



Wrist mobility, bodyline exercises, and handstands Guide

This document serves as a **reference only**.

The authors acknowledge the **source of these techniques**, Coach **Christopher Sommer**; see <http://gymnasticbodies.com>.

Wrist mobility

Wrists and forearms need to be supple and strong in order to be able to do the Bodyline circuits and, in time, to begin the handstand drills. Mobility is not only range of movement, but range of movement under load. This sequence will prepare the hands, wrists, and forearms for any activity.

Once the basic movements have been mastered, with little load on the arms, the intensity may be slowly increased by simply moving the knees back from the arms. Once the knees are behind the hips, the weight of the upper body will be felt; and when you are feeling adventurous, do the sequence off your knees, with the body and thighs in the same plane. Only the heroic will do these exercises off the feet... but all gymnasts can, so consider this the goal.

Specific physical effects include elongation of the extensor tendons of the fingers/arms; full (90 degrees plus) wrist movement in flexion and extension; increased range of movement in internal and external rotation (and consequent activation of these crucial muscles), and increased arm strength.

Bodyline exercises

These exercises train the body to hold a particular shape or alignment (line). Form is paramount; please read the cues closely. They are all whole-body exercises: in every position, all muscles in the body need to be tensed—this is surprisingly difficult, as you will experience! Tense/squeeze every single fibre, and then contract harder! As the exercises include prone, supine and side positions, literally every muscle in the body can be worked, potentially.

Aspects of the exercises (in terms of benefits to the body) may not be obvious from a simple inspection of the images, but include simultaneous co-contraction of all abdominal and back muscles (so, spinal flexors and extensors); glute activation; rotator cuff and serratus anterior activation; rear deltoid, rhomboid, trapezius activation, quad. and hamstring co-contraction, internal and external oblique activation, and enhanced arch (foot) strength, to name only the main groups. The single most-important effect though is a heightened sense of how to position, and hold, the body in a particular shape against forces that are working against this.

Handstands

Coach Christopher Sommer (of 'Building the Gymnastic Body' fame) says, simply, that the handstand, and its variants, is the single most important upper body exercise. And even the simple exercises of trying to hold a good body line while leaning up against a wall for balance will increase your upper body strength dramatically.

Once you have some familiarity with the Bodyline sequences, we will show you how to begin your handstand 'prep'. Everyone will be able to do the starting position versions, and making the exercise more challenging in small, achievable, increments is the hallmark of this series. Once the technical points are mastered, the positions are held for time.



Check out the **Kit Laughlin YouTube channel**:

www.youtube.com/kitlaughlin

Wrist mobility exercises

1a



1b



1c



Each of these must be done with **straight elbows, fingers outstretched, weight bearing down through the wrists**; their purpose is to prepare the wrists for load bearing in the following exercises

1a. Palms down, fingers pointing back at knees

1b. Palms down, fingers pointing away from the knees

1c.

* Back of hands down, fingers pointing at knees

* Try swinging the elbows in an arc to change the pull in the forearm muscles

Hold each position for 4 to 6 slow breaths.

2a



2b



2 and 3 both add **closing the fist** to the wrist bend; for both

* back of hands down

* straight elbows

* weight bearing through wrists

2. fingers pointing inwards

3. fingers pointing outwards, arms internally rotated in the shoulder joints

* 6 to 8 repetitions of each

3a



3b



4a



4b



4c



4a. Knuckle support, wrists and elbows straight

4b. Bend the wrist and straighten the hand; **do not bend the elbow** in this part

4c. Bend through the elbows as per a push-up, and lower the chest towards the floor

* Reverse back to the start

* 4 to 6 slow repetitions

5a



5b



5a



5b



45 degree angle view

front view

5a. Internally rotate the arms and place palms on floor with fingers pointing back to the knees, or as close as you can

5b. Bend through the elbows as per a push-up, and lower the chest towards the floor. Keep the elbows pulled as close together as possible; the aim is to have them pointing straight to your front!

'Bodyline' exercises

As the title 'bodyline' suggests, these exercises train the body to hold a particular shape or alignment (line). **Form is paramount**; please read the cues closely. They are all **whole-body exercises**; squeeze every single fibre, and then some!

Hollow



1.
 - * Legs pressed straight, quads contracted
 - * Toes pointed
 - * Squeeze legs together; big toes, calves, and thighs
 - * Squeeze the glutes together, plus tuck the tail with the glutes
 - * Navel to spine and flatten the lower back to the floor
 - * Breathe into the ribs at the back (those on the floor!)
 - * Hands on top of the thighs, use *rectus abdominis* to curl up and try to walk the fingertips to the knees; press the palms onto the thighs

2. Next, lift one heel six inches off the floor; keep the lower back pressed onto the floor, legs completely straight, toes pointed.
3. Next version, lift both heels six inches off the floor.
4. As well, or alternatively, raise the arms directly above the face, through to
5. arms extended next to your ears.

Gymnastics 'plank'



1. Easiest version is feet on floor; progressively ...
2. raise the feet to increase the difficulty

- * Legs pressed straight, quads contracted
- * Toes pointed, resting on the tops of the feet; or, can do with balls of the feet tucked under and press out through the heels
- * Squeeze legs together; big toes, calves, and thighs together
- * Squeeze the glutes together, plus tuck the tail with the glutes
- * Hands under shoulders; hand position optional, variously fingers pointing to the front, out to the sides, back towards the feet
- * Arms pressed straight; note, you can do this exercise using an elbow support
- * Press the floor away from you, press the upper back up to the ceiling
- * Hollow shape in the upper chest, shoulder blades spread apart
- * Lower abs pulled in (navel to spint), and contract with *rectus abdominis*

'Bodyline' exercises continued

'Fish'

- * Legs pressed straight, quads contracted
- * Toes pointed
- * Squeeze legs together, big toes, calves, and thighs together
- * Squeeze the glutes together, plus tuck the tail with the glutes, and pull the navel to the spine (no lumbar extension allowed)
- * Press the heels through the floor, or bench, to raise the hips and have a straight line from ankles to armpits
- * Hands under shoulders; hand position optional, variously fingers pointing back to the feet, out to the sides, behind you
- * Arms pressed straight ; note, you can do this exercise using an elbow support
- * Press the floor away from you, press the chest up to the ceiling
- * Lift the sternum towards the chin to straighten and lengthen the spine
- * Roll the shoulders back to open out across the chest (this is an external rotation of the upper arm in the shoulder joint)
- * Squeeze the back of the shoulders together, and attempt to pull the hands together (you can't do this because your weight is bearing down through the hands!)



Arch

- * Lie face down
- * Legs pressed straight, quads contracted – do not let the knees bend
- * Press the feet away from the hips; imagine your legs are being drawn out of the hips
- * Toes pointed
- * Squeeze legs together; big toes, calves, and thighs together
- * Squeeze the glutes together, and use the glutes to lift the legs off the floor
- * Use all the muscles either side of your spine to extend the spine and arch the upper body off the floor
- * Draw the shoulder blades together
- * Arm position:
 - Version 1: arms next to the hips, resting on the floor
 - Version 2: lift hands and arms off the floor and reach them back towards your feet
 - Version 3: reach arms out to the side at shoulder level (think aeroplane!)
 - Version 4: reach the arms out above the head, biceps next to ears



'Bodyline' exercises continued

Side plank



Body is in a straight line



- * Body is in a perfectly straight line, from ankles, through hips and chest to the top of the head
- * Resting on the side of bottom foot, feet flexed to 90 degrees at ankles
- * Legs pressed straight, quads contracted
- * Squeeze legs together, big toes, calves, and thighs together
- * Squeeze the glutes together, plus tuck the tail with the glutes, and pull the navel to the spine (no lumbar extension allowed)
- * Lift the sternum towards the chin to straighten and lengthen the spine
- * Press the shoulders and hips up towards the ceiling; reach up with the top arm, and lift the waist on the uphill side up towards the ceiling

1. Elbow support, elbow under shoulder
2. Straight arm support, hand under shoulder; fingers pointing away from feet
3. Feet raised on bench

'L'sit

- * Legs pressed straight, quads contracted
- * Toes pointed
- * Squeeze legs together, big toes, calves, and thighs together
- * Hands under shoulders; hand position optional, variously fingers pointing to the feet, out to the sides, behind you, use a knuckle support, or go up onto the fingertips!

1.
 - * Arms pressed straight, press the hands through the floor to lift the buttocks off the floor; press down with the lats and the pecs
 - * Pull the navel to the spine and 'suck' the hips up off the floor
2.
 - * Lift one heel an inch or two off the floor and hold; feel the quad cramp!
 - * Change to lifting the other heel off the floor and hold
3. As you get stronger, lift both legs off the floor





Wrist mobility, bodyline exercises, and handstands Guide

'Bodyline' exercises continued

Protocols ... putting it all together in a circuit

Once you have the form of each of the above bodyline exercises under control, next you want to put them together in a sequence (a **circuit**) and hold each position for a nominated length of time. Think **INTENSITY**.

Here are some pointers ...

1. Choose a length of time and work out which version of each exercise you can do and hold it in perfect form for that time period. Do not be too ambitious with the version you choose; you must hold it for the time period, in perfect form.
2. Do not dilly dally when changing from one position to the next; no rest allowed.
3. Don't fixate on the order of your circuit; in fact, change it every time you do the circuit. However, while you are getting started and still **conditioning the joints**, I suggest you alternate between lying and arm-support exercises. As a side note, each of the arm-support exercises (plank, fish, side plank) can be done on an **elbow support** if necessary.
4. Change the composition of your circuit regularly, using 2–5 exercises in total.

A few example circuits

One

Wrist mobility warm-up
Handstand chest-to-wall, 2 x 30s
Circuit: one round

1. L-sit, 2 x 20 sec
2. Hollow, 60 sec
3. Arch, 60 sec
4. Hollow rocks¹, x 20
5. Plank, 60 sec
6. Fish, 60 sec
7. Side plank, 60 sec/side

Two

Wrist mobility warm-up
Handstand chest-to-wall, 3 x 30s
Circuit: three rounds

1. L-sit, 15 sec
2. Hollow, 45 sec
3. Fish, 45 sec
4. Arch, 45 sec
5. Plank, 60 sec

Three

Wrist mobility warm-up
Handstand chest-to-wall, 3 x 15 s plus 2 x 30s
Circuit: one round

1. L-sit, 3 x 10 sec
2. Plank, 45 sec
3. Arch, 45 sec
4. Hollow, 45 sec
5. Fish, 45 sec
6. Hollow rocks¹, 2 x 15
7. Side plank, 45 sec/side

¹ Hollow rocks –

Holding the hollow form, rock in a small movement only; any cadence is okay. Whatever your hollow shape is, **do not let it change while rocking**; common faults are piking (flexing) at the hips as you rock onto the back, and increasing the hollow through the chest as your legs rock down towards the floor.

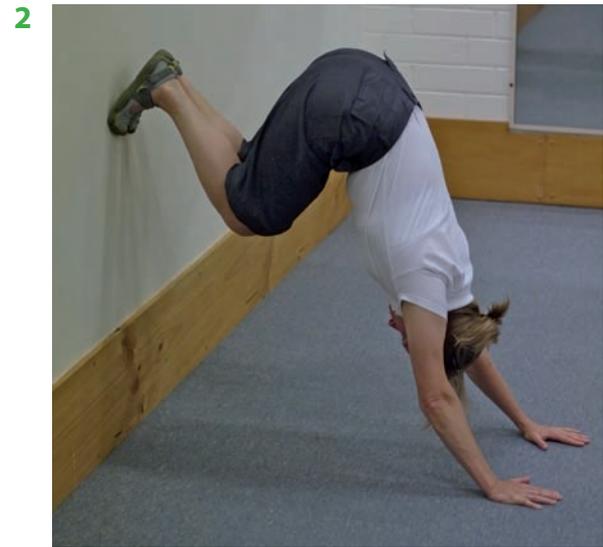
Handstands

The handstand is a – perhaps the – fundamental skill in gymnastics. It is also a superb whole-body strength exercise for non-gymnasts. The shape/line of the body in the handstand is similar to that of the full ‘hollow’: the differences are 1) straighter upper back shape (less hollow), and 2) less ‘scoop’ through the line of the hips.

Practise handstands **chest-to-wall**, not back-to-wall; in the latter, it is very difficult to produce the correct line through the body. Have your **hands shoulder-width apart** on the floor. Master the **form**, then start **holding for time**.

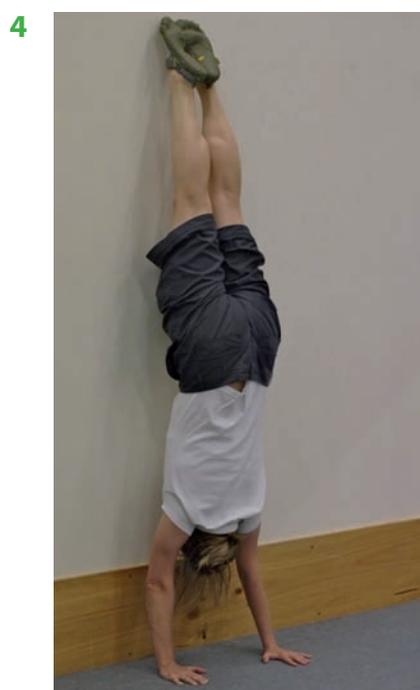


Versions 1 and 2 are where to start!
The focus is on:
* getting used to being upside down
* building arm and shoulder strength
* getting the **open shoulder angle**; that is, a straight line from the heel of the hand through elbows, shoulders, waist; and, the head in between the arms



1.
 - * Place one foot on the wall at approx. butt height, toes tucked under
 - * Press the arms straight and the hands ‘through’ the floor, and shrug the shoulders up to the ears (you want your deltoids in contact with your ears); press as hard as you can
 - * Progress this version by unweighting the second foot from the floor, so you have more weight on the arms and the foot that’s on the wall

2.
 - * Have both feet on the wall, however
 - * Keep the knees bent and pulled towards the abdomen; this allows you to keep the pelvis tilted (tail tucked) and you don’t have to worry about controlling the legs, or your balance ... you’re ‘wedged’ between your feet on the wall and your hands on the floor



3.
 - * Hands are still out from the wall
 - * Extend your legs up the wall so that the legs are straight; press them straight, actively, and press through the heels
 - * Keep the **tail tucked** so there’s a slight scoop through the line of the hips
 - * **Squeeze everything**; the **legs together** at ankles, calves, thighs; the **glutes**; pull navel to spine
 - * Press through the floor with the arms
4.
 - * Progressively walk the hands closer to the wall; do not rush this if it means you sacrifice perfect form
 - * The final position has hands only a few inches out from the wall, and only the front of the toes in contact with the wall; **point the toes**
 - * ‘Suck’ the ribcage off the wall, press up through the arms, tuck the tail and squeeze everything; breathe!