



Handstand: Introduction & Refinement

a guide for level 2 and above students

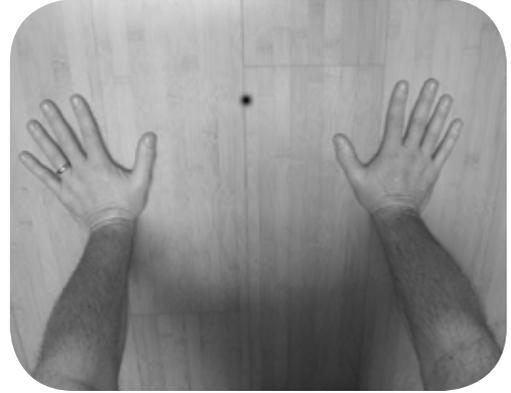
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Handstand basics

Setting the foundation

Rotate hands away from midline of pose slightly.

The hands should be rotated so that the weight is balanced between the inner and outer wrists. Students will often place the hands directly forward (e.g. middle fingers parallel to the midline of the pose) and this will drive excessive weight through the inner wrists with subsequent inner shoulder joint collapse. Experiment with turning the hands away from the midline a degree or two at a time until you find the place where the weight is balanced between inner and outer wrist joints.



Special notes for those with pronounced carrying angles in the arms: Turn your hands out, away from the midline of the pose 30-45 degrees (see below left). This will rotate your arm in a way that minimizes the carrying angle and allows the gravity lines passing through the arms to remain as much in the body as possible. If it is impossible to get the weight balanced between inner and outer wrists, then make the "live long and prosper" sign with each hand (below right). If you "Spokify" the hands, it will better distribute the weight.

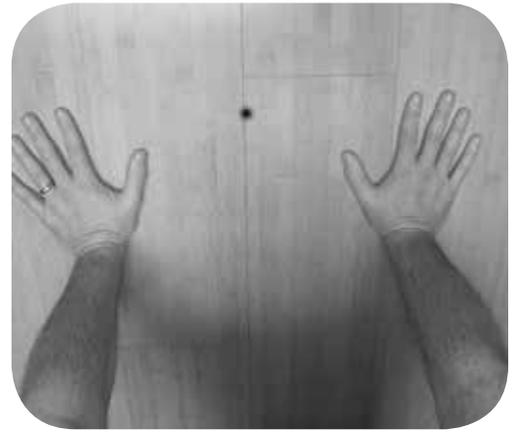


Weight distribution through the hands.

There should be less weight on the heels of the hands than on the knuckle-pads of the hands. If the weight resides predominantly on the heels of the hands, then the wrists will be compressed and the ability to rise up out of the shoulders will be diminished. Keeping the weight along the knuckle pads provides a fulcrum for balancing in the pose. The fingers are slightly arched, as if the finger pads allow you to claw the earth and drag the weight out of the heel of the hand towards the knuckle pads. Always ensure the weight is along the knuckle pads before setting up the rest of the pose. Keep it there as the pose builds to launch. Of course, weight is also balanced between the little finger side and thumb sides of the hands.

Look between your hands

Place your gaze on the midline between your hands, at about the height of your pointer fingers (see dot in photos). Keep your gaze intently focused upon this spot throughout the rest of the preparations for handstand and especially while kicking up in to handstand. If the gaze wanders from this point, it typically looks into the center of the room and this draws the body down out of the pose. Keep the gaze sharply focused ! With the gaze between the hands, once you're up, you'll have an easier time balancing the body in the front-to-back aspect of the pose.



Strengthen the inner forearms

This will keep your elbows straight. Firm and reach through the inner forearms. This helps keep the weight balanced between the inner and outer hands. It also prevents the elbows from bending when you kick up. If the elbows bend, then the strength demand of the pose increases dramatically. Be mindful to practice strengthening and reaching through the inner forearms in all warm-up poses. Be certain to keep this functionality online while kicking up into the pose.



Widen the shoulderblades

Move the shoulderblades laterally away from the spine as much as possible, without losing the strength in the inner forearms (below, left). This permits the strength in the sides of the chest and ribs to be applied through the shoulders. It minimizes the work required of the shoulder muscles. Do not let the shoulderblades collapse or squeeze towards the spine (below right).



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Refining Handstand

Training Progression

The following series of activities will allow you to track your progress as you gradually learn the intermediary steps to enter handstand in the center of the room. It is important to master these items in the order listed. Each training element builds skills used in the following activity.

1) Balance while in handstand without feet touching the wall.



1st stage

Enter handstand and place the toes of one foot on the wall while the other leg reaches for the heavens. Find where to position the straight leg so that the toes of the bent leg rest very lightly on the wall.

date completed



2nd stage

Slowly and smoothly bring the straight leg forward, towards the front side of the body, away from the wall. Keep the pelvis over the shoulders. When the weight of the straight leg offsets the weight of the leg behind, the toes will effortlessly leave the wall. Balance for a few seconds with the legs in this position, without the toes touching the wall.

date completed

...refining handstand training progression continues on pages 11-18...