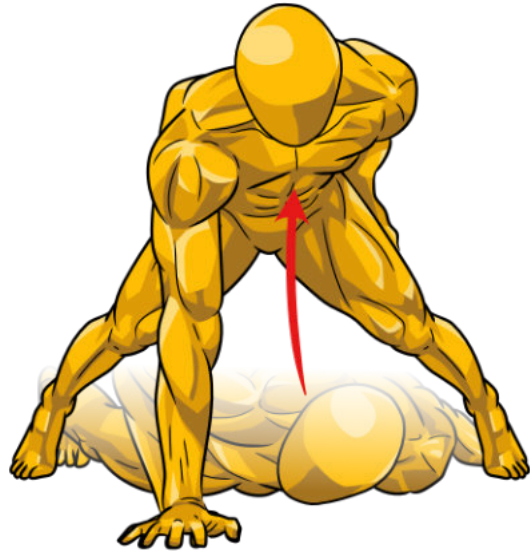
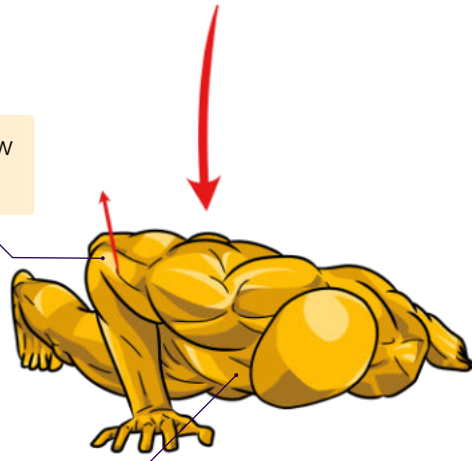


Maintain an even shoulder level throughout the exercise. Note that your shoulders don't have to be perfectly level; a slight tilt is acceptable and natural during this demanding exercise. Imagine balancing a glass of water on your shoulders to encourage uniform descent and ascent, ensuring an even intensity distribution across both arms.

▼ Descend with control. Rotate trunk slightly towards the working arm.

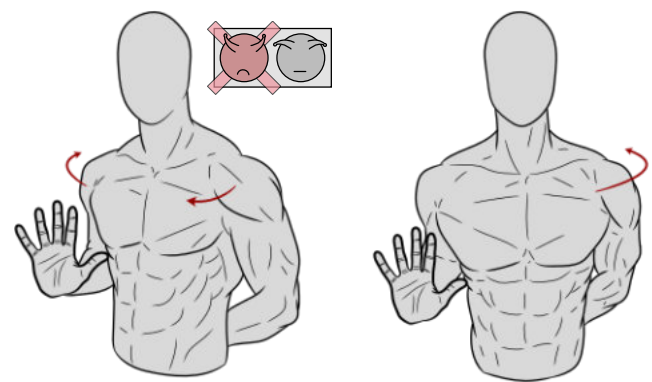
Working arm's elbow pointing skywards.

Chest is about to touch the ground.



◀ Explode back up to the start. Your shoulder blade should slide away from your spine, and your arm should return to a straight position.

NOTE Trunk rotation



Excessive trunk rotation may be a sign of lacking core strength. You should always aim to lift the non-working side of your body away from the floor. Gravity will pull it back down, forming a gentle slope at shoulder level. Practice in front of a mirror or against a wall.

ROUTINE

TRAINING ROUTINE INTRODUCTION

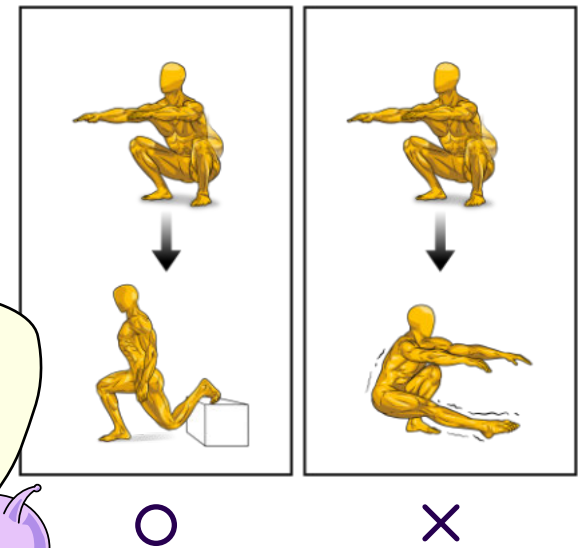
This training routine serves as 'a' method to acquire your first skill, not 'the' definitive one. Everyone's fitness journey is unique. This routine provides a blueprint that you can customize to suit your needs. If you make changes to the routine, whether it's the number of sets, reps, the speed of each movement, or the rest period, write these down. This helps you maintain consistency and accurately track your progress.

For instance, if you need to rest for 180 seconds instead of the suggested 120 seconds, that's okay. Record it so you follow the same rest period next time. Consistency helps measure your improvement accurately.

Pick a level of routine and do it two to three times per week, taking at least 48 hours rest in between each session. Progress to the next level once you meet the stated goals. It's important not to skip levels unless you know what you're doing.

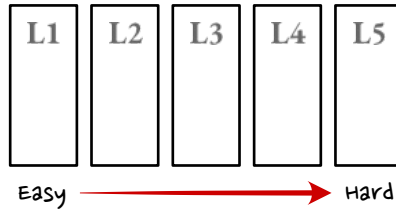
Use this routine as a starting point. Feel free to tweak it to your individual level, but adhere to the fundamental principles of consistency, adaptability, and gradual progression.

Remember to take things one step at a time. Don't skip any levels - gradually increasing your workout intensity is the secret sauce for getting stronger.

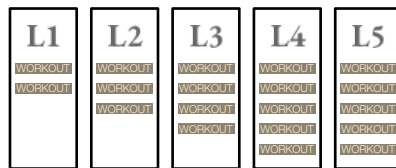


Routine principles

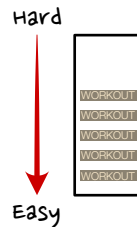
Here's how we design our workout routines:



Every routine has five levels. Level 1 is the easiest, good for beginners. Level 5 is the hardest. You can say you've finished the program when you can do Level 5.



Each level has 2 to 5 workouts. Some levels have what we call a 'superset'. This is when you do 2 or 3 workouts one after the other without a break. We have a guide that tells you when you're ready to move up a level



We always start each level with the hardest workout, and end with the easiest. This means you do the hardest workouts when you have the most energy. Then build up more training volume with the easier progressions that follow. It's a good way to make sure you get better step by step.

Understanding the properties

Reps

Or repetitions, are the number of times you perform a specific exercise without stopping.

Sets

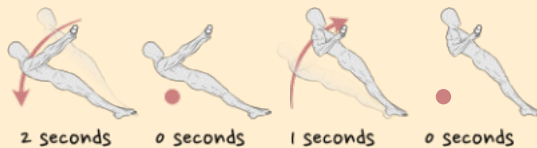
A set is a group of reps done one after another. If you do 10 pull-ups, rest, then do 10 more, you've done two sets.

Superset

It means you do multiple exercises in a row without rest. Rest comes only after completing the superset.

Tempo

In dynamic workouts, '2010' tempo implies a 2-second lowering, 0-second pause, 1-second lifting, and another 0-second pause. In eccentric exercises like negative pull-ups, tempo dictates the eccentric phase duration.

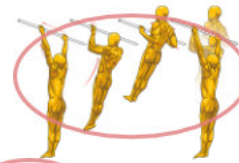


Pull-Ups

Tempo **2010**

Reps **2**

Sets 5	Rest 180 seconds
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Band Assisted Pull-Ups

Tempo **2010**

Reps **8 - 10**

Sets 3	Rest 180 seconds
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SUPERSET

Australian Pull-Ups

Tempo **2010**

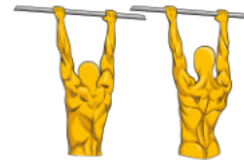
Reps **8 - 10**



Scapula Pull-Ups

Tempo **2010**

Reps **8 - 10**



Passive Hang

Time **30 - 45** seconds

Sets 3	Rest 180 seconds
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Illustrations

Basic figures showcasing exercises. See respective guides for full details.

Rest

This is the pause between sets, giving your muscles time to recover.

How to go through routine

Start with the top exercise: pull-ups. Complete 2 reps at a 2010 tempo and rest for 180 seconds. Repeat for 5 sets.

Next, transition to band assisted pull-ups. Perform 8 reps (or push to 10 reps if possible). Rest for 180 seconds. Repeat for 3 sets.

Lastly, execute a superset. Perform 8 Australian pull-ups, 8 scapula pull-ups, and end with a 30-second passive hang. Rest for 180 seconds after the superset. Repeat for 3 sets. This completes your full routine.

Time

It is the length of time you hold the exercise. Only applicable to isometric exercises, like plank holds and passive hangs.

PUSH-UPS ROUTINE

Progression guide between levels

- L1** If you can complete 8 reps for the given sets of negative push-ups, it's time to progress to level 2.
- L2** If you can perform 12 reps of regular push-ups, upgrade to level 3.
- L3** Once you can complete the specified sets and reps, proceed to level 4.
- L4** After completing the specified sets and reps, and maintaining a full minute plank (no cheating), it's time to attempt level 5.
- L5** Once you can complete the whole routine with the specific sets and reps, aim to increase the number of reps in the OAPU.

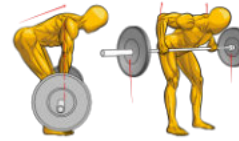
Level 1

SUPERSET

Bent Over Barbell Rows

Tempo 2010

Reps 12 - 15



Passive Hang

Time 30 - 60 seconds



Sets	3	Rest	180 seconds
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Level 2

SUPERSET

Australian Pull-Ups

Tempo 2010

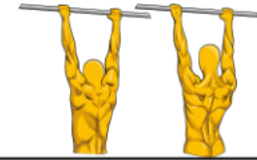
Reps 10 - 12



Scapula Pull-Ups

Tempo 2010

Reps 10 - 12

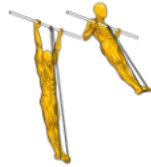


Sets	3	Rest	180 seconds
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Level 3

Band Assisted Pull-Ups

Tempo 2010
Reps 4 - 6



Sets 3	Rest 180 seconds
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SUPERSET

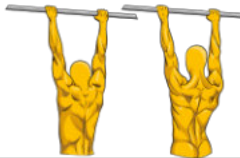
Australian Pull-Ups

Tempo 2010
Reps 10 - 12



Scapula Pull-Ups

Tempo 2010
Reps 10 - 12

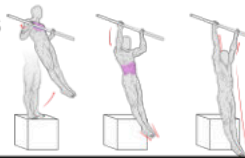


Sets 4	Rest 180 seconds
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Level 4

Negative Pull-Ups

Tempo 5 - 10 seconds
Reps 1



Sets 5	Rest 60 seconds
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Band Assisted Pull-Ups

Tempo 2010
Reps 4 - 6



Sets 3	Rest 180 seconds
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SUPERSET

Australian Pull-Ups

Tempo 2010
Reps 8 - 10



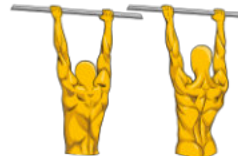
Passive Hang

Time 30 seconds



Scapula Pull-Ups

Tempo 2010
Reps 8 - 10



Sets 3	Rest 180 seconds
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Level 5

Pull-Ups

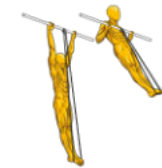
Tempo 2010
Reps 2



Sets 5	Rest 180 seconds
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Band Assisted Pull-Ups

Tempo 2010
Reps 8 - 10



Sets 3	Rest 180 seconds
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SUPERSET

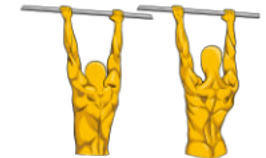
Australian Pull-Ups

Tempo 2010
Reps 8 - 10



Scapula Pull-Ups

Tempo 2010
Reps 8 - 10



Passive Hang

Time 30 - 45 seconds



Sets 3	Rest 180 seconds
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