



HOW TO HANDSTAND:

THE KEYS TO BECOME A MASTER OF BALANCE



SUMMARY:

1. INTRODUCTION	4
2. THE HANDSTAND	5
3. MOST COMMON SHOULDERS' FLEXIBILITY AND MOBILITY EXERCISES	11
4. MOST COMMON WRISTS' STRENGTHENING AND MOBILITY EXERCISES	16
5. HANDSTAND PROGRESSION EXERCISES	17



HANDSTAND PROGRAM

THE KEYS TO BECOME A MASTER OF BALANCE

Introduction to handstand – joints flexibility, mobility – How to test it and improve

Strengthening for handstand – Exercises to prepare your body, joints and tendons for heavy load

Perfect form of Handstand – Explanation on how to achieve the proper body alignment, mistakes and how to correct them

Handstand balance tricks – Favorite list of tips to change your handstand game and learn how to balance it

Handstand mobility – Which muscles cause lack of mobility in your joints and won't let you achieve perfect form of handstand and how to fix it. List of exercises presented

TOP 5 common mistakes in handstand and how to correct them.

Over 10 additional handstand exercises to become a master of handstand.

How to train handstand, frequency, methods and basics of programming.

8 explanation videos and **23 pages** of Handstand E-book

New Handstand program releases 07.09.2019 on Caliathletics.com

1. INTRODUCTION

As we all know, the Handstand is probably one of most common skills typical of all those sports that are involving the use of your own bodyweight see for instance

Gymnastics, Calisthenics, Acrobatics, Parkour and so on. We can surely say that once the Handstand is “collected” amongst the other skills, it can open new doors to new tricks and combinations both awesome to see and to perform. Another

consideration has to be done since it is a skill that no matter how simple can seem to be in regards of its achievement when looking at it while performed by someone else, in reality is not so simple to approach. The main issue comes from the limits brought by each one of us in terms of body structure, hence height, arms and legs length and even more important the range of motion of both shoulders and hips. We will talk about these specific elements in the following sections.

2. THE HANDSTAND

Let's now analyze a little more in detail which are the main elements characterizing this skill. For sure, since the main goal of the handstand is to be able to form a straight line that unifies the upper with the lower body, the very first and probably most important elements to consider are **joints' flexibility and mobility**, with particular emphasis on shoulders. When approaching the handstand from its very first steps, the main elements on which you should focus your work **are shoulders' flexion and elevation, wrists' strength and mobility and** last but not least, **hips mobility**:

a) Shoulders' flexion (flexibility): is actually one of the details that, together with their elevation, are characterizing the stance you should work on in order to achieve a perfect form handstand. When talking about shoulder's flexion I'm mainly referring to the position you get into when taking your arms up and straight in line with your ears. If by doing so, looking into a mirror, you notice an angle between your lats and the head of your triceps (say the long one), this means that your arms are not gonna be in line with your ears, but still in front of them. A good range of motion in this sense is achieved when, by not activating your lower back as a compensation of the movement, you are able to flex your shoulders so that your arms are at least in line with your ears or even beyond them, hence behind them.

So many times, I come across people who are attempting to perform a handstand with such a bad line between shoulders and the rest of the upper body, that I always wonder how they do not feel any stress in their joints by doing so. See the classic "banana" stance that is a clear evidence of a lack in terms of shoulders' flexibility. Since arms are supporting the whole body while holding the stance, they should be in a perfect straight position whilst most of the times they happen to be bent



PROPER TECHNIQUE



INPROPER TECHNIQUE

b) Shoulders' elevation (mobility): together with the flexion, also the elevation has to be considered as the second and not less important element on which you should work. In this case, the elevation comes more from a matter of lack of mobility because it's strictly connected with the shoulder blades. Working on this aspect might seem to be easy, but once you will try to test how mobile you can be, you might be surprised in noticing an effort in performing a movement that is not part of your daily habits. Putting in motion just and strictly your shoulder blades might be a challenge at the beginning, so keep in mind to not underestimate this factor as well when approaching the handstand

SCAPULA DEPRESSION



SCAPULA ELEVATION



c) Wrists' strength: I decided to include also this aspect that is another one pretty unconsidered which represents a potential threat since the practice of the handstand requires a very good warm up for your wrists. Unfortunately, most of the times I see people attempting handstands without any proper warm up prior to them and categorically, every single time, I hear complaints about a pain after. It all goes back to a matter of care to details, because also wrists need a proper journey in terms of adaptation to a stress that they weren't used to until the day you decided to start working on the handstand and in general for all the other skills of Calisthenics. For this reason you should include in your warm ups some exercises that are helping to strengthen your wrists and I suggest doing that considering all possible wrists' movement patterns



d) Wrists' mobility: of course, also in this case, the strength by itself is not much of a help; it needs for sure another supporting element that is, once again, the mobility of your wrists. If, by simply kneeling down and placing your hands in a parallel stance with your shoulders, you try leaning forward while keeping them in constant contact with the floor and by doing so you immediately perceive an intense pain in your wrists, this is the most evident proof that they lack of mobility. This test is gonna help you defining which are your limits and emphasizes on what you should focus your work.



e) Hips' mobility: if you already attempted to perform a handstand and you made it, but you had that classic banana stance with your back and legs, you should know that it is due to a matter of lack of mobility in your hips that are not allowing the posterior pelvic tilt position (PPT) rather than the anterior one (APT).

INPROPER HANDSTAND



PROPER HANDSTAND



3. MOST COMMON SHOULDERS' FLEXIBILITY AND MOBILITY EXERCISES

As we anticipated above, flexibility and mobility of the shoulders are two very important aspects to consider when approaching the handstand.

Here I would like to try to provide you with some useful tips that might help you in not being stuck in the process and achieve wisely the steps necessary to master this beautiful skill. Before we said that, in order to achieve a body alignment while performing a handstand you need to be aware of which are the limits that might stop you from doing that.

In particular, in terms of shoulders' flexibility and mobility we can identify the following "strategies" to adopt:

SHOULDERS FLEXIBILITY EXERCISES: in this case, you want to focus on increasing your shoulders' range of motion (ROM) by means of a stick or broomstick as well as a box. The tips I'm gonna provide you with, indeed, are aiming to increase the flexion of your shoulders throughout some very effective exercises that should be performed, if not on a daily basis, at least weekly, say three times a week to give you an idea. So, first thing first test your actual level of shoulders' flexibility by simply standing against a wall with your back while on feet. Elevate both arms straight until the point where you have control of your lower back since your goal is to understand which is the point where it starts to be activated in order to help shoulders get a further elevation. If the angle that is gonna form is lower or equal to 45° , it means that you lack of sufficient flexibility and so, by the time you would start performing whichever exercise for

the handstand that involves a shoulder activation, you wouldn't be capable of doing it correctly.

To increase such angle you can adopt these three main techniques:

- STICK/BROOMSTICK OVERHEAD SHOULDER STRETCH:

- 1) While standing on feet, grab a stick/broomstick with both hands placed more than shoulder-width
- 2) Keep your arms straight and start flexing your shoulders so that the stick/broomstick reaches at least a position above your head
- 3) Elevate your shoulders before passing the line of your head so to favor the flexion overhead
- 4) When you reach the point of maximum flexion and start feeling a little tension, hold the position for at least 15-30" for at least 3 sets



- STRAIGHT ARMS/BENT ARMS SHOULDER STRETCH ON A

BENCH/BOX:

- 1) Kneel on the floor with a box or bench in front of you at an arms-length distance
- 2) Perform this exercise in two different ways, with arms straight in line with the box/bench initially and then with arms bent; in first case place just the palm of your hands at the edge of the box/bench, in the second case just your elbows with forearms gathered behind your neck and hands in pray position
- 3) From these two different points of stretch, lower yourself from the initial straight line to the one where lats and shoulders are below such line
- 4) Perform these two stretches for repetitions and breathe out whenever you lower yourself since it's supposed to be the moment where the tension is higher; perform at least 3sets x 10reps with a hold of 10-15" at the last rep of each set

- RINGS SHOULDERS-LATS STRETCH:

- 1) Set-up the rings at shoulder-width, at a height that allows you to be partly hanging with your upper body and arms straight
- 2) Kneel on the floor while grabbing the rings with both hands and progressively let your upper body lean and stretch until the point where arms are completely straight as well as legs so to form a sort of curve between them
- 3) Hold this first position of stretch for at least 10-15" before going to the second step which is gonna be stretches on both sides (you decide which one first)

4) Hang and stretch the lateral lats and shoulders to their sides again for at least 10-15" each

5) Repeat the sequence passing every time through the central position of stretch for at least 3sets x 10-15" hold each stance (central-left-right)



SHOULDERS MOBILITY EXERCISES: as we previously anticipated, in this case the focus is more on shoulder blades. When talking about “shoulders’ elevation”, I’m referring to the fact that you have to become capable of taking your shoulders up and down while following always a straight line between arms and upper body.

In this case this little and yet very important movement prevents you from delivering too much stress in your tendons and joints while performing the handstand. In this case, to achieve such goal, there are basically two main exercises that can be performed always on a weekly basis (minimum) together with the others seen before which are:

- QUADRUPED STANCE SHOULDERS’ ELEVATION/DEPRESSION:

1) Start from a quadruped stance, hence kneeling down on the ground with hands at equal distance from your knees so to form a straight line with your back

2) Elevate and depress for repetitions your shoulders and shoulder blades so to isolate the movement just to these two parts, do not involve the back while doing so

3) Perform 3sets x 10reps

- RINGS/BAR HANG SHOULDERS’ ELEVATION/DEPRESSION:

1) Hang yourself on a bar or on rings, but sufficiently high in both cases so that feet are not touching the ground

2) Focus just and only on your shoulder blades through an alternated movement, also in this case of elevation and depression, do not bend your arms while doing so

3) Perform 3sets x 10reps

4. MOST COMMON WRISTS' STRENGTHENING AND MOBILITY EXERCISES

As I anticipated above, it is worth it dedicating a brief bracket to finding out which are some of the best exercises you should adopt in order to take your wrists to the next level in terms of strength and mobility.

Since the handstand is a skill that concentrates most of the load just on your wrists and since they are the ones responsible of helping balancing such stance, you cannot avoid passing through this very important step; otherwise you can get injured pretty easily.

WRISTS STRENGTHENING EXERCISES:

- BACK HAND WRISTS HOLD (WITH FINGERS FACING KNEES)
- BACK HAND WRISTS PUSH-UPS (WITH FINGERS FACING KNEES)
- BACK HAND WRISTS TWISTS (WITH FINGERS FACING KNEES)
- BACK HAND CLOSING FISTS (WITH FINGERS FACING EACH OTHER)
- BACK HAND WRISTS TWISTS(WITH FINGERS FACING EACH OTHER)
- BACK HAND WRISTS PUSH-UPS (WITH FINGERS FACING EACH OTHER)

WRISTS MOBILITY EXERCISES:

- WRISTS PALM DOWN FLEXION LEANS (FINGERS POINTING FORWARD)
- WRISTS PALM DOWN EXTENSION STRETCH (FINGERS POINTING BACKWARD)

- WRISTS PALM DOWN SIDE TO SIDE EXTENSION STRETCH (FINGERS POINTING 90° OUT)
- SINGLE WRIST PALM DOWN CIRCUMDUCTIONS CLOCKWISE/COUNTERCLOCKWISE

5. HANDSTAND PROGRESSION EXERCISES

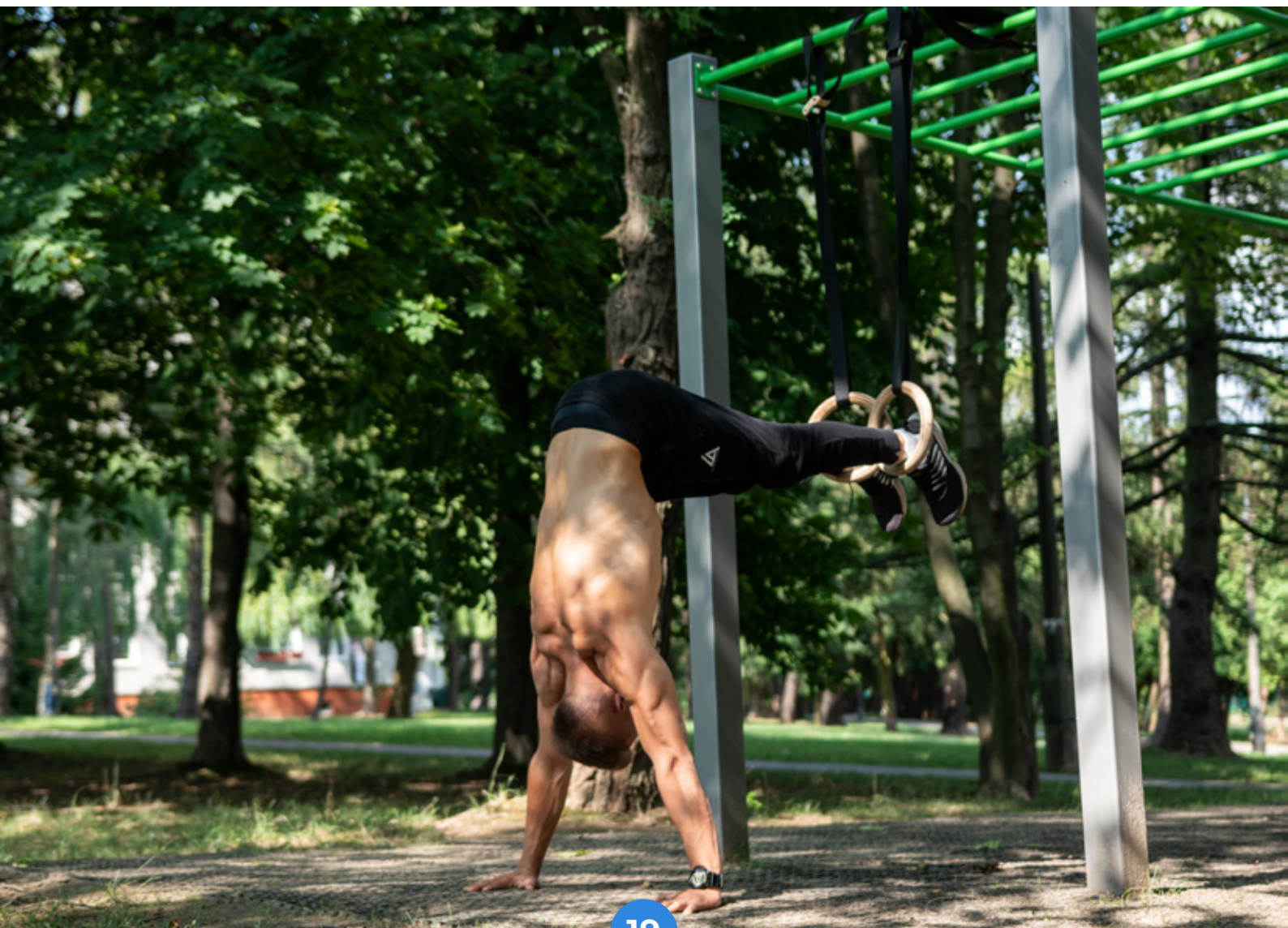
We have finally come to the most interesting part of this ebook, so now we're gonna take a look at which are the best exercises you should start including in your workouts, in order to master the handstand without any gap in terms of progressions.

1) TRIPOD (HEADSTAND) HOLD: place your hands on the floor at shoulder-width (or a little more) and the head right in front of them, at a comfortable distance so that, once you bring your knees on top of your elbows, you can hold that stance. Purpose of this exercise, especially for beginners, is to let you start getting more confident with that sense of disorientation that you might feel after going upside down with your head while taking away from the floor your feet since the balance is gonna be mainly handled by hands, knees and elbows due to the stance you have to hold. The progression starts from the basic stance with knees lying on elbows. Once you hold at least 60", you can start lifting up the knees towards a sort of advanced tuck stance; after mastering also in this case at least 50/60", you can aim to fully extend both legs together progressively so to reach the full form tripod that simulates the position you will have while performing a handstand



2) PIKE STAND HOLD: another very common exercise that helps a lot in getting the proper shoulder elevation we spoke about before, due to the position you have to get into. In this case, it's very important the set up before performing the hold; place your hands at shoulder-width once again, keep your arms straight and shoulders elevated so to not stress them with your own weight once upside down.

For such reason, your goal has to be forming a straight line between arms and torso, whilst legs placed on a surface or stall bar (even better) so that they can be fully extended and they form with the upper body a 90° angle. Make sure to master at least 60" hold before attempting the next step that is, starting to elevate the position of your legs so that, slowly, you can eventually reach their full extension upward



3) V PUSH-UPS: a strengthening exercise that comes in handy when talking about shoulder strength development. For how simple might look from the outside this exercise, once performed correctly, it can be actually pretty challenging. It also requires a very good mobility in the lower back, hamstrings and shoulders since the starting position wants you to place your hands at shoulder-width while your feet are at equal distance from them so to form an upside down V. From here, you have to lower yourself like performing a classic push-up with the difference that the activation here works much more on front deltoids and triceps. Make sure to lower yourself forward, in the eccentric phase, until the point where you have both elbows forming a 90° angle; such angle has to be kept the whole time, if the butt lowers while performing the exercise it means that you are NOT performing it correctly



5) WALL HANDSTAND HOLD (BELLY FACING THE WALL): immediately after mastering the previous exercise for the time range suggested, you can proceed to this next step.

Compared to the previous one, having your belly facing the wall, it gives you a closer idea of how it feels when holding a free handstand, since the assistance provided is different in terms of balance.

Worthless saying that, also in this case, 4sets x 60" hold would be a good and safe achievement

6) WALL HANDSTAND PPT/APT (POSTERIOR PELVIC TILT/ANTERIOR PELVIC TILT) REPETITIONS: before we spoke about the importance, later on in the process, of getting a good posterior pelvic tilt while performing a handstand in order to get that perfect line. I decided to include this exercise, at this point of the progression schedule, since here you are supposed to have gained already a good control of your body sufficiently to start focusing just and only on your hips. In this case, you can decide if performing this exercise with belly or back facing the wall; the most important aspect is the hips movement so to get into a posterior pelvic tilt and anterior one for repetitions.

By doing so, you'll become more aware of when you have it correctly and when not. Being partly a dynamic exercise, perform at least 3sets x 10 reps

7) HANDSTAND KICKUPS: it's about time to get straight to the point and start finding out which is for you the best way to get in to a handstand stance. Make sure to understand firstly which leg kicks up and which one provides

support to such movement, considering that is gonna be the one following. In order to get them both straight and into position, start by performing repetitions of kick ups eventually ending up in finding the stance to hold it for the very few first seconds. Here, more than before, shoulders' elevation and arms straight are the keys

8) FREE HANDSTAND HOLD: finally the master exercise that is the real free handstand without any assistance. In this case would be recommended to perform it prior to your real workouts on the other skills, exactly when your CNS is still “fresh” and you can focus better on body alignment and shoulder position

“Well, dear Caliathletes, also this time I tried to gather as many info as possible for you so to provide always the best contents.

As you all know, here at Caliathletics we take it seriously and we don't want to be the typical common website where you purchase something; here we want you to become owner of all the best knowledge we can gather for you so to let you become the best athlete out there. Each one of you can and we wanna be the motivators that will help you achieving this awesome life goal! Let's do it together in one unique big fam!!”

Mattia Sampaoli

Calisthenics coach and performer