

6 Techniques That Will Improve Your Grip Strength



By Meghan Callaway

When it comes to excelling at pull-ups, deadlifts, and many other exercises, grip strength is a key player, yet is overlooked by many. Having a strong and sturdy grip plays an integral role in your ability to perform the exercise, and the results you achieve. For example, if you are not able to support your body from a hanging position during a pull-up or chin-up, even if you possess awesome levels of upper body strength and pull-up specific technique, your results will suffer. If your grip strength is weak, your ability to deadlift safely and effectively will be significantly compromised. The same can even be said for exercises that involve holding onto dumbbells, kettlebells, or a barbell.

One mistake that plagues many people is that they think about gripping purely with the “grip muscles.” What if I told you that gripping is a full body movement, and must be treated as such. In short, grip strength matters, and I am going to provide you with some different strategies that will help you turn this weak link into a great asset.

Without further ado, here are 6 of my favorite techniques for improving grip strength. I am providing you with many different exercise options, and some of these exercises are for beginners, others for intermediates, and some for elites. Enjoy.

#1) Loaded Carries

I hate to throw around the term functional as it's often totally misused as a “catchy” marketing gimmick, but very few exercises are more functional than loaded carries. Most people carry grocery bags, suitcases, and other heavy objects on a daily basis. Guess what, these are loaded carries. Not only do loaded carries develop grip strength, they also improve lumbo-pelvic stability, shoulder and scapular stability (both remain in a fixed position for the duration of the carry), and full body strength. Loaded carries are pretty straightforward, and are suitable for people of most fitness levels. There are many loaded carry variations that can be performed, and that vary in difficulty. I will share several of my favorite examples in this eBook.

#2) Plate Pinches

Plate pinches are a fantastic way to improve your grip strength, and there are some different variations you can perform. With plate pinches, you are simply holding onto one or more weight plates, and are essentially “pinching” them. That being said, this is a full body movement and your entire body must be working as a synchronized unit.

#3) Fat Gripz

Fat Gripz are a very basic, and relatively inexpensive tool that will help you improve your grip strength. You can add Fat Gripz to a pull-up bar and can perform pull-up regressions or actual pull-ups, and they can be added to many exercises that are performed with dumbbells, barbells, and on occasion, kettlebells.



[Get fat gripz on Amazon.ca](#)

[Get Fat Gripz on Amazon.com](#)

#4) Bottoms-Up Kettlebell Presses And Holds

Bottoms-up kettlebell variations are a great way to improve grip strength. In addition to improving grip strength, they are a great way for you to develop shoulder and scapular controlled mobility, and can be a great option for people who are dealing with shoulder issues. The bottoms-up technique can be done in the form of a bilateral or unilateral overhead press, bench or floor press, loaded carry, and even during some lower body exercises. In short, there are plenty of options for you to play around with.

#5) Towels

Performing all of the different pull-up regressions I've included in [The Ultimate Pull-Up Program](#), or even performing regular pull-ups while gripping onto towels in place of the bar, is a great way to improve your grip strength. The thicker the towel, the more challenging it will be. In addition to improving grip strength, performing the exercises I listed will also improve

your upper body strength, shoulder and scapular controlled mobility, lumbo-pelvic stability, and pull-up specific technique.

#6) Rope Climb Variations

Rope climbs are one of my favorite “play” exercises, and are tremendous for improving grip strength. In addition to improving grip strength, performing rope climb variations will also improve your upper body strength, shoulder and scapular controlled mobility, lumbo-pelvic stability, and to some extent, pull-up specific technique.

#1) Loaded Carries

Loaded Carries With 2 Dumbbells

This loaded carry variation develops grip strength, lumbo-pelvic stability, shoulder and scapular stability (your shoulders and scapulae are in a fixed position), upper and lower body strength, and has a tremendous carryover to the pull-up, and many other exercises.

Coaching Notes:

- Get a pair of heavy dumbbells, or kettlebells. Use a weight that will allow you to perform the exercise with proper form.
- You can pick the weights up from a box or bench. If you are starting from the floor, be sure to pick up the weights properly.
- Before you go, take a deep breath in through your nose (360 degrees of air



around the spine), brace your core (6-8), tuck your ribs towards your hips (close the space in your midsection), and squeeze your glutes. This will stabilize your pelvis and spine.

- Keep your arms rigid, and drive them into your sides. Pretend that you are trying to crush something in your armpits. All of the above will help stabilize your upper body and will keep your arms from swinging.
- While maintaining this full body position, walk 25-50 meters. If you are required to turn around, this will be the most challenging component of the exercise.
- For the duration of the exercise, your head, torso, and hips should be in a stacked position, and your hips should remain level. Do not allow your lower back to hyperextend, or ribcage to flare, and do not allow your body to lean to one side. This is extremely common.
- For the duration of the exercise, press evenly through all of your toes on the foot that is striding, and maintain a tripod foot on the foot that is planted. This will help stabilize your feet.
- For the duration of the exercise, keep taking deep breaths in through your nose (360 degrees of air around the spine) and slowly exhale through your teeth.

Regression:

Make this exercise easier by using lighter weights or by walking a shorter distance.

Progression:

Make this exercise more challenging by using heavier weights, or by walking a greater distance.

Watch Video:

Prescription: 3-5 sets of a 25-50-meter carry. Do a warm-up set using 50% of your working weight.

Loaded Carry With 1 Dumbbell

This loaded carry variation develops grip strength, lumbo-pelvic stability, shoulder and scapular stability (your shoulders and scapulae are in a fixed position), upper and lower body strength, and has a tremendous carryover to the pull-up, and many other exercises.

The unilateral nature of the exercise really trains the body to resist the lateral flexion of the spine.

Coaching Cues:

- Get a heavy dumbbell, kettlebell, or barbell. Use a weight that will allow you to perform the exercise with proper form.
- You can pick the weight up from a box or bench. If you are starting from the floor, be sure to pick up the weight properly.
- Before you go, take a deep breath in through your nose (360 degrees of air around the spine), brace your core (6-8), tuck your ribs towards your hips (close the space in your midsection), and squeeze your glutes. This will stabilize your pelvis and spine.
- Keep your arm rigid, and drive it into your side. Pretend that you are trying to crush something in your armpit. All of the above will help stabilize your upper body and will keep your arm from swinging.
- While maintaining this full body position, walk 25-50 meters. If you are required to turn around, this will be the most challenging component of the exercise.
- For the duration of the exercise, your head, torso, and hips should be in a



stacked position, and your hips should remain level. Do not allow your lower back to hyperextend, ribcage to flare, or your body to lean to the side (will usually be on the side that the dumbbell is being held).

- For the duration of the exercise, keep taking deep breaths into your belly through your nose (360 degrees of air around the spine) and slowly exhale through your teeth.

Regression:

Make this exercise easier by using less resistance or by walking a shorter distance.

Progression:

Make this exercise more challenging by using more resistance, or by walking a greater distance.

Watch Video:

Prescription: 3-5 sets of a 25-50-meter carry per side. Do a warm-up set using 50% of your working weight.

Loaded Carries With Trap Bar

This loaded carry variation develops grip strength, lumbo-pelvic stability, shoulder and scapular stability (your shoulders and scapulae are in a fixed position), upper and lower body strength, and has a tremendous carryover to the pull-up, and many other exercises.

With trap bar carries, you will likely be able to use significantly more weight than during most other loaded carry variations.



Coaching Notes:

- Set up a trap/hex bar. Use a weight that will allow you to perform the exercise with proper form. This includes picking up the weight from the ground. In short, you need to deadlift the weight into the starting position.
- If you lack the ability/mobility/body structure to start safely from the ground, set the trap bar/weights up on bumper plates or boxes. No matter where you are starting from, be sure to pick up the weight properly.
- Before you go, take a deep breath in through your nose (360 degrees of air around the spine), brace your core (7-9), tuck your ribs towards your hips (close the space in your midsection), and squeeze your glutes. This will stabilize your pelvis and spine. You want to be stable before you initiate your first step.
- Keep your arms rigid, and drive them into your sides. Pretend that you are trying to crush something in your armpits. All of the above will help stabilize your upper body and will keep your arms from swinging.
- While maintaining this full body position, walk 25-50 meters. If you are required to turn around, this will be the most challenging component of the exercise.
- For the duration of the exercise, your head, torso, and hips should be in a stacked position, and your hips should remain level. Do not allow your lower back to hyperextend, or ribcage to flare, and do not allow your body to lean to the side.
- For the duration of the exercise, press evenly through all of your toes on the foot that is striding, and maintain a tripod foot on the foot that is planted. This will help stabilize your feet.
- For the duration of the exercise, keep taking deep breaths in through your nose (360 degrees of air around the spine) and slowly exhale through your teeth.

Regression:

Make this exercise easier by using less resistance or by walking a shorter

distance.

Progression:

Make this exercise more challenging by using more resistance, or by walking a greater distance.

Watch Video:

Prescription: 3-5 sets of a 25-50-meter carry. Do a warm-up set using 50% of your working weight.

Bonus Loaded Carry:

If you REALLY want to step it up, here is an extremely advanced loaded carry variation I will occasionally perform. As I said, it is extremely advanced, so if you choose to perform this exercise, proceed with caution.

Overhead Barbell Loaded Carries With Hanging Kettlebells

This loaded carry variation develops grip strength, lumbo-pelvic stability, shoulder and scapular stability (your shoulders and scapulae are in a fixed position), upper and lower body strength, and has a tremendous carryover to the pull-up and many other exercises. The unstable nature of the hanging kettlebells makes this exercise more anti-rotational, anti-lateral flexion, and anti-extension in nature.

Even if you possess enough strength and lumbo-pelvic stability, if you lack the mobility to bring your arms overhead, until you acquire the requisite level of mobility to perform this variation safely and effectively, stick to trap bar or dumbbell loaded carries.



Coaching Cues:

- Attach a band to 2 separate kettlebells, hanging the band from either end of the barbell. Use a weight that will allow you to perform the exercise with proper form. Set up the barbell so it is in a squat rack and at an overhead level, so you won't need to press the barbell into the starting position; or you can press the barbell into the starting position. If you are starting from the ground, make sure that you use solid form as you get the barbell into the starting position.
- Before you go, take a deep breath in through your nose (360 degrees of air around the spine), brace your core (7-9), tuck your ribs towards your hips (close the space in your midsection), and squeeze your glutes. This will stabilize your pelvis and spine.
- Now press the barbell so it is overhead and your arms are in a vertical position. Your elbows should be extended (not hyperextended). Press the barbell overhead by extending your elbows, not by excessively shrugging your shoulders, hyperextending your lower back and flaring your ribcage.
- Draw your shoulder blades together and down (bring each shoulder blade in towards your spine and down towards the opposite hip). This will help stabilize your upper body, and will keep your arms from swinging.
- While maintaining this full body position, walk 25-50m, turn around, and return to the starting position. The turnaround will be the most challenging component of the exercise. If space permits, you have the option of walking in a longer, straighter line and not turning around.
- For the duration of the exercise, your head, torso, and hips should be in a stacked position, your pelvis level, and your arms in an extended position. Do not allow your lower back to hyperextend, or ribcage to flare.
- For the duration of the exercise, keep taking deep breaths into your belly through your nose (360 degrees of air around the spine), slowly exhaling through your teeth.

Regression:

Make this exercise easier by using less resistance (barbell and/or kettlebells), or

by walking a shorter distance. You may also decrease the length of the hanging bands, as this will make the kettlebells more stable.

Progression:

Make this exercise more challenging by using more resistance (barbell and/or kettlebells), by walking a greater distance, or by increasing the length of the hanging bands.

Watch Video:

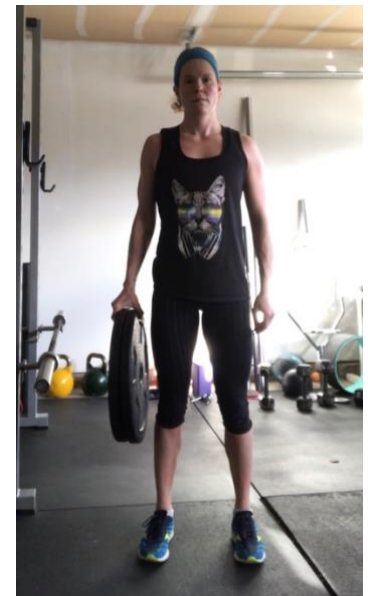
Prescription: 3-5 sets of a 25-50-meter carry. Do a warm-up set using 50% of your working weight.

#2) Plate Pinches

Basic Plate Pinches

This exercise develops grip strength, and shoulder and scapular stability (your shoulders and scapulae are in a fixed position). If more weight is being used, this exercise also serves as an anti-lateral flexion core stability exercise as your muscles must work to prevent the lateral flexion of your spine.

As per Stu McGill's awesome advice in his latest book, *The Gift Of Injury*, you must focus on engaging all of the muscles in your body, and with intent. Don't simply focus on the "grip muscles." So even with plate pinches, your entire body must be working as a synchronized unit, and gripping is actually a full body movement.



Coaching Cues:

- Get into an athletic stance. Your feet should be hip to shoulder width apart, and you should have a slight bend in your knees.
- Form a tripod base by keeping the weight on the mid to back of your feet, and keeping your toes down, particularly your big and baby toes. These parts of your feet should remain in contact with the floor for the duration of the exercise. Pretend that you are suctioning or screwing your feet to the ground.
- Grab onto one or more weight plates. Obviously the thicker the plates, and the more resistance you are using, the more challenging the exercise will be.
- Brace your core (5-6), tuck your ribs towards your hips (close the space in your midsection), and squeeze your glutes. This will stabilize your pelvis and spine.
- Now “pinch” this weight for the duration of the set.
- For the duration of the exercise, your head, torso and hips should remain in a stacked position. Do not allow your lower back to hyperextend, ribcage to flare, torso or hips to rotate, or body to lean to one side (will usually be on the side that the resistance is being held).
- For the duration of the exercise, maintain regular breathing.

Regression:

Make this exercise easier by using less resistance.

Progression:

Make this exercise more challenging by using more resistance.

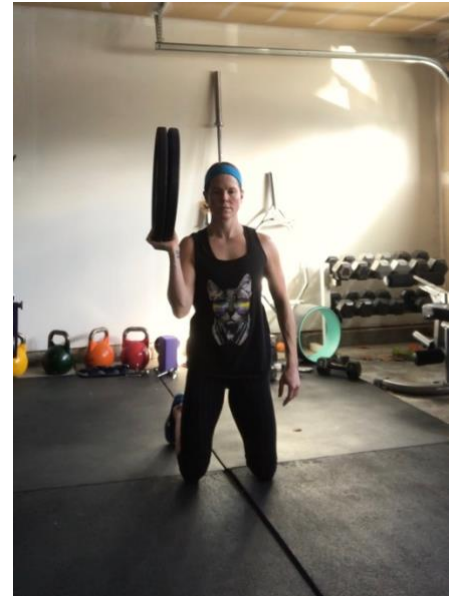
[Watch Video:](#)

Prescription: 3 sets of a 10-30 second hold per side.

Tall Kneeling Bottoms-Up Plate Pinches

This exercise develops grip strength, and shoulder and scapular stability (your shoulders and scapulae are in a fixed position). If more weight is being used, this exercise also serves as an anti-lateral flexion core stability exercise as your muscles must work to prevent the lateral flexion of your spine.

As per Stu McGill's awesome advice in his latest book, *The Gift Of Injury*, you must focus on engaging all of the muscles in your body, and with intent. Don't simply focus on the "grip muscles." So even with plate pinches, your entire body must be working as a synchronized unit, and gripping is actually a full body movement.



Coaching Cues:

- Get into a tall kneeling stance. Your knees should be hip to shoulder width apart.
- Grab onto one or more weight plates. Obviously the thicker the plates, and the more resistance you are using, the more challenging the exercise will be.
- Brace your core (5-6), tuck your ribs towards your hips (close the space in your midsection), and squeeze your glutes. This will stabilize your pelvis and spine.
- Now position the plates so they are in a bottoms-up position, and "pinch" this weight for the duration of the set. You can use your non-working hand to get the weights into the correct starting position.
- For the duration of the exercise, your head, torso and hips should remain in a stacked position. Do not allow your lower back to hyperextend, ribcage to flare, torso or hips to rotate, or body to lean to one side (will usually be on the side that the resistance is being held).

- For the duration of the exercise, maintain regular breathing.

Regression:

Make this exercise easier by using less resistance, or by performing regular plate pinches.

Progression:

Make this exercise more challenging by using more resistance.

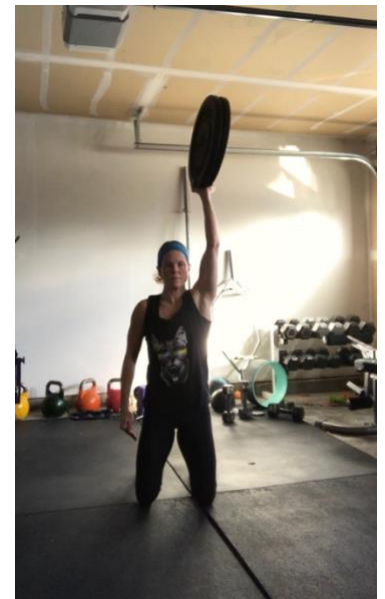
Watch Video:

Prescription: 3 sets of a 10-30 second hold per side.

Tall Kneeling Bottoms-Up Overhead Pinches

This exercise develops grip strength, and shoulder and scapular stability (your shoulders and scapulae are in a fixed position). If more weight is being used, this exercise also serves as an anti-lateral flexion core stability exercise as your muscles must work to prevent the lateral flexion of your spine. This is the most advanced plate pinch exercise I've included.

As per Stu McGill's awesome advice in his latest book, *The Gift Of Injury*, you must focus on engaging all of the muscles in your body, and with intent. Don't simply focus on the "grip muscles." So even with plate pinches, your entire body must be working as a synchronized unit, and gripping is actually a full body movement.



Coaching Cues:

- Get into a tall kneeling stance. Your knees should be hip to shoulder width apart.
- Grab onto one or more weight plates. Obviously the thicker the plates, and the more resistance you are using the more challenging the exercise will

be.

- Brace your core (5-6), tuck your ribs towards your hips (close the space in your midsection), and squeeze your glutes. This will stabilize your pelvis and spine.
- Now position the plates so they are in a bottoms-up position, and “pinch” this weight for the duration of the set. You can use your non-working hand to get the weights into the correct starting position.
- Draw your shoulder blade together and down (bring each shoulder blade in towards your spine and down towards the opposite hip). This will help stabilize your upper body,
- For the duration of the exercise, your head, torso and hips should remain in a stacked position. Do not allow your lower back to hyperextend, ribcage to flare, torso or hips to rotate, or body to lean to one side (will usually be on the side that the resistance is being held).
- For the duration of the exercise, maintain regular breathing.

Regression:

Make this exercise easier by using less resistance, or by performing regular plate pinches.

Progression:

Make this exercise more challenging by using more resistance.

Watch Video:

Prescription: 3 sets of a 10-30 second hold per side.

#3) Fat Gripz

Pull-Ups (Or Regressions) + Fat Gripz

Using Fat Gripz to perform pull-ups, and all pull-up regressions, is a great way to develop grip strength. Even though you are using a fatter grip, if you are performing this exercise correctly, the muscles in your mid and upper back, not your arms, should be doing the majority of the work. Pull-ups and pull-up regressions also develop pull-up specific technique, upper body strength, shoulder and scapular controlled mobility, and lumbo-pelvic stability.



Coaching Tips:

- Place the Fat Gripz on the bar so they are the same width as your preferred pull-up grip.
- Set your grip so your palms are facing away from you (pronated), and are slightly greater than shoulder width apart (or your preferred width). You may also use a neutral grip, where your palms are facing one another.
- Set your body so it is in a relatively straight line from your head to feet (or adopt a slight hollow body position).
- Take a deep breath in through your nose (360 degrees of air around your spine), brace your core (4-5), tuck your ribs towards your hips (close the space in your midsection), squeeze your glutes, straighten your knees, contract your quads and hamstrings, and dorsiflex your feet (you may cross one foot over the other). This will stabilize your pelvis, spine, and legs, and will prevent you from swinging ahead of the bar like a pendulum.
- Initiate the movement by using the muscles in your mid and upper back and drawing your shoulder blades in towards your spine and down towards the opposite hip, and driving your elbows down towards the floor so you are in the top position of the pull-up. Do not lead the movement with your arms, and do not allow your elbows to flare. They should remain at approximately

a 45 degree angle with your torso, similar to the bottom position of an overhead press.

- Make sure that your chin passes the bar, but do not look up and reach with your chin.
- Lower yourself to the starting position with control. During the lowering phase of the exercise, your shoulder blades should perform the reverse movements as they did during the ascending phase.
- In the bottom position, your elbows should be close to fully extended, but not hyperextended.
- For the duration of the exercise, your head, torso, and hips should remain in a stacked position. Do not allow your lower back to hyperextend or ribcage to flare.
- Before you initiate the next rep, make sure that you re-establish the proper full body positioning and requisite levels of tension and stability. Never disengage your muscles at any point.
- As for your breathing, exhale just after you have initiated the pull and have drawn your shoulder blades together and down; you may inhale and “reset” as you are descending, or do a full reset when you are in the bottom position.

Regression:

Make this exercise easier by performing one rep at a time and resting on the ground between reps (I actually recommend this strategy for most people who are starting out), or by performing the pull-up regressions I’ve included in [*The Ultimate Pull-Up Program*](#).

Progression:

Make this exercise more challenging by performing negative reps and increasing the length of time you take to lower yourself to the ground, or by performing more reps in a row without resting (but only if you are able to maintain proper form).

Watch Video:

Prescription: 3 sets of as many reps as you can. I often recommend starting out by performing a single rep (or several reps if you are capable of performing many), and resting on the ground between one/several reps as you want to maximize your form on 100% of your reps.

If you are not able to perform pull-ups, you can do any pull-up regression of your choice. This might include concentric hangs, basic hangs, scapula pull-ups, or eccentric only pull-ups.

Single Arm Bottoms-Up Kettlebell Overhead Presses + Fat Gripz

This exercise develops grip strength, shoulder and scapular controlled mobility, and lumbo-pelvic stability.

Coaching Cues:

- Get into an athletic stance. Your feet should be hip to shoulder width apart, and you should have a slight bend in your knees.
- Form a tripod base by keeping the weight on the mid to back of your feet, and keeping your toes down, particularly your big and baby toes. These parts of your feet should remain in contact with the floor for the duration of the exercise. Pretend that you are suctioning or screwing your feet to the ground.
- Grab onto a single kettlebell, and put the fat gripz on the horns.
- Before each rep, take a deep breath in through your nose (360 degrees of air around the spine), brace your core (5-6), tuck your ribs towards your hips (close the space in your midsection), and squeeze your glutes. This will stabilize your pelvis and spine.
- Now extend your elbow and press the kettlebell overhead. When you



extend your arm, do so by actually engaging your shoulder and extending your elbow, not by excessively shrugging your shoulder, hyperextending your back, flaring your ribcage, and leaning to the side.

- Lower the weight with control. Pretend that you are “rowing” it down. When you are rowing the weight down, draw your shoulder blade in towards your spine and down towards your opposite hip.
- For the duration of the exercise, your head, torso and hips should remain in a stacked position. Do not allow your lower back to hyperextend, ribcage to flare, torso or hips to rotate, or body to lean to the side.
- As for your breathing, exhale after you have initiated the press and the kettlebell is traveling away from your body. Inhale and reset as the kettlebell is returning towards your body, or pause in the starting position, and inhale/reset there before the next rep.

Regression:

Make this exercise easier by using less resistance, or by using a dumbbell in place of the kettlebell.

Progression:

Make this exercise more challenging by using more resistance, or by performing negative reps and taking 3-5 seconds to “row” the kettlebell back down to the starting position.

Watch Video:

Prescription: 3 sets of 8-12 reps per arm. Do a warm-up set using 50% of your working weight.

#4) Bottoms-Up Kettlebell Variations

Single Arm Bottoms-Up Kettlebell Floor Presses

This exercise develops grip strength, upper body strength, shoulder and scapular controlled mobility, and lumbo-pelvic stability.

Single arm bottoms-up floor presses are also a terrific core stability exercise as your muscles must work to prevent your spine from rotating and hyperextending.



Coaching Cues:

- Lie on your back on a mat, and bend your knees. Place your feet so they are about hip to shoulder width apart, and so your shins in a relatively vertical position.
- Grab onto a kettlebell by the horns.
- Before each rep, take a deep breath in through your nose (360 degrees of air around the spine), brace your core (6-8), tuck your ribs towards your hips (close the space in your midsection), and squeeze your glutes. This will stabilize your pelvis and spine.
- Now extend your elbow and press the kettlebell in a vertical path over your armpit/chest.
- Lower the weight with control. Pretend that you are “rowing” it down. When you are rowing the weight down, draw your shoulder blade in towards your spine and down towards the opposite hip. In the bottom position, your elbow should remain at approximately a 45 degree angle with your torso.
- You can either stop right before your upper arm touches the floor, or you

can touch your upper arm to the floor at the end of each rep.

- As for the non-working arm, I like to keep it in an extended position as this prevents you from “cheating” and using your non-working arm (in place of all of your core muscles) to stabilize your pelvis and spine, and anchor your body to the floor.
- For the duration of the exercise, your head, torso and hips should remain in a stacked position. Do not allow your lower back to hyperextend, ribcage to flare, or your torso or hips to rotate.
- As for your breathing, exhale after you have initiated the press and the kettlebell is traveling away from your body. Inhale and reset as the kettlebell is returning towards your body, or pause in the starting position, and inhale/reset there before the next rep.

Regression:

Make this exercise easier by using less resistance, or by touching your upper arm to the floor between reps.

Progression:

Make this exercise more challenging by using more resistance, or by performing negative reps and taking 3-5 seconds to “row” the kettlebell back down to the starting position.

Watch Video:

Prescription: 3-4 sets of 8-12 reps per side. Do a warm-up set using 50% of your working weight.

Half Kneeling Single Arm Bottoms-Up Overhead Presses

This exercise develops grip strength, upper body strength, shoulder and scapular controlled mobility, and lumbo-pelvic stability.

Coaching Cues:

- Get into a half kneeling stance. Have a very slight forward lean in your torso.
- Grab onto a kettlebell, and hold it by the horns.
- Before each rep, take a deep breath in through your nose (360 degrees of air around the spine), brace your core (5-6), tuck your ribs towards your hips (close the space in your midsection), and squeeze your glutes. This will stabilize your pelvis and spine.
- Now extend your elbow and press the kettlebell overhead. When you extend your arm, do so by engaging your shoulder and extending your elbow, not by shrugging your shoulder, hyperextending your back, flaring your ribcage, or leaning to the side.
- Lower the weight with control. Pretend that you are “rowing” it down. When you are rowing the weight down, draw your shoulder blade in towards your spine and down towards the opposite hip. In the bottom position, your elbow should remain at approximately a 45 degree angle with your torso.
- For the duration of the exercise, your head, torso and hips should remain in a stacked position. Do not allow your lower back to hyperextend, ribcage to flare, torso or hips to rotate, or body to lean to the side.
- As for your breathing, exhale after you have initiated the press and the kettlebell is traveling away from your body. Inhale and reset as the kettlebell is returning towards your body, or pause in the starting position, and inhale/reset there before the next rep.
- Perform the next set with your opposite leg in the forward position.



Regression:

Make this exercise easier by using less resistance, or by using a dumbbell in place of the kettlebell.

Progression:

Make this exercise more challenging by using more resistance, or performing negative reps and taking 3-5 seconds to “row” the kettlebell back down to the starting position.

Watch Video:

Prescription: 3-4 sets of 8-12 reps. Do a warm-up set using 50% of your working weight.

Negative Rear Foot Elevated Split Squats + Single Arm Bottoms Up Kettlebell Hold

This exercise develops grip strength, shoulder and scapular stability (your shoulders and scapulae are in a fixed position), lumbo-pelvic stability, and lower body strength.

Coaching Tips:

- Get into a split squat position, elevating your back foot on a bench or box. Bend both of your knees to approximately 90 degrees (if it feels more comfortable, your back leg may be slightly more extended), and keep most of your weight on your front leg/foot. Keep your pelvis in a level position.
- Form a tripod base by placing your weight on the mid to back portion of your foot, and keep your toes down, particularly your big and baby toes. These parts of your foot should remain in contact with the floor for the duration of the exercise. You can pretend that you are suctioning or screwing your foot to the ground.



- Grab the kettlebell by the horns, extend your elbow and press the kettlebell overhead.
- Have a slight forward lean in your torso. If you are targeting your posterior chain muscles, you may lean forward a little more (but not too much), and may adopt a slightly longer stance between your front and back foot.
- Your head, torso, and hips should be in a stacked position. Do not allow your lower back to hyperextend or ribcage to flare. Due to the single kettlebell, you will be more prone to leaning. Make sure that your torso and hips remain level. This is the anti-lateral flexion component of the exercise.
- Before you go, take a deep breath in through your nose (360 degrees of air around the spine), brace your core (5-6), and tuck your ribs towards your hips (close the space in your midsection). This will stabilize your pelvis and spine, allowing you to focus on your lower body.
- Now perform a split squat and take 3-5 seconds to lower yourself to your full depth, then push back up and return to the starting position.
- Your front leg should be doing most of the work. Make sure that you engage your quad, hamstring, and glute of the front leg and push up, versus pushing backwards and transferring your weight to your back leg. Your body should travel in a relatively vertical path the entire time, not horizontally. I like to pretend that I have a wall directly in front of me and behind me, and that if I tip forward or push backwards, my body will hit the wall.
- As you are pushing up and are completing the rep, exhale.
- Maintain control at ALL times. The same goes with the lockout.
- Do not allow your knee to cave in or fall out. Keep it in line with your toes. Also, in most instances, it is perfectly okay if your knee is above, or even slightly ahead of your toes. The key is that you do not allow your weight to shift to the front of your foot, and your heel must not leave the ground. Maintain the tripod base.

- Reset before each rep.

Regression:

Make this exercise easier by using less resistance, or by performing the exercise at the regular tempo.

Progression:

Make this exercise more challenging by using more resistance.

Watch Video:

Prescription: 3 sets of 5-8 reps per leg. Do a warm-up set using 50% of your working weight.

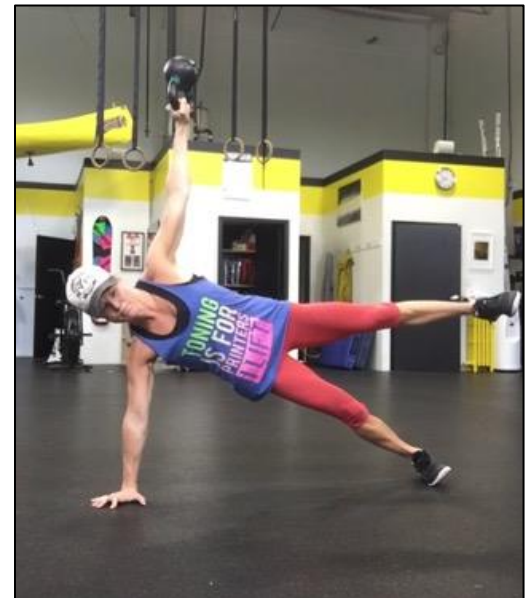
RKC Side Plank With Bottoms-Up Kettlebell Hold And Leg Abduction

This exercise develops grips strength, shoulder and scapula stability (your shoulders and scapulae remain in a fixed position), and lumbo-pelvic stability. To be clear, this exercise is extremely advanced.

Unlike the regular RKC side plank variation, you will elevate your one leg, and will perform a bottoms-up kettlebell hold, which makes the exercise significantly more challenging. If you are doing this exercise properly, you should be absolutely DONE by 10-20 seconds max.

Coaching Cues:

- Get into a side plank position on your hand and foot. Your shoulder should be above your hand.



- Set your body so it is in a straight line from your head to heels, and tuck your chin. Your head, torso and hips should be in a stacked position.
- Take a deep breath in through your nose (360 degrees of air around your spine), contract all of your core muscles (including glutes) and legs as hard as you can, and tuck your ribs down towards your hips.
- Press the kettlebell so it is in the bottoms-up position. Your hand, elbow and shoulder should be in a straight line. It is often easier to get the kettlebell into the starting position before you even get into the side plank.
- Keep your upper leg straight, ankle dorsiflexed, and lift your leg.
- Hold this position for 10-20 seconds.
- As for your breathing, for the duration of the exercise, breathe in through your nose, and slowly exhale through your teeth.
- For the duration of the exercise, your head, torso and hips should remain in a stacked position. Do not allow your lower back to hyperextend, ribcage to flare or rotate, hips to collapse, rotate or pike, or neck to collapse.

Regression:

Make this exercise easier by using less resistance, or by performing this variation but from your forearm instead of your hand, and without lifting your leg.

Progression:

Make this exercise more challenging by using more resistance.

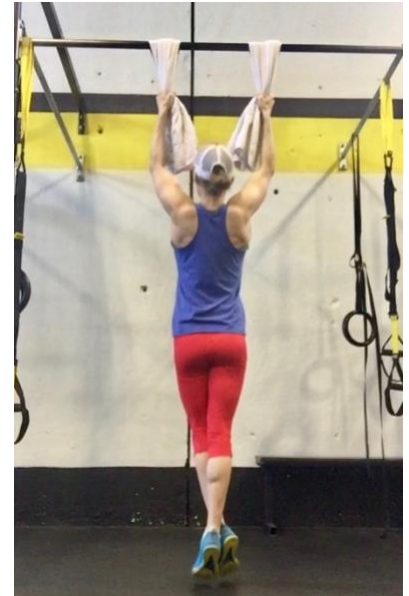
Watch Video:

Prescription: 3 sets of a 10-20 second hold per side.

#5) Towel Hangs

Towel Pull-Ups

Using towels to perform pull-ups, and all pull-up regressions, is a great way to develop grip strength. Even though you are using towels, if you are performing this exercise correctly, the muscles in your mid and upper back, not your arms, should be doing the majority of the work. Pull-ups and pull-up regressions also develop pull-up specific technique, upper body strength, shoulder and scapular controlled mobility, and lumbo-pelvic stability.



Coaching Cues:

- Hang two towels from the pull-up bar. Set your grip so your palms are facing away from you, and are slightly greater than shoulder width apart. You may also use a neutral grip, where your palms are facing one another.
- Set your body so it is in a slight hollow body position. Take a deep breath in through your nose (360 degrees of air around your spine), brace your core (4-5), tuck your ribcage towards your hips (close the space in your midsection), squeeze your glutes, straighten your knees, contract your quads and hamstrings, and dorsiflex your feet (you may cross one foot over the other). This will stabilize your pelvis, spine, and legs, and will prevent you from swinging ahead of the bar like a pendulum.
- Initiate the movement by using the muscles in your mid and upper back and drawing your shoulder blades in towards your spine and down towards the opposite hip, and driving your elbows down towards the floor, so you are in the top position of the pull-up. Do not lead the movement with your arms, and do not allow your elbows to flare. They should remain at approximately a 45 degree position (similar to an overhead press).
- Make sure that your chin passes the bar, but do not strain your neck and reach with your chin.

- Lower yourself to the starting position with control. During the lowering phase of the exercise, your shoulder blades should perform the reverse movements as they did during the ascending phase.
- In the bottom position, your elbows should be close to fully extended, but not hyperextended.
- For the duration of the exercise, your head, torso, and hips should remain in a stacked position. Do not allow your lower back to hyperextend or ribcage to flare.
- Before you initiate the next rep, make sure that you re-establish the proper full body positioning and requisite levels of tension and stability. Never disengage your muscles at any point.
- As for your breathing, exhale just after you have initiated the pull and have drawn your shoulder blades together and down; you may inhale and “reset” as you are descending, or do a full reset when you are in the bottom position.

Regression:

Make this exercise easier by performing one rep at a time and resting on the ground between reps (I actually recommend this strategy for most people who are starting out), or by performing the pull-up regressions I’ve included in [*The Ultimate Pull-Up Program*](#).

Progression:

Make this exercise more challenging by using thicker towels, by performing negative reps and increasing the length of time you take to lower yourself to the ground, or by performing more reps in a row without resting (but only if you are able to maintain proper form).

Watch Video:

Prescription: 3 sets of as many reps as you can. I often recommend starting out by performing a single rep (or several reps if you are capable of performing

many), and resting on the ground between reps as you want to maximize your form on 100% of your reps.

#6) Rope Climb Variations

Inverted Rope Climbs

This exercise develops grips strength, upper body strength, shoulder and scapular controlled mobility, and lumbo-pelvic stability.

Coaching Cues:

- Set up a bench so it is several feet ahead of a rope. The distance between the bench and rope will depend on your height, body structure, etc, so figure out what works best for you.
- Start by sitting on the floor, grabbing onto the rope, and elevating your feet on the bench. Your knees should be bent.
- Before you initiate the climb, take a deep breath in through your nose (360 degrees of air around your spine), brace your core (5-6), tuck your ribs towards your hips (close the space in your midsection), and squeeze your glutes.
- Now initiate the movement and “climb” up the rope with your arms. That being said, while you will be reaching with your arms, initiate the pulling movement by using the muscles in your mid and upper back and drawing your shoulder blade of the “pulling” side in towards your spine and down towards the opposite hip. Essentially, you are “rowing” your body up the rope.



- As you are approaching the final position, you want to simultaneously extend your arms, knees, and hips. This will be your “lockout.” Do not lock out by hyperextending your back.
- Once you are in the top position, pause for a brief count, “reset” the breathing and bracing pattern I described above, and return to the ground by performing the reverse movements as you did on the way up.
- Make sure you lower yourself with full control and intent.
- For the duration of the exercise, your head, torso, and hips should remain in a stacked position. Do not allow your lower back to hyperextend, or ribcage to flare.
- As for your breathing, exhale just after you have initiated the pull and have drawn your shoulder blades together and down; inhale and “reset” as you are descending, or do a full reset when you are in the bottom position.

Regression:

Make this exercise easier by performing one rep at a time and resting on the ground between reps, or by performing the regular modified rope climbs with your feet on the floor.

Progression:

Make this exercise more challenging by performing more reps, by not touching your hips to the ground between reps, or by performing more advanced legless rope climb variations.

Watch Video:

Prescription: 3 sets of 3-5 reps.

V-Sit Legless Rope Climbs

This advanced rope climb variation develops grip strength, upper body strength, shoulder and scapular controlled mobility, and lumbo-pelvic stability.

Coaching Cues:

- Start by sitting on the floor so your legs are in a v-position, and grab onto the rope.
- Before you initiate the climb, take a deep breath in through your nose (360 degrees of air around your spine), brace your core (8-9), tuck your ribs towards your hips (close the space in your midsection), squeeze your glutes, straighten your knees, contract your quads and hamstrings, and dorsiflex your feet.
- Now initiate the movement and “climb” up the rope with your arms. That being said, while you will be reaching with your arms, initiate the pulling movement by using the muscles in your mid and upper back and drawing your shoulder blade of the “pulling” side in towards your spine and down towards the opposite hip. Essentially, you are “rowing” your body up the rope.
- Make sure you lower yourself with full control and intent.
- For the duration of the exercise, your head, torso, and hips should remain in a stacked position. Do not allow your lower back to hyperextend, or ribcage to flare.
- As for your breathing, figure out works best for you.



Regression:

Make this exercise easier by performing the modified inverted variation I shared directly above this.

Progression:

Make this exercise more challenging by performing more reps.

Watch Video:

**To note, in this video, I could have done a MUCH better job of keeping my legs totally rigid. Keep your feet dorsiflexed and knees straight.

Prescription: 3-5 sets of 1 rep.