

# The Perfect Push-Up

Push-ups are one of the most commonly prescribed exercises because they are the easiest exercises to do anywhere, anytime. When done correctly, the push-up is an exercise that builds whole body strength. Essentially a moving plank, push-ups work many key muscles of the upper body, including the arms, pectorals (chest), deltoids (shoulders), the triceps, and lower body, including glutes, hamstrings, and especially the core.

Unfortunately, push-ups are also one of the most common exercises done incorrectly. If you're struggling to even do a single push-up, all hope is not lost. With some patience, effort, and a little creativity, you can work your way to a perfect push-up.

You have probably seen many people attempt push ups from their knees, but in doing so they are taking out the core and lower body components of the exercise. It's more efficient and effective to learn how to do a push-up using the whole body from the beginning.

The best way to approach push-ups is understanding that you must earn the right to do a push-up from the floor. And to start earning that right, you work your way down from an incline or elevated position.

## Elevated or Incline Push Up

Elevated or incline push-ups will build the strength you need to perform push-ups from the floor. Its difficulty depends on the height of the surface you use. The lower the surface the more challenging the exercise will be, as you will be closer to the floor. Hands should be elevated at least 12 inches on a sturdy bench, box, counter, chair, stair or table. The higher the surface, the easier it will be. If you have to, start higher than 12 inches. You can even do them with your hands braced against a wall.

To start, choose your elevated platform, with your body in one straight line from the top of your head to your heels and set yourself up for success.



## Set Up for Success

- Place hands a little wider than shoulder width in the start and finish position
  - Hands too narrow can create shoulder issues, and only engage the smaller muscles like the triceps, as opposed to shoulder and chest muscles
- Elbows should be at 45 degrees and feet hip width apart
  - When you look from behind your elbows should look like an ARROW not a “T”
  - Feet should start a little wider than hip width – the wider the feet, the more base of support (for more challenge you can place feet together)
- Neutral spine
  - Back should be flat, not arched or sagging
  - Think about tucking your pelvis, or pulling your pelvis towards your belly button
  - Neck neutral – look to the floor, not up
- Engaged Core
  - Brace your abs (tuck your pelvis)
- Lower yourself down, keep your elbows tucked close to your body, keeping the 45-degree angle
- In the lowest position of the move, your chest should be about a few inches from platform of choice, with elbows bent to 90 degrees
- As you come up, your shoulders and torso shouldn't twist, and the weight of your upper body should be evenly distributed between your two hands.

## The Exercise

Throughout the movement, your head and hips should be in alignment with your spine, and your body should form a straight line from the crown of your head to your heels. Clench your glutes and brace your core to lock your body into position.

\*Perform 8-12 reps for 3 sets, resting 1-2 minutes between sets. Gradually work lower. When you are able to do 12 perfect reps, drop the incline down lower.

To challenge strength in the push-up you can progress the movement when you move to the floor, or even from the elevated position.

## Push Up Progressions

### Lift One Leg

Lifting one leg creates instability. When you move from a 4-point push-up to a 3-point push-up, you are increasing the core demand and upper body strength demand.

Alternate lifting each leg, about 2 inches off the floor, doing 3-4 reps on each side, for 3 sets, resting 1-2 minutes between sets. Again, to make more challenging you would lower the elevated platform.



### Paused Push-Up

We tend to be weakest in the bottom position of the push-up. Pausing in the end position of a push-up can help build strength in this position and reinforce good position.

Pause for 3-6 seconds in the end position of the push-up. Be sure to not lose your core engagement, and neutral spine (refer to Set Up for Success). Remember, foot positioning will determine stability. The closer your feet are, the more challenge as it lessens your base of support. This is a taxing exercise, so aim to perform 3-6 reps only, for 3 sets, resting 1-2 minutes between sets.



You don't need to do push-ups every day to get results. Start by performing these push-up variations a few times a week on non-consecutive days and you will soon be performing perfect push-ups from the floor.