

The 28-Day Calisthenics Challenge

Four weeks. A test on day one, the same test on day 28.

Twenty-four active days, only twelve of them hard. Real sets and rep ranges instead of a daily circuit, a clear rule for when to move up, and a log that shows you what changed. No equipment required. A pull-up bar is an option, never a requirement.

READ THIS PAGE FIRST

What this is, and what it isn't

Most 28-day challenges ask for a hard workout every day. This one asks for something every day, and a hard workout three days a week. The easy days build the habit. The hard days build the strength.

IT IS

A four-week start for someone who is new to bodyweight training, or coming back to it. Two workouts, A and B, three times a week, with short practice days in between. Every exercise has an easier and a harder version, so there is always one you can do today.

IT ISN'T

A transformation promise. Four weeks is enough to learn the movements, add reps, and build a routine you keep. It is not enough to rebuild a body, and nothing here pretends otherwise. The retest on day 28 tells you what actually happened.

The four rules

- 01 Reps you'd be happy to film.** Decide your rep standard on day 1 and keep it for 28 days. Full range, controlled, no bouncing. A standard that changes halfway makes the retest meaningless.
- 02 Stop before failure.** Every working set ends while you could still do two or three more clean reps. Four weeks is short. A month spent sore is a month spent not training.
- 03 Move up only when you've earned it.** Top of the rep range on every set, then the harder version. One rule, applied to every exercise, is the whole progression.
- 04 Write it down.** "Did I do more than last time?" is the question the whole challenge runs on, and it has no answer without a record.

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SECTION 01 • DAY 1

The test

Fifteen minutes, warmed up, fresh. These four to six numbers decide where you start, and they are the only thing day 28 gets compared against. Day 1 is the test and nothing else: no workout afterwards.

TEST	HOW TO RUN IT	RECORD
Push-up	The hardest version you can do at least one clean rep of: full, kneeling or incline. Chest to fist height, body in one line. Write down which version.	Max reps
Table row	Under a sturdy table, heels down, body straight. Chest to the table edge, arms fully straight at the bottom. No table: two sturdy chairs side by side, a body-width apart, and pull on the seat edges from between them. Check they cannot tip first.	Max reps
Squat	Bodyweight, thighs at least parallel, heels down. If you reach 15, stop there and write "15+": past that the test measures stamina, not strength.	Max reps
Close squat	Only if you reached 15 squats, on day 1 or day 28. Feet and knees together, thighs at least parallel, heels down. Stop at 15 and write "15+".	Max reps
Plank	On your forearms and toes, elbows under the shoulders, one straight line from head to heels. Stop at the first sag, or at 2 minutes.	Seconds
Dead hang	Only if you have a bar. Arms straight, shoulders active. Stop at the first slip.	Seconds

WRITE THE STANDARD NEXT TO THE NUMBER

"6 push-ups, kneeling, chest to fist" is a baseline. "6 push-ups" is a guess you'll argue with on day 28. Rest three minutes between tests, and run them in this order both times.

OPTIONAL • THE FREE PROGRAM IN THE APP

The same 28-day program is free in the THYMOS app, with every workout laid out and every set logged. It works offline and needs no account. Make these tests your first entry and day 28 sits right next to them. Nothing in this guide needs the app. [thymos.fit](#)

Reading your push-up result

0 FULL PUSH-UPS

Start workout A on incline push-ups and workout B on kneeling push-ups. Most people start here. It is the fastest route to the first full rep.

1-7 FULL PUSH-UPS

Incline push-ups in A for volume, full push-ups in B for strength. The two versions pull each other up.

8+ FULL PUSH-UPS

Full push-ups in both workouts. You will likely reach the decline push-up in week 3.

SECTION 02

The 28 days

Three strength days a week, alternating A and B, with a short practice day between them and one full rest day. Start on any weekday. The numbers are days of the challenge, not dates.

WEEK	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 • Learn	Test	A	P	B	P	A	Rest
2 • Build	B	P	A	P	B	P	Rest
3 • Move up	A+	P	B+	P	A+	P	Rest
4 • Peak	B+	P	A+	P	B+	Rest	Retest

A and B: the two strength workouts (p.5). A+ and B+: the same workouts with the upgrades you've earned (p.6).

P: a practice day (p.7).

WEEK	SETS	REST	REPS LEFT	FOCUS
1	3, fewest reps	90s	3–4	Use the lowest number of each rep range on p.5, and find the right version of each exercise.
2	3, adding reps	90s	2–3	Same versions, one more rep per set whenever every rep stays clean.
3	3	90s	2–3	Earned upgrades go in, at the bottom of the new range.
4	4 + 3	75s	2	Four sets of the first two exercises, three of the rest. Day 26 is lighter.

12

STRENGTH SESSIONS

35 min

TYPICAL SESSION

15 min

PRACTICE DAY

Miss a day, don't double up

If you miss a training day, do that same session on your next day and carry on in order from there. Nothing is dropped; the challenge just ends a day later. Never do two strength sessions back to back to catch up: that buys fatigue, not the session you missed. If you miss more than three days, repeat the week you were in.

SECTION 03 · WEEKS 1-2

Workouts A and B

Five exercises each. A pushes and trains the legs, B pulls and trains the hips and back. Between them every pattern gets trained twice in a week of three sessions, without any one muscle group working two days running.

Workout A · Push and legs

EXERCISE	SETS × REPS	REST
Push-up, your A version	3 × 8-15	90s
Bodyweight squat	3 × 12-20	90s
Bench dip, feet down	3 × 6-12	75s
Reverse lunge	3 × 8-12/leg	75s
Plank	3 × 20-45s	60s

Workout B · Pull and hips

EXERCISE	SETS × REPS	REST
Table row	3 × 5-12	90s
Single-leg glute bridge	3 × 8-15/leg	75s
Push-up, your B version	3 × 5-12	90s
Superman	3 × 8-12	60s
Dead bug	3 × 8-12/side	60s

BEFORE YOU START · THREE MINUTES, NOT LOGGED

Loosen the shoulders and hips, then two easy warm-up sets of the first exercise at half the reps. That is the whole warm-up. It is preparation, not training, so it stays out of your log.

Reps left is how many more clean reps you could still have done when you stopped the set. "2-3" means stop while two or three more were still there. If you finish a set and honestly can't tell, you went too close.

SECTION 04 · WEEKS 3-4

Moving up

A+ and B+ are not new workouts. They are A and B with the upgrades you have earned, one exercise at a time. An exercise you haven't earned stays exactly as it was, and that is fine.

THE RULE, FOR EVERY EXERCISE

Hit the top of the rep range on all three sets with at least two clean reps left. Next session, take the harder version and start again at the bottom of its range. If one set falls short, stay and repeat.

FROM	EARNED AT	TO
Incline push-up	3 × 15	Kneeling push-up, 3 × 8-12
Kneeling push-up	3 × 12	Full push-up, 3 × 5-12
Full push-up	3 × 12	Decline push-up, 3 × 5-10
Bodyweight squat	3 × 20	Close squat, 3 × 10-15
Bench dip, feet down	3 × 12	Bench dip, feet elevated, 3 × 6-12
Reverse lunge	3 × 12/leg	Same lunge, 3 seconds on the way down
Plank	3 × 45s	Tuck hollow hold, 3 × 15-30s
Table row	3 × 12	Same row, 3 seconds down and a 1-second pause at the top. With a low bar or rings: inverted row.
Single-leg glute bridge	3 × 15/leg	Same bridge, 2-second hold at the top
Dead bug	3 × 12/side	Same, 3 seconds per leg, slower is harder

One addition in A+

If workout A is already on full push-ups, add **pike push-ups, 3 × 5-8, 90s rest**, straight after the squat. It is the first step toward overhead pressing and handstand work. Still on incline or kneeling push-ups? Leave it out, it will be there next month.

Week 4, and day 26

Four sets of the first two exercises in each workout, rest down to 75 seconds. Day 26 is the exception: two sets of everything, stopping with four reps left, so you arrive at the retest with the strength and without the fatigue.

SECTION 05

Practice days

Fifteen minutes, easy on purpose. Practice days keep the habit and move the body without taking recovery away from the next strength session. If a practice day leaves you tired, it was a workout.

PRACTICE DAY	AMOUNT	REPS LEFT
Plank	2 × 20–40s	4+
Bird-dog	2 × 8/side	4+
Bodyweight squat, slow	2 × 10	4+
Walk, any pace you can talk at	20 min	--

OPTIONAL · GREASE THE GROOVE

On practice days, do three to five easy sets of your push-up version, spread across the day. Half your day 1 max, never more than five reps, never tired. These are practice reps: keep them out of your training totals.

IF YOU'RE SORE

Keep the walk, skip the rest. Soreness that lasts past 48 hours means the strength days were too close to failure. Add a rep in reserve next session rather than skipping it.

If you have a pull-up bar

The challenge works without one. With one, these three go in, and nothing else changes.

EXERCISE	AMOUNT	WHERE
Dead hang	3 × 10–30s	Every practice day. Add 5 seconds a week.
Scapular pull-up	2 × 5–8	Start of every workout A, before the push-ups.
Negative pull-up	3 × 3, 5s down	Workout B+ in weeks 3–4, before the table row. Only once your dead hang reaches 20 seconds.

SECTION 06 • DAY 28

The retest

Same tests, same order, same standards, same three minutes between them. Day 27 is a full rest day for this reason: you want to measure the strength you built, not the fatigue you are carrying.

Read it honestly

- 01 **Same version, or it doesn't count.** Test the push-up version you tested on day 1. If you have moved up since, test the new version on day 29 as well. That is your starting point for whatever comes next.
- 02 **A higher number with a shorter range is not progress.** You will know. So will anyone watching the video.
- 03 **Look at the log, not only the test.** More reps per session, harder versions, the same work feeling easier. That is where four weeks shows up first.

IF THE NUMBERS DIDN'T MOVE

Check three things before blaming the program. Were sets really two or three reps from failure, or much further? Did practice days stay easy? Did you sleep? In a four-week plan, one week of bad sleep or missed sessions is a quarter of the whole thing, enough to hide real progress. Run weeks 3 and 4 again before you change anything.

What's next

KEEP GOING • TWELVE WEEKS

The companion guide, *Calisthenics: The First 12 Weeks*, uses the same rules over three blocks and adds the pull-up and dip ladders. Start it on the versions you finished this challenge on.

RUN IT AGAIN

Repeating the challenge is a valid choice. Your day 28 numbers become the next day 1, and most exercises start one version higher.

SECTION 07

28-day log

Tick each day as you finish it, and write the top set of the day's first exercise under the tick. Print it, or keep it on your phone. What matters is that day 28 can see day 1.

WEEK	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Test	A	P	B	P	A	Rest
2	B	P	A	P	B	P	Rest
3	A+	P	B+	P	A+	P	Rest
4	B+	P	A+	P	B+	Rest	Retest

Test results

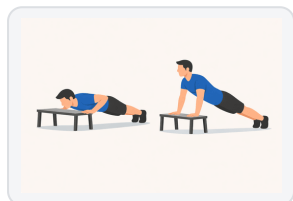
TEST	VERSION AND STANDARD	DAY 1	DAY 28
Push-up			
Table row			
Squat			
Close squat			
Plank			
Dead hang			

Written and published by THYMOS, a training log for people who keep records. You can log the tests and every session in the app if you would rather not keep this sheet, and the challenge works just as well on paper. thymos.fit

APPENDIX

How each movement is done

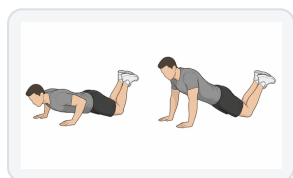
Every movement in the workouts, the upgrades, the practice days and the bar options, with the cues that matter. Look one up when a name is unfamiliar, or when a set feels wrong and you want to check the position.



Incline push-up

PUSH

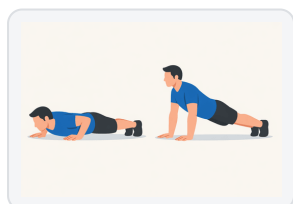
1. Stand facing bench or sturdy elevated platform. Place hands on edge of bench or platform, slightly wider than shoulder width.
2. Position forefoot back from bench or platform with arms and body straight. Arms should be perpendicular to body. Keeping body straight, lower chest to edge of box or platform by bending arms.
3. Push body up until arms are extended. Repeat.



Kneeling push-up

PUSH

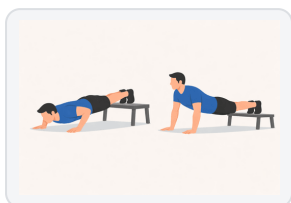
1. Kneel on a mat and place your hands on the floor slightly wider than shoulder width. Walk your knees back until your body forms a straight line from head to knees, weight resting on your kneecaps. Cross your ankles behind you. This is your start position.
2. Bracing your core, bend your elbows and lower your chest toward the floor under control, keeping elbows at about 45 degrees to your torso. Inhale as you descend.
3. Lower until your chest is a few centimetres from the floor, then press firmly through your palms back to straight arms. Exhale on the way up.
4. Keep a straight line from head to knees throughout, do not let your hips sag or pike, and keep your neck neutral.
5. Repeat for the prescribed reps. Kneeling push-ups reduce the load versus a full push-up; progress by shifting to half push-ups on your toes.



Full push-up

PUSH

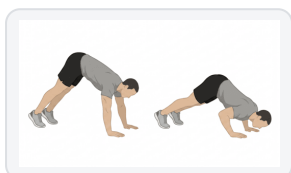
1. Get on the floor face down with your hands placed slightly wider than shoulder width apart. Keep your body straight from head to heels, forming a rigid plank.
2. Lower your body by bending your elbows until your chest nearly touches the floor. Keep your elbows at roughly a 45-degree angle to your torso. Inhale as you lower yourself.
3. Push yourself back up to the starting position by straightening your arms. Exhale as you push up. Do not lock your elbows completely at the top.
4. Keep your core tight and your body in a straight line throughout the movement. Do not let your hips sag or pike up.
5. Repeat for the recommended amount of repetitions.



Decline push-up

PUSH

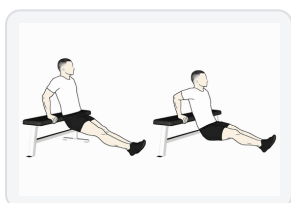
1. Lie on the floor face down and place your hands about 36 inches apart while holding your torso up at arms length. Move your feet up to a box or bench. This will be your starting position.
2. Next, lower yourself downward until your chest almost touches the floor as you inhale.
3. Now breathe out and press your upper body back up to the starting position while squeezing your chest.
4. After a brief pause at the top contracted position, you can begin to lower yourself downward again for as many repetitions as needed.



Pike push-up

PUSH

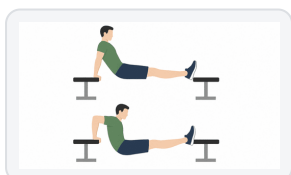
1. Start in a downward dog position with your hands on the floor and hips lifted high so your torso is angled toward the ground.
2. Walk your feet in slightly until you can stack more of your bodyweight over your shoulders while keeping your legs straight or softly bent.
3. Bend your elbows and lower the crown of your head toward the floor between your hands as you inhale.
4. Press through your palms to return to the starting position while keeping your core braced and elbows tracking back.
5. Repeat for the prescribed number of repetitions.



Bench dip, feet down

PUSH

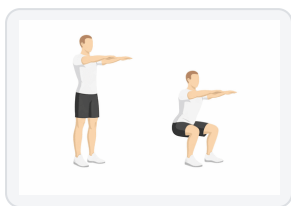
1. For this exercise you will need to place a bench behind your back. With the bench perpendicular to your body, and while looking away from it, hold on to the bench on its edge with the hands fully extended, separated at shoulder width. The legs will be extended forward, bent at the waist and perpendicular to your torso. This will be your starting position.
2. Slowly lower your body as you inhale by bending at the elbows until you lower yourself far enough to where there is an angle slightly smaller than 90 degrees between the upper arm and the forearm. Tip: Keep the elbows as close as possible throughout the movement. Forearms should always be pointing down.
3. Using your triceps to bring your torso up again, lift yourself back to the starting position.
4. Repeat for the recommended amount of repetitions.



Bench dip, feet elevated

PUSH

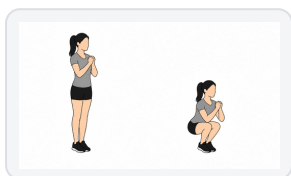
1. Set up two benches, chairs or sturdy surfaces roughly a leg-length apart. Sit on one, place your hands beside your hips with fingers pointing forward, and rest your heels on the other. This is your starting position.
2. Bend your elbows and lower your hips straight down, keeping them close to the bench and your elbows pointing back rather than flaring out. Inhale as you descend.
3. Lower until your upper arms are roughly parallel to the floor, then press back up through your palms until your arms are straight. Exhale as you press.
4. Keep your shoulders down away from your ears throughout; raising the feet shifts more of your bodyweight onto the arms than a feet-down bench dip does.
5. Repeat for the prescribed reps. This is the step between a feet-down bench dip and dipping on parallel bars.



Bodyweight squat

LEGS AND HIPS

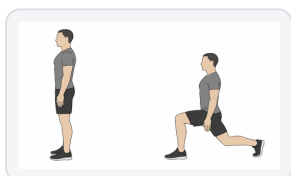
1. Stand with your feet shoulder width apart. You can place your hands behind your head. This will be your starting position.
2. Begin the movement by flexing your knees and hips, sitting back with your hips.
3. Continue down to full depth if you are able, and quickly reverse the motion until you return to the starting position. As you squat, keep your head and chest up and push your knees out.



Close squat

LEGS AND HIPS

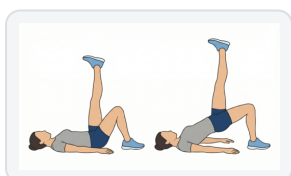
1. Stand with your feet together or nearly touching, toes pointing forward, arms extended in front for balance. Brace your core and keep your chest up.
2. Push your hips back and bend your knees to descend as deep as you can while keeping your feet together, until your hamstrings meet your calves. Inhale as you lower.
3. Drive up through your whole foot back to standing, squeezing your glutes at the top. Exhale as you rise.
4. The narrow stance challenges balance and pushes the knees forward, so keep your heels down and torso as upright as possible.
5. Repeat for the prescribed reps. Close squats prepare the balance and mobility needed for single-leg work; progress to uneven squats.



Reverse lunge

LEGS AND HIPS

1. Stand tall with feet hip-width apart, hands on your hips or held in front for balance. Brace your core and keep your chest up.
2. Step one foot back and lower under control until both knees are bent to about 90 degrees and the rear knee hovers just above the floor. Inhale as you descend.
3. Drive through the front heel to push back up and return the rear foot to standing, exhaling as you rise.
4. Keep your torso upright, front knee tracking over the toes, and most of your weight on the front leg.
5. Alternate legs (or complete all reps on one side, then switch). The reverse lunge is joint-friendly single-leg training; add load or a deficit to progress.



Single-leg glute bridge

LEGS AND HIPS

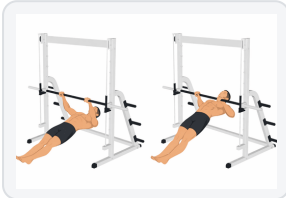
1. Lay on the floor with your feet flat and knees bent.
2. Raise one leg off of the ground, pulling the knee to your chest. This will be your starting position.
3. Execute the movement by driving through the heel, extending your hip upward and raising your glutes off of the ground.
4. Extend as far as possible, pause and then return to the starting position.



Table row

PULL

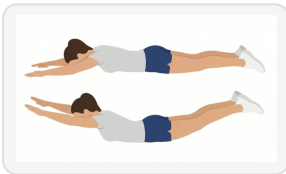
1. Lie under a sturdy table and grab the far edge with both hands slightly wider than shoulder width.
2. Brace your body in a straight line from head to heels and plant your heels firmly on the floor.
3. Pull your chest toward the underside of the table by driving your elbows down and back.
4. Pause briefly at the top, then lower under control until your arms are fully extended.



Inverted row

PULL

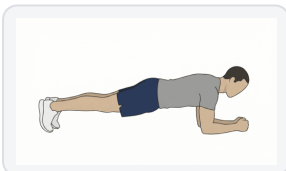
1. Position a bar in a rack to about waist height. You can also use a smith machine.
2. Take a wider than shoulder width grip on the bar and position yourself hanging underneath the bar. Your body should be straight with your heels on the ground with your arms fully extended. This will be your starting position.
3. Begin by flexing the elbow, pulling your chest towards the bar. Retract your shoulder blades as you perform the movement.
4. Pause at the top of the motion, and return yourself to the start position.
5. Repeat for the desired number of repetitions.



Superman

CORE

1. To begin, lie straight and face down on the floor or exercise mat. Your arms should be fully extended in front of you. This is the starting position.
2. Simultaneously raise your arms, legs, and chest off of the floor and hold this contraction for 2 seconds. Tip: Squeeze your lower back to get the best results from this exercise. Remember to exhale during this movement. Note: When holding the contracted position, you should look like superman when he is flying.
3. Slowly begin to lower your arms, legs and chest back down to the starting position while inhaling.
4. Repeat for the recommended amount of repetitions prescribed in your program.



Plank

CORE

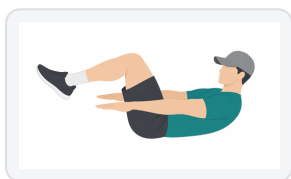
1. Get into a prone position on the floor, supporting your weight on your toes and your forearms. Your arms are bent and directly below the shoulder.
2. Keep your body straight at all times, and hold this position as long as possible. To increase difficulty, an arm or leg can be raised.



Dead bug

CORE

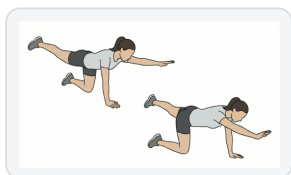
1. Begin lying on your back with your hands extended above you toward the ceiling.
2. Bring your feet, knees, and hips up to 90 degrees.
3. Exhale hard to bring your ribcage down and flatten your back onto the floor, rotating your pelvis up and squeezing your glutes. Hold this position throughout the movement. This will be your starting position.
4. Initiate the exercise by extending one leg, straightening the knee and hip to bring the leg just above the ground.
5. Maintain the position of your lumbar and pelvis as you perform the movement, as your back is going to want to arch.
6. Stay tight and return the working leg to the starting position.
7. Repeat on the opposite side, alternating until the set is complete.



Tuck hollow hold

CORE

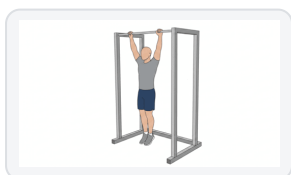
1. Lie flat on your back with your knees bent and drawn in toward your chest, and your arms reaching forward past your knees. Your entire lower back should be in contact with the floor.
2. Engage your abdominals by pressing your lower back firmly into the floor - this posterior pelvic tilt is essential and must be maintained throughout.
3. Raise your head and shoulders a few centimetres off the floor while keeping the knees tucked, so your body forms a shallow dish with the legs folded in.
4. Hold this position for the prescribed duration. If the lower back lifts off the floor, tuck the knees in tighter rather than holding a broken position.
5. Breathe steadily throughout. This is the regression of the hollow body hold: straighten the legs a little at a time as you get stronger.



Bird-dog

CORE

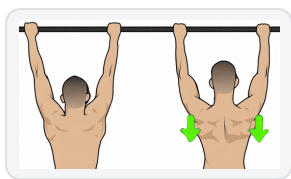
1. Start on all fours with your hands under your shoulders and knees under your hips. Keep a neutral spine and brace your core. This will be your starting position.
2. Extend your right arm forward and your left leg backward until both are in line with your torso. Breathe out as you extend.
3. Hold briefly while keeping your hips level and your lower back neutral.
4. Return to the starting position with control. Breathe in as you return.
5. Repeat on the opposite side and continue alternating for the prescribed amount of repetitions. Tip: Move slowly and avoid arching your lower back.



Dead hang

PULL-UP BAR

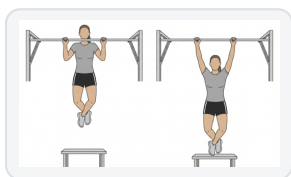
1. Jump up or step up to grab a pull-up bar with an overhand grip (palms facing away) at shoulder-width or slightly wider. Allow your arms to be fully extended and your body to hang freely. This is your starting position.
2. Relax your shoulder girdle completely, letting the weight of your body stretch the latissimus dorsi and shoulder stabilizers. Keep your core lightly engaged and your body still. Avoid swinging.
3. Hold this position for the prescribed duration, breathing slowly and steadily. Focus on maintaining a firm, even grip and keeping your wrists neutral.
4. When the set is complete, step or drop down carefully from the bar.



Scapular pull-up

PULL-UP BAR

1. Hang from a pull-up bar with an overhand grip at shoulder width, arms fully extended. Your body should be in a straight, still position. This is a dead hang. This is your starting position.
2. Without bending your elbows at all, depress and retract your shoulder blades by pulling them downward and together. Your body will rise just a few centimetres as a result.
3. Hold the packed-shoulder position for a brief pause, feeling the contraction in the muscles between and below your shoulder blades.
4. Slowly allow your scapulae to elevate and protract back to the starting dead-hang position.
5. Repeat for the prescribed number of repetitions. The elbows must remain straight throughout. This is scapular movement only.



Negative pull-up

PULL-UP BAR

1. Jump up or use a box to get your chin above the pull-up bar with an overhand grip at shoulder width. Your arms should be bent and your chin should be above the bar. This is your starting position.
2. Take a breath in and begin lowering yourself very slowly, taking 3–5 seconds to lower from the top to the bottom. Resist gravity. Do not simply drop down.
3. Continue lowering until your arms are fully extended and you are in a dead-hang position.
4. Step down from the bar, reset, and return to the top position to begin the next repetition.
5. Repeat for the prescribed number of repetitions, maintaining the slow eccentric tempo throughout.