

## The Versatile Pushup, Part I

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Push-ups aren't just for Marine Corps recruits--anyone can do them and they are a great upper body and core low-cost exercise. This is possible since you use just your own body weight or low cost resources for variation.

So if you're just looking tone up, lose weight or gain strength without bulky muscles, push-ups is a great avenue. The really appealing thing is you don't have to go to the gym and spend your hard earned money; you can do them at home! I always finish up my chest and back workout with 10-15 sets of different pushups for twenty repetitions. I love the finish they give me.

So without further ado, here's the proper way to do push-ups anywhere.

Perfect pushup form involves keeping the head in neutral alignment with the body. That means you want the top of your head to point to the opposite wall, eyes on the floor. If you can see your toes or the wall in front of you, your head is out of alignment. This is the traditional position. Now for those just starting pushups or are weak in the upper torso, you can modify this position by dropping your knees and bringing your pelvis forward.

1. Lie chest-down with your hands at shoulder level, palms flat on the floor and slightly more than shoulder-width apart, your feet are together and parallel to each other.
2. As mentioned earlier, keep your head aligned and look downward. The first contact you make with the floor with any part of the face should be your chin, not your nose.
3. Keep your legs straight and toes tucked under your feet.
4. Straighten your arms as you push your body up off the floor, Keep your palms fixed at the same position and keep your body straight. Try not to bend or arch your upper or lower back as you push up.
5. Exhale as your arms straighten out. The way I remember in any exercise to exhale is when I exert (they both start with an "E").
6. Pause for a second.

7. Lower your body slowly towards the floor. Bend your arms and keep your palms in a fixed position. Keep the body straight and feet together to keep the core engaged.
8. Lower your body until your chest touches the floor, or upper arms parallel with the floor. Try not to bend your back and keep your knees off the floor, and inhale as you bend your arms.
9. Pause for a second and begin straightening your arms for a second pushup. Exhale as you raise your body.

Now for the monkey wrench. In every class I've had, someone had some type of wrist pain. Here are some helpful tips.

### **Avoiding Wrist Pain**

One common problem exercisers may experience during pushups is wrist pain. If you already have problems with your wrists (such as carpal tunnel syndrome), pushups may aggravate the problem. If you have any problems with the wrist, try these tips for avoiding wrist pain:

1. **Distribute your weight evenly:** During pushups, try distributing your weight evenly across your entire hand rather than on the heel of your hand.
2. **Use dumbbells or pushup bars:** Holding dumbbells or using pushup bars may allow you to keep your wrists straight during your pushups.
3. **Use your knuckles:** Another option is to do the pushups on your knuckles. Make a fist and rest your hands on your knuckles. Make sure you use a comfortable, cushioned surface and, obviously, avoid this one if it's painful.
4. **Brace your core:** You can also take some of the weight off your hands (and protect your lower back) by drawing the abs in and keeping your core braced and stiff throughout the movement.

By far the biggest mistake I witness is sagging in the middle. This is usually attributed to not properly bracing the core and keeping the torso stiff throughout the movement. Because pushups require a fair amount of strength in the abs and back and letting go through the middle can cause back pain and, of course, bad form.

Another mistake is leading with the chin or dropping the head. Both of which take the neck out of neutral alignment and, thus, compromise your form. It's easy to lose track of your head position when you're focusing on so many other things, particularly when you get fatigued. Your goal should be to use perfect form for

every pushup. As soon as any part of your body fails, it's time to rest or move to an easier modification.

Locked the elbows is another mistake we sometimes make at the top of the movement. Most of us do this when we get tired and, desperate for a break, we lock the joints, which offers a little breather. Unfortunately, it's never a good idea to lock the joints during any exercise, since that can put too much stress on the joints and potentially cause pain and injury.

During pushups, locking the elbows may give you a brief rest, but it also takes the stress off your muscles and puts it on your elbow joints. You can avoid this by, first, keeping a very slight bend in the elbows at the top of the movement. Second, keep the pushups slow, controlled and flowing from one rep to the next. If you're too fatigued to avoid locking the elbows, take a break or try an easier modification.

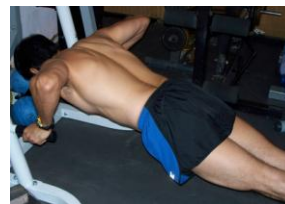
So here's part 1 of a small circuit I augment my workouts with. Have a blast!

### Incline Pushups



Elevating the hands shifts your center of gravity, placing the emphasis on the lower part of the chest and reducing the percentage of body weight you're lifting.

1. Get into pushup position with the hands on a raised step or platform, slightly wider than the shoulders. Take the legs straight out behind you, resting on the toes.
2. Make sure the arms are extended directly below the shoulders and bend the elbows, lowering into a pushup, keeping the neck in neutral alignment and lowering until your chest touches (or comes close to) the step.
3. Push back to start without locking the elbows and repeat for 1-3 sets of 8-16 reps.



## Decline Pushups

1. Kneel on the floor with the ball in front of you and roll forward on it, walking the hands out to where you can comfortably support your body with the abs in, shoulders retracted and the body in a straight line.
2. Place the hands a bit wider than shoulders and check to make sure you're not sagging in the middle. If you are, try rolling back a bit for more support.
3. Bend the elbows and lower down until your elbows are at about 90 degrees.
4. Press back to start and repeat for 1 to 3 sets of 10 to 16 reps.



## Decline Pushups

### Tips :

- Don't lead with your chin. Keep your head down so that your neck is in alignment with the rest of your body throughout the movement.
- Reposition the ball as needed to give yourself more support. Keeping the ball under the hips or upper thighs will provide the most support for the body.
- Keep the body in a straight line. Don't sag in the middle, and don't let your shoulder blades ride up. Your upper back should be flat.

To modify, try this on your knees or on your toes.

Elevating the feet on a step or platform shifts your center of gravity and places emphasis to the upper chest.



## Standard (traditional) Pushups

1. Begin on your hands and knees, placing your hands on the floor about shoulder-width apart, palms flat.
2. Extend the legs straight, resting on your toes. Make sure your hands are directly under the shoulders (not forward).
3. Brace your abs and legs to stiffen the torso and keep the neck in neutral alignment so that your body is in a straight line from the top of your head to your heels.
4. Bend the elbows, allowing them to flare naturally out to the sides, and lower your body until the nose touches the floor. Keep your torso rigid and avoid sagging in the middle or piking the hips up.



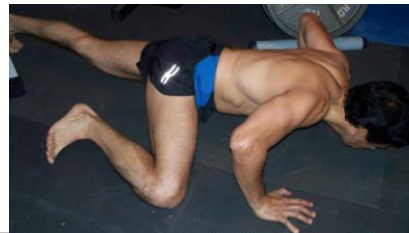
## Standard (traditional) Pushups

5. Push into the floor to push yourself back to starting position, continuing to keep the torso and legs braced. Push all the way up, but don't lock the elbows at the top of the movement.
6. Continue moving up and down in a flowing motion, avoiding pausing at the top of the movement.
7. If you're not able to do the move without lifting the hips or sagging through the middle, try a modification and slowly work your way up to traditional pushups.



## Spiderman Pushups

This variation of the push-up can be done with either your feet on the ground or elevated on a bench. Start in a push-up position. Do one push-up, then bring your right knee to your right elbow. Do another push-up and then bring your left knee to your left elbow. That's 2 reps. Repeat for 10-20+ reps. Once you have mastered this move on the ground move on to elevating your feet on a bench and then onto a stability ball. You can also try doing this with the Slider Push Up or Slider Chest Fly Push Up to really work your core.



## Reegade Pushups

Starting in a pushup position with the hands on 2 dumbbells. You then row one dumbbell up while stabilizing your body with the other arm. Bring the dumbbell back to the ground and alternate the rowing arm while stabilizing with the opposite arm. This stabilizing effect during the rows creates incredible work for your entire midsection core area. Trust me... you'll feel it in the abs!



## Medicine Ball Pushups

This exercise is great for the upper body, but it's also great for the core. Elevating one hand on a medicine ball adds a new challenge, and rolling the ball from hand to hand engages the abs and adds a dynamic element you don't often get with traditional pushups.

1. Get into pushup position on the knees (easier) or the toes (more difficult). Make sure the body is in a straight line with the abs in and the back straight.



2. Place one hand on a medicine ball and keep the other on the floor. Get your balance and lower into a pushup.
3. Push back up and roll the ball across the floor to the other hand and lower into a pushup.
4. Continue rolling the ball back and forth for each pushup for 1 to 3 sets of 10 to 16 reps.

## Medicine Ball Pushups

### Tips

- You can often find soft medicine balls which make this move a bit easier.
- Keep the body in alignment. By elevating one hand, you may not have the same range of motion, so only lower as far as you comfortably can.
- Keep the body in a straight line. Don't sag in the middle, and don't let your shoulder blades ride up. Your upper back should be flat.



## Perfect Pushups



- 1) Begin on your hands and knees, placing your hands on the apparatus about shoulder-width apart, palms flat.
- 2) Extend the legs straight, resting on your toes. Make sure your hands are directly under the shoulders (not forward).
- 3) Brace your abs and legs to stiffen the torso and keep the neck in neutral alignment so that your body is in a straight line from the top of your head to your heels.
- 4) Bend the elbows, allowing them to flare naturally out to the sides, and lower your body until the nose touches the floor. Keep your torso rigid and avoid sagging in the middle or piking the hips up.
- 5) Push into the floor to push yourself back to starting position, continuing to keep the torso and legs braced. Push all the way up, but don't lock the elbows at the top of the movement.



## Stability Ball Pushups



**Starting Position:** Lie prone (on your stomach) over the top of a properly-inflated stability ball (one that compresses approximately 6" under your body weight) with both feet and hands on the floor, hip- and shoulder-width apart. Gently contract your abdominal/core muscles to stiffen your torso and slowly walk yourself backwards until your stomach lies directly over the top of the ball with both legs extended and both feet firmly placed on the floor, hip-width or wider apart. Your head, torso and legs should be in parallel alignment with your arms resting on the ball. Place your hands to the sides of the ball close to the top, positioning your hands directly under your shoulders and elbows by your side. Think about trying to squeeze the ball between your hands to create more strength and stability.

## Stability Ball Pushups

**Upward Phase:** Exhale and slowly press your body upwards until your elbows are fully extended, but not locked. Maintain your head, torso and leg alignment, and elbows by your sides. Hold this position briefly.

**Downward Phase:** Inhale and gently lower yourself to your starting position.



**Exercise Variation (1):** If this body position proves too difficult in pressing upwards or in stabilizing your torso, take yourself down to a kneeling position, aligning your head, torso and thighs throughout the exercise.

**Exercise Variation (2) :** To increase the balance challenge, this exercise can be performed by bringing your feet together behind you and raising one foot off the floor.

## Staggered Pushups

If you're looking for a new twist on traditional pushups, staggered pushups are a great choice for adding intensity and challenge. By staggering your hands, you increase the load on one arm, which challenges your body in a whole new way. This is a more advanced version of pushups, so modify the move as needed to fit your fitness level and goals.



1. Get into pushup position with the hands slightly wider than the shoulders and resting on the toes (harder) or the knees.
2. Walk the left hand forward so that your hands are in a staggered position.
3. Bend the elbows and lower into a pushup, keeping the neck in neutral alignment and lowering down as far as you can.
4. Push back to start and repeat for 8-16 reps.
5. For your next set, switch the arms so that the right hand is in front and the left arm is back, completing 8-16 reps.

Repeat for 1-3 sets.



### Dive Bombers

These are intense and challenging, requiring tremendous shoulder and core strength as you dip down and up for a dynamic pushup.



Do it right: Begin the move in a pike position, with hands a bit forward of the body, legs straight and hips to the ceiling. Bend the elbows as you dive forward, bringing your head towards the floor. Keep moving forward,

pushing the chest towards the floor and then through the arms. Keep going until your torso is lifted, hips still off the floor and you're looking forward. Reverse the movement and repeat for 4-8 reps.



### Diamond Pushups

Kneel on all fours with the hands close together so the two index fingers and two thumbs are touching and form a diamond shape.

Straighten your legs out behind you so that your weight is distributed between your hands and toes

Bend the elbows back to lower the chest towards the floor

Push back up to the starting position

Variations & progressions

Perform with the hands on a medicine ball to add another degree of difficulty

