

Enso Calisthenics

A man is performing a handstand against a black background. He is wearing dark blue jeans and black socks. His legs are straight and pointed upwards, with his feet close together. His torso is inverted, showing a well-defined abdominal core. His arms are extended downwards, with his hands flat on the ground, supporting his weight. The lighting highlights the contours of his muscles.

How To Finally Progress And Hold A Handstand In Only 4 Phases

No Gimmick, No Fake Shortcut, No Empty Promise.

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INTRODUCTION

Whether it's for its health benefits, the transferrable strength and balance skills, aesthetics, or simply for the sake of a new challenge, the handstand is a figure and skill that more and more people are learning, and rightly so. Not only does it have great fitness benefits, it is also a great way to improve focus, confidence, it is a great way to relax body and mind, and it gives practitioners a tangible goal to reach, giving greater motivation for training and working out. Handstanding is also a discipline where every small step forward and every little progress is visible and feels like a great victory. And who doesn't want to feel a great victory daily or almost daily? This is the reason why yoga uses poses as a medium to spirituality, and doesn't only focus on meditation. While this tutorial will not approach any spiritual form of training and is more fitness oriented, it will certainly improve your mental strength and health, as it will your physical strength and health.

The last important thing to note about hand balancing is that it is a never ending journey and a real sport in itself. There is always a new goal to reach and always something to improve, which is why it becomes a real passion for many people who start... and can never stop.

This tutorial is designed to get you to hold your first handstand as soon as possible and launch you on your own hand balancing journey.

So let's get to work and all the best to you!

I BENEFITS OF HANDSTAND

As you may already know, the handstand is known to offer many benefits for both body and mind, so let's first take a look at the proven results and benefits you can get from it:

1. **Upper body and core strength increase:** Handstands don't just require getting on your hands and balancing, a lot of strength work is actually involved and this will benefit you in other sports and even your daily life.
2. **Full body exercise:** As you will see in the next chapters, you will need to fully and constantly engage your whole body throughout your training. Handstands will also strengthen stabilizing muscles that are not used enough by most people, as well as wrists, which are too often overlooked and that sometimes results in injuries.
3. **Better body awareness and coordination:** Learning to use your muscles and body properly in order to balance, as well as being upside down will help you build greater body awareness and control.
4. **Better posture and mobility:** if you want to hold a handstand you will have to control and fix your posture. Good shoulder, spine, and hips mobility will be even more important when you can already handstand and start perfecting your line, and they will naturally improve as you practice.
5. **Improved breathing:** Holding a handstand means you will have to make a constant effort (not discontinued like repetitions) while being upside down, and this will force you to actually implement proper breathing techniques that you may have already learnt but never really practiced.

6. Improved mood and stress relief: the kind of concentration and breathing required for training the handstand, combined with the endorphins released in any kind of intense exercise make it a powerful relaxing tool and stress reliever. Regular handstand training will have a similar kind of positive and healthy impact on your mental health and life as yoga.

7. Increased confidence: As with any exercise or skill, learning and progressing will naturally give you more confidence. But this is even more true when it comes to handstand for several reasons. First, progress in handstand is a steady curve for many people and small steps are made at almost every session, which gives great motivation. Second, you will actually learn to use your body in new ways, and ways humans normally can't. You will feel more capable, and this will in turn give you great confidence. Last but not least, you will learn to fall, and get back up, and eventually you won't be afraid to fall anymore. This kind of confidence overlaps in every other aspect of your life.

8. Better grip strength: Balancing in a handstand position will force you to use your fingers often and press the floor to keep your balance. Over the weeks of your training you will feel that this becomes easier and easier. It is actually your grip getting stronger and stronger. A strong grip will help a lot in lifts and other exercises as well.

9. It's fun and it looks cool!

II TRAINING

1) PROGRAM STRUCTURE

Programming and specific exercises will vary from an individual to another, and as this tutorial is designed for every level of fitness and hand balancing skills, we have built a simple system for everyone to adapt this program to their level. Please note that as you get stronger and your skills get better, you will have to adjust the program to your new level, like an upgrade. This tutorial will guide you through this.

Some exercises in part 2 and part 3 (see below) will have several variations to choose from, and you will have to pick those that suit your fitness level and ignore the others until you are ready to move to harder variations. If this doesn't seem clear at first, don't worry, it will make sense later as you follow the instructions.

Remember every workout should consist of Part 1, exercises from Part 2 depending on your level, and exercises from Part 3 depending on your level.

However, there is one exception: if your current level of Part 2 is the conditioning phase, you do not have to train Part 3 yet.

PART 1

Warm-up: This part will be the same for every level, every workout will start with it, and it must never be skipped no matter your level of fitness.

PART 2

Conditioning phase: This part is the first level of your training. It might be frustrating in the beginning but this program will not allow you to start your handstand training before you complete this conditioning period.

PART 3

Handstand training: Once your conditioning period is completed, or if you already have the level required, you will continue your workout by training either phase 1, 2, 3 or 4 depending on your handstand level.

Strength work: Every workout will end with a short session of strength work to help you progress faster and keep building stronger foundations to support your technique.

2) PART 1: WARM-UP

This part is mandatory and is the same for every level and no matter how long you intend to train for. Please remember that in a handstand position your wrists have to support your whole bodyweight... And, not judging here, this is a lot of weight! Your elbows are also at risk, and so are your shoulders. While a simple but proper warm-up can keep your practice very safe, not warming up before training (even if it's just for 5 minutes) might result in injury and keep you off training for weeks. So please do not skip it.

Since this part is the same for every level, every exercise below has to be done every time. Aim for at least 10 minutes warming up.

SHOULDERS



Those are simple arm rotations as you probably used to do in school. Starting from the top, rotate your arms to the back and make a full circle back to the original position while keeping your arms straight. Do this 10 times, then do the same thing in the opposite direction.



(1)

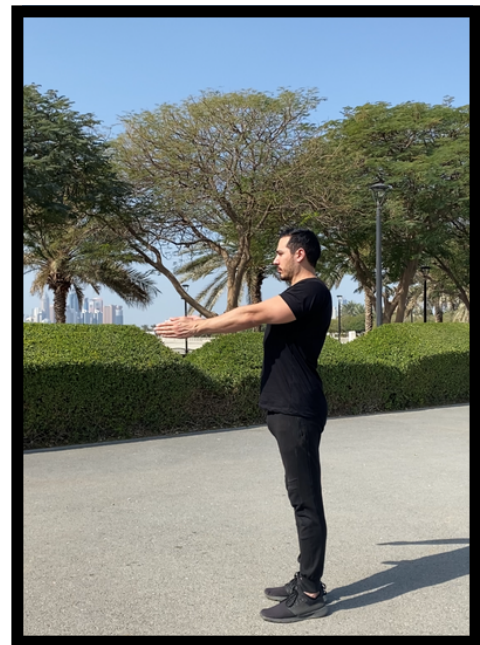


(2)

Start with your arms straight and directed to the top, as if you were trying to reach the ceiling or the sky. Extend as far up as you can. Then lower your shoulder blades while keeping your arms straight and directed to the top. You might have to do this slowly at first but once you understand the movement, try to repeat it 10 times without pausing between the 2 positions.



(1)



(2)

This is the same as the previous exercise, but done horizontally. Extend your arms as far forward as you can and push your shoulder blades forward as well (shoulder protraction), your back should be rounded a bit (1). Then push your shoulder blades backwards while keeping your arms straight (shoulder retraction). Do this 10 times without pausing between the 2 positions.

Note: the last 2 exercises not only serve as a warm-up, they are also important in teaching you the right mechanics in order to perform a proper and solid handstand later. So please pay extra attention to them!

ELBOWS



Elbow rotations: Start with your arm straight, your elbow locked out and facing up. Place your other hand below your elbow and rotate your forearm around it. Your arm should now be straight again and your elbow locked out and facing down. Rotate in the other direction to go back to the original position. That's 1 repetition. Do a total of 10 controlled repetitions without pausing and do the same with the other arm.

WRISTS

Now here's the most important part of your warm-up: the wrists. The wrists are the part of your body which will be most at risk in a handstand, and you should never attempt a handstand without proper warm-up of the wrists. Now don't be too scared, if you warmed up, handstands will be very safe and it shouldn't hurt you at all.



(1)

(2)

(3)

Grab your fingers and bend your hand backwards until you feel a stretch and hold it for 15 seconds (1). Do the same in the opposite direction (2). Repeat with your other hand. Now grab your hands together and rotate them in circles (3), 15 seconds to the left and 15 seconds to the right.



In a push-up position, with hands shoulder-width apart, start with your fingers facing forwards and rotate your hands to the outside, to the back, to the inside, and finally back to the front. To do this you will have to rotate one hand at a time (because you can't fly), so try to balance from one side to the other to apply more weight on your supporting hand and make the exercise more challenging. Do this for 1 minute, it is the most important exercise of your handstand warm-up.

WAIST & HIPS



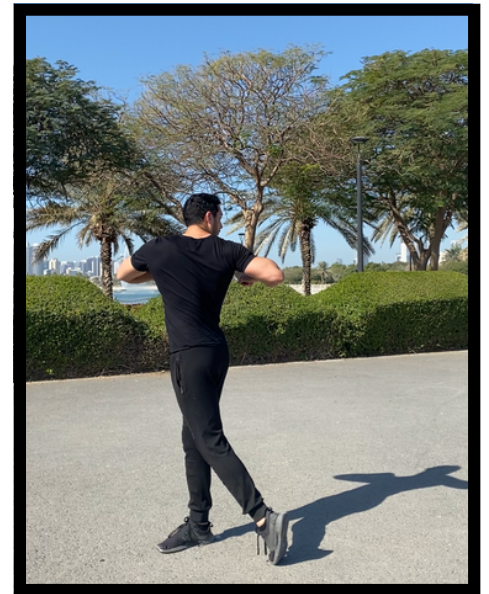
With your hands on your waist, rotate your hips in circles as shown on the pictures. Do 10 repetitions in one direction, and then 10 repetitions in the other direction. Try to push your hips as far as you can in all directions.



(1)



(2)



(3)

With your elbows raised at chest height (1), rotate your upper body as far as you can to the left, as your right hip follows the rotation but your left hip and foot stay in place (2). Do the same thing to the right. You can also exaggerate the movement for a better stretch (3). That's one repetition, Do 10 repetitions on each side.

3) PART 2: CONDITIONING

This is the first level of your training , make sure you can complete it with relative ease before moving on to the next level (Phase 1). If this is your current level, you do not have to do exercises in Part 3 and your workout only consists in Part 1: warm-up and Part 2: conditioning phase.

HOLLOW BODY POSITION

The hollow body position is a basic position used in gymnastics that we will be using here to build strength and technique. It may seem simple at first (although not easy), but it's important not to overlook it and understand it will be a solid foundation for your handstand.



(1)



(2)



(3)

Start on your back and slightly lift your legs straight. Make sure you brace your abs and contract your glutes as hard as possible (1). Now raise your arms and lift your shoulders off the floor. Your shoulders should be protracted, as we learnt in the warm-up part, and your body should form a hollow curve (2). Finally, extend your arms as far back as you can, while still contracting all the muscles in your body and keeping the hollow body position (3). This exercise will teach you to engage your whole body while fully extending your legs and pushing your arms as far as possible. Read that sentence again, this is what you should aim at when you do a handstand.

Hold this position for 30 seconds and do a total of 4 sets.

PIKE HOLD



(1)



(2)

With your feet elevated (you could use a box, a chair or a bed), place your hands on the floor shoulder-width apart. Keep your arms straight and push your shoulders up (in this case towards the floor) to lift your body off the floor. Try to keep your arms vertical and look behind (1). Hold this position for 30 seconds and repeat 4 times in total. If this is too easy, place your feet on a higher surface and try to form a 90 degrees angle with your body (2). Do whichever one suits your current level.

PUSH-UPS

This is your test and prerequisite to Phase 1. If you are able to do 4 sets of 10 proper push-ups, you are ready to move on to Phase 1. If not, you'll have to practice this conditioning phase until you can. Don't worry, you will progress faster than you think!



(1)

(2)

Start with your hands shoulder-width apart, with your body straight and fully engaged, and protract your shoulders as we've learnt before. Your back should be rounded a little bit (1). Lower your body by bending your arms and retracting your shoulders until you can almost touch the floor with your nose. Your body should still be straight and fully engaged (2). Push yourself back up to the original position. This is 1 repetition and you should aim at 4 sets of 10 repetitions.



If regular push-ups are too difficult for you, place your hands on an elevated surface and follow the same steps as explained earlier (see above). It should be much easier. Once you are able to complete 4 sets of 10 reps, you can place your hands on a lower surface to make the exercise more difficult (see below). Gradually progress in the same way until you are ready to do regular push-ups on the floor. Once you can do 4 sets of 10 regular push-ups, you can start training phase 1!



4) PHASE 1

Now here's the first phase of your handstand technique training. From now on you will be required to perform Part 1, one phase of Part 2 depending on your level and exercises of Part 3 depending on your level.

HOLD AGAINST THE WALL



(1)

(2)

(3)

Facing a wall, place your hands about 10cm from it, with your arms straight and elbows locked out (1). Kick yourself up into a handstand and let your feet rest on the wall (2). Now push your body as far as you can from the floor, extend your whole body and brace your abs, contract your glutes, stay firm on your arms and shoulders and engage your whole body (3). If you do this correctly, it should already feel challenging. Now try to hold it for 30 seconds and do a total of 4 sets.

PALM/FINGER WORK



Now this is a very important part of technique. Just as you subconsciously keep using your heels and toes to keep your balance when you stand up, your hands will need to keep adjusting your weight between your palms and fingers to keep your balance in a handstand. This is much more difficult simply because our hands and forearms are much less strong than our feet and calves.

But the mechanics are simple: If you feel your body coming off the wall, apply pressure on your palms to push you back to the wall. On the contrary, if you put pressure on your fingers, you will feel your body leaving the wall again. Note that you will get more strength if you bend your fingers a bit (see photo).

Try and spend 10-15 minutes playing with both and get familiar with it. It is important to focus and take this part seriously as this is what will allow you to hold a free handstand later.

If you can hold a handstand against the wall with your body fully engaged for 4 sets of 30 seconds, and if you are already familiar with the hands work, you are ready for Phase 2!

5) PHASE 2

CARTWHEEL FALL

Now let's take another big step in your training: learning how to fall. When you learn to fall, you are not afraid anymore, and when you are not afraid anymore, you are ready to focus on real practice and are halfway to holding a free handstand. Even better, the truth is when we learn to fall from a handstand, we actually learn to never really fall, but rather exit in a controlled way.

The exit from a handstand is essentially the second half of a cartwheel. First of all, you'll have to determine which side is your preferred side for falling, and then always look for this side when you are losing balance or want to exit your handstand. To do so, we are simply going to learn or re-learn how to do a cartwheel.



(1)

(2)

(3)



(4)

(5)

(6)

Start your cartwheel by putting your foot and hand forward on the side of your choice (1), and then place that hand on the floor (2). At this point you have naturally made a choice: you chose the side you're more comfortable with.

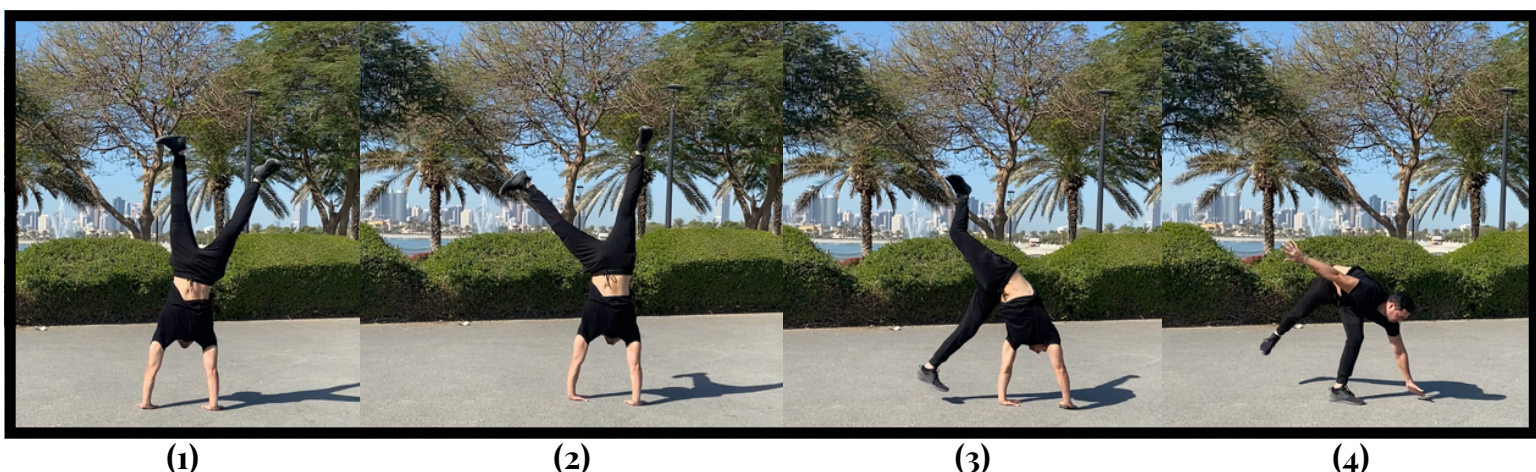
Simultaneously put your other hand on the floor while your back foot goes up, followed by your front foot (3). As you complete your cartwheel, your back foot will fall on the floor first (5), your front hand leaves the ground but your back hand is still on the ground (6). This is the second half of your cartwheel and this is exactly how you will exit a handstand from now on.

If you think you are unable to perform a "proper" cartwheel, it doesn't matter at all, you can repeat these steps while crouching as shown on the pictures below. What is important is to understand which side you're more comfortable with and how to rotate so your back foot touches the ground first, your front hand leaves the ground and your back hand stays on the ground until your front foot touches the ground too and you have both feet on the ground.



We need to add a little precision for you to have a realistic understanding of how this will work in a handstand.

In a handstand you won't be moving from one side to another, and you will probably swing forward. This is why you'll probably need to move your front hand (remember your front hand in the cartwheel) forward a little bit (2), to help your body rotate to your favorite side. That way you'll finish in the same way as we saw in the cartwheel (3,4).



HOLD AGAINST WALL - REVERSE

Now that you know which side to fall on, you are ready to do reverse holds on the wall.



Start by standing in front of the wall and turn your back to it. Place your hands in front of you but not too far from the wall, and start walking your way backward up the wall, while gradually moving your hands closer to the wall and eventually find yourself in a handstand position. You'll find that the closer your hands are to the wall, the harder it is to keep your balance. This is because so far you were used to the wall preventing you from falling forward, now you have no support anymore and this is how you are going to train your finger work, remember? Pushing on your fingers will help you balance and prevent you from falling forward. If you feel yourself falling, simply use the cartwheel exit to make sure you fall on your feet.



HOLDS AGAINST WALL – REGULAR

Finish this part with regular holds against the wall, as we learnt in Phase 1

Once you feel very comfortable with wall holds (both side), that you can easily shift your weight to your fingers or palms to balance, and that you can confidently exit all your handstands and land on your feet, you are ready for Phase 3 !

6) PHASE 3

Are you getting impatient? Well sorry, Phase 3 is still not about doing free handstands and looking cool but you're almost there!

KICK OFF WALL & HOLD



(1)

(2)

(3)



(4)

(5)

Start in the same position as regular wall holds but with your hands around 30cm away from the wall (1). Kick yourself up, engage your whole body as we previously learned and push yourself away from the wall (2). If you are relatively straight, your feet should be about 30cm from the wall (3), which will give you enough range of movement to properly work on your hands technique and balance.

When losing balance, try as much as you can to swing back to the wall, so that you can bounce back and start practicing again immediately. You should spend as much time as possible on your hands.

As you get more comfortable, practice holding your handstand while extending your arms and legs gradually (4 & 5).

Try to spend 20 minutes or more on this exercise.

VARIATIONS

This part serves 2 purposes: the first one is to add some fun, and the second one is to explore different contexts of hand balancing and build more awareness and a better sense of balance.





You can train this with your hands more or less close to the wall, the most important is to feel how different parts of your body will be solicited depending on the shape of your handstand and which side your weight shifts. Using the same mechanics as before, try and hold handstands of the shapes above. Don't hesitate to move, transition and get creative while you are holding it. Try to experiment with this for 5-10 minutes per session.

Once you are able to regularly hold a handstand away from the wall for at least 5 seconds, you are finally ready for Phase 4!

7) PHASE 4

Finally the last step of your training where you are going to learn to hold a free handstand confidently like a pro.

FREE KICK & FALL

This first part of phase 4 will serve as a warm-up for awareness and confidence. It is a good idea to do it before every session, even when you can already hold a handstand.



(1)

(2)

(3)

Start with your hands on the floor in front of you, keep your arms firm (1), start lifting one left (starting with one leg will give you stability in the beginning) (2). Kick yourself up while still keeping one leg lower than the other (3).



(4)

(5)

(6)



(7)

(8)

It is essential to keep your whole body engaged and solid as this will give you greater stability and control. Raise your second leg (4,5) and fall in a cartwheel movement as learnt previously (6,7,8), you do not need to hold it at the top.

Repeat 10 times.

FREE HOLDS

Yes, you're finally ready. (if you didn't cheat)



(1)



(2)

Kick yourself up in the same way as we learned in the previous exercise, stabilize at the top remembering how you used to stabilize when you pushed yourself away from the wall, and use the same mechanics as you did before to keep your balance. If you were able to hold a handstand for 5 seconds when the wall was not far behind, there is no reason why you can't do it now. You may only find 2 obstacles: stabilizing when you kick up (this is why we started with the previous exercise), and fear. Do not think about what will happen if you lose balance, you already know how to fall. The only thing you need from now on is practice. Also remember to check out the list of tips and reminders at the end of this tutorial from time to time, it will be of great help!

Tip: Sometimes you may have to relax a bit at the top to find balance (1), but then try to engage all your muscles again to straighten your body (2). Can you see the difference?

Practice this for at least 20 minutes.

SHAPES



Just as we used different shapes against the wall to build better awareness and used different muscles to balance our body, it is very useful to do the same in a free handstand. This part is not mandatory but it would be very good to spend 5-10 sessions on it every few sessions.

HOLDS AGAINST WALL

By now, you should start feeling tired and your handstands should be harder, if not impossible, to hold. This is totally normal and this is why we should continue using the wall no matter our level. Finish Part 2 with wall handstands to continue perfecting your technique and balance as long as you deem necessary.

8) PART 3: STRENGTH WORK

Every workout in this program should end with strength work (unless you are still in the conditioning phase on your training). Strength training is often neglected by handstand practitioners as it doesn't seem directly related to their goal. However, you do need arm and shoulder strength, as well as good endurance, to hold a handstand longer and be able to practice your technique for longer periods at a time. Training handstands alone will build the strength required, but very slowly. This part of your training is meant to accelerate your progress and make you save weeks or months of training, so it's in your best interest to make time for it!

PUSH-UPS FOR STRENGTH

In this first exercise you will need to perform 5 sets of 5 reps at high intensity. You will need to choose a variation of push-ups which is difficult enough for you so that the 5th rep is the last one you can do with great form, but it should feel like you can still do one more. If you feel like you can only do 4 reps with great form and the 5th one will be too difficult, stop at 4, that's perfectly fine. Here are 2 examples of high intensity push-ups below. If you are so tired that all you can do is regular push-ups, then do 5 sets of 5 regular push-ups. You can adapt the exercise to your level or to how you feel, as long as 5 sets of 5 reps is challenging enough.



(1)

(2)

Diamond push-ups: start with your hands placed under your chest in the shape of a diamond or a triangle, protract your shoulders and keep your body in a straight line (1). Lower your body by bending your arms and retracting your shoulders until your nose can touch the ground (2). Push yourself back up to the original position. That's 1 repetition.



(1)

(2)

Another great exercise is declined push-ups with elevated feet. With your hands on the floor, place your feet on an elevated surface (it could be a box, a chair, a bed etc...) and get into a push-up position with your arms straight, shoulders protracted and body straight (1). Lower yourself as you would with regular push-ups until your face almost touches the ground (2). Push yourself back up. That's 1 repetition.

Please note that you can make this exercise easier by placing your feet on a lower surface, or make it more difficult by elevating your feet higher.

PUSH-UPS FOR ENDURANCE

In this exercise, you will need to pick a variation easy enough so that you can complete 3 sets of 15-20 repetitions, but it should be challenging enough so that the last repetition is the last one you are able to do. Push-ups with hands elevated should be a suitable option for most people (please see the conditioning phase for details). Remember you can make this exercise easier by placing your hands on a higher surface, or more difficult by placing them on a lower surface. If you are already strong, don't hesitate to use regular push-ups for this exercise.

HOLLOW BODY HOLDS

This is the very last exercise of your workout. Following the steps explained in the conditioning phase, put yourself in a hollow body position and try to hold it for as long as you can and do this for a total of 3 times.

Do you feel like you can do more? Do 1 or 2 more hollow body holds. Do you still feel like you can do more? Do you feel like you haven't sweated enough? Just wait until you cool down. Fatigue from strength training may come later, but when it comes, it comes hard. So don't push yourself further than what is in this program, it is enough for one workout and for a safe progression towards your goal.

Your workout is done. Good job!

III PERFECTING YOUR LINE

After a few weeks or months practicing Phase 4, you should hopefully be able to consistently hold a handstand for at least 15 seconds. You may now want to work on what we call your "line", to form a perfectly straight handstand from your hands to your toes. While you may be able to do this quite soon, perfecting your form and balance will be a never ending quest, which makes hand balancing so interesting and addictive, you can always progress and get better no matter your level!

Here is a list of guidelines you can follow to get a perfectly straight line:

1. Use the wall and place your hands as close to the wall as possible. This way, your feet will naturally be right above your hands.



2. Push the floor as far as possible and extend your feet as high as possible too, as if you were trying to stretch your whole body. Pointing your toes will also help you stretching in line.



3. Remember to brace your abs, and contract your glutes



4. Practice breathing with your stomach, as movements from your stomach will make it easier to control your balance than movements from the chest.



5. Tuck your chin in and look straight behind you instead of looking at the floor.

Do you recognize the hollow body position?



You can practice these while moving further and further away from the wall until you are ready to try it in a free handstand. Note that tucking your chin in and looking behind will make your handstand much harder to balance and will be your main challenge.

Once you get a good feel of it, you can start applying all these tips to your free handstands. From a hollow body position (previous photo), fully stretch your body and you should get something like the picture below.



IV TIPS AND REMINDERS

- Warm up! Hand balancing is very safe when done properly but skipping a warm-up could quickly result in injury, especially of the wrists, and keep you off any kind of physical activity for weeks.
- Take the conditioning phase seriously and do not start Phase 1 before you are ready or your progress will later be limited and it will be counterproductive.
- Remember to engage your whole body when you kick up in a free handstand, it will be much easier to stabilize at the top on the first attempt.
- Engage your whole body when you are holding the handstand too, it will help you stay steady and will give you enough strength to balance and control.
- Alternatively, you may sometimes have to relax your hips and shoulders for a few seconds to find your balance, but you will have to engage your whole body again if you want to hold it properly in a straight line.
- Spend time learning the mechanics of fingers and palms work. You may find that slightly moving your shoulders or engaging your lats also help you shift your weight back and forth.
- Use the wall to understand how your own body works and be aware of every little movement and reflex you have, and how they affect your balance. Using the wall will allow you to relax and be mindful of these little but essential details. Your best teacher is practice.

- If you feel like you have a hard time keeping your whole body engaged and straight, keep practicing the hollow body position on the floor and make sure you contract all your muscles.
- Trying different shapes of handstand will improve your overall balance and will help you gain stability in your straight handstand too.
- When you feel your arms getting tired, spread your legs to get in a straddle handstand (see photos in Phase 3), this will take some weight off your arms and will help you hold your handstand and practice your balance longer.
- Don't get discouraged if one day it seems as if you have regressed. It is probably not the case, but balance is a very sensitive thing that can be affected by a lot of different factors like sleep, food, stress etc... If you are having a bad balance day, just practice on the wall. Bad days are great teachers too!

CONCLUSION

Not only do handstands provide many benefits for both physical and mental health, the work and preparation required to perform them properly will help you get and stay in great shape too.

This tutorial may seem long and require a lot of work for an exercise that seems as simple as getting on your hands, but this is realistically the amount of preparation, care, practice and lessons required in order to get a solid free handstand. It is a long journey but it will only make it feel greater when you can finally reach your goal. And don't forget to celebrate the little victories along the way, there will be plenty!

While there may be other ways to learn the handstand, it may not always be possible without a coach, but I can guarantee you this program will get you to your first self taught handstand, as these are all exercises and drills I used to teach myself.

I hope you will succeed and I would love to hear your experience so please don't hesitate to message me and tell me your story.

I would love to hear your thoughts and suggestions too.

If you found this tutorial useful, please share it with your friends and/or on your social media, I would appreciate it greatly!

Thank you for reading and I really hope my tutorial will help you.
Happy training!

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