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May 2006



Fit to Eat: Spring Dinner Menu

— Benjamin Sims —

There is no reason healthy food shouldn't also be delicious. Staying in the Zone is simple—and can be done with simple foods—but there's no reason it must be bland, uninspiring, or monotonous. Menus and dishes that I create in my restaurant are constructed of the best ingredients at the peak of their ripeness—food that I would serve to my family and food that I eat at home. My dishes are ingredient-driven rather than recipe-driven, meaning that I mostly don't know what the end result will be until I pick up the produce from the farmer's market. This requires a bit of flexibility, knowledge of the seasons, and understanding of flavor combinations. With a little creativity, you can produce similarly appealing meals at home.

The following recipes are straight off my specials board, with a few modifications for the home cook and a little fine-tuning for the Zone. You could find the same dishes on many French or Italian tables. In keeping with the season, this is a typical spring menu, using ingredients that are easy to find right now. The entire menu should take very little time to prepare, and most of the cooking can be done outside on the grill rather than inside over a hot stove.

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Fit to Eat: Spring Dinner Menu

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Herb-Baked Ricotta with Grilled Asparagus and Lemon

(Appetizer)

1 cup fresh ricotta
1 egg yolk
6 sprigs of fresh thyme, leaves picked off
Zest of 2 lemons
Dash of olive oil

24 asparagus spears
2 lemons
Olive oil

Preheat oven to 400° and light the grill (medium to hot is the desired temperature for the grill). Whisk together the ricotta, egg yolk, olive oil, and pinch of salt and black pepper. Spread a thin layer, about 1-2 inches thick, of the cheese mixture in a baking dish, sprinkle lemon zest and thyme sprigs over the top, and bake. Depending on the thickness and your oven, it should bake for 10 to 15 minutes; remove from the oven when the top starts to brown. Set aside to cool.

As if you were breaking a pencil, break asparagus spears; they will naturally snap

at the division between the woody stem and tender top. Discard the woody ends and drizzle the tops with olive oil and salt and black pepper. Thinly slice lemons, about 7 or eight slices per lemon.

When the grill is hot and you are getting ready to eat, grill the asparagus and lemon slices. When the asparagus is tender, lay the spears on a serving platter, arrange grilled lemon slices over the asparagus, and crumble the ricotta over everything. Serve warm or at room temperature.

SPRING DINNER MENU

Herb-Baked Ricotta
with Grilled Asparagus and Lemon

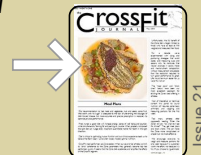
Grilled Halibut
with Artichoke and Chickpea Ragu
and Arugula-Almond Pesto

Fresh Strawberries
with Balsamic Vinegar

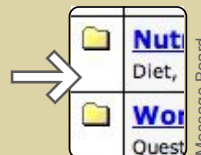
Four 4-block servings
Prep time: about 1 hour

For more information on nutrition and the Zone:

• see issue 21 (May 2004) of the CrossFit Journal



• and the "Nutrition Forum" on the CrossFit.com message board.



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Fit to Eat: Spring Dinner Menu

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Grilled Halibut with Artichoke and Chickpea Ragu and Arugula-Almond Pesto

Pesto:

2 bunches, or 6 cups, of arugula leaves
1 clove garlic, chopped
Juice of 2 lemons
12 toasted almonds, whole or sliced
1/4 cup olive oil

Halibut:

4 four-ounce pieces of halibut fillet, skin off

Ragu:

4 medium artichokes
1 red onion, thinly sliced
6 cups cooked chickpeas with their liquid
2 tbsp olive oil
Crushed red pepper
(also known as chili flakes)
Chopped parsley
2 lemons (use the ones you zested for the ricotta and asparagus appetizer)

Start with the pesto, which you can make as early as several hours before the meal. Put half of the arugula in a blender or food processor; add the almonds, lemon juice, garlic, salt, pepper, and olive oil on top of the arugula, and then add the rest of the arugula. Pulse the blender on and off until the mixture starts to catch and form a puree. Once the ingredients start to break down, let the blender run longer to get a finer paste, but do not let the motor run for longer than 5 or 10 seconds at a time (the blade will get hot and cook and discolor the arugula). Taste for seasoning and refrigerate.

To prepare the artichokes, tear off the small leaves attached to the stem, and cut crosswise through each artichoke where it begins to taper in toward the top, about an inch or two above the base. Put the

artichokes cut side down and carefully trim the leaves away, leaving the pale green center. Pare away the deep green part of the head and stem. You will now be left with the heart and stem. Trim off all but an inch of the stem and cut the artichoke in half lengthwise. With a teaspoon, scrape out the thistly choke from the center of the heart. At this point drop the clean artichoke hearts into acidulated water (cool water with the two lemons squeezed into it) to prevent them from oxidizing and turning black. Once all the artichokes are all cleaned, go back and cut each heart into three pieces and drop them back into the water.

Heat the 2 tablespoons of olive oil in a sauté pan. Drain the artichoke quarters and drop them into the hot pan; season with salt and crushed red pepper. Once

Fresh Strawberries with Balsamic Vinegar

(Dessert)

Simply find the best strawberries you can—about 6 or 8 per person—slice or wedge them, drizzle about 2 tablespoons of your best balsamic vinegar over them, and serve.



the artichokes begin to brown, add the sliced red onion, turn down the heat, and cook until the onion and artichoke are soft. Then add the cooked chickpeas and their liquid. Cook over low heat for 10 minutes to thicken and bring the flavors together.

As the ragout is reducing, grill the halibut. Make sure the grill is clean and as close to the heat source as possible. Each side of the fish should take about 3 minutes to cook. When it comes off the grill easily, it is ready to flip. Don't rush and scrape with your spatula; it should lift off the grill readily with a pair of tongs. Taste the chickpeas and artichokes for seasoning, adjust if needed, and add the chopped parsley. Spoon one-fourth of the ragout onto each plate, place the grilled fish on top, and drizzle everything with pesto. ◇

The Press

~ Mark Rippetoe ~

The press is the oldest barbell exercise in the gym. As with many old things, its value often goes underappreciated.

Picking up a weight and pushing it overhead is so basic a movement that one suspects some sort of DNA-type explanation for it. Children can be observed doing this to show off for their buddies. Preliterate civilizations in Borneo probably have a name for picking up logs from endangered rain forest trees and then putting them overhead, completely unaware of the threat this poses to the planet. I'm quite sure the first thing ever done with a barbell was a standing press, because it is the logical thing to do with a barbell.

Fifty years ago, if a fellow physical culturist wanted to know how strong you were, the question would have been, "How much can you press?" It was reckoned that a man should be able to press his bodyweight. Since not many women had at that time figured out they weren't going to get big ol' ugly muscles from lifting weights (Abbye "Pudgy" Stockton being a very important and gorgeous exception), these ancient people would probably not have known that a woman should be able to press two thirds of her body weight. Of course these numbers can apply only to people who actually train the lift. Most people don't. They bench press instead.

I am a cynical bastard. I truly believe that the reason typical commercial gym members would rather bench press is because they get to lie down. (This is not to say that the bench press is useless; in fact, next month we will investigate its usefulness in detail.) Same thing with leg presses, leg extensions, leg curls, lying triceps extensions, seated anythings, preacher anythings, and Pilates. If you're trying to relax after a strenuous day in the cubicle, go ahead and do your yoga class, finish up with some seated alternating-arm three-pound dumbbell presses on a balance ball, and have a nice smoothie. But if you want to get strong, it's probably going to involve standing with a heavy bar in your hands.

First, let's get some nomenclature problems out of the way. In resistance exercise, the general term "press" refers to a multi-joint extension that drives an external resistance away from the body. (In gymnastics, the term refers to movements that use the body itself as resistance.) So the squat is not a press (the bar is not being driven away from the body; the bar

loads the trunk segment, which is then lowered and raised), and the leg press actually is a press. If we use the term "press" specifically in reference to barbell exercise, we mean a standing overhead press with a bar in both hands, the older term for this being the "two-hands press," which has been shortened over the years to the simpler form. Anything that modifies this movement must be described with a qualifying term. The *military press* is a press done in strict "military fashion," with heels together and no torso movement, sometimes with the back against a wall. (Things have gone so far down the toilet with respect to weight room terminology that the typical Gold's Gym personal trainer thinks a seated behind-the-neck press is a military press.) A *dumbbell press* is a standing press done with a dumbbell in each hand, unless the alternating version or the one-handed version is specified. A *push press* is done with the help of the legs and hips, which start the upward momentum of the bar and can add as much as thirty percent to the weight that can be used.

Pressing a bar overhead develops core strength, and somehow manages to do so without a Swiss ball. Since the kinetic chain—the parts of the body involved in the transmission of force from the places where it is generated to the places where it is applied—in the press starts at the ground and ends at the hands, everything in between these two points gets worked, one way or another. This includes pretty much everything. Specifically, the trunk and hip muscles have to stabilize the body while the force being generated by the arms and shoulders gets transmitted between the bar and the floor. This can get really hard when the weight gets up close to 1RM, and heavy presses require and develop a thick set of abs and obliques. Vasily Alexeyev, the "Big Russian" weightlifter from the 1970s and the strongest presser in history, was not merely a fat man.

In contrast, the kinetic chain in the bench press extends from the bench, or more correctly from the place where the back and the bench connect, to the bar. Good benchers brace against the ground with the legs, but the exercise still omits the active balancing and stabilizing work that the core must do in a standing press.

Working toward a bodyweight press is a laudable goal. It provides an appreciation of, and a connection with, an important part of the



The Press

Mark Rippetoe

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history of weight training, a time when equipment was simple and training was straightforward. When you press, you train with Kono, Alexeyev, Starr, Grimek, and Cyr. When you press, you train much more than the shoulders and arms. You train the soul of the sport of barbell exercise.

The press we will perform will not be a strict military press, but it will be stricter than an old-style Olympic weightlifting press, where torso movement got so out of hand that the lift was dropped from the sport. It starts at the rack or the squat stands with an empty bar, set at about the same height as a squat, at the middle of the sternum. The grip will be just outside the shoulders, wide enough that the index fingers clear the deltoids, not so wide that the arms drive out at an angle on the way up. For most people this will be between 18 and 22 inches apart. The thumbs should be around the bar and the heel of the palm should be as close as possible to the bar, well down away from the fingers so that it is close to the bones of the forearm that will drive it up. In this position the wrist will be tight and flexed slightly back.

Take the *empty bar* out of the rack and take one step back. The bar should rest on your shoulders with your elbows slightly in front of the bar. This is an important detail, since if the elbows are behind the bar, you will drive it forward away from you on the way up. Your flexibility may not permit a good position at first, and the bar may not want to sit down on your shoulders properly, but flexibility will come with time and a proper press can be done as long as the elbows are in front of the bar.

Your stance will be comfortable and wide, wider than a pulling stance and maybe almost as wide as a squat stance. A strict military press is supposed to be harder, and a very close stance certainly makes it that way. Our object is to see how strong we can get using the press, and stability should not be a concern.

Look straight ahead to a point on the wall level with your eyes and lift your chest. This is accomplished with the muscles of the upper back and can be thought of as raising your sternum up to your chin. This fixes several position problems that usually result in a bad bar path, and it improves tightness in the upper torso between reps.

Take a big breath, hold it, and drive the bar up over your head. (Hold your breath while the bar is moving. This increased pressure provides support for the back and chest, and is essential for safety when moving heavy weights. This is discussed at length in my and Lon Kilgore's book

Starting Strength.) In the lockout position, most people will have the bar slightly in front of the head at first, so make sure that your bar is over your neck, the highest point on your skull, right over your ears. This is where the bar must be if it is to be locked out in balance with your spine in normal anatomical position. Once there, the elbows should be locked and the shoulders actively shrugged up so that the bar is supported by the skeletal components and the traps, and not just the triceps. This is the position the bar is going to be at the end of every correct rep.

From your correct starting position, lean back very slightly and drive the bar up, keeping it in as close as possible to your face. As soon as the bar passes the top of your head, get under it. Move *your body* forward under the bar and use this motion to help lock the bar out at the top. Don't move the bar back, move your body forward. When this is done correctly, the forward movement of the body helps straighten out the shoulder, which helps drive up the elbow into lockout.

There will be a small amount of lateral movement involved in getting the bar from a position in front of the neck to a point over the ears. This distance should be made up with the forward movement of the body, not the backward movement of the bar. Pushing the bar back instead of up is inefficient and misses the opportunity to leverage the elbows into extension with the powerful hip extensors working through a properly rigid torso. Abdominal, low back, and hip strength—"core" stability—make this possible, and make pressing an incredibly effective core exercise.

Start with the empty bar and do a set of five. Add a little weight—20 or 30 pounds if you're as huge, massive, and powerful as I am, ten or even less if you're intelligent enough to appreciate the usefulness of maintaining good form while learning a new movement—and go up doing sets of five until the bar speed starts to slow. Stay there and do two more sets, and call it a workout.



The Press

— Mark Rippetoe —

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The press is hard. You won't be able to press what you can bench. You have to support with your whole body what the bench supports when you lie down to press. So you're doing

all the work instead of letting the bench do some of it; you're supporting, balancing, and manhandling the whole load. This is how strength was, and is, built. ◇

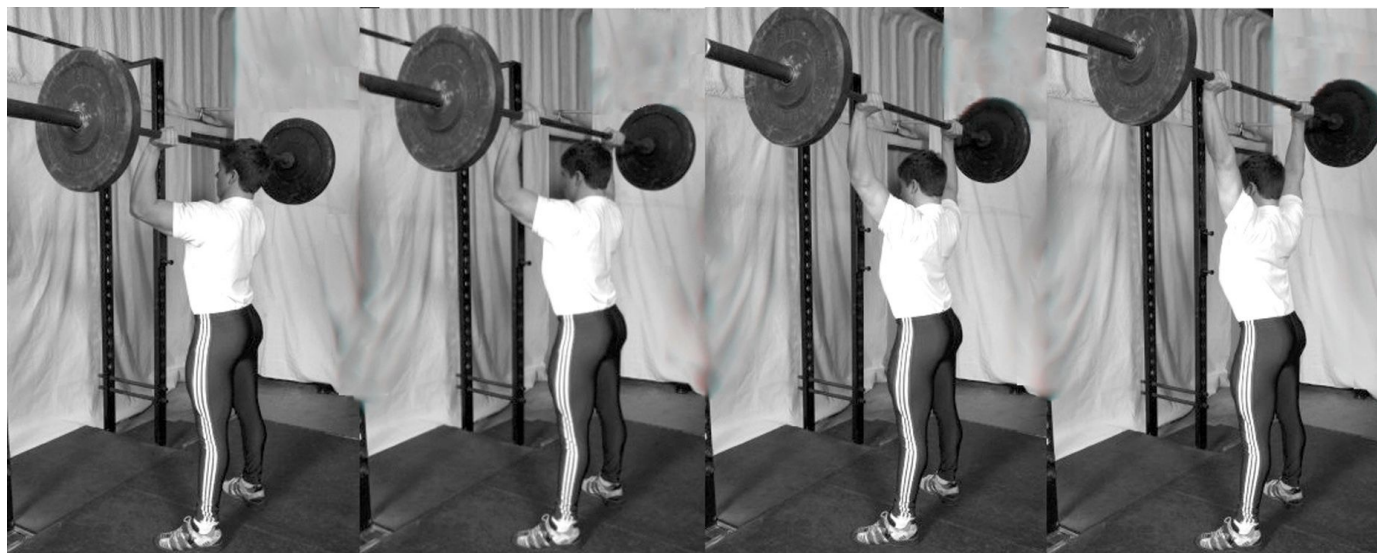


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Parkour Basics, Part I

Two-Handed, Speed, and Lazy Vaults

~ Jesse Woody ~

Parkour is about movement with a mindset of efficiency, pure and simple. The fact is, this mindset is developed through action, through experience of the movements. It is much the same for martial arts: many of the benefits come from an eventual understanding gained through practice, but there is no practice without learning the basic moves first. That being said, it's time to combine the ideas behind Parkour (*CrossFit Journal* issue 43) and the safety precautions (issue 44) with a solid foundation in the fundamental movements. We'll start with the basic two-handed vault, which is the foundation of most vaulting, and then move to the speed vault and lazy vault, two functional techniques for overcoming a variety of obstacles.

First things first, since it can't be overstated: start off every training session by ensuring the safety of the objects and environments you plan to incorporate. Make a habit of having a good warm-up, starting with basic calisthenics and moving to more dynamic movement (for a great treatise on a proper warm-up, see *CFJ* issue 11). I find that quad pedal movement, or walking on all fours in different styles, is a fun way to loosen up that also leaves your neighbors questioning your mental health. Don't worry, after they see you jumping over walls and rolling around on the concrete, they will doubt you no more.

Once you've warmed up and have checked and rechecked your environment, it's time to pick a good starting obstacle for your training—maybe a rail or small wall about waist height or slightly higher. The first, most basic, vaulting technique is the standard two-handed vault. Stand a short distance from the obstacle, close enough to reach out and put your hands on it without overreaching. Crouch down slightly, leaning back against your outstretched arms. As you jump up and over the obstacle, pull toward yourself with your arms, then press down to aid in your travel up and over to the other side, releasing as you clear the object. You will first release the railing with the hand on the side your feet are traveling on. This is necessary to avoid getting twisted up



High Lazy Vault

An example of a situation in which a lazy vault helps reduce impact, when a turn-vault isn't completely necessary.

mid-move and to keep your body facing forward toward your landing. The other hand remains on the rail to guide your body toward the ground.

The two-handed vault is a hugely functional movement, combining full-body coordination, strength, and power, and it will lay a good foundation for the basics of all vaulting technique. To minimize the total work of your legs with the initial jump and your arms while supporting you in the air, you have to use good core-to-extremity recruitment that allows you to "float" with the least possible effort from any one body part. Practice this movement on both sides, getting a feel for the exact amount of jump, pull, and press needed to clear the object with the least amount of total effort.

If you have trouble with the two-handed

vault, the problem is likely related to confidence and commitment. It is possible to use your outside foot (your right foot, if your legs are traveling on your right side) to give a slight tap on the top of the object in the mid-point in the vault to aid your travel. This will help to gradually establish the required movement pattern with a bit less risk and commitment. Over time, reduce the amount of assistance from your foot until you are able to overcome the obstacle in one fluid motion. Once you have this honed, it is time to move on to the speed vault.

The speed vault is a variation of the common one-handed vault (it can also be performed with two hands, but that's usually rather awkward). In the speed vault, you approach the object at a jog or run, leap up a few feet away from the obstacle, before your hand makes contact, and let

Parkour Basics, Part I

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your momentum carry you over. Your hand will act to boost and stabilize your body during the move, helping your feet come to a horizontal position in relation to the ground and giving you the push that will propel them back down on the opposite side. You will perform the vault on the arm on the same side as the leg you take your final step with. Typically, you will land on the opposite foot, as if the vault were just a single step in your run.

The speed vault requires commitment and speed to perform properly. When you master it, you can overcome almost any common vaulting obstacle with little effort, and you can reach a narrow wall or rail at full speed and be over and past it and back in a full sprint before you know it.

With both of these movements, the ability to powerfully extend and then flex your hips and abs is essential to the efficient completion of the technique. In the mid-vault position, your core musculature provides the stability to transfer the power from your jump to the horizontal position above the rail. The subsequent hip extension on your dismount carries this momentum to the ground so that you can land in full stride, ready to overcome the next obstacle.

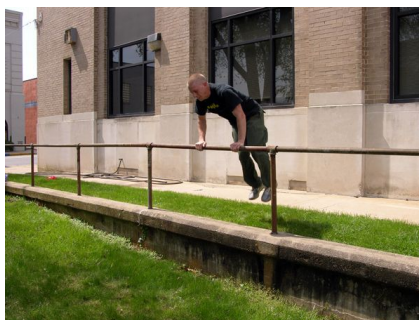
Another move, the lazy vault, is useful when you approach a wall or rail from an angle, with a bit less speed. You will still be running, but you will place the hand closest to the obstacle on top of it before you make your jump. As you jump, this hand will pull toward you while pushing down, and you will swing the corresponding leg up and over. As your leg clears the plane of the object, your outside leg will be leaving the ground, following the same path. As your hips reach the point where they are about to push your lead hand off the object, you will "pass" the rail or wall under your hips to your trailing hand to finish the vault. Once both legs have cleared the object and are on their way down, you will push off, turning your torso in the direction you wish to continue. This is a very smooth move that can be performed quietly and quickly in many different situations.



Two Handed Vault 1 Start a few feet from the object so you can grab the top without overreaching.



Speed Vault 1 A speed vault starts with a committed approach.



Two Handed Vault 2 Bend your knees and then jump up and over the object, first using your arms to pull yourself toward it and then pressing to aid your travel over it.



Speed Vault 2 Take your final step about two feet from the base of the obstacle, depending on your momentum.



Two Handed Vault 3 As your torso passes over the object, release the hand on the side your feet are traveling on to keep your body square to the landing area.



Speed Vault 3 Leap up and over, using the hand that corresponds to your take-off foot to guide your body in the air.



Two Handed Vault 4 After clearing the object, extend your legs toward the ground to land smoothly.



Speed Vault 4 As you pass over the object, push back with your guide hand, propelling your feet toward the ground to land smoothly.

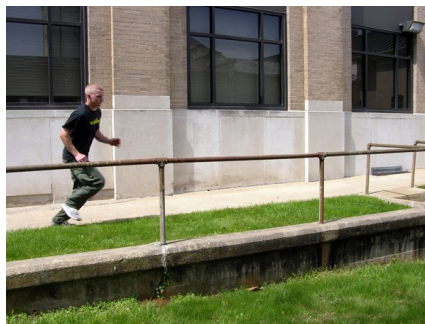
Parkour Basics, Part I

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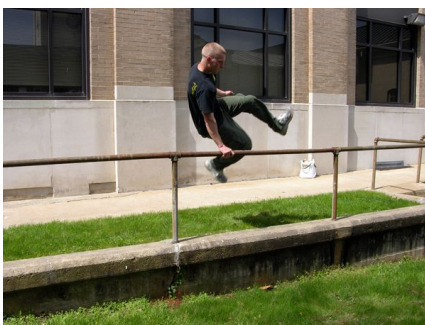
One benefit of the lazy vault is the ability to adjust your direction of travel mid-vault. Once you become proficient with the basic mechanics of the movement, you will be able to spot a hazard in midair and use the rotation of your body above the obstacle to avoid it and continue on your way unhindered. This vault is also extremely useful for reducing impact when a vault ends in a drop that isn't quite tall enough to require a turn vault (which I will discuss in a later article). The control you gain over the rail allows you to essentially lower yourself to the point of contact, eliminating a good bit of the unnecessary impact and saving your knees some grief.

Once these movements are mastered individually, it will be time to incorporate them into a run, stringing together combinations of movements as the environment dictates. In the photo sequence below, I approach the porch railing with a run, use my first step to boost me into a two-handed vault, and then end with a lazy vault, which is useful here because of the lack of speed coming into the second railing.

These moves are a first step into the realm of the standard vaults and will help you build a foundation for the coordination and agility required for many of the techniques commonly used in parkour. By cultivating these techniques you will begin to move your body through space as one piece and realize the most efficient way to travel through your environment.



LazyVault 1 Run up from an angle.



LazyVault 2 Jump off the inside foot as you place your closest hand on top of the object.



LazyVault 3 As your torso over the object, pass the object from your lead hand to your trailing hand and prepare to land.



LazyVault 4 Land smoothly and continue on your way.



Sequence 1 In this sequence I approach the porch in a run...



Sequence 2 Use a step to boost me into a two-handed vault...



Sequence 3 Then follow immediately with a lazy vault, which works well with the lack of momentum gained between obstacles.

Skill-Transfer Exercises for the Clean and Snatch

Treatments for Common Problems

— Anthony Budding —

The snatch and the clean are two of the greatest exercises known. They are unparalleled at developing athleticism in general and power in particular. All CrossFitters should incorporate them into their routines in some form. Yet the movements are complex, and perfecting them can be a lifelong pursuit. This article describes skill-transfer exercises that can be used to break down the movements and drill specific aspects of them, train good technique, and help correct some common problems. For simplicity, I describe the skill-transfer exercises here in terms of the snatch, but they can all be applied to the clean also, with just a change in grip width. Of course, any of the exercises described here can be done with no weight (e.g., with a length of dowel or PVC pipe) to learn and practice technique.

For descriptions and video of variations of the snatch balance, another skill-transfer exercise used to develop the snatch, see *CrossFit Journal* issue 39.

Prescriptions

Problem: Pulling too early with the arms
Treatments: Tall snatch, positioning pulls, dip-shrug into hang snatch

Problem: Catching the bar with too wide a stance, donkey-kicking
Treatments: Overhead squat, lands, Sots press

Problem: Jumping too early
Treatments: Positioning pulls, practicing



the transition, high hang to top of the knees to mid-shin

Problem: Not shrugging, not getting full extension

Treatments: Tall snatch, dip-shrug into hang snatch

rebanding any of those joints at start of the move. The shrug begins the upward momentum of the bar, and the aggressive movement pulls you into the overhead squat. This is an extremely fast exercise.

Positioning pulls

Using a snatch grip with heavy weight (working up to as much as 150% of your 1RM snatch weight), keep the chest up while straightening the legs (deadlift). When the bar passes the knees, transition the weight back toward the hips by lifting the chest, rebending the knees slightly, and bringing the hips forward without extending them. When the chest is upright, then stand tall to full extension. Lower the weight in reverse until it is about one inch off the ground. Repeat two more times. On the third rep, finish the extension with an explosive shrug. Other than that final burst of power, the movement should be slow and controlled.

Tall snatch

Holding a light bar or dowel with a snatch grip, stand on your toes with your feet under your hips (in the "jumping position"). Shoulders down, arms straight. The movement begins with a violent shrug of the shoulders followed by an aggressive pulling of the body under the bar to catch it in the bottom of an overhead squat. Important: Do not begin by dipping and jumping! (That would make the move a hang squat snatch from the toes, which is not what you want). This is the challenging part for most people to wrap their minds around at first. You must begin with ankles, knees, and hips already extended, without



Skill-Transfer Exercises for the Clean and Snatch

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Snatch land

Stand with the bar locked overhead in the frontal plane with a snatch grip (as in the top of an overhead squat). Drop rapidly into the catch position (the bottom of the overhead squat). This is not a jump or a squat, but a drop and land. It does not begin with a dip, and the feet should barely move at all.

Dip-shrug into hang snatch



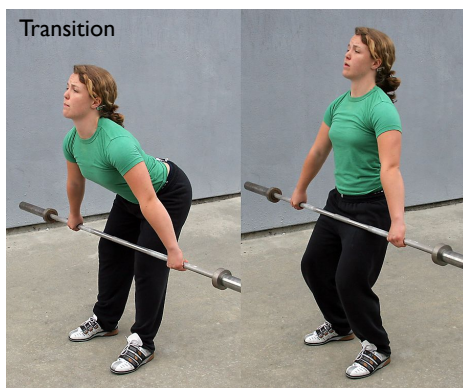
The dip-shrug is 1-2-3 of the [Burgener warm-up](#) and the second pull of the snatch. Keeping the chest up, dip down and drive up with a shrug. Repeat once or twice to ingrain the movement, and on the third or fourth rep, complete the snatch movement by pulling yourself under the bar and landing in the overhead squat. Be sure to achieve full extension and the shrug on the full movement, and keep the bar in close to the chest as you drive under it.

Sots press

This is very simply a shoulder press from the bottom of a back squat. In the bottom of the back squat, with the bar racked on the upper back and the hands in a snatch grip, press the bar straight overhead, reaching toward the ceiling. Keep the shoulders active, chest up, glutes and hamstrings engaged, and a good lumbar curve in the back. Start with a dowel and add weight in small increments. This movement both requires and develops flexibility and comfort in the bottom of the squat.



Snatch Land



Transition

information on the transition, see “The Scoop and the Second Pull” in *CFJ* issue 41.)

High hang to top of the knees to mid-shin

First, do a squat snatch from the standing (high hang) position. The movement begins with the down-up (dip-shrug), which is the proper positioning for the start of the second pull. Second, do a squat snatch with the bar starting at the top of the knees (using the transition or scoop to position the body for the second pull). This develops confidence in the transition and reinforces proper positioning for the second pull. Finally, do a squat snatch starting from mid-shin. This is the complete snatch movement, beginning with the deadlift (first pull), through the transition, and into the second and third pulls, with a full squat landing. Practicing the three in sequence discourages jumping too early, bending the arms too soon, and not coming to full extension. ◇

Practicing the transition

The transition (or “scoop”) is the movement from the top of the first pull (deadlift) to the start of the second pull (the jump). Start with the legs almost straight and the bar touching the top of the knees. Keep a good arch in the low back, with the eyes focused forward and the chest up as much as possible. Lift the chest and slightly bend the knees as the bar slides up the thighs into the hips. Go back and forth until this movement feels natural and automatic. (For more



Sots Press

Calisthenics

Conditioning and Mobility with No Equipment

— Roger Harrell —

Be creative in your application of these movements. Practice them, and incorporate them into workouts. They are an excellent as part of an active warm-up, done in isolation for strength development, or built into metabolic conditioning routines. Specific programming and repetition schemes will vary depending on the fitness levels and goals of trainees.

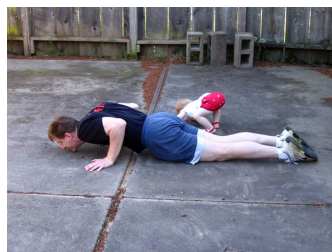
Push-ups

Push-ups can range in difficulty from very easy to so difficult that few people can do them. Adjusting the difficulty level is simply a matter of changing hand placement and body level to alter leverage and load. Keeping the body upright and the hands in line with the shoulders scales the push-up for people who are just beginning their fitness journey. Placing the feet high and moving the hands lower, toward the hips, increases the loads dramatically and can challenge world-class athletes.



Decline push-up

To do push-ups with little or no resistance, start in a standing position, arms-length from a wall. Extend the arms in front of you at shoulder height to place your hands on the wall slightly wider than shoulder-width. These push-ups (or, more literally, push-outs) are appropriate for beginners and those who are rehabilitating injuries. With the body almost completely vertical, these can be used to restore and build mobility in the arms and shoulders, to teach the plank body position, and to work toward a horizontal push-up on the floor. Even with this simple movement it is important to keep a rigid body and full range of motion (ROM). Each rep should bring the chest and face as close as possible to the wall and finish with the arms completely straight and the shoulders fully extended. The degree of difficulty can be additionally fine tuned by adjusting the distance of the feet from the wall. Obviously, the farther out they are—and the more acute the angle of the body—the more difficult they will be.



Knee push-up

Knee push-ups are another beginning push-up that starts flat on the ground, with the body supported by the hands and the knees (rather than the toes). Again, the body should be kept rigid and full ROM performed, with the knees as the fulcrum of the movement. Be sure to avoid the tendency to pike at the hips and stick out the butt; shoulders, hips, and knees should always be aligned.

Push-up

Push-ups should be performed flat on the ground, supported only by the hands and feet. Do not arch the back (swayback) or pike (push your butt up in the air). Each push-up should contact the floor with the chest at the bottom and extend to a high hollow support with straight arms and actively extended shoulders at the top.

Clap push-up

Clapping the hands together at the top of the movement makes push-ups a very dynamic athletic movement. The clap forces you to push aggressively to get your hands off the floor. Adding a chest slap or clapping behind the back will further increase the dynamic requirement.

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Incline Push-up

Moving the feet onto a raised surface increases the load on the arms. Raising the platform gradually is an excellent way to progress toward handstand push-ups.



Handstand push-up

The first full bodyweight push-up. An individual should be able to hold a 20-second handstand against a wall with shoulders fully extended before attempting handstand push-ups. You can start with your feet against a wall to remove the balance requirement; practice these both facing the wall and with your back to the wall. Maintain a good straight, tight handstand position at all times. Once you can perform five to ten reps on the wall consistently, begin working them without a wall. Freestanding handstand push-ups are an incredibly powerful stimulus, as they require rapid firing of shoulder stabilizers while maintaining a relatively heavy and dynamic load.



Pseudo planche push-up

Start with a standard push-up, but move the hands farther back under the body toward the hips, which increases the load on the arms. As you get closer to placing your hands directly under your hips, you will notice your feet beginning to slide on the floor. This is an indication that little of your weight is being supported by your feet. Eventually your feet will be able to come completely off the floor—though this will take most people years to accomplish.



Handstand shoulder shrugs

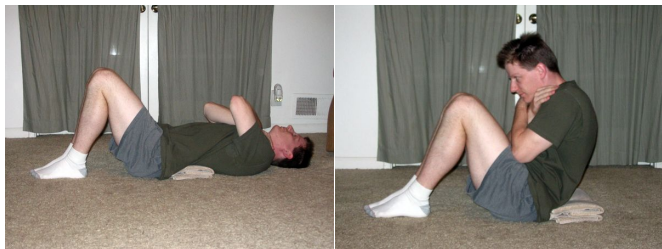
This is an excellent drill to learn to activate your shoulders. With a spot or against a wall, get into a handstand. Then, shrug up and down using only your shoulders. Keep your arms completely straight, and try to achieve as much movement as possible in your shoulders.

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Core

“Core strength” has become a marketing term for numerous commercial fitness programs. The great majority of these programs, however, are focused on developing a “six-pack,” not on developing a strong, functional core, and they are often inadequate even for that goal. Torso strength and stability are crucial for athletic endeavors. Having the ability to keep your midsection tight and to powerfully alter midsection positioning improves your power output and control in almost all functional and athletic movements.

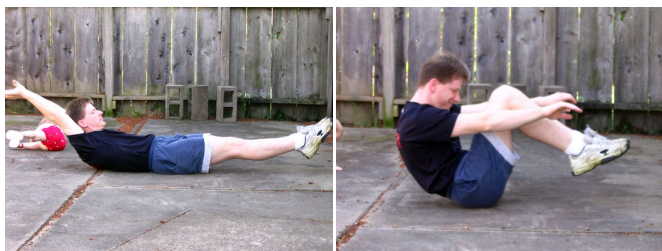


Sit-up

Good old-fashioned sit-ups are an excellent way to strengthen the abs and hip flexors. There is some lack of the functionality in the sit-up movement on totally flat ground, as a flat surface does not allow most people's abs to properly engage at the beginning of the movement. A rolled-up towel, or one of the commercial products designed for this purpose (such as an AbMat) can be placed under the lower back to avoid this limitation.

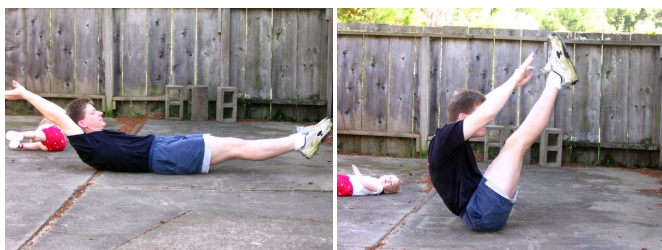
Sit-ups can be done with the feet anchored or not. Having the feet anchored generally increases the rate at which sit-ups can be performed, which intensifies the metabolic demand but also shifts the recruitment more to the hip flexors. To take the hip flexors out of the movement and require the abs to do the work, put the soles of your feet together, with knees splayed out to the sides, an AbMat or similar support under your lower back, and roll smoothly up into a fully upright sitting position, with no jerking in the motion.

To change the load on sit-ups, you can do them on an incline or decline, similar to push-ups. You can also alter your arm position to adjust the difficulty of the movement. Keeping the arms by the sides is easier, while keeping both arms straight overhead, by the ears, is more difficult. Holding weight at the chest or overhead further increases the demands.



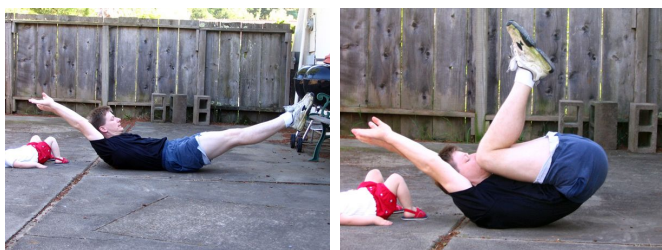
N-up

An N-up is a sit-up type movement in which the upper body and legs come together into a tuck. At the top point of this movement, you will be sitting, with only your butt touching the ground, knees to the chest, and torso upright.



V-up

A V-up is like an N-up except that the legs are kept straight throughout the motion and the arms are extended straight overhead throughout the movement. Aim to be fully extended at the bottom and completely compressed at the top, with chin to shins and fingers to toes.



Tuck-up

Lie on your back and then lift your knees toward your chest aggressively so that you roll back into a tuck with your lower back off the floor.

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L-sit/V-sit

L-sits can be performed on the ground, with legs extended straight in front of you and hands flat on the floor on either side of the legs. This requires a conscious effort to push the shoulders down to lift the body high enough to perform the L on flat ground. You can also do a straddle L, with hands on the ground between your legs. Progressions to the L-sit are discussed in *CFJ* issue 42.



Hollow rock

The starting position is lying on the back in a hollow. A hollow position for this purpose is one in which the pelvis is turned under (i.e., tail tucked), legs are lifted slightly off the floor, lower back is touching the ground, head and shoulders are lifted slightly off the floor, and arms are held by the ears, off the ground. From this position, rock smoothly back and forth, keeping the body tight, the hip angle constant (no piking of the hip), and the lower back rounded. Any thumping in the motion shows that the hollow position has been compromised, which indicates that the trainee's abs are not strong enough to keep the pelvis turned under in this position. Continued training will alleviate this deficiency.



Hollow hold

Start in a push-up position. Then slide your hands forward until you are in an extended hollow position with just your hands and feet on the floor. When first starting this exercise, it is OK to pike significantly, keeping your butt high in the air. The key is to get the shoulders completely open. Once this position has been obtained, you can begin to extend your hips and approach an open hollow position. As you build strength in this position, point your toes so that you are supported on the top of your feet. A rolling device can be connected to the hands and/or feet to increase the demands and to allow for movement in and out of the position.



Advanced leg lift

Start by lying on your back with your legs straight. Place each hand on the floor, palm down, just under each respective gluteus. While keeping hollow and looking at your toes, lift your legs. Just before your legs reach vertical, extend your torso should to lift your lower back off the floor. The top point of this move is the position known as a "candlestick."

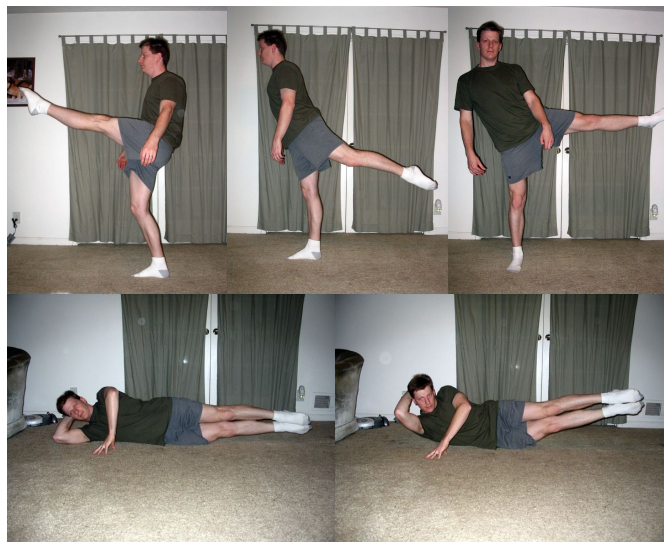


Arch-up

Start by lying on your stomach on the floor. Lift your legs and chest off the floor then return to a prone position. Make sure your heels are squeezed together throughout and your legs are kept straight, as this increases the demand of the movement.

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Standing leg lift

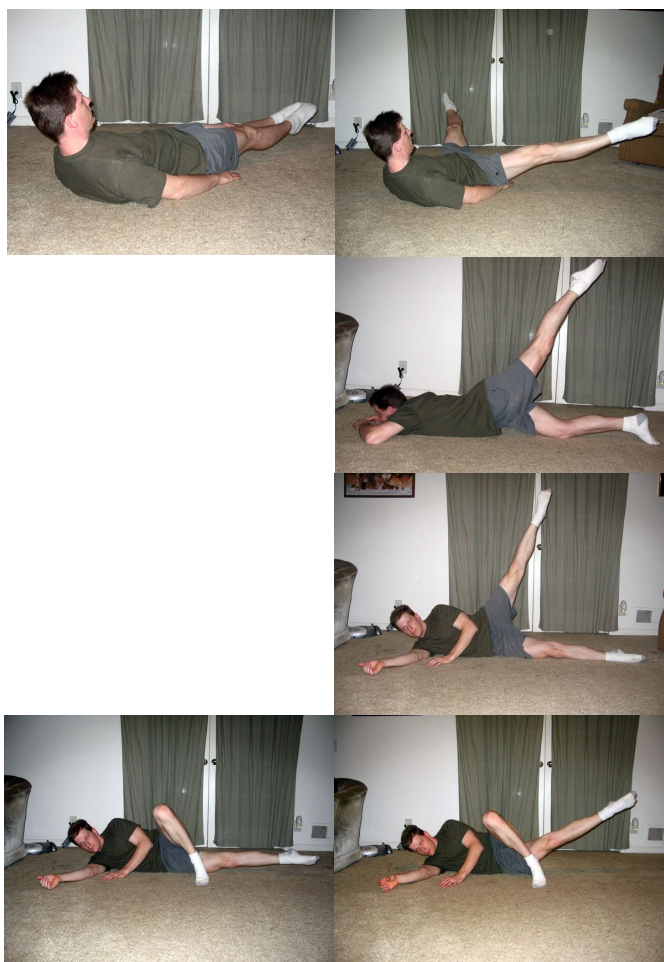
Hailing from ballet training, standing leg lifts strengthen hip muscles while increasing active ROM. Start standing, either holding onto a stable object or freestanding. Then lift one leg as high as you can (keeping base leg straight ... not like photo...). Keep the lift controlled and at a moderate pace so it is a lift, not a kick. Keep both legs straight the whole time, and the torso aligned. Do not lean in any direction. The leg lift can be performed to the front, to the back, and to the side.

Side conditioning

Start by lying on your right side, using your left hand on the floor in front of you for balance. From this position, lift your legs and shoulders simultaneously and then return to the start position. Repeat on the left side.

Arch rock to hollow rock

Lie on your back in a hollow position, perform a few hollow rocks, and then roll sideways onto your stomach, without touching the ground with either your hands or your feet. Then perform a few arch rocks and roll, again without hands or feet touching the ground, back onto your back. This sequence can be repeated to cover distance, or back and forth in a small area.



Leg lift straddle-down

Start on your back in a hollow and lift your legs to vertical, then straddle both legs out to the sides and swing them down to the start position. Then reverse the motion, straddling the legs in the hollow, bringing your legs up to vertical, and then lowering them, feet together, to the start position.

Rear leg lift

Start lying on your stomach. Lift one leg up the back as high as you can and return to the start position in a controlled movement. Legs should be kept straight throughout.

Hip adduction

Lie on your right side and lift your left leg as high as possible and return to start position. Keep both legs straight throughout. Repeat on left side.

Hip abduction

Lie on your right side with your right leg on the floor and extended in line with your body, and your left leg bent, with the left foot on the floor in front of your hips. Then lift your right leg as high as possible (inner thigh toward the ceiling) and return to the start position in a controlled movement.

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Squats, jumps, and sprints

You can't be a CrossFitter for long without learning the fundamental importance of frequent, well-executed unweighted squats (detailed in *CrossFit Journal* issue 4). There are numerous no-equipment variations that build on that foundation.



Pistol

A single-leg squat. While holding one leg out in front, perform a full squat with the other leg. This movement will be quite difficult and will require assistance for most people at first. Holding onto a stable object will allow you to perform the movement properly and gradually wean yourself of the support. A stretch band or stretch tubing can also be used for assistance. With the stretch band secured to an object overhead (such as a pull-up bar, for example), you can grab the band with one hand for stability and support. As you get stronger in this movement you can grab the band at a lower point to reduce the assistance or use a lighter-weight band. As with regular squats, pistols can be performed with a jump at the end, including a jump onto a raised surface.

Pistol roll

Starting from a stand on one leg, squat down, roll onto your back into a candlestick position (high on your shoulders with both feet pointed toward the ceiling), and then roll forward to single-leg stand again. The raised foot will never contact the ground. It is important to maintain proper squat technique as you squat and return to standing. Many people will try to lean forward over their foot and allow their heel to rise off the floor, which can lead to injury.



Pistol

Squat jump

Perform a squat and then explode upward to jump as high as you can. This is a very aggressive, dynamic movement. This should be performed only by trainees who have a good bodyweight squat, since doing squat jumps improperly can be hard on the knees. Increase the challenge and motivation by jumping onto a raised object. The height of the object can be increased incrementally as your power improves.

Sequence jump

Bound across the ground in a series of two-footed jumps, making each jump as explosive as it can be and minimizing contact time with the ground. Think of punching through the ground with your legs. Actively anticipate the ground and start driving with your legs slightly before impact, so that you bounce immediately into the next jump. Objects or lines can be used to set targets or a course and to make the movement a challenge or competition. This exercise should not be performed on pavement because of the impact involved.

Short-distance sprints

Repeated short-distance sprints are an excellent training modality. The metabolic demands are high and the loads on the legs are limited only by the trainee's motivation. Place two lines 12 to 30 meters (40 to 100 feet) apart. Sprint from one line to the other, rapidly changing direction at the line. To add variety, add another movement at each line, such as a push-up, v-up, or any other exercise.

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General movements

Burpee

To do a burpee in its most basic form, start from standing, squat with your hands on the floor, and jump your feet back to put you in a prone position with straight arms (as at the top of a push-up). Then bring your legs forward into a squat again and return to standing. This basic version is also sometimes called a squat thrust. Several modifications can be made to the burpee to increase its demands: add a push-up in the prone position, add a jump at the end as you return to standing, perform the burpee under a bar and jump up to do a pull-up in each rep, etc. Be creative with burpees and see what variations you can come up with.

Jumping jack

Most people have done jumping jacks in a PE class at some point. They are an excellent way to warm up, and they can be included in a conditioning set either as a station where fatigued muscles are allowed to recover while metabolic demands are kept high, or as a significant component of a metabolic conditioning circuit. Jumping jacks should be practiced both with arms and legs in concert (legs straddling while arms are swung upward) and in opposition (legs straddling while arms are brought down).



Mountain climbers

Start in a prone position with hands on the floor and arms straight, as if at the top of a push-up. Then pull each knee in to your chest in a rapid alternating pattern.

Handstand and press handstand

Handstands and press handstands are excellent exercises for developing strength and kinesthetic awareness. Technique and progressions are described in depth in *CFJ* issues 17 and 43. ◇

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JOURNAL

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