



Strength & Conditioning Workouts - Al Kavadlo

If you want to master basic bodyweight movements, don't miss these exclusive workouts designed by calisthenics expert Al Kavadlo.

Strength & Conditioning - Al Kavadlo: Week 1, Day 1

<http://breakingmuscle.com/strength-conditioning/strength-conditioning-al-kavadlo-week-1-day-1>

This four-week program is designed by calisthenics expert and author [Al Kavadlo](#). Three workouts are posted each week and cover a total of twelve bodyweight exercise progressions and tutorials, including everything from pull ups, to pistols, to the infamous human flag. If you're joining late in the game, feel free to jump right in!

Week 1, Day 1: Pull Up Progressions and Tutorial

Pull-ups are the most fundamental bar exercise, and they're also one of the most important exercises overall. There's no two ways about it, a well-rounded fitness program needs to include some type of pull-up. Though you may not be able to do one yet, you can use these variations to progress yourself to pull-ups and beyond over the course of several months or years.

You may need to spend a few days, a few weeks or even a few months on each step in this progression, depending on where you are starting out. I recommend practicing your pull-ups near the beginning of your workout, two or three times a week, with at least one day of rest in between efforts. Individual conditioning can vary greatly from person to person, so feel free to train more frequently if you have the energy.

Flex Hang

A flex hang involves holding yourself at the top of a pull-up position with your chin over the bar. It is best to start by using an underhand (chin-up) grip. Use a bench or a partner to help you get in position and then simply try to stay up. Think about squeezing every muscle in your entire body. If you can hold this position for even a second on your initial attempt, you are off to a good start.

Negative Pull-up

Once you can hold the flex hang for several seconds, you're ready to start working on negative pull-ups, which just means lowering yourself down slowly from the top position. In the beginning, it might be very difficult to perform a controlled negative, but with time you will be able to make your negative last for ten seconds or longer. Once you can do this, a full pull-up will be within reach.

Australian Pull-up

The Australian pull-up (or bodyweight row as it's sometimes known) is a great exercise for someone who is working their way up to a standard pull-up. The Australian involves getting "down under" a bar that is about waist height, with your feet resting on the ground. Keep a straight line from your heels to the back of your head as you squeeze your shoulder blades together and pull your chest to the bar. Novices may choose to bend their knees and push gently with their heels in order to give their arms assistance if needed. When you get a little more comfortable with this exercise you can angle your heels to the floor with your feet pointed up and your legs straight.

Chin-up

Once you are strong enough to do lot of Australian pull-ups and negative pull-ups, you will be ready to start working on chin-ups, which is the technical name for a pull-up done with an underhand grip. As with the flex hang, it is typically easier for beginners to start with the supinated grip.

Pull-up

After you can do a few good chin-ups, you should begin training for the classic pull-up (overhand grip just wider than shoulder width). You may need to go back a step and practice flex hangs and negatives with an overhand grip in order to prepare your body for a pull-up, as the pronated hand position tends to be more difficult.

Plyo Pull-up

Once you've gotten confident with controlled pull-ups, you can begin training plyo-pull-ups. Any type of explosive pull-up in which you let go of the bar is a plyo. When you perform plyo pull-ups, think about pulling your chin over the bar as fast and explosively as possible. In fact, don't think of pulling your chin over the bar - think of pulling the bar below your chest! Once you get the feel for this, try opening your hands for a split second. Eventually you can develop enough power to take your hands off long enough to clap.

These variations are just the tip of the iceberg! Check out the video below and pick up a copy of my book, [Raising The Bar: The Definitive Guide to Pull-up Bar Calisthenics](#) for more information on pull-ups and pull-up bar training.

[Watch video here](#)

Strength & Conditioning - Al Kavadlo: Week 1, Day 2

<http://breakingmuscle.com/strength-conditioning/strength-conditioning-al-kavadlo-week-1-day-2>

This four-week program is designed by calisthenics expert and author [Al Kavadlo](#). Three workouts are posted each week and cover a total of twelve bodyweight exercise progressions and tutorials, including everything from pull ups, to pistols, to the infamous human flag. If you're joining late in the game, feel free to jump right in!

Week 1, Day 2: Push-Up Progressions and Tutorial

Perfecting Your Push-up



Push-ups are one of the oldest and most widely known strength exercises on Earth. They've been a staple in military fitness, martial arts and many other types of exercise programs all over the world. Anyone who has even the slightest interest in working out has probably tried to do a push-up at least once in their life. Many people will fail on their initial attempts and abandon hope, but fear not, push-up newcomers, if you can't do one yet, here are some progressions to help you get there.

Wall Push-up

A novice or an injured person should start with the wall push-up, working to 20 and eventually 50 consecutive reps in each set before moving on. To perform this variant, simply lean against a wall with your toes a few feet away and do the push-up movement from this semi-upright position.

Incline Push-up



When you've gotten to 50 wall push-ups, move onto incline push-ups. The higher your incline, the easier the push-up will be, the lower the incline, the harder it becomes. A high incline eventually becomes a wall push-up and a low incline eventually becomes a regular push-up but there are many levels in between. You can experiment with various household objects or things you may come across outdoors to find ways to incrementally lower yourself toward the floor.

Knee Push-up

The knee push-up is another variation for beginners on the path toward full push-ups. Knee push-ups involve bending your knees and resting them on the floor instead of your toes. By shortening the length of your body, the leverage changes, making the exercise less difficult. Again, this is a great way to practice toward a push-up without requiring the full strength needed for one on your toes. Once you can do between 20 and 30 knee push-ups, you'll be ready for the real deal.

Full Push-up



When doing push-ups, I recommend placing your hands just wider than your shoulders (your thumbs should wind up right beneath your armpits). Keep your elbows fairly close to your body and point them back; do not flare them out to the sides. Lower until your chest is just above the floor, pause for a split second and then press yourself back up. Many beginners have trouble going low enough on their push-ups. Sometimes this is also the case for people who've practiced for years. Your arms should bend past 90 degrees as measured along the outside of your elbow for the rep to count; the lower the better. If you can't do a full range of motion with proper form, go back to incline push-ups or knee push-ups.

Beyond Push-ups

Depending on your starting point, it can take anywhere from a few weeks to a few years to progress to full push-ups. Be patient and give your body time to adapt. When full push-ups are no longer a challenge, there are still many new ways to progress your training. In a later installment, I'll be sharing some tips to work toward more difficult variations, including the one arm push-up.

For more information about push-ups, check out my new book, [Pushing The Limits! Total Body Strength With No Equipment](#).

Strength & Conditioning - Al Kavadlo: Week 1, Day 3

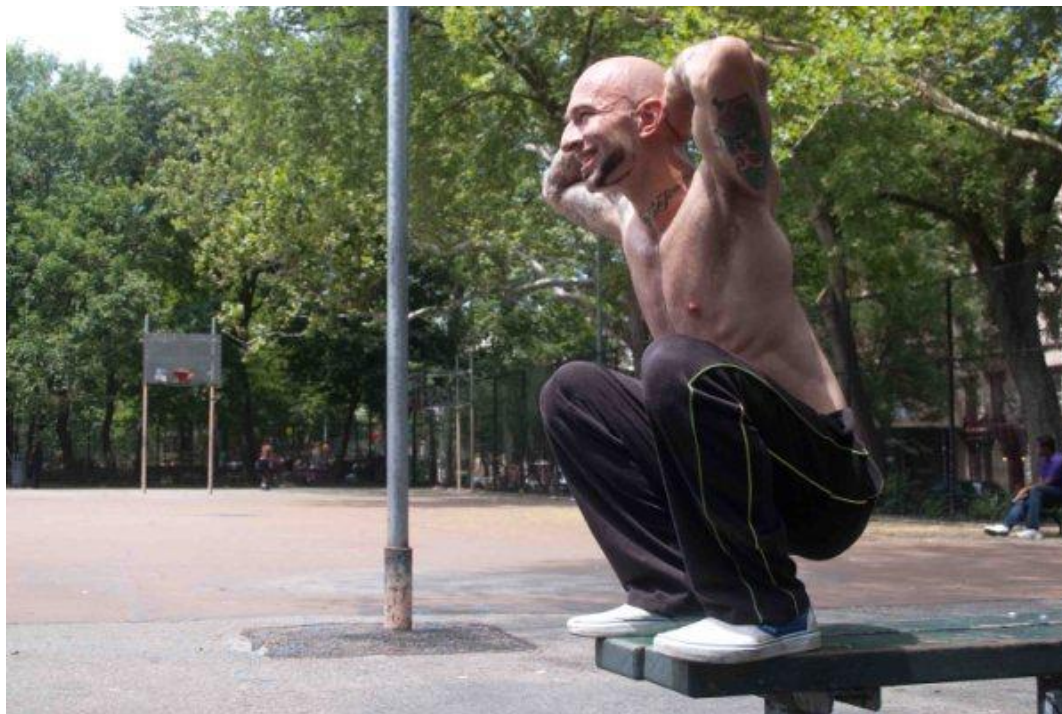
<http://breakingmuscle.com/strength-conditioning/strength-conditioning-al-kavadlo-week-1-day-3>

This four-week program is designed by calisthenics expert and author [Al Kavadlo](#). Three workouts are posted each week and cover a total of twelve bodyweight exercise progressions and tutorials, including everything from pull ups, to pistols, to the infamous human flag. If you're joining late in the game, feel free to jump right in!

Week 1, Day 3: Squatting 101

The squat is the king of all lower body exercises. Squats work every muscle in your legs as well as your abs and lower back. Since your legs are such large muscles, they require lots of blood and oxygen to perform squats. So if you do enough reps, squats can be a great way to give your heart and lungs a workout too.

A lot of trainers might tell you that proper squatting form requires you to keep your knees behind your toes. However, this is not always the case. Telling a client to keep their knees behind their toes during squats is a cue to help them understand the mechanics of moving from the hips. It isn't necessarily the literal truth for everyone.



The term “dorsi flexion” refers to the movement that occurs at the ankle joint during a squat. People with more ankle mobility can keep their heels flat and put their knees in front of their toes at the same time because of dorsi flexion. As long as you initiate your squat from the hips, keep your heels down and retract your shoulder blades, you're good to go.

Another common cue for squatters (no, not the punks living in the abandoned warehouse) is to lower down until you've reached 90 degrees of flexion at the knees. This is another generalized cue that is great for some, but not ideal for all.

First off, newcomers and people with limited mobility might not be able to get that deep without sacrificing proper form. Second, many able-bodied folk will be able to squat much deeper than thighs parallel to the ground. As long as you can maintain your form, feel free to go ass to the grass on bodyweight squats.

I recommend going for high reps on bodyweight squats. A beginner should be able to quickly build to 20 in a row, while a nice intermediate goal is to aim for 40-50 in one set. Eventually you may build to 100 consecutive squats. Once you can do more than 100, it's probably time to find a harder exercise! Look for my tutorials on lunges and one leg squats later this month. Til then, work on that hundred.

Strength & Conditioning - Al Kavadlo: Week 2, Day 1

<http://breakingmuscle.com/strength-conditioning/strength-conditioning-al-kavadlo-week-2-day-1>

This four-week program is designed by calisthenics expert and author [Al Kavadlo](#). Three workouts are posted each week and cover a total of twelve bodyweight exercise progressions and tutorials, including everything from pull ups, to pistols, to the infamous human flag. If you're joining late in the game, feel free to jump right in!

Week 2, Day 1: Getting Started With Back Bridging

The back bridge is a timeless exercise that can help build total-body strength and improve your flexibility along the way. Whether your focus is strength training, calisthenics, yoga, or any other type of exercise, back bridging is likely to come up in some form.

While bridges are often performed isometrically, they can also be done for reps. Like all exercises, there are many variations on the back bridge. Start with the beginner bridge and slowly advance to the harder progressions. Once you can comfortably hold a given variation for a full minute, try moving on to the next one.

Beginner Back Bridge

Lie on your back with your arms at your sides and your knees bent. Your feet will be flat on the ground. From here, push your heels into the ground, squeeze your butt, and lift your hips as high as you can. You'll also need to think about pushing your chest up and squeezing your shoulder blades together while your head stays on the ground. If you can't keep your knees from bowing open, you might find it helpful to squeeze a yoga block or small exercise ball in between them.

Straight Bridge

This time you're going to sit with your legs straight in front of you, almost like an L-sit except you're not in the air. From here, lift your hips by contracting your hamstrings, glutes, and other posterior musculature. Drop your head back, press your chest up, and try to look behind you. You'll wind up looking like an upside-down plank.

Neck Bridge

This starts off in the same position as the beginner back bridge except your hands are placed on either side of your head, palms down and wrists bent back. From here, press yourself off your back and onto the top of your head. You might want to place a towel or other soft object between your head and the ground when starting out.

For an added challenge: Try taking your hands away and supporting your upper body with just your neck. This variation is sometimes called a "wrestler's bridge."

Full Back Bridge

Don't be in a rush to get to a full back bridge, as it can put a lot of pressure on your spine. If you aren't ready for it, you could be in for a world of hurt.

However, if you are ready to try it, start by coming into a neck bridge. Next, press your hands into the ground, dig in your heels, and push your chest forward. This last part is really important for those of us with tight shoulders, as pushing forward with the chest will facilitate a deeper stretch through the thoracic region.

Check out the video below for more:

[Watch video here](#)

Photo from the book [Pushing the Limits](#).

Strength & Conditioning - Al Kavadlo: Week 2, Day 2

<http://breakingmuscle.com/strength-conditioning/strength-conditioning-al-kavadlo-week-2-day-2>

This four-week program is designed by calisthenics expert and author [Al Kavadlo](#). Three workouts are posted each week and cover a total of eleven bodyweight exercise progressions and tutorials, including everything from pull

ups, to pistols, to the infamous human flag. If you're joining late in the game, feel free to jump right in!

Week 2, Day 2: The Clutch Flag

The human flag is one of my favorite bodyweight feats of strength. It's also the exercise that I get asked about more than any other. Unfortunately, most people who ask about the human flag aren't strong enough to actually begin practicing toward it.

The clutch flag is a less difficult variation that's still visually impressive and just as much fun to practice. Additionally, working on your clutch flag can help you get a feel for the proper body alignment needed to perform a full human flag (aka "press flag"). It can also help you build the strength you'll need to get there.

The clutch flag is less difficult than the press flag for a few reasons. First and foremost, as your arms are not in an overhead position during a clutch flag, the length of your body becomes substantially shorter than it would be in the full flag (plus your head and shoulders are on the other side of the pole). This change in body positioning gives you better leverage. Additionally, the clutch grip allows you to squeeze the pole with your entire torso, not just your hands. The clutch flag is still not easy, though!

Though the clutch flag and press flag are similar, they work your muscles a bit differently. The press flag heavily stresses the shoulders (particularly on the bottom arm), while the clutch flag puts more emphasis on the biceps. It's more of a pull than a push as far as the arms are concerned. It's also common for the skin on your biceps to be sensitive when learning this move, so be prepared for some chafing or bruising on the inner arms.

When you can do a clutch flag for 20 seconds or longer, you might be ready to start training for the full human flag. (Look for a lesson on that move later this month.)

Watch the video below for more:

[Watch video here](#)

For more information on the clutch flag, check out Al's demonstrations in [Convict Conditioning 2](#).

Strength & Conditioning - Al Kavadlo: Week 2, Day 3

<http://breakingmuscle.com/strength-conditioning/strength-conditioning-al-kavadlo-week-2-day-3>

This four-week program is designed by calisthenics expert and author [Al Kavadlo](#). Three workouts are posted each week and cover a total of twelve bodyweight exercise progressions and tutorials, including everything from pull ups, to pistols, to the infamous human flag. If you're joining late in the game, feel free to jump right in!

Week 2, Day 3: Lunges

Once you've gotten the hang of [squats](#), lunges are the next exercise you should bring into your leg routine. Lunges work your entire lower body and offer a unique stability challenge compared to traditional squats.

Lunges are typically performed by stepping forward, then lowering yourself down until your back knee is just above the ground. It's common to alternate legs, continuing forward with each step (often called a "walking lunge").

Lunges can also be done by stepping backwards ("back lunge"), sideways (you guessed it - "side lunge"), or any other way you can think to do them. A stationary lunge is sometimes called a "split squat."

When doing lunges, stay mindful of keeping your front foot totally flat and not letting the heel up (the heel of your back foot ought to be up, however). Also make sure to keep your posture and don't allow your front knee to cross

in front of your toes.

When lunges are no longer a challenge, start working on harder variations like jump lunges.

For more information, check out my new book, [Pushing The Limits! - Total Body Strength With No Equipment](#).

[Watch video here](#)

Strength & Conditioning - Al Kavadlo: Week 3, Day 1

<http://breakingmuscle.com/strength-conditioning/strength-conditioning-al-kavadlo-week-3-day-1>

This four-week program is designed by calisthenics expert and author [Al Kavadlo](#). Three workouts are posted each week and cover a total of twelve bodyweight exercise progressions and tutorials, including everything from pull ups, to pistols, to the infamous human flag. If you're joining late in the game, feel free to jump right in!

Week 3, Day 1: Guide to Handstand Push Ups

The overhead press is one of the most fundamental strength training techniques out there - and for good reason. Overhead pressing is a great way to build upper-body strength as well as a strong core. Barbells and kettlebells are great for pressing, but no matter how strong you are, handstand push ups are a unique challenge and must be treated as such. Get ready to flip the classic overhead press on its head - literally!

Pike Press



If you aren't strong enough to do a handstand push up yet, the pike press is a great way to ease in. Pike presses allow you to train the movement pattern without having to bear your entire body weight.

Rest your toes on a bench or step and get down in a push up position. From here, walk your hands back toward the bench while you pike your hips up in the air over your shoulders. You will wind up looking like an upside-down letter L, with your body bent in half from the waist. Try to keep your back straight by taking the stretch in your hamstrings. You can bend your knees a little if you need to in order to keep your hips up over your shoulders. Lower yourself down until the top of your head touches the ground and then push yourself back up - that's one rep.

Wall Assisted Handstand Push Up

Once you can do ten consecutive pike presses without too much trouble, you're ready to try a full handstand push up against a wall. Kick up into a handstand with your back slightly arched and your fingers spread out. Engage your core muscles and keep your body tight as you lower yourself down and press yourself up. Make sure you touch your head to the ground on every rep to ensure a full range of motion. You can also try touching your nose to the floor instead of the top of your head to allow yourself to go a bit lower.

Handstand Push-ups on Parallettes



If you want a bigger range of motion for your handstand press, you've got a couple options. You could use a set of parallettes or you could set up two benches (or other sturdy objects) alongside each other with enough room for your head to fit in between. Any method that allows you to drop your head below your hands will add a new challenge to your handstand push ups.

Freestanding Handstand Push-up

The freestanding handstand is a tricky move to get the hang of on its own, and adding a push up to it takes things to a whole other level!

The freestanding handstand push up requires tremendous strength, balance, and total body control, so before you

think about training for this move, I suggest getting to the point where you can do at least ten wall assisted handstand push ups and hold a freestanding handstand for a minimum of thirty seconds.

When performing handstand holds, I've often found it helpful to look in between my hands. With the freestanding handstand push up however, I've found it better to look a few inches in front of my hands. Since the balance changes throughout the range of motion, I recommend practicing static holds at the bottom and middle positions of the range of motion to help train for this feat.

[Watch video here](#)

For more on handstand push-ups, check out my book [Raising the Bar](#).

Strength & Conditioning - Al Kavadlo: Week 3, Day 2

<http://breakingmuscle.com/strength-conditioning/strength-conditioning-al-kavadlo-week-3-day-2>

This four-week program is designed by calisthenics expert and author [Al Kavadlo](#). Three workouts are posted each week and cover a total of twelve bodyweight exercise progressions and tutorials, including everything from pull ups, to pistols, to the infamous human flag. If you're joining late in the game, feel free to jump right in!

Week 3, Day 2: Pistol Squats

The pistol squat is one of my favorite bodyweight exercises. Pistols are challenging on many levels, requiring core strength, leg strength, balance, and flexibility. Once you've gotten very comfortable with standard [squats](#) and [lunges](#), you're ready to begin working toward the pistol.

Bench Pistol



Begin

by

bench with one foot flat on the ground and the other extended in front of you. Reach your arms forward and simultaneously press your foot into the ground while tightening your abs. Don't let your heel come off the ground. If you're strong enough, you should be able to lift yourself off the bench. Once you get to a standing position, try to lower yourself slowly and repeat. You will likely lose control during the lowering phase and wind up plopping down onto the bench at the bottom. That's fine for now. In time your control will improve to the point where you no longer need to sit on the bench.

Elevated Pistol



Stand

on

one foot hanging off the edge. Squat down so that the opposite leg drops below the level of the bench. Make sure you stick out your hips and butt, and lean forward a bit. If you are having a hard time balancing, hold onto something to guide you. A broom handle works well if you are doing these at home. If you have a training partner, have them assist you by either holding your hand or standing near you so you can grab them if you lose your balance. This is an exercise where I will literally hold my client's hand through the first time they try it!

Full Pistol

Get down into a deep squat with both feet flat on the ground. Try to reach one leg out in front of you while balancing on the other. You're now at the bottom position of a pistol squat. Get comfortable with your balance here; it will come easier to some than to others. Once you can balance in the bottom position, try to stand up. It's okay to use assistance until you can perform the move independently. With practice, you will build the necessary strength and stability to perform the pistol with confidence.

For more information on pistols squats, check out my new book, [Pushing The Limits!](#)

[Watch video here](#)

[Watch video here](#)

[Watch video here](#)

Strength & Conditioning - Al Kavadlo: Week 3, Day 3

<http://breakingmuscle.com/strength-conditioning/strength-conditioning-al-kavadlo-week-3-day-3>

This four-week program is designed by calisthenics expert and author [Al Kavadlo](#). Three workouts are posted each week and cover a total of twelve bodyweight exercise progressions and tutorials, including everything from pull ups, to pistols, to the infamous human flag. If you're joining late in the game, feel free to jump right in!

Week 3, Day 3: The Human Flag

The human flag is one of the greatest bodyweight challenges of all time. When someone can hold a full human flag, it always attracts the attention and admiration of onlookers! Lots of people are strong, but the human flag demonstrates a high level of total bodyweight mastery. Before you embark on this road, make sure you've perfected the [clutch flag](#) and can do lots of [pull-ups](#) and [handstand push-ups](#).

There are basically two different methods to performing a human flag. The one most people tend to picture involves a vertical pole, both hands grasping the pole with an overhand or mixed grip. This is the textbook human flag position.



The second approach is to perform the human flag between two parallel bars. Not the type of parallel bars that you would use for a dip, but rather bars that are stacked vertically in a parallel fashion. This allows you to put your hands into a neutral grip, with your palms facing each other (as seen in the photo).

The key to working toward a full flag is gradual progressing by practicing similar positions where you'll have better leverage. Part of what makes the full human flag so challenging is that you're using a relatively short lever (your arm) to hold up a very long object (your body). Since you can't really make your arms longer, you need to find ways to make your body shorter in order to make the flag more manageable.

Try doing a variation where your body is closer to being vertical than horizontal - almost like a crooked handstand (handstands, by the way, are a great way to supplement your human flag training). Besides being easier on your arms, this puts a lot less stress on the oblique, lower back, and abdominal muscles, allowing you to get a feel for having your body up in the air while you build up the strength to fully extend your legs horizontally.

Once you can get the vertical flag, you can work towards lowering your hips down with your legs still up. Then progress to putting out one leg, and over time both legs. Practicing with your knees bent also works well as a

precursory way of working up to the full human flag. Remember, any modification that gives you better leverage is a good way to work towards this skill. The important thing is consistent practice.

Watch the video below for more:

[Watch video here](#)

For more information on the human flag, check out Al's demonstrations in [Convict Conditioning 2](#).

Strength & Conditioning: Al Kavadlo, Week 4, Day 1

<http://breakingmuscle.com/strength-conditioning/strength-conditioning-al-kavadlo-week-4-day-1>

This four-week program is designed by calisthenics expert and author [Al Kavadlo](#). Three workouts are posted each week and cover a total of twelve bodyweight exercise progressions and tutorials, including everything from pull ups, to pistols, to the infamous human flag. If you're joining late in the game, feel free to jump right in!

Week 4, Day 1: The Bar Muscle-up



The bar muscle-up has become a very popular exercise in recent years - and for good reason. It is truly the king of bodyweight exercises, bar none. No single bodyweight exercise works your entire upper body as thoroughly as the muscle-up. Though some people may see the muscle-up as just a pull-up followed by a dip, anyone who's done a muscle-up can tell you there is a lot more involved!

As the bar muscle-up is an advanced exercise, you'll need to be able to comfortably perform lots of pull-ups and dips as a prerequisite, but there is no set rule for how many reps are needed.

Some people who can only manage six or seven pull-ups can muster up a muscle-up, others who can bang out

twenty dead hang pull-ups still continually fail at getting through the sticking point; the muscle-up is a unique challenge and must be treated as such. However, the more pull-ups and dips you can do on a straight bar, the better your chances will be of achieving the muscle-up. It also helps to practice doing pull-ups with an exaggerated range of motion. Instead of stopping when the bar is below your chin, pull that sucker all the way down past your chest. Get as far over the bar as you can!

Just like someone working on getting their first pull-up, it can be helpful to practice negatives and use manual assistance from a training partner while learning to do a muscle-up. If you are going to spot someone, I suggest giving a boost by holding him or her under one or both heels, as if you were helping someone over a fence.

It's also worthwhile to practice a modified muscle-up on a bar that is about chest height so you can use your legs for assistance. (If you can't find a low bar, bring a step or a bench up to a high bar.) This will let you get a feel for the crucial transition from being under the bar to getting on top without having to overcome your full bodyweight. With practice, you'll learn to rely on your legs less and do most of the work with your upper body.

One more noteworthy technique for performing a muscle-up is the "false grip." This entails bending the wrists up over the bar so that your palms are facing the ground as you begin the pulling phase. For some, the false grip can make the transition from pulling to pushing simpler as you don't need to worry about rolling your hands over the bar.

When you are learning to do a muscle-up, you'll likely need to use your hips and legs to generate additional power to get your chest beyond the bar. Do whatever it takes to get yourself up and over – nobody's first muscle-up looks perfectly clean.

As you get stronger and more comfortable with the movement pattern, you can begin to work towards a controlled, straight-legged muscle-up, as well as other types of advanced muscle-ups.

Just don't get cocky and expect to be looking for ways to make muscle-ups harder right away. Getting just one good, clean rep may be a challenge for many.

Most importantly, be patient. It may take a while until you get your first one. The longer you work at it, the more fulfilling it will be when it finally happens!

For more information about muscle-ups, pick up a copy of my book, [Raising The Bar: The Definitive Guide To Pull-up Bar Calisthenics](#).

[Watch video here](#)

Strength & Conditioning: Al Kavadlo, Week 4, Day 2

<http://breakingmuscle.com/strength-conditioning/strength-conditioning-al-kavadlo-week-4-day-2>

This four-week program is designed by calisthenics expert and author [Al Kavadlo](#). Three workouts are posted each week and cover a total of twelve bodyweight exercise progressions and tutorials, including everything from pull ups, to pistols, to the infamous human flag. If you're joining late in the game, feel free to jump right in!

Week 4, Day 2 - The One Arm Pull-up

Several years ago, a client of mine asked me if I'd ever seen anyone do a one arm pull-up. I stood for a moment in silent contemplation, then lifted one hand, wrapped it around my opposite wrist and said, "Ya mean like this?"

"No," he said, "without the other hand assisting at all."

I told him I hadn't, adding that I didn't think such a thing was even possible – boy, was I wrong! I'll never forget the first time I saw someone do a one arm pull-up. It was a game-changer and now I'm a believer!

Pull-Up or Chin-Up?



If you want to get technical about it, a pull-up is done with a pronated (overhand) grip, while a chin-up implies a supinated (underhand) grip. A lot of people find that the pull-up is a more difficult exercise - this tends to be especially true for beginners.

When you do a one arm pull-up, however, there's a certain amount of unavoidable rotation. This is why many of the people who can perform this feat will wind up bringing the bar towards the shoulder opposite their pulling arm.

For me, the disparity between overhand and underhand grips seems negligible, though I've done so many reps of [different kinds of pull-ups](#) over years that I may have just evened it out. Besides, when someone is strong enough to pull their chin over the bar with just one arm, they've earned my respect; bellyaching over their hand position seems pointless.

Training for a One Arm Pull-Up

Only once you can perform *at least* ten consecutive dead hang pull-ups should you even consider training for this feat. Tendinitis is a bitch, so back off if you start to get pain in or around your elbows.

The following methods have helped me on my quest for the one arm pull-up, but keep in mind that these are not the only ways to train towards this feat. There are many paths that lead to the same destination - feel free to be creative!

One Arm Flex Hangs



Just like learning to do a standard pull-up, performing a flex hang (holding your body at the top of a pull-up position) with one arm is the first step towards doing a one arm pull-up. Pull yourself up using both arms, then try to stay up while you take one hand away. Squeeze your whole body tight while keeping your legs tucked in close when you're starting out. With practice, eventually you be able to try it with your legs extended.

One Arm Negatives

The idea here is to keep your body tight and controlled while slowly lowering yourself down from a one arm flex hang. Be prepared that the first time you try to do a one arm negative you will drop very quickly. When starting out, don't even think of it as a negative, think of it as just trying to keep yourself up. Gravity takes care of the rest. Eventually, try working up to the point where you can make a one arm negative last for ten seconds or longer.

Archer Pull-Ups



Archer pull-ups are a great exercise regardless of if you want to work towards a one arm pull-up or not. When performing the archer pull-up as practice for the one arm pull-up, try to do as much of the work as possible with the arm closer to you. Think of your extended arm simply as a means of giving your pulling arm assistance, so use it as little as possible - eventually you won't need it at all. (You can also spot yourself with your secondary arm by draping a towel over the bar and holding it or grabbing the pull-up bar frame).

The One Arm Australian Pull-Up



This is a nice precursor to the OAP for the same reason that Australian pull-ups can be a gateway to pull-ups - your feet are on the ground! When attempting a one arm Australian pull-up, concentrate on engaging your abs and your back muscles - don't just focus on using your bicep strength. Remember that when you do a one arm Australian, it's natural for your body to roll a little bit in the direction of your pulling arm.

Hard Core

Just like a one arm push-up or a pistol squat, core strength plays a huge role in one arm pull-ups and chin-ups. Think about keeping your entire body tight and controlled during your one arm pull-up training. If your core is weak, you may need to do some remedial ab exercises.

Pull-Up or Shut Up

Talk is cheap. The one arm pull-up is an elusive move that demands consistency and dedication. You're never going to get one without lots of patience and practice. The question you need to ask yourself is this: *How bad do you want it?*

Check out my book, [Raising The Bar: The Definitive Guide to Pull-up Bar Calisthenics](#) and watch the video below for more:

[Watch video here](#)

Strength & Conditioning: Al Kavadlo, Week 4, Day 3

<http://breakingmuscle.com/strength-conditioning/strength-conditioning-al-kavadlo-week-4-day-3>

This four-week program is designed by calisthenics expert and author [Al Kavadlo](#). Three workouts are posted each

week and cover a total of twelve bodyweight exercise progressions and tutorials, including everything from pull ups, to pistols, to the infamous human flag. If you're joining late in the game, feel free to jump right in!

Week 4, Day 3: The One Arm Push-up

Single limb exercises are a great way to add a challenge to your calisthenics regimen. Along with the pistol squat and the one arm pull-up, the one arm push-up rounds out the trifecta of isolateral bodyweight exercises.

While a certain amount of asymmetry might be unavoidable (a right-handed person is almost always going to be right dominant), training movements like the one arm push-up can go a long way towards building a strong, balanced body.

Triangle Tango

It's important to note that the form of a one arm push-up is a bit different than the standard two arm variation. Your legs will likely need to be a bit wider than a regular push-up position and your hand should be directly under your body, rather than off to the side. The three points of contact with the ground (foot, foot, hand) will make a triangular formation. Very strong individuals may be able to keep their feet a bit closer together.

Incline One Arm Push-up

Like any other difficult bodyweight exercise, a great way to work towards a full one arm push-up is to practice using a position where you will have better leverage, thus making the movement a bit easier. The best way to do this with the one arm push-up is by practicing on an inclined surface, such as a rail or bench.

Self-Assisted One Arm Push-up



Using your secondary arm to spot your primary pushing arm is another tried and true method for perfecting the one arm push-up. This can be done by resting your opposite arm on a brick, medicine ball, or other nearby, slightly elevated object.

L7 Diamond Push-up

Another type of self-assisted one arm push-up is what I call the “L7?push-up. This variation is similar to a diamond push-up, except one arm will push off the back of the hand instead of the palm (when done with the right hand turned over, your fingers will look like the letter “L” and the number “7?”). Since having a lot of weight on the backs of the hands can be uncomfortable, this variation forces you to push more with the opposite side.

Negative One Arm Push-up

Slow, controlled negatives are another excellent technique for building to a full one arm push-up. With your feet spread apart, perform a diamond push-up, then take one hand off the floor and lower your chest to the ground as slowly as possible. Bring the second hand back in when you reach the bottom, perform another diamond push-up, then do a negative on the other side.

Pistol Position One Arm Push-up



This move isn't much easier than a standard one arm push-up, but if you're real close it could help put you over the top. Get into the bottom position of a pistol squat, and then place the hand opposite your squatting leg flat on the ground. Lean over towards that hand, bringing your nose right to the floor and then press yourself back up. For a full body workout, try doing a pistol squat in between each push-up.

Check out my book, [Pushing The Limits!](#) for more info on one arm push-ups.

[Watch video here](#)