Upper Body Strength and Handstand Practice for Beginners

with

KATHRYN BRUNI-YOUNG
Course Description

This course is designed for anyone wanting to learn the basics of upper body strength, mobility and handstands. Each week you will focus on one major part of the body, each video shows different strength and mobility exercises to help prep the upper body for these challenging poses. Areas of the body include a detailed look at wrists and forearms, shoulder strength and alignment, basics of core work and handstand skill development. It’s all about building a strong foundation and preparing the body safely and intelligently. Also included in the course are live webinars that students can join or watch later in the week. The webinars provide support during the process so students feel empowered to keep up the practice and ask questions rather than feel discouraged. This course is open to all levels, no experience is necessary.

Extras Included

- one instructional video and downloadable PDF each week for 4 weeks
- approx. 1 hour of instructional video content and over 25 exercises
- access to 3 live group webinars, recording will be emailed to students as well incase you don’t have time to join in live
- students can email in questions or comments that will be addressed in the webinar
- students have access to a private google group to share insights and ask questions while the course is running
How to Use the Videos

Each video is approximately 15 minutes long. The videos show all the different exercises, basic modifications and provide general information on how many reps and sets to practice. As you watch the video pause it after each exercise and practice the movement to get a sense of how it is feeling. The downloadable PDF will provide you with more detailed information around programming, number of reps to do, how it should feel, how to progress etc.

Using the videos along with the PDFs and sending in questions to the live webinar provides students with different avenues to integrate the course material.

Please consult your doctor before starting any physical exercise program
Copyright / Disclaimer

The following material belongs to Kathryn Bruni-Young. It may not be reproduced or published without the author’s agreement.
Week One: Wrists and Forearms

Summary

Although this is one of the simplest videos you will practice with, it is also one of the most important. Wrist prep is essential to learning handstands and other arm balances; it is usually the biggest thing missing from most yoga and fitness classes. Wrist pain, carpal tunnel syndrome and wrist cysts are some of the most common injuries affecting yogis and humans in general. Knowing how to prep your joints before they become injured is the best way to keep things healthy and keep practicing. The wrists are small joints that are not necessarily designed for doing handstands. That being said, handstands are great poses for other parts of the body and mind, just another reason to strengthen the wrists and forearms to promote better support and prevent future setbacks. If we want to walk on our hands, we have to turn our hands into feet!
EXERCISES
Forearm Flexor Stretch

Instructions

Place the hands on the floor in a modified table position, beginning with one arm at a time turn the hand and fingers backwards (external rotation in shoulder). Lean the chest side-to-side then sway in a circular movement, press the fingers into the floor to activate the forearm. Bend and straighten the elbow to get into different positions. Hold the stretch and move around for 30 seconds then switch sides. Repeat for another set if desired.

What to Feel

- stretch in the forearm muscles between the wrist and elbow, don’t push to the max
- activation in the forearm as the fingers grip into the floor
- don’t over flatten the palm of the hand

Modifications

- students who tend to hyper extend at the elbow should slightly bend the elbow joint if the stretch feels unstable
- students with past injuries ie. cyst or broken wrist should be careful with the amount of weight placed on the joint, placing the hands on a chair can help remove some pressure
Thumb Circle Stretch

Instructions

Begin the forearm flexor stretch, either using one arm at a time or both arms at the same time. Peel the palms off the floor until the knuckles are lifting up, the palms are facing forward and the fingertips are still on the floor. Reach the thumbs out to the sides, feeling a stretch across the palms. Bring the tip of the thumb towards the pinky finger, without forcing it, draw a smooth circle from there. Circle both directions 10-20 reps, rest between sets and repeat if desired.

What to Feel

• active stretch from palm into thumb, base of the thumb

Modifications

• students with a history of wrist injury should proceed with caution
Forearm Extensor Stretch

Instructions

One side at a time squeeze the hand into a tight fist. Place the top of the hand onto the floor, only applying a comfortable amount of pressure to the wrist. Keep the elbow bent at first and try to straighten it slowly, while keeping the hand squeezing into the tight fist. Then start to open and close the fingers, spreading them into the floor and squeezing them back together into the fist. Repeat between 5-10 times on each side, rest for at least 30 seconds and repeat if desired.

What to Feel

• stretch through the top of the forearm muscles (opposite as the first exercise)
• forearm flexor muscles contracting to squeeze the fingers into the fist

Modifications

• students with a history of wrist injury should proceed with caution
• students with very tight wrists, elbows or forearms should practice the exercise gently at first
Inner Thumb Stretch

Instructions
Place the thumb on the inside of the palm and wrap the fingers around the thumb into a fist. Place the palm side of the fist on the floor with the knuckles turned out to the side and lean as much pressure into the hand as you feel comfortable with. This exercise stretches the inner wrist, part of the body that is often times ignored, go slowly, hold for 30 seconds and repeat as needed.

What to Feel

• stretch at the base of the thumb
• stretch on the inner wrist

Modifications

• students with severe hyper extension in the elbow may choose to slightly bend the elbow
Finger Taps – Forearm Extensor Strength

Instructions

This exercise is designed to strengthen the forearm extensor muscles in the range of motion used for handstand and arm balancing. Keeping the elbows completely straight in this exercise helps to build strength and awareness in these particular muscles, in the straight arm position needed for handstands. Students with hyper extended elbows are encouraged to practice this exercise in an attempt to bring more strength into the end range of elbow extension.

Place the hands on the floor, index fingers parallel with each other or slightly turned out (external rotation). Turn the elbow creases forwards (external rotation of upper arm bone) and lift the thumbs off the floor. Begin leaning forward until the shoulders come on top of the wrists if possible. Make sure to keep the elbows completely straight, then begin tapping the thumbs on the floor for 10-20 reps. Give the thumbs a rest and repeat the exercise on all of the fingers.

What to Feel

• strengthening the line between top of the finger and elbow
• burning sensation or muscle fatigue in the elbow, forearm and wrist without pushing yourself too far

Modifications

• students who are not used to practicing isolated strength work can begin with less reps and build from there
• always pay attention to how your body is reacting to the exercise, move with caution and awareness
Palm Raises - Forearm Flexor Strength

Instructions

This exercise is designed to strengthen the forearm flexor muscles in the straight arm position. In this exercise, like the previous exercise rather than micro bending the elbows, use completely straight elbows. If your elbows tend to hyper extend, rather than avoiding the end range of motion because it might feel weak, begin to train strength in this range. Avoiding a position will never make it better, unless you are dealing with a recent injury.

Come into a table position; place the hands closer to the knees than usual. Place the hands on the floor with the index fingers parallel or hands slightly turned out (external rotation). Turn the elbow creases forward (external rotation in the upper arm bone), and begin by lifting the thumbs slightly off the floor. At exactly the same time press the knuckles of the hands down and begin lifting the palms up. Lift as high as you feel comfortable with, and slowly lower for the count of 2 seconds.

Make sure the shoulders are stacked over top of the wrists; the wrists should be in a 90-degree angle, as they will be in handstand. To make the exercise more challenging move the hands away from your knees, maintain shoulders over wrists alignment. Practice 8-15 reps and give ample rest between sets.

What to Feel

- strength in the forearm flexor muscles
- possible stretch though the palms
- straight arm strength
- burning or muscle fatigue around the forearm and possibly elbow
Modifications

• students who have suffered a broken or dislocated elbow should pay special attention to not put too much pressure on the joint

• some students might benefit from practicing the exercise at the wall, hands on the wall
Workout Routine

The following program can be modified depending on the level of the student. Practice this wrist routine 2-4 times per week before yoga practice or gym workout for best results. This routine makes for a great warm up on any type of upper body strength training, vinyasa yoga practice or back bending oriented practice.

Rest is important, the rest interval can be modified depending on how your body feels each day. Practice 30-60 seconds of rest between the exercises and between sets for best results.

Make sure to increase the effort each week; don’t start out pushing to your max. Allowing for the body to recover and adapt each week is essential to strength development. This is not necessarily no pain no gain, your wrists should not feel painful after practicing the routine.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exercise</th>
<th>Reps</th>
<th>Sets</th>
<th>Rest</th>
<th>Repeat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flexor Stretch</td>
<td>30 seconds each side</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>30 sec</td>
<td>X 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extensor Stretch</td>
<td>10-20 taps each finger</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30-60 sec</td>
<td>X 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palm Raise</td>
<td>10-20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>